

CHAPTER V

Bob woke from a restless sleep breathing hard. His body was wringing wet with perspiration even though it was a cool, balmy morning in August, 1976. It took him a moment to realize he was in his own bed. The bad dreams he had during the night lingered in his mind. They were getting more frequent. Frustrating, horrifying dreams. Somebody or something coming after him and he couldn't get the shells in his gun or he couldn't lock the door. Sometimes he was putting things together but try as he did, they wouldn't fit. Dreams of puzzles he couldn't figure out or things he couldn't get done. Even of Sandy, an old girlfriend in high school who had rejected him in favor of his best friend. His stomach had been in such butterflies that day years ago, he felt he was going to throw up in class so he asked to be excused. He walked up and down the halls, disillusioned with his school life and self image. The sun was shining outside. He walked out the door and never returned to complete his last year.

Bob rolled over. His body was tired and ached. He had several bruises and burns from being in too much of a rush at the shop to watch were he was going. He ran about twenty five miles a day, was sleeping about three or four hours a night, not eating regularly, living on snuff and beer.

About fifty things began racing in his head. He couldn't turn it off. He couldn't let down his guard, like he had to be prepared for what was coming next. He expected the worst and had to be ready. Got to be alert, keep himself up and going. It was like being in a

hundred mile foot race but he never seemed to get through the last ten miles. He might think his goal was just six months away, but it never seemed to get to the stage of running smoothly. He waited for his day of rest, but it never came.

He wondered if it was worth it. Every damn dime. He had wanted to make something of himself, to be proud. But how come he was doing so good and was so damn miserable? Money was the biggest disappointment in his life. He almost wished he had never started this whole thing. He used to be happy . . . get off at four o'clock, forget about his job, be a homebody.

The last few months were a blur in his mind. Everyday he could see it growing, growing. Taking orders, testing new paints, talking to foundries, steel companies, building inspectors, advertising people, employees, licensees — there were 21 now — and customers. A constant flow of customers. He would go through the same speech over and over and over. They asked a thousand questions. Can you give me a deal on three stoves? Can you make the flue bigger? Hook it up to a swimming pool? Hot water tank? Sometimes he would get into natural convection, moisture on windows, wood permits, where to get wood, chimneys. Then when he came home there would be five or six messages for him.

Bob heard Carol downstairs getting breakfast on. He put the pillow over his head to drown out the noise. How he would like to stay home today! Then he heard the muffled, angry sound of yells through the pillow.

He got up, slipped on his levis and went downstairs to see what was going on. The kids were pushing and shoving one another in the bathroom. It was crowded in the mornings with all the showering, blow-drying and toiletries.

“You kids knock it off,” Bob said. His voice was cross and commanding. After he said it, he felt like an ogre. It was about the only way he was communicating with the kids these days.

He changed to a more gentle tone. “How’re you bums doin’ today?” Maybe now would be a good time to chew the fat a little.

But they were in a rush to eat and catch the school bus. “Okay, Dad,” they answered in an automatic, disinterested manner and

without hardly looking at him.

After they were gone, Bob went to the refrigerator and opened a can of beer. Carol gave him a scowling glance.

“Do you have to drink like that?” she asked.

“Ah, quit henpecking,” Bob said, again in a cantankerous tone.

They often snapped at one another nowadays. She, too, was tired and strained. She had to deal with tax people, work closely with John Watkinson, their lawyer, bolster the licensees, and now she was even trying to do all this canning. And as usual, there were all the people coming and going.

At least she had enjoyed her sister Betty and her family during their stay here for a few weeks. Merle Bidwell, Betty’s husband, had not been satisfied with his present engineering job and had grown to hate the San Francisco Bay area. Bob talked them both into building Fisher Stoves. Betty went back home and in two weeks had sold their home, packed up and went to join Merle in their new territory, Indiana.

But having Duncan, the pig farmer from Indiana, wasn’t any picnic for Carol. A bald, big man of two hundred pounds, Carol didn’t like him as soon as she met him at the Eugene airport.

“I’m just a poor pig farmer,” he said in a southern accent. He seemed to be playing a role, like he was proud of being crude. He wore heavy laced up boots, the spaces between his teeth were too wide.

When the discussions over the license fee began back at the A-frame, he wanted to dicker. “I haven’t got any money. It took all the money I had saved to make this trip,” he told them.

At first he insisted on Indiana, which had just been given to Merle and Betty. Only after listening to much moaning and groaning, did Bob convince him to take Southern Illinois. Since then he was constantly crying about one thing after another and calling repeatedly about how he couldn’t find any paint, rivets, firebrick. Then he didn’t want to use Bob’s doors; it was too far to ship them from Oregon. He wanted a foundry at his back door, but he didn’t have the money for the plates. And naturally, he wanted to borrow the money from Bob and Carol so he didn’t have to risk

losing his farm, pigs, and land.

And thank God, they had finally got rid of Cal Cotton and his clan. Cal drove down to Springfield from Boise to get some more doors. What a fiasco! Cal parked his new Winnebago next to the A-frame, his five kids running back and forth through the house, Carol doing all the cooking. Cal's wife, Joyce, had changed. She seemed to be plain and humble before. Now she had her hair in a pouf and was dressed to a T. The only contribution Bob could remember her making at suppertime was a bowl of noodles. And it didn't do Carol any good to listen to Cal talk about the new drapes and carpet in his Boise showroom considering Carol had nothing but linoleum, a secondhand desk and homemade curtains here in Springfield. She began to complain when Cal invited them up to go fishing in his new boat.

"Shh, don't say nothing," Bob whispered to her. "You'll get him upset, and he is our largest licensee so far."

But Carol put her foot down when Cal made his proposition. He wanted New York.

"He has to catch up on his bill," she said. "He is just trying to pull one over on you."

One night Cal got hold of Bob when Carol wasn't around. Cal was a fast, convincing talker. His sense of self-importance had a way of overwhelming Bob.

"The Lord brought us together," Cal said. He held his six foot frame to stress his righteousness. "You are the greatest person that ever happened to me."

Bob noticed Cal was on his second beer. Wasn't it only a few days ago Cal had been onto him about giving up drinking?

