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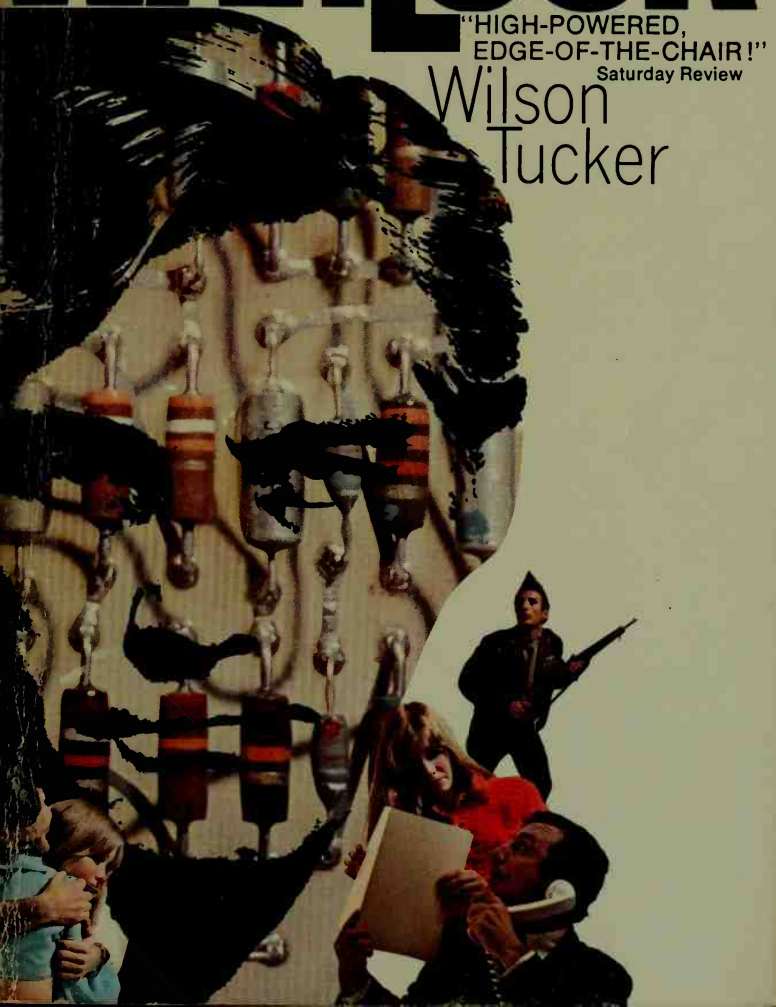
# THE WARLOCK

"HIGH-POWERED, EDGE-OF-THE-CHAIR!"
Saturday Review

Wilson Tucker



# OVER THE EDGE

Anson Bolda is on his way out. Discredited as a C.I.A. agent, Bolda is confined to the United States until his case has been resolved.

In the meantime, strange forces are pushing him toward a mysterious civilian assignment where one agent has already died fulfilling the orders of his bizarre employer.

What is the extraordinary role that he alone has been chosen to play in the deadliest spy drama in the world?

# THE WARLOCK

Wilson Tucker

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*For Robert and Wanda*

*All of the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

# 1

There was that familiar first question again: *How did it feel when you came over?*

It was the same inane question he had been asked many times before, the repetitious opening remark, and he had learned to answer it with a ready frankness. The second question was the painful one. Sooner or later that second harassing question would be asked, but it was a question that couldn't be answered so readily, so easily.

*How did it feel when you came over?*

Anson Bolda answered with civility.

"When I walked across the Glienicke Bridge, I knew I'd be allowed to live. The world became a little more secure. I walked out of the country of sudden death—a bullet in the back of the head, a poison slipped into my morning meal—and back into the land of the living. It was good to breathe again. I walked across that bridge, said hello to some American officer standing there, and knew I would live long enough to hunt down the man who sold me. I wanted to shout."

"The papers made it mysterious," the aged man said. "The hour before dawn, fog, shadow shapes, all that."

"All that was hogwash; it was daylight, and snowing."

Anson Bolda sat stiffly in his chair in the old man's darkened apartment, remembering that scene. His fingers were laced together but his hands moved restlessly in his lap, betraying his distaste of the bittersweet recollection. The civil enemies who had gathered on the bridge were as cold as the German skies overhead; they were at war with one another, had been at war for two decades or more, and would continue to war until one of them was beaten down.

Bolda was returned alive to the land of the living.

Three taciturn Russians had accompanied him on the

flight from Moscow; they had transferred him to a closed car for the drive across town, and then marched with him out to the line painted across the middle of the Glienicke Bridge—the bridge from Potsdam in the Eastern Zone, to West Berlin. He had been handcuffed until just before the car reached the bridge. Two of the Russians beside him were military men, but the third was his particular enemy, a KGB agent. All of them, including himself, were clad in the customary fur hats, greatcoats, and heavy trousers.

The Russians advanced to the newly painted white line and stopped, holding him there while they stared impassively across the bridge. The wind was chill and the sky overcast, effectively hiding a December sun. The bridge area was silent and deceptively lifeless.

Two Americans in civilian clothes awaited them on their side of the line. A third man, a captive who was not an American, huddled miserably between them and shivered in the winter morning. Bolda looked curiously at his opposite number and wondered what *he* had been doing, how *he* had been found out? The man was short, with a pronounced stoop and a sallow, sickly skin; he might have been a Syrian or a Lebanese. Bolda was annoyed with the fellow for not showing a better face; no one should go home looking like a whipped dog, despite having been caught and jailed.

One of the Americans stepped forward to the edge of the line and peered closely at Anson Bolda, seeking firm recognition.

Bolda said, "Hello, Stuffy, you're a long way from home. Want a pair of Russian boots?"

Stuffy nodded with satisfaction. "Glad to see you again, Anse. Your wife is waiting at the Consulate."

"What wife? I'm not married. Sign the papers or whatever you're supposed to do, Stuffy, and let's get the hell out of here. I'm hungry."

The KGB agent said quickly, "He was fed."

"Fish!" Bolda retorted. "You and your damned fish! I'm talking about eggs, apples, red meat."

The second American civilian broke in. "Are you certain this man is Anson Bolda?" He seemed nervous.

"No question about it," Stuffy answered with high good humor. "He's always hungry."

"Then get on, get on. Finalize the exchange."

The miserable shivering third party standing between the two Americans was propelled gently forward, and Stuffy crooked a beckoning finger at Bolda. His captors moved away, leaving him free. Bolda stepped across the white line and gulped in a great, wide-mouthed breath. He enjoyed the quick fantasy of an invisible, invulnerable shield rising from his shoulders to protect the back of his head from that vengeful bullet. He was free again—he felt like shouting, jumping, turning to spit at the hostile faces.

The KGB man stared sourly at the American's prisoner and asked in his own tongue, "Are you ready?"

The prisoner nodded and replied in kind. "I am ready, Comrade. I want to serve." He shuffled across the dividing line. Neither of the Americans understood more than the single, familiar word, and Bolda did not comment on the chilly dialogue. The exchange was complete.

A light snow began to fall.

Without further word or gesture the two companies wheeled in frigid unison and marched off the bridge into their respective territories. An American Army officer waited beside a car at the foot of the bridge, and farther away two West German policemen loitered in the street, pretending a disinterest in the scene.

Bolda felt so good he called out, "Hello, Captain!"

Stuffy nudged him in warning. "Don't talk."

The incomer was taken for another ride across the city —this time in a Detroit colossus—and to another airport where another plane was waiting, but this second flight was sharply different from the journey from Moscow, although his companions were as uncommunicative as the earlier Russians. The plane crew stared at him curiously, almost morbidly, and Bolda stared back with a happy impudence—they could spit on his shadow for all he cared, he was going home. After two years behind the curtain, including eleven months of confinement in Lubyanka Prison, he was going home. The *MATS* plane was flying him to Washington, and Stuffy would return him to the Agency.

The memory of the bridge crossing had never faded.

Now, in the early summer of the following year, the memory was as bright and bitter as if the event had occurred only last week, instead of last year. The approach of warm weather underscored the acrid images.

Bolda shifted uncomfortably in his chair and gazed across an ornate coffee table at the incredibly ancient man who lived in the shaded apartment. He felt ill at ease in his surroundings, distrusted the dimly lighted rooms, and was rather annoyed at the perfumed cigarettes the old one was smoking. Bolda was beginning to have second thoughts about the interview and the possibility of his employment with this man; the interview was not going well —and that second key question was still to come.

"The man who *sold* you? Explain that."

"I was sold—deliberately blown," Anson Bolda said bluntly. "I don't know the seller and I don't know the price. I expect to find out."

"Someone here sold you to them? You mean that?"

"I mean that."

"You've had a year."

"It could take a lifetime."

"Would you spend that much?"

"I would. I will."

"Tenacity."

Bolda shook his head. "Plain stubbornness. I can forgive anything but a double cross. I don't like the idea of somebody giving my life away."

Another irritating silence. The old man lived in silences. Bolda squirmed in the chair and waited him out.

The old man stubbed out the butt and fitted a new cigarette into his long feminine holder, sucking on it to test the draw; he had smoked three or four cigarettes in less than a half hour, taking them from a beautifully carved box on the coffee table. Seemingly satisfied with the draw, the old fellow fumbled on the table for a lighter and flipped it into flame. He carefully guided the lighter along the length of the holder until his index finger told him he had reached the firing end of the cigarette, and applied the flame. Bolda thought he was exasperatingly slow about it,

and then wrinkled his nose as the perfumed smoke reached his nostrils. He wondered quickly if the old one was blind? Blindness could explain his mannerisms.

"Why think that?"

Bolda's fingers tightened in his lap. The old man was still probing.

"We were found too easily—too surely. It wasn't a search, it was a meeting. The KGB agents who found us called us by name: they knew who we were, what we were doing, the time of day we could be found doing it. They knew where to find my equipment; they knew what that equipment was doing; they knew where the signal was going and what was receiving it. They *knew*."

"Radio?"

Bolda nodded. "Radio telemetry. I'm a specialist."

"They knew it all?"

"The KGB knew my name, my age, my Stateside address, my birthplace, my mother; they knew my life history and my mission even before they grilled me. I was held in a Moscow prison."

"Lubyanka," the old man supplied.

"I didn't say that."

"The *Dispatch* did. You were in the *Dispatch*. You earned notoriety."

"It isn't every day that one blown agent is swapped for another," Bolda retorted.

His elderly host smoked half the length of the perfumed cigarette before he spoke again.

"You said *us*."

"They found two of us. I had a partner in the operation, a sleeper who'd lived there for some time. The KGB agents shot him with a needle gun when he turned around to look, when he put his hand in his pocket. The needle went through his right eye." A brief, reflective silence. "The sleeper had a wife and a couple of kids. They're probably in a labor camp now."

"You had luck."

"Luck, hell. I said they knew me." Bolda winced at the near miss; that was almost the second key question. "I was an American and they wanted me alive until they'd used me. They didn't give a damn for the sleeper—he was a na-

tive, a Pole, a traitor in their eyes, but they wanted a live American to display in Moscow. And they did that."

"But you're Polish."

"Not anymore. I'm an American now; I was a prize."

"You couldn't know all that. Not then."

"I didn't know it then, but I had eleven months to think about it. They got the sleeper first because they met him first—he was climbing ahead of me, and then they came after me. I thought they would kill me, but I didn't make the same mistake, I didn't reach for a gun. I ran—I played the thief. I stole a briefcase from a man on the docks, an Englishman, and tried to get away."

"Foolhardy."

"Planning," Bolda contradicted him. "He was one of my escape routes. I had several, against the day they would be needed. The Englishman was from Reuters, a reporter, a pink-cheeked little dandy with a mustache and a pretty necktie, so I grabbed his case and ran. I misjudged my capture point by less than ten feet. The Englishman and the KGB caught me at the same time. There was little chance of being shot just then, not after the Englishman learned my identity and my reason for being there. He spread the news around, robbed Moscow of their surprise."

The painful silence fell on them again.

The old one across the table seemed to have lost interest; he had taken the exhausted cigarette from its holder and stubbed it out in a glass ashtray. His feeble, wandering fingers touched a bottle of brandy and played with it for a moment before moving on to the inevitable cigarette box. The earlier ritual was repeated, and Bolda decided he was blind.

The woman sitting behind him said, "That was a most fortunate coincidence, Mr. Bolda."

He turned quickly to stare over his shoulder.

The woman had been there for as long as he'd been in the apartment, but until now she had kept silent. Bolda wondered if the aged man had passed her a signal. She sat behind him, between him and the door, making it impossible for him to watch her unless he deliberately turned around. The woman had let him into the dim apartment

when he rang, indicated a chair beside the coffee table, and then sat down when he did to allow the old fellow to conduct the interview.

"I don't trust my life to coincidences."

"Your Englishman was conveniently there."

"He was working there; he belonged there."

"On the Polish docks?"

"The English are not at war with the Soviet; not the way we are."

"Nevertheless, he was handy to you."

"I knew about that Englishman from the day of my arrival on the docks; I knew he was a reporter and that the docks were a part of his beat; I knew the contacts he'd made among the dock officials. He arrived every day at a certain hour and stayed a certain length of time, he saw a certain number of officials. I timed my work so that it was performed at the same hour he was there. I *said* he was an escape route—I planned to use him if it became necessary. It did."

"You were working on the docks in Gdansk." It was a statement, not a question.

"I didn't say that."

"Your friend the Englishman did."

The woman's voice sounded tired, as if she had been working too many years at hard labor. He could not judge her accurately in the poor light of the room, but she was not old: perhaps no more than thirty or thirty-five. When she admitted him at the door there seemed to be curious gray shadows in her hair, and the dim light betrayed tired, coarse skin on her cheeks. Her eyes appeared black and lusterless. Bolda wondered if the blind old man had worn her down.

She asked next, "What kind of radio work were you doing on the Gdansk docks?"

"I can't tell you that. I'm still under oath and penalty."

Sharply, "You said you had quit the Intelligence Agency. Your letter of recommendation indicated you were no longer employed there."

Bolda held his patience. "That's right—I quit, but I am still under oath and penalty. I will be for the rest of my life. I won't tell you anything about my work with the

Agency and I certainly won't tell you anything significant about what happened on the docks."

"You won't discuss your mission?"

"No."

"The newspapers have revealed much of it."

"Then you don't need to ask me anything."

"But suppose this prospective employment involves discussing your past work? A part of your work?"

"We can stop right now. I've lost the job."

"An admirable loyalty," the woman said cuttingly. "And yet you are convinced that you were betrayed."

"I know I was sold," Bolda replied with dogged determination. "The KGB knew everything about me, about us; they knew too much. Our dossiers were handed over to them. Somebody deliberately traded us, in return for something else; somebody on this side told them where we were and what we were doing and how we were doing it. The KGB didn't smash my equipment, they dismantled it and shipped it off to Moscow to study—to copy. They're using copies against us now. I've had proof of that." His voice was hard and angry and the hands in his lap had become fists. "I was *sold*. I won't forgive somebody for that. I want to find him, find what I was traded for. I want to know that."

"And if you find him?"

Bolda stared at the woman as though she were a simpleton. "Not 'if,' *when*."

"*When* you find him?"

"I'll kill him," he said flatly.

The silence returned.

Bolda listened hard, trying to hear a sound like a typewriter anywhere in the apartment, a heavy typewriter driven at a rapid rate. It would be behind one of those closed doors.

# 2

He was born Ansòni Boldakov in the Lwow basin in Poland, either thirty-five or thirty-six years earlier; he had known the precise year up until his teens, but the knowledge slipped away in later years.

He was born in the shade of a dilapidated wagon as his mother lay in a wheat field, several miles below the city of Lwow. His parents were migrant farmers who followed the crops from spring until autumn, and that morning his mother had gone to the fields as usual, fearing the loss of a day's work and a day's wages; the peasants were poorer than the soil they worked, and a missed day was a cruel loss. Another woman attended his mother for an hour and then went back to her rough labor of shocking wheat.

Ansoni, because the overseer's given name was that, and his mother sought to show appreciation; in an unusual display of sympathy the overseer had allowed his mother the birth in the shade, and then allowed the two of them to ride in the back of the wagon the rest of the day. The field hands noted that and whispered.

Despite the mounting losses, he and his mother stayed another two days in the tent they called home, then returned to the field because his father grumbled. His mother resumed her work as if nothing had happened. The overseer permitted the baby to ride in the back of the wagon, now covered with a bed of straw, and called his mother whenever the baby's hungry cries failed to reach her. The whispers around them grew louder, bolder.

The men grinned at one another behind his father's back and guessed they knew the reason for his given name, the reason for the preferential treatment—all the while ignoring the fact that his parents had spent the previous winter in some nameless village on the Ukraine border, not knowing the overseer until they drifted north with

the maturing grain in the summer. But the wives and daughters in the field did not bother their heads with such idle fancy—they *knew* the reason, they said.

