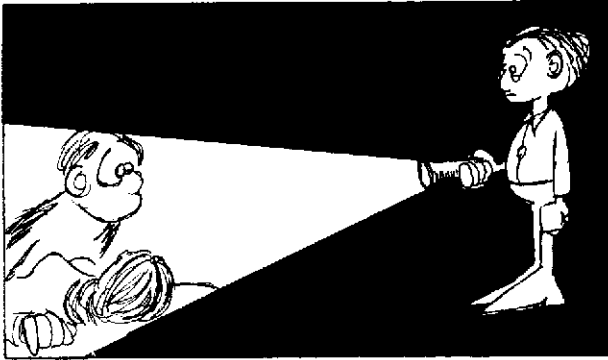


1.

I heard this one as a news item on the radio a couple of summers ago. A woman was driving along one of the LA freeways when she felt an attack of epilepsy coming on. She took a pill but somehow it didn't work fast enough, so she pulled over to the side, stopped her car, got out, and fell to the pavement in a fit of convulsions. It happened that not far behind her in the line of traffic was a well-meaning man who, seeing the woman in distress, stopped his car, got out, and ran to give the woman aid. Thinking that she was suffocating, and worried that she was going to hurt herself, gyrating in the gravels, he lay down on top of her and began to apply mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. This scene was observed by yet another well-intentioned man not far behind in the line of traffic, who was certain that an innocent woman was being raped by a mad-man right there on the LA freeway. So he stopped his car, grabbed his flashlight, ran to the writhing couple and proceeded to beat the man viciously over the head.

The court action was, to say the least, complex.



2.

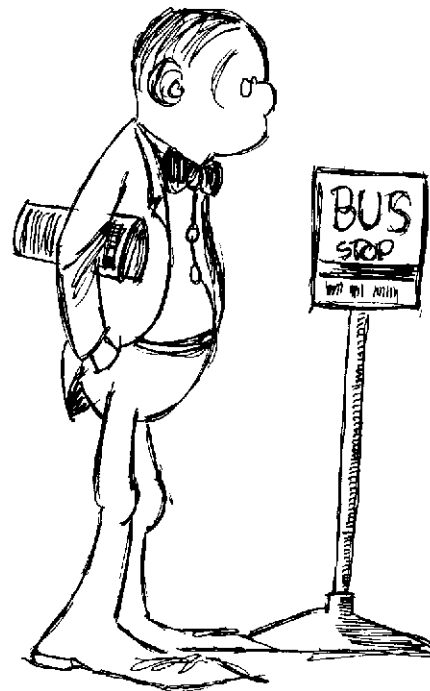
One time in Arizona there was an old prospector who hadn't had any luck in 50 years. So one day he unloaded all of his equipment - which included a few sticks of dynamite and some fuse and blasting caps - and piled it all next to a big rock. First he put down the dynamite, then his tools, his grub, and his bedroll. His burro carried a kind of saddle, so the old prospector placed it on top of the pile, then sat on it. Holding his burro closely by the reins, he lit the fuse and blew self, animal and belongings right out of this world.



3.

Last Spring I was working part-time in a warehouse in East Palo Alto, making about twelve dollars a day handling steel. Three or four other guys worked there too, lonesome down-and-outers trying to get enough money to drink on, or get some gas for their cars. It was hard work, for not much money, but most of us were philosophical about it. The only one that wasn't was an older fellow whose name I think was Lon.

It wasn't that Lon was bitter. He'd been doing twelve dollar a day work most of his life, and he was used to it. Lon was just disappointed. The day before he'd gone to the employment office, and, praise the lord, they'd found him a soft, inside job in Redwood City that paid twenty dollars a day. Lon didn't have any money to buy gas with, so the next morning he set out for Redwood City on the bus. Only, he was day-dreaming so heavily about what he was going to do with all his money that he rode right on by where his job was. by the time he back-tracked and finally showed up about mid-morning, the company had already hired somebody else. His dreams of glory gone, Lon came down that afternoon to help us handle steel.

