

The Bleary Eyes Vol. 3

Nor The Years Condemn



John Berry

contents

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ART CREDITS.

Arthur Thomson, Atom.....Front cover, pages..5,6,7,8,10,16,40,
41,42,43,44,49,51,54,55,56,58,back cover.

Steve Jeffery, S.J.....4,9,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,
22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33,
34,38,39,45,46,47,48,50,53,53.

Mike Higgs. MIK. 35,36. Alan Hunter. 37.

(items marked 'fuj' are illo's I've 'fudged' in order to make
them, more or less, fit the text).

My thanks to Vinç Clarke for his part in the re-typing.

My especial thanks to STEVE JEFFERY, whose illo's have much
enhanced the various Goon tales contained herein. No praise is
too much for his unstinting efforts.

NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN.

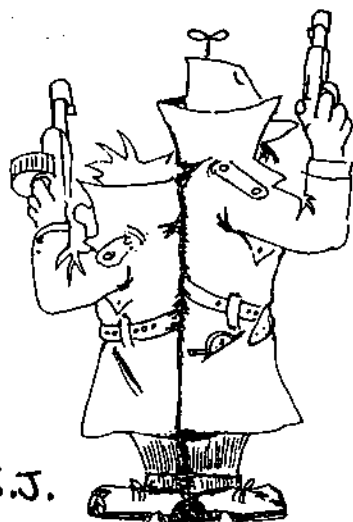
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of which this is

a guineapig press publication.

from Ken Cheslin.



introduction

by JOHN BERRY.

Once again I must express pleasurable astonishment at the generous way the Bleary Eye stories have been received, both in fanzine reviews and letters of comment, confirming in my mind that modern young fans, allegedly too serious, are starved of the facets which permitted the origins of The Bleary Eyes... over-the-top B.N.F.s... fans with amazing personalities... fan-feudes... humour; and there is an absence of fannish Pepys-like writers to report these activities, and to invent them if they didn't take place.

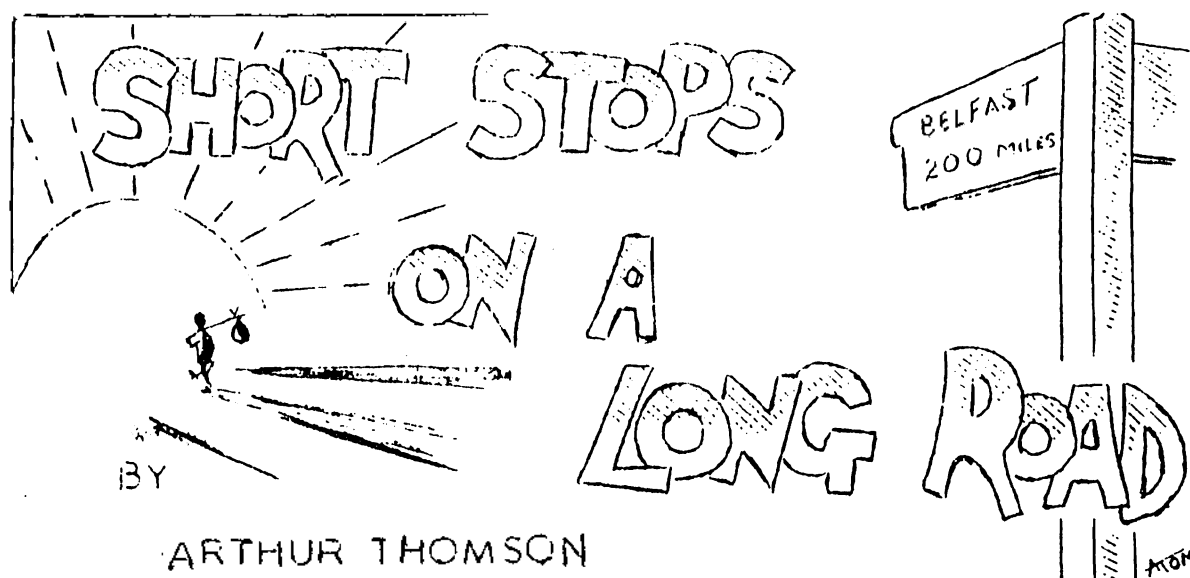
This latest volume of stories about Art and Goon Bleary climaxes with the extraordinary demise of Bleary in somewhat unsalubrious circumstances. Letters I have received from readers of the previous two volumes enquired as to how the death-knell of Bleary would occur, and one or two suggestions were submitted for my consideration. One of them I totally ignored, because the questions and observations were so framed that I am certain they formed part of a questionnaire to be completed by advanced students of psychology specialising in the phenomenon of alter ego fixation. To be truthful, I recognised the questions in their presentation form, because I was once asked them.

Another suggestion was for Bleary to blast off into the infinite in a space ship, which would certainly produce an easy conclusion acceptable to neo-fans and sf addicts, but not the aficionado of fannish mythology... it would be too trite... too easy... too flipant.

One German correspondent could not understand or apparently appreciate the constant reference to sexual matters in the stories, these, of course, being the idiosyncratic meanderings of Bleary's unsavoury and gauche character, as it were. In deference to this teutonic critique, I have permitted Bleary's last words to be uttered in the German language, with reference to a female undergarment...

I have once again to place on record the exceptionally unselfish work by Ken Cheslin and Viné Clarke in organising these publications. Kench is even now working on plans for THE BLEARY EYES 4, and he's even threatened a fifth volume.

John Berry.
July 1994.



ARTHUR THOMSON

Having given my all, in PLOY 8 (*he wrote the first of these columns*) I fled, a burnt out wreck, to Northern Ireland, where I hoped to recuperate in the balmy air of Belfast. Two weeks stay with John Berry, combined with the first heat wave Ireland has had since Saint Patrick drove out the snakes, found me back in London sunburned and semi-exhausted, face to face with a terse note from Bennett asking me for another column. I thought of replying, saying that I didn't exist any more (Norman Wansborough had said so), but realising a letter denying my existence would be futile, I sat down and wrote...

Before leaving for Ireland I went to my local Woolworths and bought a little red-backed threepenny notebook. With "Feint Ruled Lines", it said. In it I hoped to jot down some of the noteworthy incidents that might occur during my stay with Berry and visits to Oblique House. What actually happened was that I watched Berry write twenty stories covering the complete visit, while I vainly tried to note down the little items that I might have written up. He also, during odd moments, caught sunstroke, became delirious, recovered, jumped over a cliff at Ballywalter, and watched a complete three day cricket match on T.V. Walt Willis, watching Berry at one point during the holiday run straight down the beach and fling himself headlong into a sea that was only slightly above freezing point, remarked "A Powerful Man." I could only concur.

On the train returning to London after our holiday, which incidentally was one of the nicest my wife and I have ever had, I got to wondering how it had all come about. What strange destiny had brought Berry and myself together? It wasn't as if we lived near each other, or could even visit each other easily. Several hundred miles of land and sea lay between our respective homes. How did it happen, you ask? Well, it was like this....

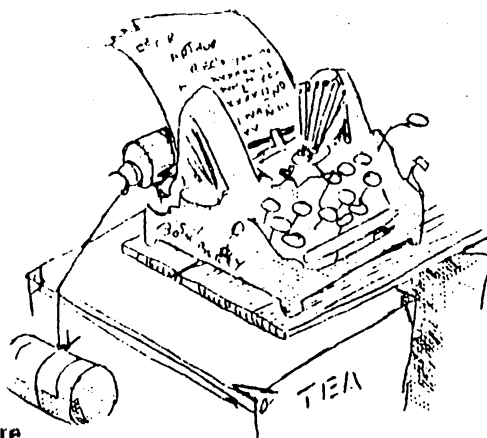
John Berry and I entered fandom around the same period of time, Autumn 1954. We entered in our own individual ways; he fell up the steps of Oblique House and I fell through the letter-box, John in the shape of a policeman and I in the form of a letter to Walt Willis. We were both about the same age, around twenty-seven.

Walter A. Willis, much to his credit, ignored the hirsute adornment on Berry's top lip, and my own atrocious spelling, and welcomed us with open arms. These closed a little after Berry had turned up at Oblique House ten days in succession and I had sent twenty misspelled letters. Berry brought up reams of manuscript he churned out in the wee small hours, and I sent hundreds of little pieces of paper covered with drawings -- I was still neo-fannish enough not to call them "illos". Willis, overcome by the efforts of both of us, finally gave in and we appeared in the same issue of HYPHEN, Berry with the first of his factual stories and I with the first of my unfactual BEMs.

My first direct contact with John Berry was the arrival of a letter from him, typed on the dreaded Shaw-Berry typer, I might add. He complimented me on the illustrations I had drawn of him in several fanzines, and said they looked exactly like him. He also volunteered the information that he was a Drawer in a police bureau. I looked up the illustrations I had drawn of him and wrote back: "You looklike that?". I also said that I hadn't thought of him as a Drawer in a police bureau. I told

him I was going to write to the Fortean Society immediately, and tell them I was in communication with an inanimate piece of wood in Belfast.

This began an exchange of letters between us which at this end of the line has filled a soap carton, two shelves and an old gas-mask case with yellowish Berry-typed paper. In the earlier letters Berry explained what he meant by a "Drawer" in a police bureau. It appeared that he drew scenes of crimes, murders, burglaries, and often went out on exciting cases like tracking down lost dogs. He stated confidentially that he also took fingerprints, and would I like mine taken? I wrote back saying they were quite happy where they were, on the ends of my fingers, and I wouldn't want them taken anywhere else. The next few letters were mainly devoted to explanations that fingerprints weren't taken, they were just took, but we both got so confused on the issue it has remained one of the subjects we just don't mention any more.



By this time we had become as friendly as letters would allow. I had sent John several illos of himself and he had sent me some clippings from his moustache



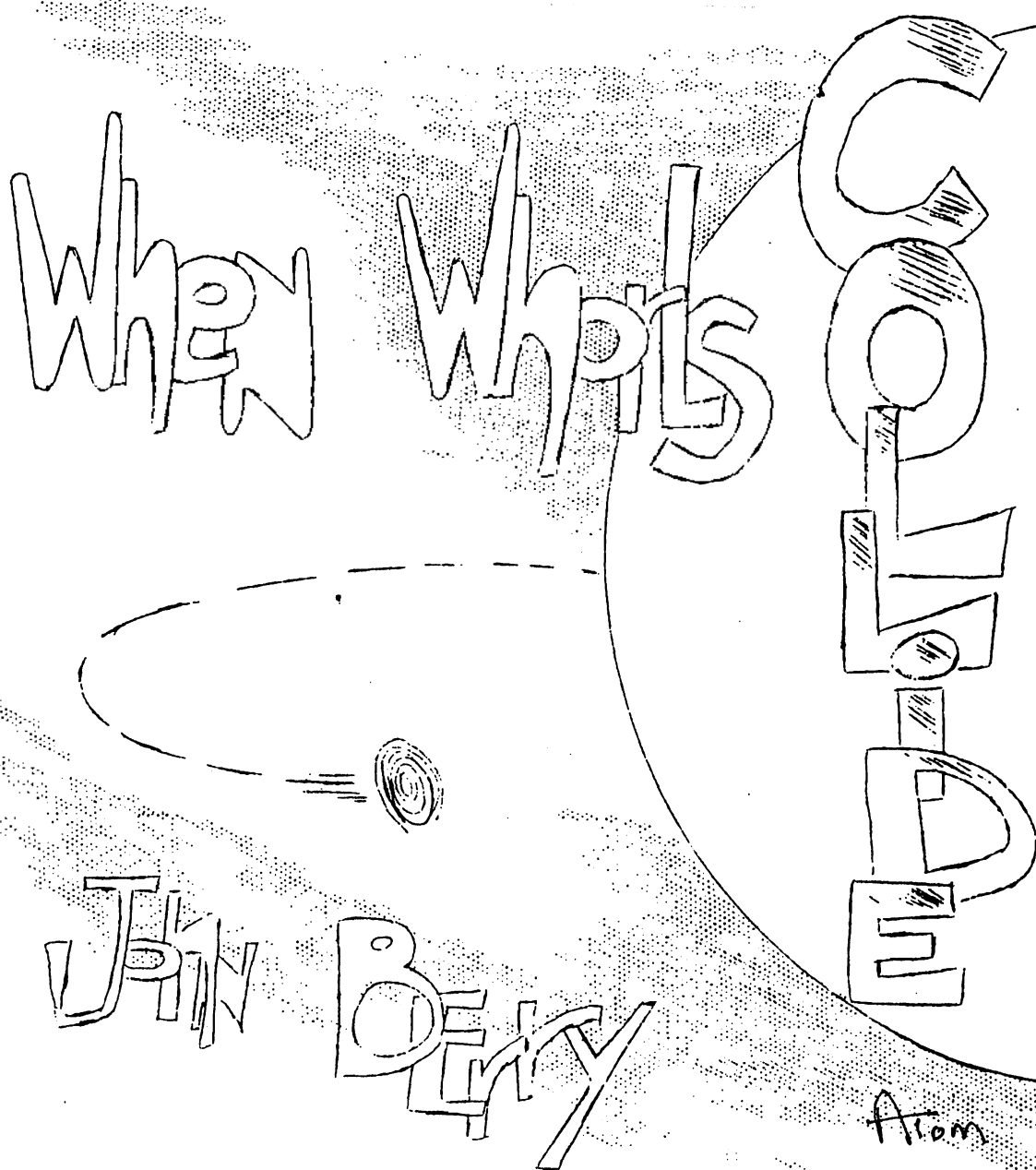
We discussed Fans, fanzines, and fandom in our letters. He praised my illos that were appearing around, and I did likewise for his stories. Ah, those balmy egobootiful days, gone now in the welter of stencils, mss, and terse notes we send each other in an effort to publish a fanzine.

In early 1956 events culminated in our first meeting. John, his wife Diane, and his children, came over to England to visit John's parents who live in Birmingham, and seizing the opportunity they travelled down to London for a few days. The visit was a complete success. John and I managed to overcome our revulsion on meeting one another face to face, and our wives, Diane and Olive, liked each other immediately and became bosom friends.

After the visit was over, the letters, stencils and mss. continued to flow both ways across the Irish Sea, and almost a year and seven RETRIBUTIONs later my wife and I stood at the rail of a ship steaming into Belfast Lough, happy and a little excited, to start what was one of the nicest and most wonderful holidays we have ever had, in the company of two of the friendliest people we know.

About the holiday itself? Well, like I said, go read Berry.

ARTHUR THOMSON
PLOY 10
Sept. '57



The GDA system of classifying fingerprints has been evolved after considerable effort by the Goon himself. There is no stereotyped method of classifying fingerprints. Police forces and investigating organisations all over the world use the ordinary Henry system as a basis, but have formulated their own individual system dependant on the number of complete sets of fingerprints they have to deal with. The Goon has discovered by trial and error, mostly error, that his agents all over the world have experienced some difficulty in classifying fingerprints according to the basic Henry system aforementioned, and it is for this reason that the Goon has invented a new simplified method of classifying the digits. It is with the Goon's authority that this lucid extract from the Top Secret Handbook is presented, below, for the information of bewildered fen the fannish world over.

'.....and to demonstrate the greater efficiency of my system when compared with that used by some mobs like the FBI and NSY, it is necessary for me to briefly explain the orthodox method. This is liable to completely baffle you, as it has done to the majority of my agents, and thus it will come as a happy surprise to know that there is an easier way, and that I have discovered it.

a). LOOP



b). TENT



c). ARCH



d). WHORL



Any person can have all the one type at his fingertips (to coin an intellectual phrase) or a mixture of the lot of them.

The normal method of classifying is to give all whorl-type fingers a numerical value, either 16, 8, 4, 2, or 1, and so, by the terribly complicated method of working out how many whorls there are in the ten digits, and adding the counts, a primary classification is obtained. You are no doubt all baffled by these sheer complications so it is understandable that my agents have been utterly frustrated in their attempts to classify the few sets of fingerprints they have been able to obtain.

Now hold tight to your beanies, for here is my new EASY method...read it...sample it's naive simplicity, sigh at it's fundamental goonishness.

Look back at illo a)....a loop. A LOOP?

This is misleading. My code name for this extremely common pattern is, the:-

PSEUDO PAPER CLIP RECLINING AT AN ANGLE OF 45 DEGREES, AND INVERTED TO LEFT OR RIGHT.

You see?, this is far more explicit than 'a loop'. With my form of nomenclature, as long as the pencil is sharpened, there should be no difficulty in enumerating my phraseology. (that latter phrase is reprinted , from page 347 of Norman G. Wandsborough's "My Life and Times").

Now cast your peepers to illo b)

A tent, it says.

A TENT ???

How ridiculous can you get? Scotland Yard and the FBI are completely up the creek. The Goonish version of the impression, which, fortunately, is not too common, is;-

VERTICAL RIDGE ON WHICH IS SURMOUNTED A PARALLEL PATTERN OF RIDGE SEQUENCES REMENISCENT OF A SECTIONALIZED STALAGMITE.

Fellow Goons, understanding this is helping you. I am enabling you to visualize the different impressions with the minimum of effort. As you will see the scheme gets easier as you progress. I mean, my definition of a tent is so self-explanatory that even a child would know what he was talking about; and if a child can do it, so can a GDA agent. A thing like a tent has nothing to do with fingerprints, has it?.

Type c) also reveals the decadence of most of the police forces the world over. They call it an 'arch'.

Get that?

An ARCH, if you please.

In all sincerity, I appeal to you, how can this insignificant pattern of ridges be an arch? To my mind an arch is something Gothic, a monumental collection of stone rising upwards and over... the Marble Arch in London, the Arc de Triumpe in Paris. My simple, straightforward description of this pattern will be easily remembered by you Goons, if you have already followed my dictums;-

COLLECTION OF HORIZONTAL RIDGES SHOWING EVERY INDICATION OF ADVANCED PREGNANCY.

I must stress this point, as you will no doubt discovered, the Goon Method obliterates any hazy adjectives or ambiguous phraseology. It is factual.

Let me prove this to you. Take type d).

The Whorl.

Now I will admit this is nearer the mark. Admittedly, the pattern does resemble a whorl. But I have found in field experience that my agents use the expression 'whorl' as more of an indication of their state of mind.

Look at type d) once more, Carefully.

I term it;-

FIFTY PERCENT OF MARILYN MONROE.

Q.E.D.....say that a fan has six whorls in his hand, in the old system you would have a primary fraction, such as $4/24$, but in my method, you would have Three Marilyn Monroes!

