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H. BEAM PIPER
and
JOHN J. McGUIRE

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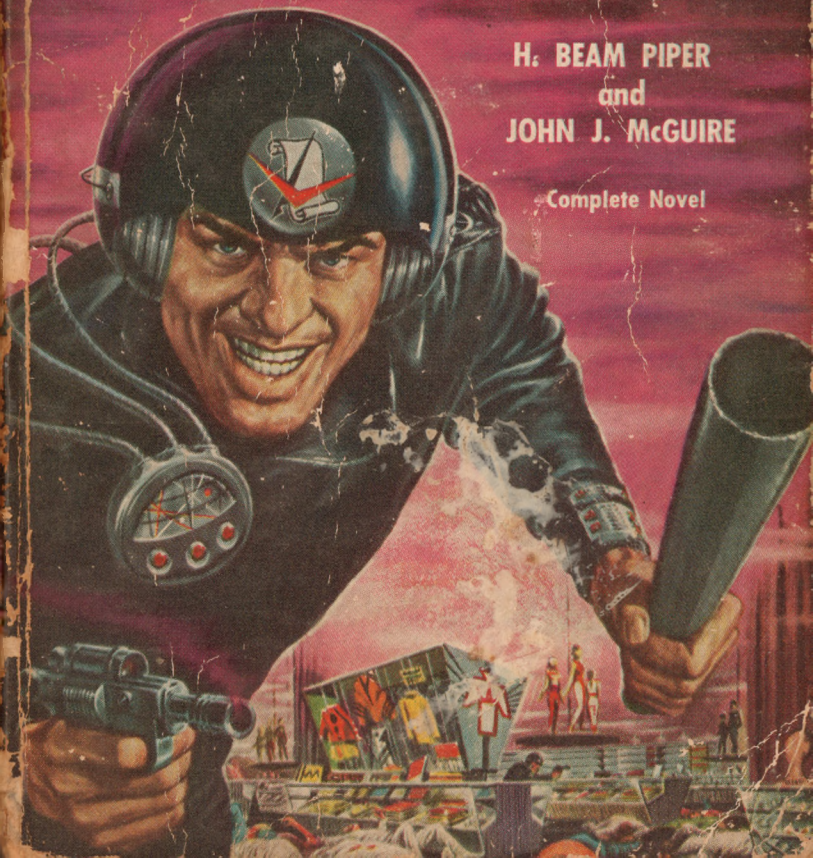

UNHOLY ALLIANCE OF SCIENCE AND IGNORANCE

In the year 2140 helicopters were a common means of transportation, visiphones were installed in every home, beltways replaced subways, and atomic energy had long been harnessed into the service of mankind. But in this world of otherwise Utopian progress there was an element of jarring discord—nine-tenths of the population *chose* to remain Illiterate!

And if you were brave enough to become a member of the minority wearing the white smock designating Literacy, your life was in constant danger from the Illiterates, whose popular political slogan was: "Put the Literates in their place! Our servants, not our masters!" For in this world Literacy was held directly responsible for war—and the populace was taking no chances on a repeat performance!

But even the most progressive audio-visual methods of education can't subdue a natural desire to learn . . . as witnessed by the panic, terror and swift changing of sides when there arises a CRISIS IN 2140!

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHESTER PELTON

A senatorial nominée, he had a hard job staying alive until the election.

CLAIRE PELTON

Her personal disgrace saved her father's life.

RALPH PRESTONBY

He was a high school principal, but he couldn't teach his students to read.

RUSSELL LATTERMAN

When he ran a department store sale, there was more than good merchandising behind it!

RAY PELTON

His three "R's" were rebel, reorganize and reeducate!

WILLIAM LANCEDALE

Turning a defeat into a victory was child's play for him.

FRANK CARDON

Brewing beer, he discovered, could lead to an alcoholic grave!

CRISIS IN 2140

by

H. BEAM PIPER

and

JOHN J. McGUIRE

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A Division of A. A. Wyn, Inc.
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CRISIS IN 2140

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CHAPTER I

CHESTER PELTON retracted his paunch as far as the breakfast seat would permit; the table, its advent preceded by a collection of mouth-watering aromas, slid noiselessly out of the pantry and clicked into place in front of him.

"Everything all right, Miss Claire?" a voice floated out after it from beyond. "Anything else you want?"

"Everything's just fine, Mrs. Harris," Claire replied. "I suppose Mr. Pelton'll want seconds, and Ray'll probably want thirds and fourths of everything." She waved a hand over the photocell that closed the pantry door, and slid into place across from her brother, who already had a glass of fruit juice in one hand and was lifting platter covers with the other.

"Real eggs!" the boy was announcing. "Bacon. Wheat-bread toast." He looked again. "Hey, Sis, is this real cow-made butter?"

"Yes. Now go ahead and eat."

As though Ray needed encouragement, Chester Pelton thought, watching his son use a spoon—the biggest one available—to dump gobs of honey on his toast. While he was helping himself to bacon and eggs, he could hear Ray's full-mouthed exclamation: "This is real bee-comb honey, too!" That pleased him. The boy was a true Pelton; only needed one bite to distinguish between real and synthetic food.

"Bet this breakfast didn't cost a dollar under five C," Ray continued, a little more audibly, between bites.

That was another Pelton trait; even at fifteen, the boy was learning the value of money. Claire seemed to disapprove, however.

"Oh, Ray; try not to always think of what things cost," she reproved.

"If I had all she spends on natural food, I could have a this-season's model 'copter-bike, like Jimmy Hartnett," Ray continued.

Pelton frowned. "I don't want you running around with that boy, Ray," he said, his mouth full of bacon and eggs. Under his daughter's look of disapproval, he swallowed hastily, then continued: "He's not the sort of company I want my son keeping."

"But, Senator," Ray protested. "He lives next door to us. Why, we can see Hartnett's aerial from the top of our landing stage!"

"That doesn't matter," he said, in a tone meant to indicate that the subject was not to be debated. "He's a Literate!"

"More eggs, Senator?" Claire asked, extending the platter and gesturing with the serving knife.

He chuckled inwardly. Caire always knew what to do when his temper started climbing to critical mass. He allowed her to load his plate again.

"And speaking of our landing stage, have you been up there, this morning, Ray?" he asked.

They both looked at him inquiringly.

"Delivered last evening, while you two were out," he explained. "New winter model Rolls-Cadipac." He felt a glow of paternal pleasure as Claire gave a yelp of delight and aimed a glancing kiss at the top of his bald head. Ray dropped his fork, slid from his seat, and bolted for the lift, even bacon, eggs, and real bee-comb honey forgotten.

With elaborate absent-mindedness, Chester Pelton reached for the switch to turn on the video screen over the pantry door.

"Oh-oh! Oh-oh!" Claire's slender hand went out to stop his own. "Not till coffee and cigarettes, Senator."

"It's almost oh-eight-fifteen; I want the newscast."

"Can't you just relax for a while? Honestly, Senator, you're killing yourself."

"Oh, rubbish! I've been working a little hard, but—"

"You've been working too hard. And today, with the sale at the store, and the last day of the campaign—"

"Why the devil did that idiot of a Latterman have the sale advertised for today, anyhow?" he fumed. "Doesn't he know I'm running for the Senate?"

"I doubt it," Claire said. "He may have heard of it, the way you've heard about an election in Pakistan or Abyssinia, or he just may not know there is such a thing as politics. I think he does know there's a world outside the store, but he doesn't care much what goes on in it." She pushed her plate aside, poured a cup of coffee, and levered a cigarette from the Readilit, puffing at it with the relish of the morning's first smoke. "All he knows is that we're holding our sale three days ahead of Macy & Gimbel's."

"Russ is a good businessman," Pelton said seriously. "I wish you'd take a little more interest in him, Claire."

"If you mean what I think you do, no thanks," Claire replied. "I suppose I'll get married, some day—most girls do —but it'll be to somebody who can hang his business up at the office before he comes home. Russ Latterman is so married to the store that if he married me too, it'd be bigamy. Ready for your coffee?" Without waiting for an answer, she filled his cup and ejected a lighted cigarette from the box for him, then snapped on the video screen.

It lit at once, and a nondescriptly handsome young man

was grinning toothily out of it. He wore a white smock, halfway to his knees, and, over it, an old-fashioned Sam Browne belt which supported a bulky leather-covered tablet and a large stylus. On the strap which crossed his breast five or six little metal badges twinkled.

". . . Why no other beer can compare with delicious, tangy, Cardon's Black Bottle. Won't you try it?" he pleaded. "Then you will see for yourself why millions of happy drinkers always Call For Cardon's. And now, that other favorite of millions, Literate First Class Elliot C. Mongery."

Pelton muttered: "Why Frank sponsors that blabbermouth of a Mongery—"

Ray, sliding back onto the bench, returned to his food.

"Jimmy's book had pictures," he complained, forking up another mixture of eggs, bacon, toast and honey.

"Book?" Claire echoed. "Oh, the instructions for the 'copter?"

"Pipe down, both of you!" Pelton commanded. "The newscast—"

Literate First Class Elliot C. Mongery, revealed by a quick left quarter-turn of the pickup camera, wore the same starchy white smock, the same Sam Browne belt glittering with the badges of the organizations and corporations for whom he was authorized to practice Literacy. The tablet on his belt, Pelton knew, was really a camouflaged holster for a small automatic, and the gold stylus was a gas-projector. The black-leather-jacketed bodyguards, of course, were discreetly out of range of the camera. Members of the Associated Fraternities of Literates weren't exactly loved by the non-reading public they claimed to serve. The sight of one of those starchy, perpetually-spotless, white smocks always affected Pelton like a red cape to a bull. He snorted in disdain. The raised eyebrow toward the announcer on the

left, the quick, perennially boyish smile, followed by the levelly serious gaze into the camera—the whole act might have been a film-transcription of Mongery's first appearance on the video, fifteen years ago. At least, it was off the same ear of corn.

"That big hunk of cheese," Ray commented. For once, Pelton didn't shush him; that was too close to his own attitude, at least in family-breakfast-table terminology.

". . . First of all; for the country, and especially the Newer New York area, and by the way, it looks as though somebody thought somebody needed a little cooling off, but we'll come to that later. Here's the forecast: Today and tomorrow, the weather will continue fine; warm in the sun, chilly in the shadows. There won't be anything to keep you from the polls, tomorrow, except bird-hunting, or a last chance at a game of golf. This is the first time within this commentator's memory that the weather has definitely been in favor of the party out of power.

"On the world scene: You'll be glad to hear that the survivors of the wrecked strato-rocket have all been rescued from the top of Mount Everest, after a difficult and heroic effort by the Royal Nepalese Air Force. . . . The results of last week's election in Russia are being challenged by twelve of the fourteen parties represented on the ballot; the only parties not hurling accusations of fraud are the Democrats, who won, and the Christian Communists, who are about as influential in Russian politics as the Vegetarian-Anti-Vaccination Party is here. . . . The Central Diplomatic Council of the Reunited Nations has just announced, for the hundred and seventy-eighth time, that the Arab-Israel dispute has been finally, definitely and satisfactorily settled. This morning's reports from Baghdad and Tel Aviv only list four Arabs and six Israelis killed in border clashes in the past twenty-four hours, so maybe they're really getting things patched up,

after all. During the same period, there were more fatalities in Newer New York as a result of clashes between the private troops of rival racket gangs, political parties and business houses.

"Which brings us to the local scene. On my way to the studio this morning, I stopped at City Hall, and found our genial Chief of Police Delaney, 'Irish' Delaney to most of us, hard at work with a portable disintegrator, getting rid of record disks and recording tapes of old and long-settled cases. He had a couple of amusing stories. For instance, a lone Independent-Conservative partisan broke up a Radical-Socialist mass meeting preparatory to a march to demonstrate in Double Times Square, by applying his pocket lighter to one of the heat-sensitive boxes in the building and activating the sprinkler system. By the time the Radicals had gotten into dry clothing, there was a, well, sort of impromptu Conservative demonstration going on in Double Times Square, and one of the few things the local gendarmes won't stand for is an attempt to hold two rival political meetings in the same area.

"Curiously, while it was the Radicals who got soaked, it was the Conservatives who sneezed," Mongery went on, his face glowing with mischievous amusement. "It seems that while they were holding a monster rally at Hague Hall, in North Jersey Borough, some person or persons unknown got at the air-conditioning system with a tank of sneeze gas, which didn't exactly improve either the speaking style of Senator Grant Hamilton or the attentiveness of his audience. Needless to say, there is no police investigation of either incident. Election shenanigans, like college pranks, are fair play as long as they don't cause an outright holocaust. And that, I think, is as it should be," Mongery went on, more seriously. "Most of the horrors of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries were the result of taking politics too seriously."

Pelton snorted again. That was the Literate line, all right; treat politics as a joke and an election as a sporting event, let the Independent-Conservative grafters stay in power, and let the Literates run the country through them. Not, of course, that he disapproved of those boys in the Young Radical League who'd thought up that sneeze-gas trick.

"And now, what you've been waiting for," Mongery continued. "The final Trotter Poll's pre-election analysis." A novice Literate advanced, handing him a big loose-leaf book, which he opened with the reverence a Literate always displayed toward the written word. "This," he said, "is going to surprise you. For the whole state of Penn-Jersey-York, the poll shows a probable Radical-Socialist vote of approximately thirty million, an Independent Conservative vote of approximately ten and a half million, and a vote of about a million for what we call the Who-Gives-A-Damn Party, which, frankly, is the party of your commentator's choice. Very few sections differ widely from this average—there will be a much heavier Radical vote in the Pittsburgh area, and traditionally Conservative Philadelphia and the upper Hudson Valley will give the Radicals a much smaller majority."

They all looked at one another, thunderstruck.

"If Mongery's admitting that, I'm in!" Pelton exclaimed.

"Yeah, we can start calling him Senator, now, and really mean it," Ray said. "Maybe old Mongie isn't such a bad sort of twerp, after all."

"Considering that the Conservatives carried this state by a substantial majority in the presidential election of two years ago, and by a huge majority in the previous presidential election of 2136," Mongery, in the screen, continued, "this verdict of the almost infallible Trotter Poll needs some explaining. For the most part, it is the result of the untiring efforts of one man, the dynamic new leader of the Radical-

Socialists and their present candidate for the Consolidated States of North America Senate, Chester Pelton, who has transformed that once-moribund party into the vital force it is today. And this achievement has been due, very largely, to a single slogan which he had hammered into your ears: *Put the Literates in their place; our servants, not our masters!*" He brushed a hand deprecatingly over his white smock and fingered the badges on his belt.

"There has always been, on the part of the Illiterate public, some resentment against organized Literacy. In part, it has been due to the high fees charged for Literate services, and to what seems, to many, to be monopolistic practices. But behind that is a general attitude of anti-intellectualism which is our heritage from the disastrous wars of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries. Chester Pelton has made himself the spokesman of this attitude. In his view, it was men who could read and write who hatched the diabolical political ideologies and designed the frightful nuclear weapons of that period. In his mind, Literacy is equated with '*Mein Kampf*' and '*Das Kapital*,' with the A-bomb and the H-bomb, with concentration camps and blasted cities. From this position, of course, I beg politely to differ. Literate men also gave us the Magna Charta and the Declaration of Independence.

"Now, in spite of a lunatic fringe in the Consolidated Illiterates' Organization who want just that, Chester Pelton knows that we cannot abolish Literacy entirely. Even with modern audio-visual recording, need exists for some modicum of written recording, which can be rapidly scanned and selected from—indexing, cataloguing, tabulating data, et cetera—and for at least a few men and women who can form and interpret the written word. Mr. Pelton, himself, is the owner of a huge department store, employing over a thousand Illiterates; he must at all times have the services of at least fifty Literates."

"And pays through the nose for them, too!" Pelton growled. It was more than fifty; and Russ Latterman had been forced to get twenty extras sent in for the sale.

"Now, since we cannot renounce Literacy entirely, without sinking to *fellahin* barbarism, and here I definitely part company with Mr. Pelton, he fears the potential power of organized Literacy. In a word, he fears a future Literate Dictatorship."

"Future? What do you think we have now?" Pelton demanded.

"Nobody," Mongery said, as though replying to him, "is stupid enough, today, to want to be a dictator. That ended by the middle of the Twenty-first Century. Everybody knows what happened to Mussolini, and Hitler, and Stalin, and all their imitators. Why, it is as much the public fear of Big Government as the breakdown of civil power because of the administrative handicap of a shortage of Literate administrators that is responsible for the disgraceful lawlessness of the past hundred years. Thus, it speaks well for the public trust in Chester Pelton's known integrity and sincerity that so many of our people are willing to agree to his program for socialized Literacy. They feel that he can be trusted, and, violently as I disagree with him, I can only say that that trust is not misplaced.

"Of course, there is also the question, so often raised by Mr. Pelton, that under the Hamilton machine, the politics, and particularly the enforcement of the laws, in this state, are unbelievably corrupt, but I wonder—"

Mongery paused. "Just a moment; I see a flash bulletin being brought in." The novice Literate came to his side and gave him a slip of paper, at which he glanced. Then he laughed heartily.

"It seems that shortly after I began speaking, the local blue-ribbon grand jury issued a summons for Chief Delaney

to appear before them, with all his records. Unfortunately, the summons could not be served; Chief Delaney had just boarded a strato-rocket from Tom Dewey Field for Buenos Aires." He cocked an eye at the audience. "I know Irish is going to have a nice time, down there in the springtime of the Southern Hemisphere. And, incidentally, the Argentine is one of the few major powers which never signed the World Extradition Convention of 2087." He raised his hand to his audience. "And now, until tomorrow at breakfast, sincerely yours for Cardon's Black Bottle, Elliot C. Mongery."

"Well, whattaya know; that guy was plugging for you!" Ray said. "And see how he managed to slide in that bit about corruption, right before his stooge handed him that bulletin?"

"I guess every Literate has his price," Chester Pelton said. "I wonder how much of my money that cost. I always wondered why Frank Cardon sponsored Mongery. Now I know. Mongery can be had."

"Uh, beg your pardon, Mr. Pelton," a voice from the hall broke in.

He turned. Olaf Olafsson, the 'copter driver, was standing at the entrance to the breakfast nook, a smudge of oil on his cheek and his straw-colored hair in disorder. "How do I go about startin' this new 'copter?"

"What?" Olaf had been his driver for ten years. He would have been less surprised had the ceiling fallen in. "You don't know how to start it?"

"No, sir. The controls is all different from on the summer model. Every time I try to raise it, it backs up; if I try to raise it much more, we won't have no wall left on the landing stage."

"Well, isn't there a book?"

"There ain't no pictures in it; nothing but print. It's a Literate book," Olaf said in disgust, as though at something

obscene. "An' there ain't nothin' on the instrument board but letters."

"That's right," Ray agreed. "I saw the book; no pictures in it at all."

"Well, of all the quarter-witted stupidity! The confounded imbeciles at that agency—"

Pelton started to his feet. Claire unlocked the table and slid it out of his way. Ray, on a run, started for the lift and vanished.

"I think some confounded Literate at the Rolls-Cadipac agency did that," he fumed. "Thought it would be a joke to send me a Literate instruction book along with a 'copter with a Literate instrument board. Ah, I get it! So I'd have to call in a Literate to show me how to start my own 'copter, and by noon they'd be laughing about it in every bar from Pittsburgh to Plattsburg. Sneaky Literate trick!" They went to the lift, and found the door closed in their faces. "Oh, confound that boy!"

Claire pressed the button. Ray must have left the lift, for the operating light went on, and in a moment the door opened. He crowded into the lift, along with his daughter and Olaf.

On the landing stage, Ray was already in the 'copter, poking at buttons on the board.

"Look, Olaf!" he called. "They just shifted them around a little from the summer model. This one, where the prop-control used to be on the old model, is the one that backs it up on the ground. Here's the one that erects and extends the prop,"—he pushed it, and the prop snapped obediently into place—"and here's the one that controls the lift."

An ugly suspicion stabbed at Chester Pelton, bringing with it a feeling of frightened horror.

"How do you know?" he demanded.

Ray's eyes remained on the instrument board. He pushed

another button, and the propeller began swinging in a lazy circle; he pressed down with his right foot, and the 'copter lifted a foot or so.

"What?" he asked. "Oh; Jimmy showed me how theirs works. Mr. Hartnett got one like it a week ago." He motioned to Olaf, setting the 'copter down again. "Come here; I'll show you."

The suspicion, and the horror, passed in a wave of relief.

"You think you and Olaf, between you, can get that thing to school?" he asked.

"Sure! Easy!"

"All right. You show Olaf how to run it. Olaf, as soon as you've dropped Ray at school, take that thing to the Rolls-Cadipac agency, and get a new one, with a proper instrument board, and a proper picture book of operating instructions. I'm going to call Sam Huschack up personally and give him royal hell about this. Sure you can handle it, now?"

He watched the 'copter rise to the two thousand foot local traffic level and turn in the direction of Mineola High School, fifty miles away. He was still looking anxiously after it as it dwindled to a tiny dot and vanished.

"They'll make it all right," Claire told him. "Olaf has a strong back, and Ray has a good head."

"It wasn't that that I was worried about." He turned and looked, half ashamed, at his daughter. "You know, for a minute, there, I thought . . . I thought Ray could read!"

"Father!" She was so shocked that she forgot the nickname they had given him when he had announced his candidacy for Senate, in the spring. "You didn't!"

