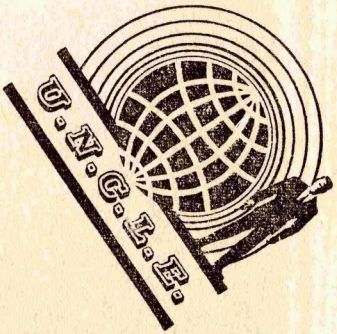
THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

The Affair of the Gentle Saboteur

Based on the well-known television series


U.N.C.L.E.


U.N.C.L.E.


U.N.C.L.E.

U.N.C.L.E.

The Man From U. N. C. L. E.

and the
AFFAIR
of the
GENTLE
SABOTEUR

by Brandon Keith

based on the well-known television series

illustrated by
Tom Gill

WHITMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY • Racine, Wisconsin

Printed in U.S.A. by
Western Printing and Lithographing Co.

CONTENTS

1. The Quarry

ON THIS HOT, bright, sunny Thursday in July, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin waited impatiently in the cool dimness of the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria. Their object of immediate attention was one Albert Stanley.

Stanley had been spotted early Tuesday morning. McNabb, an experienced old-timer, one of UNCLE's field men on permanent assignment

at Kennedy Airport, had recognized him at customs where Stanley had not been detained long. An ordinary passenger on an ordinary flight from England, his passport was in order and he had carried no baggage except a slender attaché case filled with proper commercial papers. He was a respectable salesman from a sedate London firm, International Plastics, Limited. Of course, McNabb had known better, and so he had tailed Stanley to New York and the Waldorf. There Stanley had confirmed his reservation and had been escorted upstairs by a bellboy. Then McNabb had called Alexander Waverly at UNCLE headquarters.

"Oh, my," the Old Man said after McNabb, tersely, had made his report.

"What are the orders, Chief?"

"Stay with him. Don't lose him for a moment."

"I don't intend to. What else?"

"Nothing else. You're going to have a back-

up team, a lot of company, quite shortly. You just stay with him."

"Yes, sir."

"And, McNabb. . . ."

"Yes, Chief?"

"Nice work."

"Thank you, sir."

" 'Bye now."

Waverly hung up and punched a button of the intercom.

"I want Solo and Kuryakin. Right away!"

As they came into the office, Solo lightly nudged Illya. For once the Old Man was showing excitement. He was lighting his pipe, but the fingers holding the match were trembling, however slightly. The Old Man puffed, blew vigorously on the match, and dropped it into an ashtray. He smoked, squinting through the smoke.

"Gentlemen, have either one of you ever

heard of Albert Stanley?"

Solo shrugged.

Illya said, "No."

"You, Mr. Solo?"

"No, sir."

"You're young men. Thank heaven for McNabb."

"Pardon?" Solo said.

"That he's an old man," Waverly said.

"I don't quite understand," said Solo.

"The young have their usefulness, but so do the old, Mr. Solo. McNabb's been with the organization for thirty years. In his youth, like you and Mr. Kuryakin, he traveled and worked in far places, and saw much and learned much. Now McNabb's through with romantic derring-do. Now he's merely a pair of eyes for us at Kennedy International, but those wise old eyes are capable of seeing more than your wise young eyes, if you understand me. They saw and recognized, as an

instance—Albert Stanley."

"But who. . . ?" Illya began.

Waverly touched a button on his board.

At once, from a ceiling loudspeaker, a metallic voice replied, "Photo Room."

"Miss Winslow?"

"This is she, Mr. Waverly."

"Ah. Good. I should like you to set up a photo, please. Just one, the latest. We have a rather recent one and a fairly good one at that. Slide projector, color, full screen. Albert Stanley, THRUSH, British Sector. Immediately, Miss Winslow."

"Immediately, Mr. Waverly."

"Thank you." He tapped the disconnect button, sighed, and stood up. "Gentlemen, if you please. . . ."

They followed their chief through steel-walled corridors and many doors to the Photo Room.

"Ready, Miss Winslow?" Waverly said.

"All in order. Won't you sit down, please?"

The room was like a miniature motion picture theater, the projection room up a stairway in the rear. There were eight rows of seats in the long narrow room, and up front, instead of a screen, there was a smooth white wall. They sat in the last row, Waverly between them.

"All right, Miss Winslow," he called.

She climbed the stairs in the rear. There was a click and the room went dark. There was another click and the slide projector produced a brilliant, life-size portrait that filled the smooth white wall. Solo sat forward.

The setting appeared to be a garden. In the foreground, left, was a marble fountain bordered by many-colored flowers. Off to the right was a high, green, leafy hedge. In front of the hedge stood a small, slender, expressionless man. It was hard to describe him. He had brownish hair,

brownish eyes, a brownish face, wore brownish clothes. There was not a single distinguishing feature. Nothing stood out. He was a small, slender, brownish, expressionless man.

"Nondescript," Waverly said. "A part of his art. He blends with the background; he melts into crowds. Observe him carefully, gentlemen. A most dangerous man. Albert Stanley."

"Who is Albert Stanley?" Illya asked.

"A saboteur of infinite finesse. The best that THRUSH has ever produced. What baffles me is, what the devil is he doing here?"

"Why not here?" Solo said.

The Old Man's pipe was dead. He lit it. His fingers were no longer trembling. "To the best of my knowledge, Stanley has never been in the United States and now, certainly at this time in history, he doesn't belong. There are so many sensitive areas throughout the world where THRUSH can use his special services—Viet-

nam, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Bolivia, even the Middle East, or Germany. Sensitive areas, hot spots—where his kind of damage can have volatile effect. What the devil is he doing here?"

"I take it that it's going to be our job to find out."

"You take it correctly, Mr. Solo. But you'll tread carefully, you and Mr. Kuryakin. The man's a consummate artist, a highly valued gem in the British Sector of THRUSH, a top-echelon man who never makes a move without a top-echelon plan of counteroffensive even in retreat. You may use as many men as you wish and whatever equipment you wish. But you must not touch him unless you get him red-handed, or else we'll have all of international authority down on our heads. And there's time for a full briefing; I want to give you all the warnings on the man. There's time. He's only just arrived, and McNabb's tight

on him. And make full use of McNabb. He's a wise old bird."

"Do you know this Stanley?" Illya asked. "I mean, personally?"

"Only personally—as opposed to business." The Old Man chuckled. "Met him three times in the past ten years but, as it were, socially. Once in Belgrade, once in Tokyo, once in Vienna. He knew who I was just as I knew who he was, and we displayed to one another—how shall I put it?—a grudging admiration. All right now, gentlemen, let's do our briefing." He turned and called, "Thank you, Miss Winslow. Let's please have the lights back on."

And so Albert Stanley, a quiet, mild-mannered, if somewhat eccentric guest at the Waldorf-Astoria, had become the quarry.

Solo, on arriving at the Waldorf early on Tuesday, had taken the manager of the hotel into his

confidence. From the manager he had learned that Stanley had an excellent and expensive suite on the ninth floor. The suite had been reserved for Stanley on Monday by a tall, dark man, on a monthly rental basis, payment in advance. The man had brought two heavy-looking suitcases into the suite, returning the key to the desk for Stanley. The tall, dark man had not been seen again.

On Solo's urging, the manager had removed the guests from the suite adjacent to Stanley's on the pretext that there had developed an unexpected need for repairs. McNabb and another agent had been installed in that suite. McNabb had wanted to pierce tiny holes through the walls in order to utilize the viewscope, but Solo, under instruction, had disallowed it.

"Scare the hare and lose the snare," the Old Man had said. "No holes in the walls, not even an inspection of the suite when he goes out. He's a wily old buzzard, knows every trick in the game.

He'd know, just as you'd know, that there are self-protective inspection patterns. He's setting up his own traps against surveillance, I assure you. Yours is strictly a tailing job and a most delicate one. You either get him red-handed or you don't get him at all—but we must not scare him off."

Instead McNabb had set up the rubber plungers of the audioscope against the walls, and he and his assistant, with headpieces over their ears, could hear every sound. Stanley had had no visitors. He had received no phone calls. He had eaten all his meals, delivered by room service, in his suite. But once every four hours, day and night, he had quit the suite, and immediately McNabb had alerted Solo or Kuryakin downstairs. Each time Stanley had gone to a telephone booth and each time to a different one. He had made a phone call and returned to his suite. That had been the extent of his activities. Nothing more.

And so on this hot, bright sunny Thursday in July, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin lolled impatiently in the cool dimness of the lobby. It was ten minutes after eleven in the morning. At eleven Stanley had come down to make his phone call. This time he had gone out to the street and made it from a glass phone booth. Then he had gone back upstairs.

Solo shrugged. "I'll go have a cup of coffee."

"Sure. And when you come back, my turn." But suddenly Illya held his hand up, palm out.

"Our friend has gone out again," McNabb said in his ear.

Illya removed the tiny electronic earpiece.

"He's coming down."

Solo smiled, nodded. "Good old Albert. At last. First break in the routine."

He motioned Illya to the Lexington Avenue exit. He moved toward the Park Avenue exit. He was not worried. Stanley had no car. If he walked,

they would follow, shifting the surveillance from one to the other to four others deployed on the street. If he took a cab, so much the better. Since Tuesday there had been two taxis in front of the hotel on the Park Avenue side and two on the Lexington Avenue side. These taxis accepted no passengers. Their flags were down. The excuse of the drivers was that they already had a passenger who had gone into the hotel and was coming out. The doormen had been instructed and had been shown pictures of Stanley. The few times Stanley had gone into the street to make his phone call, the flags had shot up and the taxis were ready. They were frequently relieved by other taxis, but always the drivers were agents of UNCLE.

Now Stanley came out of the elevator. He was dressed in dark slacks and a brown sport jacket. He wore no tie. A tan linen sport shirt was open at the neck, its collar over the collar

of the jacket. By a strap slung over his shoulder he was carrying a full-size portable radio in a leather case. He looked like a harmless little man going off to meet friends for a picnic. He chose the Park Avenue side. Illya, moving swiftly, joined Solo.

The flags of the taxi meters were shifted upward. Stanley talked pleasantly to the doorman, who nodded, went forward, and opened a taxi door, Stanley following. Solo and Illya slipped into the taxi behind. Solo touched a switch and they could hear every word spoken in the other cab.

"Yes, sir. Where to?" the driver said.

"I wish to go to the ferry to Liberty Island."

It was the first time they had heard his voice. It was soft, slow, polite, hesitant.

"Oh? Gonna visit the Lady?" That was Jack O'Keefe driving the front cab.

"Statue of Liberty," Stanley said.

"Quite a sight, quite a sight," O'Keefe said. "Used to be called Bedloe's Island. Did you know that, sir?"

"He's keeping the customer talking," Solo said. "That's for our benefit."

"So we're going sight-seeing." Illya turned down the corners of his mouth.

"Well, it's a lovely day," Solo said.

". . . and the name was changed to Liberty Island during the Eisenhower administration," Stanley was saying.

" 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses. . . .' "

"Beautiful, so beautiful," Stanley said. "You know where that comes from?"

"I'm only a hackie, mister. I know it's got to do with the Statue of Liberty."

"A poem by Emma Lazarus. It's engraved inside the pedestal of the Statue."

"How do you like that?" Jack said. "Never

knew it. I'm only born in this country. You guys, foreigners. . . ."

"How do you know I'm a foreigner?"

"Heck, if that ain't a British accent. . . ."

"Yes, I am English," Stanley said. "Is it permitted, while I ride, that I play my radio?"

"I got one right up front here, sir."

"May I play my own?"

"Sure. Certainly. Why not? It's a free country."

The conversation ceased and the sound of music came back to Solo and Kuryakin in the other cab.

Illya groaned. "He likes rock 'n' roll."

"So do I." Solo grinned. "I go for the big beat."

On the ferry in the sunshine Solo said, "I do hope, because it's today, that it *is* sight-seeing."

"And I hope the opposite."

"But the Old Man's in Washington."

"That's why I hope the opposite."

"You know his instructions." Solo's voice was flat.

"If we have to take him in on Thursday—then that's what we do, period. And we do nothing else. No questions, nothing. He wants to handle it all himself. Important. Other aspects, the new changes in the British Sector of THRUSH, that whole bit—so he wants to handle it personally. So that's why I hope it happens today, whatever it is that does happen."

"You're losing me, pal."

"Waverly's not due back till one o'clock tomorrow. Right?"

"Right."

"So if it should happen our friend shows his hand today, then we take him in, and we're off till one o'clock tomorrow. Like that, the pressure's off. I can go home, relax, take a tub, get a good, long, wonderful night's sleep. We haven't

had much of that since Tuesday, have we, Napoleon?"

"You've got a point there," Solo said.

Stanley mingled with the crowds. Many went up into the Statue; Stanley did not. The day was hot; the sky was blue; there were no clouds. Stanley sunned himself. He mingled with the crowds, as did Solo and Kuryakin. And now as they moved with a crowd toward the elevator, Stanley was in a shadowed, isolated area. Suddenly Illya grasped Solo's wrist, his nails digging in, his mouth at Solo's ear. "Look!"

Stanley had wedged the radio into an aperture behind a granite slab. Now he strolled away, slight, casual, a harmless little man, strolling out of the shadow and into the sunshine toward the returning ferry out of New York Harbor.

"Go with him," Illya said.

"There's time for the ferry."

"Go with him!"

The elevator opened. The crowd was swallowed. Solo made the turn behind Stanley. Illya was alone, moving out of the hot sunshine into the shadowy area. He knew what he was doing. He knew the risk. Waverly had briefed them well. He pulled the radio from behind the granite slab. He set it down on the ground, went to his knees, covering it with his body. Gingerly he turned it over. It was heavy. He released the snaps of the back cover, opening it. He heard the thin whine of the batteries coursing the current through the fuse. He plucked at the mesh of wires, carefully disconnecting them. The whine ceased. The triggering apparatus was dead. He sighed on his knees, a long, deep sigh. He snapped the back cover shut. He stood up, lifting the heavy portable radio by its leather strap.

He walked swiftly, made the turn, saw Solo quite near to the right side of Stanley waiting for

the ferry. He moved to the other side and took hold of Stanley's left arm.

"Albert Stanley?"

"I beg your pardon?" But Stanley's brown eyes were riveted to the radio hanging from Illya's hand.

"How do you want it, Mr. Stanley?" Illya said. "Rough or peaceful?"

"I beg your pardon?" Stanley said again.

Solo, smiling, took the other arm. Stanley's head oscillated between them. "Like the man said, rough or peaceful?" Solo repeated. "Either way, we can oblige you."

"I'm a peaceful man," Stanley said.

"Of course you are," Solo said. "Thus we would prefer you to come with us, Mr. Stanley. Peaceably."

He agreed to the preference. He went with them, all the way, peaceably.

2. Dinner With the Old Man

WASHINGTON THIS Thursday was dreadfully hot, but it was cool in the King George Tobacco Emporium, a vast, quiet, clean store with long flat counters and shiny showcases. The clerks wore rubber-soled shoes and gray linen jackets and spoke with English accents, which was perfectly natural, as Alexander Waverly knew, since the King George Tobacco Emporium was a subsid-

iary of a British firm and all the salesmen were Englishmen.

Waverly, patting his forehead with a folded handkerchief, entered from the steaming street and was instantly recognized by one of the clerks.

"Mr. Cunningham," the clerk said. "So good to see you. Visiting our Washington again?"

"Hot," Waverly said grumpily. "Beastly hot, this town."

"Awfully hot, sir. This isn't our best season of the year in Washington, is it?"

"July—definitely not. Quite an inferno outside."

"Yes, so the customers tell us. What with the air conditioning in here, we don't feel it. How've you been, sir?"

"Fine, thank you. Would you please tell Mr. Montgomery I'm here?" H. Douglas Montgomery was the proprietor of the King George Tobacco Emporium.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cunningham, he's not in right now."

Waverly patted his forehead again and put away the handkerchief. "He'll be back, I take it?"

"Oh, of course, sir."

"When?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. He's out on some errands. I can take your order, if you wish."

"I want five pounds of my pipe mixture—my special mixture. But nobody mixes my special mixture except Mr. Montgomery himself."

The clerk inclined his head, smiled. "Oh, I know that, sir. Of course, Mr. Cunningham. It shall be prepared for you by Mr. Montgomery himself. And where would you like it delivered? Where are you stopping this trip, Mr. Cunningham?"

"Hotel Vesey. Suite eight-oh-three. I'll be there the rest of the day."

"Very good, sir." The clerk made his notations

on a pad. "Is there anything else?"

"That's about it," Waverly said.

"Thank you then, Mr. Cunningham."

"Thank *you*," Waverly said and went out into the humid heat and got a cab and settled himself, beginning to perspire again.

"Hotel Vesey," he said to the cab driver and lit his pipe and puffed slowly as the taxi moved into the traffic toward Hotel Vesey where Alexander Waverly was registered as Dale Cunningham.

"Hot," the cab driver said.

"Yes," Waverly said.

"July in Washington—but the hottest," the cab driver said.

"Hot," Waverly said, puffing contentedly. Just as soon as H. Douglas Montgomery returned to the King George Tobacco Emporium, just that soon would Mr. Alexander Waverly be rewarded with action. Five pounds of the special mixture was the code combination for one word—*urgent*.

And H. Douglas Montgomery would himself deliver the can of tobacco because H. Douglas Montgomery was chief of the American Division of British Intelligence, Special Services.

When the phone rang in Suite 803 of Hotel Vesey, Alexander Waverly had just completed a cool shower. "Yes?" he said into the telephone.

"Mr. Cunningham?" the voice said.

"This is he."

"Mr. Montgomery here."

"Ah, yes."

"I have your tobacco, sir. When would you like it delivered?"

"Six o'clock?" Waverly said.

"Six o'clock. Excellent, sir."

"I'll be hungry then."

A chuckle came over the wire. "So will I."

"Good. See you at six."

"Good-bye, Mr. Cunningham."

"Good-bye, Mr. Montgomery."

Waverly hung up and then called downstairs to the restaurant, reserving his favorite table for six o'clock.

H. Douglas Montgomery was very tall, very thin, smiling and courteous. Waverly stood up when the maître d' escorted Montgomery to the table. Montgomery first bowed, a correct military bow, then shook hands; then the two of them sat down.

"How are you, Mr. Cunningham?"

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Montgomery."

"Gentlemen?" the maître d' said, holding a pencil over his pad as the men looked at the menus. "Something to drink?"

