

*Would you believe the
KAOS plan for world
destruction was
in code—and only
MAXWELL SMART
could crack
the case?*

A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie is holding a black handgun. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight, knowing smile. The background is a solid red color.

GET SMART ONCE AGAIN!

An original novel about NBC Television's most
hilarious super-spy, Agent 86 for CONTROL
by WILLIAM JOHNSTON

Get Smart Once Again!

As long as I keep this plan, the world, as we know it, is safe. But if the plan falls into the clutches of I. M. Noman, we can expect a PRETTY MESSY world in the future.

The piece of paper Max Smart held looked innocent enough, but hidden somewhere in the list of seven items was the Dooms Day Plan perfected by KAOS. Until the code could be broken and the plot foiled, the entire world trembled on the brink of destruction.

It was within the power of one man to guard that Plan, crack the code and emerge victorious over the Bad Guys. “It could happen to anybody,” Max had said, but with KAOS’s top agent, I. M. Noman, appearing at every turn in a different identity, Max realized that his assignment was more than routine.

Through maze-like tunnels, onto planes, trains and boats Max and his assistant rush headlong in their flight from their wily pursuer, only to intercepted when the way looks clear and the riddle begins to unravel. Never before has much depended on Max’s quick thinking, clever scheming and—niceness. All his remarkable skills are put to the test as he defies the one man who can, perhaps, best him. But, knowing those skills need the world worry?

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And Loving it!
Max Smart - The Spy Who Went Out to the Cold
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Max Smart and the Ghastly Ghost Affair

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Get Smart Once Again!

by
WILLIAM JOHNSTON

A TEMPO BOOKS *Original*



GROSSET & DUNLAP

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**GET SMART
ONCE AGAIN!**

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1.

MAXWELL SMART, a trim, dapper young man known to Control as Agent 86, stepped from his specially-designed automobile, slammed the door, then stuffed his fingers in his ears. A moment later a cannon boomed, a machine gun rattled, dense smoke poured from the car's exhaust pipe, and both seats shot into the air, then settled back toward earth, carried by parachutes.

As this happened, Agent 99, an attractive brunette, stepped from Control headquarters. She stared at the car in front of Max's, through which a cannon ball had passed, and the car in back of Max's, which was riddled with machine gun bullets.

"Max! What happened?"

"My car—it has a bug in it," Max replied disgustedly. "I was on the way to the exterminator, when—"

"The exterminator, Max?"

"To get the bug out."

"Oh."

"I was on the way to the exterminator," Max went on, "when I got an urgent call from the Chief. It seems the fate of the entire free world is hanging in the balance again."

"I know," 99 nodded. "I'm sorry I won't be on this case with you, Max."

"Oh? Why not, 99?"

"Don't you remember? My vacation starts today."

"You're going on vacation? With the fate of the entire free world hanging in the balance?"

"I've already made reservations, Max."

"In that case, I understand." He saluted. "Have a wonderful time, 99. And, while you're gone, I'll be wishing you were here. Incidentally, where *are* you going?"

“On a cruise, Max. The ship travels all the way up the exotic east coast of the United States, stopping at ports-of-call so we can observe the natives in their native habitats. It really sounds exciting. We’ll see Maryland hardware merchants selling power lawn mowers in their open-air shops. And New Jersey office workers driving to their jobs on their open-air turnpike. And New York brokers selling stocks beneath the persimmon tree on Wall Street. And New England Yankees selling—”

“Excuse me, 99. But the Chief is waiting. I’ll hear about your vacation when you get back. Don’t forget to take pictures.”

“All right. Good-by, Max.”

“Good-by, 99. And bon voyage.”

Max entered Control headquarters, made his way through a passage of steel doors, entered a telephone booth, dialed a wrong number, and was dropped through a trap door to headquarters’ main floor, where he continued to the Chief’s office.

Max rapped on the Chief’s door.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me, Chief—Max. But you’ll have to give me the password before I come in.”

The Chief’s sigh could be heard through the door. “All right, Max, here’s the password: The big blue bluebottle is burning buns on the bottom of Biscayne Bay.”

“That’s it, Chief,” Max said. “Now I’ll come in.”

Max entered the Chief’s office—and was surprised to find that the Chief was not alone. Seated in a chair near his desk was a gorgeous blond.

“Max,” the Chief said, “this is Peaches Twelvetrees. Peaches is a cryptographer.”

Max peered at her, steely-eyed. “Aren’t you a little grown up to be photographing graves?” he said.

Peaches blinked at him, puzzled.

“Max, not the kind of crypts that are graves,” the Chief said. “A cryptographer breaks codes.”

“She’s a little grown up for that, too,” Max said. “I have a nephew who breaks kiddie-cars. But he’s only four-and-a-half.”

“Max, what I’m trying to say is— Let me put it this way. Suppose we intercepted a communication from one KAOS agent to another. But, still supposing, suppose we couldn’t read it because it was in code. We would call in a cryptographer. The cryptographer would decode the code and tell us what the message said.”

“Do you think we ought to do a thing like that, Chief? Isn’t it against the law to read other people’s mail?”

“I was just giving you an example, Max.”

“Oh. Well, in that case, I guess it isn’t illegal.”

Peaches Twelvetrees spoke to the Chief. “Is *this* the man I’m to trust my life to?” she asked, distressed.

“I’m sorry, Miss Twelvetrees,” the Chief replied. “But, you see, here at Control we assign cases by rotation. And Max’s number is up.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” she said. “And, if I’m with him, I’m afraid my number will be up, too.”

“Miss Twelvetrees,” the Chief said, “Max is our top agent.”

“Then Control is in even worse trouble than I am,” she replied.

“Chief,” Max broke in, “would you mind telling me what’s being discussed? Besides my superior ability, that is.”

The Chief faced back to Max. “This may be the most important case you’ve ever handled, Max,” he said. “It concerns the Dooms Day Plan.”

“What exactly is that, Chief?”

“We don’t know.”

“Hmmm . . . that *does* sound important!”

“What we do know is this,” the Chief went on. “We have learned that a meeting has been called of all of the KAOS top executives.”

“The brass, eh?”

“Right, Max. And, at that meeting, the Dooms Day Plan will be revealed.”

“Chief, I have an idea.”

“What, Max?”

“Why don’t we send someone to the meeting? That way, we’ll find out what the Dooms Day Plan is.”

“It will be a closed meeting, Max. Only the top executives of KAOS will be allowed to attend.”

“Drat!”

“However, Max,” the Chief continued, “as matters stand, the meeting will be a total flop. Because we have acquired the only copy of the Dooms Day Plan.”

“You mean only *one* copy was made—and *we* have it?”

“That’s right, Max. That shows how important it is—only one copy was made. Fortunately, the file clerk at KAOS headquarters to whom it was given to file was one of our agents—an infiltrator, *Unfortunately*, though, the plan is in code.” He reached behind him to his desk and picked up a sheet of paper. “Here,” he said, handing the sheet of paper to Max, “would you like to see it?”

Max stepped back. “Should I, Chief? Isn’t it private?”

“You won’t be able to read it, Max. As I said, it’s in code, and, so far, we have been unable to decipher it. Go on, read it, and you’ll see for yourself.”

Max accepted the sheet of paper, and, frowning, read the list of words:

Sad Al
Astor
Mays
Bronco Con
Map Change
Three Bs
Watch

“Chief, I think you’re right,” Max said, handing back the sheet of paper.

“Keep it, Max. I want you to take it with you. And, what do you mean—right about what?”

“You’re right about it being in code. As it is, it doesn’t make any sense at all. And, uh, what do *you* mean—take it with me?”

“I’ll get to that in a second, Max. First, I want to explain Miss Twelvetreets’s part in this mission. Our own cryptographers here at Control have been unable to break the code. Consequently, we have asked Peaches to help us. Peaches is a free-lance cryptographer. In fact, she comes from a distinguished family of free-lance cryptographers.”

“Perhaps you remember the Little Orphan Annie secret code ring years ago,” Peaches said. “My father broke it.”

“The ring or the code?” Max asked. “If it was the ring, I can do you one better. I have a four-and-a-half-year-old nephew who breaks whole kiddie-cars.”

“The code, Max,” the Chief said. “Now, pay attention, will you? The fate of the whole you-know-what is hanging in the you-know-what. It so happens that KAOS has discovered that we have attained possession of the only copy of the Dooms Day Plan. Naturally, KAOS will do everything in its power to get the copy back. It has already dispatched its top agent to retrieve it.”

Max stiffened. “You mean—”

“Yes, Max. KAOS’s top agent—I. M. Noman!”

Peaches sat up, alarmed. “Who is that?”

“The Chief just explained that,” Max said. “He’s KAOS’s top agent.”

“Yes, but why are you both so concerned?”

“Because Noman is our most dangerous adversary,” the Chief explained. “You see, some years ago, by means of plastic surgery, I. M. Noman had himself fitted out with an India rubber face. And now he can assume any identity he chooses.”

“In other words, he can make himself look like anybody he wants to,” Max said. “In fact, for all we know, *you* might be Noman.”

“I doubt that, Max,” the Chief said. “Noman can do wonders with his face, but—” He glanced toward Peaches. “—he couldn’t manage to do *that* with his body.”

“I would accept that, Chief,” Max said, “except that, for all I know, you might be Noman, covering up for Peaches, who, in fact, might be Noman, covering up for— No, come to think of it, that’s unlikely, isn’t it?”

“Unless, of course,” the Chief said, “*you* happen to be Noman, Max. If you were Noman, you might be trying to confuse us by implying that we were Noman. It would—” He shook his head. “No, for the sake of sanity, let’s assume that none of us is Noman.”

“That’s a safe assumption,” Max said. “Noman could never infiltrate Control headquarters.”

“Max, he has already done it. Three of our personnel have been liquidated. And that can mean only one thing—Noman is here!”

“Gee, that’s too bad, Chief. Who did we lose?”

“29, 34 and 48½.”

“48½, Chief?”

“You knew him as 48, Max. But he was taking his exam for promotion. And he had passed the first half of it. If all had gone well, he would have become 49.” Max shook his head sadly. “Poor 48½. Little did he know that his days were numbered.”

“If you know that Noman is here, can’t you stop him?” Peaches said. “Call all of your people together, and the odd one will be Noman.”

“No, the odd one will be 73,” Max said. “73 has two left feet.”

“*You* know what I mean, don’t you?” Peaches said to the Chief.

“I know what you mean,” he replied. “But it wouldn’t work. Noman would simply assume the identity of one of our regular people. He could be anybody.”

“With the exception of 73,” Max pointed out. “It takes more than a putty face to feign two left feet.”

“No, our only chance is to remove the Dooms Day Plan from the premises,” the Chief said. “As long as the plan is at headquarters, both the plan *and* headquarters are in danger.”

“In other words,” Max said, “we have to get the plan *out* of headquarters.”

“Exactly, Max. And that’s where you come in. I want you to take the plan, Max, and run!”

Max shook his head. “That won’t work, Chief. I wouldn’t get any further than the corner. I get winded quickly.”

“No, Max. When I say ‘run,’ I don’t mean that literally. What I mean is, I want you to take the plan and leave the building and keep going. Where you go isn’t important. What is important is that you keep moving—and fast, so that Noman will have no chance of catching you.”

“I see. In other words, you want me to take the plan and *run!*”

“Yes, Max, that’s what I had in mind. You will become a fugitive, chased, no doubt, by Noman.”

“Uh, Chief, will it be all right if I stop by headquarters again around Christmas time? I’d hate to miss the annual office party.”

“I hope you won’t have to be gone that long, Max. Peaches will accompany you. And, while you’re running, Peaches will attempt to break the code. As soon as she has deciphered the words, and we know the nature of the Dooms Day Plan, then you may return.”

Max smiled, relieved. “That shouldn’t take too long,” he said. “She’ll have me to help her.” He looked at the sheet of paper. “Let’s see. Sad Al / Astor / Mays / Bronco Con / Map Change / Three Bs / Watch. Now, if we change the letters around—in the phrase ‘Sad Al,’ for instance, we have . . . hmmm. Well, let’s try another tack. Let’s combine the two words, ‘Sad’ and ‘Al.’ Now, what do we have? Yes, I see—we have ‘Sad al.’ And what is a ‘sad al’? It’s something you put on a horse.” He raised his eyes to the Chief. “I think we’re looking for a horse or a man on horseback or a racetrack.”

“Max, saddle is spelled s-a-d-d-l-e.”

“Chief, can we be certain that the people at KAOS who make up the codes are perfect spellers?”

“Max, leave the cryptography to Peaches, will you? Stick to what you know—running.”

“Hold it, Chief,” Max said, looking at the sheet of paper again. “You’ll notice that the word ‘Bronco’ also appears in the plan. Since a bronco is a

horse, that makes two horses—or, a team of horses. Now, the word ‘team’ suggests pulling together. And if we pull together all of the other words in the plan, what we have is . . . Let’s see . . . Astormaysmapchangethreebswatch. Well, what we have is a mish-mosh. Frankly, I think KAOS’s plan is to confuse us.”

“Max, please, let Peaches do the decoding.”

“Obviously, you don’t even know how to begin,” Peaches said crisply. “The first step is to transpose the letters into numbers. Then, after that, you transpose the numbers back into letters. That is, of course, if the transposition of letters and numbers is the basis for the code. If it isn’t, then you have to utilize phonetics. And, if that fails, you have to try the Palmerston Method. According to the Palmerston Method, every second letter represents a soliloquy in a Shakespeare play, and every third letter represents a paragraph in a soliloquy—unless, of course, the first letter is a vowel, in which case the second and third letter represent, combined, certain passages from Plato’s Dialogues. The Palmerston Method is rarely used any more, however. More common is the system that utilizes the letters as symbols. An ‘A,’ for instance, might represent an Indian teepee. And a ‘B’ might represent a ship’s mast and two round sails. That is, assuming that the letters are written in upper case. If they are in lower case, that means that the real message is written in invisible ink between the lines of the fake message. Since our plan, however, is written in both upper and lower case, we can assume—although not without taking a chance on being in error—that none of the methods or systems that I have mentioned have been used. That, of course, puts us right back where we started.”

Max turned to the Chief. “Why don’t we just hold it up to a mirror? Maybe it’s written backwards. That happened once in Dick Tracy.”

“Max, all I’m interested in doing right now is getting you and Peaches out of here,” the Chief said. “With I. M. Noman on the premises, every minute counts.”

“All right, Chief,” Max said, folding the piece of paper and tucking it into a pocket, “we’ll be on our way. Who will be assisting me on this case? 99 isn’t available, I know. Will it be Fang and me against KAOS again?”

“Sorry, Max. Fang isn’t available either. Fang is on special assignment.”

“Who is Fang?” Peaches asked.

“A dog,” the Chief replied.

She looked at Max. “I thought I had the dog,” she said.

Max ignored the remark. “What special assignment, Chief?”

“Well, this is the week of the kennel show, you know. And we got a report that a certain government is sending a Pekingese to stir up trouble. So we assigned Fang to investigate.”

“Very clever. Sending a plainclothesman, eh?”

“Yes, that was the idea. Now, Max, will you get going?”

Max hesitated. “Chief, you mean I won’t have *any* assistance on this case?”

“I just can’t spare anyone, Max.”

“But, Chief,” Max protested, “the fate of the entire you-know-what hangs in the you-know-what.”

“I realize that, Max. But I can’t disrupt the routine. If I did that, everytime the you-know-what was hanging in the you-know-what, we’d soon have chaos around here.”

“KAOS, you mean.”

“No, I mean we’d lose control.”

“You mean if KAOS were here, we’d lose Control.”

“Max, I don’t know what I mean any more.”

“You better try to get control of yourself, Chief. If *you* don’t know what you mean any more, the whole organization could end up in chaos.”

“Go, Max!”

“Chief, can’t you spare even one little itsy-bitsy agent? Just suppose—I realize that it’s pretty unlikely—but just suppose that, by some chance, I should make a mistake on this case? Wouldn’t it be prudent to have someone around to pick up the ball? What with the you-know-what hanging in the you-know-what.”

“Well . . . maybe you’re right, Max. I suppose I could spare Agent 44.”

“44 would be fine, Chief.”

“Who is 44?” Peaches asked.

“Rather than telling you, I’ll show you,” Max said. “Agent 44 is always around somewhere.”

“You might try my safe, Max,” the Chief said.

“Yes.”

Max walked to a wall, and removed a picture that concealed a safe. He dialed the combination, then opened the door of the safe, then stepped back.

A face appeared in the opening. It was a rather sad face.

“Peaches . . . this is Agent 44,” Max said. He turned to the face in the safe. “And, 44, this is Peaches Twelvetreets. Peaches will be accompanying me.”

44 nodded. “Howdy.”

Peaches groaned.

“See you later, 44,” Max said.

“I’ll be around,” 44 replied.

Max closed the safe, spun the dial, then rehung the picture.

“I always feel safe with 44 around,” Max smiled.

“All right, Max, now will you get going?”

“Didn’t you get that, Chief? That was a pun. You see, 44 was behind the safe, and I said, ‘I always feel *safe* with 44 around.’ ”

“Max, Noman might be closing in on this office right now.”

“I know, Chief. But did you get my pun? It was a play on the word ‘safe,’ you see. I said—”

“Max, are you sure that was 44 behind that safe?”

“Of course. I’d know 44 anywhere.”

“Are you sure, Max, that it wasn’t Noman pretending to be Agent 44?”

Max glanced nervously at the picture that concealed the wall safe. “I think we’d better get out of here,” he said to Peaches, taking her arm and steering her toward the door. “I don’t feel safe here any more.”

“Good running, Max,” the Chief said.

“Thank you, Chief,” Max replied, opening the door.

“And don’t talk to strangers!”

“Chief—don’t treat me like a child.”

“What I mean is, any stranger might be Noman.”

“I’ll remember that, Chief. And I’ll be reporting in—every hour on the hour, more or less.”

Max closed the door, and he and Peaches headed down the corridor.

“How do you know you’ll be able to report in every hour on the hour?” Peaches said. “Suppose you’re not near a phone?”

“I’ll call him on my shoe,” Max explained.

Peaches sagged a little. “I knew this was going to be a day like this,” she said woefully.

“When exactly did you decide that?” Max asked.

“When I first saw *you*.”

Max smiled. “That’s much better,” he said. “You know, there for a second, back in the Chief’s office, I had the impression that you didn’t care much for me. I’m glad to know that I’ve won you over.”

2.

AS MAX and Peaches continued down the corridor, Max took the Plan from his pocket and began to study it. Then abruptly he said, “Oops, sorry. I’m hogging the Plan. If you’d care to look at it, too, it’s all right if you peek over my shoulder.”

“Thank you,” Peaches said coolly.

“That’s quite all right. There are some occasions—such as floods, hurricanes and when being pursued by the enemy—when etiquette can be ignored.”

“When are we going to get out of here?” Peaches said, eyeing the long length of corridor that lay before them.

“Any—” Max suddenly halted. “Wait a minute. We can’t leave by the main exit. Noman will undoubtedly be waiting for us. We’ll have to go back and leave by the secret exit.”

“Where is that?” Peaches groaned.

“Sorry. I can’t reveal that information. It’s secret.” He signalled. “Follow me.”

They turned and made their way back along the corridor to an elevator.

“What’s so secret about this?” Peaches said, as they got aboard. “It looks like an elevator. It even says ‘elevator’ on the door.”

“The secret is: the ‘up’ button doesn’t work,” Max replied as the door closed. “When you punch the ‘up’ button, all you get is a recorded announcement telling you that you’ve punched the wrong button. And, oh, yes, the whole elevator explodes.”

Max punched the ‘down’ button. And the elevator began a slow descent.

“Down?” Peaches said. “But we were in the basement when we started!”

Max nodded. “Clever, eh? Very few people would get aboard an elevator in the basement and punch the ‘down’ button. That’s why we call it our secret exit. It isn’t very often used.”

“I can imagine. Where will it take us?”

“To the sub-sub-sub-sub-sub-sub-basement.” He looked thoughtful, counting in his mind, then said, “Add one more sub to that.”

Peaches snatched the Plan from his hand. “I’m not even going to talk to you any more,” she said disgustedly. “I’m going to work on this code.”

“Mind if *I* peek over *your* shoulder?”

“Yes. But I’m sure that won’t stop you.”

“Anyway, I’m glad to see that you’re speaking to me again,” Max said.

As they sank lower into the earth they studied the words on the sheet of paper.

“Have you noticed,” Max said, “that those first three words are all the names of men?”

“Shhhh! I’m working.”

“There’s ‘Sad Al’ That’s obviously a man named Al. And ‘Astor.’ That’s the last name of a man. John Jacob Astor. Remember him? He was in the fur trade. Which reminds me of a little joke. What kind of a garment is the same as a long walk?”

“Shhhh!”

“No, that’s not the right answer. The right answer is: a fur piece. Get it? A fur piece is a garment. And it’s also a long walk. For instance, if you were to ask a stranger how far it is from Washington, D.C., to New York City, he would reply, ‘It’s a fur piece.’ ”

“Will you *please* be quiet!”

“Sorry about that.”

Frowning, Max continued to study the words. “Mays,” he said. “That could be Willie Mays. But I’m sure he isn’t mixed up with KAOS.”

“Shhhhh.”

“Anyway, we know there are three men involved. So, what else do we have? ‘Bronco Con.’ Bronco is a horse. And ‘Con’ is short for ‘confidence game.’ In other words, a phony horse. Or, in still other words, a Trojan horse. Yes, now it’s all coming clear. What we’re looking for is three men in a Trojan horse.”

The elevator came to a halt, and the door slid open.

“All out,” Max announced.

“Where do we go from here?”

“Well, this is a series of tunnels—a little like a maze. If you know your way, it’s very simple to get from here to the secret exit—which is a manhole that opens in a deserted section of the city. However, if you don’t know your way, you could get lost down here and never find your way out.”

Peaches looked at him, fear-stricken. “You’re going to lead us out?”

“That’s right.”

Peaches screamed. “Help! Somebody! Help! We’re lost!”

“If I were thin-skinned, I’d consider that as evidence of a lack of confidence in my ability,” Max said.

“Help!”

At that moment, a man in an usher’s uniform appeared. He was stooped, and had a long white beard. He looked to be about one-hundred-and-ninety.

“At your service, Mr. Smart,” the man creaked.

“Just in time, Willowby,” Max said.

Peaches pointed. “Who’s he?”

“This is Willowby, our head usher,” Max replied. “You see, we were losing so many secret agents down here we had to put in guides. That was years ago. We haven’t lost a secret agent since. That is, none of ours, anyway.” He turned to Willowby. “Isn’t that true?”

“That’s true,” Willowby replied. “And I ought to know—I’ve been down here from the first.”

“All right, Willowby,” Max said, “which way to the secret exit?”

Willowby pointed to the entrance to a tunnel. “That way, sir.”

“Thank you.”

“Oh . . . Mr. Smart,” Willowby said, “one thing. I haven’t been out lately, you know. What’s the news on the outside?”

“World, national or local?”

“Well . . . how is the President doing these days?”

“I’m afraid, Willowby, that he’s having a bit of a hard time with some of the members of the Senate.”

“That’s too bad,” Willowby said. Then he smiled. “But Mr. Lincoln can handle it.”

“Yes, yes, I’m sure he can,” Max said. He turned to Peaches. “Shall we flee?”

As they proceeded down the tunnel, Max again put his mind to deciphering the Plan. “So far,” he said, “we have three men in a Trojan horse. Now, the next phrase is ‘Map Change.’ That’s pretty clear. These three men in a Trojan horse intend to change the map. But how would they do it? I suppose they could collect all the maps in the world and draw in false lines. But that would take too long. What’s the next word?”

“Three Bs,” Peaches replied. “And please be quiet.”

“Three Bs. Of course! Three bombs! Three men in a Trojan horse intend to change the map of the world with three bombs! Super-destructive bombs, no doubt.”

Ahead of them, an aged voice called out. “Halt! Who goes there?”

“That would be Ponsenby, the second usher,” Max explained to Peaches.

They approached the man, who, like Willowby, was stooped and had a long white beard. “Oh . . . Mr. Smart,” he said. “Are you lost again?”

“If I were lost, would I be here?” Max replied sharply.

“I thought maybe you bungled into the right tunnel—like the last time.”

“Never mind that,” Max said. “Which way to the secret exit?”

Ponsenby pointed. “Thataway.”

They started to go, then Max stopped and turned back to Ponsenby. “Incidentally, if you’re interested,” he said, “Mr. Lincoln is having trouble with the Senate.”

“Don’t give me that,” Ponsenby said. “Lincoln was assassinated.”

“Oh. How did you hear?”

“Heard it from a fellow who was passing through here. A John Wilkes Booth.”

“Oh . . . yes.”

“Actor fellow,” Ponsenby said. “I asked him to do me some imitations. But he was in too big a hurry. Had to go hide in a barn, he said. Didn’t say why.”

Max saluted. “Keep alert, Ponsenby.”

“Don’t I always?”

