



DR. NYET

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CHAPTER ONE

It started in London. It started in darkness. It started in bed.

It started in Gladys - almost.

But not quite.

Gladys?

She was a pre-Pygmalion Eliza Doolittle with more frontage than the fair ladies of stage, screen, and video combined. She was a 'eavenly 'arlot with 'ot 'ips and 'eathenish 'aunches. And 'igh 'opes of cadging a sheaf of shillings from the American tourist she'd picked up at a bar in Piccadilly.

The American tourist was me. Steve Victor. The man from O.R.G.Y.

O.R.G.Y.? The official name is "Organization for the Rational Guidance of Youth." Actually, it's strictly a one-man organization dedicated to providing food, shelter, clothing, and a few life-spicing luxuries for me. But don't get the wrong idea. O.R.G.Y. is on the up-and-up. Spurred on by assignments backed up by grants from various interested foundations, I conduct Kinsey-type sex surveys all over the world. And I do my job honestly and enthusiastically.

But I wasn't working the night I met Gladys. I was just out on the town for my own pleasure, barhopping the part of town known for London britches falling down. Sort of a bust-man's holiday, you might say.

So this bust marked Gladys cruised along right on schedule and made what I took to be its nightly stop at this Piccadilly pub. The doors swung open with a crooked blonde smile, and I boarded with the offer of a drink. Half an hour later we were jogging into her home depot, a three-room flat - not lavish, not cheap - in Soho.

The fair lady never mentioned the fare. She might drop her aitches and her panties, but not her pride. Gladys was only a sort of a semi-'ore, consorting only with those she judged toffs and relying on their generosity, rather than on the tawdriness of a pre-set price.

"Ow habout a drink?" she asked when we were alone in her apartment.

"Hi'll 'ave an 'arf-an!-'arf," I replied.

"Hit's not very nice to make fun of the hway ha person talks," she pouted. "Hi can't 'elp hit, you know."

I restrained my Rex Harrison-ish impulses and shelved the Professor Higgins role. "I'm sorry," I apologized. "I really think the way you speak is charming, and I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Let's kiss and make up."

"Righto, Yank." She came into my arms easily and fastened her lips over mine.

(Note: The osculatory technique of English girls varies slightly from that of their American sisters. The temperature of the lips upon first buss is generally higher - an overcompensation, doubtless, for the chill fog of the London climate. The lips themselves seem softer, more pliable - probably because the juices have not been dried up by overcosmeticizing, as is so frequently the case on the lipstickier side of the Atlantic. The teeth and tongues of British girls move more freely and both take and provide more joy during osculatory activity - this, indubitably, the result of the simpler English diet which has not jaded the taste buds to oral sensations as the more spicily varied American foods have. Finally, the English girls are less peevish about having their hair mussed during a kiss, not being easily disturbed about having their over-teased tresses or permanent waves rumpled the way U.S. girls so frequently are.)

It was a helluva passionate kiss. I slid out of it and right into her brassiere - with my hand, that is. It was more than a handful, but I palmed as much as I could.

"Oh, you Yanks are so heager," Gladys complained. "That's the third bra-strap's been broken this week."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't talk with your mouth full, love."

I came up for air and took a good look at the bosom I'd bared. It was magnificent. I've seen a lot of mammaries in my business, but very few that could measure up to Gladys's. They were impressively large, perfectly round, and as firm as warmed-over basketballs. They were cloud-white with wide pink roseates so delicately defined as to be almost invisible. From their centres, blood-red nipples stood out like rocket-shaped maraschino cherries.

"Wow! I'll bet you have to go to a tent-maker for your bras," I observed, my awe negating my usual savoir-faire.

"Thank you." She giggled at the compliment. "But I really honly tike a size forty-two, C-cup."

"Only!" I dived back in with the exclamation point. I burrowed my face into the deep cleavage and warm, panting breast-flesh enveloped my cheeks. Her hands clasped over the back of my neck, urging my tongue deeper into the cleft. My own hands were on her hips now, and they ripped rhythmically under my touch.

I think it was just after that that Gladys slid her hand under the waistband of my pants and down my bare belly. Not too far down, the way things were positioned. "Coo!" she exclaimed. "Yankee Doodle's come to London, an' fair impatient 'e his, too!"

Not to be outdone, I trailed my fingers up her burning thighs. "Thumbs up for Britain!" I quipped.

"Well, we don't need all these clothes naow, do we?" She stood up and quickly undressed.

One look at her in the nude and I undressed even more quickly. Then I pulled her into the darkened bedroom, down on the bed beside me, and kissed her again. It was a busy kiss. She had both fists around me like a sports car enthusiast going gaga over a new stick-shift. And I was strumming her little passion switch like a banjo player mad with palsy.

"Are you ready, Yank?" she panted. "Do 'urry!" Her thighs clenched and unclenched demandingly. "Hi want hit naow!"

"The Yanks are coming," I assured her. I scrambled over her, and she jackknifed to meet me, wrapping her legs around my neck and raising her lower body off the mattress so that all her weight was on her shoulders and mine. "The Yanks are coming," I repeated, poised to fill the twitching cup of her femininity.

But the Yanks didn't come. Not that night, anyway. Just as I uttered the words, there came an aggressive knocking at the door and Gladys reacted with panic that she turned a somersault right out of bed. "Oo-'Oo his hit?" she called in a trembly voice from the floor.

"Scotland Yard!" The voice was even more nastily aggressive than the knocking. "Open up!"

"What d'you want?"

"You'll find out soon enough! Now, are you going to open, or do we break the door down?"

"Just ha minute, I 'ave no clothes hon."

"That figures. Hurry up."

"Hi ham 'urrying." Gladys scrambled to the closet, threw on a robe, and hastened to open the door.

Two walrus types in plain clothes, both beefy, both red-faced, and both sporting identically ale-stained moustaches, muscled into the room. "Scotland Yard." They repeated it in unison like a pair of well-trained Anglicized parrots.

"Hwat does Scotland Yard want with me?" Gladys asked in a quavery voice.

"You've got a man in here!" one of the detectives rumbled.

"Me? Why, Hi never -" Gladys's voice rose and strained for high C. "Perish forbid!" she added, outraged.

"Oh? Then what do you call that?" The detective pointed through the half-opened door to the bedroom. Either by accident or design, his outstretched finger leveled directly at my exposed groin.

"That's me brother," Gladys said primly.

"Incest!" the detective crowed.

"Yes, Hi do hinsist," Gladys replied. "It's me brother."

"Me eye!" the detective growled. "Come out here, you!" he added, calling to me.

"I like it better where I am," I answered, modestly tugging at the blankets to cover myself.

"Move it, Yank!" the John Bull snarled.

"I don't want to," I told him. "It's nice and cozy here," I added, snuggling under the blankets. "And it looks like a cold world out there - not to mention hostile."

"Are you getting out of that bed voluntarily? Or are we going to go in and pluck you out?" He made an obscene gesture to demonstrate just how I might be "plucked."

"Since you put it so graphically," I sighed, "I'm coming out." I wrapped a sheet around me toga-style and went out to confront Scotland Yard. "You'll have to pardon me," I greeted them haughtily, "but I didn't have time to put on my laurel wreath."

"Are you Steve Victor?" one of them demanded.

"In the flesh," I answered accurately.

"Put on your clothes and come with us."

"Why should I? I haven't done anything."

"Oh? Then I suppose you have a wedding license to prove that you and this lady are married," he observed sarcastically.

"Damn!" I snapped my fingers. "I knew there was something that must have slipped my mind. Gladys -" I turned to her - "why didn't you remind me? We forgot to get married."

"That's one 'ell of ha proposal," she said wistfully, "but Hi haccept."

"It's too late for that now." Scotland Yard crooned a duet. "Get dressed, Mr. Victor," one of them added.

I got dressed.

"Now come along with us." They fell in on either side of me, each grabbing an arm.

"You can't be serious," I protested. "Since when does Scotland Yard bother with this sort of thing?"

"We have many varied duties when it comes to keeping the peace."

"Just as I thought," I wisecracked. "You want Gladys for yourself."

"Come along now."

"Wait a minute." I pulled loose and pointed. "What about her? Since when do you arrest the customer and let the hustler go?"

"Coo!" Gladys said bitterly. "Hand Hi thought you was ha blinkin' gentleman."

"We know where to find her when we want her," one of them said.

"Chicago was never like this," I told them. But I went along peacefully. I figured that whatever I'd done couldn't be too serious and I'd manage to talk myself out of trouble sooner or later. Still, I was curious about just exactly what it was they were

arresting me for. When I was in the back of their car and it began moving through the Soho streets, I raised the question. "Just what is the charge against me?" I asked.

"Well, it could be carnal knowledge out of wedlock," one of them told me.

"Are you kidding? You'd have to arrest half of London. Besides, there was no actual carnal knowledge. Just a little mutual carnal investigation. Your arrival forestalled any real in-depth carnal knowledge."

"My apologies for the *pre-coitus interruptus*," one of them Latined at me, chortling.

"This is ridiculous!" I was silent after that, brooding. And feeling guilty, too. Hell, I hadn't even kissed Gladys goodbye. If I'd behaved like such a boor, it was no wonder the American image abroad was so tarnished. Still, with this kind of European hospitality, who could blame an American for turning ugly?

The car pulled up at a gate. The driver presented some identification, and it was opened. We drove up a long driveway to the side of an imposing-looking mansion. "Where are you taking me?" I asked as the car pulled to a halt. "This isn't Scotland Yard."

"You'll see in a moment, Mr. Victor."

I was prodded out of the car. Just as I was being hustled into the building, I glanced up and saw an American flag flying from a pole on top of it. What the hell?

I was ushered into a nice-sized room. Mahogany paneling, quiet, expensive drapes, a couple of leather armchairs and a leather sofa, a desk out of Thackeray which glistened with prestige, a Sixteenth Century bas relief on the wall, a shield and pike that looked Crusades-y, a hand-loomed Persian carpet - it all added up to quiet elegance and tacit tradition. The bulls left me alone in the room. I waited a moment, then eased the door open. The figure in front of it swiveled around like a robot and barred my way with a rifle. It was eight-foot-ten - give or take a few inches - of U.S. Marine. "Semper Fidelis." I smiled weakly into his stony face and shut the door.

A few minutes later it opened again. The man who entered was dressed impeccably, ultra-conservatively. The only thing that was out of style was the face sticking out over his diplomat-blue suit. It was the face of a third-rate wrestler. The ears looked like they'd been run through a meat grinder manufactured by the Marquis de Sade. The nose was a purple lump left over from some ancient volcanic eruption. The eyes were shrewd and blue, but buried in scar tissue. The hair was gray, but bristly like steel wool dipped in a sugar bowl. And the body under the Bond Street suit was a muscle-bulging bulldozer primed for action.

I took a long look at this incongruity and cursed under my breath. "I might have known," I added aloud.

"It is pleasant to see you again, Mr. Victor," he said, the icicles dripping off his tongue detracting from the sincerity of the words.

"I'm sorry I can't say the same." I glowered at him familiarly. I knew him all right. It was Charles Putnam.

That wasn't his real name. I don't think he has a real name. Just a number, like some government issue weapon. Maybe not even that, since no government department was about to officially acknowledge his existence.

Charles Putnam was the invisible man, the man who never was, the lost statistic on the government payroll - if he was on the payroll at all. I reminded myself that I'd have to ask him about that some time. It would probably annoy him, which was reason enough to raise the question.

Anyway, this hulky human cipher held one of those indefinable positions in the nether world which lies between espionage and diplomacy. He had something to do with the State Department - something they'd never admit. And he had something to do with the CIA - something they buried quickly before the smell was detected. He'd played footsie with the Russians and held hands with the Chinese, but his loyalty to the U.S. was unquestionable. So too was his function and authority.

Because of my connection with O.R.G.Y., Putnam had found my services useful in the past. Now I was remembering the last time he'd called on those services. It had been in Tokyo and, like tonight, he'd had me hauled away from a warm bed and a willing woman so that I might be brought to him. That was only one of the reasons I didn't like him, but I brought it up now anyway.

"Mr. Putnam," I asked him, "how do you always manage to time these summonses for such maximum frustration?"

"My apologies, Mr. Victor. But this can't wait. The young lady, I am sure, can."

"But will she?"

"Surely you underrate yourself, Mr. Victor."

"Perhaps. But now I'll never know. Will I?"

"Ships that pass in the night." He shrugged.

"You certainly can turn a phrase, Mr. Putnam," I told him sarcastically.

He shrugged that off, too. "This is important, mr. Victor. Important to your country and mine."

"Doesn't your arm get tired waving that flag all the time?" Before he could answer, I raised another question. "Just what is this place, anyway?" I asked him. "It's not the American embassy. I've seen that. But there's an American flag on it. What is it?"

"You're mistaken. It is the American embassy." He allowed himself a rare smile, just the faintest trace of a crack in the iceberg. "That is, it will appear as the American embassy to millions of people all over the world."

"Come again? You lost me going around that last innuendo."

"You don't mean innuendo; you mean hint. But let me explain. This house has been decorated as a facsimile of the American embassy for use in a film. All sorts of odd people come in and out without attracting any notice."

"You mean like Scotland Yard men and such?"

"Exactly. Anybody seeing them would simply think they were extras and that their official car was a prop. So you can see why this meeting place is ideal for

purposes of secrecy. Where everything and everybody is out of the ordinary, nothing attracts attention."

"So it's a movie set." I shook my head in admiration. "You don't miss a trick, do you?"

"Not if I can help it, Mr. Victor. But let's get down to cases. Your country needs your help again. Your patriotism is as staunch as ever, I trust?"

"You keep interfering with my sex life and it won't be," I told him. "But yeah. I'm still a patsy when it comes to Uncle Sammy. What's up?"

"Have you ever heard of smut?"

"Which kind? The kind you step in, or the kind you read?"

"Neither. I'm referring to the organization. *S.M.U.T.* The Society for Moral Uplift Today. Have you heard of them?"

"Oh, yeah. Vaguely. That bunch of bluenoses back in the States who want to cover Bardot's dimples. I'm afraid I don't know much about them."

"Then let me fill you in, Mr. Victor. They are interested in much more than covering Miss Bardot's dimples, or other portions of the female anatomy. They started in the New York City area as an organization dedicated to stamping out what they considered to be pornographic literature and photographs and movies. However, today their activities encompass much more than that. Today it is their announced intention to stamp out all so-called illicit sexuality. And their concept of what is illicit includes everything from bra ads to ballet costumes. They have struck out against such things as men wearing Bermuda shorts, urinals which are not fenced off from one another, comedians who tell slightly off-color jokes, the display of Botticelli nudes in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Washington Monument which they claim is phallic, sightseeing expeditions to the Grand Canyon because they think it's blatantly ovarian, automotive designs which include headlights which they consider mammarian, and many other things. They have conducted a campaign to edit all the world's great books so that words with double meanings might be censored out."

"That's quite an undertaking," I interrupted.

"That it is. But they have already published some suggestions. For instance, they would change the famous Shakespearean line to read 'If you nick me, do I not bleed?' And they want to change one of his titles to *The Assault of Lucretia*. But they're not just limiting it to literature. They want butcher shops to sell 'chest of chicken,' and hardware stores to be enjoined from peddling nuts and screws, and fairy tales to be changed to 'gremlin stories,' and for the Department of Agriculture to force chicken farmers to call male fowl 'roosters' and cease and desist all mention of 'laying' eggs. They're even objecting to recruiting posters calling for men to enlist and 'do their duty.' And they want the phrase 'tit for tat' stricken from the shelves of the public libraries."

"Sounds like a real fun-loving group," I observed.

"Nor is language their major concern," Putnam continued. "They're also calling for legislation making it mandatory to use a method they've devised for changing babies' diapers so that the baby is never exposed. And they've stolen a leaf from that

S.I.N.A. group and now they're insisting that animals must be clothed. Only they go further than S.I.N.A. ever did. They even want birds to wear panties. Even insects! Bees in particular! And they want a law passed against the public pollination of flowers. That will give you some idea of what kind of an outfit S.M.U.T. is."

"But what has all this got to do with me?"

"I'm coming to that. As I said before, S.M.U.T. started in the New York area. That was about three years ago, and they started small. But in those three years, they've grown unbelievably. They've not only spread throughout the U.S., but also in many other countries around the globe. They're truly an international organization now, and their power and influence is considerable. Still, it's only recently that the government has taken any notice of their activities. But once that notice was taken, we investigated - quietly, but extensively. And we learned two alarming things about S.M.U.T. But we learned them too late."

"What do you mean?"

"First of all, we found that S.M.U.T. is much more than it seems to be. As extensive as their operations are, those operations are only a front - albeit a useful one for their purposes. But behind that front, S.M.U.T. is ambitious, insidious, and dangerous. They seem to have unlimited funds to back them up. We're still trying to trace the sources of those funds. So far all we know is that they come from banks all over the world, banks which themselves are innocent of any involvement in S.M.U.T.'s activities or purposes."

"Just what are those purposes?" I asked.

"Summed up, they add to one thing," Putnam told me gravely. "They want to conquer the world."

"Who doesn't?"

"It's no joking matter, Mr. Victor. They are out for nothing less than that - world conquest. We've learned that they've been around much longer than their public image would suggest. There are certain neo-Nazi - or perhaps not so neo - ties that we haven't been able to fully trace. But we do know that their activities are as concentrated on the Communist world as on the West. And they are as much of a threat to them as to us. I'll come to the specifics of that in a moment. But first, you look like you want to ask something?"

"Yes. Will you tell me just how a group can conquer the world with an anti-pornography crusade?"

"It's much more than that, Mr. Victor. When we realized the scope of their activities, we knew that. It's not just an anti-pornography campaign. It's anti-sexual. It's anti anything that might even vaguely be construed as sexual. And we are only just beginning to appreciate the reason behind this."

"What reason?"

"Their true purpose, Mr. Victor, is to remove every available form of sexual sublimation from the human race so that there will be no substitute outlet for the sex act itself. What do you think will happen if they succeed in accomplishing that purpose, Mr. Victor?"

"The pediatrics business will boom."

"Exactly. And that's what they want. They want a worldwide population explosion. They want people to breed so profusely that they will by virtue of their numbers become as sheep. And then they want to control those sheep, breed them, enslave them."

"But I don't get it. How could they enslave them? How could they feed them and house them? How could they keep the sheep from crowding the masters right off the face of the Earth?"

"You've got me there, Mr. Victor. It's scientifically conceivable that they might succeed in herding them into the undeveloped areas of the Earth. But we don't know how they would feed them. Our government is working on that. But we do know that overpopulation is their aim."

"How do you know that?"

"By S.M.U.T.'s other actions which tie in with their attempting to remove all sex sublimation stimulation from the human environment. We have learned that they are conducting a campaign to undermine both the U.S. and the U.N. birth control programs. Are you familiar with the role your country plays in worldwide birth control, Mr. Victor?"

"Only in a general way."

"Then allow me to point out a few facts which are public knowledge, although the public seems to ignore them. First of all, the birth-control program now constitutes a major part of U.S. foreign aid. In the next three years the U.S. will be spending one hundred million dollars a year to fight the population explosion in underdeveloped countries. Right now in most of these countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the populations are increasing at a rate of about two-point-five percent a year. This means that in twenty-eight years these populations will double. But the average rate of increase in food production is only about one percent a year. People are starving in most of these places today. Can you imagine what it will be like in a quarter of a century?"

"You remind me of when I was a kid," I grimaced. "With my mother telling me to finish every scrap on my plate and not waste food because I should remember the starving children in India."

"The point is, Mr. Victor, that our government, very quietly, has taken a strong pro-birth-control stand and backed it up in countries beyond its borders. But in these same countries S.M.U.T. has been waging a propaganda offensive against birth control. The strength of this offensive is what convinced us that S.M.U.T.'s anti-sex activities are really a screen to both aid and conceal their real objective: a catastrophic population increase. Now, at first, we thought they might be fronting for the Commies. But then we found that they've been active behind the Iron Curtain and not just in spots where the Reds might consider starvation and birth-rate increase a prod to revolution. And most recently there has been a development which forces us to cooperate with the Commies - yes, even the Red Chinese - in the fight against S.M.U.T."

"What is this development?"

"The defection of Dr. Nyet to S.M.U.T.," Putnam announced dramatically.

"Why don't you try blowing your nose?" I asked delicately.

"I beg your pardon?"

"It's all right. Don't be self-conscious. Go ahead and give a good blow."

"Mr. Victor," Putnam said with some asperity, "my nasal passages are quite clear. Now can we please get back to the matter at hand? As I was saying, with the defection of Dr. Nyet to S.M.U.T., it has become necessary for us to join forces with the Reds in an effort to get her back."

"Her who?"

"Who? Ha! Her! Dr. Nyet, of course."

"And just who is Dr. Nyet?" I wanted to know.

"That's part of the problem," Putnam explained. "We're not really sure who she is. And the Russians won't tell us."

"Then how can they expect us to help them get her back from S.M.U.T.?"

"Their idea was that we should help return her to Russia without really knowing who or what we were returning. It's an involved business. Let me try to piece it together for you in sequence. When Dr. Nyet defected, the Russians quite naturally thought she had defected to us. And so they made certain very complex and very secret diplomatic overtures to us to arrange an exchange. The bait they dangled was very high since the first overtures they made were through the British. Do you remember the two prominent British atomic scientists who defected to Moscow a few years back?"

"Yes." I knew who he meant, although I couldn't recall their names at the moment.

"Well, they offered to swap them for Dr. Nyet. It was the magnanimity of that offer that really aroused our suspicions. We knew that this Dr. Nyet must be pretty hot potatoes indeed if they were willing to give up two top atomic scientists for her. The Russians should have been shrewder. By showing how eager they were to get her back, they aroused our interest. They thought we had her and we didn't. But we let them go right on thinking so while we tried to find out just who and what Dr. Nyet was, and why she was so important to them."

"What did you learn?"

"Not so very much, Mr. Victor. We're still working on it, and right now our information is limited. But if you will be good enough to listen, I will tell you everything we do know."

"Shoot."

"Very well then. First the physical description. Dr. Nyet is a 24-year-old Russian female. She is described as slender but voluptuous, with a large bosom, a small waist and ample hips. Her legs are said to be very good. She has been called beautiful, although that may be an exaggeration. Her hair is long and black and she was in the habit of wearing it very simply - loose and parted in the middle. High cheekbones, an oval face, small straight nose and deep-set blue eyes."

"Sounds very attractive," I observed.

"Yes. So they say. To continue, she was born in Stalingrad, and her family moved to Moscow when she was six years old. She grew up there and received her education there. Her father was a government statistician, her mother a minor mucky-muck in the party. From her earliest childhood Dr. Nyet displayed a brilliance well beyond either of them. By the time she was twenty-one, she received her doctorate in biochemistry. At twenty-three the government provided her with a research laboratory of her own, complete with staff and the latest equipment. A year later she had made an important discovery. Before this was transmitted to the Russian government, however, she disappeared. The N.K.V.D. found she had been consorting with certain American tourists. They took it for granted that she had defected to us. However, we have since learned that these people work for S.M.U.T. And we are reasonably sure that she has joined forces with them."

"How come if you know so much about her," I queried, "you haven't been able to find out her real name?"

"You can blame that on the Russian psychology. It thrives on intrigue, you know. With typical double-think, the government refuses to tell us her name. And our own source of information about her transmitted all this data as his final act of service to us. The N.K.V.D. must have picked him up. In any case, his last dispatch was incomplete. Our guess is that he was trying to be dramatic and left her real name as the last thing to be divulged. But he was caught - or so we guess - before he could finish the message and reveal her name."

"But why do you call her Dr. Nyet?"

"Two reasons. First of all, part of the information transmitted to us concerned her personal life. Her beauty attracted many men, but she had a reputation for leading them on and then, when the chips were down, for turning up her nose and saying 'Nyet!', which in Russian means -"

"No. I know," I interrupted. "So she's a virgin, is that it?"

"Well, we can't be absolutely sure, of course, but it does seem likely. This anti-sex attitude of hers was probably what attracted her to S.M.U.T. in the first place, and it's pretty consistent with what she discovered in her research, which brings us to the second reason we dubbed her Dr. Nyet."

"What did she discover?"

"An anti-birth-control pill."

"What?"

"That's right," Putnam nodded. "Now do you see why she's so important to the Russians, to S.M.U.T., and to us? She invented a substance which neutralizes birth-control pills. And it has certain side effects she was working to overcome which have even more important implications when S.M.U.T.'s aim of overpopulation is considered."

"What side effects?"

"The bio-chemical substance she originated is also strongly aphrodisiac. It's a sex stimulant which works so instantaneously as to make the victim incapable of taking

the time to consider any means of contraception. Obviously, in the hands of S.M.U.T., such a substance is a threat to the entire world. The very idea has had an unparalleled impact on current diplomacy."

"What sort of impact?"

"Well, for one thing," Putnam told me, "there have been a series of highly secret meetings between the Russians, the Red Chinese, the French, the English and ourselves to evolve a cooperative effort to stamp out S.M.U.T. Of course the Reds are playing it very cagey. Ostensibly they're cooperating with us fully in an effort to get Dr. Nyet away from S.M.U.T. But in actuality there's a three-way race between us and the Russians and the Chinese to get her. Just the fact of getting her right name from the Russians, for instance. Every time the subject comes up, their translator develops a sudden inability to get the question over. It's like *Alice in Wonderland*, some of the dialogue that goes on at those meetings. 'What is the real name of Dr. Nyet?' our man asks. 'The Berlin wall stays up; this is not a topic for discussion at these meetings.' That's the answer that comes back. 'We're not talking about the Berlin wall, we just want to know who Dr. Nyet is,' we try again. '*Da*, we might consider enlarging the cultural exchange program,' and both the Russian and the translator sit there grinning. It would be infuriating if it weren't for the fact that the Chinese are even more infuriated than we are. No Oriental inscrutability for them; they show it. See, they're convinced that we're making some sort of deal in code, a deal aimed at ganging up on them. So they're determined to get Dr. Nyet before we do. And so are the Russians."

"Then why bother with these conferences at all?" I wanted to know.

"Because in other respects they have been useful. Apart from the Dr. Nyet aspect, both the Russians and the Chinese have been of some limited use in gathering information on S.M.U.T. And, for their own purposes it's true, they may cooperate with us in wiping S.M.U.T. out. Even if it doesn't work out, it's worth keeping the lines of communication open."

"I see. But what about me? Where do I come into all this?"

"You're the one man best qualified to help us find Dr. Nyet. You see, there's a strong lead indicating that she may be in New York. That's still the headquarters of S.M.U.T. - on the surface, at least. As the man from O.R.G.Y., you have something of a reputation. We want you to offer your services as a sex expert to them. You'll have to convince them of your sincere belief in their cause - the one they admit to, I mean, the anti-pornography crusade. You can tell them that your investigations have really impressed on you that pornography is an evil. If you handle it right, they'll appreciate that you can be of great value to them publicity-wise and in other respects, and they should jump at the chance to have you join them."

"I see. I'm to infiltrate them and find Dr. Nyet. But how will I know her when I do find her? It's a pretty thin description you've given me."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Victor, that that will be your problem. I've told you everything I know. The rest is up to you. Will you do it?"

"Yes. I'll leave for New York immediately."

"Good. I was sure we could count on you." He started to lead me to the door, but we never got there because -

Because suddenly all hell broke loose!

A brick shattered the window, and a roar like that of stampeding animals followed it. There was the sound of police sirens in the distance, but the roar grew louder and drowned them out even as they drew closer. More objects crashed through the window, and Putnam and I dived for the floor together.

After a moment, we cautiously raised our heads, crawled over to the window, and dared to peep through the drapes. The scene outside was chaos. There must have been at least a thousand people milling around. Some of them carried banners, but they were too far away to be seen. Still, even at that distance, their violence could be felt. It's been said that a mob is an enraged animal gone berserk, and looking at this mob I could well believe it.

"What is it?" I asked Putnam.

"I don't know. Perhaps it's the American flag on the building and the way it's done up. Maybe they think this is really the American embassy and they're staging some sort of protest. I can't imagine what they'd be protesting, though."

"You can't? I can. There's Viet Nam, the Dominican Republic, unpunished murder in our very own Southland - oh, if they think this is the American embassy, there's no end to the things they might be protesting against."

"I suppose you're right," Putnam granted. "Still, the English are usually such a law-abiding, unexcitable sort of people. It's not like them to get this violent. They look like they're about to storm the building."

Putnam was proven right. The mob surged toward the locked gate, and it went down under their weight. They rushed across the grounds and up to the front door of the house itself. A moment later they were inside, howling through the hallways. And then Putnam and I were face to face with their faceless faces.

It was like looking into a blazing red smokecloud of sheer violent emotions. But what did their violence stem from? What did they want? What had fired them up to this pitch?

As they made for us, I seriously wondered if we'd live long enough to find out the answers!

CHAPTER TWO

"The Beatles!"

"What? What do you want?" I couldn't help admiring the way Putnam stood his ground with his jaw stuck out.

"The Beatles! The Beatles! We know they're here! Where are you hiding them?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Putnam said, maintaining his usual icy composure.

"He's lying! Let's get them! We'll make them talk!" They milled around us, hands outstretched, blood in their eyes.

"Viet Nam and the Dominican Republic, huh!" Putnam muttered to me out of the corner of his mouth. "What do you think now, Mr. Victor? Do you still think such things can excite people's passions and arouse them to such fury? Not the English, Mr. Victor. They save their mob instinct for the things that really count. And while S.M.U.T. takes over the world, you and I stand here about to be martyred in the name of rock 'n' roll!"

"Shut up, you! Now, tell us where the Beatles are, or we'll string you up the blinkin' chandelier."

"I don't know where they are. But I do know they are not on these premises."

"You puttin' us on, guv? This here is a movie set, hain't it?"

"Yes. But the Beatles are not in the picture being made."

"That the truth, now?"

"Yes."

"Well, why hain't they?" The crowd grew even uglier with the question.

"Because it's a motion picture concerned with high-level diplomacy, that's why," Putnam explained. "There are no roles in it which would be suited to the Beatles."

"And why not? Ask me, that's the trouble with the whole bloody foreign office. The Beatles hain't got a say in makin' policy."

"He might have something there," I murmured to Putnam.

"Damn right, guv. Things'd be a lot different if Ringo 'ad 'is say with De Gaulle."

"They probably would, at that," Putnam granted.

"These blokes is puttin' us on," someone shouted. "I say rough 'em up a bit an' then they'll tell us where the Beatles is at." Again the crowd pressed around us.

"Are you with me, Mr. Victor?" Putnam asked.

"That I am."

"Then let us go."

I followed Putnam's lead as he took a step backward and then jumped through the window. I hotfooted it after him as he picked himself up and started running for the street.

"There they go!" The crowd took up the cry. And behind the leaders still others screamed, "The Beatles! The Beatles!"

Putnam headed straight for the safety of a parked car, with me in his wake. Only after we were in the back of it did I realize that it was the car I'd come in before. The driver must have been waiting. Now Putnam tapped him on the shoulder. "The airport," he said. "And you'd best get cracking before they tear the car apart," he added.

The crowd was upon the car now, and I saw that Putnam's warning made sense. Even as we roared away they were clinging to the bumpers and throwing themselves over the roof. And behind us other cars took up the chase.

"There's a chartered plane waiting for you," Putnam explained. "It will take you straight to New York."

"You were pretty sure of me, weren't you?" I observed.

"Yes," he admitted. "I was."

"I don't suppose there's time for me to stop for a good-bye to Gladys," I said wistfully.

"I'm afraid not."

"What about passport papers, clothing, things like that?"

"All on the plane waiting for you. Everything's been arranged."

I could only shrug at Putnam's efficiency and lapse into silence. Some twenty minutes later we arrived at the airport. The driver flashed some sort of identification that got us past the guard at the gate and onto the field itself. We drove straight up to the waiting aircraft, and I hopped out of the car and boarded it. It started taxiing across the field immediately. My last view of London as we took off was a mob of wild-eyed, screaming, outraged Beatle fans swarming across the runway and howling their frustration.

The flight was uneventful. We landed at Kennedy Airport. It took almost half as long to get from there to midtown Manhattan by taxicab as it had to fly from London to New York. Wedged into crosstown traffic with the meter ticking merrily, I reflected that New York hadn't changed at all since the last time I'd been here; it had only gotten more New Yorkish.

I grabbed a good night's sleep at the plush hotel where Putnam had made reservations for me. When I woke up, I dawdled over a late breakfast. It was early afternoon when I started out on my campaign to infiltrate S.M.U.T.

Not wanting to be obvious, I'd decided to start on a local level and then work my way up. So I called the Queens chapter of the organization and asked to speak to the chapter president. Her name was Mrs. Prudence Highman. She was all business and careful elocution over the phone. Still, I sensed an eagerness after I'd explained who I was and how I thought I might be of use to her organization. She readily agreed to an appointment to see me later that same afternoon.

It was almost four when the cab dropped me off in Forest Hills to keep the appointment. The S.M.U.T. regional office was in a luxury apartment building. Later I learned that the Highman living quarters were part of the same premises.

A male receptionist greeted me. He had acne and sweaty palms. His gait was suspiciously mincing as he went to tell Mrs. Highman's secretary that I had arrived. Maybe it was unfair, but I pigeonholed him as the sort of sexual reject who just naturally seeks an outlet with an outfit like S.M.U.T. A moment later he returned and led me into an inner room where Mrs. Highman's secretary was waiting.

The secretary was a dried fig labeled female by the clothing she wore, but decidedly asexual otherwise. She was juiceless and overage, joyless and as gray and drab inside - I would have bet - as was the shapeless knot of hair topping her wrinkled features. Her voice was chalk-on-a-blackboard as she told me Mrs. Highman would see me immediately. Her step was a geriatric hobble as she led the way into yet another room.

Up to then, the personnel of S.M.U.T. was just about what I would have expected. But Mrs. Prudence Highman was something else again. My first glance told me she was no stereotype of comstockery. And a second look confirmed that I had no ready pigeonhole for her.

She was younger than I had expected, although the clothes she wore were obviously intended to stress her more solid matronly qualities. Her hair as brown with just a hint of a red glow which had been played down but not snuffed out altogether. She wore no make-up, but there was something sensual about her face. The horn-rimmed glasses she wore couldn't conceal a certain subdued *joie de vivre* glinting in the depths of her deepset green eyes. And the fullness of her lips couldn't be hidden by her habit of pressing them tightly together.

Her age was a well-kept secret. She might have been as young as 25, or as old as her late thirties. It was impossible to tell.

My observation that she had a good figure was at least half a guess. The suit jacket buttoned over her bosom couldn't conceal its largeness, but it revealed nothing of its shape. The way it hung over her hips told nothing about them or of the waist above them. Her skirt was worn longer than the current style, and while her calves were admirable, any judgment of her legs was impossible.

Her voice was as it had been over the phone, formal and with each syllable enunciated with a bell-like clarity. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Victor?" As I took her up on it, she turned to the secretary. "That will be all, Eloise," she said, dismissing her.

The secretary shot me a look which said I wasn't to be trusted, and then left us alone.

"So you are the man from O.R.G.Y.," Mrs. Highman said when we were alone. She pronounced each letter individually, rather than speaking them as one word.

"And you are the lady from S.M.U.T." I pronounced it as a word.

Her forehead creased with distaste, but she ignored it. "As I understood you over the phone, Mr. Victor, you are anxious to enlist in our cause and you feel that your special field of knowledge might be helpful to us. Is that correct?"

"That's the general idea."

"Why, Mr. Victor?"

Well, she was obviously no fool. It was a good question, and it demanded an answer. A very careful answer. "Because my researches have convinced me of the rightness of your cause," I said cautiously. It was more of a feeler than an answer.

"Have they, Mr. Victor? I should have thought that someone in your profession would automatically be against our work."

"But why?" Now it was my turn to play cat-and-mouse.

"By studying and reporting frankly on sexual practices, there can be no doubt that you tend to encourage them."

She didn't know it, but she'd pointed the way for me with that statement. "What you say has been true," I granted. "But it is a side effect, rather than anything which was planned. Pure research knows no consequences, only truth. It was in this spirit that I have always conducted my activities. Still, I have been increasingly aware of what you just pointed out. It has disturbed me greatly. That's why I would like to work with your organization. I would like to redress the balance of permissiveness which I have been instrumental in creating."

"If you are sincere, Mr. Victor -" she looked at me shrewdly - "then there can be no doubt that you can be extremely helpful to us. As one who has been identified with the other side, your remorse would have great publicity value. Not just locally with the chapter I head, either," she mused. "Your importance could be countrywide, even worldwide, to our organization. Just how far are you willing to go with your public support of our case?"

"I'm not sure." I didn't want to appear over-eager. "That will depend on just how much is asked of me."

The caution implicit in my answer seemed to reassure her. "That's understandable," she agreed. "Then perhaps we should start out small, limit your activities to the local level at first. There will always be time to enlarge them."