Although I say so myself, this is my greatest discovery.... an appealing way of combining hard graft with the nicer things

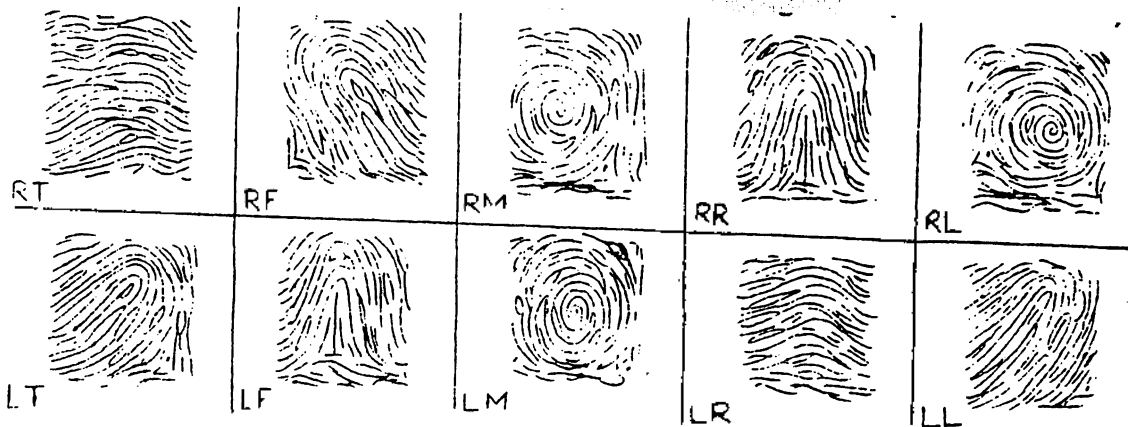
in life, and bringing into play my province that Miss Monroe should never be away from our thoughts!

On the next page is a specimen set of fingerprints. (these belong to the fan who made the malicious phone call that sent kindly fen to London Airport to meet the Benfords in 1957...at the wrong time....remember?).

To show you the great technical advance of the Goon Method, here, first of all, is how Scotland Yard would classify the set.



$$\frac{3}{13} \quad \frac{aU}{T} \quad ||$$

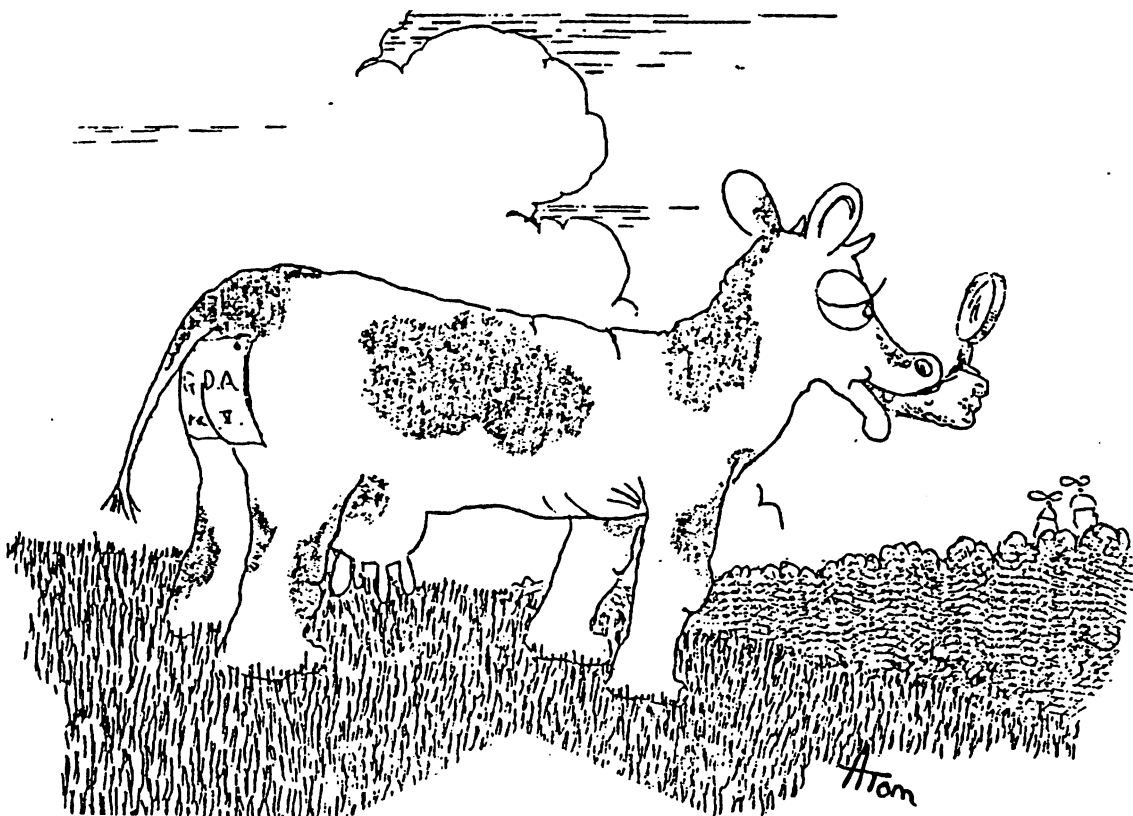


Now, really and truly, how could a GDA agent work on those lines?

But how much simpler if the classification reads thusly;-
 1½ Marilyn Monroes, two sets of pregnant ridges, a couple of pseudo stalagmites, and three paper-clips; one left, two right, all mixed up.

You see. There is utter individuality.

I must add there seems to be a rush amongst GDA men to find a person with ten FIFTY PERCENT MARILYN MONROES in their hands. So if you DO have ten FIFTY PERCENT MAR...oh blast, 10 50% MARILYN MONR...oh crikey. If you have got ten whorls in your hands, you'd better get your subs paid up.





by

John Berry.

1993.

I travelled to London to stay with Art and Olive...Art had asked me to come over from Belfast to witness the first operational test of his new MAKEFAST technique, which he considered would make the INDENTIKIT system of detailing wanted criminals faces obsolete.

I lay in bed in my room, masticating my last piece of toast. Art was at work. Olive knocked and entered with my third coffee and toast of the morning.

"It's almost eleven thirty, I suppose I should get up?" I suggested.

"No, G.B. Stay in bed, you're out of my way whilst I'm cleaning the house", she replied. The gal was very considerate.

Ten minutes later she opened the door and said I was wanted on the 'phone.

"Goon Bleary?. The voice was disguised, as if projected through a handkerchief, but I felt I knew who it was...

"Yes, good morning, Blaze", I countered.

There was a pause, as if the handkerchief was being doubled.

"Do you want to earn one hundred pounds for a two minute job?"

Business was bad, this was considerably more than my on-going fee...one hundred per cent better, in fact.

"Shoot", I ordered.

"Go to the refuse bin opposite the newsagents on Streatham High Street. One hundred pounds in used notes is under the rubbish. This is your fee. At exactly 1.37 pm go into the newsagents and purchase a Barbara Cartland paperback. That's all you do. That's the entire operation".

The 'phone was rammed down.

That gave me another hour in bed.

After a snack at 1pm I walked to the High Street, wearing my regulation trilby, trenchcoat, boots, plonker in my shoulder holster. I rummaged under the debris of plastic cups, empty tins of Cola, one or two sticky items, and found the money.

I flipped through it, smiled, and put it in my trenchcoat pocket. I leaned against a shop window until zero hour, then I sauntered into the shop, asked for the romantic book counter. Another raised eyebrows job. I selected one with a negligee'd girl on the cover, sipping a glass of champagne. TRUE LOVE IN BRUGES, it was called. I sorted out the money from my small change, and suddenly heard a raucous voice...

"This is a hold-up. No one move and no-one will get hurt. All I want is the cheques".

I turned round. A denim-dressed man with a black motor-cycle helmet on his head held a pistol, pointing it at the assistant, who, gibbering in fear, opened the till and handed over the cheques. The man grabbed them and ran out of the shop. It was over in a few seconds.

Well, The Bleary Eyes organisation could not stand by and not do something about it. I ran out of the shop shouting, 'STOP THIEF'. I pursued the robber, Barbara Cartland in my left hand, plonker in my right. As the man jumped onto the pillion seat of a throbbing motor cycle, I fired, and two plonkers stuck to the rear of his helmet as the motorcycle whizzed into the traffic.

I had done all that I could. I walked back to Art's and Olive gave me a neat coffee.

Art rushed in at 3.10 pm.

"I've taken a couple of hours time-off from work", he panted. "The Yard want me to do a MAKEFAST experiment this afternoon; there was an armed robbery in the High Street, and in", he looked at his watch..."seven minutes the police at the scene will be ringing through with details of the robber...Goon, will you sit at the 'phone please?"

Art explained that normally, when INDENTIKIT illustrations were prepared, the police generally interviewed one person to whom they demonstrated different facial features, asking the witness to pick out the most likely one. Art's idea was to infest the crime scene with numbers of police officers who would seek witnesses and ask them the most prominent thing they remembered about the offender's appearance; thus many people would be involved in the preparation of the picture of the wanted criminal, instead of one person expected to have to recall every item of descriptive data.

"But I saw the robbery, Art," I explained, "it was a man wearing a black motor cycle helmet, denim jacket and jeans, and Dr. Martin boots."

"Er, oh well, we'll see what the Yard officers tell us." he said.

Art stood at an easel on which was propped a square yard of whitened hardboard. He held a thick black-marker stylo in his right hand.

The 'phone jangled. I picked it up.

"Wearing a trenchcoat," I shouted to Art, the first item of information.



Art, eyes gleaming, started to stroke with the stylo.

"Pile of money if left hand," I shouted from the 'phone, and in the following half an hour I passed all the clues to Art..."battered trilby hat...bags under his eyes...large nose...bushy moustache...big boots...gun in right hand..."

Art drew furiously, his eyes gradually becoming larger, like goose eggs, as he surveyed his handiwork...

"L shaped tear on lower part of trenchcoat, badly sewn."

"I say, Art," I said in bewilderment, "I have an L-shaped rip on my trenchcoat, very roughly repaired."

"Come here, Goon," said Art, the corners of his mouth turned down in frustration. I crossed to him, ignoring the persistent telephone.

"Great Ghu, it's me," I breathed. But, as I explained to Art, in the best GDA tradition I had chased the robber, although the many witnesses obviously thought that I was involved in the crime. The Barbara Cartland book in my left hand had looked like a bundle of money.

Someone rapped the front door. Art waved his hands over Olive's eyes...she had been following the procedure and it appeared to have strained her incredulity to a danger point.

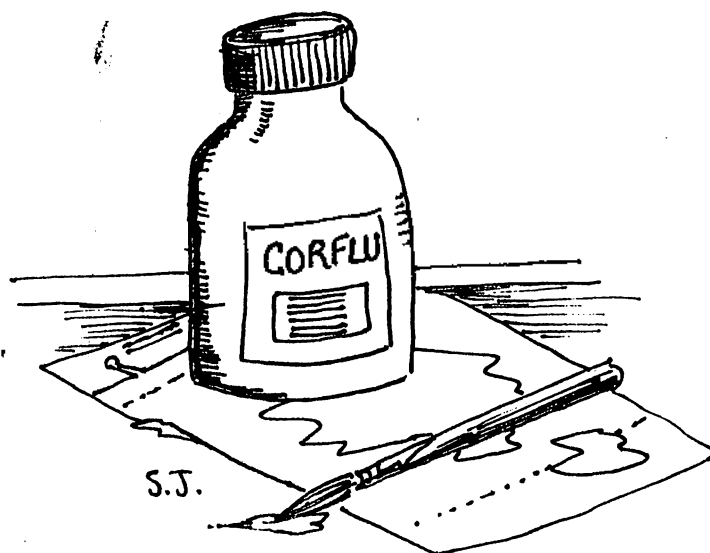
"It's the Goon," she muttered, but Art quickly took control of the situation.

"That's the detectives from the Yard," he said, "They've come to see the result of the MAKEFAST experiment...keep 'em talking for a moment."

Art picked up another hardboard square and rapidly painted on it a sketch of the motor-cycle helmeted man I had chased.

Two Yard men came in, tall and broad, in collars and ties, well-cut suits...They looked at Art's sketch.

"We've caught the man, on the M1, on the back of a motor cycle, dressed like that. A witness saw two rubber-tipped missiles jutting from the back of his helmet, and



the police spotted him. Another man chased him from the shop premises, although originally the investigating police thought he was part of the team, trying to distract attention from the motor cyclist. No matter, we'll try MAKEFAST again....don't call us, we'll call you."

"It worked out tremendously well, Art." I commiserated, "but it just goes to show how wrong witnesses can be. My plonker shots cracked it though, another triumph for The Bleary Eyes."

We sipped coffee and I explained to them the mysterious 'phone call I'd received, which took me to the premises.

Art suggested my flamboyant appearance might have been Blaze's reason for having me at the scene, he knew I'd chase the robber, and witnesses would concentrate on me, rather than on a mundane pillion passenger. If it was Blaze, of course.

"But why take cheques, not money?" mused Olive.

"Plenty of reasons," I bluffed, but nothing came to mind.

"Maybe they were following an unknown suspect," suggested Olive, "who made out the cheque in the shop, and they wanted it to chemically treat it for fingerprints to identify the suspect, and they knew they could not get the cheque until it had been passed through the bank."

"I was just going to say that," I interrupted.

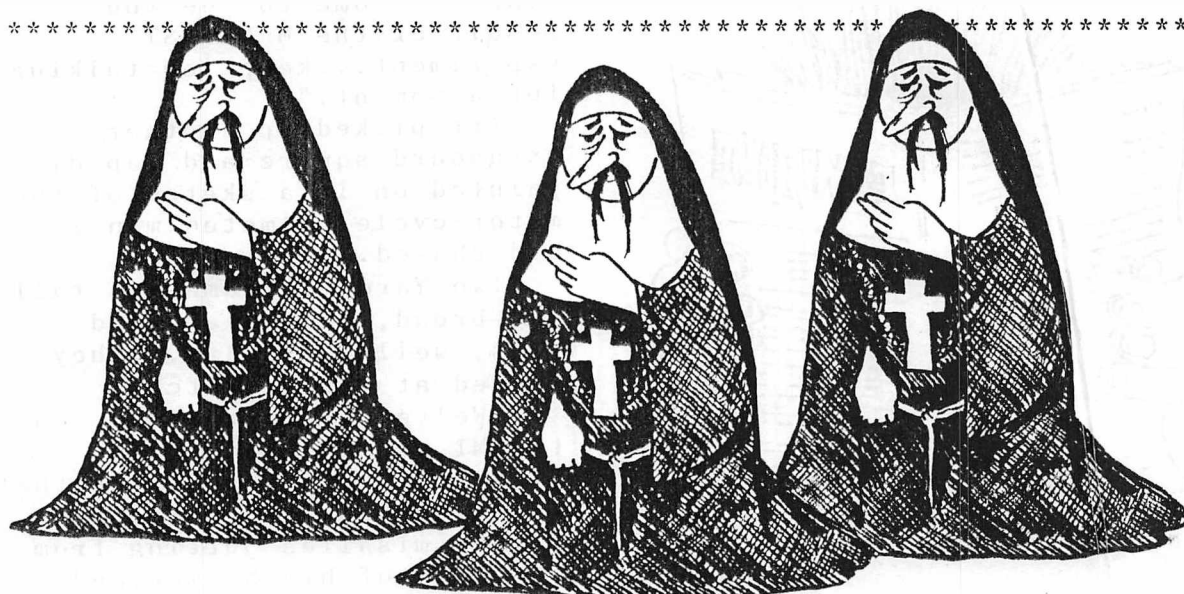
"Alternatively," stressed Olive, "a message in invisible ink could have been on the cheque, and the operation to retrieve it was so urgent that subterfuge was the only way of immediately obtaining the cheque."

"My thoughts exactly," muttered Art, a broken man.

"Or, if it wasn't MI5," went on Olive remorselessly, "maybe a man had obtained property by uttering a false cheque and wanted to retrieve it."

"I could go on all day with these theories," I snapped, "but it is only fair for me to share my hundred pounds fee... thirty three pounds each for me and Art, and thirty four pounds to Olive, to include subsistence payment for my keep."

I left next morning. I was glad Olive hadn't asked for the Barbara Cartland book, I'd only got to page 86.



I had not contacted Art for many years.

John Berry.

It was not jealousy on my part, it was just that I felt that now he was tremendously rich and moved in high circles he would not wish to be reminded of the days in the fifties and sixties when he assisted me with our Bleary Eyes investigations.

I mean, a Freeman of the City of London would not wish it to be bandied about that once he thought one had to wear bicycle clips to visit a Cyclotron.

Of course, without being cynical, it is only fair to state that Art's accumulation of lucre was the result of a complete fluke. Whilst working as a fitter at an aircraft factory he accidentally spilled a cup of canteen tea (one sweetener, no milk) into a bubbling cauldron of aluminium, zirconium and titanium. Quickly the

resultant alloy solidified, and now forms the inner casing of most of the world's jet engines, because of its superior strength. Only Art knew the essential ingredient of the alloy, ie; which brand of sweetner he used. Quickly a consortium built up around Art. It cornered the market in 'Perkins Sweeteners', and was thus able to negotiate a deal with Rolls Royce. Art, naturally, being the principal shareholder.

Sometimes his photograph appeared in the newspapers; he usually wore a Homburg hat, thick lensed spectacles, a silk scarf knotted round his throat, some critics said not tightly enough. Art had made it big, and lived accordingly.

My more limited success was also due to a mischance, but I consider it to be rather more profound than Art's discovery. I was leaving the Gent's toilet at Skelmersdale railway station in the summer of '66, when a man jammed a brush laden with black paint up my left nostril. He had been painting the word GENTLEMEN on the door when I had opened it, he was putting a full stop at the end of the word. My lightening mind hit on the idea of using a stencil to print LADIES and GENTLEMEN very quickly on lavatory doors; and thus in six months I had patented BLEARY'S LATRINE GUIDE. Dividends on the shares were minimal, because the latrine guides were made of cast iron, and lasted for about one hundred years. Luckily I had inserted a clause which allowed me 7.29 pence every time the latrine guide was used, which was constantly, because of the activities of a criminal-type with a warped mentality who kept painting across the words on the doors.

ART

DEKKO



S.J.

MEN



S.J.

However, although Art lived in Park Lane, and had my own little pad in Brixton, and was happy to listen to classical music and dream of another invention which would enable me to become more financially viable.

So I was really surprised when Art rang me up in the winter of '81.

"Bleary", he said in a posh voice completely devoid of any Celt inflexion, "I have a private box at the Festival Hall next Saturday, would you like to be my guest?"

"Oh yes, sir", I said, "Who is wrestling?"

"It's a classical concert, Bleary", he admonished, though in a kindly tone. "Actually, the London Symphony Orchestra are playing Ein Heldenleben, by Richard Strauss. As the music so closely typifies my own career I felt you would like to attend the performance".

"Wonderful", I said. "But what made you think of me, after all these years?"

"I saw you smearing a red paint covered rag over the word LADIES at the toilets at Heathrow Airport, and I said to myself, Bleary must share in my triumph".

"Oh...er", I stuttered.

"I'll pick you up in the Mercedes next Saturday night at 7.30 pm. Goodnight, Bleary".

