

## CROSS EXAMINATIONS

BY John Hegenberger

### NECKACHE

I'd been dating Chambers for the last three weeks, right into 1989; not with any great seriousness, but like two busy people pleurably colliding at a party. The problem was, she had all these little tests she wanted to try on me. Not blood tests, but psychological ones, and maybe even At least they seemed like tests to me. The latest involved my "developing a sound relationship" with her son Nicky.

"Sure," I said, when I'd called to ask her to dinner. "Where do you keep the little pain in the neck?" "Down in the basement, by his ears," she replied. "And he's yours for a whole day." I groaned. "Give me some slack, sweetheart. It's you I want to go out with. What am I supposed to do with a twelve-year-old boy in the middle of January?"

"That's part of the test, El dear; to see if you two get along with little or nothing in common. Nicky's approval means a lot to me right now," she said. "Look, I've got it all worked out. He loves comic books and there's this comic convention and costume thing at the --oh, what's it called?" I heard paper rattling on the other end of the line. "Here. The Columbus Museum of Comic Art in Victorian Village. They're even honoring Milton Caniff."

"Sounds ritzy. Do I wear a tux, or just a red cape with an 'S' on the back?"

"Nicky will take care of that," she said mysteriously. "Just pick him up on Saturday around noon. That will let me switch duty in the Emergency Room with someone else, so we can have the evening together."

"I get it. You're on late shift at the hospital, again. So, the deal is, if I spend the afternoon with Nicky, you'll be able to juggle the schedule and spend the night with me."

She sounded disappointed. "You figured it out."

"I'm a detective, remember?"

"Oh, yeah. That must be it."