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Closing Arguments

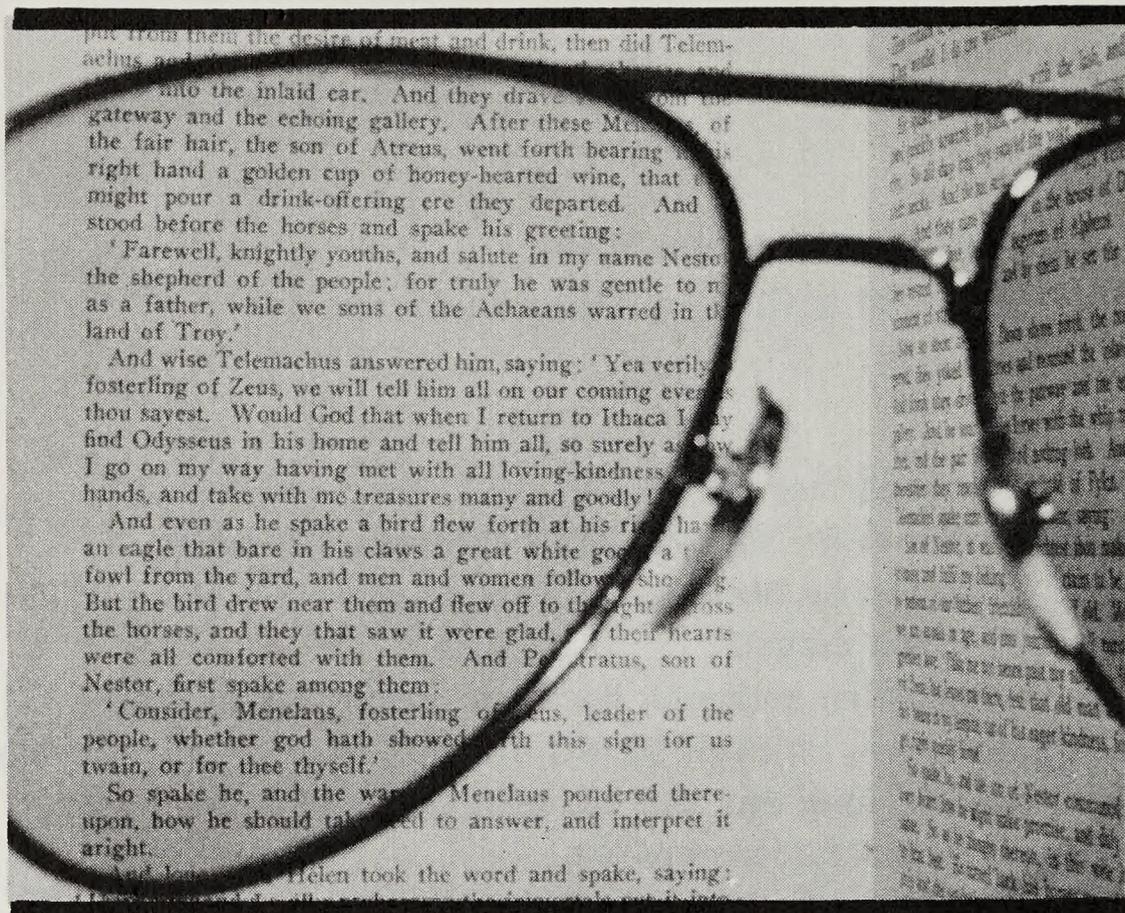
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David Field

Closing Arguments

John M. Ponzio

“Circuit Court for the county of Suffox is now in session, the Honorable James T. Ciffone presiding.”

Clement sat down and shuffled the papers on the table in front of him. The judge smacked his gavel against the bench.

“The case before the court is that of Alexander vs. Pettrolli. Is counsel for the prosecution present in the court?”

Clement, considered old in this day and age for an attorney, pulled himself with difficulty out of the chair. He steadied his shaking hands by tightly grasping the edge of the table. Too many closing arguments. He looked down at his hands, the veins of which stood out, stark blue against the paleness of his skin. He drew upon all of his 27 years, 5 of them on the bar, to maintain a semblance of command in his voice. He looked at the judge and said, “Here, your Honor.” Clement’s knees gave out. He dropped unceremoniously back to the chair.

The judge nodded. “Very well. Counsel for the defense?”

“Here, your Honor.”

The judge picked a sheaf of papers from the bench. "Gentlemen," he said, "I believe the court is now ready for you to present your closing arguments. The jury is advised to consider what occurs here today, weigh the facts presented before the court, and make its decision with fairness and without malice."

Clement stared at the papers on the table in front of him and groaned softly, shaking his head. A wife and ex-wife, two cars, and a new house had kept him in the courts long after most of his contemporaries had ended their careers or retired. Now he had to present closing arguments before the court again.

"Counsel will approach the bench."

Clement breathed deeply, then jumped to his feet. Better to get it over with. Nodding to his opponent, he stopped before the judge.

The judge acknowledged each of them. "Gentlemen, you may present your closing arguments."

The bailiff walked between them, carrying the worn mahogany case. He turned first to Clement, as was fitting to his position as counsel for the prosecution, and opened the case. Clement withdrew a silver revolver, checked the load, and nodded to the bailiff who turned to the other counsel. The judge bowed his head and sat back. Both counsels turned back to back, walked ten paces, turned, and fired. Clement saw a blinding flash and felt a white hot flame over his ear. His opponent staggered back and fell to the floor. Clement dropped to his knees, raising his fingers to his temple. They came away sticky.

The judge asked, "Foreman, has the jury reached its verdict?"

The foreman stepped out of the jury box, glanced over at Clement, and knelt beside the fallen counsel, lying on the floor. "Your Honor," the foreman said, standing. "The jury finds for the prosecution."