The Boldakov woman was a witch.

She lived in a better tent than any of the others, the overseer had assigned her a tent which was newer and did not leak; she had a greater accumulation of pots and pans and spoons than any two families; she had an extra blanket even before the baby was born, and she had a clean small shirt for the infant and did not have to take clothing from her own back to cover his nakedness. Her milk was not sour, nor was there any lack of it; the baby thrived in the back of the jouncing wagon, where another child might have been sickly or puny. The baby did not cry much, demanding only a little of her time. She had lost less than three days' work, where another woman might have been absent a week; her strength was unimpaired and she continued to match her husband's labor. The two of them had found work in the early spring and had been steadily employed since then; there'd been no need to sit around in public places waiting for work to find them. Better fortune was always with them.

But the most damning whisper of all was that one told by the woman who had attended his mother during birth: his mother had a large, blue-black splotch on her belly, a mark not unlike a cross hung upside down.

The Boldakov woman was a witch.

She had used her black powers to gain the better shelter for her family, the larger accumulation of utensils, the blanket and the clothing, the sweet milk to nurse a healthy baby, the retained strength, the long employment. She had cast a secret spell on the overseer, to gain sympathy and accommodation and favored treatment for the baby and herself. She hoodwinked and magicked the overseer by her dark powers.

She had come up from the Ukraine.

Witches had lived in the Ukraine for two thousand years or more, lived and practiced there the black arts designed to enhance themselves and bedevil their enemies. Someone of the field wives had known a witch in her own childhood, a gnarled old woman who lived in a smelly

cave and sold charms and potions to the men of the village to enable them to conquer the hearts and bodies of the village girls; but in the end the charms had proved worthless while the potions had sickened and poisoned the girls, raising great ugly sores on their arms and legs and private parts. The enraged villagers had besieged the witch, hurling fire, knives, and stones into the darkened cave to kill her and avenge themselves, but when it was over they found only the carcass of a wild pig. The witch had fled the pig's body and returned to safety in the Ukraine.

The Boldakov woman was a witch. Witches spawned warlocks, and if her husband was not a warlock—the poor man seemed innocent enough—the infant would be.

Ansoni had no brothers or sisters.

The family stayed together until the first week of September 1939, drifting back and forth across much of Poland and parts of the Ukraine, moving slowly wherever the crops took them.

During that first week of September his father heard the news that the German army had invaded Poland, and that the Polish cavalry was fighting back—fighting the invading steel tanks with little more than side arms and sabers and the fevered blood of the horses beneath them. The cavalry was losing. His father abruptly deserted the family, whether to fight or to hide no one knew; Ansoni never saw his father again.

He was seven years old—or perhaps eight—when the German army overran Poland, and scarcely three weeks later a Russian army did the same from another direction. The two victorious powers carved up the country to their liking, and the Lwow basin was made a part of the Ukraine; the boy and his mother suddenly found themselves Soviet citizens because they happened to be working south of the city near the old border. He had already been in the fields for two years, doing as much as he was able, and his mother cautioned him to keep quiet and continue working: she said that armies tended to leave farmers alone when they stayed out of the way, needing the crops and the cattle they would later buy or seize. Ansoni once watched a battle in the near distance, puzzling over which

side was which, but his mother's words were true: they were not molested and they did not stop work.

He did not understand the incongruity of the two dissimilar groups scarcely a mile apart, the one cutting oats and the other taking life. Each went about its own task with little more than a passing glance at the other.

During the severe winter of 1950, when he was eighteen —or nineteen—years old, Ansoni left his mother contentedly huddling in one of the rural villages and crossed over into Poland, seeking something other than enforced idleness; he carried a cheap cardboard suitcase and a blanket rolled up on his back, and he was without papers, but it didn't seem to matter: the borders between Soviet-oriented states were poorly guarded and sometimes ill defined—he was one of a number of wandering men. There was nothing for him in Poland, in the winter, and he drifted on into Germany where there was still less.

Near Brement he found the United States Army, an army which appeared incredibly wealthy, and he found a label that was utterly new to him: he was classified as a displaced person and placed in a loosely guarded compound where he was fed and housed in a manner he'd never before known; it seemed sheer luxury, and he regretted that he had left his mother behind in poorer surroundings.

After several weeks in the compound the sergeant who was in charge of his barracks separated the inmates into two groups, and moved his group to a different building. Ansoni noted that the group consisted of the younger, stronger men and the oldest boys.

In the new building the sergeant and a handful of officers went about the job of separating the individuals into nationality groups and offering induction into the army. Again the lack of formal papers seemed no handicap; none of the men in the compound had possessed papers. The sergeant said something in a language Ansoni didn't understand, but several of his companions raised their hands and were herded into a small group at one side of the room. Next, an officer who spoke a faulty Polish asked everyone who understood what he said to raise their hands, and Ansoni obeyed. While he was being moved

away from the larger group, another officer gave the same order but this time in a barely recognizable Russian dialect. Ansoni stopped and again raised his hand. The two officers turned to stare at him with surprise. He was separated from the rest of the men and taken to a desk, where both officers fired questions at him in their imperfect second tongues. The men seemed pleased with what they had discovered.

Another officer appeared, obviously a man of higher rank and one who had a better grasp of Russian; this new man was quick, suspicious, and given to harsh questions which demanded fast answers with no time to think through those answers. Ansoni nearly lost his temper with the inquisitor, nearly invited him to leap into a nasty Polish pit and take his affluent army with him.

At the end of the day he was persuaded to join the incredibly rich United States Army, and one of the junior officers underscored that personal judgment by giving him two or three bills in Occupation currency plus a silver half dollar in American coin. The officer completed a number of papers that were the beginning of his dossier, and shortened his name to Anson Bolda. The papers contained everything about himself that he could remember and what his mother had told him—everything except a mention of witchcraft. Prudently Anson Bolda omitted the malicious gossip aimed at his mother and himself; the Americans would only misunderstand.

Bolda was frightened numb by the Atlantic Ocean, and seasick during the whole voyage to the United States.

Because of his knowledge of the two languages he was assigned to a military intelligence unit at Fort Bragg, and spent the following six years at that station gaining the equivalent of an American high school education. He also gained American citizenship after five years' residence. Radio engineering came easily because he was fascinated by the marvel; he elected to specialize in radio, and was building receiving sets before he thoroughly understood theory and principle.

When Anson Bolda was twenty-four years old—he may have been twenty-five—the army loaned him to the Na-

tional Security Agency, headquartered at Fort Meade, Maryland, in response to a call for electronics specialists who could speak a foreign language The NSA served as the worldwide ears of the combined American intelligence units, operating air, sea, and ground auditing stations in a ring around the curtained countries, and was then undergoing an expansion program. Bolda never saw his new headquarters until many years later; the Agency promptly shipped him to a listening post at Incirlik, a military air base near Adana, Turkey. His job was to listen to the Soviet magpies.

The next five years were spent at Incirlik, surrounded by a remarkable array of radio, radar, and recording equipment designed for just one purpose: listening to military communications inside Russia. Bolda followed the conversations and the gossip of Russian military commanders in the field, overheard their orders to junior officers and troops engaged in maneuvers, listened to the exchanges between Russian pilots flying as far north as the Middle Volga, caught the excited chatter of radar crews as they tracked unfriendly planes penetrating Soviet skies, and listened to the frenzied anti-aircraft guns crews as they maneuvered to place those planes in their gunsights. The huge, black, secretive aircraft designated U-2 were stationed at Incirlik, and Bolda recorded the wild, angry commands and recriminations whenever one of those black ships overflew Soviet territory en route to Finland or Great Britain. He listened, recorded, interpreted, and sometimes joined in the distant laughter following a joke told on one Russian by another. The NSA post at Incirlik was an enormous microphone aimed at Russian military life.

A part of its usefulness was lost when one of the great black planes went down inside enemy territory.

After five years overseas, Anson Bolda was returned to headquarters at Fort Meade and introduced to his new boss, a chubby, small-statured Scotsman named MacGough. The man was dressed in civilian clothes and Wellington boots.

"People around here call me Stuffy," he said with

cheery humor. "I'm hard to get along with. You're from the Ukraine, aren't you?"

Bolda said, "Yes, sir."

"You traveled a bit in Poland?"

"Yes, sir."

"Want to go back there?"

"No, sir."

"Good, good, that's just where you're going."

Bolda forgot himself and said, "Oh, hell."

"That's the spirit," Stuffy exclaimed, and slapped him on the back. "You made one mistake, young fellow—no, you made two of them, come to think of it. You allowed yourself to be born over there, and you joined the army. Remember that next time."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, what's this claptrap about your mother being a witch?"

Bolda's mouth dropped open.

Stuffy said, "You never told us about that, mister." He seemed to be laughing at Bolda. "Holding back, mister?"

Bolda was too confused to answer.

Stuffy MacGough laughed aloud, pleased at his trick. He put a chair behind Bolda's legs and pushed him into it.

"All right, young fellow, I'll do the talking for you. You withheld that kernel of information—if it *can* be called information—because twentieth-century Americans don't believe in witches and warlocks and ghosties, because sophisticated Americans put little stock in Old Country superstitions, because modern Americans say it's claptrap. I'm a modern American and I just said it was claptrap." He sat down and put out his feet to admire his boots for a moment. "If you had told *that* to the chucklehead who interrogated you in Brement, he'd have laughed you right out of the room."

Bolda found his tongue. "Yes, sir."

"Well, so. Somebody over there picked up that bit of claptrap later on; somebody passed the word to us. It *is* claptrap, isn't it?"

Bolda swallowed and failed to answer.

Stuffy peered at him. "Are you superstitious?"

"Not much," Bolda told him truthfully.

"Not much?" A pause. "But *some?*"

"Some," Bolda admitted.

Stuffy examined his boots, looked at his visitor's shoes and then up into his face. "The old notions die hard, eh?"

Bolda didn't think that called for an answer.

"I know all about witches and warlocks," Stuffy said fatuously. "I read about them in a book, one book, and that makes me an authority." His self-mockery was evident. "I read the book after I found out about you, after I saw that note in your dossier. I was looking for a man to put into Poland, a radio specialist. I had a choice of four or five men, but I picked you after I found that note."

Bolda felt he had to say something. "I'm pretty good at radio."

"You're going to get better," Stuffy promised. "The people down in the lab have something good going for them, something hot, something new the likes of which you've never seen." Another pause. "You were at Incirlik when the U-2 spook went to pieces, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir. I was tracking the man who fell."

"Well, so. The people in the lab have something to replace that spook. Old U-2 is obsolete, and *that* should make some people happy." He was laughing again. "Do you know what a Nark is?"

Bolda shook his head.

"Not up on English or American jargon? Slang?"

"I don't know that one."

"A Nark is a stool pigeon, a tattletale." Another admiring glance at his boots. "The people in the lab are building Narks."

"Yes, sir. And you want me to put one in Poland."

"Oh, my, no!" Stuffy broke into a raucous laughter that startled his visitor. "Oh, good lord, no! I want you to put a transmitter in Poland."

"But where will those Narks be?"

Still bubbling with laughter, the man whipped his arm over his head and described a wild, wide arc through the air. "Zoom, zoom, zoom!" He peered at Bolda to see if he was understood.

Bolda didn't understand.

"Orbiting the earth, you naïve idiot! Narks are satellites,

little old tin and plastic things about the size of a beer barrel. You *do* know what a beer barrel is, don't you? Well, so. The people in the lab are going to pack four or five Narks into an Atlas rocket, and then four or five *more* Narks in another rocket, and shoot them all up into the sky. They will be fired from that base out in California, the base that puts things in polar orbit—eight or ten tattling little Narks orbiting the earth every ninety minutes. Maybe it's ninety-five minutes. Isn't that remarkable?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why aren't you excited?"

"I'll have to think about it, sir."

Stuffy said, "Oh, fudge!"

Narks were simple listening and recording machines, operating on two wavelengths in duplicate of one another because the American military mind habitually built two of everything to protect the investment if one of the units failed. The machines were fitted into satellites, and the satellites were designed to orbit the earth three hundred miles up, moving in a north-south path around the globe every ninety-five minutes. As each satellite passed over a concealed transmitter, twin electrical impulses triggered that transmitter into action and caused it to broadcast any information stored within it; twin microphones picked up the broadcast and recorded it on twin spools of magnetic tape. Half an orbit later, as the satellite passed over California, a signal from a ground station activated the tapes, and the previously recorded information was released to the NSA listening post.

The concealed transmitters were built in similar dual fashion, storing on tapes whatever sounds their twin microphones overheard and releasing those sounds when ordered to do so by the approaching satellite overhead. The transmitter would operate only upon the proper signal, while the Narks would listen only to a transmitter lying in wait for it. Narks were the stepchildren of the earlier spy-in-the-sky satellites, Samos and Midas. Where Samos photographed the earth beneath it, and Midas watched for heat patterns from rising missiles, Nark listened to the conversations of anyone within range of the transmitter's

microphones. The conversations would be repeated over California some forty minutes later.

"Suppose," Stuffy said jovially, "just suppose, mind you, that we planted a transmitter in the Kremlin. Right there in the private room where old Boris liked to talk to himself. Suppose old Boris caught cold and sneezed. In forty, maybe forty-five minutes, our man in California would hear that sneeze and know old Boris would be hard to get along with for a week or so. Think of that."

"Boris who?" Bolda asked.

Stuffy peered at him with suspicion.

"You're just the man to go into Poland," he said abruptly.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm not going to rag you anymore about that witch and warlock claptrap."

"No, sir."

"But I reserve the right to *not* run with the modern American herd."

A puzzled frown. "What does that mean?"

"It means that I have the right to put a little bit of faith —no, *belief,* into your superstitions. If I want to, mind you. I can believe you are a warlock if I want to."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't believe it for a minute, I have a modern American mind and I'm reasonably well educated. I say it's claptrap." He inspected his boots for a time and then fixed Bolda with a direct stare. "But if I *want* to believe it at some time in the future, I have a right to."

"Yes, sir."

"My book said warlocks were—ah, unkillable."

Bolda shook his head. "That's news to me."

A gesture: "What, then?"

"They're pretty damned hard to kill. You take aim at one and the gun will probably backfire in your face." Bolda knew a small embarrassment. "That's what I've heard."

"Well, so." Stuffy nodded his satisfaction. "Do you begin to see why I picked you? Over those others?"

"Yes, sir. When do I leave?"

"Oh, my, not for a while yet. The lab people haven't got

their new toys *out* of the lab yet. Bugs and things, you know. It may be another year, maybe two." The high humor returned. "You're going down there to work with them, you're going to help them build the transmitters. That's important. You'll have to know how to repair them, service them, everything. The lab people will deliver the stool pigeons, and those Buck Rogers people out there in California will put them in orbit, but the Polish transmitter will be *your* responsibility. Do it right."

"Yes, sir. Where do you want it put?"

Stuffy MacGough turned brisk and businesslike. "I want it planted in Gdansk, a port on the Baltic Sea. There's quite a bit of shipping moving through that port."

"Where in Gdansk?"

"The Harbormaster's office would be nice."

Anson Bolda stared at his new boss for a long time. Finally he said, "I guess you want to hear him sneeze."

Stuffy exploded with pleased laughter. "Anse, I'll buy you a drink!"

"I'd rather have something to eat."

# 3

Anson Bolda planted his transmitter in a tiny crawl space above the Harbormaster's office. He almost fell through the thin ceiling into the office.

Carrying false papers and a dirty blanket roll, wearing rough clothing similar to that worn in his youth, Bolda walked through the Brandenburg Gate into East Berlin and turned southward on a circuitous journey that would take him deep into the Polish grain belt. When he crossed over the border into Poland he did two things to perfect his cover. Burning his false papers, he resumed his true name and identity, Ansoni Boldakov of near Lwow. That done, he joined a straggle of migrant farmers and began drifting with the crops, following the harvest north toward the Baltic Sea. It required nearly a year, but he considered it well spent; he was browned, lean, and rough of hand and skin, indistinguishable from any other man working beside him in the fields.

His only anxiety was the fear of a chance meeting with his mother. The agency had discovered she was still alive and living in a village beyond Sokal; no one could know if she would return to the fields this summer, or if so, whether she would work in Poland or the Ukraine. Bolda was cautioned not to attempt to visit her, whatever his desires, for a meeting could well place her in greater jeopardy than himself. He worked and stayed with the men, keeping away from the women, and keeping back from the fires they built at night to cook their suppers and warm their blankets. A number of older women were following the crops that year, but Bolda never approached any of them close enough to make an identification.

To the best of his knowledge, he and his mother did not cross paths.

