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Henceforward, no wheeled vehicles whatsoever will be allowed within the precincts of the City, from sunrise until the hour before dusk . . . Those which shall have entered during the night, and are still within the City at dawn, must halt and stand empty until the appointed hour . . .

—*Senatus consultum of Julius Caesar, 44 B.C.*

It is absolutely impossible to sleep anywhere in the City. The perpetual traffic of wagons in the narrow winding streets . . . is sufficient to wake the dead . . .

—*The Satires of Juvenal, A.D. 117*

The president of General Motors was in a foul humor. He had slept badly during the night because his electric blanket had worked only intermittently, causing him to awaken several times, feeling cold. Now, after padding around his home in pajamas and robe, he had tools spread on his half of the king-size bed where his wife still slept, and was taking the control mechanism apart. Almost at once he observed a badly joined connection, cause of the night's on-again off-again performance. Muttering sourly about poor quality control of blanket manufacturers, the GM president took the unit to his basement workshop to repair.

His wife, Coralie, stirred. In a few minutes more her alarm clock would sound and she would get up sleepily to make breakfast for them both.

Outside, in suburban Bloomfield Hills, a dozen miles north of Detroit, it was still dark.

The GM president—a spare, fast-moving, normally even-tempered man—had another cause for ill humor besides the electric blanket. It was Emerson Vale. A few minutes ago, through the radio turned on softly beside his bed, the GM chief had heard a news broadcast which included the hated, astringent, familiar voice of the auto industry's arch critic.

Yesterday, at a Washington press conference, Emerson Vale had blasted anew his favorite targets—General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. The press wire services, probably due to a lack of hard news from other sources, had obviously given Vale's attack the full treatment.

The big three of the auto industry, Emerson Vale charged, were guilty of "greed, criminal conspiracy, and self-serving abuse of public trust." The conspiracy was their continuing failure to develop alternatives to gasoline-powered automobiles—namely, electric and steam vehicles—which, Vale asserted, "are available now."

The accusation was not new. However, Vale—a skilled hand at public relations and with the press—had injected enough recent material to make his statement newsworthy.

The president of the world's largest corporation, who had a Ph.D. in engineering, fixed the blanket control, in the same way that he enjoyed doing other jobs around the house when time permitted. Then he showered, shaved, dressed for the office, and joined Coralie at breakfast.

A copy of the *Detroit Free Press* was on the dining-room table. As he saw Emerson Vale's name and face prominently on the front page, he swept the newspaper angrily to the floor.

"Well," Coralie said. "I hope that made you feel better." She put a cholesterol-watcher's breakfast in front of him—the white of an egg on dry toast, with sliced tomatoes and cottage cheese. The GM president's wife always made breakfast herself and had it with him, no matter how early his departure. Seating herself opposite, she retrieved the *Free Press* and opened it.

Presently she announced, "Emerson Vale says if we have the technical competence to land men on the moon and Mars, the auto industry should be able to produce a totally safe, defect-free car that doesn't pollute its environment."

Her husband laid down his knife and fork. "Must you spoil my breakfast, little as it is?"

Coralie smiled. "I had the impression something else had done that already." She continued, unperturbed, "Mr. Vale quotes the Bible about air pollution."

"For Christ's sake! Where does the Bible say anything about *that*?"

"Not Christ's sake, dear. It's in the Old Testament."

His curiosity aroused, he growled, "Go ahead, read it. You intended to, anyway."

"From Jeremiah," Coralie said. "*'And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.'*" She poured more coffee for them both. "I do think that's rather clever of him."

"No one's ever suggested the bastard isn't clever."

Coralie went back to reading aloud. "The auto and oil industries, Vale said, have together delayed technical progress which could have

led, long before now, to an effective electric or steam car. Their reasoning is simple. Such a car would nullify their enormous capital investment in the pollutant-spreading internal combustion engine." She put the paper down. "Is any of that true?"

"Obviously Vale thinks it's all true."

"But you don't?"

"Naturally."

"None of it whatever?"