"Nothing here," Montgomery said.

"Nothing to drink," Waverly said.

They gave their order for food and the maître d' went away and then, for the first time, quietly,

Montgomery addressed Waverly by his true name. "Rather a surprise, Alexander. To what do I owe the extreme pleasure of your company this warm day in our fair city?" He had a lean, smooth face, ruddy with high color; his eyes and hair were jet black.

"I'm wondering," Waverly said, "whether to tell you before dinner or after."

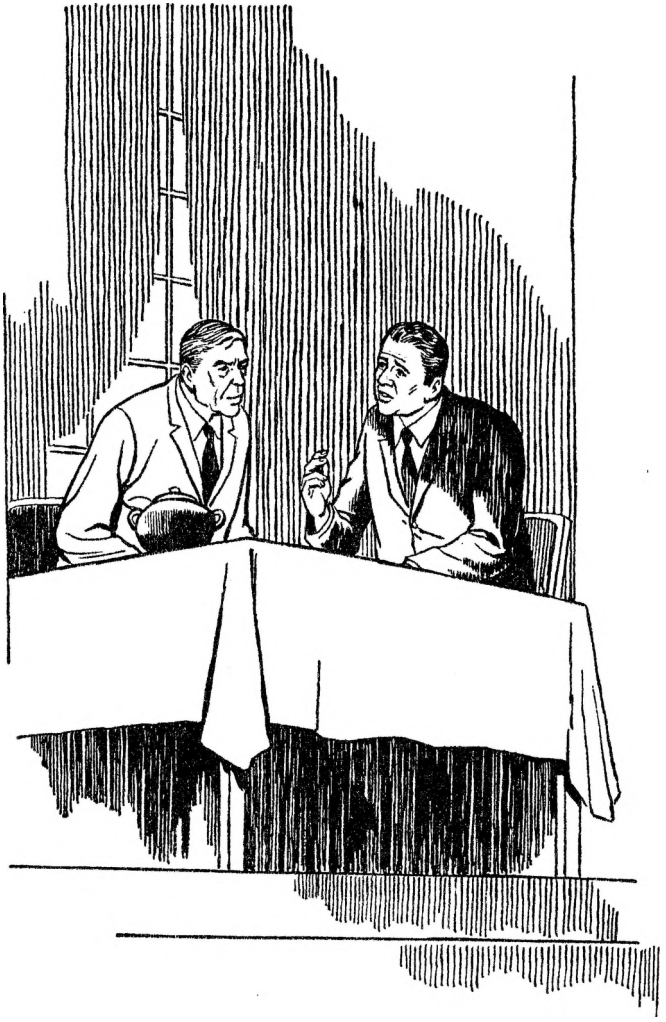
"I don't quite understand," Montgomery said.

"Hate to spoil your dinner." Their table was in an alcove, secluded from the other diners and out of earshot.

"Nothing spoils my dinner when I'm hungry. And I'm hungry. By the way, I left the five-pound tin of your special mixture at the desk. All right now"—he laughed—"spoil my dinner. I challenge you."

"Albert Stanley's in New York."

The laughter ceased abruptly. The color fell away from his face like a dropped mask. From



pale caverns his startled black eyes gleamed brilliantly. "No!"

"Yes," Waverly said.

Montgomery smiled sheepishly. "You win. I lose. Appetite's gone. Dinner's spoiled."

"You asked for it, my friend."

"That I did. Now please tell me about it, Alex."

Now it was Waverly who was smiling. "I may be able to return some of that appetite to you, Doug. We've got him."

"Pardon?"

"My office called me here at the hotel. Right after you called me, as a matter of fact. My secretary, of course, couldn't give me all the details, not on an open-wire call to Dale Cunningham at Hotel Vesey. I got the facts in a kind of semi-code. Point is, we've got him—he's out of circulation. Solo and Kuryakin picked him up—at work, as it were—planting a nice neat bundle of explo-

sives at the base of the Statue on Liberty Island. Caught him red-handed."

"Albert Stanley," Montgomery mused, "the gentle saboteur." Then his brows knitted. "Did they get Burrows?"

"Burrows?"

Montgomery leaned forward. "Do tell me, Alex. All of it, if you please."

Waverly recited the facts beginning with McNabb's sighting of Stanley at the airport. "I'll do the interrogation myself when I return tomorrow. Neither Solo nor Kuryakin knows yet that I know—nobody in my office does except my secretary—and I'll keep it that way. I'll start fresh, from scratch."

"But—but why did you come here?" Montgomery asked.

"He was still footloose. We had a large operation around him—but he was still footloose. You're British Intelligence. Certainly you would

know more about him than I. I wanted all the information I could put together—in advance. I still do. Now what's this about Burrows?"

"Eric Burrows."

"What *about* Eric Burrows?"

"If Albert Stanley's near, Eric Burrows can't be far behind. They work as a team. And, in my humble opinion, Burrows is far more deadly than Stanley. You know about the recent reorganization of the British Sector of THRUSH, don't you?"

"I do."

"Eric Burrows is now Number Two. Directly under the Chief. Second in command. The new Chief is Leslie Tudor. Burrows was entitled—"

"Tell me about Tudor."

"Burrows was entitled to the top slot. In the regular order of things—in the normal order of importance, growth, escalation—Eric Burrows was entitled to be and fully expected to be

the new Chief of the British Sector of THRUSH. Any idea why he didn't get it?"

"No," Waverly said.

"Because he's a psychopath. He's deadly. He's like a venomous snake—a killer. A cold-blooded, sadistic killer. They simply wouldn't take a chance putting a killer like that on top of the heap. That much we know."

"What do you know about the one who *is* on top of the heap now?"

"Tudor?"

"Tudor."

"Not a great deal, I'm afraid."

"Tell me, Doug."

"We know Tudor's a skillful organizer, a planner, a schemer. A killer, perhaps—but not a cruel, vicious killer like Burrows."

"Do you have a photo of Leslie Tudor?"

"No."

"Can you procure one?"

"Tudor?" Montgomery's brief laugh was grim. "Not Tudor."

"What's he look like?"

"We don't know."

"*Any* description?"

"Nothing at all, Alex. But nothing. Be sure to pump Stanley on Tudor—as thoroughly as possible. Any bit we can glean, we'd appreciate. This new Chief has been a thorn—for that very reason. We know nothing, nothing visual; whatever we know, we've heard through roundabout methods or hearsay."

"And what *have* you heard?"

"That whoever he is, he's careful and clever. That whoever he is, a shadowy figure with a passion for anonymity, he's gained the respect of all the THRUSH chieftains, worked his way up, without exposure to us, to the very pinnacle of the British Sector." Montgomery sighed. "Congratulations on Stanley." It had no ring of enthusiasm.

Waverly's eyes were wistful. "You don't sound overly optimistic."

"Pessimistic would be a more precise word."

"Doug, my boys had specific orders. If they've got Stanley, they've got him dead to rights, believe me. They weren't to pick him up on suspicion. Nothing like that—no possibility that he could be taken away from us by tricky lawyers with legal technicalities. Red-handed—or not at all. Those were the orders."

"Not that," Montgomery said.

"What, then?"

"If they've got Albert Stanley without Eric Burrows, then they've only got one end of the stick, and the small end at that. Like having a bull by the horns—there's a lot of powerful animal left over, enough of the animal to do tremendous damage. Quite simply, I'm worried, and I won't pretend I'm not. Ridiculous, isn't it? You people have accomplished quite a catch and here

I am being pessimistic about it. Please, let me try again, more heartily." He smiled. "Congratulations on Albert Stanley."

"Thank you," Waverly said.

At that point their dinner arrived.

They ate, but neither of them with appetite.

3. A Morning Stroll

FRIDAY MORNING at ten o'clock Steven Winfield came down from the duplex on the eighteenth floor of the apartment building on Fifth Avenue and 76th Street. The doorman smiled at the quick-striding, buoyant young man.

"Morning, Mr. Winfield."

"Morning, Patrick."

"We sure have us a beautiful day this day."

The towheaded young man nodded. "That we have."

"And how are Sir William and Lady Winfield this beautiful day?"

"Fine, thank you, Patrick."

"Shall I get you a cab?"

"No, I'm going to walk a bit."

"This sure is the day for that." The doorman opened the door.

Steve crossed to the park side and strolled southward, breathing deeply of the clear air. Central Park was in full bloom, and there was a morning fragrance. The sun was already high, but it was a dry day, and there was a cooling little breeze from the east. It was July 12 and an important day for the Winfield family. It was a day of celebration: July 12 was Steve's birthday and his father's birthday. He was seventeen, his father fifty-two, and this evening—as always on the evening of July 12—there would be the double birth-

day party. Steve was on his way down to Abercrombie and Fitch.

He enjoyed the noises of the birds in the trees. He whistled intermittently as he strolled southward. He would walk to Fifty-ninth and from there take a cab. He was going to pick up the gift he had already selected for his father—and what a gift. A gorgeous set of golf clubs! He had been saving all year and still didn't have enough money. He had had to borrow the balance from his mother. But what a gift! Expensive, yes; but foolhardy, no. His father would love the new clubs, and he himself would inherit the old clubs—in a sense a double gift. The man at Abercrombie's had wanted to arrange for delivery but Steve had said no. He wanted the joy of looking at them again, then waiting while they were packaged. He would bring them home himself, leave them with the superintendent, then slip them into the apartment when his father was out.

He whistled softly, happily, while he strolled. He loved Abercrombie and Fitch, loved all of America, four years now his adopted country, loved being a Winfield. It was exciting and wonderful to be the son, the only child, of Sir William Winfield. Sir William Winfield. What was the full title here in America? Sir William Winfield, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative to the United Nations from the United Kingdom.

He stopped whistling, hearing his name called. He saw the long, sleek, gray Rolls Royce slide to the curb.

"Steve! Steve Winfield!"

He moved toward the car. The girl at the wheel was blond and pretty.

"You *are* Steve Winfield. I mean, I hope. . . ."

"Yes," he said awkwardly.

"There!" she said. "I was certain. Don't you remember me? Pamela Hunter?"

"No, I don't think. . . ."

The voice, somehow, was familiar, but not actually familiar. He understood. It was clearly a British voice and any British accent, here in this country, would somehow ring familiarly. He did not know her. Perhaps he did. Through his parents he had met many persons, however fleetingly. She was very pretty.

"It's been a long time," she said. "London. It must be five years. You weren't quite as handsome then. Pamela Hunter. I'm a friend of your mother's."

"My mother's?" His mother was forty-seven. This girl was at most twenty-three.

Her laughter tinkled. "Well, *my* mother's *your* mother's friend; not I, really. Look, get in, or they'll be giving me a ticket for illegal parking." She reached back and opened the rear door.

He got in and closed the door. The car purred away from the curb. Sitting at an angle behind

her, he could see her eyes in the rear-view mirror. They were large and blue and friendly, and the sweet smell of her perfume permeated the car. *Heck,* he thought, *this is better than a taxi.*

"Out for a bit of exercise?" she asked.

"Not really. I'm going down to Abercrombie and Fitch."

"Rather a long walk," she said, and the tinkling laughter came again.

"I was going to take a taxi after a while."

"Oh? So?"

"You can drop me out if it's out of your way."

"Quite the contrary. I'm to pick up Mother outside of Bergdorf's. She'll be positively delighted to see you. Steve Winfield. New York—everything happens. We've only been here a few weeks. Visiting. Shopping. Mother'll be ecstatic. Old friends. How's your father?"

"Fine."

"Your mother?"

"Fine, thank you."

She tapped out a cigarette and held the package back toward him.

"Cigarette?"

"I don't smoke, thank you."

She took out a gold lighter. "A gift from my mother. Isn't it exquisite?"

He leaned forward. The car stopped for a red light. She turned and showed him the lighter. She extended it close, right under his nose. He heard the click, heard a hiss, heard nothing more.

The gray Rolls parked on East 68th Street. The girl got out, propped up the sleeping boy in a corner of the car, slammed the door, and went to the tall, dark man lounging at a side of the many-windowed, modern apartment house. The tall man needed a shave and his eyes were red-rimmed. His smile was brief and somewhat sullen. "All right?" he asked.

"I have him," the girl said. "Now what about the other one?"

"He'll come out."

"Are you sure?"

"Look, I've been loitering here since yesterday. I saw him go in, and he hasn't come out. He'll come out."

"And if anything goes wrong?"

"Then we'll use the other plan. As long as we've got the boy."

"Oh, we've got him."

"Nothing'll go wrong. He'll come out. He's due. Now you take over. You know what to do."

"Yes, Mr. Burrows."

"Good girl."

The tall man went to the car. He opened the rear door and looked at the boy. He put a cigarette between the boy's lips, and there it dangled. He closed the rear door, got in behind the wheel in front, and sat waiting. The girl would know

whom to approach. She had seen his picture many times, studied the picture. She would know what to do. She was bright, intelligent, devoted to the cause, an idealist. He made a grunt in his throat, his mouth closed. Idealist. He did not trust idealists; he preferred mercenaries. Not his business. He was not the boss. Leslie Tudor was the boss. Tudor trusted the girl. No question the girl was perfectly suited to her role. But an idealist. A devotee of the cause. People like her were good workers, even great workers, fanatical but unpredictable. He sighed. He was—how did they put it in Americanese?—the second banana. Leslie Tudor was Number One. What suited Tudor had to suit, perforce, him. He grunted again, lit a cigarette, and sat watching, waiting.

In time, Illya Kuryakin came out.

Quickly the girl approached him.

"Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Hello?" A fellow tenant whom he had missed? Possible, not probable. A bachelor, somehow he did not miss the pretty ones. Maybe she had recently moved in. She was certainly pretty, blond and shapely in a yellow sleeveless summer dress.

"I was about to go in and ring," she said. "You are Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Yes, but how would you know?"

"I've seen pictures of you."

"Who showed you?"

"Sir William Winfield."

"Well! The good lord of the manor!" Sir William was a friend. A year ago there had been a private time of stress, and he had been assigned as a private bodyguard for the Winfield family and had so served for a period of three months.

"I'm a messenger from Sir William."

"He certainly picks them beautiful."

"Well, thank you, sir. It's his birthday today. I imagine you know."

"No, I don't know."

"It is."

"Good enough. So take a message, lovely messenger. My hearty congratulations to Sir William."

"No. There's to be a party for him tonight." She smiled at the good-looking, blond, young man, thinking to herself that if this emergency had fallen on another day Leslie Tudor would have coached her to mouth another reason as adequately appropriate. Aloud, she said, "A surprise party. Mrs. Winfield has not sent out invitations. We're personally inviting the guests."

"We?"

"Steven Winfield and myself. I'm Sir William's new secretary. Pamela Hunter."

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance. Where's Steve?"

"He's right there in the car."

She pointed and Illya looked. A new Rolls. He

shook his head and grinned. What else for Sir William Winfield but a sleek, long Rolls?

"Please, Steve would like to talk to you," Pamela Hunter said.

"Sure."

He went with her to the car. The chauffeur smiled, nodded. The girl opened the door, and Illya bent over the seat toward Steve. A cigarette? He did not remember that the boy smoked.

"Steve," he said. "Hi."

The boy seemed to be dozing. The chauffeur leaned back, reached back with a hand holding a gold lighter, clicked it, and moved it swiftly toward Illya. He heard the hiss, tried to fight away from it, and lost.

The girl settled herself between the two sleeping men, propping Illya's limp form up in the corner opposite the Winfield boy.

The chauffeur turned the ignition key and drove off with his new passengers.

4. The Gentle Saboteur

ALEXANDER WAVERLY entered his office at twenty minutes past twelve. His buzzer sounded and his secretary said, "Napoleon Solo."

The Old Man took up the phone. There was no sound. He said into the intercom, "I thought you said Solo."

"Yes, sir."

"Phone's dead."

"Not on the phone, sir. He's here."

"Here?" The Old Man frowned. "All right. Send him in. Thank you."

Almost at once Solo knocked. He came through the door smiling, obviously rested, natty in a freshly pressed mohair suit. "Good afternoon, Mr. Waverly."

The Old Man nodded, cocked his head, and grunted. "You look like the cat that swallowed the canary."

"In a manner of speaking, I am."

The Old Man leaned an elbow on the arm of his swivel chair. The seams on his face deepened as he squinted inquiringly.

"We took him," Solo said. "Albert Stanley. Yesterday."

The Old Man sat up. "Tell me."

Solo told him. The Old Man's face remained an inscrutable mask.

"Good work. Where's Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Sleeping, probably."

The squint was back on Waverly's face.

"We've had a rough vigil since Tuesday," Solo said. "And you weren't due back today until one. He'll be here by then, I assure you."

"Um, yes, of course, of course. Where's Stanley now?"

"Downstairs in Section Five. Detention. They've fed him, shaved him, bathed him, given him fresh linens. A gentle little man. Monsters come in all guises."

"Who talked to him?"

"Nobody. He's being saved for you, as you instructed."

"And that portable radio? That infernal machine?"

"Upstairs in the lab. The technicians are having a ball with it."

"And *that* report?"

"Being held for you, as you instructed."

"Um, yes." Waverly dialed the telephone. "McNabb? . . . Waverly here. You can go into that room now. . . . Stanley's. But be careful. Keep Johnson in the corridor as the lookout. I don't want you seen going in or coming out. What's that? . . . Yes, that's right. I want you to bring out whatever's important. I want all that stuff down here. Use the freight elevator. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, that's right. Then I want Johnson, O'Keefe, and Gaines staked out inside the room. Any visitors are to be taken in. . . . Yes. Very good. See you soon. 'Bye." He hung up.

Solo said, "May I?" and sat down in a deep leather chair.

The Old Man pressed a button on the console board.

The overhead loudspeaker said, "Laboratory. Phil Bankhead."

"Waverly."

"Yes, Chief?"

"On that Stanley business. I want the report."

"Written or verbal?"

"Both."

"Yes, Chief."

"Now."

"At once, Mr. Waverly."

Phil Bankhead was fat, bald, and brilliant, a scientist of the highest rank. Solo winked at him when he came in, but Bankhead did not return the wink. That put Solo forward on the edge of his seat. Bankhead was usually a jovial soul. Today he appeared anything but that. He was pale, his jowls hung loose, and his dark, bulging eyes smoldered. He acknowledged Solo with a curt nod, went to Waverly, laid a sheaf of papers on the desk. Bankhead's controlled consternation was not lost upon the Old Man. Quite mildly, obviously in an effort to calm Bankhead, he said lightly, smiling, "And what earthshaking infor-

mation do you bring us, Mr. Bankhead?"