Sometimes at night he would study the stars in the sky

and wonder if the Narks were up there, patiently orbiting the earth awaiting the transmitter he would put together and plant in Gdansk. They were supposed to be rocketed up on some unknown date in the summer. Not all of them were waiting for him, of course; other men and other transmitters were being secreted up and down Europe in a broad path roughly parallel to the planned orbits, transmitters designed to listen in a dozen cities or bases from the Arctic to the Indian oceans. He didn't know those other men or their destinations; they didn't know him and his. That was standard operating procedure in all the agencies clustered about Washington. Any man caught behind the lines could not possibly reveal any other man or transmitter site; he knew only his own destination. Bolda watched Venus set each night as the evening star, watched Saturn rise as the morning star. He wished his eyesight was sharp enough to see the tiny Narks in their orbit—if they *were* in orbit.

In the late autumn, work was so scarce there were days when the field hands were dismissed at noon, and on rainy days there was no work at all. Bolda drifted away from the thinning camps and walked to the outskirts of Gdansk, seeking his sleeper.

The sleeper was a man who had lived in or near Gdansk all his life and was currently employed on the docks, an ordinary, a commonplace man, a discontented Pole who had been on some Washington agency payroll for many years against the time he could be used. Sleepers did nothing in return, short of the day they would be needed. They were held in reserve for some one particular job and were not permitted other, smaller jobs for fear of premature discovery; they were paid only enough to ensure their prolonged sleep. Too little pay would cause them to drift away and reveal themselves to the authorities; too much pay would bring suspicious authorities down on them because they foolishly lived beyond their incomes. Someone unknown to Bolda had visited the city sometime before him and found the exact formula to keep the sleeper satisfied, asleep, and waiting. It was possible there were a number of sleepers in Gdansk, but only one of them would be alerted to his coming—would be sup-

plied with bits and pieces of the transmitter Bolda would put together.

Bolda knew only the name and address of his sleeper, and the name of the contact who was the sleeper's next in command. The contact was a minor Party functionary who worked in an office near the Harbormaster. He was not to be approached unless Bolda's sleeper failed him.

Bolda went to the docks and applied for work as a cleaner. He told the hiring officer frankly that he was just in from the fields, he wanted a job for the winter, and he expected to return to the fields in the spring. He said he knew nothing about janitor work, but he would learn. He got the job, and in the following week he revealed himself to his sleeper—who was the supervisor of the cleaning gang.

The sleeper looked at him carefully, half afraid of a trap, only half believing it was ture.

"You got something for me?"

Bolda said, "No. But you have something for me. Several small pieces of a black plastic machine. There will be several spools of tape."

"A machine?"

"It was delivered to you one piece at a time over the past several months. I don't know how it reached you and I don't want to know. Every piece of it had my mark on it, like this—" Bolda sketched a design in the dust and then wiped it away. "Look for my marks on it."

"You're going to make it work?"

"I'm going to put it together and make it work."

"What will the machine do?"

"I won't tell you that."

A quick shadow crossed the sleeper's face. "It won't blow up? It's not a bomb?"

"It won't blow up," Bolda said emphatically. "It isn't a weapon."

A long reflective silence while the fear faded away. "Want me to tell—tell my contact you're here?"

"Tell him. He can come to me if he thinks it safe. I won't go to him."

An understanding nod. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Bring all the pieces of the machine to me, a bit at a

time. Bring me a screwdriver and pliers, a pocket knife, black tape, and some matches. Put me on the gang cleaning the Harbormaster's office. Other than that, stay away from me."

"The Harbormaster—"

"Does he sneeze much?" Bolda asked solicitously.

The sleeper showed him a narrow service corridor running along the south side of the building, and Bolda used a borrowed ladder to climb through a trap door into a cramped crawl space above the offices. Electrical wiring snaked over the joists, feeding current into each room. Assembling the transmitter in a single night, Bolda placed it in a corner of the attic above the Harbormaster's office and then spliced into a hot wire serving that same office to secure an uninterrupted power supply. Two microphones were planted below the thin ceiling. The first went into a dusty light fixture suspended from the ceiling while the second was secreted in a wall near a bank of telephones, telephones strung along a workbench overlooking the harbor.

Despite the admonition to stay away from him, the sleeper was always nearby, watching Bolda and his machine with growing fascination. After the machine was completed and powered, the sleeper guessed its function and fell into the habit of studying the ships in the harbor, trying to determine which one of them was receiving the radio signals. Bolda did nothing to disillusion him.

The daily arrival of an Englishman, a reporter from the Reuters news agency, interested him and he set up a watch on the man. Bolda suspected the reporter was really an agent of British Intelligence.

To lessen the chances of discovery, Bolda followed a random pattern of service calls on the transmitter, sometimes climbing the ladder at night and sometimes in the afternoon when the Englishman was in the building. No more than one or two men would be working in the office at night and he was forced to move over the joists with a catlike stealth to avoid being heard; by day the office was more crowded and considerably noisier, but there was also the increased possibility that someone would come into the rear service corridor and find him climbing up or down.

He soon found that the transmitter was operating faultlessly and there was nothing for him to do when he visited it; accordingly, he cut down his calls to no more than one or two a week.

Bolda hoped the Narks were up, and orbiting. He'd heard nothing from Fort Meade since the day he left, and of course there was no local news of their presence. It would be frustrating to learn that the California people had failed to orbit them after all the time and trouble he had spent on the transmitter.

Once, and only once, he noticed a worker from an adjoining office looking at him as he moved about his cleaning tasks. Bolda guessed that man was the contact, but he gave no sign of recognition and went on with his work.

The KGB tripped him in February of the next year, and the sleeper lost his life because of a whim.

The Soviet agents may have lain in wait a considerable time, not knowing which day or night would mark his next visit to the transmitter. Bolda was clearing away snow from the front entranceway when the Englishman brushed past him and mounted the stairs to the Harbormaster's office on the second floor. As the reporter gained the upper hallway and stopped to chat with someone standing there, Bolda put away his snow shovel and went around to the south side of the building and the outside stairway which led up to the service corridor. By chance, the sleeper was there ahead of him bent on another errand and Bolda fell in behind, deferring to their outward relationship of supervisor and hired hand. They reached the top of the steps and entered the narrow corridor.

The sleeper paused, considered him, and decided on the spur of the moment to postpone his errand. He went to a closet and removed a ladder he'd placed there earlier for Bolda's use. The man put the ladder in place and climbed up, pushing aside the trap door that allowed entrance to the attic. A KGB face stared down at him.

Dumbfounded, the sleeper made a strangled noise and put his hand in his pocket. He carried no weapon. Bolda was already running as the sleeper fell to the floor. He ignored the shout behind him.

Bolda ran half the length of the corridor, twisted

around a corner, and darted through a narrow service door that opened onto the main hallway. The shout was repeated behind him, and then a curious bumping noise. Bolda kept going. The Englishman turned to stare at the commotion. He was standing about where Bolda expected him to be, still in conversation with the first or second official he met there every day on his beat. Bolda shot past him without pause, tearing the briefcase from his hand and crying *"Yankee!"* The startled official fell back in alarm. KGB agents erupted from every nearby office to give chase.

Bolda expected to be stopped at the head of the front stairway, but the men behind him were a bit slower than he realized: the Englishman and the lead agent caught him together on the fourth or fifth step down.

"Come on, fellow!" the Englishman sputtered and cried. "What *is* going on here?"

Bolda answered him in his own tongue. "What the hell does it look like, buster?"

Lubyanka Prison was a dirty, dreary, chillingly cold place where a prisoner might easily freeze to death when the outside temperature dropped to zero. Heat was limited to quarters housing the prison officials, and to the few privileged inmates able to buy favors. Bolda wore boots and heavy clothing for protection, supplied him by someone from the American Embassy who came calling when Moscow finally acknowledged his presence there.

The man from the Embassy also gave him dated copies of the London *Times* and the Washington *Post*. The Englishman from Reuters had treated his capture and exposure as a spectacular news event, and of the two papers, the *Post* made the more of it. Bolda looked at an old photograph of himself and read the lengthy list of crimes charged against him by the Polish and Russian governments. He was unmasked as a turncoat, a former citizen of the Ukraine who'd sold out to the imperialist warmongers for the cheap price of American citizenship and a few hundred dollars a month; he had been engaged in spying on the Soviet people for a number of years and was last connected with the shameful U-2 incident originating in

Turkey; the spy had sneaked through the Gate in East Berlin and had traveled northward to the sea posing as a farm hand; when discovered, he was operating a radio transmitter in a little-used warehouse on the Gdansk docks, supplying stolen secrets to certain foreign ships lying at anchor in the harbor. His equipment had been seized intact before he had the chance to blow it up and the identity of his confederate, a minor official in a so-called neutral consulate, was known. His trial would be a public affair.

The first nagging suspicion overcame him.

The news story ran on for two columns and was concluded on an inside page, accompanied by other stories having some degree of relationship. Two Congressmen were demanding a thorough investigation of the CIA. The CIA denied all knowledge of Ansoni Boldakov and said he was not one of their employees. A rabble rouser in Illinois demanded that the United States send troops into Moscow to free him. The Lockheed Aircraft Corporation denied he had ever flown for them, U-2 or any other craft, and said he'd never been on their payrolls in any capacity. The White House said it would not have a statement. A biting editorial deplored American bungling.

Bolda dismissed the newspapers but wondered how the KGB had found out so much in so little time. Immediately after his arrest they knew his birthplace, his long service at Incirlik, and the method he'd used to reach Gdansk. It followed that they knew much more about him than they had revealed thus far.

He learned from a jailer one day that he was alive only because the agent hiding in the attic had suffered an accident. The man had thrust the upper part of his body halfway through the ceiling hole to fire at him, but had slipped and fallen to the floor. The corpse broke his fall.

For many weeks, Bolda's only visitors were the man from the American Embassy and a continuing stream of Soviet interrogators. He said little to the first because he suspected hidden microphones, and nothing to the latter.

They broke his silence in March.

In routine manner, Bolda was taken to one of the heated rooms used for interrogation and placed behind a

table. He was left alone. A short while later his mother was led in wearing handcuffs, and seated across the table from him. The jailers disappeared.

Bolda stared at his mother with a sharp mixture of pleasure and astonishment, and quickly put a finger to his lips —he was convinced now the room was bugged. The old woman nodded her understanding of some manner of eavesdropping, and they did nothing but look across the table at each other. Bolda was pleased with the way she had weathered the passing years: her face was lined and brown with sun as it had always been, but the skin was neither sagging nor diseased; her eyes were as black and as bright as he remembered them, but now they held the same expression they had worn the day his father walked away from camp. Despite the harsh surroundings, there was the ghost of an affectionate smile on her lips—it was as much as she ever smiled. Her hands were hard when she stretched them across the table to him and she pretended not to hear the metallic jingle of the cuffs, but the fingers curling over his own were the same strong fingers that lifted him into the overseer's wagon, that cut and shocked grain without faltering. She had grown older but she hadn't changed. She retained her strength and her outlook on life. Bolda read the sympathy and encouragement in her manner, read the love in the silent bond between them. He bitterly regretted having brought her to this.

The handcuffs were the warning.

His mother would do nothing to save herself if she thought that would help him, free him; she would suffer to the limit of her endurance and then quietly die, if a quiet death was permitted. But he knew, if she did not, that her death would do nothing for him; her suffering would be useless and empty. The KGB cared no more for her than any other peasant, and if her travail did not loosen his tongue another means would be found. He had time to wonder dully if her name and village had been a last-minute addition to his dossier.

The jailers allowed them less than half an hour, disappointed because no word had passed between them. He put a parting pressure on her hands to reassure her and

then she was pulled away from the table. Unexpectedly then, each of them broke their silence as she was taken out.

Bolda whispered, "Goodby, Mama."

The aged woman turned quickly and looked at him with a fondness not seen since he was very small. She said, "Don't cry, warlock."

He sat alone for a long while.

The sound of an opened door brought his head up and around, pushing aside the bittersweet thoughts of his mother's enforced visit. The man responsible for the handcuffs was here. The new visitor was an agent he had not seen before, but Bolda recognized his rank and authority at once; this man was the Soviet equivalent, or better, of that other inquisitor who had made him miserable in Brement. The face was as cold as a wintry blast, and the demeanor behind the face was several degrees lower.

The KGB agent placed a bulky package on the table and sat down where his mother had been sitting. The man opened a cigarette case, took the time to select and light one, then deliberately blew the smoke in his face. He toyed with the case for a moment before putting it away.

"I will not offer you one," the agent said abruptly. "You do not smoke." His English was shaded.

Bolda acknowledged that with a nod; the small fact was included in his dossier.

"You had a pleasant meeting with your mother?"

"Pleasant enough."

"But you didn't have much to say?"

"Not in words."

"When did you see her last?"

"About twelve, fourteen years ago."

"When will you see her again?"

Bolda knew better than to attempt an answer.

The KGB man stared through him. "I hope you will not be one of these pig-headed heroes."

A shrug. "It all depends."

Sharply: "On what?"

"On what's in it for me."

"What does that—ah, I understand what you mean. You are begging for something."

"I'm looking for an escape route."

A cold stare. "I understand. Yes, I understand. Perhaps you do not want to be a hero. Perhaps there is a little intelligence in that peasant head. You are ready to make a full confession?"

"In return for what?"

"In return for nothing, unless I choose to give you something!" A flash of anger burned in the cold eyes. "I will not bargain with you!"

"You said you wanted a confession."

"And I will have it, one way if not another."

Bolda nodded. "That's right, you will. I know that. But whether you get a good one or a bad one depends on things. How do you want it to sound in court?"

The anger cooled quickly. "Tell me the confession."

"I can't." Bolda spread his hands. "I'm not sure of the words. You'll have to tell me first."

The words came tumbling out in an eager torrent.

"You will make a factual confession. Factual. You will speak as if the words are coming from your heart, your conscience. You will sound convincing. You will be sorry for the crime you have committed against your homeland. You are guilty as charged, but you will beg the court to show mercy." The agent paused to grind out his cigarette, then offered an aside. "You will stand before three judges, a woman and two men. Address yourself to the woman."

"Okay. What next?"

"Following your tour of duty at Incirlik, you were returned to the United States and instructed to prepare yourself for another thrust at the Soviet people. You were trained at a radio school supported by the CIA; you were taught how to build and operate the special transmitter needed for the mission; you were instructed to destroy the machine rather than allow it to fall into other hands. Unfortunately, you did not destroy it. You were so surprised and confused by your quick capture that you failed to follow instructions. The transmitter is intact.

"You were smuggled into East Berlin in the guise of a field worker, knowing they would not suspect you because

they are simple, honest folk. In that guise you made your way to Gdansk. The dismantled transmitter was secreted on your body, strapped to your arms and legs. You were careful never to undress in sight of the other workers, for fear of discovery. It was uncomfortable, but you were fired with mistaken patriotism."

"You forgot my blanket roll," Bolda inserted.

"What about your blanket roll?"

"It was a double blanket. I carried the fragile parts inside, sewed between the two halves."

"Where is that blanket now?"

"I burned it; after I put the transmitter in the attic above the Harbormaster's office."

The angry fire returned. "You did not reach the Harbormaster's office! You could not possibly penetrate a restricted area such as that! You were captured in an unused warehouse on the docks. Factual!"

"Sorry. I keep forgetting. I burned the blanket in the warehouse and threw the ashes into the harbor."

"Were you ordered to do that?"

"No—the disposal was left up to me." Bolda looked at his inquisitor. "Was I ordered to do that?"

"You were."

"Okay."

"You bribed a Polish worker to admit you to the warehouse, and then threatened him with his life if he did not obey your every order. He lived in fear of you; he aided you in every way because he was frightened."

"He was scared, all right." Bolda looked curiously at the KGB agent. "Whatever happened to the guy?"

"He also confessed after you and your transmitter were seized in the warehouse. He will appear at the trial to give witness."

"He will?" Bolda was astonished. "I'll be damned!"

"Following his confession and after losing his fear of you, he surrendered two hundred American dollars you had given him as a bribe. Those dollars will be offered at the trial. You will acknowledge them as yours."

Bolda shook his head. "Watch out for the story there."

"What do you mean?"

"The payoff was a diamond ring. A decent jewelry shop

might pay five hundred for it, but I don't suppose the guy got more than two and a half—maybe three—on the black market. That ring might turn up."

The agent considered his statement, turning over the possibilities. "No," he said at last. "The dollars will be shown in court."

"Okay."

"We will repeat your story day after day until it is perfected, until you have memorized it. Small details may be added for further authenticity. You will perform as if speaking from the heart, but you will repeat the confession as I have outlined it. You will not wander."

"I haven't much choice. What about that other confederate?"

"What other?"

"The ribbon clerk in the neutral consulate?"

