

# The Scheme

By James Ellison

PO Box 1523  
Tupelo, MS 38802  
(662) 844-4915  
[JamesPaul54@hotmail.com](mailto:JamesPaul54@hotmail.com)

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## *1. The Scheme is Hatched*

It was a hot and muggy night in early July as Jimmy Sinclair drove out of town. He had a weekly dinner date with two people he loved. Jimmy entered his parents' rural ranch house on fifty acres, about eight miles east of Tupelo, Mississippi.

Pat and Earl Sinclair were both 74 and in excellent health. They retired two years ago and gave full ownership of their grocery store named Buffalo Bill's to their only son, age forty-five.

Jimmy carried assorted flowers into his mother's kitchen. Pat was used to her son's routine and already had an empty glass vase sitting on the breakfast table.

Jimmy spoke as he placed the flowers in the vase and added tap water from the kitchen sink, "Mom, Kathy and I are getting a divorce."

Pat was hard of hearing. Her current hearing aide was on the blink and the new one had not yet arrived by express mail. She kept peeling the potatoes.

Jimmy stepped closer and spoke louder, "Mom, Kathy and I are getting a divorce!"

Pat stopped her peeling and looked at her son, "Now that's good news, because I never did like her and I told you she was only after your money!"

Earl walked in, carrying the television remote. "It needs batteries."

Pat turned to her husband of fifty years. "They are in the top left drawer. Jimmy's getting a divorce." Pat returned to peeling the three potatoes while Earl searched for the batteries.

"I found them. I hope they're not dead. You know son, your mother and I never did like that woman. We strongly suspected that she was a gold digger." Earl continued to talk as he switched out the batteries.

"You and Kathy got hitched mighty quick. What was it - two months? How can you know someone in such a short period of time? I warned you to date longer."

"I wish I had listened to you dad. Now it's going to cost me some of my hard earned money to get out of it."

After dinner the three retired to the front porch and sat around looking at the large fish pond that sat below the four thousand square foot house on the hill.

Jimmy loved coming to his parents' house. He knew he had their support no matter what.

"I guess we can't count on grandkids anytime soon," lamented Pat, sipping on a tall glass of iced tea. Jimmy looked at his mother and father and asked himself, *Why couldn't I have found a love as great as theirs?*

"More tea son?" asked his father, holding the pitcher in his hand. Jimmy held out his empty glass and watched half of the contents hit the deck as his father shakily filled the glass.

"I'm meeting with Kathy and her lawyer tomorrow morning and will try to work out a settlement." Pat cupped her hand to her ear.

Jimmy spoke again, much louder, "I am meeting with Kathy and her lawyer tomorrow and will try to work out a settlement." Jimmy slowly drank his iced tea and thought of the man he just hired to kill his gold digging wife.

After departing, Jimmy drove home to his own large colonial mansion on Rutland Road.

He parked his old white Honda in the circular driveway next to his greedy wife's new green BMW convertible. Jimmy climbed the stairs to the master bedroom.

Kathy now slept in the guest room down the hall. Jimmy saw light coming from beneath his wife's bedroom door. "Good night gold digger," Jimmy whispered under his breath.

Jimmy left the house at six forty five the next morning. He had to be at the grocery store to open at seven. When he pulled into the parking lot he spotted Billy Sutton, age 20, exiting his mother's red Chrysler Caravan.

Jimmy liked his hard working clerk of six months. He heard from others that Billy was well liked at college. He was a good looking young man, tall and lean with close cropped blonde hair, bright blue eyes, and a personality to match.

"Morning boss."

"Morning Billy. While it's on my mind, when do you start college again?"

"No time soon. I took a year off so my pitching arm could heal. I start back in January."

"Any luck in finding that dream car yet?"

"No sir, it's hard to save money with dating and all."

Jimmy chuckled, "Well Billy, you could save more if you dated only one girl at a time."

Billy grinned as he picked up some trash in front of the store. "True sir, but how do you know which is the right one for you?"

"Well, you've got me there. I sure am no expert," said Jimmy ruefully as he unlocked the front door, turned off the alarm, and turned on all the interior lights.

Billy grabbed a white apron and headed in the direction of the storage room.

"Billy, I have to leave at eight thirty. I have an important meeting with Kathy and her lawyer at ten am.

"Yes sir, I know. Mrs. Sinclair called me before I left for work."

"What did she say to you?"

"Sir, I like you both and I don't want to come between you, so I'd rather not tell each of you what the other tells me."

"Okay Billy, that's understandable, but it's my store and I hired you, remember?"

"I know sir, but I want to be loyal to both of you."

