



# CHESS BARBS



by Jude Acers (US senior master)

You made the mistake and you must pay the price. There is a pink kitten and Chess Openings: Theory and Practice. There is Sam. There is Jude. There is a meat cleaver. Die, Jude, die. The meat cleaver rises smoothly into the air. It is behind Sam's back. It is arching smoothly toward you, Jude. It is...

## THE END OF A HUSTLER Part XII

### THE ROAD

The two policemen eyed me disbelievingly. They were courteous and wanted to help. We were miles from where it happened. The policeman said, "We may get spears, bows and arrows in that neighborhood. You're lucky to be alive, man. Look, are you sure what you're telling us is the way it happened? Are you sure that stuff in the house is yours? All we can do is ask for its return, in any event. Look, buddy, are you sure that this thing really happened?"

"Yes, sir! There is a pair of eyeglasses. I can't see in the distance without them. I can't buy another pair. I just don't have any money. I live in this hotel with a friend. His name is Al Raymond. He is a jack-of-all-trades. I was trying to make some money so I wouldn't have to keep bumming money from him just to eat, to stay alive. I know I shouldn't be alive, that it was a miracle. I'm grateful just to be alive. He can have all the money. I just need my glasses to see. I would deeply appreciate your help."

The police car goes down Geary and I see the playground and the children and the old man again. I see the beautiful green grass, and the alley is just behind them. I was telling the two policemen about Chess Openings: Theory and Practice by I. A. Horowitz. I told them it was blue and black. The car pulled in front of the house, and the driver turned to me, "You've lost your marbles, son. We know about the alley behind these buildings. I bet we've found at least a dozen bodies back there since the Second World War. That place is a graveyard. You must be crazy coming here."

They are beginning to believe now. One cop grabs a shotgun sitting in the door rack to cover the other man. He goes down the steps which I said would be there and swings the little white gate which I said would be there. He taps politely on the door. There is a long silence and then it creaks open slowly, about two inches. Two huge eyeballs and eyebrows stare out at us. She peers over three chain locks and will never open the door.

The lady's eyes tell them she knows. No, she does not know anything. No, the man named Sam is not here. In fact, there is nobody here named Sam. She doesn't even know anybody named Sam. Is there anybody here who knows what happened to this young man? Who, in fact, is that young man? "I have never seen him in my life." Oh.

The old policeman is not alive and well for nothing. With notable savvy, he says politely, "Ma'am, we're not after anyone. There is no problem. During the night he was here playing chess in your kitchen with someone. We believe there is a blue and black book, maybe some eyeglasses there. Will you look for us?"

The policeman lowered his voice. "It's your word against his. There is no case, no filed complaint. It's O.K. He doesn't want his money back. Just the book, the glasses." The lady nods slowly. In a few minutes a book and glasses come through the crack in the door. The cop looks at Chess Openings: Theory and Practice and shakes his head. "You sure are lucky. We'll drive you back."

That night I told Al Raymond about my experience, while he popped one cigarette after another into his mouth. "You were lucky. You should be dead," Raymond added, while I was gingerly placing Chess Openings into my suitcase. I wanted to keep it with me on the road. I would recommend that volume as one of the four must-have books for the chess student. It made the list on that day. There was nothing that I could do for the pink kitten...It was 1969.

The woman is just another one of the beautiful bodies that would have had nothing to do with Jude Acers if he had not made the front pages of more than 100 daily newspapers in America during 1972. Her eyes are big as saucers as she challenges him to find a copy of the Guinness Book of World Records and read the real truth. She reads his name. Aha. So it is true. He is a hero now. Kiss Jude. Smooch. It is New Orleans. The Monteleone Hotel blues.

Suzie grabs a tray of food and a book falls on the floor. It is blue and black. "What is this slash on the cover, Jude? God, that looks awful. You should put some tape over it."

Jude looks at Miss Plastic. He debates telling her about Sam. She is not interesting, really. Why get into a long thing? Turn on the radio and ask her about the Seven Seas Bar. She says that the place is going to the dogs, that they have put in three pool tables and taken out the chess tables, except one by the window. You say that Julio Kaplan drops by on travel stop-over when he plays for Puerto Rico's world chess team. "They are all weekend hippies, not real hippies," Julio recalls. "The Seven Seas is college with even wig-wearing hippies."

