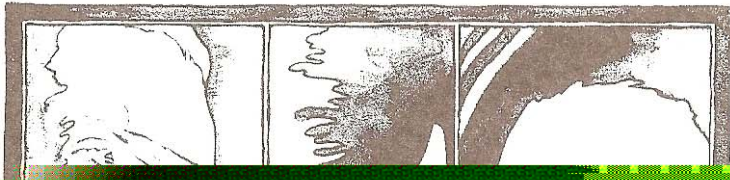


# Five in Judgment

BY DOUGLAS TAYLOR



## CHARACTERS

*Bill, 21, works in a diner*

*Sally, a waitress, 17*

*Roy, a farmer, 38*

*Paul, another farmer, 56*

*Danny, a hitchhiker, 19*

*Mack, his friend, 25*

Narrator

Salesman

Radio Announcer

**Setting:** The Paradise Diner in midwest farm country. There is a counter with stools, and three small tables with chairs. A jukebox is against the wall, and a radio is on the counter. You can hear the wind howling outside. Inside, Paul and Roy are sitting at the counter. Paul is drinking coffee. Roy has a beer, Bill is working behind the counter. He stops to adjust the



**Salesman** (*rudely*): Sorry.

**Mack**: If you're going west—

**Salesman**: I'm going west, but not with you or your buddy. I don't give rides to bums.

**Mack**: I beg your pardon?

**Salesman**: You heard me. I'm a salesman, and I've been all over. I've seen guys like you before. Hoodlums.

**Mack**: You got us wrong, mister. We're going to California to work and go to college.

**Salesman**: Oh? That's a new twist.

**Mack**: My aunt has a farm out there. (*Salesman laughs.*) What's so funny?

**Salesman**: The stories you punks dig up. Now beat it.

**Narrator**: Mack sees Paul and Roy staring at him coldly. He goes back to the table.

**Danny**: What's with him?

**Mack**: Forget it. (*Calls to Bill*) Hey, you want to take our orders?

**Bill** (*calls into kitchen*): Sally! Two at a table!

**Sally** (*off*): Be right out!

**Narrator**: The wind grows stronger. The lights dim, and the radio goes off.

**Danny** (*at the window*): Man, those trees are nearly bending to the ground. Next thing, a barn will come flying by. Come on and look, Mack. This is great!