He said irritably, "There's sometimes a germ of truth in any outrageous statement. That's how people like Emerson Vale manage to sound plausible."

"Then you'll deny what he says?"

"Probably not."

"Why not?"

"Because if General Motors takes on Vale, we'll be accused of being a great monolith trampling down an individual. If we don't reply we'll be damned too, but at least that way we won't be misquoted."

"Shouldn't someone answer?"

"If some bright reporter gets to Henry Ford, he's apt to." The GM president smiled. "Except Henry will be damned forceful and the papers won't print all his language."

"If I had your job," Coralie said, "I think I'd say something. That is, if I really was convinced of being right."

"Thank you for your advice."

The GM president finished his breakfast, declining to rise any further to his wife's bait. But the exchange, along with the needling which Coralie seemed to feel was good for him occasionally, had helped get the bad temper out of his system.

Through the door to the kitchen the GM president could hear the day maid arriving, which meant that his car and chauffeur—which picked up the girl on their way—were now waiting outside. He got up from the table and kissed his wife goodbye.

A few minutes later, shortly after 6 A.M., his Cadillac Brougham swung onto Telegraph Road and headed for the Lodge Freeway and the midtown New Center area. It was a brisk October morning, with a hint of winter in a gusty northwest wind.

Detroit, Michigan—the Motor City, auto capital of the world—was coming awake.

Also in Bloomfield Hills, ten minutes from the GM president's house, as a Lincoln Continental glides, an executive vice-president of Ford was preparing to leave for Detroit Metropolitan Airport. He had already breakfasted, alone. A housekeeper had brought a tray to his desk in the softly lighted study where, since 5 A.M., he had been alternately reading memoranda (mostly on special blue stationery which Ford vice-presidents used in implementing policy) and dictating crisp instructions into a recording machine. He had scarcely looked up, either as the meal arrived, or while eating, as he accomplished in an hour what would have taken most other executives a day, or more.

The majority of decisions just made concerned new plant construction or expansion and involved expenditures of several billion dollars. One of the executive vice-president's responsibilities was to approve or veto projects, and allocate priorities. He had once been asked if such rulings, on the disposition of immense wealth, worried him. He replied, "No, because mentally I always knock off the last three figures. That way it's no more sweat than buying a house."

The pragmatic, quick response was typical of the man who had risen, rocket-like, from a lowly car salesman to be among the industry's dozen top decision makers. The same process, incidentally, had made him a multimillionaire, though some might ponder whether the penalties for success and wealth were out of reason for a human being to pay.

The executive vice-president worked twelve and sometimes fourteen hours a day, invariably at a frenetic pace, and as often as not his job claimed him seven days a week. Today, at a time when large segments of the population were still abed, he would be en route to New York in a company Jetstar, using the journey time for a marketing review with subordinates. On landing, he would preside at a meeting on the same subject with Ford district managers. Immediately after, he would face a tough-talking session with twenty New Jersey dealers who had beefs about warranty and service problems. Later, in Manhattan, he would attend a bankers' convention luncheon and make a speech. Following the speech he would be quizzed by reporters at a freewheeling press conference.

By early afternoon the same company plane would wing him back to Detroit where he would be in his office for appointments and regular business until dinnertime. At some point in the afternoon, while he continued to work, a barber would come in to cut his hair. Dinner—in

the penthouse, one floor above the executive suite—would include a critical discussion about new models with division managers.

Later still, he would stop in at the William R. Hamilton Funeral Chapel to pay respects to a company colleague who had dropped dead yesterday from a coronary occlusion brought on by overwork. (The Hamilton funeral firm was *de rigueur* for top echelon auto men who, rank conscious to the end, passed through, en route to exclusive Woodlawn Cemetery, sometimes known as "Executive Valhalla.")

Eventually the executive vice-president would go home—with a filled briefcase to be dealt with by tomorrow morning.