"I have said nothing of a clerk in a consulate."

"But I thought— Well, what the hell, you're calling the shots. Are you going to tell me about the ship in the harbor? I had to transmit to somebody."

The KGB agent inspected Bolda's rugged face and seemed faintly amused.

"You were transmitting to a sputnik called Nark."

# 4

Anson Bolda's first excited thought was, *they're up!* The second thought, following hard on the first, was *sellout.* He could think of no other method by which the KGB had learned so much about him; they had his dossier, and that dossier must have been updated to the day of his leaving Fort Meade. He'd left more than a year ago. Sometime recently—within the past month or so—he'd been blown.

The agent demanded, "What is the meaning of *Nark?*"

Bolda shook his head. "I don't know."

"You had to know."

"Like hell I did! They weren't even up when I left." He grinned at the Soviet agent, pretending a bravado he did not possess. "I didn't know they were up until you told me —just now."

"You thought you were transmitting to nothing?"

"I thought I was transmitting to something, but I couldn't know for sure. There hadn't been any news, one way or the other. How many are up there, do you know?"

"How many are supposed to be there?"

"Two—at least," Bolda answered half truthfully. "The rig will rewind its tapes and repeat the signal to the next one. Every thirty or forty minutes, maybe."

"It will repeat the signal in eight minutes," the agent coldly contradicted him. "Your lies are transparent. The transmitter has been thoroughly analyzed." He opened the bulky package resting on the table and astonished his prisoner once more.

"Hey, you brought it with you!"

Bolda reached for the transmitter, half expecting the agent to interfere, but the man made no move. Bolda ran his fingers over the machine searching for damage and then averted his face to conceal his quick surprise. This

was not his transmitter; the feel was wrong. He removed the rear cover plate to peer inside, ostensibly to inspect the components, and found that his first suspicion was correct. The machine was a near perfect copy. The man who had made it had neglected to copy the small symbol on several of the parts—the tiny design that might pass for a trademark. Bolda had traced that mark in the dust to reassure his sleeper, but now some of them were missing. Belatedly, he recognized the different feel: this machine was made of a different plastic than his original transmitter.

"Why?" he asked the agent, referring to the duplication.

The KGB man misread his question. "So that it may listen to your confession. And repeat it."

Bolda stared blankly at him, and then at the rig. After a while the intention and the enormity of the joke penetrated his confusion.

"Buster, that will cook my goose in Washington!"

"That will cook many geese in Washington." The agent packed away the transmitter into its box. "Again, what is the meaning of *Nark?*"

"I told you, I don't know. I was told it was slang for stool pigeon, but I don't know."

"The Americans have a reason, a pattern for naming names," the agent snapped at him. "*Samos* is Satellite And Missile Observation System. What is the meaning behind *Nark?*"

"Damn it, I don't know! They don't tell me everything." Bolda gave the question serious consideration. "Navigation?" he guessed. "Navigation, Air, Rounder—oh hell, *K* doesn't mean anything."

The agent stood up. "Perhaps you will think of it. Perhaps you don't want to be a dead hero." He picked up the transmitter package and made as if to leave.

"Wait a minute—"

"Yes?"

"What about those handcuffs?"

"The handcuffs worn by your dear mother?"

Impatiently: "Of course."

Bolda suffered through a very long and chilly silence while his inquisitor stared down at him.

"They may be removed if you perform well at trial."

"Maybe. How do I know you'll keep your word?"

"You do not know. You may only hope."

"That's damned little," he complained. "So what happens if you don't like the act?"

The KGB agent drew a deliberate circle around his heart and then tapped the circle twice, indicating holes. The agent was not referring to his own fate.

Bolda knew fear. Despite his half-formed, dimly held childhood superstitions, despite his mother's cryptic admonition, he knew the iced shock of fear. He guessed he was reasonably safe until the trial was completed, for they would both hope and expect him to perform as instructed —the propaganda value would be enormous; but after that circus was concluded his life would depend on very little more than whim—cold, capricious whim. And his mother's life already depended on less than that. Their captors weren't known for their humaneness.

Apprehension stayed with him around the clock.

It snaked through his dreams in scarlet thread as again and again he looked on, bound and helpless, while a faceless man clad in the longcoat of the Soviet army thrust a revolver through the bars and fired point-blank; in the nightmares he was sometimes the victim bound to the cot and sometimes a disembodied observer floating above the victim and the assassin. Fear overshadowed the long hours of day as he watched the shuffling traffic in the corridor outside his cell; as he studied the food on every plate or bowl served him and fancied he saw flecks of green or yellow in the unsavory messes. It stayed with him, just under the surface of conscious awareness, through the tiring, repetitious confessions; through the taping sessions while microphone and transmitter spools listened to him; and through the final dress rehearsal when he met for the first time the Polish confederate who had worked with him in the warehouse, and who was now preparing to give evidence against him. Bolda realized his own unease was mirrored in the confederate.

Fear rode with him during the two-day trial that was another kind of nightmare.

The Englishman from the Gdansk docks was there, and

the young man from the Embassy, accompanied now by an older man recognized from photographs as the American Ambassador. In one part of the great room were a crowd of English and American journalists, and in another part a handful of their Soviet counterparts. All of them stared at him, and that was unsettling, contributing to his fear of failure.

The near perfect copy of the transmitter was there, and Bolda had to acknowledge it as his. The two hundred dollars had been his, supplied him by the CIA. The rough clothing worn while disguised as a field hand were his. The scraps of burned cloth and the pile of ashes were the remains of a blanket he'd burned and buried under the floor of the warehouse. The Smith & Wesson .38-caliber revolver had been worn strapped to his leg. The tiny vial of cyanide had been taped under his armpit; his seizure and search had been so quick and efficient he'd not had time to use it. The confederate he'd bribed and badgered into helping him—all were there in evidence.

(But his mother was not there. Bolda repeatedly searched the room for her.)

His only rewarding moment came when he revealed what had been receiving the signals from his transmitter. He realized with a start that he was telling a sensation; his listeners hadn't known the truth until that moment. Bolda darted a look around the courtroom, surprised that the information hadn't leaked out before him. He discovered only three people who were not astonished, even outraged at his news: his inquisitor, the KGB agent; the woman judge; and the American Ambassador. They knew. Every one of the others in the room were taken aback to learn the United States was orbiting a train of Narks; the sensation was intensified by a factual description of their function and purpose. The Soviet newsmen were apoplectic.

Obeying instructions to the letter, Anson Bolda regretted his transgressions against the Soviet people and appealed to the court for mercy. Fear fell on him like an avalanche when the woman judge sentenced him to fifteen years in solitary confinement, and the trial ended. He was returned to the same unheated cell in Lubyanka Prison.

A pair of empty handcuffs were lying on his cot.

Bolda stayed in the cell until the next winter, dying repeatedly on every night that faceless creature fired through the bars at him. He had not believed a nightmare could persist so long.

Without warning, without explanation, he was given new clothing and removed from the cell. Bolda thought his hour had come at last, but he didn't understand why his captors would waste new clothing on a corpse. Still without explanation, he was taken across country and put aboard a Soviet military plane in company with two army officers and his old enemy, the KGB agent.

They would not speak to him during the journey, and seldom spoke among themselves. Not until he thought he recognized Berlin from the air did Bolda know where he was going or get an inkling of his fate. It was too much to believe, and he refused to believe it until his handcuffs were removed and he found himself on the approaches to the Glienicke Bridge. He was suddenly so excited his heart hurt. Stuffy MacGough waited on the other side of the bridge with some civilian, and a prisoner between them. He stared hopefully at Stuffy, and found the other prisoner staring at the KGB agent with a different expression. They walked to the center of the bridge: *then* Bolda believed it. He knew he was going home alive.

The exchange of blown agents was completed.

Stuffy MacGough dropped an oversize shoebox on his desk and snapped the string to remove the lid. A new pair of Wellington boots were exposed. He picked up one boot, held it to the light, admired it, and turned it about to allow the light to catch the high polish.

"I should have been a Prussian officer," he said to Anson Bolda. "Boot fetish, spit and polish, clicking heels. Yes, I should have been."

Bolda was eating an apple and failed to answer.

"Have a good breakfast?" Stuffy asked next.

Bolda held up two fingers.

"Two breakfasts? You mean to tell me they didn't cater to your appetite over there? I'm shocked. I'll file a complaint this afternoon. Violation of the Geneva rules and all

that claptrap." Stuffy put the first boot away and plucked the second from the box. "I'll admit you don't look like the man who walked out of here two years ago. Two years? Yes. Well, so. I sent a man into Sinkiang seven years ago. He isn't back yet."

Bolda shot him a startled glance. "Jail? Dead?"

"Nothing of the sort. He's free as a lark and still operating. Think of all the back pay he'll have coming." A broad grin at Bolda. "You've got a check coming up from the front office too. Of course, two years' pay isn't much, but it'll do, it'll do. Put some meat on your bones. You weighed around a hundred and eighty when you walked out of here. What is it now?"

"One forty."

"That much? The scoundrels. Wait until Geneva hears about this!"

"Stuffy, you're a poor comedian."

The man shook his head. "Two years ago you would have sat there like a bump on a log and said, *Yes, sir!*"

"Two years ago I didn't have the hell scared out of me."

Stuffy's grin vanished, leaving him sad faced and tired. "And two years ago you were naïve, idealistic, and shot through with red, white, and blue fire. Gung ho, and the devil take the hindermost! You were pleased with your new citizenship and ready to jump into a new job with fire and brimstone. Weren't you? Admit it, Anse. I recognized the fire, and played on it." He dropped the boot into the box and closed the lid. "Now, God help you, youngster, you're a bitter old man ready to strangle the first person who looks cross-eyed at you." The shoebox was put away in a desk drawer, and the drawer pushed shut. "You're also a dangerous man, a hard, suspicious, and very dangerous man. I don't know what to do with you."

"I want to go back to work."

"Where?" Stuffy demanded.

Bolda could only spread his hands.

"You can't go back into the field. I can't put you anywhere in the field. Every operator in this whole wide world, damn them, has seen your picture, heard your voice, read your description. Anse, you are absolutely useless outside these United States. Where would you work?"

"I want to do something."

"What?"

"I don't know."

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

Stuffy drummed his fingers on the desk top. "You might do in the training school. Teach radio to the new men; we have new men coming in every day."

"I can't teach worth a damn."

"The lab? Our lab people are looking for something to make the Nark obsolete."

"No. I don't even like that word."

"Well, so." A speculative glance. "Section Three? Give some thought to monitoring internal communications. Did you know we have a group watching the Western Union trunk lines for coded messages?" A sly trace of the old grin appeared. "Section Three picked up a cipher going into the San Diego Naval Base a while back—while you were gone. It turned out some Navy wife was telling her husband she was pregnant. Section Three could put you to work on the internal stuff, Anse. They even have people reading every word moving over the Associated Press wires. Soft job."

"I don't wear a dress," Bolda retorted.

"Think of all the pretty girls! The supervisors are men, surrounded by scores of ravishing girls. Imagine that: six, maybe eight men, engulfed in a sea of women. Ah, paradise."

"Reading ten thousand telegrams a day. Ah, hell."

"All right, mister, suppose *you* tell *me*."

"I could jump back into the Ukraine."

"You could also jump into a live volcano." Stuffy slapped his hand on the desk. "*No*. That you definitely cannot do. Look here, Anse, the people around this shop aren't fools, not complete fools. We heard what happened in Lubyanka—we know about your visitor, the handcuffs, the pressure, everything. We have a pipeline into that place." He folded his arms and studied the stubbornly set mask across the desk. "After it was over, the trial and all, we asked the other agency to run a check on the village. They did, but they couldn't get near your mother. She's alive and doing fine; she's living in a little place near the

village well. They aren't bothering her. But do you know what, Anse?"

"What?"

"They have that house staked out, they're watching it and her around the clock. Do you want to guess why?"

"Waiting for me?"

"Damned right they're waiting for you! They think maybe you'll be foolish enough to come home again, visit your mother, look to see if the promise was kept. But this time the ending will be different. Know what I mean?"

"Stuffy, that means I'll never see her again!"

"That's right, you won't."

Anson Bolda threw down the newspaper, too impatient to read. For many minutes there had been nothing but a strained silence between him and his supervisor, while he fumed and the older man busied himself with paperwork.

"What next?" Bolda asked abruptly.

Stuffy put aside the papers. "They call it by a fancy, militarized name: debriefing. Those chuckleheads from the other agency will be in to see you pretty soon; they want to talk to you. Just like a quiz show, but you won't make any money. They want to analyze your confession, they want to know which parts were invented by you and which were invented by your father confessor. They're a bit stuffy because you named *them* as the culprits."

"I was told to do that."

"I know you were. I said we had a pipeline into Lubyanka. They want to hear it from your own lips, and at the same time they want to pump you about everything you saw, heard, guessed, smelled, and tasted there. You are only the second or third man to come back from Lubyanka, and that makes you a gold mine of information whether you realize it or not. They'll drain you dry, Anse, and it will go on for weeks. Lay in for a siege."

"I don't know a hell of a lot."

"Oh, yes, you do. I said you may not realize it, but you do. Give those people a description of one day in jail, and they'll come back with a manual on prison operation. Give them a description of one or two faces you saw there, and they'll submit a report on the present status of

some political prisoner or Party member who disappeared five years ago. Those people even study timetables as a hobby—they know when the trains are running in Siberia. Mark my word, boy, they'll pump you dry and then keep on pumping: week after week after week."

"Just like Lubyanka."

"But this time you'll be among friends."

"There was a family of roaches in my cell. I made friends with them."

"Tell that to the people from the other agency. They'll write a book on prison flora and fauna."

"You're still the boss."

"And don't you forget it; I'm a hard man to get along with."

"What about my dossier, hard man?"

Stuffy sighed, quickly unhappy with the turn of the conversation. He gazed down at the drawer containing his new boots but decided against reopening it. "I don't have a ready answer, Anse. Your dossier is still in the files; I checked that myself, just this morning."

"It could have been copied."

"I don't know how."

"How many people can get into those files?"

"Any of the five section chiefs. Any of the three directors in the front office. Miss Amanda, a sweet little lady who has charge of the files. They're kept in a locked vault, and Miss Amanda stays in there with them."

"Nine people."

"Only eight, really. Miss Amanda can't open a file by herself. Each of those eight people must show a need to know, and each must sign a receipt for a file taken out of the vault. Each of the eight carries a key, and Miss Amanda carries a key: both keys are required to unlock the vault, unlock a filing cabinet, unlock the reading room. The dossiers can't be taken to any office—they must be read in the reading room, with Miss Amanda sitting there watching. All the lock patterns and all the keys are changed on a random schedule—sometimes every three or four weeks. How could a dossier be copied under those conditions?"

"Who adds to them? Who reads the new pages?"

"Information can and does come to us from every

source. One of the eight people evaluates it and either types it himself or dictates the addition to Miss Amanda. She and one of the eight, together, add the new material to the dossier."

"The girls in the typing pool don't see it?"

"Certainly not. Only those eight, and Miss Amanda."

"What about Miss Amanda?"

"She has a clearance higher than yours. Equal to mine. Anse, how could your dossier be copied? Stolen?"

"I don't know," Bolda replied desperately. "I only know that KGB man knew a hell of a lot about me, a lot of stupid little things: the uncertainty about my age, that field where I was born, my service record, not smoking, all that."

"And did he know that claptrap about witches and warlocks?" Stuffy asked quietly.

Bolda was startled. He stared at Stuffy with round eyes. "No! *That* was never mentioned."

"Why not? Was the man inefficient?"

"Hell, no, he wasn't! He'll be top dog someday."

"He should have mentioned it, if he knew it. The joker should have used it against you in some way, rubbed it in to force a reaction, help wear you down."

"He never mentioned it," Bolda insisted.

"Then I would say he didn't read your dossier."

Bolda lapsed into a fretful study.

"Let's stay on that subject," Stuffy suggested. "How are you going to answer the question?"

"What question?"

"The *why*. Sooner or later those chuckleheads from the other agency will ask you the key question: why didn't you die over there? In the Harbormaster's office, or in Lubyanka after the trial? Why weren't you shot out of hand? Why did you escape the fate of other good men caught in the same fix? Why did that court give you a rather light sentence? Why did you cheat death, Anse? Not *how*, but *why?* The why will be more important to them than the how."

An embarrassed hesitation. "*You* ought to know."

"I said that I reserved the right to put a little bit of faith in your native superstitions—if I wanted to, mind you. I could believe you were a warlock if I wanted to." A pause.

"Well, confound it, I did. I sent you over there, and you came back. I did, I did. But those chuckleheads are a different breed of cat. What will you tell them?"

"Will they read the dossier?"

"No, not the rank and file, but if one of their section chiefs or someone from the front office shows a need to know, I'll have to take him to the vault."