"Goodnight, sir", I said. I replaced the telephone.

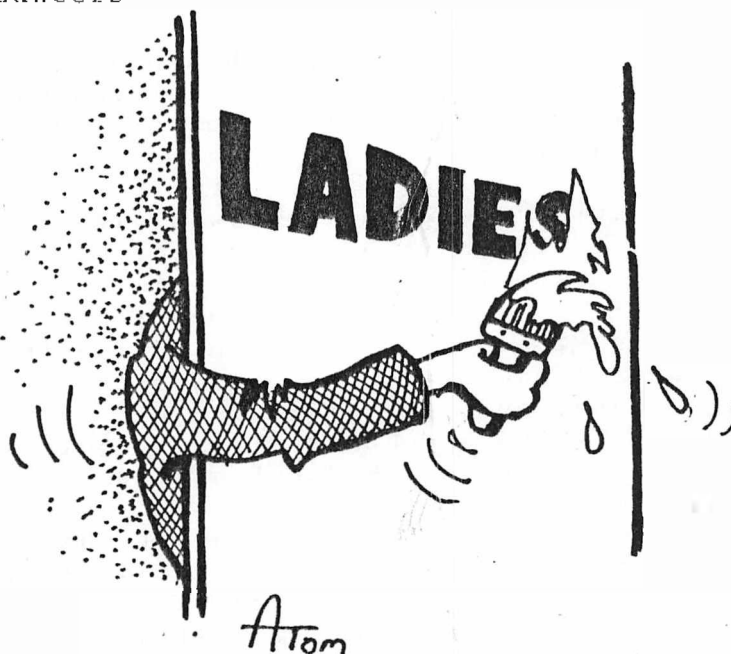
Well, what a tremendous coincidence.

Ein Heldenleben was also my favourite piece of classical music. 'A Hero's Life'. I thought it succinctly embodied my own life, and I played it every day...sometimes twice. I was particularly delighted with the frequent incursions of the solo violin, usually played by the leader of the orchestra, depicting the gentle and maybe sensual demeanour of his wife. It reminded me so very much of my own loved one, now unhappily returned to the second row of the Can Can dancers of the Follies Bergere.

I hoped my wife never found out.

Art's chauffeur, Gerald, a nice boy, knocked on my door, and of course I was ready. I felt it was incumbent upon me to show Art that although not in his 'big time' league, I was still reasonably wealthy, and I had hired an outfit for the evening.

Atop my head was a floppy wide-brimmed corduroy hat. The brim was rather wide, and I had to cut two holes in front of it to see where I was



Atom

going, but I felt it typified my unyielding personality. Some critics would opine that my pink shirt, tartan tie, green cape, and blue plastic trousers clashed somewhat, but I was told by the assistant that it was all the rage in the swinging London scene, of which I was now an acknowledged member. As the assistant told me, 'if you wear those clothes you'll be certified'.

I sat on the back seat with Art.

The Astrakhan collar of his overcoat almost hid his face, but he held out a gnarled hand.

"Good to see you, Bleary", he said, "after all these years. Um...you may call me Art".

I shook his hand, old habits die hard. I admired the way he took a rapid inventory of his rings when our hands parted.

"Congrats on the Merc", I panted.

"What do you drive, Bleary", he asked conversationally.

"I hold shares in London Transport", I replied enigmatically.

He reached under the seat and handed me a box about eighteen inches long and fifteen inches wide. The mahogany was inlaid with mother-of-pearl spelling the words, 'Goon Bleary'.

"I've had this for some time", he said, in a kindly manner, "It's a present to remind you of the good old times we had together in the fifties".

I gulped audibly and flipped the hasps off the lid. Inside were two steel-blue hand guns. One had a long barrel with half a dozen rubber-tipped plonkers in two sets of three above and below the barrel. The other had the sleek shape of a high-powered water pistol with a 300 ml capacity, as printed on the butt. Both weapons looked lethal in the comfort of their red velvet recesses. Both butts were initialled 'G.B.' in gold.

"I had them hand-made by Krupps", explained Art.

I wiped a tear from each eye.

"Th..thank you so much, Art", I gritted.

The Merc stopped outside the Festival Hall, Art gave orders to Gerald and the Merc slid silently away.

We entered the Festival Hall. Well-dressed people were flitting about, none of them as flamboyantly as myself. Art seemed to maintain a certain distance from me, which I attributed to the fact that he wished to retain his anonymity. We climbed the stairs, and were escorted into our box on the left of the auditorium, facing the stage. We sat down. I slid the gun case under the seat. I had never been in the Festival Hall before. It was magnificent. Our box gave an unobstructed view of the entire hall. Even as we became seated the musicians commenced to file onto the stage and take their seats. Soon every seat except one was filled, and the players started to practice a few nervous scales and themes on their instruments. But they became silent as the leader entered. He bowed to the audience, received scattered applause, and took the vacant seat.

Then the conductor, Sir Herbert Pilchard, made his entrance, carrying the baton tastefully between the finger and thumb of his left hand.



Sir Herbert swept the musicians into those highly charged opening bars, and I settled down in the comfort of my seat to immerse myself into the luxury of abstract appreciation. It was a wonderful experience to see the effort required by the conductor to control the contrasting tempi, which he did mostly by digital gesticulation, although, in the intensity of certain moments he used his shoulders and even an elbow to indicate the entrance of certain instruments.

At first I couldn't believe it. My attention was initially drawn to that area because I observed bulges in the curtain, but, well, when the muzzle was so suddenly thrust into view I was utterly shocked and bewildered. Yet no one else seemed to notice it. Down below me the homogeneous mass of the audience edged forwards in their seats, stunned by the overpowering grandeur of the music.

He opened his eyes and looked at me rather angrily through his spectacles. "What do you want, Bleary?" he demanded.

"Nonsense!"

"Great Ghu, Bleary, you're right!" exclaimed Art. "What the hell is happening?"

Art dropped swiftly behind the box and joined me.

"Shouldn't think so", I hissed, "Unless Joseph Nicholas is here". I peered over the edge of the box. Suddenly an evil fac

"We must do something, Bleary" hissed Art.

A black and white cartoon illustration. In the center, a detective wearing a trench coat and a fedora hat is looking towards the left. He has a serious expression and is holding a handgun in his right hand. To his left, a man in a suit and tie is walking away, carrying a briefcase. The detective's gaze is fixed on the man's back. The style is simple line art with some cross-hatching for shading. At the bottom left, the initials 'S.T.' are written.

I rested the back of my left hand on the edge of the box, placed my right wrist in my left palm, put the back sight to 75 yards, aimed at the man's forehead, and squeezed the trigger.

You've got the hand it to Krupps, and perchance a mite of egoboo for my own small skill, but there was the mans face, eyes bulging as the shaft struck his forehead, and stayed!. He looked like a reluctant unicorn.

He disappeared like a rocket inside the curtain, and then two heads peered out, scanning the auditorium, and, yes, two rifle muzzles were pushed through as well!

"This is it, Bleary", rasped Art. "Once more the Bleary Eyes sweep into sheer scintillating action".

He wrenched the zap from the case and raced out. I followed him, plonker rampant. The vast tabled complex was empty. Art seemed to know where he was going, I loped after him. Pausing only to fill his zap butt with an abandoned glass of stale brown ale Art continued his safari. Suddenly he stopped outside a closed door, a firm left forefinger to his lips demanded silence.

He gently opened the door, stepped through it, I followed him.

What a superb ambush; a triumph for the Bleary Eyes. The three men had their backs to us, looking through the curtain towards the orchestra. And there we were, their undoubted quarry, directly behind them!

Without a word of warning Art zapped the frothy brown fluid over their heads. They turned as one and advanced towards us, playing their trumpets.

Playing their trumpets?!

"Oh, awfully sorry", said Art. He grabbed me by the arm and pulled me through the doorway we had just entered. I followed him down the wide staircases. He ran so quickly that I only had time to smear out the words on three toilet doors.

"There it is, Goon", snapped Art. We were in his posh flat in Park Lane. He had withdrawn the long-playing record of Ein Heldenlaben from his vast collection of classical records. He pointed to the music notes on the reverse side of the record cover. Richard Strauss had asked for three trumpeters off stage to give dramatic three-dimensional impact to the battle sequence.

"Rifle muzzles indeed!" snorted Art. "They were the ends of trumpets. They were watching the conductor for the signal to blast out their chords".

"I won't stop for dinner", I hinted, but Art said, "alright, that would be fine". He offered to get Gerald to drive me home, but I said I'd walk.

I trudged towards Brixton, and then remembered I'd forgotten to bring the gun case with me. Oh well. Gerald would bring it round one day.

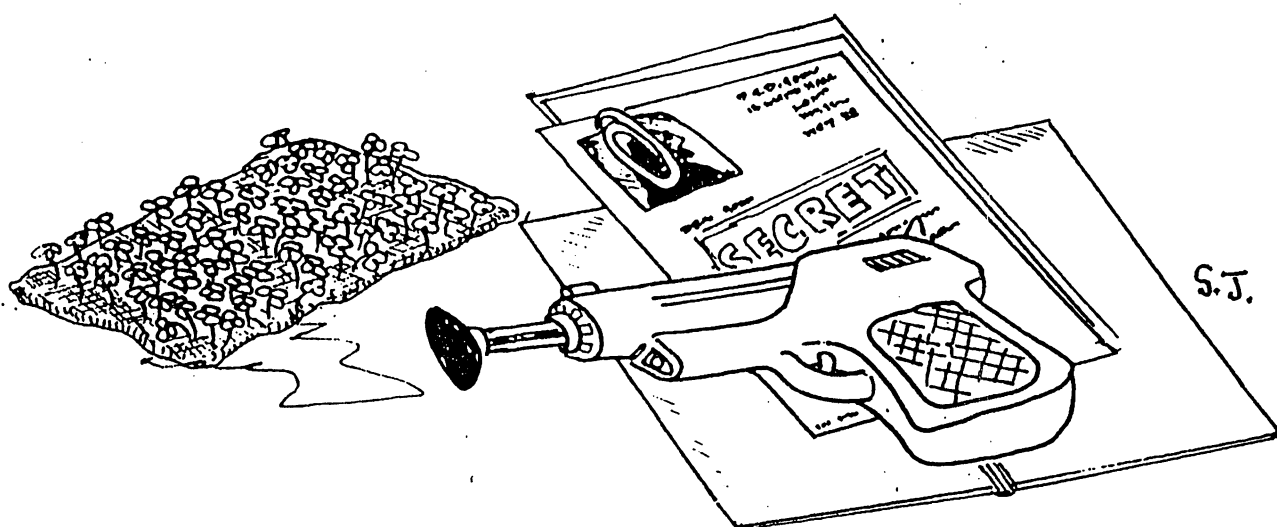
What an anti-climax to my career. For a few seconds it had looked as though it would be the apogee. Ein Heldenlaben Two. What a disaster. An all-time low for the Bleary Eyes. It just couldn't be worse.....Then it started to rain.....



S.J.

John Berry,
Pot Pourri
No.35.
1965.

THE WATERCRESS FILE



I pulled back the heavy plastic curtains and looked across the square to the austere concrete block of flats opposite. Multi-storied, grey, sombre. Serving no purpose artistically or aesthetically. Just places for people to live in.

I sighed. I always used to pride myself on enjoying one of the nicer things in life - my own company. I could sit and chuckle to myself for hours. But even I found myself boring after four months.

True, I was obeying orders. I was a sucker for doing what I was told. My army training, I suppose. I'd plenty of time for consideration. I recalled an incident when I was a rookie private. The platoon was divided into three sections. I was leading the first section. A hundred yards away was a road junction. As we approached it the gritty voice of the platoon sergeant shouted, "Turn left!" We'd marched about twenty miles, and I don't want to take the blame away from myself, but when I heard that order I said to myself, (and I'm sure you'll agree), the sergeant meant 'turn left at the road junction'. So on I staggered. "HALT!" shouted the sergeant. He came to me, red of face, the veins throbbing on his forehead like sashcords. One other thing I must tell you. I was an enigma to my platoon sergeant. He thought I was an idiot.

"I said 'turn left', did you hear me?". His face was an inch from mine. "Yes, sergeant", I said respectfully, "You said 'left turn'. When I come to the junction I intend to turn left". His jaw muscles worked furiously, like a cow catching up on mastication. "When I say 'turn left' I mean TURN LEFT!" He went to the rear and shouted "Quick march". I started up and a second later he shouted "LEFT TURN!" at the top of his voice. So I turned sharply left, jumped the ditch, waded over the stream, climbed over a wooden fence and walked diagonally across a

ploughed field. He stopped us in the middle of the field and told us to rest for ten minutes. He kept looking at me. The other chaps said they would have presumed he meant to turn left at the road junction. So after that I obeyed the most stupid order (and there were plenty of them) to the letter. I was blindly obedient to those in authority.

But, four months?

One day, lying there, munching digestive biscuits, I remembered a story I'd read in an American pulp magazine. It was about a gang boss who had an organisation for hiding escaped criminals. He guaranteed they wouldn't be caught. He merely took his clients to a room, fully stocked with books and food, and told them to stay there for two years. TWO YEARS! I forget exactly how the story ended, but the particular client in question sneaked out for a late night walk. He'd grown a beard, and a child had scribbled a beard on a WANTED poster of him. So he got nabbed. I think Harlan Ellison wrote it.

There were several reasons why I didn't walk the streets at night. First of all was that most important instruction, STAY IN THE ROOM UNTIL CONTACTED. True, there were books, magazines, crossword puzzles. But why keep me in so long? Was there a slip up? Why hadn't I been contacted? A thought kept bobbing up in my mind, but I refused to accept it. It couldn't be possible? But just....just suppose it was? Suppose the whole scheme was that I wasn't to be contacted? I knew Bunting didn't like me, I'd made a fool of him during the Smerkov spy hunt. (See, THE RETURN OF THE GOON) But surely he wouldn't stoop so low as to dump me in a room and then purposely forget all about me?

Would he?.

Another thing. I mentioned up there the reasons why I wouldn't go out at all. Because of orders, yes, but as far as I was concerned an even more potent reason was that I couldn't speak Russian.....and I was in Moscow.

I closed the plastic curtains and went back to the bed. There was no more clean linen. The food was rapidly diminishing. This was because I was doing physical exercises to keep myself fit, and consequently my appetite was enormous. Another thing, I was terribly bored. For the first month I'd been a nervous wreck waiting for the Russians to nab me. Then, as time passed, I almost wished they would.

Then someone rapped the door, hard. This had happened before, I'd gotten used to it. Ignore it. This I did. But the rapping got more persistent. I still shrugged to myself.

The door finished up in front of the window. A big, big man in a fur-collared leather coat was spread-eagled across it. Two other men followed him more conventionally into the room and looked down on me.



S.J.

I gasped in utter surprise. It COULDN'T BE!

But it was.

"Colonel Smerkov", he introduced himself to me. "So we meet again, Bleary".

I shook my head. Could this be an hallucination? A year ago Smerkov had been sent to prison for twenty years, in England, for spying. Now he was on his home ground, promoted..and reaching for me!... How?...What?...Why?!

Just how the hell had I gotten myself into such an unenviable position???

"The Scunthorpe Ballet is going on a tour of America", smiled Brigadier Bunting. "I've got an important assignment I want you to carry out for Military Intelligence in Washington, where the ballet is giving a concert".

I liked the sound of this.

"Of course you'll have to take ballet lessons to give you an authentic cover", he added.

Hmmm. This definitely wasn't me. I'd never live it down if folks got to hear I was a ballet dancer.

"I've arranged for you to go to the Royal Ballet for a week, there's no need to try and become a second Nuriyev, just so long as you are able to pass yourself off should any complications arise".

Then I thought of all them gals in black tights. Tight black tights. The Cor de ballet. I thought maybe it would be interestingI didn't quite think it was the thing to sport myself in front of them in my tights. After all, ballet girls are supposed to be delicately reared, aren't they? Maybe that was part of the attraction.

"I will only be a minute, Bleary", said Bunting. Ostentatiously, as he got up, he let a file fall to the ground. It was a thick file. It fell at my feet. I picked it up for him. It was my file.

"BLEARY.G." was lettered in green. I handed it back and he put it on his desk.

"Don't open it whilst I'm away", he said. His face bore a smile which he tried to control. I didn't like that smile. It hinted that he knew something I didn't.

After he'd gone out I just couldn't resist flipping through it. All my cases were mentioned. There was no time to read the fine type, and I couldn't even decipher some of the ball-point-written memos on the blank spaces. Just one thing intrigued me. Inside the file, on the reverse of the front cover, was written in large red print, 'BLEARY IS NOT TO BE SENT TO RUSSIA'.

I sat back, a blank expression on my face.



S.J.

S.J.



I was wearing a sort of cherubic expression of innocence when Bunting returned.

I was very relieved. Because of the necessary ramifications of the Smerkov affair, when I had been publicly named as a security agent in order to bring Smerkov to England, it had seemed to me that I wouldn't last ten minutes if I was sent on an operation to Russia. It would have been a loss of egoboo to have asked not to be sent. But this confirmation that I was safe thrilled me no end.

Bunting opened a pack of Olivier cigarettes, took the last one out, and dropped the empty packet into the yawning mouth of the waste paper basket.

I flipped.

There comes in a person's life-time possibly just one occasion when he sees before him his ultimate aspiration become a distinct possibility. This climatic moment is heralded by a loud 'boing' - followed by a couple of shattering 'pows'.

I just couldn't wait for convention. No time for protocol. No. No, "I say brigadier, pass me that empty cigarette packet please" sort of thing.

Instinctively I nose-dived over the mahogany desk, my hands scrabbling for the empty packet, which I retrieved and held above me on high.

I panted with enthusiasm as I trotted round the desk and resumed my seat. I picked up my battered suitcase and emptied nine other empty packets of Olivier cigarettes on the green-baise desk top. Bunting looked extremely bewildered.

"Excuse me, sir", I breathed, my chest rising and falling with the sudden anticipatory thrills shooting over me. I opened every one of the ten-packets, pulled out the silver paper, and, in a parabolic arc, precipitated the empty packs over Bunting's head and into the waste paper basket. They plopped in, one after the other.

Even this wasn't too much for Bunting. After all he was a hardened Military Intelligence officer. Admittedly his eyes had assumed egg-sized proportions, but he was still prepared to sit me out.

My next manouvre, though, made him rapidly search for his hip flask.

With deft digital skill, my fingers almost a part of me, I sepaated the silver paper from the thin tissue backing. It took me some little time, but I eventually had two piles on my side of the desk. To the left, ten slivers of silver paper, to my right, a more untidy bundle of tissue.

"Pardon me", I said, with, in the circumstances, as much aplomb as I could muster, and I shaped the tissue bundle into a ball and popped it into my mouth. I started to masticate.