Max and Peaches continued along the tunnel.

“Is it much further?” Peaches complained.

“Try not to think about it. Concentrate on the code.”

“How can I with you babbling in my ear?”

“Shh!” Max said. “I’m trying to think.”

Peaches turned her attention back to the Plan.

“Three men in a Trojan horse intend to change the map of the world with three super-destructive bombs,” Max mused. “Now, how could they do that? Simple. By setting off those bombs in the three main capitals of the world, that’s how. A bomb in Moscow. A bomb in Peking, And a bomb in New York.”

“New York isn’t the capital,” Peaches said. “Washington is the capital.”

“Yes, I know, that’s what they think in Washington. But in the eyes of the world, New York is the capital. Blow up Washington, and what do you get? A few politicians. But blow up New York and you destroy the symbol that holds the whole nation together.”

“The Statue of Liberty, you mean.”

“No, the Automat. Where else can you get a piece of apple pie for a nickel? That’s what we’re fighting for, you know. Mom’s apple pie. And the Automat turns out a piece of apple pie that makes Mom’s taste like warmed over glue. Yes, I think I’ve got it. The code is broken. The Plan is revealed. Definitely. Three men in a Trojan horse— Strike that. Make that three men in three Trojan horses. Three men in three Trojan horses will change the map of the world by exploding three super-destructive bombs in the three main capitals of the world—Moscow, Peking and New York.”

“What about the word ‘watch’? You left that out.”

“It’s obvious. Three men in three Trojan horses with three bombs in the three main capitals of the world. That would be something to ‘watch.’ ”

“You’re insane.”

“And you’re jealous—because I broke the code before you did. Nevertheless, since I am in command of this mission, we will assume that my interpretation of the Plan is correct. And we will proceed to the three main capitals of the world.”

“But why?”

“Well, as long as we’re running, we may as well do something constructive. My idea is to go to the three capitals, find the KAOS headquarters in each of those cities, infiltrate the headquarters, and foil the plot.”

“How, exactly?”

“Well, when we get inside the headquarters, we’ll look for a Trojan horse. That’s something that won’t be easy to hide. And, once we find the horses, we’ll take them apart, mane by mane, and hoof by hoof, and sadal by sadal.”

“Sadal by sadal?”

“The code-maker-uppers at KAOS aren’t the only lousy spellers in this world, you know.”

“Just for the sake of intelligent conversation,” Peaches said, “let me tell you what I’m beginning to get from the code.”

“Later. We’re coming to the elevator.”

Peaches looked. “Where does that take us?”

“Up,” Max replied. “It takes us to the manhole in the deserted section of town that is, in fact, a cleverly disguised secret exit.”

They boarded the elevator and Mas punched the ‘up’ button.

“What happens if you punch the ‘down’ button?” Peaches asked.

“You go down, naturally. To the sub-sub-sub-sub-sub-sub-sub-sub-basement.”

“That’s pretty far down.”

“Yes, and very unpleasant. The temperature down there sometimes gets up to 150 degrees. It’s as hot as— Well, as I said, it’s extremely uncomfortable.”

“Will you let me tell you what I’ve deciphered so far?”

“Why not? I’m always willing to listen.”

“Well,” Peaches said, “I’ve been using the Hoppman method. Hoppman was a sixth-grade math teacher in Framingham, Massachusetts, who stumbled onto the method by accident. He was always confusing the number ‘3’ with the letter ‘B.’ Whenever he saw the number ‘3,’ he would say, ‘Who left the stick off this letter B?’ And, after that, naturally, he evolved his method.”

“That’s a good basis,” Max said. “The same thing used to happen to me. Except that it was with the number ‘1’ and the letter ‘l.’ I could never tell them apart. I used to spell the word ‘sadal’ with a one at the end.”

“Anyway,” Peaches went on, “using the Hoppman method, I gave every phrase the value of six, then multiplied it by itself in series.”

“The value of six? Why is that?”

“Six was the only number that Hoppman didn’t confuse with a letter. So he decided to play it safe and use the number six for everything.”

“Good thinking.”

“So,” Peaches continued, “we get a series of numbers. Six times six is thirty-six. And six times thirty-six is two-hundred-sixteen. And six times two-hundred-sixteen is one-thousand-two-hundred-ninety-six, and so on. Then, we take those numbers and transpose them into letters. Take the number thirty-six, for instance—our first number. It is composed of a three and a six. And the third letter of the alphabet is ‘C’, and the sixth letter is ‘F’. So, thirty-six stands for ‘CF’. Understand?”

“What could be simpler?”

“Fine. So, what we get is: CF BAF ABHF GGGF DFFEF.”

“I see. And now that you have it, how do you pronounce it?”

“Oh, we don’t. We’re just starting. Next, we eliminate all the unnecessary letters. You’ll notice that there are many too many ‘Fs and ‘G’s. So we toss

them out. That gives us: CBAABHDE.”

“Excuse me,” Max said, “but we’re coming to the secret exit.”

Peaches looked up, and saw the underside of a manhole cover. “Through there?”

“Right. Through there, and we will find ourselves in a deserted section of the city. There probably won’t be a soul around.”

Peaches shuddered. “It’s creepy.”

“But necessary,” Max said. “It’s the one sure way of eluding Noman.”

The elevator stopped. Max reached up and raised the manhole cover—and found himself face-to-face with a particularly expressionless face.

“Excuse me,” Max apologized. “I thought this was the secret exit.”

The face spoke. “It is, Max. I was just checking to make sure you hadn’t got lost in the tunnels again.”

“Oh! Agent 44!” Max said, recognizing the face. “Good fellow. Glad to see that you’re on duty.”

44 nodded. “I’ll see you around, Max,” he said. Then his face disappeared from the opening.

“Now then, we’ll just crawl out of here, then we’ll be on our way to New York,” Max said to Peaches.

“Why not Moscow or Peking?”

“Limited expense account,” Max explained, helping Peaches out.

When she reached the street, Peaches offered a hand to Max, and, with her help, he pulled himself out of the hole.

“It’s gloomy,” Peaches said, looking around. “Even in the daylight it’s gloomy.”

“No one ever comes here,” Max explained. “We are as alone as we would be in the middle of the Sahara desert.”

At that moment, a taxi came screeching around a corner and stopped a few feet away.

“We’re in luck,” Peaches said. “There’s a camel.”

“The driver must be lost,” Max said. “No one ever comes to this part of town.”

Followed by Peaches, Max walked over to the cab. The driver, a rather plump man, who, all in all, looked like a typical taxi driver, put his head out the window. “Cab?” he said.

“Yes, that’s what it is,” Max replied. “But, more important, what is a cab doing in this deserted section of town? You couldn’t possibly find any business here.”

“What would be your guess?” the driver said.

“You’re lost?”

The driver brightened. “Right! I’m a new driver, and I’m lost.”

Max turned to Peaches. “That explains it,” he said. “At first, I was a little worried. I thought this driver might actually be I. M. Noman in disguise.”

“Can I take you somewhere?” the driver said.

“Do you think you could find the airport?” Max replied. “We want to take a plane to New York.”

“How come?” the driver asked. “If I had a plane, I think I’d keep it right here. I sure wouldn’t take it to New York. There’s a lot of sharpies in New York. You take your plane to New York and somebody’ll swindle you out of it.”

“You don’t understand,” Max said. “We don’t have a plane. All we— Never mind. Just take us to the airport.”

The driver shrugged. “Hop in.”

Max and Peaches got into the cab, and it started off.

“Now, what was it you were saying when we reached the secret exit?” Max said to Peaches.

“I was telling you what I’d worked out, using the Hoppman method.”

“Oh, yes. ‘CBAABHDE’ wasn’t it?”

“That’s right. Now, the problem is to rearrange those letters so that they make sense.”

The driver turned in the seat. “What’s that, some kind of new game?” he said.

“Sorry. We can’t tell you,” Max replied. “It’s top secret.”

The driver laughed.

“No, really, it is,” Max insisted.

“That’s okay, if you don’t want to tell me, don’t tell me,” the driver said. “My feelings won’t be hurt. Us cab drivers are used to that kind of thing. Nobody won’t explain no new games to us. It hurts—at first—but we get used to it.”

“Honest,” Max said. “It isn’t a game, it’s a top secret code. We’re trying to decipher it.”

“Sure.”

“Cross my heart,” Max said.

“Yeah, yeah . . . it’s the same old story. A cab driver’s not human. He’s just a slob that sits up front and steers. I know. I get it all the time. But that’s okay. It don’t hurt so much no more.”

“Look,” Max said, getting out his wallet. “Here are my credentials. I’m a secret agent. And this young lady is a free-lance cryptographer.”

The driver glanced at Max’s credentials, then looked back at Peaches. “A cryptographer, eh? Ain’t you a little grown up to be going around taking pictures of graves?”

“That’s not what she does,” Max said. “She breaks codes.”

“Max, ignore him,” Peaches said. “We have work to do.”

“Ignore him? Hasn’t the world hurt him enough? Do you want me to add to that by ignoring him? I couldn’t sleep nights with that on my conscience.”

“Them’s nice credentials,” the driver said, handing back Max’s wallet.

“Then, you believe me?”

“Sure, sure, sure,” the driver said sourly, facing front again.

“No you don’t. You don’t really believe me,” Max said.

“All I know is, anybody can get a bunch of phony credentials made up.”

Max turned to Peaches. "Let's let him play our game."

"No thanks," the driver said. "I don't want to play in no game where I ain't wanted."

"Please," Max begged.

"Well . . ." He turned back to them once more. "Okay, if it'll make you happy. How does the game go?"

"We have these letters," Max said. "The letters are: CBAABHDE. Now, the problem is to change the letters around until they make a message. Got it?"

"Got it," the driver replied, facing front once again.

Max smiled happily. "I may have just saved a human soul," he said to Peaches. "There was a man who felt discriminated against by society. We were all playing games, but we wouldn't let him play. In time, he could have become a criminal cab driver. But, now, I think he'll be all right. He's in the mainstream of society. Before long, he'll have enough confidence in his ability to give up driving a cab and get an executive position in one of our major industries. He'll be a Somebody. And when he rides in cabs he'll remember what happened today. He'll play games with the drivers, and send them on the road to Success."

"That's nauseating," Peaches said. "Now, can we get back to work?"

"Yes." Max leaned forward. "Do you have anything yet?" he said to the driver.

"I worked out a name," the driver replied.

"What is it?"

"C. B. Aabhde."

"That's a name?"

"That's all I can figure out it could be."

"Keep trying," Max said, settling back in the seat.

"I think I'm getting something," Peaches said. "So far, I have the words 'bad' and 'he'. That leaves me with 'acb'."

"Hmmm. Bad he. Or, he bad. You're right, there might possibly be something there."

“But I can’t make anything out of ‘acb’.”

“How about ‘bac’? He bad bac. Perhaps it refers to someone with a slipped disc or a strained sacroiliac.”

“Max! I have it!”

“What? What?”

“It’s ‘He bad cab’.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Max said. “It doesn’t make any sense at all.”

“Max—what are we riding in?”

“A taxi.”

“No, no, what’s the other word for taxi?”

“Hack?”

“No, Max. Cab!”

“In other words, you’re saying that we’re riding in a bad cab. Or, in still other words, that our cab driver is a bad guy.”

“That’s it, Max. Our driver is—”

At that moment, the driver turned in the seat to face them. “Permit me to introduce myself,” he said, smiling sinisterly. “I am I. M. Noman!”

“Yes,” Max said peevishly, “and you also bad cab.”

3.

As MAX spoke, the cab suddenly shot forward at a tremendous speed. And at the same time, Noman turned completely in the front seat, facing Max and Peaches, and ignoring the steering wheel and other controls.

“Help!” Peaches shrieked. “We’ll be killed.”

“You know, that possibility does exist,” Max said to Noman. “We’re hurtling forward at—” He looked at the speedometer. “At ninety-one-point-three miles per hour, and no one is at the wheel. It’s conceivable that an accident *could* occur.”

“As a matter of fact, it’s entirely unlikely,” Noman replied. “This cab is electronically-controlled—and programmed to avoid all obstacles.”

“That’s hard to believe,” Max said.

“Would you believe, then, that it’s programmed to avoid ninety per cent of the obstacles?”

“That sounds a bit more like it,” Max said. “After all, no one is perfect—not even an electronically-controlled cab.”

“This cab is as close to perfect as any cab now in existence,” Noman said. “It was the cab, in fact, that made it possible for me to find you in that deserted section of the city. You see, it has a homing device. I can direct it toward any of several objects and it will speed unerringly to the target. To find you, all I had to do was set the dial on ‘Max Smart’.”

“This is insane!” Peaches said. “I don’t believe it—not any of it!”

Noman indicated a dial on the control panel. “See for yourself.”

Max and Peaches leaned forward and peered at the dial. It had several settings—‘Max Smart’—‘Potomac River’—‘Busy Bee Lunch’—‘Public Library’—‘Frank’s Shoe Repair’—‘Hotel Windsor (Room 603)’—‘Miscellaneous’.

“Busy Bee Lunch?” Max said.

“They serve the best beet soup in town,” Noman explained.

“I see. I also notice that, right now, the indicator is set on ‘Potomac River’. Is that significant?”

“No, it’s a plain old river.”

“What I mean is, is the cab, by any chance, headed for the Potomac River?”

“I’m glad you asked that,” Noman replied. “It saves me the trouble of pointing it out. And time is important in this case. For, in a very few minutes, this cab will plunge—carrying with it all its occupants—directly into the Potomac River.”

“Help!” Peaches shrieked again.

“That won’t help,” Noman said. “The cab can be stopped only by disengaging its homing device. And, of the three of us, only I know how to do that.”

“Would it be unreasonable to suggest, then, that you *do* it—before we all plunge into the river and drown?” Max said.

“Not unreasonable, but pointless. I have no intention of disengaging the device until I have the Dooms Day Plan in my hands.”

“Give it to him!” Peaches screamed at Max.

Max looked at her disappointedly. “You seem to forget—the fate of the entire you-know-what hangs in the you-know-what.”

“But we’ll all be drowned!” she wailed.

“That’s a telling point,” Max admitted. “However, I sort of promised the Chief that I’d look after this Plan. And it just isn’t nice to break a promise. So, I guess we’ll all just have to drown.”

Noman pulled a gun and pointed it at Max’s head. “Maybe this will change your mind.”

“To a drowned man, a hole in the head is not particularly troublesome,” Max replied.

“But suppose I shoot you, take the Plan, then disengage the homing device and escape?”

“Now, *that* could be troublesome,” Max admitted.

“Give him the Plan!” Peaches begged.

“No,” Max said. “Obviously, the only honorable thing to do is swallow it.”

“It’s too big to swallow!”

“Not bite by bite, it isn’t,” Max replied. And, so saying, he took a bite off the corner of the sheet of paper.

“You fool!” Noman raged. “This means your death!”

Max frowned. “Is paper poisonous?”

“No, but it means that I have no choice. Now, I must send you to your end in the river.” He looked out the front window. “And the river is only minutes away.”

“For heaven’s sake, hurry,” Peaches said to Max. “If you’re going to swallow the Plan, do it!”

“My mother taught me to chew thoroughly,” Max said. “It’s the secret of good digestion.”

“What does that matter! You’re going to die!”

“Perhaps so. But not because of poor digestion.”

“We’re almost to the river!” Noman cried. “Hold your noses!”

Max sighed heavily. “I can’t go through with it,” he said. He handed the Plan to Noman. “Here, take it.”

“Oh, Max,” Peaches squealed. “You did this for me.”

“No, I did it for my digestive system,” Max said. “I just couldn’t eat that Plan. It’s the most poorly seasoned Plan I ever tasted. It tastes like . . . well, like paper.”

Peaches turned to Noman. “You have the Plan. Now, stop the cab!”

“Like fudge, I will!” Noman laughed. “Your doom is sealed. Now that I have the Plan, I intend to eject myself from the cab, and leave you two here to plunge into the Potomac.”

“Exactly what I’d expect from a KAOS agent,” Max said. “Your actions are like your Plans—tasteless.”

“Toodle-loo!” Noman said. “I am now going to activate my ejection seat, rocket into the air, and descend safely by parachute.”

Then, smiling evilly, Noman punched his ejection button.

But, just as he did, Max reached out and snatched the Plan from his hand.

Noman went shooting through an opening in the roof of the cab—without the Plan.

“I did it!” Max cried. “I saved the day!”

“For how long?” Peaches said gloomily. “We’re still headed for the river.”

“But we have the Plan! The entire you-know-what of the you-know-what is no longer hanging in the you-know-what.”

“In a few minutes, I don’t think that’s going to make much difference to me,” Peaches moaned.

“We may still be able to escape,” Max said. “Try the doors.”

But the doors were all locked.

“Good-by, Max,” Peaches wept. “I wish I could say it had been a pleasure knowing you.”

Max was looking out the rear window. “There’s Noman,” he said. “He’s floating safely down to earth by parachute. *But*—without the Plan. I guess that proves it—the good guys always win.”

“Max! I can see the river! We’re lost!”

“We couldn’t be lost if you can see the river,” Max said. “That’s where we’re headed—the river. So how could we be lost?”

“I mean we’re doomed!”

“No—wait! Parachute! That gives me an idea!”

“Even if we had parachutes, what good would it do? We’re too close to the ground to jump.”

“A parachute can be used for other things besides jumping,” Max said. He began poking in his pockets. “Let’s see now, where did I put that parachute?”

“You’re mad!” Peaches sobbed.

Max extracted a ballpoint pen from an inside pocket. “Ah! Here it is!”

“That’s a parachute?”

“Yes. A parachute, and an acetylene torch, and a six-shot revolver, and a hair-dryer, and half of a set of chopsticks, and a miscellaneous. The only thing it won’t do is write.”

“But how will it help?”

“Just watch!”

Max punched the button at the top of the pen and a sledge hammer popped out the end. “That’s the miscellaneous,” he explained.

“You’re mad, and your pen is mad!”

Quickly, with one blow, Max smashed the rear window of the cab.

“That’s wonderful!” Peaches enthused.

“It could have been neater,” Max said.

“What now?”

Max retracted the sledge hammer, then pointed the pen out the opening. “Now—”

He punched the button again. This time a parachute popped from the pen. It opened, billowed, and then, acting as a brake, brought the cab to a halt.

“We’re saved!” Peaches cried joyfully.

“Yes,” Max said, less happily. “But every blessing has its drawbacks. Now, I have to re-pack that parachute.”

“But we’re alive, Max!”

“That’s fine for you. But have you ever tried to pack a parachute into a ballpoint pen?”

“Then leave it,” Peaches said disgustedly.

“Leave it?” Max was appalled. “That’s Government property. Every parachute I lose comes out of my salary.”

“But Max, we don’t have time to re-pack it. Noman might catch up with us. And, as you keep saying, the fate of the entire you-know-what hangs in the you-know-what.”

“I guess you’re right,” Max sighed. “I’ll have to leave the parachute. Even though it’ll mean that, to pay for it, I’ll have to skip lunches for a week.”

“What now, Max?” Peaches said.

“Onward and upward.”

“What does that mean?”

“Onward to the airport, and upward in a plane,” Max replied. “But first, I think I’d better report in to the Chief. He’ll be worried. You know how Chiefs are—they worry.”

Peaches looked at him warily. “This is where you contact the Chief on your shoe—right?”

“Right. But we can’t stay here by the river. Noman will probably come looking for us.” He pointed. “There’s a building over there. We’ll get inside, out of sight, then I’ll phone the Chief.”

“Oh, I see,” Peaches said, brightening. “That’s the Telephone Company.”

Max looked at the building again. “As a matter of fact, it is,” he said. “But, that’s all right—any building will do.”

“Any building with a phone, you mean.”

“No, I mean— Let’s not discuss it any more. The longer we stay here, the better chance Noman has of catching us.”

Max and Peaches left the river and walked to the Telephone Company building. Entering, they spotted a doorman.

Max walked up to him. “I’d like to make a private call,” he said. “Where would be a quiet place?”

The doorman pointed. “Public telephones, second door on the right, sir.”

“No, I don’t want a public telephone. This is a private call.”

“All private calls are made on public telephones, sir.”

“If you’ll think about it a second, you’ll see how ridiculous this is,” Max said. “What I want is a quiet little corner where I won’t be disturbed.”

“There are booths, sir.”

“All right,” Max said, “I suppose that will have to do.”

With Max leading the way, he and Peaches walked to the door that the doorman had pointed out. They entered a large room where a great number

of operators were operating switchboards. Near the entrance were a great many booths.

“We’ll just duck into one of these,” Max said.

“I don’t think there’s room enough for both of us.”

“All right, we’ll leave the door open. I have trouble getting my shoe off in a closed telephone booth, anyway. You stand guard.”

Peaches nodded agreement.

Max stepped into the booth, then, bending over, removed his shoe.

“Mad!” Peaches groaned.

Max dialed, then held the shoe to his ear.

Operator: The number you have dialed is not a working number, sir.

Max: Of course it’s a working number. I dial it a dozen times a day.

Operator: What number did you dial, sir?

Max: I can’t tell you that, Operator. It’s top secret.

Operator: Are you the same kook who was trapped in a limousine in Greenwich Village a while back, sir?

Max: Operator—is that you? How’re things?

Operator: Oh, fine—in general. My Aunt Harriet isn’t doing too well these days, though. Her lumbago.

Max: That’s too bad. I have an Uncle Horace who suffers from the same thing. Has your Aunt Harriet tried milk baths? That seems to work for Uncle Horace.

Operator: She tried it. But she had to give it up. It was bad for her psychologically. She said, sitting there in a tub of milk, she felt like a giant Rice Krispie.

Max: That’s hard to believe.

Operator: Would you believe a shredded wheat biscuit?

Max: I’d be more likely to believe a Rice Krispie, frankly.

Operator: Every time she opened her mouth she said ‘snap, crackle, pop!’

Max: Operator, I’m trying to contact the Chief at Control. Would you put me through, please?

Operator: I can’t remember the number. Is it in the book?

Max: No, it’s an unlisted number.

Operator: Well, if it’s top secret and you can’t tell me, and it isn’t in the book, I don’t see how I can help you.

Max: How would this do? Suppose I write it down for you? Will you promise to destroy it as soon as you’ve read it?

Operator: Couldn’t I just show it to a few of the girls first? Only my best friends, of course. I don’t think any of them have ever seen a top secret unlisted number.

Max: All right. But only your trusted friends. Agreed?

Operator: Girl Scout’s honor.

Max stepped out of the booth and handed his shoe to Peaches. “Hold the phone for me a second, please,” he said.

“Mad!”

Max got a small notepad and a ballpoint pen from his pocket. He pressed the button on the top of the pen—and a small motor began to whirl.

“Ooops! Wrong pen!”

“What was that sound?” Peaches asked curiously.

“That was the hair-dryer,” Max replied, putting the pen away and getting out another one.

This time he was successful. He wrote Control’s number on a slip of notepaper, then walked over to one of the operators and handed it to her. A moment later, he returned, retrieved the shoe from Peaches, and stepped back into the booth.

Chief: Max? Is that you?

Max: Reporting in, Chief. Peaches and I are on our way to the airport.

Chief: Where exactly are you, Max?

Max: In a telephone booth.

Chief: Max, you'll never get to the airport in a telephone booth. Better try a cab.

Max: We tried that, Chief. But the driver turned out to be I. M. Noman. We very nearly lost our lives.

Chief: Well, I can understand why that would sour you on cabs, Max. But, even so, I don't think you'll ever make it to the airport in a telephone booth.

Max: No, Chief, you don't understand. We intend to take a cab to the airport. I'm in the telephone booth only so I can report in to you.

Chief: Why didn't you call me on your shoe, Max?

Max: I *am* calling you on my shoe.

Chief: In a telephone booth?

Max: Forget it, Chief. I just wanted to tell you that as soon as we get to the airport we're going to take a plane to New York. Then to Moscow. And then to Peking. I want you to know where we'll be.

Chief: Max, is there any reason for going to New York, Moscow and Peking? Or do you just happen to be headed in those three directions?

Max: It's a complicated story, Chief. But, to put it briefly, we're going to New York, Moscow and Peking in order to foil KAOS's Dooms Day Plan.

Chief: Then you've broken the code!

Max: That's still being debated, Chief. I say yes, and Peaches says no.

Chief: In other words, you *haven't* broken the code. All right, Max. The important thing is to keep on the move—out of the clutches of Noman. I suppose it won't do any harm if, while you're running, you visit New York, Moscow and Peking. Happy landings, Max.

Max: Thank you, Chief.

Operator: Happy landings from all the girls here at the Telephone Company, and from Aunt Harriet, too, Maxie.

Max: So long, Operator. Don't take any wrong numbers.

Max stepped from the booth and slipped his shoe back onto his foot. "Onward and upward," he said to Peaches.

She shook her head in dismay. "Mad!"

Max and Peaches left the building. As they stepped out onto the sidewalk, a cab pulled up.

"Taxi?" the driver said.

Max looked at him closely. He did not resemble the other cab driver in any way.