"I'm number one, aren't I?" Cal was saying. "You couldn't give New York to anyone better than me. How much do you want for it?"

Bob thought for a moment. He had just sold Maine and Vermont to Arnold Dunagan for \$25,000. New York ought to be worth at least that.

"Tell you what. I won't charge you much so you will have

money to get it started. Beings you are a good guy, I'll sell it cheap. Five thousand."

"Praise the Lord," Cal said. "I'm going to multiply that money you saved me tenfold for you," he bragged. "I'm going to make us both a million dollars. I know what I'm doing. I'll get into New York before the competition hits."

The latest Bob had heard was that Cal hired a manager, Rick Cornish, for Boise and moved to New York to set it up. But so far, he was still way behind in paying what he owed.

Bob drained the last drop of beer from the can and let out a loud belch. Carol gave him another glowering look as she hurriedly cleared away breakfast dishes and wiped off the table. The telephone rang.

"I'll get it," Bob said. The beer had taken the edge off his stiffness.

"Hello."

"Well, it has happened again." It was his cousin, Barbara Jorgenson, calling from their shop in Seattle. Her voice was frantic, angry. "The new man we taught to build our stoves ran off and began building his own. Calls it the Sigman Stove."

The same old thing — imitators. There were getting to be more and more every day. Son of a bitch! How they plagued him! It was getting so he hated to pick up a magazine or go to the fair — he would see all the Fisher Stove adaptations: Schrader's Homebaker, Jake Jackson's Frontier, Ray Bruce's Buffalo, Self Sufficiency's Sierra.

As Bob listened to Barbara tell her story, he couldn't help but feel sympathetic. This was the second time the Jorgenson's production manager had struck out on his own — making a stove along Fisher lines. The first time, Bob had called the man up, faked like he was a customer and asked several questions about the man's stove. Finally, he said, "Do you know who you're talking to? This is Bob Fisher. And that's my stove you've just described."

Sometimes Bob could scare imitators off with just such a chewing

out or threats. It had worked when Smith and Trachsel had that trouble with their fabricators. When Bob and Carol's lawyer, John Watkinson, wrote them a harsh letter threatening to take them to court, they immediately stopped manufacturing Fisher Stoves. What they eventually did, however, was change the design a little and call the stove Sierra.

"Why can't you put a stop to these imitators?" Barbara shrieked. "That's what we paid for when we bought our license is this big patent of yours. We are sending in royalties for some kind of rights . . ."

"Carol has been working with our patent attorney," Bob said. "Patents are very complicated."

"All we get is the same run around," Barbara scoffed.

"We have spent thousands on it," Bob said. "Take it from me, you can spend all of your energy and money over lawsuits. It leads nowhere. I guess the best thing to do is concentrate on making the best stove there is. That's the only way of beating them."

Carol was right beside him, listening to the conversation. Funny how they might be feeling hostile toward each other but would instantly pull together when faced with a common problem. He handed Carol the phone, and she took a turn at calming Barbara down. They talked about ten minutes, then Bob took it again for a while.

After Bob hung the phone up, he felt like leaving it off the hook or yanking the plug out of the wall. There never seemed to be a time when that phone stopped ringing. And everytime he answered it, there was a new problem. A customer was having trouble with creosote or a licensee complained about the unclear set of blueprints or was out of doors or chrome balls. Or it was something to do with the foundries. Bob had set up foundries with patterns at four locations over the nation. But there was always some problem with warpage or getting the doors delivered on time.

Then there were squabbles to settle between the licensees over boundaries. Art Beevor and Tofflemer argued over their advertising overlapping into one another's territory. Of course, it was partly Bob's fault because he hadn't made the borderlines more

specific. But who would have guessed things were going to get this complicated?

Disputes were going on up in Canada, too. Jim Craig and Bob Warman claimed Claudio Querin and Paul Zyri were not putting out quality stoves and ruining the Fisher Stove reputation.

The worst was between Ted Howe and Dee Pererra. Bob had given Howe all of the Oregon Coast. But when he gave Pererra a certain county that extended into a small piece of the coast, there was trouble.

Pererra was mad and accused Bob of going back on his word. Howe was upset but did not hold it against Bob. He understood the mistake and eventually gave up that part of his territory.

But as much as Bob wanted solitude and quiet, he could not cut the phone off from the licensees. Bob felt a responsibility, a personal tie to each one. They were industrious, courageous people who left good jobs to take off on a lick and a promise to build his stove. They had seen opportunity, but Bob knew what each one had to go through — working off little money, and as they grew, ploughing what they made into equipment, fork-lift trucks, more material. He couldn't stop worrying about them. He took every one of their problems onto his shoulders, feeling as though he himself were the cause of them all.

Carol finished the dishes and started upstairs to get dressed. She would be ready to leave for the shop soon, but somehow Bob couldn't get himself stirring. He sat down in his big chair in front of the television. It felt soft and comfortable. He never had time to sit in it anymore. It was always go to work, eat, sleep and go to work again. And the only television he watched was occasionally the late news, and then he only caught the parts about energy shortages, unemployment and inflation.

How he would like to stay home today! Maybe watch Redd Foxx or a quiz show. He thought of visiting a few of his relatives a little later on, but he quickly gave up that idea. They would only want to bug him about Baxter's stove or talk about the draft caps.

They had formed a group to finance and promote Baxter's stove, following in Bob's footsteps by taking it to fairs, the flea market,

home shows and trying to sell licenses in Montana and Idaho. But Baxter's stove didn't sell. So they were back again to get Bob to take it on.

Just three months after Teresa's party, Don took Bob to the tavern to discuss it over a beer.

"Hell, no," Bob said. "The only thing that stove has going for it is the draft cap." After Bob had got to studying it, he saw that Baxter's cap was far superior to his own.

"Okay, if you only want the draft cap, why don't you buy it?" Donny said.

Bob thought a moment. If he made money off the draft cap, he was afraid his relatives might accuse him of cheating them.

"No. You better keep the draft cap in your own names. You can make more money off royalties," Bob said.

"Ah, we'd never sell enough," Don said. The pessimist again.

Bob told him how many Fisher stoves were being sold all over the nation, but Donny seemed disbelieving. That sounded too preposterous to him.