Bolda hesitated. "I guess I'd better tell them. I remember catching hell when I held out on you."

Stuffy nodded his agreement. "Wisest, I suppose. It could be sticky, but I'll help you sweat it out." The man lapsed into a silent study, which was abruptly punctured by a loud, explosive guffaw.

"What's the matter?" Bolda stared at him.

The small Scotsman was laughing crazily. "If it gets *too* sticky, Anse, I know how to tidy things up, I know how to change the subject in a hurry. Would you like to know the secret word?"

Bolda was curious. "What is it?"

"All you have to do is ask them a question. Just ask them if they heard your confession. Be sure to keep a straight face, mister, but ask them that question." And he fell into another fit of riotous laughter.

"What's so funny about that?"

"Anse, those sly devils at the KGB put your confession on tape and then put that tape back into your transmitter. You knew that, didn't you? They took the transmitter back to Gdansk and plugged it in. You knew that, didn't you?"

"I was told."

"Well, so. The day your trial began, those devils turned on the transmitter and let it run. Your two Narks picked up the confession and brought it back to the listening post in California. Anse—that has been going on since last March. Every forty-five minutes or so, another Nark arrives over California and dumps another repetition on the ground station—every forty-five minutes for the past eight or nine months. The people out there at the station are sick and tired of you." Stuffy wiped the tears from his eyes to peer at Bolda. "I'm the only man left in Washington with a sense of humor."

# 5

After endless weeks of interrogation ("They call it by a fancy, militarized name: debriefing.") Anson Bolda quit the other agency down the road and went back to his superior at NSA. A ring of men with expressionless faces had grilled him in new surroundings, rather than his own.

Stuffy met him with mock surprise. "Well, so. Home again, straggler." He was wearing the boots that had been new at their last meeting. MacGough sat sideways in his chair, held his feet out before him and brought the heels together with a slap. "Click, click. Mister, those actors in the Nazi movies do it with an admirable grace, but I do it more natural. Click, click."

Bolda said, "You haven't changed."

"Could have. Could have grown warts and a long gray beard; but then, I said it would take time." He peered again. "You have shaken that stoop you brought back from Lubyanka."

Bolda sat down on a corner of his desk.

"Why was I brought back from Lubyanka?"

The Section Chief forgot his boots. He carefully folded his legs beneath his chair and turned on Bolda.

"You were a long time asking that."

"I've been asleep. Now, *why*, Stuffy?"

"I don't know."

"Damn it, Stuffy, that won't—"

"Anse, I don't know!" He slapped at the desk. "I take my orders from the Director. The Director takes his orders from the White House, or the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or the Security Council meeting as a body. The orders came down to me through channels, and I carried out those orders to the best of my ability. Certain wires were pulled and certain men were sent to Moscow to negotiate your release. The negotiations were successful."

Open sarcasm: "Just like that?"

"*Not* just like that, you idiot. It took time, and diplomacy, and sweat. Those men endured vilification, ridicule, threats, and personal abuse. For you. Negotiations started shortly after your trial closed; they went on for months, they stumbled over one hurdle after another, they lost you twice, and had to go back to the beginning and start over. The KGB fought like the devil to keep you. People around here were betting you wouldn't get back—it was that sticky. So don't be so damned sassy."

"Why did they bother?"

"I don't know." Stuffy peered at him with frankness. "I don't know. You were expendable."

"Who wanted me back?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. I wish I knew. I'd like to ask that question."

"Didn't you ask questions?"

"I didn't question my orders—I didn't question my superiors. You don't ask questions here if you want to maintain your usefulness, safeguard your clearance, keep your job. A man may have mental reservations, despite his oath, but he doesn't question his superiors." An added thought, "You're the only one doing that, with impunity. How do I shut you off?"

"Tell me why anybody bothered to bring me back."

Stuffy grunted. "Wish to hell I knew!"

"You could have nosed around, picking brains."

"I could have told the Director I wanted to retire, raise chickens on some little farm somewhere."

"Did you handle the negotiations?"

"No. I found two men who were willing to try. The front office took over from there."

"Who were the men?"

"A New York attorney and an Atlanta newspaper man."

"Who put them up to it? Who paid them?"

Stuffy laughed hollowly and tapped the soles of his boots on the floor. After a while he said, "Somebody *did* throw out a smoke screen called public sympathy. Petitions were circulated, that Atlanta newspaper started a de-

fense fund—maybe they paid the attorney. I don't know. That was just a smoke screen."

Bolda said desperately, "I must have been brought back for something!"

"I wish I knew what it was."

"Haven't they told you anything?"

"No. Well, now, wait a minute. They told me to find a job for you. But there hasn't been another word."

"Don't they care what happens next?"

"Guess not. Not as long as you keep busy doing something. Within the continental United States."

"Stuffy, that doesn't make sense!"

The boots slammed against the floor. "What *does,* warlock?" The anger was rising. "If my grandmother told me once, she told me a hundred times, my generation was going to hell in a handbasket. She was right—oh, she was *so* right. We have gone to hell. If the twentieth century isn't hell, what is? If this shop isn't a compartment of hell, what is? And mark this, mister: none of us have the power to stop it." Stuffy shut his mouth and took a firm grip on his temper.

"Anse, you must know the pressures in this shop are murderous—and the same goes for that other agency down the road. We're losing people. Some of our people are in an asylum, they lost what little sanity they had; some are confined to their homes under a doctor's care; and some—some were suicides. Our kind of people specialize in defenestration, if that's indicative of anything. I don't plan to join any of those three groups, so knock off; I've told you all I know, or all I can tell you." He stopped again for breath. "I'm sorry, Anse."

"Okay, Stuffy, okay. I guess I should apologize to you."

"That isn't necessary. Confound this hell, anyway. Where were we?"

"Job hunting."

"Well, so. Have you decided on something?"

Bolda said, "No." A brief glance at his superior. "And I don't want to waste my time reading telegrams."

"Too bad. Well, what?"

"I'd like to be outdoors."

Stuffy peered over the desk. "Do you want out?"

"Not that," Bolda answered with some confusion. "I don't want to work around here, but I don't want to quit either. I've been in the army too long, Stuffy; I like the food and the easy living. I've been with you too long. I don't want to quit you." He paused, trying to untangle the confusion. "I don't want to stay here, but I don't want to leave."

"Well, so."

Stuffy MacGough got up from his desk and took a turn around the room. He stopped by a window to watch some activity outside, and then dismissed it and continued walking about the room. Another pause while he stared at a framed photograph hanging on the wall, and that too was dismissed. Once he stared at Anson Bolda, and once he looked down at his boots. His hands were shoved deep into his pockets. After a bit he came back to his desk and rummaged through the drawers. The empty boot box was found and tossed into the wastebasket. Another drawer was ransacked, and then a third.

Bolda watched his search.

"What are you looking for?"

"The want ads," Stuffy told him. "Ah, here we are." He found a folded newspaper and tossed it across the desk. The paper had been opened to the classified section, then folded back to reveal several columns of small type under the caption, *Help Wanted, Male.*

Bolda glanced over the columns and then looked at the top of the page to find it was a St. Louis newspaper, several weeks old.

"Hey, this thing is out of date."

"Pay no mind, the ad is still running. It's there every Sunday."

"Which one?"

"Little box, down at the bottom of the second column."

Bolda looked to where he was directed and found a small display box one column wide by two inches high, requesting the services of an experienced investigator. The advertisement said an immobilized author was seeking a research man to work in the field, a man capable of finding and analyzing information of value to the author. Experience was stressed; satisfactory compensation was prom-

ised. Applicants were asked to contact a blind box number in care of the paper, and to include a letter of recommendation and a photograph.

Bolda thought it was silly. He said so.

Stuffy was grinning at him, almost laughing at him and at some private thought. "Oh, it is, it is." He dipped into the drawer a second time and brought out two heavy volumes. "Now ask me what kind of books that immobilized author publishes."

"What kind of books does he publish?"

"This kind, of course." The two volumes were pushed across the desk. "Weird books, queer-people books, books about characters who do the damnedest things. Take a look."

Bolda read the titles. The first was *The Strangest Men in the World,* while the companion volume was entitled *The Strangest Women in the World.* "What goes?" he demanded.

"Just what it says—just what I said. Queer folks. The old boy writes about strange people who do strange things that can't be explained. One man in a courtyard walked around a team of horses and vanished—never seen again. Another man left his house one morning to walk to work, five or six blocks away; he was found on a Singapore street that same afternoon, out of his mind. An entire boatload of people—twenty or thirty of them—vanished in the middle of the ocean. The ship was found later, but they weren't. Haven't you heard about the *Marie Celeste?* No? Well, read the book. And there was a woman in Boston who leaned against the wall of her hotel room, ten floors above the street. She fell through the wall, but there weren't any windows or holes there—she fell through a solid brick wall. Queer things happening to people, Anse, or people doing queer things. Both books are full of it. That's what the author writes about."

"Is it true?"

"How would *I* know?" Stuffy countered.

"You don't expect me to run out to St. Louis and ask him?"

"I expect you to run out there and ask for a job."

"Watching for people to disappear?"

"Watching for an author to appear."

"Stuffy, I think you're—" But he wasn't crazy. Bolda stopped talking abruptly. Sober consideration held his tongue for a space while he studied the man over the desk. At length he said, "I think you're pushing me into another Poland. There's something more here."

"You can jolly well bet there's something more!" Stuffy was pleased at having trapped his attention. "The author who writes these books is named Victor Angoff. Look here, see, here's his name." Fingers tapped the book jacket. "Victor Angoff. A woman lives with him; she might be his secretary or she might be—well, so. Her name is Karen Collins. They don't have a phone."

"Some people don't, one reason or another."

"Ah!" Stuffy crowed. "Ah, but they have a teletype. Those people have an Associated Press teleprinter in their apartment."

Bolda was alert. "The commercial printer? The kind newspapers use?"

"The same, and that's how Section Three found them. Not everybody has an AP teleprinter in their den or bedroom or whatever. Think of that, now. Status—snobbery, eh?"

Bolda played with a wild idea in his mind. "You know what can be done with a teleprinter? Do you know what can be done with any sort of telegraphic rig?"

"Yes—oh, my, yes, but hold on now, hold on, there is one more little thing."

"What thing?"

"At about the same time you went down to the other agency for your debriefing, a retired FBI man went to St. Louis and applied for the job. He was a ringer. He carried phony papers of recommendation, papers supposedly from his last civilian employer. The author hired him—he got the job."

"Well, then, the job is filled."

"On the contrary. The job is again vacant." Stuffy peered at him. "That FBI man was dead in less than three weeks. Somebody put a bullet through his head."

# 6

Stuffy MacGough sat hunched over his desk, looking fixedly at Bolda. Entirely unaware of what he was doing, the heels of his boots were striking together in monotonous, rhythmic fashion. He watched Anson Bolda's expression.

Bolda was suspicious. "Are you picking on me again? Are you picking on me because of—you know, that note you found in the dossier? Is this another Gdansk?"

"Picking on you? Hah! I'm not picking on you at all. You're hollering for a job, a soft cushy job with long pay and short hours. All right, there's a job." The heel noise stopped. "But if this *were* an assignment, I'd be tempted. Oh, good lord, I'd be tempted."

"What is the FBI doing?"

"Running around in circles—running hard, you can bet, but all they find is circles. Oh, it's all quiet and unofficial, of course; their man was retired, striking out on his own. Jurisdiction remains with the St. Louis police. But everybody is running in the same circles."

"Do you know anything they don't?"

"No."

"Why do you have that newspaper? Those books?"

"Every section chief in the shop has a copy of the paper; some of them have the books. Section Three alerted all of us, this thing has been kicking around the shop for ideas, brainpicking. Mind you, Anse, nothing has happened to put the agency into that St. Louis picture, but just the same, Section Three is mighty curious about it all. They're not going to forget it."

"If I went out there, I'd have to go for Three."

"Right, mister. My section handles only foreign communications—you've been around long enough to know that. I'd have to loan you to Three."

"Did you read the guy's books? All the way through?"

"All the way through. They're fantastic. There's a woman in one of them who can make sparks jump from the tip of her finger, set paper afire. Fantastic."

"Do you believe any of it?"

"Hah! I told you once before, I'm a modern American man with a modern American mind. Out with claptrap!"

"How did that FBI man die? Where?"

"In a saloon," Stuffy said wryly. "Shot through the temple in a saloon brawl. One of those things that happen almost every night in riverfront saloons, they tell me. Somebody started a fight, somebody started throwing beer mugs or bottles or whatever, but this time somebody pulled a gun and got off several shots. Into the wall, the ceiling, the bar, into that poor devil's head."

Bolda was again suspicious. "Was it set up?"

"Probably. The FBI man was a teetotaler. He'd as likely walk into a saloon and ask for a drink as I'd walk into the Director's office and ask for a pay cut."

"Was he working on his new job?"

Stuffy grinned. "That's what the St. Louis police asked his employer, asked old Victor Angoff and the woman. They said no, not there. They said they couldn't imagine what he was doing in there. He was supposed to be out in the field doing research on some queer people. Research for the next book."

"What queer people?" Bolda demanded.

The grin turned to derisive laughter, and Bolda felt the laughter was somehow directed at him. "Queer folk who have an annoying habit of living beyond threescore and ten; peculiar people who think nothing of going on to a hundred and ten—maybe a hundred and twenty—before they get around to dying. Claptrap, fantastic claptrap."

"I don't see a hundred-and-ten-year-old man knocking around in a riverfront saloon."

"Right!" Stuffy exclaimed with satisfaction.

Bolda made a backward leap. "No telephone?"

"None."

"That printer offers possibilities."

Stuffy slammed his heels together. "I said that's how

Section Three found old Victor Angoff. Do you know how many teleprinters are located in private homes?"

"No idea."

"Just four." Stuffy held up four fingers for Bolda to inspect. "Just four. Oh, the White House has some, of course, and there are swarms of them in offices like State, Defense, Agriculture, and the agencies and whatnot, but they don't count." He folded away the fingers. "I'll bet the rental on those machines is terrific—good thing the taxpayers don't see the bills. Well, so. Three of the printers are set up in VIP homes: a big-time publisher in San Francisco installed one in his basement rumpus room—can you picture that?—and a couple of AP executives have them in their homes. People who like newsprint with their morning eggs. The fourth is Victor Angoff. Victor gets his news fresh from the telegraph wire."

"Telephone," Bolda corrected. "Most of that traffic uses telephone wires. It's split off at the receiving station and channeled to the customers."

"Yes, yes, now you said what?"

"I could build a rig to convert a teletype circuit into a telephone system; it's just a matter of picking frequencies and filters, if they're using the same lines."

"A very private system? No eavesdropping?"

"Very private—a tight little two-party circuit." He looked at his boss with curiosity; Stuffy should know all that. "Two identical rigs operating on the same frequency could be spliced into any two printers—one in New York and one in California, if you wanted it that way. There'd be no interference with the newspaper stuff moving on the same line; I'd pick a high frequency, and filters to match. And it would be next to impossible to listen in, impossible to tap, unless you found my frequency and then built a third phone the exact duplicate of my first two. That's privacy, Stuffy."

"Well, so!" The abused heels were smacked together under the desk.

Bolda was already playing with the wild new idea.

News service teleprinters—or teletypes of any kind—were a form of telegraphy, and the greater bulk of all telegraph traffic moved over the existing telephone lines: hun-

dreds of thousands of miles of telephone wire strung in every direction across the continent. Those common lines carried not only normal voice transmission, but Western Union traffic, ticker-tape transactions, hotel and airline reservations, industrial communications, news stories and photographs—any kind of informational matter transmitted by any kind of teletype or facsimile machine.

Modern carrier-current techniques permitted the simultaneous transmission of several hundred individual messages on the same wires, without interference of one with another; a bleeding-over was prohibited by the use of different frequencies, and by the installation of filters at the sending and receiving stations to maintain the separation. A telephone would not overhear a telegraphed message transmitted on the same pair of wires, nor would the telegram interfere with a stockmarket transaction traveling over or under it. The telephone companies provided the wire, and a confusion of instruments used them.

Bolda knew he could build a rig—a pair of ordinary telephones, a two-way radio, or an intercom system—which could be spliced into the AP newsprinter circuit and used successfully without either machine being aware of the other. The first task would be to find an unused frequency. The telephone companies generally used frequencies ranging from four thousand to greater than two million cycles per second, and the task would be to tap one not already in use. The lower frequencies, below four thousand, were used for telegraphic traffic, such as the printer, and anything he chose above that number would eliminate any bleeding to or from the teleprinter circuit. He would need filters to screen out the low-frequency traffic on the circuit, and a generator to provide the ultrahigh frequency for his own voice transmission; those same filters would not allow a teleprinter to reveal his presence on the line. There'd be no bleeding, leakage, or static, no interference with the news dispatches coming in on the line. The rig should be spliced into the circuit behind the machine—where the wires emerged from the wall or floor—and so be alive all the time. The telephone company kept its lines charged twenty-four hours a day, and some printers were never shut off.

