

*It seemed just a routine hit-and-run tragedy;
but fate had played a macabre trick.*

The officer noted John Madison's address and wrote down a description of the injured man: He was about 54 years old, 5 feet 7 inches tall, and weighed about 150 pounds. He wore a gray suit, white shirt, brown overcoat, and black oxfords. Gold fillings gleamed from an upper and lower front tooth.

The ambulance crew picked up the victim and rushed him to the county hospital. He died early the next morning without regaining consciousness. John Madison was notified.

After he had regained his composure, John Madison told the officers that he was a plasterer and Applegate had worked with him until just before Christmas. He had tired of plastering and had taken a job in a night club. It was within walking distance of the home of his married daughter with whom he lived.

John Madison recalled that his brother had planned to spend New Year's Day visiting friends on the northwest side; apparently he had been on his way home when the car struck him.

At the morgue, John Madison made formal identification of the body. "I'd better tell Josephine," he said sorrowfully.

He didn't relish this duty and he thought of a hundred ways to break the news, but in the end he just blurted it out to the daughter.

She stared at him dry-eyed and somewhat dubiously. "How did it happen? Do they know what caused his death?"

"Hit-and-run driver."

"When?"

"Last night."

"When did you see the—the body?"

"Not more than an hour ago."

She sighed with relief. "Then it's not Dad. He just left here five minutes ago."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, I am."

"Where is he? Where did he go?"

"To work at the night club."

John Madison hurried to the club where he found Applegate at work. His head was swathed in bandages.

"What happened to you?" John asked.

"Hit-and-run driver," Applegate replied. "Nearly killed me."

"I sure thought he did," John said. He reached out and touched his brother. "I just came from the morgue—I identified your body."

"Some mistake," Applegate said cheerfully. "I haven't been near the morgue." He grinned, showing two gold filled front teeth.

"Well, that's a big relief," John said, still dazed. "I wonder who that is over there?"

"Let's take a look," said Applegate.

The morgue attendant's gaze was fixed on Applegate as they walked in. He paled and began trembling; his mouth gaped open.

"I think there's been a mistake," Applegate said.

"We'd like to see the body again," said John.

Still shaky, the attendant directed them into a large room. The body was still there. The attendant looked from Applegate to the corpse, then covered his eyes with his hands.

Applegate Madison stared as if he were seeing a ghost. He examined the clothing; each item might have been a duplicate of his own apparel.

"I can't believe it," he said. "Wonder who the poor fellow is?"

That puzzled the Chicago police, too. It was several days before the corpse was finally identified. His movements were traced and he, too, had been visiting on the northwest side. There had been two hit-and-run accidents at about the same time in the same neighborhood. Coincidence had followed coincidence and resulted in a chilling error.

Applegate Madison went back to work, but occasionally he pinched himself, just to make sure.

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