

"Olivia Warchowl"
(Written Dec. 15, 1944)

Sent

	<u>Sent</u>	<u>Ret</u>
Harpers	Dec 16, '44.	Jan 15, 1945
Atlanta	Jan 16, 45	Feb. 5, 1945
Stony.	Feb. 5, 1945	March 26, 1945 (note)
Harpers.	Jul. 12, 1945.	

Written by:
John D. Vrethen
DePue, Mich

OLIVER'S WAREHOUSE
~~THE STORY OF A BUILDING~~

Robert Franer

For many years

This is the story of an old building. ~~It~~ ^{it} stood
~~along~~ by the railroad tracks in ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~town~~ ^{the town of} ~~Chippewa~~, a ^{mining} ~~town~~ near Lake Superior in
the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It was built by my grandfather
Nicholas Biegler, ~~street~~ who was a brewer, a few years after
the Civil War. ^{Following Grandpa's death} ~~it~~ ^{passed} ~~into~~ ^{large} ~~the~~ ^{hands} of my father, Oliver
Biegler, a saloonkeeper. ^{Now it is only a memory, as it} ~~It~~ ^{was} ~~destroyed~~ ^{by} ~~fire~~ ^{many} ~~years~~ ^{ago,}
when I was ^{still} a young boy. I have never forgotten Oliver's warehouse.

Oliver's warehouse on Canada Street was one of those
fate-fated structures, which abound in the small towns of
America, in which no enterprise ever succeeded. There was
a "hant" on the place, and insolvency and despair was the
portion of any optimistic soul that sought to dispute it. All
during my boyhood Oliver had been trying vainly to get a
tenant in the place who could continue to pay his rent after
the first month.

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

OLIVER'S WAREHOUSE

by
Robert Traver

This is the story of an old building. For many years it stood by the railroad tracks in the ~~town of~~ ^{the iron-mining town of} Chippewa, ~~an iron-mining town~~ ^{which lies in a broad valley} near Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. ~~It~~ ^{This ancient structure} was built by my grandfather, Nicholas Biegler, who was a ~~brewer~~ ^{years} a few after the Civil War. Following Grandpa's death it passed into the large hands of my father, Oliver Biegler, ~~a~~ ^{This tall, ruthless man who was, among many other things,} a saloonkeeper. Now ~~it~~ ^{the old building} is only a memory, as it was destroyed by fire ~~many years ago~~ ^{about ten years ago} when I was still a ~~young boy~~ ^{my father's old}. I have never forgotten Oliver's warehouse...

Oliver's warehouse on Canada Street was one of those fated structures, which abound in the small towns of America, in which no enterprise ever succeeded. There was a "hant" on the place, and insolvency and despair was the portion of any optimistic soul that sought to dispute it. All during my boyhood Oliver had been trying vainly to get a tenant in the place who could continue to pay his rent after the first month. Oliver enjoyed the heady feeling of being a landlord. And it gave him an opportunity to use the jealous knowledge of higher education he had gained in Milwaukee years before: his course in double-entry bookkeeping. Oliver kept an elaborate set of books, recording in monstrous spelling the minutest transactions in his beautiful copperplate handwriting. "To Martin Hallgren--one ^{second} hand slay for farm.....\$4.75."

As I have said, the old two-story frame building had been built by my grandfather Biegler ^{many} ^{ago} ~~years before~~ as a storage place for his beer. Grandpa Biegler had lived but a year or so after it was completed. He was the first of a long procession of occupants. The warehouse had a damp and moldy stone-walled basement with a stone floor. ^{level.} The ~~ground~~ ^{first} floor had ~~large~~ ^{roseately} large work room in front, ^{several feet above the street} and in the rear there was a series of flimsily partitioned rooms, more like cages or coops. The front work room was lighted by a rippling expanse of pigeon-stained windows covering the entire front from the ceiling to the floor and broken only by tall ^{and} narrow double-doors in the middle.

Insert.

There was an unused sliding ^{side} door in the ~~side~~ alleyway through which once had rolled an ocean of Grandpa's beer. The wide double doors in the rear opened onto a ramp leading into the barnyard beyond which stood Oliver's horsebarn.

But the most dramatic part of the warehouse ^{a place of creaking pine rafters and fluttering pigeons,} was the upstairs loft, which could be reached only by a great-wheeled elevator, which ran through the center of the building and ^{down} was operated by hand with an endless rope. My father was not ^{usually} given to understatement, but I once heard him refer ^{to} this fantastical labyrinth of jinks as "jest my store room where I put a few odds and ends." Oliver never rented this loft with the rest of the building, but kept it fanatically barred and locked against prying tenants.

~~So jealously guarded Oliver's grand~~

See Insert

grandpa's
barrelled
beer. The

There was a sliding side door in the alleyway ^{an unused} and wide double-doors in the rear ^{through which once had rolled an ocean of} opening out into the barnyard beyond which stood Oliver's horsebarn. ^{Though he was not quite to understatement, Oliver called this} The upstairs ^{his storage room} was a storage room, ^{this fantastic labyrinth of junk that he} which Oliver never rented with the rest of the buildings, ^{and} but ^{it} which he kept fanatically barred and locked ^{from} prying tenants. This loft was a place of creaking pine rafters and fluttering pigeons. The three floors were joined by a partitioned great-wheeled elevator which ran through the center of the building and was operated by hand with an endless rope.

This jealously guarded upstairs was packed to the rafters with a most curious assortment of articles. There were piles of used lumber: planks and laths and pieces of old flooring with the nails still in them; old carpets and mattresses and bed-springs; scores of cigar boxes of rusty nails and screws, old keys and washers and broken locks, each duly labelled by Oliver in blue crayon; old furniture and heaping barrels of dusty dishes and ^{stained} pewter from the home of Oliver's dead parents; battered and bulging trunks full of old clothing and letters in faded handwriting; a packing-case of my Uncle Karl's photographic equipment; ^{the bust of a smiling Negro gauntly smoking a cigar;} and an old clamped and leather-bound German Bible which weighed almost as much as I did. There were odds and ends from Grandpa's old brewery and ^{a wealth} of obsolete saloon fixtures: various tanks, meters and valves, copper vats and an old pool table, a rack of tipless cues, beer pumps, miscellaneous tables and chairs, ^{foaming brass} chandeliers...

^{antique} From the cobwebbed rafters dangled a dozen or more large Alaskan kerosene lamps which formerly adorned the brewery and saloon, and pails partly filled with hardened paint left by a former tenant. There was a rusty weigh^t-lifting machine from the saloon-- Oliver could once ring its bell with one arm--and also a kerosene-lighted early slot machine of picture views of "Paris at Night." My older brothers had long since pilfered the pictures of the fine plump ladies. There was a row of old wooden wall telephones each a yard high, and a pile of tombstones, both left by former tenants. The list was endless. There was even a dust-covered racing sulky with hard-rubber tires, a memento of the days when Oliver used to race at the County Fair. Over all of this silent, ~~but~~ museum lay a thick covering of dust mingled with pigeon droppings. This was the building for which Oliver endlessly strove to find a paying tenant...