I guessed that she was thinking it would be a feather in her cap to be able to use me under her personal sponsorship as a spokesman for her particular chapter of S.M.U.T. "That sounds like a good idea," I agreed. Her next words confirmed my guess.

"I shall have to work very closely with you myself," she said. "And I think we should keep your activities secret at first so that the impact will be greater when we

do make your participation public. Yes, there are many things we should discuss, you and I." She glanced at her wristwatch. "The office will be closing soon," she told me. "I wonder if you might take dinner with me tonight, Mr. Victor?"

"I'd be delighted."

"Good. My quarters lie just beyond these offices. We may as well go in now."

Dinner was to be promptly at six. I mention that because the cooking of it was something to behold. It began, in a sense, when Prudence Highman led me from the office to the apartment behind it.

The apartment was quietly expensive. The furnishings were utilitarian with no frills. There was nothing at all frivolous about them. Everything was functional in the living room to which I was first conducted. Even the landscapes on the walls contained hidden light tubes to justify their having been hung.

It was dusk when we entered, and the room was dim. Mrs. Highman clapped her hands and immediately there was light. "They call it Sonuswitch," she explained. "It reacts to certain sounds and turns on lights and sets all sorts of electrical appliances in motion." She consulted her watch. "Come into the kitchen and you'll see," she told me. "My husband is about to cook dinner."

I followed her into the kitchen. There was a telephone on the wall nearest to the stove. As we entered, it started to ring. Mrs. Highman stood half-smiling as it rang fifteen times. As the last ring sounded, a tray with a roast on it slid into the oven. The oven door closed, and the electric stove went into action. One of the burners on top grew red, and a fry-pan containing potatoes slid into place atop another burner which was heating. And a gadget beside the stove began tossing a salad positioned beneath it.

"I thought you said your husband was cooking dinner," I said to Mrs. Highman.

"He is. That was him on the phone. By the time he gets home there will be nothing for him to do but put the food on dishes and serve it. I think you'll find our household very well-organized, Mr. Victor. Sonuswitch has enabled us to regulate almost all of the tasks of daily living." She led me back into the living room. "Would you like a cocktail?" she asked.

The question took me by surprise. I would have bet Mrs. Highman was teetotal. Still, never look a gift drink in the mouth. "Yes," I nodded.

She walked over to a massive buffet and snapped her fingers. I stared at it as she returned to me. Two bottles and a cocktail shaker had popped to the surface of it. Now metal fingers picked up the bottles and poured. The shaker was capped and began to agitate itself. After a moment two cocktail glasses snapped into place and the shaker uncapped itself and poured its contents neatly into the tumblers.

"Well, I'll be damned!" I exclaimed as Mrs. Highman went to fetch the drinks.

"Please, Mr. Victor," she said sternly. "If you are to join S.M.U.T., you must renounce the use of all profanity."

"Sorry. I promise I'll be more careful." I accepted the drink she handed me and took a hearty swallow.

"Gosh darn it to heck and back!" I exploded, still managing to remember to restrain my natural profanity. "What the blue blazes is this stuff?"

"Sauerkraut juice, Mr. Victor. With a dash of attar of wheat germ. It's a health cocktail. I'm sorry if it isn't to your taste."

"Oh, it's fine," I lied. "It's just than when you said a cocktail, I naturally thought -"

"That it would be alcoholic. I'm sorry, Mr. Victor, but I don't believe in indulging in alcoholic beverages. It's against my principles. Against S.M.U.T.'s too. That's something else you'll have to curb if you are to join with us. Also, your smoking. I have noticed that you smoke a great deal. We shall have to cure you of that, too."

"How about sex?" The question sprang to my lips before I could stop it.

"My husband and I are content with a relationship of courtly love," she informed me primly.

"And he doesn't object?" I asked.

"Not at all. You can ask him for yourself when he arrives."

Over dinner later, I did just that. Peter Highman was pretty much what I expected. He was a scrawny man with a nervous tic and a Caspar Milquetoast habit of looking to his wife for approval every time he spoke. Still, I sensed something brooding under his surface.

"You don't smoke?" I tried it on him for openers.

"No, Mr. Victor. I did try a cigarette once. I found no joy in it. So I never tried it again."

Prudence Highman nodded approval.

"And you don't drink, either?"

"That is correct," he said. "I indulged myself in a glass of wine once. It made me ill. I've never touched alcohol since."

Again his wife's nod said that his course was wise.

"How about gambling?" I asked.

"No." He shook his head. "I played poker once. I lost. Since then I have never touched a card."

His wife's nod was peremptory this time. Her mind had strayed. "Did you look in on Oscar when you came home?" she asked.

"Of course, my dear. Oscar," he explained to me, "is our son."

"Your only child, I presume," I responded.

"Yes." Now there was more than a trace of wistfulness in Peter Highman's tone as he explained. "Since Oscar's conception, my wife and I have lived together in blissful chastity."

"Blissful?" Somehow I managed to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

"Blissful," he repeated staunchly. But there was a quaver in his voice.

"You see," Prudence Highman told me. "We don't just talk S.M.U.T. We live it. We live by our principles."

"Yes, I see. Very laudable," I assured her. "Quite admirable."

"And now, Peter," she said, turning to her husband, "Mr. Victor and I have business to discuss. You can do the dishes while I take him into the study."

"Maybe first I can give you a hand with the dishes," I offered.

"That won't be necessary," he told me. "All I have to do is tack them in the dishwasher and whistle. Sonuswitch will see that the washer and dryer does the rest. We're completely automated here," he told me proudly.

"It's really more than human," his wife agreed.

"Or less," I muttered, but not loudly enough to be heard. I was thinking more of their "blissful chastity" than of Sonuswitch, tough. "Then why don't you join us in the study?" I asked Highman aloud.

He didn't answer. But the look he shot his wife was the equivalent of a child begging to be allowed to stay up for the grown-ups' party.

"That won't be possible." Prudence Highman scotched his hopes firmly. "You see, Mr. Victor, Peter is only a lay member of S.M.U.T. The library contains much confiscated material which I, as an official of the organization, am responsible for holding. It's the hardest part of my job, having to study such filth. But my position obliges me to do it, and so I do. However, I would never subject Peter to such material."

"Then do you think it's really all right to let me -" I started to say.

"Your case is different, Mr. Victor. I'm sure that you have seen many such examples in your work. Like myself, I'm sure that you are able to control your disgust while viewing the real enemy."

"Well, I'll certainly try," I assured her, noticing that Peter Highman looked disappointed but resigned as he started to clear the table. I got to my feet as his wife did and followed her to the library.

Outside the door she paused, mouthed a whistle which had been hanging on a chain from around her neck, and blew it. There was no audible sound. Yet the door swung open and closed behind us as we entered. "I keep it locked because of the salacious nature of the material stored here," Mrs. Highman explained. "It will only open if the proper ultrasonic pitch is sounded outside the door. And this is the only existing whistle capable of reaching that inaudible pitch. That way I'm sure that no one can sneak in here."

"You mean Peter might try -?"

"I would hope not. But one can never be sure. He is made of flesh as we all are, and flesh is weak. That's why it's so important that the work of S.M.U.T. be carried forward to fight the temptations of the flesh. Here, let me give you some idea of what I mean." She crossed over to a row of filing cabinets and stopped in front of one of them. She snapped her fingers and a drawer slid open. She took out a folder and came back to me. "It will be more comfortable if we sit down," she said, leading me over to a couch. "Now, just look at this." She handed me the folder.

I took it and looked at the outside of it. A small ad was neatly pasted on the tab, evidently to identify it. "GENUINE FRENCH POSTCARDS" was the heading on the ad. I glanced casually at the first three subheads underneath it. "A Sight for the Discriminating and Knowing Tourist in Paris!" the first announced. "The Hottest Picture in Montmartre!" the second blurb read. "A Stimulating Close-Up of a Magnificent French Organ!" the third promised. There was more, but I didn't read further. Curious, I opened the folder instead.

The first "genuine French postcard" was a picture of the Eiffel Tower. The second turned out to be a shot of a blast furnace in a Montmartre factory. The third was a close-up of a French organ all right - a church organ!

"Sorry. Wrong folder." Prudence Highman took it back from me. "We gave these people a clean bill of health," she explained as she replaced it. "From the ad we thought they might be peddling pornography, but we were wrong."

"I can see how you might be misled," I told her.

"Yes. Ah, here we are. This is the genuine article." She pulled out another folder and rejoined me on the couch. She opened this one herself.

I found myself looking at a picture of a fully clothed girl. Prudence turned the page and the girl was still fully clothed except that her gloves were removed. When the next page was turned, the photo showed the girl with her shoes off. Now Prudence stopped turning the pages and began riffling them. The pictures dissolved one into the other to show a rapid strip tease. When all her clothes were off, the girl was stretched out nude on a bed.

But that wasn't the end of the sequence. Far from it. Prudence continued turning the pages slowly again, and with each new picture the girl was caressing her naked body more and more intimately. Then Prudence riffled the pages again and the effect was of the girl having an erotic ball all by her lonesome.

The model played with her large breasts until the areolae widened and the nipples distended. The riffling pictures gave the impression of her breasts heaving rapidly as, with eyes half closed, she caressed her lower body. The photos blended into a series of close-ups of this area as she manipulated various objects and the flesh began pulsating as if with a life of its own. Then they blended back into the full view to show her body writhing as her hand disappeared almost to the wrist. The grand finale showed her jackknifing with a double-jointed display that was pretty amazing.

"Isn't that disgusting?" Prudence said, gazing over my shoulder and breathing a little rapidly herself.

"Disgusting!" I granted. "And I wouldn't have thought it possible, either."

"It's not. These pictures have been doctored."

"How can you tell for sure?"

"They had to be. What she's doing is impossible. I checked to make sure of that."

"How did you check?"

"I tried it. For position only, of course. I'm in pretty good shape, you know. Physically, I mean. So I did my duty and attempted it. Believe me, it's an anatomical impossibility."

"You certainly do take your work seriously," I complimented her. "Not many people in your position would be willing to make such sacrifices."

"I believe in what I'm doing," Prudence said. "And it's necessary to know exactly what we're up against. That's why I devote so much time to this filth. Most of the people in my chapter of S.M.U.T. have never even seen this sort of thing. They have no idea of the real nature of the evil they're fighting. By taking the burden on myself, I save them from ever having to confront it. I am strong enough to do this while someone like Peter, say, might be overwhelmed by it. But," she added, "you haven't seen anything yet, Mr. Victor. Here, take a look at this." She brought me another folder.

This one contained printed matter. It was a booklet called *The Naughty Nympho*. I opened it at random and started reading. Prudence read right along with me. I could feel one of her breasts rising and falling as it pressed against my arm.

"... *Dolly was burning with lust as she looked at the stripling lad,*" I read. "*No older than she, he had not her experience and so trembled under her insinuating gaze. Dolly wasted no time on words. She pulled off her clothing until she stood before him clad only in her shift. Then she kissed him, her body clinging to his, feeling the rock of his burning manhood through the flimsy material covering her soft belly. When the kiss was over, he tore off his own clothing, so aroused that his shyness was forgotten. Dolly gasped with admiration at the magnificent length of his passion. She made haste to caress it, and her eyes opened wide as it swelled in her grasp. He had pushed the shift down to her waist now, and his face was buried in the creamy roundness of her wondrous white bosom like a greedy little tom-kitten lapping up a saucer of milk. Wild with desire, but fearful at what she might have unloosed, Dolly pulled off her shift altogether and mounted him. Before settling herself, she paused to look once again at his mighty machine. Almost, she changed her mind at the sight of it. Surely it would split her asunder! Surely she would never survive such an impalement! But his hands clasped the hot flesh of her round buttocks and forced her to complete the motion she had started. Pain and pleasure mingled as the hot poker of his manhood pierced her, and then...*"

"Turn the page! What are you waiting for? Turn the page!" Prudence was taut with impatience beside me.

"I'm just resting my eyes," I told her. "This print is so fine, and the light's kind of dim here."

"Oh. Well, we can fix that." She clapped her hands twice, and the room was plunged into darkness. "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "There must be a short circuit somewhere." She calpped her hands once, and the lights came back on the way they'd been before. Then she reached over her head and clapped again. A reading light beamed down from the wall behind us. "Do you want to go on?" she asked. "Or would you rather look at something different?"

"I think I get the idea of this one," I told her. "But I'm afraid I don't understand why you're showing me these things."

"I want you to appreciate the full scope of what S.M.U.T. is up against," she told me. "It's necessary if you're to play a major role in our activities. Here, just look at these! Aren't they appalling?"

She took a small box from one of the filing cabinets and handed it to me. I opened it to find a dozen or so wood-carvings inside. They were quite intricate, obviously done by a master, and highly detailed. Each one featured a man and a woman, both naked, in very sophisticated sexual positions.

"These come from India," she told me, removing one of the little wooden sculptings and holding it in the palm of her hand. "There are few cultures so depraved as the one from which these items come." Her fingers trailed delicately over the wooden sex organs. "Notice that the erotic titillation is accomplished by surpassing reality," she said, her eyes glittering as she stared at the sculpture, a fine film of perspiration glistening on her brow.

"Surpassing reality?" I shrugged. "I don't think so, the position is unusual, I'll grant, but quite within the realm of possibility."

"Do you really think so? Do you really think it's possible for a man and woman to have sexual congress in such a manner?" I noticed that she was surreptitiously clenching and unclenching her thighs as she asked the question.

"Yes," I told her, and then momentarily changed the subject. "The erotic titillation you mentioned before? Doesn't it ever effect you? I mean, being forced to spend so much time with the kind of material you've shown me, don't you find yourself responding to it despite yourself?"

"I'm afraid I do," she admitted, lowering her eyes. "But I struggle against it. My body struggles against it."

"And you're struggling right now," I guessed, aware that the little, secret, rhythmic movements of her hips were making the couch move under us.

"I am. But I always win my struggle, Mr. Victor. In the end my body always finds the contentment of virtue. I always conquer my lust."

I saw that she was serious. And I realized that she wasn't even aware that when she "conquered her lust" she was actually releasing it. She didn't admit to her orgasms; she merely had them and told herself they were triumphs over passion. Well, to each his own, I told myself.

"Surely you're mistaken, Mr. Victor," she was saying now. "Surely this particular position is unattainable." She continued bouncing on the couch, seemingly unaware of what she was doing.

"I say it is attainable."

"Then prove it." Her tongue darted between her lips as if obeying some inspiration apart from her, an inspiration all its own.

"What do you mean?"

"Prove it. With me. Show me how it's possible."

"Do you mean -?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Victor!" She actually looked shocked. "I simply mean that we should assume the position. With our clothes on, of course. Just to see if it really is possible."

"Okay," I agreed. "If that's what you want." I took the wood sculpture from her and studied it for a moment. Then I set it down on the table in front of the couch. "Let's go," I told her.

Prudence stretched out on the couch. I grasped her ankles, and she bent at the waist. I forced her ankles back until they were touching her shoulders. Then I crossed her arms so that she had a hand gripping each ankle and locking it in place.

"Just a minute," she panted.

I couldn't tell whether she was breathing hard from exertion or excitement. "What is it?" I asked.

"My suit jacket's in the way," she said. "Let me take it off."

"Okay." I released her.

She doffed the jacket. The blouse she was wearing under it was very sheer. She must have been wearing a halfslip, because the flesh of her waist was clearly visible. Also, the bra she was wearing was surprisingly frivolous and only doing half the job for which it was intended. For the first time I was able to appreciate that Prudence Highman did indeed have a voluptuous figure. The waist was small, but the bosom was more than ample and firmly molded into exciting twin peaks that quivered and strained with her breathing.

I manipulated her into position once again. Now her skirt was tight over her derrière, which was outlined clearly through the material. I turned around and slipped my ankles into the wedge created by her ankles and wrists. She tightened her grip, and now my ankles were also locked securely in place. Then I sort of folded myself around her, bending at the waist with outstretched arms and slipping beneath her until my fingers were clenching her shoulders from underneath. My nose was buried somewhere in the middle of her back and my voice was muffled when I managed to speak.

"You see," I told her, "It is possible. Not the most comfortable position, but it does provide tremendous pressure just where it's needed." To demonstrate, I moved against her.

I was getting pretty excited myself, and I guess she couldn't help feeling this as I proved my point. But she chose to remain unconvinced. "I still don't believe that penetration is possible this way," she huffed. "Wait a minute and let me pull my skirt up. Then we can get a clearer idea."

She hoisted her skirt and half-slip over her waist. She had good legs, shapely, with fleshy thighs that were pink from having been rubbed together. I caught a brief glimpse of flimsy, transparent white panties before we resumed the position once again.

"Would you mind unbuttoning your trousers, Mr. Victor?" she asked in a voice that didn't quite manage to remain above it all. "Then we can be really sure."

I obliged. Then I wrapped myself around her once again. Only those skimpy panties were between us now. Our flesh burned hungrily as the position we were in mashed it together. And then I felt her eager desire clutching at my manhood as if trying to draw it deeper. I took my hands from her shoulders and pulled off her panties from underneath.

"What are you doing, Mr. Victor?" she asked, half moaning.

"I just want the experiment to be accurate in every detail," I assured her as I once again grasped her shoulders for leverage.

"Very well. We'll see it through in the interests of research. But there must be no passion, Mr. Victor. Please remember that. We are not making love."

"Oh, absolutely not," I assured her, sliding against her ever so gently.

"You must under no circumstances lose control of yourself and allow your lust to be released."

"Under no circumstances!" I rammed with all my strength.

Her body was writhing now as if possessed by a demon. Her first explosion came so quickly that it took me by surprise. It was followed by half a dozen more in rapid succession. She screamed aloud with the last one, and I joined her in a long drawn-out moment of ecstatic release. Then we fell apart, momentarily exhausted.

"Mr. Victor," she said finally, her voice chiding, "you broke your word. You had sexual congress with me."

"It takes two," I reminded her.

"Nothing could have been further from my actions," she told me seriously. "While you were giving in to your carnal impulses, I was conquering mine."

"Again and again," I mused.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" she asked frostily.

"Look, let's not fight," I told her. Suddenly I was feeling tender toward her, kookie as she was. In her own perverse way, she had given me great pleasure. I was seized with a sudden desire to show my appreciation. Also, I was feeling a little playful.

I suppose that's why I clapped my hands twice so that the lights went out, made a grab for her, and kissed her soundly. She slapped me in the face - hard! - and the lights popped on again.

"Mr. Victor!" she was truly outraged. "How dare you take such liberties with me?"

"But after what we just did -" I said confusedly.

"That has nothing to do with it. That was merely an experiment. Nothing more. And it certainly gives you no right to think you can take advantage of the situation to indulge in libertine osculation. Why, I don't even allow my husband to kiss me the way you just did. I shall have to wash my mouth out thoroughly."

"Gargle away." I shrugged and zipped up my fly. The motion made me conscious of a sudden need which would make it necessary to zip it down again. "Is there a bathroom around here?" I asked her.

"Just down the hall. And please see that you return in a frame of mind more suitable to S.M.U.T." She blew her soundless whistle at the door and it swung open.

It closed behind me and I heard the lock click as I started down the hall. It was still solidly shut when I returned from the bathroom. I knocked at the door. There was no answer. I knocked louder. Same result. I pounded.

"Is there some difficulty, Mr. Victor?"

I turned around to find Peter Highman standing behind me. "I seem to have locked myself out," I told him.

"Well, it won't do you any good to knock. The room is completely soundproof. Prudence insisted on that. She's so easily distracted from her work, poor dear."

"I can see how she would be," I told him, feeling half sarcastic and half guilty. "But then how do I let her know I want to come back inside?"

"There is a pushbutton on the wall." He pointed it out to me. "Prudence should have told you about it."

"Oh, well, now I know." I pushed the button.

He stood there with me for a moment, hovering, as I waited. Nothing happened. The door remained staunchly shut. I stuck my finger on the pushbutton and held it there.

"That will annoy her," Peter Highman remonstrated mildly.

I took my finger off the button. Still there was no response. "Why doesn't she answer?" I asked him.

"I can't imagine. Do you suppose she's all right?" He was starting to look genuinely concerned.

"She was all right when I left her just a couple of minutes ago," I assured him. "Perhaps the bell is short-circuited or something."

"Then the door would be out of order, too," he said positively. "It's on the same circuit. And if that's the case, she can't get out."

"Do you think we should break it down?" I asked.

"I'm afraid it's the only way, Mr. Victor. Will you help me?"

We put our shoulders to it. It took some doing, but we finally broke the lock and forced it open. I went hurtling into the room first. I stopped short at what I saw, knowing that my jaw was hanging open but unable to summon up the will to close it. All I could do was stare in horrified fascination.

Prudence Highman lay in the middle of the floor, completely nude. Her clothing, in shreds and tatters, was strewn all over the room as if it had been forcibly ripped from her body and violently thrown every which way. Her body was horribly twisted as if it had been rung by some gigantic mangling machine. Her hands were pressed tightly to her ears as if trying to hold her skull together. Her features were

contorted as though by a sudden cerebral stroke. I didn't have to look twice to know that she was dead.

But how? I knelt beside her. Despite the way every muscle in her body was twisted, there wasn't a mark on her. For a crazy instant it occurred to me that perhaps she had strangled herself. But her neck, although broken, didn't have a mark on it. There were no wounds of any kind on her.

Yet Prudence Highman had met violent death in a locked room. All by herself, she had been killed. Yes, she had told me herself that she had the only key to the door - or, rather, the only whistle pitched to open it. But then how had she died? What had killed her? And why?

Most of all, why?

CHAPTER THREE

Why?

And then something happened to make me think I saw the answer. I looked up from Prudence Highman's sorry corpse and found myself staring into the yawning barrel of a .45. Peter Highman's eyes didn't look so timid any more as they gazed at me from behind it.

"Stay just as you are, Mr. Victor," he advised. "Ad do just as I say."

"Shoot," I said. "Strike that!" I added hurriedly. "I mean tell me what you want me to do."

"Put your hands around Prudence's neck, Mr. Victor. Let your fingertips sink into her flesh."

It was the conclusion of an instant then that he had killed her and was now trying to frame me by getting my fingerprints on her throat. Right on top of the conclusion, I guessed that as soon as I did what he wanted, he'd pull the trigger of the .45. That way he'd have a nice, neat package to present to the police. It would look like he'd caught me as I finished murdering his wife, not soon enough to save the unfortunate victim, but just in time to blow her killer's brains all over the decor.

Realizing this, I had nothing to lose by fast action. If I did as he said, I'd surely be dead. By doing what I did, I was just playing the long odds to stay alive.

I reached out as if I was about to wrap my hands around her throat. But instead, my hands grabbed an edge of the carpet on which he was standing and yanked hard. The gun went off just as his feet went out from under him. I heard the bullet whistle over my head. I didn't hang around to give him a chance to shoot again. He was still trying to pick himself up as I bolted past him and out of the room. I ran down the hallway, through the living room and foyer, through the offices of S.M.U.T. beyond, down the stairwell, and out of the building. I didn't stop running until I was safely seated on a subway bound for Manhattan.

Then I unscrambled my thoughts. The way the pieces fit, it looked like the old jealous-husband bit. Somehow Peter Highman had found out what Prudence and I were up to in the locked room. My guess was that he'd meant to kill us both, and that if I hadn't gone to the john when I did he would have succeeded. He must have thought I was there, and whatever it was he'd used to kill Prudence would undoubtedly have killed me too if I'd been in the room. Then, when he saw me in the hall, he must have revised his plans. It probably looked even better from his standpoint. He'd frame me for the murder, shoot me, be rid of both of us and go scot

free with no explanations necessary. Only one thing continued to bug me: just how the hell had he killed Prudence?

I shelved that for the time being and thought about whether I should call the cops. I decided against it. It would be my word against Highman's, and at the very least I'd use up a lot of time convincing the police of my innocence. And there was always the chance that I wouldn't be able to convince them. In any case, I had no time to waste. Putnam had made that clear back in London. It was imperative that I work fast to retrieve the defecting Dr. Nyet from the clutches of S.M.U.T.

Still, there was nothing further to be done this night. So I went back to my hotel and caught a good night's sleep. When I woke up I ordered breakfast sent up to my room and told them to bring the morning papers with it.

There was no murder story splashed over the front pages. Evidently once I'd made my escape Highman also had decided not to bring in the police. He must have made up his mind to conceal his wife's murder. I wondered what he'd done with the corpse.

I found the answer in a small news item buried on page three of one of the papers. It said that the body of a naked woman had been found in the swamps of Canarsie early that morning. The body was strangely twisted, but there were no marks on it. Police were trying to identify the victim, but admitted they had no clues. From the description, it sounded like Prudence.

Renewing my decision not to become involved, I put the papers aside. If I was right about Highman's trying to cover his tracks, he wouldn't be in any hurry to tell S.M.U.T. about his wife's fate. And that meant he wouldn't tell them about me. So I ought to be able to start from scratch with my plans to infiltrate them. This time I decided to start closer to the top than a regional chapter. I called the national headquarters in Manhattan and made an appointment to see one of their higher-level execs.

The appointment was for three that afternoon. By three-thirty I had convinced the exec of my sincerity and he was already waxing enthusiastic over how useful I could be to their cause. By four-thirty we were on our way to an exclusive Park Avenue brothel!

"A brothel?" I had raised my eyebrows back in the S.M.U.T. offices when the exec made the suggestion.

"Yes. Surely you have been in such establishments before in the course of your work, Mr. Victor?"

"Well, yes, but -"

"But?"

"But isn't S.M.U.T. sort of opposed to brothels? I mean isn't one of your aims to stamp them out?"

"Precisely. But that isn't as simple as it might seem. This particular brothel, for instance, is but one such establishment being run by a large international vice ring. Getting the goods on such an organization is extremely difficult. It's a long-term project of S.M.U.T.'s to destroy this ring at its very roots. We're hoping that the occurrence planned for tonight will provide evidence toward that end. You see, we

have arranged for the place to be raided tonight. However, the police are most lax and most corrupt in such matters. Therefore S.M.U.T. itself has seen fit to take a hand to insure that there will be testimony available which will at least result in the convictions of those who run this particular brothel. Now do you understand, Mr. Victor?"

"In principle, yes. But you'll have to spell out for me just how S.M.U.T. is going to participate in these proceedings."

"Very well. You and I and two other men from S.M.U.T. are going to the brothel, where we will pose as customers. There are already three young ladies from S.M.U.T. who have infiltrated the brothel in a working capacity."

"You mean they're actually selling their bodies?" I worked hard at looking shocked.

"It's a great sacrifice, but these brave young ladies didn't hesitate to volunteer to make it. Actually, I'm proud to say that there were twenty-seven other volunteers from our Manhattan office alone, but these three were chosen because of their physical qualifications. In any case, between what they have learned and the information we hope to secure tonight, S.M.U.T. not only hopes to put this establishment out of business but perhaps also to be in a position to strike at the heinous vice ring itself. I had thought that with your experience, Mr. Victor, your help might be very useful in this endeavor."

"I'll be happy to cooperate," I assured him. "But isn't five o'clock rather early to raid a brothel?"

"The raid itself won't take place until six. We just want to be in position when it does. And as to the time, you're wrong. Their busiest time, according to the S.M.U.T. girls who have infiltrated, is between five and eight. That's when the tired businessmen and commuters stop off for a quick one before catching their trains home."

"That makes sense," I nodded. But there was something else in the back of my mind that didn't make sense, and I puzzled over it to myself. If S.M.U.T.'s real aim, as Putnam had said, was to overpopulate the world, then why would they want to stamp out sex in brothels? I could see why they'd want to stamp out pornography. That provided sublimation for the sex act itself. But in a brothel the sex act was actually performed. So why, since it wasn't sublimation, should S.M.U.T. want to crack down on it?

Then I thought of something, and it all became clear. Strict birth control was always observed in brothels. Sex there was never procreative. Also, sex in a brothel was a substitute for sex in the home, which in S.M.U.T.'s eyes was definitely more apt to result in upping the birth rate. And that's why S.M.U.T. was really anti-brothel.

By the time I'd figured this out, I was in a taxicab with the three men from S.M.U.T. Seated beside me was the exec to whom I'd been talking. His name was Horace Crampdick. So help me! And he looked like his name. He was a short, flabby guy with a perpetual stoop and fat hands that seemed always to be dangling in the neighborhood of his crotch, hands that moved constantly and nervously not so

much as if he didn't know what to do with them as that maybe he did and was afraid he might give in to the impulse to do it.

Next to Crampdick was the fellow he'd introduced as Jock O'Steele. He was a mountain of a man, body bulging with muscles and above it a stern red face shiny with determination to stamp out sin. He had the look of a man whose faith in the rightness of his cause is unswerving - but who nevertheless finds it necessary to take frequent cold showers.

The most interesting of the trio sat on the jumpseat. This was Singh Huy-eva, who, according to Crampdick, was an important personage in the New Delhi chapter of S.M.U.T. I had been surprised to learn that Singh Huy-eva was Indian. To me he had looked more Tibetan. In any case, he was being accorded the privilege of a visiting fireman by being taken along to the brothel. He had specifically asked to go along, and this was one of the things that intrigued me about him. You see, Crampdick had confided to me that Singh Huy-eva was a eunuch.

I suppose this would give him a certain detachment where the brothel activities were concerned. He certainly looked detached - no pun intended. He was a small, compact man with extremely wide shoulders and a broad chest that tapered down to a girlish waist, flat hips, and short legs which looked slightly bowed when he walked. His face was birdlike, the features sharp, the eyes deep-set black dots, watchful but serene. Of all of us, he was the most composed during the cab ride.

Crampdick was playing Dick Tracy, so we got off a block away from the brothel and walked to it. From the outside it looked like anything but what it was. Squeezed between a couple of posh Park Avenue apartment houses, it looked more like an ultra-respectable Victorian mansion than a house of ill repute. Cupids and gargoyles scampered over its facade, their cheeks puffed out with the effort of blowing their heavenly trumpets. Here and there a figure out of Greek mythology stucco'd out and leered lewdly at passersby. Heavy draperies sealed off all the windows from the outside. But Gothic triumphed over all with a gabled roof right out of Hawthorne. The house stood as a monument to how individually artistic elements can be scrambled together to create massive ugliness.

I half expected a footman in livery to answer when Crampdick struck the ornate brass knocker against the solid mahogany door. But I was disappointed. It was a demure maid in a simple black dress and an unfrilly white cap who answered. She nodded when Crampdick uttered the banality which served as a password and led us through the old-fashioned foyer to a large parlor.

Here the furnishings were somewhat brighter and more festive. Snug little couches - loveseats, really - in bright colors ringed the room and a long bar extended the length of one wall. A bartender was looking businesslike behind it. The only other person there was a matronly woman who rose to greet us.

"How do you do? I am Mrs. Vendergash. It's so nice that you gentlemen could come." Her manner of speaking went with her looks. Both were suburban-tea-party style with the ladies' auxiliary waiting in the wings.

The rest of us browsed around while Crampdick made certain financial arrangements with Mrs. Vendergash. "I'm sure the young ladies are impatient to

meet you," she announced when they'd finished. "Please excuse me while I go and fetch them."

"I told her we wanted to spend the night," Crampdick whispered to me when she'd gone. "And I arranged to have her send down all the girls so we could make a selection at our leisure. That way I'll be able to contact the three girls S.M.U.T. planted here without being obvious about it. She insisted that if it was done that way we would have to allow the other customers to mingle with the girls too. I told her that would be all right. You're the expert, Mr. Victor. How does it sound to you?"

"Ginger-peachy."

"In a little while, it may be necessary for each of us to accompany one of the girls to a room. That way we'll be in position to supply truthful testimony after the raid. But if we time it right we won't have to actually do anything. The police should arrive in time to save us from that."

"Thank goodness for that," I told him fervently.

"However, we do want to be sure that none of us go off with one of the S.M.U.T. girls," he continued. "So when they come down, I'll point them out to you. After all, there's no sense in duplicating our activity."

"Crampdick," I told him, "you've really organized this magnificently. You're a credit to S.M.U.T."

"Thank you, Mr. Victor." He beamed. "I really do appreciate such praise coming from a man of your wide experience in this area."

At this point, Mrs. Vendergash returned, herding her flock of soiled doves before her. No plumes and feathers for these doves, however. It was much too hoity-toity a place for the girls to be garbed obviously. They didn't bounce around in their underwear or sport filmy negligees. On the contrary, they looked like a smart set of debutantes ready for the cocktail hour. Their hairstyles were subdued, their frocks simple, their bodices demurely high. And they were quiet and well-behaved as they arranged themselves around the room like so many pieces of luscious but still unpeeled fruit.

There were about a dozen of them. While Jock O'Steele and Singh Huy-eva were getting acquainted, Crampdick pointed out the three S.M.U.T. plants to me. One was a tall brunette with Slavic features and impressive hips framing an even more imposing *derrière*. The second, also a brunette, was smaller, pixie-ish, with a kittenish expression I'd come to associate with European gypsy girls, and a high bosom so sharply pointed it looked capable of piercing a man's flesh should it be pressed against him. The last of the trio was a blonde, medium height, full-lipped, petulant-looking, full and round in the chest, which was perched to accentuate the promise of perfection in the pelvic area.

All three were young. All three were extremely attractive. All three seemed well-suited to the brothel environment. What I couldn't figure out was how three such sensual creatures had come to enlist in S.M.U.T. in the first place.

I turned my attention from them to the other girls. As my gaze traveled around the room, I saw that each of them measured up to the high standards Mrs.

Vendergash must have set for her establishment. There wasn't one who would have looked out of place in a bathing beauty contest.

My gaze settled on a redhead across the room. She returned it and smiled. When I smiled back, she crossed over to me.

"Hello there," she introduced herself. "My name is Adrian."

"Hi. I'm Steve."

"Shall we have a drink, Steve?"

"I'd love one. Scotch on the rocks."

Adrian called out the order to the bartender, and a few moments later he brought the drinks over.

"What's your line, Steve?" Adrian made conversation as we sipped at our drinks.

"Gynecology," I told her, straight-faced.

"Are you a doctor?"

"No." I improvised. "I'm a tactician."

"What's that?"

"I'm an expert in the strategy and tactics of gynecology."

"Oh. Sort of a family planner, you mean?"

"Yeah." I decided to let it go at that. "And tell me, Adrian," I changed the subject, "do you enjoy your work?"

"Oh, very much. It brings me into contact with such interesting people."

"Intimate contact, eh?" I couldn't help saying.

"Oh, Steve, you have a sense of humor." She chuckled brightly. "I like that." She took my hand in hers and pressed it snugly against her breast. "I can see that we're going to get along very well," she told me throatily.

"Sure. It's going to be a real relationship," I agreed.

"Then shall we get started?" she suggested. "Shall we finish our drinks and go upstairs?"

"Okay." I was more than willing. But I noticed that none of the other three men from S.M.U.T. had made a move as yet. "Still, let's not hurry things," I added. "Why don't we have another drink first?"

"Of course, Steve." She signaled the bartender to do it again.

"What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" Every so often my sense of the absurd prompts me to such banality.

I sensed that she was groaning inside, but Adrian was too well-trained not to come up with an answer. "My mother is a widow and she suffers with arthritis," she recited. "I have to support her and I'm putting my kid brother through college, too."

"Through med school, of course," I said helpfully.

"No. Business administration. He wants to open a candy store."

I began to wonder just who was having fun with whom. "I can't help admiring your spirit of sacrifice," I told her anyway. "But I wonder, do you vary the story for matinees?"

"Somewhat," Adrian admitted. "I often throw in a wheelchair and a fine old Southern family background. I even drawl a little if the spirit moves me. Somehow it all comes out so much more pathetic with the scent of magnolias wafting over it."

"If you really want sympathy," I told her calculatedly, "why not say you were kidnapped by a white slave ring and forced into a life of prostitution?"

Her careful lack of response when she answered was a telling response in itself. There was a quick flicker of fear in her eyes, a fast-vanishing flicker that made me think Crampdick could be right about the white slave operation behind this bordello. "That's old hat," she said. "There are no white slave rings in the modern world. Girls don't have to be forced or lured into the profession. There's money enough to make it attractive. And in my case I find it attractive for its own sake."

"Meaning you enjoy your work?"

"I do. I like sex," she told me frankly. "Lots of it and lots of variety. Don't you, Steve?"

"Yeah. I do."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

The question was well-timed. Crampdick was just starting for the door with one of the girls. The room was filling up with other male customers and I guess he wanted to be sure he latched onto his "evidence" before the demand could make it unavailable. O'Steele was also getting to his feet with a girl. As Adrian and I followed them out, I caught a glimpse of Singh Huy-eva pairing off in our wake. I guessed that he figured the raid would be pulled off before his eunuch status was revealed. In any case, it was his problem.

For myself, I was half hoping the raid might be delayed. Watching Adrian's *derrière* wriggle provocatively as I followed it up the stairs, I was in no mood for *coitus interruptus* - not even *pre-coitus interruptus*.