"In one word," Bankhead said, "exitron."

"Exitron," the Old Man said. He clung to his smile but now, as Solo could plainly see, with effort. It hung on his face grotesquely, like a badly adjusted mask, but he kept smiling. He *was,* after all, the Old Man. "Do tell us about exitron," he said calmly and turned on the tape recorder.

"We thought it was all ours," Bankhead said. "Top-level, top-secret. We thought we were at least six or seven years ahead of them. Seems we're not."

"Tell us about exitron," the Old Man repeated.

"A nuclear explosive, small but clean, no fall-out. Small. What is small? A comparative term. This particular atomic concentration hasn't yet been developed for massive warheads, for city-leveling bombs, for the rockets that overnight would change the power structures of the world. Small, the exitron concentrate, but indescribably

destructive, and Stanley's device was powered with exitron. The tiny bomb contained in that confounded radio had the explosive equivalent of five thousand tons of TNT."

"And if exploded? What effect on Liberty Island, the Statue, the soldiers of Fort Wood, the civilian personnel, the many sightseers?"

Bankhead's expression said more than a thousand words.

"First things first," the Old Man said. "Please sit down, Mr. Bankhead."

Bankhead sat limply in a chair near Solo.

Waverly put through a call to the Pentagon and transmitted his information. It took time. When he hung up he said, "We've exploded our own little bomb in *their* laps. And now, if you please. . . ."

The buzzer rasped. Waverly flicked a key.

"Mr. McNabb," his secretary said through the intercom.

McNabb carried in two large valises. One contained, carefully wrapped in heavy cloth, four portable radios similar to the one confiscated at Liberty Island. Bankhead examined them. "Exitron—all of them," he said.

"Dangerous, Mr. Bankhead?" the Old Man asked.

Bankhead pointed. "Not unless this switch key is on. Then this timing device is adjusted. Then the electric current from the batteries triggers the detonator. Beautiful job, really. Most ingenious."

"I'd appreciate it if you'd get those deadly little things out of here," the Old Man said.

"Yes, sir." Bankhead repacked them in the suitcase. "One was good. Four more are better. My people will enjoy working them over."

"Enjoy away," the Old Man said.

The other suitcase contained maps, photographs, and booklets of minute detail relevant to

five famous sites on the eastern seaboard—including the Statue of Liberty.

"Time we brought in the star of the show," Waverly said.

McNabb packed the suitcase and put it in a closet.

Waverly looked at his watch, then looked at Solo. "And where's our Mr. Kuryakin?"

"I hope not still asleep."

"Perhaps you ought to call him."

Solo called. There was no answer.

"Probably on his way."

"We won't wait." The Old Man punched a button on the console.

The loudspeaker announced, "Detention. Tom Dailey."

"Waverly. Bring up Albert Stanley."

Stanley was small between two burly, armed guards. He nodded to Solo, smiled toward

Waverly. His face was composed. His brown eyes were round, innocent, gentle.

"Here, please," Waverly said, indicating a chair by the desk.

The guards let him go forward. He sat in the chair facing Waverly. Primly he crossed his legs. He flicked lint from a knee with slender, graceful fingers.

Waverly glanced at the tape recorder. It churned silently.

"You know where you are, Mr. Stanley?"

"I assume at a depot of UNCLE. United Network Command for Law Enforcement." The voice was soft, smooth, unexcited, the diction clear and precise.

"And you know who I am?"

"A man I greatly admire. Alexander Waverly."

"And I know who you are."

"Thus we start even," Stanley said.

Waverly filled his pipe, lit it.

"You've been treated fairly?"

"Perfectly so."

"And so it shall continue—if you cooperate."

"I believe in cooperation, Mr. Waverly. He who cooperates today lives to cooperate another day."

"Quite the philosopher, aren't you?"

"I pride myself that I am, Mr. Waverly."

The Old Man puffed on his pipe. "All right, let's have it. What the devil are you doing here?"

"Here?"

"In this country. In the United States."

Stanley smiled. He had little yellow teeth. He lifted a hand and wriggled a finger at Solo. "This young man can tell you. If I may so presume, he *has* told you."

"I'm not asking him. I'm asking you."

"Quite. Well, to begin with, the Statue of Liberty. . . ."

"And Grant's Tomb, the Verrazano Bridge, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial."

"Ah, I see you've studied my maps. Yes. They would have followed one another in quick succession, perhaps several in one day, had I not been—er, apprehended."

"But why? In heaven's name! Why?"

"They are great works, world famous shrines in this country, national monuments—even the bridge, the longest and heaviest in existence."

"To what purpose their destruction?"

The little man patted his pockets. "May I have a cigarette, please?"

McNabb brought him a cigarette and held the match for him.

"Thank you."

McNabb made no reply, but moved off to the side of the room.

"Mr. Waverly," Albert Stanley said. "The Cold War. Propaganda, influence, spheres of influence, world opinion. There are many uncommitted nations—in Asia, Africa, South America. The two

great powers hold off from each other in hot war—there is a stalemate, a balance of weaponry, a balance of terror. But each seeks to win the uncommitted nations, to tilt the delicate balance of the Cold War, to loosen allies, and to defeat treaties by the use of different kinds of weapons —ideas, propaganda, subtle acts, even sensational acts. Our purpose at this time is to make the United States a laughingstock."

"By the commission of this terrible kind of sabotage?"

"Precisely. First these five sites here in the East; later on five more in the Midwest; more, later on, on the Pacific Coast. We believe the time to be ripe to create confusion and terror within the United States itself, to make it an object of world ridicule, and to precipitate the United States into unwise and unfortunate acts—and thus, aside from influencing the uncommitted nations, to cause division and foment discontent between the

United States and its allies."

Waverly sat back, his teeth clenched on the stem of his pipe.

"And you were to be this saboteur."

"I am the best in the world, Mr. Waverly."

"But you have failed!"

"Failed?" The little man smoked his cigarette calmly. "We cannot always all succeed. Happenstance, chance, circumstance—who knows? Maybe the entire plan was doomed to failure. Perhaps its effect would have been the reverse of that intended." He shrugged. "I am not the commander, the general, the architect of plans. I am but one small soldier."

"Soldier! A soldier who murders hundreds, perhaps thousands, of innocent bystanders."

The little man uncrossed his legs. A crease appeared between his eyes. For the first time he seemed to be offended.

"I am not a murderer! I am a soldier assigned to

destroy certain targets. As in bombing raids, the death of innocent civilians does occur. But that is not the purpose. That is incidental, cannot be helped. The purpose is the destruction of the targets, and I am the soldier assigned."

"Well, you're one soldier THRUSH will no longer have."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that, Mr. Waverly."

"What?"

The little man crushed his cigarette in an ashtray. He looked toward McNabb. McNabb tossed the package of cigarettes. Stanley caught it skillfully. He drew out a cigarette and lit it with a lighter from Waverly's desk. Solo watched, fascinated.

"They now know you have me, Mr. Waverly," Stanley said. "I'm certain they shall attempt a means for my rescue."

"Who do you mean by 'they'?"

"My people."

"And how do they know?"

"Quite simple. I was to call a certain number every four hours precisely on the hour. If my call did not come through, they would know."

"What number?"

"What difference? There's no longer anyone there."

"What number!"

Stanley gave him the number. Waverly made the call. There was no answer. Waverly hung up, tapped ash from his pipe, relit it.

"I want to know all about your people, Mr. Stanley."

"Happy to oblige you, sir. I'm not one for keeping secrets, as they well know; perhaps that's why they don't impart too many of their secrets to me. I'm unique unto myself—and so they must countenance me. I work with dreadful explosives. I am an expert, the best there is. I live with danger. I expose myself, risk my life, every time I do a job.

I am paid well, but I make no pretense at being a hero, and they know it. In my life I've been caught a few times. I've talked—to mitigate my punishment. I'm a soldier, not a martyr. It is my pattern for survival. I cooperate. You know my motto, sir." The little man grinned with yellow teeth. "He who cooperates today lives to cooperate another day."

"Tell me, please, about your people. Who is here in the States with you?"

"Leslie Tudor, Eric Burrows, Pamela Hunter."

Solo braced. Now here was a sudden stroke of luck. In the new reorganization of the British Sector of THRUSH, Eric Burrows was second in command and Leslie Tudor was the new chief. UNCLE knew all about Burrows, but UNCLE knew absolutely nothing about Leslie Tudor. Now here was an unexpected break. He wondered how the Old Man would handle it.

Waverly showed no excitement. His seamed

face remained placid. Contentedly he puffed his pipe, and he started with the least important name.

"Pamela Hunter?" he inquired.

"A beautiful young woman recruited to THRUSH," Stanley said. "Her first important job. Two bigwigs are breaking her in."

"Ah, yes, bigwigs. Burrows is an old and respected antagonist. Tell us a bit about your new chief."

"Nothing to tell."

"Well, anything." Waverly smiled encouragingly.

"I wish I could oblige you, Mr. Waverly. I can't. Tudor has a passion for anonymity. He works through Eric Burrows. I know Burrows well. Tudor—nothing. I've never seen him. I've never heard his voice. All I know is the name—Leslie Tudor."

Waverly sucked on his pipe, hiding his disap-

pointment behind a cloud of smoke. "All right. We know how and when you came here. When did they come?"

"Last week."

"How?"

"By private jet to a private airstrip in Nova Scotia. Then by private helicopter to an estate here on Long Island. Burrows is an expert pilot. So is Leslie Tudor."

"How do you know?"

"Burrows told me."

"Where is this estate on Long Island?"

"I don't know. I came in by commercial plane Tuesday morning. I brought in nothing. They brought in all my equipment. On Monday Burrows took the suite in my name at the Waldorf. That was my base of operation. Of course, I'd been thoroughly briefed in England. By Burrows. Monday, when he took the suite, he brought in two suitcases with all the equipment I needed—

also, fifty thousand dollars in American money."

McNabb said, "Yes, we have most of that."

"Mission accomplished, I would return the way I had come. If Burrows—or Tudor—wanted any changes, they knew where to reach me. That's it, Mr. Waverly—so help me."

Solo knew—as he was certain Waverly knew—that the man was telling the truth. It matched their own knowledge; his statements aligned with the meager but incontrovertible facts they themselves had deduced. Waverly sighed. "Well, now, Mr. Stanley. . . ."

The loudspeaker came alive.

"Mr. Waverly! Television Section! Frank Mitchell here! Emergency! Please come up at once, sir!"

Waverly pressed a button of the console board. "Right away, Mr. Mitchell."

"Is Mr. Solo in your office, sir?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Solo, too, please."

"Yes."

Waverly punched the disconnect button, stood up, and waved to the armed guards. "Take Mr. Stanley back to Detention. Thank you."

As soon as he entered the Television Room, Solo heard the beep of Illya's code signal and the additional signal of their code for SOS—emergency! The large room was crowded with electronic equipment. The technicians stood by. Waverly pointed at Frank Mitchell.

"Extrapolate!"

Mitchell moved quickly to a huge scanning board. He pulled a lever and the board lit up, showing maps slowly revolving behind cross hairs. He put a headset over his ears and plugged the line into an outlet. The fingers of both hands took the control knobs, and he nodded toward Waverly.

"You, Mr. Solo!" Waverly said.

Solo positioned himself in front of the eye of a camera in another wall. He flicked a switch.

"Napoleon Solo. Go ahead, Illya. Over."

He pushed down on the switch.

A small screen showed Illya's face. He was using the micro-TV, transistorized receiver and sender, tiny, cigarette-package-sized, standard equipment for special agents of UNCLE. The beam was on his face for identification. He would have moved the instrument to give them some idea of where he was. He did not. Solo understood. Illya could not. There was, in all probability, a gun leveled at him.

Mitchell turned the control knobs. The maps behind the cross hairs revolved more slowly.

Illya spoke tensely.

"I have been taken by agents of THRUSH. Also taken is Steven Winfield, son of Sir William Winfield, British Ambassador to the UN. We are

being held as hostages for the return of Albert Stanley." Illya smiled wryly. "Two for one. Tell Mr. Waverly to reassure Sir William and warn him that there be no outcry. You, Napoleon, will be contacted by phone at your apartment some time after nine o'clock tomorrow morning. No tricks. Take care." Illya smiled again, and his picture disappeared from the screen.

Solo pushed up the switch.

"Are there any other instructions? Over."

He pushed down the switch.

There was no sound. The screen was black.

He tried again. Nothing.

Grimly Waverly said, "All right. Kill it." Turning to Mitchell, he queried, "What've we got?"

Mitchell removed his headset.

"Not enough time to pinpoint anything, but I did get the general location."

"Where?" Waverly asked.

"He's somewhere out on Long Island."

5. "No Way Out"

THEY WERE NOT uncomfortable, although they had no idea where they were or when it was day or night. It was a large, windowless room fitted with a prison-type steel door. They could hear no sounds from outside. Illya believed it to be a basement room because of the feeling of dampness and because, by tapping and testing, he had found the walls to be of concrete, even the ceiling. He

had stood on Steve's shoulders and rapped his knuckles at the ceiling.

"All concrete." And he had leaped off. "A concrete room."

"What are those up there, Mr. Kuryakin?" Steve pointed to the holes.

There were four of them, two-inch holes, one in each corner of the ceiling.

"For ventilation. So we can breathe."

"You mean if they turned it off—the ventilation, I mean—we would—well—like choke to death?"

"Now why would they want to do anything like that?" Illya laughed. He was doing a lot of laughing, with a lot of effort, but the least he could do was try to keep up the boy's spirits. "You heard me when I talked to Mr. Solo." That of itself troubled Illya. Why had they permitted the boy to be present? Over the micro-TV, under instruction, he had mentioned both THRUSH

and Albert Stanley. They would not permit information like that to leak to a youngster unless —unless. . . .

"We're to be exchanged," Illya said, "just as you heard, for Albert Stanley. How do you like being a hostage?"

"I think I like it." Steve grinned. "I mean—hostage. Now *that's* something to tell my grandchildren about."

"Grandchildren yet! A bit premature, aren't we, Stevie boy?"

"Figure of speech, sir."

"Of course." He slapped the boy's shoulder, chuckling.

The tall, dark man had held a gun to him, and he had said what he had been told to say over the micro-TV; then it had been taken away from him. They had been ordered to undress and supplied with new clothes, underwear, baggy slacks, sport shirts, and crew socks, and that had been the

last they had seen of the tall, dark man. Their food was served through a slot in the prison-type door by the blond girl. They were not uncomfortable.

"THRUSH," the boy said. "I've heard about them from my father."

"And there've been fathers who've heard about them from their sons."

"THRUSH," Steve said. "The bad guys."

"That about sums it up, lad. Depends, of course, on the viewpoint. For them they're good; for us, bad."

"Who is Albert Stanley, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"One of the bad guys—from our viewpoint. Our side caught up with *him*—and their side caught up with *us*. Fair, or unfair—again depends on the viewpoint—fair exchange, and you and I'll be out of here."

"I can't believe it."

Startled, Illya shook that off and said quite

blithely, "Well, aren't you the pessimist!"

"Me? I?"

"Can't believe we'll be out. . . ."

"Oh, no, not that. I mean, Miss Hunter. She's so lovely."

"You've got a pretty sharp eye right early, young fella."

"I can't believe—I mean, Miss Hunter, a bad guy. I wish she weren't."

"Stevie boy, so do I. But emphatically!"

And they both laughed.

They were not uncomfortable. They had electric lighting, books and magazines; there were beds, tables, chairs, and toilet facilities. And there was, of all things, a pool table, fully equipped: balls, cues, rack, chalk, and all. That delighted Steve, who was an excellent pool player, but depressed Illya. The plastic balls and the wooden cues could be weapons. Would THRUSH provide weapons unless THRUSH full well knew there

would never be an opportunity to use them? Illya said nothing of that but played pool with Steve Winfield. They spent hours at the table with Illya consistently being beaten until they arrived at a handicap figure. Illya was given twenty-five points in advance in a hundred-point game; that made it a contest and the hours sped by in intense competition. Now, at the end of a game, Illya being defeated by a single point, Steve laid his cue on the table.

"What time do you think it is, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Not the faintest idea—but night, I'd say. I mean like I'm beginning to feel a bit sleepy—else I wouldn't have missed that shot I *did* miss."

"Me, I'm beginning to get hungry."

"She hasn't failed us yet, has she?"

As though in corroboration, the slide-panel in the door scraped open.

Illya squatted and peered through. The blond girl was wearing gold slacks and a gold blouse.

"You're very beautiful," Illya said.

"Please don't," she said.

"Actually I'm conveying the compliments of young Mr. Winfield. Mine, too."

"Thank him for me." She smiled.

"She thanks you," Illya said over his shoulder, and then his vision was blotted out by plates passing through. There were two tongue sandwiches and two Swiss cheese sandwiches and two glasses of milk. It was probably night, a snack before sleep. The meal before had been roast beef hot with gravy, peas, potatoes, bread and butter, and coffee.

"What time is it?" Illya asked.

"I'm not supposed to talk to you," the girl said.

"How go the negotiations?"

"I don't know."

"When are they going to let us out of here?"

"I don't know."

"Where are we?"

"I can't talk to you anymore. Good night."

So it was night. Without realizing, she had given *some* information. She was becoming accustomed to talking with him. Each time that she opened the slide-panel he made conversation, each time trapping her into some minor admission. So, he hoped, he might learn more. For what? What good would it do? What good if he drew a *major* piece of information from her? They were locked in, penned, like animals. Information could satisfy curiosity, what else? Any time their captors pleased they could turn off the ventilation—and it would be a long, horrible death.

There was no way out, no means of escape. He had thought out every possibility: There was none. He could hurt the girl; if he wanted to, he could kill her. He could be ready for her with the back of the pool cue. When she opened the slide-panel he could shoot it through, with power, at her head. He could knock her unconscious, he

could kill her, depending upon the amount of force he used. But to what purpose? None, except vengeance. What vengeance upon all of THRUSH to harm a young girl even if she was one of them?

He turned to the boy now seated at the table, eating, sipping milk.

"Delicious," Steve said. "We can't complain about the food in this hotel, can we?"

"That we can't."

"Aren't you hungry, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"I am."

"Well?"

They ate. Steve washed the dishes.

They played another game of pool, then went to sleep.