"This here place is centrally located," Oliver would say to some hapless prospective tenant, as they prowled about the warehouse, roping themselves up and down the elevator, poking about the ~~smelly~~^{beery} damp basement. I usually hung in the background to watch the familiar ritual. "An' it's nice and close to the railroad tracks, too," Oliver would add. And indeed it was. If it were any closer to the railroad tracks I was sure it would have been run over. The building shuddered to the foundations with every passing ore train.

When he was trying to rent the place Oliver became as gentle and full of guile as an artful woman. *At these times it often come over me what a loss it was to the world of drama that my father turned to the profession!* He would grow falsely pensive, drawing the palm of his big hand under his chin, dubiously shaking his head, drawing down his lower lip, blinking his eyes. I was held in a kind of a thrall. "But I sorta hate to let the place go again," he would say. Chuckling. "You see--hah!--I got all my tools and woods paraphernalia here." Serious again, shaking his head. "No-o-o, I guess I can't..." This usually made me brighten. It looked like the deal was off. Then there would be a sudden note of firm resolution, a square and manly lift of the head. Oliver would look the prospective tenant straight in the eye. Enough of this childish indecision. "I'll tell you what, man--I shouldn't do it, but I'll let you have it! Hell, I'll move ^{all} my things again--just to help you out, friend. Here--I got a little lease all drawn up." Softly. "What do you say?" It seemed almost a shame for a tenant to take advantage of Oliver. Yet no gentleman could resist this generous sacrifice. It had become a point of honor. "What do you say, man?"

At this juncture Oliver would produce a ninety-nine-year lease which he had painfully typed out with one finger at his desk down at the saloon on an ancient machine *The thing runs in a vicious circle, you see, Oliver using the loot from old tenants to gather in the new.* which was the residuary legacy of a former tenant of the warehouse. This typewriter stammered, automatically repeating each letter in an engaging lavender ink. But Oliver did not seem to mind. Perhaps he hoped the document would thereby ~~be~~^{become} doubly binding. "You sign on that there line there," Oliver would say, professionally pointing at the lease he had copied out of Maitland's "Every Man His Own Lawyer." Oliver had a deep distrust of all attorneys--"bloody connivers" he called them--and would pit his Maitland

4

against the Supreme Court itself, any day in the week. I once estimated that if all of the ninety-nine-year leases which had been put on the place were laid end for end that the millenium could not be far behind. It was a ghastly thought...

I would wait in quiet awe, watching the master at work. The helpless prospect would stand staring down at Oliver's lavender lease. I held my breath, whispering over and over to myself, "Don't sign, don't sign, you poor fool... Don't you know you'll go broke... The place is bewitched... It'll mean we got to move all this bloody junk around again-- -- Oh, there, he's signing it... Oh Lord, there goes another one..." Oliver would triumphantly fold the lease and put it away and shake hands with his new tenant. "I'm tellin' you--you're gettin' a real bargain, mister. Nice an' close to the tracks an' ever'thin'..." It seemed to me that it was unfair, it was no match, that somehow a black form of hypnosis entered in these transactions. This ceremony of the ninety-nine-year lease was virtually a semi-annual affair.

The old warehouse mutely bore the evidences of the host of tenants who had briefly roosted there. Wistfully hopeful plumbers, blacksmiths, fuel dealers, feed merchants, horse traders--once even a local telephone company and a travelling evangelist had paused there. Their number was // legion. The place still stank from the rotten apples abandoned by a disconsolate fruit merchant who had finally fled Chippewa with his pretty blonde bookkeeper. Since he was a married man with a large brood of children, the authorities had been obliged to bring him back. Oliver appeared as a witness down at Circuit Court and joyously testified against the unhappy man. In later years I wondered if the blonde bookkeeper might not have had something to do with it. Oliver was ever a solicitous landlord... The walls of the warehouse were bedizened with greag gobs of paint left by a partnership of bankrupt decorators. ^{In their flight they} They had also left a ~~large~~ farewell sign painted on the wall inviting their landlord to go to hell. "O. Biegler can go plumb to Hell!" ^{greeted Oliver, in large block letters.} Oliver, in a wild rage, had in turn painted this over in a mottled robin's egg blue. The upstairs floor groaned with the weight of the brownstone tombstones left by a defunct monument company. One of these drab red stones, a little marker with a child's head carved on it, read simply "Paul." That was my name. In bed

at night I often indulged in dark speculations on the reasons why Oliver kept it...

When the desperate tenants would finally abandon the warehouse, jumping the lease, leaving ninety-eight or more years of the term dangling in midair, they were usually so deep in Oliver's debt, so eager to get hence from the damp and malodorous building, so filled with black despair, that they usually left all manner of their belongings behind them--like dazed war refugees fleeing before an advancing enemy. By some uncanny instinct Oliver had these wild flights timed to the day, often to the very hour.

As Oliver sensed that another beautiful landlord and tenant relationship was drawing to a close, he would employ various diabolical shifts and ruses to hasten the evacuation. In this way more loot was apt to be left behind. One of his favorite strategems, as the zero hour approached, was to dispatch some sad-eyed barfly from the saloon up to the warehouse to casually drop the word that Oliver had left that morning to spend the day at camp. "But he belongs to be gettin' back now most anytime before dark," he would add. This last bit of intelligence was vital to create confusion and the need for haste. After planting these sinister seeds the barfly would leave. His departure would invariably be followed by a wild and hurried final exit from the premises, the frantic tenant usually trying to remove all of his possessions in one groaning drayload on Cornishman Benny Gobb's ^{one-horse} dray.

In the meantime Oliver would be waiting down at the saloon, pacing up and down, ^{tossing down a whiskey and bitters} peering out the alley door, getting periodic bulletins on the course of the retreat from his boozy accomplice. Almost before the harried tenant had rounded the corner of Tilford's Drug Store on Main and Canada Streets, precariously hanging from ^{one of the stakes of} Benny Gobb's dray, Oliver would descend on the place, invoking some mysterious provision of his lease, putting new secondhand locks on all the doors, and gleefully appropriating everything that had been left behind. I have always felt certain that Oliver enjoyed gathering in this miscellaneous swag infinitely more than he ever did receiving his ^{regular} rent payments. Oliver would stride about the littered and deserted place, poking into boxes, peering in drawers and cubbyholes, ^{cooing and} grunting and ahing over each new surprise. "My, my--a nice new cribbage board an' a deck of cards! An' poker chips! No wonder that there

See all them empty whiskey bottles! Just a Goddamn soaks!

lazy bastard failed--settin' around on his fat prat all day playin' cards! Ah--lookit what we have here..."

