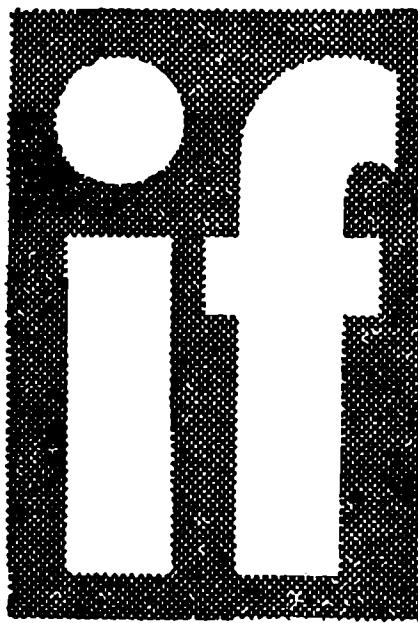


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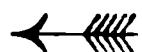
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It's not so bad, being on trial for murder.

Of course, it's a little embarrassing —

when the principal witness is the corpse!



THE HAPPY

→ HOMICIDE

BY FRANK BANTA



ATTENDANTS pushing an ambulance cot wheeled what was left of murdered Fannie Bork into the center of the courtroom. The body was covered with a white sheet, except for the long, slim feet which were sticking out. Her toenails were painted red.

Forty-year-old John Bork listened while the prosecutor read the indictment against him: "—and the same John Bork did on the twelfth day of March, 1986, fire a pistol at his wife, having then and there a long preconceived desire to kill her, and then and there did achieve his felonious intent, and did murder the same Fannie Bork."

"John Bork, you have heard

the indictment," stated the judge formally. "How do you wish to plead: Not guilty, no contest, or wait and see?"

"I'll wait and see, your honor."

"I thought you would," sighed the judge. "We haven't had a straight not-guilty plea in ages. Proceed, Mr. Prosecutor."

"Roll in the Very Complicated Monstrous Proximilator machine," commanded the prosecutor. Two burly laborers, panting, rolled the machine on its creaky casters across the court room floor to Fannie's head. The machine was six feet tall, three feet wide, and twelve inches deep; on its face were forty-three meters and an on/off switch.

The laborers plugged the machine's line cord into an outlet and got out of the way.

THE prosecutor flipped the switch from off to on. Then he folded his arms and waited until all the forty-three meters ceased their dancing and went back to zero. That done, he turned to the jury.

"In this machine rests the proof of the crime charged against the defendant," he said dramatically, patting the smooth gray side of the machine. "This machine will tell you *all* you need to know about the murder. Oh, to be sure, I shall show you the *corpus delicti* presently; but *why* and *how* this crime was committed shall be revealed only by this machine's stimulation of the deceased's brain. *She will herself relate who her killer was!*"

There was a shocked gasp from the jurors and the spectators in the court room when the prosecutor pulled back the sheet from the body, uncovering her head and chest. "The jury will note that the government has removed her skull down to her eyebrows so that we could contact her brain's recordings with the machine's probe. The jury will also note the four bullet holes in the deceased's chest, which we intend to prove were put there by John Bork."

"I missed twice," said John Bork, nodding.

"Silence!" shouted the suddenly enraged judge. "This court depends entirely on the Very Complicated Monstrous Proximilator machine for its evidence." He turned to the jury, still seething. "The jury will completely disregard the defendant's utterly uncalled-for admission. Proceed, Mr. Prosecutor."

The prosecutor fastened the ground cable of the machine to Fannie's big toe by means of an immense alligator clamp. Then taking the bulbous radio-frequency probe in his hand he said portentously, "Now we shall search for the memory-recording of Fannie Bork's moment of death!"

He touched her brain lightly with the probe.

Those seeing it for the first time were chilled by the dead body's sudden animation.

"Oh, Winston!" cooed dead Fannie Bork, her arms raising from the cot to embrace an invisible something. She kissed. "You tastes good!"

The prosecutor moved the probe.

"George?" called Fannie, her slim arms searching at the side of her cot. "I didn't hear you leave, George." She relaxed. "Oh, I hope he found his shoes."