**Narrator**: Roy slams his bottle down.

**Paul**: Take it easy, Roy. Don't pay no mind to those fellas.

**Roy**: Smart aleck punks!

**Paul**: Forget them. This will blow over before long.

**Roy**: Are you nuts? Look at it out there. I've never seen anything so bad.

**Paul**: All right, all right. But there's nothing you can do about it now.

**Danny** (*whispers to Mack*): What gives with these guys, anyway?

**Mack**: I don't know. The storm's got everybody jumpy.

**Danny**: I don't think they like us very much. You know what I mean?

**Mack**: Look, we're gonna sit here and keep our mouths shut. When the storm calms down, we take off.

**Narrator**: Sally comes from the kitchen, drying her hands on a towel.

**Sally**: Hello. What would you like?

**Danny** (*attracted to her*): Gosh—I don't know. How about you, Mack?

**Mack**: Scrambled eggs and coffee.

**Danny**: Me, too. Toast and lots of butter.

**Sally** (*smiling*): All right. (*To Bill*) Two eggs. Scrambled. Toast! (*She wipes the table.*) Where are you going?

**Danny**: College.

**Sally**: Huh?

**Mack**: We're going to California.

**Danny**: Yeah, his aunt invited us. We're gonna work on her farm and go to college near Sacramento.

**Sally**: Yeah? That sounds swell.

**Narrator**: She starts setting the table. Bill watches her from behind the counter.

**Danny**: Lot of people stop here that are going to California?

**Sally**: Quite a lot.

**Danny**: Must be interesting working here and meeting so many people.

**Sally** (*smiles and shrugs*): Both want coffee?

**Danny**: Yeah, sure.

**Sally**: Okay. (*She goes to the counter.*)

**Danny** (*softly*): She's nice, huh?

**Mack**: Yeah. But we're just passing through, remember?

**Danny**: Well, no harm in looking, is there?

**Narrator**: Sally has the cups on the counter and is pouring coffee. Bill moves to her.

**Bill:** At it again, huh?  
**Sally:** What?  
**Bill:** Don't act so innocent. You were gabbing a mile a minute with those two.  
**Sally:** What's the matter with you, Bill? Can't I talk to anyone any more?  
**Bill:** I'm sorry, honey. I'm just looking out for your own good. They think they're something just because they're on the road. They're just a couple of bums.  
**Sally:** Bums? They don't act like bums to me.  
**Bill:** You get their eggs. I'll serve them.  
**Sally:** That's fine with me. *(She goes into the kitchen. Bill brings the coffee to the table.)*  
**Bill:** Your eggs are coming.  
**Danny:** What happened to the girl?  
**Bill:** Listen, you! Mind your own business! Eat your food and get. This ain't no railroad station.  
**Danny:** Now, wait a minute—  
**Mack:** Danny! *(Danny is silent. Bill walks away.)* What are you trying to do?  
**Danny:** I didn't mean anything.  
**Mack:** Use your brain. We're not at home, where everybody knows us. Now, keep quiet.  
**Roy** *(muttering to himself):* Year after year, working from sunrise till after dark. What has it got me? I can't even pay for a new tractor.  
**Paul:** Take it easy, Roy. It may not be so bad this time.  
**Roy:** You hear that wind? It's cutting that corn down like a knife. And here we sit, doing nothing!  
**Paul:** We got no choice!  
**Roy:** You mean *you* got no choice! Me, I'm going back to my farm!  
*(Paul gets between Roy and the door.)*  
**Paul:** Roy, you can't go into that wind. It'll blow you to pieces.  
**Sally** *(enters and puts food on counter):* What's the matter?

**Roy:** Get out of my way, Paul!  
**Paul:** Will you listen to me? Bill, try the radio again, will you? See if you can get a weather report. *(To Roy)* Son, listen to me. I've had five farms blown out from under me. But I've learned to grit my teeth and take it.  
**Roy:** I just can't stand by while my farm is blown to kingdom come! Now get out of my way.  
**Paul:** Just wait for the report. If it ain't gonna end soon, I'll go with you. Maybe we could make it together.  
**Narrator:** Roy looks at Paul. Then he sees Danny, who is watching wide-eyed.  
**Roy:** What are you looking at, you creep? I suppose you think it's funny!  
**Danny:** Me? No, I—  
**Sally:** Roy!  
**Narrator:** Roy goes for Danny. Mack jumps to his feet to head him off.  
**Mack:** Wait a minute, mister! We don't want no trouble.  
**Narrator:** Paul takes Roy's arm. The radio screeches as Bill tries to tune it.  
**Bill:** Hey, Paul. I think I'm getting it.  
**Paul:** Come on, Roy. Let's hear the report.  
**Narrator:** Mack goes back to his chair. Roy gets another beer.  
**Announcer:** And there are winds up to 110 miles an hour. The storm is at its peak now and should pass over within an hour. There has been severe damage to crops in the area—  
**Roy:** Three months of plowing—for nothing!  
**Announcer:** There's another tragedy in the news today. The body of Roberta Ferguson, age 16, was found in the woods just west of Willowburg.  
**Paul:** That's Glen Ferguson's girl!  
**Announcer:** She died from several blows to the head. It is suspected that robbery was the motive. She

had \$25 when she left home this morning. All persons should be on the lookout for two youths who were seen walking with her before she was reported missing. They are said to be about 25 and 20 years of age. They were wearing black leather jackets and jeans. Both were carrying suitcases.