For a moment I honestly thought that Bunting was about to negotiate the heavy dun curtains which hung either side of a rain-splattered window overlooking the Cenotaph. He definitely gibbered, there's no getting away from that. Somehow he had his right fist in his mouth and was gnawing at it. If I hadn't been too busy to worry about it his eyes would have frightened me. They sort of swung

slowly from side to side. Once, as a shaft of sanity struck him, I thought he was going to dive for the red 'phone...then his peepers started to gyrate once more.

Frankly I found it most difficult to reconcile his demeanour with perhaps my rather eccentric behaviour. But I knew it had never been done before, and I wanted to do it.

As I chewed the tissue into an unpleasant tasting soggy mass I smoothed out each sheet of silver paper and carefully reshaped it into a long cylinder. I then pinched it approximately one third of it's length, and with a little more smoothing and carressing I manufactured a miniature silver paper wine glass.

By the time I had manufactured ten little wine-glass shapes Bunting had retreated behind a large grey metal filing cabinet, and occasionally his visage would peer uncertainly from the side of it. If my eyes caught his his head would quickly disappear. I expect what was worrying him was the loving way I had turned all the wine glaases upsidedown, and carefully deposited a chunk of gooey substance from my mouth to the comcave undersides of each cup.

I surveyed my handiwork, thought of a refinement, most carefully I placed the ten little pseudo wine-glasses in a row on the egde of the desk, the gooey end away from me, the ten empty ends looking at me like cigarette burns in a thick pile carpet.

"It's OK, Brigadier", I said gently. I crossed to him, sat him in his chair. An arm, like a puppets, came up, trembling, and criss-crossed his vacant eyes. He seemed to have trouble focussing I nudged him.

"Watch this sir", I said, "it's never been done before". It was true, but I didn't like to add that no-one had ever thought of doing it before.

I rounded the desk, my feet eighteen inches apart. I flexed my fingers and thumbs through my hair. It wasn't a reflex action just to make me nice-looking, I wanted a layer of hair cream on each digit.

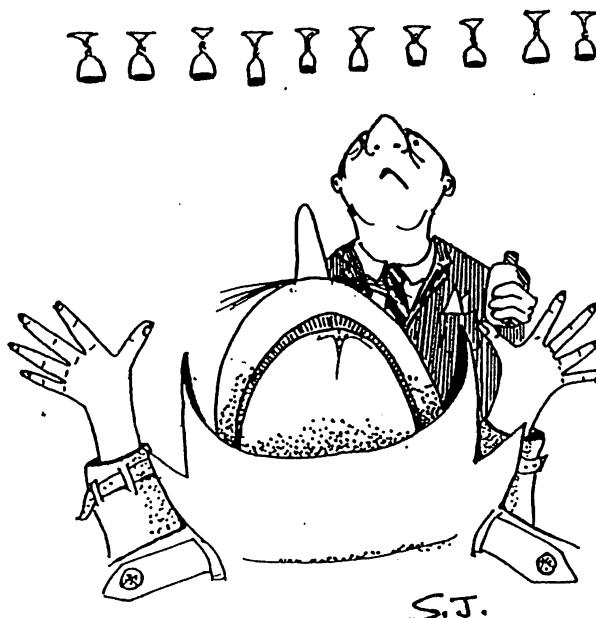
Gently, one by one, I inserted a finger into an empty wine glass, until I stood facing Bunting, my hands in front of me, fingers and thumbs rampant, each one bearing it's own silver paper ornament.

Suddenly Bunting burst into life.

"Good lord, Bleary", he panted, "just what the hell...?!"

But I forget what else he said. I just didn't hear, because a magnificently ethereal feeling came over me. I felt, well, dedicated. There was a choir of soprano's, a relentless beating of voodoo drums, a clashing of cymbols.

I stood, and oh, so slowly I pulled my hands downwards, just to above the horizontal, so that the cups wouldn't fall off, and then....



...like a flash of lightening, I forced my hands upwards and stopped them abruptly.

Lubricated by the hair cream the silver missiles shot vertically from my fingers and in a series of 'plutt,plutt,plutt's' landed in roughly a staught line across the cieling above the Brigadier's head.

AND STAYED THERE!

Nary a one trembled or fell.

You reeka!

I turned to Bunting, expecting copious egoboo, but all I could see was his Adam's Apple bobbing like a cork in a choppy sea as he drained the last drop of whiskey from his hip flask.

"Get the hell outs here!" he babbled, and pushed across to me the conventional thick heavilly sealed envelope, which I knew from long experience contained false documents, money, maybe even a false eyelash or two, plus the inevitable complicated instructions which had to be read, digested - digested, most likely, both literally and metaphorically.

Madame took a long repulsive look at me.

....."and to sum up", she said, her voice like a piece of



Wedgewood, "you don't really look like a ballet dancer. Admittedly I have seen thinner men, maybe ones even less aesthetic-looking, and whilst, er, your physique in tights does look, shall we say, compromising, those hobnail boots are definintele non-U".

I saw surprised. I told her so. I did an entrechant on the spur of the moment. She gritted her teeth as the floor boards vibrated like a couple of dozen tuning forks.

"Brigadier Bunting has told me something of his problem, but you are definitely out as a ballet dancer. The Russians, after all, are sending the Bolshoi to us in a few months, we in England can only send the cream of our dancers to them".

"But I'm going to America with the Scunthorpe Ballet!", I insisted.

"Of course, that's right, you're going to America", she spoke quickly, and she blushed in some confusion. "I'll suggest to Desmond, er, Brigadier Bunting, that you should go to, er, the States as a choreographer. And your alias, of course, fits superbly, it's the classic name for a choreographer - my choice. How do you like it?". She smiled primly.

The instructions I'd read (Which mentioned nineteen times I was

going to America) attested that my passport, visa, etc., were all in the name of Anton Fudge.

I sniffed. The door opened and a seedy middle-aged unshaven man in shirt sleeves came in. He nodded to Madame, sat at the piano and limbered up with something from Swan Lake. Five gals came in, attired only in black form-hugging dancing kit. They looked at me lang and hard as they passed by; and started to tone up on a horizontal bar which bisected a wall-length mirror.

"That will be all, Bleary", snapped Madame, clapping her hands to dismiss me.

I sniffed. I walked over to the gals, patted them on their tight little bottoms, and told 'em. "Watch this".

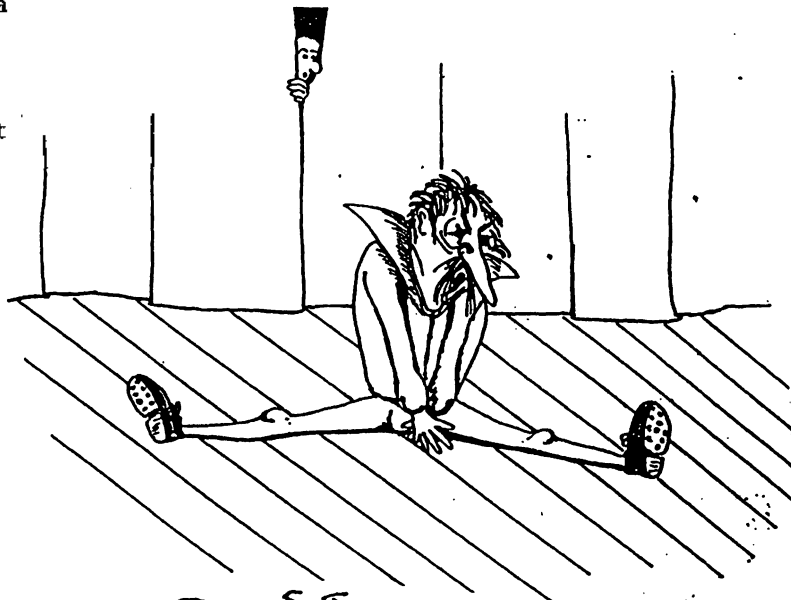
I sauntered to the far wall and crushed myself up against it, curling myself into a tight spring. I didn't know what the technical name of the manoeuvre was, but I'd seen Nuriyev do it on TV. He took a run, leapt high, and whilst in the air, opened his legs wide, closed 'em again, and landed like a fluff of eiderdown, feet together. I thought I could add poetry to this delicate ballet step by a sharp click as the heavy heels of my hobnails smacked together..

I broke into a lope, and run, and then took off, my muscles strained to the utmost as I hoped I soared upwards. Madame, the pianist and the gals stood in wide-eyed wonder as I reached my apogee, my feet at least eighteen inches above the ground. I decided the time was ripe to open my legs wide. I threw my head back, fingers speaking a mystic message. I thrust my hobnails apart....

Look, I don't want to go into unnecessary anatomical detail- I know my readership is mostly adult. Save to say that I landed heavily on the floorboards when my hobnails were still parting company. I lay there, hollaring like mad as Madame told the gals to close thei eyes, and directed the pianist to drag me out.

After a week I could do without the St. John's sling.

At a sort of secret transit camp at 27B Albemarle Street I went through the final briefing. My hair was given a Beatle-cut (I had to have an anesthetic before the barber was allowed to flip his sissors) and my finger nails manicured. I was told to assume a lisp. I read a precis of all the major works on the ballet, especially those dealing with choreography. I didn't mind all this, as it was to help my cover, and if there's one thing I can say about myself with all modesty, I'm dead enthusiastic. However I drew a line at walking along with my right hand crooked at the waist. And I refused to wink at all and sundry..



S.S.

One thing baffled me. My visa stipulated that I could stay in Russia for six weeks with the Scunthorpe Ballet. This didn't agree with the memo in my personal file that I shouldn't be sent to Russia; and the assertions by everyone that I was going to Washington, U.S.A.

"You see, Anton", I was told, "it's all got to do with your cover. Everyone knows that they're going to America with the ballet company, but for the sake of international intrigue, we let it out that Russia is our tour schedule. This baffles enemy spies. We do it all the time. You've heard the cliché 'Never let your right hand know what your left hand is doing'. (I'd heard it many times actually, from gals I used to take out)..well, this is all part of the cover. You're really going to America, so take no notice if anyone suggests you're going to Russia".

I knew all about international intrigue, but I couldn't see what it had to do with ballet. Even the newspapers were full of the news of the Scunthorpe Ballet's first visit to Russia. But I was in the know, I was at the hub of things, Military Intelligence...and I chuckled to myself that I was the only one who really knew we were going to America.

I had a mite of a shock at London Airport though. I met the rest of the ballet company there, with my lisp and intellectual disguise. I was soon accepted. But they all said they were going to Russia. I winked and said, "Oh yeah", and was soon on first name terms with Rupert, the premier male ballet dancer....We boarded a Tu 124, a huge Russian airliner. We took off. Most of the company had fur coats, I'd even been given one too. I'd been to America before and it didn't seem credible to me that we'd require fur coats and thick underwear in Washington in the Fall. But, like everyone kept telling me, we were going to America.

The captain of the airliner, after we'd taken off, announced in broken English that we'd be in Moscow in three hours. I yukked. Such superb organisation. Even the air crew thought we were going to Russia...

We landed exactly on schedule. I had a sneaking suspicion that something was wrong. This wasn't America. All the people outside had fur coats on, and big flags with red stars on them were flying everywhere. All the shops had notices in a language reminiscent of an eye-testing chart. It was really cold, and pictures of Krushchev were everywhere. My party of ballet dancers (and myself) all had a pocketful of roubles. I was told that my roubles were part of the international intrigue.

Gradually the truth dawned on me.

I really was in Russia.

Had I caught the wrong 'plane?

No. All my party were members of the Scunthorpe Ballet, and they were talking animatedly about their shows in Moscow and Leningrad. I was just too bewildered by it all, but I didn't have too much time to concentrate on that particular problem....I was sharing a room with Rupert....



Faj

S.J.

He showed me a mouthful of yellow teeth.

"You'll not make many jokes where you're going", he hissed. He nodded to his aides and they gripped my arms and took me down the back staircase and into a large black car. As we crossed the pavement I just sagged and let them drag me. My hope was that perchance a British agent would spot me and organise an escape attempt. No luck though.

We drove due south of Moscow for over an hour, to a large sort of estate in the countryside.

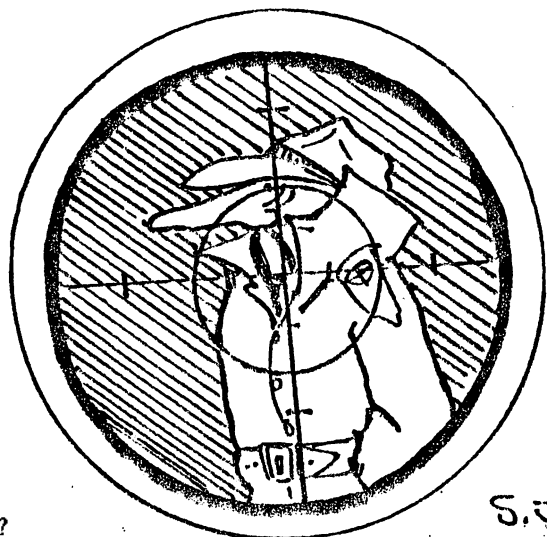
I was stripped, my clothing taken away, and I was given a rough grey-brown overall-type garment, rather like an ostentatious nightshirt. I was taken to a small room with no windows. No one said a word. It was all efficiently casual, if you know what I mean. A bulb in the dirt white ceiling shone brightly. I crossed to a wooden bunk and lay back on it, looking at the door and wondering just what the heck I was going to do now.

Somehow I felt that there was something definitely wrong. Was it possible that I had boobed?

I contemplated my navel, as some literary gink had once postulated.

I lay on a dirty blanket, folded my arms behind my head, and pondered. Someone had scribbled a mystic message on the wall. It was in Russian of course. Probably when translated it would say something inspiring. Like 'Abandon all hope all youse who enter here'. Or maybe, more cryptically, the author could have been wishing his readers a happy May Day. The walls were dry, and actually it was quite warm, although, what Blaze McKendrick had told me about Russian spy prisons, the temperature could be altered at will, depending on what mood the client was in, or what state they wanted him in. If a critter was proving obstinate presumably they could bring icicles on the ceiling, or make the cell like a Turkish bath. The ceiling was high. I reckoned that if I stood on the bunk on tip toe I couldn't reach it. I was too tired to try, frankly, but I saw scuff marks on the wall alongside the bunk where previous occupants had tried. In the middle of the ceiling, like I said, was a single electric light bulb. Not bright enough to dazzle you, but adequate. McKendrick had said they could make it as bright as a magnesium flare if they wanted to. There were no windows, no noise. It was, let's face it, the essence of austerity.

And then as I lay there contemplating like mad, my eyes landed unconsciously on my shoes. My heart flipped a mite as it changed gear. My shoes. They'd left me my shoes. My own shoes.. thick crepe soles, purple suede uppers, with a delicate tracery of fine mauve thread around the wide silver buckles. Why would they go to all the trouble to remove all my clothing, give me merely a flicking overall, and then leave me my lovely pansy shoes?



It was just too good to be true. For the first time since Smerkov had grabbed me I felt I had a slight chance. They should definitely have known about my shoes. I had heard of miracles, but this was ridiculous. One factor was over-riding in my mind. Would they give me a bath? It was a crucial question. Admittedly I'd fought against having baths all my life. There was, I suppose, no direct reason why they should make me have a bath, or a shower. I scratched my body, I felt fleas scavenging like mad, on safari for my red corpuscles. I reasoned that although I had a bad case of B.O. the fleas were presumably a normal issue, they went with the overall, and that meant hygiene wasn't a 'thing' with the Russians. QED...maybe, if I was lucky, probably no bath.



Finally my cogitations gradually settled down into a definite pattern. McKendrick had told me that if you wanted to escape the time to do it was as soon as you were in your cell. It was reasonable to suppose that normally a potential escapee would plan thoroughly, note the time of food visits, guards, interrogations, build up his strength and hope for a break. This would take time, and all that was required was a couple of beatings, and then the strength would go, and maybe also the will. But if an escape was attempted immediately, you would have the strength, the will, and the surprise...surprise because no-one could be expected to escape from a solid room with thick walls and no windows, and a lock on the door about a foot square.

Question; would they switch the electric light off? I thought they would, initially at least. I guessed, if normal Russian interrogation technique was practised on me, they would leave me alone for a week or ten days, feed me a bare minimum. I'd see no-one, except maybe a fleeting glimpse of the food carrier. They would leave me in darkness for varying periods, and also give me meals at various times, maybe three in two hours, then maybe none for twenty four hours. In this way I would soon have no notion of the passing of time, and by the time they'd got me a nervous wreck, they'd wheel me in front of Smerkov or one or more of his minions, and then I'd had it. I'd be like the Spanish senorita with some Jewish blood in her veins, she didn't know whether she was.. Carmen or Cohen.

I thought I could get out within twentyfour hours, providing that, a)they didn't take away my shoes, b)they switched off the light for a spell, and, most important of all, c)they didn't make me take a bath.....

It was thirty six hours before the light went out. I calculated I'd got three days stubble, and I'd shave the day before they'd nabbed me. QED, it was about a day and a half. For at least half that time, in case they were watching me, I'd given them a few buckshee samples of advanced nervous dibility.

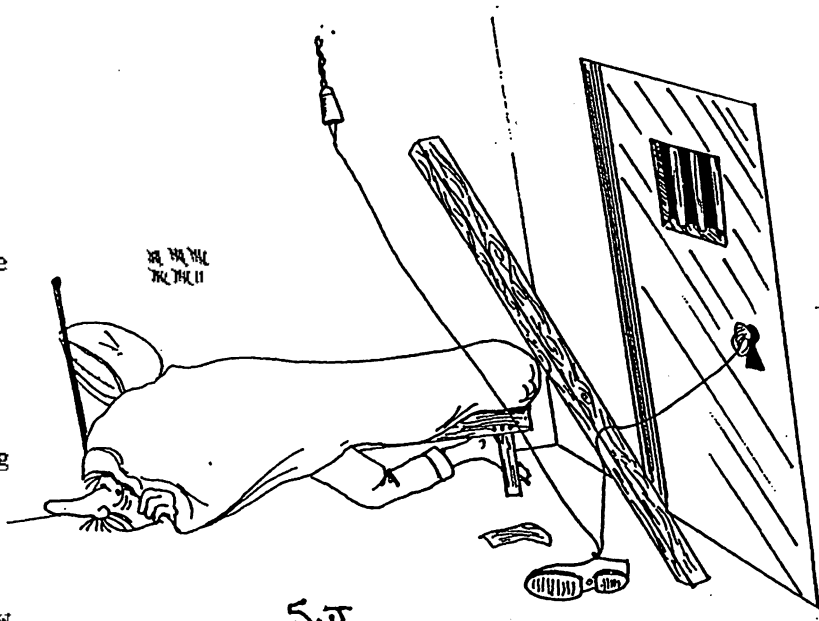
Now I had to exercise even greater care. I climbed up the beam, clung like a limpet to it, and pulled out the electric light bulb. I held the end in my mouth, and then gingerly felt inside the breast overall pocket for the two small inch-long tassles. One had a wide hollow end, the other a narrow one. I wanted the narrow one. My fingers were sweating but I had to make certain I had the correct one. My thigh muscles were cramped by the way I was hugging the beam, so I backed down, put the bulb under the bunk, wound the fuse wire round the centre of the narrow-ended metal tassle. I then re climbed the beam and fitted the tassle into the recess which held the bulb. I prayed that the switch wouldn't be pulled to turn the light on. I backed down the beam. I laid a trail of the fuse wire from the bulb socket to the door. I pulled the moist walnut of explosive from the breast pocket and fitted it into the wide key-hole of the massive door. I took the other tassle, formed the end of the fuse wire into a little spring ball and forced this with extreme care into the hollow end of the tassle. The tassles of course being detonators. Finally I gently pushed the other end of the detonator into the plastic explosive.

