

ARSENIC AND

November 16, 1980. 3:00 A.M. Bob "Robert" Woodward, lone reporter, woke from a dream about Carl Bernstein in a meat grinder to the ringing of the telephone.

"Woodward, this is Ben Bradlee, your boss and editor of the *Washington Post*." Bradlee sounded badly shaken. "You better sit down, Bob. I have some bad news."

"I'm lying down. Will that do?"

"No. Get up and sit down. No, never mind. It's okay to lie down. But for God's sake, man, whatever you do, don't stand up!"

"Okay, Ben."

"Junior Samples . . . oh God, Bob . . . Junior Samples has been found missing and presumed dead in his two-hundred-dollar-a-day bungalow on his private man-made beach around the fountain next to the soda machine in the lobby of the Nashville Best Western."

In a daze, Woodward hung up the phone and poured a Scotch on rye.

First Woodward cried. Then he was angry. Then he cried again. Then he shined his shoes. Then he took a bath. Then he felt better, but not great. Then he whined. Then he went back to bed and fell asleep.

4:10 A.M. Woodward woke from a dream about Bernstein in a cannibal's pot to the phone ringing again.

It was Ben Bradlee.

"What the hell are you waiting for? Get on the plane to Nashville and reconstruct the last forty-eight hours of Samples's life."

"Okay," Woodward whined, with reason. "But I won't work with Stinko."

"Who?" Bradlee asked.

"You know. Dopey Carl Bernstein. He's a pest. He has to go everywhere I go and know everything I find out. He's like a baby."

"He's not the baby. You are," said Bradlee.

"No, you are," Woodward chided.

"No, you are."

"No, you!"

"No, you!"

"No, me! Damn!" Woodward had

The Death of Junior Samples

blown it. Bradlee, long recognized as the smartest man in the world by Crazy Ed, the mail-room coffee boy, had outwitted Woodward again.

"Ha!" Bradlee gloated, and quickly hung up.

9:14 A.M. The Aer Lingus Washington-to-Nashville air shuttle. Woodward greedily accepted his complimentary breakfast of whiskey and soda bread, and cream cheese on Junior Samples's autobiography, *Everything About Junior*. Woodward read the book from cream cheese to cream cheese. All it said was: "I am fat. I wear overalls." And it said it over and over again for 250 pages.

That may be good enough for Oxford University Press, Woodward thought, but the *Washington Post* digs deeper. Here I go!

11:13 A.M. Nashville Best Western. Woodward took a look around Samples's bungalow. There wasn't much there he hadn't already learned from the book. Just overalls and a scale, and

a pot of cream cheese simmering on the stove.

Crossing the beach to the soda machine, Woodward questioned maintenance man Milton Joe Schwartzberger, a circus-like midget with a haircut.

The horrifyingly freakish dwarf, or "little person," as they prefer to be called,* had some bad news. Samples was no longer missing and presumed dead. He had been found and was definitely dead. Schwartzberger said Samples had been found when they dragged the fountain.

"Look," Woodward said, "I read Samples's book, and if there was one *idée fixe* that obsessed him like nobody's business, it was that he was fat. Now you mean to tell me that you couldn't see a man as fat as Samples in this *fontaine petite* without dragging it?"

"He wasn't in the fountain," Schwartzberger explained. "He was underneath. We found him when we dragged the fountain over to the front desk because the night manager wanted a drink."

What was the cause of death? Something heavy had fallen on him. An autopsy determined that it had been a large simulated-marble vessel adorned with cherubs and filled with water and three or possibly more coins. Any clues as to what the *objet de mort* had been? No. The police were stymied. But as soon as they finished their golf game, they were going to check into the possibility that it was the hood ornament on Liberace's car.