"Just a second," Max said. He drew Peaches aside, and whispered to her. "This may be Noman again," he said. "Once a cab driver, always a cab driver."

Peaches looked past Max at the driver. "I don't think so. The other driver looked like a typical cab driver. This man looks like a stockbroker."

"But remember—Noman can assume any identity."

"Maybe you're right," Peaches replied worriedly.

"I'll have to test him," Max said.

"Test? How?"

"Well, when I applied for a job at Control as a secret agent, I was given an examination. It consisted of a series of multiple-choice questions. The idea was to determine if I was suited for secret agent work."

"And you flunked?"

"I'll pretend you didn't say that. As a matter of fact, I got the highest score in the history of the Department."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true, nevertheless. Although I suppose I should add that I'm the only one in the history of the Department who ever took the examination. After I took it, and passed it, they threw it out. There was some talk that it was undependable. But I suspect that it was jealousy that dictated that opinion."

“But what good will it do to give the test to that cab driver?” Peaches said.

“Simple. If he passes it, it will mean that he’s well-suited for secret agent work. And that will mean that beneath that disguise he is really I. M. Noman.”

Peaches shrugged. “So try it.”

Max and Peaches returned to the cab. “Driver,” Max said, “this young lady and I *do* intend to engage a cab. But first we’d like to know a little about our driver. Do you have any objections to submitting to a brief examination?”

The driver shook his head. “You got to make a lot of compromises with the Establishment when you’re in the cab driving business,” he said.

“Fine. Now, these are multiple-choice questions. Take your time, think the questions through thoroughly, then give me your answers. Ready?”

“Shoot.”

“All right. Here is question number one: You are a secret agent. You and another secret agent have been captured by the bad guys. The other secret agent has been hung up by his thumbs. The bad guys will release the other secret agent only on the condition that you reveal the whereabouts of your organization’s headquarters. You would do which of the following? Reveal the whereabouts of your organization’s headquarters? Let your friend hang by his thumbs? Engage the bad guys in a game of poker and win their firearms from them? Or send in your resignation as a secret agent?”

The driver thought for a moment, then said, “How good a friend is this friend of mine who’s hanging by his thumbs?”

“A *very* good friend.”

“Is he, maybe, the kind of guy who *likes* to hang by his thumbs?”

“That’s irrelevant.”

“Not the way I see it,” the driver said. “If he likes to hang by his thumbs, maybe I’d be doing him a favor to let him hang.”

“That’s rather preposterous, driver.”

“I don’t know. Driving a cab, you meet some strange guys. It wouldn’t surprise me to meet some guy that likes to hang by his thumbs.”

“All right. Let’s assume that your friend does *not* like to hang by his thumbs. Now, what’s your answer?”

The driver pondered again. “This game of poker—is that straight poker or deuces wild?”

“What—if you’ll pardon my curiosity—does that have to do with it?”

“I can’t win at straight poker,” the driver replied. “It’s got to be deuces wild.”

“All right—deuces wild. Is that your answer? Would you engage the bad guys in a game of poker—deuces wild—and win their firearms from them?”

The driver scowled. “Let me think about it a minute.”

“Driver, we don’t have all day. We’re fleeing from a master criminal.”

“Suppose I sent in my resignation?” the driver said. “Would I lose my retirement benefits?”

Max opened the rear door of the cab, then turned to Peaches. “Get in. Let’s go,” he said.

“Are you sure he’s not you-know-who?”

“No, I’m not sure. We’ll just have to take a chance. By the time he gets around to answering the question, the real Dooms Day will be here and the examination will have become pointless.”

Peaches got into the rear seat of the taxi. Max followed her in, closed the door, then said to the driver, “Airport, please.”

The driver shrugged and headed the cab into traffic.

“Out of curiosity,” Peaches said to Max, “what *is* the answer to the question?”

“I don’t know,” he answered. “That’s the one question on the examination that I missed. I was hoping to find out the answer from the driver.”

“What did *you* answer?”

“I’d rather not say,” Max replied. “But I will tell you this: If I had been in that situation, and I had done what I said I would do on the examination, I would have had a friend with very *long* thumbs.”

Peaches turned away and stared out the cab window.

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4.

IT WAS not long before they reached the airport. As they left the cab and entered the terminal, Max said to Peaches, “Keep an eye out for Noman. He might be anywhere and anybody.”

“If he might be anybody, how would I know if I saw him?”

“That’s right, I forgot. Not being a secret agent, you don’t have that sixth sense about criminals.”

“You do, I suppose.”

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Max replied. “Whenever I get within sensing distance of a bad guy, a bell rings in my mind, and a little sign pops up. The sign says: ‘There’s one, Max!’ ”

“If you expect me to believe—”

Peaches cut the statement short as Max was stopped by a plump man in a checkered suit. The man looked like a typical air terminal tout.

“Hey, uh fella . . .” the man said, glancing about cautiously.

“Yes?” Max replied.

“Interested in a tip on the noon flight to Bermuda?”

“Well . . .”

“Don’t take it,” the man said. “It’ll be cancelled due to engine trouble.”

“I didn’t intend to take it,” Max said. “We’re only interested in New York flights.”

“Then you want the Arr Dee Airline,” the tout said. “It flies only to New York.”

“Arr Dee? What does that stand for?”

“It stands for R. D.”

“Oh. Well, what does R. D. stand for?”

“Ruptured Duck.”

“I see. I don’t think we’re interested in that, either,” Max said. He started to move on.

But the tout caught him by the sleeve. “You’re interested in getting the best deal you can get, aren’t you, fella? To me, you look like a man who is on a limited expense account.”

“Yes, that’s true. What do you have to suggest?”

“Arr Dee Airline has some special flights. If you qualify, there are some price advantages. For instance, if you’re a seventy-year-old midget, and you fly between 10 A.M. Tuesday and noon on Thursday, wearing a sealskin coat and a patch on your left eye, you can get a tremendous discount”

“That’s interesting. How much would it cost?”

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing. In fact, Arr Dee Airline pays you.”

“It sounds worth looking into,” Max said. “I wonder if it has discounts for secret agents.”

“Secret agents are in the same category as seventy-year-old midgets wearing sealskin coats and eye patches.”

“And how about cryptographers?”

“You may have some trouble there,” the tout replied. “Arr Dee frowns on people who go around taking photographs of graves.”

“We’ll chance it,” Max said. “Which way to Arr Dee?”

“Straight ahead until you hear a ‘ssssst!’ ”

“Thank you. You’ve been very helpful.”

“Nothing,” the tout said. He hurried on ahead.

“Somehow,” Peaches said, “I don’t trust that man.”

“Nonsense,” Max replied. “Don’t let appearances deceive you. If he weren’t trustworthy, a bell would have gone off in my mind, and a little sign would have popped up. Forward!”

They continued through the crowded terminal, until Peaches suddenly noticed that it was no longer crowded.

“Where are we?” she asked. “We’ve passed all the ticket counters.”

“Arr Dee is probably a little out of the mainstream,” Max said. “Considering the discounts it gives, it probably can’t afford space in the high rent district.”

“Max, I don’t know about this. I think—”

She was interrupted by a sound. “Sssst!”

They saw a plump man beckoning to them from a half-open doorway. He looked like a typical airline reservations clerk.

“This is it,” Max said. “See there—in fresh paint it says ‘Arr Dee Airline’.”

“That looks suspicious to me. Look—something has been scratched out, and ‘Arr Dee Airline’ is painted over it.”

“I’m sure there’s a logical explanation for that,” Max said.

They had reached the clerk.

“Doing some fresh painting, I see,” Max said.

“This is our new office,” the clerk smiled. “We just moved in a few minutes ago. Before, we were up front with all the other airlines. But it got crowded. We like privacy.”

Max turned to Peaches. “I told you there was a logical explanation.”

“Right in here,” the clerk said, opening the door.

They stepped in and found themselves in a room about the size of a janitor’s closet.

“Let’s see now, you’re looking for a deal on a flight to New York,” the clerk said.

Max’s eyes narrowed. “How did you know that?”

“I have a sixth sense about people who are headed for New York,” the clerk replied. “When I see one, a bell rings in my mind, and a little sign pops up. It says: ‘There’s one!’ ”

“Well, in this case, your sixth sense is wrong,” Max said. “We’re not one, we’re two. The lady will be accompanying me.”

“I have just the thing for you,” the clerk said. “Two seats on the next Arr Dee flight to New York.”

“That sounds about right,” Max said. “When does it leave?”

“As soon as you get to the plane.”

“That’s convenient,” Max nodded. “And the cost?”

“Seven-thousand dollars,” the clerk replied. “Unless, of course, you happen to be a secret agent. Secret agents travel free.”

“Are we in luck!” Max said. “And how much for the lady?”

The clerk looked at Peaches. “How much are you asking?”

“No, no, she’s not for sale. What I mean is, how much will it cost for her to fly to New York?”

The clerk thought for a moment, then said, “Well, let’s see, she’ll need gas and oil. Gas, I think, is twenty cents a gallon. And oil—”

“No, no, no. She doesn’t fly herself. What I’m trying to find out is, what will you charge for a ticket to fly to New York on your airline?”

“Tickets fly free,” the clerk replied.

“Let me put it another way,” Max said. “Suppose a secret agent came in here, accompanied by a lady cryptographer, and asked you what it would cost for a ticket for the lady cryptographer to fly to New York—what would your answer be?”

“Nothing.”

“You wouldn’t answer?”

“No, I mean there would be no charge. You see, there’s a vicious story going the rounds that Arr Dee frowns on ladies who take pictures of graves. There’s not a bit of truth in it. Some of our best friends are lady cryptographers. So, to combat that awful lie, we let lady cryptographers fly free—as long, of course, as they’re accompanied by secret agents.”

Max extended a hand. “I think we’ve got ourselves a deal,” he said.

The clerk shook Max’s hand warmly. “Your plane is waiting,” he said. “Just go out to the runway and walk to the far end of the field.”

“Don’t your planes come to the terminal?”

“No, it’s much too crowded. Our planes like privacy.”

“That’s understandable,” Max said. “I like a little privacy myself every now and then.”

Max and Peaches left the Arr Dee office, made their way back through the terminal, walked across the ramp to the runway, then headed for the far end of the field. Every once in a while they had to step off the runway to let a plane land or take off.

“I’m still not sure about this,” Peaches said. “I’m afraid we’re making a mistake.”

“At these prices? Impossible.”

“That clerk—he looked familiar to me. He looked a lot like that tout. As a matter of fact, he looked a lot like our first cab driver, too.”

“Ridiculous. They all had different faces.”

“I think they were all Noman. They were all plump.”

“So is Santa Claus. But I don’t think you’d get very far accusing Santa Claus of being Noman. Besides, if you did, you’d break a lot of little hearts.”

“Children’s hearts mend quickly.”

“I wasn’t thinking of children, I was thinking of me.”

Peaches pointed. “There’s the plane. See, it has Arr Dee Airline painted on it—in fresh paint.”

“I can read,” Max replied sharply.

They boarded the plane, then stopped in the aisle. All of the seats except two were occupied by passengers. But, oddly, all the other passengers appeared to be asleep.

“That’s funny,” Peaches said.

“Funny? What’s funny about it? They’re probably all first-time-flyers, and they were probably up all night worrying. No wonder they’re tuckered out.”

“Where’s the stewardess?” Peaches said, looking around.

“You get in your seat and buckle yourself in and I’ll look for her,” Max said. “I want to make a thorough inspection of the plane, anyway. It’s just possible that Noman has slipped aboard and is hiding somewhere.”

“Would you know him if you found him?”

“I think so. He’s plump—reminds me a bit of Santa Claus.”

Peaches buckled herself into her seat, and Max made his way forward, tiptoeing so he wouldn’t disturb the other passengers, to the cockpit.

A moment later, he returned. “No pilot,” he said. “I’m beginning to understand why the prices are so reasonable.”

“He’s probably still at the terminal, checking the weather,” Peaches said.

Max looked out a window. “He could do that from here,” he said. “It’s a beautiful day.”

“The weather in New York, I mean.”

“Oh. Well, if he can see what the weather is in New York from the terminal, he’s got better eyes than I have. I can barely see the terminal.”

“You better check the rear of the plane,” Peaches said.

Max moved on, toward the rear of the plane, then disappeared into a rear compartment.

He checked the lavatory, then the baggage compartment. Both were empty. Next, he opened a small door marked: ‘Danger—Do Not Open.’

A bland, unsmiling face appeared. “Hello, Max.”

“Agent 44! What are you doing back here?”

“On duty, Max.”

“Good fella!” Max peered through the opening. “What’s in this compartment?”

“A lot of wires,” 44 replied. “I think they control the plane.”

“Hmmm. All right. But don’t fiddle with anything. It could be dangerous. They ought to put a warning sign on the door to this compartment.”

Max returned to the cabin and buckled himself into the seat next to Peaches.

“Did you find anything?” she asked.

“You wouldn’t believe it.”

“Try me.”

“Would you believe me if I told you I found Agent 44 hiding in the little compartment that contains the wires that control the plane?”

“Hardly.”

“Would you believe Agent 22?”

“No.”

“Agent 11?”

Peaches did not get a chance to reply. At that moment, they heard a sound behind them—the sound of hearty laughter. And, turning, they saw that the pilot had entered the plane. He moved toward them along the aisle.

“Ho! Ho! Ho!” he laughed. He was plump, and looked like a typical airline pilot.

“What’s so funny?” Max asked.

“ ’Tis the season to be jolly.”

Max peered at him closely. “Are you sure you know how to fly a plane?”

“Positive,” the pilot replied. “Although, frankly, I prefer reindeer.”

Max turned to Peaches. “I’ve seen that face somewhere before,” he whispered.

“I think—”

But the pilot broke in. “All ready to fly, are you?”

“Have you checked the weather in New York?” Max asked.

“I can’t see New York from here,” the pilot replied. “I can barely see the terminal.”

“That’s what I told her,” Max said, indicating Peaches. “But she had some crazy idea that—”

“Fasten Seat Belts,” the pilot said, breaking in again.

“Don’t you have a co-pilot?” Max asked.

The pilot shook his head. “They’re too much trouble. They keep wanting to take over the controls. And you’re so busy slapping their hands, you sometimes lose your way.” He saluted. “See you in Kansas City.”

“New York,” Max corrected.

“Oh, yes. Good thing you reminded me.”

The pilot headed up the aisle, then disappeared into the cockpit.

“I still say I’ve seen that face somewhere before,” Max said.

“No, I think it’s the body. It’s plump.”

Max shook his head. “No, it’s the face. I have a little trouble remembering faces, but I never forget a body.”

The engines roared, then the plane began taxiing.

“You’d think the passengers would wake up,” Peaches said.

“Never mind the other passengers. We have work to do.” He took the Plan from his pocket and began studying it. “Let’s see now. We have Sad Al / Astor / Mays / Bronco Con / Map Change / Three Bs and Watch.”

“I’m going to try the Frankmacher method,” Peaches said. “You take the second letter of every word, transpose the letters to numbers, spell out the numbers, then take the first letter of each word, transpose the letters into numbers, then—”

“Do you mind?” Max interrupted. “I’m trying to think. How can I think with you babbling that gibberish in my ear? Please keep your Frankmacher to yourself.”

“Oh, all right.”

The engines were being revved up.

“We must be about ready for take-off,” Max said.

At that moment, sliding panels opened at the front of the cabin, exposing a movie screen.

“Scratch that take-off,” Max said. “Revving up the engines apparently means that the movie is about to start.”

The picture flashed on the screen.

“Drat!” Max said. “I’ve seen it. That’s what happens when you fly these cheap re-run airlines.”

“Max, will you do something about that picture,” Peaches said. “I can’t think with that going on.”

Max got up and went to the front of the cabin. In a service compartment he found a blanket, and he hung it over the screen, then returned to his seat. At that moment, the plane began to move.

“Finally—take-off,” Max said. “Now, let’s settle down to work.”

Peaches began muttering to herself, decoding by means of the Frankmacher method.

“Sad Al,” Max mused aloud. “That might refer to Al Capone. I imagine he was pretty unhappy when they plunked him in jail.”

“So far, I have ‘ALSAROAHHSA’,” Peaches said.

Max ignored her. “Astor. That’s a hotel. That gives me Al Capone in a hotel. Or, any gangster in a hotel. Mays. That definitely refers to baseball.”

“ ‘ALSAROAHHSA’ breaks down to ‘1-12-19-1-18-15-1-8-8-19-1’,” Peaches said.

“And Bronco Con can’t mean anything but Trojan horse. So, that gives me a gangster in a hotel room playing baseball with a Trojan horse. I think I’m getting close.” He frowned, cogitating, and, as he thought, he glanced out the window. Then suddenly he straightened in his seat. “That’s an airport down there,” he said.

“So?”

“It looks like the airport we just left.”

Peaches looked out the window. “It does, doesn’t it.”

“We seem to be flying in circles,” Max said.

“That is strange.”

“Oh well,” Max said, relaxing. “The pilot is probably just taking no chances. My guess is that he’s waiting for another New York-bound plane to take off so he can follow it. That’s the surest way. Especially if you have difficulty distinguishing between New York and Kansas City.”

“I think it’s strange,” Peaches said.

“Back to work,” Max said. “That’s the important thing.” He turned his attention back to the Plan. “Map Change. That might refer to the time when the days change—in other words, 12 midnight. Now, let’s see—Three Bs.”

“I have ‘OTNOEFOEENO,’” Peaches informed him.

Again, Max ignored her. “Three Bs. Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. Music. A tune. A certain tune. ‘Over the Waves.’ ”

“Over the Waves?” Peaches said puzzledly.

“I used to play ‘Over the Waves’ on my piccolo when I was a child.”

Peaches turned back to her deciphering.

“All right now, let’s see what I have,” Max said. “A gangster in the Astor hotel will play baseball with a Trojan horse at 12 midnight to the tune of ‘Over the Waves.’ ” He shook his head, “doh, but not yet it.”

“What about ‘Watch’?”

“That, apparently, is the key word,” Max replied. “But it’s a stumper.”

“Here’s what I have,” Peaches said. “I have ‘FFFFFF.’ Now, ‘F’ is the sixth letter of the alphabet. So, I have ‘666666’. And, following the Frankmasher method, I turn those 6s upside down, and I get ‘999999.’ in other words, I have a series of 9s. And 9 times 9 equals 81. That is two separate numbers, an 8 and a 1. Now, 8 is H—”

“How do you arrive at that?” Max asked.

“ ‘H’ is the eighth letter of the alphabet.”

“Oh, yes, I see.”

“So the 8 and the 1 stand for H and A.”

“HA!”

Peaches saddened. “I’m afraid so.”

From the cockpit they heard the sound of laughter again.

The pilot emerged. “Ho! Ho! Ho!”

“No, it’s ‘Ha! Ha! Ha!,’ ” Max corrected.

“You’re right,” the pilot replied, grinning sinisterly. “The laugh is on you!”

Max stared, stunned. “Noman!”

“It ain’t Santy Claus,” Noman smirked.

“Now I know why we’re circling the airport,” Max said. “You never had any intention of flying us to New York.”

“This is as far as you go,” Noman said. “Hand over the Dooms Day Plan.”

“Not so fast, Noman. We are not alone,” Max said. He got to his feet and addressed the other passengers. “Fellow air travelers,” he said, “there comes a time in every secret agent’s life when he must go to the people for support. My time has come.”

“In spades,” Noman commented.

“The fight waged against the forces of evil by your secret agents is a lonely fight,” Max continued, still addressing the passengers. “Imagine yourself in a lonely hotel room, on a dark and stormy night, in a strange city, with the forces of evil knocking on your door. Sometimes a secret agent wants to cry out ‘Help! Help!’ But he knows that it is his duty to stand alone. However, this is not a hotel room, it is not a dark and stormy night, and we are not in a strange city—so, I think that, for this one time, we can forget about the rules. It would be permissible, I think, considering the circumstance, for me to yell ‘Help! Help!’ ”

“Yell already,” Noman shrugged. “Yell your head off.”

“With your permission, I will,” Max replied. He faced the passengers again. “Help! Help!”

The passengers slept on.

“They *are* tuckered out!” Max said, disappointed.

“They’re dummies,” Noman said.

Max looked at him disapprovingly. “You’re not going to have this airline very long, referring to your passengers in that way,” he said.

“When I say dummy, I mean dummy,” Noman replied. He picked up a passenger and tossed it to the floor. “See? Dummy. Filled with rags. It was a trick to lure you onto the plane. I knew you wouldn’t board the plane if it was empty.”

“As a matter of fact, I would,” Max said. “I like my privacy, too.”

“Enough of this babble,” Noman said. “Hand over the Dooms Day Plan!”

“Not quite yet,” Max said. “A Control secret agent is always prepared for emergencies like this.” He reached into a pocket and brought out a cigarette

lighter. "I'll burn the Plan before I'll turn it over to you, Noman!"

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Just watch me!"

Max flicked the lighter—and a fully inflated life raft popped out.

"Right emergency, wrong lighter," he muttered. "Or, to put it another way—wrong emergency, right lighter."

"It amounts to the same thing," Noman said. "Hand over the Plan."

Resigned, Max passed the Plan to Noman. "Little good it will do you," he said. "When this plane lands it will be immediately surrounded by the National Guard, the city police, and a retired General of the Army, all armed to the teeth."

"That's hard to believe," Noman said.

"Would you believe six members of the Seaford, Long Island, Lions Club, all carrying firecrackers?"

"Hardly."

"Then would you believe—"

"I wouldn't even believe a toy fox terrier with a lit match in its teeth."

"Then there's no point in my mentioning it," Max said. "However, we are thousands of feet in the air, so I see no way for you to escape with the Plan."

"Look out the window," Noman commanded.

Max looked. "That airport is much nearer than it was the last time I looked," he said.

"Before I left the cockpit I put the plane in a crash dive and locked the controls," Noman said. "Within minutes it will hit the ground and explode."

Max shook his head derisively. "That's no way to run an airline," he said.

"You, Max Smart, and your lady cryptographer, will be destroyed."

"And you?"

"You'll notice that I'm wearing a parachute."

"Oh. Is that a parachute? I thought you were putting on a little weight in the rear."

“Now,” Noman said, “I’m going to the door and jump.” He headed down the aisle toward the rear of the plane.

Max followed him. “I know you have your orders, Noman,” he said. “But, secret agent to secret agent, couldn’t we talk this over?”

“I’d like to,” Noman said. “But there isn’t time. The plane is going to crash very soon.”

“Oh . . . well, I understand, then.”

Noman opened the door. “Happy landing!”

“The same to you.”

“Sorry about this,” Noman said.

“You’d better go—time is running out.”

“Yes . . . well . . .”

Noman dived out the doorway. But, just as he did, Max reached out and snatched the Dooms Day Plan from his grasp.

Noman’s cry of protest floated back. “That’s dirty poooooooo . . .”

5.

PEACHES RUSHED to Max's side. They stood together in the doorway of the plane, watching Noman float safely to earth.

"History repeats itself," Max said. "Once more, the bad guy bites the dust."

"But, Max—he's safe, and we're hurtling to our doom."

"True," Max replied. "But you forget one little element—we have the Plan."

"Hooray for us," Peaches said sourly.

"You have to look at it in the broad perspective," Max said. "It's true, as you say, that you and I are doomed. But, on the other hand, the you-know-what of the you-know-what is you-know-whated. That's worth *something*, you know."

"How much in actual cash?"

Max thought for a second. "You have a point there. It might not be unpatriotic for us to try to get ourselves out of this scrape. Let's trot up to the cockpit and see what we can do about changing the course of the plane."

Reaching the cockpit, they slipped into the pilot's and co-pilot's seats. Max grasped the wheel and pulled back on it.

"Locked! Just as Noman said. Well, it's comforting to know, anyway, that he's no liar."

"Max! Do something!"

"I'll call the tower," Max said. "They might have a suggestion. I suppose this is old hat to them." He picked up the pilot's microphone, punched the button, and spoke.

Max: Crashing airplane calling tower. Crashing airplane calling tower. Come in, please. Over.

Tower: Identify yourself, crashing airplane. Over.

Max: Well, let's see . . . what can I say? We're the plane with the sun shining brightly on our fuselage. Our nose is down and our tail is up. And we're about to make violent contact with the earth and explode in a shower of multicolored flames. Over.

Tower: Yes, I see you now. What seems to be the trouble? Over.

Max: Think back on that description I just gave you and I think you'll be able to figure it out. Over.

Tower: Oh, yes . . . Well, I wish there were something I could do to help. But I just don't have time right now. I'm going off duty. Could you call back tomorrow? About eight hours earlier? Over.

Max: May I make a countersuggestion? Over.

Tower: It's your nickel. Over.

Max: Perhaps I could talk to your relief. He might have something to offer. Over.

Tower: Oh, I'm *sure* he would. Old Big Mouth. You name it and he's got the answer. But I'm afraid that would involve us all in a nasty jurisdictional dispute. You see, you're crashing in my time period. So you're my responsibility. If I turn you over to Big Mouth, he'd get to share in all the glory. Over.

