

The Perfect Kill

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Judge Montgomery lent back in her chair and relaxed. This was going to be fast and easy. Plenty of eyewitnesses, and even the defendant had admitted killing the old lady. They would be done in a couple of hours and then she could go fishing. When was it that she'd last been to Scotland? Must be over two years now. She just never managed to get away from work. All cases she had been working on had had a tendency to take much longer than anticipated. She wondered if that huge trout she'd been after last time was still around. This time she meant to get it...

"Excuse my, your honor..."

Judge Montgomery started from her reverie.

"Excuse me, your honor", the DA seemed slightly distressed, "should I proceed with calling the witnesses?"

"No, thank you, not yet. Maybe we can do without them." She was definitely determined to see the case through at record speed.

"Defendant", she turned to the young woman to her left. "Did you hear that the prosecution accuses you of having administered a lethal dose of cyanide to Ms. Joan Verge on July 7, 2069?"

The young woman nodded.

"Do you wish to plead guilty of having killed Ms. Verge?"

The defendant gave her the judge her sweetest smile. "Oh yes, absolutely."

"Well", the judge was a bit at a loss. "I guess that's that then", she shrugged.

"Ms. Decker, is there anything you might want to add?"

"Yes, I'm awfully sorry to have caused all this work, but you will have to acquit me."

Judge Montgomery blinked. "But we've got all the evidence, the witnesses, and you just admitted killing Ms. Verge...", she could already see her fishing trip go down the drain.

"Oh sure, but there is no law against committing suicide." Joan Decker smiled sweetly at the judge.

"SUICIDE!?! But..." Judge Montgomery couldn't think of anything to say that would make at least a tiny little fraction of sense. The DA was equally speechless upon that woman's temerity. The audience erupted into a loud murmur.

"Well, your honor, if I may explain..." She looked inquiringly at the judge. The judge merely gestured for her to continue.

"I was born on March 31, 1989. I studied engineering, and by chance constructed a device that functions as a so-called time machine. I don't want to go into any details here, but in 2021, I made some trips to find out more about my future. I discovered that I would die on July 7, 2069. You see, I had lung cancer, anyway, a really nasty disease, so I figured I might as well end it quickly and painlessly. You might argue about the moral aspects", she shrugged, "but in terms of criminal law, it is not punishable."

The audience was completely quiet. Judge Montgomery tried to say something, but the appropriate words failed her before she could mouth them. The DA wasn't faring any better...

The case hit the media and went around the Earth and its colonies almost at the speed of light. At first nobody believed her, but Joan had planned her everything in advance. Joan Verge had had her fingerprints and DNA taken shortly before she died. There was no denying that Joan Verge and Joan Decker were one and the same person.

Supreme Court judges discussed the case in all details, but they could not find any law that said suicide was a punishable crime. All they could do was to put Joan Decker/verge away in an asylum, but the psychiatrists couldn't find anything wrong with her.

The DA tried to convict her for forging her personal papers, but the problem was that Joan Decker who had come from the past in her time machine had not committed that crime yet, and Joan Verge, the older Joan, was dead and buried. The DA finally gave up and applied for a nice and quiet upholstered room in the mental asylum. Joan was fully acquitted and free to go.

All the big companies tried to buy the construction plans for the time machine for incredible sums of money, but Joan steadfastly refused to give away the secret that - if unleashed - could get the world into even more trouble than it was in already. She never mentioned, though, that she had no idea how she had constructed the time machine in the first place. Back in 2021, she had made all kinds of experiments to repeat the chance construction of the time machine, but all of the failed utterly (unless one would count the invention of a coffee machine that made the coffee it brewed disappear instantly as a success).

After her release, Joan fled five months into the future. By then, all the turmoil had died down. Some political scandals, the occasional juicy murder and the royal families' marital problems had helped to keep the media busy with other things. The political debate on the question if suicide committed by a younger ego should be considered murder had been eagerly started and soon been turned over to a specially appointed committee of experts who enjoyed their jobs so much that they were anxious not to jeopardize them by achieving any final results too soon, and then been forgotten about completely.

Joan created herself a new identity and returned to the week after the incident to claim Joan Verge's life insurance that she had contracted a few years ago and that paid \$ 10 million to a certain Joan Thirge as the beneficiary in the unlikely event that old Ms. Verge, who had no enemies and no relatives as the insurance company had verified, was murdered - compared to a mere \$ 100,000 in case of natural death or accident.

Joan Thirge staid just long enough to collect the money and left, before Joan Decker was put on trial. She traveled all over the time, saw many places and met many interesting people, until one day the time level selector broke down, just when she had decided to pop in on 10,849 BC or thereabouts to see some real-life mammoths. Unfortunately, she'd forgotten to bring the required spare part, but very fortunately she'd brought enough paper with her to write her memoirs.