*(Roy stares at Mack and Danny.)*

**Danny:** He's describing us. That must have been the girl that—

**Mack:** Shut up!

**Announcer:** If you see anyone who fits this description, please notify Sheriff Williams. It is believed that the suspects are still in the area, since the storm has stopped all transportation—

**Danny:** That's crazy! We didn't do anything to that girl.

**Mack:** Yeah, but try to tell that to this bunch.

**Announcer:** I'll repeat the descriptions. The youths were wearing—*(Radio goes dead.)*

**Narrator:** There is a long silence. The people at the counter stare at Mack and Danny.

**Mack:** Miss, are those eggs we ordered ready?

**Narrator:** Roy sees the plates of food on the counter. He picks them up and crosses to the table.

**Roy:** Here are your eggs, mister. *(He puts them down.)* Will there be anything else, mister?

**Mack:** No. I guess not. *(Suddenly, he pushes past Roy.)* Come on, Danny. We're getting out of here!

**Narrator:** Roy grabs Danny and knocks him to the floor. Bill catches Mack and pins his arms behind him. Roy slaps Mack hard while Bill holds him.

**Roy:** You dirty punks!

**Bill:** Get the other one! He's getting up!

**Narrator:** Danny gets to his knees. Roy goes to him and twists his arm behind his back.

**Roy:** This baby ain't going nowhere.

**Bill:** Sally, get those ropes in the kitchen! Quick! *(She*

*runs to the kitchen.)* Well, Roy, looks like we got ourselves a catch!

**Danny:** My arm!

**Roy:** Shut up, punk.

**Mack:** Let him go. He won't try to get away.

**Roy:** Another peep out of you, and I'll break his arm!

**Danny:** We didn't do nothing! *(Roy twists his arm.)*  
Ow!

**Mack:** Don't say no more, Danny.

**Narrator:** Sally returns with the ropes. She gives them to Paul, who seems stunned by the violence. The Salesman sits and watches. Soon, Danny and Mack are tied up.

**Mack:** Why don't you guys listen to us for a second?

**Bill:** You looking to get slapped again?

**Narrator:** Roy drains his bottle of beer. Then he looks over at the Salesman.

**Salesman:** Nice work.

**Danny:** Listen! You got us all wrong.

**Bill:** Shut up!

**Paul:** I guess we should call Sheriff Williams.

**Roy:** Wires are probably down.

**Paul:** We could try.

**Roy:** I said the wires are probably down!

**Danny (low to Mack):** We gotta make them listen to us. We only talked to that girl.

**Roy:** Cut that gabbing over there.

**Narrator:** Roy and Bill move over to a table. The Salesman gets off a stool and moves over to them.

**Salesman:** Mind if I join you?

**Roy:** Come ahead. Bill, how about some more beer?

**Bill:** Sure. *(He gets up and goes behind the counter. Sally is at the window.)*

**Sally:** I think the storm's letting up. Want me to try and call the sheriff?

**Bill:** You keep out of this. *(He takes the beer to Roy and the Salesman.)*

**Salesman:** I had those two pegged the minute I laid eyes on them. Bums.

**Bill:** Yeah.

**Salesman:** Once I was working in northern California, and I pulled into a peaceful little town for the night. My hotel room overlooked the town square. The jail was right across from my window. Well, that night, the citizens of that town got together in front of the jail. They broke down the door and dragged two prisoners out. Then they hung them from a tree.

**Bill:** What had they done?

**Salesman:** Never did find out. Next morning I hit the road early. Wasn't a soul around. Everything was calm and peaceful, just like nothing had happened.

**Paul:** Sounds pretty savage to me.

**Salesman:** Savage? I guess you could say that. But it was their way of handling that particular problem. Wouldn't you say that Ferguson girl was treated savagely?

**Bill:** She sure was.

**Roy:** He's right. She was Glen's only child. He must be out of his head by now.

**Narrator:** Roy gulps some more beer. Then he walks toward Mack and Danny.

**Sally:** Roy, let me get you some hot coffee.  
*(Roy ignores her and speaks harshly to Mack and Danny.)*

**Roy:** You thought you were smart trying to run for it, didn't you? But I was ready for you, wasn't I? *(He kicks Mack.)* Wasn't I?