I remember the New Orleans days, when Suzie and I listened to the Crocodile Rock in Bonaparte's Retreat. She was the superstar bartender and atomic lady. I would buy coffee and doughnuts at the French coffee markets across the street. She was the 1970 chess tour heart throb. Each worldwide chess tour always has one and only one heart throb. It is like the Miss America pageant, only I is the judge. "Wild

Horses" was the number one record in the nation the week I lost my green dufflebag. Suzie was the last to see the only memory of Sam, the end of a hustler.

My lucky charm is gone now. Suzie is gone now. There are only memories when I go back to Franco and the Cafe Trieste in San Francisco's North Beach. I look at Julio Kaplan's photograph on the wall. And my glasses of 1969 stare out at me as the coffee latte pours and as many ladies as I can meet sit by the stove.

You step out of the Cafe Trieste and gaze up at the "Margrave" sign on the hill. Below it was a coffee shop that stayed open all night. It was there that I made the mistake that should have cost my life.

It was raining in the middle of the night. I wasn't able to get a game for any amount of money in four North Beach chess haunts that I virtually lived in. So I was watching a game, when Sam and his lady came in. He was dying to play chess. He wanted to play now. He challenged both players at the chessboard for any amount, and they fed him to me, "a strong class C player."

There are only three people in the United States with greater instinctive feel for hustling people in, shall we say, uneven circumstances. They are Larry Evans, Walter Browne and Kenneth R. Smith. You would want all three on a burglary, stinging operation or bank holdup. They are born gamblers. They will play anything.

Yes, Larry Evans gets around. He knows the most interesting people. Evans once closed the blackjack table at two different gambling casinos. He only had to memorize the cards as they were dealt and figure the odds on the last cards. It is difficult, to say the least. Although absolutely honest, Evans is not allowed to play blackjack anymore. He may be forced to go back to being an international chess grandmaster after he spends the enormous revenue from his ten chess books, nationally syndicated chess column and two columns in Chess Life & Review. His wife, Ingrid, is of course, total dynamite. Evans is the most versatile, learned of all United States players. He lives for the game, the wager. He will bet you on your funeral.

Kenneth R. Smith is paralyzed by enormous weight problems. He is one of three or four authentic chess geniuses in America, people who were born with talent, people who never study at all anymore. The others are Bisguier, Reshevsky and Robert Burger. Gone are the days when Smith played five chess opponents blindfolded at ten seconds a move simultaneously before a Florida television audience (score: 3 wins, 1 loss, 1 draw).

Smith had a problem in the sixties which called for all his cunning and hustling qualities. He carefully hid from chessplayers throughout the nation that the blood could not reach his brain during a long playing session. He would lapse into dizzy spells, even unconsciousness, during a chess tournament, and Smith would have to provide for this, that oxygen could not reach his brain. Such a prospect is sickening to consider, much less solve.

Smith invented one fantastic sidebet after another during a game. His opponent would be considering several bets and the terrific complications of the Smith Gambit, while Ken Smith was staggering in the hall, fighting to regain his vision and mind. His chess opponents did not realize that all they had to do was make moves, any moves, and Smith would not be able to continue to play. And this went on for ten years, with Smith winning more than 100 Swiss systems chess tournaments throughout the United States.

A wealthy underground construction contractor who made it the hard way, Ken Smith has won and lost more chess bets than any living chessmaster. He is publisher of Chess Digest, sells the largest collection of chess books, chess sets, chess clocks known to man. Lately, his business has been interrupted a little bit, because he researches everything for the chess champion of the world, Robert Fischer, and has to fly to secret Captain Midnight rendezvous with the great Bobby and report how the next Soviet victim is going to suffer. Of course, Fischer phones at 3 am most all the time to relay secret Captain Midnight messages and where he is hiding out now. So Smith is a busy man. He picks the winners, knowing the money-making heavies, Fischer, Evans, Koltanowski and Acers, long before they were doing well at the bank. If Smith doesn't sell it or know it, it isn't. His eyes are everywhere, even if he does scare the hell out of you by almost dying on the operating table. His most famous bets are another day's story, told later.

Smith is a hustler, "a sleeper, if there ever was one," says Addison. True, true. Dallas, Texas had the legend. He is the most discussed, controversial of all American players who actually play in the country regularly. But is his gambit sound? Of course.