She led me into a cozy room with a bed, a couple of chairs, a bureau, and a connecting door to a private bathroom. The blinds were drawn, and she turned on a lamp that shed a very soft light. A stereo set switched on along with it; background music, slow and romantic, something by Tchaikovsky as schmaltzed up by Kostelanetz.

"Does everybody get music to make it by?" I asked her as we started to undress.

"Yes. But it's different in every room," she told me as she wriggled free of her dress. Her figure looked even better in a bra and half-slip.

"Different at random?" I pulled off my socks.

"Oh, no. The music is always picked to go with the girl and the particular taste which would lead a customer to select such a girl."

"That's very interesting." I thought of Crampdick as I stepped out of my pants. He had picked a rather savage-looking girl who was probably Spanish. "As a matter

of fact, from a psychological viewpoint, it's fascinating," I told Adrian. "For instance, what sort of girl would you say my friend selected? The short pudgy fellow I came with, I mean."

"Oh, you mean the one who went next door with Elena."

"Yeah. What sort of girl is Elena?"

"I don't believe in gossiping about the other girls. But," Adrian giggled, "I'll tell you the music they're probably listening to right now."

"What is it?"

"The Nutcracker Suite."

"Say no more." I laughed. Poor Crampdick! "How about the other guy I came with, the muscle-man?" I asked Adrian. "What's the tune he's jiving to?"

"Let's see." She thought a minute. "Yes, he's with Bubbles. She used to be a stripper. Can't break the habit. Still goes into her routine when she's undressing for a customer. She'll be bumping and grinding to *A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody* right about now."

I hoped for Jock O'Steele's sake that the bathroom adjoining his room has a real cold cold shower. "How about my Oriental friend?" I asked. "He went off with that petite little blonde - the kittenish one. What's her theme song?"

"Oh, that's Tabby. And she knows more than one way to skin a cat. Any cat. Her theme song is *Around the World in Eighty Ways*."

"The title is *Around the World in Eighty Days*," I corrected her.

"You don't know Tabby!" She shrugged off her bra and plumped up her breasts.

It was pretty plump plumping, and I appreciated the view. Kostelanetz was building to a climax, and I figured I'd better start doing the same before it was too late. So I kicked off my jockey shorts with a gesture that urged Adrian to do the same with her panties.

She did. Whadda you know? She was a natural redhead. I made a grab for the proof.

"Take it slow," she advised, as though lecturing a novice. "It's much better if you don't rush things."

She was right, of course, but with that raid due any minute, I wasn't about to waste any time. So I played it like a technique-less Paul Revere and made haste to jump all over her.

"My, you certainly are impetuous." She sighed resignedly and did her professional best to catch up with me passion-wise.

Her best was plenty good enough. Pretty soon we were galloping through the fields of Passionata on our way to the heights of Eros. We varied our gait as we went, splitting the exercise load, shifting our weight, breaking stride for an occasional sophisticated side-trip. And we went over the terrain thoroughly, yours truly nibbling neck-nape-ily, gently bosom-biting, nuzzling a nook here and kissing a cranny there while Adrian beat at my buttocks, scratched her way down my spine, sipped at the nectar-heavy straw of my passion. Then she was thrashing about,

frothing at both mouts, no longer trying to slow me down, but instead begging me to take her quickly.

No fancy stuff then. Just sex, pure and simple, straight and hard. And the two of us went soaring off into the Never-Never Land of pure and exquisite sensation. We hit the zenith and then plummeted downward, back into reality.

Reality, at that moment, was a sudden commotion in the front hallway downstairs. It was quickly followed by a lot of excited squealing and the sound of panicky footsteps racing past our door. It couldn't help but intrude on our post-coital mood.

"What's that?" Adrian asked, stretching luxuriously.

"Search me. I'll go have a look." I pulled on my jockey shorts and eased open the door. I figured it was the raid beginning. I figured wrong.

Opening the door a crack, I had a clear view down the staircase to the foyer below. Mrs. Vendergash was standing there talking to two men. The men didn't look like cops. Not even like vice cops. They looked more like Mafia rejects - the kind the brotherhood turns down because they play too rough.

I waited while a couple of excited doxies rushed past the door, and then I sneaked over to the banister so I could hear what was being said below. "But I pay through the nose for protection," Mrs. Vendergash was protesting, no longer seeming quite the grand dame she had before. "Why should they raid my place?"

"Some outfit named S.M.U.T.'s been squeezing 'em high," one of the hoods explained. "We was lucky we even found out about this raid. It's due any minute now, so you better hustle the broads and the johns outta here. But first we wanna get them S.M.U.T. guys an' tech 'em a lesson. Our info is there's four of 'em here right now. An' you got three of their chicks workin' for you, too."

"I think I've pegged the four men," Mrs. Vendergash told them. "And I've got a pretty good idea who the girls are, too."

"Well, come on and help us round 'em up before it's too late."

"That won't be hard. There's one of them now." Mrs. Vendergash had spotted me, and now she was pointing straight at me.

A gun swung up along with her outstretched arm. It was followed by a second one. Those hoods had good reflexes. Both muzzles held steady, pointed with deadly accuracy right at the white triangle of my jockey shorts. Instinctively, I clasped my hands in front of the target area.

"Ain't he cute?" one of the hoods remarked. "Won't you join us?" he added politely. The gun made a little beckoning circle which drew me to the head of the stairs. "Oh, now don't be coy," the hood said. "Come on down."

I went down. As I joined them, I could see that there was chaos in the parlor beyond. Evidently word of the impending raid had been spread. But the hoods were more interested in getting revenge on S.M.U.T. than in protecting the clientele or the girls. One of them backed me up against the wall while the other went with Mrs. Vendergash to round up the other S.M.U.T. members.

"What will you do with us?" I asked the gorilla conversationally.

"Slap your hand," he told me brusquely. "Whadda ya think?"

"With a sledgehammer? Is that the idea?"

"Yeah. On'y sometimes we miss an' hit the head instead. Too bad. You look like you got a real soft head."

"It's stuffed with feathers," I admitted. "But can't we talk this over?" I held up my hand with what was meant to be a friendly, conciliatory gesture. But the movement was just a mite too fast, and he misread its intent. The gun slammed into my jockey shorts so hard that my spine played castanets with the wall. "Oof!" I gasped, not too brightly.

"You certainly have a way wit' words, Mac," the gorilla observed. "But don't try that again," he added. "It could be fatal."

The gun unplugged itself from my abdomen, and I was able to breathe again. Three breaths later the lights went out. Just like that. We were plunged into total darkness, and I didn't stop to ponder what had happened. I just dropped down on all fours, below where I remembered the gun having been, and started crawling.

"Don't move, Mac, or I'll pug ya!" The hood's voice came from behind me now, and I kept right on crawling. Then I guess he must have decided not to take any chances in the dark. He fired three shots in rapid succession.

I don't know what he hit, but the immediate result of the shots was chaos. Suddenly the stairway and the hall were filled with frantic, half-clad prosties and their even more frantic customers stumbling over one another in the dark. Feeling them swirl around me, I figured it was safe to get to my feet again.

"I've lost my hearing aid!" It was a quavery, old man's voice at my elbow. "What's going on?"

"It's a raid," a female voice beside him answered.

"Of course I paid!" he said irritably. "And I'm not going to be gypped out of it by any tricks, either. I know you girls! You're all alike! No consideration for old people! Well, you're not going to take advantage of me! Only first I have to find my hearing aid."

"But you don't understand," the female voice said. "You have to get out of here!"

"I don't want any beer! All I want is my hearing aid. And my jollies. I paid for my jollies. I won't leave without them!"

"But the cops are coming. You have to duck!"

"That's what I said," the old man grumbled. "But first let's find my hearing aid. A man has to be able to hear what he's doing."

I elbowed around them in the darkness and started up the stairs. I bumped smack into a man coming down. "Somebody stole my pants!" he told me as we held onto each other for balance.

"Well, I'm obviously not the culprit," I told him, firmly removing his hand from my bare leg.

"We'll probably both catch our death of pneumonia," he assured me morosely as we sidled past each other.

"What happened to the lights?" a voice called gaily from above.

"They went out," someone called back accurately.

"How is it down there?" the first voice persisted.

"Very dark," came the answer.

"I just looked out the window," a third voice called.

"How is it outside?"

"Very dark!"

"You mean the whole city's dark?"

"That's right," a new voice announced. "And half the country, too. I just heard it over my transistor radio. There's been a power failure. The whole eastern seaboard is blacked out."

And that was the first I heard of the big blackout. Later, I would hear all kinds of stories of how people had been stuck on subways and in elevators, of how they'd passed the time in bars or walked to their homes. But when my grandchildren ask me how I spent the night of the big blackout, I'm darned if I know what I'm going to tell them. After all, I can't tell them I was trapped in a whorehouse, can I?

Still, there are worse places I might have been stuck. Even considering the S.M.U.T. situation and the two hoods gunning for me in the dark, there are worse places. All in all, if I had a choice, I don't know that I would have picked differently.

You see, once everybody became aware of the scope of the blackout, it became obvious that the police wouldn't be conducting any vice raids this night. So, just as on the outside, the panic simmered down and folks resigned themselves to waiting out the blackout. As the man from O.R.G.Y., despite the peril I was in, the situation held particular interest for me.

When I returned to the room I'd left, Adrian hadn't budged. She was still lolling in bed in a sort of after-sex reverie, which I suppose was something of a compliment to me. I filled her in on the blackout situation, and she surprised me by opening a bureau drawer and coming up with a powerful-looking flashlight.

"How do you happen to have this?" I asked her as I aimed the strong beam around the room.

"It belongs to a special of mine," she told me.

"A special?"

"Yes. A steady customer who likes to do certain things which are out of the ordinary. One of the things is playing children's games. Hide-and-seek in the dark is his favorite, and we play it with the flashlight. He's always it, and I always hide. When he finds me with the light beam, I have to freeze right where I am and stay that way without moving while he makes love to me."

"I'll bet he has a great version of *Pin-the-Tail-to-the-Donkey*," I ventured.

"He does. And it's painful sometimes. But," Adrian shrugged, "he plays extremely well."

It was about then that I hit the door with the ray from the flashlight. It was just being eased open. I saw Mrs. Vendergash, and behind her there was a hand with a gun glinting in it. The search for the S.M.U.T. spies was evidently still continuing.

I doused the light and crept silently behind the door as it slid open wider. As she and the gorilla entered, I stepped behind them, smacked the gorilla over the head with the flashlight, stepped back into the hallway, and slammed the door shut behind me. I ran down the corridor and around a bend in the hallway. Then I stood silently in the darkness for a few moments, thinking.

If I really wanted to put myself in solid with S.M.U.T., this could be my big chance. If I could warn the others of the danger they were in and help them escape from the brothel, it would really prove my loyalty. I decided to have a crack at it.

I moved through the pitch-blackness to the door of the room I remembered Crampdick entering. I opened it silently and slipped inside. I shut it just as silently, and only then did I turn on the flashlight.

Elena, the Spanish type Crampdick had paired off with, blinked owlishly as the light hit her square in the eyes. Dressed in the sheerest of black nightgowns, she'd been working over the knob to the locked door of the adjoining bathroom when I entered. Now she shielded her eyes against the light and tried to squint at me. "Who is it?" she asked. "What do you want?"

"I'm looking for my friend. The one who came in here with you," I told her.

"He's in there." She indicated the locked door. "He won't come out."

"Why not?"

"Don't ask me. He's your friend. And a kook if I ever saw one. All I know is he won't unlock the door."

"Let me have a try." I walked over to the door and called through it. "Horace," I called, "it's me, Steve. Come on out."

"Not while that woman is there!"

"You see," Elena said.

"What did you do to him?" I asked.

"I hardly touched him. But he bolted in there, and now he won't come out. Damn inconsiderate if you ask me. I told him I won't lay a finger on him. All I want to do is use the john."

"Look, Horace," I tried again. "I have to talk to you. Come on out."

"No! Not until she leaves."

"Well, can I come in, then?"

"All right. But only you." He opened the door cautiously, and I slid inside. He quickly closed and locked it behind me.

"What's up?" I turned the flashlight on him. He was wearing his underwear and nothing else. It was long underwear, of bright red flannel. The drop-seat was hanging loose, revealing Crampdick's pudgy and extremely hairy behind. I've seen few less prepossessing sights in my time.

Following my glance, he quickly turned to one side, reached behind him, and buttoned up. "She did that!" he told me, his voice quivering with indignation. "That woman out there! Mr. Victor, you wouldn't believe how depraved that woman is. And aggressive too! It was all I could do to get away from her."

"Well, I suppose you have to expect that sort of thing in a place like this," I soothed him.

"Perhaps. But I never thought - Mr. Victor, the brazen way she tore her clothes off as soon as we were alone in the room. And then she had the audacity to start undressing me. I was filled with revulsion, but I let her do it until I was down to my underwear. I thought surely the raid would have taken place by then."

"There isn't going to be any raid." I went on to quickly fill him in on the situation.

"Hey! You guys going to tie it up all night?" Elena wailed from outside the door as I finished.

"But what can I do?" Crampdick ignored her. "If I go outside, either that woman will attack me again or those two hoodlums will get me."

"Look," I said. "Just let her in here, and you go out there and get dressed. If she comes out before you're finished, I'll protect you. But you have to get out of here before the lights go back on. Otherwise those two killers will find you and kill you."

"But what about the others?"

"I'll warn them, too. I'll try to get everybody out."

"Mr. Victor, you're real S.M.U.T.," he complimented me. "The organization won't forget what you're doing for us tonight."

"Okay. Then let's go." I led the way out of the bathroom. Crampdick flinched as Elena passed him. But she was too anxious to get into the john to pay him any mind.

He was almost completely dressed when she came out again. "Leaving so soon, sweetie?" she asked. She started straight for him.

"Mr. Victor!" he wailed.

"Leave him alone." I stepped in front of Elena.

"I'm just teasing him," she assured me. "I don't really go for problem cases. He should see a psychiatrist. I can't imagine what he came here for in the first place. Whereas on the other hand -" She wrapped herself around me insinuatingly.

"Mr. Victor! What are you doing?" Crampdick demanded.

"No sacrifice is too great for S.M.U.T.," I assured him, running my hands over Elena's lush body.

"But I can't let you do this for me," he protested.

"It's not for you. It's for S.M.U.T.," I assured him, allowing Elena's embrace to pull me down to the bed with her.

"You're sacrificing yourself to protect me," he insisted.

"The hell I am," I muttered under my breath as Elena pulled my shorts down around my ankles and straddled me. The way she landed, I appreciated just how apropos her theme song was.

But she didn't move again after that. She couldn't. She was knocked unconscious by the sudden blow Crampdick struck her over the head with the bedlamp he'd picked up.

"What did you do that for?" I exclaimed.

"If you would go to such lengths to protect me, then I certainly owe you the same loyalty."

"Thanks a lot, buddy." I had a hard time keeping the sarcasm out of my voice. "Well, I guess we better get you out of this place," I added, getting back to business.

I eased the door open and beamed the light down the hall. It looked all clear. I took Crampdick by the hand and led him to the staircase. We made our way down it without incident. We'd almost made it to the front door when I felt the cold muzzle of the gun against my naked back.

"Goin' someplace, Mac?" I recognized the hood's voice from before.

Flashing the light up as I turned around, I saw that he was holding a girl firmly by the arm with his free hand. She was the tall, Slavic-looking brunette Crampdick had pointed out to me as a S.M.U.T. spy just after we'd arrived at the brothel. Mrs. Vendergash must have fingered her for the hoods, and now they'd nabbed her. And us too, it seemed - unless I acted quickly.

I acted quickly. I shot the light straight in his eyes, chopped at his gun hand, and connected with a kick to his groin. He let go of the girl as he doubled over. I doused the light and shoved Crampdick and the girl into the parlor. "Go out through the window!" I hissed at them. Then I opened the front door and jumped back for the staircase. As I'd expected, a volley of bullets went out the door. The hood was crumpled on the floor, shooting up what he thought was the escape route.

I flashed my light quickly at the window. It was open, and they were gone. I doused the light and raced up the stairs. As soon as he was able to pick up his swollen crotch, it figured the hood would be after me. And there was the other one with Mers. Vendergash to consider as well. I'd have to move fast if I was going to get the S.M.U.T. people out safely.

Still, I had to be cagey. So I kept going past the first floor of bedrooms to the second. There I began flinging open doors at random and shining my flashlight into the rooms.

"Get the hell out of here!" Candlelight flickered in the first room. The naked man with the whip turned from his target and snapped the lash angrily at me. I ducked it and shined the light at his target. The nude girl, bent double and holding her ankles, shot me an impish grin from between her shapely legs. She wasn't one of the two I was seeking.

"Sorry," I apologized as the whip cracked at me again. "But there's no need to get nasty." I slammed the door shut.

"What are you, some kind of voyeur or something?" was the next response I drew.

"I see your belly button," I sang out as I slammed the door behind me.

"Jeez! You get more privacy in a parked car than in this joint!"

"Watch it! Your brake is slipping," I advised, moving on to the next room.

"Hey! Can't you see we're busy?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to get unbusy, and fast." I'd struck pay dirt. The body beneath the speaker belonged to the brunette S.M.U.T. pixie, one of the two girls I was looking for. "It's time to go home," I added to her. "Your mother wants you."

"That light is blinding me," she complained. "Go 'way."

"S.M.U.T.," I told her. "I'm one of you. And the orders are to evacuate fast."

"I don't dig that kind of jazz," the man complained. "I'm pretty broad-minded, but there's some scenes I draw the line at."

"Don't knock it until you've tried it," I advised him. "Come on, let's go," I told the girl.

"Can't you wait 'til I get my girdle on?"

"Hurry it up. I'm having a busy night."

"Some nerve!" the guy called after us as we exited. "Now what am I supposed to do?"

"Just start without me," the chick called over her shoulder.

"Just how the hell am I going to get you out of here?" I wondered aloud. "Those hoods are sure to be watching that staircase."

"I know." She snapped her fingers. "Just follow me." She led the way down the hall and pointed out a dumbwaiter set into one of the walls. "You can work the ropes and lower me from here," she suggested.

"Okay." I helped her in and began lowering away.

Everything went well for a minute, and then she suddenly yelped up at me. "Stop! stop! Sto-

"What's the matter?"

No answer. I leaned over the shaft and shined the flashlight straight down. It lit up the bottom, where the shaft widened. There was a heap of garbage down there. As I hit it with the light, the girl was just crawling out from under it. Evidently the dumbwaiter platform had tilted and dumped her there.

Suddenly another head, a man's, leaned out into the shaft from the floor below me. He looked down at the girl floundering in the garbage pile and then looked up at me. "You shouldn't throw her out," he advised. "She's good for at least another ten years yet." He shook his head sadly and vanished.

"Are you all right?" I called down to the girl.

"Yes. I missed my stop. But it's probably better this way. I can get out through the basement."

"So long, then." I waved goodbye and resumed my quest for the other members of S.M.U.T.

Jock O'Steele was easy to find. I just listened outside a few doors until I heard the sound of running water. My light picked up a girl wearing only pasties and a G-string. She was lying on the bed alone. I guessed this must be Bubbles.

"Where's Jock?"

"Taking a shower. Can't you hear him?"

I certainly could. A booming, off-key rendition of *A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody* was coming through the bathroom door. "How come he's singing?" I wondered aloud.

"If you really want to find out -" Bubbles stretched insinuatingly.

"Sorry, I don't have the time. But are you trying to tell me that he - umm - made it with you?"

"And how!" She held up four fingers.

"Then how come he's taking a shower now?" I was confused.

"He told me he believed in moderation so he was gonna take a cold shower to prove to himself he still had the will power to stop."

"I'll be damned." I crossed over to the bathroom door and banged on it with my fist. "Jock. It's me, Steve."

The sound of rushing water stopped, and the door opened. Jock looked shamefaced but rebellious as he confronted me.

"S.M.U.T.'s got trouble," I started to tell him. "We have to-"

But he interrupted me. "The hell with S.M.U.T.!" he said. "I resign! I've fallen off the wagon. And I don't give a damn what you think."

"I don't think anything," I assured him. "Your secret's safe with me if you want it to be. I don't blame you one little bit. But that's aside from the point right now." I explained to him about the hoods gunning for us.

"Don't worry. We'll get out," he assured me, flexing his muscles, which were indeed impressive. "We'll use Bubbles here for a decoy." He outlined his plan to me as he got dressed.

A few minutes later Bubbles sashayed down the staircase with a lit candle in her hand. She spotted the hood at the bottom of the stairs and wiggled over to him. Then, holding her candle in front of her, she went into a slow, sexy bump-and-grind routine. The hood's eyes bugged out as he watched her.

With him distracted, Jock and I crept down the stairs. Jock moved over right in back of the gunman and raised his fist. He brought it down just once - hard. The hood crumpled on the floor, unconscious.

But neither Jock nor I saw the second gunman coming out of the parlor. I had shined the light on the unconscious hood, and as I raised it the beam inadvertently

focussed on Jock. Two shots rang out before I could douse the light. By that time Bubbles was already trying to drag Jock out of what had been the line of fire.

I helped her as she felt her way into a closet. She closed the door silently behind us, and I turned on the light again, shielding it with my hand. One look was enough to see that Jock had had it.

He looked up at Bubbles with a big smile. He winked. And then he died. I do believe he died happy.

I let Bubbles slip out of the closet first. After a moment or two, I followed. It was still pitch black, and I didn't dare use the light. There was no telling where those killers might be.

I went back up the stairs. It didn't take me long to find the third of the S.M.U.T. girls, the blonde. She was putting on a little show for some of the men in an upstairs parlor. About two dozen candles had been arranged in a circle to light up her playing area.

As I entered, she was just dousing herself with lighter fluid from head to toe. She held one foot daintily over one of the candle flames and immediately her body burst into a flaming torch. She moved quickly around the circle, blazing away, her nudity peeping through the crackling flames.

I saw through the impressive stunt. It's a fact that if the body moves fast enough to create a semi-vacuum in its wake, only the fluid on the surface and not the flesh itself will burn. But the other men were awed by it. "That's the hottest show I ever saw," one of them remarked as she rolled on the floor to put out the fire before it was too late.

The show wasn't over yet, though. Now she applied the same principle to specific portions of her anatomy. She sat in a bowl of the lighter fluid and lit up her *derrière*. Then she did it to one breast, twirling it quickly so the flames wouldn't scorch it. It was quite a sight, with the long, red nipple quivering in the flames. She repeated it with the other breast, and then she was ready for the grand finale.

"I need a volunteer," she said, as she poured handfuls of lighter fluid over the curly triangle beneath her belly.

I had to get to her somehow, so I volunteered.

"Make love to me," she instructed, lying down on the floor.

Under ordinary circumstances, that wouldn't have been any hardship - but these weren't exactly ordinary circumstances. Nevertheless, I did my best to comply. The murmurs from the onlookers said my best was more than adequate.

"Now," she panted, "move very hard and fast."

I did as she said, and she reached out for a candle and ignited the lighter fluid-covered area. Immediately, she began moving like a motor being raced. I hurried to keep up with her, prodded by a sudden singeing from the flames flaring up where we were joined. I found that if I followed her rhythm, I wouldn't be burned.

So I followed her rhythm. All the way. And with one final surge of passionate release, we put out the fire.

"Come with me," I murmured to her as we clasped each other in the moment of exhaustion following our exertions. "They've caught wise to S.M.U.T., and there are gunmen after you."

Her eyes got very wide, and she followed me out of the room unquestioningly. We stopped off in another room for a moment while she threw on some clothes and I explained the situation more fully to her. After that, figuring the dumbwaiter was worth another try, I started to lead her to it.

Halfway there, my flashlight beam picked up one of the hoods standing guard at the dumbwaiter. Mrs. Vendergash must have tipped him off to its possibilities as an escape route. I pulled the blonde back around the bend in the hallway before we were spotted.

The question was what to do now. The other bullyboy was bound to be conscious again by now and covering the staircase. How was I going to get the blonde out?

The sight of a fireplace in the room inspired an answer. I lay down on my back and peered up the chimney. It was quite wide, and I could see a couple of stars dotting the top of it. "I wonder what the roof of this place is like?" I mused aloud.

"I've been up there," she told me, catching on fast. "There's a fenced-in sundeck for the girls there. And you can reach out and touch the fire escape of the building next door."

"Then let's go." I gave her a boost up the chimney.

It was easy climbing. The bricks had been staggered, probably for the benefit of a chimney sweep, and provided more than adequate footholds. A few moments later, covered with soot and looking like refugees from a minstrel show, we emerged from the mouth of the chimney and dropped the few feet to the roof. I helped the blonde onto the fire escape of the building next door, directed the light so she could see her way down, and then waved a goodbye. I wasn't sure she could see in the blackout.

I had to go back. There was still one more member of S.M.U.T. to be rescued: Singh Huy-eva. The thought of his name brought a curse to my lips as I went back down the chimney. It was more difficult going down than it had been coming up, and I slipped at one point. Only a fast grab saved me from joining Singh's rather exclusive fraternity. As it was, I skinned a few inches of fat from my *derrière*.

Fortunately, it wasn't too difficult to find him. He was inside the third room I tried. He was naked except for the white turban around his head. Tabby, the girl with him, was even more nude. She wasn't even wearing a turban.

Singh was sitting with his legs crossed, staring off into space. He was oblivious to my entrance. His features were transformed as if he was off in another world somewhere - which may well have been the case.

Tabby was sitting at his feet, her chin cupped in her hands, also staring fixedly. But the depth of her concentration didn't begin to approach his. Still, she didn't move her eyes as she asked me what I wanted.

"What are you staring at?" I asked her in turn.

"His navel."

"His navel? But why? Why are you staring at his navel?"

"Because," she sighed, "he has nothing else to stare at."

I could see what she meant. Poor Singh! But I had no time to waste on sympathy. "How do I get him out of his trance?" I asked Tabby. "I have to talk to him."

"What is it that you want, Mr. Victor?" Singh's voice seemed to come from very far away.

"I thought you were in Nirvana," Tabby said disillusionedly.

"I am. But I have dual consciousness. I have mastered the art of being in two places at the same time."

"Then you better stay in the other place," I told him. "Because this one is getting to be quite a hot spot." I continued talking, explaining the situation to him. By the time I finished, his return from Nirvana was complete.

"I think we had best make haste to leave," he summed up and began pulling on his clothes. "But, Mr. Victor," he added, surveying my soot-covered nudity, "don't you think you too should dress?"

"It's too risky going back for my clothes," I told him.

"Ah, I see. Then we shall have to improvise." Singh pulled a sheet from the bed and draped it around me.

Tabby looked on with interest as he twisted and tucked it here and there. "You look like Sammy Davis, Jr., in drag," she observed when he'd finished toga-ing me.

"Don't be chauvinistic," I told her.

"But she is right, Mr. Victor. At a quick glance, the way you look at the moment, you and I could be brothers."

"Okay, brother, so tell me how we're going to get out of here. I've just about exhausted all the possibilities I can figure."

"I can help you," Tabby said. "There's a back staircase that used to be used by servants. It runs all the way down to the cellar. You can get out that way."

So we let Tabby lead us, and the escape proved simplicity itself. Singh gave her his blessing in the basement, and we slipped outside to an alley running alongside the building. As we emerged from the alley, I got my first real look at New York in the blackout.

There's only one way to describe it. It was dark. Very dark. Park Avenue might have been some underground cavern. And the skyline looked like a subterranean horizon of stalagmites. Here and there, in the distance, car headlights flitted like twin fireflies coming in low for a landing. Candles in windows dotted the facades of the buildings like flickering rebukes to Tom Edison. An occasional flashlight drew chalkmarks across the blackboard of the night with the impudence of a naughty child whose teacher has left the room.

I turned on my own flashlight as we started up the Avenue. A sedan, large and black, its headlights out, moved slowly up, pacing us for a moment. Then an extremely bright searchlight beam was aimed at us from one of the windows. The

tone of the voice behind it said that the speaker had a gun and that the lightbeam was meant to pinpoint a target area. Needless to say, we were the target area.

"Get in." Only the two words.

Singh and I looked at each other.

"Don't try it," the voice advised.

We didn't try it. We got in the car.

"Smart." The voice approved our compliance. "Neat, the way you got out, too. We almost missed you."

"What do you want with us?" I asked.

"You're from S.M.U.T." The voice assumed the statement was explanation enough.

"What are you going to do to us?"

The voice laughed. It was an extremely unpleasant laugh. "Kill you, of course." The tone said the answer should have been obvious and that it was childish of us to have even raised the question. Still, it was an indulgent tone as it repeated the answer: "We're going to kill you!"

CHAPTER FOUR

"We're going to kill you!"

Cheery words; a cheery prospect. That's how they were spoken, anyway. But somehow I couldn't get into the joyful spirit of the occasion. Neither could Singh. We both fell quiet as the car moved slowly through the pitchblack streets of the crippled city.

Finally Singh broke the silence. "I do not smoke myself," he said, following it up with more relevance. "But perhaps my companion would like a last cigarette."

It was very considerate of him, but his choice of words sent a chill down my spine. Still, I did want a smoke. "Is it okay?" I asked.

The hood in the back and the one sitting beside the driver exchanged shrugs. "Go ahead," one of them said.

So I reached for a cigarette, reached down to where my pocket should have been. No cigarette. No pocket. There are no pockets in a toga; not even in a homemade toga. Nero may have fiddled while Rome burned, but he sure as hell couldn't have done much smoking in that bedsheet he was wearing. I spread my palms to indicate my predicament.

"Here." One of the hoofds passed me a cigarette.

"Allow me." Singh reached over with a Zippo lighter, which burst into flame as he lit the coffin-nail for me.

What happened then was done so quickly and so casually that it was a moment before either I or our captors realized it had happened. Just prior to it, Singh must have manipulated the window handle beside him with his elbow so the window was open a few inches. Now, as he finished lighting my cigarette, he tossed the lit lighter over his shoulder and out of the window as naturally as if it was an ordinary match. But he tossed it calculatedly and with accuracy.

The flaming lighter landed neatly in the open coat collar of a traffic cop who had just waved us past a corner. It lodged there. Jumping up and down to beat out the flames, the cop began blowing his whistle and waving his flashlight at us. These actions also served as a signal to the cop at the next corner to stop us, which he did.

It all happened so fast that both cops were alongside the car before our captors had a chance to react. The first cop was singed and mad, and he was waving his pistol around furiously. The second cop, probably more jittery than usual because of the blackout, also had his gun out.

"Did you see him jump?" Singh said loudly as the cops leaned into the car.

"Who threw that?" The first cop looked apoplectic.

"It was an accident, officer," one of the hoods tried to explain.

But Singh overrode his explanation. "I did," he admitted loudly. "But it was my friend's idea." He pointed at me.

"All right, you wise guys. Get out!"

Singh got out. The hood in back followed him. I emerged last.

"They had nothing to do with it," Singh told the cop, pointing at the hood on the sidewalk and the two still in the front of the car. "They don't even know us. We just asked them for a lift because of the power failure and they agreed."

"All right." The cop motioned the hood back into the car. "You three can go."

"But -" the driver started to protest, realizing that Singh and I were about to slip out of their clutches.

"No buts," the cop said firmly. "You wanna go to jail with these two, just hang around. Otherwise, get out of here fast before I change my mind."

The driver threw his companions a helpless look and then did the only thing he could do under the circumstances. He threw the car into gear, gunned the engine, and they sped away from the scene. Thanks to Singh we'd escaped from them.

But it didn't look like it was going to be quite that easy to get away from the cops. Mad as they were, it sure seemed we were destined to spend the night in the cooler. The remarkable Singh, however, again came up with a way out.

"You cannot arrest us," he told the cops haughtily.

"Oh, yeah? Why not?"

"Because we have diplomatic immunity," Singh announced, looking down his nose at them.

"Oh, no!" the cop who'd been burned moaned. "I might have known it!"

"Just a minute." The second cop was more suspicious. "That car didn't have DPL plates on it."

"Of course not. It was not our car. I told you that we just took a lift from them." Singh's tone said he didn't think the cop was very bright.

"Well, if you're diplomats, you must have some identification," the cop persisted. "Let's see it."

"Persecution!" Singh sang out. "You are persecuting the U.N. ambassador from Nepal!" He pointed at me, his finger quivering with outrage. "My country will lodge a formal protest!"

"All I did was ask for identification," the cop muttered, obviously somewhat intimidated by Singh's outburst.

"I have none," I said frostily, following Singh's lead. "There are no pockets in my clothing. But if you persist in detaining us, I insist on my right to make a telephone call."

"Who do you want to call?"

"The White House." I stared him down.

"What about him?" the first cop piped up, pointing at Singh. "He's wearing civilized clothes. He's got pockets. Where's his identification?"

"You are a witness that this creature implied that our native garb is uncivilized," I told Singh. "You will so testify at the international diplomatic hearing we shall demand." I turned back to the cops. "He needs no identification since he is with me, under my protection, and shares my immunity," I told them. "Now, are you going to stop badgering us immediately, or shall I have the Asian-African bloc lodge a formal protest with the Security Council?"

"I think we can count on the Communist bloc to support our resolution of denunciation," Singh added fuel to the fire.

"We'd better let them go," the first cop said. "Remember what happened to that guy who stopped a DPL for speeding? He's pounding a beat in Staten Island now."

"Yeah. And how about the guy who tried to take that knife away from that drunken ambassador? He got bused down to patrolman and sent up to Riverdale."

"I congratulate you on your wisdom," Singh told them.

He turned on his heel and started to march off. I followed him. But he stopped after a few steps, turned around, and strode back to the cops.

"What do you want now?" the one whose eyebrows had been burned off whined. "We said you could go."

"My lighter, please," Singh said politely, holding out his hand.

The cop took a deep breath, and I feared for his blood pressure. His face was a study in frustrated rage. But he handed Singh the lighter.

"Thank you." Singh rejoined me and we swaggered off together. "Where to, Mr. Victor?" he asked after a moment.

"I don't know about you, but I could use a drink," I told him.

"An admirable suggestion."

We found a little bar just off Lexington in the Sixties. It was jammed with people, their shadows dancing over the walls in the sputtering candlelight. I paused in the entrance, remembering my pocketless state and the lack of money which went along with it.

Singh sensed my embarrassment without my having to say anything. "My treat, Mr. Victor." He took me by the elbow gently and guided me into the place.

"A ghost!" some girl screamed, startled by my billowing white sheet.

"And he brought his Swami with him," a male voice observed a bit drunkenly, spotting Singh's turban.

"Spirits for the spirit," a second man told the bartender. "Haunting's thirsty work."

"That it is," I agreed, squeezing up to the bar with Singh. "Scotch on the rocks," I ordered. "Make it a double."

"The same," Singh told him.

"You fellows coming from a costume party?" the man at my elbow asked seriously.

"A seance," I assured him just as gravely.

"I am a medium," Singh added, getting into the act. "And this is a spirit I have just summoned from beyond."

"Yeah. Sure." The man edged away nervously.

"Hey, you guys, what's the latest word on the blackout?" the fellow on the other side of Singh asked. "What's going on out there?"

"It's very dark," Singh told him.

"You're telling me? Hey, you know where I was when this thing started?"

"No, but you're going to tell us, aren't you?"

"Sure. I was in the john at Penn Station along with about a hundred other guys. It was rush hour, you know, with a whole slew of guys lined up waiting for the guys at the urinals to finish. Well, when the lights went out, it really startled some guys. I mean, they just turned around without thinking. First thing you know, I'm caught in a regular crossfire. Well, you can imagine -"

"Yes," Singh sniffed. "But I don't have to imagine. There is a decided aroma bearing out your story."

"That's too bad," another man chimed in. "But it isn't as bad as what happened to me. I was in a poker game up in the office. There's a wowsler of a pot and I'm sitting there with four aces when the lights go out. By the time we get the matches out, somebody's walked off with the kitty. How do you like that? Best hand I've had in ten years and I don't even collect on it!"

"You think that's tough," a girl piped up. "I live in an elevator building, you know? Also, I work nights -"

"Doing what?" a male voice asked insinuatingly.

"Never mind that," she continued. "So anyway, I always get up around four o'clock in the afternoon and have breakfast. Well, today I get up and I'm out of coffee. I don't bother to get dressed, just throw on a coat and go down to the grocery. Only while I'm there, the power goes out and I can't get back up in the elevator. And here I am trapped with nothing on but this fur coat and what I sleep in."

"What do you sleep in?" The male voice was getting more interested.

"My skin," she admitted demurely.

"Can I buy you a drink?" he asked.

"Sure. Only don't come too close. You smell awful funny."

"That's Penn Station toilet water," he told her accurately. "It's the latest thing in men's colognes."

"Well, I don't think it's going to catch on," she said positively. "I'd hate to tell you what it smells like to me!"

"Those people are leaving that table." Singh grabbed my arm and pointed. "Let's get out of this crush."

"Okay."

We made our way to the table. We passed a line-up of people waiting to use the wall telephone. The guy holding the receiver to his ear at the moment seemed to be having a rough time. Even in the faint candlelight I could see that he was sweating.