There was always this thrill of discovery, of unexpected treasure, like the time the Chippewa Monument Works had left behind the ghastly row of tombstones. Oliver had gloated over them like a ghoul. It was this same establishment that had forsaken the stuttering typewriter, along with boxes full of unused pads of gummed order blanks for tombstones, all in triplicate, first on white paper, then pale green, then pink. All through the lower grades in school I had been obliged to use the backs of these hateful order blanks in place of tablets. Oliver had put an inventory value on each pad and doled them out to me, six at a time, scrupulously crediting the transaction to this ancient rent account in his double-entry books. Oliver was not going to be hoisted on the petard of his own lease, despite the fact that the poor flown monument men were probably long since sleeping under their last tombstone. There were still a few of the pads left--but one afternoon ⁱⁿ ~~just~~ the ^{fall} ~~before~~ ^{when I was} in seventh grade I had finally foresworn using them ever again.

It had come about this way: I was sitting at my desk in school. It was a late study period, and nearly time for school to let out. I had been drawing pictures on one of the ^{tombstone} pads, as I often did. This time it was a picture of the South Camp. I turned the pad over and examined the printing on the blanks as I had done scores of times. Musing over the blank I idly fell to filling out one of the tombstone order blanks to fit my school teacher, sweet, tired Miss Lindquist, of whom I was very fond.

I had subconsciously chosen her, simply because she was standing up there in front of me. ^{And there was an} ~~It~~ ^{ethereal, other-world quality about the poor woman... Anyway, it} helped to pass the time and was more fun than studying. I warmed to my task, ^{carefully} filling in each blank space. "NAME: 'Karen Lindquist'; DATE OF BEATH: 'October 2nd'; DATE OF BIRTH: 'The Lord knows, being her childhood contemporary, but He won't tell'; TYPE OF MONUMENT: 'Consult my old man, the used-monument magnate of Chippewa'; SIZE OF MONUMENT: 'One that will be sure to hold the old girl down'; INSCRIPTION: 'Here lies a maiden lass, She never had a -- -- --'"

So much I had written, absorbed in my idle composition, oblivious that Miss Lindquist had silently padded around the room and stood behind me reading the glowing specifications of her own tombstone over my shoulder. There was a strangled moan, and I wheeled about to see Miss Lindquist, grown deathly pale, supporting herself between two desks. She stared down at me with bright horrified eyes, as though I were a reptile, a feeling about myself which I quickly shared with her. She tottered and seemed about to collapse.

"Oh, Miss Lindquist -- --" I began, rising and reaching out to assist her. I wildly feared that the tombstone order might not be in vain. "Don't touch me!" Miss Lindquist shrieked, shrinking away from me as from a leper. "You--you monstrous youth... Oh, how could you do this to me... And--and such a sweet good m-mother, too..." The stricken woman had finally found relief in tears. My misery was boundless. The dismissal bell sounded in the corridor, and Miss Lindquist vaguely waved the bewildered children out of the room. She still stood weeping by my desk. I hung back, burning with shame, and then hurried from the classroom. My pal, Fritz, was waiting for me in the hall, his pale blue eyes round and staring with curiosity. "Hully gee, Polly, what did you do?--goose her with your jack-knife?"

I fought a hysterical impulse to shout and whinny and leap and swear--and even to go back in the room and do just what Fritz had feared I might have done. This was the end--why hold back now...I thrust the fateful tombstone order at Fritz. Fritz's eyes bulged as he read on. "Oh my gawd, Polly," he whispered, "she didn't read this! Oh my gawd..." I nodded my head, pursing my lips tightly, seeking to control myself. Little gusts and blurts of laughter constricted my bowels and welled up my throat and beat against my pressed lips. I feared I was going to get one of my mother's helpless laughing spells, and this very fear seemed to add a sort of macabre comedy to the situation.

Miss Lindquist slowly came out of her room, wearing her wraps and dabbing her red eyes with a knotted wet handkerchief. Fritz silently faded down the hallway. ^{deserted} ^{My teacher} ~~she~~ stood

in the dusky corridor, staring dully at me, sniffing, fighting back her tears. A wisp of damp gray hair hung down her forehead. All the laughter drained from me in an instant. Miss Lindquist looked so lost and forlorn that I wanted to throw my arms about her and cry with her. In a flash of perception I saw her as one of the brave procession of unselfish women, the school teachers of the world; loveless, lonely, misunderstood; sensitive, patient, intelligent; often blamed for faults which inhered in a creaking educational system and not in them; constantly paying the price of spinsterhood, not despite but because of their very pride and superior endowments; patiently guiding and developing the children of lesser women who happened to be more adroit after dark; lavishing on the ungrateful brats of these other women their starved and thwarted affections... All of these things swept over me in a wave of understanding. I had never before in my life felt such sympathy and humility--and such abject shame...

"Oh Miss Lindquist--" [^]I heard myself speaking in a croaking voice that didn't sound like my own-- "--from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for what I did... Please believe me that it was entirely thoughtless--I--I didn't realize..." I stopped, the words clogging in my throat. I knew what I wanted to say but I could not say it. I impulsively clutched at her hand and held it. "Next to my mother, Miss Lindquist--I think you're one of the finest ladies I ever knew. Honest cross my heart, Miss Lindquist..." Then I turned and blindly ran out of the school, Fritz falling in beside me. I did not stop running. We ran all the way downtown to Oliver's saloon. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry. On the way to the saloon I pledged Fritz to black secrecy. The next ^{morning} ~~day~~ [^] Miss Lindquist acted as though nothing had ever happened. She even nodded and smiled brightly at me when she saw me come in the next morning with my ^{brand} ~~new~~ [^] Jumbo writing tablet.

* * *

But back to Oliver's warehouse. There isn't much more to tell. The night my father, looking ^{so} ~~as~~ [^] bewildered, quietly died in his big walnut bed, there was a wild clanging of the town's fire bell. ^{From} ~~By~~ [^] force of habit my mother, Belle, hurried to the back bedroom and looked out the window towards Canada Street. There was a great glow

of fire coming from where the warehouse stood. We could hear the muffled shouts of the firemen, the noise of falling timbers. There was an awesome crash and a tremendous shaft of flame soared into the air. ^{I knew that the} ~~The~~ great wheel of the warehouse elevator had plunged into the basement.

My mother looked at me. By the glow of the fire I could see tears in her eyes. There seemed to be a quiet smile on her face. She was whispering. "It knew," she was whispering. "It knew that all the color had gone out of its life..." I put my arm about my mother, and we stood there together, watching the death of Oliver's warehouse.

