

# JACK SCHMIDT, ARTS ADMINISTRATOR

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It was one of those sweltering days toward the end of the fiscal year when Minneapolis smells of melting asphalt and foundation money is as tight as a rusted nut. Ninety-six, the radio said on the way in from the airport, and back at my office in the Acme Building I was trying to fan the memory of ocean breezes in Hawaii, where I had just spent two days attending a conference on mid-western regionalism.

It wasn't working. I was sitting down, jacket off, feet up, looking at the business end of an air conditioner, and a numb spot was forming around my left ear to which I was holding a telephone and listening to Bobby Jo, my secretary at the Twin Cities Arts Mall, four blocks away, reading little red numerals off a sheet of paper. We had only two days before the books snapped shut, and our administrative budget had sprung a deficit big enough to drive a car through—a car full of accountants. I could feel a dark sweat stain spreading across the back of my best blue shirt.

"Listen," I sputtered, "I still got some loose bucks in the publicity budget. Let's transfer that to administration."

“J.S.,” she sighed, “I just got done telling you. Those loose bucks are as spent as an octogenarian after an all-night bender. Right now we’re using more red ink than the funny papers, and yesterday we bounced three checks right off the bottom of the account. That budget is so unbalanced, it’s liable to go out and shoot somebody.”

You could’ve knocked me over with a rock.

“Sweetheart,” I lied quietly, hoping she couldn’t hear my heavy breathing, “don’t worry about it. Old Jack has been around the block once or twice. I’ll straighten it out.”

“Payday is tomorrow,” she sniffed sharply. “Twelve noon.”