6. *"Two Trumps"*

ON THAT SAME day the men in the room at the Waldorf-Astoria had been recalled—that work was done—and, still later, Alexander Waverly himself called on Sir William Winfield and informed him of the circumstances.

"There must be no outcry, Sir William. No public mention. The boy's safety depends on absolute secrecy."

The ambassador was tall, spare, white-haired. "What do you think, Mr. Waverly? Please don't try to be kind to me. I want it straightforward. Your honest opinion, Mr. Waverly."

"They'd be crazy to harm him."

"THRUSH has done crazy things in its time."

"But what sense *this* time? They want Albert Stanley, and we'll give them Stanley because *we* want your boy and our Mr. Kuryakin. Oh, we're going to be right on top of it all the way, that I can assure you. I don't trust them, of course not. They play tricks, we know. But what purpose any trick *this* time? Their object is the return of Stanley. Essentially this is an exchange—we have what they want and they have what we want. But we must not upset the applecart, Mr. Ambassador. There must be no public knowledge of the kidnapping of young Steven."

"I understand."

"I know how you must feel about this, and you

have my deepest sympathy. But please do remember, sir, we ourselves are not unskillful in matters like this and all our resources shall be concentrated."

"May I work with you?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir William?"

"I just can't sit around here, waiting. May I be *with* you? Perhaps I can be of some small service. Perhaps they'll want to talk directly to me—about my son. Whatever. You must understand. May I join. . . ?"

"Of course."

And so Sir William Winfield was present during the turmoil of preparation in Solo's apartment early the next day. Portable equipment had been brought in, and there were many special agents of UNCLE; there were also Solo, Waverly, and McNabb. Albert Stanley had said there were but three others of THRUSH here in the United States on this job—Leslie Tudor, Eric

Burrows, and Pamela Hunter. Tudor had a "passion for anonymity." Hunter was a young person being indoctrinated by the "bigwigs." So—if Stanley had told the truth—it would be Burrows who would make the contact. Solo, like Illya, had heard about Eric Burrows but did not know him, had never before seen him or talked with him. But McNabb had, and so McNabb was present, a headset over his ears.

Activity thrummed in the early morning in Solo's apartment.

Telephone wires were spliced and attached to tape recorders and electronic gear. Contacts were made with agents previously assigned to the central office of the telephone company in New York and Long Island. Tests were run, jokes were made, but the overall atmosphere was deadly serious. And now all was in order; the specialists, wearing their headsets, sat silently at their apparatus, waiting impatiently. Waverly sat in a corner,

smoking his pipe. Sir William Winfield sat nearby, his hands clasped in his lap. There was no sound in the room except the sound of Solo's pacing.

Promptly at nine o'clock the phone shrilled. Solo lifted the receiver. "Hello?"

"Mr. Solo?"

"This is he."

"First this, Mr. Solo. Any attempt to trace this call will be perfectly fruitless. We're not amateurs, as, I might imagine, you're aware. Many and varied electronic cutoffs have been installed. So don't try to draw out this conversation in any hope that you'll trace me. I'm free to talk with you as long as you please—but to the point. Have I made myself clear?"

"You have. With whom am I speaking?"

"That, Mr. Solo, is *not* to the point. Who I am is no concern of yours. Or who you are, for that matter. What does matter is Albert Stanley. Do

you have him ready for us?"

"We do."

Waverly was standing over McNabb. McNabb looked up and nodded. "It's Eric Burrows."

"These shall be your directions, Mr. Solo," Burrows said. "If you wish to get a pencil to write them down"—short laugh—"be my guest."

"I'll do that. Hold the wire." He did not need a pencil. The recorders would take down the directions. But he put down the receiver with a bump so that the person at the other end of the wire could hear, and he went to the specialists with the headsets.

"Nothing," he was told. "His cutoffs are working. We're getting plugged into personal conversations, business conversations, and busy signals. He's done a beautiful jam-up. We're useless."

"It's Eric Burrows," Waverly told him.

Solo picked up the receiver. "Hello? Okay. I've got pencil and paper."

"Listen closely, please. You, alone with Stanley, will drive out to Long Island in the Southampton area. But *alone*, Mr. Solo!"

"Naturally."

"If you try tricks, you'll get tricks. Remember about your friend Kuryakin and the boy from England."

"I am remembering."

"You can anticipate a three-hour drive."

"Yes."

"You—together with Stanley—will drive out to the intersection of Savoy Lane and Remington Road on the North Shore. You will find it a rather untraveled, desolate area, Mr. Solo, which is in accordance with the general idea, if you know what I mean."

"I believe I know what you mean."

"I believe you do. You will be there, at that intersection, at one o'clock this afternoon."

"One o'clock," Solo repeated.

"Remington Road runs north and south. You will drive a couple of hundred yards north on Remington Road and then you and Stanley will abandon the car. You will drive it up on a shoulder of the road and leave it there. Am I coming through?"

"Perfectly."

"Then you and Stanley will walk north. In time you will be picked up."

"What time?"

"Any time of *our* choosing. You will walk north. Clear?"

"Yes."

"Remember about the boy and Mr. Kuryakin."

"I'm remembering."

"If you put any value on their lives, remember to *keep* remembering."

"I'll remember to keep remembering. Anything else?"

"That's it."

"Now may I ask a question?"

"Certainly."

"What *about* Kuryakin and young Winfield?"

"They're being cared for."

"I assume they are. I mean, how does it work out—the exchange?"

"A fair question. Certainly. Once we have you and Stanley, we will take you to Kuryakin and the boy, and we'll lock you up with them."

"Lock me up?"

"A proviso against any foolish antics by UNCLE. As you know, we've failed to accomplish our mission. Retreat, when necessary, is an honorable tactic of war. All we want is Stanley and an opportunity to get out of your country. Are we asking too much—seeing as we hold hostages?"

"I don't know. Depending. . . ."

"You'll be confined, together with Kuryakin and the boy, for one hour. But only for an hour.

That will be sufficient time for our group to be safely out of your country. We shall then be in radio communication with the American authorities, and you three will be released. A precaution, but the kind of precaution you yourself would take, would you not?"

"I suppose. . . ."

"That's it, Mr. Solo. Any more questions?"

"No more questions."

"Don't try tricks, I beseech you. We'll be watching, and we can meet your tricks with tricks of our own, but in this particular game, this time, we hold the trumps. Two trumps. Illya Kuryakin and Steven Winfield. No trick can be successful. If you win, you lose, because what you will win will be two corpses. Do you read me, Mr. Solo?"

"I read you clear."

"Good-bye. See you later."

7. Game Without Rules

ERIC BURROWS cradled the receiver and smiled toward Pamela Hunter. "There! Did I omit anything?"

"Nothing. You were precise and specific."

"Well, thank you, my dear."

"Now if he'll only comply—no tricks, no complications—then all of this will be over with and finished."

"He *has* to comply. No alternative."

"I'll be happy when it's over."

"Are you frightened, Miss Hunter?"

She shook her head. "No, it's not that. Just—I don't like it—any of it."

"Who are you to like—or not like?" Burrows' eyes narrowed.

"I'm nobody."

"If you'll just keep repeating that to yourself, over and over, you'll have mastered the first lesson. That's who and what you are exactly—nobody. You're a tiny unimportant cog in a vast machinery. You have nothing to do with decisions. You are part of the machine that grinds out the work and, may I add, a dispensable part. What I mean is, if we lost you, it would be no loss to the machine. You'd be replaced cheaply and quickly. The Americans have a phrase for it—you're a dime a dozen, my dear."

"Not very flattering."

"The truth rarely is." His dark eyebrows contracted. "I'm curious. You don't—didn't—like any of it. You're pleased by our failure. Why?"

She went near a window of the large drawing room and looked out. The window was closed, the room air-conditioned. Outside, even so early in the morning, it looked hot. The sky was clear. The sun gleamed on the long lawns. "Because," she said, "to destroy shrines, to kill people. . . ."

"But it had a purpose."

"I know. But innocent people. . . ."

"Incidental. The shrines were the purpose—the effect of the destruction of the shrines." He laughed briefly. "Any killings would have been incidental. We failed. Now we must kill—not incidentally. By the way, has Leslie had breakfast?"

"Yes."

"Is there still coffee?"

"Yes."

"Would you bring me a cup, please?"

"Certainly, Mr. Burrows."

In the kitchen she poured hot coffee into a mug and set it on a tray. She added a small pitcher of cream, a spoon, a container of sugar, and a napkin and carried the tray into the drawing room. She was troubled, hesitating to open the subject again, watching as he stirred cream and sugar in the cup. He sipped, then lit a cigarette. He sat at a table drinking the coffee, smoking. She remained standing.

"I don't quite understand, Mr. Burrows."

"What?" he said pleasantly, exhaling a cone of smoke.

"What you said before."

"Said before?"

" 'Now we must kill—not incidentally.' "

The dark eyes looked up at her. She felt dizzy, weak, pulled as though drowning in a sea of dark eyes. "You've a right to be informed, Miss Hunter. After all, *all* of us are cogs in the machinery.

There must now be killings with a purpose. The boy, Kuryakin, and Solo."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes."

"But why? What possible purpose?"

The dark eyes remained fixed on her. "Stanley will be delivered, and Solo taken. You heard me on the telephone. Solo will be locked in with the other two."

"You told him it would be for an hour."

He sipped, smoked, looked back to her. "He will be placed in the room with the other two. The ventilation vents will be closed off. A cyanide pellet will be exploded in the room, injected through the slide-slot, the slot then instantly shut. Death will be quick, merciful, no suffering. Then we'll immediately take off—we four—in the helicopter."

The huge helicopter was there now, waiting, fueled and already packed with their things, on

the wide private beach at the rear of the house. The house was a half-mile in from the road. The back had the beach and the ocean; the other three sides had paths, lawns, trees, sculptured gardens. The entire estate was surrounded by a high, iron, picket fence which, in an emergency, could be electrified.

"But why?" she asked again.

"Why *what?*" Angrily he pushed away the coffee mug; it tilted, then turned over, and the dregs of the coffee spilled. She brought a towel from the kitchen, wiped the table, and took the things away. When she came back he was standing, smiling, leaning against a baby grand piano, smoking a new cigarette. "I'm sorry," he said. His voice was back under control. The dark eyes were now narrow, wrinkled, amused. Softly he said, "What was it we were discussing, my dear?"

"Murder. Senseless murder."

"Murder must never be senseless. That, too,

I'd advise you to repeat over and over again. Your second lesson for today."

"But to kill them?"

"Not senseless."

"Why not as you told him? An exchange. Stanley for them. Mr. Solo to be locked in with the other two for an hour. An hour. Two hours. Whatever. Wouldn't that provide our margin for safety?"

"One hour would be enough."

"Then *why?*"

"We all learn. Even I. We're never too old to learn, not one of us. Just as you're learning today from me, so have I learned from Leslie Tudor. Passion for anonymity. That's not just some stock remark. That's not a bright saying made for the purpose of sounding clever. It has depth, meaning, merit. Anonymity—that's why Albert Stanley was chosen for this job. It has made him unique—his great capacity to blend, to be an-

other blade of grass in an orchard, another tree in a forest, another grain of sand in a desert, to be anonymous, unknown, an unrecognizable part of the whole. Somehow his anonymity failed him; somehow he was recognized; and that made the rest of it easy for them. We don't have to be geniuses to know that. He was recognized, followed, caught in the act doing his work, apprehended. The point is, he was recognized! That resulted in our failure and Leslie's bitter disappointment."

"What's that to do with this?"

"What?" There was annoyance again in Burrows' voice.

"With murder, cold-blooded murder?"

"Anonymity. *Not* to be recognized. It is a form of self-preservation—even for you, my dear. You are a part of a secret organization, but always remember: *Secret* is the key word for your very own protection and self-preservation." He moved away from the piano and crushed out his cigarette in

an ashtray. "Kuryakin and young Winfield have seen you and have seen me; alive, they can recognize us in the future. No good. Solo has seen Stanley, and he will see me; alive, he can recognize us in the future. No good. The fewer from their side that see and know and can recognize, the safer it is for those of us on our side. Not senseless murder, my dear, not at all."

She shivered. She knew now, finally, what her "cause" had led her into. Up to now she had been an amateur, mouthing words, thinking in abstractions, marching with the students in London, going limp and being carried off into the police vans, shouting deliriously with the others, *"Down with the Bomb! Fallout is Failure! We want a Future! Better Red than Dead! Peace! Peace!"* And so, with soft words and hard words, she had been recruited to THRUSH, and the hard words were attributed to the enemy, and the soft words had been the words of THRUSH. So she had

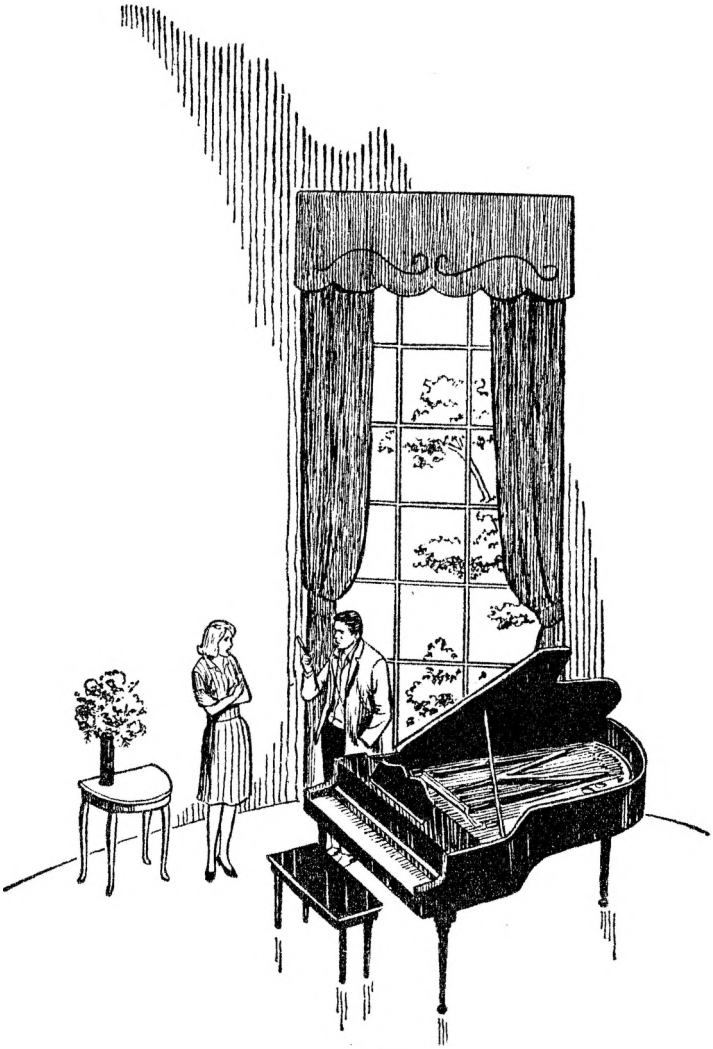
been won, and had believed, and had even believed that the destruction of the shrines here in America were but steps toward peace. Peace! This was not peace. They had won her, experts had lectured her, and so she had gone with them now on her first endeavor—a professional for peace. Peace! This was not peace! This was crime! And she began to understand. Caught with crime, involved with crime, crime upon crime, there could not be a turning back. These were the professionals using the slogan of *Peace* for the purpose of their professionalism; she was now one of them, a professional, already caught in crime; she had been won to the "cause" by the soft words and was hearing now from Burrows the new words, the hard words from this side, the truth. And she shivered again, crossing her arms, her fingernails pinching her skin.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"It's cold. The air conditioning."

"Yes, the air conditioning," he said, and the dark eyes, narrow, smiling, grew crafty, and he uttered what now in the coldness she knew to be a warning, lecturing sternly, educating her. "We must kill as part of our work. The work of peace cannot always be peaceful. We are soldiers of peace in an army of peace, but we are soldiers. A soldier who defects is a traitor, and the penalty for treason is death. A soldier does not always like his duty, but he obeys orders and does his duty. If not, he is a traitor. There is much he does not understand because, above him, there is a grand plan." Burrows lit another cigarette. "In essence, here, in our own little company, you are a soldier, I am a colonel, Leslie Tudor is the general. I take orders from above, and you take orders from me, and neither of us questions the instructions. We are soldiers fighting in a cause."

"But isn't a soldier—without questioning the orders—allowed to ask questions?"



"Idiocy! I've been answering your questions, haven't I? I'm trying to give you—at this long last—an understanding."

"An understanding about murder?"

"You did not question me about murder. You questioned about *senseless* murder. I'm against murder, just as you are—against senseless murder. But don't you ever forget that our fight for peace is just that—a *fight!*—and in a fight people die."

"And those three must die?"

"But not senselessly. On the contrary, quite sensibly—because our own self-preservation is primary. Unless we do preserve ourselves, how can we continue our fight for peace? Sounds pretty—fight for peace—but there's another name to that game, more real but not as pretty; not a pretty little game with pretty little rules; there are no rules at all in that game."

"What game without rules?"

"War," he said. "The name of our game is 'war.' "

"Even war has rules."

"Not this war; on our side there are no rules."

"What about the other side?"

"The deuce with the other side. Our concern is only with our side, us! That's lesson three for today, my dear. And now, if you please, I'm bored with giving lessons. Where's Leslie?"

"On the beach by the helicopter."

He clicked his heels, made a mock salute. "Should anybody want me—and nobody will except possibly you—I'm outside with General Tudor arranging the final details."

8. The Living Beacon

AT UNCLE headquarters Mr. Solo was being prepared, but with caution.

"Remember that," Waverly said. "Caution! You're young; I've known you to be foolhardy, to go to daring extremes. Don't!" They were in the Laboratory Room. Solo was being fitted out with his equipment, and they were waiting for what one of the lab technicians had called "your galvanized thick shake."

"Caution." Solo grinned. "Yes, sir."

"There are lives at stake, Mr. Solo—an innocent boy, your friend Kuryakin—so please, no heroics. Your job is to deliver Stanley and effect the return of our two. It sounds simple; it may not be as simple as it sounds. If it works out simply, well and good—don't push it. If not"—he shrugged—"we're arranging precautions. But essentially your job is to effect the exchange."

"Right," Solo said. "Anything else?"

The Old Man rubbed a finger along his jowls and his smile was small. "Well, if without risk—without any risk, mind you—if by chance—you'll be in the field, you know—if by chance and without risk you can find out anything about Leslie Tudor, we would, of course, appreciate that."