"We could charge \$4.50 a set," Don said worriedly. "At least get our money back."

"That's too much," Bob warned him. "Better to sell cheap, go for volume."

But Don was still doubtful of Bob's large figures, so the group decided to stick to \$4.50 a set. Bob sent all the licensees a sample, and they started ordering the caps. As Bob predicted, the price was too high. Now Utah was making their own. Just yesterday Bob told Delores, who was running the operation out of her home — counting nuts and bolts and mailing them out — to write a letter to each licensee and bring the price down. Damn, he had all their worries on his shoulders, too. Seemed like everyone was leaning on him.

Thinking about it, he began to get uneasy, fidgety. The chair suddenly felt confining, binding him down. As tired as he was, he couldn't be still; he had to get up, get to moving. He went upstairs to dress and went to the shop with Carol.

As soon as they arrived at the office, Carol set to putting out a

newsletter to each licensee. The first thing facing Bob was the monthly bills. There was no end to them. *Big* bills, up in the tens of thousands. The better he did, the bigger he grew, the greater and more frequent the bills were. It used to be so simple, he knew exactly where he stood. He sold a stove and made a profit. He paid expenses, fed his family, and bought more material. But hell, now it was all on paper. He never knew where he was. He was financing foundries to the tune of \$20,000; lawyers and accountants bills had reached as much as \$10,000 a month. His advertising bill for such magazines as *Mother Earth*, *Organic Gardening*, *Country Side* and the *National Enquirer* ran anywhere from \$8,000 to \$10,000 for national coverage. It had been another of Woody Taylor's ideas to get some correlation and uniformity into nationwide advertising. He was still frequently calling to give advice.

"Listen to what I'm telling you, Bob," he would say. He seemed to sense over the phone Bob's preoccupation with five things at the same time. "I'm trying to be helpful. Are you paying attention? Promise me you'll follow through on this."

Bob opened the bill from Gas and Mechanical Laboratories in Los Angeles — \$5,000. Testing, testing, testing — it was costing him a fortune. It had started when the building inspectors and fire marshalls began to get concerned over all the wood stoves going into homes. They were getting fanatic about it, afraid of the liability connected with fires started by faulty stoves or installations. Codes and regulations became stricter. Finally, it was required that stoves had to be ICBO* approved.

Bob knew his stove was safe if attached to a good chimney or pipe and properly installed. But he had been the first in Eugene to play ball. He took his stove to a testing laboratory in Portland and sent the report to ICBO to get a listing. But ICBO would not recognize that laboratory so then he sent the stove to Gas and Mechanical Laboratories in Los Angeles to be tested by Alan Dudden and spent another bundle. Since then he learned that ICBO approval was accepted only by twenty nine states. The southern

*International Conference of Building Officials

states went by the standards of the SCBC* and the northeastern states only acknowledged the BOCA*. Shit, how many times did they have to go through this rigamarole?

And they were practically ruining his stove in the name of safety. They wanted to put heat shields on the bottom and back, change the flue size to eight and ten inches, modify the draft cap to allow less air intake and put on a barometric damper. Anything to decrease the output of heat.

The trouble was that the Fisher Stove was too efficient. The BTU per hour factor was far beyond the Franklin, the cone stoves and so many others. Yet those cracker boxes could pass easily through the tests. No wonder — they didn't put out any heat.

Now Bob was faced with a dilemma. Should he sacrifice the efficiency of the stove to satisfy the codes? Damn, how he hated rules, laws and regulations, distrusted beaucracy. All a bunch of bullshit! Just screwed things up. It seemed like there were no freedoms left, like the Russians were here already. You couldn't even do what you wanted on your own property anymore.

He remembered when he was young how he rebelled against permits or licenses to hunt or fish and the times he went salmon snagging down in the river and deer poaching in the forest behind the house. He felt he had a right to the wildreness. Why should the government tell him what he couldn't do? They didn't own it, they didn't develop it. Now, of course, he wouldn't think of snagging or poaching. He didn't even hunt moose or bear anymore because he felt sorry that wildlife was becoming extinct.

Before paying the bills, Bob thought over his money position. At the present, the accounts receivable from the licensees were large. A few of the licensees were in pretty heavy. One of them was Stan Chaney. Stanley had messed things up as usual down in Arizona. He became involved with his accountant by giving him ten percent of the business, and he later, so Stan claimed, robbed him blind. The accountant, of course, gave another side of the story.

Most of the licensees, however, sent in their royalties regularly:

*Southern Codes Building Congress

*Building Officials Conference Association

Gullickson, Robinson, Bidwell . . . Even Doyle Hawks who was worried about making his royalty minimum, began to pick up shortly after his phone call the night of Teresa's party. He had made his six hundred stoves easily. Doyle now had about thirty-three to thirty-four dealers set up.

Most of the bigger licensees were using dealers now. Walt Dunn flew to Oregon from West Virginia last April to talk about selling wholesale versus retail. Originally, Bob had wanted to keep the licensees in small, family type operations — manufacture in the back room, sell out the front door. Like Art Beevor, Dick Higgins and Ron Correll. Build about ten stoves a day, make about \$100 profit on each one. It was a good, clean living. This way the middlemen were eliminated — salesmen, shipping clerks, distributors. The man who made the money was the man who did the labor.

The idea was perfect until all those damn imitators got in the picture. Now it was a race. He had to outrun the competitors. Build it better, faster; market it more effectively. It had become big business.

Now he had to think about some kind of a national organization. Arnold Dunagan had been onto him about the need for some guidance from a main office here in Eugene. Arnold was right when he said there was too much duplication among the licensees in the way of advertising, laboratory testing, lawyers. There should be some centralized program for insurance and bulk purchasing of component parts and brick. There should be a quality control man to go around to the various manufacturers to give advice on production efficiency, the best type of equipment to use, prices of steel and paint, and to make certain the high standards were kept up.

Bob could see that setting up and running a national organization was a necessity, but the idea seemed an additional burden. It meant more headaches, worries. He would need more staff, there would be more paperwork, more expenses. How could he put it all together? He thought of having a convention to bring all the licensees together to discuss problems and share ideas. But having to stand up and speak in front of several people was petrifying. He was sure he would pass out. And he worried about his vocabulary

— maybe he would offend some of them.