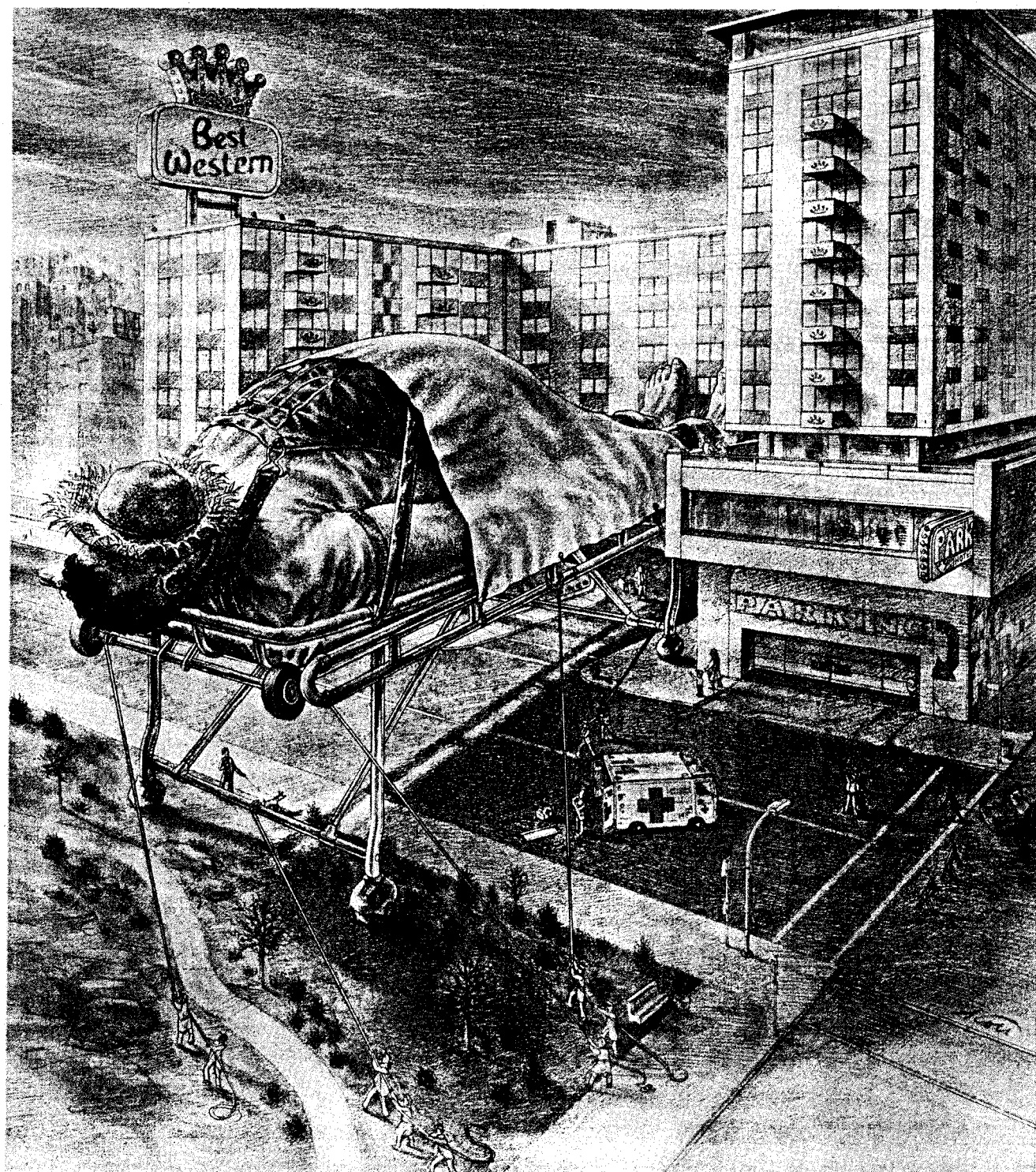
Woodward sat down on the edge of the large simulated-marble fountain. Schwartzberger sat on his lap.

"What can you tell me about the man inside the overalls?" Woodward asked.

"Well," Schwartzberger said, "he was a big tipper. At least that's what the crew of the ferry on the bayou called him. And a ladies' man? Hus-

*Some of the nine out of ten psychologists polled might say, if pressed, that there might be a few people who may think—and don't quote them on this—that these men no bigger than a child's toy are made to feel like big men (ha-ha) indeed, but not in stature (heh-heh).

