



**Bill
Walraven**

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Here's the original born loser

I'm not sure where the term "fall guy" started. It could have been in Hollywood where the star stood bravely before the grinding cameras until the dangerous stunt came up. Then the stunt man took the fall. Maybe it was from the fight game, where countless pugs took dives or falls to set up some up-and-coming boxer for a title match.

Or maybe it came from con talk for some sucker who took the rap and went to jail, taking the fall for someone else. Maybe it is a guy who is a born loser who falls for any sucker deal that comes along.

The dictionary says the victim of a swindle or deception is a fall guy. A person who is easily gulled or victimized is a fall guy. He is a born loser and a sucker.

That sums up my situation quite well.

Once I was busily pounding on my typewriter. It was 10 minutes until deadline for the afternoon paper and I still had pages to go. My deskmate on the other shift came in early and had nothing particular to do. So he picked up a set of liar's dice I had on my desk.

These are five dice with playing card numbers that are rolled in a game in which you try to see if the other guy is telling the truth or is lying about the hand he says he is holding.

As the dice clattered against his typewriter, the executive editor walked by and looked at him accusingly.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

"Playing with Walraven's dice," he answered.

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The boss glared at me as I was working up a sweat and shook his head, indicating I was a hopeless case. My deskmate smirked as if the judge had just found him innocent.

Another time a fellow worker had a Playboy magazine that contained an interview I wanted to see. I wouldn't pass up taking a peek at the illustrations, but this time I was innocent. I needed some information from the article.

I heard a growl behind me. The big boss had come up the back elevator.

"Like to read girlie magazines on company time, do you?" he asked, scowling.

There was no way I could answer without making an excuse that would not be believable. When you have lost, no answer at all is the best answer.

Once, a young blonde reporter of the female persuasion was my deskmate. She was supposed to do a story on the old courthouse and was stuck for an angle.

It would, I suggested, make a perfectly good granary. It would hold a lot of grain that could be piped right over to the port.

Then, I added, it could be an ideal pigeon farm because there were already thousands of pigeons in residence. They could represent a new industry, providing squab to restaurants and adult pigeons to the pigeon shooters.

At the same time, the upper floors of the dilapidated old building would make a perfect place to produce and harvest bat guano, I said. It seemed only natural since politicians had spent years and years spreading their own particular brand of manure about the premises.

Finally, it occurred to me that the bricks that had fallen from the structure could be sold as paperweights, barbecue pits, riprap for an eroding shoreline and hundreds of other purposes.

My deskmate adopted some of my ideas for a Sunday fantasy story that I thought was sort of funny until another of the big bosses came by and asked, "Just where did you get your ideas about using the courthouse?"

She nodded at me. "I might have known," he grumbled.

It's hard to be a reliable footnote when you are also a fall guy.