"Billy, your loyalty is one of your best qualities. I won't put you on the spot."

"Thank you sir," said a relieved Billy. "What do you want me to do first?"

Kathy was undecided what to wear. Should she wear a suit, a dress, or a blouse and skirt? She called her mother for advice.

"Wear the dress," Carol Cummings, age 56, advised her only child. "Now remember, fight for what is legally yours."

"I will mom. I hired a bulldog of an attorney."

Kathy checked her appearance in the full-length mirror located by the entryway. The floral print dress was definitely the right choice.

Kathy brushed her long dark hair, put on red lipstick, grabbed her purse, and headed out the front door. She drove slowly away in her new car, listening to country music.

John Farran, age 35, with short dark hair and a mustache, comfortable in a striped shirt and blue jeans, checked his Wheel of Fortune watch again.

His partner was late. John sat in a corner booth in the dark, away from the other customers in the Hideaway Bar. His watch read nine twenty five am.

Jimmy sat in his car in front of the dimly lit and smoky bar, knowing he was keeping his partner in crime waiting. He was having mixed feelings.

Jimmy wanted to kill his wife, but then again he didn't. He just didn't want to give his money grubbing wife a huge sum of money for only eleven months of marriage.

He really hated her for setting him up. He wanted the same long lasting and loving relationship that his parents had.

He stepped into the relatively empty bar and walked over to John, who was sipping on a Coors Light at nine thirty in the morning.

"Sorry I'm late. I had another argument with the missus," Jimmy lied as the waitress approached. Jimmy ordered the same as John and once they were alone, Jimmy spoke.

"I know the police will check my bank account for any transactions once she is killed, so I can't have any out of the ordinary withdrawals.

I thought of a good way to give you your down payment." After the waitress delivered the beer Jimmy continued,

"After I visit with Kathy's divorce lawyer, meet me at Summit Bank, on the East side of Main Street.

I'll give you half of the thirty thousand we agreed on and the other half once she is dead."

Sitting across from the unhappily married man was John Farran, a professional truck driver posing as a hit man.

"Now did you visit my store and check my wife out?"

"Yep, a very attractive woman, maybe 15 years younger than you?"

"She's 26 and I'm 45. Can you make it look like a store robbery?" Jimmy asked, showing his hit man the headlines of the *Tupelo Business Journal*: "*Rash of Store Robberies - One Owner Shot.*"

"That's my work," John lied, acting serious as he tried to look convincing as a professional killer. "You want it in the head or torso?"

Jimmy looked at his watch, gulped down the last of his beer and said, "The torso will do. I have to leave; our meeting is at ten am. I have to pretend I want to settle."

Jimmy and Kathy Sinclair, married almost a year, and the owners of Buffalo Bill's grocery store, sat at opposite ends of Attorney Paul Salman's conference table.

Jimmy read the newspaper about the robberies while Kathy looked out the window at all the kids playing in the fountain on this beautiful Friday morning.

The city's number one divorce attorney entered, placed a small file folder on the conference table and sat next to Kathy, his new client.

"Morning Jim. I know you want to get this over with, so here are our demands."

The meeting lasted only ten minutes, and shouting from both parties could be heard from down the hall before Jimmy walked out to the elevator, caught one before the doors closed, and was gone.

Kathy stayed behind, talking with her very expensive attorney.

"Paul, I don't think we ever will come to an agreement on who gets what. I guess you'd better prepare the papers."

"Your husband, soon to be ex-husband I might say, has no legal grounds to deny you what is legally yours. In Mississippi, it's a 50-50 split."

"Where's Kathy? Where's Jimmy?" That's all Billy heard from customers as he did his best to provide the best customer service possible.

"They will be back in a few hours," Billy would respond while bagging groceries or ringing their purchases. Billy knew the Sinclair's had loyal and dedicated customers who really cared what was going on in their lives.

He ignored the twinge in his arm as he repeatedly performed his duties.

Billy had injured his pitching arm while at a friend's birthday party several months ago. In a strange twist of fate, a drunken adult male fell off a trampoline onto Billy, breaking Billy's right elbow.

It resulted in a surgery with three large pins inserted to hold things in place. Following the orthopedic doctor's instructions to give it time to heal, Billy was throwing lightly every day to his younger brother, Ray.

The loyal Sinclair customers would also inquire about the elbow, which Billy explained, was getting stronger every day.

The young man had some money put away in the bank destined for a used car, but Billy's ultimate dream car was a Chevy Camaro with the sport package and the top of the line stereo system.

He would gently refuse his mother's offers to pick him up in front of his place of employment each day. Instead he would walk the twenty or so blocks to Tupelo Chevrolet and walk the lot.