Now, pushing his breakfast tray away and shuffling papers, he stood up. Around him, in this personal study, were book-lined walls. Occasionally—though not this morning—he glanced at them with a trace of longing; there was a time, years ago, when he had read a good deal, and widely, and could have been a scholar if chance had directed his life differently. But nowadays he had no time for books. Even the daily newspaper would have to wait until he could snatch a moment to skim through it. He picked up the paper, still folded as the housekeeper had brought it, and stuffed it into his bag. Only later would he learn of Emerson Vale's latest attack and privately curse him, as many others in the auto industry would do before the day was out.

At the airport, those of the executive vice-president's staff who would accompany him were already in the waiting lounge of the Ford Air Transportation hangar. Without wasting time, he said, "Let's go."

The Jetstar engines started as the party of eight climbed aboard and they were taxiing before the last people in had fastened seatbelts. Only those who traveled by private airfleets knew how much time they saved compared with scheduled airlines.

Yet, despite the speed, briefcases were out and opened on laps before the aircraft reached the takeoff runway.

The executive vice-president began the discussion. "Northeast Region results this month are unsatisfactory. You know the figures as well as I do. I want to know why. Then I want to be told what's being done."

As he finished speaking, they were airborne.

The sun was halfway over the horizon; a dull red, brightening, amid scudding gray clouds.

Beneath the climbing Jetstar, in the early light, the vast sprawling city and environs were becoming visible: downtown Detroit, a square mile oasis like a miniature Manhattan; immediately beyond, leagues of

drab streets, buildings, factories, housing, freeways—mostly dirt encrusted: an Augean work town without petty cash for cleanliness. To the west, cleaner, greener Dearborn, abutting the giant factory complex of the Rouge; in contrast, in the eastern extremity, the Grosse Pointes, tree-studded, manicured, havens of the rich; industrial, smoky Wyandotte to the south; Belle Isle, hulking in the Detroit River like a laden gray-green barge. On the Canadian side, across the river, grimy Windsor, matching in ugliness the worst of its U.S. senior partner.

Around and through them all, revealed by daylight, traffic swirled. In tens of thousands, like armies of ants (or lemmings, depending on a watcher's point of view) shift workers, clerks, executives, and others headed for a new day's production in countless factories, large and small.

The nation's output of automobiles for the day—controlled and masterminded in Detroit—had already begun, the tempo of production revealed in a monster Goodyear signboard at the car-jammed confluence of Edsel Ford and Walter Chrysler Freeways. In figures five feet high, and reading like a giant odometer, the current year's car production was recorded minute by minute, with remarkable accuracy, through a nationwide reporting system. The total grew as completed cars came off assembly lines across the country.

Twenty-nine plants in the Eastern time zone were operating now, their data feeding in. Soon, the figures would whirl faster as thirteen assembly plants in the Midwest swung into operation, followed by six more in California. Local motorists checked the Goodyear sign the way a physician read blood pressure or a stockbroker the Dow Jones. Riders in car pools made bets each day on the morning or the evening tallies.

The car production sources closest to the sign were those of Chrysler—the Dodge and Plymouth plants in Hamtramck, a mile or so away, where more than a hundred cars an hour began flowing off assembly lines at 6 A.M.

There was a time when the incumbent chairman of the board of Chrysler might have dropped in to watch a production start-up and personally check out a finished product. Nowadays, though, he did that rarely, and this morning was still at home, browsing through *The Wall Street Journal* and sipping coffee which his wife had brought before leaving, herself, for an early Art Guild meeting downtown.

In those earlier days the Chrysler chief executive (he was president then, newly appointed) had been an eager-beaver around the plants, partly because the declining, dispirited corporation needed one, and partly because he was determined to shed the "bookkeeper" tag which clung to any man who rose by the financial route instead of through sales or engineering. Chrysler, under his direction, had gone both up and down. One long six-year cycle had generated investor confidence; the next rang financial alarm bells; then, once more, with sweat, drastic economies and effort, the alarm had lessened, so there were those who said that the company functioned best under leanness or adversity. Either way, no one seriously believed any more that Chrysler's slim-pointed Pentastar would fail to stay in orbit—a reasonable achievement on its own, prompting the chairman of the board to hurry less nowadays, think more, and read what he wanted to.