He felt himself tense up and wished he had stayed home. He threw the bills down on the desk and walked back to the shop. He began to hammer on a piece of channel iron from the border of an ash fender. Doing something physical might help to work off some of his tensions. He hammered more and more fiercely. He felt his blood rushing through his veins; even the outside surface of his skin tingled. He began to sweat. He didn't feel any relief; he seemed to be working himself up even more and more.

Just then Carol came back to where he was working. She held a paint chart and some carpeting samples in her hand.

"Which colors do you like for the new office?" she asked. They had decided to rent one unit of the motel around the corner as a temporary measure for more space. Bob had bought about seven acres on 42nd Street as a site for a bigger shop and eventually the office for the national organization. But last week Carol had announced she couldn't wait any longer. She said it was just too congested in there with her, Jean Trobough the new secretary, and the bookkeeper.

Bob looked at the carpet samples. "What the hell you lookin' at those for? You know we are going to be tracking in and out with dirty boots. You better order linoleum."

"I want it to look nice, Bobby," she said, trying to reason.

"It's just temporary. Why the hell do we have to do a lot to it?" he growled.

"Just a few touches make a place more presentable. I thought maybe a nice planter just outside the window — do you think you could make one for me? Get some dirt?" She meant to be cheerful, get him out of his bad mood. Well, he wasn't buying it.

"Hell, no. I'm not going to build no goddam planter. I'm sick and tired of doing this, doing that. I'm sick of working my ass off night and day. I'm sick of everyone on me all the time. Including you. And do you know what? You can take this whole damn stove works and shove it."

His whole body was shaking. He wanted to hit something, smash something. He felt he had to blow off steam, somehow get

some relief or he would blow his own brains out.

He stormed outside and walked in circles around the parking lot awhile but couldn't calm down. He knew he had to get away from there, get away from everything. There was only one place he could go — to the stump.

He got in his pickup and drove toward Upper Camp Creek. On his way, he stopped at the neighborhood grocery store for a six pack of beer. He tried to be as quick and inconspicuous as possible but before he could get out the door, one of the elderly members of the community had sighted him.

“Hey, Bob. How's the stove business?”

“Great,” Bob said, forcing a cordial smile, but he kept moving through the check stand and out the door. Damn, he was tired of people. He couldn't stop at the tavern for a beer or fill up at the gas station without people accosting him.

“Do you think the stove business is just a fad?”

“How long will it take to build your new shop?”

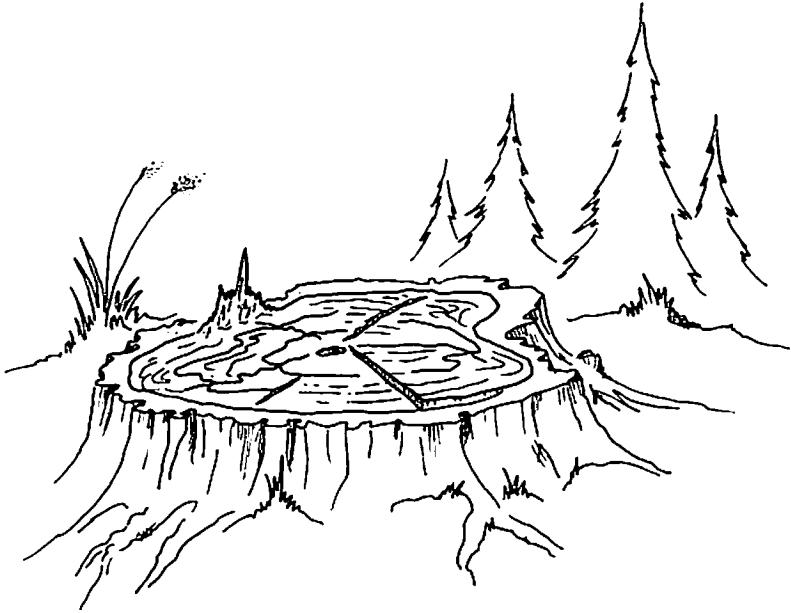
“How come you haven't sued Schrader yet?”

Son of a bitch! He was tired of people. How he'd like to lock himself in the closet somewhere.

He drove on about 1½ miles past his house, parked the pickup and walked up to the woods until he came to a large stump about six feet in diameter. He hadn't been here since his previous wife, Gloria, had left him and he was about to crack up. Shit, what did he know then about building a marriage relationship? All he knew was work, work. He thought of his harsh words to Carol and hoped to God he wasn't going to blow it this time, too.

He opened a can of beer, lay back on the stump and stretched out. There were white, wispy clouds in a blue sky, the fir trees swayed gently in the breeze, the leaves of the maple trees shimmered in the sunlight. It was so quiet he could hear the birds twitter and the chipmunks and squirrels scampering up and down the trees, clicking and chattering to one another over the nuts and seeds. A hawk flew overhead, and Bob watched it dive the moment something caught its eye. Their little world, their life cycle were so simple. Nature seemed the opposite of the hassle of society. It was

peaceful, certain, balanced — everything followed its natural course, there was a reason for everything.



How Bob longed for order and equilibrium to be restored to his mind. He wanted to be at peace, feel relieved, in harmony with himself and nature once again. As it was, his mind was so bogged down, it couldn't run free. He needed dreamtime, to let his mind drift, mull over what had happened and what to do about it, to focus on what he was doing and where he was going.

He felt like the time as a child he had crawled under a road through a 150 foot drain pipe about 16 inches in diameter. He got a cramp in his leg, panicked and started to fight. He couldn't turn around to go back and yet was too scared to go on. Since then he had a phobia about tight places — and that was exactly what he was in now. He was in a bind, a trap — even if it was of his own making — of customers, licensees, suppliers, relatives. He had wanted

independence, being on his own, no one telling him what to do — but now he had everyone pushing and pressing in on him. He had liked people — but now so many were draining him. He had liked the simplicity, the uncomplicatedness of his stove business but now it had to go big.