"He didn't though," contributed John Bork.

The prosecutor moved the probe, hurrying on by emotion-stirred quavers: Angelo, Moose, Maudie, Deacon and Quasimodo.

"Speed, darlin', what's your hurry?" asked Fannie in her plaintive, metallic voice as she held out her hands beseechingly.

"I never got to know him very well," interjected John Bork. "His visits were all so short."

The prosecutor moved his probe.

"Bork! Bork!"

"Ah," said the prosecutor. "Now we are getting down to cases. I shall try that spot again."

"Bork! Bork!"

"She's not calling for me," advised Bork. "She just had a cold that week."

THE prosecutor moved his probe. At each touch, the body broke into quaking action: Ferdinand, Frenchy, Yacob; Peyton, Rebel, Young foo Yum; and John.

"Ah!" said the prosecutor. "Here we are now."

"John!" whispered Fannie. "John, John, John! Oh, Johnny Johnson, my love! Stay here forever!"

"Wife's other John," said John Bork succinctly.

The prosecutor moved his probe: Sinclair, Henrik, Sitting Duck, Oscar, Kenny, and Aqueduct.

"That Aqueduct is Sitting Duck's educated brother," confided John Bork. "Before he went to Princeton his name was Wet Duck."

The prosecutor moved his probe: Pease, Reese and

Meese, Acuff, Eyolf and Beowulf; Bork! Bork!

"That cough again?" muttered the prosecutor, ready to move on.

"No, she's calling for me that time," corrected Bork.

"How can you tell?"

"It has more of a snarl in it than her cough has."

The prosecutor tried the spot once more.

"Bork! Bork! Why are you pointing that at me, Bork? What are you going to do, Bork?" She held out her hands to ward him off. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!" Then she dropped her hands.

"I missed twice," John said, nodding.

"The defendant will keep his lousy confessions to himself!" shrieked the judge. "I will not have the importance of our Very Complicated Monstrous Proximilator machine vitiated by these unwanted confessions!"

Bork shrugged. "I just wanted to clear up a couple of details, your honor. I just like to be tidy."

"We don't need your help," responded the judge crushingly. "The Very Complicated Monstrous Proximilator machine tells us *all* we want to know." He turned to the prosecutor. "You may proceed."

"The state rests."

BORK'S lawyer advised the court that no defense would be presented. The

prosecutor exhorted the jury that its duty was plain. The judge gave final instructions, and the jury filed out. It returned in four minutes.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict in such a gratifyingly short space of time?" the judge asked, beaming.

The foreman arose. "We have, your honor."

"Just for the record, what is your verdict?" twinkled the judge.

"Not guilty, your honor."

The prosecutor jumped up. "Why, that can't be!" he shouted. "It's a *prima facie* case, unrefuted and therefore patent. What else do you need?"

"Yeah!" agreed the judge, outraged.

"We need some plain, old-fashioned evidence of a crime," answered the juryman, unperturbed.

"Old-fashioned?" The fuming prosecutor rejected the heresy, pushing it away from him with both hands. "This is all unscientific now," he warned. "The Very Complicated Monstrous Proximilator machine—especially the new model with the forty-three

meters which replaces the old thirty-nine meter machine—is the *ne plus ultra* of justice!"

"Oh, no, it isn't," dissented the foreman. "Did your evidence place the deadly weapon in the defendant's hand? Did your evidence even tend to show the holes in the woman's chest were *made* by a gun? She said nothing about a weapon, if you will recall. She merely said, 'Why are you pointing that at me, Bork? What are you going to do, Bork?'"

"But he had plenty of motive," pleaded the prosecutor.

"Oh, we'll go along with that," assented the foreman.

"And the defendant admitted it!" pursued the prosecutor triumphantly.

The foreman shook his head. "Admissions don't count. The judge said so himself."

"So even though you know he's guilty," the prosecutor said hollowly, "you're going to let him go?"

"That's right," agreed the foreman happily, and cleared his throat. "We, the jury," he pronounced, "find this fellow innocent of what he did!"

END