

Enveloped In a Fantasy

By Art Buchwald

Everyone has his favorite fantasy after watching the Watergate hearings. I got mine when I watched Tony Ulasewicz testify last week how he left manila envelopes filled with \$100 bills in phone booths and airport lockers to pay off defendants and lawyers involved in the trial.

My fantasy is that I have to call my wife so I walk into the lobby of a lawyers' building and head for a public phone booth. I dial my number and get a busy signal. I hang up wondering how long she'll be on the phone. Then I notice a plain brown envelope Scotch-taped to the side of the phone. I tear it open and find inside a wad of \$100 bills.

I immediately call my wife again. "Remember I told you this morning we couldn't buy any steak for a month? Well that statement is inoperative. Go out and get six of the most beautiful sirloins you can find." I look in the envelope again. "And you can buy some lettuce, too."

"But we can't afford it," she protests, "I just bought a dozen eggs."

"Don't argue," I say. "We're going to eat steak for a week."

I hang up, shove the envelope in my inside coat pocket and nonchalantly leave the booth.

A burly man with a part in the middle of his black, greasy hair comes up to me. "What are you doing with that manila envelope?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"It's my envelope."

"It doesn't have your name on it."

"If you don't give it to me I'll break your knees with a baseball bat."

Just then a man comes out of the elevator and goes to the phone booth. He searches it and comes out looking puzzled. Then he comes over to the burly man and says, "I thought you told me my \$25,000 legal fee would be in the phone booth."

"It was in the booth," the burly man says, "but this joker took it out and he won't give it to me."

"There's a law against stealing someone's fee," the lawyer says.

"Show me where there is anything in this manila envelope to indicate this is a lawyer's fee," I reply.

"Well, for one thing," the lawyer says nervously, "I always get paid in \$100 bills."

"In a phone booth?"

"Our accountant is on vacation," he blushes.

The burly man says, "I better call Mr. Novak." He goes into the booth.

"Who's Mr. Novak?" I asked the lawyer.

"That's the code name for Mr. Kalmbach, the President's lawyer."

The burly man speaks into the phone. "Mr. Novak, this is Mr. Rivers . . . No, I didn't pay the lawyer because some guy picked up the lettuce in the phone booth before the lawyer got there . . . The guy won't give it back . . . Should we turn him over to the plumbers? . . . Well, you better talk to him because I'm going to break his arm . . . Hey, Mac, Mr. Novak wants to speak to you."

I take the phone.

"What's your name?" Novak asks.

"Gemstone Sedan Chair II," I reply.

"I understand you found \$25,000 in cash in a phone booth."

"That's correct," I reply. "And as a lawyer you should know whatever someone finds in a phone booth belongs to him."

"It does not," he says, "it belongs to the phone company."

"Okay, I'll give the \$25,000 to the phone company."

"No. Don't do that," Mr. Novak says. "All right, let us for the moment assume the money is yours. Would you be willing to donate it to a defense fund for the poor families and starving lawyers who are trying to help the misguided individuals who broke into the Democratic headquarters early in the morning on June 17?"

"Nope."

"Give me Mr. Rivers again."

Rivers takes the phone. "I gotcha, Mr. Novak . . . Let the guy keep the \$25,000, and leave another \$25,000 in the phone booth for the lawyer . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Novak, for the botchup . . . Yes, I agree with you . . . There just aren't any honest people in the world anymore."