King of the hustlers in Walter Browne. He is conditioned to gamble without emotion. He will lose hundreds of dollars against the best backgammon player in New York to get the feel of stakes and the game. He will lose \$2,000 against tremendous blackjack and poker players without batting an eyelash. He is one of the very few professional gamblers that I have ever known who learns. He simply gets better and better. After losing several thousand, he puts his arm on my shoulder and tells me not to worry, "I'll lose a lot more before I'm through!" he promises. I watch somebody walk away with Walter's dough or hear about it.

I suppose that I knew Walter Browne would become the world's youngest grandmaster, the most successful Swiss system chess tournament player in US history and the all-time best chess hustler anywhere through one curious episode.

With nothing to do between US tournament games in hundreds of cities and towns everywhere, Browne is a

mad Indian rapid transit chess demon. His specialty is five-minute blitz chess, where each side has a clock with only five minutes to make ALL the moves of a chess game. You punch your clock and it stops your time and starts the evil opponent's clock. A buzzer or flag indicates who gets the blade when someone's five minutes are gone. Of course, a checkmate may occur before then. (If Robert the crusher, the world's best blitz maniac, is playing, then checkmates will come out of the sky.) Browne plays blitz with anybody for stakes per game and was doing a bumper crop business at the San Antonio, 1967 Open tournament, which he and Smith were to co-win.

Warren Porter, an amateur collegiate chessplayer, was in that tournament so he could meet and lose to a few of the great masters he had been reading about. He found himself suddenly confronted by Walter Browne, terrible titan of the twitching lips, twitching fingers, shock hair, with severe crushing intentions to mash thee in blitz games while waiting for the next tourney round.

Browne blasted Porter five times at a dollar a game. It was now time to give a handicap for the amateur Porter and up the stakes. Browne took two and a half minutes on his clock, while giving Porter ten. This encouraged Porter to bet heavy against the US Junior Champion. The results were, of course, favorable to Browne, but he lost several games because even with crushing positions he did not have time to checkmate Warren Porter!

Porter is no dummy. He played on, knowing that hustler Browne would increase the odds so greatly that Porter would have to keep playing! Sure enough, Browne now offered incredible odds: ten minutes to one minute. It was too much for Walter Browne, surely, thought Porter, and he bet heavy on three games.

With only 60 seconds for 60 moves at best, Walter Browne began to lose game after game. Bong! Bong! Bong! The gong heralding next round had been aired over the public address system. Something happened then that Porter remembers to this day.

Brown stood up and paid about \$40 net profit to his unknown, lowly rated opponent with no emotion whatever, like a machine. "You had to notice it, that he could pay off like an automatic bill-changer after losing his shirt, solely because he gave odds to make it fair betting. Honest, he paid up and was gone to the tournament game as casually as most people open a door," Porter recounted at a L.S.U. chess club meeting. Yes, it was unusual, and it explains the greatest hustler trick: keeping the opponent close but not too close before closing out. No one else loses like that. Coolness is a must. You can twitch or quiver all you like, as long as you are cool...

The nature of my hustling ability during 1967-1970 US barnstorming rested on four very significant apples and meant the difference in hard times. By difference is meant eating.

FIRST, I made it a point to never drink anything, which puts 90 percent of the money games into my wallet post haste. Almost nobody can drink and play 40 moves accurately, especially if they have never once played 40 consecutive humdingers in their lives! Now for that remaining ten percent, hereafter referred to as the points.

SECOND, I get a good eight hours sleep always during the daytime and am playing in the evening hours against people who have been on their feet at least 14 hours before they run into the strong class C opposition (2 points).

(Note: It is astounding that most Swiss system players do not get enough sleep as well! Remember this. It's worth a lot of money to you!)

THIRD, I never, never, never say a word during a game, which enormously helps a hustler concentrate. Any words tell your opponent what your position looks like to you, that a rook or queen is en prise and, most dreadfully, in the case of a stranger, tips that you are trying to hustle him by false encouragement (3 points)!

FOURTH, until Bobby Fischer messed up the hustler scene by tossing forty million new US chessplayers into the pot, it was possible to "book" strong players. Thus, in 1970 there were only about 300 names and faces I had to know by studying chess magazines, rating lists and, above, all photographs.

You see, it is an unfortunate fact of life that there is nothing to be gained but starvation from an unofficial ten-hour marathon between two master players in the Coffee Gallery. The only point in playing is a US Chess Federation rated tournament, which is for blood and national reputation. What is lost, you may wonder, if two players fight it out in the Coffee Gallery?