"I know; it's an awful thing to think, but— Well, the kids today do the craziest things. There's that Hartnett boy he runs around with; Tom Hartnett bought Literate training for him. And that fellow Prestonby; I don't trust him—"

"Prestonby?" Claire asked, puzzled.

"Oh, you know. The principal at school. You've met him."

Claire wrinkled her brow—just like her mother, when she was trying to remember something.

"Oh, yes. I met him at that P.T.A. meeting. He didn't impress me as being much like a teacher, but I suppose they think anything's good enough for us Illiterates."

CHAPTER II

LITERATE First Class Ralph N. Prestonby remained standing by the lectern, looking out over the crowded auditorium, still pleasantly surprised to estimate the day's attendance at something like ninety-seven per cent of enrollment. That was really good; why, it was only three per cent short of perfect! Maybe it was the new rule requiring a sound-recorded excuse for absence. Or it could have been his propaganda campaign about the benefits of education. Or, very easily, it could have been the result of sending Doug Yetsko and some of his boys around to talk to recalcitrant parents. It was good to see that that was having some effect besides an increase in the number of attempts on his life, or the flood of complaints to the Board of Education. Well, Lancedale had gotten Education merged with his Office of Communications, and Lancedale was back of him to the limit, so the complaints had died out on the empty air. And Doug Yetsko was his bodyguard, so most of the would-be assassins had died, also.

The "North American Anthem," which had replaced the "Star-Spangled Banner" after the United States-Canadian-Mexican merger, came to an end. The students and their white-smocked teachers, below, relaxed from attention; most of them sat down, while monitors and teachers in the rear were getting the students into the aisles and marching them off to study halls and classrooms and workshops. The orchestra struck up a lively march tune. He leaned his left elbow—Literates learned early, or did not live to learn, not to immobilize the right hand—on the lectern and watched the interminable business of getting the students marched out, yearning, as he always did at this time, for the privacy of his office, where he could smoke his pipe. Finally, they were all gone, and the orchestra had gathered up its instruments and filed out into the wings of the stage, and he looked up to the left and said, softly:

"All right, Doug; show's over."

With a soft thud, the big man dropped down from the guard's cubicle overhead, grinning cheerfully. He needed a shave—Yetsko always did, in the mornings—and in his leather Literates' guard uniform, he looked like some ogreish giant out of the mythology of the past.

"I was glad to have you up there with the Big Noise, this morning," Prestonby said. "What a mob! I'm still trying to figure out why we have such an attendance."

"Don't you get it, captain?" Yetsko was reaching up to lock the door of his cubicle; he seemed surprised at Prestonby's obtuseness. "Day before election; the little darlings' moms and pops don't want them out running around. We can look for another big crowd tomorrow, too."

Prestonby gave a snort of disgust. "Of course; how imbecilic can I really get? I didn't notice any of them falling down, so I suppose you didn't see anything out of line."

"Well, the hall monitors make them turn in their little

playthings at the doors," Yetsko said, "but hall monitors can be gotten at, and some of the stuff they make in Manual Training, when nobody's watching them—"

Prestonby nodded. Just a week before, a crude but perfectly operative 17-mm shotgun had been discovered in the last stages of manufacture in the machine shop, and five out of six of the worn-out files would vanish, to be ground down into dirks. He often thought of the stories of his grandfather, who had been a major during the Occupation of Russia, after the Fourth World War. Those old-timers didn't know how easy they'd had it; they should have tried to run an Illiterate high school.

Yetsko was still grumbling slanders on the legitimacy of the student body. "One of those little angels shoots me, it's just a cute little prank, and we oughtn't to frown on the little darling when it's just trying to express its dear little personality, or we might give it complexes, or something," he falsettoed incongruously. "And if the little darling's mistake doesn't kill me outright and I shoot back, people talk about King Herod!" He used language about the Board of Education and the tax-paying public that was probably subversive within the meaning of the Loyalty Oath. "I wish I had a pair of 40-mm auto-cannons up there, instead of that sono gun."

"Each class is a little worse than the one before; in about five years, they'll be making H-bombs in the lab," Prestonby said. In the last week, a dozen pupils had been seriously cut or blackjacked in hall and locker-room fights. "Nice citizens of the future; nice future to look forward to growing old in."

"We won't," Yetsko comforted him. "We can't be lucky all the time; in about a year, they'll find both of us stuffed into a broom closet, when they start looking around to see what's making all the stink."

Prestonby took the thick-barreled gas pistol from the shelf under the lectern and shoved it into his hip pocket; Yetsko picked up a two-and-a-half foot length of rubber hose and tucked it under his left arm. Together, they went back through the wings and out into the hallway that led to the office. So a Twenty-second Century high school was a place where a teacher carried a pistol and a tear-gas projector and a sleep-gas gun, and had a bodyguard, and still walked in danger of his life from armed teen-age hooligans. It was meaningless to ask whose fault it was. There had been the World Wars, and the cold-war interbellum periods —rising birth rates, huge demands on the public treasury for armaments, with the public taxed to the saturation point, and no money left for the schools. There had been fantastic "Progressive" education experiments—even in the 'Fifties of the Twentieth Century, in the big cities, children were being pushed through grade school without having learned to read. And when there had been money available for education, school boards had insisted on spending it for audio-visual equipment, recordings, films, anything but textbooks. And there had been that lunatic theory that children should be taught to read by recognizing whole words instead of learning the alphabet. And more and more illiterates had been shoved out of the schools, into a world where radio and television and moving pictures were supplanting books and newspapers, and more and more children of illiterates had gone to school without any desire or incentive to learn to read. And finally, the illiterates had become Illiterates, and literacy had become Literacy.

And now, the Associated Fraternities of Literates had come to monopolize the ability to read and write, and a few men like William R. Lancedale, with a handful of followers like Ralph N. Prestonby, were trying—

The gleaming cleanliness of the corridor, as always, heart-

ened Prestonby a little; it was a trophy of victory from his first two days at Mineola High School, three years ago. He remembered what they had looked like when he had first seen them.

"This school is a pig pen!" he had barked at the janitorial force. "And even if they are Illiterates, these children aren't pigs; they deserve decent surroundings. This school will be cleaned, immediately, from top to bottom, and it'll be kept that way."

The janitors, all political appointees, Independent-Conservative party-hacks, secure in their jobs, had laughed derisively. The building superintendent, without troubling to rise, had answered him:

"Young man, you don't want to get off on the wrong foot, here," he had said. "This here's the way this school's always been run, an' it's gonna take a lot more than you to change it."

The fellow's name, he recalled, was Kettner; Lancedale had given him a briefing which had included some particulars about him. He was an Independent-Conservative ward-committeeman. He had gotten his present job after being fired from his former position as mailman for listening to other peoples' mail with his pocket recorder-reproducer.

"Yetsko," he had said. "Kick this bum out on his face."

"You can't get away with—" Kettner had begun. Yetsko had yanked him out of his chair with one hand and started for the door with him.

"Just a moment, Yetsko," he had said.

Thinking that he was backing down, they had all begun grinning at him.

"Don't bother opening the door," he had said. "Just kick him out."

After the third kick, Kettner had gotten the door open, himself; the fourth kick sent him across the hall to the oppo-

site wall. He pulled himself to his feet and limped away, never to return. The next morning, the school was spotless. It had stayed that way.

Beside him, Yetsko must also have returned mentally to the past.

"Looks better now than it did when we first saw it, captain," he said.

"Yes. It didn't take us as long to clean up this mess as it did to clean up that mutinous guards company in Pittsburgh. But when we cleaned that up, it stayed cleaned. This is like trying to bail out a boat with a pitchfork."

"Yeah. I wish we'dda stayed in Pittsburgh, captain. I wish we'd never seen this place!"

"So do I!" Prestonby agreed, heartily.

No, he didn't, either. If he'd never have come to Mineola High School, he'd never have found Claire Pelton.

Sitting down again at the breakfast table with her father, Claire levered another cigarette out of the Readilit and puffed at it with exaggeratedly bored slowness. She was still frightened. Ray shouldn't have done what he did, even if he had furnished a plausible explanation. The trouble with plausible explanations was having to make them. Sooner or later, you made too many, and then you made one that wasn't so plausible, and then all the others were remembered, and they all looked phony. And why had the Senator had to mention Ralph? Was he beginning to suspect the truth about that, too?

I hope not! she thought desperately. If he ever found out about that, it'd kill him. Just kill him, period!

Mrs. Harris must have turned off the video, after they had gone up to the landing stage. To cover her nervousness, she reached up and snapped it on again. The screen lit, and from

it a young man with dark eyes under bushy black brows was shouting angrily:

". . . Most obvious sort of conspiracy! If the Radical-Socialist Party leaders, or the Consolidated Illiterates' Organization Political Action Committee, need any further evidence of the character of their candidate and idolized leader, Chester Pelton, the treatment given to Pelton's candidacy by Literate First Class Elliot C. Mongery, this morning, ought to be sufficient to remove the scales from the eyes of the blindest of them. I won't state, in so many words, that Chester Pelton's sold out the Radical-Socialists and the Consolidated Illiterates' Organization to the Associated Fraternities of Literates, because, since no witness to any actual transfer of money can be found, such a statement would be libelous—provided Pelton had nerve enough to sue me."

"Why, you dirty misbegotten illegitimate—!" Pelton was on his feet. His hand went to his hip, and then, realizing that he was unarmed and, in any case, confronted only by an electronic image, he sat down again.

"Pelton's been yapping for socialized Literacy," the man on the screen continued. "I'm not going back to the old argument that any kind of socialization is only the thin edge of the wedge which will pry open the pit of horrors from which the world has climbed since the Fourth World War. If you don't realize that now, it's no use for me to repeat it again. But I will ask you, do you realize, for a moment, what a program of socialized Literacy would mean, apart from the implications of any kind of socialization? It would mean that inside of five years, the Literates would control the whole government. They control the courts, now—only a Literate can become a lawyer, and only a lawyer can become a judge. They control the armed forces—only a Literate can enter West Point or Fort MacKenzie or Chapultepec or White Sands or Annapolis. And, if Chester Pelton's socialization

scheme goes into effect, there will be no branch of the government which will not be completely under the control of the Associated Fraternities of Literates!"

The screen went suddenly dark. Her father turned, to catch her with her hand still on the switch.

"Put it back on; I want to hear what that lying pimp of a Slade Gardner's saying about me!"

"Phooy; you'd have shot it out, yourself, if you'd had your gun on. I saw you reaching for it. Now be quiet, and take it easy," she ordered.

He reached toward the Readilit for a cigarette, then his hand stopped. His face was contorted with pain; he gave a gasp of suffocation.

Claire cried in dismay: "You're not going to have another of those attacks? Where are the nitrocaine bulbs?"

"Don't . . . have any . . . here. Some at the office, but—"

"I told you to get more," she accused.

"Oh, I don't need them, really." His voice was steadier, now; the spasm of pain had passed. He filled his coffee cup and sipped from it. "Turn on the video again, Claire. I want to hear what that Gardner's saying."

"I will not! Don't you have people at party headquarters monitoring this stuff? Well, then. Somebody'll prepare an answer, if he needs answering."

"I think he does. A lot of these dumbos'll hear that and believe it. I'll talk to Frank. He'll know what to do."

Frank again. She frowned.

"Look, Senator; you think Frank Cardon's your friend, but I don't trust him. I never could," she said. "I think he's utterly and entirely unscrupulous. Amoral, I believe, is the word. Like a savage, or a pirate, or one of the old-time Nazis or Communists."

"Oh, Claire!" her father protested. "Frank's in a tough business—you have no idea the lengths competition goes to

in the beer business—and he's been in politics, and dealing with racketeers and labor unions, all his life. But he's a good sound Illiterate—family Illiterate for four generations, like ours—and I'd trust him with anything. You heard this fellow Mongery—I always have to pause to keep from calling him Mongrel—saying that I deserved the credit for pulling the Radicals out of the mud and getting the party back on the tracks. Well, I couldn't have begun to do it without Frank Cardon."

CHAPTER III

FRANK CARDON stood on the sidewalk, looking approvingly into the window of O'Reilly's Tavern, in which his display crew had already set up the spread for the current week. On either side was a giant six-foot replica, in black glass, of the Cardon bottle, in the conventional shape accepted by an Illiterate public as containing beer, bearing the red Cardon label with its pictured bottle in a central white disk. Because of the heroic size of the bottles, the pictured bottle on the label bore a bottle bearing a label bearing a bottle bearing a bottle on a label. . . . He counted eight pictured bottles, down to the tiniest dot of black. There were four-foot bottles next to the six-foot bottles, and three-foot bottles next to them, and, in the middle background, a life-size tri-dimensional picture of an almost nude and incredibly pulchritudi-

nous young lady smiling in invitation at the passing throng and extending a foaming bottle of Cardon's in her hand. Aside from the printed trademark-registry statements on the labels, there was not a printed word visible in the window.

He pushed through the swinging doors and looked down the long room, with the chairs still roosting sleepily on the tables, and made a quick count of the early drinkers, two thirds of them in white smocks and Sam Browne belts, obviously from Literates' Hall, across the street. Late drinkers, he corrected himself mentally; they'd be the night shift, having their drinks before going home.

"Good morning, Mr. Cardon," the bartender greeted him. "Still drinking your own?"

"Hasn't poisoned me yet," Cardon told him. "Or anybody else." He folded a C-bill accordion-wise and set it on edge on the bar. "Give everybody what they want."

"Drink up, gentlemen, and have one on Mr. Cardon," the bartender announced, then lowered his voice. "O'Reilly wants to see you. About—" He gave a barely perceptible nod in the direction of the building across the street.

"Yes; I want to see him, too." Cardon poured from the bottle in front of him, accepted the thanks of the house, and, when the bartender brought the fifteen-dollars-odd change from the dozen drinks, he pushed it back.

He drank slowly, looking around the room, then set down his empty glass and went back, past two doors which bore pictured half-doors revealing, respectively, masculine-trousered and feminine-stockinged ankles, and opened the unmarked office door beyond. The bartender, he knew, had pushed the signal button; the door was unlocked, and, inside, O'Reilly—baptismal name Luigi Orelli—was waiting.

"Chief wants to see you, right away," the saloon keeper said.

The brewer nodded. "All right. Keep me covered; don't

know how long I'll be." He crossed the room and opened a corner-cupboard, stepping inside.

The corner cupboard, which was an elevator, took him to a tunnel below the street. Across the street, he entered another elevator, set the indicator for the tenth floor, and ascended. As the car rose, he could feel the personality of Frank Cardon, Illiterate brewer, drop from him, as though he were an actor returning from the stage to his dressing room.

The room into which he emerged was almost that. There was a long table, at which two white-smocked Literates drank coffee and went over some papers; a third Literate sprawled in a deep chair, resting; at a small table, four men in black shirts and leather breeches and field boots played poker, while a fifth, who had just entered and had not yet removed his leather helmet and jacket or his weapons belt, stood watching them.

Cardon went to a row of lockers along the wall, opened one, and took out a white smock, pulling it over his head and zipping it up to the throat. Then he buckled on a Sam Browne with its tablet holster and stylus gas projector. The Literate sprawling in the chair opened one eye.

"Hi, Frank. Feels good to have them on again, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Clean," Cardon replied. "It'll be just for half an hour, but—"

He passed through the door across from the elevator, went down a short hall, and spoke in greeting to the leather-jacketed storm trooper on guard outside the door at the other end.

"Mr. Cardon," the guard nodded. "Mr. Lancedale's expecting you."

"So I understand, Bert."

He opened the door and went through. William R. Lancedale rose from behind his desk and advanced to greet him

with a quick handshake, guiding him to a chair beside the desk. As he did, he sniffed and raised an eyebrow.

"Beer this early, Frank?" he asked.

"Morning, noon, and night, chief," Cardon replied. "When you said this job was going to be dangerous, I didn't know you meant that it would lead straight to an alcoholic's grave."

"Let me get you a cup of coffee, and a cigar, then." The white-haired Literate executive resumed his seat, passing a hand back and forth slowly across the face of the commo, the diamond on his finger twinkling, and gave brief instructions. "And just relax, for a minute. You have a tough job, this time, Frank."

They were both silent as a novice Literate bustled in with coffee and individually-sealed cigars.

"At least, you're not one of these plain-living-and-right-thinking fanatics, like Wilton Joyner and Harvey Graves," Cardon said. "On top of everything else, that I could not take."

Lancedale's thin face broke into a smile, little wrinkles putting his mouth in parentheses. Cardon sampled the coffee, and then used a Sixteenth Century Italian stiletto from Lancedale's desk to perforate the end of his cigar.

"Much as I hate it, I'll have to get out of here as soon as I can," he said. "I don't know how long O'Reilly can keep me covered, down at the tavern—"

Lancedale nodded. "Well, how are things going, then?"

"First of all, the brewery," Cardon began.

Lancedale consigned the brewery to perdition. "That's just your cover; any money it makes is purely irrelevant. How about the election?"

"Pelton's in," Cardon said. "As nearly in as any candidate ever was before the polls opened. Three months ago, the Independents were as solid as Gibraltar used to be. Today,

they look like Gibraltar after that H-bomb hit it. The only difference is, they don't know what hit them yet."

"Hamilton's campaign manager does," Lancedale said. "Did you hear his telecast, this morning?"

Cardon shook his head. Lancedale handed over a little half-inch, thirty-minute, record disk.

"All you need is the first three or four minutes," he said. "The rest of it is repetition."

Cardon put the disk in his pocket recorder and set it for play-back, putting the plug in his ear. After a while, he shut it off and took out the ear plug.

"That's bad! What are we going to do about it?"

Lancedale shrugged. "What are you going to do?" he countered. "You're Pelton's campaign manager—Heaven pity him."

Cardon thought for a moment. "We'll play it for laughs," he decided. "Some of our semantics experts could make the joke of the year out of it by the time the polls open tomorrow. The Fraternities bribing their worst enemy to attack them, so that he can ruin their business; who's been listening to a tape of 'Alice in Wonderland' at Independent-Conservative headquarters?"

"That would work," Lancedale agreed. "And we can count on our friends Joyner and Graves to give you every possible assistance with their customary bull-in-a-china-shop tactics. I suppose you've seen these posters they've been plastering around: *If you can read this, Chester Pelton is your sworn enemy! A vote for Pelton is a vote for your own enslavement!*"

"Naturally. And have you seen the telecast we've been using—a view of it, with a semantically correct spoken paraphrase?"

Lancedale nodded. "And I've also noticed that those posters have been acquiring different obscene crayon-drawings, too. That's just typical of the short-range Joyner-Graves men-

tality. Why, they've made more votes for Pelton than he's made for himself. Is it any wonder we're convinced that people like that aren't to be trusted to formulate the future policy of the Fraternities?"

"Well . . . they've proved themselves wrong. I wonder, though, if we can prove ourselves right, in the long run. There are times when this thing scares me, chief. If anything went wrong—"

"What, for instance?"

"Somebody could get to Pelton." Cardon made a stabbing gesture with the stiletto, which he still held. "Maybe you don't really know how hot this thing's gotten. What we had to cut out of Mongery's report, this morning—"

"Oh, I've been keeping in touch," Lancedale understated gently.

"Well then. If anything happened to Pelton, there wouldn't be a Literate left alive in this city twelve hours later. And I question whether or not Graves and Joyner know that."

"I think they do. If they don't, it's not because I've failed to point it out to them. Of course, there are the Independent-Conservative grafters; a lot of them are beginning to hear jail doors opening for them, and they're scared. But I think routine bodyguarding ought to protect Pelton from them, or from any isolated fanatics."

"And there is also the matter of Pelton's daughter, and his son," Cardon said. "We know, and Graves and Joyner know, and I assume that Slade Gardner knows, that they can both read and write as well as any Literate in the Fraternities. Suppose that got out between now and the election?"

"And that could not only hurt Pelton, but it would expose the work we've been doing in the schools," Lancedale added. "And even inside the Fraternities, that would raise the devil. Joyner and Graves don't begin to realize how far we've gone

with that. They could kick up a simply hideous row about it!"

"And if Pelton found out that his kids are Literates—*Woooo!*" Cardon grimaced. "Or what we've been doing to him. I hope I'm not around when that happens. I'm beginning to like the cantankerous old bugger."

"I was afraid of that," Lancedale said. "Well, don't let it interfere with what you have to do. Remember, Frank; the Plan has to come first, always."

He walked with O'Reilly to the street door, talking about tomorrow's election; after shaking hands with the saloon keeper, he crossed the sidewalk and stepped onto the beltway, moving across the strips until he came to the twenty m.p.h. strip. The tall office buildings of upper Yonkers Borough marched away as he stood on the strip, appreciatively puffing at Lancedale's cigar. The character of the street changed; the buildings grew lower, and the quiet and fashionable ground-floor shops and cafés gave place to bargain stores, their audio-advertisers whooping urgently about improbable prices and offerings, and garish, noisy, crowded bars and cafeterias blaring recorded popular music. There was quite a bit of political advertising in evidence—huge pictures of the two major senatorial candidates. He estimated that Chester Pelton's bald head and bulldog features appeared twice for every one of Grant Hamilton's white locks, old-fashioned spectacles and self-satisfied smirk.

Then he came to the building on which he had parked his 'copter, and left the beltway, entering and riding up to the landing stage on the helical escalator. There seemed to have been some trouble; about a dozen Independent-Conservative storm troopers, in their white robes and hoods, with the fiery-cross emblem on their breasts, were bunched together, most of them with their right hands inside their bosoms, while a similar group of Radical-Socialist storm

troopers, with their black sombreros and little black masks, stood watching them and fingering the white-handled pistols they wore in pairs on their belts. Between the two groups were four city policemen, looking acutely unhappy.