OLD OVERALLS



GREG SCOTT

ARSENIC AND OLD OVERALLS

ker-du! He had a famous dame on each arm for every broken light on Broadway between 148th Street and 157th Street. Zsa Zsa Gabor. Eva Gabor. Linda Gabor. And the twins, Pat and Mike Gabor. Dody from *My Three Sons*. She's quite a looker now, and she uses that overbite to her advantage. But you know, for all his fast women and loose cars, and all his drugs and alcohol, and all his usual tables at his fancy nightclubs, I think he was the loneliest guy I ever met. He never really had the one thing he really wanted: someone to love him for himself, not for the sex, drugs, and good times he could provide. Also he ached to be in charge of the world's food supply. But that is another story, my friend."

Woodward asked Schwartzberger what he knew about the day Samples died.

Samples had left his bungalow for work around 8:13 A.M., Schwartzberger said. He had a hundred dames on each arm, a couple on his back, and one on each shoe. "I don't know," Schwartzberger mused. "He seemed like a burdened man."

Schwartzberger gave Woodward the once-over twice, because he had forgotten to load the film the first time. "A burden that you, in your homeliness beyond the laws of physics, are not likely to be the bearer of very soon, and for the rest of your life. Ha-ha!"

"At least I'm not a horrifyingly freakish dwarf," Woodward shot back, sharp as a tack and two hundred times as tall.

"At least I don't have a horrifyingly freakish dwarf sitting on my lap,"

Schwartzberger shot back, sharp as a tack and half again as tall.

"Neither do I now!" screamed Woodward, throwing the hellish thing into the fountain and stalking off, triumphant, to find a cab.

"Take this!" Schwartzberger shot back, fast as a bullet and tall as a bullet and . . . oh, Woodward's God! It was a bullet!

Fortunately, Schwartzberger was as good a shot as he was an impersonator of tall Abe Lincoln at the local Macon County fair in the summertime. So he missed and collapsed to the ground in a heap junior, and he wept little tiny tears.

12:13 P.M. Hee Haw-ville.* Woodward had to bribe the armed "tour guide" with 2.5 grams of gumbo—almost his whole supply—before he was let through the gate. Once inside, he interviewed some 65,000 people, about half of them under hypnosis. Not that it was his intention to become hypnotized halfway through his investigation. It's just that Professor Hypno, who was appearing on the show that week, was such a darned good hypnotist that Woodward didn't stand a chance. Needless to say, most of the latter 32,000 interviews were rendered useless due to the reporter's inability to recall anything that happened after his "talk" with Hypno, and to the fact that he was obliged to take off his clothes and cluck like a chicken whenever someone said the word "the."

However, by painstakingly twisting the information gathered in the first

33,000 interviews, and by fabricating entire episodes to suit the "truth," Woodward was able to piece together a sketchy scenario of the events leading up to Junior Samples's disappearance and death, and this it what it spells:

November 14, 1980. 10:13 A.M. The morning of the day before his death, Junior Samples awoke in a prison cell. At 4:13 that morning, he had been picked up for driving under the influence of gumbo, and for possession of more than an ounce of same. Looking out the window, he saw his teenage fans chanting on his behalf.

"Free Samples! Free Samples!" they cried. One middle-aged man rushed over to them and asked, "Where are the free samples?" He was told, "Free Junior Samples."

The man just walked away muttering, "There's always a catch!"