Max: Glory? Over.

Tower: Whenever there's a crash, the tower operator on duty is always interviewed on TV. Over.

Max: I can understand that. But I'm a little vague on the jurisdictional aspect. Could you fill me in? Over.

Tower: My wife has jurisdiction over my TV appearances, and Big Mouth's wife has jurisdiction of his TV appearances. My wife would have a tantrum. She's grooming me to be the new Arthur Godfrey. Over.

Max: My best wishes. Over.

Tower: Care to hear a ukulele solo? Over.

Max: I thought you were going off duty. Over.

Tower: We could consider it an encore. I don't mind cheating a bit if it will help my career. Over.

Max: All right. May I make a request? Over.

Tower: Anything you want to hear. Over.

Max: Give me one chorus of ‘How to Land an Airplane that is Headed Straight for the Ground with the Controls Locked’. Over.

Tower: In what key? Over.

Max: At this point, I don’t think it matters very much. Looking out the window, I see that we’re only about ten feet from the ground. Over.

Tower: I think you better make that ‘Over and Out’. Over and out.

Max put aside the microphone. He turned to Peaches. “It might be a good idea to close your eyes,” he suggested. “I suspect the next few minutes are going to be rather messy.”

“Max! No! Look! The plane is leveling off!”

Max stared out the window. “Fantastic! We’re coming in for a perfect three-point landing!”

“What happened?” Peaches said, baffled.

“Apparently I’m a better pilot than I thought,” Max replied. “Which is pretty amazing, since I’ve never had a lesson in my life.”

“Max, you didn’t do anything.”

“Then who, what—” Max suddenly brightened. “Of course!”

“What is it?”

“Follow me,” Max said.

He got out of the pilot’s seat, left the cockpit, and made his way down the aisle toward the rear of the plane. Peaches tagged after him, perplexed. Max entered the rear section of the plane, then opened the door to the compartment that housed the control wires. The emotionless face of Agent 44 appeared in the opening.

“You did it!” Max said.

“I’m sorry, Max,” 44 replied sheepishly. “I was just fooling around. I got lonesome back here. Did I break anything?”

“Only our fall,” Max replied. “We were crashing, 44, and you brought us in for a perfect landing!”

“Imagine that! And I’ve never had a lesson in my life.”

“You have a natural talent, obviously,” Max said. “Don’t spoil it, 44, by taking lessons.”

“I won’t.”

“So long, 44,” Max said. “And thanks again.”

“My pleasure. See you around, Max.”

Max closed the door, then led the way out of the plane.

As they crossed the runway toward the terminal, Peaches said, “Max, I’m not interested in doing any more flying today.”

“Relax,” Max replied. “Since I. M. Noman probably waited around to see the crash, and then saw us land, he’s undoubtedly still here at the airport. I imagine he’s just itching for us to get aboard another plane—so he can plan another of his devilish tricks. But, we’re going to out-fox him. We’re going to drive to New York!”

“Is your car here, Max?”

“My car is parked in front of Control headquarters,” Max replied. “We couldn’t use it, anyway. It has a bug in it. Every time I slam the door the cannon goes off.”

“I won’t ask you to explain that. But, tell me, if you don’t have your car here, how are we going to drive to New York?”

“Simple. We’ll rent a car.”

“That *is* simple!” Peaches said, surprised. “How did *you* think of it?”

“It wasn’t easy,” Max replied.

They entered the terminal, then went to the rent-a-car desk.

“We’d like to rent a car,” Max said to the girl behind the counter.

“Fancy that!” she replied. “Most of our customers ask for elephants.”

“That’s very funny,” Max said sourly. “But, do you mind? We’re in a bit of a hurry.”

“Where are you taking this car?” the girl said.

“I’m sorry. That’s classified information.”

“Well . . . when will you bring it back?”

“Sorry. Top secret.”

“Why don’t you take a bus?” the girl suggested. “There’s always a bus leaving every-hour-on-the-hour—more or less—and you can leave the driving to the bus driver.”

“Madam, we want to rent a car.”

“All right. Tell me where you’re taking it.”

Max sighed. “New York, then possibly Moscow, then possibly Peking.”

“Moscow and Peking are across a couple of oceans, aren’t they?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea,” Max replied. “I intended to stop at a filling station on the way and ask.”

“Will you promise not to get water in our ash trays?”

“The minute we reach the ocean,” Max replied, “I’ll wrap your ash trays in waterproof bags.”

“Fine. We’re very careful about our ash trays. Do what you want with the rest of the car, but please take care of the ash trays.” She made an unpleasant face. “Some of our customers put ashes in them.”

“May we have the car now?”

The girl handed him a card. “This is your authorization. Just go up to the roof. A car will be along in a minute.”

Max peered at her. “The roof?”

“That’s the only way you can get a car from us. We drive it by and you jump into it from the roof. That’s how we put you in the driver’s seat.”

Max turned and looked around the terminal. “Does the second largest rent-a-car outfit have an office here?” he said.

“Oh, all right. If you’re chicken, you can get into the driver’s seat any way you want to. But don’t expect to see yourself on TV.”

Max and Peaches left the desk and went outside. Soon, a car pulled up—driverless—and they got into it and drove off.

“Do you know the way to New York?” Peaches asked.

“Of course. I have a map of every country and state in the world etched in my mind.”

“Then how do you get to New York?”

“Simple. You head straight toward the top of the page. You drive through the yellow state and the green state, and when you get to the pink state, you’re in New York.”

“I’m relieved,” Peaches said. “For a second, I didn’t think you really knew.” She leaned back in her seat. “Now, may I have the Plan? While we’re driving, I’ll try to decipher it.”

Max handed her the Dooms Day Plan. “I don’t actually need it any more,” he said. “The words are etched in my mind.”

“I think I’ll try transposing the letters into mathematical symbols,” Peaches said. “That’s the Phorbisher system.”

“Lots of luck,” Max said. “I’ll stick to my own system, if you don’t mind.”

Peaches pointed to the speedometer. “You’re driving too fast.”

“I can’t help it,” Max replied. “This is the way secret agents are required to drive. Scary, isn’t it?”

“But what’s the hurry?”

“There isn’t any hurry. But when a secret agent drives, he has to drive fast. Rule No. 13.”

“Isn’t 13 bad luck?”

“It is if you and another secret agent happen to meet at a cross street.”

Peaches suddenly sat up. “What’s that? That sound. It sounds like a siren!”

Max looked in the rear-view mirror. “There’s a police car following us,” he said. “Probably chasing some criminal.”

“Or a speeder?”

“Yes, that’s possible.” Max peered ahead. “But I don’t see a speeder.”

“You, you idiot!”

“Oh,” Max winced.

The police car, siren wailing, drew up alongside. The trooper at the wheel motioned for Max to pull over.

“He’s signaling!” Peaches said.

“Are you sure? Maybe he’s just waving. After all, we’re in the same trade—more or less.”

“Pull over!” Peaches insisted.

Max slowed down and eased the car off the highway, then stopped. The police car came to a halt, too, and the trooper got out and walked back to Max’s car. The trooper was plump. He looked like a typical trooper.

“Where’s the conflagration?” the trooper asked.

“Conflagration, officer?”

“That’s college talk for ‘fire’,” the trooper explained. “I’m one of the new breed of police officers—college educated.”

“Oh. Well, actually, there isn’t any fire. That is, not that I know of. Although, considering the number of little boys who play with matches, I suppose there must be a fire somewhere.”

“I’ll have to take you in,” the trooper said.

“What’s the charge, officer?”

“Speeding.”

“Well then, I’m afraid I’ll have to take you in, too, officer,” Max said. “You were driving as fast—if not faster—than I was. Faster, I believe. See? Your car is parked ahead of mine, so you must have been driving faster. I’ll have to make a citizen’s arrest.”

The trooper smiled. “That’s only fair,” he said. “Who’ll lead?”

“Lead?”

“We’ll have to drive to the courthouse in the nearest town and face the judge,” the trooper explained. “I could lead, or you could lead. As long as we both get there, the judge won’t mind.”

“I don’t believe I know the way,” Max said.

“Then I’ll lead. Follow me.”

Max started to get out of his car.

“No,” the trooper said, “I mean follow me in your car. I’ll be in *my* car.”

“Lucky you went to college,” Max said. “Otherwise, I might have had a long walk ahead of me.”

The trooper returned to his car, got in, then proceeded along the highway. Max and Peaches followed in their car.

“Wasn’t there something familiar about that trooper?” Peaches said.

“As a matter of fact, yes. He reminds me a little of Harry Hagedorn, a boy I knew in seventh grade. Except that Harry was much shorter. Of course, he was only thirteen at the time.”

“No, I mean someone we’ve met recently.”

“The girl at the rent-a-car desk?”

Peaches shook her head.

“Beats me,” Max said. “Maybe it will come to you.”

They entered a small town. The streets were totally deserted. The buildings looked extremely temporary—as if they might consist only of false fronts.

“These picturesque small towns fascinate me,” Max said. “This one looks almost like a movie set—as if it were put up for some special purpose and would be torn down tomorrow.”

“It does look un-lived in,” Peaches frowned.

“Ahh . . . here we are,” Max said, pulling up behind the trooper’s car, which had stopped.

Max and Peaches got out, and joined the trooper, who was waiting.

“The courthouse is just up the street a ways,” the trooper said.

“A ways?”

“I talk that rustic talk when I stop in these small towns,” the trooper explained. “Let ’em know you have a college education, and you’re dead.”

“Yes, I suppose so. Well, lead the ways.”

They marched up the street.

“Isn’t it strange that none of the natives are out on the street?” Peaches said.

“Not really,” Max replied. “Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun. There probably isn’t a mad dog or Englishman in the whole town.”

“None of the stores seem to be open. In fact, I don’t think they’ve ever been open.”

Max stopped and rubbed a clean spot on the dusty window of a store. He saw the face of Agent 44 peering out at him from inside. Max nodded, then moved on.

“I’m worried,” Peaches said.

“Relax,” Max said. “We have at least one friend in this town.”

“Who?”

“You wouldn’t believe it.”

The trooper stopped in front of a dilapidated building. “This is it,” he said. “It’s not much, but it’s fine for collecting fines.”

“Fine,” Max replied.

They entered the building, then the trooper led them into a small courtroom.

“The judge is probably in the back room,” the trooper said. “I’ll get him.”

“Don’t try to sneak away,” Max said. “Remember—you’re under arrest.”

“Promise.”

The trooper disappeared into the back room. “Max, I’m getting worrieder and worrieder,” Peaches said.

“I don’t see why. Speaking as our lawyer, I’m sure I can get us off. Our arrest, as I see it, is clearly unconstitutional. It violates our freedom of speedsh.” He smiled. “Get it?”

“Where do I get another lawyer?”

“Never fear. With me—”

Max was interrupted by the sound of the door of the back room opening. The judge appeared. He was plump, and looked like a typical small town judge.

“Your Honor, first I want to say that this is a travesty of justice,” Max said. “Next, I’d like to say: Where is the trooper who arrested us?”

“He left by the back door,” the judge replied. “He’s got to get back to the highway and catch himself another city slicker.”

“But that man was under arrest!” Max protested. “I caught him speeding!”

“He told me all about it,” the judge said, seating himself at his bench. “I tossed the case out of court and released him. You were violating his constitutional right of freedom of the press.”

“I don’t quite understand that, Judge.”

“His freedom to press charges against you,” the judge explained.

“Oh. Well, in that case . . .”

“Now, we’ll get to your case,” the Judge said. “How do you plead?”

“What’s the choice?” Max asked.

“Guilty or Not Guilty or Somewhere-in-Between,”

“How about a little sample of each?” Max suggested.

“The Court finds you guilty,” the Judge said. “Do you have a statement to make before sentence is passed? Too late. You had your chance and muffed it. Now, I’ll pass sentence.”

“That wasn’t much of a chance, Judge,” Max complained. “And I had a dandy statement all ready, too.”

“Sorry about that,” the Judge said. “Rise, please, so I can pass sentence.”

“We’re already standing, Judge.”

“I thought you looked pretty tall for a pair who were sitting down.”

“Judge, if you don’t mind, would you get it over with?” Max said. “We have other fish to fry.”

The Judge cleared his throat, then said, “I sentence you to hand over the Dooms Day Plan.”

“Max!” Peaches squealed. “It just came to me—that’s Noman!”

“That’s hard to believe,” Max said.

The Judge pulled a pistol and pointed it at Max. “Would you believe this?”

Max nodded. “That, I believe. Noman, I’ll have to give you credit—you’ve done it again. You’re a worthy adversary.”

“Stow the gab and hand over the Plan,” Noman said.

“Not likely,” Max replied. “Before I’d hand over the Plan to you, I’d burn it.”

“With the same life raft you used to burn it last time?” Noman smirked.

“Max Smart never makes the same mistake twice,” Max said. He took his ballpoint pen from his pocket. “This pen, among other things, happens to be an acetylene torch,” he said. “I’ll just depress the button on the top and—”

There was the sound of a small motor.

“That’s the hair-dryer again, Max,” Peaches said.

“Well, if at first you don’t succeed—” Max depressed the button again.

Noman leaned forward over the bench, looking puzzled. “What are you going to do with one chopstick?”

“Let’s not panic,” Max said. “There’s an acetylene torch in there somewhere.”

“You’re not operating the pen correctly,” Noman said. “You should use both hands. Here, let me take that sheet of paper you’re holding in your left hand—just to get it out of your way.”

“That *might* help,” Max said. He handed the sheet of paper to Noman.

“Max! You gave him the Plan!” Peaches shrieked.

“No, I didn’t. I gave him— Oh, yes . . . that *is* the Plan, isn’t it. Well, I guess that’s a horse on me.”

“And, now—once more—I bid you *adieu*,” Noman said. “Happy landing!”

“I don’t think that’s the appropriate farewell,” Max said. “We’re no longer in a plane.”

“No, but you’re standing over a trap door. The effect will be the same. I’ll just pull this lever, and—”

The trap door opened beneath Max and Peaches.

Peaches screamed.

Max reached out and snatched the Plan from Noman.

Then they disappeared beneath the floor.

Noman sighed woefully. “Will I ever learn?”

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6.

SURPRISINGLY, MAX and Peaches landed on a soft carpet. When they looked around, they found they were in what appeared to be the living room of a comfortable suburban home. Besides the wall-to-wall carpet, there were comfortable-looking sofas and chairs, lamps and tables, and a large television set. And most surprising of all, the room was occupied. A number of men were seated around the TV set, absorbed in a program.

“The only thing I can think of is, there must be a mistake,” Max said. “I think Noman used the wrong trap door.”

Peaches shook her head. “No, Max. Look at the door. It has bars on it.”

“Oh, yes, I see. Well, if I had to be in a cell, this is the cell I’d choose.” He frowned. “I wonder what those other prisoners are in for?”

“They seem happy enough,” Peaches said. “They must be drugged or something. They didn’t even look up when we dropped through the floor.”

“Let’s check it out,” Max said.

They moved to the nearest chair, where a middle-aged man was seated, hunched forward, staring at the TV screen.

“Excuse me,” Max said. “I wonder—”

“Shhhhh!” the man said, annoyed, keeping his eyes on the screen.

“I guess we’ll have to wait for a commercial,” Max said.

As they waited, they watched the program. It was a soap opera, in which the heroine, Little Eva, was being chased across an ice floe by the villain, Simon Legree, and a pack of bloodhounds.

“I think I’ve seen it before,” Max said. “As I recall, just as Simon Legree and the bloodhounds are about to catch Little Eva, a squadron of Royal Mounted Police swoop down in helicopters and—”

“Now you’ve done it,” the man in the chair grumbled. “All the suspense is gone.”

“Sorry about that,” Max said sheepishly.

“Oh, well, this is the fourth time I’ve seen this episode anyway,” the man said. “This is the morning rerun of the noon rerun of the afternoon rerun of the evening program. I caught it first in 1936 when it was on a two-inch screen.”

“Has it changed any?” Max asked.

“It’s grown about nineteen inches,” the man replied. “But otherwise it’s the same.” He looked at Max closely. “Aren’t you new here?”

“We just dropped in,” Max said. “We don’t intend to stay.”

“Too bad.”

“You *like* it here?” Max said, puzzled.

“Why not? Four square meals a day, comfortable chairs, and a twenty-one-inch screen. What more could a man ask for?”

“But aren’t you locked in?”

“Sure. That’s the best part. This way, we’re not tempted to wander off.”

“But don’t you miss your freedom?” Peaches said.

The man squinted at her. “You been outside lately, lady?”

“Yes. We just came in from the outside.”

“What was going on out there?”

“Well, let’s see . . . We nearly got driven into the Potomac River . . . and we were almost in an airplane crash . . . and we were arrested for speeding . . . and . . .”

“In other words, a typical day,” the man said. “And you can ask me if I miss my freedom?”

“Yes, but—” Peaches thought for a second, then sat down in one of the chairs. “He’s right, Max. Have a seat.”

“You forget,” Max said. “Noman is probably on his way down here. And when he gets here, he’ll demand the Plan. Let’s not forget—the you-know-what of the entire you-know-what is hanging in the you-know-what.”

“That sounds familiar,” the man said. “You must be a Control agent.” He indicated the other men. “We were all Control agents once,” he said. “But, luckily, we were captured by Noman.” He smiled, recalling. “Oh, the many

times I've heard that call to duty—the you-know-what of the entire you-know-what is hanging in the you-know-what. Fortunately, I don't remember what it means any more."

Max crooked a finger at Peaches. "I'd like to speak to you in private, please," he said.

"I'm just getting comfortable."

"If you don't mind!"

Reluctantly, Peaches got up and followed Max to the other side of the room.

"I think we're in luck," Max said. "Right now, these men are under the spell of the TV set. But . . . once a Control agent, always a Control agent. I think I can revive their interest in the fate of the you-know-what. And when I do, they'll rebel and help us break out of this cell."

"They'd be fools to," Peaches said. "They've got it made."

"Nevertheless, instinct is stronger than security."

"Who told you that?"

"I just made it up," Max replied. "And now I'll prove it."

Max stepped to the center of the room. "Gentlemen!" he called. "May I have your attention!"

The program had paused so that the sponsor could deliver a commercial, so the men turned to Max.

"Gentlemen, my name is Max Smart. I have been sent here by Control to liberate you from the clutches of that diabolical monster, I. M. Noman."

A voice replied. "Yeaaaa! Noman! Booooo! Smart!"

"I think you will change your minds," Max went on, "when you learn that I have in my possession a Dooms Day Plan. As long as I keep the Plan, the world, as we know it, is safe. *But*—if the Plan falls into the hands of Noman, I think we can expect a *pretty messy* world in the near future. Consequently, I call upon you to—"

Max had lost his audience. The program was on again, and the men had turned back to it.

Max sighed. "I guess I'll have to wait for the station break," he said.

But at that moment Noman appeared at the bars of the cell.

“Smart!” he called. “Hand the Plan through the bars to me!”

“Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin,” Max replied.

“Smart, the cord to the television set is plugged in outside the cell. Hand me the Plan or I’ll unplug it. And when the set goes dead, these prisoners will go stark raving mad and destroy everything and everyone within reach. It’ll be a cruel way to go, Smart.”

“The key word is ‘everything,’ Noman. They’ll also destroy the Plan.”

Noman winced. “You have a point there. They’d be mad as wet hens back at Headquarters.” He sighed. “I’ll just have to come in and get it.”

“This is our chance,” Max said to Peaches. “When he opens the cell door, we’ll rush him.”

But Noman first pulled out a pistol, *then* opened the cell door.

“Scratch that,” Max said to Peaches. “We’ll have to play it by ear.”

Just then the program ended, and the between programs commercial came on. Noman took advantage of the situation.

“Prisoners,” he said. “You have an enemy in your midst.”

The men turned toward Max and Peaches, showing their teeth.

“That piece of paper that Smart is holding,” Noman said. “It’s next week’s program schedule. Get it!”

The men rushed at Max.

But Max wadded the Plan into a ball and tossed it across the room to Peaches. “Run!”

Peaches caught the ball—but found herself hemmed in by another group of men. She tossed it to Max.

Max caught it, and started to throw it back. But just then he was struck on the arm by one of the men.

“Foul!” Max cried.

The men stood back, looking sheepish.

“That’s a free-throw for me,” Max said. “Everybody keep away!”

The men waited, tense and eager. And Max lobbed the ball to Peaches.

As she caught it, the men came to life and rushed at her once more.

Peaches tossed the ball high into the air—toward Max. But, as the ball rose toward the ceiling, the trap door above opened, and a hand reached down and snatched the ball from the air.

“Interference!” Noman shrieked.

“What happened?” Peaches asked, perplexed.

“I think the referee got into the game,” Max said.

Noman whipped around and raced from the cell, leaving the door open.

“After him!” Max cried.

Max and Peaches ran from the cell, and saw Noman disappearing up a stairway.

At the same time, the men in the cell cried out to Max and Peaches. “Stop! Wait! Lock the door!”

Max and Peaches halted.

“Lock the door?” Max said.

“We might escape!” one of the men explained fearfully.

“Oh . . . yes.” Max walked back to the cell and locked it. “There you are—snug in your spell in the cell.”

“We’ll never forget you for this,” the men said. “If you ever have a TV program, we promise to watch you.”

“That’s hardly likely,” Max said. He turned back to Peaches. “Onward and upward!” he cried.

They raced up the stairs. And just as they reached the top they saw Noman again. He went charging through the doorway. As he did, however, a foot was stuck in his path, and he fell flat on his face and skidded across the floor.

Max and Peaches reached the doorway just in time to see Noman plummet through the trap door.

“Happy landing!” Max called out.

They went to the trap door and looked down. Noman was in the locked cell, shaking a fist up at them.

Max shook a fist back at him.

“Why are you doing that?” Peaches asked.

“Good manners are never out of fashion,” Max replied. “When someone shakes a fist at you, politeness requires that you shake a fist back at him.” He closed the trap door. “That, I suspect, is the end of Noman,” he said.

“I hope so. But, Max, where is the Plan?”

Max looked around the room. It was vacant. “Look for a foot,” he said.

“A foot?”

“The foot that tripped Noman. Attached to that foot, I think, we will find our benefactor—whoever it was who snatched the Plan out of the air.”

“I wouldn’t even know where to look,” Peaches said.

“Logic will reveal the answer,” Max replied. “Now, logically, where would you expect to find a foot? In a shoe—right? And where would you expect to find a shoe?”

“On a foot?”

“Technically, yes. But I don’t think that kind of reasoning will get us anywhere. Where *else* would you expect to find a shoe? The answer, obviously, is: in a shoe store.”

“Max, you’re mad.”

“May I remind you that there is only a thin line between madness and genius. Now,” he said, glancing around, “let’s look for a thin line.”

“How about this crack in the floor?”

“That’s it!” Max said.

They followed the crack in the floor, which led to the doorway, which led outside.

Max looked up and down the street. “There it is,” he said, pointing. “The Happy Feet Shoe Store.”

They went to the store and entered. There was no one in sight.

“The Plan is lost,” Peaches said. “That must have been another KAOS agent who took it.”

“Let’s not give up yet,” Max said. “Not while we still have logic on our side. Now, where, in a shoe store, would a shoe be? In a shoe box, right?”

“I want to go home,” Peaches moaned.

Max walked to the shelves of shoe boxes. “Do you have any idea what size shoe that was that tripped up Noman?” he said.

“12-C?”

“No, I think it was closer to a size . . . Ah, here it is,” Max said. “A size 44.”

Max pulled the shoe box from the shelf—and the face of Agent 44 appeared in the opening.

“Here’s the Plan, Max,” 44 said, pushing the paper out through the opening.

“Thank you, 44.”

“See you around, Max.”

“Duck,” Max replied.

44 ducked. And Max pushed the shoe box back into the hole.

Max turned to Peaches. “Simple logic,” he said.

“Can we leave now?” Peaches said. “Even if Noman *is* locked in that cell, I’m frightened. Maybe he has another key. He may be looking for us right now.”

“I doubt that,” Max said. “I have a feeling that we’ve seen the last of Noman. Besides, I think I better report in to the Chief. As I told you, he worries.”

“All right. But hurry!”

Max took off his shoe, and dialed.

Chief: Chief, here. Who’s calling?

Max: This is Max, Chief.

Chief: Max who?

Max: Max Smart, Chief. Remember me? The one you worry about if I don’t call in every once in a while.

Chief: Oh, yes, *that* Max. Well, where are you, Max—New York, Moscow or Peking?

Max: Actually, Chief, we're in a little town outside Washington. We've had a number of setbacks.

Chief: Max—the Plan. Do you still have the Plan?

Max: At the moment, yes. And, Chief, I have also found a number of the agents we've lost over the past few years. They're here in this little town. They're watching television.

Chief: Max, we must have a bad connection. I thought you said they're watching television.

Max: It isn't the connection, Chief. That's exactly what I said.

Chief: Max, that's hard to believe.

