

The Test by Henry Slesar

Vernon Wedge didn't want to see the old man. Olga, his secretary, gave Blesker a sub-zero reception, but he sat on in the **attorney's** waiting room. His shoulders were rigid, his crooked fingers interlaced, his chalky face a portrait of stubbornness and determination. Finally, Vernon had to yield.

lawyer

"Sit down, Mr Blesker," he said wearily, pointing to the leather chair in his office. "I know why you're here; my phone's been ringing all morning. Four newspapers, a youth worker, even a **settlement house**. What have you got, anyway, an organisation?"

a place providing services and support to poor, town communities

The old man looked befuddled. "Please," he said. "I just come about my boy."

"Yes, I read the newspapers. And I suppose you think your kid's innocent?"

"He is!"

"Naturally. You're his father. Have you talked to him since it happened?"

"I came from the prison this morning. They're not treating him good. He looks skinny."

in an irritated, impatient manner

"He's only been in custody a few days, Mr Blesker. I doubt if they're starving him. Look," Vernon said **testily**, "your boy is accused of knifing another kid in the street. That's what happened. You know how many witnesses there are? You know what kind of evidence the district attorney has?"

"I know he's innocent," the old man said. "That's what I know. Benjy's a good, serious boy."

"Sure," Vernon frowned. "They're all good boys, Mr Blesker, until they start running with a street pack. Then they're something else." He was almost shouting now. "Mr Blesker, the State will pick an attorney for your son. You don't need me."

"I have money," Blesker whispered. "The family, we all got together. I run a fuel oil business; I'm selling the big truck. I can pay what you ask, Mr Wedge."

"It's not a question of money – "

"Then, it's a question of what?" The old man was suddenly **truculent**. "Whether he's guilty or not? You decided that already, Mr Wedge? From reading the newspapers?"

aggressive and quick to argue

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Vernon couldn't meet the challenge, it was too close to the truth. He had pre-judged the case from the newspaper stories, and knew from the accounts that this was one client he could live without. His record was too good. What was worse, he had lost his last client to **Ossining**. Every criminal lawyer is allowed a few **adverse** verdicts; but two in a row?

unfavourable

Now known as
Sing Sing prison
in New York state

"Mr Blesker," he said miserably, "will you tell me why you came here? Why did you pick me?"

"Because I heard you were good."

"Do you know what happened in my last case?"

Obstinate: "I heard you were good, Mr Wedge."

"You told every reporter in town that you intended to hire me. That puts me in a very compromising position, you know that? And you, too. Know how it'll look if I turn you down? Like I think your boy is guilty, that the case is hopeless."

"I didn't mean any harm," the old man said fumblingly. "I just wanted to get the best for Benjy." He was getting teary. "Don't turn me down, please, Mr Wedge."

Vernon knew a lost cause when he saw one; perhaps he had known from the start how this interview would end. His voice softened.

"I didn't say your boy is guilty, Mr Blesker. All I say is that he's got a bad case. A very bad case."

Motionless, the old man waited.

"All right," Vernon sighed. "I'll think it over."

The police blotter had Benjy Blesker's age down as seventeen. He looked younger. The frightened eyes gave him a look of youthful bewilderment. Vernon wasn't taken in by it; he had seen too many innocent, baby-faced, icy-hearted killers.

The boy's cell was clean, and Benjy himself bore no marks of ill-treatment. He sat on the edge of the bunk and kneaded his hands. When Vernon walked in, he asked him for a cigarette.

Vernon hesitated, then shrugged and offered the pack. "Why not?" he said. "If you're old enough to be here."

Benjy lit up and dropped a tough mask over his boyish features.

"You the lawyer my old man hired?"

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"That's right. My name is Vernon Wedge."

"When do I get out of here?"

"You don't, not until the trial. They've refused bail."

"When's the trial?"

"Don't rush it," Vernon growled. "We need every minute of delay we can get. Don't think this is going to be easy."

Benjy leaned back, casual. "I didn't **cut** that guy," he said evenly. "I didn't have anything to do with it."

stab

Vernon grunted, and pulled a sheet of handwritten notes out of his pocket.

"You admitted that you knew Kenny Tarcher?"

"Sure I knew him. We went to **Manual Trades** together."

practical skills
educational programme

"They tell me Kenny was a member of a gang are called The Aces. You ever run with them?"