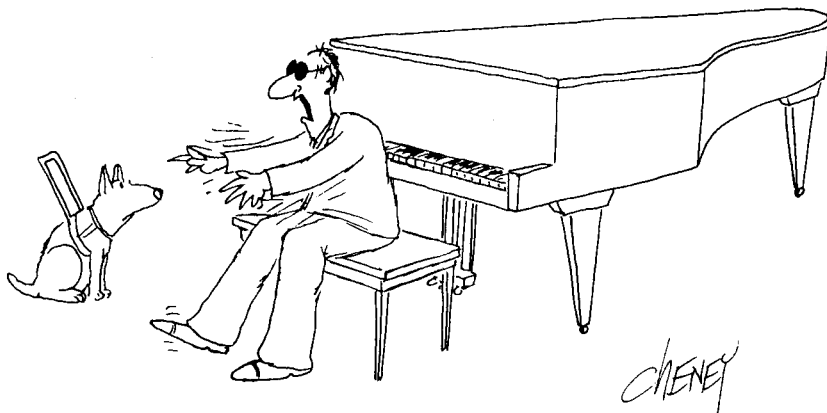
The man seemed to represent the over-thirty attitude to the whole Junior Samples phenomenon. Only the young-at-brain could understand and relate to the man who personified the word "swinger" and the state of Oklahoma while still being able to forget his lines and, with a little extra studying of the script, everyone else's.

At 11:13 A.M., Dean Martin, who had been arrested the previous night for drinking while children in India went sober, and Samples were released into each other's custody because, in Nashville, Junior Samples was an institution and Dean Martin was to be sent there for evaluation.

As they pulled out of the prison Park-N-Lock in his Rolls-Royce pickup, Samples immediately fell asleep at the wheel. Martin took the opportunity to use the truck phone and call the Chairman of the Board—Mr. . . . Francis Albert Sinatra!

At this point the following conversation took place between Martin and Sinatra, according to Buck Owens, who was still attached to the gun rack where he had fallen asleep the night before. From this vantage point he was able, by utilizing the gun-rack extension, to listen in undetected, except for one point toward the beginning of the conversation when he said, "Hello, this is Buck Owens."

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 44)



"Oh, my God! Spotty? Spotty? They've stolen the Steinway!"

*The vast walled city-state within the city of Nashville which contains the complex of Hee Haw recording, television, and film studios, the publishing house, hairstyling salons, etc. It is divided into three parts: the Hee Sector, the Haw Sector, and the Forbidden Zone. All of Nashville's roads lead to it.

ARSENIC AND OLD OVERALLS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36)

MARTIN: Hello, Frank. It's Dean. Oooh, I want to tell you. . . . Do you remember Junior Samples? Heh-heh.

SINATRA: Husker-du! Do I ever!*

MARTIN: Well, I'm with him now. Oooh. And the time is ripe to make more fun of him than we ever have before.

OWENS: Hello, this is Buck Owens.

SINATRA: What do you have in mind, Dino mine?

MARTIN: We invite him up to your house, tell him that we changed our mind, that the Rat Pack deal is on again. Heh-heh. That the only one who was against it was Peter Lawford and he's been thrown out on his cummerbund.

SINATRA: I like your thinking, baby. You are one cool cat.

MARTIN: Oooh. And now here's the best part. . . .

As Martin's plan unfolded, the truck hit a bump, and Buck Owens fell off the gun rack and into a ditch on the side of the road. No one knows why he lay there for seventy-two hours, but every scientist in the world would agree with Woodward's theory that he was probably a victim of Dontlet-meanoia, a type of amnesia in which one imagines a ditch is where one be-

longs, or in hell, but not out warning one's friends about impending practical jokes at their expense.

Meanwhile Samples and Martin drove on to Sinatra's home, the Golden Nugget Hotel in Bald Knob, Arkansas, right across from the store with all the tires and refrigerators out front.

Waiting in the parking lot as they drove up were: Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Joey Bishop, Jill St. John, and a severely tuxedoed man introduced only as "P. L." Samples was handed a tuxedo, a martini, and a showgirl in a sequined gown and was told: "Here. Put these on."

Once Samples was dressed, each of the seven got into an Aston-Martin. Then the procession of the autos of the rich and famous drove upstairs so the drivers could get their wallets, then downstairs to the basement, where the hotel's nightclub and Bald Knob's most sizzling *spot du night*, the Golden Knobarama, was located.

Seated under the biggest and best table, in the center of the room, under a spotlight, the Rat Pack proceeded to order dinner. Samples had his eye on the filet mignon and the asparagus Thomas P. "tips" au Neill. But the Rat

Pack had other plans. To prove his dedication to the group, Martin told him, he should order live rats in a basket. Then eat them. Then ask for seconds.