He dropped his empty can of beer and covered his eyes with his arms. He felt a large knot, a lump moving up from his chest. Uncontrollable. A loud guttural croak, then a groan came out of his throat. He began to sob, gruffly and in deep spasms. He couldn't stop; finally he didn't try. There was too much to let out.

CHAPTER VI

Throbbing pain ran down Bob's arms as he handed Carol a pair of socks, underwear, and a tee shirt from the dresser drawer. Carol lay them neatly beside her things in a suitcase laid out on their bed. He had a pulsing headache, his legs were shaky, his entire body felt limp. He was nervous about flying; he hated airplanes and had always been afraid of heights. And he dreaded negotiating with all the big executives at Hesston.

He had a feeling something bad was going to happen. Something was coming. He tried to bolster himself up, to be ready, but he was too weak and tired. He never would be on top of it all — people chewing on his ass, lawyers, imitators, regulations. He felt like he was loaded on a chain saw — the teeth just kept coming and soon were going to get him.

It was raining outside, a heavy April downpour. He felt cold and clammy even though the Fisher Stove was going and the room temperature was up to 72°. The flu he had over two weeks ago was hanging on and draining him of strength.

He should never have gone to the party last night at Delores' house. She had invited the relatives over to celebrate the completion of her new swimming pool, and Bob drank too much beer. He was feeling angry over hearing a few days ago that Baxter had offered the draft cap to Pioneer. Damn it, he had a right to be pissed off. Hadn't he spent thousands of dollars promoting the thing?

The tension in the air came to a head when the arm wrestling began. There were twenty dollar bets on, accusations of cheating,

and it ended in a free for all, everyone swinging out, bouncing furniture, and Carol screaming lest Bob was hurt.

Now he had to wear this pair of glasses with one broken lens that he had just recently acquired because of a growing dimness in his eyesight.

He sat down on the bed. "I don't feel so good," he said. "I think I'm going to have a heart attack or something."

Carol looked alarmed. "You want to stay home? Maybe we had better not go."

Bob thought a moment. This trip to Hesston was necessary. They were negotiating a contract with Hesston to make stoves for the large licensees. Back in January another cold snap had hit the eastern states. President Carter in his fireside chat stressed energy conservation. The licensees back there couldn't manufacture enough stoves to keep up with the orders — Dunns, Dunagan, and even Hawks, who had been worried last year about making his minimum royalty, was one thousand stoves behind. It was evident that some outside manufacturing source was needed.

Arnold Dunagan had made arrangements for himself, Bob and Carol to meet with the people of Hesston Corporation, near Wichita, Kansas. Hesston was a large manufacturer of farming equipment, but at the moment sales were down, they had huge production capacity going to waste and they were centrally located.

The negotiations had put an extra strain on Bob. He had been nervous about the trip then, too. Old self doubts, fears of inadequacy came back upon him. He might not measure up to corporate bigwigs, they might get the better of him and he would let the licensees down.

Sitting on the plane, he became self-conscious of his dirty lizard boots, the same old leather jacket that he had bought two years ago. To cheer him up, Carol suggested he pick out some new clothes somewhere in Wichita. So, after arriving and checking into the hotel at the airport, Arnold rented a car and they stopped at Sheplar's, the world's largest western store, on the way to Hesston. Bob tried on sport coat after sport coat. He became weary — they were all expensive and he dreaded more decisions. Finally he chose

a blue denim suit and vest. With the new shirt, tie and boots to match, the price was high, but Carol insisted that he was worth it.

They met with eight Hesston executives in a big conference room — the vice president, production manager, purchasing agent, the sales manager — and Bob didn't know who the hell the rest were. They all sat around a big table; their faces were serious. Bob knew the company had Mennonite origins, and the stiffness made him nervous. He had to tell a joke to get relief, loosen the atmosphere.

“Do any of you know the definition of a hypotenuse?”

They looked puzzled.

“The plane we were just on,” Bob explained, “a high pot in use.”

They gave a friendly laugh, but Bob still felt tense. Then he stood up, swirled around and pointed to his new suit. “This is the first time I've had a suit on,” he said.

Carol, Arnold and the others began to laugh. Carol leaned over the table toward him and pointed to the back of his collar. He had been so nervous, he had forgotten to take off the price tags.

Things got somber again as they buckled down to discussions. Bob went over the drawings and advantages of the stove then told them why he needed Hesston. The executives began talking about projections — for as far into the future as six years. Bob began to feel uneasy again. He had no background in long term planning; he had just gone by the number of customers he had at the time. Then he felt foolish, too. After telling them of the great demand for the Fisher Stove, he still wanted to be cautious and not be overextended. Fortunately, Arnold stepped in and helped by projecting for his area.

Bob couldn't tell how it was going over until a middle-aged man hurriedly entered the room. He was introduced as Nelson Galle, the general manager.

“I'm sorry I can't stay but I'm on my way to another meeting,” he said.

Then George Goering spoke up and said, “I think you'd better stay and hear about this.” He recapped what Bob had just told them

and right away Mr. Galle buzzed his secretary to postpone the other meeting. It was then that Bob realized they were keen on making his stove.

They cordially offered to show Bob, Carol and Arnold their manufacturing facilities. A bus was ordered to take them across the twenty-five acre grounds of Hesston Corporation. Inside one of the huge factories, where parts for hay conditioners were being made, they all watched huge coils of 1/4" steel rolling out, being pressed and cut a by massive panel of dials and buttons. The patterns were being stamped out by a giant cookie cutter. It was fast, clean, precise.

They went back into the conference room to discuss costs. Some sandwiches were brought in while they worked out an estimate, some kind of bid Bob could offer the licensees. Bob was certain it would be low with their mass production techniques and large quantity buying of steel. He was surprised when they came up with a price ten dollars over what the licensees could make them for.

Bob didn't know what to say. Did he have to play a game of poker?

"That's rock bottom price. We thought you would be excited," Mr. Galle said.

"It's too high. We wouldn't be ahead," Bob said.

"It's the lowest we can make it," Mr. Galle said.

"We can't do 'er," Bob answered. He was uncomfortable. The tie was too tight, he couldn't breathe. "We'd be stupid to pay more than our own price."

For the next five hours, they reviewed the fabrication processes, demanded more definite projections, hassled over price. At times the executives grew silent, sat back and looked piercingly at him.

