



THE CRIMINALS WHO MISCALCULATED

RATLIFF V. STATE

Robert E. Rains

ONE OFTEN HEARS OF CALCULATING CRIMINALS. Some have such great mathematical aptitude that they prosper in a certain line of work known as the numbers game. Others, of course, might not be quite sure that one and one make whatever it is that they make.

You will recollect fondly, no doubt, the happy hours you spent in your high school algebra class wherein you sought to ascertain the value of an unknown. Likewise, Kevin, Harry, and McArthur, three guests of the Florida penal system, were in search of the unknown. More specifically, Kevin, Harry, and McArthur had each been sentenced to life in prison for various and sundry breaches of the peace. But, said they, we know not how long our respective sentences will actually last. Moreover, they pointed out, the Florida Constitution forbids indefinite terms of imprisonment, and, since no one can tell us exactly how long we're in for, the state must let us out.

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The justices on the Florida Supreme Court carefully cogitated on this conundrum and concluded that the criminals' contentions did not compute. While the justices could not provide the curious criminals with the precise dates of their future release from incarceration, and the travails of this life, they reasoned that Kevin, Harry, and McArthur sufficiently knew what they could expect. Cheer up, the justices added helpfully, even a short prison sentence can potentially exceed a prisoner's life span.

Moral:

It's said one oughtn't do the crime
If not prepared to do the time.
But who can say, down to the minute,
How long one's life has got left in it?