The group in the Lone Ranger uniforms, he saw, were standing in front of a huge tri-dimensional animated portrait of Chester Pelton. As he watched, the pictured candidate raised a clenched fist, and Pelton's recorded and amplified voice thundered:

"Put the Literates in their place! Our servants, not our masters!"

He recognized the group leader of the Radical-Socialists —the masks were too small to be more than token disguises— and beckoned to him, at the same time walking toward his 'copter. The man in black with the white-handled pistols followed him, spurs jingling.

"Hello, Mr. Cardon," he said, joining him. "Nothing to it. We got a tip they were coming to sabotage Big Brother, over there. Take out our sound-recording, and put in one of their own, like they did over in Queens, last week. The town clowns got here in time to save everybody's face, so there wasn't any shooting. We're staying put till they go, though."

"Put the Literates in their place! Our servants, not our masters!" the huge tridianimate bellowed.

Over in Queens, the Independents had managed to get a similar tridianimate, had taken out the record, and had put in one: *I am a lying fraud! Vote for Grant Hamilton and liberty and sound government!*

"Smart work, Goodkin," he approved. "Don't let any of your boys start the gunplay. The city cops are beginning to get wise to who's going to win the election, tomorrow, but don't antagonize them. But if any of those Ku Kluxers tries to pull a gun, don't waste time trying to wing him. Just hold

on to that fiery something-or-other on his chest and let him have it, and let the coroner worry about him."

"Yeah. With pleasure," Goodkin replied. "You know, that nightshirt thing they wear is about the stupidest idea for a stormtroop uniform I ever saw. Natural target in a gunfight, and in a rough-and-tumble it gets them all tangled up. Ah, there go a couple of coppers to talk to them; that's what they've been waiting on. Now they can beat it without looking like they been run out by our gang."

Cardon nodded. "Tell your boys to stay around for a while; they may expect you to leave right after they do, and then they'll try to slip back. You did a good job; got here promptly. Be seeing you, Goodkin."

He climbed into his own 'copter and started the motor.

"Put the Literates in their place!" the tri-dimensional colossus roared triumphantly after the retreating Independents. *"Our servants, not our masters!"*

At eight thousand, he got the 'copter onto the lower Manhattan beam and relaxed. First of all, he'd have to do something about answering Slade Gardner's telecast propaganda. That stuff was dangerous. The answer ought to go on the air by noon, and should be stepped up through the afternoon. First as a straight news story; Elliot Mongery had fifteen minutes, beginning at 1215—no, that wouldn't do. Mongery's sponsor for that time was Atomflame Heaters, and Atomflame was a subsidiary of Canada Northwest Fissionables, and Canada Northwest was umbilicus-deep in that Kettle River lease graft that Pelton had sworn to get investigated as soon as he took office. Professional ethics wouldn't allow Mongery to say anything in Pelton's behalf on Atomflame's time. Well, there was Guthrie Parham, he came on at 1245, and his sponsor was all right. He'd call Parham and tell him what he wanted done.

The buzzer warned him that he was approaching the lower Manhattan beacon; he shifted to manual control, dropped down to the three-thousand-foot level, and set his selector beam for the signal from Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise. Down toward the tip of the island, in the section that had been rebuilt after that Stalin Mark XV guided missile had gotten through the counter-rocket defenses in 1987, he could see the quadrate cross of his goal, with public landing stages on each of the four arms, and the higher central block with its landing stage for freight and store personnel. Above the four public stages, helicopters swarmed like May flies—May flies which had mutated and invented ritual or military drill or choreography—coming in in four streams to the tips of the arms and rising vertically from the middle. There was about ten times the normal amount of traffic for this early in the morning. He wondered, briefly, then remembered, and cursed. That infernal sale!

Grudgingly, he respected Russell Latterman's smartness, and in consequence, the ability of Wilton Joyner and Harvey Graves in selecting a good agent to plant in Pelton's store. Latterman gave a plausible impersonation of the Illiterate businessman, loyal Prime Minister of Pelton's commercial empire, Generalissimo in the perpetual war against Macy & Gimbel's. From that viewpoint, the sale was excellent business—Latterman had gotten the jump on all the other department stores for the winter fashions and fall sports trade. He had also turned the store into a madhouse at the exact time when Chester Pelton needed to give all his attention to the election.

Pressing the button that put on his private recognition signal, he rose above the incoming customers and began to drop toward the private landing stage, circling to get a view of the other four stages. Maybe the sale could be turned to

some advantage, at that. A free souvenir with each purchase, carrying a Pelton-for-Senator picture-message—

He broke off, peering down at the five-hundred-foot-square landing stage above the central block, then brought his 'copter swooping down rapidly. The white-clad figures he had seen swarming up the helical escalator were not wearing the Ku Klux robes of the Independent-Conservative storm troops, as he had first feared—they were in Literate smocks, and among them were the black leather jackets and futuristic helmets of their guards. They were led, he saw, by Stephen S. Bayne, the store's Chief Literate; with him were his assistant, Literate Third Class Roger B. Feinberg, the novices carrying books and brief-cases and cased typewriters, and the guards, and every Literate employed in the store. Four or five men in ordinarily vivid-colored business suits were obviously expostulating about something. As he landed and threw back the transparent canopy, he could hear a babel of voices, above which Feinberg was crying: "Unfair! Unfair! Unfair to Organized Literacy!"

He jumped out and hurried over.

"But you simply can't!" a white-haired man in blue-and-orange business clothes was protesting. "If you do, the Associated Fraternities'll be liable for losses we incur; you know that!"

Bayne, his thin face livid with anger—and also, Cardon noticed, with what looked like a couple of fresh bruises—ignored him. Feinberg broke off his chant of "Unfair! Unfair!" long enough to answer:

"A Literate First Class has been brutally assaulted by the Illiterate owner of this store. Literate service for this store is, accordingly, being discontinued, pending a decision by the Grand Council of the local Fraternity."

Cardon grabbed the blue-and-orange clad man and dragged him to one side.

"What happened, Hutschnecker?" he demanded.

"They're walking out on us," Hutschnecker told him, unnecessarily. "The boss had a fight with Bayne; knocked him down a couple of times. Bayne tried to pull his tablet gun, and I grabbed it away from him, and somebody else grabbed Pelton before he could pull his, and a couple of store cops got all the other Literates in the office covered. Then Bayne put on the general-address system and began calling out the Literates—"

"Yes, but why did Pelton beat Bayne up?"

"Bayne made a pass at Miss Claire. I wasn't there when it happened; she came into the office—"

Cardon felt his face tighten into a frown of perplexity. That wasn't like Literate First Class Stephen S. Bayne. He made quite a hobby of pinching salesgirls behind the counter which was one thing; the boss' daughter was quite another.

"Where's Latterman?" he asked, looking around.

"Down in the office, with the others, trying to help Mr. Pelton. He's had another of those heart attacks—"

Cardon swore and ran for the descending escalator, running down the rotating spiral to the executive floor and jumping off into the gawking mob of Illiterate clerks crowded in the open doors of Pelton's office. He hit and shoved and elbowed and cursed them out of the way, and burst into the big room beyond, and then, for a moment, he was almost sorry he had come.

Pelton was slumped in his big relaxer chair, his face pale and twisted in pain, his breath coming in feeble gasps. His daughter was beside him, her blond head bent over him; Russell Latterman was standing to one side, watching intently. For an instant, Cardon was reminded of a tomcat watching a promising mouse hole.

"Claire!" Cardon exploded, "give him a nitrocaine bulb. Why are you all just standing around?"

Claire turned. "There are none," she said, looking at him with desperate eyes. "The box is empty; he must have used them all."

He shot a quick glance at Latterman, catching the sales manager before he could erase a look of triumph from his face. Things began to add up. Latterman, of course, was the undercover man for Wilton Joyner and Harvey Graves and the rest of the Conservative faction at Literates' Hall, just as he, himself, was Lancedale's agent. Obsessed with immediate advantages and disadvantages, the Joyner-Graves faction wanted to secure the re-election of Grant Hamilton, and the way things had been going in the past two months, only Chester Pelton's death could accomplish that. Latterman had probably thrown out Pelton's nitrocaine capsules and then put Bayne up to insulting Pelton's daughter, knowing that a fit of rage would bring on another heart attack, which could be fatal without the medicine.

"Well, send for more!"

"The prescription's in the safe," she said faintly.

The office safe was locked, and only a Literate could open it. The double combination was neatly stenciled on the door, the numbers spelled out as words and the letters spelled in phonetic equivalents. All three of them—himself, Claire, and Russell Latterman—could read them. None of them dared admit it. Latterman was fairly licking his chops in anticipation. If Cardon opened the safe, Pelton's campaign manager stood convicted as a Literate. If Claire opened it, the gaggle of Illiterate clerks in the doorway would see, and speedily spread the news, that the daughter of the arch-foe of Literacy was herself able to read. Maybe Latterman hadn't really

intended his employer to die. Maybe this was the situation he had really intended to contrive.

Chester Pelton couldn't be allowed to die. If Grant Hamilton were returned to the Senate, the long-range planning of William Lancedale would suffer a crushing setback, and the public reaction would be catastrophic. *The Plan comes first,* Lancedale had told him. He made his decision, and then saw that he hadn't needed to make it. Claire had straightened, left her father, crossed quickly to the safe, and was kneeling in front of it, her back stiff with determination, her fingers busy at the dials, her eyes going from them to the printed combination and back again. She swung open the door, skimmed through the inside, unerringly selected the prescription, and rose.

"Here, Russ; go get it filled at once," she ordered. "And hurry!"

Oh, no, you don't, Cardon thought. One chance is enough for you, Russ. He snatched the prescription from her and turned to Latterman.

"I'll get it," he told the sales manager. "You're needed for the sale; stay on the job here."

"But with the Literates walked out, we can't—"

Cardon blazed: "Do I have to teach you your business? Have a sample of each item set aside at the counter, and pile sales slips under it. And for unique items, just detach the tag and put it with the sales slip. Now get out of here, and get cracking with it!" He picked up the pistol that had been taken from Pelton when he had tried to draw it on Bayne, checking the chamber and setting the safety. "Know how to use this?" he asked Claire. "Then hang onto it, and stay close to your father. This wasn't any accident, it was a deliberate attempt on his life. I'll have a couple of store cops sent in here; see that they stay with you."

He gave her no chance to argue. Pushing Latterman ahead

of him, he drove through the mob of clerks outside the door.

". . . Course she can; didn't you see her open the safe?" he heard. ". . . Nobody but a Literate—" "Then she's a Literate, herself!"

A couple of centuries ago, they would have talked like that if it had been discovered that the girl were pregnant; a couple of centuries before that, they would have been equally horrified if she had been discovered to have been a Protestant, or a Catholic, or whatever the locally unpopular religion happened to be. By noon, this would be all over Penn-Jersey-York; coming on top of Slade Gardner's accusations—

He ran up the spiral escalator, stumbling and regaining his footing as he left it. Bayne and his striking Literates were all gone; he saw a sergeant of Pelton's store police and went toward him, taking his spare identity-badge from his pocket.

"Here," he said, handing it to the sergeant. "Get another officer, and go down to Pelton's office. Show it to Miss Pelton, and tell her I sent you. There's been an attempt on Chester Pelton's life; you're to stay with him. Use your own judgment, but don't let anybody, and that definitely includes Russell Latterman, get at him. If you see anything suspicious, shoot first and ask questions afterwards. What's your name, sergeant?"

"Coccozello, sir. Guido Coccozello."

"All right. There'll be a medic or a pharmacist—a Literate, anyhow—with medicine for Mr. Pelton. He'll ask for you, by name, and mention me. And there'll be another Literate, maybe; he'll know your name, and use mine. Hurry, now, sergeant."

He jumped into his 'copter, pulled forward the plexiglass canopy, and took off vertically to ten thousand feet, then, orienting himself, swooped downward toward a landing stage

on the other side of the East River, cutting across traffic levels with an utter contempt for regulations.

The building on which he landed was one of the principal pharmacies; he spiraled down on the escalator to the main floor and went directly to the Literate in charge, noticing that he wore on his Sam Browne not only the badges of retail-merchandising, pharmacist and graduate chemist but also that of medic-in-training. Snatching a pad and pencil from a counter, he wrote hastily: *Your private office, at once; urgent and important.*

Looking at it, the Literate nodded in recognition of Cardon's Literacy.

"Over this way, sir," he said, guiding Cardon to his small cubicle office.

"Here." Cardon gave him the prescription. "Nitrocaine bulbs. They're for Chester Pelton; he's had a serious heart attack. He needs these with all speed. I don't suppose I need tell you how many kinds of hell will break loose if he dies now and the Fraternities are accused, as the Illiterates' Organization will be sure to, of having had him poisoned."

"Who are you?" the Literate asked, taking the prescription and glancing at it. "That,"—he gestured toward Cardon's silver-laced black Mexican jacket—"isn't exactly a white smock."

Cardon had his pocket recorder in his hand. He held it out, pressing a concealed stud; the stylus-and-tablet insigna glowed redly on it for a moment, then vanished. The uniformed Literate nodded.

"Fill this exactly; better do it yourself, to make sure, and take it over to Pelton's yourself. I see you have a medic-trainee's badge. Ask for Sergeant Coccozello, and tell him Frank Cardon sent you." The Literate, who had not recognized him before, opened his eyes at the name and whistled softly. "And fix up a sedative to keep him quiet for not less

than four nor more than six hours. Let me use your visiphone for a while, if you please."

The man in the Literate smock nodded and hurried out. Cardon dialed William R. Lancedale's private number. When Lancedale's thin, intense face appeared on the screen, he reported swiftly.

"The way I estimate it," he finished, "Latterman put Bayne up to making a pass at the girl, after having thrown out Pelton's nitrocaine bulbs. Probably told the silly jerk that Claire was pining away with secret passion for him, or something. Maybe he wanted to kill Pelton; maybe he just wanted this to happen."

"I assume there's no chance of stopping a leak?"

Cardon laughed with mirthless harshness. "That, I take it, was rhetorical."

"Yes, of course." Lancedale's face assumed the blank expression that went with a pause for semantic reintegration. "Can you cover yourself for about an hour?"

"Certainly. 'Copter trouble. Visits to campaign headquarters. An appeal on Pelton's behalf for a new crew of Literates for the store—"

"Good enough. Come over. I think I can see a way to turn this to advantage. I'm going to call for an emergency session of the Grand Council this afternoon, and I'll want you sitting in on it; I want to talk to you about plans now." He considered for a moment. "There's too much of a crowd at O'Reilly's, now; come the church way."

Breaking the connection, Cardon dialed again. A girl's face, over a Literate Third Class smock, appeared in the screen; a lovely golden voice chimed at him:

"Mineola High School; good morning, sir."

"Good morning. Frank Cardon here. Let me talk, at once, to your principal, Literate First Class Prestonby."

CHAPTER IV

RALPH PRESTONBY cleared his throat, slipped a master disk into the recording machine beside his desk; and pressed the start button.

"Dear Parent or Guardian," he began. "Your daughter, now a third-year student at this school, has reached the age of eligibility for the Domestic Science course entitled, 'How To Win and Hold a Husband.' Statistics show that girls who have completed this valuable course are sooner, longer, and happier married than those who have not enjoyed its advantages. We recommend it most highly.

"However, because of the delicate nature of some of the visual material used, your consent is required. You can attach such consent to this disk by running it for at least ten seconds after the sign-off and then switching from 'Play' to 'Transcribe.' Kindly include your full name, as well as your daughter's, and place your thumbprint on the opposite side of the disk. Very sincerely yours, Literate First Class Ralph C. Prestonby, Principal."

He put the master disk in an envelope, checked over a list of names and addresses of parents and girl students, and put that in also. He looked over the winter sports schedule, and signed and thumbprinted it. Then he loaded the recorder with his morning's mail, switched to "Play," and started it. As he listened, he blew smoke rings across the room and toyed with a dagger, made from a file, which had been thrown down the central light-well at him a few days before.

The invention of the pocket recorder, which put a half-hour's conversation on a half-inch disk, had done more to slow down business and promote inane correspondence than anything since the earlier inventions of shorthand, typewriters and pretty stenographers. Finally, he cleared the machine, dumping the whole mess into a basket and carrying it out to his secretary.

"Miss Collins, take this infernal rubbish and have a couple of the girls divide it between them, play it off, and make a digest of it," he said. "And here. The sports schedule, and this parental-consent thing on the husband-trapping course. Have them taken care of."

"This stuff," Martha Collins said, poking at the pile of letter disks. "I suppose about half of it is threats, abuse and obscenities, and the other half is from long-winded bores with idiotic suggestions and ill-natured gripes. I'll use that old tag line, again—'hoping you appreciate our brevity as much as we enjoyed yours—' "

"Yes. That'll be all right." He looked at his watch. "I'm going to make a personal building-tour, instead of using the TV. The animals are sort of restless, today. The election; the infantile compulsion to take sides. If you need me for anything urgent, don't use oral call. Just flash my signal, red-blue-red-blue, on the hall and classroom screens. Oh, Doug!"

Yetsko, his length of rubber hose under his arm, ambled out of Prestonby's private office, stopping to stub out his cigarette. The action reminded Prestonby that he still had his pipe in his mouth; he knocked it out and pocketed it. Together, they went into the hall outside.

"Where to, first, captain?" Yetsko wanted to know.

"Cloak-and-Dagger Department, on the top floor. Then we'll drop down to the shops, and then up through Domestic Science and Business and General Arts."

"And back here. We hope," Yetsko finished.

They took a service elevator to the top floor, emerging into a stockroom piled with boxes and crates and cases of sound records and cans of film and stacks of picture cards, and all the other impedimenta of Illiterate education. Passing through it to the other end, Prestonby unlocked a door, and they went down a short hall, to where ten or fifteen boys and girls had just gotten off a helical escalator and were queued up at a door at the other end. There were two Literate guards in black leather, and a student-monitor, with his white belt and rubber truncheon, outside the door.

Prestonby swore under his breath. He'd hoped they'd miss this, but since they hadn't, there was nothing for it but to fall in at the tail of the queue. One by one, the boys and the girls went up, spoke briefly to the guards and the student-monitor, and were passed through the door. Each time, one of the guards had to open it with a key. Finally, it was Prestonby's turn.

"B, D, F, H, J, L, N, P, R, T, V, X, Y," he recited to the guardians of the door.

"A, C, E, G, I, K, M, O, Q, S, U, W, Y," the monitor replied solemnly. "The inkwell is dry, and the book is dusty."

"But tomorrow, there will be writing and reading for all," Prestonby answered.

The guard with the key unlocked the door, and he and Yetsko went through, into an utterly silent soundproofed room, and from it into an inner, noisy, room, where a recorded voice was chanting:

"Hat—*huh-ah-tuh.* H-a-t. Box—*buh-oh-ksss.* B-o-x. Gun—*guh-uh-nnn.* G-u-n. Girl—*guh-ih-rrr-lll,*" while pictures were flashed on a screen at the front, and words appeared under them.

There were about twenty boys and girls, of the freshman-year age-bracket, at desk-seats, facing the screen. They'd started learning the alphabet when school had opened in

September; now they had gotten as far as combining letters into simple words. In another month, they'd be as far as diphthongs and would be initiated into the mysteries of silent letters. Maybe sooner than that; he was finding that children who had not been taught to read until their twelfth year learned much more rapidly than the primary grade children in the Literate schools.

What he was doing here wasn't exactly illegal. It wasn't even against the strict letter of Fraternity regulations. But it had to be done clandestinely. What he'd have liked to have done would have been to have given every boy and girl in English I the same instruction this selected group was getting, but that would have been out of the question. The public would never have stood for it; the police would have had to intervene to prevent a riotous mob of Illiterates from tearing the school down brick by brick, and even if that didn't happen, the ensuing uproar inside the Fraternity would have blown the roof off Literates' Hall. Even Lancedale couldn't have survived such an explosion, and the body of Literate First Class Ralph N. Prestonby would have been found in a vacant lot the next morning. Even many of Lancedale's supporters would have turned on him in anger at this sudden blow to the Fraternities' monopoly of the printed word.

So it had to be kept secret, and since adolescents in possession of a secret are under constant temptation to hint mysteriously in the presence of outsiders, this hocus-pocus of ritual and password and countersign had to be resorted to. He'd been in conspiratorial work of other kinds, and knew that there was a sound psychological basis for most of what seemed, at first glance, to be mere melodramatic claptrap.

He and Yetsko passed on through a door across the room, into another soundproofed room. The work of soundproofing and partitioning the old stockroom had been done in the last

semester of his first year at Mineola High, by members of the graduating class of building-trades students, who had then gone their several ways convinced that they had been working on a set of music-class practice rooms. The Board of Education had never even found out about it. In this second room, a Literate teacher, one of the Lancedale faction, had a reading class of twenty-five or thirty. A girl was on her feet, with a book in her hand, reading from it:

"We are not sure of sorrow;
And joy was never sure;
Today will die tomorrow;
Time stoops to no man's lure;
And love, grown faint and fretful
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure."

Then she handed the book—it was the only copy—to the boy sitting in front of her, and he rose to read the next verse. Prestonby, catching the teacher's eye, nodded and smiled. This was a third-year class, of course, but from h-a-t spells hat to Swinburne in three years was good work.

There were three other classes, a total of little over a hundred students. There was no trouble; they were there for one purpose only—to learn. He spoke with one of the teachers, whose class was busy with a written exercise; he talked for a while to another whose only duty at the moment was to answer questions and furnish help to a small class who were reading silently from a variety of smuggled-in volumes.