I pulled my shoes on again. My luck had held. I had correctly gone through the complicated schedule without the light being switched on. Now I had to wait for that eventuality, until it was deemed that my light should be switched on again. For when it was, the electric circuit would result in the; hell, you all know what would happen.

Me, I lay underneath the bunk, trembling and sweating like hell, an unexpected after-effect of the mental, to say nothing of the physical, energy I'd expended.

Exactly, I pondered, exactly what would happen when the door blew up?

The back of my head hit the unplanned bunk-bottom as I jerked upwards from my sleep at the explosion. It took me about twenty seconds to orient myself. Jayne Mansfield had just asked me to tie a knot at the back of her bikini bra. When I woke up I was in a cold sweat. I scrambled up. There was no smoke, just an acrid smell and lights from the corridor outside. This showed the heavy door swinging on its hinges, I peered outside, heard heavy footsteps, and raced along the corridor in the opposite direction. I opened a door, ran up some dank stone steps, opened the door at the top, and found that I was on a balcony overlooking a large reception room. Three men in black leather fur-collared top coats rushed across the room. I ducked below the rails and scampered



S.T.

★ breathlessly on my hands and
 ★ knees. A door was half open.
 ★ I nipped inside, found myself
 ★ in a sort of office. It
 ★ appeared empty, but a half
 ★ smoked black cigarette was
 ★ in the ash tray. Across the
 ★ desk was a military cap with
 ★ a large red star in the
 ★ centre of it. I could see
 ★ small globules of water on
 ★ the black peak where presum-
 ★ ably snow had just recently
 ★ condensed. Across the back
 ★ of a chair was a heavy
 ★ military overcoat with a
 ★ couple of stars on the
 ★ shoulders. I put the coat on,
 ★ it was too big. Attached to
 ★ the sleeve by a thin but strong
 ★ chain was a leather case.



★ I tugged but it wouldn't come off. I put the hat on, but it was too
 ★ big for me too. I felt the warmth of the inner rim, it had only
 ★ recently been worn. I pulled my ears outwards and balanced it
 ★ precariously. I listened. I heard shouting, loud orders being bark-
 ★ ed out..near at hand the sound of a rifle bolt being drawn back and
 ★ applied again, probably someone stuffing a round up the breech. Once,
 ★ on TV, I'd seen a comedy sketch about this man who had a piece of
 ★ sticky flypaper on his hand, and he couldn't get rid of it. Well,
 ★ this blasted leather case was the same. I nearly flogged myself to
 ★ death trying to get rid of it, all to no effect.

★ I crossed the room, peered through the window. It was snowing
 ★ like hell. At the front of the house I saw a black car, puffs of
 ★ blue smoke coming from the exhaust. I could even see a shadowy shape
 ★ sitting behind the steering wheel. I went back across the room,
 ★ closed the door and pushed a heavy chair against it. I pushed a desk
 ★ against the chair. Once more in the centre of the room I shook my
 ★ right arm up and down in a last desperate effort to get rid of the
 ★ flicking case. And then I froze. Quietly, even muffled, but dis-
 ★ tinctly, I heard a suppressed titter come from inside the wardrobe.

★ Inside the wardrobe?

★ Things had become confused again. But I didn't stop to ponder
 ★ over the ramifications. I pushed the desk in front of the wardrobe
 ★ and leapt out of the window. I landed on my back in the snow twenty
 ★ feet below. I picked myself up, rammed the hat on my head and stag-
 ★ gered over to the car. I climbed inside and sank exhausted into the
 ★ back seat.

★ The driver had a small moustache, the hairs at both ends hang-
 ★ ing downwards. His eyes were wide. He flicked a cigarette butt out
 ★ of the window, closed it, and said, "Moscow?".

★ "Ja..er..oui...non..er...tovarich", I panted.

★ His eyes performed the standard roulette wheel spin, which
 ★ frequently happened with people I came into contact with. He turned
 ★ the wheel, slowly at first, and the car drove away northwards...

★ *****

★ The sound of heavy traffic woke me up. I orientated myself once
 ★ more. I'd been dreaming about trying to get rid of a piece of sticky
 ★ paper.



I looked through the window at the slushy streets, the driving snow, the fur-capped people leaning forward trying to negotiate it. Then I saw the familiar sight of minarets ... I was almost being driven into the Kremlin. The driver presumably had been waiting to take a Red Army officer for a conference or suchlike.

I tapped him on the shoulder and gave him a blast of Birmingham back-slang.

"Iay antway ootay ogay orfay an umppay".

His hair stood on end and he screeched to the kerbside. Quick as a flash I scuttled out of the car, and then was jerked back, throwing me into

the air. The blasted chained case had caught in the door handle. A small crowd gathered as I tried to disentangle the chain. I couldn't take the coat off because of the cold, and of course I was wearing my prison garb underneath. Eventually, my fingers numb with cold, I got free, still attached to the case. The crowd stood respectfully to one side as I sprinted away. Most of them were looking at my pansy shoes.

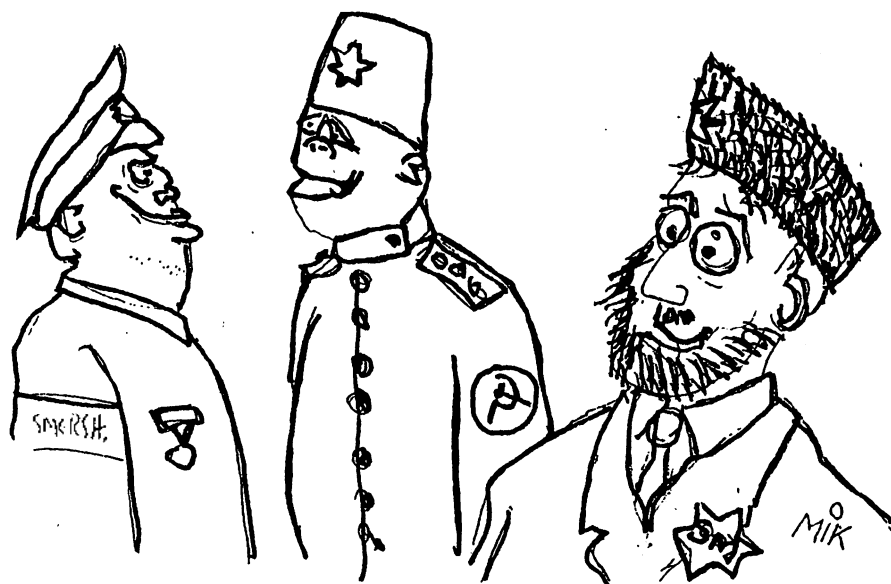
Colonel Smerkov was ill at ease in the presence of the two top security men in the Kremlin. He had escaped relegation to a minor army post in Siberia by the skin of his teeth. His capture a year previously by yours truly had ruined him in the eyes of the Reds. He had been duly exchanged, as I later learned, for a British tourist who made so bold as to snap his camera at a Russian airliner flying over Red Square, and laid himself wide open for a charge of espionage, which was duly pressed with vigour.

Smerkov had brought back some little snippets of information which he had duly passed on to the Russian spy schools, (such items as the method of British interrogation of spies, etc.,) and had been given back his old rank and back pay, and reinstated in Security on probation, pending the result of the ingenious plan he had presented to his superiors. It was a scheme to present the British authorities with supposedly ultra top-secret information gleaned from the Russian space flights of Messers Gagarin, Titov, Popovic, etc., The British would pass this information on to the Americans, as part of a reciprocal deal regarding secret information which was of special interest to the other. Smerkov had overheard a rather loud conversation in Bunting's office before he had been released. This revealed that the Goon was incarcerated in a flat in Moscow. It had taken Smerkov a couple of weeks to discover which flat.

"Smerkov", said the bald fat man with piggy eyes, "the first part of your plan seems to have gone perfectly".

"Most certainly, Comrade", hissed Smerkov. "By judiciously placing my men, and allowing him to keep his shoes, he blew the door down and took the path

we envisaged. I was actually in the wardrobe when he came in here. He had to put on the uniform, and so of course he had to carry the case which was chained to the sleeve. He had to take a chance and escape in the car we had placed for him. The driver reports that although Bleary made an unscheduled escape from the car he was immediately followed by an agent who had been discretely travelling behind. Of course, I



don't know the details of the documents you placed in the case, and I wouldn't presume to ask their importance, but I.....?

The other one, a quiet man, the former Russian Monopoly champion, smiled rather proudly. He looked at the fat man, saw the subtle nod, and smiled at Smerkov.

"I prepared them", he sneered, "As yet the astronauts the Americans have sent up have not orbited for long periods. As we have. The documents supposedly give the results of tests of the latest space flights by our hero's. Specifically, dealing with orthostatic hypotension. The reports have minimised the dangers of weightlessness, whereas the reverse is the case. The documents are authentic in every respect; except that the figures have been carefully changed so as to give a misleading diagnosis. It will appear that metabolism, and the central nervous system, though affected, does not endanger an astronaut in space for at least a month. Now we know that within ten days there is serious medical danger. The Apollo Moon Shot is now almost due but the Americans are holding back because of their doubts about orthostatic hypotension. If these documents should ultimately reach them they will be accepted, hence an unsuccessful Moon Shot".

Smerkov uncorked a bottle of vodka and threw the cork into the fire, the sign of a true host, intimating that he wanted the bottle emptied before his guests left.

It was put plainly to Smerkov that if his scheme was a success and the documents reached the Americans he would be forgiven for getting captured. There was a symbolic 'thumbs down' if it didn't.

"What's the next step, Smerkov?" asked the fat man.

Smerkov grinned. His master stroke.

"Comrades", he said triumphantly, "The Goon will be introduced to Nadia".

There is nothing more depressing than being soaked to the skin, chilled to the marrow, (and any

other worn but fitting cliches you can think of) with no way of avoiding the elements, with nowhere to go. I was in this unenviable predicament as I cowered in a doorway, somewhere (I knew not where) in Moscow. The snow had turned to an icy drizzle, and the deep slush was almost up to my knees. The thick Red Army greatcoat did little to protect my trembling body. My nose was blue, and I had lost the feeling of my extremities...all of them.

In the darkness, illuminated only by the lights of a drab house, I saw a muffled figure approach and pass me. The figure wore a white fur hat, a chic tight-fitting fur coat, and fur boots. It was a slim figure. As it passed me a small purse dropped at my feet in the slush. The figure stopped, turned round, peered at the slush, a thin arm held across the face to protect it from the drizzle as the eyes sought for the missing purse. I knew exactly where it had dropped, and with some difficulty I bent down, put my numb fingers in the slush, and retrieved it.

"Here's your purse, my dear", I said in English. I fear I must have suffered from hallucinations because I thought I was in the Mall in London, or on the set of a period film.

Her eyes were wide, almost scared, as she took the purse from my freezing hand.

"You speak English?" she panted, unbelievably. I was bewildered that she could speak English, albeit with a strong Russian accent. It seemed to me at the time a fantastic coincidence that the one person in Moscow who had spoken to me could speak English. But then, I always was a sucker for coincidences.

Then though I was exhausted, quick as a flash, I saw an opening.

"I'm a member of the Scunthorpe Ballet", I said, "I went to a party and had a mite too much vodka. When I woke up I was dressed like this. Must've been a joke".

"Oh, I saw them! A very good company. I didn't see you though".

"I was the choreographer".

She accepted this. She must have been mad. The Scunthorpe Ballet had returned to England some months previously. I thought she would have asked where I'd been since then, but she didn't. Instead she took my arm.

"You've no where to go?"

"No", I said.

"You must stay at my flat until I can get you some clothes", she purred. She pulled my arm and led me via devious side streets to one of those ugly blocks



of flats I think I've mentioned before.

When I woke up the next morning I was alone. I prowled round the three rooms, scratched my head, swilled it under the cold water tap. My overall and greatcoat had gone so I draped a furry blanket around me. I found some food waiting for me in the little kitchen. I heated it up then prowled round some more. It was just like what you'd expect a young gal's flat to be like. I wondered how she'd dumped my old garments, would she be able to get some conservative clothes to fit me?.

I did find a copy of PRAVDA. On the bottom of the front page I saw the word 'Bolshoi'. Naturally I couldn't read the text, but in pencil at the bottom of the page I saw the words, 'Bolshoi leaves Moscow 6pm 27th'. I looked at the wall calendar and saw that it was the 27th. I thought a lot about that..

"No Nadia, not again..". I forced myself to say. Her perfume was like abstract purple hearts. She was shaking me gently by the shoulder....Then I woke up. She was shaking me by the shoulder, I'd fallen asleep on the red upholstered couch.

"Sorry", I blushed, "I was dreaming".

She looked amused.

"I've got you some clothes", she smiled, her angelic face crowned by jet-black hair like a school marm.

I stood up and yawned, clutching the blanket to me. She tittered as she left the room.

The clothes were folded over a chair. Very austere, just what I wanted. Also there was a black trilby and a black leather trench-coat and, dammit, I couldn't believe my eyes, attached to the sleeve of it by a chain was that blasted brief case. I put the trenchcoat on the floor, stood on it, and tugged. The flippin' case wouldn't become detached!. She must've fixed it up the sleeve with nuts and bolts. Jeeze, I was stuck with it again.. She must've

thought I had attached some importance to it, and in her naive way, had ensured that it was still a part of me.

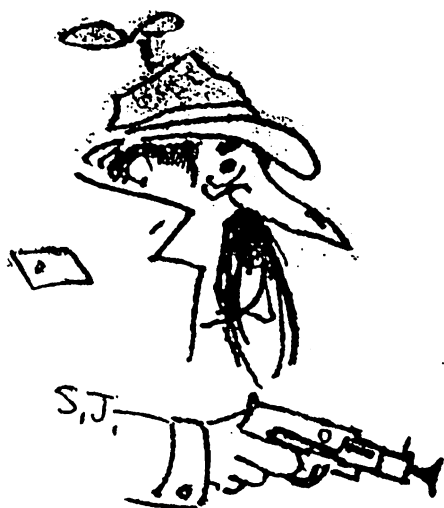
I put the suit on, combed my hair, washed my mouth out with the off-white cold water, and went into the kitchen.

"Oh, they fit you very well", beamed Nadia. I helped her make another meal, and we did a mite of cross-talk. The upshot was that she told me I could stay as long as I liked. She said I was perfectly safe. She said, in fact, that I mustn't leave.

I glanced at the clock, it was just after 3pm. This was going to be rough.

"I have to go out to get some extra supplies", she smiled, "I'll be back soon".





She gave me a smacker with her slightly-opened mouth which made my eyeballs click back.

Then she left.

I couldn't believe my luck. Normally nothing went right for me. Now everything was going like greased clockwork.

I did another swift reconnaissance of the room. I wanted some money. She'd been a good kid, but I had to relieve her of some ready cash. The bottom drawer of a bureau was locked, but I forced it. I found a cashbox with some roubles in it. I couldn't help opening a large envelope. Chee. Nadia at one time must have been a model. And I had always thought the Ruskies to be prudes. I gulped. 37:22:35 I guessed. There must have been twenty of the photographs

..hell, you never can tell. Then I heard the clock chime 3.30pm, and I realised it was all going to be just a happy memory. I put the 'photos back in the envelope. I shut the drawer.

I put on the trench-coat. I shook my right hand up and down like mad, and still I couldn't detach the brief case. I finished up swinging round and round like an Olympic hammer thrower, but it was still with me when I finished.

No more time.

I jammed the hat on, picked up the newspaper, and stole furtively from the room.

"Yes, yes?", panted Smerkov into the 'phone. "that you Nadia?"

"Uh-hu".

"Everything going according to the Master Plan?"

"Exactly as you envisaged. He left a few moments after I'd gone, But don't worry, he still had the case with him. He looked somewhat flushed as he left, must have tried to get rid of it again. But in this weather he couldn't go without the coat, and so everything is perfect".

"Congratulations".

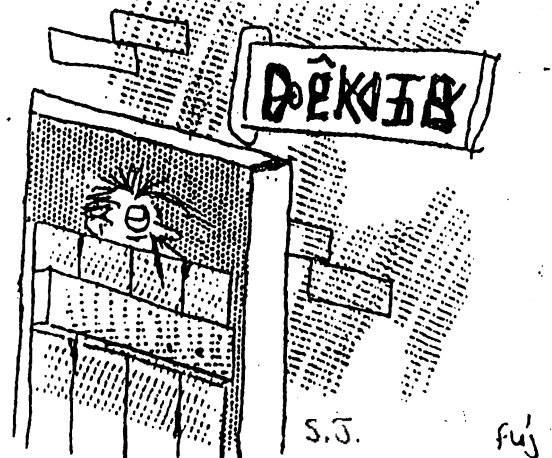
Smerkov grinned. Excitedly he rammed the cross-piece of the telephone up and down, and asked the operator to get him the Kremlin

A taxi was conveniently parked across the road. I climbed in the back. The driver turned to me and muttered some gibberish. Damned foreigners. Probably asking me where I wanted to go. What the hell was Russian for Moscow Airport?

Suddenly I was hit by inspiration. I sat back on the seat and opened my arms wide. Then I made a raspberry sort of noise, and swayed slightly too and fro, as though I was an aeroplane banking. There we go again. I thought, those blasted big white bewildered eyes, with a little black pupil wobbling about in the middle. But he turned round, whipped the car into gear, and away.

I peeled off some notes. I could have given him a fortune, or short-fared him, but I strode away across to the terminal building. It was 4.30 pm.

I sat for over half an hour ostensibly reading a magazine. Suddenly I saw a large group of obvious ballet dancer gals and chappies go across the main hallway. I stood up and followed. I was banking on one significant thing. Ever since Nuriyev had sprinted from the 'plane in Paris to avoid returning to Redland, hotly pursued by security men, the Russians, when they sent a cultural group abroad on tour, perforce had to include almost as many security men as artistes. And I planned to take the place of the security men detailed to accompany the Bolshoi...