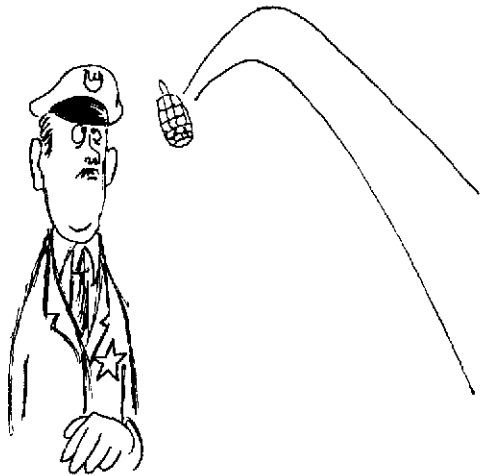


# Five

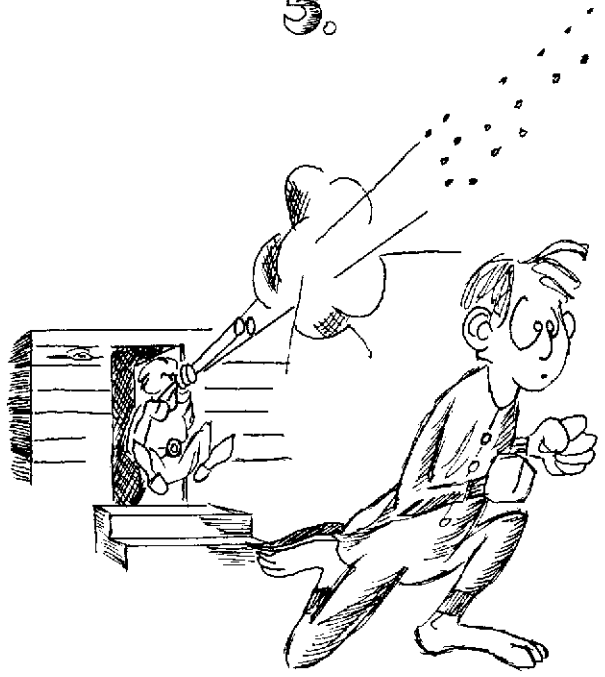
by Gurney Norman

4.

Last Spring there was a hippie who tried to hitch-hike through the Kentucky mountains. In Letcher county he got in a car with a couple of fellows who were drinking beer and cruising around for the afternoon, and when they invited him to pal around with them, he thought, why not? So they drove around, drinking, yelling at the girls, having a good time, as young men with a car and beer will do. They were driving kind of fast, naturally, a little too fast to suit a young state trooper who was also out cruising around that afternoon. He chased them a few miles, pulled them over, and, seeing that the boys were drunk, decided to take them all to jail. The hippie and the boy who wasn't driving went along peacably enough. They got in the trooper's car. But the other fellow was a little harder to deal with. When the trooper told him to get out, he got out all right, brandishing a hand grenade, threatening to blow them all up if the trooper didn't turn his buddies loose. It isn't clear who did what next, but the upshot of it was that the fellow pulled the pin on the grenade and threw it while the cop dived for cover blazing away with his pistol. The grenade turned out to be a dud, but the bullets weren't. Several of them hit the boy in the chest and killed him. It turned out that the hippie wasn't really a hippie, either. He was a Marine, absent without leave, hitch-hiking, seeing the country. I'm not sure what finally happened to him.



5.



as late as the age of eleven, Wilgus Collier still had a bed-wetting problem. The only way he could control it was to get out of bed in the middle of the night and go outside and relieve himself. He even had his own alarm clock to get up by. One night Wilgus was so sleepy he didn't hear the clock until its final ding. He managed to get outside okay, as if in a dream of the sweet outdoors at night, to pee. But he was so groggy that instead of going back inside the house to bed, he got turned around and wound up rattling the doorknob of the wash house, where his paranoid Uncle Emmit had been barricaded in almost three months now. "Who the goddamn fuck hell is it!" screamed Emmit, going for his shotgun. But the boy was so far gone he didn't hear, he only stood there on the bottom step, rattling the old lilse doorknob. "You crazy bastards, I'm going to kill you if you don't get away. I'll count to three. One!" But Wilgus didn't hear. "Two!" Wilgus didn't hear. "Three! BLAM!" The blast ripped out the whole top half of the door. But fortunately, it missed the boy entirely. It didn't even scare him. Wilgus thought it was all part of his dream. It scared Emmit though, the worst he'd ever been scared in his life. It scared him to find out how really crazy he was. It scared him to think his nephew might have been killed, and it scared him to think what the consequences would be when the others heard about what he'd done. But as it turned out, Emmit didn't have to be afraid. His old parents heard the blast, but they were too sleepy to worry about what Emmit was shooting at this time. And the boy Wilgus proved himself a loyal comrade. He didn't get excited. And he didn't tell any of the others what had happened. For ever after that, Emmit and Wilgus had a special secret between them. And for ever after, Emmit always knew there was at least one person in the world that he could trust.