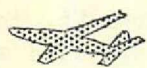


# POT POURRI

featuring



35

"HUBBLE,

BUBBLE,



TOIL & ROUBLE"

or

(THE WATERCRESS FILE)

THE GOON'S GREATEST  
ADVENTURE



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, architecturally 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 there 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 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 at me.

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 it 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 ???

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"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.

~~Hummmmm~~. 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 interesting. I didn't quite think it was the thing to sport myself in front of them in my tights. After all, ballet gals 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 memo's 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 'THIS AGENT IS NOT TO BE SENT TO RUSSIA.'

I sat back, a blank expression on my face, a sort of cherubic innocence, as Bunting returned. Secretly, I was very relieved. Never having failed for M.I.5, I always suspected that if a really big job came up in Redland, they would have to send me. 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 ten packet into the yawning mouth of the waste paper basket.

I flipped.

There comes in a persons 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 '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 poked 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 10-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-size proportions, but he was still prepared to sit me out.

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

With deft digital skill, my fingers almost part of me, I separated 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.

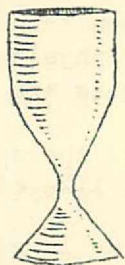
"Pardon me," I said, with, in the circumstances, as much aplomb as I could muster, and I shaped the tissue bundle into a ball and popped it into my mouth. I started to masticate.

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 re-shaped it into a long cylinder. I then pinched it at approximately one third of it's length, and with a little more smoothing and carressing I manufactured a miniature silver paper wine glass. (Like the illo on the left here, especially drawn for those of you who have difficulty in following these instructions, which I sincerely hope you'll emulate, preferably when you're by yourself.) 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 glasses up-side-down, and carefully deposited a chunk of gooey substance from my mouth to the concave 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 edge 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 stirred into life.

"Good Lord, Eleary " 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 symbols.

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 lightning, 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 straight line across the ceiling above the Brigadier's head.

AND STAYED THERE.

Nary a one trembled or fell.

You reckon.

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 outa here," he babbled, and pushed across to me the conventional thick heavily 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.

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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 definitely non-U".

I was 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 dozen tuning forks.

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

"But I'm going to America with the Scurthorpe 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 long and hard as they passed by, and started to tune 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, arms akimbo, 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 their eyes, and directed the pianist to drag me out.

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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 anesthetic before the barber was allowed to flip his scissors) 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.

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, and 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. But I told you of the shock. 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 yucked. 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 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 problem.

I was sharing a room with Rupert...

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The Scunthorpe Ballet were guesting at the Bolshoi, and I was sitting in a little dressing room wondering what it was all about. Why was I in Russia? Obviously I'd been duped, but what was the motive?

I was chewing the ends of my moustache in perplexity, when the door opened, a man slipped in like a ferret and closed the door rapidly behind him. He was dressed in a typically Russian way, fur coat and big hat and boots. He knocked the snow off his boots, pulled them off and started to take mine off.

"Nyet," I hissed, using what I hoped was a Russian word. One of the Bolshoi ballerina's had said it to me, so I guessed it meant either 'yes' or 'no'. Probably no. Why did a strange man want me to take my boots off?

"Quick, strip off," he panted, disrobing with alacrity.

"Look here, whoever you are," I grated...but he gripped me by the velvet lapels.

"You're Bleary, aren't you?"

"Yeah," I panted. "Who the hell are you?"

"Miles Faversham, Military Intelligence," he hissed. "Didn't Bunting tell you? You're here to change places with me so that I can get back to England. I've got some urgent top secret information to deliver about Russia's I.C.B.M's"

I pondered as I took my clothes off, and put his on. He put mine on. He whipped on a false moustache, and told me to shave mine off. He had a razor with him, and except for a nicked nostril I did a pretty good job. He looked at himself in the full-length mirror, frowned at what he saw, and told me he thought he looked a mite like me.

"Well, cheerio, Bleary," he said.

"Er, cheerio," I said in reply, but he sat down in my chair, which sort of intimated it was me who was going.

"Where the hell do I go now?" I said angrily, "and more to the point, how am I getting back to England?"