"Theoretical knowledge" is what is in danger, lost. Every good master has his whole ten or twenty move opening system memorized with new moves, something more than is published by theoreticians. Also you show your future tournament opponent what his weaknesses are in your opinion. These two factors explain why chessmasters never socialize with chess and clocked serious games. You don't give free goodies away for peanuts, particularly when the study of your opening systems has taken hundreds of hours.

So now you understand why you don't drop over to Bobby Fischer's house on Saturday afternoon and play a clocked game or two. You are the enemy of the future if you are a grandmaster or getting there. However, if you are a beginner, Fischer might well agree to play you for a ten or fifteen thousand dollar fee, paid in advance. A world chess champion never gambles. He accepts.

There is no way out. If a strong player shows up at the Coffee Gallery, you don't play him even if you know you will beat him (unless you're desperate for money,



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naturally). It wears you out, gives away a great deal for free, and, worst, of all, tips off everybody within miles that you are the strongest class C player who ever lived. You will also have to pay a little something to waitresses and past opponents to keep their lips sealed as new business appears. Know every strong player on sight (6 points)!

These coffeehouse survival hints may appear superfluous, but they were the difference in hard times, as I have said earlier. I had it down to a science. I was rolling in three egg salad sandwiches and a quart of milk, consumed direct from the carton every day. This was the life.

It is not impossible that I won 5,000 quarter games in the Coffee Gallery alone in those starvation years, 1968-1970. If I lost one I do not recall, but perhaps I lose even four or five. You know, one for each season. Surely, I lost sometime, but I can't remember. Oh, well...

Only one habit of the "expert" hustlers escaped me entirely. For whatever reason I cannot imagine, I never could bring myself to throw a game, although this has its advantages when you have won six in a row and want to keep the fish on the line. I suppose this is the unconscious result of my experience. I have seen an expert hustler suffer indignities like having a wooden chessboard broken over his head, cold beer poured down his shirt, being punched senseless, stabbed in the chess-playing arm as he was holding a chess piece and making a move! I have seen a chess hustler go to the men's room and return to find his chess clock, chess set, chessboard gone. Then he went outside and found his car gone. Then when he took the matter up with his antagonist, Mr. Fish, later, two of the hustler's teeth were gone. I have seen hustlers challenged to duels with fists, pistols, rifles and once even bow and arrows. Being more honest than the "expert" hustler, I have been attacked only twice. This is the royal game for the big money. Bring back those good old days.

For some reason, if you play as well as you are able in the monotonous coffeehouse grind, then the opponent is expecting a good player to appear during each game. But giving a player a tossed game or two as opening candy and then upping the stakes at master strength plus eight wins in a row is like feeding hot barbed wire to a gorilla. Also pride enters into the matter. Kenneth R. Smith believes it is impossible for me to throw a game. I believe this is an interesting theory and have asked Smith to bet on this when we will examine the praxis of the matter. While we are on this subject, there is a well-known claim that Svetozar Gligoric, Robert Fischer and Boris Spassky cannot be bought.

The most famous story about Gligoric is that he once refused \$1,000 in a last round to draw with his opponent, who would then become an international chessmaster by reason of his score in the tournament. Then the game was drawn anyway! Spassky was asked to throw a game and replied, "Are you serious? Go away, little boy!" Matulovic, the Yugoslav grandmaster, definitely has a price, about two grand for a game. The Soviets had to pay it so that Taimanov would qualify to play Robert Fischer and lose six straight to Bobby Bomber. But for most chessplayers, especially grandmasters, fixing games goes against the grain. Chess is your mind, your heart. Still...ahh... how much do you offer?...

The most asked question is how anybody can tolerate losing game after game to a master in a coffee house. There are three reasons. First, the loser may possess insane optimism, which is not a bad thing to possess when you play chess and lose ten in a row. Thus, Larsen is shattered six in a row by Fischer and Bent Larsen comes right back to win international chess tournaments, while Fischer does not play at all, worried about everything! Everyone laughs at Larsen, who is a happy human being, and everyone worships Fischer, who is unable to function through paranoia and well founded fears of inevitable conditions in a public performance, where the money is. Even the Hilton Hotel corporation's \$1,400,000 cash guarantee was not sufficient to get Fischer to be Fischer again. Yes, Fischer needs insane optimism!