"With that bunch?" Benjy sneered, and blew a column of smoke. "I was a Baron. The Barons don't mix with those bums. You know who they take into that gang? A whole lot of –"

"Never mind," Vernon snapped. "We can talk about your social life later. You were a Baron and Kenny was an Ace, so that made you natural enemies. You had a rumble last month, and this Kenny Tarcher beat up on you pretty good. Don't give me any arguments about this, it's ancient history."

Benjy's mouth was quivering. "Look, Mr Wedge, we don't have that kind of gang. You know Mr Knapp –"

"The youth worker? I just came from him."

"He'll tell you about the Barons, Mr Wedge, we're not a bunch of hoods. We got a basketball team and everything."

Vernon smothered a smile. "Why do you carry a knife, Benjy?"

"It's no **switchblade**, Mr Wedge. It's more like a boy scout knife; I mean, they sell 'em all over. I use it for whittlin' and stuff like that."

flick knife

"**Whittling**?" It was hard to hide the sneer. The end of Benjy's cigarette flared, as did his temper.

carving

"Look, whose side are you on? I didn't stick Kenny, somebody else did! I swear I didn't kill him!"

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"Take it easy. I'm not making accusations, kid, that's the court's job. Now sit back and relax. I'm going over the story, from the police side, and then you can tell me where they're wrong. Every little thing, understand?"

Benjy swallowed hard. Then he nodded.

"It was 10 minutes to midnight on June 21," Vernon said, watching him. "You and two other guys were walking down Thurmond Street; you came out of a movie house. Kenny Tarcher came out of the corner apartment building on Thurmond and Avenue C. You bumped into each other, and there was some horseplay. The next thing that happens, you and your pals start running down the street. Kenny falls down and tries to crawl to the porch with steps stoop of his house. There were two people on the steps. They saw you running. They saw Kenny die, right in front of them. He had an eight-inch gash in his stomach."

Benjy looked sick.

"Ten minutes later, the cops caught up with you in your old man's fuel supply store on Chester Street. The knife was still in your pocket." He paused.

"I didn't cut him," the boy said grimly. "All the rest of that stuff, that's true. But I don't know who cut Kenny."

"Who were the other two guys with you?"

"I never saw him before. I met 'em in the movies."

"Don't give me that!"

"What the hell do you want from me?" Benjy bellowed. "I tell you I don't know those guys! One of them must have done it, I didn't! When I saw he was hurt, I ran. That's all it was!"

"You had the knife –"

"I didn't use it!"

"That knife is Exhibit A," the lawyer said. "You know that, don't you? The witnesses saw you holding it –"

"Leave me alone! You ain't here to help me!"

Vernon got up.

"I am, Benjy. The only way you can be helped, kid. I want you to cop a plea."

"What?"

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"I want you to plead guilty. Believe me, it's the only sensible thing to do. You put this case to a jury, I swear you'll be spending the rest of your life in a cage. Plead guilty, and the worst you'll get is twenty years. That's not as bad as it sounds; you'll be eligible for parole in five."

allowed to
apply for

release before
end of a
sentence

"I won't do it!" Benjy screamed. "I'm innocent! I'm not going to jail for something I didn't do!"

"I'm talking sense, kid, why don't you listen?"

"I didn't do it! I didn't!"

Vernon sighed. The corners of his mouth softened, and he dropped a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Listen," he said gently. "I really want to help you, son."

For a moment, Benjy was still. Then he threw off the arm of sympathy, and snarled at the attorney.

"I'm not your son! I got a father!"

in a dry,
mocking way

Like father, like son, Vernon thought wryly, looking at the mulish mouth and marble eyes of the old man. He was sure Blesker had a softer side. Under other circumstances, he would smile and tell jokes and hum old-country tunes. Now, faced with the lawyer's blunt advice, he was hard as a rock.

stubborn, like
a mule

"You've got to talk some sense into him," Vernon said. "He doesn't know what's good for him. If he pleads guilty to murder in the second degree, the judge will be lenient."

more tolerant
than expected

"But he goes to prison? For something he didn't do?"

"You're his father, Mr Blesker. You're ignoring facts."

"The facts are wrong!" Blesker put his fists on his knees and pounded them once. When he looked up again, there was a new mood in his eyes.

"You tell me something, Mr Wedge –"

"Yes?"

"You don't like to lose cases, am I right? That's what they say about you."

"Is that bad?"