"The Brigadier will fix that for you," smiled Faversham. "Now here's a key. Go to Flat 237 in the Maxim Gorki block...you'd better walk as you don't speak Russian. The flat is adequately stocked with food and things. Now this is most important... DO NOT LEAVE THE FLAT UNTIL YOU ARE CONTACTED BY ONE OF OUR AGENTS....I can't impress this too much on you....well, once again, old man, cheer-ho."

"Cheer-ho," I said miserably. Things were moving too fast for me, and as I explained in some of my narratives years ago, when things move fast I sort of lose my grip, things seem to recede, and I can't do anything about it. I got bewildered.

The only consolation I had was that he didn't know he was sharing Rupert's room....

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"Stand up," ordered Smerkov. I did so. The two big men quickly

searched me and the room.

"What, no plonker?" smiled Smerkov.

"Wish I had," I quipped. "It's frustrating having a sudden plentiful supply of suckers and no plonker."

He showed me a mouthful of yellow teeth.

"You'll not make many jokes where you're going," he hissed. He nodded to his aids 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 dirty white ceiling shone brightly, and I crossed to a wooden bunk, lay back on it, looking at the door, wondering just what the heck I was going to do now.

Somehow I felt that there was definitely something wrong.

Was it possible I had boobed?

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I contemplated my navel, as some literary gink 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 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 state 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 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. I couldn't believe my luck. They were, I presumed, typical choreographers 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'd 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 scavaging 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, but 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 twenty four hours.... providing 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 shaved 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. The frequent mutterings and gnashing of teeth was really only impatience, but I thought I'd let 'em think I had the wind up. And when the light finally did go off, I had no idea how long it would be before they switched it off again. It could be an hour, it could be three days...it all depended on what effect they thought would suit me best. Me appearing nervous and all that, I reasoned they'd leave me in the dark for a long time.

I pulled my shoes off. My socks smelled. They always did, but this was a different odour. That's why I was worried in case I was bathed. I forced the prong of the shoe buckle inwards and pulled. It came away, a sharp steel rod, it almost hummed like a tuning fork. A great feeling of triumph came over me...I'd thought out exactly what I had to do...usually, when I got a complicated job I made a regular hash of it, as readers of my earlier chronicles will be well aware. I commenced paring away the hard stained wood with the steel rod from the heavy nails which held the bunk together. I wanted one long beam. I had to extract four five-inch nails. I was working in pitch darkness, expecting that any second the light would blast on, revealing me hunkered up burrowing like a death-

watch beetle.

Eventually I had a beam from the outer edge of the bunk. I placed one end against the wall alongside the bunk. I laid the other end against the far wall. It was, I guessed, at an angle of 45 degrees. I felt a thrill as I pulled away the delicate mauve thread which patterned my pansy shoes. The core of the thread was thin but extra-strong fuse wire. I took the thread from both shoes, extracted the fuse wire, tied the pieces together, hung it round my neck like a garland. On my shoes were two shiny metal tassles. I put them tenderly in the breast pocket of my overall.

I stopped for a moment. It was strange in the darkness...I sensed where everything was, I seemed to know instinctively. When I reached for the shoes alongside my bunk, I hit them first time. Something had happened to me...in my desperate position I had become calm and self-disciplined. It was fortunate...I could easily have blown a finger off, playing with those tassles. And now the testing time came...everything depended upon the dexterity with which I could clean my toenails in total darkness.

I pulled my socks off. I chose my right big toe. The nail hadn't been cut for some weeks. Behind it, if the light had been on, I would have seen black dirt. That's why I didn't want a bath or shower. Because it wasn't accumulated dirt. It was plastic explosive...suitably treated with a black powder. I scraped the 'dirt' from behind the nails of my ten toes. I collected it in a ball in my left palm. The accumulated explosive was almost as big as a walnut. Yep, I sure did have long toenails. (I might modestly add that I didn't especially grow 'em long for the concealment of the plastic explosive.)

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 that 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 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 keyhole 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, well, 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 ?

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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 orientate 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 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 a 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 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 presumably snow had just recently condensed. Across the back of a chair was a heavy military overcoat with a couple 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 it balanced precariously. I listened. I heard shouting, loud orders being barked 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 distinctly 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 staggered 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 hanging downwards. His eyes were wide. He flicked a cigarette butt out of the window, closed it, 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....