I don't want to take any credit for being able to diagnose the security men. They all wore black trilby's and black leather trench coats, by some miraculous fluke exactly the clothes I wore. They clustered in a small group behind the dancers. I had to wait until one of them went to the toilet. Again, as if I had willed it, one of them wriggled a mite and then strode over to a door with a peculiar Russian word on it. I followed him in, looked round, saw no-one was about. As he opened the door of a loo I bungled in afterwards. Before I hit him with the brief case (so that's what it was for!) I caught a flashing glimpse of big wide eyes...

I took his documents, opened his passport, saw this handsome face staring up at me. My luck was in once more, he bore an almost perfect likeness to myself. Things were certainly swinging my way. It had never been so cushy before. Always I was up the creek, now it seemed as though my retreat from Moscow had almost been planned for me. It really was incredible.

Then and I was suddenly struck by a flash of blinding genius. At last I saw a simple way to get rid of my brief case. 'Change trench coats with him!

Unfortunately...Just my flaming luck! He had a brief case chained to his sleeve, identical in size and shape with mine! What was the use.

I rejoined the ballet group but no-one took any notice of me. I played it this way by standing in the group of dancers. They ignored me almost pointedly, and the security men, if they looked at me, would have attributed my close proximity to the dancers as being ultra keenness.

I tingled all over with apprehension as we shuffled forward. Across the cold snowy tarmac we walked, the ballerina's muffled up to the nostrils with fur coats. All the time I was expecting the heavy hand on the left shoulder. Even as we climbed the steel stair-case and I forced myself into a seat between two gorgeous gals I expected to hear a raucous shout, or to see Smerkov climbing up after me. But nothing. I smiled at the two gals, but they sniffed distainfully. The engines of the mighty Ilyushin started up, and we roared down the runway, and headed westwards.

It's no use denying that I'd worked myself up into a pretty potent rage by the time I



walked into the War Office. I'd been doing some thinking on the flight from Moscow, and even though I wasn't sure my conclusions were correct, I'd enough basic facts to realise that somehow I'd been a mere pawn in some devious plot. I hadn't worked out what I was going to say to Bunting, but I knew he'd be lucky if I didn't ram his red hat down his gullet.

Fred, the be-ribboned attendant at the door didn't recognise me. Probably because the trilby hat was too big and covered my eyes. Also, and you've got to give him credit for his powers of

observation, he didn't much like the look of my black leather trenchcoat.

He pushed a restraining hand towards me as I thundered through the entrance. I looked at him aggressively, and was almost tempted to kick one of his crutches away. I swayed out of reach and pounded down the corridor. I heard voices behind me, voices growing louder in protest at my passing, but I ignored them. Up three flights of stairs, along another corridor. A gal was carrying a tray of tea cups, the big handles rampant, and she presumed I was a gentleman and would step out of the way. I heard the cups thumping to the polished brown linoleum floor behind me, and the tray, a metal one, slapped full face on the floor, like a cymbalist gone berserk.

Round the corner; and there was The Room. It hypnotised me, it was like a dream, the door got bigger and bigger until the room number was an inch from my eyeballs. I kicked the door open and saw it swing back and heard the handle crunch into the plaster. Bunting, caught unawares, was taking a swig out of the office bottle. I swear he thought he was about to be assassinated. Then he recognised me...

I stood across the desk from him. I was breathing heavily. The brief case swung too and fro at my wrist like a pendulum.

"It's you, Bleary", he said. His face was ashen.

"You mean you didn't expect to see me again?" I questioned sarcastically.

"Of course I meant to see you again", he smiled, as about an effective a smile as that on the face of a gargoyle on Notre Dame.

"How come you left me in a flat in Moscow for four months?" I grated.

"It was all part of the plot", he said, his smile becoming more personable, as if he had regained his composure.

"Why didn't you tell me about the plot?" I hissed.

"Because you wouldn't have acted naturally if I did", he countered.

I paused for a moment, marshalling my mental reserves.

"Er...", I pondered. "In order for this to be a plot, it occurs to me that you must have told Smerkov where I was?"

He was relaxed now. He actually smiled warmly, as if congratulating me on my appraisal

of the situation.

"True, you see, when we exchanged Smerkov for that camera-happy tourist (it was one of my own men actually, but the Ruskies don't know it..I planned this with great cunning) I had already converted Smerkov to a double spy. I told him to put a scheme to his superiors in the Kremlin. This scheme to work on the premise that he would allow a captured Western spy to escape with important documents. Now get this. Smerkov was to exchange the documents for authentic yop secret data. Get the master stroke, the utter genius of my ploy? The Kremlin bods would allow a Wester spy to escape with secret papers which they had carefully prepared to bluff the West, but Smerkov would carry out a double bluff by changing them. All the time they would be aiding and abetting a superb piece of espionage against themselves! This'll make the Ruskies the laughing stock of the world. It'll go down in all the classic literature of spying. And I planned the whole thing from start to finish.

He had half risen from the desk, his eyes were glazed. Speck of saliva were framing his lips into a grimace which was terrifying to behold.

"It occurs to me", I said, meditating an the enormity, and, let it be admitted, the supreme brilliance of his plan, "that it all hinges on whether or not you did a good job of swinging over Smerkov to the West".

"I agree", he said, He shook his head, as if to bring himself back to normality, to my mental plane. "and the proof of my success is shown by the fact that you are here and that you have the brief case with you".

"Suffering catfish", I panted, "so that's why I couldn't get rid of the blasted thing".

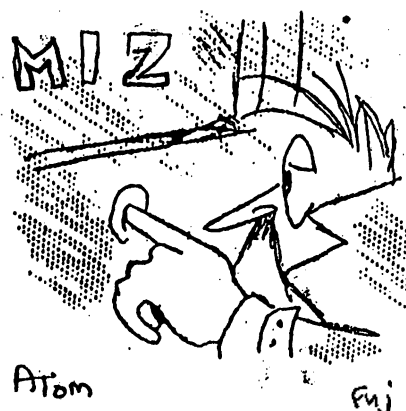
"You tried?" grinned Bunting.

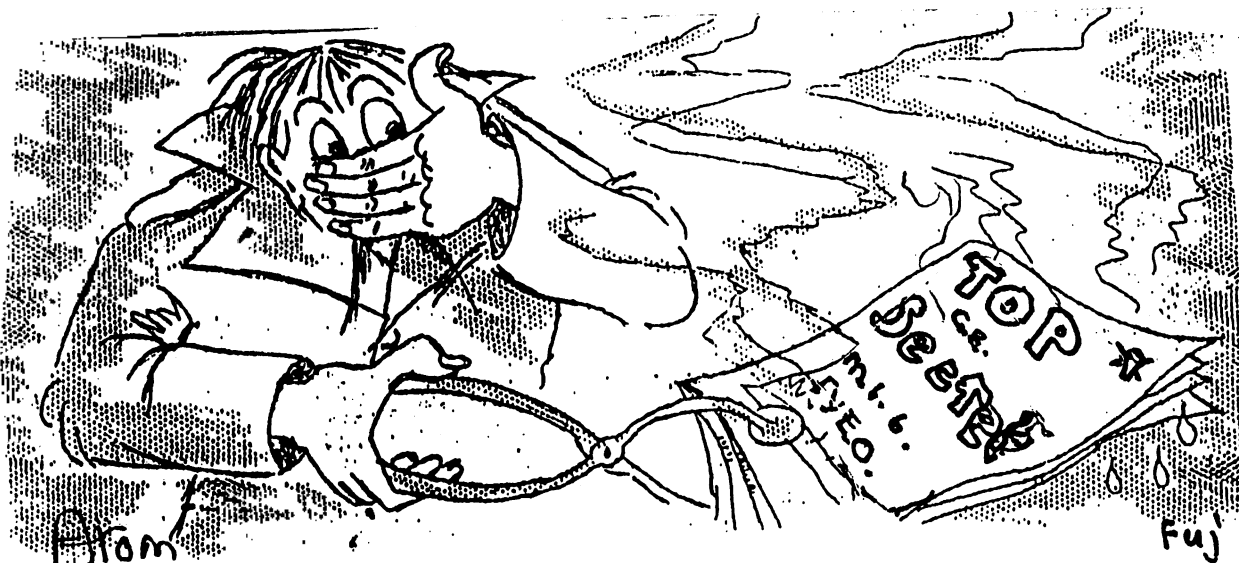
"Ghod, how I tried", I said. I almost broke down and sobbed. The superb way the Russians had passed me along, one to the other so unobtrusively was just beginning to hammer itself into my reasoning. The clever way Nadia had asked me to stay, but at the same time, without telling me, letting me know of the Bolshoi's trip to London from Moscow that night. The magnificent way all the security men with the dancers at the airport had all got brief cases chained to their overcoats, so that I wouldn't swap coats when I coshed one of them, (and obviously that was the only way I would be able to get on the 'plane, wasn't it, especially when you consider that Nadia had dressed me identically with them) It was, as Bunting said, without parallel in the history of espionage.

Or...or was it?

"And now", said Bunting, rubbing his hands, "we come to the climax. Smerkov said he wouldn't pick you up until he had something extra-special to put in the brief case. Give me the case, Bleary.

I slowly took the trench coat off. Bunting, sniffing excitedly came round the desk. He forgot all about me in his feverish haste to snap open the lock. I backed away noiselessly on the government issue carpet. I thought that what the case contained should be Bunting's very own. After all, he'd worked the whole thing out in some devilishly cunning way..





and he was entitled to his supreme moment of triumph. I didn't wait. I walked along the corridor, and so out of the building. I must confess I hurried a little.

Smerkov, who had grown to appreciate tea when in Brixton Prison sipped the drink, nodded to Nadia, and sat down opposite her.

"You did marvellously, my dear comrade", he said, noting the provocative way she crossed her legs blatantly in front of him, "er, yes, I will have another cup".

It was his fourth cup, but the way her calves bunched up as she crossed the carpet made his nostrils twitch.

"It was all so easy", Nadia stressed. "It was like, well, if you'll allow me to be poetic, it was like guiding a rambling stream by a little dam here, a little waterfall there. I felt like an artist as I gradually added little snippets of information to him, I watched with something resembling a clinical interest as I saw these little snippets click in his mind, and the shifty, sort of nonchalant expression cross his face, trying to persuade me that he didn't know that I didn't know I was helping him. Ha-ha. And you told me about the way he tried to get rid of that brief case just after he'd escaped. You should have seen how red and irritated he was as he left my flat. It must have been a mortal shock for him to have a new outfit of clothes and still be attached to that case".

"I shouldn't tell you this", muttered Smerkov quietly, moving across and sitting beside her, "but his chief in Londo thinks that I've gone over to the West and am feeding him priceless secret information".

Nadia put her fingers across his leg, just above the knee, and he almost took lockjaw as he swung round and looked at her. The remains of the cup of tea saturated the side of the settee as the cup fell from Smerkov's as he made a grab for the girl.

"I'm sorry", he breathed, inwardly raging at this untimely upset. "It'll soon dry off".

He pushed the cushion away and started to rub the stain with his handkerchief. Then he saw a tuft of paper sticking out of the back of the settee, where the cushion..

had hidden it. It looked very much as though the paper had been rapidly stuffed there. His forehead tightened, his mouth suddenly became dry and his tongue seemed to swell. Only someone who has suffered sudden fear or terror knows how he felt as he tugged at the paper, held securely, until half a page came away in his hand. He turned it over and read, 'Report on the Effects of Orthostatic Hypotension in the crews of Vostoks 1 to 8, with particular emphasis on the....'. Smerkov, trembling, turned to Nadia.

"This is part of the documentation from that brief case...". He bent down, lifted the front of the settee, and forced it against the wall. He savagely tore away the buckram backing, and forced his hands up amongst the springs. A moment of fumbling searching and he withdrew several closely typed sheets of thick paper, some of them showing graphs with wavy lines fingering their way across squares..

"This is Siberia for both of us, Nadia!" he panted, "your timing must have been slightly off. You should have waited until the very last moment before leaving the flat, so that Bleary had no time to think of anything else except getting on that 'plane'".

Nadia quickly saw the way things were going. It was a common form of self-preservation in any organisation to determine speedily that someone else was to blame. She grabbed the papers off Smerkov, ran to the kitchen, putting the lock on the door. She crumpled the papers up in the sink and applied a match to the bottom layer. Not until the black embers were swilling away did she open the door.

"What papers?" she hissed.

Smerkov knew of course that even if the blame had been successfully shifted to Nadia it would still signify an unsuccessful coup,

which, as far as he was concerned, would be the end. Better to keep things the way they were, to allow the Big Brains in the Kremlin to consider the job carried out completely.

He rammed his black trilby on his head, and left without saying a word.

Nadia watched him go. She pushed the settee away from the wall, sat down on it, lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, wriggling her toes as if the smoke had penetrated to them.

She had an idea... rather more than an idea. She had a firm conviction that she finally knew what had happened to her photographs.



John Berry 1964.

ATOM.

43

A FINAL GENUFLEXION



Atom

John Berry
1993

Report in the form of a DYING DECLARATION by G.Bleary, 66 years. No Fixed Abode, (except for Salvation Army Shelters, London), taken at Bielefeld Military Hospital, Bielefeld, West Germany at 7.30 pm, 10th September 1989, by Corporal Winifred Jones, W.R.A.C.

First of all, I want my fee for my recent work for M.I.6. to be donated to the Salvation Army, because that organisation has helped me considerably during the last few dark years living on the streets (and under the bridges) of London. Art also deserves great credit for helping to sustain me. For many weeks he met me every Thursday night... I sat on the last plank seat on the right in Trafalgar Square, facing south... at around seven in the evening he would come and sit with me. He always let me drain his hip flask... I really looked forward to the cold bacon and lard sandwiches he gave me... in the depth of winter he always gave me at least one item of warm clothing, thick socks, long underpants, or woollen gloves. His visits suddenly stopped, I wasn't really surprised, because I knew he was unwell. One June day in 1989 I was in Soho, outside Raymond's Revue, keenly perusing the photographs of unclothed females, and wishing I had begged enough money for the entrance fee. I heard high heels urgently tapping the pavement, and even though I knew I

was suffering from incipient senile dementia, I recall that instinctively I knew I was the quarry; my training with the Bleary Eyes, d'you see?.

"Mr. Bleary?"

I slowly turned round, a blond-haired young woman with bright purple eyes (obviously tinted contact lens) looked at me with distaste, her nostrils twitching at the sweet aroma of unwashed flesh, mine, of course.

"Yes, my deah", I said. She wore a red dress with a black belt and red shoes. Gorgeous.

"I've a proposition to put to you", she said.

"I've only got 57 pence", I panted.

A look of sheer malevolence creased her beautiful features, but very gradually she retook control of her facial muscles.

"I'll start again. I represent an agency that will take you out of this abject poverty and will re-adjust you and offer you a large fee for one short-duration operation".

I took a quick glance at the Paul Raymond girls, and a smirk did a couple of laps round my lips under my straggling moustache hairs. I nodded vigorously.

"Follow me", she snapped.

It was sheer heaven following closely behind her, ogling her shapely figure, noting the subtle pantie line, and they couldn't arrest me because I was following her orders.

We stopped at the kerbside a hundred yards away...the heavy London traffic slowed to ease past a large yellow van parked uncaringly on the double yellow lines. STEMENS FLOWERS FOR ALL OCCASIONS was painted on the side in ostentatious purple lettering. She knocked several times on the back doors, they opened, she pointed at me...strong arms lifted me, placed me on a worn leather seat strutted to the slatted floor, affixed a safety belt. The heavily-built man rolled his eyes, attempted to retract his nostrils, opened a sliding door and resumed the driver's seat. We accelerated.

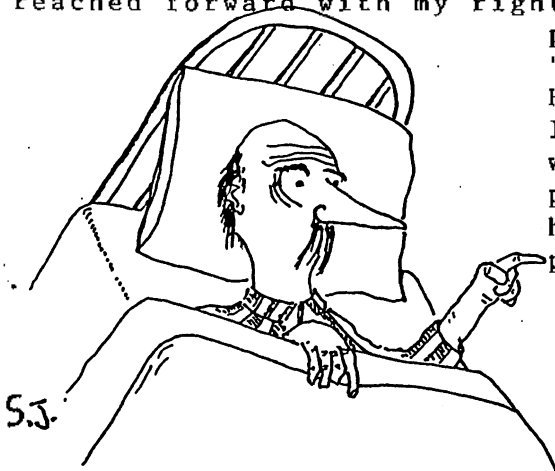
I was quite comfortable in the warmth, and dozed off...I'm sure we had been driving for over an hour, and I heard the braked wheels crunch on a scree drive.

He let me out of the vehicle...the van was outside a large stately home, somewhere in Kent, I discovered later. He ordered me brusquely to accompany him up the steps to the huge front door. I noted strategically sited video cameras following our progress. I reached forward with my right leg, pushed against him, and purposely fell.

"You tripped me!" I shouted.

He looked surprised, especially when I attacked him, punching and kicking without much effect because of my poor physical condition. He gritted his jaw, put a hand on my face, and pushed me away...certainly not a result of him losing his temper, because he controlled himself, but he was over six feet tall, and broad, and I felt a dribble of blood trickle into my lips. Hallelujah.

The door opened and he gently pushed me ahead of him across a hall-way, along a



53.

corridor to a door with a red light above it... he knocked on the door and an authoritative voice shouted, "Come". He ushered me in and closed the door behind me.

A large table, behind which was seated a distinguished looking gentleman, thick grey hair, creased eyes, ninety degree angles etched either side of thick sensual lips.

"Mr. Bleary, I presume... I am Sir Alexander Waring". He looked distastefully at my disgraceful apparel, and at the blood on my lips.

I took off my trenchcoat, which I had possessed for over forty years, and leaned across his desk, showing him the worn bottoms of the sleeves of my Oxfam jacket.

"Ah, frayed in the cuff, I notice", he observed.

"No, cuffed in the fray!" I screamed. Ghod, what a magnificent moment.

He frowned, opened a thick file on the desk in front of him, flipped over a few pages, suddenly laughed and tapped the appropriate page.

"Bob Shaw made that pun in 1957", he observed.

Christ. A bloddied nose for nothing.

He told me to sit down, put his elbows on his desk, clasped his fingers and rested his chin on the digital base, and looked at me with all the sincerity of a prozine salesman at a Convention.

"It's like this, Bleary. An international happening of considerable import is allegedly to occur this winter and an agent is required for a specific task. Circumstances suggest that the agent must possess unusual requirements. We at M.I.6. gave our computers all the available data, and your name was the only one quoted. We just could not believe it. We treble-checked with the same result. Of course, we are aware of your work with Blaze McKendrick many years ago, but we do not understand why your name was tossed to us. So here we are... Can you speak German?"

"I only know three words", I said, breathing heavily... "ja, nein, and grössenbustenhalt".

"What does that last word mean?"

"An extremely large bra".

He made another note in the file... I saw perspiration on his forehead.

"So, we will have to sort you out... I will now send you to be taken care of... I can tell you nothing about Operation Strabismus except that in a couple of months time you will emerge as a major in the Queen's Own Scottish Borderers. I'll see you again in due course".