"Only a hundred and twenty, out of five thousand," Yetsko said to him, as they were dropping down in the elevator by which they had come. "Think you'll ever really get anything done with them?"

"I won't. Maybe they won't," he replied. "But the ones they'll teach will. They're just a cadre; it'll take fifty years before the effects are really felt. But some day—"

The shops—a good half of the school was trades-training—were noisy and busy. Here Prestonby kept his hand on his gas-projector, and Yetsko had his rubber hose ready, either to strike or to discard in favor of his pistol. The instructors were similarly on the alert and ready for trouble—he had seen penitentiaries where the guards took it easier. Carpentry and building trades. Machine shop. Welding. 'Copter and TV repair shops—he made a minor and relatively honest graft there, from the sale of rebuilt equipment. Even an atomic-equipment shop, though there was nothing in the place that would excite a Geiger more than the instructor's luminous-dial watch.

Domestic Science—Home Decorating, Home Handicrafts, Use of Home Appliances, Beautician School, Charm School. He and Yetsko sampled the products of the Cooking School, intended for the cafeteria, and found them edible if uninspired.

Business—classes in recording letters, using Illiterate business-machines, preparing Illiterate cards for same, filing recordings—always with the counsel, "When in doubt, consult a Literate."

General Arts—Spanish and French, from elaborate record players, the progeny of the old Twentieth Century Linguaphone. English, with recorded-speech composition, enunciation training, semantics, and what Prestonby called English Illiterature. The class he visited was drowsing through one of the less colorful sections of "Gone With The Wind." World History, with half the students frankly asleep through an audio-visual on the Feudal System, with planted hints on how nice a revival of same would be, and identifying the clergy of the Middle Ages with the Fraternities of Literates.

American History, with the class wide awake, since Custer's Massacre was obviously only moments away.

"Wanta bet one of those little cherubs doesn't try to scalp another before the day's out?" Yetsko whispered.

Prestonby shook his head. "No bet. Remember that film on the Spanish Inquisition, that we had to discontinue?"

It was then that the light on the classroom screen, which had been flickering green and white, suddenly began flashing Prestonby's wanted-at-office signal.

Prestonby found Frank Cardon looking out of the screen in his private office. The round, ordinarily cheerful, face was serious, but the innocent blue eyes were as unreadable as ever. He was wearing one of the new Mexican *charro*-style jackets, black laced with silver.

"I can't see all your office, Ralph," he said as Prestonby approached. "Are you alone?"

"Doug Yetsko's all," Prestonby said, and, as Cardon hesitated, added: "Don't be silly, Frank; he's my bodyguard. What could I be in that he wouldn't know all about?"

Cardon nodded. "Well, we're in a jam up to here." A handwave conveyed the impression that the sea of troubles had risen to his chin. He spoke at some length, describing the fight between Chester Pelton and Stephen S. Bayne, the Literate strike at Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise, Pelton's heart attack, and the circumstances of Claire's opening the safe. "So you see," he finished. "Maybe Latterman tried to kill Pelton, maybe he just tried to do what he did. I can't take chances either way."

Prestonby thought furiously. "You say Claire's alone at the store with her father?"

"And a couple of store cops, sterling characters with the hearts of lions and the brains of goldfish," Cardon replied.

"And Russ Latterman, and maybe four or five Conservative goons he's managed to infiltrate into the store."

Prestonby was still thinking, aloud, now. "Maybe they did mean to kill Pelton; in that case, they'll try again. Or maybe they only wanted to expose Claire's literacy. It's hard to say what else they'd try—maybe kidnap her, to truth-drug her and use her as a guest-artist on a Conservative telecast. I'm going over to the store, now."

"That's a good idea, Ralph. If you hadn't thought of it, I was going to suggest it. Land on the central stage, ask for Sergeant Coccozello of the store police, and give my name. Even aside from everything else, it'd be a good idea to have somebody there who can read and dares admit it, till a new crew of Literates can get there. You were speaking about the possibility of kidnaping; how about the boy? Ray?"

Prestonby nodded. "I'll have him come here to my office, and stay there till I get back; I'll have Yetsko stay with him." He turned to where the big man in black leather stood guard at the door. "Doug, go get Ray Pelton and bring him here. Check with Miss Collins for where he'd be, now." He turned back to the screen. "Anything else, Frank?"

"Isn't that enough?" the brewer-Literate demanded. "I'll call you at the store, after a while. 'Bye."

The screen darkened as Cardon broke the connection. Prestonby got to his feet, went to his desk, and picked up a pipe, digging out the ashes from the bowl with an ice pick that one of the teachers had taken from a sixteen-year-old would-be murderer. He checked his tablet gun, made sure that there was an extra loaded clip in the holster, and got two more spare clips from the arms locker. Then, to make sure, he called Pelton's store, talking for a while to the police sergeant Cardon had mentioned. By the time he was finished, the door opened and Yetsko ushered Ray Pelton in.

"What's happened?" the boy asked. "Doug told me that

the Senator . . . my father . . . had another heart attack?"

"Yes, Ray. I don't believe he's in any great danger. He's at the store, resting in his office." He went on to tell the boy what had happened, exactly and in full detail. He was only fifteen, but already he had completed the four-year reading course and he could think a great deal more logically than seventy per cent of the people who were legally entitled to vote. Ray listened seriously, and proved Prestonby's confidence justified by nodding.

"Frame-up," he said succinctly. "Stinks like a glue factory of a put-up job. Something's going to happen to Russ Latterman, one of these days."

"I think you'd better let Frank Cardon take care of him, Ray," Prestonby advised. "I think there are more angles to this than he told me. Now, I'm going over to the store. Somebody's got to stay with Claire. I want you to stay here, in this room. If anybody sends you any message supposed to be from me, just ignore it. It'll be a trap. If I want to get in touch with you, I'll call you, with vision-image."

"Mean somebody might try to kidnap me, or Claire, to force the Senator to withdraw, or something?" Ray asked, his eyes widening.

"You catch on quickly, Ray," Prestonby commended him. "Doug, you stay with Ray till I get back. Don't let him out of your sight for an instant. At noon, have Miss Collins get lunches for both of you sent up; if I'm not back by fifteen-hundred, take him to his home, and stay with him there."

For half an hour, Frank Cardon made a flying tour of Radical-Socialist borough headquarters. Even at the Manhattan headquarters, which he visited immediately after his talk with Prestonby, the news had already gotten out. The atmosphere of optimistic triumph which had undoubtedly followed Mongery's telecast and his report on the Trotter Poll,

had evaporated. The Literate clerical help was gathered in a tight knot, obviously a little worried, and just as obviously enjoying the reaction. In smaller and constantly changing groups, the volunteers, the paid helpers, the dirt-squirters, the goon gangs, gathered, talking in worried or frightened or angry voices. When Cardon entered and was recognized, there was a concerted movement toward him. His two regular bodyguards, both on leave from the Literate storm troops, moved quickly to range themselves on either side of him. With a gesture, he halted the others.

"Hold it!" he called. "I know what you're worried about. I was there when it happened, and saw everything."

He paused, to let them assimilate that, and continued: "Now get this, all of you! Our boss, and—*if he lives*—our next senator, was the victim of a deliberate murder attempt, by Literate First Class Bayne, who threw out his supply of nitrocaine bulbs and then goaded him into a heart attack which, except for his daughter, would have been fatal. Claire Pelton deserves the deepest gratitude of every Radical-Socialist in the state. She's a smart girl, and she saved the life of her father and our leader.

"But—she is *not* a Literate!" he cried loudly. "All she did was something any of you could have done—something I've done, myself, so that I won't be locked out of my own safe and have to wait for a Literate to come and open it for me. She simply kept her eye on the Literates who were opening the safe, and learned the combination from the positions to which they turned the dial. And you believe, on the strength of that, that she's a Literate? The next thing, you'll be believing that professional liar of a Slade Gardner. And you call yourselves politicians!" He fairly gargled obscenities.

Looking around, he caught sight of a pair who seemed something less than impressed with his account of it. Joe West, thick-armed, hairy-chested, blue-jowled; Horace Ying-

ling, thin and gangling. They weren't Radical-Socialist party people; they were from the Political Action Committee of the Consolidated Illiterates Organization, and their slogan was simpler and more to the point than Chester Pelton's—the only good Literate is a dead Literate. He tensed himself and challenged them directly.

"Joe; Horace. How about you? Satisfied the Pelton girl isn't a Literate, now?"

Yingling looked at West, and West looked back at him questioningly. Evidently the *suavitor in modo* was Yingling's province, and the *fortior in re* was West's.

"Yeh, sure, Mr. Cardon," Yingling said dubiously. "Now that you explain it, we see how it was."

CHAPTER V

It was worse than that in some of the other boroughs. One fanatic, imagining that Cardon himself was a crypto-Literate, drew a gun. Cardon's guards disarmed him and beat him senseless. At another headquarters, some character was circulating about declaring that not only Claire Pelton but her younger brother, Ray, as well, were Literates. Cardon's two men hustled him out of the building, and, after about twenty minutes, returned alone. Cardon hoped that the body would not be found until after the polls closed, the next day.

Finally, leaving his guards with the 'copter at a public landing stage, he made his way, by devious routes, to Wil-

liam R. Lancedale's office, and found Lancedale at his desk, seeming not to have moved since he had showed his agent out earlier in the day.

"Well, we're in a nice puddle of something-or-other," Cardon greeted him. "On top of that Gardner telecast, this morning—"

"Guthrie Parham's taking care of that, and everything's going to be done to ridicule Gardner," Lancedale told him. "And even this business at the store can be turned to some advantage. Before we're through, we may gain more votes than we lose for Pelton. And we had an informal meeting—Joyner for Retail Merchandising, Starke for Grievance Settlements, and four or five others including myself, to make up a quorum. We had Bayne in, and heard his story of it, and we got a report from one of our stoolies in the store. Bayne thought he was due for a commendation; instead, he got an eat-out. Of course, it was a fact that Pelton'd hit him, and we can't have Literates punched around, regardless of provocation. So we voted to fine Pelton ten million for beating Bayne up, and to award him ten million for losses resulting from unauthorized withdrawal of Literate services. We ordered a new crew of Literates to the store, and we exiled Bayne to Brooklyn, to something called Stillman's Used Copter and Junk Bazaar. For the next few months, the only thing he'll find that's round and pinchable will be second-hand tires. But don't be too hard on him; I think he did us a favor."

"You mean, starting a rift between Pelton and the Consolidated Illiterates' Organization, which we can widen after the election?"

"No. I hadn't thought of it that way, Frank," Lancedale smiled. "It's an idea worth keeping in mind, and we'll exploit it, later. What I was thinking about was the more immediate problem of the election—"

The buzzer on Lancedale's desk interrupted, and a voice came out of the commo box:

"Message, urgent and private, sir. Source named as Sforza."

Cardon recognized the name. Maybe the Independent-Conservatives have troubles, too, he thought hopefully. Then Lancedale's video screen became the frame for an almost unbelievably commonplace set of features.

"Sforza, sir," the man in the screen said. "Sorry I'm late, but I was able to get out of the building only a few minutes ago, and I had to make sure I wasn't wearing a tail. I have two new facts. First, the Conservatives have been bringing storm troops in from outside, from Philadelphia, and from Wilkes-Scranton, and from Buffalo. They are being concentrated in lower Manhattan, in plain clothes, with only concealed weapons, and carrying their hoods folded up under their coats. Second, I overheard a few snatches of conversation between two of the Conservative storm troop leaders, as follows: '. . . Start it in China . . . thirteen-thirty,' and '. . . Important to make it appear either spontaneous or planned for business motives.' "

"Try to get us more information, as quickly as possible," Lancedale directed. "Obviously, we should know, by about thirteen hundred, what's being planned."

"Right, sir." Lancedale's spy at Independent-Conservative headquarters nodded and vanished from the screen.

"What does it sound like to you, Frank?" Lancedale asked.

"China is obviously a code-designation for some place in downtown Manhattan, where the Conservative goon gangs are being concentrated. The only thing I can say is that it probably is not Chinatown. They'd either say 'Chinatown' and not 'China,' or they would use some code-designation that wasn't so close to the actual name," Cardon considered.

"What they're going to start, at thirteen-thirty, which is only two hours and a half from now, is probably some kind of a riot."

"A riot which could arise from business motives," Lancedale added. "That sounds like the docks, or the wholesale district, or the garment district, or something like that." He passed his hand rapidly over the photoelectric eye of the commo box. "Get me Major Slater," he said; and, a little later, "Major, get a platoon out to Long Island, to Chester Pelton's home; have the place searched for possible booby traps, and maintain guard there till further notice. You'll have no trouble with the servants, they're all in our pay. That platoon must not, repeat not, wear uniform or appear to have any connection with the Fraternities. Put another platoon in Pelton's store. Concealed weapons, and plain clothes. They should carry their leather helmets in shopping bags, and roam about in the store, ostensibly shopping. And a full company, uniformed and armed with heavy weapons, alerted and ready for immediate 'copter movement." He went on to explain about the intelligence report and the conclusions drawn from it. The guards officer repeated back his instructions, and Lancedale broke the connection.

"Now, Frank," he said, "I told you that this revelation of Claire Pelton's Literacy can be turned to our advantage. There's to be a full Council meeting at thirteen hundred. Here's what I estimate Joyner and Graves will try to do, and here's what I'm going to do to counter it—"

A couple of men in the maroon uniform of Pelton's store police were waiting as Prestonby's 'copter landed on the top stage; one of them touched his cap-visor with his gas-billy in salute and said: "Literate Prestonby? Miss Pelton is expecting you; she's in her father's office. This way, if you please, sir."

He had hoped to find her alone, but when he entered the office, he saw five or six of the store personnel with her. Since opening her father's safe, she had evidently dropped all pretense of Illiteracy; there was a mass of papers spread on the big desk, and she was referring from one to another of them with the deft skill of a regular Fraternities Literate, while the others watched in fascinated horror.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Hutschnecker," she told the white-haired man in the blue and orange business suit with whom she had been talking, and laid the printed price-schedule down, advancing to meet him.

"Ralph!" she greeted him. "Frank Cardon told me you were coming. I—"

For a moment, he thought of the afternoon, over two years ago, when she had entered his office at the school, and he had recognized her as the older sister of young Ray Pelton.

"Professor Prestonby," she had begun, accusingly, "you have been teaching my brother, Raymond Pelton, to read!"

He had been prepared for that; had known that sooner or later there would be some minor leak in the security screen around the classrooms on the top floor.

"My dear Miss Pelton," he had protested pleasantly. "I think you've become overwrought over nothing. This pretense to Literacy is a phase most boys of Ray's age pass through; they do it just as they play air-pirates or hi-jackers a few years earlier. The usual trick is to memorize something heard from a record disk, and then pretend to read it from print."

"Don't try to kid me, professor. I know that Ray can read. I can prove it."

"And supposing he has learned a few words," he had parried. "Can you be sure I taught him? And if so, what had you thought of doing about it? Are you going to expose me as a corrupter of youth?"

"Not unless I have to," she had replied coolly. "I'm going

to blackmail you, professor. I want you to teach me to read, too."

Now, with this gang of her father's Illiterate store officials present, a quick handclasp and a glance were all they could exchange.

"How is he, Claire?" he asked.

"Out of danger, for the present. There was a medic here, who left just before you arrived. He brought nitrocaine bulbs, and gave father something to make him sleep. He's lying down, back in his rest room." She led him to a door at the rear of the office and motioned him to enter, following him. "He's going to sleep for a couple of hours, yet."

The room was a sort of bedroom and dressing room, with a miniscule toilet and shower beyond. Pelton was lying on his back, sleeping; his face was pale, but he was breathing easily and regularly. Two of the store policemen, a sergeant and a patrolman, were playing cards on the little table, and the patrolman had a burp gun within reach.

"All right, sergeant," Claire said. "You and Gorman go out to the office. Call me if anything comes up that needs my attention, in the next few minutes."

The sergeant started to protest. Claire cut him off.

"There's no danger here. This Literate can be trusted; he's a friend of Mr. Cardon's. Works at the brewery. It's all right."

The two rose and went out, leaving the door barely ajar. Prestonby and Claire, like a pair of marionettes on the same set of strings, cast a quick glance at the door and then were in each other's arms. Chester Pelton slept placidly as they kissed and whispered endearments.

It was Claire who terminated the embrace, looking apprehensively at her slumbering father.

"Ralph, what's it all about?" she asked. "I didn't even

know that you and Frank Cardon knew each other, let alone that he had any idea about us."

Prestonby thought furiously, trying to find a safe path through the tangle of Claire Pelton's conflicting loyalties, trying to find a path between his own loyalties and his love for her, wondering how much it would be safe to tell her.

"And Cardon's gone completely cloak-and-dagger-happy," she continued. "He's talking about plots against my father's life, and against me, and—"

"A lot of things are going on under cloaks, around here," he told her. "And under Literate smocks, and under other kinds of costume. And a lot of daggers are out, too. You didn't know Frank Cardon was a Literate, did you?"

Her eyes widened. "I thought I was Literate enough to spot Literacy in anybody else," she said. "No, I never even suspected—"

Somebody rapped on the door. "Miss Pelton," the sergeant's voice called. "Visiphone call from Literates' Hall."

Prestonby smiled. "I'll take it, if you don't mind," he said. "I'm acting-chief-Literate here, now, I suppose."

She followed him as he went out into Pelton's office. When he snapped on the screen, a young man in a white smock, with the Fraternities Executive Section badge, looked out of it. He gave a slight start when he saw Prestonby.

"Literate First Class Ralph N. Prestonby, acting voluntarily for Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise during emergency," he said.

"Literate First Class Armandez, Executive Section," the man in the screen replied. "This call is in connection with the recent attack of Chester Pelton upon Literate First Class Bayne."

"Continue, understanding that we admit nothing," Prestonby told him.

"An extemporary session of the Council has found Pelton

guilty of assaulting Literate Bayne, and has fined him ten million dollars," Armandez announced.

"We enter protest," Prestonby replied automatically.

"Wait a moment, Literate. The Council has also awarded Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise damages to the extent of ten millions dollars, for losses incurred by suspension of Literate service, and voted censure against Literate Bayne for ordering said suspension without consent of the Council. Furthermore, a new crew of Literates, with their novices, guards, et cetera, is being sent at once to your store. Obviously, neither the Fraternities, nor Pelton's, nor the public, would be benefitted by returning Literate Bayne or any of his crew; he has been given another assignment."

"Thank you. And when can we expect this new crew of Literates?" Prestonby asked.

The man in the screen consulted his watch. "Probably inside of an hour. We've had to do some re-shuffling; you know how these things are handled. And if you'll pardon me, Literate; just what are you doing at Pelton's? I understood that you were principal of Mineola High School."

"That's a good question." Prestonby hastily assessed the circumstances and their implications. "I'd suggest that you ask it of my superior, Literate Lancedale, however."

The Literate in the screen blinked; that was the equivalent, for him, of anybody else's jaw dropping to his midriff.

"Well! A pleasure, Literate. Good day."

"Miss Pelton!" The man in the blue-and-orange suit was still trying to catch her attention. "Where are we going to put that stuff? Russ Latterman's out in the store, somewhere, and I can't get in touch with him."

"What did you say it was?" she replied.

"Fireworks, for the Peace Day trade. We want to get it on sale about the middle of the month."

"This was a fine time to deliver them. Peace Day isn't till the Tenth of December. Put them down in the fireproof vault."

"That place is full of photographic film, and sporting ammunition, and other merchandise; stuff we'll have to draw out to replace stock on the shelves during the sale," the Illiterate objected.

"The weather forecast for the next couple of days is fair," Prestonby reminded her. "Why not just pile the stuff on the top stage, beyond the control tower, and put up warning signs?"

The man—Hutschnecker, Prestonby remembered hearing Claire call him—nodded.

"That might be all right. We could cover the cases with tarpaulins."

A buzzer drew one of the Illiterates to a handphone. He listened for a moment, and turned.

"Hey, there's a Mrs. H. Armytage Zydanowycz down in Furs; she wants to buy one of those mutated-mink coats, and she's only got half a million bucks with her. How's her credit?"

Claire handed Prestonby a black-bound book. "Confidential credit-rating guide; look her up for us," she said.

Another buzzer rasped, before Prestonby could find the entry on Zydanowycz, H. Armytage; the Illiterate office worker, laying down one phone, grabbed up another.

"They're all outta small money in Notions; every son and his brother's been in there in the last hour to buy a pair of dollar shoestrings with a grand-note."

"I'll take care of that," Hutschnecker said. "Wait till I call control tower, and tell them about the fireworks."

"How much does Mrs. H. Armytage Zydanowycz want credit for?" Prestonby asked. "The book says her husband's good for up to fifteen million, or fifty million in thirty days."

"Those coats are only five million," Claire said. "Let her have it; be sure to get her thumbprint, though, and send it up here for comparison."

"Oh, Claire; do you know how we're going to handle this new Literate crew, when they get here?"

"Yes, here's the TO for Literate service." She tossed a big chart across the desk to him. "I made a few notes on it; you can give it to whoever is in charge."