Second, and far more common, is the refusal to believe in the expert in a pure skill sport. You really believe that nice lady who beats you six in a row in Specs Adler's can't be anything but lucky and isn't even in your class. The next six will show reality. They sure do! Then you must resort to losing axiom number three...

Third, the mind has an amazing ability to ignore losing totally, if it is a threat to the ego. Chess is one of the activities in which all participants are forced to be creative, to visualize, decide. Therefore, the mind will be badly affected if it blames itself for losing. If your mind earns your living in professional chess, you must say, "That wasn't me, that was some other guy who lost that game." Alibis are very important to preserve sanity and livelihood. The best alibis for losing are (a) the radio was playing down the hall; (b) I couldn't stand the cigarette smoke; (c) My opponent is a weak fish and a loss to him is as rare as Haley's comet; (e) I am lonely; (f) I am sex starved; (g) I was suffering from indigestion; (h) I had a headache; (i) I have not eaten for days; (j) I was out of the running for cash, so I didn't care...The climate, the weather, you get the idea. Where there is a will to forget there is no loss. Presto!

Walter Browne can take terrible punishment and return to win a grandmaster tournament days later, when most grandmasters would be out of commission for a year, at least. It's a miracle to forget and protect ego. "You're nothing without ego in professional chess. Drive is everything," said Ed Edmondson, who, pound for pound, knows more egomaniacs than anybody else in the chess world. Whether the situation is so extreme as Edmondson suggests I don't know. However, it may actually be that the difference between winning and losing has nothing whatever to do with chess ability, knowledge of chess theory or chess history.

If ego pills are devised, soon you will certainly find Chess Life & Review flooded with ads. Certainly, in a coffee shop skill is not the decisive factor. It is determination to take all those quarters, all.

Fourth, very rarely, the loser is simply trying to learn about chess masters, meet them, enjoy playing

chess. (I agree with Evans that most players are out to murder their father, or at least their relatives or unpleasant past.)

There we are in the all-night place and the hustler is meeting prey. We return to the scene...

Sam and his wife sit quietly as I tell them that I am a master. "I don't want to hustle you," I lie.

The man cannot resist. "Oh my, if you're a good player, we'll just have to play for money. I always like to play for money and play better that way." He smiles warmly and the lady is silent. Play begins. Sam does not believe. How nice. Case type two.

Sam plays very well for hours and loses at dawn. One game for one dollar has lasted far too long for any profit. Sam says, "You play well. But as to whether you are the best, we'll just have to see. Come on over to my place and we'll play for really big money, and we'll just see if you are the best."

The decision heard 'round the world. "No, no, no, Jude. Are you crazy? Always play on neutral ground. Never go to a guy's house to take his money," said Addison.

"Now it's definite. I know you are crazy, nuts, Jude. How could you ever go to a guy's place to play for money? Yeah, you're definitely nuts," says Browne.

There was a reason. Greed was in my soul. I wanted all of his money. He had a lucious green roll, carefully displayed when paying for the coffee. This was paradise. I needed his money. Trophies, the US Chess Federation people, who do not care if a master lives or dies, and USCF's mickey-mouse Swiss tournaments would not feed me. Sam's money would buy lots of sandwiches. He did not have one chance in a million. Master chessplayers are a small club in America, and Sam was not a member. He was safe sucker-fish. Dennis Waterman's highest accolade for such a player is "dream-a-dream!" Sam's wife would come along and make us a pot of "good black coffee for all those long games," she said.

We climbed into a black chevy and pattered slowly down Broadway, Van Ness, Geary. I did not notice where we were going and I didn't care, either. I would take ALL his money. Clutching Chess Openings, I felt secure.

The car door opens and we are going down into a cellar apartment that looks like a coffin. How nice. It has no windows that I can see. It is ready for church. The kitchen light goes on and Sam proudly places each chesspiece carefully on its starting square. He is anxious to find out who is the best for big money. He places his nice roll of United States currency beside the refrigerator for Jude Acers to think about.

The coffee pot is perking away and Sam's wife goes to bed. Jude Acers plays smoothly and wins five games in two hours. Sam is drinking one beer after another at ten dollars a game. Jude Acers places his money to the left of the board and now begins to worry. Sam will observe the huge pile of bills and might quit playing. Jude, get those bills off the table so those thoughts about how much money is gone with the wind will not cross his mind.

