

Galesburg in many ways than anyone else, I'm certain. I know that E. V. Marsh really saw the streetcar he said he did, whether that's possible or not; and I know why the old Pollard place out on Fremont Street didn't burn down.

The morning after the fire I was driving by on my way to work and saw Doug Blaisdel standing in the side yard, waist deep in yellow weeds. I thought he'd finally sold the place—he's the real-estate man who was handling it—and I pulled in to the curb to see who'd bought it. Then, turning off the ignition, I saw that wasn't it because Doug was standing, fists on his hips, staring up at the side of the building, and now I noticed half a dozen kids there, too, and knew that something had happened.

Doug saw me stop, and as I opened the front gate he turned from the old building to cut across the front yard through the weeds to meet me. The place is on a great big lot, and there's a wrought-iron fence, rusting but in good shape, that runs across the lot in front by the sidewalk. A small gate opens onto a walk leading to the porch, and a larger taller pair of gates opens onto what was once a carriage drive to a portico at the west side of the house. Closing the small gate behind me, I was looking up at the house admiring it as always; it looks like an only slightly smaller Mount Vernon, with four great two-story pillars rising to the roof from a ground-level brick-paved porch, and there's an enormous fanlight above the double front doors. But the old place was at least five years overdue for painting; the heirs live in California and have never even seen it, so it sat empty and they didn't keep it up.

"What's the trouble?" I called to Doug when I got close enough.

He's a brisk, young, heavy-rimmed-glasses type from Chicago; been here about five years. "Fire," he said, and beckoned with his chin to follow, turning back across the yard toward the house, the kids trooping along.

At the side of the house I stood looking up at the damage. The fire had obviously started inside, bursting out a window, and now the white clapboard outside wall was scorched and charred clear to the roof, the upper part of the window frame ruined. Stepping to the window to lean inside the house, I saw there wasn't much damage there. It looked as though the dining-room wallpaper, peeling and hanging loose, had somehow caught fire; but outside of soot stains the heavy plaster wall didn't seem much damaged. Mostly it was the window frame, both inside and out, that had burned; that was all. But it was ruined and would cost several hundred dollars to replace.

I said so to Doug, and he nodded and said, "A lot more than the owners will ever spend. They'll just tell me to have the opening boarded over. Too bad the place didn't burn right down."

"Oh?" I said.

He nodded again, shrugging. "Sure. It's a white elephant, Oscar; you know that. Twenty-four rooms, including a ballroom. Who wants it? Been empty eight years now and there's never been a real prospect for it. Cost twenty thousand bucks to fix it up right, and just about as much to tear it down. Burned to the ground, though"—his brows rose at the