"You are either the shrewdest or most honest person I've ever met," Mr. Goering said.

Two or three of the executives would leave awhile and come back again with more figures. Other people were brought in to be consulted on packaging expenses, warehousing, and fixed costs.

By 6:00 p.m. they were still in a deadlock. Finally, Arnold drew it to a close by saying they would seek another manufacturer.

Bob was exhausted and depressed when he, Carol and Arnold returned to the hotel. It had been a gruelling, sapping ordeal. Being confined in a stuffy room, encountering intense closeness without personal involvement, racking his brain without moving the limbs or muscles of his body, dealing with abstracts, future potentials and not the here and now. Hell, they had used words he couldn't even understand — contingent liability, capital reserve, gross profit ratio, revenue potential, on an on.

He and Arnold had a couple of drinks and were about to go to bed when the telephone rang. It was Nelson Galle. "We'd like to talk further on your stove," he said.

"We have an early flight at 8:30 in the morning back to Eugene," Bob said.

The next morning they came at 6:30 sharp and quoted Bob a lower price. Bob accepted, and a preliminary agreement was made.

Now, weeks later, tired and sick, and with one broken lens, Bob had to go back again to Hesston to finalize a contract for the Dunn brothers. He was grateful this time that he and Carol were taking John Watkinson. Let him sit there through all that bullshit, he thought.

On the plane Bob told himself to keep calm, try not to worry about his feeling that something bad was coming. The pain in his arms had subsided, his headache was better, so he settled down to a game of twenty one with John Watkinson, and the trip went by quickly.

At Hesston, Bob left Carol and John and spent the morning with company engineers going over the components and detail work of the stove. He joined them later in the same conference room they had met in before.

Nelson Galle and the same eight executives were there, this time with three company attorneys. On the other side of the table sat Walt Dunn and his lawyer, Carol and John Watkinson.

Walt Dunn's lawyer was on the warpath. "I don't like the deal you're trying to pull," he said to the Hesston lawyers.

Bob sat down beside John Watkinson. John was angry also. "We won't sign if the 'no compete' clause is not included," he said emphatically.

Bob looked questioningly at Carol. "What the hell is going on?" he asked her.

"Our lawyers feel Hesston should be refrained from making other kinds of stoves for a certain period after our contract with them expires," she whispered. She looked distraught.

Bob felt his body go rigid, his pulse quickened. Another problem, more hassling, turmoil. Pain came back into his arms again, he felt pressure in his chest. Then his whole body began to throb. He felt like his head was going to blow up.

Everything became dim, his vision was tunnel-like. It was like a part of his brain was going to sleep. He felt dizzy, the floor began moving.

He tried to shake it off. He had to be alert, responsible; people were counting on him.

Suddenly blood gushed out of his nostrils. Huge spurts. He caught it in his hands.

Carol looked petrified. "What's wrong, Bobby?" she asked.

He didn't want to scare her. "Just a nose bleed," he said.

He rushed out of the conference room and headed for the restroom. He held large handfuls of toilet paper up to his nose until the bleeding stopped. Rich Huxman, the manager of manufacturing, had followed him. He insisted on taking Bob to the infirmary. At first Bob refused. He wanted to go back for the discussions, but his knees were wobbly, his tongue felt thick and he noticed he couldn't pronounce his S's when talking to Rich. He felt nauseated and he was afraid if he went back, he would throw up on the conference table. Finally he agreed to Rich's offer, and they rushed out of the building to the infirmary.

The nurse immediately ordered him to lie down on the examination table for ten minutes. She checked his blood pressure. It was 180 over 120.

“You should be in a hospital,” she said.

Things began running through Bob’s mind. Carol’s tender touch, picking wild blackberries with the kids when they were young, the huge willow tree in front of the old place on Hayden Bridge Road. If only he could be in the woods now, lie down on the stump and cry. He knew he was washed up and at the end of the line. If he could just get through this, get back home . . .

He lay on the table for about twenty minutes more then said, “I’ll be okay.”

Bob re-entered the conference holding his handkerchief up to his nose. Nelson Galle was saying, “I can’t understand why you lawyers can’t come to some agreement.” He looked exasperated.

Carol saw Bob and rushed to his side. “You look as white as a sheet. Maybe you ought to go to a hospital.”

“No,” Bob said. “Let’s get this over with.”

He saw down at the table. Walt Dunn looked disappointed and dejected. His attorney was gone. “Where’s Walt’s attorney? Why haven’t we got a deal?” Bob demanded.

“We came to an impasse. The thing fell apart, and Walt’s attorney walked out,” John Watkinson said.

Nelson Galle was concerned over Bob’s ghostly appearance.

“We are not going to copy your stove,” he tried to reassure Bob.

“We are a strong, upstanding company with a long Christian heritage.”

But Bob held firm. “We can’t sign without the ‘no-compete’ clause,” he said.

Just then the door opened. A hush came over the executives and lawyers as Howard Brenamin, president of Hesston Corporation, walked in.

“What’s the problem?” he asked. He was a distinguished looking man.

“I’m glad you could come,” Mr. Galle said. “I called you because I thought maybe you can settle this.” Briefly, he explained the situation. Mr. Brenamin glanced occasionally over at Bob as he listened.

“I see no reason why we can’t agree to the ‘no compete’

clause," he said, very staunchly. "These lawyers are not running this company, we are. Now let's get this man back to Springfield where he can get some medical attention." He then apologized to Bob for the delay, shook hands, and said he was looking forward to a good relationship.

That night, Hesston secretaries worked until late hours of the night to get the contract typed up. In the morning, Bob and Carol signed the contract authorizing Hesston to make stoves for Fisher Stove licensees, and Dunn made out the first purchase order of five thousand stoves.

Bob had slept well that night, a deep sleep, almost in a collapsed state of coma. But he still didn't feel up to par that morning at Hesston nor on the plane going back to Springfield. The moment they returned, Carol made an appointment for Bob to have a physical examination the next day.

Doctor Thomashefsky was very blunt. "You have extremely high blood pressure. that is highly dangerous to your heart, brain and kidneys. There is already blood in back of your eyeballs and in your urine. What you had back in Kansas was a mild stroke. You should be in the hospital right now."