**Mack:** Yeah.

**Roy (to Danny):** Why ain't you laughing, kid? Storm's not so funny now, is it? *(Kicks Danny.)* Is it?

**Danny:** No.

**Roy:** Did you ever see a farm after a storm? It's not a very pretty sight. *(Takes drink of beer.)* Do you like beer?

**Danny:** No.

**Roy:** That's too bad. I'm gonna give you some anyway! *(He throws beer in Danny's face.)*

**Bill (to Mack):** Who's gonna pay for the food you ordered? You owe me \$1.20. Where is it?

**Mack:** My wallet's in my jacket.

**Narrator:** Bill takes the wallet from Mack's jacket and leafs through the bills.

**Bill:** Say, \$80! Where would a couple of punks like you get \$80? I bet some of it came from Roberta Ferguson!

**Narrator:** Roy throws the rest of the beer in Danny's face.

**Bill:** I'll keep this as evidence.

**Roy:** Evidence? Who's gonna need evidence?

**Mack:** We saved that money to get to California and go to college.

**Narrator:** Salesman, Roy, and Bill all laugh. Sally pulls Bill aside.

**Sally:** What did Roy mean about not needing evidence? What are you gonna do?

**Bill:** You're pretty worried about those two, ain't you?

**Sally:** Bill, why are you acting like this?

**Bill:** Why are *you* acting the way you are? You knew Roberta as well as I did. You're more worried about *them* than her.

**Narrator:** Bill goes back to join the others. Sally goes to the phone and lifts the receiver. The line is dead.

**Mack (half to Danny, half to himself):** That's the way it is. You're born a bum. You grow up a bum. That's what you are. They won't let you change. Nobody really looks at you. You tell them you're going to college, and they laugh. They take one look at you, and you've had it.

**Danny (whispering to Sally):** Miss? Miss? We didn't do nothing. We didn't hurt that girl. We just walked down the road with her and then said good-bye.

**Sally:** You're shivering. You've got beer all over you. I'll get a towel.

**Danny (to Mack):** I think she believes us. I think she's on our side.

**Mack:** She doesn't carry no weight around here.

**Danny:** You're not giving up, are you?

**Mack:** Look, we didn't do anything, did we? So what do we have to worry about? When they get that sheriff out here, we'll explain it to him. He'll listen and let us go.

**Danny:** You think so?

**Mack:** Sure.

*(Sally returns with a towel and wipes Danny's face.)*

**Danny:** What are the chances of getting the sheriff on the phone?

**Sally:** The line is dead. The storm's letting up, though.

**Bill:** Sally! Stop playing nursemaid to those murderers!

**Sally:** Why are you acting so jealous?

**Bill (embarrassed, he turns to Roy):** What are we waiting for? The storm's almost over.

**Sally:** I didn't mean to say that, Bill! Please wait for the sheriff! *(Bill pushes her aside.)*

**Roy:** I'm with you, Bill. Come on, Paul. Let's take care of those murderers.

**Paul:** No. I'm waiting for the sheriff.

**Roy:** We don't want any of your old man arguments! If you're not with us, stay out of our way.

**Bill:** They didn't give Roberta a chance.

**Mack:** Okay, let's stop fooling around! We want to see the sheriff! We got a right to see him.

**Roy:** Bums like you ain't got no rights! What makes bums like you think you can do anything you want? What made you think you could rob and murder a little girl? Is that the "rights" you're talking about?

**Mack:** You're crazy!

**Roy:** You ain't going to no college. The only place

you're going is on the end of a long rope!

**Danny:** No! Please!

**Roy:** Okay, untie their feet. Let's get started.

**Sally:** Bill! I don't want you to have anything to do with this!

**Bill:** I told you to stay out of this!

**Narrator:** He starts to untie Mack's feet. Sally goes to the phone and bangs on the receiver.

**Mack:** Keep your hands off of us!

**Danny:** We didn't hurt that girl!

**Bill:** Shut your mouth, tramp!

**Mack:** What's the matter with you guys? You're crazy!

**Roy:** Get them on their feet! *(He takes off his belt.)* We'll show them how we treat murderers around here.

**Danny:** We only asked her about the crops! We just wanted to know what was growing out there. We didn't—

**Sally (the noise drowns her out):** Hello? . . . Operator? . . . Thank goodness! Can you find Sheriff Williams quick? . . . What? . . . He has?