At this moment he was reading Emerson Vale's latest outpouring, which *The Wall Street Journal* carried, though less flamboyantly than the *Detroit Free Press*. But Vale bored him. The Chrysler chairman found the auto critic's remarks repetitive and unoriginal, and after a moment turned to the real estate news which was decidedly more cogent. Not everyone knew it yet, but within the past few years Chrysler had been building a real estate empire which, as well as diversifying the company, might a few decades hence (or so the dream went), make the present "number three" as big or bigger than General Motors.

Meanwhile, as the chairman was comfortably aware, automobiles continued to flow from the Chrysler plants at Hamtramck and elsewhere.

Thus, the Big Three—as on any other morning—were striving to remain that way, while smaller American Motors, through its factory to the north in Wisconsin, was adding a lesser tributary of Ambassadors, Hornets, Javelins, Gremlins, and their kin.

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At a car assembly plant north of the Fisher Freeway, Matt Zaleski, assistant plant manager and a graying veteran of the auto industry, was glad that today was Wednesday.

Not that the day would be free from urgent problems and exercises in survival—no day ever was. Tonight, like any night, he would go homeward wearily, feeling older than his fifty-three years and convinced he had spent another day of his life inside a pressure cooker. Matt Zaleski sometimes wished he could summon back the energy he had had as a young man, either when he was new to auto production or as an Air Force bombardier in World War II. He also thought sometimes, looking back, that the years of war—even though he was in Europe in the thick of things, with an impressive combat record—were less crisis-filled than his civil occupation now.

Already, in the few minutes he had been in his glass-paneled office on a mezzanine above the assembly plant floor, even while removing his coat, he had skimmed through a red-tabbed memo on the desk—a union grievance which he realized immediately could cause a plant-wide walkout if it wasn't dealt with properly and promptly. There was undoubtedly still more to worry about in an adjoining pile of paper—other headaches, including critical material shortages (there were always some, each day), or quality control demands, or machinery failures, or some new conundrum which no one had thought of before, any or all of which could halt the assembly line and stop production.

Zaleski threw his stocky figure into the chair at his gray metal desk, moving in short, jerky movements, as he always had. He heard the chair protest—a reminder of his growing overweight and the big belly he carried around nowadays. He thought ashamedly: he could never squeeze it now into the cramped nose dome of a B-17. He wished that worry would take off pounds; instead, it seemed to put them on, espe-

cially since Freda died and loneliness at night drove him to the refrigerator, nibbling, for lack of something else to do.

But at least today was Wednesday.

First things first. He hit the intercom switch for the general office; his secretary wasn't in yet. A timekeeper answered.

"I want Parkland and the union committeeman," the assistant plant manager commanded. "Get them in here fast."

Parkland was a foreman. And outside they would be well aware which union committeeman he meant because they would know about the red-tabbed memo on his desk. In a plant, bad news traveled like burning gasoline.

The pile of papers—still untouched, though he would have to get to them soon—reminded Zaleski he had been thinking gloomily of the many causes which could halt an assembly line.

Halting the line, stopping production for whatever reason, was like a sword in the side to Matt Zaleski. The function of his job, his personal *raison d'être*, was to keep the line moving, with finished cars being driven off the end at the rate of one car a minute, no matter how the trick was done or if, at times, he felt like a juggler with fifteen balls in the air at once. Senior management wasn't interested in the juggling act, or excuses either. Results were what counted: quotas, daily production, manufacturing costs. But if the line stopped he heard about it soon enough. Each single minute of lost time meant that an entire car didn't get produced, and the loss would never be made up. Thus, even a two- or three-minute stoppage cost thousands of dollars because, while an assembly line stood still, wages and other costs went rollicking on.

But at least today was Wednesday.

The intercom clicked. "They're on their way, Mr. Zaleski."

He acknowledged curtly.

The reason Matt Zaleski liked Wednesday was simple. Wednesday was two days removed from Monday, and Friday was two more days away.