Thoughts of going to the hospital scared Bob. It was bad enough coming to the doctor. He was shy and self-conscious about his body; he had even refused to remove his underwear for the examination.

"I'd recuperate better at home," he said.

"Bob, I'm warning you, if you don't take it easy, you'll be dead in two weeks," Doctor Thomashefsky said.

Bob thought of all the things he had to do . . .

The doctor seemed to sense his thoughts and sounded emphatic. "You have to make up your mind to change your way of living. Either you get someone else to run your business or you'll have another stroke soon. And there is a possibility you may end up as a vegetable."

That penetrated, and Bob flinched. He was not afraid of death as much as being half there, disabled. Very early in life he had made up his mind never to be helpless, dependent.

The doctor gave Bob a prescription for Inderal and Hydrochlorothiazide and demonstrated to Carol how to use a blood pressure gauge.

She was broken up and in tears. "Bobby," she said, half demanding and half pleading, "you are not going to set foot into that shop or the office. You are worth more to me than all the stoves in the world."

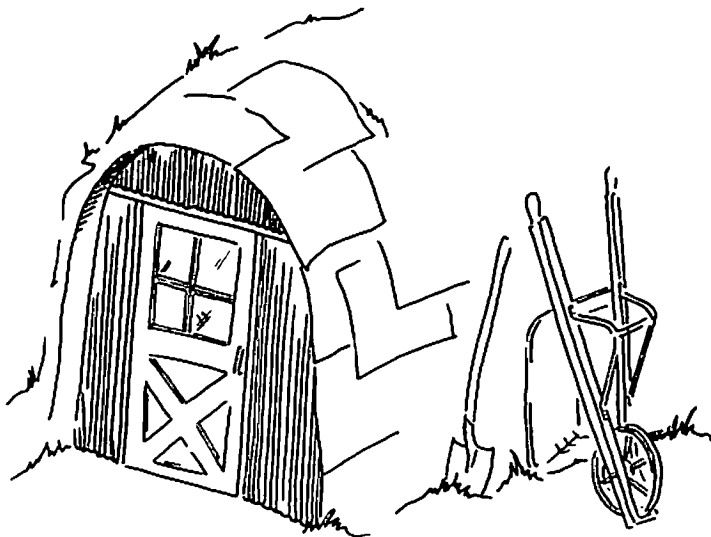
Bob lay back on the living room couch for his afternoon rest. His eyelids would not stay shut; he felt wide awake. Learning to relax was tough. He felt guilty over being idle and not getting something done.

He had been out farming his new 115 acres of land just up the road. If he ever had a chance to be born again, he would choose to live in the pioneer days. Be self-sufficient, raise his family away from the hassle of society. He was a farmer at heart; he loved to till the soil, smell the freshly ploughed ground. Sometimes he would piss on the tractor exhaust pipe and watch the steam roll. Make it stink, let the ormeriness come out of him.

It was August, and he had just mowed the hay. Physical work was good for him, the doctor had said, as long as there were no worries or stress involved. Out on the plough, things were simple and mechanical and he didn't have to rack his brains.

Sometimes he would get caught up in projects like clearing off old fences, putting in ditches or cutting away foilage. He had built a root cellar to store potatoes, onions, squash and peppers from his garden and a smokehouse in which he used a Fisher Stove. Once in

a while he would have to check himself. It was difficult for him to realize he didn't *have* to do anything. He worked for three or four hours in the morning, then took a nap. Sometimes he stopped at the house of his old friend, Dan Ray, for a visit. He was starting to feel good again. And he was drinking very little.



He shifted position on the couch and fluffed the pillow under his head. Just as he had become comfortable, the telephone rang. Jesse and the girls were not there; Bob had taken them to the Springfield swimming pool. He felt happy about spending more time with them.

He answered the phone. It was a trucking company calling about shipment dates for a load of stoves to Alaska.

“Would you mind calling my attorney, John Watkinson, or my wife Carol?” Bob asked in a rather ashamed voice. “I’m sorry I can’t help you.”

It bothered him to have to turn people away when they needed help or advice. It was a large load for Carol to carry, too, until they had hired someone to run the business. He and Carol had thought of hiring one of the licensees — maybe Dunagan — but each had his own territory to run. Carol and John Watkinson had been interviewing a man named Henry Eaton for the past three weeks. Carol had described him as a tall man in his late fifties and in good physical condition. He had been an independent lumber broker for several years but now was retired. The Fisher Stove business intrigued him, but he was only interested in the challenge of getting a national office going, after that, in about six months, he had another man in mind — a business associate named John Lynn, who would take over.

Bob tried to stop thinking, but try as he could, he still worried about the business. He knew the licensees needed direction and unity. He felt he was letting them down.

Right now there was a meeting taking place in Roanoke, Virginia, among the eastern licensees. Cal Cotton was heading it up, Dunagan, the Dunn brothers, Hawks, Bidwells, Marion and Mary Moore from Pennsylvania, Duncan, John Jordan from Mississippi, Carl Baughman, and Chuck Dynes from Ontario were there.

Carol had flown back to attend. When she telephoned last night, she reported there was an atmosphere of dissension. There were complaints over screwed up patterns, no available component parts and not enough national advertising as was promised.

The hottest issue was the imitators. An ex-Fisher Stove dealer had come out with a close facsimile in the New England states called the All Nighter. And Carl Baughman, a licensee in Georgia, was extremely wrought-up over an adaptation of the Fisher Stove in his territory called the Huntsman, made by Atlanta Stove Works. He wouldn't let up, repeating over and over again, "What are you going to do about it?"

Carol said John Watkinson answered the questions being fired at him as best he could but, of course, had to be honest about the limitations of patents.

What troubled Bob the most was Cal Cotton. Carol had learned

that Cal was trying to sell licenses to build his own new stove — another adaptation of the Fisher Stove called Timberline. Carol said it warmed her heart when the Dunns, Hawks, even the Moores who were relatives to Cal, had turned him down. They said they felt an appreciation, a loyalty to Bob for giving them the opportunity to get started on their own.