"But I tell you, I'm trapped. It's a city-wide black out!" he was screaming into the mouthpiece over the din of the crowd. "No, of course I'm not with another woman!" he said indignantly, squeezing the breast of the girl hanging onto him. "No, I'm not in 'some bar' either! I'm in the waiting room at Grand Central!... For Pete's sake, it's a citywide emergency! How can you be so suspicious at a time like this?... Okay, so I work for Con Ed. So what?... So you wouldn't put it past me to what?... Now, Martha, that's ridiculous... I tell you, I had nothing to do with it!... All right, dammit, you're right! I would do anything to get away from you for a night!... Okay... Okay now, stop crying... But I swear to you, Martha, I did not pull any switches just so I could have a night out... Besides, how could I, Martha? I'm only a meter-reader, remember?... I know you don't trust me, but..."

We passed out of earshot. The two men were just getting up from the postage-stamp table as we reached it, and we grabbed it fast. It was almost pitch dark in this part of the lounge. And it was so crowded I was practically in the laps of the couple at the table directly behind me. Some are born eavesdroppers, some become eavesdroppers, and some have eavesdropping thrust upon them. Right then, I fell in the last category.

"God bless this blackout," the woman was saying. "Ten years of marriage, and you've never behaved as romantically with me as you're behaving tonight."

"Yes," the man replied. "And you've never aroused me so. I don't know what it is, but your body feels warmer and softer than it ever has before."

"Oh, darling, don't," she tittered encouragingly, belying her words.

"Nobody can see." His hand slid down from her breast and dropped under the table where it squeezed a leg.

Unfortunately, it was my leg. "Watch your aim, Mac," I protested.

"Oh, sorry. It's just that the Mrs. is almost never sexy like this. I guess I got carried away." He removed his hand. "She's like a firecracker," he confided. "My wife! I wouldn't have believed she still had it in her!"

"Oh, darling!" Another trill-like giggle followed by the sound of kissing.

I turned my attention to Singh. His features were hard to make out. I more or less guessed that he was smiling at the incident. But I was wrong. His tone was serious when he spoke. And his mind was on something else. "Mr. Victor," he said, "we must talk. It is urgent."

"Shoot," I told him.

"Mr. Victor, I know who you are, and -" His voice fell away because at that very moment the lights suddenly came back on.

I blinked in the unexpected glare and managed to focus my eyes. The first thing I saw was the bartender with his hand in the till. He was stuffing bills into his pocket. Now he turned brick red and hurriedly closed the cash register.

There was turmoil at the table behind me. "You're not my husband!" the woman was screaming as she pulled down her skirt.

"And you're not my wife!" the man shouted back as he hurriedly removed his hand from inside her blouse.

"I should have known!" the woman sighed, lowering her voice.

"It was too good to be true," the man agreed. "Still, why don't we -?"

"George!" The voice roared out from across the barroom. "There you are! And you told me you were just going to the bathroom!" The lady who'd shouted charged across the room.

"Hi, honey." A man popped up alongside the woman seated at the table behind me. "Having fun?"

"Yes. I've been having fun. Come on." She stood up. "Let's go home now."

"Okay. I'm dead tired myself. All I want to do is get to sleep."

"That," the woman sighed one last sigh, "figures!"

Behind her George was still trying to explain things to his irate wife. My attention was distracted from them by a sudden shout from a man standing against a side wall. He'd been standing there a long time, it seemed obvious, embracing a lady who'd seemed more than willing to be embraced. With the lights out, they'd been attempting the vertical fulfillment of a horizontal desire. They'd almost succeeded when the lights went back on. Nor did that stop them, since they both had their eyes squeezed shut. But now he'd just opened his eyes, and as he focused on the woman, his shock sounded out over the general furor. "My lord!" he screamed. "It's mother!"

"Well," she replied, "I brought you up to stay out of bars."

"If you want to talk," I told Singh during the wave of laughter which swept over the place after her remark, "we'd better get out of here."

"My hotel isn't far," Singh suggested.

"Okay. Let's go."

My sheet and smudged face drew some stares as we walked through the lobby of Singh's hotel. But most people just shrugged off the sight. It wasn't the night to question the most bizarre of sights. Anything could happen - and it had. So why puzzle over a man with a dirty face wearing a bedsheet?

"What did you mean back in the bar when you said you knew who I was?" I asked Singh cautiously when we were alone in his hotel suite.

"Just that. I know who you are and what your mission is. Also, I have a similar mission. I believe we may be able to help each other."

"You mean in furthering the work of S.M.U.T.?"

"Come, Mr. Victor, there is no further need of us playing cat-and-mouse with each other. We are on the same side. You have infiltrated S.M.U.T. in the interests of your government. And I have done the same in the interests of my religion."

"What makes you think I'm a spy?"

"I don't think it. I know it. I have received instructions to cooperate with you fully."

"Instructions from whom? The Indian government?"

"I am not an Indian, Mr. Victor. I am from Nepal."

I remembered then that he'd told the cops I was the ambassador from Nepal. But why had he pretended to be an Indian? And what was his purpose in passing himself off to S.M.U.T. as a fellow member from New Delhi? How much could I trust him? And just what was his angle?

When I put these questions to him, he seemed frank enough in answering them. And there was a certain logical pattern to the answers. Logical, even though his story was pretty outlandish in spots.

According to Singh, S.M.U.T. was engaged in a complex operation involving both Nepal and India. What this operation boiled down to was well-organized thievery on a large scale. The object of this thievery was the priceless erotic temple art of Nepal. Having explained this much, Singh digressed to fill me in on the history and value of this art.

First this involved explaining to me the development and ramifications of religion in Nepal. In ancient times the tribes of Nepal followed pagan gods similar to those worshipped by peoples the world over. These ancient Nepalese were of Mongol origins and were known as Bhotias. Their gods were based on primitive concepts of sun and moon, climate and weather conditions, beasts - both real and imaginary - and cloud structures. It was this last which deviated most greatly from the primitive god concepts held by other peoples.

This phase was followed by the Gutpa dynasty which ascribed divine powers to its founder, Ne-Muni, for whom Nepal is named, and to his descendants. After the collapse of the Gutpa dynasty, Buddhism took root in Nepal. However, rather than sweeping away the older god concepts, it merged with them. The result was that Buddhism in Nepal became a far different sort of religion than Buddhism in most other parts of the world.

Then, in 1768, the Brahmans and Rajputs were driven out of India by the Muslims. These two groups, known today as Gurkhas, pushed into Nepal and eventually conquered it. The Gurkhas were Hindus, and it wasn't long before their religion was assimilated into the Buddhist-dominated, but much combined, religion of Nepal.

It should be pointed out, Singh insisted, that the Buddhists, Hindus, and other religions neither strove to overcome one another nor held themselves aloof in an

attempt to maintain their purity. On the contrary, they merged to form a combined religion to which all Nepalese subscribe today. Singh would have liked to go into the nature and beauty of that combined religion at length, but he restrained himself because it was not the religion itself, but the art which had grown out of it with which we were concerned.

From the early pagan days, Nepalese worship involved all sorts of idols. As the more sophisticated religions absorbed the older ones, the religious sculpture became more elaborate, and more precious materials were used. By the time the Gurkhas and their religion had become assimilated, religious art and architecture had become something of a national pastime and the creating of it was a highly developed national skill.

Today there are 2,733 shrines in the valley of Nepal. Each one of these contains artworks of inestimable value. These sculptures and temple decorations and rugs and tapestries have a worth apart from the gold and silver, rubies and pearls and diamonds, precious silks and fine-spun velvets of which they are made. They represent a craftsmanship which outshines that of the Florentines. And they accurately reflect the collection of beliefs which make up the religion of Nepal.

It is this accuracy which sometimes shocks the Western visitor. From the time of its ancient origins, eroticism had played a large part in Nepalese religion. Their concepts of ancient gods ascribed great phallic powers to them. The Gutpas were "elephant men" - which is to say that they were god-men with large trunks between their legs. Buddhism in Nepal - as in China, Japan and India - contributed an exaggerated concept of the size of genitalia, both male and female, to the temple art of Nepal. And to these erotic god powers and outsize organs the Hindus contributed the sophistication of the *Kama Sutra*, their religion's ritual of love. The result is a variety of eroticism in the religious art of Nepal which is unmatched anywhere else in the world.

From my researches with O.R.G.Y., I already knew some of what Singh was telling me. I knew, for instance, that in the Buddhist temple art of Japan and China, the size of the sex organs is enlarged out of all proportion to the figures shown. Biological studies among the peoples of these countries, on the other hand, point up the fact that the actual size of Chinese and Japanese sex organs - both male and female - tends to be noticeably smaller than the world average. Psychologists have hypothesized that the actual smallness may be the subconscious reason for the artistic enlargement and exaggeration.

However, the Nepalese, with their strong Mongol bloodline, are not only more impressively endowed phallically than the Chinese and Japanese, but are also much larger in that area, on the average, than the Caucasian peoples of Europe and America. Yet the erotic temple art of Nepal succumbed to the Buddhist influence and stresses unrealistic size just as if the Nepalese were suffering from the inferiority complex of the other "pure" Buddhists.

Liberal sociologists will throw up their hands in horror at the idea of categorizing an ethnic group in terms of the size of its sex organs. They would prefer to think it a canard that the native African, for instance, has, on the average, a larger penis than the European. Admittedly, there has not been enough investigation in this area. But

what investigation there has been points to the truth of a difference in sizes of sex organs among the various ethnic groups.

Nor is the point being belabored in an effort to provide aid and comfort to racists. There is nothing to indicate that any one group is any "sexier" or more "animalistic" than another. Degrees of sexuality seem much the same the world over. And, genetically speaking, miscegenation tends to combine the strong points of the various peoples, rather than their weaknesses.

So the real question to be faced by both liberals and racists is why the very idea of a difference in sizes should be threatening. After all, the difference is almost never so great as to interfere with the sex act, or to harm either of the participating parties. Size is just one more way in which peoples may be different. And true tolerance lies in accepting differences, not in trying to ignore them, nor in exploiting them by perverting them into signs of inferiority.

This is exactly what the Nepalese have done, and done successfully. The Gurkhas who came from India were rather small phallically. The Bhotias, the original Nepalese of Mongol origin, were much larger. But today, the intermingling of the two peoples has resulted in a national average far closer to the Mongols than to the Indian invaders. And the two peoples were so thoroughly mixed that it is impossible to find anyone of Nepal whose blood is "pure" Gurkha or "pure" Mongol. Indeed, all the soldiers of Nepal are called "Gurkhas" today, but most are quite satisfactorily Bhotian beneath their loincloths.

If I seem to be spending a lot of time on this size business, it's because it's important to what Singh was telling me and to the role he would play in my quest for Dr. Nyet. Specifically, he was laying the groundwork to tell me about a particular idol which for the past 150 years had graced an ancient and hallowed temple in the Valley of Kathmandu. This idol was considered by Nepalese artists to be the most inspiring example of a jeweled sculpture representing the combined concepts of Nepalese religion in the country.

The idol stood eight feet from base to crown. Six of the eight feet were taken up by a figure sitting cross-legged. The figure was male and naked, and to the Western eye it might have looked like another example of a seated Buddha. But it wasn't. It was a figure which combined pagan beliefs with the king-god concept and the symbolism of both Hinduism and Buddhism.

This statue was made of solid gold. It was encrusted with rubies, emeralds, pearls, and diamonds. The fine etching of the musculature and facial features had been done in silver. Teeth, fingernails, and toenails were represented in platinum. Among the precious stones set into the gold were some of the most perfect gems in the world. Apart from its artistic value, the value of the precious metals and jewels used in the creation of the statue ran into the millions of dollars.

As in most Nepalese erotic religious art, the sex organ of the figure had been sculpted to portray a state of excitation. And, of course, it was exaggerated; It extended some four feet straight out from the figure itself, angling upward from between the crossed legs. The scrotum sac was the size of a regulation football.

Singh showed me a picture of the idol. "That's what it used to look like," he told me. "That's what it should look like. But it doesn't look that way any more."

"Why not?"

"Because," he pointed, "this part of the statue has been broken off and stolen."

"You mean they took his -?"

"Precisely, Mr. Victor. It was a crime against the people of Nepal, all the people. And the God of Nepal is most unhappy with his genitals missing!"

"Well, who wouldn't be?" I mused.

"A man gets over it." He reminded me gently of his own unfortunate condition. "But not a god."

"Just how did you -?" I was prompted to ask. "I mean, what happened to you to -?"

"You mean how did I become a eunuch, Mr. Victor? Oh, I don't mind talking about it. I didn't begin life this way, you know."

Singh went on to sketch in his background for me. Singh was born and raised in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. His father was a nobleman and minister at the court of the Maharajadhiraj, the supreme ruler of Nepal. Thus Singh was a member from birth of one of the most upper of upper castes.

This meant that traditionally there were only two careers he might pursue when he reached manhood - which in Nepal is really midadolescence. He might join the priesthood or the army. Singh chose the latter course.

He became a Gurkha by choice and was automatically made an officer because he was high-born. The Gurkhas are the finest force of fighting men in the world - bar none, and let the U.S. Marines argue as they will. They have a standing army of 45,000 men and a reserve force of between 70,000 and 80,000. They are professionals - even the reserves - and they pride themselves on their professionalism.

Traditionally, Gurkha units have served the British Empire. During the British occupation of India, it was the Gurkhas who provided the main muscle. They fought alongside the Tommies in the trenches in World War One and played a large part in the African and Italian campaigns in World War Two. In both wars more Victoria Crosses and other medals of valor were won by Gurkhas than by any other group in the British army.

After the Second World War, the British landed Gurkhas in Greece to cope with the revolution there. This campaign provided Singh with his first and last foreign action. It was mostly an antiguerrilla action, fought in the mountains, the kind of fighting for which Gurkhas are most admirably suited since they are natural and expert mountain fighters. It was the unorthodox sort of war in which the Gurkhas' skill with the *kukri*, the curved native knife which every Gurkha carries as standard equipment, played a paramount part. They became masters at staging fast, commando-style raids, slitting sentries' throats silently, spraying an encampment with a deadly crossfire, and vanishing back into the hills as suddenly as they'd come. It was on just such a raid that Singh's military career was brought to an abrupt end.

"It was ironic the way it happened," he said a bit ruefully. "It was all because I had acquired this taste for Greek olives."

Perhaps it was the three throats he silently slit in preparation for the raid which made Singh work up an appetite. In any case, the sight of Greek olives on the table in the mess tent during the massacre of the guerilla diners by the Gurkhas brought saliva to this mouth. So when his comrades made haste to disperse after the flash raid, Lieutenant Singh Huy-eva tarried to cross over to the table and fill his tunic pockets with the wrinkled fruit.

Now Gurkhas are usually very neat and thorough killers. But this time someone had slipped up. This time one of the Gurkhas had been sloppy. And one of the guerillas at the table was not quite dead.

Unfortunately, it was this one who lay slumping half under the large wooden table as Singh reached over him for the bowl of olives. The half-dead Greek reached up, eased Singh's *kukri* from his sash, and slashed out with the deadly accuracy of a veterinarian gelding a stallion. Singh immediately clubbed him to death with his riflebutt, but by then it was too late. The damage was done. Singh was a eunuch forevermore.

It's a tribute to the Gurkha spirit that he didn't even faint. He tied a tourniquet himself and managed to drag himself back to his unit. Here an army doctor had no choice but to complete the amputation the Greek had started. A few weeks later Singh was given an honorable discharge and shipped back to Kathmandu.

"It was a difficult time for me," Singh remembered. "Again I was faced with a choice of futures. Only this one was more drastic. I would look at the women of the court, know I could never possess one, and consider the advisability of slitting my throat. I almost did, but in the end I found solace and tranquility through meditating in the temple, and decided to go on living. I wanted my life to have purpose, and so it was that I decided upon the priesthood."

Once made, this choice had carried him far. He was both bright and dedicated, and shortly after his novitiate he was given the honor of being appointed to serve in the temple of the Raj Guru himself. The Raj Guru is the high priest of Nepal and as all-powerful in the religious sphere as the Maharajadhiraj is in the government. Over the years Singh had moved up in the hierarchy of the temple until, a few years back, he'd achieved the status of being the Raj Guru's right-hand man.

It was just about this time that the thefts of temple art had started. As they grew more frequent, the Raj Guru complained more and more to the Maharajadhiraj that the government had to do something about it. Finally, when this last theft of the priceless jeweled phallus with the intrinsic desecration by castration of the jeweled idol had occurred, the Raj Guru had decided to act himself. He had assigned Singh to investigate the thefts, and above all to retrieve the four-foot phallus and restore it to its proper place on the body of the grieving god.

So Singh had investigated, and the more he'd investigated, the deeper he'd been drawn into the orbit - or was it a web? - of S.M.U.T. From the very first, his sleuthing had uncovered a geographical pattern indicating that the thievery was the work of a band of raiders operating across the Nepal border from the Gangtok passage of India. This Gangtok passage is a narrow strip of land separating Nepal

from East Pakistan. Acting on this deduction, Singh took two courses of action. He prevailed upon the Maharajadhiraj to beef up the border guard facing the Gangtok passage, which effectively slowed the raids to a halt. And he disguised himself as a hill bandit and infiltrated the Gangtok area.

In this disguise, he had many adventures before he managed to trace down the gang responsible for the thefts. But once he had, the information he acquired only complicated the problem of retrieving the jeweled phallus. After stealing the temple art from Nepal, the gang had not only crossed back into India, but had kept going across the narrow Gangtok passage until they'd crossed the border of East Pakistan. It was here that they had a contact with an international fence who took the loot off their hands for a fragment of its actual value.

The complexities of tracing the idol further once Singh had established these facts stemmed from the delicate international relations between Nepal, India, and East Pakistan. Nepal is traditionally a country of determined isolationists. The mountains ringing it provide a natural geographic barrier to keep foreigners out. The attitude of the government is to maintain and strengthen this barrier. Thus the only part of Nepal which foreigners are allowed to visit is the Valley of Kathmandu. Officially, no outlander has ever set foot in any other part of Nepal. And, it's only since 1927 that even Kathmandu has been open to foreigners. At that time a narrow-gauge railway was built from the Indian border town of Raxaul to Kathmandu. Today special permission from the Maharajadhiraj himself is still required for the non-Nepalese to travel this railroad. And it is still the only means of transport into the country.

One of the reasons for this is that the Indians and the Nepalese still regard each other as natural enemies. This stems from the active role of the Gurkhas in maintaining British rule in India until the recent present. Another is the fact that Nepal still maintains cordial relations with Tibet, which it also borders, and the Indians consider Tibet a satellite of Red China and are fearful of Nepal being used as an invasion route by the Red Chinese.

Nor has Nepal particularly cordial relations with East Pakistan. There too the role of the Gurkhas in fighting for the British is still remembered bitterly. But East Pakistan is today far more concerned with its running quarrel with India to vent more than a historical dislike on Nepal. And the bitterness of this quarrel is such that there is no reciprocal extradition agreement between the two countries.

Thus Singh was faced with a gang of thieves which had shrewdly crossed two borders - the Nepal-India border, and the India-East Pakistan border - and involved three countries in their activities, three countries whose police refused to cooperate with each other. Realizing this, Singh gave up on the idea of trying to catch and prosecute the thieves. Instead, he decided to concentrate on the job of getting the priceless phallus back.

To do this, Singh went to East Pakistan and himself picked up the trail of the fence who had received the stolen works of art. The Raj Guru provided Singh with some minor sculptures to peddle to the fence. Passing himself off as a Gangtok hill bandit, Singh did this and then arranged to have the fence followed day and night. He led Singh back to India, clear across the country to New Delhi. Here an organization relieved the fence of his stolen goods. That organization was S.M.U.T.

Another year's work was involved before Singh was able to piece together the fantastic details of the S.M.U.T. operation. What it came to was this: the New Delhi chapter of S.M.U.T. was on the surface an organization pursuing two legitimate aims. One of these was a strong propaganda campaign against the birth-control program then being put into effect by the Indian government. No country in the world was suffering from the population explosion so much as India, but that didn't stop S.M.U.T. from actively opposing it on the grounds that it was a diabolical plan for the U.N. to take over India for the purpose of turning it into a colony of the U.S. which was supplying the bulk of the funds for the birth-control program as part of its imperialist plot to dominate India.

S.M.U.T.'s second public function in New Delhi was similar to its activities in the U.S. and other parts of the world. It was engaged in a crusade against pornography and pushing a drive to have all such objects, books, etc., confiscated and taken out of circulation. In India, where religion itself is interwoven with sex, there was much for S.M.U.T. to crusade against.

But Singh learned that these surface activities were also a smokescreen to obscure another activity of S.M.U.T. It was this activity which enabled S.M.U.T. to acquire the large sums of money needed to finance its operations around the world. It was this activity which lay behind the thefts of the jeweled phallus.

S.M.U.T. was the receiver of many priceless relics from temples all over Asia. All of these objects had one thing in common. They were all erotic in one way or another.

Having acquired them at a fraction of their real value from bands of thieves dealing with fences in many parts of Asia, S.M.U.T.'s real profit lay in disposing of them. This was done under the table in cities all over the world. But the really nefarious thing was that after it was done, S.M.U.T. would blow the whistle on the buyers for possessing pornographic items, have the local police confiscate them, and then have a front man step in claiming to be the real owner. Since the buyer had come into illegal possession, he would be hard put to prove his claim. Usually the police were anxious to dispose of the case, and "proof of ownership" took them off the hook and saved them the trouble of prosecuting. The S.M.U.T. front man would promise to take the offending object out of the country, and this was usually enough to smooth things out all around. And he would take it out of the country - to some other part of the world where the whole process would be repeated.

Singh learned that this was what had been done with the jeweled phallus. At the time that he learned it, the object had just been sold to a wealthy Texan, and the process of recovering it with the cooperation of an extremely crooked local sheriff had been about to begin. So Singh had wangled an assignment from S.M.U.T. to go to New York and dispose of some other items to undercover buyers. His thought had been that once in New York he might continue on to Texas and somehow recover the jeweled phallus.

But he was too late. The phallus had been reconfiscated and shipped out of the country by the time he arrived in New York. Learning this, he had no choice but to continue his role as a S.M.U.T. representative and try to find out where the object had been sent. In line with this, he had contacted the New York S.M.U.T. office and accepted the invitation to go along on the brothel raid. It was his thought that by

ingratiating himself in this way, he would be able to milk some information regarding the fate of the four-foot phallus.

It was quite a story, and it fit in with what I knew about S.M.U.T. as far as it went. But it didn't tell me how such Singh knew about me and my assignment. More important, it didn't explain *how* he knew, and so left open the question of how far I could trust him. I decided to bring my doubts out in the open.

"You said before that you know who I am and what my mission is," I told him. "What did you mean by that?"

"When I discovered the scope of S.M.U.T.'s activities, I became concerned as to what their real objective was. So, back in New Delhi, I made contact with an agent from Nepal and he relayed my concern back to the Maharajadhiraj. He took it up with the British envoy who is permanently attached to the court. As you know, Mr. Victor, our relations with the British are extremely close and extremely friendly. They go back for more than a century and are of mutual benefit. We supply Gurkha troops to the British and today they guarantee our borders against Indian aggression. Well, it seems that the British were already concerned about S.M.U.T. themselves. The word brought back to me from the Maharajadhiraj was to make contact with their secret agents and co-operate with them in every way possible. When I arranged to come to New York, the British consulted with the Americans and decided to fill me in on your involvement on the chance that our paths might cross and I might be of some help to you."

"Just what did they tell you about me?" I asked cautiously.

"That you are the man from O.R.G.Y. acting in the interests of your government. And that your purpose in infiltrating S.M.U.T. is to locate a Russian woman known as Dr. Nyet who defected from the Soviet to S.M.U.T. They did not tell me, however, just why this woman is so important."

"Well, we all have to keep some little secrets," I pointed out to Singh.

"Then you won't tell me, either. Very well. Despite your suspicions, I have some information which may be useful to you. You have been much closer to the lady you seek than you would ever dream."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have met her. Tonight. She was one of the three girls from S.M.U.T. whom you helped to escape from the brothel."

"I don't believe it! Why would they take the risk of sending her there?"

"To hide her. What better place? You see, they know you are a secret agent. They knew you were coming, and they suspected what you might be after."

"How could they know?"

"The Russians gave you away."

"The Russians? But that's crazy! I haven't had anything to do with the Russians."

"Not recently. That's true. But," Singh explained, "you have crossed swords with the N.K.V.D. in the past, haven't you?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"Then I'm afraid you and your government have underrated them. They had you under surveillance all the time you were in London. And they followed you to New York."

"But why would the Russians tell S.M.U.T. about me?"

"They didn't. But the Russian agent tailing you was in turn under surveillance by S.M.U.T. They just put two and two together, that's all."

"But why were they keeping tabs on the Russian?"

"Because he too is looking for Dr. Nyet."

"But if that's true," I said, puzzled, "then why did Crampdick take me to the brothel, Wasn't that leading me right to Dr. Nyet if she was there?"

"Because Crampdick is only a dupe. He knows nothing about you. Indeed, he knows nothing about the real objectives of S.M.U.T. He is perfectly sincere in fighting vice, and so he is useful to them. But both he and O'Steele were only foils in S.M.U.T.'s real game. Crampdick's leading you to the brothel was strictly his own idea. Once he'd done it, though, it provided the opportunity to have you eliminated."

"You mean the two hoods? Are they working for S.M.U.T. too? I thought they were on the other side."

"I'm only guessing," Singh admitted, "but I wouldn't be surprised if that vice ring is only another branch of S.M.U.T. Most of the gangsters involved in it probably don't even know that themselves. Probably the killers were perfectly sincere in believing you had to be murdered because of S.M.U.T.'s interference with their operation. And yet S.M.U.T. itself may have pulled the strings."

"But then why kill the others? Crampdick, O'Steele, yourself, even the girls?"

"We were all expendable if the menace you constitute could have been removed."

"What about Dr. Nyet? You say she was one of the girls. She wasn't expendable."

"No. That's true. But then you don't know for sure that they would have killed any of the girls. Maybe their orders were to simply abduct them and not to harm them. That would be my guess, anyway," Singh said.

"Which one of the three girls was Dr. Nyet?"

"I was unable to find out," Singh admitted.

"And did you find out who's really the top man in S.M.U.T. in New York?"

"No. All I'm sure of is that it's nobody obvious. It's none of the people who run the operation. They're all dupes dedicated to anti-vice. But their orders come from someone higher. He's probably the only one who's in on S.M.U.T.'s real purpose."

I couldn't think of anything else to say to Singh. My head was spinning with everything he'd told me. I told him good night, and just before I left we arranged to meet at the S.M.U.T. offices the next afternoon. It seemed the only place to renew both our quests.

I slept right through until an hour before the time we'd set to meet. Then I had a quick shower, got dressed, gulped down some coffee, and grabbed a cab to the midtown S.M.U.T. offices. Singh was already there, and Crampdick saw us together immediately.

"Do you know that Jock O'Steele was murdered last night?" Crampdick said agitatedly as soon as we entered his office.

We told him we knew about it.

"Every one of us who was in that dreadful place is in danger of our lives!" Crampdick continued. "That vice ring will stop at nothing to revenge itself on us. New York isn't safe. For that reason S.M.U.T. has made arrangements for all of us to leave the city."

Singh and I raised our eyebrows at each other. "Where are we to go?" Singh asked.

"Different places. I am going to Toronto myself. You are to return to New Delhi. The three young ladies will be dispersed elsewhere. Mr. Victor is to accompany you."

"Suppose I don't want to go to New Delhi?" I asked mildly.

"But you must. It's for your own safety. And it's an order. If you wish to remain in S.M.U.T., you must learn not to question orders, Mr. Victor."

"New Delhi it is, then," I agreed because at the moment I didn't have any other idea of how to pursue my search for Dr. Nyet and there seemed no point to severing the tenuous connection I'd made with S.M.U.T.

They worked fast. All the arrangements were made for us, and that very evening Singh and I were at Kennedy Airport, all set to leave for New Delhi. But while we were waiting I saw something that made me abruptly decide to change my plans.

I spotted one of the S.M.U.T. girls I'd helped escape the brothel. It was the Slavic-looking brunette who'd gone through the window with Crampdick the night before. She was standing in a line-up of people waiting at one of the gates for their plane to begin loading.

I checked the flight schedules. The plane she was waiting for was bound for Johannesburg, South Africa. I had to work fast.

I told Singh I wouldn't be going to New Delhi with him after all and waved away his questions. Fortunately, thanks to Putnam's foresight, my passport was validated for any destination I chose. Now I chose Johannesburg, bought a ticket for the same plane as the brunette, and made haste to board it.

Once in my seat, for a moment I thought I might have goofed. She wasn't aboard. I peered out the window and finally I spotted her. She was talking to a man at the gate. Her figure blocked the man's face. Then, as she turned away, I saw him. It was Peter Highman!

A moment later she boarded the plane. Shortly after that, another man came racing up just as they were removing the stairway. They held it for him, and he boarded the aircraft, much out of breath. He seemed to be looking for someone as he came down the aisle. He made such a point of not staring that I guessed that I

was the man he was seeking. But when he chose the seat behind the girl, it inspired me to twist my conclusion for my own ends.

The opportunity came about an hour after we were in the air. He got up and went to the men's room. I quickly moved to take the seat beside the girl.

"Do you recognize me?" I asked in a low tone.

"Why, yes," she said, sounding surprised. "I think I do. Aren't you the one who helped me last night? Mr. Crampdick's friend?"

"That's right. I'm Steve Victor. What's your name?"

"Ilona Tabori."

"Well, listen, Ilona. Listen carefully. We don't have much time to talk. That man in the seat behind you is following you. Don't ask me how I know. Just take my word for it."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"We're on the same side, aren't we? We both work for S.M.U.T. And we're in the same fix. We're both on the lam from New York because of what happened last night. Only I think that guy following you may be one of the bunch we're on the lam from."

"Is S.M.U.T. sending you to Salisbury, too?" she asked innocently.

Salisbury! So that was it. She wasn't going to Johannesburg to hide out there. She was going to change planes for Salisbury, the capital city of Rhodesia! "Yes," I lied. "They're sending me to Salisbury, too." Just then I spotted the door to the men's room opening. "He's coming back," I told Ilona. "I don't want him to see me with you. We'll have to talk later." I scurried back to my seat.

Once there, a swarm of questions buzzed through my mind. Who was the man following me? Which side did he represent? Why had S.M.U.T. sent Ilona to Rhodesia? How come she was talking to Peter Highman at the airport? What was Peter Highman's part in all this? Why had he murdered his wife and tried to murder me? Was it more than mere jealousy? And then there was the most important question of all:

Was Ilona Tabori really Dr. Nyet?

CHAPTER FIVE

At Johannesburg I arranged to continue on to Salisbury. Ilona Tabori was already booked through. It was no surprise to either of us to see the man who'd been following me board the plane at the last minute.

Fortunately, his kidneys were as weak as ever, and so I had a chance to exchange a few words with Ilona while he was in the john. It seemed wise not to let him see us together. If he hadn't connected us up together already, why make the connection for him?

During our short talk, Ilona gave me the name of the hotel she'd be staying at in Salisbury. I assured her that I'd contact her there. I suppose she took it for granted that the contact had to do with S.M.U.T. I would have liked to ask her some questions then about Peter Highman, but there was no time. I barely made it back to my seat before my urinary tail was back on the job. Not long after that we set down in Salisbury.

We landed in the middle of quiet chaos. It was late in the evening of November 11, 1965 - the day Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian D. Smith declared the country's independence from Great Britain and subjected four million Africans to rule by a small voting minority of the country's 172,000 white Europeans. In the wake of this announcement, as I left the airport by cab with the man who'd been following me in another cab close behind, the Salisbury I found was a city of silence broken by the sound of sudden gunfire, a city under surveillance by patrolling white soldiers trying to ferret out the secret meetings of liberty-minded black men risking their lives to plan for freedom in cellars and attics, a time-bomb of a city whose fuse was the policy of apartheid.

But there was another aspect to Salisbury which struck me as my cab crawled down the quiet streets, halted frequently by one of the patrols, then waved onward when it was determined that the driver and passenger were both white. This other aspect was of an extremely modern metropolis with a population of over 314,000 people, a population which had multiplied almost tenfold in less than thirty years. Yet the part of the city through which I was traveling showed no hint of the overcrowding which might have been expected to result from such a population increase. It was clean, with tall, white apartment buildings spaced well apart. Later I would learn that this view was typical only of the major portion of the city in which the white population lives. Like most modern African cities, Salisbury has its slums. And like Johannesburg, the slums of Salisbury are set off by the invisible line of apartheid and house only non-whites.

But the section through which I was traveling said something important about both the city and the country. It said that where there is gold, people live well. It said that the living standard is the gold standard in Rhodesia.

Gold!

Even today it is still the chief resource of Rhodesia. Before the country had a recorded history, it contained what was probably the greatest gold field of the ancient world. The ancient shafts used to mine this gold back then are still to be seen today in the are of the gold fields, an area which measures roughly 400 miles by 500 miles. Estimates by archeologists are that some four hundred million dollars in gold was taken from these mines in ancient times.

Yet these ancient miners barely scratched the surface. For some reason, they stopped digging up the gold long before the white man came to Rhodesia. Perhaps it was so abundant that it no longer had any great value in their economy. Or perhaps they had arrived at a philosophical stage beyond that of civilized man today, a philosophy that turned its back on slaving and killing for precious metal and took refuge in a more naturalistic tribal culture, a culture based on survival rather than competition.

In any case, such was the culture that the white man found when he came to Rhodesia. And so he plundered the land of its gold and used as his justification the fact that the natives hadn't developed their natural resources. And by "natural resources," he meant gold.

With his arrival, the natives developed their natural resources, all right. Actual slavery and semi-slavery forced them back down into the ancient mine shafts to bring up still more of the inexhaustible supply of gold. At gunpoint they flushed the gold from the bowels of the earth for their white masters. And the masters grew fat on the gold, and built houses and then cities, the greatest of which is Salisbury. And now Salisbury ruled the golden land and defied the British Empire to give the native Rhodesians any share of the city of Gold.

My hotel was smack in the middle of this city. Two white Rhodesian soldiers guarded the entrance. They checked my passport and other credentials and then waved me on through. I had wired ahead from Johannesburg for reservations, and the desk clerk had a room waiting for me. It was a large room, well-furnished and luxurious, and the bed looked soft and comfortable. As soon as the bellhop left, I locked the door behind him and started undressing. Right now, all I wanted was to get into that bed and get some much-needed sleep.

I took off my pants and suit-jacket and arranged them on a hanger I took from my suitcase. Then I crossed over to the closet to hang them up. Yawning, I opened the closet door and reached inside with the hanger.

"Mr. Victor, you are stepping on my foot!"

I jumped back and opened my eyes very wide. At first they saw nothing. Then they dropped and my jaw dropped with them as I saw the speaker.

Standing against the rear wall of the closet was an African pigmy. He was dressed in a neat blue suit with a maroon tie and a stiffly starched white shirt. The neatly shaped beard he sported left no doubt that he was a man and not a child. Nor was it only his ebony complexion that led me immediately to think of him as a

pigmy, rather than an ordinary midget. It was also the blowpipe he held in one hand grazing the clean-shaven cheek above his beard. I'd seen such weapons before. The darts they discharge are usually tipped with a deadly poison which kills on contact.

"What do you want?" After my initial jump, I wasn't about to make any more sudden moves. He looked as if he knew how to use that blowpipe.

"I wish to speak with you, Mr. Victor. Do not be afraid. I mean you no harm." His English was Oxford-perfect.

"Oh, no?" I eyed the blowpipe with obvious suspicion.

"I am holding this at the ready to protect us both from the threat of intruders. It is not meant to threaten you. It is meant to protect you. There are dangers here of which you are not yet aware. Indeed, tonight Salisbury is a city fraught with danger for all. But the danger to you, Mr. Victor, is more specific and greater than to most."

"How so?"

"Hang up your clothes, Mr. Victor, and sit down, and I will explain."

I did as he said and then perched on the edge of the bed. He came out of the closet and took a chair opposite me. I noticed that he picked a chair against the wall which enabled him to keep an eye on both the window and the door. He continued to hold the blowpipe like a cigarette from which he was about to take a puff.

"Now, who are you and what do you want?" I asked.

"Call me Lagula. I'm an agent of British Intelligence."

"Let me see your credentials."

"Don't be foolish, Mr. Victor. I don't walk around carrying identification. Even before today, a British agent who did that would simply be asking to be shot."

"Granted. But how can I be sure you are what you say you are?"

"Does the name Charles Putnam mean anything to you?"

"Yes, it does."

"I was told to say that Charles Putnam said you should trust me. And I was told to identify myself further by delivering a rather peculiar message to you from Mr. Putnam."

"What message?"

"I am to tell you that Gladys is on ice and the Beatle fans are waiting."