It went on, like that, for the next hour. When the new Literate crew arrived, Prestonby was delighted to find a friend, and a fellow-follower of Lancedale, in charge. Considering that Retail Merchandising was Wilton Joyner's section, that was a good omen. Lancedale must have succeeded to an extraordinary degree in imposing his will on the Grand Council. Prestonby found, however, that he would need some time to brief the new chief Literate on the operational details at the store. He was unwilling to bring Claire too prominently into the conference, although he realized that it would be a matter of a half an hour, at the outside, before every one of the new Literate crew would have heard about her Literate ability. If she'd only played dumb, after opening that safe—

Finally, by 1300, the new Literates had taken over, and the sale was running smoothly again. Latterman was somewhere out in the store, helping them; Claire had lunch for herself and Prestonby sent up from the restaurant, and for a while they ate in silence, broken by occational spatters of small-talk. Then she returned to the question she had raised and he had not yet answered.

"You say Frank Cardon's a Literate?" she asked. "Then what's he doing managing the Senator's campaign? Fifth-columning?"

He shook his head. "You think the Fraternities are a solid,

monolithic, organization; everybody agreed on aims and means, and working together in harmony? That's how it's supposed to look, from the outside. On the inside, though, there's a bitter struggle going on between two factions, over policy and for control. One faction wants to maintain the *status quo*—a handful of Literates doing the reading and writing for an Illiterate public, and holding a monopoly on Literacy. They're headed by two men, Wilton Joyner and Harvey Graves. Bayne was one of that faction."

He paused, thinking quickly. If Lancedale had gotten the upper hand, there was likely to be a revision of the Joyner-Graves attitude toward Pelton. In that case, the less he said to incriminate Russell Latterman, the better. Let Bayne be the villain, for a while, he decided.

"Bayne," he continued, "is one of a small minority of fanatics who make a religion of Literacy. I believe he disposed of your father's medicine, and then deliberately goaded him into a rage to bring on a heart attack. That doesn't represent Joyner-Graves policy; it was just something he did on his own. He's probably been disciplined for it, by now. But the Joyner-Graves faction are working for your father's defeat and the re-election of Grant Hamilton.

"The other faction is headed by a man you've probably never heard of, William R. Lancedale. I'm of his faction, and so is Frank Cardon. We want to see your father elected, because the socialization of Literacy would eventually put the Literates in complete control of the government. We also want to see Literacy become widespread, eventually universal, just as it was before World War IV."

"But wouldn't that mean the end of the Fraternities?" Claire asked.

"That's what Joyner and Graves say. We don't believe so. And suppose it did? Lancedale says, if we're so incompetent that we have to keep the rest of the world in ignorance to

earn a living, the world's better off without us. He says that every oligarchy carries in it the seeds of its own destruction; that if we can't evolve with the rest of the world, we're doomed in any case. That's why we want to elect your father. If he can get his socialized Literacy program adopted, we'll be in a position to load the public with so many controls and restrictions and formalities that even the most bigoted Illiterate will want to learn to read. Lancedale says, a private monopoly like ours is bad, but a government monopoly is intolerable, and the only way the public can get rid of it would be by becoming Literates, themselves."

She glanced toward the door of Pelton's private rest room.

"Poor Senator!" she said softly. "He hates Literacy so, and his own children are Literates, and his program against Literacy is being twisted against itself!"

"But you agree that we're right and he's wrong?" Prestonby asked. "You must, or you'd never have come to me to learn to read."

"He's such a good father. I'd hate to see him hurt," she said. "But, Ralph, you're my man. Anything you're for, I'm for, and anything you're against, I'm against."

He caught her hand, across the table, forgetful of the others in the office.

"Claire, now that everybody knows—" he began.

"Top emergency! Top emergency!" a voice brayed out of the alarm box on the wall. *"Serious disorder in Department Thirty-two! Serious disorder in Department Thirty-two!"*

The voice broke off as suddenly as it had begun, but the box was not silent. From it came a medley of shouts, curses, feminine screams and splintering crashes. Prestonby and Claire were on their feet.

"You have wall screens?" he asked. "How do they work? Like the ones at school?"

Claire twisted a knob until the number 32 appeared on a dial, and pressed a button. On the screen, the Chinaware Department on the third floor came to life in full sound and color. The pickup must have been across an aisle from the box from whence the alarm had come; they could see one of Pelton's Illiterate clerks lying unconscious under it, and the handphone dangling at the end of its cord. The aisles were full of jostling, screaming women, trampling one another and fighting frantically to get out, and, among them, groups of three or four men were gathered back to back. One such group had caught a store policeman; three were holding him while a fourth smashed vases over his head, grabbing them from a nearby counter. A pink dinner plate came skimming up from the crowd, narrowly missing the wired TV pickup. A moment later, a blue-and-white sugar bowl, thrown with better aim, came curving at them in the screen. It scored a hit, and brought darkness, though the bedlam of sound continued.

CHAPTER VI

CARDON looked at his watch as he entered the Council Chamber at Literates' Hall, smoothing his smock hastily under his Sam Browne. He'd made it with very little time to spare, before the doors would be sealed and the meeting would begin. He'd been all over town, tracking down that report of Sforza's; he'd even made a quick visit to Chinatown, on the

off chance that "China" had been used in an attempt at the double concealment of the obvious, but, as he'd expected, he'd found nothing. The people there hardly knew there was to be an election. Accustomed for millennia to ideographs read only by experts, they viewed the current uproar about Literacy with unconcern.

At the door, he deposited his pocket recorder—no sound-recording device was permitted, except the big audio-visual camera in front, which made the single permanent record. Going around the room counterclockwise to the seats of his faction, he encountered two other Lancedale men: Gerald K. Toppington, of the Technological Section, thin-faced, sandy-haired, balding; and Franklin R. Chernov, commander of the local Literates' guards brigade, with his ragged gray mustache, his horribly scarred face, and his outsize tablet-holster almost as big as a mail-order catalogue.

"What's Joyner-Graves trying to do to us, Frank?" Chernov rumbled gutturally.

"It's what we're going to do to them," Cardon replied. "Didn't the chief tell you?"

Chernov shook his head. "No time. I only got here fifteen minutes ago. Chasing all over town about that tip from Sforza. Nothing, of course. Nothing from Sforza, either. The thing must have been planned weeks ago, whatever it is, and everybody briefed personally, and nothing on disk or tape about it. But what's going to happen here? Lancedale going to pull a rabbit out of his hat?"

Cardon explained. Chernov whistled. "Man, that's no rabbit; that's a full-grown Bengal tiger! I hope it doesn't eat us, by mistake."

Cardon looked around, saw Lancedale in animated argument with a group of his associates. Some of the others seemed to be sharing Chernov's fears.

"I have every confidence in the chief," Toppington said.

"If his tigers make a meal off anybody, it'll be—" He nodded in the direction of the other side of the chamber, where Wilton Joyner, short, bald, pompous, and Harvey Graves, tall and cadaverous, stood in a Rosencrantz-Guildenstern attitude, surrounded by half a dozen of their top associates.

The Council President, Morehead, came out a little door onto the rostrum and took his seat, pressing a button. The call bell began clanging slowly. Lancedale, glancing around, saw Cardon and nodded. On both sides of the chamber, the Literates began taking seats, and finally the call bell stopped, and Literate President Morehead rapped with his gavel. The opening formalities were hustled through. The routine held-over business was rubber-stamped with hasty votes of approval, even including the decisions of the extemporary meeting of that morning on the affair at Pelton's. Finally, the presiding officer rapped again and announced that the meeting was now open for new business.

At once, Harvey Graves was on his feet.

"Literate President," he began, as soon as the chair had recognized him, "this is scarcely *new* business, since it concerns a problem, a most serious problem, which I and some of my colleagues have brought to the attention of this Council many times in the past—the problem of Black Literacy!" He spat out the two words as though they were a mouthful of poison. "Literate President and fellow Literates, if anything could destroy our Fraternities, to which we have given our lives' devotion, it would be the widespread tendency to by-pass the Fraternities, the practice of Literacy by non-Fraternities people—"

"We've heard all that before, Wilton!" somebody from the Lancedale side called out. "What do you want to talk about that you haven't gotten on every record of every meeting for the last thirty years?"

"Why, this Pelton business," Graves snapped back at him. "You know what I mean. Your own associates are responsible for it!" He turned back to face the chair, and, with a surprising minimum of invective, described the scene in which Claire Pelton had demonstrated her Literacy. "And that's not all, brother Literates," he continued. "Since then, I've been receiving reports from the Pelton store. Claire Pelton has been openly doing the work of a Literate; going over the store's written records, checking inventories, checking the credit guide, handling the price lists—"

"What's that got to do with Black Literacy?" Gerald Toppington demanded. "Black Literacy is a term which labels the professional practice of Literacy, for hire, by a non-Fraternity Literate, or Literate service furnished for criminal or politically subversive purposes, or the betrayal of a client by a Fraternity Literate. There's nothing of the sort involved here. This girl, who does appear to be Literate, is simply looking after the interests of her family's business."

"She was taught by a Literate, a Fraternities member, under, to say the very least, irregular circumstances, and without payment of any fee. Any fee, that is, that the Fraternities can collect any percentage on. And the Literate who taught her also taught her younger brother, Ray Pelton, and this Literate, who is known to be her lover—"

"Suppose he is her lover, so what?" one of Lancedale's partisans demanded. "You say, yourself, that she's a Literate. That ought to remove any objection. Why, if she were to come forward and admit and demonstrate her Literacy, there'd be no possible objection from the Fraternities' viewpoint to her marrying young Prestonby."

"And as for Prestonby's action in teaching Literacy to her and to her brother," Cardon spoke up, "I think he deserves the thanks and commendation of the Fraternities. He's put a period to four generations of bigoted Illiterates."

Wilton Joyner was on his feet. "Will Literate Graves yield for a motion?" he asked. "Thank you, Harvey. Literate President, and brother Literates: I yield to no man in my abhorrence of Black Literacy, or in my detestation for the political principles of which Chester Pelton has made himself the spokesman, but I deny that we should allow the acts and opinions of the Illiterate parent to sway us in our consideration of the Literate children. It has come to my notice, as it has to Literate Graves', that this young woman, Claire Pelton, is Literate to a degree that would be a credit to any Literate First Class, and her brother can match his Literacy creditably against that of any novice in our Fraternities. To show that we respect Literate ability, wherever we find it; to show that we are not the monopolistic closed-corporation our enemies accuse us of being; to show that we are not animated by a vindictive hatred of anything bearing the name of Pelton—I move, and ask that my motion be presented for seconding, that Claire Pelton, and her brother, Raymond Pelton, be duly elected, respectively, to the positions of Literate Third Class and Literate Novice, as members of the Associated Fraternities of Literates!"

From the Joyner-Graves side, there were dutiful cries of, "Yes! Yes! Admit the young Peltons!" and also gasps of horrified surprise from the rank-and-filers who hadn't been briefed on what was coming up.

Lancedale was on his feet in an instant. "Literate President!" he cried. "In view of the delicate political situation, and in view of Chester Pelton's violent denunciation of our Fraternities—"

"Literate Lancedale," the President objected. "The motion is not to be debated until it has been properly seconded."

"What does the Literate President think I'm doing?" Lancedale retorted. "I second the motion!"

Joyner looked at Lancedale in angry surprise, which grad-

ually became fearful suspicion. His stooge, who had already risen with a prepared speech of seconding, simply gaped.

"Furthermore," Lancedale continued, "I move an amendment to Literate Joyner's motion. I move that the ceremony of the administration of the Literates' Oath, and the investiture in the smock and insignia, be carried out as soon as possible, and that an audio-visual recording be made, and telecast this evening, before twenty-one hundred."

Brigade commander Chernov, prodded by Cardon, jumped to his feet.

"Excellent!" he cried. "I second the motion to amend the motion of Literate Joyner."

If there were such a thing as a bomb which would explode stunned silence, Lancedale and Chernov had dropped such a bomb. Cardon could guess how Joyner and Graves felt; they were now beginning to be afraid of their own proposition. As for the Lancedale Literates, he knew how many of them felt. He'd felt the same way, himself, when Lancedale had proposed the idea. He got to his feet.

"Literate President, brother Literates," he raised his voice. "I call for an immediate vote on this amended motion, which I, personally, endorse most heartily, and which I hope to see carried unanimously."

"Now, wait a minute!" Joyner objected. "This motion ought to be debated—"

"What do you want to debate about it?" Chernov demanded. "You presented it, didn't you?"

"Well, I wanted to give the Council an opportunity to discuss it, as typical of our problems in dealing with Black . . . I mean, non-Fraternities . . . Literacy—"

"You mean, you didn't know it was loaded!" Cardon told him. "Well, that's your hard luck; we're going to squeeze the trigger!"

"I withdraw the motion!" Joyner shouted.

"Literate President," Lancedale said gently, his thin face lighting with an almost saintly smile, "Literate Joyner simply cannot withdraw his motion, now. It has been properly seconded and placed before the house, and so has my own humble contribution to it. I demand that the motion be acted upon."

"Vote! Vote! Vote!" the Lancedale Literates began yelling.

"I call on all my adherents to vote against this motion!" Joyner shouted.

"Now look here, Wilton!" Harvey Graves shouted, reddening with anger. "You're just making a fool out of me. This was your idea, in the first place! Do you want to smash everything we've ever done in the Fraternities?"

"Harvey, we can't go on with it," Joyner replied. He crossed quickly to Graves' seat and whispered something.

"For the record," Lancedale said sweetly, "our colleague, Literate Joyner, has just whispered to Literate Graves that since I have seconded his motion, he's now afraid of it. I think Literate Graves is trying to assure him that my support is merely a bluff. For the information of this body, I want to state categorically that it is not, and that I will be deeply disappointed if this motion does not pass."

An elderly Literate on the Joyner-Graves side, an undersized man with a bald head and a narrow mouth, was on his feet. He looked like an aged rat brought to bay by a terrier.

"I was against this fool idea from the start!" he yelled. "We've got to keep the Illiterates down; how are we ever going to do that if we go making Literates out of them? But you two thought you were being smart—"

"Shut up and sit down, you old jackass!" one of Joyner's people shouted at him.

"Shut up, yourself, Ginter," a hatchet-faced woman Literate from the Finance Section squawked.

Literate President Morehead, an amiable and ineffective maiden aunt in trousers, pounded frantically with his gavel. "Order!" he fairly screamed. "This is disgraceful!"

"You can say that again!" Brigade commander Chernov boomed. "What do you people over on the right think this is; an Illiterates' Organization Political Action meeting?"

"Vote! Vote!" Cardon bellowed.

Literate President Morehead banged his gavel and, in a last effort, started the call bell clanging.

"The motion has been presented and seconded; the amendment has been presented and seconded. It will now be put to a vote!"

"Roll call!" Cardon demanded. Four or five other voices, from both sides of the chamber, supported him.

"The vote will be by roll call," Literate President Morehead agreed. "Addison, Walter G."

"Aye!" He was a subordinate of Harvey Graves.

"Agostino, Pedro V."

"Aye!" He was a Lancedale man.

So it went on. Graves voted for the motion. Joyner voted against it. All the Lancedale faction, now convinced that their leader had the opposition on the run, voted loudly for it.

"The vote has been one hundred and eighty-three for, seventy-two against," Literate President Morehead finally announced. "The motion is herewith declared carried. Literate Lancedale, I appoint you to organize a committee to implement the said motion, at once."

Prestonby flung open the door of the rest room where Sergeant Coccozello and his subordinate were guarding the unconscious Pelton.

"Sergeant! Who's in charge of store police, now?"

Coccozello looked blank for an instant. "I guess I am," he

said. "Lieutenant Dunbar's off on his vacation, in Mexico, and Captain Freizer's in the hospital; he was taken sick suddenly last evening."

Probably poisoned, Prestonby thought, making a mental note to find out which hospital and get in touch with one of the Literate medics there.

"Well, come out here, sergeant, and have a look around the store on the TV. We have troubles."

Coccozello could hear the noise that was still coming out of the darkened screen. As he stepped forward, Claire got another pickup, some distance from the one that had been knocked out. A mob of women customers were surging away from the Chinaware Department, into Glassware; they were running into the shopping crowd there, with considerable disturbance. A couple of store police were trying to get through the packed mass of humanity, and making slow going of it. Coccozello swore and started calling on his reserves on one of the handphones.

"Wait a moment, sergeant," Prestonby stopped him. "Don't commit any of your reserves down there. We're going to need them to hold the executive country, up here. This is only the start of a general riot."

"Who are you and what do you know about it?" Coccozello challenged.

"Listen to him, Guido," Claire said. "He knows what he's doing."

"Claire, you have some way of keeping a running count of the number of customers in and out of the store, haven't you?" Prestonby asked.

"Why, yes; here." She pointed to an indicator on Chester Pelton's desk, where constantly changing numbers danced.

"And don't you have a continuous check on sales, too? How do they jibe?"

"They don't; look. Sales are away below any expectation

from the number of customers, even allowing for shopping habits of a bargain-day crowd. But what's that got to do—"

Prestonby was back at the TV, shifting from pickup to pickup.

"Look, sergeant, Claire. That isn't a normal bargain-day crowd, is it? Look at those groups of men, three or four to a group, shifting around, waiting for something to happen. This store's been infiltrated by a big goon gang. That business in Chinaware's just the start, to draw our reserves down to the third floor. Look at that, now."

He had a pickup on the twelfth floor, the floor just under the public landing stages, and at the foot of the escalators leading to the central executive block.

"See how they're concentrating, there?" he pointed out. "In that ladies' wear department, there are three men for every woman, and the men are all drifting from counter to counter over in the direction of our escalators."

Coccozello swore again, feelingly. "Literate, you know your stuff!" he said. "That fuss in China is just a feint; this is where they're really going to hit. What do you think it is? Macy & Gimbel's trying to bust up our sale, or politics?"

Prestonby shrugged. "Take your choice. A competitor would concentrate where your biggest volume of sale was going on, though; political enemies would try to get up here, and that's what this gang's trying to do."

"He's absolutely right, Guido," Claire told the sergeant. "Do whatever he tells you."

Sergeant Coccozello looked at him, awaiting orders.

"We can't commit our reserves in that Chinaware Department fight; we need them up here. Where are they, now, and how many?"

"Thirteen, counting myself and the man in there." He nodded toward the room where Chester Pelton lay in drugged sleep. "In the squad room, on the floor below."

"And for the mob below to get up here?"

"Two escalators, sir, northeast and southwest corners of office country. And we got some new counters that Mr. Latterman had built, that didn't get put out in time for the sale. We can use them to build barricades, if we have to."

"How about a 'copter attack on the roof?"

Coccozello grinned. "I'd like to see that, now, Literate. We got plenty of A-A equipment up there—four 7-mm machine guns, two 12-mm's, and one 20-mm auto-cannon. We could hold off the State Guard with that."

"That isn't saying much, but they're not even that good. So it'll be the escalators. Think, now, sergeant. Fires, burglary, holdups—"

The sergeant's grin widened. "High-pressure fire hose, one at the head of each escalator, and a couple more that can be dragged over from other outlets. Say we put two men on each hose, lying down at the head of the escalators. And we got plenty of firearms; we can arm some of these clerks, up here—"

"All right; do that. And put out an emergency call, by interdepartment telephone, not by public address, to floorwalkers from the fifth floor down, to gather up all male clerks and other store personnel in their departments, arm them with anything they can find, and rush them to Chinaware. Tell them to shout 'Pelton!' when they hit the mob, to avoid breaking each others' heads in the confusion, and tell them they're expected to hold the Chinaware and Glassware department themselves, without any help from the store police."

"Why not?" Claire wanted to know.

"That's how battles come to happen at the wrong time and place," Prestonby told her. "Two small detachments collide, and each sends back for re-enforcements, and the next thing anybody knows, there's a full-size battle going on where no-

body wants to fight one. We're going to fight our main battle at the head of the escalators from the twelfth floor."

"You've done this sort of work before, Literate," Coccozello grinned. "You talk like a storm-troop captain. What else?"

"Well, so far, we've just been talking defense. We need to take the offensive, ourselves." He glanced around. "Is there a freight elevator from this block to the basement?"

"Yeah. Wait till I see." Coccozello went to the TV-screen and dialed. "Yeah, and the elevator's up here, too," he said.

"Well, you take what men you can spare—a couple of your cops, and a couple of the office crew—arm them with pistols, carbines, clubs, whatever you please, and take them down to the basement. Gather up all the warehouse gang, down there, and arm them. And as soon as you get to the basement, send the elevator back up here. That's our life line; we can't risk having it captured. You'll organize flying squads to go up into the store from the basement. Bust up any trouble that seems to be getting started, if you can, but your main mission will be to rescue store police, Literates, Literates' guards, and store help, and get them back to the basement. They'll be picked up from there and brought up here on the elevator." He picked up a pad from a desk and wrote a few lines on it. "Show this to any Literate you meet; get Literate Hopkinson to countersign it for you, when you find him. Tell him we want his whole gang up here as soon as possible."

"How about getting help from outside?" Claire asked. "The city police, or—"

"City police won't lift a finger," Prestonby told her. "They never help anybody who has a private police force; they have too much to do protecting John Q. Citizen. Hutschnecker; suppose you call Radical-Socialist campaign headquarters; tell them to rush some of their Lone Rangers around here—"

Russell M. Latterman was lunching in the store restaurant, at a table next to the thick glass partition, where he could look out across Confectionery and Pastries toward the Tobacco Shoppe and the Liquor Department. There were two ways of looking at it, of course. He was occupying a table that might have been used by a customer, but, on the other hand, he was known by sight to many of the customers, and the fact that he was eating here had some advertising value, and he could keep his eye on the business going on around him. Off in the distance, he caught the white flash of a Literate smock at one of the counters; one of the new crew sent in to replace the ones Bayne had pulled out. He was glad and at the same time disturbed. He had had his doubts about staging a Literates' strike, and he was almost positive that Wilton Joyner had known nothing about it. The whole thing had been Harvey Graves' idea. There was a serious question of Literate ethics involved, to say nothing of the effect on the public. The trick of forcing Claire Pelton to reveal her secret Literacy was all right, although he wished that it had been Frank Cardon who had opened that safe. Or did he? Cardon would have brazened it out, claimed to have memorized the combination after having learned it by observation, and would probably have gotten away with it. But that silly girl had lost her head afterward, and had gone on to brand herself, irrevocably, as a Literate.