If Billy arrived during business hours, the salesmen would not approach. They knew well that the star pitcher of the University of Mississippi baseball team was broke.

*Someday, Billy would say to himself, someday I'll drive out of here instead of walking.*

Billy's brother, Ray, age fourteen, walked into Buffalo Bills with their mother. Billy was happy to see his family.

For some reason, this day was extra busy and Billy needed help. "Thanks for coming brother. Can you bag the groceries and help carry them out to the cars?"

"Okay," smiled the younger boy, excited at the chance to work with his older brother. "Plastic or paper?" he asked the elderly woman standing at the counter.

"Ray, you know we only have plastic at this store," reminded Billy.

"I know brother, but I always just wanted to say those words!"

"Are you staying too mom?" asked Billy.

"No honey, your father wants me to help him lay new sod in our back yard. Call me when you need a ride." Both boys gave their mom a big smile and went back to work.

"Billy, you didn't say how much I'm gonna get paid."

"I'll talk to Mrs. Sinclair when she gets back from her settlement meeting, but I think seven an hour."

*Wow, seven an hour. I can buy something really good with that,* thought Ray as he started to sweep the aisles.

Kathy rode the elevator to the lobby, saying hello to the young couple that got on at the fourth floor. Near her car, Kathy called Buffalo Bill's grocery store, and Billy Sutton, her trusted clerk of six months, answered.

"Billy, I'll be there in about twenty minutes to take the deposit to the bank."

"Ma'am, Mr. Sinclair just left carrying the week's proceeds."

*How odd,* thought Kathy, waiting at the traffic light in her newly purchased green BMW convertible. *That's my Friday chore.*

Jimmy pulled into the parking lot of Summit Bank, located on the corner of Main and First. Suddenly, a white Cadillac pulled up alongside and a gun was thrust into Jimmy's face.

The hooded man smiled, "Give me my money please!"

Jimmy did as instructed, and just like that John Farran had his fifteen thousand. An elderly woman ran over after the Cadillac departed the parking lot.

"I saw what happened. I got the license plate number."

John placed his fifteen thousand dollars under his dresser. He looked at his Wheel of Fortune watch and walked over to the television set in the corner of his one bedroom apartment and turned it on.

He went over to the microwave oven and made himself some popcorn.

"Show time," John said to no one as he sat down to watch his favorite game show, Wheel of Fortune. This was a game John was good at.

He was quick to solve the puzzle on the display board before most of the show contestants could do so. He had found his unique watch among many others at a novelty store for only twenty dollars while on one of his truck runs, before he got hurt on the job.

At the first commercial John went out to check his mail. Unfortunately, there was no mail waiting for him.

He was expecting his monthly worker's compensation check as he had been running low on funds - that is until he met his sugar daddy, Jimmy Sinclair.

John went back inside his residence, failing to notice a young man with a video camera recording his every move.

The activity caught the eye of the nosey landlord however, who spotted the stranger and approached him in the parking lot.

"I own this property. Can I help you?" quizzed Mr. Martin.

The young man put down his video camera and flashed a gold badge with photo identification.

"I'm a private investigator hired by an insurance company to document the activities and alleged injuries of your tenant in unit thirty-three.

I'm telling you this sir, because this claimant might set you up as well with a fake slip and fall or something like that.

"How long do you plan to be out here?" asked the suspicious landlord.

"The insurance company only hired me for today, so I'll be gone in a few hours."

The private investigator named Roderick Naughton handed the landlord his agency card. "In case you ever need a PI."

Mr. Martin took the card and went back inside his office.

John's telephone rang. It was the landlord on the other end of the line. "John, I like you and I want to thank you again for helping around the complex with the painting and repairs. At my age I couldn't have done it all myself."

"I was glad to do it Mr. Martin. We are friends and I appreciate the fact that you give me free rent in exchange."

"Well another reason I called was to warn you about a man sitting in a gray Volvo who was filming you when you checked your mail."

"What?" asked John, totally caught off guard.

"Yes, I have his business card. He is from 'I See You Investigations,' his name is Roderick Naughton and he said he would be here just for today.

Something about an accident."

"Yes, I am out on worker's compensation from a heavy box that fell on me a few months ago. I'll hang up now and pay him a visit."

John thanked the landlord, placed some newspapers in a trash bag, and went outside to the dumpster that was located at the rear of the parking lot.

On his return, John approached the young man sitting behind tinted windows. John knocked on the window.

"Roderick, I know you are in there. Roll down your window!"

The private investigator, realizing his cover had been blown, rolled the window down about two inches.

"Hand me the video tape before I break this window and yank you out!" demanded John.