**Roy:** Don't listen to them, Bill. They'd say anything now. They know they're gonna get it.

**Narrator:** Mack and Danny are pulled to their feet.

**Danny:** Don't! You've got to believe us!

**Sally:** They didn't do it! The phone's working! They've caught the murderers.

**Bill:** She's lying, Roy. She's been sticking up for them from the beginning.

**Roy (shoving her away):** Stay out of the way if you don't want to get hurt! *(To Mack)* You ever been whipped real good? Well, I have. *(He lashes the counter with his belt.)* And now you're gonna get it, too.

**Sally (to the Salesman):** They're innocent. Stop them! You gave them the idea. You stop them!

**Salesman:** It's not my affair. I don't live here.

**Sally:** Paul, you've got to do something. You've got to!

**Paul:** I can't do anything. They're angry, and I'm an old man. *(He moves toward Roy.)* Roy. Roy, you've got to stop this.

**Roy** *(pushing Paul aside):* Get away.

**Paul:** I'm older than you, and I'm telling you to stop. *(He grips Roy's arm.)*

**Roy:** Let go of me!

**Paul:** I'm not gonna let you do this, Roy.

**Roy:** I said let go!

**Narrator:** He turns on Paul and begins hitting him on the side of the head. Paul falls to the floor. Roy has grabbed a beer bottle and raises it to strike Paul.

**Sally** *(screaming):* Bill! Stop him! Stop him!

**Bill:** Roy, stop it! You'll kill him!

**Narrator:** Roy lowers the bottle. He seems dazed. Bill kneels down and looks at Paul.

**Bill:** He's dead.

**Roy:** Dead? He's not dead.

**Bill:** He's dead, Roy.

**Sally** *(crying):* Oh, why wouldn't you listen to me? I tried to tell you. They didn't do it. The sheriff caught the murderer.

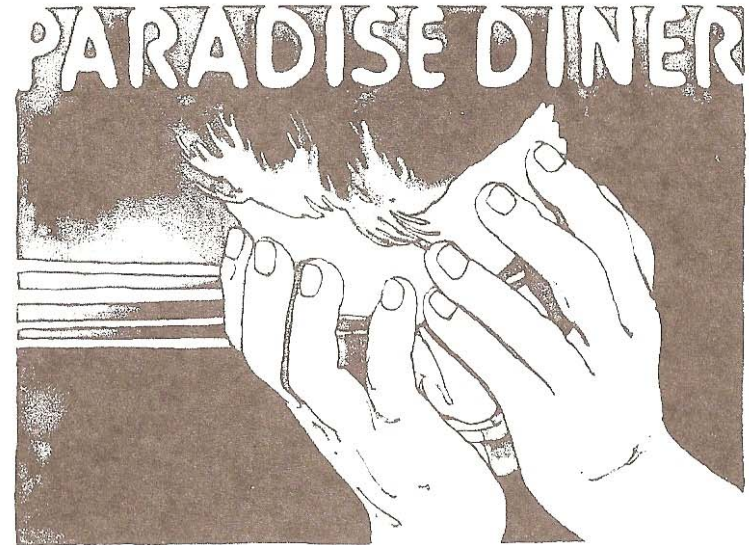
**Bill:** You were lying! *(Pointing at Mack and Danny)* They're the murderers!

**Sally:** Why don't you listen? Sheriff Williams caught the murderer hiding in a boxcar by the railroad station.

**Narrator:** Bill and Roy stare at each other.

**Mack:** Cut us loose. *(He and Danny are cut free.)* Come on, Danny. Let's get out of here. *(To Bill)* You got my wallet.

**Narrator:** Bill gives him his wallet. Mack checks it and puts it in his pocket. He puts on his jacket and picks up his suitcase. He looks down at Paul's body, then at Bill and Roy.



**Mack:** I pity you guys. *(He and Danny go out the door.)*

**Roy** *(yelling out the door):* Why did you come here? If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have done it! You bums! It's your fault!

**Narrator:** The Salesman crosses to the counter. He looks at Paul. There is a look of horror on his face. He puts a dollar on the counter.

**Salesman:** That should cover everything. See you next time through.

**Narrator:** He leaves. Sally is slumped in a chair. Bill is looking out the window. Roy's head is in his arms. The neon sign glows in the window. It says "Paradise Diner."