"If my boy pleads guilty, you don't lose nothing. You still got your good record, right?"

"Do you think that's my only reason?"

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Blesker shrugged. "I'm only asking, Mr Wedge. I don't know nothing about the law."

disprove / say
someone is
wrong

Unable to **refute** this accurate estimate of his inner thoughts, Vernon tried to summon up an angry denial and failed. He shrugged his shoulders.

"All right," he said grudgingly. "So we plead Not Guilty. I'll do everything I can to make it stick."

Blesker examined his face for signs of sincerity. He seemed satisfied.

Vernon came to the courtroom on opening day with a heart as heavy as his briefcase. Surprisingly, the first day didn't go badly. Judge Angus Dwight had been assigned to the bench. In spite of his **dour** look, Vernon knew him to be **scrupulously** fair and sneakily sentimental. Wickers, the prosecuting attorney, was a golden-haired **Adonis** with a theatrical delivery, a keen mind, and an appeal for the ladies. Fortunately, the **empanelled** jurors were men with only two exceptions, and they were women far past the age of **coquetry**. During the first hour, Wickers' **facetiousness** in his opening remarks drew a **rebuke** from the judge concerning the seriousness of the affair; Vernon's hopes lifted a notch.

with great
effort to avoid
doing wrong

severe / stern /
gloomy

an extremely
handsome
young man

sworn in (to a jury)

treating serious
issues
humorously

flirting

telling-off

But it was his only good day. On the second afternoon, Wickers called a man named Sol Dankers to the witness chair.

"Mr Dankers," he said smoothly, "you were present at the time of Kenneth Tarcher's slaying, isn't that so?"

"That's right," Dankers said heavily. He was a hard-breathing, bespectacled man with a red-veined nose. "I was sittin' on the stoop, when those kids started foolin' around. Next thing I know, one of 'em's stumbling to the stoop, bleedin' like a pig. He drops dead right at the feet of me and my Mrs. I was an hour getting' the bloodstains off my shoes."

"Is that all you saw?"

"No, sir. I seen that boy, the one over there, runnin' away with a knife in his hand."

Then it was Vernon's turn.

"Mr Dankers, is it true your eyesight is impaired?"

"True enough. I'm sixty-two, son, wait 'til you're my age."

He drew a laugh and a rap of the **gavel**.

a judge's hammer

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"It was almost midnight on a street not particularly well lit. Yet you saw a knife –" he pointed to the table where Exhibit A rested – "that knife, in Benjamin Blesker's hand?"

"It was sort of flashin' in the light, if you know what I mean. But to tell you the truth, I wouldn't have noticed if Mrs Dankers hadn't said, 'look at that boy, he's got a knife!'"

The crowd buzzed, and Vernon frowned at the **inadvertent hearsay** testimony. The damage was done; he didn't even bother to voice a complaint.

not deliberate

rumour

Mrs Dankers testified next; there was nothing wrong with *her* eyes, she said stoutly, and she knew a knife when she saw one. It was the third witness who did the most harm. he was Marty Knapp, a dedicated youth worker serving the neighbourhood.

"No, Benjy isn't a bad kid," he said thoughtfully. "But he had a temper. And he never forgave Kenny Tarcher for the beating he gave him."

"Then in your opinion," Wickers said triumphantly, "this *might* have been a grudge killing? Not just a sudden scuffle or unplanned assault, but a deliberate, cold-blooded –"

Vernon was on his feet, shouting objections. Judge Dwight took his side at once, but the impression was **indelible** in the collective mind of the jury. When Vernon sat down again, he felt as forlorn as Benjy Blesker looked.

not able to be forgotten

On the eve of the fourth day, he went to see him.

"What do you say, Benjy?" he said quietly. "You see the way things are going? I'm pulling out the whole bag of tricks, and I'm not fooling anybody."

"Try harder!" Benjy snapped.

"If I knew how to work miracles, I'd work one. Look, this State doesn't like to hang kids, but it's happened before –"

"Hang?" The boy said incredulously. "You're crazy!"

"Even if you got life, know what that means? Even if you got paroled in twenty years, you'll be thirty-seven years old, almost middle-aged, with a record."

There were tears flooding Benjy's eyes. It was the first sign of a crumpling defence, and the lawyer moved in swiftly.

"Plead guilty," he said earnestly. "Plead guilty, Benjy. It's not too late."

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The boy's head snapped up.