Samples balked, but Davis Jr. reminded him that they had been willing to ax Lawford.

"Well, that's not axing much," Samples quipped, reminding himself of the latter-day George S. Kaufman.

The remark was met with stony silence.

"The least you can do," Davis Jr. continued, "is eat live rats."

"Remember," P. L. told Samples, "a day without Peter Lawford—heh-heh—is like a day without Junior Samples eating live rats."

"Heh-heh," they all agreed.

Reluctantly Samples agreed. "I agree," he said.

The waiter, Fernando, brought the rats, and Samples ate them.

After two helpings, Samples beamed.

"At last, my lifelong dream has been realized. Now I am a member of the Rat Pack!"

It was probably Fernando who laughed first, then Francis Albert, then the entire Rat Pack.

Samples looked from face to Rat Pack face. His eyes came to rest on the enigmatic P. L. He noticed that laughing sounds were coming from the face, but the face was not moving. It was as in a dream. As if the face were made of plastic. Indeed. For at this point "P.L." was revealed to be none other than Peter Lawford wearing a child's chewable plastic Fred Flintstone mask.

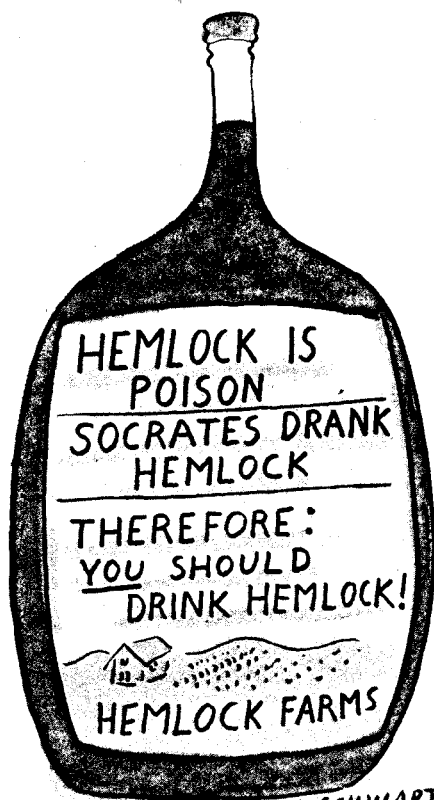
Still laughing, the Rat Pack stripped Samples of his tuxedo, sequined showgirl, and martini, then tied him up and threw him into the community punch bowl.

Then they left, still laughing, leaving Samples to pay the bill, leave the tip, and mop the floor around the punch bowl.

Samples had never felt so degraded and humiliated in his life as he did now.

"Oh my God," he wept. "I wish I were dry."

He collapsed into unconsciousness, and the basement collapsed into the



*Years earlier, Frank's wife had kicked him out, requesting that he never return. He showed up at the door of his childhood friend Junior Samples. And, in a moment of emotional instability, requested that Samples join the Rat Pack. The only thing that destroyed Samples's chances of watching Peter Lawford rub elbows with himself was that, during the filming of *Ocean's 11*, Samples kept tipping the boat to one side. He was given a six-pack, kicked out of the Rat Pack, and sent packing.

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subbasement.

November 15, 8:13 A.M. Samples woke up in Brian Doyle-Aykroyd's swinging bachelor pad, which was located in Nashville at the end of a long rope.

"Can't you stop this thing?" cried Samples. "Haven't I been through enough torture? I've still got eight rats in my stomach."

Brian Doyle-Aykroyd petitioned the gods at the oracle at Delphi for the pad to stop swinging. Suddenly it did. Samples rejoiced for three and twenty seconds, then proceeded to tell Doyle-Aykroyd of his horrible ordeal.