He must have depressed a silent call button, because my minder came in, grabbed an arm, and took me along more corridors to white double doors with a red cross painted on them. He passed me on to a nurse who blanched whiter than her apron when she saw me.

"Come along, Mr. Bleary. First of all we get rid of those horrible clothes and then Nurse Jamison will give you a bath".



Nurse Jamison cowered behind her,
and then she stepped into full view.

((At this juncture in the statement
Bleary's eyes rolled in his head
and he gasped for breath. I
immediately sent for the Senior
Medical Officer, who gave him an
injection. Bleary calmed down. The
S.M.O. stated that he thought
Bleary was close to 'snuffing it',
his own words, but that I should
contine with the Dying Declaration.
Signed, Corporal Jones.8.50 pm))



For three weeks I was kept in
bed in a small private ward. I was
often injected with unknown
substances, massaged frequently,
with persistant kneeding of the area
around my eyes and mouth, given a protracted bed-bath every day
by Nurse Jamison, to which I looked forward with baited breath, and
gradually my food bore more varied content and quantity. A chart
beside my bed denoted a steady increase in weight and I began to
feel fit and quite healthy. Two sorts of mental phsiotherapy
bewildered me...firstly, all conversations took place in the German
language, and I gradually absorbed elementary aspects of grammar...
they spoke slowly to assist my appreciation. Secondly, for an hour
every day operatic music flowed around me, mostly Wagner, Richard
Strauss, Mozart and Beethoven, and a spectacled woman spent a few
moments every day explaining the story line of FIDELIO, pointing
out specific excerpts when the speakers blared. I took a keen
interest when I noted that cross-dressing was part of the senario.

I was duly transferred to another part of the stately home,
quite a large flat, austerey furnished, and when I lay in bed at
night, with the lights on, a couple of mice used to appear from
behind the large carved mahogany fire-place.

I attended lectures in the mornings, dealing with a wide range
of topics, including political lectures on the possibility of the
fall of Marxism in the east, international terrorism, and the role
of M.I.6. in those circumstances. Afternoons were spent slowly
jogging through the fields and woods in the vicinity, the large
acreage protected by a high wire fence.

My extraordinarily gifted sense of humour was not appreciated.
On the first evening after my transfer to the flat as I queued at
the cafeteria I pointed to tray three.

"There's no rhyme or reason why I shouldn't have that flavour
of ice cream", I beamed.

"Which flavour?"

"That one".

"This one?"

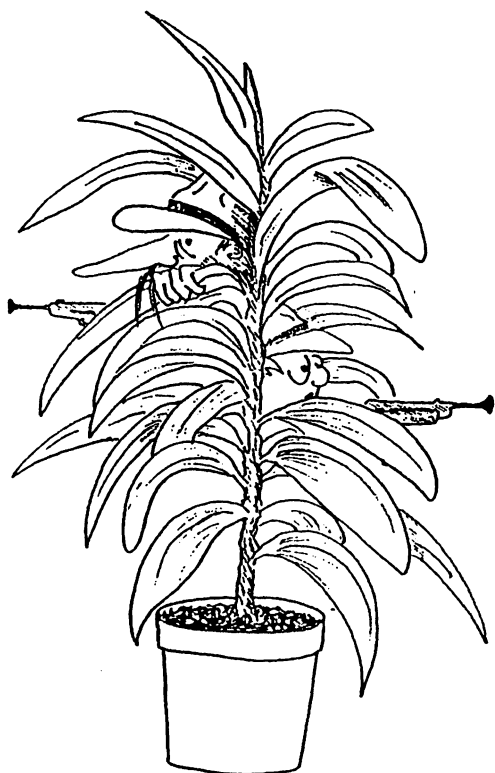
"Nunno...that one".

"Ah, rum and raisin".

"That's what I said", I retorted, to amazed expressions.

After two months I was measured by an adept tailor, the tape

S.J.



measure was like a snake in his hands. He took numerous measurements from my hips to my knees, and remembering what Sir Alexander had told me, the dreadful thought struck me that I was being measured for a kilt.

Formal dinner was every Thursday night, and some amazing displays of unfunctional military dress was revealed...I was still kiltless, and they were forced to accept my green sports jacket, grey flannels, with a yellow cravat carelessly tucked into my mauve shirt. I was positively one of the quietest dressers.

One night in the mess I found myself the centre piece of an appreciative audience of the younger cadre of secret agents... I had innocuously dropped into the conversation that I had worked with Blaze McKendrick thirty years previously.

"His memoirs, THE FAIRY RING, a great deal of which concerned Anthony Blunt, is required reading

on our course...did he mention you in it?" asked one acolyte.

"He did send me a complimentary copy". I sniffed and quickly changed the subject. (On page 37 it mentioned his work with, 'an itinerant operative, G.B. who was 'a genus of an esoteric microcosm'. It amazed me how the proof reader had missed the obvious typo.).

I knew the dreaded kilt was pending when Maurice, the famous M.I.6. hairdresser, gave me a semi-skinhead haircut, viciously trimmed my moustache, and gave all the hairs on my face a black rinse. I cautiously declined his offer of a blow dry.

I needed assistance to put on the dress uniform. The multi-coloured cross-checked tartan fitted terribly, and I was somewhat shocked when the tailor queried if I required under-shorts, the regimental tradition deemed otherwise...

"The trews will outW, I growled. (James White, 1961).

He shoved a dirk inside one of my socks, fluttered here and there with his fingers, mostly there, rammed a glengarry on my head and stood back to admire his juxtaposition of fabric and flesh.

"Pity about the knees", he commented.

I was warned by an aide that 'the big day is coming', and one morning I was summoned to meet Sir Alexander, in full dress uniform.

I entered his room...three men were sitting at the wide oak table, and they eyed me shrewdly.

"Gentlemen, may I introduce Major Gerald Fortesque", smirked Sir Alexander.

"You say this man was a deadbeat in his late sixties just a few weeks ago?" asked one.

"Yes".

"You've certainly done a good job. He looks the part, slightly puffy features, suggestion of a delicate squint in the left eye, signs of a wilting personality, knees remarkably knobbly...exactly like an aged officer on his last extension with a severe drink problem.

"But an opera lover", said another sarcastically.

They laughed in unison.

"Pray give us a short dissertation on The Ring".

My mother gave it to me when I joined the army in 1943".

"Noooo...Wagner's work".

"Ah, he wrote Cosima Fan Tutte".

A couple of ties were loosened.

"And this is the man to swing Operation Strabismus", one gentleman stage-whispered to Sir Alexander.

"We've got to use him, unfortunately, he's the only person they'll accept".

They discussed me, constantly flashing me glowering glances from under bushy eyebrows. Eventually they nodded agreement.

"Bleary", announced Sir Alexander, "tomorrow you'll participate in the Jock Ploy, phase one of Operation Strabismus".

((Bleary asked for a drink of iced water, which I held to his cracked lips to sip. His eyes were half closed, and his frequently protruding tongue was swollen. He gulped frequently, I called the doctor, who gave him another injection. Bleary rallied in a few moments, and said

he was ready to continue. Signed, Corporal Jones 9.47 pm.))

The erstwhile minder drove me to Heathrow..I was in civvies, my dress uniform in my suitcase.

The PAN-AM Boeing 737 flew to Hamburg...all passengers were asked to leave the aircraft, we did a circuit of the concourse and returned to the 737 and resumed our original seats. We flew down the air corridor over East Germany to Tegel, in West Berlin, the civilian airport.

A young man with a short haircut, obviously a soldier, came up to me and asked me to follow him. He took me to a house in the French Sector...this was obvious, because quite a number of French soldiers were promenading on the clean streets.

"Be ready at eighteen hundred hours in uniform, sir", he said, and departed. I had a nap, was woken by the alarm, and showered and dressed. I did look younger, not much younger, but a miracle of regeneration had been performed. I looked like a knackered fifty year old. A meal was cooked for me, nothing pretentious, and the soldier returned with instructions.

"Sir, two instructions...firstly, when you've seen FEDALIO, exit





to the rear of the theatre, go to the last toilet door on the left and knock rapidly seven times. Later, as the operation develops, do not let them know that you can understand the German language. It is essential to monitor their conversations. Ah, here's the Frog Good luck, sir".

This was terribly vague, but I was thrilled at the knowledge. I was going to see a performance of FEDALIO...I knew almost every note of the blasted opera.

The Frog was a French officer sitting in the back seat of the car...the driver was also in uniform, sans hat. The officer wore atop his head one of those pill-box type hats with gold braid round the peak. He ushered me to sit next to him, sneered, and tapped the driver's shoulder to commence. He kept looking furtively at my knees...the smell of cognac drifted from him, but he was entirely uncommunicative.

I noted the Reichstag on my left, in the distance, the EAST German flag hanging limply. After ten minutes we reached the border post. A grim faced East German soldier opened the door, looked at us and checked our passes, took a few deep breathes of cognac and looked the better for it, and waved us into East Germany. Was it really this easy?

I saw the high TV tower at Alexanderplatz, but before we reached it the driver stopped at the steps of Deutschen Staatsoper on Unter den Linden. Groups of well-dressed civilians were entering the theatre, speaking loudly in excited German. I was really pleased with my prowess in plucking whole strands of the conversations. I must state I was the subject of considerable curiosity to the German populace...some of them grinned as they scrutinised my kilt and sporran. I felt an absolute pratt...I can hardly say that I entered East Berlin incognito, which one would have thought to have been a prerequisite of my activities.

Everything suddenly became clear...in the foyer I saw quite a number of British, French, and American military personnel, mostly officers. Obviously there was reasonably easy access to East Berlin by the occupying nations from the west, at least for cultural affairs.

The opera was superb, I could almost have sang along with it. The opera house surroundings were luxurious, a motif of red and gold, and the seats were plush and comfortable. It was hard to believe that this was in a country where austerity was an art form.

At the interval I reconnoitered the toilets, noting the cubical I would enter at the conclusion of the opera.

I was in a blissful state as the opera concluded, what had I been missing all my life? After the ninth curtain call, and I was clapping louder than most, people started to leave their seats, and with some trepidation I made my way to the required toilet. I would have preferred to wait until the foyer was almost empty, but I rapped the door seven times, as ordered. It opened. A man in an off-white vest and shorts was crouched on the seat, hunched like a gnome on a mushroom. He looked..

rather like me, with black hair, thin moustache and deep-set rheumy eyes.

"Whip 'em off quick", he whispered, "I'm Carruthers of M.I.6."

"Bleary of the Salvation Army", I quipped.

He pointed to a worn pseudo-leather jacket, brown baggy trousers, boots, and a flat cap on the floor beside him. As I disrobed and handed him my service dress, I put on his clothing. Suddenly the whole ghastly travesty of the Jock Ploy asserted itself. A video of our activities, though utterly and completely innocent, would certainly been shown in the seamier districts of Amsterdam. It was all so bizzare. I rammed on the 'Schmitt' hat, as he called it, I could not reconcile the thought that M.I.6. would believe that the Jock Ploy would work, but I understand it has been used several times to transfer agents across the Wall.

"My documents are in the sporran", I hissed, "a French officer is impatiently awaiting you outside the theatre".

He rammed on the glengarry.

"You'll be met outside", he panted.

He left the toilet first, I followed in a few seconds. I saw Carruthers drive away with the French officer, the two red rear lights of the car brightly reflected on the wet surface of the Unter den Linden.

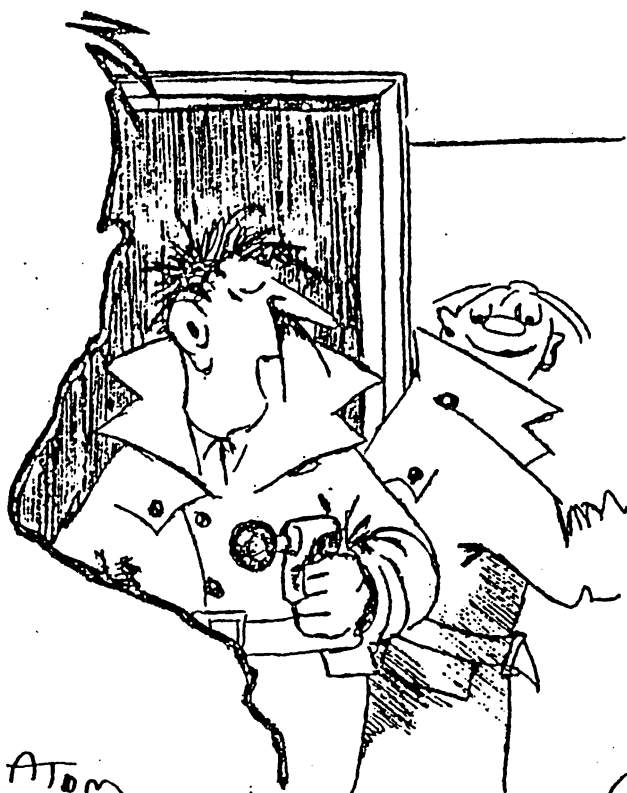
A girl attached herself to my arm. Straw-like hair, woollen jacket, plain skirt, face deathly white in the street lighting.

She spoke slowly in English. She asked me how Chuch Harris's christian name was spelt in fanzines... obviously a basic ploy to test my bona fides. She asked who water-coloured the front pages of their fanzine. She asked me where Harry Warner Jnr. lived. I gave her the answers, she smiled. We boarded a tram, number 22, and rattled northwards in the night. I knew we were travelling northwards because passenger jets flew in from the left towards Tegel, being permitted to fly over East Berlin if the landing wind decreed it.

We got off the tram outside a Rathaus - town hall - and walked along a street with old three storey houses on either side of the road, dating prior to World War 1... small shrapnel holes still spotted the walls.

She unlocked a door at one of the buildings, locked it behind her. I followed her up a wide staircase, voices and music coming from various flats. At the top floor she opened a door, ushered me inside, and switched on the lights. The room had a high ceiling but was barely furnished.

"Stay here until tomorrow night, until I come for you. Through that door is the kitchen, with an adequate supply of food. Do not go out. Tomorrow night you will be Guest of Honour of Pankow fandom".



((Bleary asked for a shot of brandy. I gave him a tot from the dispensary. He sat up in bed, his face flushed, saying he wanted to continue his report. Occasionally he breathed stertorously, and then improved, as if he had asserted his willpower. I was anxious to conclude the document, realising its importance, especially because it was thought he would not last the night. I felt that if he had a sleep, he might regain sufficient strength to complete his Declaration, but he croaked that he wanted to continue. Signed, Corporal Jones..11.25 pm.))

I lay in bed most of the day, later made myself some tea and toast in the Klubraum, a joint facility shared with another flat, empty at the time.

At 7.30 pm the door was knocked and the girl was there, smiling, looking rather excited. She led me to the basement of the building, where weak electric light bulbs revealed a dozen young men and women gazing at me with wide eyes.

I blinked to widen my iris's.

"This is Mr. Bleary, well known English B.F."

"That should be B.N.F. deah", I hissed.

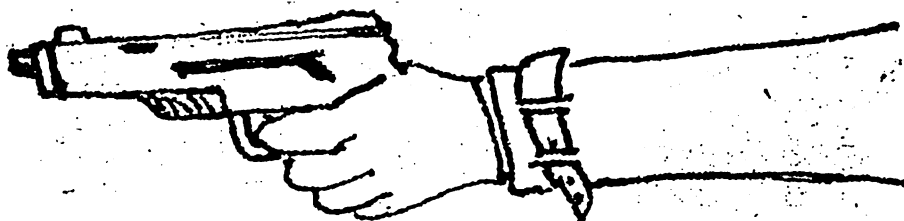
"We were told B.F.", she insisted.

"Mr. Bleary cannot speak German, but I'm sure you'll be pleased to know, Mr. Bleary, that most of the fans here can speak reasonable English".

Of course, I wanted to know why I was there, but fans held up their hands for attention.

"Tell us about Irish Fandom", they shouted.

S.J.



I gave them a humorous discourse, mostly stressing the diverse but highly intelligent and literate personalities, stressing classic puns which they appeared to appreciate, even if they had read them in fanzines.

"Yes, we've quite a few fanzines here, but we require to secrete them as the authorities would consider them to be subversive".

I noted that one fan was industriously sorting out chairs, moving tables, neatly stacking fanzines, singing to himself the while.

"That fan is working very hard", I crooned, trying to hold back the climax of the heavenly chorus.

"Hear that singing, he's in the local choir", said one fan. —

"You mean he's a horsed vassal", I screamed, and signalled for the top C's of approbation. But once again the utter sparkle of my repartee was lost on the fans, who shuffled uncertainly and looked at each other from under lowered eyelids.

One fan, older than the others, sat in the background, looking at me closely. I heard him say to another fan, in German. "He's got to be genuine. Only Bleary would make such a terrible pun in such very bad taste".

"I understand you've met Willy Ley, Mr. Bleary", he asked in English.

"You're going home with the yanks tonight", he said, and gave me the registration number of the vehicle.

I slipped into the back seat, tucking the kilt around my legs.

Three U.S. Army officers were also in the vehicle, but not a word was spoken.

I said to myself that this was so pathetic, surely the East Germans must be aware of the scheme. But apparantly they weren't, a cursory examination of our documents and we were waved into West Berlin.

I was dropped at a safe house where, under hypnosis, they plucked the names and addresses from my dormant mind. As far as I could gather they were members of an organisation determined to overthrow the East German regime and make the Wall come tumbling down. Snapped fingers brought me back to reality, surrounded by M.I.6. people smiling delightedly at the coup.

((at 01.30 hours on the 11th September 1989 Mr.Bleary died. It was really dramatic.