Max: Would you believe that they're watching radio?

Chief: I don't believe so.

Max: Then would you believe that they're watching the third window from the left on the second floor of the building next door, waiting for the shade to go up?

Chief: That sounds more like it. Tell them as soon as that shade goes up I want them to get right back here, Max. If they're back by noon tomorrow, they can keep their retirement benefits.

Max: I know a taxi driver who will be happy to hear that, Chief.

Chief: Max, have you deciphered the code yet?

Max: There's still some debate about that, Chief. But, if you have an agent stationed in the Astor hotel, you might ask him to check the rooms. If he finds a gangster playing baseball with a Trojan horse to the tune of 'Over the Waves,' then, yes, I think we've broken the code.

Chief: I'll check it out, Max. But, in the meantime, keep trying.

Max: Will do.

Max hung up and put his shoe back on his foot.

"Now can we go?" Peaches said nervously.

“Just one little matter to take care of,” Max said. “I have some good news for those missing Control agents. They may not lose their retirement benefits.”

Peaches sagged. “I’ll wait in the car,” she said.

They left the shoe store and walked to the car. Max left Peaches there, then entered the courthouse.

He returned a few minutes later.

“Did you tell them?” Peaches asked.

Max nodded sadly. “Yes.”

“What did they say?”

“They said, ‘TV, sí—Retirement Benefits, no.’ ”

“That’s too bad,” Peaches said.

“Yes, and that’s not all. Noman is no longer in the cell.”

“He escaped! I knew it!”

“However, little good it will do him,” Max said. “We have the Plan, and we’re on our way to New York. And, in this car, there’s no way he can stop us. We’re not likely to fall for that trooper gag again.”

“He’ll think of something else!”

“I will not stop this car again for anything,” Max said, getting in behind the wheel.

“Suppose we run out of gas?”

“I’ll peddle!”

Max started the engine and headed the car toward the highway. “While I drive, you work on the code,” he said, handing the Plan to Peaches.

She handed it back. “I’ve lost interest,” she said. “Why bother? We’re doomed, anyway. With Noman after us, we don’t have a chance.”

“There’s one thing you seem to forget,” Max said. “You are in the care of Control’s top agent—Max Smart.”

“Forget? That’s what makes me sure we’re doomed!” A tear trickled down her cheek. “My whole life has been wasted,” she wept.

“I don’t see how you can say that—you’ve known me.”

“Business, business, business,” Peaches sobbed. “All my life, I’ve kept my nose to the grindstone. And what’s it got me?”

“A short nose?”

“Nothing. Nothing but money and fame.”

“Fame?”

“In the world of cryptographers.”

“Oh.”

“I’ve missed out on the best part of life—romance,” Peaches wept.

“Actually, that’s not the best part,” Max said. “The best part is that instant when you get the shower adjusted exactly right and the water stops scalding you.”

“A waste!” Peaches wailed. “My whole life has been a waste!”

Max stopped the car.

“I thought you weren’t going to stop the car for anything.”

“This is an emergency,” Max replied. “Emergencies don’t count.”

“But why did you stop?”

“Somebody has to try to break that code,” Max said. “Since you won’t do it, I’ll have to. But I can’t break codes and drive, too. So, you’ll have to do the driving.”

“Oh, all right.”

Peaches got behind the wheel, and Max settled in the passenger’s seat. Then they started up again.

Max concentrated his attention on the Plan. “Let’s see . . . ‘Astor’. Now, the Astors have money—they must have, if they own a hotel. And ‘Mays’. Willie Mays, as I recall, is a highly-paid ball player. There we have ‘money’ again. Now—”

“Max, make a list for me, will you, please,” Peaches said.

“A list?”

“A list of all the romantic things I intend to do if I get out of this alive.”

“I’m busy with the code.”

“Just a little list. You can do both. I don’t want to forget any of these things.”

“Couldn’t you make a mental list?”

“The old me could have,” Peaches said. “But not the new me. The new me is an empty-headed blonde.”

Max got a sheet of notepaper from his notebook. “All right, but keep the list short,” he said.

“I’ll try. Put down: Fly to Rome, drop three coins in the fountain.”

“Got it,” Max said. “Now then, the code. We have Astor money, and Mays money. Oops! I forgot ‘Sad Al. Al, of course, is Al Capone—who was jailed for not paying income tax. And income tax suggests money.”

“Put down: Cruise to Bermuda,” Peaches said.

“Got it.” Max replied, shifting papers. “Okay now, where was I? Oh, yes. Three hotels in the fountain. Is that right?”

“We’re coming to the highway,” Peaches said.

“Fine. When we reach it, head for New York.”

“Put down: Dinner by candlelight.”

“Got it.”

“How are you doing on the code, Max?”

“So far, I have Al Capone taking a shower in a fountain.”

“How did you get that?”

“I’m not sure,” Max replied. “But what really puzzles me is that he’s doing it on a cruise to Bermuda. Are there many fountains on board ships these days?”

“I don’t know. But it sounds romantic,” Peaches giggled.

“Ah, well, let’s see,” Max said, concentrating on the Plan again. “Willie Mays by candlelight. No, that’s not right. What’s my next word? Oh, yes . . . Bronco Con. Con suggests a confidence game, which is usually played for money. And Bronco suggests horse. Horses are usually found at race tracks. And race tracks are where you bet money. So, we have money again.”

“Put down: Soft music.”

“Got it.”

“This highway seems familiar,” Peaches said.

“All highways seem familiar,” Max replied. “They’re all the same, a long stretch of concrete.”

“That must be it.”

“Al Capone betting his income tax money on a horse at the race track,” Max mused. “The name of the horse is ‘Cruise to Bermuda.’ And the name of the jockey is ‘Dinner by Candlelight.’ Then the name of the race track must be—”

“Washington, D. C.,” Peaches said.

“No, I don’t have that name on my list.”

“I meant that sign,” Peaches said, pointing.

Max looked. He saw a highway sign saying: Washington, D. C.

“We’re right back where we started from,” Peaches said.

“I told you to head for New York!”

“But you didn’t say which way New York was. How was I supposed to know? I’m an empty-headed blonde.”

“Well, we’re here now,” Max said disgustedly. “Drive into town and find the train station and we’ll take a train to New York. If you tried to drive us there, we’d probably end up in Moscow.”

“Or Peking,” Peaches giggled.

“Right.”

“Put down: Trip to Chinatown,” Peaches said.

“Got it.”

“Have you broken the code yet, Max?”

“I’m getting close,” Max replied. “I have Al Capone betting a fountain on a horse named ‘Candlelight in Bermuda.’ The horse is being ridden by a jockey named ‘Chinatown,’ who is taking a shower to Rome, where he intends to drop three coins in the soft music. How does that sound to you?”

Perfect!” Peaches said. “But then, I’m an empty-headed blonde.”

“I wish I were,” Max said. “As a level-headed brunette, it doesn’t make much sense to me.”

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7.

WHEN MAX and Peaches reached the train station, they parked the car, then went inside. The station was crowded. A red cap rushed up to them.

“Carry your bags, sir?” he said to Max.

“We don’t have any bags,” Max replied.

“Carry your Dooms Day Plan, then?”

“Why, yes,” Max said. He started to hand the Plan to the red cap—then stopped. “Oh, no you don’t! You’re—”

But the red cap quickly disappeared in the crowd.

“That was close!” Max said. “Do you know who that was?”

“I’ve never seen him before,” Peaches replied. “But he was sort of romantic-looking, wasn’t he?”

“That was Noman!”

“Oh, was it? I don’t remember him being so romantic-looking before.”

“Which only goes to prove the old saying: Romantic-looking is in the eyes of the beholder,” Max said. “From now on, keep an eye out for romantic-looking men. They’re Noman!”

They went to the ticket window, and Max addressed the agent. “We’d like to get a train to New York,” he said.

“Well, we have some nice tracks you could use,” the agent replied.

“Pardon?”

“Tracks,” the agent said. “You could try to get it there by bus, but I doubt that you could get it in the luggage compartment. Unless it’s a small train. Exactly how big is this train you want to get to New York?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Max replied. “It’s your train, not mine. Do you have a train going to New York?”

“Oh, yes, lots of trains going to New York,” the agent answered. “How would you like to go? By way of Philadelphia?”

“I’m not sure. How does your fastest train go?”

“The same as all the others,” the agent replied. “It goes: Choo-Choo-Choo!”

“Then that’s the one we’ll take,” Max said. “Two tickets, please.”

“Round-trip or one-way?”

“One-way,” Max replied. “We’ll probably fly back from Peking.”

“Sorry—we’re all out of one-way tickets.”

“Then give us a round-trip ticket and we’ll split it in two,” Max said. “I’ll use half, and the lady will use half.”

“All right. But she’ll be coming while you’re going.”

“The way she is now, she doesn’t know whether she’s coming or going, anyway,” Max said. “The typical empty-headed blonde.”

The agent handed over the ticket. “The train leaves in exactly one hour,” he said.

“Isn’t there a train that goes sooner?”

“No, I told you, they all go: Choo-Choo-Choo!”

Max turned back to Peaches. “Well, apparently we have no choice,” he said. “We’ll have to wait.”

“Let’s have lunch,” Peaches said.

“I’ll go to the restaurant with you,” Max replied. “But I won’t be able to eat.”

“Nervous tummy?”

“No, I’m skipping lunches to pay for that parachute—remember?”

“Oh . . . yes. Well, anyway, let’s go to the restaurant. Maybe we’ll meet a romantic stranger.”

“I hope not,” Max said. “Any romantic stranger we meet is likely to be Noman.”

They left the ticket window and walked toward the restaurant. On the way, Max kept glancing about, as if expecting to be attacked. “I’d feel safer if I didn’t have this Dooms Day Plan on me,” he said.

“You could check it in a locker,” Peaches suggested.

“That’s an excellent idea,” Max said. “In fact, I was just about to think of that myself.”

They detoured and went to the row of public lockers. Max opened the door of one of the empty lockers—and found himself face-to-face with Agent 44.

“You’re right on the job, 44,” Max said. He passed him the plan. “Hold onto that until we return,” he said. “And guard it with your life.”

“That’s what I’m here for,” 44 replied.

Max closed the door, dropped a quarter into the slot, then removed the key and put it into his pocket.

“You should have put my valuable list of romantic things to do in there, too,” Peaches said. “If it gets lost, I’ll have to start thinking all over again. And for an empty-headed blonde that’s not easy.”

“Aren’t you overdoing this empty-headed blonde business?” Max said, as they headed once more for the restaurant.

“Practice makes perfect,” Peaches said.

As they entered the restaurant, the headwaiter approached them.

“On your toes,” Max said to Peaches. “This fellow looks like Noman to me.”

“Max, I don’t—”

But she was too late. The headwaiter had reached them. And as he opened his mouth to speak, Max grasped him by the wrist, turned, and flung him over his shoulder. The headwaiter landed on the flat of his back on the floor.

“Table for two?” the headwaiter said painfully, looking up.

Max eyed him narrowly. “That’s the wrong line,” he said. “You’re supposed to demand the Plan.”

“I didn’t know,” the headwaiter apologized. “I thought all I was supposed to do was take you to a table. That’s all I’ve been doing for years.”

“Max,” Peaches said, “he isn’t Noman.”

“Apparently not,” Max said. “But he sure fooled me.” He extended a hand to the headwaiter. “Sorry about that,” he said. “I thought you were a

fellow I know.”

“I’m glad I’m not,” the headwaiter said, accepting Max’s hand and pulling himself up. “If I were, and you did that to me, do you know what I’d do?”

Max shook his head. “No, what?”

The headwaiter clipped Max at the back of the neck with a karate chop. Max dropped to the floor.

“That,” the headwaiter smiled.

“And I would have deserved it,” Max said, rising. “But, of course, I would have to respond in kind.”

“In kind?”

“Like this,” Max said.

He pounded a fist into the headwaiter’s midsection. The headwaiter doubled over, then collapsed.

“Now I know what ‘in kind’ means,” the headwaiter smiled from his position on the floor. “It means something like this.”

The headwaiter swung a leg, knocking Max’s legs out from under him. Max joined the waiter on the floor.

“Yes,” Max said, “table for two, please.”

The headwaiter got to his feet. “Right this way, sir.”

“Thank you,” Max replied, rising.

Max and Peaches followed the headwaiter to a table. When they were seated, he bowed, then departed.

“Nice fellow,” Max said. “But he’s wasting his talent as a headwaiter. He could be a first-class assassin.”

Peaches was reading the menu. “Here’s something romantic,” she said. “Hearts of lettuce with vinegar and oil dressing.”

“That’s about as romantic as oatmeal cookies,” Max said.

The waiter came to the table.

“Could we have a candle, please?” Peaches said. “Lunch by candlelight is so romantic, don’t you think?”

“I can take it or leave it,” the waiter replied. “To me, with or without, it’s just a job.”

“The lady would like to have a candle,” Max said sharply to the waiter.

“What watt?”

“What what what?”

“How many watts?”

“Well, let’s see—what what what—that’s three whats.”

“We’re all out of three-watt candles,” the waiter said. “How about a sixty-watt candle?”

“Oh, ‘watt’!”

“I said how about a sixty-watt candle.”

“I know what you said, waiter. And I said, ‘Oh, watt!’ At first, I thought you were saying ‘what?’. Then I realized that you were saying ‘watt’.”

“Okay—what watt?”

“What?”

“Maybe I could get the electrician to turn the lights up a little higher,” the waiter said.

“It wouldn’t be the same,” Peaches replied. “Just bring me any watt candle, please.”

The waiter departed.

“Watt was that all about?” Max asked.

“What?”

“Just like an empty-headed blonde,” Max said. “You don’t know what’s watt.”

Peaches turned her attention back to the menu. “I think I’ll have French fries,” she said. “The French are so romantic.”

“Try the Hungarian goulash, too,” Max said. “It’s probably served by a strolling violinist. In the meantime, if you don’t mind, I’ll work on that code again.”

“But you don’t have the Plan with you.”

“The words are etched in my mind,” Max said. “For instance, ‘Three Bs’. It’s just occurred to me that that may not represent Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, but, on the contrary, The Three Bears.”

“Like in the fairy story?”

“Why not? If you’ll recall, I figured out a while back that ‘Sad Al’ ‘Astor’ ‘Mays’ and ‘Bronco Con’ stand for money. And money is gold—right? So, what do we have? Goldilocks and the Three Bears.”

“All right. But, now that you have it, what do you have?”

“I’m not sure. Let’s take the next phrase—‘Map Change’. Maybe it doesn’t refer to changing the map of the world. Map is a slang word for face. And who do we know who changes his face?”

“Noman!”

“Correct. Now, could Noman be masquerading as Goldilocks? Hardly. He’s too plump for the part. But . . . one of the bears? That’s much more logical. In fact, he’d be perfect for the part of Papa Bear.”

“And what does that get you?”

“A candle,” Max. replied.

“A candle?”

“Here is your sixty-watt candle, lady,” a voice said. It belonged to the waiter.

“That’s an electric candle!” Peaches protested. “That’s not romantic. I want a candle that burns.”

“The outside wrapping is pasteboard,” the waiter said. “You can set it on fire.”

“Oh, well, it’ll have to do,” Peaches said. “Plug it In.”

“The cord won’t reach,” the waiter replied.

“Then watt good is it?” Peaches pouted.

“It’s cheap,” the waiter answered. “It doesn’t use up a lot of electricity that way.”

Peaches waved irritably. “Take it away!”

Again, the waiter departed.

“Papa Bear,” Max mused. “What connection would Papa Bear have with a Dooms Day Plan?”

“I think you’re on the wrong track, Max,” Peaches said.

Max looked at his watch. “You’re right. We should be on the track that has a train on it. It’s time to board.”

“But I haven’t had lunch.”

“Going without lunch is pretty romantic,” Max said, rising. “Let’s go.”

At the door they were met by the headwaiter.

“Did you enjoy your lunch?” he smiled.

“I didn’t eat,” Max replied. “But I did enjoy that little tussle we had when we first came in.”

“Next time, I’ll throw you through a plate glass window,” the headwaiter smiled.

“I’ll be looking forward to it,” Max said.

“Your food would probably have been all right—if I’d had any,” Peaches said to the headwaiter. “But I can’t say much for your candles.”

“Watt?” the headwaiter replied, puzzled.

“Never mind,” Max said. He hurried out, pulling Peaches after him.

“Don’t forget the Plan, Max,” Peaches said. “You left it in a locker—remember?”

“How could I forget that?” Max said, leading the way toward the lockers. “I put the Plan in the locker, then I locked the locker, then I put the key in —”

“What’s the matter, Max?”

Max had stopped and was going through his pockets.

“I seem to have misplaced the key,” he said.

“Max!”

“A pickpocket has pocked my picket!” Max said.

“Are you sure?”

“Positive!”

“Then how can we get into the locker to get the Plan?”

“Fortunately, we secret agents are prepared for such emergencies,” Max replied. “Come along.”

They made their way through the crowded station to the row of lockers.

“If you don’t have the key, how will you know which locker it is?” Peaches asked.

“By the process of elimination. I’ll simply open all of the lockers until I find the one with a Dooms Day Plan in it.”

“Without any keys, Max?”

Max got out his ballpoint pen. “With this acetylene torch, I’ll burn a hole in the door of each locker, then reach in and inspect the contents.”

“Oh, dandy. But what will you do when you punch the button and get a hair-dryer?”

“I’ll go soak my head and put it to use,” Max replied. “After that, I’ll punch the button again. As I recall, the acetylene torch is activated by the second punch.”

“Why don’t you just punch twice the first time?”

“Very good—for an empty-headed blonde,” Max said. “I’ll try it.”

He punched the button—twice. And a tongue of flame leaped from the end of the pen.

“I think you’ve got it,” Peaches said.

Max burned a round hole in a locker, then stepped back, and handed the torch to Peaches. “Hold this. I’ll reach in.”

“Careful.”

Max reached in through the hole. “I’ve found something,” he said. “In fact, I’ve found a lot of whatever it is.”

“Is it the Plan?”

“No. It seems to be a basket of very large marbles.”

“Max, they’re not *your* marbles!”

“I know. But this is— No, they’re not marbles. They’re more like . . . wait a minute, I’ll give one of them a squeeze.”

Max squeezed. An unpleasant expression appeared on his face. He withdrew his hand, which was dripping.

“Not marbles?” Peaches said.

“More like a basket of eggs,” Max said.

“I guess the yolk’s on you,” Peaches giggled.

Grimly, Max wiped his hand with his pocket handkerchief. Then, “All right,” he said, “I’ll take the torch again.”

“The flame seems to have gone out,” Peaches said, handing him the pen.

Max studied it. “It needs a little adjusting,” he said. “Do you have a hairpin?”

“Sorry.”

“Well, let’s see what I have,” Max said, beginning to go through his pockets. “Here’s my door key, and my car key, and a locker key, and . . . locker key?”

“Max, your picket wasn’t pocked. You’ve had that key all the time.”

“A slight error,” Max shrugged. “It could happen to anybody. The important thing is, we now have the key, and we can retrieve the Plan. Let’s see, which locker was it? Oh yes, locker 44, it says on the key.”

“You should have remembered that.”

“A slight loss of memory,” Max replied. “It could happen to anybody.”

Max fitted the key into the lock, turned it, and opened the door. The locker was completely empty.

“Agent 44?” Max called, putting his head into the locker.

There was no reply.

“Maybe he’s out to lunch,” Peaches said.

“No. He would have hung a little sign on the outside of the locker,” Max replied.

“Max . . . do you suppose . . . ?”

Max withdrew his head from the locker. “I’m afraid so. Evidently the Agent 44 we gave the Plan to wasn’t Agent 44. My guess is that Agent 44

was Noman. And, by now, Noman is well on his way to KAOS headquarters to report the success of his mission.”

“I’m awfully sorry about that, Max,” Peaches said sympathetically.

“And you should be,” Max snapped. “This is entirely your fault!”

“Did *I* give the Plan to Agent 44?”

“No, but—”

“Did *I* mistake Noman for Agent 44?”

“No, but—”

“Was *I* the one who said it was a good idea when I suggested putting the Plan in the locker?”

“No, but—”

“Was I the one who insisted on having candlelight for lunch?”

“No, but—”

“Yes, that was me, Max.”

“Oh.”

“So how can you say it’s entirely *my* fault?”

“Because,” Max replied, “my mind hasn’t been on my work. It’s been on you.”

“Max! That’s so romantic!”

“Not on you exactly,” Max said, correcting himself. “It’s been on your list of romantic things to do. And, consequently, it hasn’t been on the mission.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper. “What I ought to do is tear this list limb from limb,” he said. “Because of it, Noman has emerged victorious.”

“No, Max! Don’t do that.”

“And just why not?”

“Because that isn’t my list, Max! That’s the Plan!”

Max looked at the sheet of paper. “By George, It is!”

“You gave Noman my list and kept the Plan,” Peaches said.

“A slight error,” Max said. “It could happen, to anybody.”

“You’ve ruined everything!” Peaches sobbed.

“Actually, it’s all in the way you look at it,” Max said. “Since I’ve kept the Dooms Day Plan out of the hands of Noman, some might say that I’ve saved the day.”

“That’s selfish!” Peaches wept. “My list! Now I’ll have to start all over again.”

“But civilization (as we know it) has been given a second chance!” Max said.

“What does that mean to an empty-headed blonde who’s lost her list of romantic things to do?”

“Let’s argue about it on the train,” Max said. “We started early this morning, and it’s past noon, and we’re still not out of Washington. Considering that we’re living in the jet age, that’s not a very good record.”

“All right, let’s go,” Peaches wept. “Anything to take my mind off my loss.”

They boarded the train, then looked for their compartment.

“What number is it?” Peaches asked.

“Compartment 44,” Max replied. “That sounds familiar, doesn’t it? I wonder if I’ve ridden this train before.”

“That’s your friend,” Peaches reminded him.

“My friend? I don’t have any friends who are train compartments.”

“Agent 44.”

“Oh . . . yes. Good old Agent 44. He must be well thought of by the railroad.”

“Why is that?”

“They named a compartment after him,” Max said.

“Maybe it was some other 44,” Peaches said.

“That’s possible.”

They met a porter coming along the aisle from the opposite direction. Max stopped him.

“Porter, we’re looking for Compartment 44,” Max said. “Do you have any idea where it might be?”

“Yes, sir. Right between Compartment 43 and Compartment 45.”

“That’s helpful. Now, where would we find, say, Compartment 45?”

“Well, sir, that’s right between—”

“Never mind,” Max broke in. “I’ve found it. It’s right here—this compartment we’re standing in front of.”

The porter looked and nodded. “That’s it all right, sir. Right where I said it was—right between Compartment 43 and Compartment 45.” He opened the door. “Right in here, sir, and lady.”

Max and Peaches stepped in. The porter followed them.

“May I see your tickets, sir?” the porter said.

Max handed him the tickets. “That’s for a round-trip one-way,” he said.

“Yes, sir, I see it is.” The porter pointed to the right-hand seat. “The lady sits here,” he said. He pointed to the left-hand seat. “And the gentleman sits here.”

“Why is that?” Max asked. “Why can’t we sit in any seat we want to?”

“You got a round-trip ticket, sir,” the porter explained. “One seat is the ‘going’ seat and the other seat is the ‘coming’ seat. You sit in the ‘going’ seat, and the lady sits in the ‘coming’ seat.”

“I’m sorry I asked,” Max replied. “All right, porter. Thank you for your help. I’ll call you if I need you.”

The porter backed out and closed the door.

“He looked familiar to me, Max,” Peaches said.

“I don’t wonder. He looked like a typical pullman porter.”

“Yes, I suppose that was it.”

Max went to the window and raised the shade—and found himself face-to-face with Agent 44.

“Good to see you again,” Max said. “Unless, of course, you’re Noman masquerading as Agent 44.”

Agent 44 made signals, indicating that he could not hear Max through the window.

“I said, ‘Good to see you again’!” Max shouted.

“Why don’t you open the window, Max?” Peaches suggested.

“Because train windows do not open.”

Peaches went to the window, touched a finger to the bottom of the frame, and raised the window easily.

“Let me put it another way,” Max said. “*Normally*, train windows do not open.” He turned back to Agent 44. “Good to see you again,” he said. “Assuming, of course, that you’re not Noman.”

“I don’t think I am,” 44 answered. “What does he look like?”

“If he’s in a public locker, he looks like you,” Max said.

“Ask him if he has my list of romantic things to do,” Peaches said. “If he does, he’s Noman. If he doesn’t, he’s 44.”

“I’ll try that,” Max said. He turned back to Agent 44.

“I don’t have it,” 44 said.

Max turned back to Peaches.

“Then he’s 44,” she said.

Max turned back to Agent 44. But he was gone.

“I felt a little left out of that conversation there at the end,” Max said, closing the window.

“Shhh!” Peaches said. “I’m trying to remember what I had on my list of romantic things to do.”

“You were going to dunk Al Capone in a fountain, I remember that,” Max said.