I grinned. Occasional humor from the usually dour Putnam never failed to surprise me. And the message certainly seemed to vouch for the fact that Lagula was legit. I said as much by the way I untensed and relaxed against the pillows on the bed.

"What does the message mean?" Lagula asked.

"Nothing really. It's a private joke. But it says I should trust you. So go ahead and fill me in on the situation."

"Very well, Mr. Victor. First of all, you were followed from the airport."

"I know that," I interrupted.

"Yes. But do you know who followed you?"

"Not really. I'd guess he's an agent of S.M.U.T. Or possibly of a New York vice ring out to get me because they think I'm an agent of S.M.U.T." I decided against going into the tie-in between the vice ring and S.M.U.T. It was too complex, and I wasn't sure I understood it myself.

"Wrong on both guesses, Mr. Victor. The man following you is a Russian agent. His name is Vlankov. British Intelligence has a long dossier on him. But what we don't know is why he is following you. Have you any idea?"

"No," I said noncommittally.

"Mr. Victor, you must confide in me. Has it to do with S.M.U.T.?"

"Then he must be following you because he thinks you have discovered a lead to the whereabouts of Dr. Nyet."

"You know about Dr. Nyet?"

"I know that you are searching for her, and I know that she is important. I was told no more than that. Nor are you obliged to tell me any more than that. But if I am to help you, I should know why your quest has brought you to Salisbury."

I opened up a little then. I told Lagula that I had narrowed the identification of Dr. Nyet down to three girls and that one of the girls was now in Salisbury. I told him that I planned to shake Vlankov the next day and arrange a private meeting with Ilona Tabori.

"A good plan - if you live until tomorrow," he told me calmly.

What a happy little man! "I'll do my best," I told him. "And if that's all for now, I'd like to get some sleep."

"It is not all, but the rest can wait until morning. You go on and sleep. I shall remain here and do my best to see that you remain alive."

"Suit yourself." I pulled off my shoes, socks and shirt, doused the light, and crawled under the covers. In the moonlight I could barely make out the pigmy still sitting in the chair and fondling his blowpipe. I thought drowsily that his silhouette looked somehow lewd, and then I drifted into a deep sleep.

I was awakened by a body falling across me. An instant later the overhead light went on. A machete was buried in the pillow an inch from my skull.

"What the hell!" I pushed out from under the body, turning it over as I did so. There was a dart neatly embedded in the exact center of the throat. I watched, dazed, as Lagula crossed the room to retrieve it.

When he'd done so without comment, I gathered my wits together and took a good look at the dead man. He was a large Caucasian in his late twenties or early thirties. He had the leather-skinned look of an outdoorsman. His clothing was the rough corduroy favored by white men who work in the Rhodesian bush country. I'd never seen him before in my life.

"Who is he?" I turned back to Lagula.

"I do not know. But I can guess who he serves."

"Who?"

"T.U.M.S."

"No thanks. Never use them," I told him. "I've got a cast-iron stomach."

"I beg your pardon?"

"That's quite all right. Go right ahead. Never squelch a belch. That's my motto."

"Mr. Victor, I seem to have lost the thread of this discussion. T.U.M.S. -"

"- for the tummy. I know all about it," I told him. "It's very popular back in the States. Pregnant women live on them."

"Somehow, Mr. Victor, I begin to suspect that we are talking about two different things. The T.U.M.S. to which I refer has nothing to do with abdominal complaints."

"Not Tums for the tummy?"

"No. Whatever that is, no."

"Oh." I puzzled over it for a moment. "Then what -?"

"T.U.M.S. - T-U-M-S," Lagula spelled it out, "are the initials of the organization which I believe sent this man to kill you. They stand for Tactical Underground Masters' Society."

"Ours is an age of initials," I observed. "They permeate our whole society and wreak havoc with conversation. It's a master agent indeed who can keep them all straight. But in any case, I never heard of this outfit. What's their game?"

"It's complicated. T.U.M.S. is a group of white men who banded together to try to restore a sort of company rule to Rhodesia. You see, from 1889 through 1923, the country was ruled by the British South Africa Company. Cecil Rhodes, for whom Rhodesia is named, was general manager of that company, and the stockholders gave him a free hand in ruling the country. It was very profitable for them, and under his rule the native population was completely enslaved. T.U.M.S. wants to set up a similar corporation along the same lines. Only this one wouldn't be subject to English control. It would be run from right here in Salisbury."

"But why should they want to kill me? I have nothing to do with Rhodesian politics."

"They are a peculiar organization - somewhat like your Ku Klux Klan back in America, only far more influential."

"Not *my* Ku Klux Klan!" I assured him.

"Your pardon. The implication was unintentional. I only meant to say that they are not only political terrorists, but that they also set themselves up as violent enforcers of a strict morality of their own devising. They have been known to whip a man for drinking too much. They have tarred and feathered certain "loose women" who may or may not have been actual prostitutes. They burned down a book store because it was selling copies of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*."

"I begin to see a connection," I said. "T.U.M.S. spelled backwards is -"

"S.M.U.T. Exactly! British Intelligence has indeed traced an undercover relationship between the two. We can't prove it, but we believe that T.U.M.S. has been smuggling gold out of Rhodesia to help finance S.M.U.T.'s operations around the world."

"And S.M.U.T. wants me killed. It figures," I mused. "Is this what you meant when you said I was in danger?" I asked Lagula. "Is this what you were protecting me against?"

"Yes. This and the Russians. And anybody else you may have antagonized."

"Well, thanks. But I'm afraid you've bitten off quite a hunk of trouble."

"Perhaps even more than you realize, Mr. Victor. T.U.M.S. has powerful connections in the Rhodesian government established yesterday. It is at odds with that government because it wishes it to go further than even Ian Smith dares. Still, it will support Smith until the British are completely out of the picture. After that, nobody knows. But there's always the chance they may try to seize control themselves. Meanwhile, they engage in terrorist activities - mainly against blacks, but also against whites - which the government can't condone, but finds it convenient not to stop."

"It's a hodgepodge all right," I yawned. "But I'm too tired to think about it now. I'd like to get back to bed. I'm damned if I'll sleep with a strange stiff, though. Any ideas about what we can do with him?"

"If you'll give me a hand, I suggest we just drop him out of the window to the gutter below."

"Isn't that likely to cause a fuss?"

"Not if we make sure nobody observes his descent. The way things are in Salisbury tonight, one more corpse should cause little concern."

After first making sure the street was clear of patrols, we did as Lagula suggested. The corpse didn't make too much noise when it hit the pavement; just a sort of soft squish. We drew the window curtains on its exit.

"I shall have to be leaving now, Mr. Victor," Lagula told me. "I think you will be relatively out of danger for a little while."

"Thanks for saving my life," I answered sincerely. "Thanks for everything."

"What are your plans for the afternoon?" he asked.

I told him I intended to contact Ilona Tabori.

"Don't do it by phone," he cautioned. "Your wire may be tapped, or hers, or both."

"I won't," I promised. "I'll go to her hotel."

"When you are through there, come and see me."

He handed me a card. "I may have further information for you."

I looked at the card. It identified Lagula as a tourist guide and gave his address. "Business can't be very good," I remarked.

"It's at a standstill," he admitted. "Good night, Mr. Victor. I will see you tomorrow."

"Good night."

I went back to bed. The machete was still stuck in the pillow. I shrugged, removed it, tossed it out the window, turned the pillow over, and went back to sleep. It was past noon when I awoke.

A half-hour or so later, I left my hotel. As I walked onto the street, I noticed three things. The first was that the corpse had been removed. The second was the thermometer on the wall just outside the hotel entrance. It read 102 degrees. I could well believe it. The sun hit my bare head like a sizzling mallet.

The third thing I noticed was the man following me. A quick look over my shoulder identified him as Vlankov, the Russian. On general principles, I decided to lose him.

It was easier decided than done. Vlankov had the tenacity of a Siberian bulldog. What his tailing technique lacked in subtlety, he more than made up for in stick-to-it-iveness. He stuck like glue.

I hopped in one end of a tram-car and out the other, and he was right behind me. I hailed a cab and took a sightseeing tour of the city, doubling and redoubling back on my route, and still when I hopped out of the cab at a traffic light, he was right behind me. I tried a tall office building, took an elevator up ten floors, a second one down eight, walked three flights of stairs to the basement, exited through the service entrance - and found Vlankov waiting for me. He trailed idly behind me by half a block as I sauntered up the street and tried to figure what to do next.

Inspiration came from a large truck parked at the curb of a side street down which I aimlessly turned. The truck was unloading some gook via a mechanical chute, a sort of a metallic conveyor belt running down into the cellar of a large building. On the spur of the moment, I hopped on the belt and was propelled downward. I landed on something that felt like soft, gooey mud. More of the same poured over me from the chute.

It was pitch black as I crawled away from the icky cascade. I couldn't feel any floor under me as I tried to lose myself in the darkness. It was like trying to move over toasted marshmallows, only the stuff was more powdery than that. Just about the time I settled into a squishy corner, as I'd expected, Vlankov came sliding down the chute. He wasn't taking any chances. There was a big, fat gun in his hand as his eyes tried to pierce the darkness.

Like me, he crawled out of the path of the torrent behind him. Fortunately for me, he crawled in the opposite direction. Once he was out of the beam of daylight coming through the delivery hole, I lost him in the blackness of the cellar.

I bided my time. There seemed no end to the stuff pouring down the chute. The bin - or whatever it was we were in - really began filling up. As it did, the chute retracted automatically so that it wouldn't be submerged by its cargo. I kept brushing the stuff off me climbing higher as it mounted around me. I presumed Vlankov was doing the same.

Finally the avalanche petered out, and the conveyor belt of the chute ground to a halt. I watched as the chute itself began retracting through the delivery hole. I waited until it had only a few more feet to go, and then I dived for it. The sockets of my arms strained as it pulled me back to the surface with it.

I stayed aboard right back into the van itself. At the last minute Vlankov grabbed the tail end of the chute and was also pulled to the surface. I let him claw his way to the open truck door and then brought my heel down hard on his fingers. I couldn't resist laughing in his face as he let go and fell to the gutter. He was clawing at the gun in his belt, his face red with rage as the van pulled away.

I rode the truck for about twenty minutes, then hopped out when it stopped for a traffic light. I noticed the lettering on the back of it for the first time as it pulled away. It said ACME FERTILIZER COMPANY. Just under that, in smaller print, was their slogan: *The Finest Processed Cow Dung in the Land!*

My nose confirmed it. James Bond smelled like this. The way the driver of the cab I hailed wrinkled up his face seconded the motion. I waved enough money at him to make him stop sniffing, and he hauled me to Ilona Tabori's hotel.

She was sunning herself on the balcony outside her room, and she spotted me as I got out of the cab. "Hello there," she called. "I'd just about given up on you. Come on up."

I went up.

"What happened to you?" She stepped back in astonishment as I came through the door.

"It's a long story."

"And a dirty one, from the looks of you," she opined. "What that dreadful odor?"

"What does it smell like?"

"Not roses, that's for sure."

"Answer the question."

"I'm too polite. I'd hate to tell you what it smells like."

"You guessed it. That's what it is, too."

"It makes me nostalgic. I used to be a farm girl." But the look on her face was more kittenish than nostalgic.

"Is that so? And where was that, Ilona?" I fished.

"When I was a kid."

"Not when. Where?"

"Do you like to ask questions, Mr. Victor?"

"I like to get answers."

"Later. I'll tell you the story of my life later. For now why don't you get out of those smelly clothes and take advantage of my shower in there." She pointed at the bathroom.

I took her up on the offer. While I was scalding the offal aroma off my hide in the stall shower, I thought about Ilona. She was a puzzle, all right. In the short-shorts and halter she'd been wearing to sun herself, she looked like a sexy volcano ready to erupt. And if I wasn't mistaken, I'd detected traces of bubbling lava in the throaty way she'd swapped dialogue with me. There was a certain steaminess in the way those near-black eyes had raked me over too.

She was a long drink of vodka, only two or three inches shorter than my six-foot-one. With that wild, long black hair and those ball-bearing hips, she looked more like a leggy invitation to love than a dedicated and anti-sex member of S.M.U.T. And if she was that anti-sex, how come she'd volunteered for the brothel bit in the first place?

I turned off the shower, dried myself, wrapped the bath-towel around me and rejoined Ilona. She raised an eyebrow at my appearance. "What the well-dressed man will wear," she commented.

"I'll get dressed if you want," I offered.

"You're kidding." She waved towards the balcony where she'd put my clothes to air out.

"So I won't get dressed." I sat down opposite her.

We looked at each other in silence for a long moment. It was the look of wrestlers sizing each other up just before they come to grips. The way I sized Ilona up, it was going to be quite a clinch.

The straps of her halter hung loosed in front of it, grazing the tips of her breasts. The tips were outlined clearly under the white material hugging them. Her shorts were of the same material, and just as tight. The way she was sitting, they creased into an erotic V bisected revealingly at the base. I sensed more than saw the faint, hungry pulsation there. She moved uncomfortably under my gaze and the flesh of her thighs quivered slightly.

"Why are you staring at me so?" Ilona finally broke the silence.

"No reason." I shrugged.

"Your towel says differently."

She was right. Her sexiness had affected me. There was a terrycloth tent rising from my lap. I felt like a schoolboy caught short without any textbooks behind which to hide the naughtiness of his aroused puberty.

"Why, Mr. Victor, you're blushing!"

"Sorry."

"Don't be. It's sweet. But very unexpected from a man of your experience. After all, you are the man from O.R.G.Y."

"Even Casanova was capable of being embarrassed in a specific situation. But how come you know about O.R.G.Y.?"

"Oh, word gets around," she said evasively.

"And," I added, "your frankness isn't really very consistent with your membership in S.M.U.T."

"Let's forget about S.M.U.T.," she cooed. "Let's just stick with the situation at hand." She unfolded her charms and sauntered over to me. "You're putting an awful strain on that towel," she murmured, standing over me. "The hotel isn't going to like it if you rip through." Her hand hung directly over the top of the tent, the fingers dangling loosely with a nervous sort of plucking motion.

I don't have to be hit over the head. The handiest portion of her anatomy as she stood in front of me was the *derrière* quivering under the white shorts. I encircled her with my arms and took a firm grip with both hands.

She plucked. The towel was tossed over her shoulder, and she knelt in front of me. Her hand stroked for a moment, and then she converted it into a fist. My own hands slid around the front of her body and dipped into the white halter, sliding past where her suntan ended and squeezing the hot, creamy whiteness of her breasts.

Ilona slip onto my lap then, grasping my manhood with the fast-fluttering muscles of her thighs. She was facing me with her eyes shining brightly, her lips moistly parted. The heat of her desire burned against me through the shorts with a steady, insistent pressure.

We kissed. Her mouth was a suction valve, the lips alive and hungry, the sharp, even teeth playing a teasing game of pleasure-pain, the tongue probing and retreating with a sensuality that was maddening. Throughout the kiss, I clawed at the waistband of her shorts, trying vainly to pull them down over the fleshiness of her writhing hips.

"No." Ilona stayed my hands. "First I want to -" She left the sentence unfinished as she slid back to the floor and once again knelt in front of me. Her black hair swept over my naked thighs as her mouth swooped down to capture the target she had selected.

She was no novice. She didn't rush things. Quick, exciting kisses covered the are and then her tongue darted at random, making me squirm. After a few moments of this, she slowed down, her lips fastening for longer periods here and there, her tongue laving me with slow, thorough relish. Her head came up for a moment, and her face was flushed with wantonness. Her hand grasped the base of my manhood and she bent her head once again. This time she seized the target directly.

My body arched like a strung bow and shook uncontrollably. My hands tangled in her hair and forced her head down farther and farther. Her tongue churned wildly. Her cheeks were taut hollows formed by the vacuum-like sipping of her lips. I could feel her very throat contract in preparation for the nectar she had brewed in me, the nectar at the boiling point and set to erupt. And then -

And then there was a sudden loud pounding at the door. For a moment my passion-fogged mind played tricks on me and I was back in London again with Gladys. But the passion subsided and I came back to reality as Ilona, startled, relinquished her erotic meal-in-the-making and half rose to her feet.

"What's that?" she exclaimed.

The knocking was repeated.

"Who is it?" she called.

No answer. Just more rapping.

"Go away!" Ilona responded, frustrated and annoyed.

But the pounding only grew louder.

She crossed over and opened the door. "There's no one here!" Puzzled, she threw the door wide open to demonstrate her conclusion to me.

However, I knew she was wrong. And a moment later, just after she closed the door, she knew it herself. "Eek!" she screamed as she turned around and her line of vision fell downward. "What's that?" She pointed.

"Lagula," I sighed. I had seen him walk softly between her legs to enter the room while she was still peering out the door. "What do you want?" I asked him.

"To save your life once again, Mr. Victor. You and the young lady must get out of this room immediately!"

"Your timing is really something," I grumbled. "I can well believe Putnam put you up to helping me. He has a sadistic habit of interrupting me at the most crucial times."

"My apologies, Mr. Victor. But believe me, it's a matter of life and death."

"Who is he?" Ilona demanded. The way her voice went up the scale showed she was just as outraged at the interruption as I was.

"I guess we don't have time for me to explain," I told her. "We'd better do as he says."

"Can't he wait five minutes until we -" Her hands slid down her body expressively.

"There is no time!" Lagula insisted. "Please! Come at once!"

"Come on," I echoed to Ilona reluctantly.

"Just a minute." She crossed over to a closet and grabbed a dress from a hanger.

I followed her example and started for my clothes out on the balcony.

"No time to dress!" Lagula insisted, tugging at my arm and starting to push me towards the door.

"But I'm stark naked! I can't go out like this," I protested.

"Wait. There's a poncho here. You can wear that." Ilona reached into the closet and tossed me the slicker. It was the kind of thing both men and women wear in Africa during the rainy season.

Her dress was on over the shorts and halter but still unbuttoned as Lagula urged us out of the room. He led us down a back staircase, and we left the hotel by the delivery entrance. Lagula had a car waiting, and Ilona and I got in the back while he took the wheel. He pulled the car around to the front of the hotel.

We were just in time to observe the effect of the fate we had so narrowly missed. A man hopped nimbly down from the balcony just above Ilona's, tossed an object into her room, and kept going to the balcony beneath hers, where he threw himself flat on the flagstones. A moment later there was an explosion, and the contents of Ilona's room spewed out over the street. I caught a faint whiff of manure as the clothes I'd been wearing wafted by in fragments overhead. We all ducked

instinctively, and when I raised my head, the man who had thrown the bomb had vanished. Lagula hit the gas pedal, and we too sped off in the wake of the explosion.

"I feel faint," Ilona said, grabbing at me with instinctive accuracy.

"So do I!" I told her, chopping at her wrist to make her loosen her grip. "What are you trying to do? Unman me?"

"Sorry." She eased up enough to allow the blood to circulate again. But she didn't let go. She seemed to find some sort of security in keeping her hold there.

"Was that T.U.M.S. again," I asked Lagula.

"Yes," he said, his nose, which just barely cleared the steering wheel, pressed to the windshield as he drove.

"You mean S.M.U.T.?" Ilona sounded shocked. But her emotions were all cross-circuited, and her response to the situation was a deliberately erotic tickling motion that sent a sexy shiver up my spine.

"Arrange the initials as you wish," Lagula shrugged. "It's all the same organization."

"But why should they try to kill me?" she asked, her hand starting to twitch frantically under the poncho I'd donned.

"It is Mr. Victor they want to kill," Lagula told her. "You just got in the way, and I imagine they consider you expendable."

"Oh, they do, do they?" Indignation made her squeeze hard again.

"Please," I moaned.

"Sorry!" She loosened her grip and patted me soothingly. "So I'm expendable, am I?" she muttered to herself. "Well, I'll show that dirty pig!" She released me and reached behind her back with both hands. The simple summer frock she'd grabbed before was still unbuttoned, and now she released the clasp of the halter she was wearing. She tossed it to the floor of the car and her breasts bobbed free, only half hidden by the loose material of the low-cut dress.

"What are you doing?" I exclaimed.

"Switching sides!" she told me with grim determination as she pulled her skirt up over her hips and unzipped her shorts. They fell to the floor with the halter as she pulled the skirt down again.

"But it isn't necessary to -" I started to say.

"I never do things halfway! If I'm going to betray Highman, I'm going to betray him in every sense!" Ilona took my hand, slipped it under her bodice, and pressed it hard against the straining of her breast.

"Highman? But what has he got to do with -?"

"Don't worry, I'm going to tell you." She reached under the poncho again and her hand slid down my belly. "I'm going to tell you everything. And I'm going to make love to you, too! That'll show that -!" Her legs began moving like feverish scissors.

"Aren't you being just a bit hypocritical?" I asked mildly. "After all, you were all set to make love before you had anything to get even with Highman about."

"That was different!" she insisted with typical feminine logic. "That was because you got me all excited when you came in smelling like that. That was because I couldn't control myself. It was strictly for my own pleasure, and it made me feel guilty. But this is for revenge, and I don't feel guilty at all." As if to drive home her point, she parted the folds of the poncho, straddled my lap, and neatly impaled herself.

"I see," I said, not seeing at all.

She stayed quite still for a while, thinking, her face reddening with obvious anger as she thought. I was somewhat torn myself. My natural instinct was to start moving like crazy, of course. But I didn't want to take a chance on sidetracking her from anything important she might be about to tell me about the S.M.U.T.-Nyet-Highman mishmash. I noticed Lagula adjusting his rear-view mirror and realized we were putting on a show for him. I wondered just how much of a show we might be putting on for the rest of the traffic we were passing. It was considerable at the moment, and we were crawling along in a jam reminiscent of mid-Manhattan at theatre time. I decided the situation was ridiculous.

"Look, why don't we postpone this until later?" I suggested to Ilona. "And you can tell me what you know about Highman and the rest now."

"Are you rejecting me?" she asked indignantly. "Because if you are, I won't tell you a damn thing!"

"Tact, Mr. Victor," Lagula murmured from the front seat. "Hell hath no fury like a lady scorned. But be sure it is Highman's scorn which remains uppermost in her mind."

"Of course I'm not rejecting you," I assured Ilona soothingly. I bounced a bit to prove my enthusiasm.

"Ahh!" she responded, bouncing right along with me. "Well then, let me start at the beginning." She nuzzled my lips with her breast, and I opened them to receive it. "I was seventeen years old when I first met Peter Highman." Her womanhood continued to clutch at me rhythmically as she spoke. "That was two years ago and -"

"What's going on here?" A voice at the top of the side window of the car interrupted her.

I looked up. Lagula had been forced to stop the car at an intersection. And now a Salisbury traffic cop was peering into the back.

"It's all right officer," Lagula said quickly. "The gentleman and the lady are engaged. She is merely sitting on his lap to see better out the back window."

"Yes," Ilona agreed without missing one twitching movement under the cover provided by her skirt. "Is there a law against sitting on my fiancé's lap? If not, then why are you bothering us?"

"Sorry." The cop touched his cap apologetically and moved away.

Our car began inching again as Ilona resumed her story. "At that time, two years ago," she said, digging her nails into the back of my neck and slamming down on

my thighs with each frantic downstroke of her passion, "I was oversexed. Now, you may find that hard to believe, but I really was."

"I don't find it hard to believe," I panted, straining to keep up with her.

"At least Peter Highman said I was oversexed," she said, enveloping me with ripple after ripple of her sudden climax, "and I believed him."

"Few are the things upon which he and I might agree," I grunted, keeping a firm grip on her hips so that she wouldn't bounce right through the roof. "But -"

"Yes, I believed him. Ahh! Ahh! Ooh! Aah! That was good! Now again!" She had subsided momentarily, but then she started again, moving in slow, churning circles. "After all, I was a simple farm girl in Hungary when he found me."

"How did he happen to find you?" I was biting hard on my lip and concentrating on the pain to keep from ending matters before Ilona finished her story. By now I had realized that it was sex which was making her so loquacious, and I couldn't risk turning her off.

"By sticking a pitchfork into a haystack. I was - umm - playing there with a field hand. That pitchfork stabbed me right in my bare sinner. I still have the scar. You want to see it?" Ilona was innovating now, rocking with a gentle motion that caressed the entire length of my manhood.

"Maybe later," I told her, tensing my muscles for the same reason I was biting my lip. "Go on with your story. What was Highman doing on a Hungarian farm in the first place?"

"Working for S.M.U.T."

Now, that was interesting! I had thought Highman's connection with S.M.U.T. was only because his wife headed up a chapter. Now it seemed that he was much more deeply involved. Not just in New York - which I'd guessed after seeing him with Ilona at the airport - but internationally. "How does an outfit like S.M.U.T. operate in an Iron Curtain country like Hungary?" I wondered aloud, still rocking right along with Ilona.

"Underground," she told me. "But with a lot of infiltration in the government, too. The Commies are notoriously moralistic, you know. That makes it easy for S.M.U.T. For instance, Highman had been sent to Hungary because the illegitimate birth rate had dropped. I don't understand that even now. I mean, you'd think S.M.U.T. would be pleased by that. But they weren't. Highman said they weren't because the reason was that more birth-control devices were being used, and while there were fewer illicit conceptions, there was lots more immoral love-making." Ilona wriggled tantalizingly, as if to demonstrate her point. "Anyway, Highman was sent to my district to organize small watchdog groups that would put a stop to it and punish the people involved. Highman spoke perfect Hungarian; you couldn't tell him from a native. And in the hinterlands where we were, party control is kind of loose, so he didn't have any trouble getting things organized. I guess the neighbors must have told him I had a sort of reputation as a wild kid in the area, and so he led a bunch of them down to give me a lesson in morality. As I said, they caught me in the act." She contracted expertly, as if to show me that it had been, and still was, quite an act.

I bit through my lip and somehow managed to hold back the release of my passion. "Go on," I said through clenched teeth.

"Well, when they caught me that day, they insisted that my father give me a strapping in front of the whole bunch of them. I was already pretty sore from the pitchfork, but that didn't stop dear old Dad. He pulled up my skirt and pulled down my panties and beat me with his belt while the whole bunch of them watched. I'll never forget their faces. They may have been spouting morals, but there wasn't a man there who wasn't itching to lay hands on my bare and twitching *derrière*." Her *derrière* was just as bare and just as twitching under the poncho now.

"Including Highman?" I asked, unable to stop myself from thrusting upward in response to her tight-clutching movements.

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Including Highman-Highman-Highman!" She was off again, her body shaken by one tremor after another of release.

It was much harder now - more difficult, I mean - not to join her. A sudden cramp in my leg was the only thing that enabled me to control myself. It was agonizing, and I concentrated on the pain, purposely prolonging it to reduce the boiling point of my lust.

"Highman, yes." She subsided, not through, but merely resting a moment between explosions. "He tried to look stern while my father was beating me, but I caught him licking his lips. And I wasn't surprised when he came to see me a few days later. Still, I was pretty young and naive. I believed him when he said he only wanted to help me fight my own evil passions."

"Evidently he wasn't too successful," I observed, made conscious of the fact that her oven of love was starting to rekindle itself.

"Surprisingly enough, at first he was. I bought the reform bit hook line and sinker. He almost had me shouting Hungarian hallelujahs!"

"Hallelujah!" I echoed, pounding the exclamation point home.

"Did you call, Mr. Victor?" Lagula asked.

"No. Just keep driving."

"You too," Ilona instructed me, her enthusiasm mounting again. "So anyway," she continued, "Highman converted me to the S.M.U.T. cause. And just about the time he had me really convinced, something must have exploded inside him because he raped me."

"That's hard to swallow."

"Goodness, you're not supposed to!" She pulled her breast from my lips in alarm.

"I meant your being raped."

"Oh. Well, he did. One night in the parlor after my folks had gone to bed. He was explaining to me how evil sex is, and he went into detail. The more detail he went into, the more excited he got. Then he told me he was going to show me exactly what he meant so I wouldn't forget it, and he raped me."

"Why didn't you scream if your parents were home?"

"Because I liked it," she admitted frankly. "And I still do. Don't you?" She was galloping frantically now.

"Yes." I felt like I was being raped myself. Fortunately, the cramp in my leg had gotten worse.

"He liked it, too," Ilona went on. "He liked it so much that he took me with him when he went back to New York. He arranged for forged papers for me and everything. And when we got there, he got me into S.M.U.T. so we'd have a legitimate excuse to see each other. It was sort of a cover-up for our affair. He was married, you see. I didn't know that until after we got to New York. He didn't tell me until then. But unless he's a bigger liar than I think, he and his wife didn't have much of a sex relationship. If they did, my hat's off to him, because he was insatiable when it came to making love to me."

"He was telling the truth," I assured her. "But just where does he stand with S.M.U.T.?"

"Very high. He was the one who gave the orders in New York. Only one or two people in S.M.U.T. knew that. His wife wasn't one of them, either. He played the henpecked cipher with her. But he arranged things through S.M.U.T. so that she was always kept busy when he wanted to be with me. And he wanted to be with me a lot."

"I can understand that," I panted, realizing that I couldn't possibly hold out much longer.

"I was crazy about him, and I thought he was crazy about me. But after that bomb today, I am beginning to wonder. And then there was that business with him having S.M.U.T. send me to that brothel. He said that it would be good experience, that I'd learn some new innovations there. But I didn't learn anything I didn't already know. And I think I know enough to get by all right. Don't you?"

"Yeah," I gasked. "Did Highman assign the other two girls to the brothel, too?"

"The order came down from him."

"Did you know the other two?"

"Not before we went to the brothel. But I didn't get to know them there, either. We were kept too busy."

"Do you know if one of them was Russian?"

"Russian? Search me." She relaxed her muscles to expedite the search. "All I know is," she admitted bitterly, "that Highman must have been getting tired of me. I wasn't willing to face it until today. See, I was really hung up on him. But looking back, it's clear. First the brothel, then sending me here to get rid of me. And that cock-and-bull story he told me at the airport about how he was doing it for my own good because my life was in danger in New York. Oh, he promised to join me here all right, but he sure didn't mention anything about having somebody throw a bomb at me."

"Are you sure he was behind that?"

"If your pinky pal is right, he was. He's pretty high up in S.M.U.T. - more than just running the New York operation. So if S.M.U.T. was behind that bomb, I'm

pretty damn sure Highman must have known about it. I guess I'm expendable, all right," she added bitterly. "Well, I'll just show him!"

She was going like a Mixmaster again. Her laugh announced the beginning of a new series of joyous releases. This time I couldn't stop myself from joining her. Some six laughs later I slammed up so hard that she cried out, and we went off the deep end together in a burst of cataclysmic ecstasy.

"We have arrived," Lagula announced, pulling the car into the curb.

"I'll say we have!" I agreed, still up on Cloud Nine.

"I mean we're here."

"Oh, yes!" Ilona agreed. "Yes-yes-yes!"

"Don't you want to get out and rest?" Lagula asked. "The long ride must have tired you."

"Now that you mention it, I'm exhausted," I admitted.

"Wouldn't you like to stretch your legs?"

"I've been doing that for the past hour," Ilona said.

"He said 'stretch'," I explained.

"Oh. Well, all right." Amazingly, she sounded reluctant.

But she rearranged her dress anyway. I adjusted my poncho, and the three of us got out of the car. We were in front of a small hut on the outskirts of Salisbury. It was Lagula's home, and he ran much of his business as a tourist guide from there. Twilight was descending as he showed us inside.

He fixed us something to eat, and we hit the sack early. Not the same sack. Three different ones. But it wasn't long before Ilona crawled into mine. I was beginning to appreciate why Highman might have wanted to ditch her. She was insatiable. If he'd had her as a steady diet, she must have been quite a drain on his energies. I couldn't see how he'd had any strength left for S.M.U.T. It was one whale of a night, and it was nearly dawn before she allowed me to get any sleep at all.

It was close to noon when Lagula shook me awake. Ilona was still deep in dreamland. I envied her.

"I thought I might drive you back to your hotel to get some clothes," Lagula suggested.

"Yeah. I guess we'll have to do that. I can't keep running around in a poncho."

"Shall I wake the young lady?"

"Please don't." I shuddered at the thought of facing any more of Ilona's passion. "Let her sleep until we get back."

The trip took us about an hour. We made better time than the afternoon before because it was still early and the traffic wasn't so heavy. I figured Ilona must still be asleep when we returned.

But she wasn't asleep. She wasn't awake, either. She was lying in the middle of the room, a shambles now, like a naked, broken doll. Her body was horribly

twisted, the neck broken. Yet there were no visible marks on her. Only her face, with its horrible grimace, seemed to speak of violence. Only her hands, like claws frozen to her ears, gave some hint of the agony through which she must have gone. Only her staring eyes gave mute testimony to the final terror of her death.

As with Prudence Highman, there was no clue to what had killed Ilona. But the twisted flesh was enough to make me sure of one thing. Peter Highman was in Rhodesia, all right. He'd kept his date with his mistress. And somehow, he'd murdered her.

He meant to murder me, too. I was positive of that. He'd kill me as he'd killed Prudence and Ilona if he got the chance. He'd do it in the same way. There wouldn't be a shred of evidence, yet somehow he'd contrive my death.

The question was how?

CHAPTER SIX

There seemed no sense in waiting around for the answer, which would undoubtedly be a killer. Lagula's hut had been fingered, and Ilona's corpse said it was no longer a safe place to hide out. I said as much to my pigmy friend, and he agreed. We left everything as it was and headed back into the center of Salisbury.

"You can't go back to your hotel," Lagula advised. "They'll be waiting for a chance to kill you there."

"Then where can we go?"

"I don't know. I'm trying to think. I'd take you into the native district with me, but your skin would make you too conspicuous there."

"Maybe we should split up," I suggested. "You'd be safer among your people."

"My people?" Lagula chuckled. "You think that because my skin and theirs are black that they are my people. Do you always deal in appearances, Mr. Victor?"

"What do you mean?" I was nettled because he seemed to be laughing at my naiveté.

"While my sympathies are with them, the black men of Salisbury are not my people," Lagula explained. "We African pigmys are not Negroids as other native Africans are. We are Negrillos, smaller in stature and lighter in color than the average African. The Negrillos originally migrated to Africa from South Asia. But when you speak of 'my people' in that would-be definite way, not even all Negrillos share such a kinship. The two largest pigmy tribes are the Batwas who settled in the great bend of the Congo and the Akkas who live along the banks of the upper Nile. Neither group considers the other 'their people'. And I bear no relationship to either. 'My people' were the Balulwa tribe, a small and select group who lived for centuries in the Rhodesian bush."

"Were?" I fastened on the word. "What happened to them?"

"They are almost extinct by now. Earthquakes destroyed our village and nearly all the inhabitants some twenty years ago. Only two families survived. Mine and one other. Since then the old people have died off. The only ones left are myself - unfortunately an only child - and the offspring of the other family. And the other family had no sons. Only five daughters. Thus it fell to me to see to it that the Balulwa were perpetuated. Since the five girls are all attractive, that wasn't hard to do at first. But their sexual demands grew insatiable and eventually I was forced to flee from them. That's when I came to Salisbury and then went from there to

England for my education. But those five girls of the Bulalwa tribe are still waiting there for my return."

"And will you go back?"

"Eventually. It is my duty. And my pleasure, I admit. But when I go back it will be to die. The five of them will kill me with their lust."

"There are worse ways to go," I told him.

Amen! It came in the form of a sudden burst of tommygun fire, a rat-a-tat demonstration of one of those "worse ways". We'd been cruising up a long avenue and traffic was light when the limousine shot out of a side street and the fusillade was loosed at us. Only our hairpin-triggered reflexes kept Lagula and I from proving the point with our lives. Only by diving for the floorboards of the car did we avoid instant corpsedom.

With Lagula no longer at the wheel, the car spun out of control. It mounted the sidewalk, cut a neat swath across a wide lawn, and kept going to shear down a row of low bushes. Throughout, the other car paralleled our erratic route in the gutter and continued to spray us with bullets.

"Jump!" Lagula yelled as we kept going toward the brick wall of a house. "And run in different directions," he added.

It made sense. If we separated, the gunman would have to split his fire between two moving targets. We'd each have a better chance of getting away that way, too, since the car couldn't follow us both.

As it turned out, fortunately, it couldn't follow either one of us. I dived out and turned a somersault. As I came up, I saw Lagula skidding across the turf on his belly. He sprang up and kept going in a crouching run, bullets kicking up the dirt at his heels, but not catching up with him before he'd gained the shelter of a hedgerow. By the time he vanished behind the hedges, I was sprinting around the side of the house our car had rammed. The killer car was unable to stay with either of us and it roared off in frustration.

I kept running, cutting through backyards and alleys, avoiding the streets. After a half-hour or so of this, I was pretty winded. I slowed and cautiously went down a long driveway leading to another avenue. As I neared the mouth of it, I saw something that made me flatten myself against the garage wall and stare across the street.

A car was just easing into the curb there. I recognized the car. It was the same one which had just been spewing hot lead at me.