"Ready," a white-jacketed technician called. "Here you are, Mr. Solo." He brought a tall glass filled with a thick cream-colored mixture.

Solo made a face. "What's it taste like?"

"Good, as a matter of fact. We flavored it with vanilla syrup."

"Well, here goes." Solo gulped it down, grimacing.

"That bad?" the technician said, but his expression had gone sour in sympathy with Solo.

"Let's put it this way," Solo said. "If I sponsored it to replace malted milks, I'd go broke."

The technician laughed. "Well, it's down and that's what counts. You're ionized. From here on out you're a living beacon, electronically charged. For the next twenty-four hours you'll have these ions in your bloodstream. Harmless, but most effective. Listen." The technician went to a wall and touched the switch of an instrument. A sharp, penetrating screech filled the room.

Waverly put his hands to his ears. "Enough."

The technician switched off the sound. "They'll be able to hear that, in the cars, within a hundred-mile radius."

"What cars?" Solo asked.

"We'll go to my office now," Waverly said.

In the office, he sat behind his desk and lit his pipe. "The car's waiting upstairs. Nothing special, an ordinary Chevy. They'll bring Stanley out to you, and off you'll go. You'll follow Burrows' directions to the letter."

"How much does Stanley know?"

"That they have hostages, and he's being exchanged for them."

"Does he know who?"

"No."

"May I tell him?"

"For what purpose?"

"To prevent him from trying to make a break. If he knows who, he'll know how stupid he'd be to try to break."

"He's not quite the type, but yes, you may tell him; no reason why not."

"And if he does try to break?"

"Then you'll have to use your pistol, but low, not for a kill. You'll get him back to the car and proceed according to instructions. A wounded Stanley would be infinitely better than a dead one. Our object is rescue, not retribution. By the way, do you have your sunglasses? It's blistering out there."

"I have them."

Waverly opened a drawer of his desk, took out a pair of sunglasses, and handed them up to Solo. "For Stanley. To keep him comfortable. What's good for you is good for him. As long as we're doing what we're doing, we may as well do it properly right down the line. Now about those cars."

"Yes?" Solo said.

"There'll be five cars, ten agents, two in each car. They'll be all around you, at various distances, out of sight, of course. But they'll be able to judge just where you are by instruments,

marking you by the electronic sound that emanates from you."

"Be careful," Solo said. "No interference. We really don't know how many of them there are; perhaps Stanley himself doesn't know. You said yourself there are lives at stake. That poor kid, and Illya. . . ."

"A most careful man is in charge. McNabb."

"Excellent."

Waverly looked at his watch, then stood up. "You have all your equipment?"

"Everything."

"Good luck, Mr. Solo."

9. "A Crazy World"

SOLO DROVE. Stanley sat silently beside him. It was early, the city traffic was not heavy, and they crossed 59th Street bridge without misadventure. There, as Solo made the turn into a narrow one-way street leading toward the highway, he saw the car bearing down on him, going the wrong way on the one-way street. He jammed on his brake, veered, as did the other car; their collision

was light, but their bumpers were firmly entangled.

Solo got out, wary, ready for a trick from THRUSH, but from the other car there emerged a squat, elderly woman, fat and perspiring and obviously frightened.

"Gee whiz, mister, my fault," she said, "my fault entirely."

"Yes, ma'am," Solo said, keeping an eye on Stanley.

"I got onto this one-way street just by the other corner. Like before I knew it, I was on this one-way street. Figured I'd go the one block and get off and then, boom, there you were."

"Yes, there I was, wasn't I?" Solo smiled. This was no trick of THRUSH.

"Gee whiz, I sure hope there's no damage, mister."

"Doesn't seem to be. I'll just have to pry us apart."

"I mean, I hope you won't sue me. I'll pay you right here for any damage. I've got some cash on me; if it's not enough, I'll write you a check. You can have my name and address from my license. Anything you say. The thing is—my husband."

"Your husband?" Solo inquired.

"He always ribs me that I'm a lousy driver. Maybe I am, but you don't like it your husband always ribbing you you're a lousy driver. When I get a ticket, I don't care; I pay it and my husband, he don't know about it. But if I get sued, a lawsuit, he has to know—because the car is in his name. You know?"

"Sure," Solo said. "Don't worry, ma'am. There's hardly any damage at all, as you can see. No damage, no payment, no lawsuit. And now if I can get us unhooked—"

"You are a gentleman and a scholar." The fat lady smiled with big white teeth. "And also very handsome, if I may say."

"Thank you, ma'am."

He went to the locked cars, the woman toddling with him. Her bumper was over his, and her car was heavy. He pulled at the bumpers to no avail; he could not dislodge them. Perhaps he should ask Stanley for help. No, better to keep him sitting where he was. He tried again, knowing the strength of one man was not enough; he would have to use the jack from the rear compartment of his car. Then he heard the woman whispering behind him: "Oh, no! We got company. Just my luck."

He looked up. A police patrol car was rolling to a stop behind his car. One of the policemen got out and strolled toward them slowly. He was heavy-set and red-faced, gray hair showing beneath the sides of his visored cap.

"Well, what have we got here?" he said in a gravelly voice.

"Bumpers caught," Solo said. "Would you give

me a hand, please, Officer?"

The policeman disregarded him. He looked from one car to the other, then pointed to the one obviously at fault.

"Who owns this heap?"

"Me," the lady said.

"What are you doing wrong way on a one-way?"

"I made a mistake," she said lamely.

The policeman puffed up his cheeks, blowing out a sigh. "Just a little mistake, hey? You got a driver's license, by any chance?"

"Sure."

"Okay, let's have it."

She took her handbag from her car, and from the handbag produced her license. The policeman read it slowly.

"You Rebecca Brisbane?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you own this heap?"

"No, sir. My husband."

"Where's the registration?"

"Right here, sir."

She gave him the certificate of registration. He studied it carefully, compared it with the license plate of her car, sighed again, took out his book, and laboriously wrote out the summons. Solo wanted to hurry him but didn't dare. This policeman, positively, wasn't in a pleasant mood, or, simply, he wasn't a pleasant man.

"Okay, Rebecca," the policeman said. "Wrong way on a one-way, that's a violation. You could have killed this gentleman. You know?"

"Oh, I know. This is one ticket I deserve."

For the first time the policeman smiled. He gave her the ticket, the driver's license, and the certificate of registration, and Rebecca returned her possessions to her handbag. Solo fidgeted in the morning sunshine, watching Stanley. Stanley sat uncurious, immobile, disregarding them.

"Now you get back in your car, Rebecca," the policeman said, "and we'll get you loosened up." He put away his summons book and his pen. "You and me ought to be able to manage it, young fella."

They went together to the entangled bumpers. Solo opened his jacket. They wedged their hands beneath the bumper of Rebecca's car. "When I say heave, we'll heave," the policeman said. "One —two—three—*heave!*" The bumpers became disengaged. "Okay," the policeman called to Rebecca. "Put her in reverse and back up—slow."

Rebecca obeyed. Grindingly her car moved away from Solo's.

"Okay, keep going like that," the policeman called. "Back up to the corner and go your way."

Solo watched until the car disappeared around the corner, turned to thank the policeman—and found himself facing a leveled gun!

"What in the world—"

"Easy does it, young fella. Into the prowl car. Move."

"But—"

"You heard me! In the prowl car. Now move!"

The man in the passenger seat of the police patrol car was a sergeant with a gold badge. Rigidly, observing intently, he watched as Solo, under the policeman's direction, entered the car from the driver's side. Then the policeman got in, slammed the door, and Solo was wedged between them, the muzzle of the policeman's gun a sharp warning thrust into his ribs. Solo could see Stanley in the car in front. Stanley was sitting motionless. If this were some complicated deception engineered by THRUSH, then by now Stanley should be out and running. Or was it a deathtrap? He was helpless, wedged between them, the muzzle of the gun tight in his side.

"What's up?" the sergeant said.

"This baby's got a gun on him, that's what's

up. He had his jacket open when we were working on them cars. He's wearing a shoulder holster."

"Yes?" the sergeant said.

Solo breathed deep in relief. No deathtrap. Proper police work. But now it became a matter of time. Enough time had been wasted. He had an important appointment, but he was not at liberty to divulge it. "Yes," he said.

The sergeant slipped a hand beneath Solo's jacket, opened the holster, and drew out the pistol.

"You got a permit for this firearm, mister?"

"Yes, but not with me."

Aside from his driver's license there was very little in the way of identification he did have with him. On this kind of job, the fewer papers that could fall into the hands of THRUSH the better.

"Why not with you?" the sergeant said.

"It's hard to explain."

"Well, try."

"I'm on official business. That man up there in my car is a prisoner. I'd appreciate it if you kept an eye on him."

"We're keeping an eye on him," the policeman on Solo's left said. "Just let him make a move and you'll see. But we are also keeping an eye on you, buster."

The sergeant asked, "Any proof of this official business?"

"I'm sorry; no."

"What's your name?"

"Solo. Napoleon Solo."

"What kind of official business?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you."

"By any chance, if I may ask—you got a driver's license, Mr. Solo?"

There were two guns on him now: the policeman's, and his own in the sergeant's hand. He moved gingerly getting out his driver's license. The sergeant inspected it and returned it.

"I'm afraid we're going to have to take you in, Mr. Solo. You *and* that guy up there—your prisoner, you say."

"No," Solo said.

The sergeant had a calm, level voice. "Could be you're telling the truth; these are crazy times we're living in. In that case, can you blame me? You're a guy with a gun and no permit. You say you're some kind of law enforcement officer on business. Could be. But you got no proof for us. So we *got* to take you in, don't we? At least until that proof is furnished?"

"Yes," Solo said. "But no."

"You're losing me, mister." Exasperation put a flush on the sergeant's face. "Yes—but no. What kind of an answer is that?"

Solo sighed. "Yes—because you're right. Certainly, logically, of course you'd have to take me in. No—because it's a matter of time. I'm on an urgent mission and time is of the essence."

"Then what *do* you want, mister? That we take your word for it? What would *you* do in my place? Take your word?"

Solo snapped his fingers, pointed at the two-way radio.

"Who's your man in charge, Sergeant?"

"Lieutenant Weinberg."

"Can you get through to him?"

"Sure."

"Would you do that, please? Tell him to call this number." Solo spoke Alexander Waverly's private number. "Tell him to ask for Waverly."

Perplexed, the sergeant said, "Who's Waverly?"

"Please do as I say, Sergeant. Believe me, this is urgent business and official business, and if you don't cooperate you'll be subject to censure. You've nothing to lose, sir. If it doesn't work out *then* you can take me in, and I'll have no cause for complaint."

The sergeant shifted about uncomfortably.

Solo understood his dilemma. If the sergeant complied and then the man with a gun without a permit turned out to be some sort of crank, the sergeant would be labeled a fool by his colleagues. If he did *not* comply and then the man truly turned out to be an agent on urgent business, then he would be severely reprimanded by his superiors as an *inflexible* fool.

And now the policeman on his left said sarcastically, "That prisoner you say you got up there — he don't seem to be in no hurry to try for an escape, does he?"

Solo made no reply to that. He looked to his right.

"Please, Sergeant," he said. "Time. Don't let me run out of time."

The sergeant touched a switch. The shortwave thrummed, crackling. "Lomax here," the sergeant said. "Harry Lomax. Put me on with the lieutenant."

"Okay, Sergeant," the voice answered.

"Lieutenant Weinberg here. What've you got for me, Harry?"

"I got a crazy one, Lieutenant. I got a guy with a gun, no permit. Says he's some kind of law enforcement officer but he's got no papers to prove it. Wants you to call this number." He stated the number. "You're to talk to a Mr. Waverly. This guy here says this Waverly will straighten you out. His name is Solo, Napoleon Solo."

"Hold it a minute," Solo said.

"Just a minute, Lieutenant." He turned to Solo. "What?"

"Insurance," Solo said. "Let him tell Waverly that you people picked me up because of a minor traffic accident. And let him just state these additional names—Kuryakin, Winfield, Stanley, Burrows. That should do it."

Into the microphone the sergeant said, "Do

you hear that, Lieutenant?"

"You sure you're all right?" the lieutenant's voice crackled back.

"If I think I'm getting you right, Lieutenant—yours truly's sober as a judge."

Brief laughter came through clearly. "All right, Harry. Stay with it. I'll get back to you."

Silence.

They sat, Solo between the two pistols pointed at him.

Then, finally, the radio came alive.

"Harry! Sergeant Lomax! Weinberg here!"

"All yours, Lieutenant."

"A-okay on Napoleon Solo. Let him loose and forget the whole deal."

"You sure, Lieutenant?"

"Let him loose. That's an order."

"I got his gun."

"Give it back to him."

"Okay, if you say so."

"I say so. And wish him good luck from me."

The radio went dead. The sergeant returned Solo's gun and Solo buttoned it into the holster.

"Sure is a crazy world today," the sergeant said. "Good luck from the lieutenant. Lieutenant Weinberg tells me to tell you good luck from him."

"Thank the lieutenant for me," Solo said. "And thank *you,* gentlemen."

"Don't mention it," the sergeant mumbled and opened the door and got out. Solo followed and the sergeant watched, his brow crinkled, as Solo got into his car and drove off.

"Local police—efficient officers," Solo said to Stanley. "They mistook me for somebody else, but they didn't jump all over me; stayed patient and proper till we got ourselves straightened out." He glanced at his watch. "We're still okay for time. It's a good thing we started early."

Stanley said nothing.

10. Rendezvous

IT WAS A scorching morning, without wind, humid and hot, the sun blazing through the windshield directly at them. Solo put on his sunglasses, gave the other pair to Stanley, who accepted them without spoken comment but with a grateful grunt. They were a half-hour out now, not speeding but going at a good pace, and already on the highway. In that time Stanley had not said a single word.

He was clean, spruce, shaven, and smelled of pomade. Solo wished he would say something.

"Have you been treated well, Mr. Stanley?"

"I have no complaints."

Solo, watching the road, made a proper turn, then settled back.

"Do you know where you're going, Mr. Stanley?"

"I'm being returned to my people."

"Do you know why?"

"My people have acquired hostages, and I'm being exchanged for them."

"Do you know who?"

"No."

"Would you like to know?"

"I don't care. It's sufficient that I'm here alone with you, driving along your remarkable highways. Whoever the hostages are, they must be important. My people aren't idiots. Nor are your people, for that matter."

Solo shook his head. "Pretty cool, aren't you?"

"Cool? Contrary. Hot. Is it always so beastly hot in your country?"

"Not in the winter."

That brought a chuckle from Stanley and a sidelong glance.

"How long before we get to where we're going?" he asked.

"One o'clock, the man said."

"What man?"

"Burrows, I think."

"Probably."

"Talked to me on the phone, made the arrangements. Of course, it might have been Tudor."

"I wouldn't know," Stanley said. "All right, whom are they holding?"

"The man who worked with me when we picked you up. Also, the son of the British Ambassador to the UN."

"Two for one. I'm important, eh?"

"Seems you are."

Stanley lit a cigarette, threw the burnt match out the window.

"It pleases the ego."

"Pardon?" Solo said.

"When one knows that one is considered important."

"Important to them, perhaps, Mr. Stanley; not to us. What we think of you would not, I assure you, please your ego. You mean nothing to us. Should it enter your mind, for instance, when it happens we're stopped for a light, to bolt, I'd shoot you down like an animal."

"Sorry, but I won't afford you that pleasure. Run? Where would I run? A fugitive in a strange country? I'm not quite the type. I imagine you would know that by now. Albert Stanley is a thorough professional who prides himself in his work, but he's never, ever, pretended to be a blooming hero."

"Just wanted to clear the air."

"Nothing to clear."

"So be it."

Solo drove. The little man slumped down, leaned his head back, closed his eyes, and appeared to be asleep—but he was not. Each time the car stopped for a light his eyes opened. But as they went farther east, the lights grew fewer. There was less and less traffic, and it was hot. The sun was high now, burning down, and the car was like a cauldron. Solo opened his collar and pulled down his tie. He used a handkerchief on his face and down his neck. His body was wet with perspiration. Finally they came to Savoy Lane, broad at this section, and Solo pulled the car to a side. It was ten minutes to one. He took a road map from the glove compartment and opened it on his knees. The little man sat up and leaned over.

"May I be of assistance?"

"Remington Road. You know where it is?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

Solo pointed it out on the map. "That's where we're going. Not far now." He put away the map and started up the car. Savoy Lane grew narrow, finally leading them to Remington Road, and Solo understood why this was the appointed area. It was a flat, relatively uninhabited region. If Burrows was observing them through field glasses he could see for miles, and he could see whether they were part of a convoy, whether cars were following them. Solo made the turn onto Remington Road, drove north a few hundred yards, pulled up the car on the shoulder of the road, and turned off the ignition. "Okay," he said. "Out."

"Where are we going?"

"I don't know. We're following instructions."

They walked north. It was a dirty, dusty country road, no houses in view, nothing but the high blue sky and the blazing sun. Solo turned once; he could no longer see the Chevy. No car passed

them in either direction. The road was desolate, deserted, unused. Their shoes kicked up dry clouds of dust as they trudged, and finally the neat little man was no longer neat. His hair glistened wetly; rivulets of perspiration coursed down his cheeks; his suit was crumpled in damp wrinkles; his shirt collar was a sodden circle around his neck. He took the kerchief from his breast pocket, flapped it open, and mopped his face.

"How long?" he said.

"Our orders are to walk."

The little man grinned slyly. "He certainly picked an excellent location for the rendezvous, didn't he?" He stopped and looked about. "Nothing can be following us, no car, no man, nothing."

"Nothing," Solo said, knowing there were cars about, somewhere, far perhaps, but somewhere, their special instruments attuned to whatever it was he was carrying in his bloodstream. What

was it the lab technician had called him? *A living beacon!* "Yes, nothing," Solo said.

"Leave it to Burrows. I can't say I'm enjoying this, but I must say I admire him."

Again Solo fished for information. "Burrows or Tudor?"

"I don't know, but whoever," Stanley said.

