The Practical Joke

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HARVEY was a fool. He just couldn't take a joke; he had to go and die just to complicate matters and get me in a mess with the cops. Damn that Harvey, anyway. Well, I like to play jokes on people, and on animals, too, believe it or not. Once I put a dog and cat together in a room and listened to them fight, and then I heard the dog mangle the cat to death. It was sure a bloody mess to clean up. My wife got so mad at me, I had to quiet her down with a couple of well placed punches. Ever since then she's been different towards me, and that makes me mad. Anyway, the cops are on their way over to the apartment—well, what I can call an apartment—right now to investigate how I rigged the room. Ha, ha, it was a cinch. Boy, I sure put one over on them, and Harvey included, the poor sap. I might as well sit down and relax while I'm waiting for the cops to come. This is about the fifth time they're coming today. Oh, it had been so easy I'll tell them again. I don't know why cops have to hear the same story over and over. I'll just tell them what I told them before.

It all began Saturday, last night. A bunch of the guys I graduated with from high school and I all got together and
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decided to really hit the town—like a sort of reunion, you know. We hadn’t seen each other for almost four years. It was the same group I’d always hung around with: Jim, the real intelligent guy who knew all the answers; Cap, whose real name was Clarence Andrew Pysymski—he wanted to be called Cap; Wilhelm, the big boned guy from Germany—we called him Willy; and then Harvey, the fall guy of the group. Yeah, he fell for everything all right; he was naturally born stupid. His folks tried to send him to college, but they just wasted their money on him. Old Harv was a real dope. I think we played more jokes on him than we could count, and poor Harv laughed along with the rest of us; he thought it was really funny. Once he even collapsed from laughing so hard. His heart wasn’t what it should have been, and when he got excited too easily, he’d collapse, and start gasping for breath. Poor Harv. It’s not that we were really mean to him—it’s just that he was a stooge and we liked to have fun with him, that’s all. He was really a good guy in his own way. My wife always got mad at me whenever I played jokes on Har­vey. She was always such a spoilsport. All she could ever do was nag, nag, nag, and then if I slugged her or something, she’d run home to her old lady’s place. That damn old lady was a nag too—they were both two of a kind.

Well, anyway, I had the best and most perfect joke for Harvey Saturday night and nothing could spoil it—not even my wife. Nothing could ever top this one, I told the boys. I must have been born a practical joker. Anyway, this joke would really be the best yet. I let all the boys in on it before we went up to the Morocco Night Club to meet Harvey. We would do the town for awhile and then go back to my apart­ment for a, shall we say, nightcap. It would all be good clean fun and then we would play the joke on Harvey, and tell him about the room after I got him stiffened up on the booze at Morocco’s. All the guys busted into laughter when I finished telling them. Old Harv would really get a jolt out of this one. Well, we got to Morocco’s and there was Harvey, saving a table for us. Poor guy was already on his way to dreamland with the way he was drinking those bourbon and seven-ups. You’d think they were going out of style or some­thing. He was never supposed to drink that much because of
his heart, but he didn’t seem to care. He liked to drink. He was happy to see us, so we all had a big party, talking about old times. After Morocco’s we hit the Golden Spoon and stayed for the floor show. Harvey tucked a few more under his belt and was really getting high. We were too, for that matter, but no one noticed too much. We were all concentrating on Harvey. It was late before we left that place, so we jaunted to one more—The Corner Spot. We really soaked Harvey up there, and we had to practically carry the guy out. He was babbling on and on and couldn’t even hold his drink in his hand anymore, so we figured he’d had enough. We slapped him a few times so he wouldn’t go out on us, and then left the place. We were all having a big time, so I told the boys to wind it up at my apartment for a nightcap. That was the last thing Harvey needed—all of us for that matter. I managed to stay fairly sober, though, because I had to see how Harvey would like my joke. As soon as we got to the apartment we all told Harvey to go into this adjoining room; he laughed and staggered in there. It was a real dismal room; used to be a storeroom because there wasn’t any windows in it and just a couple of pieces of furniture and old boxes. Anyway, I had it fixed up real good—especially for Harvey. We pushed him in there, and as soon as the door closed, we knew he couldn’t get out anyway, unless someone opened it from the outside. We left him alone and had another drink. The boys noticed my wife wasn’t anywhere around and I told them she had decided to go on a trip. That’s why I was living like a bachelor. They laughed.

I stayed at one of the other boys’ places, so I could make sure Harvey enjoyed his joke to the fullest. He’d really get a laugh out of it, and I’d go back later in the day and let him out.

The rest of the boys came back with me, and we knew Harvey would be sober and hanging on the door of the room. We were really going to razz him. As soon as we walked into my apartment, I knew something went wrong—I didn’t hear any sound from Harvey. We walked stealthily to the room, and I unlocked the door. It was real dark in the room, because I had disconnected the electricity so Harvey couldn’t have any light. I had left a very small candle stump in there
lighted, but it must have gone out right away—just like I
planned. I opened one of the frontroom window curtains
and some of the light shone into the room where Harvey was.
We all stood and gasped at what we saw. Harvey was lying
in the middle of the floor, dead—his eyes were still open and
they had a look of terror in them. His mouth gaped open
too. I still can’t understand why it frightened Harvey so. The
boys looked at me incredulously and I shrugged. Jim, the
one who always knows what to do, called the cops. I was
speechless. They all started swearing at me. I couldn’t under-
stand why, because when I had told them about the joke they
all thought it was such a good idea. Anyway, the cops came
and I had to tell them the whole story.

That’s what I’m sitting here waiting for now—the rest
of the cops to come and listen to it. They got a guard outside
my door, so I can’t get out any way. Then I guess they’re
going to take me to some quack psychiatrist. I don’t know
what then’re trying to prove. After all, it was just a practical
joke. All I did was fix up this little room. I put curtains on
the wall, so that when you opened them, there’d be nothing
but wood. I thought that was clever. I fixed it so he couldn’t
see a thing; that’s why I turned the electricity off, but I did
put the little candle in there so Harvey could see the nice
arrangement. It must have burned out a little while later.
And then I put the dead grinning corpse in an armchair so
it stared at Harvey. I guess I forgot to tell the boys about
my wife’s corpse being in there. That’s why we’re not friends
anymore. But all my wife could do was nag, and I thought it
would be for the best if I quieted her down for good. It’s too
bad I didn’t get her nagging old lady too. Anyway, I guess it
was too much for Harvey’s heart, because he died after look-
ing at the corpse. I think he tried to get out too, because the
curtains were pulled off the wall, and there was blood under
his fingernails where he evidently tried to scratch the walls
to get out. Well, that’s the story I told the police, so they’re
going to take me in for murder. I guess they’re going to have
me examined first, though. Poor Harv, he just couldn’t take
a practical joke. My wife never could either.