It stopped and a man got out of the back. He was carrying - so help me! - a violin case. I didn't have to think back to Jimmy Cagney movies to know this was no Heifetz toting a Stradivarius to Carnegie Hall. It was corny, but there it was. Chicago had shipped a reincarnation of Al Capone to sunny, fun-filled Salisbury.

The man stepped aside and another man emerged from the rear of the car. He too was carrying something, a large package of some sort; I couldn't tell what it was. The first man climbed back inside and the car pulled away. The other, left standing on the sidewalk, turned to watch it go, and I saw his face clearly for the first time.

It was Peter Highman!

My mind was still absorbing this as Highman hefted his package and strolled up the walk to the building entrance opposite which the car had dropped him. It was a small building, and when I approached it myself after he'd gone inside, I saw that it housed a sort of combination museum and art gallery. A group of five or six well-dressed people entered it after Highman, and I fell in close behind him.

I followed them as they moved slowly through a series of cubicles with paintings, sculptures, and other art objects arranged in them. There was no sign of Highman. Off one of the cubicles, I noticed a staircase leading to the second floor of the gallery. I broke away from the group and mounted it.

I found myself in a large lecture hall. It was empty. At the far end was another door like the one leading from the staircase. I crossed over and opened it. Now I was in a narrow hallway. There were two or three doors leading off it, and from the open transom above one of them I heard voices. One of the voices was Highman's.

"Make sure it doesn't get to the airport until the last possible moment," Highman was saying. "But remember that it must be on that midnight plane."

"But where will I keep it until then?" the other voice asked. "It's too big for the safe. And I can't have a thing like this just lying around."

In Salisbury, the doors are old-fashioned - conveniently old-fashioned. They have keyholes - nice, big keyholes. This door outside which I was eavesdropping was no exception. So I made the most of it, squashing my nose against the door as I stooped to peer into the room.

The object they were discussing was on the desk directly opposite the keyhole. I had a perfect view of it. I recognized it immediately, although I'd never seen it before. I would have known it anywhere from Singh Huy-eva's description. It was the gold-encrusted, multi-jeweled phallus which had been hacked off the Nepalese god-idol!

I could appreciate that they had a problem. Four feet of jeweled genitals isn't exactly an easy thing to hide. I mean, they couldn't exactly play "Purloined Letter" with it, or anything like that. And it was too valuable to just shove in a drawer or a closet somewhere.

But Highman had an answer. "There's a lock on the door of that refrigerator down in the basement, isn't there? Well, put it in there. And don't let the key out of your possession."

I jumped away from the door and flattened myself against the wall as they came out. They didn't see me. When they'd passed through the door leading to the lecture auditorium at the end of the hallway, I slipped into the room they'd left.

I thought I'd have a fast look around and see what I could see. I saw nothing. It was a perfectly ordinary office with nothing incriminating around. Its interest had dimmed with the departure of the jeweled phallus in Highman's arms.

I glanced out the window just in time to see Highman leave the building. My face broke into a grin as I saw Vlankov, the Russian agent, step out of a doorway and start to tail Highman down the street. The grin grew wider - if a bit puzzled - as I spotted a third man fall in all too casually behind Vlankov and start to tail him.

I didn't waste any time trying to figure this third man's angle. I figured I'd better get out of the office before Highman's playmate returned. But what should my next move be?

On the spur of the moment, I came up with an answer. I decided to have a try at retrieving that jeweled phallus. If I succeeded, I'd be doing Singh a favor, I'd be bugging S.M.U.T., and I'd be forcing Highman to come to me - which just might be a step in the direction of finding Dr. Nyet.

I found my way down to the basement without any trouble. The refrigerator unit was right there, in plain sight, a large steel box that looked impregnable. It was fastened with a stout chain and a heavy lock.

What now? I might have been able to blow it with nitro, but - wouldn't you know it? - I'd left my nitro in my other suit or someplace. If I'd had the skill, maybe I could have picked the lock. But, despite my checkered background, that was one knack I hadn't picked up. Well then, there was always muscle.

I found a poker hanging beside the furnace. Made of iron, it was a natural crowbar. It was too thick to work into the lock itself, but I just managed to wedge it between the links of the chain. Teeth gritting, muscles bulging, adrenal glands pumping, I strained with all my might. Finally, something gave. Me.

I stood back and looked at the goddamn chain. All my prying hadn't opened it so much as a centimeter. I cursed and smacked the crowbar against its linky teeth. That would teach it to kick sand in my face! But it only grinned back at me, undented by the blow.

My money-back guarantee from Charles Atlas having run out, I decided there was no point in my continuing to rail against my physical shortcomings. I faced the fact that I wasn't going to be able to bust the chain. And I put my brain to work to find another way of getting at the refrigerated genitalia. The thing to do, I finally decided, was to find the man with the key, wave my gun under his schnozzola, and make him unlock the freezebox. I decided to wait for nightfall when the gallery would presumably be closed and there wouldn't be anybody around to get in my way. So I curled up behind the unlit furnace and dozed the afternoon away.

When I woke up, the small cellar window told me it was night. I went upstairs and found the gallery closed and darkened as I had figured it would be. I guessed the man with the key was probably in his office on the second floor, and so I kept going up the stairs. But I was in for a surprise as I came out the stairway door and into the auditorium.

The lecture hall was filled with people. The man I was seeking wasn't hard to find. He was put on the platform with two other speakers. I stuck my gun back inside my jacket and took a seat in the rear of the hall. Obviously I couldn't deal with him until whatever was going on was over.

It seemed to be some sort of a debate on art. My target was evidently the moderator. The audience was all-white, well-dressed, and definitely upper-crust Rhodesian. The first speaker went to some lengths, citing all sorts of arbitrary classical standards, to prove that primitive art isn't art at all. His point seemed to me to be more politically racist than artistically valid. Summed up, he was trying to prove that only Caucasians were capable of producing real art. The rhetorical

convolutions he went through in attempting to place all African and Oriental art beyond the pale were worthy of a Governor Wallace. But the audience was obviously with him. It was the time for rationales from every area of white Rhodesian life to justify the steps being inaugurated by the government to insure that black Rhodesians were kept barred from all those lily-white provinces - the art world included - which the whites had earmarked for their own.

Loud applause greeted the end of this diatribe. Then the moderator introduced the second speaker. Right off the bat it was obvious that he was licked.

First of all, he had a decidedly English university accent which wasn't calculated to please a crowd which so obviously identified with the slurred Rhodesian speech pattern of the previous speaker. Second, his voice was unfortunately high-pitched, an easy target for laughter. And third of all, the audience was in no mood to listen to any point of view, no matter how moderately presented, which might suggest that the native art of the land was a cultural asset to be treasured. Still, they didn't resort to catcalls to shut him up.

They didn't have to. It only took two men and a trick that carried me back to my high school days to accomplish that. It's a trick that depends on the speaker using a p.a. system, which was the case here. Two people sitting in opposite corners of the room take ordinary, half-filled water glasses and make sure the inner parts of the rims are thoroughly wet. Then they each run the tip of one finger around this inner rim. The result is a crossfire of unheard high-frequency sound-waves which are picked up by the microphone. Then, when the speaker talks into the mike, his voice is transmitted as a garbled series of high beeps and his words are lost in a senseless caterwaul. As a kid, I'd been involved in pulling off this stunt once or twice when a high-school assembly speaker had been particularly dull. Now two grown men were doing it to drown out a speaker pleading for artistic appreciation and tolerance.

Watching the speaker turn red and start to stutter, I had a vague intuition about this business of using sound as a weapon. Somehow it seemed to tie in with all the gadgets which were activated by sound back in Highman's apartment in New York. I couldn't pin the connection down, but I sensed that the tactic somehow tied Highman in with what was happening in the lecture hall. Could it also have something to do, I wondered hazily, with the murders of Ilona Tabori and Prudence Highman?

The thought skipped away from the fringe of my mind as the speaker stopped trying to fight the interference. Angrily, but with dignity, he left the platform and strode down the center aisle toward the exit. The moderator hurried after him as if to apologize for what had happened.

I kept my eye on the moderator. He was the one I was after. He was the man with the key.

As he followed the speaker out the door, I got to my feet. But two men beat me to the exit. They were the same two men who'd pulled off the water-glass trick. I was right on their heels as they followed the speaker and the moderator down the stairs.

Talking in low, soothing tones which I couldn't overhear, the moderator led the speaker to a side door and opened it for him. He escorted him outside, to a narrow

alley running alongside the building. Then he stood aside with a small smile on his face as the two men caught up with the speaker and stopped him.

The moderator was still standing there, a sort of disinterested observer, when I got outside. The two men were giving the speaker a silent, thorough going-over. I figured I'd get to them in a minute. First things first, and I wanted that key. So I shoved my gun against the moderator's belly and politely asked him to hand it over.

It happened so fast that he must have drawn at the same instant. The muzzle of his gun prodded me in the ribs even as I spoke. Only he didn't waste words as I had. He pulled the trigger.

The split-second realization that he'd do just that was all that saved me. Even as his finger tightened on the trigger, my hand was coming down with a karate chop to his wrist that sent the gun spinning from his grasp. The bullet grazed my hip, the pain searing but momentary. Still, it was just enough to give him the opportunity to make a grab for my gun.

We struggled for it. We sank to our knees, then rolled in the dust, neither of us able to make the other relinquish his grip on the revolver. Then one of the other men left off beating the speaker to come to my opponent's aid.

He stomped hard on my wrist, and the gun went flying. He started to dive after it, but I managed to stick out my foot and trip him up. The moderator was on top of me now, but I slammed my elbow into his throat and he fell back gasping.

The other bully-boy lunged to get into the act. But the gutsy speaker still had enough strength left to hinder him by sinking his teeth into the calf of his leg. I spotted the other gun lying on the ground where the moderator had dropped it. The first hoodlum saw it at the same moment. He dived for the gun and I dived for his groin. My head slammed into it, and I grabbed the gun. Now the moderator grabbed me from behind and we were again struggling for possession of a weapon. Only this time the gun went off.

The fight continued, but the sound of the shot drew footsteps both from inside the gallery and from the street beyond the alley. Before they reached us, one of the muscle-men clipped me from behind and the moderator wrenched the gun from my grasp. The speaker made a dive for him, and the moderator drilled a neat little hole right in the center of his forehead. Then he turned the gun on me and coolly drew a bead. From the sound of their footsteps, the crowd from both directions was almost on us now. Obviously he intended to finish me off before any more witnesses appeared on the scene.

Then, suddenly, his jaw dropped open in agonized surprise and he pitched forward on his face. In the moonlight I saw a small dart sticking out of the back of his neck. Immediately, there were people thronging around.

I wanted to elbow through them to his body. I wanted to get that key. But the two hoods had kept their heads in the sudden confusion, and now they were steadfastly flanking the corpse. They seemed to be known to many in the crowd, and they were explaining that I was a murderer and urging the others to grab me before I escaped.

Getting the key was out. I'd be lucky to get away with my skin. I could sense the building of a lynching fervor. I spotted one of the guns on the ground and swooped

down to pick it up. Holding it on the crowd, I backed away from them. A sudden tug at my elbow almost gave me a heart attack, but then I looked down and saw that it was Lagula. He grinned up at me, and I grinned back my thanks for his once again having saved my life.

"This way," he told me.

I followed him into the bushes and then paced him as he started to run. Once again I found myself fleeing through backyards, over fences, and through alleys. Our route took us finally across the color line and into the native section of the city. Lagula paused at the rear of a rundown house and led me inside through a cellar window. A tall Negro boy of about sixteen was waiting for us in a back bin of the cellar. There was a single candle on the table in front of him and he was bent over a book. As we entered, I made out the title. It was H. G. Wells' *Outline of History*.

"This is Manzu." Lagula introduced the boy. "And this is Mr. Steve Victor from America," he told him.

We exchanged greetings.

"Manzu is the great-grandson of a famous Bantu emperor," Lagula added. "He is a leader in the fight against white oppression."

"A fight which is as old as history," the boy said, tapping the book.

"A fight which has to end," I said, suddenly very conscious of being white.

"Or to be won," the boy said meaningfully. Then he took off his glasses and his face relaxed into a smile. "But please don't misunderstand, Mr. Victor. I don't want black supremacy any more than white. It's simply that we are being forced into a corner where the battle may have to be joined by just such absolutes. Only by the white man's voluntarily relinquishing his immoral hold over the black man can such harsh terms of battle be avoided. In Rhodesia, the Negro has nothing to relinquish, and so no position from which to compromise. Thus it is the white man who must give if he wishes to avoid total race war. Perhaps in your country it is different, but here-

"It is different," I interrupted him. "But there are similarities as well. The problem isn't as clearcut, since non-whites are only ten percent of our population. The danger of forcing them into a rigid anti-white position may not be great, but it is present."

"I should have warned you about Manzu," Lagula said, laughing. "He is a living discussion trap. Sometimes I think he would like to talk the white Rhodesians into giving back the country."

"If only that were possible," Manzu sighed.

"So young, and so serious." Lagula laughed again.

"Freedom" - Manzu pointed to the book again - "has always been a young man's battle throughout history."

"And the young men of Rhodesia are engaged in it constantly," Lagula said, turning to me. "It is they who saved your life on two occasions, Mr. Victor. The first time it was Manzu himself."

"What do you mean?"

"It was nothing." Manzu looked embarrassed. "I work as an attendant in the men's room of the hotel to which you came. Shortly before your arrival, I overheard two members of T.U.M.S. making plans to assassinate you in your bed. The Liberation Front for which I work still maintains some contacts with British agents. I alerted them, and they arranged for Lagula here to warn and protect you."

"He also arranged to smuggle me into your room before you got there," Lagula added. "And the second time it was a confederate of Manzu's, a waiter at the hotel where Miss Tabori was staying, who eavesdropped on a conversation and learned that T.U.M.S. expected you to contact her and had a man waiting to throw a bomb into her room when he was sure that you were there."

"Unfortunately," Manzu said with genuine regret, "we didn't find out that Lagula's house was to be a target until it was too late to save the lady."

"How is it," I wondered, "that the T.U.M.S. people allow themselves to be heard in the presence of African natives? You'd think they'd be more cautious."

"You have to understand their idiotic premises," Manzu said. "To the white man we are virtually invisible. He never looks at us, and so he never sees us. We are simply servants - no, less than servants - more a part of a decor. One doesn't hesitate to speak in the presence of a chair or a drapery. Not only has prejudice conditioned the white man to think of us as mindless, but as without senses, incapable of hearing, or at least of assimilating what we hear. It is a paradox. It is this very thing which we are fighting, and yet it is the same thing which is one of our greatest weapons in the fight. That a men's room attendant - a mere boy who will still be a boy when he is sixty - might have the mentality to even think of freedom is inconceivable to the self-brainwashed segregationists. That he might fight for it is completely beyond their ken. 'Good niggers' like that aren't the ones making the trouble, they say. It's only the savage, criminal types who dope themselves up and go berserk who cause the trouble."

"And yet they are beginning to wake up," Lagula pointed out. "Recently, I begin to see fear in their eyes. A black man who walks six blocks in a white neighborhood will be stopped six times by six separate patrols and searched for weapons. And I have heard whites warning each other not to turn their backs on their houseboys."

"Yes, that is true," Manzu granted. "It is a period of transition from the complete lack of awareness of contempt to fear. But the old habits are still strong with the whites. When they're not confronted by the situation directly, they forget themselves. They forget the threat. They forget us. And they speak freely when common sense ought to dictate otherwise because we are not yet really thinking human beings in their estimation."

"And so Manzu is dedicated to opening their eyes," Lagula told me. "To a limited extent the British endorse his objectives, and-"

"It's far too limited an extent!" Manzu said with some anger. "Why don't they send us guns? Why?"

"And so," Lagula continued, smiling at Manzu fondly as he overrode his interruption, "as a British agent, I frequently find Manzu's cooperation invaluable. His comrades are the source of much of my information."

"Were they responsible for your timely arrival tonight?" I asked.

"No. That was sheer chance. I was in the area looking for you when I heard the gunshot. I arrived just in time to see your predicament and end it with my blowpipe."

"Again, my thanks," I said. "To both of you," I added.

"You are welcome, Mr. Victor." Lagula glanced at his wristwatch. "But it is time for us to end discussion and consider some information which should interest you, Mr. Victor. It concerns the Russian agent, Vlankov. An agent of British Intelligence has been keeping him under surveillance."

"I should have guessed," I laughed. So that was who the third man was in the espionage procession led by Highman when I spotted him leaving the art gallery.

"This afternoon Vlankov followed a man who was in the car that tried to kill us," Lagula, continued, not knowing that I already knew this. "Vlankov followed the man to his hotel. When the man went down to dinner, Vlankov sneaked into his room. He didn't stay too long, but when he came out he abandoned his watch on the man and went to an airline office where he purchased a ticket. British Intelligence believes that he found something in the man's room which pointed to the girl we are all seeking. They think there's a possibility that he may have stumbled on something telling him where the girl is. They thought you might want to follow up on this and be on the plane with Vlankov. And so they took the liberty of arranging it." Lagula handed me an airline ticket.

I looked at it. It was for the weekly flight from Salisbury to Ankara, in Turkey. It was stamped for a twelve o'clock departure that night.

I remembered then how insistent Highman had been that the jeweled phallus go out on a midnight flight. It must be the same plane. But Vlankov wasn't interested in the phallus. What could he have discovered in Highman's room to make him take that plane? Might he really have found a hot lead to the whereabouts of Dr. Nyet?

"Yes," I told Lagula. "I definitely want to be on that plane."

"I thought you would. But there are problems. The two men you fought with back at the art gallery are both staunch members of T.U.M.S. I recognized them. Our paths have crossed before. By now their organization must be scouring the town to find you - and probably me as well. And they've probably convinced the authorities that you're a murderer, so the police will be after us, too." Lagula glanced at his watch again. "We have an hour to get you to the airport. It's only a half-hour ride, but we have to allow for interference. However, I scheduled our departure for now so that you wouldn't get there too early. Hanging around there would only increase your chances of being picked up."

While Lagula was speaking, Manzu had crossed the cellar to a window looking out on the street. Now he pulled aside the curtains and peered out, "It is there," he announced.

"Manzu arranged for a car for us," Lagula told me.

"It is a stolen car," Manzu apologized. "But it's the best I could do on such short notice and it shouldn't be missed before morning."

I thanked Manzu once again for everything he had done, wished him luck, and followed Lagula out to the car. "I'll drive," he said, getting in behind the wheel. "I know the back streets to take us into the vicinity of the airport. That way we'll avoid the highway patrols. If we're lucky, we may not run into any of the street patrols."

We were lucky - right up until almost the end of our ride. Then, with the lights of the airport in sight, sirens sounded from an intersection ahead of us and two official-looking lorries pulled up in such a way as to block the road. As uniformed men poured out of the lorries, a third siren sounded from behind us.

Lagula hit the brake, and a moment later we were pedestrians again. Shouts to halt were followed by bullets as we plunged into the underbrush fringing the road. Lagula pulled me down behind some bushes almost immediately, and we stayed absolutely quiet as the searchers thrashed the brush around us.

After a while they moved off and Lagula whispered in my ear. "They won't give up," he said. "They've got the area staked out now, probably cordoned off, and pretty soon they'll start a systematic search. We have to act before they do. And we have to act fast if you're going to catch that plane."

"What should we do?" I whispered back.

"I'm going to draw them off. When I do, you climb over that fence across the road. There's a landing strip there, and if you follow it you'll come to the main part of the airfield."

"But what about you?" I asked, genuinely concerned for this little man I'd come to like so much and value so highly.

"I'm going to lead them right back that way," Lagula whispered, pointing behind him.

"What's there?"

"Nothing." He grinned. "And everything," he added. "It's jungle. The nice thing about being a savage," he said sardonically, "is that I'm much more capable of coping with the jungle than our so-called civilized playmates out there. Once I've distracted them from you, I'll have no trouble losing them."

"And then what will you do?"

"Head straight back to the Bulalwa country. I've become too prominent in Salisbury. My usefulness as an agent there is over. So I'll just go home to my five brides. If you should encounter British Intelligence in your travels, you might convey my resignation."

"Will do," I promised. "But I hate to see you taking a chance like this for me."

"The real danger comes later." He rolled his eyes. "Surviving the white Rhodesians is as nothing compared with the problem of surviving the greetings of

five frustrated Bulalwa ladies." The pigmy clasped my hand. "Goodbye, Mr. Victor," he said.

"Goodbye, Lagula." I watched him crawl off, thinking to myself that there went the biggest man I'd ever met. I'd have bet my right arm that he was more than enough of a man to satisfy the quintet awaiting his return. And even if I was wrong, I knew he'd die trying.

Five minutes passed, and there were shouts and gunfire off to my right. I waited for the running footsteps to pass my hiding place, and then I dashed across the road and started climbing the fence. I was almost to the top when I heard Lagula's mocking laugh. There were loud curses then, and more gunfire, but as I dropped down to the ground on the other side, that indomitable, nose-thumbing laugh sounded again and I was reassured. If Lagula had gotten this far, I was sure he'd make it all right.

I trotted down the airstrip, past the hangars, and to the back of the main terminal building. I peered through the window. There were Rhodesian cops checking people's papers at all the entrances and exits. I looked at my watch - 11:55. I ducked around to the other side of the terminal building and spotted a plane loading there. I was just in time to see Vlankov boarding it. A moment later one of the uniformed cargo attendants climbed into the belly of the plane with a large package. From the shape and size of the package, I guessed the last-minute delivery of the Nepalese phallus had been accomplished despite the demise of the man originally entrusted to see to it. Highman must have managed to make other arrangements.

I waited until I saw the ground crew start to remove the wheeled staircase from the side of the plane before I dashed up to it. "You're late, sir," the stewardess chided me as she checked my ticket. "You almost

missed your flight."

"Sorry. I was unavoidably detained," I told her.

"That's all right." She smiled pleasantly. "Seat number eight in the back, please."

Vlankov's face was a study in astonishment as he saw me coming down the aisle. I gave him a jaunty wave, and the astonishment changed to a snarl. I didn't see what he had to be miffed about. He'd been tailing me, and now it looked like I was tailing him. Turnabout is fair play, isn't it?

I half-dozed through most of the flight to Ankara. When we landed, I didn't even try to pretend I wasn't following Vlankov. I didn't have to follow him far. He never left the airport terminal.

When he first sat down there, I strolled over to the window looking out on the field and divided my attention between the plane from which we'd just disembarked and Vlankov. The package I'd spotted before was unloaded and placed to one side of the field with some other cargo. But most of the cargo was loaded on hand trucks and wheeled around to the back of the terminal. I guessed that the package was slated to be transferred to another plane.

I was right. About two hours later Vlankov got up, and at the same moment a baggage handler fetched the package and loaded it into another plane which had just

taxied up to pick up passengers. Vlankov was now standing at the line-up waiting for a gate to open. The sign above the gate said *Flight 317-Oslo*.

I was lucky. There was plenty of space available on the plane. I bought a ticket without any trouble and followed Vlankov aboard.

When we landed in Oslo, I began to think that Vlankov and I might be involved in a game of tag on a global scale. Again he didn't leave the airport. Again the package I thought contained the phallus was held with other cargo waiting to be loaded on other planes.

A half-hour in the Oslo airport, and then Vlankov got up abruptly. A flight for Stockholm had just been announced. He joined the queue at the gate where it was loading. Why hadn't he gone directly from Ankara to Stockholm, I wondered. There were more flights out of there to Stockholm than there were to Oslo. Still, I didn't have time to figure it out. I hurried to buy a ticket on the Stockholm flight.

Standing at the ticket counter, I watched Vlankov pass through the gate and board the plane. With my ticket in my hand, I started to follow him. But as I came through the gate, I spotted the package I'd been watching still sitting off to one side of the field.

"Has all the cargo been loaded on this plane?" I asked the stewardess.

"Yes, sir." She looked at me curiously.

"Thanks. I've changed my mind." I turned away and went back into the airport terminal. There was no sign of Vlankov.

That being the case, there was nothing else to do but watch the package. So I watched it for about a half-hour. Then it was plucked up by a hand truck and loaded onto an old four-motor, bucket-seat plane that had just wheeled up alongside the building.

I inquired at the information desk and found out that the plane was bound for Hammerfest, a seaport on the Barents Sea at the northern tip of Norway. It was mainly used for cargo, I was told, but it did carry passengers when the need arose. At most only a few people took advantage of this during any one flight. And tonight, my informant believed, there was only one ticket sold for the flight.

I made it two. I boarded the rickety crate and strapped myself into a bucket seat facing the door. It was almost take-off time when Vlankov finally showed. The look on his face was priceless when he saw me sitting there waiting for him.

"Do you play gin rummy?" I asked.

"*Da.*"

"Then it's a pity we don't have any cards," I sighed.

"I do." He produced a deck and riffled the cards in my face challengingly.

"Deal," I told him as the plane taxied down the runway and into the air.

"Why are you following me?" he asked as I dealt.

"Why were you following me back in Salisbury?" I countered.

"I asked you first."

"Shut up and play cards," I advised him.

He was silent for a few moments, but then he spoke again. "We will bury you!" he quoted, sneering.

"Gin." I smiled at him pleasantly.

He scored it, bared his teeth, and re-dealt the pasteboards. "Look," he took a different tone. "We are together in this. No matter what our feelings about the struggle between Russia and America, can't we put them aside and cooperate for the good of both our countries? Why shouldn't we share what we know?"

"Great idea. You first," I told him.

"But since you are following me," he said smoothly, "it is you who should speak first. That will prove your good intentions."

"All right." I readily agreed. "The fact is that I've stumbled on something which should really be of vital interest to you."

"Da? Da?"

"It's just this," I told him conspiratorially. "Russians are the world's lousiest gin rummy players."

"Capitalist imperial pig!" he sputtered.

"Gin." I proved my point.

"You American's don't really want world peace," he muttered, dealing again.

"And you Russians do?" I picked up my cards and discarded one.

"Da! We do want peace."

"Sure you do." I picked up his discard and fitted it neatly into my hand. "A piece of Europe, a piece of Southeast Asia, a piece here, and a piece there."

"That is your whole trouble. You are not serious peoples" He was angry now and pounding the table. "How can we cooperate if you won't be serious? What are you doing?" he asked as I spread my cards out face up on the table once again.

"Gin."

"Nyet!" he protested.

"Da," I assured him. "And schneider."

By the time we bumped down in Hammerfest, I'd taken him three more games. The last two were played in total silence. He'd run out of both propositions and insults, and I'd run out of wisecracks. Still, his parting rationale as we disembarked from the plane is worth noting as an interesting example of typical Commie doublethink.

"Gin is a bourgeois game," he sneered. "Chess is the only pastime really worthy of the intellect. And we Russians are traditionally the chess champions of the world."

"That's because you have so many Russian pawns," I told him.

Vlankov snorted and walked on ahead of me across the small airstrip to the shed-like structure which served as the airport terminal for Hammerfest. Evidently, as far as he was concerned, our brief - and on the whole rather unsatisfactory - rapport was at an end. He wasn't going to resign himself to my company; he was back on the job and about to do his best to lose me.

He went straight to the men's room and entered it. When I started to follow him in, I discovered he'd locked the door behind him. It figured the men's room would have a window and Vlankov might attempt to shake me that way. I found a window farther along the same wall and stuck my head out so I'd be able to see him if he did.

My view also took in a cargo receiving platform. I spotted a female figure in a parka standing in front of it, waiting to pick up something. Then, as I watched, she was handed a package and started to walk back toward the entrance to the terminal. The package was the same one I'd been tailing since Salisbury.

Just as the female figure entered the building, Vlankov started to hoist himself out the window of the men's room. I pulled my head back in so he wouldn't see me watching him. He scurried around the side of the building to the front.

The girl stopped to talk to the porter, and for the first time I got a good look at her face. Right then I decided to let Vlankov go. I guessed that we'd meet later, he and I; the trails we were following were merging, only now I judged myself to be one jump ahead of him. You see, I recognized the girl who'd claimed the package.

I didn't know her name, but I'd have known that pixie-face and Bardot-style bosom anywhere. The last time I'd seen her she'd been crawling out of a pile of garbage at the bottom of a dumb-waiter shaft in that brothel back in New York. She was the second of the S.M.U.T. girls I'd helped escape that night, and she might well be Dr. Nyet.

As a matter of fact, there seemed a better than fifty-fifty chance that she might be the elusive Russian scientist. Her short-cropped black hair, her age and general appearance all tallied with the description - inadequate as it was - given me by Putnam back in London. And the fact that she and the priceless jeweled phallus should both be in this remote corner of the world seemed to indicate that S.M.U.T. valued her highly.

I approached her before she reached the exit. "Hello," I greeted her.

Her eyes widened with surprise as she recognized me. "What are you doing here?" she exclaimed.

"Meeting you," I told her. "Highman sent me," I added, improvising.

"He did? But why?"

"To be your bodyguard." I went on to embellish the lie. "You've got a Russian agent on your back. Highman sent me to deal with him for you. You're pretty important to Highman, you know."

"What you mean is that I'm pretty important to S.M.U.T.," she corrected me. "Well then, I guess you'd better come along and guard the body, Mr.-?"

"Victor. Steve Victor. And I've never seen a body more worth guarding." I added gallantly.

"That doesn't sound like S.M.U.T. talk."

"Well, it certainly wasn't meant to be," I said indignantly.

"I mean it isn't the sort of talk that seems to reflect the attitude of our organization."

"Sorry. I forget myself sometimes. But I'm really very dedicated to our cause."

"Oh, I'm sure you must be. Highman wouldn't have sent you unless he was absolutely sure of your loyalty."

"Let me carry that." I took the package from her and followed her out to a line of horse-drawn sleds waiting in front of the building. As she was climbing into one of them and giving the driver an address, I stole a look at the address on the label of the package. It was addressed to "Olga Duval, General Delivery, Hammerfest Airport, Hammerfest, Norway."

Olga! It was a good Russian name, even if the last name was French. As I climbed into the cab of the sled after her, it occurred to me that I might very well have found both the missing phallus and Dr. Nyet!

It was a long drive on a short day. The days are always short in Norway. My watch said it was only four o'clock, but it was dark when we reached our destination. I followed Olga out of the sled into the darkness.

There was a house, but she bypassed it. I followed her across a strand of beach, ducking my head against the biting cold sea wind. She led the way to a dock with a rowboat tied to it. She indicated for me to take the oars and then guided me on the course she wanted to take.

I didn't have to row far. It was only about fifteen minutes later that we reached a fishing sloop rocking at anchor. Olga tied up alongside a rope ladder and climbed aboard the vessel. I followed her.

She led the way across the deck and down a dark gangway to a cabin. She closed the door behind us. The room was pitch black. Olga lit a match and held it to the wick of a kerosene lamp. The lamp flared up and the room took on a shadowy substance. Olga screamed!

Loud! It was a scream filled with both shock and fear. I pushed around from behind her to see what had caused it.

There was my old buddy Vlankov again. He was sitting in an armchair facing us. There was a sort of half-smile on his face, as if he were greeting someone. And neatly embedded in the center of his forehead was a small hatchet. He was dead as dead could be.

Who'll bury whom? I thought to myself as I crossed over to the corpse. I reached out and pulled the hatchet free. I studied it for a moment.

I'd seen a hatchet like this only once before in my life. A friend of mine on the San Francisco police force had shown it to me. It was a souvenir from the Chinatown Tong Wars of the early 1900s. It had the same sort of carefully honed

blade, expertly carved hilt and delicate balance as this one. The balance was important because, as my friend had explained, such hatchets were made to be thrown. And from the split in Vlankov's skull, this one had been thrown with deadly accuracy.

"Are there any Chinese aboard this boat?" I asked Olga.

"No." She was still shaking, and it seemed hard for her to get even the one word out.

Despite her denial, I was sure that there had been a Chinese aboard. He'd eliminated the Russians from the search for Dr. Nyet at what might have been the very moment before Vlankov found her. And if Olga was Dr. Nyet, he'd sure as hell eliminate the American competition as soon as he could.

Which meant, kiddies, that I was the most likely guy to get the axe!

CHAPTER SEVEN

Was Olga really Dr. Nyet? How could I find out for sure without giving my hand away? If she was, just how much control over her secret anti-birth control pill formula had she already turned over to S.M.U.T.?

These were the problems I pondered while drifting off to sleep that first night on the boat. When I awoke the next morning, the ship was already under way and I had no choice but to be carried along and hope for developments to provide some of the answers.

The captain and crew were Norwegian. As far as I could tell, there were no Chinese aboard. Not wanting to arouse Olga's suspicions by asking questions, I nosed around among the crew to see if I could find out our destination.

As far as they knew, we were heading for the fishing grounds just north of the Isle of Edge, a Norwegian possession well within the Arctic Circle. By the second day out there were murmurings among these experienced seamen about the change in our course which they had detected. They knew it had something to do with Olga's and my being aboard as passengers. They hadn't guessed any more than that. But by the third day our destination had become obvious to most of them. By then we had crossed into the Arctic Ocean and the only thing between us and the North Pole was Franz Josef Land.

The crew was both angry and frightened when they realized this, and with justification. Franz Josef Land is an arctic archipelago located well beyond the point where the Barents Sea turns into the Arctic Ocean. It is ringed with icebergs and frequently the ocean access to it is frozen over solid. While our ship had some ice-cutting equipment, it wasn't fully fitted out as an ice-cutter, and venturing into such waters was dangerous. That was one reason for the crew's resentment. The second reason was that Franz Josef Land is Russian territory.

The Russians use it for weather observation and other scientific surveys. The suspicion is that they may be using it as a secret atomic testing ground, but this is unproven. On occasion they have fired on Norwegian fishing vessels which have strayed in sight of their shore settlement. This has happened perhaps half a dozen times over the years since the end of World War Two, when they threw out the score of Norse trappers in Franz Josef Land and set up an official government outpost.

Our ship, however, wasn't fired upon. We gave a wide berth to the official Russian settlement and approached the archipelago from the northwest. A boat was lowered, and Olga and I and the package containing the jeweled phallus were rowed

ashore. Watching it row away, I had the feeling we had been abandoned on a deserted iceberg.

But such wasn't the case. Behind us there was movement under what looked like a pile of snow, and a man appeared. As he came up to greet us, I saw that he was an Eskimo. Odd! Franz Josef Land has no native population. That much I knew about it both from casual reading and from my conversations with the crew aboard the boat. The nomadic drift of the Eskimos across the centuries had never taken them this far east.

He and Olga spoke in a language I couldn't understand. Then we followed him back toward the snowbank from which he'd emerged. There was a snow-covered wooden trapdoor in it, and he led the way underground. Here we found a fairly comfortable setup with walls of wood and utilitarian furnishings. It was as far advanced over the typical Eskimo igloo as a palace is over a stable. I wondered at that, too.

Once inside, he said something to Olga and she turned to translate it for me. "He says that he was told to expect only one person," she explained. "And he apologizes for the meagerness of his hospitality. If he had known you were coming, he would have tried to arrange a more sumptuous welcome."

I grinned at the Eskimo. "Tell him it's all right and I appreciate his accepting me as a guest at all," I instructed Olga.

After she'd translated, he returned my grin and came directly in front of me. "Ungilak." He pointed at his chest and repeated it: "Ungilak."

I caught on and pointed at my own chest. "Steve," I told him. "Steve."

"Steve." He leveled his finger at me and his grin widened. "Steve." Then he turned back to Olga and spoke for a few moments in his native tongue.

"He says we should wait until morning to start for the S.M.U.T. settlement," she told me, taking it for granted that I knew all about the settlement. "He thinks we should eat and sleep first."

As I was nodding agreement to this, an Eskimo girl appeared. She was quite lovely, with exotic features and one of the most genuine and pleasant smiles I've ever seen. There was more finger-pointing, and I gathered her name was Poli. Olga explained that she was Ungilak's wife.

Dinner, it seemed, was to be a special treat. Ungilak had slain a polar bear in preparation for Olga's arrival, and now we were to have polar bear steaks. Poli went to prepare them. Note that I say "prepare," and not "cook." What she did was season the meat with some sort of fish oil, and then serve it to us raw. But polar bear meat is kind of tough, and it's Eskimo etiquette for the Eskimo wife to pre-chew it for her husband and guests. Politely, Poli served me first.

By the time she got through softening it up for me, I'd hate to tell you what that polar bear steak looked like. Somehow, I managed to keep from gagging, swallowed some of it, and nodded my head that it was good. Then Poli masticated Ungilak's meat and passed it to him. He tore into it with gusto. Being a woman, Olga was served last, but being a guest, she too had her meat pre-chewed by Poli. She evidently had some prior knowledge of what was coming, for she didn't flinch

and managed to get a good part of her steak down. When Poli had finished her own piece, she hospitably offered us seconds. But we both declined.

Then it was time to turn in. The underground hut was partitioned off, and Olga and I were each given cubicles to ourselves. But I wasn't by myself for long.