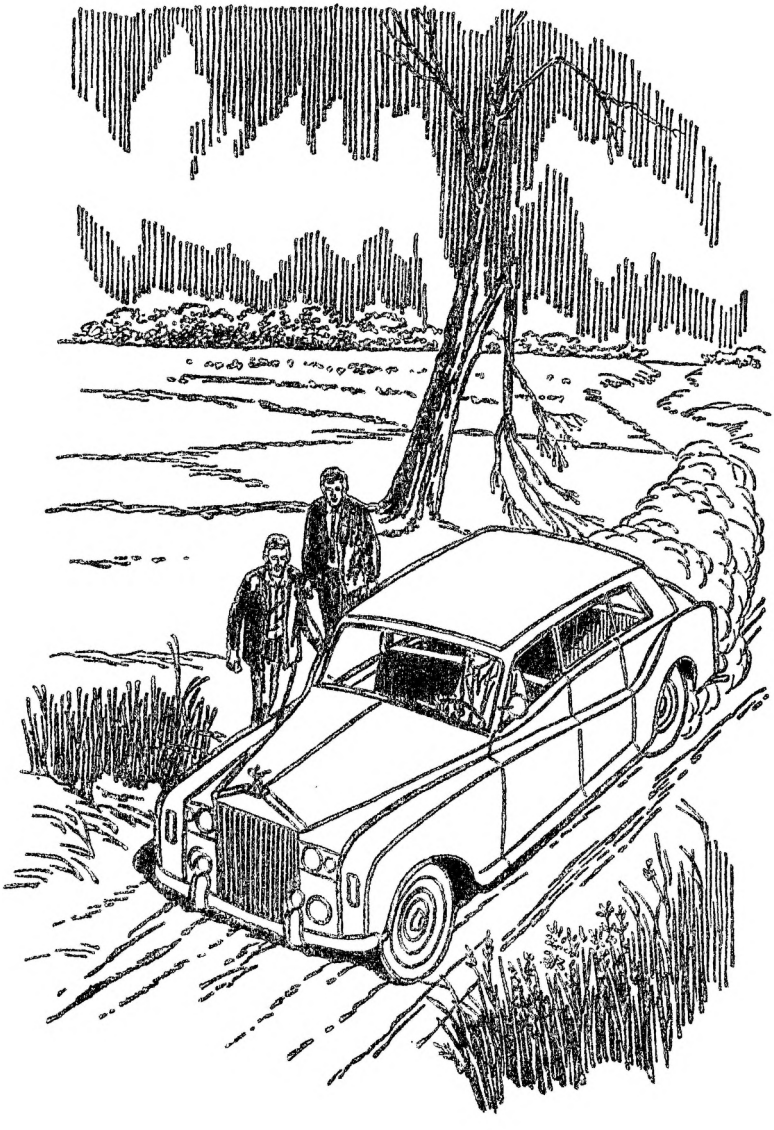
They trudged, kicking up dust, the sun burning overhead. Then, at long last, a half-hour by Solo's watch, they heard the sound of the motor behind them, the first sound of a car in all their long walk, and they stopped. A long, sleek, gray Rolls Royce purred slowly past them, braked a few feet in front of them, and they came to it. The driver was hatless, a dark man in an open-necked sport shirt.

"Stanley," he said.

"Hello," Stanley said.

"Thanks for nothing," the dark man said.

"You can't always win," Stanley said.



"What went wrong?" The dark man's voice was flat.

Stanley shrugged. "I don't know. Ask him."

"What went wrong, Mr. Solo?"

"UNCLE has eyes," Solo said.

"Where?"

"Everywhere. He was recognized."

"Where?"

"This time at the airport. When he arrived. Next time—who knows?"

"Recognized," the dark man snarled. "All right. Get in. Both of you."

They sat in the rear. Stanley lit a cigarette.

The Rolls glided forward, picked up speed.

Just like that, Solo thought. *He knows I've got a gun, yet he sits up front with his back to me. It is a contempt, and he's enjoying his contempt of me. He knows I won't make a move, I can't, and he's enjoying making me sweat. He has Illya; he has a seventeen-year-old boy, so he is perfectly*

confident and enjoying it and rubbing it in. He is unhappy about Stanley's failure, but he is happy about the method of Stanley's return. Power gives confidence: He has Illya and the boy and now he is getting Stanley, and UNCLE cannot retaliate. It is a superlative contempt. Through me, rubbing my nose in the dirt, he is rubbing UNCLE's nose in the dirt.

The Rolls purred through Remington Road, grown marshy now, high weeds on either side, no houses, utterly desolate, and then the Rolls veered off the road and stopped in the weeds.

Burrows turned his head. "You. Solo. Get out."

Solo opened the rear door, Burrows, the front door. They came out of the car together. Burrows was tall, with long arms and powerful hands.

"This way." Again the contempt. He walked ahead, into the weeds, his back to Solo. He had a strong tread, catlike. He walked without swinging his arms, and in his right hand he held, of all

things, a pair of black swim trunks. He pushed through the tall weeds, Solo following, until they came to a small, round clearing surrounded by the tall weeds. Now Burrows turned, smiling.

"I imagine you're armed."

"You've a good imagination."

"And I imagine you're equipped with some weird little hidden gadgets—like a pistol disguised as a fountain pen, or a button of your jacket that's really an explosive capsule. Well, we're going to get rid of all of that."

"Are we?"

"Take your clothes off. Everything."

"Everything?" Solo said modestly.

"Everything!"

"And what do I do with the clothes after I take them off?"

"You leave them here, right here. Now come on! Start!"

Solo took off his jacket and dropped it to the

ground, and his shoulder holster, and all the rest, including his shoes and socks. Then Burrows tossed him the swim trunks and he climbed into them.

"All right. You in front of me this time. Move!"

Solo understood. Burrows was not turning his back now, not giving him any opportunity to pick up some tiny harmless object that could in fact be a weapon. In sunglasses and swim trunks and nothing else Solo walked gingerly, barefoot through the prickly weeds, back to the car.

"Going for a swim?" Stanley said.

"This is the day for it," Solo said.

Burrows, in the front seat, slammed the door, backed the car out from the weeds and straightened it on the road. He opened a compartment in the dashboard and drew out a microphone. He held it close to his lips and spoke softly. "All in order. We're coming in. Be there in thirty minutes."

11. "Mistake in Judgment"

ALL WAS READY, all prepared. Burrows' message came through sounding hollow in the speaker. Tudor switched off the receiver, went out to the helicopter on the beach. Pamela Hunter, rehearsed as an assistant in murder, waited in the house. Thirty minutes! And she was to be the greeter, the hostess. Stanley would proceed at once to the helicopter; she and Burrows would

escort Solo to the concrete room. That's why she was in the house—to keep Solo placid, unsuspecting. She was young, a young girl, she would be smiling and gracious. He could not possibly conceive that she was the decoy leading him to death. Once Solo was locked in, Burrows would do the rest; then the panel in the iron door would be slammed shut. Smooth and simple, uncomplicated—and horrible!

Thirty minutes! She lit a cigarette, her fingers trembling. It was cool in the air-conditioned room, but her palms were wet and sticky and her mouth was dry. She tried to reason with herself, tried to shut the present out of her mind. Soon, soon, thirty minutes, and it would all be over; she would be with the others in the helicopter flying swiftly to safety.

Safety! What safety is there against oneself? What helicopter can fly you away from yourself? How can you live with yourself for the rest of your

life knowing, knowing. . . ?

She fought in her mind. She was a soldier. No!

Yes! But in the wrong army—she knew that now, finally. She had been recruited, enticed by sly words, drawn in by fine-sounding phrases, slogans, speeches, all empty, untrue, enticements to ensnare her. What soldier in what army? What army entraps an innocent seventeen-year-old and murders him? *He* was no soldier in any army, nor was she!

The truth struck now like a tremendous gong. She was not a soldier but a mercenary, a paid professional. She was not a part of an army but a member of a world organization of professional criminals, covering their crimes by a pretense of political activity, earning huge sums of money as the lackeys, without conscience, of governments that desired unrest and world turmoil. And she had become one of them, lured by the lower echelon of their experts, the speechmakers, the

lecturers with their high-flown slogans. And now there would be no turning back. Crime is its own trap. The blackmail of one crime compels the next; she would be forever committed.

No! Perhaps she could not save Solo. Perhaps she could not save herself from whatever punishment the American authorities would mete out to her, but she *could* save herself from herself! She could be free again, out of the trap, her conscience clear; free, her own self again, not hating herself, not cringing looking into her eyes in a mirror; free, remembering her blithesome nature; free, remembering her old happiness; free, no matter what her penalty. Free!

She hurled the cigarette into an ashtray and fled down the stairs to the basement. Breathlessly she tugged at the bolts of the iron door—three wide slide-bolts, top, middle, and bottom—and pulled with all her strength at the heavy door. It opened, creaking.

Mr. Kuryakin and the boy stood in the middle of the room, looking at her. They needed shaves. The clothes provided them fitted badly. Pale, untidy, unkempt, they looked rough, dangerous, like tramps, this man from UNCLE and this son of the British Ambassador to the United Nations. Wanting to cry, blinking, biting back hysteria, she laughed—and stopped it, feeling her teeth against her suddenly stiff lips.

"Come!" she whispered, realizing there was no need to whisper, for they were alone in the house.

Kuryakin frowned, standing still, holding back, studying her.

Softly but quite distinctly he said, "What is it?"

"Come! Please! Quickly!"

Still he stood his ground, persisting. "Why?"

"They—they want to—they want to kill you."

It was as though his study was completed. His grin was boyish, his blue eyes crinkling at the corners. He slapped an open palm at the boy's

rear, like a coach sending in a football replacement. "They want to kill us, the lady says, the beautiful lady." He slapped again quite casually, cheerfully, but his voice was tense. "Get a move on, Stevie boy. Don't let's keep our lady waiting."

She led them up and out through a side door, and they were in the hot sunshine under the blue cloudless sky.

"This way." Still she was whispering. She could not help herself.

They hurried, a little group, a long way through shady, sweet-smelling orchards and then in the blazing sun along the tended grass of wide lawns and then in the coolness of shady trees again. She led them a long way westerly, until they came, by a narrow path, to a little side-gate in the high, iron picket fence. The lock was a combination lock, and she twisted and turned the circular indicator, whispering the numbers, left, right, right again, left, right, right and right, left, and right.

She pulled down and there was a click and the lock opened and then the gate opened and she led them under the hot burning sun a long way along narrow roads. Then they were on a big road and cars passed and they waved at the cars and the cars passed.

"Look," Kuryakin said. "Steve and I better get out of the way. We look like a couple of hoods, delinquents. I don't blame them for not stopping." And he grinned. "But for you, Miss . . . Hunter, did you say?"

"That is correct."

"Anybody doesn't stop for you, Miss Hunter—that would be a pretty sick fella."

They went off the road and squatted behind a hedge of weeds and were out of sight of the whizzing cars. The girl stood alone, a blond girl in a green-and-white striped dress, and waved at the whizzing cars. A truck stopped, and she talked to the driver. Then she turned and waved to them,

and they came out of the shelter of the weeds and went up into the truck, and they all sat huddled together in the steamy cab of the truck thunderously rumbling on the hot road.

"I'm not allowed no riders," the driver said, a round-faced man in a visored cap, "but the little lady says emergency, and emergency, naturally that's different. But I am dropping you off at the first town, which ain't far, which is the deal I made with the little lady, which is all I can do for you. I'm not allowed no riders."

"Thank you," Kuryakin said.

"Ain't much of a town. Three blocks of town and then no more town. All the rest all around is suburbs for rich people."

They rode rumbling in the sun for a few miles, and then the truck stopped at the edge of a paved street.

"This is it," the driver said. "All I can do. I can get into trouble. I'm not allowed no riders."

"Thank you," Kuryakin said.

"Welcome. Watch your step, little lady."

The truck was gone, leaving a smell of gasoline in the motionless air. They walked and came to a diner, built in the shape of a railroad car, painted yellow. Now it was Kuryakin who was leading. They climbed up three stairs, slid open a door, and entered. It was an off hour; there were no customers. It was cool from wood-bladed fans slowly rotating from wooden staves in the ceiling. There was a counter with backless round-seat stools screwed into the floor. Opposite the counter there were booths by the windows. The windows had Venetian blinds drawn against the glare of the sun. It was dim and cool and empty.

A woman in a yellow uniform with a lacy white apron came out from the kitchen behind the counter, took up a pad and pencil from the counter, looked rather suspiciously at Kuryakin and Steve, but smiled toward Pamela Hunter.

She had a long face and long teeth and narrow inquiring eyes. Her voice was not friendly, but neutral.

"Yes, folks? What can I do for you?"

Kuryakin smiled, nodded, and said, "Please, a minute," and the three huddled. "Do you have any money?" Kuryakin asked Pamela. "We don't."

"No. I didn't bring a bag. Nothing."

Kuryakin broke from them, went to the woman behind the counter.

"We don't have any money, ma'am, but if you please. . . ."

"What the heck's going on here?" the woman said, fear pinching in her mouth. "What is this?"

"Please, we don't mean any harm. We're in a bit of trouble."

"Look, I only work here. I can't serve you. . . ."

"Could you lend me a dime, please, for a phone call?" Kuryakin pointed toward the phone booth

at the far end of the diner. "A call to New York. . . ."

"That costs more than a dime, mister."

"I'll call collect. I'll return the dime to you at once."

"What the heck's going on here?" She looked from the unshaven men to the well-dressed girl. "These guys bothering you, miss? I mean. . . ."

"No."

"You with them—or they forcing you into something?" Her voice pitched up shrilly. "Just don't you be afraid, dearie. . . ."

"No, I'm with them."

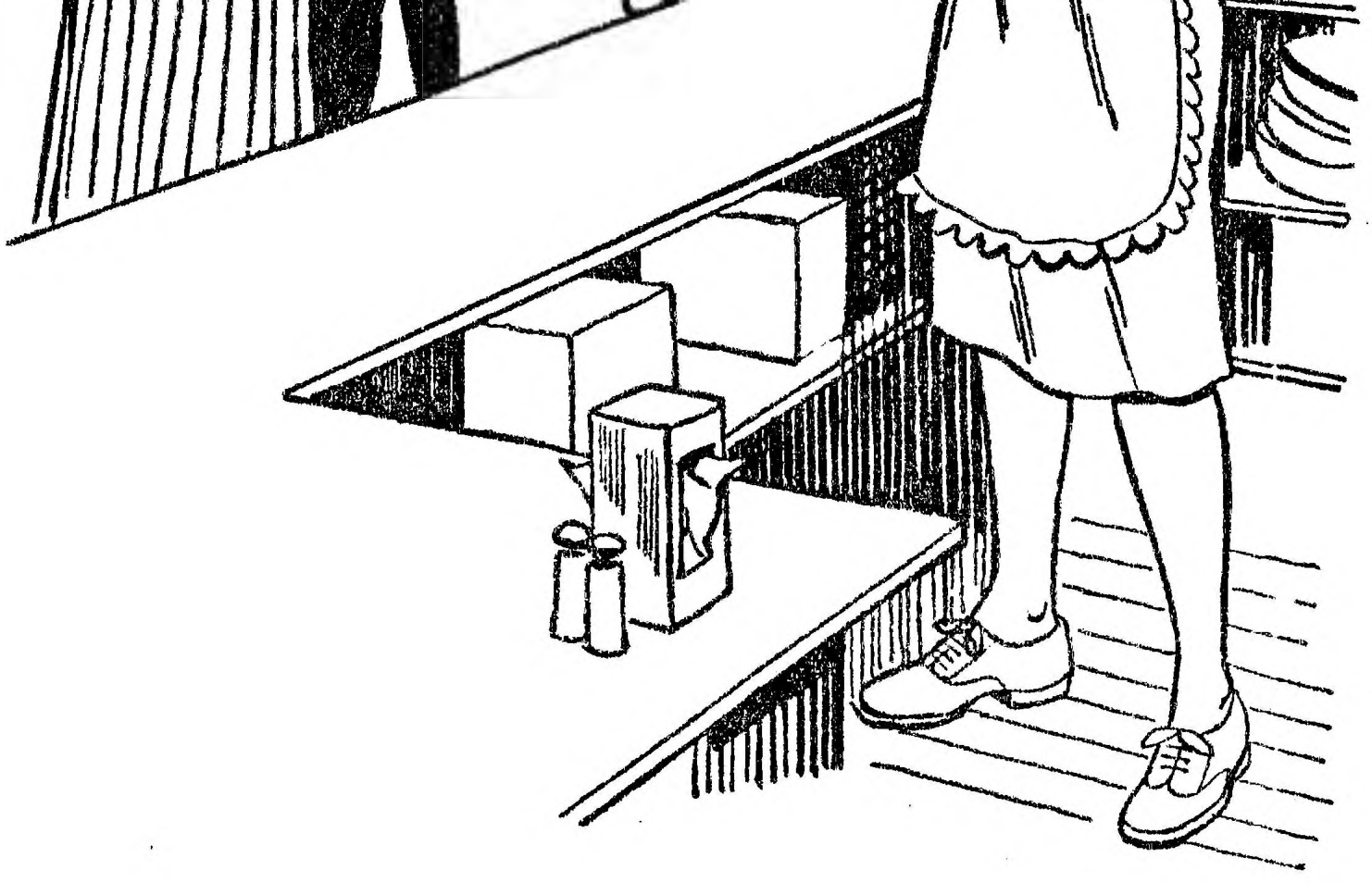
"What the heck? Now what the heck is this? Something's darned funny. . . ."

"Please give him the coin. Please!"

"Darned funny. Who are these guys? You sure you know them? Look, we got cops. . . ."

"I know them."

"You in trouble?"



"Yes. All of us."

"Look, honey, if you're hungry, it's okay. I don't own this joint, but grub, a meal, I can stake you. . . ."

"Not hungry, thank you."

"You sure?"

"Sure."

"Honey, I don't like this. Look, we got a kitchen man in the back. He's big; he can take these two guys and knock their heads together. Don't be afraid now. I can see you're afraid. You got tears in back of your eyes, I can see. Now just hold up. William!" she called toward the kitchen. "Hey, *Bill!*"

A towering man in a white apron came out of the kitchen and out from behind the counter. "Okay, I been listening. I'll take care of these bums, lady. I'll throw them right out on their ear." He took hold of Steve. Kuryakin pulled him off. The man clenched a huge ham-hand, turned

swiftly, hammered the hand at Kuryakin. Illya ducked and jolted a fist upward, in a short thrust to the man's jaw. Abruptly the man sat down on the floor.

"No. No!" Now Pamela was crying. "Please, no!"

The man sat on the floor, blinking.

The woman behind the counter held a kitchen knife menacingly.

"Please! Please!" Pamela cried.

Kuryakin helped the man to his feet. "Sorry."

