



# Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

## All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

"I have an interview with an insurance company tomorrow," John told me when he reached our fourth-floor room one evening. Selling insurance wasn't what he wanted to do, but after knocking on publishers' doors for four months and the baby due in five weeks...



## Stopgap

John took three days of tests and was offered the job over some two dozen other applicants.

"It's only a stopgap," he told my parents the following weekend when we took the train out to Scarsdale. The four of us were at the dinner table. "Just for a few months, till we start sending pieces from Europe again."

"Stopgap?" My father set down his fork. "A long time ago I took a stopgap job. . . ."

He'd been twenty years old, Daddy went on, living with his family in New York City, where his father was preaching against Wall Street. As usual the pews emptied swiftly, and it fell to Daddy and his brother Raymond, the two oldest boys, to see their younger brothers and sisters through school.

"Like you," Daddy said, "I was going to be a writer..." A piece of his past I'd never known. "I'd even sold a couple of stories."

Then on the opposite side of the country occurred a cataclysmic event. Just before dawn on April 18, 1906, the city of San Francisco was rocked by a massive earthquake. Eighteen hundred people died, thousands of buildings collapsed. With gas and water mains ruptured, fire broke out, raging unchecked for three days and destroying many more buildings.

### Investigator

Insurance companies in New York, facing ruin in the wake of the disaster, recruited a small army of investigators. Their task: to sift through four square miles of fire-charred rubble, determining in each case whether a structure had been shaken apart by the quake and only afterward burned -- an "act of God" for which the insurer was not liable -- or whether it had withstood the shocks and collapsed as a result of the fire, for which the company would have to pay.

Daddy and Raymond joined scores of young men boarding trains for San Francisco with a list of downed buildings to locate. "That job was a stopgap measure, too," he said. "Just till my writing earned

more."

Much to their own surprise, the two brothers turned out to have a knack for deduction, spotting clues others had overlooked. Their reputation preceded them back to New York, where they began to be called in on police cases.

"Raymond enjoyed the work. I didn't." But it was regular money coming in. "The 'stopgap' has lasted forty-five years. My writing's packed away in a box in the attic."

He turned to his son-in-law. "Don't give up the dream, John." If John was worried about me and the baby starving, "I can use you as a shadow anytime you say -- tomorrow morning if you like.

"Somewhere out there," Daddy said, turning back to his cold dinner plate, "there's a writing job with your name on it."

## **Shadow**

What that job with John's "name on it" would prove to be, none of us -- Daddy least of all -- could have guessed. It's only looking back that most of us can read the signposts to heaven.

John turned down the insurance job and continued standing in those lines of out-of-work writers. Days when the help-wanted columns listed no editorial openings at all, he worked for the Schindler Bureau as a shadow. Only an experienced operative, of course, can trail a subject on foot. John's work consisted of sitting in a car in sight of a warehouse door or occupying a rented room across from a restaurant under surveillance. One whole day he sat in a hotel room recording the precise moment when the phone rang in the room next door. The work was mindless and monotonous, dispelling any notion John may have had about the glamour of detective work.

In September Mother's parents arrived from Florida for their annual six weeks' stay in Scarsdale, timed for the end of the baseball season, when Papa never missed a Yankees home game. Goggie -- the best my infant tongue had been able to do with "Grandmother" -- had been knitting a layette for her first great-grandchild, tiny sweaters, caps, and booties in noncommittal yellow

## **New Look**

Now Goggie made a despairing inventory of my wardrobe, stored in Scarsdale until I could get into my clothes again. While we'd been in France, the New Look had arrived in the States: voluminous jackets, skirts stretching six inches below the knee -- a reaction to the fabric shortages of the war years. I'd never bothered about styles, but Goggie got out the sewing machine and set to work.

The New Look... if it had been only clothes, Goggie's needle would have set things right. But there was about to be a new look to every aspect of our lives. A new setting and new roles -- for me that of a housewife in 1950s suburbia. And thus I stepped into the dragons' lair itself.