"No!" he screamed. "I didn't do it!"

The fourth day was the worst of all. Vernon **railed** mercilessly at the prosecution witnesses. He called Dankers a weak-eyed, boozing liar. He forced Mrs Dankers to admit that she hated the neighbourhood kids, and the Barons especially. He got Knapp, the youth worker, to recite every detail of Benjy's good record. But through it all, the jury shifted restlessly, bored, irritated, obviously unimpressed by the 'character' testimony, eager only for facts, the bloodier the better.

complain or
protest strongly

all the details in
the order in which
they occurred

Wickers gave them what they wanted. Wickers treated them to a **blow-by-blow** re-enactment of the stabbing. He bled for them. He clutched his stomach. He put the victim's mother on the stand. He let her cry through ten minutes of pointless testimony, until even Judge Dwight got sick of the spectacle. But it was working. Vernon, jury-smart, knew it was working.

The trial was almost over. Wickers, waving the knife under Benjy Blesker's nose, got him to admit that it was his, admit that he was never without it, admit that he had it in his pocket – maybe even in his hand – the night of the slaying. It was his curtain-closer. Wickers sat down, the prosecution's case stated.

One more day, and it would be finished.

a pause or break

There was a weekend **hiatus** before the trial resumed. Vernon Wedge spent the time thinking.

It was the old man's fault, he thought bitterly. It was the old man Blesker who was behind all the trouble. His faith in Benjy was the **indomitable**, obstinate faith of the fanatic. Even if the boy was guilty, concern for his father would prevent him from admitting the truth.

impossible to
subdue or defeat

"The funny thing is," he told Olga, his secretary, "if I was on that jury, I wouldn't know how to vote."

Olga clucked.

"You don't look well," she said. "You look anaemic. When this is over, you ought to see a doctor."

psychiatrist

"A **headshrinker**, that's what I ought to see."

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"I mean a doctor," Olga said firmly.

It was then that the idea was born. Vernon looked at his secretary queerly, and stood up behind his desk.

"You know, it's a thought. Maybe I ought to see one. You remember Doc Hagerty?"

"No."

"Sure you remember! On the Hofstraw case, 1958 –"

"but he's not the kind of doctor I mean. I mean a good all-round GP."

"I'm going out," Vernon said suddenly. "I'll be at the Dugan hospital if you need me. But don't bother me unless it's urgent."

He found Hagerty in the basement laboratory of the Dugan hospital. Olga was right: Hagerty was no chest-thumping, tongue-depressing practitioner; he was more biochemist than physician. But he was what Vernon needed.

Hagerty was a white-haired man with shoulders rounded from years of bending over microscopes, and he smelled vaguely of sulphur. He turned out to be ignorant of the trial. Vernon summarised the facts briefly, and then talked about blood.

chemical that shows presence of blood

"You mean there were no **benzidine** tests made?" Hagerty said quickly. "Of the murder weapon?"

"Yes," Vernon admitted, "and the test proved negative. There weren't any bloodstains on the knife, you understand, it was clean. The prosecution claims that all traces were wiped or washed off. It's never been much of an issue up till now. But I once heard you talk about a more sensitive test than benzidine –"

"There is," Hagerty grunted. "Benzidine is the standard blood test in this city, but there's another one. It's a lot more delicate, in my opinion, and it's not always employed. It's called the reduced **phenolphthalein** test, and depending on a couple of factors, it might be just what you're looking for."

pronounced: feenol-thay-teen (like benzidine)

"What factors?"

having pores / minute spaces or holes

"The quality of the blade metal, for one thing. And even if the metal is **porous** enough to retain microscopic particles of blood, it may be impossible to determine *whose*. If your boy ever cut his finger, or somebody else –"

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"What do we have to do?" Vernon said excitedly.

"Get me the knife."

"That's impossible. It's court property at the moment."

"Then get me a half dozen like it."

The lawyer spent all of Saturday morning searching for the weapon's counterpart. His mental picture of it was sharp; He even remembered the letters at the base of the blade: B. L. CO. USA.

gloomy / drab

He finally found one in a dingy variety store four blocks from the scene of the stabbing. The proprietor had exactly five left in stock; he took them all.

There was a two-hour wait that afternoon before he could see Hagerty again; when the white-haired doctor joined him in the laboratory, he didn't apologise.

"I have the solution all ready," he said crisply. "You sure this is the same make of knife?"