One of the waitresses was hurrying toward him, almost falling over herself in excitement. She began talking when she was ten feet from the table.

"Mr. Latterman! Mr. Latterman!" she was calling to him. "A terrible fight, down in Chinaware—!"

"Well, what do we have store police for?" he demanded. "They can take care of it. Now be quiet, Madge; don't get the customers excited!"

He returned to his lunch, watching, with satisfaction, the

crowd that was packing into the Liquor Department, next to the restaurant. That special loss-leader, Old Atom-Bomb Rye, had been a good idea. In the first place, the stuff was fit for nothing but cleaning drains and removing varnish; if he were Pelton, he would have fired that fool buyer who got them over-stocked on it. But the audio-advertiser, outside, was re-iterating: *"Choice whiskies, two hundred dollars a sixth and up!"* and pulling in the customers, who, when they discovered that the two-hundred-dollar bargain was Old Atom-Bomb, were shelling out five hundred to a grand a sixth for good liquor.

He finished his coffee and got to his feet. Be a good idea to look in on Liquor, and see how things were going. The department was getting more and more crowded every minute; three customers were entering for every one who left.

On the way, he passed two women, and caught a snatch of conversation:

"Don't go down on the third floor, for Heaven's sake . . . terrible fight . . . smashing everything up—"

Worried, he continued into Liquor, and the looks of the crowd there increased his worries. Too many men between twenty and thirty, all dressed alike, looking alike, talking and acting alike. It looked like a goon-gang infiltration, and he was beginning to see why Harvey Graves had wanted the Literates pulled out, and why Joyner, bound by ethics to do nothing against the commercial interests of Pelton's, had known nothing about it. He started toward a counter, to speak to a clerk, but one of the stocky, quietly-dressed young men stepped in front of him.

"Gimme a bottle of Atom-Bomb," he said. "Don't bother wrapping it."

"Yes, sir." The clerk seemed worried, too. He got the bottle and set it on the counter. "That'll be two C, sir."

"I see you're wearing a Radical-Socialist button," the customer commented. "Because you want to, or because Chet Pelton makes you?"

"Mr. Pelton never interferes with his employees' political convictions," the clerk replied loyally.

Saying nothing, the customer took the bottle, swung it by the neck, and smashed it over the clerk's head, knocking him senseless.

"That's all that rotgut's good for," the customer said, jumping over the counter. "All right, boys; help yourselves!"

CHAPTER VII

For a surprisingly long time, the riot was localized in China, where it had begun. Using, alternately, three TV-pickups around the scene of the disturbance, Prestonby watched its progress, and watched successive details of store personnel, armed with clubs and a few knives and sono pistols, hit the riot, shouting their battle cry, and vanish. They were, of course, lambs of sacrifice, however unlamblike their conduct. They were buying time, and they were drawing groups of goons into the action in China and Glassware who might have been making trouble elsewhere.

There was an outbreak on the sixth floor, in Liquor; Claire, touring the store on the other TV-screen, spotted it and called his attention to it. Back of the shattered glass partition, a mob of men were snatching bottles from the shelves and toss-

ing them out to the crowd. One of the clerks, in his gray uniform jacket, was lying unconscious outside. While Prestonby watched, another, and another, came flying out the doorway. A fourth victim, in ordinary business clothes, tattered and disheveled, came flying out after them, to land in a heap, stunned for an instant, and then pick himself up. Prestonby laughed heartily when he recognized Literate—undercover—First Class Russell M. Latterman.

"I ought to have anticipated that," he said. "Any time there's a riot, the liquor stores are the first things looted. The liquor stores, and the—Claire! See what's going on in Sporting Goods!"

Sporting Goods, between Tools & Hardware and Toys, on the fifth floor, was swamped. One of the clerks was lying on the floor in a puddle of blood, past any help; none of the others were in sight. The gun racks and pistol cases were being cleaned out systematically. This had been organized in advance. There were four or five men working industriously wiping grease out of bores and actions before handing out firearms, and a couple more making sure that the right cartridges went with each weapon. Somebody had brought a small grinding wheel over from Tools and plugged it in, and was grinding points on the foils and épées. Others were collecting baseball bats, golf clubs, and football helmets and catchers' masks. The Tool Department was being stripped of everything that could be used as a weapon, too.

The whole store, by this time, was an approximation of Mutiny in a Madhouse. Dressgoods was being looted by a howling mob of women, who were pulling bolts of material from shelves and fighting among themselves over them. Somebody had turned on the electric fans, and long streams of flimsy fabric were blowing about like a surrealist maypole dance. Somebody in Household Furnishings had turned on a couple of fans, too, and a mob of hoodlums were opening

cans of paint and throwing them into the fan blades.

The little Antiques Department, in a corner of the fourth floor back of the Gift Shoppe, was an island of peace in the general chaos. There was only one way into it, and one of the clerks, who had gotten himself into a suit of Fifteenth Century battle armor, was standing in the entrance, leaning on a two-hand sword. There was blood on the long blade, and more blood splashed on the floor in front of him. He was being left entirely alone.

Hutschnecker, called to the telephone, spoke briefly, listened for a while, spoke again in hearty thanks, and hung up.

"Macy & Gimbel's," he told Prestonby. "They heard about our trouble—probably one of their price-spotters phoned in about it—and they're offering to send twenty of their store-cops to help us out. They'll be landing on our stage in eight minutes, rifles and steel helmets."

Prestonby nodded. It would have been quite conceivable that Pelton's chief competitor had started the riot; since they hadn't, their offer of armed aid was just as characteristic of the bitter but mutually-respectful rivalries of the commercial world. A few minutes later, another call came in, this time on the visphone. Prestonby took it when he saw a Literates' Guards officer in the screen and recognized him.

"That you, Prestonby?" the officer, Major Slater, asked in some surprise. "Didn't know you were at Pelton's. What's going on, there?"

Prestonby told him, briefly.

"Yes; we had some of our people at the store, in plain clothes," Slater said. "Just in case of trouble. On Mr. L.'s orders. They reported a riot starting, but naturally, their reports were incomplete. Can you get one of your landing stages cleared for us? We have two hundred men, in twenty 'copters." Then he must have noticed some of the store Il-

literates back of Prestonby, and realized that this offer of help to Literacy's worst enemy would arouse suspicion. "Not that we care what happens to Chester Pelton, but we have to protect our own people at the store."

"Yes, of course," Prestonby agreed. "Come in on our north stage. You'll probably find a fight going on on our twelfth floor, just inside. Anybody who's trying to get up the escalators to the office block will be an enemy."

"Right. We're halfway there now." The Literates' Guards officer broke the connection.

"You heard that?" he asked, turning to the others in the office. "If we can hold out till they get here, we're all right. Did you contact Radical-Socialist headquarters, yet, Hutschnecker?"

"Yes. I talked to a fellow named Yingling. He said that all the party storm troops had been lured out to some kind of a disturbance in North Jersey Borough; he'd try to get them recalled."

Prestonby swore bitterly. "By the time his own party-goons get here, the Literates' Guards and Macy & Gimbel's will have pulled Pelton's bacon off the fire for him. Nice friends he has!"

An alarm buzzer went off suddenly, and an urgent voice came out of the box on the wall:

"Here come the goons! South escalator!"

Prestonby grabbed a burp gun and a canvas musette bag full of clips. By the time he had gotten down to what, in deference to the superstitions of the Illiterate store force, was known as the fourteenth floor, an attack on the north escalator had developed as well. In both cases, the attackers seemed to expect no organized resistance. They simply jumped onto the escalators, adding their own running speed, and came rushing up, firing pistols ahead of them at random.

The defenders, however, had been ready; the fire hoses

caught those in the lead and hurled them back. Some of them vaulted the barrier between the ascending and descending spirals and let themselves be carried down again. Less than five minutes after the buzzer had sounded the warning, the attack stopped. The noise on the twelfth floor increased, however, and, leaning over into the escalator-way, Prestonby could see the rioters firing in the direction of the entrance from the north landing stage. Within a mater of thirty seconds, they began to flee, and a wave of Literates' Guards, in their futuristic "space cadet" uniforms, came pouring in after them.

Douglass MacArthur Yetsko put the burp gun back together again, tried the action, and laid it aside with a sigh. He had cleaned every weapon in his and Prestonby's private arsenal, since lunch, and now he had to admit the unpalatable fact that there was nothing left to do but turn on the TV. Ray had been no company at all; the boy hadn't spoken a word since he'd started rummaging among the captain's books. Gloomily, he snapped on the screen to sample the soap shows.

Della Pallas was in jail again, this time accused of murdering the lawyer who had gotten her acquitted on a previous murder rap. Considering the fact that she had languished in jail for almost a year during the other trial, Yetsko felt that she had a sound motive. Rudolf Barstow, in "Broadway Wife," was, like Bruce's spider, spinning his five hundredth web to ensnare the glamorous Marie Knobble. And there was a show about a schoolteacher and her class of angelic little tots that almost brought Yetsko's lunch up.

He shifted the dial again; a young Literate announcer was speaking quickly, excitedly:

". . . Scene of the riot, already the worst this year, and growing steadily worse. We take you now to downtown Man-

hattan, where our portable units and commentators have just arrived, and switch you to Ed Morgan."

The screen went black, and Yetsko swore angrily. Ray lifted his head quickly from his book and reached for the sono pistol Yetsko had given him.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and just a moment, until we can give you the picture. We're having what is usually labeled as 'slight technical difficulties,' in this case the difficulty of avoiding having a hole shot in our camera or in your commentator's head. Yes, that's shooting you hear; there, somebody's using an auto rifle! How are you coming, Steve?"

A voice muttered something which, two centuries ago, would have caused an earth-shaking scandal in the whole radio-TV industry.

"Well, till Steve gets things fixed up, a brief review, to date, of what's sure to go down in history as the Battle of Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise—"

"Huh?" Ray fairly shouted, the book forgotten.

". . . Started in the Chinaware Department, as a relatively innocent brawl, and spread to the Liquor Department, and then, all of a sudden, everybody started playing rough. At first, it was suspected that Macy & Gimbel's had sent a goon gang around to break up Pelton's fall sale, but when the former concern rallied to the assistance of their competitor with a force of twenty riflemen, that began to look less likely, and we're beginning to think that it might be the work of some of Pelton's political enemies. About ten minutes ago, Major James F. Slater, of the Literates' Guards, arrived with two hundred of his men, to protect the Literates on duty at the store. They captured the entire twelfth floor, where we are, now, with the exception of the Ladies' Lingerie and Hosiery departments around one of the escalators to the lower floors; here the gang who started the riot, and who are

now donning white hoods to distinguish themselves from the various other factions involved, have thrown up barricades of counters and display tables and are fighting bitterly to keep control of the escalator head. Ah, here we are!"

The screen lit suddenly, and they were looking, Ray over Yetsko's shoulder, across the devastated expanse of what had been the Ladies' Frocks department, toward Lingerie and Hosiery, which seemed to have been thoroughly looted, then stripped of everything that could be used to build a barricade.

". . . Seems to have been quite a number of heavy 'copters just landed on the east stage, filled with more goons, probably to re-enforce the gang back of that barricade. The firing's gotten noticeably heavier—"

Yetsko had turned from the screen, and was pawing in the arms locker. For a job like this, he'd need firepower. He took the ten-shot clip from the butt of his pistol and inserted one with a curling hundred-shot drum at the bottom, and shoved two more like it into the pockets of his jacket. And now, something to clear the way with. He took out a three-foot length of weighted fire hose.

Then he saw Ray. That kid was pinning him down, here, while the captain was probably fighting for his life! But the captain'd told him to stay with Ray—He dropped the weighted hose.

"What's the matter, Doug?" the boy asked. "Pick it up and let's get going."

He shook his head. "Can't. The captain told me I had to take care of you."

The boy opened his mouth to speak, closed it again, and thought for a moment. Then he asked:

"Doug, didn't Captain Prestonby tell you to stay with me?"

"Yes—"

"All right. You do just that, because I'm going to help Claire and the senator. That's who that goon gang's after."

Yetsko considered the proposition for a moment, horrified. Why, this was the captain's girl's kid brother; if anything happened to him—His mind refused to contemplate what the captain would do to him.

"No. You gotta stay here, Ray," he said. "The captain—"

Then his eye caught the screen. Ed Morgan must have found a place where he could run his camera up on an extension rod from behind something; they were looking down, from almost ceiling height, at the barricade, and at the Literates' guards who were firing from cover at it. A sudden blast of automatic-weapons burst from the barricade; more men in white hoods came boiling up the escalator, and they all rushed forward. The few Literates' guards skirmishers were overwhelmed. He saw one of them, a man he knew, Sam Igoe, from Company 5, go down wounded; he saw one of the white-hooded goons pause to brain him with a carbine butt before charging on.

"Why, you dirty rotten Illiterate—!" he roared, retrieving his weighted hose. "Come on, Ray; let's go!"

Ray hesitated, as though in thought. "Ken Dorchin; Harry Cobb; Dick Hirschfield; Jerry McCarty; Ramon Nogales; Pete Shawne; Tom Hutchinson—"

"Who—?" Yetsko began. "What've they gotta do with—?"

"We need a gang; the two of us'd last about as long as a pint of beer at a Dutch picnic." Ray went to the desk, grabbed a pen, and made a list of names, in a fair imitation of Ralph Prestonby's neat block-printing. "Give this to the girl outside, and tell her to have them called for and sent in here," the boy directed. "And see if you can find us some transport. I think there ought to be a couple of big 'copters finished down at the shops. And if you can find a couple more Literates' guards you can talk into going with us—"

Yetsko nodded and took the paper without question. He was not, and he would be the first to admit it, of the thinking type. He was a good sergeant, but he had to have an officer to tell him what to do. Ray Pelton might be only fifteen years old, but his sister was the captain's girl, and that put him in the officer class. A very young and recently-commissioned second lieutenant, say, but definitely an officer. Yetsko took the list and looked at it. Like most Literates' guards, he could read, after a fashion. He recognized the names; the boys were all members of the top floor secret society. He went out and gave the list to Martha Collins.

He'd expected some argument with her, but she seemed to accept Ray Pelton's printing as Prestonby's; she began checking room charts and class lists, and calling for the boys to be sent at once to the office. He went out, and down to the 'copter repair shop, where he found that a big four-ton air truck that the senior class had been working on for several weeks was finished.

"That thing been tested, yet?" he asked the instructor.

"Yes; I had it up, myself, this morning. Flew it over to the Bronx and back with a load of supplies."

"O. K. Have somebody you can trust—one of your guards, preferably—bring it around behind the Administration Wing. Captain Prestonby wants it. I'm to take some boys from Fourth Year Civics on a tour. Something about election campaign methods."

The instructor called a Literates' guard and gave him instructions. Yetsko went to the guards' squad room on the second floor, where he found half a dozen of the reserves loafing.

"All right; you guys start earning your pay," he said. "We're going to a party."

The men got to their feet and began gathering their weapons.

"Mason," he continued, "you have your big 'copter here; the gang of you can all get in it. I'm taking off in a four-ton truck, with some of these kids. I want you boys to follow us. We're going to Pelton's store. There's a fight going on there, and the captain's in the middle of it. We gotta get him out."

They all looked at him in puzzled surprise, but nobody gave him any argument. Funny, now that he thought of it; it had been quite a long time since anybody had ever given him any argument about anything. A couple of guys out in Pittsburgh had tried it, but somehow they'd lost interest in arguing, after a little—

When he returned to the office and opened the door, a blast of shots greeted him through the open door of Prestonby's private office. He had his pistol out before he realized that the shooting was going on at Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise, ten miles away. Literate Martha Collins, in the inner room, was fairly screaming: "Shut that infernal thing off and listen to me!"

The dozen-odd boys whom Ray had recruited for the improvised relief-expedition were pulling weapons out of the gun locker, pawing through the boxes on the ammunition shelf, trying to explain to one another the working of machine carbines and burp guns. Yetsko shouldered through them and turned down the sound volume of the TV.

"This is absolutely outrageous!" Literate Martha Collins stormed at him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, taking these children to a murderous battle like that—"

"Well, maybe it ain't right, using savages in a civilized riot," Yetsko admitted, "but I don't care. The captain's in a jam, and I'd use live devils, if I could catch a few." He took a burp gun from one of the boys, who had opened the action and couldn't get it closed again. "Here; you kids don't want this kinda stuff," he reproved. "Sono guns, and sleep-gas guns, that's all right. But these things are killing tools!"

"It's what we'll have to use, Doug," Ray told him. "Things have been happening, since you went out. Look at the screen."

Yetsko looked, and swore blisteringly. Then he gave the burp gun back to the boy.

"Look; you gotta press this little gismo, here, to let the action shut when there's no clip in, or when the clip's empty. When you got a loaded clip in, you just pull back on this and let go—"

Frank Cardon looked at his watch, and saw that it was 1345, as it had been ten seconds before, when he had last looked. He started to drum nervously on his chair arm with his fingers, then caught himself as he saw Lancedale, who must have been every bit as anxious as himself, standing outwardly calm and unruffled.

"Well, that's the situation which now confronts us, brother Literates," the slender, white-haired man was finishing. "You must see, by now, that the policy of unyielding opposition which some of you have advocated and pursued is futile. You know the policy I favor, which now remains the only policy we can follow; it is summed up in that law of political strategy: If you can't lick 'em, join 'em, and, after joining, take control.

"In spite of the Radical-Socialist victory in this state at tomorrow's election, it will not be possible, in the next Congress, to enact Pelton's socialized Literacy program into law. The Radicals will not be able to capture enough seats in the lower house, and there are too many uncontested seats in the Senate now held by Independent-Conservatives. But, and this is inevitable, barring some unforeseen accident of the order of a political cataclysm, they will control both houses of Congress after the election of 2142, two years hence, and we can also be sure that two years hence Chester Pelton will be nom-

inated and overwhelmingly elected president of the Consolidated States of North America. Six months thereafter, the socialized Literacy program will be the law of the land.

"So, we have until mid-2143 to make our preparations. I would estimate that, if we do not destroy ourselves by our own folly in the meantime, we should, two years thereafter, be in complete if secret control of the whole Consolidated States Government. If any of you question that last statement, you can merely ask yourselves one question: How, in the name of all that is rational, can Illiterates control and operate a system of socialized Literacy? Who but Literates can keep such a program from disintegrating into complete and indescribable confusion?

"I don't ask for any decision at this time. I do not ask for any debate at this time. Let each of us consider the situation in his or her own mind, and let us meet again a week from today to consider our future course of action, each of us realizing that any decision we take then will determine forever the fate of our Fraternities." He looked around the room. "Thank you, brother Literates," he said.

Instantly, Cardon was on his feet with a motion to recess the meeting until 1300 the following Monday, and Brigade commander Chernov seconded the motion immediately. As soon as Literate President Morehead's gavel banged, Cardon, still on his feet, was running for the double doors at the rear; the two Literates' guards on duty there got them unsealed and opened by the time he had reached them.

There was another guard in the hall, waiting for him with a little record-disk.

"From Major Slater; call came in about ten minutes ago," he said.

Cardon snapped the disk into his recorder-reproducer and put in the ear plug.

"Frank," Slater's voice came out of the small machine.

"You'd better get busy, or you won't have any candidate when the polls open tomorrow. Just got a call from Pelton's store—place infiltrated by goons, estimated strength two hundred, presumed Independent-Conservatives. Serious rioting already going on; I'm taking my reserve company there. And if you haven't found out, yet, where China is, it's on the third floor, next to Glassware."

Cardon pulled out the ear plug, stuffed the recorder into his trouser pocket, and began unbuckling his Sam Browne as he ran for the nearest wall visiphone. He was dialing the guard room on that floor with one hand as he took off the belt.

"Get a big ambulance on the roof, with a Literate medic and orderly-driver," he ordered, unbuttoning his smock. "And four guards, plain clothes if possible, but don't waste time changing clothes if you don't have anybody out of uniform. Heavy-duty sono guns, sleep-gas projectors, gas masks and pistols. Hurry." He threw the smock and belt at the guard. "Here, Pancho; put these away for me. Thanks." He tossed the last word back over his shoulder as he ran for the escalator.

CHAPTER VIII

It was three eternal minutes after he had reached the landing stage above before the ambulance arrived, medic and orderly on the front seat and the four guards, all in conservatively cut civilian clothes, inside. He crowded in beside the medic,

told him, "Pelton's store," and snapped the door shut as the big white 'copter began to rise.

They climbed to five thousand feet, and then the driver nosed his vehicle up, cut his propeller and retracted it, and fired his rocket, aiming toward downtown Manhattan. Four minutes later, after the rocket stopped firing and they were on the down-curve of their trajectory, the propeller was erected and they began letting down toward the central landing stage of Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise. Cardon cut in the TV and began calling the control tower.

"Ambulance, to evacuate Mr. Pelton," he called. "What's the score, down there?"