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

OLIVER'S WAREHOUSE

by
Robert Traver

This is the story of an old building. For many years it stood by the railroad tracks in the iron-mining town of Chippewa, which lies in a broad valley near Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This ancient structure was built by my brewer grandfather, Nicholas Biegler, a few years after the Civil War. Following Grandpa's death it passed into the large hands of my father, Oliver Biegler. This tall, restless man was, among many other things, a saloonkeeper. Now the old building is only a memory, as it was destroyed by fire about ten years ago. But I have never forgotten my father's old warehouse...

Oliver's warehouse on Canada Street was one of those fated structures, which abound in the small towns of America, in which no enterprise ever succeeded. There was a "hant" on the place, and insolvency and despair was the portion of any optimistic soul that sought to dispute it. All during my boyhood Oliver had been trying vainly to get a tenant in the place who could continue to pay his rent after the first month. Oliver enjoyed the heady feeling of being a landlord. And it gave him an opportunity to use the jealous knowledge of higher education he had gained in Milwaukee years before: his course in double-entry bookkeeping. Oliver kept an elaborate set of books, recording in monstrous spelling the minutest transactions in his beautiful copperplate handwriting. "To Martin Hallgren--one second hand slay for farm.....\$4.75."

As I have said, the old two-story frame building had been built by my grandfather Biegler many years ago as a storage place for his beer. Grandpa Biegler had lived but a year or so after it was completed. He was the first of a long procession of occupants. The warehouse had a damp and moldy stone-walled basement with a stone floor. The first floor rose several feet above the street level. There was a large work room in front, and in the rear there was a series of flimsily partitioned rooms, more like cages or coops. The

front work room was lighted by a rippling expanse of pigeon-stained windows covering the entire front from the ceiling to the floor and broken only by tall and narrow double-doors in the middle. There was an unused sliding side door in the alleyway through which once had rolled an ocean of Grandpa's beer. The wide double doors in the rear opened onto a ramp leading into the barnyard beyond which stood Oliver's horsebarn.

But the most dramatic part of the warehouse was the upstairs loft, a place of creaking pine rafters and fluttering pigeons, which could be reached only by a great-wheeled elevator, which ran through the center of the building and was operated by hand with an endless rope. My father was not usually given to understatement, but I once heard him refer to this fantastic labyrinth of junk as "jest my store room where I put a few odds and ends." Oliver never rented this loft with the rest of the building, but kept it fanatically barred and locked against prying tenants.

This jealously guarded upstairs was packed to the rafters with a most curious assortment of articles. There were piles of used lumber: planks and laths and pieces of old flooring with the nails still in them; old carpets and mattresses and bed-springs; scores of cigar boxes of rusty nails and screws, old keys and washers and broken locks, each duly labelled by Oliver in blue crayon; old furniture and heaping barrels of dusty dishes and stained pewter from the home of Oliver's dead parents; battered and bulging trunks full of old clothing and letters in faded handwriting; a packing-case of my Uncle Karl's photographic equipment; the bust of a smiling Negro jauntily smoking a cigar; an old clamped and leather-bound German Bible which weighed almost as much as I did. There were odds and ends from Grandpa's old brewery and a wealth of obsolete saloon fixtures: various tanks, meters and valves, copper vats and an old pool table, a rack of tipless cues, beer pumps, miscellaneous tables and chairs, foaming brass chandeliers...

From the cobwebbed rafters dangled a dozen or more large Alaskan kerosene lamps which formerly adorned the brewery and saloon, and pails partly filled with hardened paint left by a former tenant. There was a rusty weight-lifting machine from the saloon--Oliver could once ring its bell with one arm--and also a kerosene-lighted early slot machine of picture views of "Paris at Night."

My older brothers had long since pilfered the pictures of the fine plump ladies. There was a row of old wooden wall telephones each a yard high, and a pile of tombstones, both left by former tenants. The list was endless. There was even a dust-covered racing sulky with hard-rubber tires, a memento of the days when Oliver used to race at the County Fair. Over all of this silent, museum lay a thick covering of dust mingled with pigeon droppings. This was the building for which Oliver endlessly strove to find a paying tenant...

"This here place is centrally located," Oliver would say to some hapless prospective tenant, as they prowled about the warehouse, roping themselves up and down the elevator, poking about the beery damp basement. I usually hung in the background to watch the familiar ritual. "An' it's nice and close to the railroad tracks, too," Oliver would add. And indeed it was. If it were any closer to the railroad tracks I was sure it would have been run over. The building shuddered to the foundations with every passing ore train.

When he was trying to rent the place Oliver became as gentle and full of guile as an artful woman. At these times it often came over me what a loss it was to the world of drama that my father turned to the saloon. He would grow falsely pensive, drawing the palm of his big hand under his chin, dubiously shaking his head, drawing down his lower lip, blinking his eyes. I was held in a kind of a thrall. "But I sorta hate to let the place go again," he would say. Chuckling. "You see-hah!--I got all my tools and woods paraphernalia here." Serious again, shaking his head. "No-o-o, I guess I can't..". This usually made me brighten. It looked like the deal was off. Then there would be a sudden note of firm resolution, a square and manly lift of the head. Oliver would look the prospective tenant straight in the eye. Enough of this childish indecision. "I'll tell you what, man--I shouldn't do it, but I'll let you have it! Hell, I'll move all my things again--just to help you out, friend. Here--I got a little lease all drawn up." Softly. "What do you say?" It seemed almost a shame for a tenant to take advantage of Oliver. Yet no gentleman could resist this generous sacrifice. It had become a point of honor. "What do you say, man?"

At this juncture Oliver would produce a ninety-nine-year lease which he had painfully typed out with one finger at his desk down at the saloon on an ancient machine which was the residuary legacy of a former tenant of the warehouse. The thing ran in a vicious circle, you see, Oliver using the loot from old tenants to gather in the new. This typewriter stammered, automatically repeating each letter in an engaging lavender ink. But Oliver did not seem to mind. Perhaps he hoped the document would thereby become doubly binding. "You sign on that there line there," Oliver would say, professionally pointing at the lease he had copied out of Maitland's "Every Man His Own Lawyer." Oliver had a deep distrust of all attorneys--"bloody connivers" he called them--and he would pit his Maitland against the Supreme Court itself, any day in the week. I once estimated that if all of the ninety-nine-year leases which had been put on the place were laid end for end that the millenium could not be far behind. It was a ghastly thought...