"Positive."

Hagerty sprung the large blade. Then he removed a bottle of whole blood from a cabinet, and dipped it inside. Vernon swallowed in revulsion as Hagerty wiped the blade clean with a soft cloth, and marked the knife with a pencil.

"Any trace?" he said, offering it for examination.

"Clean as a whistle."

Hagerty brought all five blades to a beaker filled with a murky liquid. Vernon helped him open all the knives, and they were ready for the demonstration.

"Mix 'em up good," Hagerty said. "It's like a magic trick; You shuffle 'em up, I'll find the one."

Vernon scrambled the knives. Then, one by one, Hagerty dipped them into the solution.

The third one turned the liquid pink. It was the knife that had been marked.

"It works," Vernon breathed. "It really works."

"The metal is porous. If there were bloodstains on it from years ago, this test would show it up."

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"Thank you," Vernon said humbly. "You've saved my life, Doc."

"Your life?" Hagerty said dryly.

When Vernon entered Benjy's cell, the boy was reading a **pulp** magazine with intense concentration. He seemed detached, disinterested. Vernon understood it; He had seen this before in the condemned.

popular, but poor quality, writing

"Listen to me," he said harshly. "Listen good. I have an idea that might save you, but I have to know the truth."

"I told you everything –"

"There's a test," the lawyer said. "A test that can determine whether or not there was ever blood on that knife of yours."

"So?"

"I propose to make that test in court on Monday. If it's negative, the jury will know you didn't kill Kenny Tarcher."

"I don't understand that kind of stuff –"

"I'm not asking you to understand," Vernon said tautly. "If you stabbed that boy, a solution is going to turn pink and you can kiss your freedom goodbye. What's more, if you ever cut *anybody* with that knife, even yourself, it will turn pink. So I want you to tell me now. *Was there ever blood on that knife?*"

"I told you I didn't cut him!"

"You moron!" Vernon shouted. "Do you understand my question? Was there ever blood of any kind on that knife?"

"No! It was brand-new. I never cut anybody with it."

"You're sure? Absolutely sure?"

"I told you, didn't I?"

"This is scientific stuff, boy, don't think you can fool a test tube!"

"I said it's clean!"

Vernon Wedge sighed, and stood up.

"OK, Benjy. Will see how clean it is. We'll give it a bath. And God help you if you lied to me."

On Monday, Wickers rose to make his final **peroration**. He was bland-faced, a picture of confidence. Vernon looked at the vacant faces of the jurors, waiting for their emotional rubdown. But he wasn't going to allow it.

concluding part of a speech

The Test by Henry Slesar

He stood up, and addressed judge Dwight.

more important
than anything
else

"Your Honour, something occurred over the weekend which I consider of **paramount** importance to this case. I ask the court's permission to introduce new evidence."

"Objection," Wickers said calmly. "The defence has had sufficient time for the introduction of evidence. I suggest this is a delaying tactic."

Vernon looked defeated, but he was only **playing possum**. Judge Dwight prompted him.

pretending to be
dead / asleep to
lure a victim

"What sort of evidence, Mr Wedge?"

"It's a demonstration, Your Honour," he said weakly. "In my opinion, it will clearly establish my client's guilt or innocence. But if the court rules –"

"Very well, Mr Wedge, you may proceed."

Quickly, Vernon undid the clasps of the black box in front of him. He removed the wide-mouthed beaker, and then the foil lid that covered it. He brought the murky solution to the bench that held the trial exhibits.

"And what is this?" Judge Dwight said.

"This, Your Honour, is a chemical solution formulated for the detection of blood."

The courtroom buzzed; on the prosecution's side of the room, there was a hurried consultation.

Vernon faced the jurors.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Exhibit A in this case is the knife which presumably killed Kenneth Tarcher. This is the knife which was in the possession of Benjamin Blesker the night of the slaying. Yet not one shred of testimony has been heard during this trial concerning the vital factor of *blood*."

He picked up the knife, and sprung the long, shining blade.

"This knife!" he said, waving it in the air. "Look at it carefully. It has never left the court's possession since my client's arrest. Yet this clean, shiny blade can still tell a story of guilt or innocence. For as every biochemist knows, there is an **infallible** test which can determine whether an object of such porous metal has ever been stained with even one drop of blood!"

never failing

He poised the knife over the mouth of the beaker.