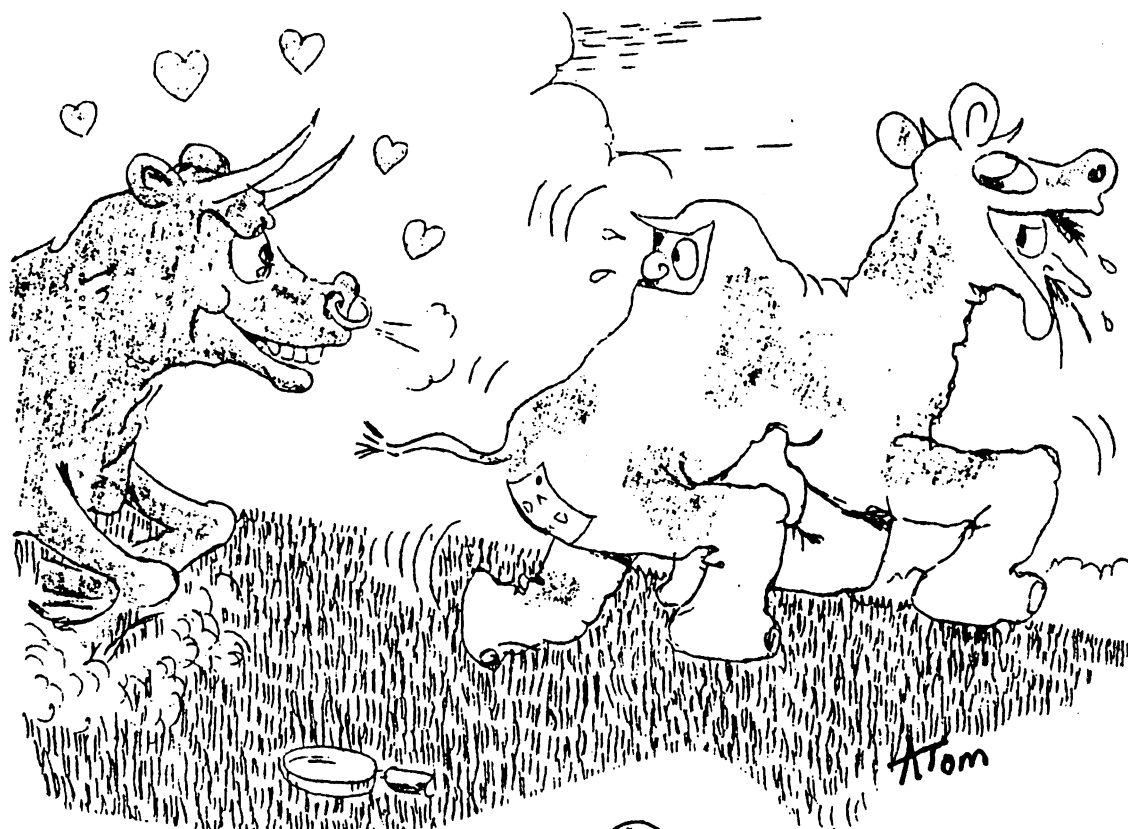
After he had completed his Dying Declaration he lay back on the pillow, his remaining teeth still gritted together with the concentration required for the dictation. He had a sip of water, and sank back exhausted. At 01.23 hours I head his croaking voice mumur "nurse". I went over to him. Although he was extraordinarily frail he reached forward with his claw-like hands, and spoke.

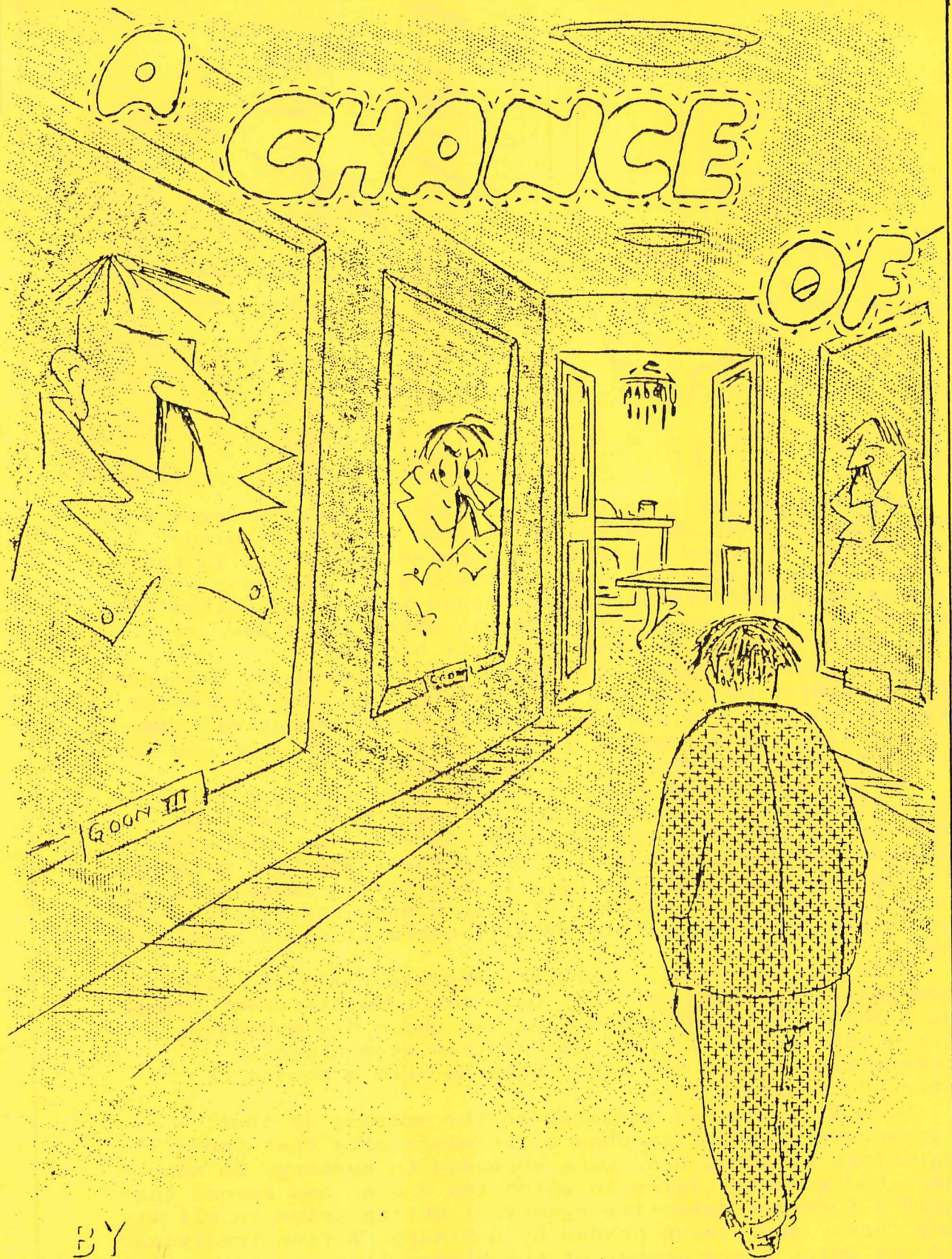
His last word was, "grössenbustehenhalten".

He dropped back, and had obviously expired.

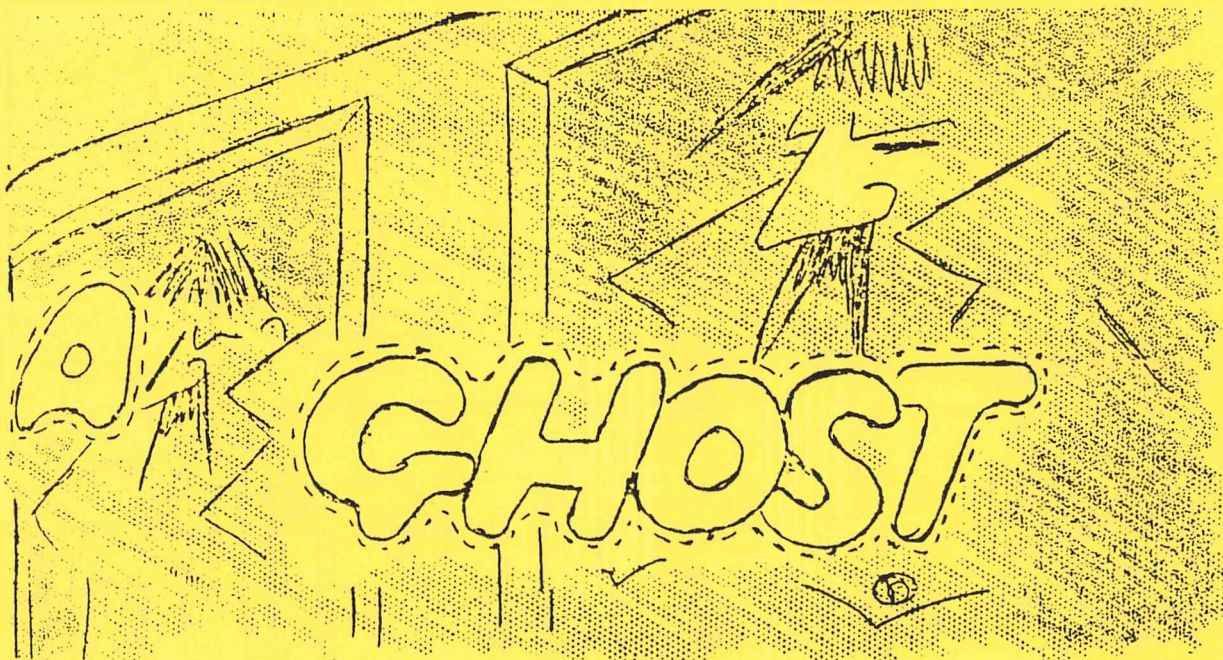
I sent for the M.O. who pronounced life extinct, at 01.30 hours Signed, Corporal Winifred Jones. W.R.A.C....01.50 hours, 11th October 1989)))

*****JOHN BERRY*****





BY BOB SHAW



Winter came early in the year 2113 - a long succession of cold sad months in which the chill rain swooped in windy shapes down deserted streets and gurgled mournfully in the gutters. Goon Bleary VI, head of the G.D.A., walked slowly towards his home; trench-coat buttoned tight, hat pulled down against the hopeless drizzle. He was whistling a low, sad tune, which reached no other ears but his own.

Overhead, the dark evening sky was occasionally disturbed by the whisper of commuting copters, but the Goon preferred to walk. The G.D.A. was not far from the Bleary ancestral home, anyway. Reaching his house, he opened the front door and stood in the hallway removing his outer garments.

Before him, lined along the wall, were the familiar portraits of the preceding heads of the G.D.A. They were remarkably alike - strong, athletic-looking men with keen, penetrating eyes and luxurious moustaches. The Goon hung up his coat and went down the hall to the living room, stopping for a minute at the painting of Goon Bleary the First, which was in the darkest part of the hall where it could hardly be seen.

This was the Goon's favourite ancestor. All the others were grim determined men, but Goon 1st. was different. There was a cheery twinkle to his eyes and under his moustache lurked the hint of a grin. His clothes were slightly dishevelled, and in his right hand he held a square of battered cardboard.

Goon VI had often pondered on the meaning of that incongruous piece of cardboard. It was a pity that the beginnings of the G.D.A. were shrouded in mystery. So many years had gone by. Years in which the G.D.A. had become the world's foremost detective agency, fighting crime in all its many forms, and always headed by a Bleary. A fine tradition and one which every member of the Bleary line was expected to carry on.

In his living room the Goon sat down before a glowing coal fire which differed from a 20th. century coal fire only in

that it never needed tending. He pressed a button on the arm of the chair and a bottle of beer and a glass were levitated up from the basement store. Goon poured the beer and sat staring into the fire, and the cold rain pattered on the windows.

An hour later the Goon was aroused from his lonely reverie by the robot butler's announcement that he had a visitor. He went out to the hall where he saw a small, neat man with large ears and sleek black hair, turning off his field-force umbrella. The small man was looking in surprise at the Goon's dripping trench coat and hat.

"The traditional G.D.A. outfit," the Goon explained going forward. "I'm Goon Bleary."

"How do you do?" the small man replied, and the Goon saw that he was pale and nervous. "I'm Aub Long."

"Indeed. I would have said you were fairly well rounded. Get it? Hee hee hee. What a smashin' pu - " The Goon stopped, inwardly angry at himself. Why did he sometimes get these uncontrollable impulses to make weird puns and then praise them extravagantly? "What's your trouble, Mr. Long?"

"It's my house. It's haunted. Do you handle cases like that?"

"Oh yes," said the Goon. "The more unusual the case is, the better. Where is the house?"

"The address is 170 Upnards Road."

"170 Upnards Road," the Goon echoed faintly. "170, Upnards Road...."

"What's the matter, Mr. Bleary?" Long asked anxiously. "You look quite pale."

"I don't know," said the Goon. "Am I pale? For a moment I seemed to....it's nothing. Let's go." He grabbed his trenchcoat.

"Right now?" Long queried.

"Why not? This is a lonely house. I hate it. Tell me about your ghosts."

As they flew in Aub Long's copter, Long explained that he could not get any tenant to remain in his house more than a few days. They all claimed they had heard ghosts in the attic - screams, shouts, bangs, horrible cries, moans. Probably the ghostly re-enactment of a terrible murder.

"Don't worry," the Goon explained. "Until a few years ago ghosts were not accepted, but with the definite proof of psychic phenomena great steps were made. Exorcising, for instance. I have in my pocket a little machine which sets up vibrations which either destroys spectres or renders this 'continuum' absolutely untenable for them. When I use this machine these ghosts will vanish for ever." He gazed sadly down through the whirling mists to where the lights of the Upnards Road were rising slowly to meet them.

The tiny copter landed in the front garden of 170. The Goon got out and stood surveying the house and lawn, narrowing his eyes against the windborne rain.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing to a jumble of vaguely seen bars on top of a short pedestal.

"It is a genuine 20th. century bicycle. I had it put there as a curio. It was found at the back of the house."

"Really?" the Goon replied. He poked the thing with his fingers and it sagged slightly.

"Hard to believe that it could have become so rusted in 150 years or less. He smiled a little as tried to imagine the sort of person it would have been who actually rode on that piece of metal.

They went into the house and stood in the dark, empty hall. The Goon took off his hat and flipped it towards the stairs, where it landed on top of the newel post.

"Why did you do that, Mr. Bleary? We will be here for only a few seconds, won't we? Are you sure you feel alright?"

"I don't know," the Goon said faintly, retrieving his hat. "Listen. I heard something."

They listened. From upstairs came strange sounds, growing gradually louder and louder - bangs, cries, weird laughter, screams.

"It is they!" screamed Long. "It's the ghosts. What a horrible sound! Quickly, Mr. Bleary, use the machine!"

Moving like a man in a trance, the Goon removed the exorciser from his pocket. For a moment his fingers hovered above the activator switch, then he withdrew them. "I'm going up there to see them," he said slowly.

Long caught his arm. "Are you mad? You can't go up there. Who knows what would happen to you?"

The sounds floating down the stairs grew even louder.

The Goon's eyes were shining with an unnatural brightness as he brushed off Long's hand. "I don't care. All my life I have been lonely. I've been searching, searching, searching. Looking for.....something. I'm not a Master Detective at heart. I need something else, and I'm going up those stairs."

He started up the stairs and the sounds grew thunderous from above.

With a desperate cry Long threw himself forward, caught the exorciser and turned its switch.

All at once the sounds ceased. The house was silent.

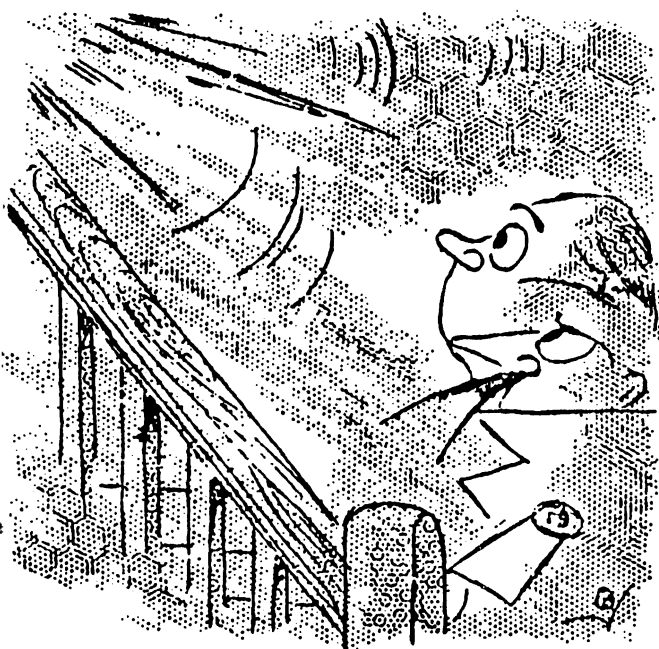
The Goon stood stock still on the third step, his face buried in his hands. He stood like that for some time, then turned and walked slowly, tiredly, down the hall.

"I guess we've both been under a strain," said Long, timorously, outside the house. "I'll fly you straight back."

The Goon gazed at him for a second.

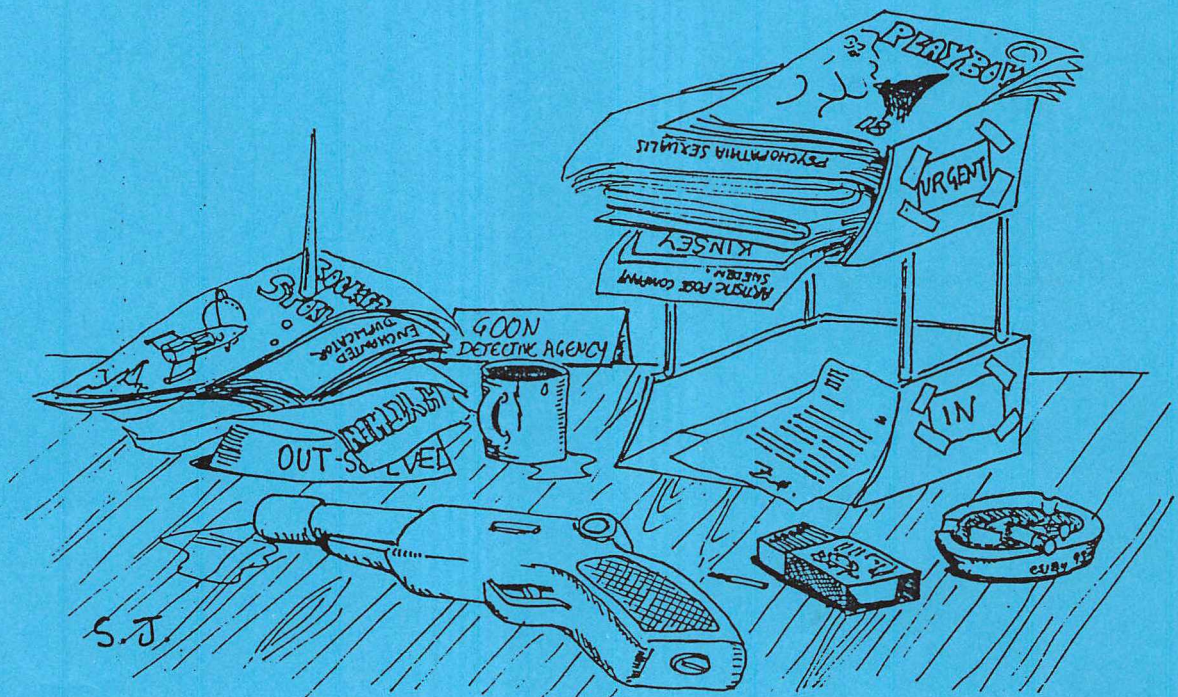
"No thanks. I'll walk."

He pulled his hat down over his eyes and walked away into the night. Long glimpsed him once as his copter rose in the sky; and the Goon looked very small and lonely as the rain and clouds closed over him and hid him from view.



ROBERT SHAW

The Bleary Eyes Vol. 3



Nor The Years
Condemn

John Berry