Properly done, the clandestine telephone could be used around the clock, and no Associated Press editor anywhere would know what was going on under his nose—or on his circuit.

"I think I'd rig a pair of telephones," Bolda said aloud. "Handier than an intercom system or radios."

"Fun," Stuffy retorted. "Fun, fun! Is Victor Angoff having fun?"

"Maybe." A sharp glance. "But if he is, who is on the phone at the other end? Where is the other end?"

Stuffy slammed his boots together. "I'd give a pretty penny to find out! Section Three would declare a holiday."

"How many of those printers are in use? Did the AP give a breakdown?"

"Oh, good lord! Thousands, thousands—here, there, everywhere. Think of all the newspapers in the country, think of all the government departments, think of that publishing magnate out there in San Francisco."

Bolda said, "Think of the White House."

The heels were suddenly stilled. "That's not funny."

"Maybe Victor Angoff knows somebody there."

"I said that wasn't funny."

"Okay." Bolda recognized that rebuke. He searched for something to turn Stuffy's attention. "What do you know about this Angoff?"

"Next to nothing. I mean, Section Three knows next to nothing. He's an old duffer, ninety if he's a day, and he never leaves that apartment. The FBI man sent back word that Angoff never got out of his chair all the time he was there. Perhaps he isn't able to walk."

"Does he speak for himself?"

"He's capable of it, but the woman handles most of the interviewing. The report said Angoff would indicate a direction, a line of questioning, and then the woman did the spadework. Between the two of them, they gave that poor devil a thorough going-over."

"Why?"

"Why? Well, to learn his background, his experience. To determine his fitness for employment. To discover if he was able and willing to scout around for queer people;

people who light fires by pointing their fingers, people who tumble through walls and all. To learn if he could report what he saw and heard. Victor is researching another book, and they didn't know he was an FBI agent."

"Are you sure?"

"No," Stuffy said unhappily.

"Do you have a dossier on Angoff?"

"Of course not. He—" Stuffy MacGough came to a full and anguished stop. He glared at Anson Bolda with distress, sharply aware of an oversight. Grabbing up the telephone on his desk, he jabbed at a button and waited for the answering party.

"Miss Amanda—sweet lady. Please check the index and see if you have Victor Angoff or Karen Collins. Yes, yes, *those* two."

A short space of anxious waiting.

Bolda read the answer in Stuffy's eyes. The little Scotsman ducked his head to avoid Bolda's gaze, but he was too late to hide the confirmation.

Stuffy said, "I'm coming. Notify Section Three." He replaced the phone and searched his pockets for a key.

"Jackpot," Bolda said laconically.

Stuffy pushed back from the desk and found the key to the vault. He shook it in Bolda's face. "You've caught me off base twice in one lifetime, warlock. We've got Karen Collins."

Left alone, Anson Bolda reclaimed the newspaper and again read the advertisement. It told him nothing new on second reading, and he tossed the paper on the desk. The two books caught his eye, and he turned the pages of one at random until he came to the author's introduction. Victor Angoff wrote in an affected style which sometimes obscured his meaning.

We may believe, trust, rely upon an omnipotent Power above, below, somewhere, who draws the puppet strings of our uncertain lives in strange patterns we do not discern, or discerning, do not approve; we may love a Power who forces us to dance, play, now turn this way and then that, without apparent purpose, logic, reason, often to distress.

We may love and believe, but we may also question. We may dare. We may seek a flaw.

We may question the wisdom, the benevolence of Power, any Power who would pluck from the street a fragile human and put him down again in another place half a world away, without preparation, without explanation, indeed without love for that human life. The human may well have been put down in a jungle, a sea, an arctic waste, to perish in senseless cruelty. We may dare question the wisdom, the love of a Power who would visit on a mere human visions of unearthly beauty, visions of another planet, another world, or a heaven so beyond comprehension as to destroy a human mind; and then set out that poor mind to preach in public places the story of beauty unimaginable, unattainable, until at last her audience, frightened, vindictive, angry, chain that human to the post and apply the torch to still her lips. The human may well have been devoured by lions, strapped to a charlot wheel, cast into the python's pit to die in cruel agony.

We may question the beloved Power, or we may turn our probes elsewhere. We may speculate, theorize.

We study the incident of the little girl who dreams, night upon night, of a great bird falling from the sky, falling upon her, smothering her, stifling her cries and blackening her vision, until she flees screaming from her bed. The little girl tells the repeated dream to her mother, her schoolteacher, her playmates, until all are in a near state of hysteria and anxiety. One day in the schoolyard a huge aircraft tumbles from the skies, with the expected result. We study this and wonder, build, formulate. We suspect a different Power at work.

We postulate a capricious child, scion of Darkness.

We think of an ill-intentioned child, given to acts of thoughtless cruelty for his own amusement, entertainment. A child sharing that same power found above, below, elsewhere. The cruelty of some children is as well understood as the love of others; indeed, we may ofttimes observe the two mixed, interchangeable, one facet first dominant and then submerged. We postulate a rancorous child, of Power, who will snatch a man from his familiar street and put him down to his fate in an alien place, who will fill a

poor woman's head with visions of forbidden beauty, then send her forth to babble as one demented. We propose that only a child who would torture another child with recurrent dreams of death, then impose a like death. We . . .

Bolda flipped past the introduction and stopped at a place in the middle of the book.

Dorothy Arnold, one of the very many who have vanished in the largest city. On the twelfth of December, 1910, Dorothy Arnold vanished utterly from the city and the earth as she walked through Central Park near the 79th Street entrance. She was not seen to go, but a creature was found in her place, an exchange, as it were, in the form of a swan, a new swan found on the lake near that same entrance. Dorothy Arnold, for a swan.

What Power caused the exchange?

Bolda turned a sheaf of pages and found himself in the middle of a paragraph at the top of a new page, in the middle of another marvel. A torrent of water was pouring from a wall of a ranch house, in the arid lowlands of Arizona. The region was locked in a severe, prolonged drought, yet the mysterious stream of water continued to flow from the wall, falling and flooding the room and its furnishings, forcing the family to move out, cascading across the floor and through the door to be absorbed in the earth. Flowers were quickly blooming around the wet place. The water continued to flow for three days, then stopped as mysteriously as it had begun. No explanation.

Bolda closed the book to examine the back cover. The customary photograph and biographical sketch of the author were missing, with the space being given over to teasing extracts from the body of the book. A brief examination showed the second volume to be a sequel to the first. Bolda stacked one book atop the other and pushed them across the desk toward Stuffy's vacant chair. He laced his fingers together in his lap and waited for the agitated man to return.

After a while he decided that Victor Angoff's cover—if it *was* a cover—was an exceptionally good one.

When Stuffy MacGough came back to his office, he was more puzzled than unhappy. He dropped into his chair, shoved aside the books in front of him, and leaned on the desk with a small show of frustration. His boots were forgotten for the moment.

Anson Bolda waited him out.

"What did you think of the books?" Stuffy asked.

"Queer."

"Interested?"

"Yes."

"Want to go out there?"

"It's better than staying here."

"That's a negative approach," Stuffy said absently. "We've got *somebody* named Karen Collins."

"But not this one?"

A shrug. "Who knows?"

"Didn't your FBI man send a report on her?"

"The report didn't include a detailed description, and it especially did not include a mention of her age."

"Don't tell me she's ninety years old."

"No, no, nothing like that." He took a breath. "Our Karen Collins, down there in the files, was a flyer. A stunt pilot, one of those daredevil idiots who flew in the flying circuses touring the sticks in the nineteen thirties and early forties. I don't suppose you had them in your country when you were a lad? No, guess not. Well, now, a flying circus was a conglomeration of stunt pilots who barnstormed the country in old airplanes, putting on shows at county fairs and bean festivals and whatnot. If there wasn't a landing strip handy, they used somebody's pasture. The show consisted of stunt flying, wing walking, acrobatics on top of the plane, races, and parachute jumping. They usually finished up with somebody jumping down in front of the grandstand. Sometimes they fell into the grandstand." Another breath. "I guess they made a living at it. There were several of them around."

"Karen Collins?" Bolda nudged him.

"Karen Collins was a pilot, and a wing walker. They used biplanes, and she'd climb out of the cockpit and walk along the lower wing, holding onto the guy wires, or whatever they called them. Her specialty was pretending to fall

off, then come parachuting down to the grandstand." A dolorous shake of the head. "The way some people make a living!"

"She must have lived through it."

"Oh, she did, she did. Ever hear of a man named Donovan, William Donovan? They called him Wild Bill?"

"Yes."

"Donovan recruited Karen Collins into the OSS in 1943. They were using women agents as early as that. She taught parachuting."

"Where's the mystery?"

"The year after that, 1944, Karen Collins parachuted into Holland on a mission, some business with the Dutch resistance people, and that was the end of her. The mission was unsuccessful—the records say there was no visible evidence that she completed her job. The records list her as dead or missing." Stuffy rubbed his hands across the surface of the desk. "The files stop right there. Nothing more on Karen Collins."

"How old was she? When she jumped?"

"Thirty-two."

"If the woman in St. Louis is in her middle fifties, she could be the same Collins."

"Could be," Stuffy acknowledged. "But what the devil is she doing there?"

"Using the telephone on the AP circuit," Bolda retorted. "Helping Victor Angoff find your queer people."

"It may be just a similarity of names," Stuffy mused. "This country is full of people with the same name." He moved the books in an aimless circle. "Funny, eh?"

"I'm laughing."

"Stop laughing," came the quick command. "Section Three is waiting for you."

"Another damned briefing?"

"How in the world did you guess that? Anse, you're the eighth wonder of the world."

Bolda made a derogatory reply.

"That's the spirit!" Stuffy crowed. "Now, you just hustle right down to Section Three and do your homework; they want you in St. Louis before the week is out. And they're going to equip you with a lovely set of papers, Anse,

really lovely. An honorable discharge, a certificate of merit for services rendered above and beyond, a letter of recommendation to prospective employers—oh, everything. Isn't that thoughtful of them?"

"Touching. I'm not going out as another phony civilian?"

"Oh, good lord, no. Your name and face are much too familiar: my boy, you should have *seen* the papers when the news broke. You're going out there as Anson Bolda, has-been spy, discredited and now useless agent of these United States. You're going as your sweet, intractable self. You couldn't do anything else with that face."

"Thank you, Mister MacGough."

"My pleasure. Root out a lot of queer people for old Victor Angoff; help him write that new book. Take a good look at that teleprinter in his apartment. Take another at Karen Collins." A studied pause. "And keep away from riverfront saloons—your discharge papers are spurious, I want you back when the mission is concluded."

"I expected that. Simon—what's his name?"

"Simon Legree, a lovable chap. But you won't be out on the ice all by yourself; somebody will be running with you. Keep an eye open for a confederate with a radio. Now, have a good time in St. Louis, Anse. It can be as diverting as Gdansk."

# 7

St. Louis in the early summer was still pleasantly warm, not yet the hot, humid, discomforting place it would become in the weeks ahead. His train had come into the city from the East, from Washington and Cincinnati, and crossed the brownish waters of the Mississippi River to leave him at a station that was a relic of another century. A rented automobile and its attendant were awaiting him there.

Bolda drove to the hotel holding his reservation, but stayed less than an hour in his room; he bought a street map of the city and set out in search of Victor Angoff. The residence wasn't hard to find.

Angoff's apartment occupied the entire top floor of a five-story brick building on South Grand Boulevard. The curtains on most of the windows of that floor were drawn. The building contained a restaurant and drugstore on the street level, and appeared to house nothing but apartments above. It had its own parking lot at the rear, and a bus stop at the door.

This was a neighborhood of hospitals: a large one adjoined Angoff's building on the south, rising to the same level, while a smaller institution was situated just across a narrow street to the north; a newly built nursing home was behind the building, beyond the parking lot. The apartment building and both hospitals faced Reservoir Park to the east, across the boulevard. Another cluster of hospital buildings were only a few blocks away.

Bolda left his rented car in the parking lot and searched the rear face of the building for utility wires. There were none, and he guessed those services were underground, entering the building through the basement. The back door was locked. Bolda peered through a small window set into

the door and discovered it was a fire door, with a panic bar on the inside to open the lock.

He went around to the front and found a stopper on duty in the lobby; the guardian would not allow him in the elevator until he first phoned upstairs and learned Bolda was expected. A self-service elevator carried him to the top floor, and the tired-looking woman, who may have been Karen Collins, let him into the dimly lighted apartment. She seated him beside an ornate coffee table, near Victor Angoff, and then took a chair behind him, between him and the door. Bolda had to twist around to see her, speak to her.

The woman had introduced him to his prospective employer but said nothing about herself; she hadn't spoken at all until the old man passed her a surreptitious signal during one of those frequent silences. Almost at once, after the preliminaries, Victor Angoff had asked: *How did it feel when you came over?* Anson Bolda answered with civility and frankness, and immediately found himself defending the conviction he'd been sold. He'd said bluntly, perhaps incautiously, he would kill that betrayer.

"Are you as harsh as you sound, Mr. Bolda?"

Bolda suspected the woman was mocking him. "I can take care of myself."

"Your recent unhappy experience would suggest otherwise."

"It's one thing to be in jail over there, and another to be out of jail over here. Somebody behind me, above me, sold me out, but I've learned that lesson. I can take care of myself."

"Are you a prudent man?"

"I try to be, but I have a temper."

"The man who applied for the position ahead of you died in a rather brutal manner."

Bolda didn't want to reveal his knowledge. "Is it that kind of a job?"

"Certainly not. The position consists solely of interviewing people, determining facts and evaluating circumstances. You would be expected to interpret what you see and hear, and to report it accurately. Research is under

way on a new book, and your duties would consist only of aiding in that research, of visiting distant places and talking to people. Your background of intelligence work would appear to make you ideal for our purposes, but I can assure you the work would not involve transmitters, Narks, or devices of that nature." A suspicion of mockery lingered.

"I can't leave the country. I'm confined to the United States."

"It would not be necessary to leave." She studied his face. "How you choose to spend your spare time is your affair, of course, but we would hope you did not frequent low places. We would hope for moral character."

"Maybe I'd better leave now. Sometimes I hang around with women."

"Women?" The mockery again. "More than one?"

"Sometimes they come in pairs." He stared at her for a space. "I didn't mention Narks."

"The *Dispatch* did, Mr. Bolda. The radio and television stations did. We are quite familiar with your background."

"All that happened a long time ago—more than a year ago."

"But your letter, and the letter of recommendation arrived only a few days ago. Your name was familiar, of course, and your story was published in a number of newspapers and magazines. Those periodicals are still available, Mr. Bolda. Haven't you read any of them?"

"No."

"Modesty, I suppose." Again the speculative study. "Aren't you curious about your predecessor?"

"I'm not going to wheedle—I'm not going to play mouse games. If you want to talk about him, I'll listen. If you don't, I'll look it up in the newspapers. They're still available, Miss—"

The woman neglected to fill in the blank. "No questions?"

"None. Either you come out with it, or you don't. I have my own ways of getting what I need."

A cold smile. "I'm sure you do."

Bolda had a quick feeling of wrongness. He was sure he'd said something wrong, something to prompt that icy

smile and the recurring mockery. He ran back over all that he'd said—and she'd said—searching for the mistake. The blanketing silence again fell over the three of them. A slight noise caused him to turn back to the old man.

Victor Angoff was performing the cigarette ritual. He removed a fresh one from the carved wooden box on the coffee table, slipped it into the long holder and put the holder to his lips to test the draw. The lighter was moved carefully along the length of the holder and the cigarette until it reached the far end. Perfumed smoke drifted across the table.

"Want one?" Angoff asked.

"No, sir."

"Where are you staying?"

"The Mississippi House."

"I know that place. Danced there when I was young. When it still had a ballroom." He pulled on the cigarette. "Gone commercial now. Shops and bars."

Bolda said nothing to that, but listened hard for the telltale sound of a teleprinter.

"Like the sound of your voice," Angoff went on. "I judge a man by his voice, the way he walks. I think you can get along with people. Curb your temper."

"Yes, sir." Bolda was certain the man was blind.

"Take my book with you, study it. Read it tonight. Know what you're getting into."

"Do I have the job?"

"Read the book, then tell me tomorrow. We know about *you*. You make up your mind about *us*."

Angoff's fingers strayed to the coffee table, but this time he passed over the cigarette box and picked up the brandy bottle. He appeared to hesitate and then decided against a drink. The bottle was put down. As if in response to a signal, the woman spoke out.