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“Ladies and gentlemen, I intend to prove once and for all whether I have been defending a boy falsely accused, or a lying murderer. I intend to dip this blade in the solution. If it turns pink – you must punish him for his guilt. If it remains clear – you must do what is just, and set him free.”

Slowly, he brought the knife down.

“Your Honour!”

Wickers was on his feet, and Vernon halted.

“Your Honour, objection! Objection!”

“Yes, Mr Wickers?”

Wickers' eyes flashed angrily. “Defence counsel is acting improperly. The police laboratory has already made the standard benzidine test of the weapon and found no bloodstains on the blade. We admit that the knife has been cleansed –”

“Your Honour,” Vernon said loudly, “the sensitivity of this test far exceeds the benzidine –”

“This performance is irrelevant, immaterial, and completely improper!” Wickers whirled to the jury. “At no time during this trial has the prosecution denied the absence of blood on Benjamin Blesker's knife. Any so-called ‘test’ that corroborates this is completely **gratuitous**, and is intended as pure theatrics to mislead and befuddle the jury! I demand this farcical demonstration be stopped!”

There was a moment's silence. Vernon looked up at the judge hopefully, waiting.

Dwight folded his hands.

“Mr Wedge, I'm afraid you're not in a position to qualify as an expert in forensic chemistry. And, as Mr Wicker says, mere corroboration of the police laboratory report is gratuitous evidence that cannot be properly admitted. Therefore, the objection is sustained.”

“But Your Honour –”

“Sustained,” judged white said gravely. “You cannot make the test, Mr Wedge.”

His **summation** was the briefest of his career.

uncalled for

summary / closing arguments

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"I believe Benjamin Blesker is innocent," he said wearily. "I believe this because of a test I was not permitted to make. This boy knew that the results of this test might have condemned him, yet he told me to proceed. No guilty man would have allowed it; No innocent man would have had it any other way."

The jury was out less than an hour. When they returned, they declared that Benjamin Blesker was innocent.

Vernon was permitted the use of an adjoining chamber for a meeting with his client. It wasn't a victory celebration. The boy seemed stunned, and the happiness in old man Blesker's face looked more like sorrow. When the lawyer entered the room, he stood up shakily and held out his hand.

"God bless you," he whispered. "Bless you for what you did."

"I didn't come to be congratulated," Vernon said coldly. "I wanted to see you both for another reason."

an official in court

The **bailliff** entered, and placed the beaker on the desk. When he left, Vernon took the knife out of his pocket, and put it down beside the beaker. The old man picked it up and looked at the weapon as if he had never seen it before

"Wickers was right," Vernon said flatly. "What I did out there was theatrics. I didn't want to make the demonstration; I was counting on the prosecution halting it."

"You didn't want to?" Blesker said blankly. "You didn't want to make the test?"

"I could have gotten an expert, a real one, like Doc Hagerty. But I didn't want to take the chance; if this stuff turned red..." he looked at the beaker and frowned. "No," he said. "The risk was too great. If Wickers had played along, I would have been forced to do it. But I figured they would object, and the jury would be impressed the right way. They were, thank God."

Blesker let out a long sigh.

"But now there's something we have to do," Vernon said. "Something to satisfy us all."

"What do you mean?"

Vernon looked at the boy. Benjy wouldn't meet his eyes.

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"I still don't know the truth," the lawyer said. "I don't know it, and neither do you. Only Benjy here knows it."

"You can't mean that! You said yourself –"

"Never mind what I said out there. There's only one way we can really know, Mr Blesker."

He held out his hand.

"Give me the knife, Mr Blesker. We're going to make the test the judge wouldn't allow. For our own sakes."

"But why?" the old man cried. "What difference does it make?"

"Because I want to know! Even if you don't, Mr Blesker, I want to know!"

"Give me the knife," Vernon said.

Blesker picked up the knife. He touched its cool blade thoughtfully.

"Of course," he said.

Then, slowly, he drew the blade deliberately across the back of his hand. The sharp edge bit deep. Blood welled like a crimson river in the cut and stained his hand, his cuff, his sleeve, the surface of the desk. He looked at the wound sadly, indifferently, and then handed the dripping weapon to the attorney.

"Make your test," he said dreamily. "Make your test now, Mr Wedge."

And as Vernon stared at him, he removed a crumpled handkerchief from his pocket and wound it around his injured hand. Then he took his son's arm, and they left the room together.