

PETEY. Mrs. Pearl Burras, General Delivery, Tuna, Texas. (*PEARL enters.*) Dear Mrs. Burras. After a recent unsettling phone call from your niece Bertha Bumiller, I feel compelled to write to you. As you know, relations have never been strong between the Humane Society and those who raise chickens. We do understand that this is your livelihood, disgusting as it may be to those of us here at the Humane Society.

PEARL. (*feeding chickens*) Here chick, chick, chick, chickie. Come and get it babies. Eat it up, eat it up. Babies, babies, babies . . .

PETEY. We do feel, however, that you are posing a danger to the children of your neighborhood, as well as their pets. We're sure you love the kids of your neighborhood as much as we do.

PEARL. (*spotting children in her yard*) Get out of those tomatoes! Get out of 'em! I'm gonna call Sheriff Givens . . . Let me at 'em.

PETEY. Mrs. Burras, we have traced over seventy dog-poisonings to your doorstep. Now, don't you think you've taken eccentricity a bit too far?

PEARL. Oh, they've left that poodle in my yard. I'll bet it's an egg-sucker! Where is it?

PETEY. We feel that you have been somewhat overzealous in the protection of your chickens.

PEARL. Where's my strychnine? Please to God, don't tell me I'm out!

PETEY. In fact, Mrs. Burras, there are those of us at the Humane Society who believe that you actually enjoy poisoning dogs.

PEARL. I'll kill Henry if he's hidden my strychnine!

PETEY. We are well aware of your "bitter pills", those strychnine-laced biscuits rolled into enticing little dough balls.

PEARL. Oh, I found it. Henry thought he'd be smart and hide it, but I found it. I'm gonna kill me a poodle. Now, where's my biscuits? I'm gonna make you a bitter pill.

PETEY. We are also aware that your husband Henry is the owner of Ripper, the finest bird dog in Dewey County. How could anybody who lives around a \$2,000 dog like Ripper poison people's puppies so heartlessly?

THURSTON. Well, folks, in the news today, we've got the winner of the Tuna Junior High American Heritage Essay Contest for this year. And this year's winner is Connie Carp. She's the daughter of W.H. and Vera Carp here in Tuna, and the name of her essay was titled "Human Rights, Why Bother?" Second place went to Jimbo Beaumont for "Living with Radiation", and third place went to Levita Posey for her essay titled, "The Other Side of Bigotry." I'll tell you, Arles, with subjects like that, I don't know how they ever picked a winner.

PEARL. Hello Stanley, this is Pearl. Get over here quick, I need you . . . I want you to run over Henry's bird dog . . . Ripper . . . Umhmm . . . Well, he's already dead . . . I killed him . . . Oh, Stanley, I know it's not as much fun running over a dead dog! But please to God, get over here. I don't believe I can stand it . . .

You're a good nephew . . . I'll see you in a minute . . . All right. Goodbye. (*She hangs up.*) Oh, I knew I could count on Stanley. Oh, and while he's here, I'll get him to run me down to the funeral parlor so I can view Judge Buckner. Oh Lord, nothing would get me out in this heat except to see him dead. I just want to see for myself. Make for sure.

STANLEY. (*offstage*) Pearl!

PEARL. Stanley, is that you? Come in, come in. (*STANLEY enters.*)

STANLEY. Pearl, how come you poisoned Uncle Henry's bird dog?

PEARL. Oh, don't say that, Stanley. I didn't. It was an accident. I was after an egg-suckin' poodle, and Ripper just came up and snatched the bitter pill.

STANLEY. Why hell, Pearl, I always kinda liked ol' Ripper.

PEARL. Well . . .

STANLEY. You know, when Uncle Henry finds out you poisoned a \$2,000 dog, he's gonna have a kination fit.

PEARL. Oh, Stanley, he'll scream like a banshee . . . Quick, drag that dog out in the road. We'll run over it.

STANLEY. Hell Pearl, you're crazy.

PEARL. Oh Stanley, don't you say that. I'm not . . . Oh, and Stanley, I want you to take me down to the funeral parlor so I can view Judge Buckner. You can wait for me at the Tasty Freeze. I'll buy you an ice cream cone.

STANLEY. All right, hurry up, Pearl, get in the car.

PEARL. I'm comin'.

STANLEY. Oh, come on, Pearl, hurry up. I don't want nobody to see this.

PEARL. Don't rush me, Stanley. I'm an old woman.

ARLES. (*tape*) This is Arles Struvie with the Crime Report. Now according to statistics, crime is down in the Greater Tuna area from this time last year. Now this time last year, there were six arrests, and this year so far we only had four. Sheriff Givens says, though the numbers may still seem high, there's no reason for alarm over Tuna's high crime rate. He says it's mostly the same people getting arrested over and over and over again. Here we have Sheriff Givens himself in an interview taped early this morning.

SHERIFF. (*tape*) Yeah, well, I don't run no country club, that's for sure. Where I come from, jail's supposed to be a, you know, unpleasant experience. And I think it still should be. I really do. And I'll tell you one thing, you can call me old-fashion', but a couple of hundred years ago, law enforcement was a much more rewarding profession than it is today.

BERTHA. Woffie, come down here. Get on down here. (*whistles*) Come on, Woffie . . . Now listen you—I told you about comin' through that door . . . the next time, I said the next time you come in this house, I know a German Shepherd that's gonna be lookin' for a new home. (*points to another dog*) And you're next! (*CHARLENE enters.*) Charlene, honey, you want some oatmeal?

CHARLENE. No.

BERTHA. Well, how 'bout some biscuits?

CHARLENE. Un-uh.

BERTHA. Will you try some hashbrowns?

CHARLENE. No, thank you.

BERTHA. Well, here honey, at least have a cup of coffee. (*CHARLENE repeatedly scoops sugar into her cup, making sound effects.*) Charlene. Charlene, honey, now stop! Remember that agreement we made that we were gonna use Sweet and Slender in our coffee?

CHARLENE. I used Sweet and Slender when I still had something to live for, Mother.

BERTHA. Oh, honey, what's wrong?

CHARLENE. Nothin'!

BERTHA. Why are you mad?

CHARLENE. I'm not!

BERTHA. Charlene, snap! Now honey, everybody can't be cheerleader.

CHARLENE. Oh, Mother . . .

BERTHA. Well honey, there are other things to live for.

CHARLENE. Name one.

BERTHA. Well, I can't think of any right now, but when I do I'll write 'em down and give 'em to you.

CHARLENE. I'll tell you one thing. If that vicious little Connie Carp calls me "two-bits" one more time, she better send out for bandages.

BERTHA. She's just like her mother. You kill her with kindness.

CHARLENE. I'll kill her with somethin'!

BERTHA. You do unto others . . .

CHARLENE. (*as she exits*) Uh-huh! (*CHARLENE changes to CHAD.*)

BERTHA. And don't let those damn dogs in the house! Get out of here! I wish you would get on that table! Please get on that table! Trixie, Trixie, Dolly, now come on honey, get out. You girls know better. Woffie! You come through that door one more time and you'll need drugs to kill the pain! Now I have had it! (*We hear CHAD HARTFORD offstage, ringing a DOORBELL.*) Oh, it's that reporter. Comin'! (*She checks her appearance. RINNNNNGGG!*) I said I was comin'! (*RINNNNNGGGGG!*) Well, you'll just have to hold onto your horses! I said I was comin'! (*RINNNNGGG.*)