"Do you object to a probationary period, Mr. Bolda? A month, perhaps? We would like to determine how well you work in the field."

"No objections."

"Mr. Angoff's work can sometimes be difficult. We would need time to evaluate your efficiency."

"I'll try it."

"We are prepared to offer five hundred dollars for the probationary period, plus any reasonable expenses you may incur. Some travel may be necessary. Do you have a car?"

"I rented one today."

"If your work proves satisfactory and you wish to remain, we are prepared to double that figure. You may draw the compensation by the week or month, as you prefer. You will be reimbursed for your expenses at the same time. Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes."

The woman left her chair and went to a bookcase. Bolda watched her walk: she walked like a wilted, worn-out woman who was already tired of life and movement. There was no bounce to her step, no provocative vitality visible in the curve of her body or the slender legs, despite her knowledge that a man was looking at them. She lacked the vitality, and she didn't care whether he looked at her legs or ignored them.

When she returned from the case to hand him a copy of Victor Angoff's first book, Bolda inspected her hands for signs of age or declension. The signs were absent. Her hands fitted well into his earlier guess, the hands of a woman thirty to thirty-five years old. Only her manner reflected the weariness; her manner and the tired despondency shadowed in her eyes. He had seen that same expression repeated in many faces, in Lubyanka.

The woman waited beside him, holding the book, and Bolda knew the interview was at an end.

He stood up and said, "Goodby, Mr. Angoff."

"Tomorrow morning," Angoff replied. "Early, if you decide to come in."

"Yes, sir."

The woman took him to the door. A small telephone was fastened to the wall beside the door frame, the phone used by the doorman to announce his arrival. Bolda stopped in the doorway and deliberately turned around to look at her. The dark eyes were lusterless, and there was a pale, betraying streak, a hint of gray, in her hair.

"What is it, Mr. Bolda?" Her gaze was impassive.

"I wanted to see you in the light."

"Why?" Ice was beginning to form.

"I wanted to see if you really were as old as you act and sound. You're not."

"Was that meant as a compliment? Or are you trying to be friendly, in your strange way? A waste of time, Mr. Bolda. I don't make friends easily, and I prefer to be selective."

"I meant exactly what I said," he retorted. "I wanted to see you in the light—nothing else."

He stared for a moment more, reading the new expression on her face, listening again for the sound of a teletype in the apartment, and then turned away abruptly to ring for the elevator.

The apartment door was gently closed behind him, leaving him alone.

Bolda darted back across the carpeted corridor to her door and fingered the wall where it met the door frame, seeking the tiny wires of that intercommunication phone. Three of them punctured the wall at about the height of the phone and then hugged the door frame, all but invisible, as they dropped to the baseboard and disappeared beneath the carpet. Three wires instead of two, and that puzzled him. Bolda returned to the elevator cage and searched the floor at the carpet's edge until he found them again; three braided wires emerged from the carpeting, entered a small conduit, and dropped into the elevator shaft to connect with that other phone in the lobby. The third wire was unnecessary for that use.

He entered the waiting elevator.

Bolda found the doorman still on guard in the lobby and stopped to protest.

"Why didn't you tell me Mr. Angoff was blind?" He rapped the book. "I might have embarrassed him."

The doorman glared at him, half submissive and half defiant. He looked down at the book and up at Bolda. "You didn't ask me, mister."

"I wish I'd known that before I went up there. I might have made an awful goof. That woman, what's her name, tipped me off before it was too late."

"Miss Collins always takes care of things, sir."

"I'm glad she did—saved my skin."

Bolda left the lobby and its informative doorman and walked out into the late afternoon sunlight. He had no sooner reached the open air than he felt hungry, and turned around again to enter the restaurant adjoining the lobby. Bolda was pleased to find mumbled rabbit on the menu, and promptly ordered that. Another early diner at a nearby table overheard the order and stared over his shoulder; the man peered at the dish when it was served and thereafter watched Bolda eat the meal with a mixture of fascination and disfavor. He obviously didn't approve of a blend of boiled rabbit and scrambled eggs, but seemed to admire a man who could and did.

Bolda reclaimed his car and drove downtown to the Olive Street Public Library.

He guessed at the approximate date, judging it by what Stuffy had told him and by the amount of time he'd spent on the debriefing. A reading-room attendant furnished him a file of old newspapers. The riverfront brawl and the shooting of the former FBI agent were set out in the morning edition of a Tuesday paper, with subsequent stories on the next two days. There was no mention of the victim's association with the FBI, nor his new St. Louis employer, although it was reported he was locally employed; details of the brawl were common enough, and the question of the victim's presence there was not raised in print. Police were said to be without valid clues but were searching the neighborhood—the corner of Marceau and Van Buren—with thoroughness, seeking the man responsible. The only new fact Bolda learned was the location of the tavern, and the bartender's name, John Bentcliff. As might be expected, witnesses were scarce: the habitués of the saloon fled at the sound of the first approaching siren.

The story disappeared from the newspapers after the next two days.

Bolda put away the papers and turned his attention to a shelf of city directories and telephone books. As expected, Victor Angoff was missing from the phone books.

The most recent city directory, published only the year before, listed Angoff at the address where Bolda had found him. Another directory, five years older, also had

him there. Random samplings told the same story: Victor Angoff remained at the same address as early as 1945; the library had no earlier volumes than that one. Karen Collins never appeared at the address. She failed to appear at any address, in any directory, for any year.

Bolda wondered how she had managed that?

It wouldn't be too difficult to evade the agent, the directory compiler, when he came calling to check the residents of each address on the block, but how had she managed to evade all the crosschecks the compilers use? How did that compiler miss questioning the doorman on duty in the lobby, miss her name on voter registration lists, miss her entry on the tax rolls? Karen Collins was all but invisible. And another Karen Collins was said to be dead or missing behind the lines in Holland.

They *were* two separate and distinct individuals, weren't they?

Bolda put away the directories and telephone books. His eye was caught by a file of backdated news magazines, and he ran an exploratory finger along the spines, seeking a certain date. After two or three tries he found the issue he was seeking. *Newsweek* had printed a likeness of him on the cover, a line drawing picturing him as a rugged, bronzed, curly-haired adventurer; his shirt was open at the throat, and an identification patch sewn to the shirt pocket bore a cloak and dagger. In the background were the easily recognizable walls and towers of the Kremlin, while overhead a red, white, and blue Nark sailed silently through the Russian skies. Bolda knew dismay, and quickly returned the magazine to its place.

He quit the library and drove back to South Grand Boulevard.

The last fiery traces of a summer sunset were fading in the western sky as he parked his car on the street a block away from Angoff's apartment building and walked the remaining distance to Reservoir Park, across the street from his target. Bolda sat down on a bench which provided him with an unobstructed view of the lobby, and waited. Inside the lobby, the guard or doorman or whatever he was sat on a stool, reading a newspaper. To one side of the lobby

a few diners lingered in the restaurant, while on the opposite side the drugstore was empty except for a clerk working at the shelves. Bolda fastened his gaze on the man in the lobby.

Karen Collins occupied his thoughts.

She was no more than thirty-five years old, give or take a year. He'd stand on that.

That other Karen Collins who had parachuted into Holland for the OSS would be about fifty-five, if she were still living. The agency dossier would stand on that.

The woman lived with Victor Angoff—had lived with him for some time—and probably served as his secretary, helping him write those books. Victor was too damned old for Karen Collins to serve him in any other way. She appeared worn and tired beyond her years, yet she held an icy hardness that had twice chilled him for something he'd said. The second chilling, there by the door as he was leaving, was understandable. She had supposed he was trying to pull something because they were out of Angoff's hearing; she thought he was going on the make by offering the first verbal pass. She iced him.

It was the first chilling that left him with a feeling of unease, of wrongness. She had mocked him, laughed at him behind that cold, triumphant smile, given him the sensation that he had stumbled into a well-prepared ambush. He had refused to play questions and answers, refused to wheedle information on the murdered FBI agent; his temper had slipped a notch and he'd told her he would dig out the information for himself. He said he had his own ways of getting what he needed. Karen Collins jumped on that. The freeze came right there.

Damn it—she *had* ambushed him!

She'd caught him as surely as those KGB agents had caught him in the Harbormaster's office. The slain FBI man was never mentioned by name; she'd said only that the previous applicant for the job had died in a brutal way. No identification. No date. No clue as to name, place, manner, or time of death. Nothing more than a bare statement of death and a passing reference to low places. He stepped into that. Karen Collins had a right to laugh, mock, freeze him. She'd ambushed him.

Bolda cursed himself, then cursed Stuffy MacGough for briefing him. He sat in the darkness, staring sourly at the man loafing in the lobby across the street. After a while he called back the curse hurled at Stuffy. It wasn't Stuffy's fault. His own stupidity had tripped him—his own damned, cocky stupidity. He'd let his guard down because he was in St. Louis, not Poland or any other place behind the curtain.

The doorman in the lobby jumped off his stool and put away the newspaper. He was looking at the closed elevator. Bolda sat up, alert.

After a space the door opened and Karen Collins emerged from the elevator. She exchanged casual greetings with the doorman, and the two of them left the lobby and went out to the sidewalk; they turned north together and started walking in a purposeful manner. There had been no hesitation, no conversation, no invitation for him to accompany her; they simply walked out together as if they knew what they were doing and where they were going, as if they'd done it before.

Bolda looked back at the unguarded lobby with disbelief, then checked the time. After a decent interval he drifted north through the shadows of the park, following the pair. Karen Collins and the doorman entered a grocery store three blocks north of the apartment building. They were gone from sight.

Bolda reversed himself and strolled back through the park, taking up a new position a safe distance away. He passed the time by counting the cars traveling past the store.

When they came out of the store, the doorman was carrying two large paper sacks, while Karen Collins had another, smaller one. Bolda drifted back to his bench across the street from the apartment, taking care to keep within the concealment of the park. The doorman put down his two heavy sacks inside the waiting elevator, then stood aside for the woman to enter. She got in, thanked the man for his assistance, and pressed the button for the top floor. The door closed, and the guardian went back to his newspaper and the stool.

Bolda counted twenty-three minutes. The lobby had

been empty and unguarded for twenty-three minutes. He glanced up at the top floor and found only one pair of windows lighted. That should be Karen Collins behind the windows. Victor Angoff had no need of light.

He stayed on the bench another hour, but nothing more happened to interest him. A few building residents drifted in, and each time the stopper jumped off the stool to hold the elevator door for them. No one came out.

Bolda got up from the bench and put his hand in his pocket for the car keys. The keys were missing. Annoyed rather than alarmed, he hurried back to the car and found the keys where he'd left and forgotten them: hanging in the ignition lock.

He left the car in a numbered slot in the hotel parking lot and went inside The Mississippi House, seeking out the bell captain to ask if his trunk had arrived. The bell captain told him it had been delivered to his room. Bolda went upstairs, locked and chained the door, and opened the trunk to check its contents. All the electronic gear Section Three had furnished him was there, securely packed to escape damage in shipping. Someone had even thought to include a transistor radio for his relaxation. He took it from the trunk and turned it on.

Bolda had time only to remove his coat and hang it in the closet when the radio spoke to him.

"Anson?"

Bolda picked up the radio. "Anson here."

"I'm Frank. On the floor above you, 421."

A quick frown. "That's risky. You should be across the street, or somewhere."

"There is no hotel across the street. It was this, or take a chance on losing you because of distance. Do you have anything?"

Bolda sat down on the edge of the bed, bouncing the springs. "Have you checked out this room?"

"I did. It was clean, after the trunk was brought in. Did you bring anything in with you?"

"Those people gave me a book to read."

"Check it now."

Bolda examined the copy of Victor Angoff's book, leaf-

ing through it from beginning to end, holding it upside down and shaking it, examining the cloth covering the spine, and finally throwing it to the floor.

"Nothing here," he said to the radio.

"Put a reader on it," Frank's voice ordered.

Bolda searched through the trunk until he found a small plastic device resembling a light meter. He thumbed a switch to activate it and then passed the meter slowly over each flat surface of the book, searching for hidden strips of metal. Had a transmitter—or anything made of metal—been concealed in the volume, the detector would have buzzed a warning.

"Clean," Bolda reported.

"Good enough. Do you have anything?"

"I have the job, a sort of probation period for thirty days. If they like my work, they promised to sign me on and double my salary. Book research, doing the leg work on the next book. Karen Collins did the talking—she's the tough one."

"Description?"

"About thirty-five years old, five foot five, a hundred and twenty pounds. Dark-brown hair ready to turn gray, dark eyes—almost black. Plain face, English features, sharp tongue, sharp mind. She was pretty once, but something has beat the devil out of her. She's worn out—acts and walks like a tired old woman."

"Could she be a tired old woman? Fifty-five?"

"I don't think so. Her skin says thirty-five; so do her legs and you-know-what. But she just doesn't have the old bounce. Look, I didn't mean wrinkles or crowsfeet or anything like that. I meant she looked old inside her skin, inside her head where she thinks. Her attitude."

"Victor Angoff?"

"Pretty much as described. He's blind, ninety if he's a day, but he isn't feeble. I think he could get up and trot all around that room without hitting anything; he's memorized every stick of furniture. Almost bald, thin neck, wrinkled skin with a yellowish color on his cheeks and hands, all shriveled up. His clothes are too big for him—he must have bought them years ago, and now he's just shrinking inside them."

"Senile?"

"Definitely not. He kept me on the defensive."

"When do you go back?"

"Tomorrow morning. I'm supposed to read this book and find out what kind of a job I'm getting into. If I want to try it, we size each other up for the next thirty days. They'll give me an assignment to see how I work out."

"Any ideas? Opinions?"

"Some doubts. Before I saw them I thought they might be Soviet agents. Now—I don't know." A gesture of his hands, forgetting the radio couldn't see it. "They *could* be, but if they *are* it's something new for Moscow."

"Time will tell. My orders are to follow your lead. Anson, this radio is alive all the time; just turn yours on and this one emits a signal. Anything else?"

"Nothing more tonight."

"Good enough; I'll wait for you. Out."

Bolda responded, "Out."

He turned off the radio, changed into pajamas, and climbed into bed. Victor Angoff's book of strange people put him to sleep somewhere along in the sixth chapter.

# 8

Anson Bolda's first waking thought was of Karen Collins. She had missed a key question yesterday.

Always, everywhere, the first familiar question was some form of *How did it feel when you came over?* The newspaper people, the television reporters with their microphones thrust into his face, a few of the men at the agency, Victor Angoff, each of them asked that same trite question. It became a cliché. A possible second question had not been asked: *How did you get back alive?* They assumed he was alive because he'd traded a confession and a public trial, a prison sentence and the miracle of an exchange for the death penalty. A very few people at the two agencies—the sharp ones who thought beyond the clichés—had asked a second question: *Why did you live?*

Neither Karen Collins nor her aged companion had asked that one. Bolda expected it, but it hadn't come. For some reason the omission disturbed him.

He stretched his feet out to the two lower corners of the bed, yawned, and sat up to look at the early sun filling the east windows. Victor Angoff's book fell off the bed to the floor. Bolda picked it up, read a paragraph or two without any real interest, and put it on the night table beside the transistor radio. He yawned again and left the bed, turning on the radio as he crossed over to the adjoining room.

The shower was cold and brisk and he stayed under it for several minutes, pulling himself together. Karen Collins was successfully put aside, but another nagging matter was not—the presence of three wires on her little telephone continued to puzzle him. There was no need for three; that circuit needed only two wires, and no more than six volts, for the limited use of its design. The third wire suggested some other use, some added function.

Bolda turned off the shower and returned to the bedroom to dress.

The radio said, "Anson, do you always do this?"

"Do what?"

"Get up before dawn?"

"Slugabed!" Bolda retorted.

"They should have warned me," Frank's sleepy voice complained. "We thought this was a routine job."

"Who is 'we'?"

"I have a relief man outside, Otto. He's on the lot, keeping an eye on your car."

"Somebody try to steal it?" Bolda made a hasty search of his pockets, seeking the keys.

"No. Somebody bugged it."

Bolda came to a full stop with a shoe dangling in one hand. After a space he said ruefully, "I remember an old Russian proverb. If you want friends who can be trusted, go ask in the graveyard."

"Did you let your friends out of your sight?"

"The three of us were together the whole time." He sat down on the bed to put on the shoe. "Somebody else is working for them. They keep a stopper in the lobby who helps out with the chores."

Frank's voice said, "It was an old-fashioned bug, obsolete, the kind we discarded ten years ago. The range would be a mile or less, probably less. A car following you could pick up the signal down on the short end of the radio dial, say five hundred fifty kilocycles, but around here that signal would have to compete with some rock-and-roll stations. Where did you leave your car?"

"A parking lot behind Angoff's place."