“That doesn’t sound romantic.”

“It does to me. But then, all fountains sound romantic to me,” Max said.

“Candlelight—I remember that,” Peaches said.

“Yes, and—” Max interrupted himself. “Wait a minute! Hear that?”

Peaches cocked an ear. “What?”

“Listen.”

Then Peaches heard the sound, too. It went: “Choo-Choo-Choo!”

“We’re on our way!” Max said happily. “New York—here we come!”

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8.

AS THE train moved slowly out of the terminal, Max sat down in his seat and removed his shoe. “Time to check in,” he said. “The Chief will be glad to hear that we’re finally on our way.”

“Ask him if he knows of any romantic things to do,” Peaches said.

“Sorry,” Max said, dialing. “This is a business phone.”

Operator: Sorry, sir, this is impossible.

Max: Impossible, Operator? What’s impossible?

Operator: You’re calling from a compartment on a train, sir. That can’t be done.

Max: Operator, this is official business. Couldn’t you make an exception?

Operator: Well . . . just this once. If you promise you won’t do it again.

Max: I promise. Now, please, connect me with Control.

Operator: Yes, sir. Here is your number, sir.

Chief: Control, here.

Max: Is that you, Chief?

Chief: Da.

Max: Da, Chief?

Chief: That’s Russian for ‘yes,’ Max. I assume you’re calling from Moscow.

Max: Well, no, not exactly, Chief. We’re a little short of that mark.

Chief: From New York, then?

Max: We’re a wee bit short of *that* mark, too, Chief.

Chief: Miami, Florida?

Max: That’s in the other direction, Chief.

Chief: Baltimore, Maryland?

Max: You're getting warmer, Chief. Try Washington, D.C.

Chief: Max! You haven't even left town yet?

Max: Chief, it isn't because we haven't tried. We've tried it by plane, and we've tried it by car. Now, we're trying it by train.

Chief: I see. You're taking a train to New York. Is that right?

Max: No, Chief, the train is taking *us* to New York. You see, we're in a compartment, and the train is on the tracks.

Chief: You didn't have to tell me that. I know how a train goes.

Max (smiling smugly): How does a train go, Chief? There's a very funny answer to that. Want to hear it?

Chief: I don't have to hear it, Max. I know how a train goes. It goes: Choo-Choo-Choo! I can hear it over your shoe.

Operator (breaking in): So that's how you're doing it, is it?—talking on a shoe. I knew we didn't have any telephones in any train compartments.

Max: All right, now you know. Will you please get off the line, Operator? This is a private conversation.

Operator: Is that your shoe or our shoe?

Max: It's *my* shoe.

Chief: Sorry to dispute you, Max. But, actually, that isn't your shoe. We lease that shoe from the Telephone Company.

Max: Maybe so. But I keep it under *my* bed. That should give me *some* rights.

Operator: It's *our* shoe, so I can listen to your conversation.

Max: Chief, couldn't you arrange to buy this shoe from the Telephone Company?

Chief: They won't sell, Max.

Max: Why not?

Chief: They don't want to break up a pair.

Max: Oh. Well . . . I can understand that.

Chief: Max, has Peaches broken the code yet?

Max: I'm afraid Peaches has lost interest in the code, Chief. Our hard-hearted Hannah has turned into a soft-headed Susie. If you know what I mean.

Chief: No, Max, I don't know what you mean.

Operator: Me, neither.

Max: Well, folks, what I mean is, our Peaches has gone soft. She thinks we're doomed, and she wants to live a little before she goes. Her only interest at the moment is Romance.

Operator: With a capital 'R'? Good for her.

Chief: Well, I guess you'll just have to make the best of it, Max. Try breaking the code yourself.

Max: I'm one step ahead of you, Chief.

Operator: In *our* shoe? Watch where you step in that shoe.

Max: As I was saying, Chief, I'm already at work on the code. Do you see any connection between Papa Bear and Dooms Day?

Chief: No, I don't, Max. How did you arrive at Papa Bear?

Max: It wasn't easy. I started with money. That gave me Goldilocks. And Goldilocks suggested Papa Bear.

Operator: Why Papa Bear? Why not all three of the bears?

Max: Because Noman is a male. And Papa Bear is a male.

Operator: Maybe Baby Bear was a male, too. I think you picked the wrong bear.

Max: You may be right, Operator. Let's see . . . Baby Bear. Or, if you turn that around, you get Bear Baby. Or, to put it another way, bare baby. And all newly-born babies are bare. So, what we're looking for is—no, I don't think that's it.

Chief: Max, keep working on it. I know you'll come up with something. And . . . keep in touch.

Operator: Don't encourage him to make a lot of calls, Chief. We don't want him to wear out our shoe.

Chief: Good-by, Max.

Max: So long, Chief.

Operator: Keep your laces tight, Max.

Max put his shoe back on.

“That was the Chief,” he said to Peaches. “And the Operator,” he added.

“Shhh! I’m thinking.”

Max looked out the window. “Well, we’re on our way,” he said. “We’ve left the station.”

“Will you stop bothering me with trifling little details,” Peaches said. “I’m trying to—”

She was interrupted as the door of the compartment opened and the porter stepped in. He was holding a gun. And he quickly closed the door behind him.

“If you’re peddling guns, we don’t want any,” Max said, annoyed.

“Max!” Peaches shrieked. “It’s Noman!”

Noman smiled. “I would have been around sooner,” he said, “but I didn’t want to interrupt while you were on the shoe.”

“A fellow with good shoe manners can’t be all bad,” Max said. “Noman, let’s make a deal. Let me keep the Dooms Day Plan, and I’ll try to talk the Chief into giving you a job at Control. There are a lot of benefits connected with being on the side of the Good Guys.”

“Like what?” Noman asked.

“Peace of mind.”

“At KAOS we get three weeks vacation after twelve years.”

“Well, at Control we get a sense of accomplishment.”

“We get time-and-a-half for overtime. And overtime is any time after we sight our victim.”

“We have a friendly atmosphere,” Max responded.

“Our cafeteria serves chocolate sauce on the ice cream,” Noman said. “Even on the chocolate ice cream.”

“Well, I can’t match that,” Max admitted. “I guess you’ll just have to go your way, and I’ll go mine.” He stepped toward the door. “Excuse me—I’ll go mine.”

Noman pressed the pistol against his abdomen. “You can go your way,” he said, “but you’ll go feet first if you don’t hand over that Plan.”

Max backed away. “I can’t give you the Plan,” he said. “If I did, you’d rush out that door with it, and I’d never see it again.”

Noman smiled craftily. “Suppose I promised *not* to rush out the door with it?”

Max considered. “That throws a different light on the situation,” he said. “But how do I know I can trust you?”

“How do I know I can trust *you*?” Noman replied. “I’m taking as big a chance as you are. But I’m willing. I guess it’s a matter of basic character—you either trust people or you don’t.”

“You put me to shame,” Max said. “I’m sorry I doubted you.”

“Then it’s a deal?”

“Right. I’ll hand over the Plan. And you’ll promise not to rush out the door with it.”

“Shake,” Noman said.

They shook hands, then Max reached into his pocket and pulled out the Plan and handed it over to Noman. “A promise is a promise,” he reminded him.

Noman grinned evilly, taking the Plan. “Right,” he said. “But I *didn’t* promise not to jump out the window!”

Max looked disappointed. “Once a KAOS agent, always a KAOS agent,” he said.

Holding the gun on Max, Noman moved around to the window. With his back to it, he opened it.

“So long, sucker!” he laughed derisively.

“Happy landing,” Max said.

Noman threw himself backward through the opening and disappeared.

A second later a face appeared—the face of Agent 44.

“Good work, 44,” Max said. “You snatched the Plan from him as he hurtled past, of course.”

“The Plan and something else,” 44 said, handing in two sheets of paper.

“My list!” Peaches cried happily, leaping up.

Max accepted the two sheets of paper from 44 and handed one of them to Peaches.

“This isn’t my list!” she said angrily, throwing the sheet of paper to the floor.

“Here!” Max said, giving her the other sheet of paper. “That one is the Plan,” he said, picking it up.

“How could you mistake my lovely list for your horrid old Plan!” Peaches exclaimed, hugging her list to her bosom. “They should have named you Max Dumb.”

Max turned back to Agent 44. “Thanks again,” he said. “I’ll see you around.”

Agent 44 disappeared.

Max faced back to Peaches. “Did you notice how I maneuvered Noman into using the window—where I knew 44 would be waiting?” he said. “What was so dumb about that?”

“He’s just dumber than you are,” Peaches grumbled. “He should have been named Nobody.”

“Well, he’s Nowhere now.”

“Want to bet?” Peaches said. “I’ll bet he’s back on the train right now. And I’ll bet he’ll be back here with his gun before you can say ‘Jack Robinson.’ ”

“Jack Robinson!” Max snapped. He looked around. “Ha! He’s not here. You lose.”

“I’ll still bet he’s back on the train.”

“That bet I won’t take,” Max said. “And, just to make sure he won’t find us here when he comes back, I think we’d better go to the lounge car. If we surround ourselves with loungers, he won’t dare try anything.”

Peaches leaped up again, excited. “Isn’t that where the romantic strangers are?”

“There may be one or two,” Max replied. “However, I think you’ll probably find more stationery salesmen than romantic strangers.”

“I’ll chance it,” Peaches said. “Let’s go.”

Peaches led the way this time, and Max had to trot to keep up with her. When they reached the lounge, where a number of passengers were seated in lounge chairs, Peaches rushed forward and addressed the first man she came to.

“Are you a stationery salesman?” she asked.

“No, I’m a traveling salesman,” he replied. “I move around quite a bit.”

“I don’t mean stationary like standing still,” she said, “I mean stationery like writing letters.”

“I write home—to the wife and kiddies,” the man replied.

“Then you’re not a romantic stranger,” Peaches said disappointedly.

At that moment, Max caught up with her. “Try that fellow down there,” he said, pointing.

“Where?”

“At the other end of the car,” Max said. “That pleasingly plump fellow who looks like a typical romantic stranger.”

“Oh, him! Yes, he does look typical,” Peaches said.

She rushed off, headed for the far end of the car, and Max tagged after her.

When she reached the man, Peaches dropped into the vacant seat next to him. The man was reading a newspaper. But Peaches dug him in the ribs with an elbow, then, when he looked up, she fluttered her eyelashes at him.

“Hello, there!” the man beamed.

“I don’t speak to strangers,” Peaches replied.

“Oh. I thought that dig in the ribs was an introduction.”

“That was a slip of the elbow—purely unintentional,” Peaches said. “But, if you want to introduce yourself, then we’d be introduced.”

The romantic stranger smiled romantically. “You can just call me The Romantic Stranger,” he said. “Or, TRS, for short.”

At that moment, Max arrived. “Excuse me,” he said to the man. “May I sit on the other side of you? You see, I’m sort of responsible for this young lady.”

“Welcome, welcome,” TRS said.

But Peaches wasn’t exactly pleased. “Max, why don’t you go up to the engine?” she asked. “The engineer may need your help to get the train to New York. He may not know the way.”

“What could I tell him? Except, ‘Follow the tracks.’ ”

“You could run ahead and show him the way,” Peaches said.

Max sat down in the empty seat. “No, I think I’ll just stay here and see what I can do about this code.”

“You have a code?” TRS said. “I suggest that you take a couple aspirins, drink lots of water, and get lots of rest.”

“Code,” Max replied. “Not cold.”

“Oh—code.” TRS seemed interested. “Like secret code?”

“I can’t answer that,” Max replied. “It’s top secret.”

“Just keep it that way,” Peaches said to Max. “We don’t want to hear anything more about it.” She smiled at TRS. “I suppose you have a lot of outrageous lies you’d like to tell me,” she said.

“You mean, things like, ‘You’re gorgeous, you’re beautiful, and we were meant for each other’?”

“No, lies,” she replied. “Things like—”

“The Three Bears have stuffed Goldilocks into a Trojan horse,” Max mused.

“That sounds like a lie to me, all right,” TRS said.

“Max, will you keep out of our conversation!” Peaches complained.

“I didn’t know I was in it,” Max said. “I was simply working on the code.”

“Perhaps I could help you,” TRS said.

“You’re with *me!*” Peaches snapped at him. “Now, tell me some outrageous lies or I’ll—”

“Blow up the world with three bombs planted in a watch,” Max said.

TRS turned to Peaches. “You’d do that?”

“He said that—I didn’t.”

TRS faced back to Max. “You’d do that?”

“Not me,” Max said. “But somebody would.” He showed the Plan to TRS. “See this? This is a Dooms Day Plan. But it’s in code. We won’t know exactly what it means until we break the code.”

TRS started to reach for the Plan. But Peaches reached first and pushed it away. “You don’t want to look at that,” she said. She showed him her list. “Look at this. This is really interesting. See that? Trip to Bermuda. Candlelight. Three coins in the fountain.”

“Yes, I see,” TRS said. “It’s also in code, eh?”

“No, no, these are my romantic things to do.” She fluttered her eyelashes at him again. “But it wouldn’t be much fun doing these things alone. Do you have any suggestions?”

“I do,” Max said. “Do you have a maiden aunt you could take along with you? You’ll need a chaperone.”

“Nobody asked you!”

“If I waited to be asked,” Max replied, “I’d never get to say anything.”

“Speaking of three coins in the fountain,” TRS said, “could I see that Plan again?”

Max looked at him puzzledly. “I don’t get the connection.”

“Plan is the key word,” TRS replied. “If you’re going to throw three—exactly three—coins in the fountain, obviously you’re following some preconceived plan. Otherwise, you might throw one, or six, or ten, or two. Clear?”

Max nodded. He showed the Plan to TRS again.

“Could I hold it in my own hands?” TRS asked.

Max shook his head. “I don’t dare lose it. It’s the only copy in existence.”

“I would be very careful with it.”

Max shook his head again.

“You can hold my list in your hands,” Peaches said to TRS.

“It wouldn’t be the same,” TRS smiled.

Peaches scooted down in her chair, pouting.

“You know,” TRS said to Max, “I just may be able to decode this plan for you. It so happens that I’m a traveling computer salesman. And I happen to have a computer with me.”

Max looked him up and down. “Tiny, isn’t it?”

“As a matter of fact, it is. It’s a miniature computer. But I don’t have it on me. It’s in my compartment.”

Max studied him suspiciously. “A computer salesman, eh? That’s quite a coincidence—since a computer may be just the thing I need to break this code.”

“I think that’s approximately what *I* said.”

“Yes . . . quite a coincidence.” Max looked at him narrowly. “Has your miniature computer had any experience in breaking codes?”

“No. But it performs wonders. I’m sure it would have no trouble with the code.”

“What wonders, for instance?”

“Oh, well, for instance, I suppose you’ve heard about computers that match up men and women, find the perfect mates for them. Well, this computer takes that one step further. It finds the perfect mates for other computers.”

“Hmmm . . . sort of a computer’s computer, eh?”

“Exactly.”

“That sounds promising,” Max said.

“Promise *me* something,” Peaches said to TRS. “Promise me *anything!*”

He ignored her. “Shall we go to my compartment?” he said to Max.

Peaches leaped to her feet. “Is that a promise?”

“Maybe you better wait here,” Max said to her. “If you act like this in a lounge car with a romantic stranger, heaven only knows how you’ll act in a compartment with a romantic computer.”

“There’s no worry,” TRS said. “My computer is all business.”

“In that case,” Max said, rising, “lead the way.”

TRS got to his feet and walked toward the door of the lounge car. Max and Peaches followed closely at his heels.

“Does this computer have a name?” Peaches asked.

“Sam Schwartz,” TRS replied.

“Good gracious! How did that happen?”

“Well, Schwartz is the family name. And he was named after an uncle. Uncle—”

“Sam,” Peaches nodded.

“Correct.”

They reached the door. TRS opened it, and Max and Peaches stepped out into the area between the cars.

“This is far enough,” TRS said, joining them and closing the door behind him.

Max looked around at the small space. “Is this the best compartment you could get?” he said. “You must have an even more limited expense account than I do.”

“This isn’t a compartment, you fool!” TRS snarled. “We’re standing between two cars.”

Max frowned. “What happened to your friendly, helpful attitude?”

TRS pulled a gun. “Guess.”

“Noman!” Peaches shrieked.

“Let’s not jump to conclusions,” Max said. “He may be only an unusually cantankerous computer salesman.”

“No, she’s right,” Noman said. “I’m Noman, all right.”

“I suppose you have some means of identification,” Max said doubtfully.

Noman pressed the gun against Max’s abdomen.

Max nodded. “Yes, you’re Noman, all right. I remember your technique. I sometimes forget a face, but I never forget a technique.”

“Hand over the Plan!” Noman said menacingly.

“Wouldn’t you rather have a nice long list of romantic things to do?” Max replied. “The list doesn’t have to be decoded. Think of all the time you’d save. And time is money. Think of it as a bribe.”

“Hand over the Plan!” Noman said again, this time more menacingly.

“What’s the other choice?” Max asked.

“If you hand over the Plan now,” Noman replied, “I’ll go easy on you. I’ll wait until the train reaches a tunnel, then I’ll shove you out the door.”

“I see—that’s the easy way. Now, what’s the hard way?”

“If you don’t hand over the Plan, I’ll shoot you both and take it anyway.”

“In that case, I think we’ll take the easy way out,” Max said.

“Then hand over the Plan!”

“Not so fast,” Max said. “I’ll hand over the Plan when we reach the tunnel. Strange as it may seem, Noman, I don’t entirely trust you. If I handed you the Plan now, you might not stick around to shove us out the door when we come to the tunnel.”

Noman sighed. “Oh, all right. But your lack of faith in your fellow man is certainly disheartening.”

“When you’ve been in this business as long as I have, you get a little cynical,” Max replied.

The door of the lounge car opened and the conductor stepped out.

“Excuse me, Conductor,” Max said. “But when do we come to the next tunnel?”

The conductor got out his watch. “Oh, in about—”

“Max! Tell him!” Peaches said.

Max looked at her blankly. “Tell him what?”

“Tell him that You-know-who has a you-know-what!”

“Peaches, you’re not making any sense.”

“Noman! Gun!”

“Oh . . . that.” Max turned back to the conductor. “Conductor, it is my duty as a passenger on this train to tell you that Noman has a gun.”

“Glad to hear it,” the conductor replied. “If there *was* a man on this train with a gun, I’d toss him off.” He moved on. “The next tunnel will be along in about two minutes,” he said, entering the next car. The door closed behind him.

“Well, I tried,” Max said.

“And nicely, too,” Noman said. “My heart was in my mouth. But . . . you failed. So, get ready to jump!”

“Ready?” Max said to Peaches.

“Ready,” she whined.

“Just one other thing—the Plan,” Noman said.

“Oh . . . yes . . . sorry.” Max handed over the Plan. “In times of stress like this,” he apologized, “I sometimes overlook the small details.”

“We’re coming to the tunnel!” Noman warned.

“Will it be dark?” Max asked.

“I hope so,” Noman replied. “I couldn’t stand to see it.”

Ahead, the engine tooted.

“This is it!” Noman said.

They were suddenly plunged into total darkness.

“Now!” Noman cried.

Max and Peaches, hand in hand, jumped!

“We seem to have landed on moving ground,” Max said.

“I have that sensation, too,” Peaches replied.

Then there was light.

Max and Peaches looked around.

“We’re in a box car,” Max said.

“It’s a miracle!” Peaches enthused. “Our train must have been passing a freight train in that tunnel. And when we jumped, we jumped into the open

top of this box car.”

“I wonder where it’s headed?” Max said.

“Well, it’s going in the opposite direction from the passenger train. So it must be headed for— Oh, Max, no!”

Max sighed deeply. “Back to Washington!”

“And Noman is headed for New York!”

“Yes,” Max smiled, “but empty-handed.”

“What do you mean?”

“When the lights went out,” Max explained, “I reached out and snatched. And I have here—” He held up a sheet of paper. “I have here—” Looking at the paper, his expression changed, losing its smile. “I have here your list of romantic things to do,” he finished sorrowfully.

“But, Max, you couldn’t have my list.”

“How’s that?”

“Because, well, when I felt someone snatch my list, I snatched back. And I have it right here.” She showed him a sheet of paper.

Max looked at it. His smile returned. “You got the Plan,” he told her.

She shoved the sheet of paper at him. “Take it! Give me my valuable list!”

They exchanged sheets of paper.

“I better report in to the Chief,” Max said. “A lot has happened since we last talked.”

“I wouldn’t tell him where we’re headed, if I were you,” Peaches said. “He’s liable to lose confidence in you.”

“That’s not likely,” Max said, removing his shoe. “The fact that we’re on our way back to where we started is only a minor episode in this broad panorama of intrigue. It could happen to anybody,” he said, dialing.

Operator: Cut it out, Max. A compartment on a train was hard enough to believe. But a box car?

Max: Where I go, my shoe goes.

Operator: Our shoe. And we don't appreciate your wearing it in a box car. How do we know what's been carried in that box car?

Max: I promise to keep it off the floor.

Operator: I'd like to see that.

Max: Operator, will you please put me through to the Chief? He worries.

Operator: So do we. You could ruin that shoe, the places you take it.

Max: Operator . . . please . . .

Operator: Don't get itchy.

(Pause)

Chief: Is that you, Max? Where are you now?

Max: I'm happy to report, Chief, that Peaches and I are aboard a train.

Chief: Good. The Trans-Siberian Railway, I assume.

Operator: Ha!

Max: Not exactly, Chief. But that's close—in a sense.

Chief: If you're not in Russia aboard the Trans-Siberian Railway, Max, then where are you?

Max: Sorry, Chief, that's classified information.

Chief: Oh. Well then, can you give me a hint? What do you see when you look out the window?

Operator: Who ever heard of windows in a box car?

Chief: Max . . . did she say box car?

Max: She said 'lox car,' Chief. You know how some pullman cars are named after states and cities? For instance, 'The Spirit of St. Louis'? Well, this pullman was named after a specialty at a corner delicatessen.

Chief: That's hard to believe, Max.

Max: Would you believe 'sox car'? That it was named after a fellow whose first name was Bobby?

Chief: I don't think so, Max.

Max: How about 'pox car'? That it was named after a chicken?

Chief: Max, tell me, truthfully, what do you see when you look out the doorway of your box car?

Max: Well, a tall, skinny monument, for one thing, Chief.

Chief: And what might the name of that tall, skinny monument be, Max?

Max: Sam Schwartz?

Chief: Is it named after the Father of our Country, Max?

Max: Is Sam Schwartz the Father of our Country, Chief? That comes as a great surprise to me. I've always thought it was George Washington. Well, live and learn.

Chief: You just said it, Max. Now, admit it, you're back in Washington, aren't you?

Max: Not quite, Chief. But ask me that question again in about ten minutes and I think I can give you an affirmative reply.

Chief: Max, it's mid-afternoon, and you've been trying to get out of Washington since early morning. What happened?

Max: Would you believe a wrong turn, Chief?

Chief: Don't start that again, Max. Frankly, I'm a little disappointed in you. I gave you the Doms Day Plan and told you to run, and you're still in town.

Max: Chief, would you believe that the lights have been against me?

Chief: Stop it, Max. Tell me what really happened.

Max: Oh, all right. In the first place, we got aboard a plane that was flying in circles. In the second place, we drove the wrong way on a two-way highway. In the third place, we jumped into a freight train that was headed in the opposite direction. There, now, that's the truth.

Chief: Why didn't you say so? That could happen to anybody, Max.

Operator: Anybody like him, it could. He couldn't find his own foot with our shoe.

Max: Well, Chief, I'm sure it will be all clear sailing from now on.

Chief: What makes you so sure, Max?

Max: Because when this freight train gets to Washington, we intend to take an excursion boat to New York.

Operator: They'll never let you on the bus with it.

Max: I think we've run that gag into the ground, Operator. Will you drop it, please?

Operator: All right. But it'll make an awful splash.

Max: Chief, I can't talk to you any more. There's too much interference.

Chief: Just one thing, Max. Have you deciphered the code yet?

Max: No, Chief. But I expect to have the answer very soon. I'm going to begin using Peaches' system of transposing the letters into numbers, and the numbers into letters, and the letters into— Well, you get the idea.

Chief: Good luck, Max.

Max: 9-12-12 14-5-5-4 9-20, Chief.

Chief: What does that mean, Max?

Max: It means, 'I'll need it,' in code, Chief.

Max put his shoe back on his foot.

"I heard what you said, and I think it's just *wonderful!*" Peaches gushed.

"I did transpose those letters into numbers pretty quickly," Max replied. "But 'wonderful' is rather strong. Impressive, yes—but wonderful? I think that's putting it on a bit thick."

"No, no, no, no, no! I mean the news that we're going on an excursion. That's *very* romantic!"

"Yes, going by boat has its advantages," Max admitted. "That way, getting there is half the fun." He scowled. "Unfortunately, coming back is pure misery."

9.

WHEN THE freight train reached Washington, Max and Peaches hopped out of the box car and crossed the tracks to a nearby building. Entering, they found a middle-aged man seated at a desk.