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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 cotay 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, flick it, attached to the case. The crowd stood respectfully to one side as I sprinted away. Most of them were looking at my pansy shoes...

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Col 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.

Smervov had brought back some little snippets of information which had been duly passed 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 re-instated 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 Messrs Gagarin, Titov, Popovic, etc. The British would pass this information to the Americans, as part of a reciprocal deal regarding secret information which was of special interest to the other. Smervov had overheard a rather loud conversation in Bunting's office before he had been released, revealing that the Goon was incarcerated in a flat in Moscow. It had taken but a couple of weeks for him to discover which flat...

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

"Most certainly, Comrade," hissed Smervov. "By judiciously placing my men, and allowing him to keep his shoes, he blew the cell 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 discreetly 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 other, saw the subtle nod, and smiled at Smervov.

"I prepared them," he sneered. "As yet the astronauts the Americans have sent up have not orbited for long periods. 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 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 Appollo 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 in 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 one.

Smerkov grinned.

His master stroke.....

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

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There is nothing more depressing than being wet 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 me.

"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.

But even 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, and 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 Sounthorpe Ballet had returned to London 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, led me via devious side streets to one of those ugly blocks of flats I think I've mentioned before.

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When I woke up 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, prowled round some more. It was just like what you'd expect a young gals 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, on the bottom of the page I saw the pencilled words.. 'Bolshoi leaves Moscow 6 pm 27th.' I looked at the wall calendar and saw it was the 27th. I thought a lot about that....

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"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 swept back 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 trenchcoat and, dammit, I couldn't believe my eyes, attached to the sleeve of it by a chain was the blasted brief case. I put the trenchcoat on the floor, stood on it, and tugged, and 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 3 pm. 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 20 of the photographs...hell, you can never 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 photo's back in the envelope. I shut the drawer.

I put on the trenchcoat. 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.

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"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. 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.

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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 to 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 4.30pm. 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 Muriyev 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 one of the security men detailed to accompany the Bolshoi...

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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 vacant lot, I bundled 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 almost a 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 then 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 trenchcoats with him....

Unfortunately, just my flaring luck, he even 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 had 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 staircase and forced myself into a seat between two gorgeous gals, I expected to hear a raucous shout, or see Szerkov climbing up after me. But nothing. I smiled at the two gals, but they sniffed disdainfully. The engines of the mighty Ilyushin started up, we roared down the runway, and headed westwards...

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It's no use denying that I'd worked myself up into a pretty potent rage as 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 fact 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 know 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 beserk.

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 un-awares, 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...about as 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 promise that he would allow a captured Western spy to escape with important documents. Now get this. Smerkov was to exchange the documents for authentic top secret data. Get the master stroke...the utter genius of my ploy? The Kremlin bods would allow a Western 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. Specks of saliva were framing his lips into a grimace which was terrifying to behold.

"It occurs to me," I said, meditating at 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.

"My 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'd 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 trenchcoat 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 brief 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...

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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. Haha. 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."

"And I shouldn't tell you this," muttered Smerkov quietly, moving across and sitting beside her, " but his chief in London 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 they fell from Smerkov's fingers as he made a grab for the girl.

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

He pulled the cushion away, and started to rub the stain with his handkerchief, when 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 on the crews of Vostok's 1 to 6, 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 fingered their way across the 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 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, put 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, was the end. Better to keep things the way they were, to allow the Big Brains in the Kremlin to consider the job carried through 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

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This is POT POURRI #35. As I promised a year ago, this is the latest story of the Goon - sequestered as he is in Moscow. I've written it as a satire on the James Bond kind of thing, and trust that you've been able to follow the complicated plot, and worked out the denouement for yourself, before the Goon revealed it in his own inimitable way. It gives me a kick to write these stories, and I shall be pleased to continue the series if you so desire. For the next issue I've written OFF THE BEATEN TOSKEY - it's long, with copious illustrations and fotoshoots - detailing the the exciting and adventurous experiences my family and I had when Toskey drove us around Northern Ireland in July and August last.

Future issues will feature my PROJECT RESEARCH...I'll try and get another issue of PP in the next mailing, with the Toskey story, but I don't promise.

Meanwhile, this is printed and published by John Berr, number 31, Campbell Park Avenue, Belmont, BELFAST 4, Northern Ireland.