I would wait in quiet awe, watching the master at work. The helpless prospect would stand staring down at Oliver's lavender lease. I held my breath, whispering over and over to myself, "Don't sign, don't sign, you poor fool... Don't you know you'll go broke... The place is bewitched... It'll mean we got to move all this bloody junk around again-- -- Oh, there, he's signing it... Oh Lord, there goes another one..." Oliver would triumphantly fold the lease and put it away and shake hands with his new tenant. "I'm tellin' you--you're gettin' a real bargain, mister. Nice an' close to the tracks an' ever'thin..." It seemed to me that it was unfair, it was no match, that somehow a black form of hypnosis entered in these transactions. This ceremony of the ninety-nine-year lease was virtually a semi-annual affair.

The old warehouse mutely bore the evidences of the host of tenants who had briefly roosted there. Wistfully hopeful plumbers, blacksmiths, fuel dealers, feed merchants, horse traders--once even a local telephone company and a travelling evangelist had paused there. Their number was legion. The place still stank from the rotten apples abandoned by a disconsolate fruit merchant who had finally fled Chippewa with his pretty blonde bookkeeper. Since he was a married man with a large brood of children, the authorities

had been obliged to bring him back. Oliver appeared as a witness down at Circuit Court and joyously testified against the unhappy man. In later years I wondered if the blonde bookkeeper might not have had something to do with it. Oliver was ever a solicitous landlord... The walls of the warehouse were bedizened with great gobs of paint left by a partnership of bankrupt decorators. In their flight they had also left a farewell sign painted on the wall inviting their landlord to go to hell. "O. Biegler can go plumb to Hell!" greeted Oliver in large block letters. Oliver, in a wild rage, had in turn painted this over in a mottled robin's egg blue. The upstairs floor groaned with the weight of the brownstone tombstones left by a defunct monument company. One of these drab red stones, a little marker with a child's head carved on it, read simply "Paul." That was my name. In bed at night I often indulged in dark speculations on the reasons why Oliver kept it...

When the desperate tenants would finally abandon the warehouse, jumping the lease, leaving ninety-eight or more years of the term dangling in midair, they were usually so deep in Oliver's debt, so eager to get hence from the damp and malodorous building, so filled with black despair, that they usually left all manner of their belongings behind them--like dazed war refugees fleeing before an advancing enemy. By some uncanny instinct Oliver had these wild flights timed to the day, often to the very hour.

As Oliver sensed that another beautiful landlord and tenant relationship was drawing to a close, he would employ various diabolical shifts and ruses to hasten the evacuation. In this way more loot was apt to be left behind. One of his favorite strategems, as the zero hour approached, was to dispatch some sad-eyed barfly from the saloon up to the warehouse to casually drop the word that Oliver had left that morning to spend the day at camp. "But he belongs to be gettin' back now most anytime before dark," he would add. This last bit of intelligence was vital to create confusion and the need for haste. After planting these sinister seeds the barfly would leave. His departure would invariably be followed by a wild and hurried final exit from the premises, the frantic tenant usually trying to remove all of his possessions in one groaning drayload on Cornishman Benny Gobb's one-horse dray.

In the meantime Oliver would be waiting down at the saloon, pacing up and down, tossing down a whiskey and bitters, peering out the alley door, getting periodic bulletins on the course of the retreat from his boozy accomplice. Almost before the harried tenant had rounded the corner of Tilford's Drug Store on Main and Canada Streets, precariously hanging from one of the stakes of Benny Gobb's dray, Oliver would descend on the place, invoking some mysterious provision of his lease, putting new secondhand locks on all the doors, and gleefully appropriating everything that had been left behind. I have always felt certain that Oliver enjoyed gathering in this miscellaneous swag infinitely more than he ever did receiving his regular rent payments. Oliver would stride about the littered and deserted place, poking into boxes, peering in drawers and cubbyholes, cooing and grunting and aching over each new surprise. "My, my--a nice new cribbage board an' a deck of cards! An' poker chips! No wonder that there lazy bastard failed--settin' around on his fat prat all day playin' cards! See all them empty whiskey bottles! Jest a Goddam soak! Ah--lookit what we have here..."

There was always this thrill of discovery, of unexpected treasure, like the time the Chippewa Monument Works had left behind the ghastly row of tombstones. Oliver had gloated over them like a ghoul. It was this same establishment that had forsaken the stuttering typewriter, along with boxes full of unused pads of gummed order blanks for tombstones, all in triplicate, first on white paper, then pale green, then pink. All through the lower grades in school I had been obliged to use the backs of these hateful order blanks in place of tablets. Oliver had put an inventory value on each pad and doled them out to me, six at a time, scrupulously crediting the transaction to this ancient rent account in his double-entry books. Oliver was not going to be hoisted on the petard of his own lease, despite the fact that the poor floundering monument men were probably long since sleeping under their last tombstone. There were still a few of the pads left--but one afternoon in the Fall when I was in seventh grade I had finally foresworn using them ever again.

It had come about this way: I was sitting at my desk in school. It was a late study period, and nearly time for school to let out. I had been drawing

pictures on one of the tombstone pads, as I often did. This time it was a picture of the South Camp. I turned the pad over and examined the printing on the blanks as I had done scores of times. Musing over the blank I idly fell to filling out one of the tombstone order blanks to fit my school teacher, sweet, tired Miss Lindquist, of whom I was very fond. I had subconsciously chosen her, simply because she was standing up there in front of me. And there was an ethereal, other-world quality about the poor woman... Anyway, it helped to pass the time and was more fun than studying. I warmed to my task, carefully filling in each blank space. "NAME: 'Karen Lindquist'; DATE OF DEATH: 'October 2nd'; DATE OF BIRTH: 'The Lord knows, being her childhood contemporary, but He won't tell'; TYPE OF MONUMENT: 'Consult my old man, the used-monument magnate of Chippewa'; SIZE OF MONUMENT: 'One that will be sure to hold the old girl down'; INSCRIPTION: 'Here lies a maiden lass, She never had a -- -- --'"

So much I had written, absorbed in my idle composition, oblivious that Miss Lindquist had silently padded around the room and stood behind me reading the glowing specifications of her own tombstone over my shoulder. There was a strangled moan, and I wheeled about to see Miss Lindquist, grown deathly pale, supporting herself between two desks. She stared down at me with bright horrified eyes, as though I were a reptile, a feeling about myself which I quickly shared with her. She tottered and seemed about to collapse.

"Oh, Miss Lindquist-- --" I began, rising and reaching out to assist her. I wildly feared that the tombstone order might not be in vain. "Don't touch me!" Miss Lindquist shrieked, shrinking away from me as from a leper. "You-- you monstrous youth... Oh, how could you do this to me... And--and such a sweet good m-mother, too..." The stricken woman had finally found relief in tears. My misery was boundless. The dismissal bell sounded in the corridor, and Miss Lindquist vaguely waved the bewildered children out of the room. She still stood weeping by my desk. I hung back, burning with shame, and then hurried from the classroom. My pal, Fritz, was waiting for me in the hall, his pale blue eyes round and staring with curiosity. "Hully gee, Polly, what did you do?--goose her with your jack-knife?"