“How-do-you-do,” Max said. “My name is Max, and this lady is Peaches. We just arrived on that freight.”

The man picked up a paper from his desk. “That’s odd,” he said. “I’m expecting a carload of peaches. But there’s nothing on here about a shipment of Maxes.” He looked up. “Sure you got the right freight yard?”

“It’s a mistake,” Max said.

“Oh. Well, in that case, the peaches can stay, but the Maxes will have to find their right freight yard.”

“Just answer a simple question,” Max said. “Where would we find a taxi?”

The man frowned. “That’s a tough one. But I’ll give it a go. Under a taxi driver?”

“Let me try it again,” Max said. “Is there a taxi around here anywhere?”

The man shook his head. “Not likely. You hardly ever see a taxi in a freight office. Try down at the corner at the taxi stand.”

“Thank you,” Max said.

“You’re welcome. Just pile them peaches in a corner of the office here. I’ll count ’em later.”

Max and Peaches left the freight office and walked to the corner. A taxi was standing at the taxi stand. Max and Peaches got in. Then Max addressed the driver, a plump man who looked like a typical taxi driver.

“Take us to the pier,” Max said.

The driver turned in the seat to face them. “Would you like to check your ballpoint pen first?” he said,

“Noman!” Peaches shrieked.

Max pulled his pistol and aimed it at the driver. "Don't make a move!"

But the driver stuck a finger into the end of the barrel. "You're disarmed, Smart!" he snarled viciously.

"Not quite!" Max replied, reaching for his ballpoint pen.

But, as Max reached, the driver jumped from the cab and raced off down the street.

"Get him, Max!" Peaches screeched.

Max aimed the pen. He pressed the button. A tiny motor made whirring sounds.

Peaches groaned.

"You're right," Max said. "I doubt that I could dry his hair at this distance."

"He got away," Peaches lamented. "What now?"

"*He* got away, yes. But his cab didn't," Max said. "We'll simply commandeer this taxi and drive ourselves to the pier."

"Do you know the way?"

"The cab probably knows the way," Max said, getting in behind the wheel. "Cabs have a sixth sense about such things."

Peaches got into the rear seat, and Max started the engine and drove off.

As the cab reached the corner and Max stopped for a traffic signal, they heard a voice.

"Now, hear this," the voice said. "This is Noman speaking!"

Max looked around, perplexed. "Where are you?"

"You're hearing me over a speaker in the cab," the voice replied. "I'm in another car, talking to you from here. I am also operating your taxi by remote control."

"That's hard to believe," Max said.

"Would you believe, then, that I'm operating your taxi by pull-string?"

"I don't even believe that you're in control of our taxi," Max replied.

"The proof is in the pudding," the voice said. "I'll drive you right through that red light."

“That, I’d like to see,” Max smirked.

The taxi lunged forward and crossed the intersection, ignoring the traffic light.

“Now, you’re in trouble!” Max said. “You just broke a traffic law!”

“Fiddle-dee-dee,” the voice said, “What’s important is, do you believe me now?”

Max nodded. “I believe you. You are operating this taxi by remote control. But, the question is, what will it get you?”

“The Dooms Day Plan,” the voice answered.

“I don’t think so,” Max replied. “Peaches and I would risk our lives to keep that Plan. If you’ll keep an eye on the taxi, in just a second you’ll see us throw ourselves out the doors.”

“That *would* be risky!” the voice said, dismayed. “Fortunately for you, you can’t do it. If you were at all observant, you would have noticed that you’re in the same taxi that I used to pick you up in that deserted section of town early this morning.”

“In other words, we’re sealed in?”

“Right. And this time you don’t have a parachute to use as a brake.”

“However, we do have an ejection seat,” Max replied. “I recall that you used it this morning.”

“But *I* had a parachute.”

“Do you think the lack of a parachute will stop us?” Max said.

“It’ll stop *me*!” Peaches said.

“It’ll stop her,” the voice said.

“Gossip!” Max snapped.

“Are you interested in the alternative?” the voice asked.

“Not particularly,” Max replied. “But I *will* listen. What is it?”

“You don’t *have* to listen.”

“Yes, I do. I’m a captive audience,” Max replied. “Now what’s the alternative?”

“How does this sound?” the voice said. “By remote control, I’ll drive the taxi toward the nearest overpass. Meanwhile, you place the Plan on the driver’s seat. As the taxi approaches the underpass, you will activate the ejection seat. That will fire the Plan into the air. I will be waiting on top of the overpass to catch it. And the taxi will proceed under the overpass. After that, I’ll disconnect my remote control, and you’ll be able to drive the taxi wherever you want to.”

“Let me get that straight,” Max said. “I’ll drive the taxi over the underpass, and you’ll—”

“No, no, under the overpass.”

“Yes, that’s right—you’ll be under the overpass, waiting for me to put the taxi in overdrive and fire the ejection seat over . . . no, make that under . . . under . . . no, scratch that . . . over the under . . . would you repeat that, please?”

“You’re stalling. You’re not that dumb, Smart.”

“Right—got it. I drive the taxi over the underdumb, and you’ll be waiting with an overdone ejection seat.”

“You have one second to make a choice, Smart!”

“How can I make a choice? You didn’t tell me the other alternative.”

“Oh. Sorry about that. The other alternative is a dunk in the Potomac.”

“I think this is where I came in,” Max said.

“No, this is where you go out. All the way out. Your taxi is headed for the Potomac. Unless you agree to hand over the Plan, you’re headed straight for the bottom.”

“All right, Noman,” Max said. “I’ll give you my answer in just a second. But, in the meantime, will you do me one favor? Will you tell me where the speaker is hidden?”

“That’s top secret,” the voice replied.

“Would it be this thing on the control panel that looks like a speaker?” Max asked.

“Don’t touch that!” the voice cried.

“Ah-ha!”

Max raised his foot and jammed his heel through the speaker.

“Now say something!” he challenged.

“Peep!” said the speaker.

“That fixed it!” Max said to Peaches. “It’s out of order. Noman’s means of communication with the taxi has been destroyed.”

“How does that help?” Peaches asked.

“I won’t have his voice barking at me, and I can concentrate on how to get out of this fix,” Max replied. “I was getting an idea, but he kept babbling at me, and the idea kept slipping away.” He frowned thoughtfully. “Let’s see—what was my idea?”

“I don’t think it matters much, Max,” Peaches said. “We’re still headed for the Potomac.”

“Yes, he’s still driving the car by remote control.”

“Max, let’s give up,” Peaches said.

“Up! That’s it!” Max said. “That’s my idea! We’ll pop ourselves ‘up’ into the air.”

“You mean the ejection seat?”

“Exactly.”

“But we don’t have a parachute. We’ll be killed in the fall.”

“Long before that, I imagine,” Max said. “It’s only spring now. We’d hit the ground long before fall. That is—unless!”

“Unless what?”

Max took off his shoe and dialed.

Chief: Back in town again, Max?

Max: Not again, still. Chief, do you have a whirly-bird handy?

Chief: Just a second, Max. I’ll look in the canary’s cage. It sometimes has strange visitors.

Max: Hold it, Chief. I’m referring to a helicopter.

Chief: Oh. Yes, I have a helicopter handy, Max.

Max: Does it have a large net hanging below it, Chief?

Chief: No.

Max: Too bad. I had a great idea.

Chief: But we could hang a large net below it, Max. Would that somehow help?

Max: Chief, I think you've saved our lives. I want you to send the helicopter up over the city. And, uh, don't forget the net.

Chief: Then what, Max?

Max: Tell the pilot to look for a speeding taxi that is headed straight for the Potomac. When he spots it, tell him to hover over it.

Chief: Got it, Max. Hover over.

Max: I'll take it from there, Chief.

Chief: I hope you know what you're doing, Max.

Operator: Me, too. He's wearing our shoe.

Max: Stay out of this, Operator.

Operator: All right. But no more kicking in speakers with our shoe. You scuffed it.

Max: Sorry about that.

Max put his shoe back on. "Get set," he said to Peaches.

"Take care of your shoe," she said.

Max stared at her. "You, too!"

"I own stock in the Telephone Company," she explained.

Max cocked an ear. "I hear a helicopter. That was fast work."

"Max! I'm afraid!"

"There's no time for that," Max said. "Now, do just exactly as I say."

"I can't! I'm afraid."

"Since there's only one ejection seat," Max said, "I want you to come up here and sit on my lap."

"I can't. I'm—Oh . . . that's different. That's romantic."

Peaches climbed into the front seat and settled on Max's lap.

"Ready?" he said.

"Do we *have* to rush?" Peaches asked. "This is the first really romantic thing that's happened to me since I became an empty-headed blonde. Why spoil it?"

Max cupped a hand around his ear. "I can't hear you over the roar of the helicopter motor!"

"I say, 'This is neat!' " Peaches screamed.

Max nodded. "Right—I'll activate the seat!"

Max pulled the ejection lever, the roof of the cab slid back, and the seat, Max and Peaches rocketed into the air.

They shot past the helicopter.

"Higher!" Max shouted at the pilot.

The helicopter hurried after them as they zoomed higher.

"Nice view from up here," Max said to Peaches. "Look—the people appear to be so small that they look like ants."

Peaches looked down. "Those *are* ants, Max."

"Oh . . . yes. The people must be the big ones, then. I thought there for a moment that we were being invaded by a race of giants."

They reached the apex of their flight, hesitated in mid-air, then plummeted downward. A second later they passed the helicopter.

"Lower!" Max shouted at the pilot.

The helicopter hurried after them as they hurtled downward.

"Max, if we're higher than the helicopter, how will the helicopter catch us in that net—since the net is below the helicopter?" Peaches asked.

"That *will* be a problem," Max said. "I suspect the pilot will have to execute a deft maneuver."

At that very moment, the pilot executed a deft maneuver, catching Max and Peaches in the net. Then, Peaches and Max climbed the rope ladder and joined the pilot in the cockpit of the plane.

"Magnificent!" Max said to the pilot.

“Thanks to you, Max,” the pilot said. “I didn’t know what to do until I heard you suggest that deft maneuver.”

“It was the only thing to do,” Max said.

“Where to now?” the pilot asked.

“To the pier,” Max replied.

“I can’t land there,” the pilot replied. “There isn’t space.”

“Then drop us at my car,” Max said. “It’s parked outside Control headquarters.”

“Right-o!”

“Drop us?” Peaches said to Max.

Max turned back to the pilot. “Scratch that,” he said. “Make it ‘land us’ at my car.”

“Right-o!”

A few minutes later, the helicopter landed in the street beside Max’s car. Max and Peaches thanked the pilot again, then got out and walked to the car.

“I thought you said your car had a bug in it,” Peaches said.

“It does. But it’s safe unless you slam the door. Just don’t slam the door.”

“I’ll try to remember that. But, you know me, I’m just an empty-headed blonde.”

Max and Peaches got into the car. But instead of starting the engine, Max took off his shoe.

“Reporting in again?” Peaches asked.

“Yes. The Chief worries when I ask him to send a helicopter to circle over a cab that’s headed straight for the Potomac and don’t tell him why.”

Max dialed.

Chief: Max? Is that you? Are you safe?

Operator: Never mind about him. How’s our shoe?

Max: I am fine. Peaches is fine. And the shoe is fine.

Chief: Max, why did you want that helicopter?

Max: I had to activate an ejection seat, Chief, to get out of that cab. And I wanted the helicopter and the net to be there when we were shot into the air.

Operator: Eeeeeek! Our shoe! It could've been killed!

Max: Operator, will you get off the line, please!

Operator: Was it frightened, poor thing?

Max: No, the shoe was the calmest of the three of us. Now, *please*, get off the line!

Chief: Just ignore her, Max. Incidentally, where are you now?

Max: Parked out in front of Control headquarters, Chief.

Chief: Out front! Max, you left here early this morning headed for New York, Moscow and Peking, and *that's* as far as you've got?

Max: Chief, I think I detect an undercurrent of chagrin in your tone.

Chief: I don't know why. Frankly, Max, I'm surprised you've managed to get that far. I didn't think you'd make it out the secret exit. You know how you always get lost down there.

Max: Shall we talk about happier things, Chief?

Chief: For instance?

Max: Well, right now, we're going to drive straight to the pier and board an excursion boat for New York. We might think about a bon voyage party.

Chief: That wouldn't be proper, Max. You're on duty.

Max: That's right—it wouldn't be proper. I forgot about Rule 707: Never mix business with pleasure.

Chief: That's Rule 303, Max. Rule 707 is: Never lose your parachute, or it'll come out of your salary.

Max: I wish you hadn't mentioned that, Chief. It's a painful subject.

Chief: Keep in contact, Max. And . . . bon voyage.

Max: Will do, Chief. And thank you.

Operator: Bon voyage, shoe.

Max slipped his shoe back onto his foot, then started the engine of the car and turned it out into traffic.

“Can you find the pier this time?” Peaches asked.

“It’s only a few blocks from here.”

“But can you find it?”

“I can smell a pier a mile away,” Max replied.

Two hours later, after having asked directions several times, Max and Peaches arrived at the pier.

“There’s an excursion boat,” Max said, pointing to a huge boat that had a sign saying “Excursion Boat” hanging over its side.

“I hope your eyes are in better working order than your nose,” Peaches said.

They parked, then walked to the boat. Standing on deck, leaning on the rail, was a plump man in uniform who looked a lot like a typical excursion boat captain.

“Hail!” Max called to him.

The man cupped an ear. “What’s that?”

“I said, ‘Hail!’,” Max replied. “I was hailing you.”

“Oh. Hail to you, too.”

“Where are you bound?” Max called.

“Around the middle,” the man replied. “I wear a corset to keep my tummy in.”

“What I mean is, where does your boat go?”

“Same as most boats—on the water!”

“On the water to New York?” Max asked.

“New York, Moscow and Peking,” the man replied.

Max turned to Peaches. “I think this is the boat we want,” he said.

They went aboard.

“How-do-you-do,” Max said to the man. “I’m Max Smart, and this is Peaches Twelvetreets.”

“Jus’ call me Cap’n Andy,” the man beamed.

“All right, Captain. Now—”

“Cap’n,” the Cap’n corrected.

“Oh . . . yes, Cap’n. Well, Cap’n, we’re interested in getting to New York. We’ll decide about Moscow and Peking later. Can you accommodate us?”

“Do better’ll that,” the Cap’n replied. “I can take you there.”

“Fine. Now, do you have a cabin?”

“I’m the Cap’n.”

“No, cabin—c-a-b-i-n. Cabin.”

“Sure. Got a whole boatload of ’em. Matter of fact, you can have the Cap’n’s cabin.”

“The Cap’n’s cabin? Won’t you be needing that yourself?”

“I spend all my time on the bridge,” the Cap’n replied.

“I see. Steering the boat?”

“No, watchin’ the cars drive by underneath.”

“Let’s take a look at that cabin,” Max said warily.

“Right this way.”

The Cap’n led them along the deck, then stopped at a door and opened it and gestured them inside.

“Very nice,” Max said, looking around. He turned back to the Cap’n. “About how long will it take us to get to New York?” he asked.

“At the rate we’ll travel, until Dooms Day!” the Cap’n replied.

“Noman!” Peaches shrieked.

Cap’n Andy whipped out a pistol and pointed it at them. “Guess who!” he grinned evilly.

“Peaches already identified you,” Max pointed out.

“Then let’s get down to business,” Noman said. “Hand over the Plan!”

“As you should know by now, we’d rather die first,” Max replied.

“Then so be it!” Noman said. “In one hour, this boat will leave the pier. You two and me—and, oh yes, one other passenger—are the only ones on board. When the boat reaches the ocean, I’ll pull the plug in the bottom and it will sink!”

“The boat or the plug?” Max asked.

“The boat!”

“Mmmmm . . . that’s bad,” Max said. “If it were the plug, I think we could survive. But the boat, that’s another matter.”

“But what about you?” Peaches said to Noman. “Won’t you sink, too?”

Noman grinned again. “I’m taking a leaf from Max’s notebook,” he said. “I’m being picked up by helicopter.” He backed toward the door. “In one hour,” he said, “we’ll shove off!”

“Why in one hour?” Max asked. “Why not now?”

Noman took a timetable from his pocket. “See?” he said. “It’s right here on the schedule. The boat doesn’t leave for another hour.”

Max nodded. “That answers my question, thank you.”

Noman backed out the doorway. “Keep your feet dry!” he taunted.

Then he slammed the door.

Max rushed to the door and tried to turn the knob. “Locked!” he said. “We’re prisoners!”

“Max! What can we do?”

“I’m not sure. But, at least, we have an hour to do it in. Try to think of something.”

“Help!” Peaches screamed.

Max shook his head. “That won’t help. You’ll never be able to keep it up for an hour. In ten minutes, you’ll have laryngitis.”

10.

MAX STUDIED the door of the cabin. “That doesn’t look too sturdy to me,” he said. “I think I can break it down.”

“Then do! Don’t just stand around telling me about it!”

Max backed away, then threw his full weight against the door. He bounced off it, hit one wall, then another wall, then the third wall, then tumbled over a chair and landed on his back on the floor.

“Nice try,” Peaches said gloomily.

“Well, I—”

Max was interrupted by a knocking sound on one of the walls.

“Who’s there?” Max called.

“Quiet!” a voice replied.

“That’s the other passenger!” Max said to Peaches. “He, she or it is in the next cabin!”

“What good does that do us?”

“I’m not sure,” Max replied. “But . . . he, she or it might have an idea. We can use all the help we can get.”

Max got out his ballpoint pen and pressed the button twice. A tongue of flame shot from the end. Max immediately set to work to burn a hole through the wall.

“That he, she or it is probably Noman,” Peaches grumbled.

“We’ll soon know.”

Max removed a round section from the wall, then looked into the hole. He saw Agent 99 peering at him from the other side.

“99!”

“Max!”

“Who is it?” Peaches asked.

“It’s 99!”

“Well, we’ll outnumber Noman, anyway,” Peaches said. “Ninety-nine and you and me, that makes one-hundred-and-one.”

“No, no, this is Agent 99. She’s one of our men.”

“Men?” Peaches said.

“Men?” 99 said.

“That’s a generic term,” Max explained. “At Control, all agents are men. Isn’t that right, 99?”

Silence.

“99?”

“I’m not speaking to you.”

“Then let me put it another way,” Max said. “At Control, all agents are men—except the women.”

Smiling, 99 appeared at the hole again. “Max, what are you doing on this boat?” she said.

“A very good question,” Max replied. “So good, in fact, that I’ll use it myself. 99, what are *you* doing on this boat?”

“I told you this morning—I’m going on an excursion.”

“Oh . . . yes. Well, so are we. But not very far. A KAOS agent named Noman has taken over the boat, and he intends to sink it in the ocean.”

“A KAOS agent? But, Max, the only other person on board is Cap’n Andy.”

“That’s Noman.”

“Well, you may be right. I suspected as much. I understand he—or she—wears a corset.”

“No, no—Noman is his name.”

“Max! Something has to be done!” 99 said.

“That’s very observant of you, 99. And, I think I have an idea. First, I want you to come around and open our door. It locks from the outside.”

“Will do, Max.”

A few seconds later, they heard a sound at the door. Then it opened.

“Fine, so far,” Max said to 99. “Now, we’ll go to your cabin.”

“How will that help, Max?”

“Noman doesn’t know that you’re a Control agent, does he?”

“No, I didn’t mention it.”

Max stopped and picked up a length of rope from the deck. “This will come in handy,” he said.

“You haven’t told me what we’re going to do.”

“You haven’t told me, either,” Peaches said.

“Incidentally,” 99 said, looking Peaches up and down, “who is she?”

“She’s a cryptographer.”

“I take pictures of graves,” Peaches explained.

“That’s not what a cryptographer does,” 99 frowned. “A cryptographer deciphers codes.”

“Now you tel me—after I’ve become famous for my pictures of graves!” Peaches said.

“She’s being facetious, 99,” Max explained. “Her responsibility on this mission is to break the KAOS code and decipher the Dooms Day Plan. But her one-track mind has jumped the track.”

“I’m giving up business for romance,” Peaches said.

“Max, I don’t understand any of this,” 99 complained.

“Never mind. Just follow orders,” Max said.

“All right.”

They entered 99’s cabin, and Max closed the door behind them.

“Now,” he said to 99, “use the intercom system and call the Cap’n and order a basket of fruit.”

“A basket of fruit, Max?”

“Tell him you need it for a bon voyage party.”

“Oh . . . yes, I see.”

“Have him include some purple grapes,” Peaches said. “Purple grapes are romantic.”

“Never mind her,” Max said to 99. “Call.”

99 did as Max requested. And a few minutes later there was a knock at the cabin door.

“Who is it?” 99 called.

“One basket of fruit!”

Max stationed himself at the doorway, holding the length of rope at the ready. He motioned to 99.

“Come in, basket of fruit,” 99 called.

The door opened. Noman entered, carrying a large basket of fruit.

Max leaped at him—and looped the rope tightly over the basket of fruit. Fruit rolled all over the floor.

“That’s dirty!” Noman cried, jumping back and pulling his gun.

But, as he jumped back, he stepped on a banana. His feet flew into the air. The gun slipped from his grasp and slid across the floor.

99 snatched up the gun and pointed it at him.

“Watch out!” Noman cried. “That gun is loaded!”

“Yes,” Max said, “and your ‘other passenger’, who is, in fact, Agent 99 of Control, will use it.”

“Have her put it down,” Noman begged. “A woman with a gun makes me nervous.”

“She will—in just one moment,” Max replied. “First, get to your feet.”

Noman scrambled up.

“Now, sit in that chair,” Max commanded.

Noman sat in the chair.

Max tied him tightly. “Now,” he said to 99, “hand me a handkerchief, please.”

99 handed him a handkerchief.

Max stuffed it in Noman’s mouth. “There you are, nicely bound and gagged,” he said. “Now—talk!”

“Mrrrrmph,” Noman replied.

“Max, he can’t talk with a gag in his mouth,” 99 pointed out.

“Oh . . . yes.” Max removed the gag. “Now—talk!” he said again.

“Well,” Noman began, “I was born in a log cabin in Greenwich Village. My father was a poor but honest silversmith and my mother was a Zen Buddhist monk. As a child—”

“That’s very interesting,” Max broke in. “But it isn’t what I want to hear.”

Noman looked at him quizzically. “What is it you want to hear?”

Max frowned thoughtfully. “Well, let’s see . . .”

“May I tell you a little more about my childhood while you think?” Noman said.

“Yes, that would be—”

“Max,” 99 said, “isn’t it something about a Dooms Day Plan?”

“Right,” Max replied. “Thank you, 99.”

“I just wish I knew what was going on,” 99 said.

“You’ll soon find out,” Max said. He turned back to Noman. “As a member of KAOS,” he said, “you are probably familiar with the KAOS code.”

“Know it well,” Noman replied. “In fact, I always get a gold star on code tests.”

“Good. Then it will be an easy matter for you to decipher the Dooms Day Plan.”

“I wouldn’t even have to decipher it,” Noman said. “I know what it says by heart.”

“All right. The next step, then, I think, would be for you to tell *us* what it says.”

Noman shook his head. “I’d lose all my gold stars,” he said. “That’s the penalty for snitching.”

“Apparently we’ll have to apply some pressure,” Max said.

“You’ll never get anything from me,” Noman replied. “Stick bamboo slivers under my fingernails, tweeze my eyebrows, tickle the bottoms of my

feet—but I’ll never talk.”

“I have something a lit-tle more diabolical in mind,” Max said. He reached into his pocket and got out his ballpoint pen and handed it to Peaches. “This pen, when used as a pen, contains indelible ink,” he said.

“That’s the kind that can’t be erased,” Noman explained to her.

“I know!” she snapped.

Max next handed her his notebook. “Using indelible ink,” he said, “I want you to write in this notebook the phrase, ‘I will never ever again be a silly cryptographer.’ And I want you to write it one hundred times.”

Peaches shrugged. “All right—if it’ll help.”

“It won’t make *me* talk,” Noman said stoutly.

“We’ll see about that,” Max smirked.

“Max,” 99 said, “I don’t understand any of this, either.”

“Simple, 99,” Max replied. “As soon as Peaches has written ‘I will never ever again be a silly cryptographer’ one hundred times in indelible ink, I will try to erase it.”

“Do you have an eraser, Max?”

“No, but I do have a man with an India rubber face.”

“But indelible ink can’t be erased!” Noman protested. “Your so-called eraser will give out.”

“Exactly,” Max said.

“You mean—”

“Yes, Noman—I’m going to rub you out!”

“No!” Noman screeched. “I’ll talk!”

“I thought that would do it,” Max smiled. “Now—talk!”

“Well, I was born in a little log cabin in—”

“Not that! Decipher the code!” He bent closer to Noman. “What is the Dooms Day Plan?”

“It’s a menu,” Noman sobbed.

“That’s hard to believe,” Max replied. “Try again.”

“I tell you, it’s a menu.”

“You have one more chance,” Max said, “then Peaches begins writing.”