Doyle-Aykroyd laughed, then told Samples how sorry he was. Brian Doyle-Aykroyd was a longtime friend. In fact, he had been Samples's soul mate ever since the untimely death of his previous soul mate, Sal Mineo. Then, upon Samples's untimely death, according to a computer-generated list Doyle-Aykroyd kept in his shoe, he would become the soul mate of Dick York ("the comedic genius that walked like a man"). Following York's untimely death, the list recommended a new kid by the name of Harry, or Harold, or possibly Howard, Hessemann.*

But further, a second computer-generated list Doyle-Aykroyd kept in his other shoe told him which famous comedian's last name he should tack onto his own in order that his career in show business be advanced that much quicker. Thus, before Aykroyd he was known to millions as Brian Doyle-Sahl, and later he would become known to hundreds as Brian Doyle-Murray. Still later, when Bill Murray will have ceased to be considered the funniest man in all but forty-eight of the continental United States, he will call himself Brian Doyle-Piscopopo. And so on till the end of time, or until he can no longer walk because the voluminous lists in his shoes have so deformed his Doyle-feet that he is completely bedridden and can no longer walk to the corner store for a

*Computer programmers Woodward had consulted suggested that Hessemann followed the obscene recommendation of Dick, or Dick, or possibly Dick, Sargent.

**The Confederate National Holiday, celebrating the birth of Congressman Floyd Bennett Field on November 15, 1835. Field was the Georgia statesman who discovered corn liquor when he accidentally jammed three ears of corn into a bottle of wine and let it set for three years under the bed of his three boys, Zeke, Zake, and Electro-Magneto Field. When Congressman Field drank the "smoke," he went blind in one eye, then died, then went blind in the other eye, and the Age of the Riverboat Gambler was born.

pint of bread, much less make a million Frenchmen laugh, even as Brian Doyle-Lewis.

Doyle-Aykroyd had never seen Samples as agitated as he was now. Beads of sweat formed on his upper lip, and he paced back and forth. Doyle-Aykroyd's pad began to swing again.

Suddenly Samples stopped pacing and said, "Husker-du! I know what to do. I have an idea."

"What?" Doyle-Aykroyd asked.

"You'll see tonight. You and all of America. I'll show you all. It's perfect! We're taping the big Field's Day**Hee Haw special tonight."

Samples had Doyle-Aykroyd drive him to the Knobarama, where Doyle-Aykroyd waited in the car while Samples went in. Moments later he returned to the car hauling a small glassine envelope. Doyle-Aykroyd assumed that it had been a gumbo deal. Although he did not approve, Doyle-Aykroyd kept his mouth shut. I'm his soul mate, not his mother, he thought.

They then drove to Hee Haw-ville.

Samples got out of the car and through the open window told Doyle-Aykroyd never to leave him alone.

Doyle-Aykroyd drove away.

At the gate, the guard demanded to see Samples's picture I.D., then grudgingly let him through.

"Just wait till the day you forget that I.D.!" the guard called after him.

Showing up late for dress rehearsal, Samples seemed depressed and listless, fellow cast members recalled. They assumed that he had fallen off the haywagon and begun drinking again, something they'd all been urging him to do for months.

Samples was so preoccupied, Grandpa Jones recalled, that an hour into rehearsal he actually began to remember his lines and, incredibly, develop a sense of timing. Veteran director Jerry Paris was at such a loss that he took drastic measures: taking Samples aside, he hit him on the head with a two-by-four. Things went smoothly from then on, up until the taping of Samples's first cornfield scene.

Samples and Archie Campbell popped up together for the first of their two exchanges.

ARCHIE: Junior, something terrible has happened!

JUNIOR: Yeah. . . I saw the first half of the
(CONTINUED ON PAGE 56)

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ARSENIC AND OLD OVERALLS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45) show, too, Roy. . .uh, Archie.

ARCHIE: No, I mean my wife has just bought one of them newfangled dishwashing machines, and she threw the old one out.

JUNIOR: What's. . .so terrible about that, Archie. . .I mean Mel. . .I mean Archie?

ARCHIE: I've been living in the garbage can for a week.

THE CROW PUPPET: Squak!