One of Pelton's traffic-control men appeared on Cardon's screen. "You're safe to land on the central stage, but you'd better come in at a long angle from the north," he said. "We control the north public stage, but the east and south stages are in the hands of the goons; they'd fire on you. Land beside that big pile of boxes under tarpaulins up here, but be careful; it's fireworks we didn't have time to get into storage."

The ambulance came slanting in from uptown, and Cardon looked around anxiously. The May-fly dance of customers' 'copters had stopped; there was a Sabbath stillness about the big store, at least visually. A few small figures in Literates' guards black leather moved about on the north landing stage, and several Pelton employees were on the central stop stage. The howling of the 'copter propeller overhead effectively blocked out any sounds that might be coming from the building, at least until the ambulance landed. Then a spatter of firing from below was audible.

Cardon, the medic and the guards piled out, the latter with the stretcher. The orderly-driver got out his tablet pistol and checked the chamber, then settled into a posture of watchful relaxation. Major Slater was waiting for them by one of the vertical lift platforms.

"I tried to get hold of you, but that blasted meeting was going on, and they had the doors sealed, and—" he began.

Cardon hushed him quickly. "Around here, I'm an Illiterate," he warned. "Where's Pelton? We've got to get him and his daughter out of here, at once."

"He's still flat on his back, out cold," Slater said. "The medic you sent around here gave him a shot of hypnotaine; he'll be out for a couple of hours, yet. Prestonby's still here. He's commanding the defense; doing a good job, too."

That was good. Ralph would help get Claire to Literates' Hall, after they'd gotten her father to safety.

"There must be about five hundred Independent-Conservative storm troopers in the store," Slater was saying. "Most of them got here after we did. The city cops have all the street approaches roped off; they're letting nobody but Grant Hamilton's thugs in."

"They were fairly friendly this morning," Cardon said. "Mayor Jameson must have passed the word." They all got off the lift two floors down, where they found Claire Pelton and Ralph Prestonby waiting. "Hello, Ralph. Claire. What's the situation?"

"We have all the twelfth floor," Prestonby said. "We have about half the eleventh, including the north and west public stages. We have the basement and the storerooms and the warehouse—Sergeant Coccozello's down there, with as many of the store police and Literates and Literates' guards and store-help as he could salvage, and the warehouse gang. They've taken most of the ground floor, the main mezzanine, and parts of the second floor. We moved two of the 7-mm machine guns down from the top, and we control the front street entrance with them and a couple of sono guns. The store's isolated from the outside by the city police, who are allowing re-enforcements to come through for the raiders, but we're managing to stop them at the doors."

"Have you called Radical-Socialist headquarters for help?"

"Yes, half a dozen times. There's some fellow named Yingling there, who says that all their storm troops are over in North Jersey, on some kind of a false-alarm riot-call, and can't be contacted."

"So?" Cardon commented gently. "That's too bad, now." Too bad for Horace Yingling and Joe West; this time tomorrow, they'll be a pair of dead traitors, he thought. "Well, we'll have to make do with what we have. Where's Russ Latterman, by the way?"

Prestonby gave a sidewise glance toward Claire and shook his head, his lips pressed tightly together. *She doesn't know, yet,* Cardon interpreted.

"Down in the basement, with Coccozello," Prestonby said, aloud. "We're in telephone communication with Coccozello, and have a freight elevator running between here and the basement. Coccozello says Latterman is using a rifle against the raiders, killing every one he can get a shot at."

Cardon nodded. Probably vindictive about being involved in action injurious to Pelton's commercial interests; just another odd quirk of Literate ethics.

"We'd better get him up here," he said. "You and I have got to leave, at once; we have to get Pelton and Claire to safety. He can help Major Slater till we can get back with reenforcements. I am going to kill a man named Horace Yingling, and then I'm going to round up the storm troops he diverted on a wild-goose chase to North Jersey." He nodded to the medic and the four plain-clothes guards. "Get Pelton on the stretcher. Better use the canvas flaps and the straps. He's under hypnotaine, but it's likely to be a rough trip. Claire, get anything you want to take with you. Ralph will take you where you'll be safe for a while."

"But the store—" Claire began.

"Your father has riot-insurance, doesn't he? I know he

does; they doubled the premium on him when he came out for Senate. Let the insurance company worry about the store."

The medic and the guards moved into Chester Pelton's private rest room with the stretcher. Claire went to the desk and began picking up odds and ends, including the pistol Cardon had given her, and putting them in her handbag.

"We've got to keep her away from her father, for a few days, Ralph," he told Prestonby softly. "It's all over town that she can read and write. We've got to give him a chance to cool off before he sees her again. Take her to Lancedale. I have everything fixed up; she'll be admitted to the Fraternities this afternoon, and given Literate protection."

Prestonby grabbed his hand impulsively. "Frank! I'll never be able to repay you for this, not if I live to be a thousand—" he began.

There was a sudden blast of sound from overhead—the banging of machine guns, the bark of the store's 20-mm autocannon, the howling of airplane jets, and the crash of explosions. Everybody in the room jerked up and stood frozen, then Prestonby jumped for the TV-screen and pawed at the dials. A moment later, after the screen flashed and went black twice, they were looking across the topside landing stage from a pickup at one corner.

A slim fighter-bomber, with square-tipped, backswept wings, was jetting up in almost perpendicular flight; another was coming in toward the landing stage, and, as they watched, a flight of rockets leaped forward from under its wings. Cardon saw the orderly-driver of the ambulance jump down and start to run for the open lift-shaft. He got five steps away from his vehicle. Then the rockets came in, and one of them struck the tarpaulin-covered pile of boxes beside the ambulance. There was a flash of multicolored flame, in

which the man and the vehicle he had left both vanished. Immediately, the screen went black.

The fireworks had mostly exploded at the first blast; however, when Cardon and Major Slater and one or two others reached the top landing stage, there were still explosions. A thing the size and shape of a two-gallon kettle, covered with red paper, came rolling toward them, and suddenly let go with a blue-green flash, throwing a column of smoke, in miniature imitation of an A-bomb, into the air. Something about three feet long came whizzing at them on the end of a tail of fire, causing them to fling themselves flat; involuntarily, Cardon's head jerked about and his eyes followed it until it blew up with a flash and a bang three blocks uptown. Here and there, colored fire flared, small rockets flew about, and firecrackers popped.

The ambulance was gone, blown clear off the roof. The other 'copters on the landing stage were a tangled mass of wreckage. The 20-mm was toppled over; the gunner was dead, and one of the crew, half-dazed, was trying to drag a third man from under the overturned gun. The control tower, with the two 12-mm machine guns, was wrecked. The two 7-mm's that had been left on the top had vanished, along with the machine gunners, in a hole that had been blown in the landing stage.

Cardon, Slater, and the others dashed forward and pulled the auto-cannon off the injured man, hauling him and his companion over to the lift. The two rakish-winged fighter-bombers were returning, spraying the roof with machine-gun bullets, and behind them came a procession of fifteen big 'copters. They dropped the lift hastily; Slater jumped off when it was still six feet above the floor, and began shouting orders.

"Falk: take ten men and get to the head of this lift-shaft! Burdick, Levine: get as many men as you can in thirty sec-

onds, and get up to the head of the escalator! Diaz: go down and tell Sternberg to bring all his gang up here!"

Cardon caught up a rifle and rummaged for a bandolier of ammunition, losing about a minute in the search. The delay was fortunate; when he got to the escalators, he was met by a rush of men hurrying down the ascending spiral or jumping over onto the descending one.

"Sono guns!" one of them was shouting. "They have the escalator head covered; you'll get knocked out before you get off the spiral!"

He turned and looked toward the freight lift. It was coming down again, with Falk and his men unconscious on it, knocked senseless by bludgeons of inaudible sound, and a half a dozen of the 'copter-borne raiders, all wearing the white robes and hoods of the Independent-Conservative storm troops. He swung his rifle up and began squeezing the trigger, remembering to first make sure that the fire-control lever was set forward for semiauto, and remembering his advice to Goodkin, that morning. By the time the platform had stopped, all the men in white robes were either dead or wounded, and none of the unconscious Literates' guards along with them had been injured. The medic who had come with Cardon, assisted by a couple of the office force, got the casualties sorted out. There was nothing that could be done about the men who had been sono-stunned; in half an hour or so, they would recover consciousness with no ill effects that a couple of headache tablets wouldn't set right.

The situation, while bad, was not immediately desperate. If the white-clad raiders controlled the top landing stage, they were pinned down by the firearms and sono guns of the defenders, below, who were in a position to stop anything that came down the escalators or the lift shaft. The fate of the first party was proof of that. And the very magnitude of the riot guaranteed that somebody on the outside, city po-

lice, State guards, or even Consolidated States regulars, would be taking a hand shortly. The air attack and 'copter-landing on the roof had been excellent tactics, but it had been a serious policy-blunder. As long as the disturbance had been confined to the interior of the store, the city police could shrug it off as another minor riot on property supposed to be protected by private police, and do nothing about it. The rocket-attack on the top landing stage and the spectacular explosion of the fireworks temporarily stored there, however, was something that simply couldn't be concealed or dismissed. The cloud of varicolored smoke alone must have been visible all over the five original boroughs of the older New York, and there were probably rumors of atom-bombing going around.

"What gets me," Slater, who must have been thinking about the same thing, said to Cardon, "is where they got hold of those two fighter-bombers. That kind of stuff isn't supposed to be in private hands."

"A couple of hundred years ago, they had something they called the Sullivan Law," Cardon told him. "Private citizens weren't even allowed to own pistols. But the gangsters and hoodlums seemed to be able to get hold of all the pistols they wanted, and burp guns, too. I know of four or five racket gangs in this area that have aircraft like that, based up in the Adirondacks, at secret fields. Anybody who has connections with one of those gangs can order an air attack like this on an hour's notice, if he's able to pay for it. What I can't understand is the Independent-Conservatives doing anything like this. The facts about this business will be all over the state before the polls open tomorrow—" He snapped his fingers suddenly. "Come on; let's have a look at those fellows who came down on the lift!"

There were two dead men in white Independent-Conservative robes and hoods, lying where they had been dragged

from the lift platform. Cardon pulled off the hoods and zipped open the white robes. One of the men was a complete stranger; the other, however, was a man he had seen, earlier in the day, at the Manhattan headquarters of the Radical-Socialist Party. One of the Consolidated Illiterates' Organization people; a follower of West and Yingling.

"So that's how it was!" he said, straightening. "Now I get it! Let's go see if any of those wounded goons are in condition to be questioned."

Ray Pelton and Doug Yetsko had their heads out an open window on the right side of the cab of the 'copter truck; Ray was pointing down.

"That roof, over there, looks like a good place to land," he said. "We can get down the fire escape, and the hatch to the conveyor belt is only half a block away."

Yetsko nodded. There'd be a watchman, or a private cop, in the building on which Ray intended landing. A couple of hundred dollars would take care of him, and they could leave two of Mason's boys with the vehicles to see that he stayed bribed.

"Sure we can get in on the freight conveyor?" he asked. "Maybe it'll be guarded."

"Then we'll have to crawl in through the cable conduit," Ray said. "I've done that, lots of times; so have most of the other guys." He nodded toward the body of the truck, behind, where his dozen-odd teen-age recruits were riding. "I've played all over the store, ever since I've been big enough to walk; I must know more about it than anybody but the guy who built it. That's why I said we'd have to bring bullet guns; down where we're going, we'd gas ourselves with gas guns, and if we used sono guns, we'd knock ourselves out with the echo."

"You know, Ray, you'll make a real storm trooper," Yetsko

said. "If you manage to stay alive for another ten years, you'll be almost as good a storm troop captain as Captain Prestonby."

That, Ray knew, was about as high praise as Doug Yetsko could give anybody. He'd have liked to ask Doug more about Captain Prestonby—Doug could never seem to get used to the idea of his officer being a schoolteacher—but there was no time. The 'copter truck was already settling onto the roof.

The watchman proved amenable to reason. He took one look at Yetsko, with three feet of weighted fire hose in his hand, and gulped, then accepted the two C-notes Yetsko gave him. They left a couple of Literates' guards with the vehicles, and Ray led the way to the fire escape, and down into the alley. A few hundred feet away, there was an iron grating which they pulled up. Ray drew the pistol he had gotten out of Captain Prestonby's arms locker and checked the magazine, chamber, and safety, knowing that Yetsko and the other guards were watching him critically, and then started climbing down the ladder.

The conduit was halfway down. Yetsko, climbing behind him, examined it with his flashlight, probably wondering how he was going to fit himself into a hole like that. They climbed down onto the concrete walkway beside the conveyor belts, and in the dim light of the overhead lamps Ray could see that the two broad belts, to and from the store, were empty for as far as he could see in either direction. Normally, there should be things moving constantly in both directions—big wire baskets full of parcels for delivery, and trash containers, going out, and bales and crates and cases of merchandise, and empty delivery baskets and trash containers coming in. He pointed this out to Yetsko.

"Sure," the big Literates' guards sergeant nodded. "They got control of the opening from the terminal, and they probably got a gang up at the other end, too," he shouted,

over the noise of the conveyor belts. "I hope they haven't got into the basement of the store."

"If they have, I know a way to get in," Ray told him. "You'd better stay here for about five minutes, and let me scout ahead. We don't want to run into a big gang of them ahead."

Yetsko shook his head. "No, Ray; the captain told me I was to stick with you. I'll go along with you. And we better take another of these kids, for a runner, in case we have to send word back."

"Ramon, you come with us," Ray said. "The rest of you, stay here for five minutes, and then, if you don't hear from us, follow us."

"Mason, you take over," Yetsko told the guards corporal. "And keep an eye out behind you. We're in a sandwich, here; they're behind us, and in front of us. If anything comes at you from behind, send the kids forward to the next conduit port."

Ray and Yetsko and Ramon Nogales started forward. Halfway to the next conduit port, there was a smear of lubricating oil on the concrete, and in it, and away from it in the direction of the store, they found footprints. It was Ramon Nogales who noticed the oil on the ladder to the next conduit port.

"You stick here," Yetsko told him, "and when Mason and the others come up, hold them here. Tell Mason to send one of the guards forward, and use the rest of the gang to grab anybody who comes out. Come on, Ray."

At the port beyond, they halted, waiting for Mason's man to come up. They lost some time, thereafter, but they learned that the section of conduit between the two ports was empty and that the main telephone line to the store had been cut. Whoever had cut it had gone, either forward or back away

from the store. A little farther on, the sound of shots ahead became audible over the clanking and rattling of the conveyor belts.

"Well, I guess this is where we start crawling," Yetsko said. "Your father's people seem to be holding the store basement against a gang in the conveyor tunnel."

One of the boys scouted ahead, and returned to report that they could reach the next conduit port, but that the section of both conveyor belts ahead of him was stopped, apparently wedged.

Yetsko stood for a moment, grimacing in an effort to reach a decision.

"I'd like to just go forward and hit them from behind," he said. "But I don't know how many of them there are, and we'd have to be careful, shooting into them, that we didn't shoot up your father's gang, beyond them. I wish—"

"Well, let's go through the conduit, then," Ray said. "We can slide down a branch conduit that runs a power line into the basement. I'll go ahead; everybody at the store knows me, and they don't know you. They might shoot you before they found out you were a friend."

Before Yetsko could object, he started up the ladder, Yetsko behind him and the others following. At the next conduit port, they could hear shooting very plainly, seeming to be in front of them. At the next one, the shooting seemed to be going on directly under them, in the tunnel. With the flashlight Yetsko had passed forward to him, Ray could see that the dust on the concrete floor of the three-foot by three-foot passage between and under the power and telephone cables was undisturbed.

A little farther on, there was an opening on the left, and a power cable branched off downward, at a sharp angle, overhead. Ray was able to turn about and get his feet in front of him; Yetsko had to crawl on until he had passed

it, and then back into it after Ray had entered. Bracing one foot on either side, Ray inched his way down the forty-degree slope, hoping that the two hundred pound weight of Doug Yetsko wouldn't start sliding upon him.

Ahead, he could hear voices. He drew his hands and feet away from the sides of the branch conduit and let himself slip, landing in a heap in the electricians' shop, above the furnace rooms. Two men, who had been working at a bench, trying to assemble a mass of equipment into a radio, whirled, snatching weapons. Ray knew both of them—Sam Jacobowitz and George Nyman, who serviced the store's communications equipment. They both stared at him, swearing in amazement.

"All right, Doug!" Ray called out. "We're in! Bring the gang down!"

Frank Cardon and Ralph Prestonby were waiting at the freight-elevator door when it opened and Russell Latterman emerged, a rifle slung over one shoulder. Cardon stepped forward and took the rifle from him.

"Come on over here, Russ," he said. "And don't do anything reckless."

They led him to one side. Latterman looked from one to the other apprehensively, licking his lips.

"It's all right; we're not going to hurt you, Russ," Cardon assured him. "We just want a few facts. Beside rigging this business with Bayne, and almost killing Chet Pelton, and forcing Claire to blow her cover, how much did you have to do with this business?"

"And who put you up to it?" Prestonby wanted to know. "My guess is Joyner and Graves. Am I right?"

"Graves," Latterman said. "Joyner didn't have anything to do with it; didn't know anything about it. He's in charge of the Retail Merchandising section, and any action like this

would be unethical, since Pelton's is a client of the Retail Merchandising section. All Graves told me to do was fix up a situation, using my own judgment, that would provoke a Literate strike and force either Claire or Frank here to betray Literacy. But I had no idea that it would involve a riot like this. If I had, I'd have stood on Literates' ethics and refused to have any part in it."

"That's about how I thought it would be," Cardon nodded. "Graves probably was informed by Literates with the Independent-Conservatives that this riot was planned; he wanted to get our people out of the store. Unfortunately for him, he wasn't present at the extemporary meeting that reversed Bayne's action in calling the strike." He handed the rifle back to Latterman. "I just took this in case you might get excited, before I could explain. And you can forget about the Graves-Joyner opposition to Pelton. We had a meeting, right after noon. Lancedale gained the upper hand; Joyner and Graves are co-operating, now; the plan is to support Pelton and get on the inside of the socialized Literacy program, when it's enacted."

"I still think that's a suicidal policy," Latterman said. "But not as suicidal as splitting the Fraternities and trying to follow two policies simultaneously. I wonder if I could put a call through to Literates' Hall without some of these picture-readers overhearing me."

"You've been out of touch, down in the cellar, Russ," Prestonby told him. "Our telephone line's cut, and the radio is smashed." He told Latterman about the rocket attack on the control tower, which also housed the store's telecast station. "So we're sandwiched, here; one gang has us blocked at the twelfth floor, and another gang's up on the roof, trying to get down at us from above, and we've no way to communicate with the outside. We can pick up the regular telecasts, but nobody outside seems to be paying much attention to us."

"There's a lot of equipment down in the electricians' shop," Latterman said. "Maybe we could rig up a sending set that could contact one of the telecast stations outside."

"That's an idea," Prestonby said. "Let's see what we can do about it."

They went into Pelton's office. The store owner was still lying motionless on his stretcher. Claire was fiddling with a telecast receiving set; she had just tuned out a lecture on Home Beautification and had gotten the mid-section of a serial in which three couples were somewhat confused over just who was married to whom.

"Nobody seems to realize what's happening to us!" she said, turning the knob again. Then she froze, as Elliot C. Mongery —this time sponsored by Parc, the Miracle Cleanser—appeared on the screen.

". . . And it seems that the attack on Chester Pelton has picked up new complications; somebody seems determined to wipe out the whole Pelton family, because, only ten minutes ago, some twenty armed men invaded the Mineola High School, where Pelton's fifteen-year-old son, Raymond, is a student, and forced their way to the office of Literate First Class Ralph N. Prestonby, in an attempt to kidnap young Pelton. Neither Literate Prestonby, the principal, nor the Pelton boy, who was supposed to be in his office, could be found. The raiders were put to flight by the presence of mind of Literate Martha B. Collins, who pressed the button which turned in the fire alarm, filling the halls with a mob of students. The interlopers fled in panic after being set upon and almost mobbed—"

Prestonby looked worried. "I left Ray in my office, with Doug Yetsko," he said. "I can't understand—"

"Maybe Yetsko got a tip that they were coming and got Ray out of the school," Cardon suggested. "I hope he took

him home." He caught himself just in time to avoid mentioning the platoon of Literates' guards at the Pelton home, which he was not supposed to know about. "Don't worry, Claire; if anything'd happened to Ray, Mongery'd have been screaming about it to high heaven. That's what he's paid to do."

"Well, I'll stake my life on it; if anybody tried to do anything to Ray while Yetsko was with him, you'd have heard about it," Prestonby said. "It'd have been a bigger battle than this one."

". . . Can't seem to find out anything about what's going on at Pelton's store," Mongery continued. "Telephone and radio communication seems to be broken, and, although there is continuous firing going on inside the building, the city police, who have a cordon completely around it, say that the situation in the store is well in hand. Considering Chester Pelton's attacks on the city administration and particularly the police department, I leave to your imagination what they mean by that. We do know that a large body of unidentified plug-uglies who Police Inspector Cassidy claims are 'special officers' are holding the conveyor line into the store at the downtown Manhattan terminal, and nobody seems to know what's going on at the other end—"

"They have the sections of both belts at the store entrance end wedged," Latterman said, coming up at the moment. "Coccozello has a barricade thrown up across the store end of the tunnel, and they have a barricade about fifty yards down the tunnel. That's where I was fighting when you called me up."

"Anything being done about goldberging up a radio sending-set?" Prestonby asked.