Noble, kind Jude Acers now decided to give his fish, his customer, "a break." He offered to play three to one odds, that is, Jude would put up \$60 on each game while Sam puts up only \$20. It never occurs to Jude Acers that the helpless drunken man is blowing his whole monthly paycheck to a bloodsucking professional chess master. It is no matter that the man will have no money to feed his wife and pay the rent. It never occurs to the great Jude Acers to give the man back at least one half of his money and play a game or two for fun. It never occurs to Jude Acers that since Sam does not have one chance in a million against a full-time chess professional, it might even be fair to give him all of his money back. Well, well. That's it, Jude. Show us your stuff. It is Sunday morning.

Jude Acers clips Sam three in a row at \$20 a crack. The action is getting heavy. One hundred and ten dollars is too large a pile to leave there. Better put it in your wallet. Sam is cursing himself, but keeps saying "You're not just lucky. You sure, sure are a good player. Yes, you sure are a wonderful player."

The great Jude Acers takes his wallet out and is moving the stack of bills past the dl square to the wallet in his right hand. Incredibly, Sam's hand is at e1, intercepting the entire wad of bills. Incredulous at such unexpected dexterity from a man very much under the weather, Jude just sits there. "Sam, man, what is happening? What are you doing? That's my money, man. Please, Sam, give me back my money. Please, Sam, return my money."

First you see it and then you don't. A huge wad of bills is going straight up into the air, grabbed at the exact point they were going into your wallet. Now the bills are going into Sam's pants pocket as he is half standing, straddling his chair like a cowboy sits on his horse. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

"You say you are the best. You're nothing but a cheap hustler. (expletive deleted) I'm the best. I can beat you. I can beat you," says Sam as his left arm is suddenly going to the left. Jude Acers is furious.

"Sam, that's not true. I have won nine games straight. That proves that I am..."

The great Jude Acers froze. Sam's hand was opening a drawer and reaching for a long wooden handle. From the drawer comes a meat cleaver more than two feet long.

It was at this moment that Jude Acers began to appreciate what an outstanding chess player Sam really was. Suddenly Jude Acers considered Sam a grandmaster, world title candidate and major find. "Sam, Sam, Sam. Oh, God, man, cool down. I realize it now. You are a clever man. Your play is brilliant, crafty. Yes, you are the best, best, best. You are tremendous, Sam. I was lucky. Lucky that you were drinking, too. Sam, Sam, what are you doing?... Sam! No, man, no, no, no! Please, no! You can have the money. Sure, sure, Sam. Take the money, please."

You made the mistake and you must pay the price. There is a pink kitten in the kitchen, Jude and Sam. There is Chess Openings: Theory and Practice. There is a meat cleaver. Die, Jude, die. The meat cleaver rises smoothly into the air. It is behind Sam's back. It is arching smoothly toward you, Jude. At that moment, Jude Acers realized that here was a sore loser.

Suddenly, Jude Acers no longer cares about his glasses, his money, his chess book. The idea is com-

ing in now. Sam is going to cut off the hands that Jude is raising to defend himself. Badly bleeding, Jude will fall to the floor. Then Sam will cut Jude on the side of his body, slicing his kidneys and his intestines. Then Sam will grab Jude's hair and repeatedly hack at his neck until Jude's head falls on the floor. Sam is insane. He cannot control his desire to slice.

Jude Acers began to move. His hand grasped Chess Openings and flipped it directly in front of the cleaver. The cover was cut almost in two. Then he turned the entire table and chess pieces over on top of Sam. Screaming "Oh God no, Sam! I'm a good guy, good guy! Please, Sam," he tired desperately to find a door. Where was a door?

Horribly nearsighted, Jude Acers could not see whether cracks in the wall were windows, doors or whatever. Sam had not released his meat cleaver. There was no time to turn around and pull on a window. For god's sake, look for a doorknob, Jude! No doorknob. Feel around, Jude. Sam is getting up. It's over, Jude.

Sam curses, rises above the table from the floor. The kitchen is very dark and curtains blacken the windows. Sam turns off the one kitchen light and Sam is coming now, swinging the meat cleaver in a wide arc, backing you to the wall.