"You sure pack a wallop, young fella," the man said, rubbing his chin. "Give him the dime, Esther. This is no bad one. Bad, he could have kicked me in the head while I was sitting down there. He could have kicked my brains in. Instead he picks me up and says he's sorry. Well, I'm sorry, young fella. Mistake in judgment. Takes all kinds. It's a crazy world. Give him the dime, Esther."

The woman put down the knife and rang the cash register.

Kuryakin accepted the coin and went to the phone booth and closed himself in.

12. Change in Plans

AFTER BURROWS' CALL to Solo, Sir William Winfield had routinely called his office and had been advised of urgent business. The British Ambassador to the United States and the Japanese Ambassador were flying in from Washington for a conference with Sir William; they would be in his office in the UN Building at ten-thirty that morning and would remain for lunch with Sir

William. He, of course, confirmed the meeting. His son was missing but UNCLE was actively engaged in it. There was no assistance he himself could provide. Waverly had put his own car and chauffeur at Sir William's disposal.

"You know the arrangements," Waverly had said. "The first contact is one o'clock. After that, who knows how long it will take? I'll be in communication, by telephone, with my car as soon as anything breaks. My chauffeur, Ronny Downs, beginning at one o'clock, won't leave the car. You keep him informed where you'll be. If there's any news, I'll get through to him, and he'll get through to you. When your business is completed, come down to the office and you and I'll sit out the vigil together."

Sir William had left the UN Building at one-fifteen.

"Anything?" he had asked the chauffeur.

"Nothing, sir."

He had gone home, spent a half-hour with his wife; he had been glib and cheerful, pretending assurance, encouraging her about Steven; then Downs drove him to UNCLE headquarters.

Waverly was alone when Sir William entered. Green blinds were drawn to keep out the sun; Waverly was slumped in his chair at the desk, smoking.

"Sit down, Sir William."

"Thank you."

Waverly smiled glumly. "The contact's been made."

"How do you know?"

Waverly laid away his pipe. "Stanley and Mr. Solo went off alone as Eric Burrows instructed, but five cars at safe distances went along with them *not* as Eric Burrows instructed."

"I—I don't understand."

"Our lab introduced certain substances into

Mr. Solo's body that give off an electronic signal. Special computers in the cars indicate precisely where and what distance he is from them. The men in the cars are in communication with me." Waverly pointed to an oblong box on his desk. "This is a lovely instrument, a sender-receiver meshed with the sender-receivers in the cars; the synchronized wave bands automatically change every thirty seconds. Thus, if by chance a conversation is intercepted, a listener can hear only a thirty-second fragment."

"The cars are out of sight?"

"Far out of sight."

"Then how do you know about the contact?"

"Mr. Solo with Stanley came to the intersection of Savoy and Remington at approximately one o'clock; that the computers were able to pinpoint. On Remington Road the car was abandoned, and they walked."

"But how. . . ."

"The electronic signal emanating from Solo. The rate of speed of *his* movements can be computed. He walked, presumably with Stanley, for about a half-hour. During this time, one of our cars spotted Solo's abandoned car—didn't touch it, of course. Then, oh, about twenty minutes ago, the rate of speed accelerated again. They were picked up by a moving vehicle. And that's about how it stands right now."

"My son?"

"Not yet."

Waverly lifted a lever of the oblong box. "Alex here, calling Number One. Come in."

McNabb's voice was clear. "They're still moving at a fairly good clip. Number One, Jack and I, trailing. Number Two a half-mile behind us. Three, Four, and Five are fanned out on other roads. No significant stops since he entered the moving vehicle. No hits, no runs, no errors—nothing. All smooth, no change."

"Check." Waverly depressed the lever. Sir William was sitting forward, his hands clasped so tightly the knuckles were white. "So far, so good," Waverly said. "Please relax. So far it's going exactly to specifications, and my people are instructed not to interfere, to take no risks. Our object is to effect the exchange without putting the hostages in any possible jeopardy. We hate losing Stanley, but the welfare of your son and our Mr. Kuryakin is paramount."

"But—all this time . . . ?"

"According to specifications, Sir William. Burrows—and we can't fault that—was being careful. He set the rendezvous a good distance from the point of destination. We can't blame him for that, can we?"

"No, I don't suppose. . . ."

"And even before the rendezvous—he let them walk for a good half-hour on a country road, observing them from somewhere, I'm certain—

making sure they weren't being followed—that we were proceeding in accord with his instructions. All of that is good rather than bad, Sir William. I appreciate your concern. Your son—"

The short sharp jangle of the phone startled him. He had left orders at the switchboard that he was not to be disturbed unless it was a matter of extraordinary importance. He pulled the receiver from the cradle and said curtly, "Yes?"

Sir William watched as the Old Man straightened tall in his seat.

"Yes . . . yes . . . um . . . I see." The color was up in Waverly's face; in the dim, shadowy green of the sun-subdued room his eyes sparkled with dancing lights. "Yes . . . yes . . . all right. Now hear me. Stay just where you are. Just *stay* there! They'll pick you up. 'Bye now." He hung up, turned a smile to Sir William. "Your boy is safe!"

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Thank goodness!" Sir William was on his feet, his hands spread on the desk; he leaned across to Waverly. "But what—how . . . ?"

"Listen!"

Waverly flipped the lever of the oblong box.

"Alex here! Number One! Come in!"

"You're loud and clear, Chief," came the voice of McNabb.

"Hold sharp! We've got a shift in operation!"

"I hear you, Chief. Go!"

"Defection. The girl. I don't know the details. The boy and our boy are out, along with the girl. Initials P.H."

"I read you. Go!"

"They're in a restaurant called Pullman Diner in a town on the North Shore called Carbonville. Have Numbers Three, Four, and Five go directly and pick them up. Now!"

"I read you! So do they! We're all tuned in!"

"Change in operation, Mac. No more ex-

change. Bring back A.S. Stay in communication, all of you—among yourselves, and all of you back to me. Hear?"

"Check! We all hear!"

"I'll keep this thing wide open! Talk, any one of you, whenever you want to!"

"Check!"

Waverly slumped back in his swivel chair, looked up to Sir William. "Before, there was a faint possibility of trouble. Now it's for sure." He reached out, clicked shut the lever on the oblong box, and sighed. "But McNabb's a sturdy old bird. He'll keep the young ones in rein. You and I—even older birds—all we can do is sit and wait."

"Steve?"

"He's out of it now. Safe and sound."

"I thank you, Mr. Waverly."

Waverly grunted, clicked open the lever, and sat slumped in his chair.

13. "Two-Gun McNabb"

OUTSIDE, THE SUN glared hotly. Inside the gray Rolls, Solo was not uncomfortable. He was, in fact, cool. The car was air-conditioned, but not cold. Burrows had adjusted the thermostat after Stanley had reminded him that Solo was not wearing conventional clothes. He was a strange man, this saboteur. Aside from his work—which was exploding places and killing people—he was as

kindly and considerate as a devoted grandfather. Once he had even had Burrows stop the car so that he could get a light blanket from the trunk in the rear for Solo's knees. It was as though, in the new circumstances, he was the host. He chatted with Solo, offered cigarettes, even a drink from a bar in the car, courteously; and as courteously Solo refused. The little man sipped brandy and chatted affably. It must have bored the man in front; he touched a button on the dashboard and the dividing window rose up, shutting him off from the two in the rear. He did not once turn his head; Solo's view of Burrows was black hair, the back of a thick, strong neck, and an occasional flash of a rugged profile.

But the view outside the car had changed. The Rolls now sped along a good-surfaced road; the landscape now had trees and bushes and rolling hills and fine houses deeply set in the hills. Once they passed a golf course with brightly dressed

men and women at play, trying to escape the oppressive heat.

"Lovely countryside," Stanley said. "So peaceful, slumbering in the summertime. I adore a pleasant countryside. I paint, you know, in my leisure. Oil, mostly landscapes. Quite good, if I may be so immodest as to say; I've had several showings in London galleries."

Solo's eyes were hidden behind his sunglasses; Stanley could not see the amusement that crinkled the corners. "I don't get you," Solo said.

"What is there to get, Mr. Solo?"

"I mean—if I didn't know what you do. . . ."

"One must not judge a man by the work that earns him his keep."

"But *your* work."

"It is work. One need not love one's own work; one may take pride, but not love. A long time ago, Mr. Solo, I was greatly respected—by respectable people—for just that kind of work. A

long time ago, during a shooting war, I was a major in the British service; I was a demolitions expert." He shrugged his thin shoulders. "Quite natural, I would imagine, that peacetime people would gather in a wartime expert." He smiled a melancholy smile. "Expert! The expert failed here quite miserably, didn't he? You told Mr. Burrows I was spotted at the airport. Where at the airport, if I may inquire?"

"Customs."

"But I was only a salesman with a dispatch case that was utterly innocent."

"The dispatch case may have been innocent. But not you."

"But who would know me?"

"UNCLE is efficient, Mr. Stanley."

"We do not underestimate UNCLE, I assure you."

"Had you been as innocent as your dispatch case, you wouldn't have been molested. We would

have loved to pluck you out of circulation—whether or not you made any wrongful move—but we don't work like that in this country. Instead, a heavy surveillance was put around you. The room next door to yours was ours, and we were in the lobby, and we were outside in the streets; the taxi that drove you to Liberty Island was ours."

The little man puckered his lips. "Clever, these Americans."

The man up front was talking into the microphone.

This time Burrows received no acknowledgment, but it did not disturb him. Tudor was probably out in the helicopter and the girl out front on the portico as a welcoming committee of one. For that, she would be valuable; psychology had its uses. A blond, shining, cherubic-faced girl did not present an image of a terrorist, an executioner; and it was best to keep this Mr. Solo placid.

Not that he could do any damage with all his lethal little gadgets lying useless in that clearing in the weeds, but it was best to keep him placid because time was of the essence, and UNCLE was not stupid. Certainly they were about—somehow—somewhere—and he, Burrows, was a veteran. Never play down the enemy, always expect the worst. They were somewhere about, but they could not risk, would not dare, an awkward interruption. They had two lives at stake, including one of their own valuable men—he himself would have been sufficient in exchange for Stanley—plus a boy whose death could produce international furor, the son of the British Ambassador to the United Nations.

No, they wouldn't dare; nevertheless, time was of the essence! If it went according to plan it would be over five minutes after their arrival—the concrete room, an accommodating Solo supposedly to be locked in for an hour, the cyanide

pellet exploded in the concrete room, the slide-door snapped shut—and the four agents from THRUSH would be off and away in the aircraft and out of the country. All told, no more than five minutes—but keep Mr. Solo placid. A break in the smooth-flowing scheme, a Mr. Solo grown suspicious and balking, the waste of time in scuffling and physical persuasion, gunfire out-doors—and the people from UNCLE might swoop in, no matter the risk.

The man up front put away the microphone.

The Rolls turned into a wide private pathway of gleaming white pebbles.

"Are we there?" Solo asked Stanley.

"I don't know," Stanley said. "Believe me, I don't know where we're going. They don't tell me everything. I work under orders and try to do my job; that's all." He peered out the window with casual interest.

Solo watched with more than casual interest,

sitting up straight now, tense, alert.

The pebbled roadway was lined with tall green trees.

The Rolls rode up it perhaps half a mile.

Then it stopped at high iron gates in a high picket fence—a black iron fence, high, very high, sharp spokes like knives pointing upward, razor-edge-sharp, malevolently gleaming in the sunshine, cutting, killing long points like the points of gigantic upthrust sabers, protective, forbidding. Beyond the iron gates the white-pebbled roadway continued, curving away.

The motor of the Rolls died to a silence. All was still.

Then Burrows got out, a black automatic pistol in one hand, a huge black key in the other, and stood outside the rear door. Stanley rolled down the window.

"Is this it, Mr. Burrows?"

"Well, what do *you* think? Out, gentlemen.

Yes, this is it, Mr. Stanley."

They climbed out, and of the three standing on the white pebbles, Solo, in the swim trunks, was most appropriately dressed—it was blazing hot, the air like a thick blanket of heat. Appropriately dressed, but he wished he had sneakers. The white pebbles, like heated stones of torture, burned at his soles. He kept moving his feet, dancing a little jig as the bottoms of his feet tried to grow accustomed to the agony.

"Whew!" Stanley said.

Burrows tossed the key, and Stanley caught it casually.

The black automatic was pointed at Solo.

"Why the weapon?" Solo said.

"To assure us you'll be a good boy," Burrows said.

"I'll be a good boy. What choice do I have?"

"No choice." Then Burrows, his eyes not leaving Solo, the gun leveled straight, said, "Stanley!"

"Yes, sir?"

"The key. You'll open the gate. After we pass through, you'll lock the gate. Then, on the right side, you'll see a switch. Pull it up, all the way. That'll electrify the fence all the way around. Anybody touches it, he's electrocuted."

"But we have an arrangement, don't we?" Solo asked.

"We do," Burrows said.

"Then why all the precautions?"

"To assure us the arrangement will be kept. Just one hour, Mr. Solo. When we notify the authorities to pick you up—you and Kuryakin and Steven Winfield—at that time we'll also notify them of the electrified fence." Then he added sarcastically, "Any more questions, Mr. Man from UNCLE?"

"No."

"Stanley!"

"Yes, sir?"

"*Well?* What are you waiting for?"

"Yes, sir."

Stanley inserted the key and turned the lock, withdrew the key, pushed, and the heavy gate swung inward noiselessly.

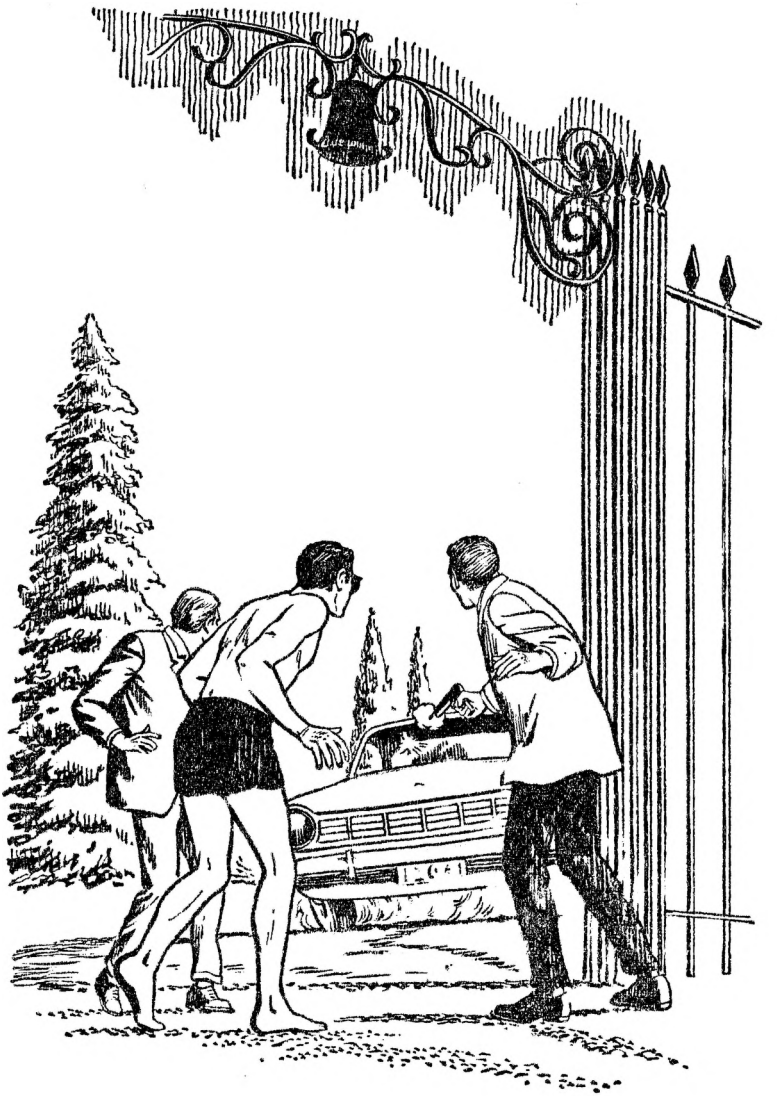
"All right," Burrows said impatiently, gesturing with the black automatic. "Move, Mr. Solo!"

"Don't tell me you're leaving the beautiful Rolls."

"Mind your own business. Get in there."

"Yes, sir," Solo said meekly, mimicking Stanley.

And then the roaring sound was upon them and they turned, all three, and saw the wildly racing car careening directly at them, and already Burrows was shooting. There was the sound of grinding glass but the bulletproof windshield did not shatter. The car skidded to a stop on the white pebbles, and two men were running out. Solo recognized them—McNabb and O'Keefe.



O'Keefe, a famed sharpshooter, held a huge revolver in his hand. He shot just once, and Burrows' automatic flew from his hand, and Burrows was running. O'Keefe, tossing aside the gleaming revolver, was running after Burrows, and McNabb—quite casually, slowly, almost tiredly, not even looking at the running men—picked up the black automatic and the silver-shining revolver. O'Keefe closed ground on Burrows and, leaping forward in a flying tackle, hit Burrows precisely at the knees, and the two fell to the ground with a thud. The struggle was brief. O'Keefe pulled Burrows to his feet, twisted Burrows' right arm behind his back, and, broadly grinning, brought the grimacing Burrows back to them.

"Not bad, hey?" O'Keefe said. "One shot and I knocked his gun out of action. And not even a scratch on him, not even a sideswipe; didn't wing him, not a nick on him. Now you just be good, baby," O'Keefe said to the squirming Burrows,

"or you'll spoil the whole thing. I'll have to break your arm."

McNabb stood smiling like a tired gunfighter of the Old West, limply holding the pistols, his arms loose, the muzzles pointed downward. Two-gun McNabb of the wild, old, woolly West. Calmly, as though addressing a PTA meeting, McNabb said, "Don't you worry about Eric; he'll be good. Eric is a veteran campaigner; he knows when he's licked. Don't you, old Eric, old bean? Let him loose, Jack."

O'Keefe released Burrows. Burrows stood motionless, panting, chin down. "Two veteran campaigners," McNabb said. "Our troubles are over, Jack. Relax." McNabb gave the pistols to O'Keefe and unhooked a pair of handcuffs from his belt. "You," he said to Stanley, who was standing round-eyed. "Come join the party, old Albert, old bean."

Stanley obligingly shuffled forward. McNabb

handcuffed the right hand of Burrows to the left hand of Stanley. "There's your package, all wrapped up for you, Mr. O'Keefe," McNabb said. "Make them comfortable."

