

THE PRICE IS AUSTIN

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or go to jail... Come on, now. I don't want to take you to jail... I mean move... Where is your ticket?..."

Jude Acers is grabbed by the collar as he sees that nobody is behind the Texas International Airlines desk. "Okay, sir. Okay..." He drags the bags in the wrong direction, then reverses himself toward the door. Jude Acers does not know where he is. He hears a bell, no, a telephone, as he is stepping on the automatic door opener. He is now crying. He stares blankly at the ringing pay telephone as the guard is forcing him out of the airline terminal entrance.

"Please, sir. May I answer the phone? Please... Please." The pay telephone stops ringing. The sound of silence.

"Look, leave and you'll be all right. I see you in here again without a ticket and you go to jail. We don't fool around here, boy. You gotta go." He jams his night stick into Jude Acers' side to help Jude plan his moves. Jude moves. Here is the cab. Get in. Say, "Any good hotel, please, sir." It pulls quickly away.

Miller thinks everything is all right. He will begin to call the airlines for Jude Acers desperately, when Acers does not show up in Savannah hour after hour. Miller also has the job of fielding the tremendous heat that begins to pour over telephone lines from Georgia's

commercial and club organizers who had worked countless hours on the prison, shopping center and television appearances of Jude Acers.

Miller would not know for many hours that it was over, that the machine was out cold in a motel, that he would never make it. Miller hoped until there was no hope left. He writhed in Portland agony. If only this. If only that. Last minute airline schedules that could mean nothing anymore. Dreams. But it was over. The heat on Miller would now become tremendous. A perfect team, a miracle of teamwork, even in this jet age, would cough and sputter and die.

There was only the prison exhibition left a day later now. We were spending all of our money on Georgia now. And if Oglethorpe Mall sued, it would be terribly tough right down the line... "But if they sue, I'm getting Bill Waguespack of New Orleans. I'm calling Karl Cavanaugh in Denham Springs, Louisiana. They will never let me get killed. They will defend, wheel, deal. My tour will live. I did nothing wrong. My tour must live. I must save it. I live for my tour," my mind whispers, prays. If it goes to court, it's all the way with legal weasel Waguespack in court and Cavanaugh for research, baby. They play for keeps, daddy-o. We go to the wall.

I debated calling them. No. Wait. Hope. Georgia will

be fair. They will understand in Georgia. But the bad publicity is now. You must pay the price of Austin. You are certain of that. You can read the Georgia newspapers and chess newsletters before they are printed. It's going to be tough, tough.

The Righteous Brothers are fighting to make a comeback on somebody's car radio. I listen to them. "If you believe in forever, then life is just a one night stand" is coming through the window of Pushkin's Truck Stop, bar, grill and motel, where I wearily write about Austin for the last time in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. There will be four radio commercials an hour, announcing that Jude Acers is in town at the Lebanon Plaza. There is a quarter-page announcement with two photographs. Very well. Think of the good things. Forget the past...

No, it doesn't really matter now. It doesn't matter that I lost more than \$50,000 in cash bookings in Savannah, Georgia that day. It can mean nothing that Savannah's people despise Jude Acers. The very nice lady from the Oglethorpe Mall called Miller yesterday and politely asked for the return of the \$130 deposit. She does not wish to begin anew. She could not understand or believe what happened. She does not hate Miller or me. It is all gone now. Remember...

"If you believe in forever, then life is just a one night stand."