Jude Acers took a chair and completely broke the back of it across Sam's face, but Sam only fell to the floor and the damn meat cleaver stayed right with him. Jude jumped completely over Sam and headed for the living room, the door. He grabbed the door and yanked. It would not open! Horrified, Jude Acers reached up and felt three chain locks securely fastened on the door. There was absolutely no time to open the door.

Sam began laughing from the kitchen. In darkness, Jude was helpless to figure out how to open a window or the door. Desperately, Jude switched on a light to see Sam's meat cleaver coming down directly over him. Jude dodged and Sam watched his blade put a tremendous cut in a leather chair "You s.o.b.! My chair is busted. I'm gonna kill you, man. I'm gonna cut your liver out. Get ready, man, because here I come again!" You know, your typical Sunday morning scene.

Sam's wife screamed. "Sam, Sam! What are you doing to that boy? Sam, don't kill him! Sam! Let the boy alone! He ain't done nothing to us, Sam." She was sitting in bed, watching as her husband moved in for the kill in the living room.

Jude Acers dodged three terrific swings of the meat cleaver. Sam was doing his best. So far, he had cut up his wall in two places, while totally decapitating the top of the lamp that Jude had turned on a moment earlier. The whole thing popped electricity all over the place. A large and beautiful vase fell on the floor and exploded into hundreds of pieces around Sam's legs. His sofas were cut twice and overturned. Jude grabbed a hunk of marble and an ashtray and threw them desperately at Sam, but missed. There was now only one standing sofa and one usable table to dance around and they both made use of the privilege. Jude tried to turn on every possible light in order to see exactly how Jude Acers was going to die. Sam took ten good healthy double-handed swings in the direction of the good guy. It was right out of a Zorro movie. Tune in next week.

Now it happened, of course. Sam's wife came out of nowhere and grabbed Jude's arm firmly so that Sam could simply walk up and hack Jude Acers to death. Curtains. Time for the first miracle. Sam stumbles over a lamp cord three feet away from the screaming, begging Jude Acers, who grabs Sam's lady and dumps her on top of Sam, What now, Jude?

Jude Acers saw a silver ray, the sun, a line of light in the wall. The second coming. The second miracle. It was coming from the dark kitchen in this horrible death trap apartment. My God. It is a door! The little pink kitten was nosing the door open somehow, a door you would never have been alive to find otherwise. I mean it. It was an absolute god-damn miracle. A door. A real live open door. Move your donkey, Jude baby, move!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Jude Acers heard Sam and his wife getting up from the floor. But the smell, the fear of death, the terrific power which a human body possesses in danger was now unleashed. Jude ran to the kitchen's crack of light, grabbed the edge of the door and gave it a pull that smashed it completely off the upper hinge. All the door windows broke into pieces instantly. It had no doorknob, perhaps to let the kitten in and out, or something. Jude Acers didn't stick around to ask the beautiful kitten how he or she had gotten the door open, but flew into the back yard.

There was no escape. The backyard was enclosed on all sides and Jude Acers was in a cage of death. Sam appeared at his kitchen door with a smile and raised the meat cleaver as he stepped into his yard. It was a case where there was no return. Only one man could get away. Super-Jude.

I do not expect you to believe that with a single bound I leaped into the air, grabbed the top of a twelve foot wall and pulled myself over it as Sam threw his meat cleaver at me. It cut the wood below my fingers as I yelled my Ko-wan-ko Voodoo chant and said, "Bye, Sam!" with my usual wit, charm and humor. I tried to give him the Dennis Waterman sign of the eagle finger, but fell over before I could complete the task. Ha, ha.

All was fun now. Sure. I realized that I had landed in a maze, another coffin. It was a sealed alley from which there was no escape except climbing over walls and then the houses sealed you from the street. I would have to go through somebody's house or die. Sam knew, I knew, that the end game was fast approaching. Sam knew that I would get no help from anybody in this neighborhood and was calmly maneuvering to kill me, knowing that I was thrashing around in the alley, lost. Edgar Allen Poe would have died of joy just watching...

As I looked left and right, my eyes zeroed in on an astounding old woman looking down from three stories up, right into my eyes. She watched me coldly and understood everything. Calmly, she would watch me die. Instantly I realized she had seen people die in the alley before. I knew it, oh God, I knew it. I was trapped. Die, Jude, die. Should Jude Acers give that old lady the Dennis Waterman sign of the eagle? No, that is rude, not class, Jude.

Somehow, somewhere Sam would enter the alley, see next page