“Honest,” Noman insisted. “Scout’s honor. On my word as a gold star KAOS agent. It’s a menu.”

Max took the Plan from his pocket and looked at it:

Sad Al
Astor
Mays
Bronco Con
Map Change
Three Bs
Watch

“That’s a menu?” he said. “What’s it for—mixed grill?”

“You have to know the code,” Noman replied.

“I see. You use the Hoppman method, I assume.”

“No, that stuffs too complicated,” Noman replied. “We just scramble the letters.”

“Scramble the letters,” Max mused. He looked at the Dooms Day Plan again. This time, unscrambling the letters in his mind, he saw:

Salad
Roast
Yams
Corn on Cob
Champagne
Sherbet
Watch

He looked at Noman again. “That makes a tempting meal,” he said. “All except that last item. Is that watch with or without onion sauce?”

“The watch isn’t on the menu,” Noman replied. “The watch comes after.”

“After what?”

“Well, you see, this is a menu for a testimonial dinner. And, after the dinner is finished, we’ll give Arthur the watch. It’s a gold watch. In honor of his twenty-five years of faithful service.”

“Arthur?”

“Yes. Arthur has been with the organization for twenty-five years, and now he’s retiring. So, we’re having a special day for him, and throwing him a testimonial dinner, and giving him a gold watch.”

“I see. A special day.”

“Right.”

“And Arthur’s last name is—”

“Dooms,” Noman replied.

“Arthur Dooms. Yes, it’s all coming clear. And this,” he said, rattling the sheet of paper, “is the Dooms Day Plan.”

“Absolutely right.”

“It’s a bit of a letdown,” Max sighed.

“Sorry about that.”

“There’s one thing I still don’t understand,” Max said. “Why did you go to so much trouble to keep the Plan out of our hands?”

“Well, the code is so simple, we thought you’d break it,” Noman replied. “Any kindergarten child could break our code.”

Peaches hauled back a fist. “I’ll slug ’im!”

99 held her back.

“That’s no discredit to you,” Max said to her. “You’re not a kindergarten child.”

“Well . . . if you put it that way . . .” Peaches muttered, lowering her fist.

Max addressed Noman again. “Suppose we had broken the code,” he said. “It’s only a menu.”

“Yes, but we thought that if you saw the word ‘watch’ at the end of the Plan you’d know the menu was for a testimonial dinner.”

“What’s so wrong about that?” Max asked, puzzled.

“Think, Max,” Noman said. “What is KAOS’s image?”

“You’re the bad guys.”

“Right. And do bad guys throw testimonial dinners? Hardly. It would destroy our image. We’d be thought of as an organization of sentimentalists—a bunch of softies.”

“Now, I understand,” Max said.

“What do we do now, Max?” 99 asked.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Max smiled. “We have the means to destroy KAOS for once and all.”

“We do?”

“We’ll publicize this Dooms Day Plan,” Max said. “KAOS’s image will be destroyed, and—what’s an organization of bad guys without its image?”

“That’s marvelous, Max!” 99 said.

“Max! Think before you do that!” Noman pleaded. “Think of all the bad guys you’ll be putting out of work!”

“Sorry. But the guilty will just have to suffer with the innocent,” Max replied. “I’m going to take this Plan to the Chief. I’m sure he’ll agree with me that it should be publicized. I can see the headline now: ‘KAOS Unmasked! Bad Guys Revealed To Be a Bunch of Softies!’ ”

Noman shuddered.

“Let’s go,” Max said to 99 and Peaches. “I want to get this Plan to the Chief as soon as possible.”

“What about him?” 99 asked, indicating Noman.

“We’ll leave him here—tied up,” Max replied. “It’s the only way we can be sure he won’t make another attempt to get the Dooms Day Plan.”

“Good thinking, Max!” 99 said.

Max, 99 and Peaches left the boat and went to Max’s car. Peaches was the last one to get into the car, and as she did, she slammed the door.

A cannon fired out of the front of the car. The shell passed through one side of the boat and came out the other. Slowly, the boat began to sink.

“Didn’t I warn you about that door!” Max snapped at Peaches.

“Never mind that, Max!” 99 said. “We can’t leave Noman on board the boat. He’ll drown.”

“He’s a bad guy,” Max replied. “That’s what bad guys deserve.”

“Max—that doesn’t sound like you!”

“Oh . . . all right.”

Max got out of the car and returned to the boat. A few minutes later, he returned. But Noman was not with him.

“He’s not there,” Max said.

“He’s escaped?”

“Apparently so.”

“But, Max,” 99 said, “you had him tied so tightly.”

“Correction,” Max replied. “My guess is that it was his corset that I had tied so tightly. Evidently he slipped out of his corset and . . . Well, you’d know more about that than I would.”

“Too bad,” 99 said.

“Yes. We’ll have to keep a sharp lookout,” Max said. “I suspect he’ll try to get the Plan from us. Without the Plan—the evidence in writing—we’d have no proof that the KAOS boys are, in fact, a bunch of softies.”

“We’d better hurry, Max,” 99 said.

Max got behind the wheel, started the engine, and drove off.

“Can you find Control headquarters?” Peaches asked.

“That’s a ridiculous question,” Max said. “Of course, I can—as long as 99 is along to point out the way.”

Not long after that they reached Control headquarters. Max parked the car, and they got out. But as they walked toward the building, Max suddenly put out a hand, stopping Peaches and 99.

“That man—there at the entrance,” Max said. “Doesn’t he look familiar?”

“Of course, Max,” 99 replied. “That’s Agent 44.”

“How do we *know* that?” Max said. “My guess is that it’s Noman posing as Agent 44.”

“Well . . .”

“I say no,” Peaches said. “That man doesn’t look anything like Noman.”

“When you’ve been in this business as long as I have, you’ll learn not to trust your own eyes,” Max said. “To quote a well-known KAOS agent, ‘The proof is in the pudding.’ 99, I’ll approach the fellow—whoever he is—pretend to shake hands with him, throw him to the ground, and pin him there—while you frisk him.”

“All right, Max.”

Max approached the man, extending a hand.

The man accepted the hand, threw Max over his shoulder, and pinned him to the ground.

Max looked pained. “44, why did you do that?” he asked.

“Sorry, Max,” 44 replied. “I thought you were Noman posing as Max Smart.”

“Well, I’m not!” Max said, getting up. “And I’d appreciate it if you’d have a little more faith in your own eyes from now on.”

44 saluted. “I’ll try to, sir,” he said.

“All right . . . see you around, 44.”

“See you around, Max,” 44 replied, disappearing into the building.

“Max, you can stop worrying about Noman now,” 99 said. “We’re safe. We’re home.”

“I suppose you’re right, 99,” Max smiled. “This time, Noman has been outSmarted.” He gestured toward the entrance. “Shall we go see the Chief now?”

They entered the building and made their way along the long corridor of steel doors. When they reached the telephone booth that was in reality a trap door—secret entrance to the lower floors, Max said, “I think we’d better take the stairs. I don’t think we’d all fit in that telephone booth.”

“We could try,” Peaches giggled. “It might be romantic.”

“Get your own secret agent to try it with,” 99 snapped.

They descended by way of the stairs, and, a moment later, reached the door of the Chief's office. Max knocked.

"Who's there?"

"Chief—aren't you forgetting the password?"

"That's it," a voice answered. "I ask 'who's there?', and you answer with your name. That's the password for today."

"Oh. It's Max, Chief."

"I don't know any Max Chief. Any relation to Max Smart?"

"Chief! This is me—Max Smart."

"Come in, Max."

Max opened the door and he and 99 and Peaches entered. The Chief got up from his desk and came to meet them. He was plump and looked a lot like a typical Chief.

"I'll take the Plan, Max," the Chief said.

Max halted. "Just a minute, Chief. There's a story that goes with it."

"You can tell me the story later, Max. Right now, Just give me the Plan."

"Chief, the story is very important," Max said. "I insist that you listen to the story first. Otherwise, you won't know what to do with the Plan."

The Chief sighed. "All right, Max, what's the story?"

"Well, I was born in a little log— No, that's a different story. The way this story begins is . . ."

Max proceeded to tell the Chief exactly what had happened after he and Peaches had left him early that morning. He didn't leave out a single detail.

"That's fine, Max," the Chief said when Max finished. "It was a fascinating story. Now, give me the Plan."

"Wouldn't you like to hear the part where Peaches shot the holes in the boat again, Chief?"

"No, Max. Just give me the Plan."

"What do you intend to do with it, Chief?"

"Why, publicize it, just as you suggested."

“Good. Here it is, Chief.”

The Chief snatched the Plan from Max’s hand, then headed hurriedly for the door.

“Where are you going, Chief?” Max asked curiously.

“Oh . . . well, I’m going to take the Plan to the publicity department,” the Chief replied. “It’s the publicity department that does all our publicizing, you know.”

“That makes sense,” Max nodded.

The Chief went out the door, then closed it behind him.

“Max . . .” 99 frowned, “. . . I didn’t know we had a publicity department.”

“It’s news to me, too,” Max said.

“If we’re a secret organization, why would we have a publicity department?” 99 asked.

“We’re not *that* secret,” Max replied. “Everybody knows about us. You can’t keep a thing like a secret organization a secret.”

“Still . . .”

At that moment, the door opened and the Chief came back in.

“Max!” he said. “You’re back!”

Max shook his head. “No, Chief, you’re the one who’s back. I haven’t been anywhere.”

“I don’t doubt that,” the Chief said. “But you tried, didn’t you? New York, Moscow, Peking—remember?”

“Max!” 99 cried.

“Just a minute, 99,” Max said. “Let’s get this other thing straightened out.” He turned back to the Chief. “Chief, you’re the one who apparently doesn’t remember. I explained all that in my story—remember?”

“Your story, Max?”

“Max!” 99 cried again.

“99, please, just a moment.” Once more, he faced toward the Chief. “Surely you remember, Chief. When Peaches shot those holes in the boat?”

You remember that, don't you? I just finished telling the story not ten minutes ago."

"Max!"

"99, please!"

"Max, I've been out of my office on a coffee break for over a half-hour," the Chief said.

Max blinked at him—then turned to 99. "Yes, you were saying?"

"Max!"

"Yes, I know. But what else."

"Max, that first man you talked to, the one you told the story to, that wasn't the Chief. That was—"

"Noman!" Peaches shrieked.

"Max, what's going on here?" the Chief demanded.

"Well, Chief, I hate to admit it, but I think I've been outNomaned," Max replied.

"What happened?" the Chief asked.

Max motioned toward the Chief's chair. "Have a seat, Chief. This is a long story."

"Twice as long when you hear it the second time," Peaches groaned.

Max then proceeded to tell the story again, leaving out not one single detail.

When he had finished, the Chief said, "Then, as I understand it, Noman masqueraded as me, and he now has the Plan."

"That's the way I understand it, too," Max replied.

The Chief smiled. "Well, it could be worse, Max."

Max stared at him. "How?"

"The Dooms Day Plan could have been a plan for a Dooms Day."

"It *is*, Chief! Didn't you understand? The whole day will be Arthur Dooms's."

"No, Max, I mean a *real* Dooms Day—the end of the world."

“Oh. Well then, yes, I agree. That would be worse. But, we’ve lost our opportunity to destroy KAOS. That isn’t good, Chief.”

“I’m not so sure about that, Max.”

“Chief! Is that *you* saying that?”

“Maybe he’s Noman again,” 99 said.

The Chief shook his head. “No, no, 99—I’m the Chief, all right.”

“Then how can you say that you’re not sure that it isn’t good that we’ve lost our opportunity to destroy KAOS, Chief?” Max asked.

“Well, Max, any organization that holds a testimonial dinner for a trusted employee can’t be *all* bad. I expect the same thing from Control when I retire.”

“Yes, Chief, but—”

“And, Max, I think that, in this day of reality and reason, we ought to encourage sentimentality wherever we find it. There’s little enough of it left in the world.”

“Yes, Chief, but—”

“There’s another reason, too, Max. A more practical reason.”

“Yes, Chief, but— But what is it, Chief?”

“Well, Max, if we eliminated all the bad guys, what would be the eventual result?”

“A perfect world?”

“That’s a little long-range for me, Max. I’m thinking of the short-term aspects. Ask yourself this, Max: In what kind of work are we engaged?”

“Chasing bad guys.”

“And, if there were no more bad guys, Max?”

“A lot of swell good guys would be out of work,” Max replied.

“Exactly.”

“I see your point, Chief.”

“All us good guys out of work, we’d be a burden on the nation’s economy,” the Chief said. “Good guys would be standing in bread lines.”

Max shuddered. "I guess it's a good thing that Noman escaped with the Plan."

"All's well that ends well, Max," the Chief said. He turned to Peaches. "Miss Twelvetimes," he said, "needless to say, we are grateful for your assistance."

"She was no help at all, Chief," Max said.

"How can you say that, Max?" the Chief replied. "She failed to break the code, didn't she?"

"Yes, Chief, but—"

"If she had broken the code, Max, and we had discovered that the Dooms Day Plan was a menu for a testimonial dinner, and we had publicized the fact that KAOS was staffed with a bunch of softies, all us good guys would now be on the brink of unemployment."

"I take back what I said," Max said to Peaches. "Your services were invaluable."

"Thank you," Peaches giggled. "Now, can I ask a favor?"

"Anything," the Chief replied.

"Could you give me the address of KAOS headquarters?"

"Well . . . yes . . . I suppose," the Chief said, baffled. "Max," he said, "will you get that address from the file, please?"

Max went to the file, and came back a moment later with the address written on a slip of paper.

"Would I be too nosy if I asked what you intend to use this for?" Max said, handing Peaches the slip of paper.

"Heavens, no!" she replied. "I'm going to join KAOS."

"You're—"

"I've been thinking," she explained. "About that Noman. He could be quite romantic."

"Noman? That cold-blooded arch-criminal?"

"He may be a cold-blooded arch-you-know-what to you," Peaches said. "But he's a fantastic possibility to me."

“I’m not sure I understand,” the Chief said.

“With that face of his?” Peaches giggled. “He could be a pudgy Cary Grant in the morning, a pudgy Rock Hudson at noon, and a pudgy Tony Curtis at night. You think that ain’t a fantastic possibility?”

“Well, I suppose—the Chief began.

But Peaches could not wait. “Happy landings,” she called, going out the door.

The Chief looked at Max disappointedly. “Max—what happened? When that girl came in here this morning, she was a friend. Now, she’s joining KAOS. From friend to enemy in less than twenty-four hours.”

Max winced. “Sorry about that, Chief,” he said.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



WILLIAM JOHNSTON (1924-2010), author of many movie and TV tie-in novels was born January 11th, 1924 and passed away October 15th, 2010.

On January 4th, 2010, The International Association of Media Tie-in Writers www://iamtw.org announced it was bestowing The *Faust*, its Grand Master Award for excellence, to author William Johnston, the writer of over a hundred tie-in novels and the most prolific practitioner of the craft.

(From the January/February 2010 Newsletter - IAMTW)
The Newsletter of the International Association
of Media Tie-in Writers

**IAMTW's GRAND MASTER SCRIBE AWARD,
THE *FAUST*, GOES TO THE GENRE'S MOST
PROLIFIC PRACTITIONER**

By David Spencer

The inarguable preeminent author of tie-ins, with more published tie-in titles to his credit (well more than 100) than any writer in the game before or since—the legendary and until now somewhat elusive William Johnston—will be honored by the IAMTW with a Faust Award, the honor bestowed upon Grand Masters. He is currently residing in San Jose, California, and will turn 86 on January 11th, 2010—a fitting number, as it is his series of novels based on the spy sitcom *Get Smart*, about Secret Agent 86 for CONTROL, which turned his byline into a virtual tie-in “brand” and thereafter defined the nature of his tie-in (and the largest proportion of his literary) career as the industry’s comedy specialist.

Johnston’s style is paradoxically recognizable, despite seeming matter of fact and transparent, his narration employing little reliance on metaphor, idiosyncratic locution or other literary manipulation. But the ostensible simplicity is utterly deceptive: for in the “serious” books, depth of characterization sneaks up on the reader, dialogue and internalization unusually nuanced, layered and when appropriate even subtle, with a psychological perception very ahead of its time.

Johnston’s humorous novels are a textbook lesson on comic timing in prose, possibly because he had some experience as an actor (a signature of his books is writing phone conversations as play-format dialogue exchanges, woodshedding redundant “he said’s” and “she said’s”).

He knew the wisdom and the technique of “simply” staying out of the way, and letting the tale be carried by action, dialogue, and an impeccable sense of cadence and rhythm. Plus his own unique brand of whimsy and wordplay.

Johnston’s career started in 1960 with the release of a hardcover comic murder mystery, *The Marriage Cage* (Lyle Stuart, reissued in paperback by Dell), which earned him a Best First Novel Edgar Award nomination from the Mystery Writers of America. Curiously, this did not lead immediately to more mystery novels (though he would write mystery tie-ins later in his career), but rather to a number of early 60s pulp titles for Monarch Books, which ranged from light comedy (*The Power of Positive Loving*) to medical romance (the *Doctor Starr* trilogy) to soft core racy (*Save Her for Loving*, *Teen Age Tramp*, *Girls on the Wing*).

The medical novels in particular either dovetailed with, or led to, his first tie-in commissions, which were for original novels based on medical dramas, such as *The Nurses* (Bantam), *Doctor Kildare* (Lancer and Whitman) and *Ben Casey*. These books, published between 1962 and 1964, were so successful that a cover variant on *The Nurses* includes a “2nd Big Printing” starburst; and his next (and it would seem last) original medical romance, *Two Loves Has Nurse Powell* (Neva Paperbacks) trumpets “From the author of *Ben Casey*. ”

It’s likely that among these books, the *Doctor Kildare* title written for Whitman’s young audience line was a significant pivot point, because in 1965, Tempo Books (the Young Audience paperback imprint of Grosset & Dunlop) commissioned Johnston to write *Get Smart*, an original novel based on the spy satire sitcom starring Don Adams, Barbara Feldon, and Edward Platt, created by Mel Brooks and Buck Henry. The first *Get Smart* book proved so staggeringly popular, going through multiple printings, that follow ups were immediately commissioned, leading to what would become a series of nine books over the course of the show’s five-season history.

That doesn’t sound like much in new millennium terms, but in the 60s it amounted to a single-author original tie-in grand slam, outdistanced only by the *Dark Shadows* series authored by Dan (as “Marilyn”) Ross. Indeed, it was the third place holder for TV tie-in series originals in general, with only the 23-book *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* series—by multiple authors—between it and *Dark Shadows*. (James Blish’s 12 book *Star Trek* series for Bantam, which continued into the 70s, did not feature original tales, but was rather comprised exclusively of short stories adapting the show’s teleplays.)

Johnson’s gig as Maxwell Smart’s official novelist in turn led to his becoming the go-to guy for sitcom-based novels in general. Continuing with Tempo Books from the rest of the decade into the mid-70s, he authored a one-shot based on the short-lived *Captain Nice* (starring William Daniels of *1776* and also created by Buck Henry) and book series based on *Room 222*, *Happy Days*, and *Welcome Back, Kotter*. Concurrently he also authored books based on *The Flying Nun* for Ace, as well as *The Brady Bunch* and *Nanny and the Professor* (Lancer). As if that weren’t plenty, he also did sitcom novels for Whitman, including titles based on *The Munsters*, *Gilligan’s Island*, *Bewitched*, *The Monkees*, and *F-Troop*.

Though the sitcom novels dominated Johnston's tie-in career, and were the work with which he was reflexively identified, he still did a catalog's worth of work in just about every other TV tie-in genre except science fiction and military. He authored one-off mysteries based on *My Friend Tony* (Lancer), *Ironside* (Whitman), and the comic strip *Dick Tracy* (Tempo), a two-book series based on the American Revolution youth historical, *The Young Rebels*, and an original Western based on *The Iron Horse* (Popular Library). Under pseudonyms he tackled social drama, with a book based on Rod Serling's *The New People* (as "Alex Steele" for Tempo) and two based on *Matt Lincoln* (as "Ed Garth" for Lancer). His catalog even includes a smattering of juvenilia, with Whitman Big Little books based on Hanna Barbera cartoon characters such as Magilla Gorilla and Snugglepuss, among others. (According to the late Howard Ashman—whose day job, before *Little Shop of Horrors* made him a musical theatre icon, was assistant editor at Ace/Tempo during Johnston's most prolific period—Johnston's services as sitcom specialist were so much in demand that, simply to keep up the pace and meet the deadlines, he would occasionally create detailed outlines which would then be farmed out to anonymous "ghosts" for fleshing out. Since the style remains consistent, one assumes Johnston added the final polish.)

Aside from his TV tie-in originals, Johnston penned many script novelizations, again in multiple genres. He novelized the pilots for the 1930s-era private eye series *Banyon* (Warner) and the high school drama *Sons and Daughters* (Ballantine). His feature film novelizations include (and may not be limited to) Alan J. Pakula's controversial *Klute*, *The Swinger*, *Echoes of a Summer*, Robert Bloch's *Asylum*, *The New Interns*, *The April Fools*, *The Priest's Wife*, Disney's *Lt. Robin Crusoe, USN* (written as "Bill Ford") and *Angel, Angel, Down We Go*. If you note that *The Swinger* was published under the Dell imprint and review the publishers named in this release, another astonishing fact emerges: Johnston tie-ins seem to have been issued by every major paperback house of the era, with the exception of Fawcett.

Which is not to say that Fawcett didn't publish him: during this period he, like a lot of male pulpsmiths, also wrote gothic romances behind a female pseudonym. His were published—by Fawcett—under the name

“Susan Claudia.” Johnston’s wholly original work became scarce once he was established as a tie-in machine, but it didn’t altogether disappear. Aside from the Susan Claudia gothics, he also authored *The Manipulator* (Lancer, 1968, reissued under Magnum), a racy paperback potboiler about an ambitious business executive fighting the odds to get a revolutionary jetliner into the air; and in hardcover, a novel about an overweight, bigoted beat cop called *Barney* (Random House, 1970, reissued in paperback by Warner).

Barney was his longest novel ever, clocking in at 307 pages. The page count is an interesting statistic owing to the period in which Johnston wrote: at that time, tie-in novels were typically shorter than they are today—as indeed were genre novels in general—and a typical Johnston paperback ranged from between 128-144 pages of small print to 160-190 pages of moderate print. By those standards, his two longest original tie-ins, the small print releases *The Nurses* at approximately 224 (Bantam) and *The Iron Horse* at approximately 190 (Popular Library) were tie-in epics.

Johnston’s last book— anyway, his last as far as can be determined—was an atypically “epic” small-print novelization, of the likewise epic, and thoroughly notorious film *Caligula* (Warner, 1979, 222 pages). As shamelessly salacious as the film apparently was, the book sported the byline “William Howard,” possibly to avoid inappropriately attracting the younger readers who flocked to his sitcom pastiches. Indeed, the book had its own notoriety, for it was originally released in advance of the film—with the film’s logo design (a Roman coin featuring an embossed close-up likeness of Malcolm McDowell in the title role) against a tan background—as Gore Vidal’s *Caligula*. But soon after, all unsold copies of the print run were recalled, as Vidal had filed suit to have his name taken off Bob Guccione’s vulgarized film. Vidal lost the suit, but his name was removed from the book, which was reissued with the logo against an ironically lily white background as simply *Caligula*, with no screenplay attribution.

The following profile comes from the premier edition back cover of Johnston’s first book, *The Marriage Cage*, and constitutes virtually the only bio of any meaningful detail he allowed on any of his books (he is quoted as having said, “I wanted to stay as anonymous as possible”). Based on its irreverent style, it’s safe to assume Johnston wrote it himself:

William Johnston was born in Lincoln, Illinois on January 11, 1924.

He ended his formal education after three years of high school, when he left home and school at seventeen to become an actor. Claims he was a lousy actor.

Joined the Navy in 1942 after seeing a Naval band marching in a newsreel. Has tried to avoid newsreels ever since. Served in the Pacific. After the war, he became a disk jockey for radio station WTAX, Springfield, Illinois. A year later, he became a wandering disk jockey, working at stations in Illinois and Indiana.

In another year, as Johnston tells the story, he, with two acquaintances and one client, formed an advertising agency in Chicago. For certain mystic reasons, they named it Merchants Limited, after a train that ran between Boston and New York. The day after the agency was formed, the client came to his senses and pulled out. Agency disbanded.

He was for two years the associate editor of *The Lion*, magazine of the International Association of the Lions Clubs.

For the past nine years he has been a public relations account executive. At the moment he handles the Lionel trains account for Tex McCrary's public relations agency.

After *Caligula*, Johnston—who had amassed millions of fans yet little meaningful literary recognition—tired of writing and decided to become—

—wait for it—

—a bartender.

Then living on Long Island, New York, he attended bartending school and graduated to find that he was considered too old to hire. His solution was to buy his own bar, which he did. It was called *The Blind Pig*; it was located in Massapequa, and he ran it very successfully until his retirement.