Of all the people who had turned against him, Bob felt most hurt by Cal. Bob had listened, lapped up all of Cal's empty words — "You are the best thing that ever happened to me" and "I'm going to make you a million dollars." Bob now regretted having not heeded Carol's early distrust of Cal.

The old familiar tenseness and pressure began creeping up on Bob. He immediately heeded the warning symptoms and tried to shut Roanoke and Cal Cotton out of his mind. He sat up — maybe watching some television would occupy his thoughts.

Before he could turn the set on, the telephone rang again. He wondered if he should answer. Maybe it would be another problem or crisis to upset him. He went ahead and picked up the receiver.

"Hello."

It was an unfamiliar voice, panicky. "Mr. Fisher, your shop is on fire. You better get down here."

As Bob drove down the road, he repeated over and over in his mind — don't get excited, don't get excited. About one half mile away from the shop he saw the smoke, then he could smell the fumes. Fire trucks were there; police and people were offering to help. Carol's father, Barney Evans, who had come up with his wife from California to work for Bob, was organizing work teams. He told Bob that someone had stacked cardboard boxes too close to the chimney of the Fisher Stove display model, the elbow had become dislodged and the cardboard caught fire.

Bob had to fight to keep down his fury. Stupidity! This would probably be another feather in the caps of the fire marshalls and building inspectors. Woodburning stoves would be blamed again when it was the carelessness and stupidity of those who installed or operated them improperly.

Bob worked a couple of hours trying to salvage parts and pipe.

He bought diesel from a nearby gas station to soak the elbows so they would not rust. As he worked, two people came up and wanted to know when they were getting their Fisher Stove they had just ordered.

After the commotion died, Bob hung around the shop, looking it over, thinking about his predicament. He never had taken out an insurance policy on the contents of his shop and had only assumed the landlord had insured the building. He had lost \$25,000 worth of inventory and he guessed he had lost about two or three months of sales. Maybe he would even have to pay damages on the building. All in all, he figured this fire had cost him around \$50,000.

He had about \$20,000 in the bank after buying his 115 acres of land and equipment. This was going to put him pretty low. Usually he could count on about \$12,000 to \$50,000 a month in receivables from licensees. But now that was uncertain. What if the licensees decided to pull away?

What could happen next? The world seemed to have toppled over on him. He had the urge to fight back, struggle. That had been what he had done ever since he could remember. Toil, strive, wrestle through. But he couldn't now. He had to think of his life. He pulled himself together; he wasn't going to let this kill him. It wasn't worth it. He decided right then and there on the most important things in the world to him — life, loved ones, peace of mind.

In the spring of 1977 came the Fisher Stove national convention that Bob had hoped and dreamed about for two years. Three intensive and jam-packed days were spent in conference rooms and private suites at Eugene's beautiful hotel, the Valley River Inn. All of the licensees representing forty-nine states and Canada had

attended — with the exception of Cal Cotton, whose territory was being revoked, along with Duncan, the pig farmer, who chose to go with Cal and Timberline. Also, much to Bob and Carol's regret, Woody Taylor had recently suffered a severe heart attack, retired, and sold his territories to Arnold Dunagan.

On the last evening, a banquet was held in the Willamette Ballroom. Before sitting down to dine, Bob intermingled with the licensees, listening to their comments, watching the expressions on their faces.

At the opening of the convention, he had been anxious about their reaction. Would they feel they now had the leadership, the organization they wanted? Did they feel a sense of unity, centralized strength to compete with and win over imitators? He had spent his last \$10,000; everything he had worked for in the past four and a half years hinged upon the outcome of this convention.

Henry Eaton and his assistant manager, John Lynn, had done well at putting things together. They brought in speakers on future economic trends; specialists in advertising, patents, and laboratory testing; consultants on foundries and insurance. There were seminars on marketing, warehousing, financing inventories, stove accessories; panel discussions on chain stores. And Hesston executives had made a presentation of their facilities and capacity to provide volume.

Bob had watched Mr. Eaton and Mr. Lynn frantically working in the past months setting up the national headquarters in the large office building across from the Valley River Center. Toll-free Watts Lines were installed, more staff was engaged to better service the licensees, the accounts receivable were brought to a current status, new territories were opened up and joint ventures were formed. They had set up bulk purchasing systems, launched a research and development program for adding new models, stepped up and improved national advertising, surveyed overseas markets, set up warehousing facilities and promoted tax credits for wood stoves in Washington, D.C. They seemed to thrive on organizing, systematizing, schedules and procedures. That was good. As for him, he knew he wasn't of the same breed. The reason

he had started his stove business was to avoid all that.

Well, let them run it. Every man has to be what he is. He was tired of trying to be something he wasn't. He was too much of an individualist, a maverick. And now he accepted himself for what he was and chose to live according to his own nature.

It was time to eat, and everyone began taking places at their tables. All of Bob's relatives sat with him and Carol at the head table. Mom had on a new dress, Dad was happy as a lark and had been dancing a jig a moment ago. Donny wore a new sports jacket and looked more confident than Bob had ever seen him, and Delores looked radiant as she discussed draft cap royalties with John Lynn. They were once again a happy group. The marketing and manufacturing rights of the draft caps were now turned over to the national headquarters, and Dad was thrilled and proud over the bronze plaque hanging on his wall for his invention of the draft cap.

After dinner, the awards ceremony began. The Dunn brothers received a large silver trophy for the largest number of units sold, and the Hawks second. Ron Correll won for the highest number of sales based on population and John Jordan won the Gorgeous George award for being the best dressed man. Dunagan's wife won a special recognition as the wife whose husband was away from home the most.

In a moment Bob would have to stand before everyone and give a speech. Thinking about it gave him butterflies in his stomach. Sure as hell he would goof up, make an ass out of himself. But he approached the podium undaunted. He was what he was. Anybody who didn't like it could go to hell. Maybe he'd tell the story of the two tomcats.

Bill Byrd, a young, good-looking and witty sales representative from California and the master of ceremonies, was finishing his introductory remarks — "So if ever a short, curly haired guy chewing snuff says 'follow me,' grab ahold of his checkered shirt and hang on."

Bob stood before the group but had to wait several minutes to tell his story. Everyone was standing, giving him a thunderous ovation.