Mondays and Fridays in auto plants were management's most harrowing days because of absenteeism. Each Monday, more hourly paid employees failed to report for work than on any other normal weekday; Friday ran a close second. It happened because after paychecks were handed out, usually on Thursday, many workers began a long

boozy or drugged weekend, and afterward, Monday was a day for catching up on sleep or nursing hangovers.

Thus, on Mondays and Fridays, other problems were eclipsed by one enormous problem of keeping production going despite a critical shortage of people. Men were moved around like marbles in a game of Chinese checkers. Some were removed from tasks they were accustomed to and given jobs they had never done before. A worker who normally tightened wheel nuts might find himself fitting front fenders, often with the briefest of instruction or sometimes none at all. Others, pulled in hastily from labor pools or less skilled duties—such as loading trucks or sweeping—would be put to work wherever gaps remained. Sometimes they caught on quickly in their temporary roles; at other times they might spend an entire shift installing heater hose clamps, or something similar—upside down.

The result was inevitable. Many of Monday's and Friday's cars were shoddily put together, with built-in legacies of trouble for their owners, and those in the know avoided them like contaminated meat. A few big city dealers, aware of the problem and with influence at factories because of volume sales, insisted that cars for more valued customers be built on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, and customers who knew the ropes sometimes went to big dealers with this objective. Cars for company executives and their friends were invariably scheduled for one of the midweek days.

The door of the assistant plant manager's office flung open abruptly. The foreman he had sent for, Parkland, strode in, not bothering to knock.

Parkland was a broad-shouldered, big-boned man in his late thirties, about fifteen years younger than Matt Zaleski. He might have been a football fullback if he had gone to college, and, unlike many foremen nowadays, looked as if he could handle authority. He also looked, at the moment, as if he expected trouble and was prepared to meet it. The foreman's face was glowering. There was a darkening bruise, Zaleski noted, beneath his right cheekbone.

Ignoring the mode of entry, Zaleski motioned him to a chair. "Take the weight off your feet, then simmer down."

They faced each other across the desk.

"I'm willing to hear your version of what happened," the assistant plant chief said, "but don't waste time because the way this reads"—

he fingered the red-tabbed grievance report—"you've cooked us all a hot potato."

"The hell I cooked it!" Parkland glared at his superior; above the bruise his face flushed red. "I fired a guy because he slugged me. What's more, I'm gonna make it stick, and if you've got any guts or justice you'd better back me up."

Matt Zaleski raised his voice to the bull roar he had learned on a factory floor. "Knock off that goddam nonsense, right now!" He had no intention of letting this get out of hand. More reasonably, he growled, "I said simmer down, and meant it. When the time comes I'll decide who to back and why. And there'll be no more crap from you about guts and justice. Understand?"

Their eyes locked together. Parkland's dropped first.

"All right, Frank," Matt said. "Let's start over, and this time give it to me straight, from the beginning."

He had known Frank Parkland a long time. The foreman's record was good and he was usually fair with men who worked under him. It had taken something exceptional to get him as riled as this.

"There was a job out of position," Parkland said. "It was steering column bolts, and there was this kid doing it; he's new, I guess. He was crowding the next guy. I wanted the job put back."

Zaleski nodded. It happened often enough. A worker with a specific assignment took a few seconds longer than he should on each operation. As successive cars moved by on the assembly line, his position gradually changed, so that soon he was intruding on the area of the next operation. When a foreman saw it happen he made it his business to help the worker back to his correct, original place.

Zaleski said impatiently, "Get on with it."

Before they could continue, the office door opened again and the union committeeman came in. He was a small, pink-faced man, with thick-lensed glasses and a fussy manner. His name was Illas and, until a union election a few months ago, had been an assembly line worker himself.

"Good morning," the union man said to Zaleski. He nodded curtly to Parkland, without speaking.

Matt Zaleski waved the newcomer to a chair. "We're just getting to the meat."

"You could save a lot of time," Illas said, "if you read the grievance report."