I fought a hysterical impulse to shout and whinny and leap and swear--and even to go back in the room and do just what Fritz had feared I might have done. This was the end--why hold back now... I thrust the fateful tombstone order at Fritz. Fritz's eyes bulged as he read on. "Oh my gawd, Polly," he whispered, "she didn't read this! Oh my gawd..." I nodded my head, pursing my lips tightly, seeking to control myself. Little gusts and blurts of laughter constricted my bowels and welled up my throat and beat against my pressed lips. I feared I was going to get one of my mother's helpless laughing spells, and this very fear seemed to add a sort of macabre comedy to the situation.

Miss Lindquist slowly came out of her room, wearing her wraps and dabbing her red eyes with a knotted wet handkerchief. Fritz silently faded down the deserted hallway. My teacher stood in the dusky corridor, staring dully at me, sniffing, fighting back her tears. A wisp of damp gray hair hung down her forehead. All the laughter drained from me in an instant. Miss Lindquist looked so lost and forlorn that I wanted to throw my arms about her and cry with her. In a flash of perception I saw her as one of the brave procession of unselfish women, the school teachers of the world; loveless, lonely, misunderstood; sensitive, patient, intelligent; often blamed for faults which inhered in a creaking educational system and not in them; constantly paying the price of spinsterhood, not despite but because of their very pride and superior endowments; patiently guiding and developing the children of lesser women who happened to be more adroit after dark; lavishing on the ungrateful brats of these other women their starved and thwarted affections... All of these things swept over me in a wave of understanding. I had never before in my life felt such sympathy and humility--and such abject shame...

"Oh Miss Lindquist--"---I heard myself speaking in a croaking voice that didn't sound like my own-- "---from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for what I did... Please believe me that it was entirely thoughtless--I--I didn't realize..." I stopped, the words clogging in my throat. I knew what I wanted to say but I could not say it. I impulsively clutched at her hand and held it. "Next to my mother, Miss Lindquist--I think you're one of the finest ladies I

ever knew. Honest cross my heart, Miss Lindquist..." Then I turned and blindly ran out of the school, Fritz falling in beside me. I did not stop running. We ran all the way downtown to Oliver's saloon. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry. On the way to the saloon I pledged Fritz to black secrecy. The next morning Miss Lindquist acted as though nothing had ever happened. She even nodded and smiled brightly at me when she saw me come in the next morning with my brand new Jumbo writing tablet.

* * *

But back to Oliver's warehouse. There isn't much more to tell. The night my father, looking so bewildered, quietly died in his big walnut bed, there was a wild clanging of the town's ^{fire} bell. From force of habit my mother, Belle, hurried to the back bedroom and looked out the window towards Canada Street. There was a great glow of fire coming from where the warehouse stood. We could hear the muffled shouts of the firemen, the noise of falling timbers. There was an awesome crash and a tremendous shaft of flame soared into the air. I knew that the great wheel of the warehouse elevator had plunged into the basement.

My mother looked at me. By the glow of the fire I could see tears in her eyes. There seemed to be a quiet smile on her face. She was whispering. "It knew," she was whispering. "It knew that all the color had gone out of its life..." I put my arm about my mother, and we stood there together, watching the death of Oliver's warehouse.

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

OLIVER'S WAREHOUSE

by
Robert Traver

This is the story of an old building. For many years it stood by the railroad tracks in the iron-mining town of Chippewa, which lies in a broad valley near Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This ancient structure was built by my brewer grandfather, Nicholas Biegler, a few years after the Civil War. Following Grandpa's death it passed into the large hands of my father, Oliver Biegler. This tall, restless man was, among many other things, a saloonkeeper. Now the old building is only a memory, as it was destroyed by fire about ten years ago. But I have never forgotten my father's old warehouse...

Oliver's warehouse on Canada Street was one of those fated structures, which abound in the small towns of America, in which no enterprise ever succeeded. There was a "hant" on the place, and insolvency and despair was the portion of any optimistic soul that sought to dispute it. All during my boyhood Oliver had been trying vainly to get a tenant in the place who could continue to pay his rent after the first month. Oliver enjoyed the heady feeling of being a landlord. And it gave him an opportunity to use the jealous knowledge of higher education he had gained in Milwaukee years before: his course in double-entry bookkeeping. Oliver kept an elaborate set of books, recording in monstrous spelling the minutest transactions in his beautiful copperplate handwriting. "To Martin Hallgren--one second hand slay for farm.....\$4.75."

As I have said, the old two-story frame building had been built by my grandfather Biegler many years ago as a storage place for his beer. Grandpa Biegler had lived but a year or so after it was completed. He was the first of a long procession of occupants. The warehouse had a damp and moldy stone-walled basement with a stone floor. The first floor rose several feet above the street level. There was a large work room in front, and in the rear there was a series of flimsily partitioned rooms, more like cages or coops. The

front work room was lighted by a rippling expanse of pigeon-stained windows covering the entire front from the ceiling to the floor and broken only by tall and narrow double-doors in the middle. There was an unused sliding side door in the alleyway through which once had rolled an ocean of Grandpa's beer. The wide double doors in the rear opened onto a ramp leading into the barnyard beyond which stood Oliver's horsebarn.

But the most dramatic part of the warehouse was the upstairs loft, a place of creaking pine rafters and fluttering pigeons, which could be reached only by a great-wheeled elevator, which ran through the center of the building and was operated by hand with an endless rope. My father was not usually given to understatement, but I once heard him refer to this fantastic labyrinth of junk as "jest my store room where I put a few odds and ends." Oliver never rented this loft with the rest of the building, but kept it fanatically barred and locked against prying tenants.

This jealously guarded upstairs was packed to the rafters with a most curious assortment of articles. There were piles of used lumber: planks and laths and pieces of old flooring with the nails still in them; old carpets and mattresses and bed-springs; scores of cigar boxes of rusty nails and screws, old keys and washers and broken locks, each duly labelled by Oliver in blue crayon; old furniture and heaping barrels of dusty dishes and stained pewter from the home of Oliver's dead parents; battered and bulging trunks full of old clothing and letters in faded handwriting; a packing-case of my Uncle Karl's photographic equipment; the bust of a smiling Negro jauntily smoking a cigar; an old clamped and leather-bound German Bible which weighed almost as much as I did. There were odds and ends from Grandpa's old brewery and a wealth of obsolete saloon fixtures: various tanks, meters and valves, copper vats and an old pool table, a rack of tipless cues, beer pumps, miscellaneous tables and chairs, foaming brass chandeliers...