O'Keefe herded them into the backseat of the car and got in with them, and now McNabb turned smilingly on Solo.

"Going swimming, Mr. Solo?"

"This is the day for it, Mr. McNabb."

"What's with all the nudity? What's with swim trunks?"

"Burrows thought it safer—for them—if he stripped me down."

"Got to hand it to him. He's a wise old campaigner."

"Now what's this all about, Mr. McNabb?"

McNabb drew out a handkerchief, wiped his face. "Hot day, hey?"

"Yes, it's a hot day. What's this all about, McNabb?"

"Defection. A young girl. Pamela Hunter. You were in for the works. They were going to give you the cyanide business in a locked room—you, Illya, and the ambassador's kid. Too rough on a young girl, a new recruit. Couldn't take it. They laid it on too stiff on their new recruit; they weren't prepared for a failure by the vaunted Stanley. Couldn't take it. Basically a nice girl roped in by their phony speeches; you know how their phony speeches can brainwash a youngster till the youngster's roped in and tied up and a criminal by reason of crimes already committed. This little girl wised up in time, thank heaven. It got through to her—what they are, what they were making of her. Defected. Brought out Illya and young Winfield. We're in the clear, and we've got Stanley back. Let's go."

"Why the cyanide treatment? I don't get it. We were going along. We were giving them back their ace saboteur."

"THRUSH," McNabb said. "A basic rule of THRUSH. Kill the witnesses."

"Who witnessed? What witnesses? What?"

"Illya saw Stanley, Hunter, Burrows—could identify them. Young Winfield saw Hunter and Burrows—could identify them. You saw Stanley and Burrows—could identify them. A matter of recognition. THRUSH does not like recognition; the fewer that can recognize, the better they like it. Whoever can recognize is a witness—if not for the present, for the future. In their scheme of things the best witness is no witness—and a dead witness is no witness. Therefore the cyanide treatment. Let's go, young fella."

"No." Solo's voice was sharp.

For the first time McNabb showed concern. "What's up?"

"Inside there. Tudor."

"Forget it. You win a major battle; doesn't mean you have to win the whole war. There are

reinforcements coming up and a new plan of attack, with the Old Man in charge. We've won our battle; we have Stanley back, and we have Burrows, and even the girl."

"But inside there—Number One. Tudor!"

"So we'll get to him."

"Will you? They may have a time schedule. If too much time elapses, they know there's trouble; they sacrifice what they have to leave behind and take off."

"So? Still we've won our battle—with no casualties on our side." McNabb was old, patient, wise. "Let's leave it to the Old Man's reinforcements." He grinned. "They'll storm the castle."

But Mr. Solo was young. "An onslaught—and Number One gets scared off. There's a house there somewhere inside, and we don't know how many eyes are in there watching. Me, they're expecting, and just like this—the barefoot boy in swim trunks. And they know who I am—Burrows

talked to *me*—Napoleon Solo. Me, they're expecting; I'm after Number One. I'm going in, McNabb, and I've got to go alone."

"Napoleon, wait! Listen to me; I'm an old hand. You go in there now, and it might be we'll carry you out feet first. You're a bright young guy, and you've got a long career ahead of you. Who needs you dead?"

"I'm going in, Mac. I appreciate what you're trying to do, and I do thank you, but your concern is for me and not the overall. You know as well as I do, probably better, that this is the right moment, and it may never happen again. They're expecting me, all dressed up—or undressed—as I am. If ever there's an opportunity to catch up with Tudor, it's now, and they themselves have shaped me up as the guy to do it."

"Talk to the Old Man on the two-way."

"He's more of a papa rooster than you. His major concern is his flock and you know it. He'll

call me off—and from the Old Man it's an order. From you it's advice. Mac, if you were in my spot, wouldn't you go in?"

McNabb was silent.

"Wish me luck, McNabb."

"Good luck. Take a gun."

Solo laughed. "Where'll I hide it?"

"Yeah," McNabb grunted.

"I've got better ammunition than bullets. I've got facts. I'm not going in for a kill. I'm hoping to bring Tudor out. Facts, if I can get through. If I can talk to him, I may be able to bring him out. The old story—self-preservation. I'll tell about our reinforcements—an attempt at escape can mean death. The other way, prison; but prison, you're still alive. I'll tell him we've got Stanley, Burrows, the girl. I'll tell the truth—to save their skins they'll testify against Tudor; to get lesser sentences they'll testify that Tudor's the boss, the architect of the schemes of attempted

sabotage and actual kidnapping, but none of that carries a penalty of death. Prison, there's always hope; there's precedent all the way back since that guy with the U-two. Governments will release and exchange political prisoners. I'm going in, McNabb."

"Go, boy."

"Protect my flanks."

"You can bet on that."

Solo passed through and McNabb closed the gate.

Protect the flanks. You can bet on that, kid.

When the others came they would have to wait this side of the gate.

A horde, no matter how subtle the invasion, could mean quick death for Solo.

Perforce this was Solo's adventure, alone.

McNabb sighed and stood, a watcher at the gate, as lonely on this side as Solo on the other.

14. Turnabout

He walked in the heat on the hot pebbles. It seemed such a long time since the operation had begun; since McNabb had discovered Stanley at the airport so much had happened, events tumbling upon events. Now his feet dragged, and there was a heaviness in him, an exhaustion. He realized it was not physical fatigue; it was relief, a letdown, the weight of an emptiness. He had

not admitted, not even to himself, how terribly anxious he had been about Illya. And he had worried about the Old Man, and the young boy, and the failure of UNCLE with Stanley, the disgrace—they had all avoided discussion of that —at having to release a dangerous criminal whom at last they had apprehended. But mostly it had been the worry about Illya, his friend for so long. Now Illya was safe, and now he felt the accumulation of all the worry, now it was upon him, the letdown, the fatigue of relief. He shook it off. He braced his shoulders, breathed deeply, filled his lungs. He thought about himself, his immediate mission, and it helped. The fact that he himself was approaching possible peril gave him an excitement and served as an antidote to the exhaustion. Suddenly, as though the elements were assisting in his recovery, it was cooler. There was a little breeze from the east, and he smelled the fresh salt-wet of the sea skimmed off the top of

the ocean and carried by the breeze. He walked more quickly, alert, watching.

The pebbled road curved. There were trees and foliage, wide green lawns with marble benches, flowers, trimmed hedges, and bushes with red-blooming roses. Above, the sky was pure blue, cloudless, and the sun, westerly now, was a burning orange ball. The salt smell of the ocean mingled with the perfume of the roses; it was quiet, fragrant, peaceful. There was no sound except the pleasant chattering of the birds. He walked for a long time, perhaps a quarter of a mile, until the pebbled roadway curved to the house, a red brick mansion with a portico of tall white columns. He walked up five white marble steps into the cool shade beneath the roof of the portico and rapped the gold knocker of a wide white door. There was no answer. He opened the door and entered.

Cool, silent.

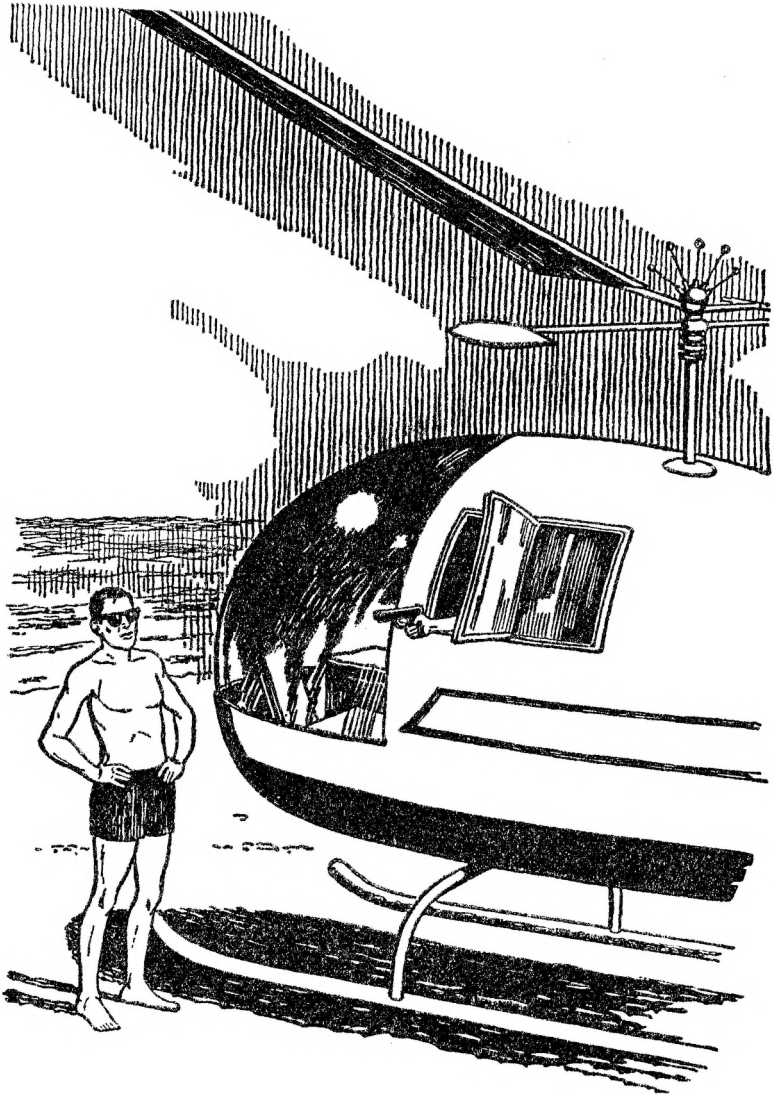
He padded, barefoot, through the rooms.

"Hello," he called. "Hello!"

There was no answer except his own voice coming back to him in echoes. He went all the way through and out the rear and saw the helicopter. It was resting on a smooth beach of packed white sand. Beyond the helicopter the ocean was gray, flat, calm, with little wavelets lapping at the sand of the beach. Inside the helicopter a woman was leaning out an open window. She was attractive, smiling, and tanned from the sun; she had gleaming white teeth, dark eyes, dark hair.

"Please come closer!"

He obeyed for two reasons: First, he wanted to come closer, and second, and more imperative, a thick black gun was pointed at him, and she was holding it very competently. The sand squeaked beneath his feet, and then he was at the helicopter looking up at her.



"Where are the others, Mr. Solo?"

He squinted behind the dark glasses. "You know me?"

"I've seen photographs. Stupidly, there are many of them." She had a low-pitched, harsh voice, and spoke clearly, precisely, and with authority. "Where are the others?"

"Tell Leslie Tudor I want to talk to him."

"You are talking to Leslie Tudor."

A woman! Amazement prickled at his scalp!

"Surprised, Mr. Solo?"

He nodded, gulped. "To say the least—yes."

"So much for that, for all the good it will ever do you. Now quickly, please. Where are they?"

"We have them."

"You *what?*"

"We have them, Miss Tudor."

"You haven't!"

"Stanley, Hunter, Burrows."

"The *truth,* Mr. Solo!"

"And Kuryakin and the boy."

"No!"

"But, yes, Miss Tudor."

"You're lying!"

"Gospel truth, Miss Tudor."

"But—but—*how?*"

The sun was hot on his back, but from the ocean the breeze was cool. The little wavelets swished quietly, musically, at the edge of the beach.

"You put too much pressure on a youngster. You didn't let the wine ferment enough, putrefy to rotten vinegar. You put too much pressure on her too soon; she wasn't spoiled enough yet, rotten enough to join in cold-blooded, useless, evil, multiple murder."

"Incompetent infant!"

"She defected, Miss Tudor, and she brought out young Winfield and Kuryakin with her."

"And Stanley? Burrows?"

"Taken by us. Intercepted by our people."

"Then why you?"

"Pardon, Miss Tudor?"

"Why are you here?"

"To take you out."

"Not on your life!" The gleaming teeth were still exposed, but it was no longer a smile; it was a leer of hatred, bared teeth, a silent snarl, the jaw stiff, the muscles at the corners quivering. "Not ever in your life, Mr. Solo."

"There are many men gathering outside the gates. I came in alone for *your* safety." It was a reasonable statement. He would use any statement, any ruse, any argument, to accomplish his mission. He wanted her surrender. "Many men, many temperaments," he said. "One of them might have an itchy trigger finger."

"Thank you for nothing, Mr. Solo."

Solo bowed his head as though modestly accepting a compliment.

"Will you put away that gun and please come with me?"

"You're out of your mind!"

"Miss Tudor, you'll get a fair trial. There are always two sides to any question. THRUSH is rich enough to provide you with the finest lawyers. There may be technical loopholes, and you might win at a trial. If you win, you're scot-free; if you lose, you get a jail sentence, but prison isn't death. In time, you're out, you're free. I repeat—please put away the gun and come with me."

"And *I* repeat—you're insane."

"Would you tell me why you think so, Miss Tudor?"

"Gladly. And then we'll be done with this." She leaned out farther, steadily holding the gun pointed directly at his head. "Mr. Solo—charming, handsome, debonair Mr. Solo—you're a fool! *I am Leslie Tudor!* I'm not Burrows or Stanley or that little pipsqueak Pamela Hunter. *I am*

Leslie Tudor! Don't you think I anticipated the possibility—this which is happening right now? Why do you think I'm out here in this aircraft?"

"Why, Miss Tudor?"

"Because I touch a button of this machine and it is up and out and over the Atlantic. In moments, literally moments, I am in the air and away, out of the territorial jurisdiction of the United States. What can you do, any of you? Shoot down a British plane in free air over international waters? That is an act of war! You wouldn't dare, any of you! I challenge you! Is UNCLE an outlaw organization? Would it effect an act of war upon a friendly country no matter the alleged—and as yet entirely unproven in any court of law—would it effect an act of war under these alleged circumstances? I ask you, Mr. Solo. Is UNCLE an outlaw organization?"

"No." Perhaps he should have listened to McNabb, wise old McNabb. Perhaps he should have

waited and gone in with the others. Then they would have had her, *within* the territorial United States, a criminal alien bent upon conspiracy *within* the United States and subject to United States law. But would *she* have waited? How long would she have waited, her time schedule having lapsed? Had he been right in going in at once, alone? Or should he have waited? It was a question that would remain forever unanswered.

Leaning out through the open window she stared down at him, silently regarding him. He knew of her satisfaction, how much she was enjoying his consternation, how she was savoring at least this crumb of THRUSH's victory. And there was nothing he could do. He could not make a move. He was helpless against the wide round muzzle of the thick black gun unswervingly pointed at his head. Any action on his part, any sudden move, and the gun would spew forth its lethal charge, and death would end all hope.

What hope?

And then, suddenly, there *was* hope.

She laughed—shrill, tremulous, spiteful—and it gave him hope. She was not done yet.

"Failed in our mission"—the harsh voice rasped in an anger, a futility—"but for me at least, a booby prize."

Solo pulled up the corners of his mouth, forcing a smile.

"What last prize can I give you, Miss Tudor?"

"You're not giving *me!* I'm giving *you!*"

"A prize for me, Miss Tudor?" Hope fluttered. Keep her talking. Let's see what happens. "A prize? A memento, perhaps? A token of our meeting?" He played along with it, played it stupid. "But didn't you say for you—a booby prize for you?"

"A prize for both of us, Mr. Solo."

"Well, thank you, Miss Tudor."

The harsh voice now snapped an order: "Take

off your glasses, Mr. Solo!"

And Solo, quite mildly, pretending stupidity, frowning inquiringly, responded, "Beg pardon, ma'am?"

"The great Mr. Solo. The vaunted Mr. Solo. I want to see your eyes, Mr. Solo. Courage or fear? Take off your glasses. You have seen me, you know me, the only one of UNCLE thus far—but not for long. Take off your glasses. Courage or fear in the face of the inevitable? It must happen, sooner or later, to all of us. I'm curious about you. Let me look in your eyes, Mr. Solo, as I present your prize—a prize for both of us. Let me look at your eyes as they look on—death."

His smile, no longer forced, was grave.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

He opened his arms, bowed politely, straightened, looked up at her, direct, exact, moving his head slightly, arranging the line of vision.

"I'm waiting, Mr. Solo."

"As you wish."

His right hand came up like a salute to the right temple of the glasses, his index finger pressed to the hidden spring, and a tiny dart was released. A slender streak gleamed in the sunshine. Suddenly she was rigid, her eyes round in wonder; then she hung limp in the window, unconscious. The gun slipped from her hand and soundlessly met the sand.

It was over. It was ended.

Solo sighed and went back through the house and the long way over the pebbled road to McNabb and the many men now gathered.

Whitman CLASSICS

Black Beauty

Tales to Tremble By

Heidi

Tales from Arabian Nights

Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch

Little Women

Huckleberry Finn

The Call of the Wild

Tom Sawyer

Robin Hood

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

Robinson Crusoe

Wild Animals I Have Known

The War of the Worlds

Here are some of the best-loved stories of all time. Delightful . . . intriguing . . . never-to-be-forgotten tales that you will read again and again. Start your own home library of WHITMAN CLASSICS so that you'll always have exciting books at your fingertips.

Whitman

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

Adventure Stories for GIRLS and BOYS...

REAL LIFE STORIES

To Dance, To Dream
The Great War
Heroes in Blue and Gray

POWER BOYS SERIES

The Haunted Skyscraper
The Flying Skeleton
The Burning Ocean
The Million-Dollar Penny
The Double Kidnapping

DONNA PARKER

In Hollywood
At Cherrydale
Special Agent
On Her Own
A Spring to Remember
Mystery at Arawak
Takes a Giant Step

TROY NESBIT SERIES

Forest Fire Mystery
Indian Mummy Mystery
Mystery at Rustlers' Fort

New Stories About Your Television Favorites...

I Spy

Lassie
- Secret of the Summer
- Forbidden Valley
- Wild Mountain Trail

The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

Combat! The Counterattack

The Beverly Hillbillies

The Munsters
- The Great Camera Caper
- The Last Resort

Gilligan's Island

The Big Valley

Bonanza

Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea

Walt Disney's Annette
- Mystery at Medicine Wheel
- Mystery at Moonstone Bay
- Mystery at Smugglers' Cove

C.L.E.

U.N.C.L.E.

U.N.C.L.E.

U.N.C.L.E.

THE MAN FROM

U.N.C.L.E.

The Affair of the Gentle Saboteur

KEITH

AUTHORIZED TV ADVENTURE

Whitman

1541