"Yes. I just called Coccozello," Latterman said. "Fortunately, the interdepartment telephone is still working. He's

put a couple of men to work, and thinks he may have a set in operation in about half an hour."

". . . And if, as I much fear, Chester Pelton has been murdered, then I advise all listening to me to go to the polls tomorrow and vote the straight Anarchist ticket. If we've got to have anarchy in this country, let's have anarchy for all, and not just for Grant Hamilton and his political adherents!" Mongery was saying.

There was a series of heavy explosions on the floor above. Everybody grabbed weapons and hurried outside, crowding onto the escalators. The floor above was a shambles, with bodies lying about, and the descending escalator was packed with white-robed attackers, who had apparently prepared for their charge by tossing down a number of heavy fragmentation bombs. Cardon had a burp gun, this time; he emptied the fifty-shot magazine into the hooded hoodlums who were coming down. Prestonby, beside him, had a heavy sono gun; he kept it trained on the head of the escalator and held the trigger back until it was empty, then slapped in a fresh clip of the small blank cartridges which produced the sound waves that were amplified and altered to stunning vibrations. Still, many of the attackers got through. More were dropping down the lift-platform shaft. Cardon's submachinegun ceased firing, the action open on an empty clip. He dropped it and yanked the heavy pistol from his shoulder holster. Then, from the direction of the freight elevator, reinforcements arrived, headed by a huge man in the black leather of the Literates' guard, who swung a three-foot length of fire hose with his right hand and fired a pistol with his left, and a boy in a black-and-red jacket who was letting off a burp gun in deliberate, parsimonious bursts. It was a second or two before Cardon recognized them as Prestonby's bodyguard, Doug Yetsko, and Claire Pelton's brother Ray. There were four

Literates' guards and about a dozen boys with them, all firing with a variety of weapons.

At the same time, others were arriving on the escalators from the floors below, firing as they came off—Slater's Literates' guards, the Literates and their black-jacketed troopers of Hopkinson's store service crew, the fifteen survivors of the twenty riflemen from Macy & Gimbel's. The attackers turned and crowded onto the ascending escalator. Most of them got away, the casualties being carried up by the escalator. Doug Yetsko bounded forward and brought his fire hose down on the back of one invader's neck. Then, after a last spatter of upward-aimed shots from the defenders, there was silence.

Cardon stepped forward and yanked the hood from the man whom Yetsko had knocked down, hoping that he had a stunned prisoner who could be interrogated. The man was dead, however, with a broken neck. For a moment, Cardon looked down at the heavy, brutal features of Joe West, the Illiterates' Organization man. If Chester Pelton got out of this mess alive and won the election tomorrow, there was going to have to be a purge in the Radical-Socialist party, and something was going to have to be done about the Consolidated Organization of Illiterates. He turned to Yetsko.

"You and your gang got here just in the nick of time," he said. "How did you get into the store?"

"Through the freight conveyor, into the basement."

"But I thought those goons had both ends of that plugged."

"They did," Yetsko grinned. "But Ray Pelton took us in at the middle, and we crawled through a cable conduit to get around the gang at this end."

Cardon looked around quickly, in search of Ray. The boy, having come out of the excitement of battle, was looking around at the litter of dead and wounded on the blood-splashed floor. His eyes widened, and he gulped. Then,

carefully setting the safety of his burp gun and slinging it, he went over and leaned against the wall, and was sick.

Prestonby, with Claire Pelton beside him, started toward the white-faced, retching boy. Yetsko put out a hamlike hand to stop them.

"If the kid wants to be sick, let him be sick," he said. "He's got a right to. I was sicker'n that, after my first fight. But he won't do that the next time."

"There isn't going to be any next time!" Claire declared, with maternal protectiveness.

"That's what you think, Miss Claire," Yetsko told her. "That boy's gonna make a great storm trooper," he declared. "Every bit as great as Captain Prestonby, here."

Claire looked up at Prestonby almost worshipfully. "And I never knew anything about your being a fighting-man, till today," she said. "Ralph, there's so much about you that I don't know."

"There'll be plenty of time to find out, now, honey," he told her.

Cardon stepped over the body of Joe West and went up to them.

"Sorry to intrude on you two," he said, "but we've got to figure on how to get out of here. Could we get out the same way you got in?" he asked Yetsko. "And take Mr. Pelton with us?"

Yetsko frowned. "Part of the way, we gotta crawl through this conduit; it's only about a yard square. And we'd have to go up a ladder, and out a manhole, to get out of the conveyor tunnel. What sorta shape's Mr. Pelton in?"

"He's under hypnotaine, completely unconscious," Prestonby said.

"Then we'd have to drag him," Yetsko said. "Strap him up

in a tarp, or load him into a sleeping bag, if we can get hold of one—"

"There are plenty, down in the warehouse," Latterman interrupted, joining them. "And the warehouse is in our hands."

"All right," Cardon decided. "We'll take him out, now, and take him home. I have some men there who'll take care of him. We'll have to get you and Ray out, too," he told Claire. "I think we'll take both of you to Literates' Hall; you'll be absolutely safe there."

"But the store," Claire started to object. "And all these people who came here to help us—"

"As soon as I have your father home, I'm going to start rounding up a gang to raise the siege," Cardon said. "Radical-Socialist storm troops, and—" He grinned suddenly. "The insurance company; the one that has the store insured against riot! Why didn't I think of them before? They're losing money every second this thing goes on. It'll be worth their while to start doing something to stop it!"

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIP out through the conduit was not so difficult, even with the encumbrance of the unconscious Chester Pelton, but Prestonby was convinced that, except for the giant strength of Doug Yetsko, it would have been nearly impossible. Ray Pelton, recovered from his after-battle nausea and steeled by responsibility, went first. Cardon crawled after him, fol-

lowed by a couple of the boys. Then came Yetsko, dragging the sleeping bag in which Chester Pelton was packed like a mummy. Prestonby himself followed, pushing on his future father-in-law's feet, and Claire crawled behind, with the rest of Ray's schoolmates for a rearguard.

They got past the battle which was still going on at the entrance to the store basement, letting Pelton down with a rope and carrying him onto the outward-bound belt. They left it in time to assemble under the ladder leading to the alley through which Ray said they had entered, and hauled Pelton up after them. Then, when they were all out in the open again, Ray ran up the alley and mounted a fire escape, and, in a few minutes, a big 'copter truck which had been parked on the roof let down to them. Into this, Cardon ordered the unconscious senatorial candidate loaded, and the boys who had come with Ray.

"I'll take him home, and then run the boys to the school," he told Prestonby. "You and Ray and Claire get in this other 'copter and go straight to Literates' Hall." He pointed up to the passenger vehicle which was hovering above, waiting for the truck to leave. "Go in the church way, and go straight to Lancedale's office. And here." He scribbled an address and a phone number and a couple of names. "These men have my 'copter at this address. Call them as soon as you get to Literates' Hall and have them take it at once to Pelton's home, on Long Island."

Prestonby nodded and watched Cardon climb into the truck. The Literates' guard who was driving lifted it up and began windmilling away toward the east. The passenger 'copter, driven by another guard from the school, settled down. Putting Ray and Claire into it, he climbed in after them.

"Ray," he said, "how would you like to be a real white-smock Literate?"

Ray's eyes opened. "You think I'm good enough?"

"Good enough to be a novice, to start with. And I don't think you'll stay a novice long."

Claire looked at him inquiringly, saying nothing.

"You, too, honey," he said. "Frank fixed it all up. You and Ray will be admitted to the Fraternities, this afternoon. And that will remove any objection to our being married."

"But . . . how about the Senator?" she asked.

Prestonby shrugged. "It's all over the state now that you can read; there's nothing that you can do about it. And Frank has a lot of influence with him; he'll talk him around to where he'll be willing to make the best of it, in a week or so."

Russell Latterman noticed that Major Slater was looking at him in a respectfully inquiring manner. He said nothing, and, at length, the Literates' guards officer broke the silence.

"You didn't go out with the others."

Latterman shook his head. "No, major; I'm an executive of Pelton's Purchasers' Paradise, however unlike its name it may look at the moment. My job's here. I'm afraid I'll have to lean pretty heavily on you, until Mr. Cardon can get help to us. I'm not particularly used to combat."

"You've been doing all right with that rifle," Slater told him.

"I can hit what I aim at, yes. But I'm not used to commanding men in combat, and I'm not much of a tactician."

Slater thrust out his hand impulsively. "I took a sort of poor view of you, at first. I'm sorry," he said. "Want me to take command?"

"If you please, major."

"What are you going to do, after this thing's over?" Slater asked.

"Stay on with Pelton's, provided Mr. P. doesn't find out

that I organized that trick with his medicine and the safe," Latterman said. "Since Lancedale seems to have gotten on top at the Hall, I am, as of now, a Lancedale partisan. That's partly opportunism, and it's partly because since a single policy has been adopted, I feel obliged to go along with it. I'll have to get the store back in operation, as soon as possible. Pelton's going to need money, badly, if he's going to try for the presidency in '42." He looked around him. "You know, I've always wanted to run a fire sale; this'll be even better—a battle sale!"

Cardon watched Chester Pelton apprehensively as the bald-headed merchant and senatorial candidate sipped from the tall glass in his hand and then set it on the table beside him. His face was pale, and he had the look of a man who has just been hit with a blackjack.

"That's an awful load of bricks to dump on a man, all at once, Frank," he said reproachfully.

"You'd rather I told you, now, than turn on the TV and hear some commentator talking about it, wouldn't you?" Cardon asked.

Pelton swore vilely, in a lifeless monotone, cursing Literacy, and all Literates back to the invention of the alphabet. Then he stopped short.

"No, Frank, I don't mean that, either. My own son and daughter are Literates; I can't say that about them. But how long—?"

"Oh, for about a year, I'd say. I understand, now, that they were admitted to the Fraternities six months ago," he invented.

"And they were working against me, all that time?" Pelton demanded.

Cardon shook his head. "No, Chet; they were for you, all the way. Your daughter exposed her Literacy to save your

life. Your son and his teacher came to your store and fought for you. But there are Literates who want to see you defeated, and they're the ones who made that audio-visual, secretly, of the ceremony in which your son and daughter took the Literates' Oath and received the white smock, and they're going to telecast it this evening at twenty-one hundred. Coming on top of the stories that have been going around all afternoon, and Slade Gardner's speech, this morning, they think that'll be enough to defeat you."

"Well, don't you?" Pelton gloomed. "My own kids, Literates!" He seemed to have reached a point at which he was actually getting a masochistic pleasure out of turning the dagger in his wounds. "Who'd trust me, after this?"

"No, Chet; it isn't enough to beat you—if you just throw away that crying towel and start fighting. They made one mistake that's going to wreck them."

"What's that, Frank?" Pelton brightened, by about one angstrom unit.

"The timing, of course!" Cardon told him, impatiently. "I thought you'd see that, at once. This telecast comes on at twenty-one hundred. Your final speech comes on at twenty-one thirty. As soon as they've shown this business of Claire and Ray taking the Literate Oath, you'll be on the air, yourself, and if you put on any kind of a show worth the name, it won't be safe for anybody in this state to be caught wearing a white smock. Now, if they'd only had the wit to wait till after you'd delivered that speech you've been practicing on for the last two weeks, and then spring this on you, that would have been different. They'd have had you over a barrel. But this way, you have them!"

Pelton took another gulp from the tall glass at his elbow, emptying it. "Fix me up another of these, Frank," he said. "I feel like a new man, already." Then his face clouded again.

"But we have no time to prepare a speech, now, and I just can't ad lib one."

Cardon drew a little half-inch record-disk from his pocket case.

"Play this off," he said. "I had it fixed up, as soon as I got wise to what was going to happen. The voice is one of the girls in my office, over at the brewery. Pronunciation, grammar, elocution and everything correct."

Pelton snapped the disk onto his recorder and put in the ear plug. Then, before he pressed the stud, he looked at Cardon curiously.

"How'd you get onto this, anyhow, Frank?" he wanted to know.

"Well . . . I hope you don't ask me for an accounting of all the money I've been spending in this campaign, because some of the items would look as funny as hell, but—"

"No accounting, Frank. After all, you spent as much of your own money as you did of mine," Pelton interrupted.

". . . But I bought myself a pipe line into Literates' Hall big enough to chase an elephant through," Cardon went on, ignoring the interruption. "This fellow Mongery, for instance." Elliot Mongery was one of Literate Frank Cardon's best friends; he comforted his conscience with the knowledge that Mongery would slander him just as unscrupulously, if the interests of the Lancedale Plan were at stake. "I have Mongery just like this." He made a clutching and lifting gesture, as though he were picking up some small animal by the scruff of the neck. "So, as soon as I got word of it, I started getting this thing together. It isn't the kind of a job a Literate semanticist would do, but it's all honest Illiterate thinking, in Illiterate language. Turn it on, and tell me what you think of it."

While Pelton listened to the record, Cardon mixed him another of the highballs, adding a little of the heart-stimu-

lant the medic had given him. Pelton was grinning savagely when he turned off the little machine and took out the ear plug.

"Great stuff, Frank! And I won't have to ham it much; it's just about the way I feel." He thought for a moment. "You have me talking about my ruined store, there. Just how bad is it, anyhow?"

"Pretty bad, Chet. Latterman says its going to take some time to get it fixed up, but he expects to be open for business by Thursday or Friday. He's going to put on a big Battle Sale; he says it's going to make retail-merchandising history. And the insurance covers most of the damage."

"Well, tell me about it. How did you get the riot stopped, after you got me out? And how did you—?"

Cardon shook his head. "You play that record over again; get yourself in the mood. When you go on, we'll have you in a chair, wrapped in a blanket . . . you're supposed to have crawled back out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death to make this speech . . . and we'll have the wire run down inside the blanket, so that you can listen to the speech while you're giving it. Chet, this is going to be one of the great political speeches of all time—"

Literate William R. Lancedale looked up from his desk and greeted his visitor with a smile.

"Well, Frank! Sit down and accept congratulations! I suppose you got the returns?"

Cardon nodded, dropping into a chair beside the desk. "Just came from campaign headquarters. This automatic tally system they use on the voting machines is really something. Complete returns tabulated and reported for the whole state within forty minutes after the polls closed. I won't be silly enough to ask you if you got the returns."

"I deserved that, of course," Lancedale chuckled. "Can

I offer you refreshment? A nice big stein of Cardon's Black Bottle, for instance?"

Cardon shuddered and grimaced horribly. "I've been drinking that slop by the bucketful, all day. And Pelton's throwing a victory party, tonight, and I'll have to choke down another half gallon of it. Give me a cup of coffee, and one of those good cigars of yours."

Lancedale grinned at him. "Ah, yes, the jolly brewer. His own best advertisement. How's Pelton reacting to his triumph? And what's his attitude toward his children? I've been worrying about that; vestigial traces of a conscience, I suppose."

"Well, I had to keep him steamed up, till after he went off the air," Cardon said. "Chet isn't a very good actor. But after that, I talked to him like a Dutch uncle. Told him what a swell pair of kids and a fine son-in-law he had. He got sore at me. Tried to throw me out of the house, a couple of times. I was afraid he was going to have another of those attacks. But by the time Ralph and Claire get back from their honeymoon and Ray finishes that cram-course for Literate prep school, he'll be ready to confer the paternal blessing all around. I'm going to stay in town and make sure of it, and then I'm taking about a month's vacation."

"You've earned it, all right." Lancedale poured Cardon's coffee and passed him the cigar humidor. "How's Pelton's attitude toward the Consolidated Illiterates' Organization now?"

Cardon, having picked up the Italian stiletto to puncture his cigar, looked at it carefully to make sure that it really had no edge, and then drew it quickly across his throat.

"Just like that. You know what really happened, yesterday afternoon, at the store, don't you?"

"Well, in general, yes. I wish you'd fill me in on some of the details, though, Frank."

"Details he wants. Well." Cardon blew on his coffee and sipped it. "The way we played it for propaganda purposes, of course, there was only one big riot, and it was all the work of the wicked Literates and their Independent-Conservative hirelings. Actually, there were two riots. First, there was one the Independents had planned for about a week in advance; that was the one Sforza tipped us on, the one that started in China. Graves knew about it, enough to advise Latterman to get all the Literates out of the store before noon, which Latterman did, with trimmings.

"Then, there was another riot, masterminded by a couple of Illiterates' Organization Action Committee people named Joe West and Horace Yingling, both deceased. That was the result of Latterman's bright idea to trap Claire and/or me into betraying Literacy. These Illiterate fanatics made up their minds, to speak rather loosely, that the whole Pelton family were Literates, including Chet himself. They decided that it was better to kill off their candidate and use him for a martyr two years from now than to elect him and have him sell them out. They got about a hundred or so of their goons dressed in Independent-Conservative KKK costumes, bought air support from Patsy Callazo's mob, up in Vermont, and made that attack on the top landing stage, after starting a fake riot in North Jersey, to draw off the regular Radical-Socialist storm troops. Incidentally, when I found out it was Callazo's gang that furnished those fighter bombers, I hired another mob to go up and drop a block-buster on Callazo's field, to teach him to keep his schnozzle out of politics."

Lancedale nodded briskly. "That I approve of. How about West and Yingling?"

"Prestonby's muscle man, Yetsko, killed West. I took care of Comrade Yingling, myself, after I'd gotten reinforcements

to the store—first a couple of free-lance storm troops that the insurance company hired, and then as many of the Radical Rangers as I could gather up."

"And Pelton knows about all this?"

"He certainly does! After this caper, the Illiterates' Organization's through, as far as any consideration or patronage from the Radicals is concerned."

"Well, that's pretty nearly the best thing I've heard out of the whole business," Lancedale said. "In about eight or ten years, we may want to pull the Independent-Conservative party together again, to cash in on public dissatisfaction with Pelton's socialized Literacy program, which ought to be coming apart at the seams by then. And if we have the Illiterates split into two hostile factions—"

Cardon finished his coffee. "Well, chief, I've got to be getting along. O'Reilly can only cover me for a short while, and I have to be getting to this victory party of Pelton's—"

Lancedale, rose and shook hands with him. "I can't tell you, too many times, what a fine job you did, Frank," he said. "I hope . . . no, knowing you, I'm positive . . . that you'll be able to engineer a reconciliation between Pelton and his son and daughter and young Prestonby. And then, have yourself a good vacation."

"I mean to. I'm going deer hunting, to a place up in the mountains, along the old Pennsylvania-New York state line. A little community of about a thousand people, where everybody, men, women and children, can read."

Lancedale was interested. "A community of Literates?"

Cardon shook his head. "Not Literates-with-a-big-L; just people who can read and write," he replied. "It's a kind of back-eddy sort of place, and I imagine, a couple of hundred years ago, the community was too poor to support one of these 'progressive' school systems that made Illiterates out of the people in the cities. Probably couldn't raise enough

money in school taxes to buy all the expensive audio-visual equipment, so they had to use old-fashioned textbooks, and teach the children to read from them. They have radios, and TV, of course, but they also have a little daily paper, and they have a community library."

Lancedale was thoughtful, for a moment. "You know, Frank, there must be quite a few little enclaves of lower-case-literacy like that, in backwoods and mountain communities, especially in the west and the south. I'm going to make a project of finding such communities, helping them, and getting recruits from them. They'll fit into the Plan. Well, I'll be seeing you some time tomorrow, I suppose?"

He watched Cardon go out, and then poured a glass of port for himself and sipped slowly, holding the glass to the light and watching the ruby glow it cast on the desk top. It had been over thirty years ago, when he had been old Jules de Chambord's assistant, that the Plan had been first conceived. De Chambord was dead these twenty years, and he had taken the old man's place, and they had only made the first step. Things would move faster, now, but he would still die before the Plan was completed, and Frank Cardon, whom he had marked as his successor, would be an old man, and somebody like young Ray Pelton would be ready to replace him, but the Plan would go on, until everybody would be literate, not Literate, and illiteracy, not Illiteracy, would be a mark of social stigma, and most people would live their whole lives without personal acquaintance with an illiterate.

There were a few years, yet, to prepare for the next step. The white smocks would have to go; Literates would have to sacrifice their paltry titles and distinctions. There would have to be a re-constitution of the Fraternities. Wilton Joyner and Harvey Graves and the other Conservative Literates would have to be convinced, emotionally as well as intellec-

tually, of the need for change. There were a few of the old brothers who could never adjust their thinking; they would have to be promoted to positions with higher salaries and more impressive titles and no authority whatever.

But that was all a matter of tactics; the younger men, like Frank Cardon and Elliot Mongery and Ralph Prestonby, could take care of that. Certain changes would occur: A stable and peaceful order of society, for one thing. A rule of law, and the liquidation of these goon gangs and storm troops and private armies. If a beginning at that were made tomorrow, using the battle at Pelton's store to mobilize public opinion, it would still take two decades to get anything really significant done. And a renaissance of technological and scientific progress— Today the manufacturers changed the 'copter models twice a year—and, except for altering the shape of a few chromium-plated excrescences or changing the contours slightly, they were the same 'copters that had been buzzing over the country at the time of the Third World War. Every month, the pharmaceutical companies announced a new wonder drug—and if it wasn't sulfa, it was penicillin, and if it wasn't penicillin it would be aureomycin. Why, most of the scientific research was being carried on by a few Literates in the basements of a few libraries, re-discovering the science of two centuries ago.

He sighed, and finished his port, and, as he did probably once every six months, he re-filled the glass. He'd be seventy-two next birthday. Maybe he'd live long enough to see—

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