Just after I turned in, Ungilak appeared in the entryway to my cubicle. He was holding an oil-lamp - another jarring note beyond the Eskimo culture - and leading Poli by the hand. There was a polar bearskin loosely draped around Poli, and from the glimpses of flesh I caught, I guessed she wasn't wearing anything underneath it. Those glimpses also told me that she'd anointed her flesh with seal oil, the Chanel Number 5 of Eskimo women which to a non-Eskimo nose smells as rancid and erotically unstimulating as it sounds. She giggled as Ungilak pushed her into the room.

I knew enough about Eskimos to realize what was afoot. It's an integral part of their concept of hospitality to offer their wives to a visitor for the night. The visitor's carnal use of the wife is tacitly understood. And to refuse such an offer is a great insult to the host, an insult so great indeed that the Eskimo is quite likely to kill the guest who spurns such an offer.

It would have been easy not to spurn Poli if it hadn't been for my fear that Olga might find out about my sleeping with the Eskimo girl. I had my reputation as a sex-forsaking member of S.M.U.T. to think of, after all. I couldn't have Olga thinking that I fell prey to lust so easily. I knew there was no chance that Poli might in turn lend Ungilak to Olga for the night. Eskimos strictly observe a double standard all their own in such matters.

Despite my concern about Olga, I decided to chance it. I liked Ungilak too much to risk insulting him. So I smiled up at the pair of them and spread the skins upon which I was sleeping to indicate that I was prepared to accept their hospitality. Ungilak rubbed noses fondly with Poli then - an Eskimo kiss - and left us alone, handing the lantern to her as he departed.

She set it down and came closer to me. The bearskin dropped from her shoulders, and she stood naked in the flickering lamplight. Her body was good, slender and full-breasted, with ample hips and sturdy legs. It glistened with the seal oil and seemed to quiver with the anticipation of extending the hospitality of her husband's home.

Now she knelt beside me and gently began to rub her nose against mine. To be honest, it didn't do a thing for me. But from her sighs, there could be no doubt that it was erotically meaningful to her. So I rubbed back, and this prompted her to take my hand and place it against the fullness of her swaying breast. I reached around her with my other hand and started to tug at her long black hair gently to draw her down beside me.

My hand skidded off her tresses before I could get a grip. They were thick with bear grease - another Eskimo custom the woman observes in preparing for love-making. Talk about that greasy kid stuff!

But I didn't let it throw me. I kept right on rubbing noses and trying to hold onto her breast, which was almost as slippery from the seal oil as her hair was from the

bear grease. She giggled each time I lost my grip. By her standards, I guess I was somewhat inept as a lover.

Eskimo love-making was turning out to be a slippery business, but with Poli to inspire me, I lost none of my enthusiasm to learn. She slid down beside me under the skins, and while her naked body may have been hard to hold onto, it was still exciting, and very, very warm. Despite their customary climate, Eskimo women are anything but cold. Indeed, if Poli was any example, they more than overcompensate for the freezing temperatures with the warmth of their flesh and the heat of their passions.

"Oggledywoggedyglup."

Well, that's what it sounded like, anyway. I looked at Poli questioningly.

"Oggledywoggedyglup." She repeated it, a hint of annoyance in her voice at my obtuseness.

I spread my hands to show her that I didn't dig. She took my hands, pressed the lower part of her body against mine, and pulled them around her so that each palm rested on one of her plump rear cheeks. Of course they promptly slid off. With a sigh that said she was losing patience, Poli reached around to my backside to demonstrate. She parted the cheeks and deftly slipped her small hand around. And how!

"Oggledywoggedyglup," she explained.

"Kay-rist!" I reacted, jumping halfway to the ceiling.

This seemed to agitate her. She rubbed her hands together and blew on them and shivered and blew on them again, and then reached behind her to insert one of her hands in the cleft of her own rosy buttocks. "Oggledywoggedyglup!" she told me again in the tone one uses to a child in explaining something that should really be crystal clear. "Oggledywoggedyglup!"

I got it then. Poli was trying to show me the Eskimo ritual by which lovers warm each other's hands so that they will not be a jarringly cold note when the actual love-making begins. She was obviously disappointed that I'd been too tense to allow it. Now she tried again more gently, and I followed her example.

"Whoops!" I found myself giggling like a schoolboy. Although she was restraining herself, Poli's probings were making me more nervous than passionate. I was very glad I hadn't eaten too much of that polar bear steak.

When our hands were warmed to her satisfaction, she started the nose-rubbing bit again. I was getting the hang of keeping my grip on her slippery skin now, and my caresses grew more intimate. With each new thrill they provided, she laughed louder. At first this nettled me, but after awhile I realized it was her Eskimo way of paying me a compliment. Civilized women may sob, groan, or cry out during sex, but to the Eskimo girl it is sheer pleasure and to be appreciated with laughter. Why, after all, should one sob, groan or cry when the emotion one is feeling is joy?

The peaks of her breasts had grown long and fiery under my touch, and now I bent to kiss them. When I raised my head, I saw that she was looking at me with astonishment. I remembered then that Eskimos rarely use their mouths in love-making. I was about to try to apologize with sign language, but Poli's astonishment

turned out to be by no means censure. On the contrary, she pushed my head back down and laughed excitedly as my lips fastened once again.

Her excitement excited me in turn. I forgot myself for the moment and my lips traveled down her belly in a series of small, passionate kisses. When they reached the mouth of her lust, she instinctively clasped her hands over the back of my neck and pressed me to her, prolonging the kiss. The laugh she unloosed then was a veritable roar of appreciation.

I tried to raise my head, but she wouldn't let me. She didn't want to relinquish this new thrill to which I'd introduced her. Which would have been all right with me except for one thing: Poli had gone a bit overboard with her seal-oil perfume in this particular area. I was damn near asphyxiated before her body was finally seized by a long, drawn-out tremor which ended with the heartiest laugh yet.

Then she let go and held her arms open. Her eyes were shining with wonder as I came into them. We made love more conventionally, and she enjoyed that, too. But when it was over, she kept sliding my head down her belly again until I obliged her and repeated the first act.

And so the long arctic night passed, alternating between one form of love-making and the other. In the morning, Ungilak came to wake us. When he had done so, he conveyed to me by gestures his concern as to whether his poor excuse for a wife had given me any satisfaction. I gestured back with great enthusiasm, and he nodded, pleased that this humble offering had met with my approval. He patted Poli on the head to show his praise for her having done well.

Poli had something she wanted to show him, too. She pulled him down beside her excitedly, and drew his head to her breast. He pulled away, puzzled. She raised the pelts covering his chest, and then chattered some words to explain the kiss she bestowed there. Ungilak shrugged and pressed his lips to her breast. He looked at her out of the corner of his eye, and she giggled approval. Then she pulled the skins from her legs and pushed his head farther down. She pointed at me and chattered some other words. Ungilak raised his eyebrows and pressed his lips where she indicated. She held him there and soon her laugh sounded out once again. Only then did she release him.

Poli turned to me as Ungilak got to his feet, and I gathered she was thanking me for enlarging her erotic horizons. She tugged at Ungilak and said something to him. Then he too thanked me politely. But I could see his heart wasn't in it. He tried to hide it, but he obviously thought I was some kind of nut or something. Why else would I humor a woman with an orifice meant to consume polar bear steak and other arctic goodies? Surely, the look he was trying to hide seemed to say, it was foolish to make her laugh in this way when a man could laugh along with her while making love more conventionally. But I guessed that Poli would find a way of overcoming his skepticism.

There wasn't time for her to try that morning, though. Ungilak was kept too busy preparing for the journey ahead. At first I tried to help him load up the dogsled, but I could soon see I was more in the way than being helpful. So I strolled down to the shoreline, where I found Olga.

She was staring out toward the sea. I followed her glance and saw a ship which seemed to be lying at anchor quite far out. "I thought they left yesterday," I remarked.

"That's not our ship," Olga replied.

I took another look and saw that she was right. "Who is it, then?" I asked.

"I wish I knew. All I know is that it's not ours, and that means it's probably dangerous to us."

I was still mulling this over a while later when Ungilak came to tell us he was ready to shove off. Olga and I bundled up in the sled while he harnessed the dogs to it. Then he kissed Poli and we waved goodbye to her as Ungilak hopped on the back runners and cracked his whip over the sled dogs.

The thing about sled dogs is that the lead dog is the only one who ever gets a change of scenery. Not that there is much in the way of scenery in Franz Josef Land. Pack ice, an occasional glimpse of moss or lichen, the knowledge that there are fox and polar bear farther inland, and the sea stretching out to the horizon - that sums up the view. Which is one reason why the ship paralleling our dogsled course along the coastline was the most interesting thing in sight.

The other reason was our wonder at why it was following us. The question became academic when Ungilak made close to a right-angle turn and headed inland. The ship couldn't follow that course.

Still, Olga and I kept looking back over our shoulders at it. The coastline was almost out of sight when we saw two longboats from the ship reach the shore. Olga had Ungilak stop a moment and pointed out to him what we had seen. His keen eyes studied the activity of the dots back at the shore, and then he commented to Olga.

"He says," she translated for me, "that there are four men with a sled, dogs and supplies. It will take them about half an hour to get loaded, hitch up the dogs, and start out to follow our trail. That will put them about two hours behind us. Ungilak thinks we'll be able to lose them when we go through the glaciers." Olga pointed to a low ridge of ice mountains.

We started moving toward them now, with Ungilak riding the runners behind us and lightly flicking his whip over our heads at the dogs pulling the sled. It was cramped, bundled up in the sled that way, but we didn't feel the cold too much with those heavy bear pelts covering us. It was dull, too, and it was as much from boredom as anything else that I decided this might be a good time to try to pump some information out of Olga. I figured if I could keep her talking, she might drop some clue to prove that she was really Dr. Nyet.

"How did you happen to join S.M.U.T. in the first place?" I asked for openers.

"My mother was a whore," Olga told me simply.

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"That's all right. I don't mind talking about it. I was born in a brothel in Paris. I was named by a white Russian, a steady customer of Mama's who may or may not have been my father. I grew up in the brothel. I ran away when I was thirteen. That

was the day Mama tried to put me to work. But I'd made up my mind a long time before that never to be a whore like Mama. I'd seen what it did to her and to the other women there. Old before their time, too jaded to enjoy sex or anything else - I wasn't going to let that happen to me. So I ran away."

"Where did you go?"

"Not very far. I stayed in Paris. I lied about my age and got a job. It was as a clerk in an office. I went to school nights and studied shorthand and typing. By the time I was sixteen - they thought I was twenty-one, of course - I was secretary to one of the senior executives in the firm. It was an import-export outfit, and there were promotions available to girls who could speak the Scandinavian languages and qualify as translators. So I went back to school again and took language courses. I found I had a real knack for languages; they came very easily to me. By the time I was really twenty-one, I was the top translator in the company and they were sending me on assignments all over the world. They imported furs, and one of these assignments took me into the interior of Greenland to deal with the Eskimo fur-trappers. That's where I picked up their language. The tongue Ungilak speaks is just an offshoot dialect of what I picked up there."

"You still haven't told me how you came to join S.M.U.T.," I reminded her.

"Shortly after I came back from Greenland, the company opened a new office in New York. A large staff of translators was to operate out of that office. I was put in charge of them, and so I located more or less permanently in New York. But I didn't know a soul there outside of the people with whom I worked, and my position sort of set me apart from them. I was lonely, and I had nothing to do with my spare time. Then one day I read an article on S.M.U.T. in one of the Sunday supplements."

"And so you joined."

"Yes. I still remembered Mama, you see. And all those other poor unfortunates who sold themselves. I knew the harm that sex could do. S.M.U.T. was doing something about curtailing that harm. So I volunteered my services to them."

"They must have put a very high value on them, considering how much they trust you," I observed.

"They do now, yes. But not at first. In my early days with S.M.U.T., my value to them was pretty much restricted to translating. I was given foreign language books which are circulated in the U.S. to check for pornographic content."

"And did you find much?"

"I'm afraid so," Olga said with the true zeal of the believer in censorship. "Particularly in books from my native land. With such reading material available to them, it's no wonder so many French girls end up like Mama!"

I could have taken issue with that. My O.R.G.Y. experience has indicated that most girls who read such things didn't end up like Olga's mother. And most girls who landed in brothels didn't have time to read such things en route.

But I was supposed to be as fanatic about the rightness of S.M.U.T.'s cause as Olga, and so I only nodded understanding and prompted her to continue. "How did you happen to be assigned to that brothel?" I asked her.

"Mr. Crampdick knew about my background - having grown up in a place like that, I mean. He asked me to volunteer, and I did. I guess he thought I'd be more able to cope with it and not lose my faith in the rightness of S.M.U.T. than some of the other girls who volunteered."

"Didn't it bother you? Feeling about sex and brothels the way you do, I mean?"

"Yes. It bothered me. But it was worth it if I could be instrumental in closing down such an establishment. Besides, Crampdick provided me with the means of making it sufferable."

"What do you mean?"

"He gave me a hypodermic and some drugs. It was a local anesthetic. I gave myself an injection in the loins before going to bed with a customer. So you see, I never had to feel a thing. There was nothing sexual about it for me. I was simply performing a mechanical act for S.M.U.T. Even the first time, the night I lost my virginity, I didn't feel a thing. It was only a technicality, and as far as I'm concerned, I still am a virgin."

"Of course you are," I assured her. "And was it Crampdick who sent you to Hammerfest after the fiasco at the bordello?" I asked.

"Why, no," She looked at me curiously. "Mr. Highman sent me. I thought you knew that."

"I wasn't sure whether he did it directly or through Crampdick," I told her smoothly.

"Oh. Well, he did it himself. Crampdick brought me to see him just after the night of the blackout. It was the first time I ever met him. He's such a self-effacing sort of man, Mr. Highman. All that time I was with S.M.U.T., and I never knew he was the one in charge. And I was impressed with the way he was so concerned about my safety with that awful vice gang after me. I was so grateful to him for making it possible for me to serve S.M.U.T. at the same time I was running away. But don't you think this is a strange part of the world for S.M.U.T. to have an outpost? I mean, there aren't any people here, so how can they carry on their campaign against libertinism?"

Was she putting me on? I couldn't tell. If she was Dr. Nyet, she couldn't be as innocent of S.M.U.T.'s real purposes as she seemed. But if she wasn't, she could be completely sincere and chances were Highman wouldn't have told her any more than he had to in order to use her. In which case she might just be following his instructions in all innocence.

"Did Highman tell you what was in the package you were sent here to pick up and deliver?" I asked.

"No. Do you know what it is?"

"Yes. But I guess he had good reasons for not telling you."

"Well, I'd certainly never question Mr. Highman's reasons. It must be awfully important if that man back on the boat was killed because of it."

"Must be." I figured I might as well let her go on thinking that was the reason for Vlankov's death. If she really didn't know any better, I could only hope that the lead Vlankov was following was valid and pointed toward Dr. Nyet.

"And that other ship following us must mean it's important, too," she added. "How do you suppose they managed it? I didn't see them while we were aboard our own ship."

"Radar, probably," I told her. "It wouldn't be hard."

Ungilak pulled the sled to a halt, ending the conversation. We were at the foot of the snow ridges, and the sky was turning to deep gray. It was time to make camp for the night.

Ungilak unhitched the dogs, unloaded the sled, and turned it over, angling it against the hillside for a makeshift lean-to. He indicated that Olga and I should crawl under it while he bedded down with the dogs a little distance away. Survival in the Arctic depended on those dogs, and although he was too polite to have ever put it into words, Ungilak's actions said that he was more concerned with their care than our comfort. He handed us large chunks of raw blubber for our dinner and indicated that we should cut it into chewable pieces with our knives. But he labored patiently at cutting the blubber up for the dogs, and it wasn't until they had been fed that he himself ate.

By that time we could no longer see him or the dogs across the blackness of the night. Olga and I crawled up under the sled - keeping a respectable distance between us - and went to sleep. When I woke up, it wasn't blackness but a dazzling whiteness that was just as impenetrable which greeted me. I blinked, but the whiteness remained. It had started to snow during the night and it was still snowing - an ivory powder pouring down from the sky, with no particular force, but steadily and unceasingly.

Olga was also awake. We discussed the snow, neither of us sure how it would affect our journey. After a while Ungilak crawled under the sled to join us and put an end to our speculations.

He told Olga how he evaluated the situation and she translated his words for me. We couldn't travel through the snowstorm. It would be too difficult for the dogs to pull a full sled. We would have to wait where we were until it ended. We would have to hope that no winds sprang up to turn it into a full-scale blizzard. And we would have to pray that it was over before we started running seriously short of food.

So it began. With a flurry of snow, not too heavy, but steady - steady! - a snowfall no worse than the average winter storm back in the U.S. That's how it started. Only such a snow back home lasts a day or two, maybe three, four at the most, and then it's over. But this snowfall didn't end. The days dragged by and still the snow fell. A week passed. More. We couldn't be sure. Olga and I lost track.

Ungilak stayed with the dogs, but came to us with food regularly. Hardtack and blubber - a monotonous diet, but it kept us alive. And then the day came when Ungilak brought us half the rations he normally doled out. He explained the situation to Olga.

"He says we have only enough rations left for a few days," she translated for me. "It has been one day since he fed the dogs. If he feeds them now, there will be no food left for us after tomorrow. So he intends to kill one of the dogs and let the others feed off the carcass."

"And then what?" I asked.

"He doesn't know. He says it is in the laps of his Eskimo gods."

Those gods must have been asleep on the job that night. I was asleep myself, and so was Olga, when starving terror stalked through the white hell of night and invaded our shelter. One of the sled dogs had chewed through the leather strap by which Ungilak had tethered him and now he came looking for food. Hunger pushed him toward the smell of warm, living flesh, and when the dog traced the scent to its source, he went berserk.

Olga's scream awoke me. Only that fact that she had huddled under the bearskins against the cold so that they completely covered her saved her from instant death. The dog was going at the skins claw and fang, bent on ripping out her throat.

Ungilak had left a flashlight with me and I'd carefully conserved the batteries. Now I reacted to that first scream by turning it on and shining the beam at Olga. Even in that brief moment, the beast had torn her coverings to tatters. His snarling jaws were inches from her face when I sighted my gun and fired three times in rapid succession.

The beast's head flew apart, and his blood spurted over Olga. The shots brought Ungilak on the run. Behind him the other dogs scented the fresh blood and set up an excited howling. Ungilak took one look at the dead animal and turned his attention back to the other dogs. But it was too late for him to try to cope with them. The starving animals had gone berserk, and now the pack of them had pulled free from where Ungilak had tethered them and was making for the scene, howling and slaving as they came.

Ungilak grabbed up Olga and motioned for me to follow quickly. We moved away from the sled lean-to as the pack descended on it. Ungilak said something to Olga, and she repeated it to me.

"They have gone wild now, and there is no bringing them back under control. If there had been time, he would have taken the body of the dead dog and cut it up and fed it to the others. That way they might not have turned into such mad beasts. But there will be no holding them now."

I shined the flashlight on the pack of dogs and saw just how horribly right Ungilak was. A couple of them had torn loose from the main pack, but the rest were still loosely tied together, and they kept getting tangled up with one another. They had thrown the sled over now and fallen on the carcass of the dead dog. They ripped out his insides and set about devouring him, flesh, bones, fur and all. Inevitably, two of the dogs got into a fight over a chunk of the carcass. Snarling, they attacked each other in a battle to the death. The other dogs circled them, watching warily. One of the fighting dogs managed to get a grip on the other's neck. The crunching of jaws was audible, and then he swung the victim around by his broken neck and flung him from him. When he landed, the other dogs

descended on him and tore the body to pieces. Then they turned back to the winner of the fight. He was still weak from the battle, and they made short work of killing him.

With three carcasses to feast on, the pack became less savage toward each other. Olga and I both had to turn away from the awful spectacle of their cannibalism. Ungilak, however, seemed unaffected by it. He watched until they'd gorged themselves and then huddled together amongst the bearskin blankets we'd left behind to take advantage of each other's body warmth against the cold. When they were quiet, Ungilak spoke in a voice that was sad and very weary.

"He says now he must kill the dogs that are left," Olga told me.

"But why? How will we ever get out of here if he does that?"

Olga exchanged some more words with Ungilak and then got back to me. "He says it will be easier to kill them now than to wait until they become ravenous again. When that happens, he says, they will attack us with all their fury and it will be much harder to fight them off. They have had a taste of blood now, and they are no better than wolves. They won't hesitate to kill us after they have slept. So Ungilak must kill them first. After that, he will leave their bodies for food for us and go on by himself to the settlement to try to bring back help. He says the journey is too arduous for us while the storm continues - impossible without a sled and dogs. Our only chance of survival is for him to go for help."

There was fear in Olga's voice as she told me this. I didn't like it any better than she did, but I could see that we had no choice. We had to go along with Ungilak's judgment. He was the only one familiar with the techniques of survival in the Arctic, and so his was the only opinion which counted.

I shined the flashlight beam for him just above where the dogs were huddled and watched as he crept stealthily up to them with his spear at the ready. I had offered to help with my gun, but according to Olga he had advised me to conserve my bullets. Still, I had the safety off and my trigger finger was tensed in case he should suddenly need help.

Once he'd reached his objective, Ungilak moved very quickly and surely. He straightened up, poised for a split second with his spear over the neck of one of the sleeping dogs, then brought it down surely. Its deathpoint went in and out smoothly, and then he moved on to the next dog. And the next. And the next...

A yelp of pain aroused the last three left alive. One of them, Ungilak's target, sprang up before he could plunge the spear to its mark. He lunged for Ungilak, and the Eskimo quickly shoved the spear out in front of him to fend the beast off. Now the other two came at him and I sprang to my feet, looking for a chance to shoot.

But there was no chance. The dogs were too fast. Their furious attack was a blur in the beam of the flashlight. I couldn't fire for fear of hitting Ungilak. Fortunately, the Eskimo was even faster than they were.

Fending off one dog with the shaft of the spear, he brought the tip down so that it gashed the side of a second dog. As that one started yelping, Ungilak's foot shot out and connected with the throat of the third dog. It fell back, leaving him free to club the first beast. He hit it hard and accurately, and it collapsed on the snow, its brains oozing out of its skull. Ungilak quickly finished off the second dog by plunging the

spear-point into its chest. The movement left him off balance as the last dog attacked again, and they went down together with the snarling beast trying to tear off his fur-covered arm.

I moved in closer, but I wasn't needed. Ungilak's knee slammed into the dog's belly with all his might, and his arm was released. He brought the spearhead up to where he'd kicked, and it went through the animal's stomach and out its back. Ungilak got up and finished it off by stamping on its head with both feet.

The excitement was over for the night. Ungilak arranged the carcasses so they were shielded against the storm and indicated that we should all get some sleep. The next morning he left us, promising to return with help as soon as possible.

In retrospect, the days following Ungilak's departure are a hellish blur. I'm not sure whether it was two days or three when our food ran out and we had to start on the dead flesh of the dogs. I wasn't sure that either Olga or I could bring ourselves to eat it, but hunger finally drove us to it - although even then we ate sparingly.

It was right after that first reluctant meal that the storm changed into a blizzard. The wind became a howling knife cutting through the shelter provided by the sled. The cold was unbelievable now. It penetrated right through the furs we used for covering and it was with us all the time, growing steadily worse. Once every hour I insisted that Olga get up and join me in some exercises to stave off frostbite and keep our circulation going. I didn't tell her, but I had my doubts about how long this might work. Indeed, I had my doubts about whether we could survive at all, and they grew worse as the blizzard grew stronger and the cold increased.

Finally there was nothing to do but bundle together and share the mutual warmth of the furs. The cold still came right through them, though, and the only real source of warmth was our own flesh. Olga protested, the prissy S.M.U.T. fanatic to the bitter end, but I insisted that we take maximum advantage of this source of warmth. I forced her to lie naked with me under the pile of furs, and I kept agreeing to her demands that I wouldn't let anything of a sexual nature occur.

However, due to a defect in my character, or perhaps in my biological make-up - or maybe just because it's instinctive to do just about anything to keep alive - the night came when my body refused to keep the promises I'd made to Olga. By then the cold had grown so intense that it was necessary not only to wrap our bodies around one another, but also to keep up a constant rubbing of flesh against flesh, a life-saving friction, as it were. It was while this was going on that I noticed that a certain intimate portion of my anatomy had grown quite stiff. Half-crazed with cold and hunger as I was, I couldn't tell whether the member was frozen or merely taut with passion. But there seemed to be little feeling in it, and this panicked me. I had a sort of hysterical vision of it suddenly breaking off from its own weight like an icicle.

From this awful possibility, my mind jumped to a consideration of Olga. I remembered the first time Crampdick had pointed her out to me back in the brothel in New York. Was it a million years ago? More? No matter. Now I recalled how her pixie face and petite body had made me think she might be a gypsy girl. Little had I guessed that she'd turn out to be just the opposite of the uninhibited gypsy - a girl who'd rather die than part with a virginity she didn't even possess. I remembered how sharp and pointy her breasts had looked under her dress that day,

and I marveled that while I'd judged their shape correctly, they felt marvelously soft - even warm - as they pressed against my chest now. I recalled how she'd looked later when I pulled her out of the brothel bed, and my sense of touch now confirmed the promise my sense of sight had made back then. That same sense of touch told me she moved marvelously well, moved with a naturally sexy rhythm that would have been perfect if only -

If only we'd been having sex!

I don't know how long my hallucinating mind dwelt on it, building the obsession. All I know is that finally I reached the point where I just couldn't take all this frenetic motion without following it through to its natural conclusion. Reaching down, I touched myself, and it seemed to me that there was less and less feeling in my rigid manhood., There was only one way to thaw it out, and I decided that it must be done immediately.

Still, even in my hallucinatory state, I remembered not to be a hypocrite about it. I pulled away for a moment and looked straight into Olga's deep blue eyes.

Forthrightly, I told her my intentions. "I'm going to rape you," I said.

"No!" she protested.

"Yes!" I insisted.

"Why?" she interrogated.

"So it won't fall off!" I indicated.

"You mean it's likely to-"

"Yes!"

"But then suppose it happens while you're-"

"That's a chance we'll have to take."

"Surely you're exaggerating," Olga pleaded.

"I am not. Remember the brass monkey."

"What brass monkey?"

"The one that froze its whatzis off."

"I don't care about any brass monkey. I'm not going to let you. Why, if anybody found out, I might be drummed out of S.M.U.T."

"S.M.U.T. will understand." I tried to reassure her. "It's necessary to stay alive."

"I'd rather die!" She crossed her arms dramatically over her breasts.

"I wouldn't. And stop hogging the bearskins." I cuddled closer to her again. "It's no use your protesting," I told her. "I'm going to rape you."

Over us the blizzard raged. The wind screamed its arctic wrath endlessly. The biting cold crawled under the bearskins and beneath our own skins - icy, probing fingers tipped with death. And yet, in my arms, this voluptuous French girl was struggling furiously against accepting the sex which might well be the difference between life and death to us.

She fought me every frozen inch of the way. Her nails raked my cheeks and dug into my neck. Her teeth clamped down on my arm, and I had to slap her to make her let go. Her knee connected with my crotch, and I held her pinned for a moment while I recovered from the pain.

As I was getting over it, I thought to myself that perhaps I really was being too abrupt, not tender enough. I decided to woo her more gently. So I bent and kissed her on the lips. The savage clamp of her teeth almost ripped my tongue from its roots. Her hand, flailing out behind me, fastened on the flashlight, and she cracked it against the side of my skull. At the same moment her other hand tangled in the beard I'd grown and tugged mightily.

I retreated for another breather. "It's easy to see you don't know anything about rape," I gasped. "Don't you know the victim is presumed always to have encouraged the attacker?"

"Men!" She spat the word out as if it was the filthiest of curses. "I'll bet some man thought that one up. Men only want one thing from a girl. Even when we're about to freeze to death, the only thing on your mind is sex."

"If you know another way to stay alive, then tell me."

She merely snorted with contempt and fell silent.

The howl of the wind grew louder. The cold it brought with it renewed my determination. I grabbed Olga again.

We wrestled. I wedged my knee against her tight-clenched thighs and bore down hard, slowly prying them apart. No gentleman resting on his elbows was I. My weight was necessary to keep her pinned, and my chest crushed those soft, heaving, pointed breasts beneath me. She fought hard, but the fight itself was a kind of perverse love-making. The way she thrashed around and pounded her fists against, my body was exciting. Even the tears of frustration which sprang to her eyes with the realization that she wasn't strong enough to hold me off were an added goad to my passion.

She kept struggling even after the rape was technically a *fait accompli*. But now her angry writhings took on a certain sexual rhythm despite herself. She kept beating at my spine with the heels of her feet, but the way things were, the tattoo only merged into the act of making love. It was the same with her bouncing efforts to pull free of my stabbing blade of passion. Each movement found it slammed back to the hilt.

Finally she cried out and lost control altogether. Her body took over, and she wasn't fighting me then. Her eyes closed, and she gave herself up to one tremor of release after another. She was thrusting against me now, digging her nails into my buttocks to hold me fast, no longer trying to push me away. Realizing this, I gave myself up to the sensation, and together we soared to the heights of passion.

When it was over, we clung together wearily for a moment. Then she pushed away, groping to regain her composure, seeking the proper tone of voice for a woman forcibly defiled, a woman raped against her will. But she was caught between wanting to come on this way and the vestiges of pleasure she was still feeling. The result was a tone that was shaky and words that equivocated.

"Well, at least," Olga said, "it didn't break off while you were -" She left it hanging.

So did I. I was satisfied - for the time being. We were alive, and the warm afterglow of love-making would keep us alive for a while.

But with the passing of another day, the feeling of satisfaction also passed. The cold gripped us again. And once again I raped Olga.

She didn't fight me quite as hard this time. And the next time she struggled even less strenuously. Soon she was putting up merely token resistance. She would have liked me to believe that this was because her strength was being sapped by our ordeal, but I suspected otherwise.

One night she woke me from a sound sleep and my suspicions were confirmed. "Aren't you going to rape me?" she asked.

"I'm tired," I told her. "Later."

"No. Now! I'm freezing!"

So I obliged. And when she started struggling as usual, I simply stopped and rolled away from her.

"What's the matter?" she panted.

"I'm too tired to fight with you."

"Oh." Olga thought a moment. "All right, then I won't fight," she decided.

The next morning the storm abated. The wind died down, and the snow flurried to a stop. For the first time in I don't know how long, we saw the sun again.

It gave our morale a boost. We were still dependent on Ungilak's return to save us, but our chances of freezing to death were lessened by the passing of the blizzard. We smiled encouragement at each other and speculated that Ungilak might reach us today, or surely tomorrow.

But it wasn't Ungilak who found us. It was mid-afternoon and we were dozing in the shadows of the shelter provided by the overturned sled when Olga's scream awoke me. She screamed only once, and I sat bolt upright with my pistol in my hand.

It was too late. There was a hatchet sticking out of Olga's naked breast. She was dead.

I snapped a shot at the figure standing over her. But I fired too fast, and I missed. I caught a glimpse of a face that was decidedly Chinese, and then he was gone.

I bolted after him, but he was too fast for me. His footsteps led to a narrow crevice running between two mountains of ice. It would have been foolhardy to try to follow him there. I'd have been a setup for an ambush.

He'd be back. I was sure of that. I guessed that it was really me he was after. He'd probably killed Olga only because she'd seen him and screamed. Even now the Chinese might be cursing to himself over the chance that he might have killed Dr. Nyet herself.

So I settled back of the sled to wait for his return. I propped myself up on the package containing the jeweled phallus and concentrated on staying awake. I was alone now. Just me and the golden genitalia of a Nepalese god.

Death lurked in the ice mountains. Death would surely return. The only question was whether I might not freeze to death before the Chinese came back to kill me. If I did, that priceless phallus might make a worthy tombstone for the man from O.R.G.Y.!

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Merry Christmas!"

It woke me from the sleep I'd tried so hard to avoid. I blinked, sure that I must still be dreaming. My eyes refocused on Ungilak standing over me, a big grin on his face.

"Merry Christmas!" He repeated it.

Nothing seemed to add up in my fogged brain. Was it really Ungilak? Or was it some vision conjured up from my delirium? If it was him, then how come he was suddenly speaking English? And what was this about Christmas?

"Merry Christmas!" He said it a third time, obviously waiting for some response.

"Merry Christmas." I responded.

My mind went off on a minor obsession, trying to add up the days. Somehow this Christmas bit seemed the easiest thing to cope with at the moment. Allowing for half a dozen or so days that I'd lost in the Arctic cold, I realized that it might indeed be Christmas.

Ungilak was rattling off some of his Eskimo dialect now. I understood that "Merry Christmas" was the extent of the English he'd picked up. When he saw that he wasn't getting through to me, he switched over to sign language. It clicked after a moment, and I understood he was asking where Olga was.

I took him outside and showed him where I'd stashed her corpse. He looked at it and his face grew dark with anger. He thought I'd killed her!

I backed away from him, shaking my head. I pointed to the hatchet still buried in her breast and made gestures to tell him that it wasn't mine. Finally I pointed out the tracks the Chinese had made when he ran away. Ungilak examined them and then nodded to show that he believed me.

I followed him back to the rescue party he'd brought with him. There were five Eskimos besides Ungilak, and two dogsleds. He spoke to them in their native tongue, evidently explaining about Olga's murder, and pointed out the tracks to them. They nodded, and four of the five set out to follow the tracks.

We waited. I guess it was about three hours later that they finally returned. They had the Chinese with them. He was half-dead from frostbite and in no condition to put up a fight, but they tied him down to one of the sleds anyway.

I settled in alongside him as we got under way. The other sled was laden with supplies, and Ungilak didn't seem to want to take the time to shift them. I didn't mind. The Chinese was in no condition to give me any trouble.

We were three days on the trail before he regained some of his strength. I tried talking to him then as we skimmed over the endless snow. To my surprise, he spoke flawless English.

"Why are you here?" I asked him.

"The same reason you are. To find Dr. Nyet."

"How did you know where to look?"

"We had the Russian agent followed."

"Why did you kill him?"

"We felt he was getting close. Indeed, we thought he might have found Dr. Nyet. We thought it was the young lady with you. We didn't want the Russians to have her. Nor you, for that matter. We wanted to take her ourselves. And so we eliminated the Russian to expedite matters."

"And you also may have eliminated Dr. Nyet," I pointed out.

"Possibly. It couldn't be helped. My reflexes simply worked too fast. She screamed and I killed her before she might have had a chance to kill me."

"Just like that." The hatred for him that came through in my voice then was genuine.

"What is done is done." He shrugged it off. "Right now our aims are the same, and we must think about how best to cooperate with each other."

"Oh? So now you want to cooperate."

"Yes. Are you agreeable?"

"Drop dead!" I told him, ending the conversation.

A few hours later we came in sight of the S.M.U.T. settlement at last. There were perhaps thirty or forty igloos spaced out in a wide circle. Ungilak called a halt and strode over to me. He took my hand between both of his and then leaned over to rub his nose against mine affectionately.

"Poli," he said, pointing back the way we'd come. "Poli." He repeated it and I understood that he was saying goodbye, that he was going to leave now because he wanted to get back to his wife. He made signs to tell me that the other Eskimos would see me to the conclusion of the journey, and then he turned the other sled around and started back to Poli.

Before he was out of sight, we were on our way to the settlement. As we drew closer, I was surprised at the number of Eskimos hard at work there. The tribal life of Eskimos is very loose, and it's rare for more than two or three families to congregate together. Yet I guessed there were more than a hundred in sight as we approached. Not one of them, I knew, was a native of Franz Josef Land. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to relocate them here. And someone was seeing to it that they were kept busy building still more igloos.

It wasn't long before I came face to face with that someone. The ice-structure in the center of the circle of igloos turned out to be only an entrance to a vast underground complex. The Chinese and I were escorted down in an elevator and then taken through a series of chambers hinting at the magnitude of the operation. Two of the Eskimos flanking me indicated that I should be seated in one of these chambers while the others took the Chinese through a door opposite the one by which we'd entered.

It was an hour or more before the Chinese reappeared. He looked like he'd been given a going-over. The Eskimo guards hustled him out, and then it was my turn. They prodded me through a door, and I found myself facing a man seated behind a plush desk. The man was Peter Highman!

"We meet again, Mr. Victor."

"So it seems." I was too shaken to say anything else. I had hoped to come up against some S.M.U.T. official I could con the way I'd conned Olga. Instead, I'd hopped out of the arctic frying pan and straight into the fire of Peter Highman's clutches.

"I congratulate you on your persistence," Highman said.

"Thanks. I take it I'm your prisoner."

"Yes."

"And I suppose you're going to kill me."

"At my leisure, Mr. Victor. There is no cause for immediate alarm on your part."

"Why wait?" I asked.

"There is certain information I would like from you and your Chinese friend, Mr. Victor."

"He's no friend of mine."

"Quite so. Nevertheless, there are things that you can tell us."

"Like what?"

"Like just how much your government has managed to learn about S.M.U.T. Like why they are cooperating with the Russians and even the Chinese in their quest for Dr. Nyet."