From the cobwebbed rafters dangled a dozen or more large Alaskan kerosene lamps which formerly adorned the brewery and saloon, and pails partly filled with hardened paint left by a former tenant. There was a rusty weight-lifting machine from the saloon--Oliver could once ring its bell with one arm--and also a kerosene-lighted early slot machine of picture views of "Paris at Night."

My older brothers had long since pilfered the pictures of the fine plump ladies. There was a row of old wooden wall telephones each a yard high, and a pile of tombstones, both left by former tenants. The list was endless. There was even a dust-covered racing sulky with hard-rubber tires, a memento of the days when Oliver used to race at the County Fair. Over all of this silent museum lay a thick covering of dust mingled with pigeon droppings. This was the building for which Oliver endlessly strove to find a paying tenant...

"This here place is centrally located," Oliver would say to some hapless prospective tenant, as they prowled about the warehouse, roping themselves up and down the elevator, poking about the beery damp basement. I usually hung in the background to watch the familiar ritual. "An' it's nice and close to the railroad tracks, too," Oliver would add. And indeed it was. If it were any closer to the railroad tracks I was sure it would have been run over. The building shuddered to the foundations with every passing ore train.

When he was trying to rent the place Oliver became as gentle and full of guile as an artful woman. At these times it often came over me what a loss it was to the world of drama that my father turned to the saloon. He would grow falsely pensive, drawing the palm of his big hand under his chin, dubiously shaking his head, drawing down his lower lip, blinking his eyes. I was held in a kind of a thrall. "But I sorta hate to let the place go again," he would say. Chuckling. "You see-hah!--I got all my tools and woods paraphernalia here." Serious again, shaking his head. "No-o-o, I guess I can't..". This usually made me brighten. It looked like the deal was off. Then there would be a sudden note of firm resolution, a square and manly lift of the head. Oliver would look the prospective tenant straight in the eye. Enough of this childish indecision. "I'll tell you what, man--I shouldn't do it, but I'll let you have it! Hell, I'll move all my things again--just to help you out, friend. Here--I got a little lease all drawn up." Softly. "What do you say?" It seemed almost a shame for a tenant to take advantage of Oliver. Yet no gentleman could resist this generous sacrifice. It had become a point of honor. "What do you say, man?"

At this juncture Oliver would produce a ninety-nine-year lease which he had painfully typed out with one finger at his desk down at the saloon on an ancient machine which was the residuary legacy of a former tenant of the warehouse. The thing ran in a vicious circle, you see, Oliver using the loot from old tenants to gather in the new. This typewriter stammered, automatically repeating each letter in an engaging lavender ink. But Oliver did not seem to mind. Perhaps he hoped the document would thereby become doubly binding. "You sign on that there line there," Oliver would say, professionally pointing at the lease he had copied out of Maitland's "Every Man His Own Lawyer." Oliver had a deep distrust of all attorneys--"bloody connivers" he called them--and he would pit his Maitland against the Supreme Court itself, any day in the week. I once estimated that if all of the ninety-nine-year leases which had been put on the place were laid end for end that the millenium could not be far behind. It was a ghastly thought...

I would wait in quiet awe, watching the master at work. The helpless prospect would stand staring down at Oliver's lavender lease. I held my breath, whispering over and over to myself, "Don't sign, don't sign, you poor fool... Don't you know you'll go broke... The place is bewitched... It'll mean we got to move all this bloody junk around again-- -- Oh, there, he's signing it... Oh Lord, there goes another one..." Oliver would triumphantly fold the lease and put it away and shake hands with his new tenant. "I'm tellin' you--you're gettin' a real bargain, mister. Nice an' close to the tracks an' ever'thin..." It seemed to me that it was unfair, it was no match, that somehow a black form of hypnosis entered in these transactions. This ceremony of the ninety-nine-year lease was virtually a semi-annual affair.

The old warehouse mutely bore the evidences of the host of tenants who had briefly roosted there. Wistfully hopeful plumbers, blacksmiths, fuel dealers, feed merchants, horse traders--once even a local telephone company and a travelling evangelist had paused there. Their number was legion. The place still stank from the rotten apples abandoned by a disconsolate fruit merchant who had finally fled Chippewa with his pretty blonde bookkeeper. Since he was a married man with a large brood of children, the authorities

had been obliged to bring him back. Oliver appeared as a witness down at Circuit Court and joyously testified against the unhappy man. In later years I wondered if the blonde bookkeeper might not have had something to do with it. Oliver was ever a solicitous landlord... The walls of the warehouse were bedizened with great gobs of paint left by a partnership of bankrupt decorators. In their flight they had also left a farewell sign painted on the wall inviting their landlord to go to hell. "O. Biegler can go plumb to Hell!" greeted Oliver in large block letters. Oliver, in a wild rage, had in turn painted this over in a mottled robin's egg blue. The upstairs floor groaned with the weight of the brownstone tombstones left by a defunct monument company. One of these drab red stones, a little marker with a child's head carved on it, read simply "Paul." That was my name. In bed at night I often indulged in dark speculations on the reasons why Oliver kept it...

When the desperate tenants would finally abandon the warehouse, jumping the lease, leaving ninety-eight or more years of the term dangling in midair, they were usually so deep in Oliver's debt, so eager to get hence from the damp and malodorous building, so filled with black despair, that they usually left all manner of their belongings behind them--like dazed war refugees fleeing before an advancing enemy. By some uncanny instinct Oliver had these wild flights timed to the day, often to the very hour.

As Oliver sensed that another beautiful landlord and tenant relationship was drawing to a close, he would employ various diabolical shifts and ruses to hasten the evacuation. In this way more loot was apt to be left behind. One of his favorite stratagems, as the zero hour approached, was to dispatch some sad-eyed barfly from the saloon up to the warehouse to casually drop the word that Oliver had left that morning to spend the day at camp. "But he belongs to be gettin' back now most anytime before dark," he would add. This last bit of intelligence was vital to create confusion and the need for haste. After planting these sinister seeds the barfly would leave. His departure would invariably be followed by a wild and hurried final exit from the premises, the frantic tenant usually trying to remove all of his possessions in one groaning drayload on Cornishman Benny Gobb's one-horse dray.

In the meantime Oliver would be waiting down at the saloon, pacing up and down, tossing down a whiskey and bitters, peering out the alley door, getting periodic bulletins on the course of the retreat from his boozy accomplice. Almost before the harried tenant had rounded the corner of Tilford's Drug Store on Main and Canada Streets, precariously hanging from one of the stakes of Benny Gobb's dray, Oliver would descend on the place, invoking some mysterious provision of his lease, putting new secondhand locks on all the doors, and gleefully appropriating everything that had been left behind. I have always felt certain that Oliver enjoyed gathering in this miscellaneous swag infinitely more than he ever did receiving his regular rent payments. Oliver would stride about the littered and deserted place, poking into boxes, peering in drawers and cubbyholes, cooing and grunting and ahing over each new surprise. "My, my--a nice new cribbage board an' a deck of cards! An' poker chips! No wonder that there lazy bastard failed--settin' around on his fat prat all day playin' cards! See all them empty whiskey bottles! Jest a Goddam soak! Ah--lookit what we have here..."