Samples and Campbell ducked down behind the corn, and when it came time for them to pop up again, only Archie Campbell did. Samples was never seen again. The remainder of the show was replaced with a rerun of *Johnny Cash Live at the Gulag Archipelago*, and the police were called in. Archie Campbell was questioned and remembered hearing sounds of a struggle next to him, but assumed that Samples had become stuck on the cornstalks again.

Chief of Police Earl "Billy Bob" Buchanan searched Samples's dressing room alone, without any witnesses, as prescribed, he said, "by federal law." He flashed a document that he said authorized the private search, but no one remembers seeing any words written on it. In fact, Roy Clark said, the document seemed to be made of wax paper and smelled of roast beef and onions.

Buchanan told the press that nothing was found, but amnesiac Buck Owens's substitute host, veteran unfunny man Buck Henry, who was catnapping unnoticed on the gun rack on the back of Samples's chair, awoke and

spied Buchanan finding and setting fire with his cigar to a small glassine envelope with something inside it.

Woodward knew that this was as far as conventional journalistic techniques would take him. He knew that to uncover the cockroach of truth in this Caesar salad of corruption, so that he could send it back and not have to pay the bill of guilt, and even get a free drink of gratitude compliments of the management of justice, he would have to take off the gloves of integrity and put on the hat of yellow journalism, and embrace its columnist manifesto: Interview stars after they're dead. Sometimes before they're dead, then kill them. And if the story includes celebrities, aliens, and weight loss, so much the better!

So Woodward tried to contact Samples through a medium. This proved unsuccessful. He tried a large. Still no luck. Finally he tried an extra-large, still to no avail.

Woodward first decided to go to the Underworld, then he was pleased with his decision. Finally, he went to the Underworld.

"Hello, Mr. Samples," Woodward said as he met the man in his plush Underworld apartment. Samples was wearing a tuxedo and drinking martinis with some of the best-looking dead girls Woodward had ever seen. On the wall over his bed was a poster for *Ocean's 11*, starring, it announced, "Junior Samples and nobody else."

"Sit down," he told Woodward. "I want to tell you my whole story. It will

include celebrities and aliens, but no weight loss, much to my chagrin."

"Never mind the aliens," Woodward told him. "Who killed you and why?"

Samples told all.

"Frank Sinatra had me killed because I was going to go on nationwide television and reveal that he was suffering from hair loss. The morning after the Rat Pack humiliated me, I remembered seeing hundreds of hairs in Sinatra's soup that hadn't been there when the waiter first served it.

"I went back there to get the hair as proof. But Fernando the waiter must have seen me rummaging through the garbage and tipped Sinatra off."

Sinatra. Sure. That explained Buchanan. The chief of police had been on Sinatra's payroll since dinosaurs roamed the earth. He burned the hair to cover up for his boss.

"I suspected Sinatra might try to bump me off, so I hid half the hair in the crow puppet's beak. If you could expose Frank Sinatra's hair loss, I'd be mighty grateful."

"I sure will," Woodward told him. "Goodbye, Mr. Samples."

"Goodbye, Sonny," he said.

And Woodward left him to the world he always belonged in, where the real Junior Samples was given free rein and allowed to wear a tuxedo. He was happy at last.

Back on earth, events moved rapidly. The *Washington Post* broke the story, and Frank Sinatra was forced to go on television and resign as President and Chairman of the Board of the Hair Club for Men. He was tried for the murder of Junior Samples. He was found guilty and awarded fifty dollars for his troubles.

Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, Sammy Davis Jr., Jill St. John, and Joey Bishop were named as unindicted co-conspirators. None were awarded any money, but each received a home version of Match Game '79.

As for Woodward, he went back to sleep and waited for Bradlee to call him with his next assignment, dreaming all the while of Bernstein. Bernstein is buried up to his neck, his head tied back and his eyelids cut off so that he has to stare into the blazing desert sun. His face is covered with honey, and there are these giant red army ants coming right at him. And he's trying to scream, but see, there's a sock stuffed in his mouth, so no one can hear him. Oh baby!

Damn you, Ben Bradlee, he dreamed, don't call me now. ■