"You tell me your secrets, I'll tell you mine," I singsonged.

"I don't mind satisfying your curiosity, Mr. Victor. You are no longer in a position to do S.M.U.T. any harm. It's a human failing that I hope you'll forgive, but the truth is I rather enjoy this opportunity to gloat over a vanquished adversary."

"Why not call Dr. Nyet in to gloat with you?" I suggested.

"Alas, she has already left. She had to keep a previous engagement. I know she'll be devastated when I tell her how closely she missed you. Indeed, you made quite an impression on her."

"Then it was the blonde back in New York! The one who liked to go up in flames while making love!"

"It was. And it is. But she's not really a blonde, you know. She's a natural brunette. We simply prevailed upon her to dye her hair."

"She's the last one I would have picked," I admitted. "She talked like a born and bred Yankee."

"Among Dr. Nyet's other talents is a sure tongue for linguistics," Highman told me.

"Olga had that talent, too," I mused. "But then she was exactly what she said she was. Except she was also a dupe for you, which she didn't know."

"That's right."

"And so was Ilona."

"Yes - but something more as well." Highman sounded regretful.

"So she told me. And you were really hooked on her, weren't you? But then why did you have her killed?"

"It was inevitable once she took up with you, Mr. Victor. If only you had gone to New Delhi with Singh as planned, she would be alive today. It would have been you who was killed if you had gone to India. Everything was arranged for your quiet assassination. How did you happen to pick up Ilona's trail anyway?"

"Sheer chance. I spotted her at the airport."

"Sheer chance," Highman repeated. "And so you signed her death warrant. A death warrant, I can assure you, which I executed with great reluctance."

"Just how was she killed?" I asked. "And your wife - how did you manage that in a locked room? There wasn't a mark on either body to show what killed them."

"Both were killed by sound, Mr. Victor."

"Sound?"

"Yes. In my wife's case, I simply hooked a high-frequency device in on the Sonuswitch lines operating the appliances in her study. There was a timing mechanism attached so it would go off about an hour after the two of you were in there. You see, I wanted to give you time to get into a compromising position so that it might look as if you assaulted her. Oh, yes, I knew my wife. I knew how she arranged to enjoy her sex without ever admitting to herself what she was doing. I banked on her sucking you into some sort of sex situation. But what I didn't bank on was you going out to the bathroom. Again, sheer chance. If not for that, you would have died with her as you were meant to die."

"I still don't quite understand how sound killed her."

"Then let me explain. The pitch of the frequency directed into the room is so high that it can't be heard. It bypasses the eardrum and goes directly to the brain. It makes for a direct and agonizing sort of 'hearing.' Every muscle in the victim's body contracts from it. Spasm after spasm seizes the body as the clothes are ripped off in an effort to pluck the ultra-sensitized nerve-ends themselves from the body. The stress is so great that eventually the victim breaks her own neck in an effort to escape the deadly - but actually unheard - sound."

"You sound like you enjoy it." I shuddered.

"Well, you must admit it's ingenious. It was even more ingenious in Ilona's case. I had to virtually invent a hand transmitter with all-transistor components, a new weapon which could aim a beam of high frequency at her without the sort of leakage that might have killed half of Salisbury. I tell you, it wasn't easy."

"I'll bet. But why did you send Ilona to Salisbury in the first place? And why did you go there yourself? Surely that wasn't necessary just to transport the phallus. Any underling could have seen to that."

"True. The phallus was secondary. I only took it with me to Salisbury to throw those seeking its return off the track. I had to go to Salisbury anyway, and I simply took advantage of the trip to send it to Hammerfest from there. My real reason for going to Salisbury was gold, Mr. Victor."

"Gold?"

"Yes. The gold necessary to finance S.M.U.T.'s operations. You see, the stealing and selling and reclaiming of art objects like the phallus is not sufficient to finance our expanding needs. I went to Salisbury to arrange a deal through T.U.M.S. with the Rhodesian government. That government faces an international embargo on its gold exports. I was arranging terms whereby S.M.U.T. would bypass that embargo and dispose of the gold for the Rhodesians at a handsome profit. Unfortunately, the details were still being worked out when your Russian counterpart succeeded in rifling my room and getting a lead on the whereabouts of Dr. Nyet. That made it necessary for me to leave Rhodesia and fly here immediately. S.M.U.T. couldn't take any chances of the Russians' finding Dr. Nyet."

"Just what was it that Vlankov discovered?" I asked.

"You don't know? But how amusing! I naturally thought you were in cahoots when you traveled to Hammerfest together. What Vlankov found was a half-written message from me to my superiors requesting a plane to pick up Dr. Nyet in Hammerfest and fly her here."

"Then Dr. Nyet was in Hammerfest along with Olga?"

"Not with her, no. But they were both there at the same time. The original plan was for Dr. Nyet to wait there for the delivery of the phallus, and then sail to Franz Josef Land. Olga was to be sent back to Paris. But your interference made me nervous, and so I decided Dr. Nyet should be taken to safety as soon as possible while Olga waited to deliver the phallus."

"And the name of the ship was in the letter," I guessed. "That's why Vlankov went straight to it when he reached Hammerfest."

"Yes."

"Something he had just said stuck in my mind. "You mentioned your superiors," I said. "Does that mean you're not top man?"

"No, I'm not. I'm very close to the top. But I'm not the man in charge of S.M.U.T."

"Who is?"

"If I told you the name it wouldn't mean anything to you, Mr. Victor. It's just a name. Some day the whole world will know it. But that's in the future. By then you will be long dead."

"The whole world..." I picked up the phrase. "You really think that S.M.U.T. can enslave the population of the whole world by multiplying it? But how will you control them? And how will you feed them if their numbers increase? There's not enough food to sustain the population of the world as it exists today."

"Control and survival are intertwined, Mr. Victor. Let me give you an example. Did you notice the Eskimos above ground when you arrived?"

"Yes. I wondered about them. I've never seen so many Eskimos gathered together in one place. They don't usually crowd together in such numbers."

"Quite so. And the reason there are so many of them here is that S.M.U.T. carefully selected them as a sample population to test the theories we intend to apply to all the peoples of the world. To understand this, let me give you some facts about Eskimos. Twenty years ago, when the last worldwide census was taken, those countries with an Eskimo population put the total number of Eskimos in the world at 100,000. Today those same nations place their combined Eskimo populations at 30,000. A fantastic drop during a period when the rest of the world is faced with a population explosion."

"What caused it?" I asked.

"Civilization. That's right, Mr. Victor. Civilization is responsible for decimating the Eskimo population. As new frontiers were opened, Eskimos retreated farther and farther into the arctic wildernesses. Those who remained fell prey to diseases brought by civilized man. Believe it or not, measles killed thousands of them. There was no heritage of immunity to diseases which to us are minor. Indeed, the Eskimos have been dying off at such an alarming rate that both the U.S. and Canadian governments are taking measures to check their declining birth rate before the Eskimos become extinct."

"But what has this to do with S.M.U.T.?"

"We took our lead from those government programs. We sought out small bands of Eskimos on the brink of starvation and held a carrot in front of their noses. The carrot was food - just that, food, the means of survival - and they readily followed it to this settlement. Here our control over them is total. They labor for S.M.U.T. in return for food and shelter - and one thing more."

"Which is?"

"The security of knowing that their children will live. The infant mortality rate among Eskimos is fantastically high ordinarily. But not among the Eskimos here. We have reduced it to an insignificant fraction. We encourage our Eskimos to have children and we guarantee the survival of those children. The Eskimos here know that S.M.U.T. controls that survival, and so they work willingly in exchange for it."

"In other words, you're breeding them like work animals. You're creating a slave population."

"I don't deny it," Highman said. "But it is only the beginning of S.M.U.T.'s great experiment. What has worked with the Eskimos will work on a far vaster scale with all the people in the world."

"I'm not so sure. You still haven't answered my second question. How will you feed your hordes of slaves if you succeed in creating an overpopulated world?"

"I take it you didn't see *The New York Times* of December 24th, Mr. Victor."

"The newsboy didn't deliver my copy," I told him drily. "Because of the weather, I imagine. What's that got to do with it?"

"There was a front page story there which answered your question. It told of the results of certain investigations by your Interior Department's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. S.M.U.T. has long been interested in these investigations, and we have kept pace with their progress. There was nothing secret about them, and so it was simple. It is a mark of our faith in your scientists that we were convinced they would succeed in what they were working on long before their actual success was accomplished. You see, they didn't realize it, of course, but they were going to provide us with the answer of how to feed an overpopulated world of slaves. And now they have done it."

"Just what is it that they've done?"

"They've developed a pure fish concentrate with a protein content of 80 percent, the remaining 20 percent consisting of the most beneficial minerals and vitamins. It's really quite ingenious - the process, I mean. The flesh of the fish is ground to a pulp and then the pulp is put through an alcohol cold-bath. This removes all the water and fatty content from the pulp. Then it is immersed in isopropyl alcohol, which further purifies it. Finally it's spray-dried, and the result is the world's first perfect synthetic food supplement."

"Very interesting. But how can a fish-food sustain an overexpanded humanity?"

"This isn't just a 'fish-food,' Mr. Victor. It is a pure food concentrate. By your own government's estimates, it can be produced so cheaply and easily as to feed two-thirds of the human race today with no strain whatsoever. All it would take to do this would be the building of a relatively inexpensive plant capable of producing ten tons of concentrate daily. That, incidentally, is close to the output of - say - a large sardine cannery. The cost of this - including a margin for profit - would be only eighteen cents a pound. A larger plant might produce 100 tons daily at a cost of only thirteen cents a pound. And a pound of this concentrate could easily sustain - and provide a maximum of nourishment to - a human being for a week to ten days. Thus S.M.U.T. will easily be able to feed large populations. Indeed, one of the reasons for establishing this base here is the excellent fishing off the coast of Franz Josef Land. The need for secrecy keeps us inland now, but eventually we will move to the coast. Here we'll set up a processing plant to be supplied on a regular basis by our own fishing fleet."

"It looks like you've figured all the angles."

"Yes. Plus some fortuitous ones we didn't anticipate. Did I mention that this substance is colorless, odorless and tasteless? It looks like a gray flour, has no trace of a fish smell or taste about it, and is easily soluble. It's an ideal food supplement. It can be put in milkshakes, for instance, without being detected. These qualities

have turned out to be most important to S.M.U.T. You see, they are also true of the formula for an antibirth control pill developed by Dr. Nyet."

"So what?"

"So this, Mr. Victor. Your government has been trying to encourage private industry to manufacture the food supplement. A company fronting for S.M.U.T. is already in the process of complying with this request. Only the supplement we produce will also have in it the formula invented by Dr. Nyet. Thus we will insure overpopulation at the very same time that we create the means to feed and control the resulting hordes."

"Then you do have Dr. Nyet's formula."

"Now we do, yes. You see, when she fled Russia, she was unable to take her notes with her. She had to destroy them. But with her scientific mind and photographic memory, it wasn't difficult for her to recreate the formula. She had done so and was testing the results when we got word of your coming to New York and took the precaution of hiding her in the brothel. How could I have guessed that fool Crampdick would steer you directly to her? No matter. That's past now. She finished the testing of the formula here yesterday, and wrote the ingredients and composition down on paper for S.M.U.T. I have that paper right here with me now." He tapped his breast pocket.

"And what will you do with it?"

"I will fly to New York immediately. Dr. Nyet already awaits me there. We will confer with the men arranging the production of the food supplement. Dr. Nyet has some ideas concerning the combining of the two in production." Highman sat back in his chair and beamed an "Oh-what-a-genius-am-I-don't-you-agree?" sort of smile at me.

"It's an ingenious scheme," I granted. "But how come you're telling me about it?"

"You will never be in a position to act on the information, Mr. Victor. Rest assured of that. As to why I'm telling you - Well, a man has to be able to talk to someone about his accomplishments. There's no one else here capable of understanding, even if I weren't kept from telling them by the need for secrecy. As for those above me - well, they only want to know the results, not the methods I labor so hard to devise in order to produce those results. We are enemies, Mr. Victor, but you are the only one with whom it is possible to enjoy a rapport concerning my work. I trust that rapport will continue after I return from my journey to New York."

"If I live that long."

"Oh, you shall. And much longer if you will only cooperate with S.M.U.T. All you have to do is tell us the extent of your government's knowledge about our operation."

"Suppose I don't know."

"Come now, Mr. Victor. You couldn't have been as effective as you were if you didn't have such knowledge."

"And if I refuse to betray my government?"

"Then eventually you will die. But I feel sure you will change your mind before accepting such a drastic fate. Just a taste of the sound that kills, a taste that will fall short of actually killing you, should insure that." Highman nodded as if he was trying to be reassuring. "But now," he added, looking at his watch, "I must be off. The plane is waiting for me." He turned to the Eskimo guards and said something to them in their native tongue. They led me away.

A few moments later I was pushed into a sparsely furnished room which evidently served as a cell. The door was locked behind me. But I wasn't alone. The Chinese was already imprisoned there.

"Welcome," he greeted me.

I didn't return the greeting. I just glared at him. I couldn't forget that he'd killed Olga. I hated his guts.

He knew it, but he wasn't going to let it deter him. "Our only chance of escape, Mr. Victor, is if we cooperate with each other. Regardless of how you feel about me, it would be foolhardy not to cooperate. That would doom you as well as me."

"It's almost worth it," I told him. But I had to admit he was right. Whatever slender chance we had depended on us acting together. "All right. I'll cooperate," I agreed reluctantly. "What's your plan?"

"First I have to sneeze."

"Go ahead."

"It's not that simple," he said. "I don't feel like sneezing."

"Then don't sneeze. What the hell's this all about, anyway? I thought we were going to plan an escape."

"We are. You see, in my right sinus cavity there is a small capsule which may make escape possible. But the only way to get it out is to sneeze."

"What's in the capsule?"

"Nitroglycerine."

"Then don't sneeze too hard," I advised. "As a matter of fact, if I were you, I wouldn't even sniffle. And," I added, "in my opinion, that's a pretty drastic cold cure even for a Chinese Red."

"It's not a cold cure. It's to enable me to commit suicide if I'm tortured. You see, the idea of a capsule of poison concealed in a tooth is too widely known to be effective any more. So my superiors devised this variation. Under pressure all I have to do is slap my forehead where the sinus passage is and my head will be blown apart. With luck, I might even take my inquisitor with me."

"But suppose you sneezed inadvertently?"

"It wouldn't necessarily set it off. Of course, it might, but when I do have to sneeze, I've trained myself to do it gently. I don't suffer from sinus trouble, so the passages are never so clogged as to present a very great hazard. However, right now the only way of extracting the capsule is if I can induce a series of sneezes."

"Sneeze away," I told him. I backed away to the far corner of the room. Why take a chance on germs? I figured. Or on nitro?

The Chinese knelt down, scooped up sonic dust in his hand, stuck his nose in the palm and sniffed mightily. "Ah-choo!" - which is a Chinese sneeze in any language.

I lowered my hands from in front of my face. "Is it out?" I asked.

"Not yet." He sniffed again, sneezed again, and made a wild dive to catch the flying capsule before it could hit the floor. I was flat on my belly before I realized he'd made the catch.

"Gezundheit!" I said fervently, getting to my feet. "What next?"

"We wait until the guards open the door to bring us a meal."

"Why wait? Why don't we just blow the door open ourselves right now?"

"I can't be sure the charge will be powerful enough to do that. It is, after all, only a very small amount. But if we time it right, it should blast the guards off their feet and we'll be able to overcome them before they recover their wits."

"And what then? Suppose we do get out of here? Suppose we even succeed in getting above ground? If they don't catch us, we'll only freeze to death out there, anyway."

"Don't be so negative," he told me. "We'll just have to try to steal a sled and supplies and make it back to civilization. Unless you have a better idea."

I had to admit I didn't. But it still seemed like suicide to me to attempt to brave the Arctic on our own. We hadn't the knowho'w to survive in such an environment. I guessed that he didn't have it from the fact that the three men with him when he'd disembarked from the ship must have perished in the storm. He was right, though. There was nothing else to do but try it.

It was about an hour before the guards arrived. There were two of them. One entered carrying a tray of food. The other stood beside him, leveling a sub-machine gun at us.

But before he had a chance to use it, the Chinese lobbed the capsule of nitro to the floor at their feet. The blast knocked them both backwards on their keisters. The Chinese and I dived on top of them. I came up with the sub-machine gun. The Chinese took the pistol from the holster worn by the other guard. They were still dazed, and he saw to it that they stayed that way. He clubbed each of them over the head with the gun butt, and then motioned for me to follow him down the passage.

The first guard we hit was when we reached the entrance to Highman's office. We hit him hard - or rather, the Chinese did. He shot him through the heart before the man could even raise the rifle he was holding.

The Chinese was as curious about Highman's office as I was. We rifled it together. He was looking for information, but he didn't find any. I was looking for something else, and I did. I found the jewelled phallus and hefted it under one arm. If I got out of this alive, I didn't see any reason why I shouldn't return it to Singh Huy-eva. I owed him a favor.

The Chinese raised his eyebrows and made a crack about "materialistic Americans." I let it pass. This was no time for dialectics. We still had to make it to the elevator.

There was another guard waiting when we reached it. He never saw us. The Chinese shot him in the back. A few moments later we got off the lift, on the surface once again.

There was a large stack of crates piled up beside the entrance to the elevator shaft. Each of them bore the same warning: DYNAMITE-CAUTION! The Chinese looked at them, and then around at the circle of igloos. He stopped his slow turning and pointed.

I looked beyond the fringe of igloos to where he was pointing. There was a small, single-engined cabin plane sitting on the flat ice-field there. "I don't know how to fly a plane," I told the Chinese.

"I do," he assured me. "But first let us take care of S.M.U.T."

I followed his lead, and we loaded up the elevator platform with the dynamite. Then he attached a long fuse and lit it. We lowered the elevator and sprinted for the plane. Just as we reached it, the explosion went off.

I tossed the phallus in the plane and turned around for a moment to see the results of the blast. Icicles were still flying around, and the area where the S.M.U.T. underground HQ had been was thick with smoke. The igloos around the perimeter seemed to be caving in, melting before my very eyes. And the ice in the center of the circle was splitting and shifting downward, caving in on what was left of the underground complex. The Eskimos had bolted from their igloos and were putting distance between themselves and the site of the blast.

The Chinese was already in the pilot's seat, revving up the engine of the plane. I started to climb aboard, and found myself looking into the barrel of his pistol. There was a nasty smile on his face. He motioned me to pass him the sub-machine gun I'd slung over my shoulder, and I did. Then he waved his gun at me to back off. I backed off. I saw his finger start to tighten on the trigger, and I dived under the plane. He'd only been waiting until I was clear of it to shoot.

But he didn't waste time chasing me. I guess he figured it was just as good to leave me there to freeze to death. So he gunned the motor and skimmed down the field for a take-off.

The plane had skis in place of wheels for landing gear. What the Chinese didn't know was that I was balancing on one of those skis as he took to the air. I began climbing up the strut supporting it as he leveled off.

It was touch and go, but I managed to pull myself to the top of the fuselage. I inched along it until I was just over the cabin. I grabbed the wing with both hands and swung sideways into the cabin, feet first, breaking the window and slamming into the face of the Chinese with the heels of my boots.

He was fast. I'll say that for him. He rolled with the kick, let go of the controls, and came up with the sub-machine gun from the seat beside him. I slammed the barrel with my arm just as he fired. He blew off the top of his own head. It splattered messily over the ceiling of the cabin.

Now I was in a fine mess. I was umpteen thousand feet up in mid-air and I had no more idea of how to fly a plane than the man in the moon. I hadn't meant for the Chinese to die. I'd just wanted to get the drop on him and force him to fly me to something approximating civilization. But he was dead now, and there was no sense crying over spilled won-ton soup.

I pushed his body out of the plane and sat down in the pilot's seat. The controls meant nothing to me. So far the plane seemed to be flying itself. Seemed to be? It *was* flying itself!

Then I spotted the radio. I may not know anything about planes, but I do know how to work a radio. When I was a kid, I had a ham set. Me and Barry Goldwater. Except that he knows how to fly a plane.

I turned the radio on for an all-stations alert. I picked up the hand mike and cleared my throat. "May Day!" I hollered. "May Day! May Day!" I wasn't sure what it meant, but it was what they always yelled when they were in trouble in all those old war movies I'd seen on the Late Show. "May Day! May Day!" I caught a sudden reflection of myself in the glass covering the instrument panel. It was a surprise to see my face and not Jimmy Cagney's. "May Day! May Day!" Oh, Pat O'Brien, do you read me? I thought irrelevantly. I switched over and a voice sounded in my earphones.

"This is the United States Weather Station in Greenland," it said. "Identify yourself. Identify yourself."

"Steve Victor," I told him.

"Identify your craft."

"It's an airplane."

"Identify your craft," the voice repeated.

"That's all I know about it," I told him. "This is an emergency."

"What is the nature of the emergency? What is the nature of the emergency? What is the nature of the emergency?"

Just my luck to get a redundant radio operator at a time like this. Or maybe he just stuttered. "The nature of the emergency is that I don't know how to fly a plane," I told him.

"Are you in the air? Are you in the air?"

"Yes. Yes."

"How did you get there if you can't fly? How did you-"

"It's a long story," I interrupted. "The fact is that I'm here and I don't know how to fly this thing."

There was a long pause. Then - "We have advised Air Traffic Control of your predicament," the voice said. "We are cutting you in on their frequency. We are turning you over to Air Traffic Control now."

"Hello," a new voice said. "This is Air Traffic Control. We have been advised of your May Day. What is your altitude?"

I looked at the instrument panel. "Two-fifty," I told them.

"That is your speed. Look at the dial on your extreme left. What is your altimeter reading?"

"Thirty gallons."

"That is your fuel gauge." The voice sounded disgusted. "What we want is the reading on the gauge beside it."

"Oh. Eight thousand."

"Good. Maintain that altitude."

"How?"

"We do not read your last transmission."

"How do I maintain that altitude? I mean, doesn't this plane have to come down sooner or later?"

"Roger. We understand your predicament. Do not touch any of your instruments. Repeat. Do not touch any of your instruments. Now, reply to this. Reply to this. What is your destination?"

"Anywhere!" I said fervently. "Anywhere I can put my feet on the ground."

"We have picked you up on our radar and must advise that you are over Russian territory. Repeat, you are over Russian territory. The United States government takes no responsibility for your unauthorized flight. This message is being broadcast over all frequencies now. The United States government takes no responsibility for unauthorized flight over Russian territory."

"Well, how do I get away from Russian territory?" I wailed.

"Your current course on our radar will take you deeper into Russia. If your fuel holds out, you may make it to the Chinese border if you continue on that course. But must warn you that Russians will undoubtedly fire on your unidentified flying object before you reach China. Also, the Chinese will fire if-

"Hold it!" I shouted into the mike. "I can't hear you. There's some kind of an explosion outside the plane." I craned my head out the window. There were small puffs of black smoke all around me. I knew what they were. I smiled a Cagney smile and said the word to myself out loud: "Flak!"

The mike was still on, and it picked up the sound.

"Are you being fired upon?" the voice in my earphones asked.

"Yes."

"The United States government takes no responsibility for unauthorized flights over Soviet territory."

"Whose side are you on?" I asked. "Can't you tell me how to turn this crate around and get the hell out of here?"

"Turn your wheel until the reading on your compass shows thirty-five degrees. That will take you out of Russian territory and back toward Greenland."

I did as he said. A few moments later I was out of the flak-storm. After that, it was duck soup. They just told me what to do and I did it. I followed their radar beam straight to Greenland.

"Stand by for landing instructions," I was told. "All air traffic has been cleared for May Day landing. Now press your throttle forward so that the plane will lose altitude."

I did as he said and left my stomach somewhere up in the clouds. "I'm diving!" I shrieked.

"Pull back on your throttle. Do not panic. Do not panic."

"Who's panicking? It's just that I forgot to buy an insurance policy before I took off."

"Now, we are going to start you on a glide path. But before we do, keep in mind that your wheels and tail should touch ground at the same time so that you don't nose over."

"I don't have any wheels!" I remembered.

"Last transmission not understood. Repeat last transmission."

"I don't have any wheels. There's skis on this plane."

"Oy!"

"Can you talk him down, Irving?" I heard a new voice ask.

"I don't know how to ski," the first voice, Irving's, replied.

"Well, do your best."

"Yes!" I echoed. "Do your best. My bones break easy."

"Very well. Start your glide-path. Now, lower your flaps."

"What?"

"Your flaps! Lower them!"

"I wear jockey shorts. I can't-"

"The lever beside your knee. Pull it!" I pulled it.

"Now pull back on your wheel so that you're level. ... That's it.... Up on the nose a little so you can skid right in and - Look out! You're heading right for this transmission tower! Look out! Look - !"

I shielded my face against the crash. The impact of it hurled me from the plane. I landed right in the lap of a guy sitting in front of a large radio and radar setup.

"I told you to look out," he said disgustedly. "Now look what you've done. You wrecked the control tower."

"Sorry, Irving." I'd recognized his voice. "I'll try to see that it never happens again." My eyes lit on an object which had been hurled out of the wreckage along with me. I hurried to retrieve the four-foot bejeweled phallus.

"What's that?" Irving asked.

"What does it look like?"

"What happened to the rest of it?" Irving peered into the wreckage with worried eyes.

"There is no rest. This is all there is. And it isn't even scratched. That's what I call luck," I enthused.

"What are you going to do with it?" Irving asked.

"What do you think?"

"I don't know." He edged away. "Nothing would surprise me. Not after today. Now, you may not believe this," he added as he paused in the doorway before taking flight, "but this is the first time a man with a four-foot long golden dingus has ever crashed a plane into my conning tower!"

I hadn't time to chase after him and explain. I hustled over to the office of the man in charge and persuaded him to let me put in a call to Putnam in London. Putnam put the wheels in motion fast. I was saved from explanations and investigations. He arranged for a plane to fly me to New York immediately.

Just before take-off I spotted Irving walking across the airstrip. A voice called out to him as he passed the hangars. "Hey, Irv, coming to the New Year's Eve party tonight?"

"No," Irving replied.

"Why not?"

"It would be anti-climactic," Irving told him.

I chuckled to myself, hefted the phallus, and climbed aboard the plane. It was quite different from my last flight. It was good to be a passenger again and leave the driving to somebody else.

It was New Year's Day when I landed in New York. Putnam had arranged a room for me at a motel adjacent to the airport, and I went straight to it. I slept for twelve hours straight. The phone ringing beside my bed woke me. It was the room clerk. I had a visitor - "a friend of Mr. Putnam's."

I told the clerk to send him up to the room. A few moments later I was shaking hands with Singh Huy-eva. "I understand you have something for me," he said when the greetings were over.

"That I do." I opened the suitcase and produced the jeweled phallus with a flourish. "Gonads and all," I told him.

"Now my quest is over," Singh said. "But my instructions are to continue to help you if I can."

"I think you can," I told him. "Has S.M.U.T. discovered you're a spy yet?"

"No. Crampdick seems to believe I'm as legitimate as ever. He's back from Toronto now. I don't know why he was recalled. But I suspect something's up."

"Something is," I assured him. "Do you know if that blonde chick from the brothel is back, too?"

"Yes. I saw her up at the S.M.U.T. offices only yesterday." He looked at me curiously. "Don't tell me that she's-"

"Dr. Nyet. Right. Do you think you can find out where she's staying?"

"I can try. I'll get on it right away. I'll call you back when I have anything."

Singh left then. There was nothing for me to do but wait. I waited. Another day went by before he contacted me.

"I followed the young lady," he said over the phone. "She's staying at one of the S.M.U.T. branch offices in Forest Hills. People by the name of-"

"Highman." I finished the sentence for him.

"That's right. But how-?"

"Never mind that. Can you meet me over there right away?"

"As quickly as possible. But I'm afraid that won't be very quickly. Traffic's jammed up all over the city."

When the cab I'd called pulled onto Queens Boulevard, I saw that Singh hadn't been exaggerating. The transit strike had traffic tied up for miles. It was ridiculous in the direction I was going, and it was absolutely impossible coming from the other way. It was the evening rush hour, and cars coming from the city were averaging about a yard a minute.

We were doing a little better, but not much. Finally I couldn't take it any longer, and I got out and walked. I trudged some twenty blocks before I came to Highman's apartment house. Considering the transit mess, I figured it might be hours before Singh got there. I was just about to go it alone when my figuring was proved wrong.

Singh came pedaling up on a bicycle, his face quite composed under his white turban. "It's the only way to travel," he told me as he parked the bike.

"You are truly a unique eunuch." I grinned at him fondly. "Come on. The lion's den awaits."

The same acne'd faggot answered the doorbell. He hadn't changed since my first visit. He was still sweating for S.M.U.T. Singh waved his sharp, curved kukri under his nose, and we kept going through the S.M.U.T. offices back to Highman's private quarters.

"Look out!" Singh cried out, shoving me aside.

He'd seen them before I had: two gorillas behind the half-opened door, ready to pounce. They sprang out with guns blazing, but thanks to Singh's warning I was too fast for them. Using a table in the hallway for cover, I had time to aim more accurately. I fired twice and they both went down.

My gun was still smoking as Singh and I stepped over their bodies. I knew them both - though from different places. The first was one of the hoods who'd tried to kill me in the bordello. The other was the fellow who'd packed the violin case back in Salisbury.

"So I was right," Singh murmured, looking at the first.

I remembered then that he'd guessed the vice ring hooligans were really taking their orders from the same people who ran S.M.U.T. He'd guessed it that morning after the blackout in his hotel room. Now, with them playing watchdogs for

Highman, there could be no doubt. Only these watchdogs were through woofing for good.

"Those shots," Singh said. "They'll know we're coming."

"No," I disagreed. "This place is all soundproofed. It's a good bet that those shots were never even heard."

We continued cautiously into the interior of Highman's apartment. I led the way through the living room to the kitchen door. I shoved the door open and plunged in gun-first.

And there was Dr. Nyet!

She was perched on the kitchen table, a steak knife in her hand. The tip, of the knife was black with caviar. Dr. Nyet was smearing it on Ritz crackers.

"Steve Victor!" she exclaimed, surprised.

"Dr. Nyet." I returned the greeting.

"Then you know."

"That I do."

"Oh." She considered it a moment. "Well, would you like some caviar?" she offered.

"No, thanks."

"It's really delicious. I love caviar." She smiled. "Ethnic will out, I suppose."

She was wearing a low-cut peasant blouse and a skirt that was carelessly high on her thighs. She looked as blonde and sexy as she had the night we'd fanned the flames with our passion. Now my eyes gave me away, and she was amused at what they said I was thinking.

"Remember, Mr. Victor?" she said sultrily. "How could I forget?"

"It was a glorious blaze, wasn't it?" There was mockery in her sigh.

"But very out of character for Dr. Nyet," I remarked. "I was told the name came from your reluctance to have sex."

"That was before I became a victim of my own experiments," she explained. "You see, I tested the formula out on myself before I was forced to hide out in the brothel. Later, while I was actually working there, I did use the opposite, of course. But the side effects of my formula must have lingered."

"What side effects?"

"The side effects which make it strongly aphrodisiac. They can't be done away with - not if it's to counteract birth-control pills."

"Steve Victor!" It was an exclamation coming from behind me.

I swung around fast, sure that I'd find Highman with a gun in his hand. Singh turned with me, but we were both wrong. Highman had been so shocked to see me alive in New York that he'd spoken my name without stopping to think. If he had stopped to think, he might have gone away silently and fetched a weapon. Now it was too late. He stood there with - of all things - a baby in his arms!

"Hello, Oscar." Dr. Nyet made a kitchy-koo motion toward the child.

"What are you doing with a baby?" I blurted out to Highman.

"He's my son. Since his mother's demise, he has no one but me. Don't look so surprised, Mr. Victor. All kinds of people become parents. And I'm a good father, too. You should see me change a diaper."

"I'll bet. The question is, how do you find time between changing diapers and making formulas to go about taking over the world?"

"Fatherhood keeps few men from their work, Mr. Victor."

"Okay then, back to business. Hand over that formula."

"All right," Highman agreed.

"All right?" Dr. Nyet broke in. "Just like that? You're just going to hand it over to him?"

"The man is pointing a gun at me, Dr. Nyet. I never argue under such circumstances."

"But what about S.M.U.T.? Are you going to throw away everything we stand for just like that?"

"I don't believe in being a martyr," Highman told her. "I owe it to my child to survive as best I can." He set the baby down on a chair and reached inside his jacket pocket for the formula.

Singh and I were both looking at him, and Dr. Nyet made her move before we could stop her. She shot off the table with the steak knife in her hand and plunged it into Highman's chest. It left a nasty smear of black caviar on his white shirt. She grabbed the papers from his hand as he fell, pulled out the knife, and scooped up the baby.

"Victor," Highman said, blood bubbling to his lips. "Look out for Oscar." He pitched forward on his face. He was dead.

That dying request was going to be hard to grant. Dr. Nyet held the squalling orphan slung over one arm now. In the other hand she held the steak knife poised at the infant's throat. "Stay where you are, Mr. Victor," she said. "Or I'll kill the baby."

"Isn't it enough that you've made him an orphan?"

"That was only half my doing. You can blame his father for the other half."

"Surely you wouldn't hurt an innocent baby. Where are your motherly instincts?" Singh asked.

"S.M.U.T. comes first. Highman may have forgotten that, but I haven't. Either this baby and I go out of here together with the formula, or neither one of us goes out alive. Don't cry, Oscar," she added automatically, rocking the child.

"See. You do have womanly instincts." Singh pounced.

"Of course I do. But S.M.U.T. is more important to me."

She was standing alongside the stove now, and I had a sudden inspiration. I put the gun down and slapped my hands together sharply. The gamble paid off. A frypan shot out of its niche in the wall and dropped on the stove. En route it clipped Dr. Nyet's wrist and sent the knife flying from her grasp.

She darted out the kitchen door and into the living room, still holding the baby. She opened the French doors and poised on the small balcony outside them. But Singh was right behind her, and he grappled with her there. He wrested the infant from her just as I came to his aid. He stepped backward as I stepped forward, bent on grabbing the formula from Dr. Nyet's hand. She pulled away from me violently.

Too violently. The motion carried her over the edge of the balcony. Her scream seemed to echo in the air long after the splattering sound that said she'd hit the sidewalk fifteen stories below.

Singh and I bundled Oscar up and got out of there. Downstairs I elbowed through the crowd starting to gather around Dr. Nyet's body and removed the formula from her death-grip. Then Singh and I took Oscar back to my motel.

I called Putnam from there. He said he'd make arrangements for the child to be looked after in New York. He was pretty sarcastic about it. "I send you after a Russian scientist, and you come up with a baby," he snorted. "In all my espionage experience, you are the only man I know who could be depended upon for something that outlandish. Come back to London immediately. I'll want a full report."

I caught a plane the next morning. Singh and I said goodbye at the airport. He was going back to Nepal with his jeweled phallus. The eunuch returns with golden gonads, I thought to myself as I watched his plane take off. A few minutes later I took off myself.

I didn't call Charles Putnam immediately when I set down in London, though. I had some unfinished business to take care of first. I dialed Gladys' number from a booth at the airport.

"Well, fancy 'earin' from you, Yank. Hi'd given you hup for fair."

"Can I come over?" I asked.

"Not now. Hi'm hoccupied now. Han holder gentleman. A real toff 'e his too. But you might drop by lyter hon. Say hafter midnight. Hi'll leave the latch hoff so you can just let yourself hin."

"All right," I agreed. "It'll give me a chance to check into my hotel and get spruced up, anyway."

"See you lyter then, ducky." She hung up.

I did as I told her and arrived at her flat in Soho a few minutes after midnight. I let myself in as she'd suggested and headed straight for her bedroom. Gladys was lusciously nude and sound asleep on the bed. She was sleeping on her stomach.

"Gladys, I'm here." I shook her shoulder gently.

She opened her eyes and looked at me without moving. "Oh, hullo." She was still half asleep.

"What's that?"

"What, luv?"

"That." I pointed, but she couldn't see what I was pointing at. I had spotted a neatly folded sheet of paper sticking out from between the luscious globes of her *derrière*. I removed it, opened it, and read it.

"Oh, hisn't 'e ha caution." Gladys giggled. "Such ha gentleman, hand so much henergy for ha man 'is hage. Knocked me out properly, 'e did. Just like 'im to leave ha note hin a place like that. Wondrous frolicsome, 'e his. What does hit siy?"

"It says you were great," I lied, folding the paper up again and sticking it in my pocket. "Just great."

"Aow, hisn't that nice."

She may have been pleased, but I wasn't. I was pretty damn miffed at the note. You see, what it really said was, *S.M.U.T. on rampage again. Come immediately.* And it was signed, *Putnam!*

Damn him! I tore off my clothes. I grabbed Gladys. I did what Putnam said. Immediately! Both times! Then - and only then! - I left to report to Charles Putnam.