"I've read it. But sometimes I like to hear the other side." Zaleski motioned Parkland to go on.

"All I did," the foreman said, "was call another guy over and say, 'Help me get this man's job back in position.'"

"And I say you're a liar!" The union man hunched forward accusingly; now he swung toward Zaleski. "What he really said was 'get this *boy's* job back.' And it so happened that the person he was speaking of, and calling 'boy,' was one of our black brothers to whom that word is a very offensive term."

"Oh, for God's sake!" Parkland's voice combined anger with disgust. "D'you think I don't know that? D'you think I haven't been around here long enough to know better than to use that word that way?"

"But you *did* use it, didn't you?"

"Maybe, just maybe, I did. I'm not saying yes, because I don't remember, and that's the truth. But if it happened, there was nothing meant. It was a slip, that's all."

The union man shrugged. "That's your story now."

"It's no story, you son-of-a-bitch!"

Illas stood up. "Mr. Zaleski, I'm here officially, representing the United Auto Workers. If that's the kind of language . . ."

"There'll be no more of it," the assistant plant manager said. "Sit down, please, and while we're on the subject, I suggest you be less free yourself with the word 'liar.'"

Parkland slammed a beefy fist in frustration on the desk top. "I said it was no story, and it isn't. What's more, the guy I was talking about didn't even give a thought to what I said, at least before all the fuss was made."

"That's not the way *he* tells it," Illas said.

"Maybe not now." Parkland appealed to Zaleski. "Listen, Matt, the guy who was out of position is just a kid. A black kid, maybe seventeen. I've got nothing against him; he's slow, but he was doing his job. I've got a kid brother his age. I go home, I say, 'Where's the boy?' Nobody thinks twice about it. That's the way it was with this thing until this other guy, Newkirk, cut in."

Illas persisted, "But you're admitting you used the word 'boy.'"

Matt Zaleski said wearily, "Okay, okay, he used it. Let's all concede that."

Zaleski was holding himself in, as he always had to do when racial issues erupted in the plant. His own prejudices were deep-rooted and

largely anti-black, and he had learned them in the heavily Polish suburb of Wyandotte where he was born. There, the families of Polish origin looked on Negroes with contempt, as shiftless and troublemakers. In return, the black people hated Poles, and even nowadays, throughout Detroit, the ancient enmities persisted. Zaleski, through necessity, had learned to curb his instincts; you couldn't run a plant with as much black labor as this one and let your prejudices show, at least not often. Just now, after the last remark of Illas, Matt Zaleski had been tempted to inject: *So what if he did call him "boy"? What the hell difference does it make? When a foreman tells him to, let the bastard get back to work.* But Zaleski knew it would be repeated and maybe cause more trouble than before. Instead, he growled, "What matters is what came after."

"Well," Parkland said, "I thought we'd never get to that. We almost had the job back in place, then this heavyweight, Newkirk, showed up."

"He's another black brother," Illas said.

"Newkirk'd been working down the line. He didn't even hear what happened; somebody else told him. He came up, called me a racist pig, and slugged me." The foreman fingered his bruised face which had swollen even more since he came in.

Zaleski asked sharply, "Did you hit him back?"

"No."

"I'm glad you showed a little sense."

"I had sense, all right," Parkland said. "I fired Newkirk. On the spot. Nobody slugs a foreman around here and gets away with it."

"We'll see about that," Illas said. "A lot depends on circumstances and provocation."

Matt Zaleski thrust a hand through his hair; there were days when he marveled that there was any left. This whole stinking situation was something which McKernon, the plant manager, should handle, but McKernon wasn't here. He was ten miles away at staff headquarters, attending a conference about the new Orion, a super-secret car the plant would be producing soon. Sometimes it seemed to Matt Zaleski as if McKernon had already begun his retirement, officially six months away.

Matt Zaleski was holding the baby now, as he had before, and it was a lousy deal. Zaleski wasn't even going to succeed McKernon, and he knew it. He'd already been called in and shown the official assessment of himself, the assessment which appeared in a loose-leaf,