There was always this thrill of discovery, of unexpected treasure, like the time the Chippewa Monument Works had left behind the ghastly row of tombstones. Oliver had gloated over them like a ghoul. It was this same establishment that had forsaken the stuttering typewriter, along with boxes full of unused pads of gummed order blanks for tombstones, all in triplicate, first on white paper, then pale green, then pink. All through the lower grades in school I had been obliged to use the backs of these hateful order blanks in place of tablets. Oliver had put an inventory value on each pad and doled them out to me, six at a time, scrupulously crediting the transaction to this ancient rent account in his double-entry books. Oliver was not going to be hoisted on the petard of his own lease, despite the fact that the poor flown monument men were probably long since sleeping under their last tombstone. There were still a few of the pads left--but one afternoon in the Fall when I was in seventh grade I had finally foresworn using them ever again.

It had come about this way: I was sitting at my desk in school. It was a late study period, and nearly time for school to let out. I had been drawing

pictures on one of the tombstone pads, as I often did. This time it was a picture of the South Camp. I turned the pad over and examined the printing on the blanks as I had done scores of times. Musing over the blank I idly fell to filling out one of the tombstone order blanks to fit my school teacher, sweet, tired Miss Lindquist, of whom I was very fond. I had subconsciously chosen her, simply because she was standing up there in front of me. And there was an ethereal, other-world quality about the poor woman... Anyway, it helped to pass the time and was more fun than studying. I warmed to my task, carefully filling in each blank space. "NAME: 'Karen Lindquist'; DATE OF DEATH: 'October 2nd'; DATE OF BIRTH: 'The Lord knows, being her childhood contemporary, but He won't tell'; TYPE OF MONUMENT: 'Consult my old man, the used-monument magnate of Chippewa'; SIZE OF MONUMENT: 'One that will be sure to hold the old girl down'; INSCRIPTION: 'Here lies a maiden lass, She never had a -- -- --'"

So much I had written, absorbed in my idle composition, oblivious that Miss Lindquist had silently padded around the room and stood behind me reading the glowing specifications of her own tombstone over my shoulder. There was a strangled moan, and I wheeled about to see Miss Lindquist, grown deathly pale, supporting herself between two desks. She stared down at me with bright horrified eyes, as though I were a reptile, a feeling about myself which I quickly shared with her. She tottered and seemed about to collapse.

"Oh, Miss Lindquist-- --" I began, rising and reaching out to assist her. I wildly feared that the tombstone order might not be in vain. "Don't touch me!" Miss Lindquist shrieked, shrinking away from me as from a leper. "You-- you monstrous youth... Oh, how could you do this to me... And--and such a sweet good m-mother, too..." The stricken woman had finally found relief in tears. My misery was boundless. The dismissal bell sounded in the corridor, and Miss Lindquist vaguely waved the bewildered children out of the room. She still stood weeping by my desk. I hung back, burning with shame, and then hurried from the classroom. My pal, Fritz, was waiting for me in the hall, his pale blue eyes round and staring with curiosity. "Hully gee, Polly, what did you do?--goose her with your jack-knife?"

I fought a hysterical impulse to shout and whinny and leap and swear--and even to go back in the room and do just what Fritz had feared I might have done. This was the end--why hold back now... I thrust the fateful tombstone order at Fritz. Fritz's eyes bulged as he read on. "Oh my gawd, Polly," he whispered, "she didn't read this! Oh my gawd..." I nodded my head, pursing my lips tightly, seeking to control myself. Little gusts and blurts of laughter constricted my bowels and welled up my throat and beat against my pressed lips. I feared I was going to get one of my mother's helpless laughing spells, and this very fear seemed to add a sort of macabre comedy to the situation.

Miss Lindquist slowly came out of her room, wearing her wraps and dabbing her red eyes with a knotted wet handkerchief. Fritz silently faded down the deserted hallway. My teacher stood in the dusky corridor, staring dully at me, sniffing, fighting back her tears. A wisp of damp gray hair hung down her forehead. All the laughter drained from me in an instant. Miss Lindquist looked so lost and forlorn that I wanted to throw my arms about her and cry with her. In a flash of perception I saw her as one of the brave procession of unselfish women, the school teachers of the world; loveless, lonely, misunderstood; sensitive, patient, intelligent; often blamed for faults which inhered in a creaking educational system and not in them; constantly paying the price of spinsterhood, not despite but because of their very pride and superior endowments; patiently guiding and developing the children of lesser women who happened to be more adroit after dark; lavishing on the ungrateful brats of these other women their starved and thwarted affections... All of these things swept over me in a wave of understanding. I had never before in my life felt such sympathy and humility--and such abject shame...

"Oh Miss Lindquist--"--I heard myself speaking in a croaking voice that didn't sound like my own-- "--from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for what I did... Please believe me that it was entirely thoughtless--I--I didn't realize..." I stopped, the words clogging in my throat. I knew what I wanted to say but I could not say it. I impulsively clutched at her hand and held it. "Next to my mother, Miss Lindquist--I think you're one of the finest ladies I

ever knew. Honest cross my heart, Miss Lindquist..." Then I turned and blindly ran out of the school, Fritz falling in beside me. I did not stop running. We ran all the way downtown to Oliver's saloon. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry. On the way to the saloon I pledged Fritz to black secrecy. The next morning Miss Lindquist acted as though nothing had ever happened. She even/nodded and smiled brightly at me when she saw me come in the next morning with my brand new Jumbo writing tablet.

* * *

But back to Oliver's warehouse. There isn't much more to tell. The night my father, looking so bewildered, quietly died in his big walnut bed, there was a wild clanging of the town's ^{fire} bell. From force of habit my mother, Belle, hurried to the back bedroom and looked out the window towards Canada Street. There was a great glow of fire coming from where the warehouse stood. We could hear the muffled shouts of the firemen, the noise of falling timbers. There was an awesome crash and a tremendous shaft of flame soared into the air. I knew that the great wheel of the warehouse elevator had plunged into the basement.

My mother looked at me. By the glow of the fire I could see tears in her eyes. There seemed to be a quiet smile on her face. She was whispering. "It knew," she was whispering. "It knew that all the color had gone out of its life..." I put my arm about my mother, and we stood there together, watching the death of Oliver's warehouse.