"There, I guess. Otto found it early this morning."

"Why was he looking?"

"Wait until you get to know Otto. Suspicious man. Give him two minutes and he'll check every car he rides in."

"Including his own?"

"*Especially* his own. Every time he takes it out of the garage; every time his wife comes back from the store. Otto sees bugs everywhere."

"Where did he see mine?"

"Taped to the rear axle."

"Somebody is an amateur. What did he do with it?"

"Planted it in a taxi. That old bug has probably jumped all over town in the last couple of hours. Your tail should be going crazy."

"The fun won't last long," Bolda said.

"Guess not. They'll come back to you after a while, and this time they'll do a better job."

"All right. I'll do something with the car after I see Angoff. They'll have something else stuck on it by that time." A quick, surprising thought struck him. "Frank—Maybe I didn't have a tail."

"What, then?"

"Call it a burglar alarm. If that bug rattled on five hundred fifty kaycees, Angoff could be using a radio in his apartment. Checking my approach to him."

"Possible and logical, yes."

"Then his radio told him I came within a mile of him last night. I was in that little park across the street, the one with the reservoir. The car was a block away."

The transistor radio was silent for a space. At length Frank's voice cautioned, "You should assume he's on to you, Anson."

"I think he is. The name of this game is 'Gdansk.' "

"Are you carrying a gun?"

"No."

"Look in the trunk."

Bolda searched through the packaged objects in the trunk and uncovered a small, lightweight revolver that was new to him. The cylinder held only five shots, and the barrel was but two inches long; the gun was so small it could almost be covered by his open hand.

"What is this one, Frank?"

"Read the nameplate; I don't know what you have."

"Charter Arms."

"Now I know. That's a new one some of the agencies are using; you can pack it under your belt without a bulge. It's a .38 Special with a nine-pound trigger pull, but Anson, don't try to get off six shots. Look at the cylinder."

"I did. What's the range?"

"Fifty yards, but keep a steady hand. That short barrel has its drawbacks."

Bolda went back to rummaging through the trunk and was astonished at the variety of paraphernalia the agency had packed for him. There were enough electronic gadgets to supply the St. Louis Police Department, enough tools and materials to open his own shop in the hotel room. He turned up two small objects that brought him up short.

"I'll be damned!" he said aloud.

Frank asked, "What is it?"

"A pair of salt and pepper shakers." The shakers were beautifully shaped objects of cherrywood, polished to a high gloss with the letters *S* and *P* set in gold leaf.

"In the trunk?"

"Yes."

"They'd make awfully nice gifts, Anson."

Bolda turned the shakers over to examine the bases. They were so finely made and finished, there was no telltale line to separate the false from the true bottom, and the design so cleverly distributed the weight of each shaker that their true purpose was not revealed by heavy bottoms.

"They're too pretty to use—actually *use*."

"That's the point," Frank said.

Bolda looked into the depths of the trunk. "I'm going to make up some decoys. That woman out there is a sharpie."

He removed three ballpoint pens from the trunk and distributed them through the pockets of his jacket, placing one in the outside lapel pocket where it was easily visible against the white tip of a handkerchief. A cigarette case was slipped into a side pocket, while the matching lighter went into his trousers. Bolda pushed his wristwatch up his sleeve, out of sight, and slipped a new one over his wrist. A heavy tieclasp was fastened to his shirtfront, and a massive ring was placed on a finger. Finally the trunk gave up a small brown object the size and shape of a short cigar, having needlelike prongs at each end.

Bolda turned his attention to the book Karen Collins had given him to read.

He cut out the centers of a thick sheaf of pages, making a hollow nest in the middle of the book, and glued a flat transistor battery into the hollow. Five sheets of kitchen foil were cut to a size just smaller than the pages and

glued into place, one foil sheet to a page, but each one several pages apart for proper spacing. Short lengths of vanadium wire were cut from a spool. Bolda wired each foil page to the next one, looping the wire tightly over the innocent pages between, to create the impession of a series circuit; the last foil nearest the battery was wired to its terminals and taped over.

One last piece of wire was pushed down the spine of the book beneath the red buckram cover, then looped tightly in between the pages and glued to a foil sheet. Bolda paused to admire his handiwork. The circuit would do absolutely nothing except drain the battery; it was a farce and a fraud, but the untrained eye was not expected to appreciate that. Unless Karen Collins was a professional, she could be misled into believing the doctored book was a crude invasion of her privacy. Bolda hoped for no more than that.

He completed the decoy by gluing together all the pages in the middle of the book, hiding his tampering but creating a clump of paper that would immediately arouse suspicion. That done, he took from the trunk a small leather case the size of a shoebox, and flipped back the lid to reveal a compact radio receiver.

"Okay, Frank," he said at last. "I'm ready here. Go back to bed."

"I'm *in* bed."

"Soft civilians! When does the restaurant open?"

"At six. It's, uh, a quarter past, now. If you get out there fast enough you may catch Angoff in bed."

"Why do I want to catch him in bed?"

"All right, then, catch the woman in bed."

"The woman scares me."

"Anson, you're hopeless. You'll spoil our gaudy reputation. You'll have people believing we're not adulterous rakehells, like those chaps in the movies."

"Drum me out of the corps. I'd rather get into Angoff's basement or the elevator shaft."

"What's in the shaft?"

"A three-wire circuit on his house phone."

"Three? On an intercom?"

"The doorman calls upstairs first to see if visitors are welcome, but that third wire is doing something else."

"Maybe it's tied to a bomb in the basement," Frank suggested. "You'll never take him alive."

"I'd put the bomb in the shaft," Bolda said. "Best way to discourage snoops like me. Anything more before I go? I'm getting hungry."

"Nothing; it's been a quiet night. You might see Otto on the lot, or the street. Sandy hair, brown eyes, a cold pipe stuck in his mouth and a hearing aid behind his right ear. The hair and eyes are genuine."

Bolda was curious. "What happens when he lights that pipe?"

"He doesn't; he can't. The heat would fuse the circuitry. Otto carries a spare for smoking."

"Is he listening to all this?"

"Yes."

"He hasn't said anything."

"Would you stand around on the street talking to your pipe?"

"Sure. If people stared at me, I'd tell them I was CIA. They'd understand."

"Go eat breakfast, Anson."

Bolda shut off the radio and stowed it in the trunk. He gathered up the bits and scraps of wire and foil, and put them away, closing and locking the trunk lid. The jacket went on over his shoulders and buttoned smoothly at the belt without revealing a bulge. Bolda picked up the book and the gear and quit the room.

The hotel lobby was empty except for the desk clerk and a dozing bellboy perched on a stool behind a theater sign. Bolda nodded to the clerk and glanced through the open doors of the coffee shop, but went on across the lobby to the street. The city had an empty, early-morning air about it. He put all of his gear except the salt and pepper shakers in the car trunk, and locked it. Across the way, a sandy-haired man with a pipe in his mouth sat behind the wheel of a parked Ford and watched his movements without apparent curiosity.

Bolda carried the shakers back into the hotel and strolled along the lobby corridor searching for the gift

shop. A young woman was dusting china figurines on a display counter. She listened politely to his concocted story, murmured something about the beauty of the shakers, said it wasn't usually done, then accepted his proffered dollar bill to box and wrap the set as a gift package. The name of the hotel was imprinted on paper and ribbon.

Bolda went to the coffee shop for breakfast.

A different doorman was on duty in the Angoff lobby, but the procedure was the same. Bolda waited while the man telephoned upstairs to announce his arrival. There was a short delay before the party answered.

He studied the telephone and noted the absence of a number of selector buttons which would permit the man to call other apartments; there was only one button, and the only other station on the circuit was that box fastened to the wall beside Victor Angoff's front door. The usual two wires extended from the phone to a jackbox on the wall beside the doorman. Angoff seemed to be living in a kind of fortress, but Bolda was aware of flaws in the defenses.

The stopper put down the phone. "Miss Collins wants you to wait ten minutes, please."

Bolda nodded and left the lobby to wait outside in the sunshine. He hoped that he'd roused her from bed. It was apparent she had no warning of his coming.

The ten minutes had nearly expired when another stratagem came to mind, and he entered the drugstore next to the lobby to buy cigarettes and a notebook. He didn't run the risk of asking for Angoff's particular brand—they were too uncommon—but instead bought two packs of ivory tips which closely resembled the perfumed cigarettes. The feel would be wrong; Angoff's sense of touch would likely detect the difference immediately, but the decoys would have already served their purpose. The old man would be off balance, and his secretary with him. Gdansk was a two-way game.

Bolda rode the elevator to the top floor. A telephone tap was hidden in the palm of his hand.

He darted from the elevator as soon as the door began to slide, knowing he had little time. The three loosely braided wires of the apartment phone were pulled from

their nesting place down near the baseboard, and the brown cigar-like tap was inserted behind them. Bolda pushed the needle prongs through the insulation to make contact with the wire, then shoved the prongs on the other end into the wood of the door frame, fixing it in position. The wires were pressed back into place. The tap left a lump in the wiring, but it wasn't likely to be noticed unless someone was looking down at the floor.

Bolda straightened up and reached for the bell push. Karen Collins opened the door. He read the peculiar expression on her face and knew the purpose of the third wire.

He said cheerfully, "Good morning, Miss Collins."

The woman looked at his outstretched finger not yet touching the bell push, at the gift package in his free hand, and then into his face. She gave the impression of having hastily dressed.

"It is barely eight o'clock, Mr. Bolda."

"Mr. Angoff said early."

"Are you always so literal?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Angoff hasn't had his breakfast."

"I'll wait."

Karen Collins frowned and seemed at a momentary loss. She stared at the package again and then stepped back from the door. Bolda took it as an invitation and walked in. He closed the door behind him, and handed her the gift.

"For you, Miss Collins."

The frown was still on her face. "I said yesterday that I don't make friends easily, Mr. Bolda. It was nice of you, but it will not alter my position." The freeze could be measured by a thermometer.

"I have *some* manners, Miss Collins. I'm not a barbarian, whatever my background."

She reacted as though he had struck her. The woman stared at him for a brief space and then said quickly, "Excuse me." She turned on her heel and left the room.

Bolda moved swiftly across the room. An unopened pack of cigarettes was placed on a windowsill and pushed out of sight behind a drape. A ballpoint pen was hidden

on the upper casement of an adjoining window. The tie-clasp was dropped into a vase of artificial flowers. Bolda crossed over to the bookcase on another wall. Two copies of Angoff's first book were resting on the upper shelf, and Bolda took one of them, slipping his decoy volume into its place. A small plastic radio rested atop the bookcase. It was still warm to the touch, and he noted the dial was set at 530 kilocycles. Bolda slid another ballpoint pen beneath the radio and moved on.

The extra wristwatch came off his arm and was put in the milky bowl of an old-fashioned floor lamp; the bowl and its three-way bulb were designed to light the ceiling. The cigarette case was dropped to the floor and shoved beneath the heavy sofa Angoff had been sitting on. The lighter was dropped between the cushions. Bolda opened the second pack of cigarettes he'd bought and dumped them into the box on the coffee table, thoroughly mixing them with Angoff's supply of perfumed cigarettes. The new supply filled the wooden box to the top.

Bolda sat down in the same chair he had occupied the day before, to await results. He held the book in his lap. The last pen remained in his lapel pocket.

For a space there was nothing; no sound, movement, life. He could be alone in the five-story building.

After a bit he detected the odor of fresh coffee, then heard a faint noise of dishes from the kitchen. Karen Collins came into the living room carrying place mats and two cups with saucers. She had done something to her appearance, removing the hasty impression he'd seen at the door. Another trip to the kitchen produced a glass coffeepot nesting in a wire basket, and a pitcher of cream. Bolda watched in thoughtful silence as she poured two cups, added a dash of cream to her own, then set the coffee and creamer aside. She sat down on the sofa across the table from him and took the time to light a cigarette from a case carried in her skirt pocket. It was a straight brand without perfume or menthol. Bolda looked at her with a growing wonder.

Karen Collins had recovered her composure. "I am very sorry, Mr. Bolda. I apologize."

He tried to wave it aside. "No need. You thought I was

trying to make time." (The plain ones were more suspicious than the pretty ones.)

"I admit to that, but I do owe you an apology. That was very rude of me."

"I'm getting used to you," Bolda said. "You have a temper and the lip to match, but I'm getting used to you."

"That is never an excuse for rudeness."

Bolda sipped his black coffee and said nothing.

"The shakers are very beautiful, and I am quite pleased with them." She studied him through the curling smoke. "It was thoughtful of you."

"I liked them myself," he said honestly. "I thought somebody put in a lot of work on them—you know, handmade."

"Yes, indeed. And speaking of work, what did you think of our book?"

"Is all that stuff really true?"

"We believe it to be. Mr. Angoff is a stickler for accuracy and authenticity. Remember that."

"People disappearing in midair?"

"We have documentary evidence that people have vanished from city streets, from midair, so to speak."

"What about that water coming out of the wall?"

"Several witnesses, including an undersheriff of the county, have furnished affidavits to the phenomenon."

"Pardon me if I'm skeptical."

"How much have you read?"

Bolda opened the book in his lap and thumbed the pages. "Number six. I went to sleep somewhere in the sixth chapter."

The woman continued to study him through smoke.

"The sixth," she repeated, and something in her voice warned Bolda of another ambush.

"I'll be honest," he added. "I did a lot of skipping around—I thought it was, uh, far-fetched." He almost said "hogwash."

She nodded, either in acknowledgment or admiration of his footwork. "Many people share your sentiments. The critics have been unkind."

"Do the books sell?"

"Mr. Angoff is very pleased with the response."

"Well, then, to hell with the critics." He looked up quickly. "Excuse me, Miss Collins."

"You have made some progress since yesterday, Mr. Bolda. How much have you made?"

He said in answer, "Karen Collins."

"Only that?"

"You've managed to keep off the tax rolls and the voter lists; you're not in the city directory or the phone book. Not many people know you; the flunky down in the lobby, the grocery clerk up the street, a handful." He decided the woman was overdue for another push off balance. She had recovered from that first one.

"I congratulate you."

"Let's congratulate each other."

Her guard went up. "For what, Mr. Bolda?"

"Your progress. You've been busy. I didn't know my car was bugged until this morning. It was a sloppy job, but I didn't spot it." He stared at her cigarette. "I didn't know you smoked, until now."

"Is my smoking important to you?"

"You didn't offer me one."

Karen Collins tripped herself with one incautious word. "But—"

"But I don't smoke," he finished the sentence. "A man in Lubyanka told me that."

Icily: "Isn't all this a little ridiculous?"

"There's no sugar on the table."

She glanced at the table and quickly looked away, keenly aware of the mistake. "I don't understand your humor, Mr. Bolda."

"I'm not trying to be funny, I'm trying to point up your progress. You didn't offer me that cream."

Karen Collins sat very still, her spine rigid.

"I don't smoke, I take my coffee straight. You knew that; you found it in my dossier." He bent forward in the chair to seize her attention. "Are they peddling copies on every street corner?"

# 9

Anson Bolda saw a movement beyond her shoulder, in the kitchen doorway, and turned his head to look at Victor Angoff. The old man was wearing a lounging robe over his trousers, but a gap in the upper part of the robe revealed a striped pajama shirt he hadn't taken the time to remove. Bolda wondered how long the old fellow had been eavesdropping.

Karen Collins had seen his gaze move to the door. She didn't turn to look at Angoff, but the tautness left her spine. She reached out for her cup of coffee.

Angoff said, "Trouble, Karen?"

"Mr. Bolda is confused."

"Is he? About what?"

"He believes I have read his dossier."

"Have you?"

"No."

"Why does he think so?"

"I neglected to offer him a cigarette, or the cream for his coffee. We have no sugar in the house."

"Manners," Angoff said gently, as if to dismiss an oversight. "Don't have many guests, but manners . . ." He let it dangle there.

Karen apologized. "I'm sorry." She made it appear the apology was directed to the old man alone.

Angoff quit the kitchen to join them. He was wearing woolen socks with limp leather soles. Bolda watched his progress across the room. The aged man moved with deliberate sureness, knowing the precise location of each chair, table, and lamp; he eased around a magazine rack as though he were seeing it and came up behind the woman sitting on the sofa.

"I would like coffee, Karen."

She jumped up and went into the kitchen for a cup.

Angoff moved around the end of the sofa and sat down in his favorite place. Bolda waited for him to reach for the cigarette box on the table.

"Karen isn't given to lying," Angoff said.

Bolda mentally rejected the excuse but said nothing.

"Many good traits in that girl, but some bad ones. Sometimes she disappoints me. I thought she would find a good man, marry him. She didn't."

"She'd scare a man off," Bolda said flatly.

Victor Angoff nodded. "Yes. *My* failure. Didn't bring her up properly."

Bolda jumped into the opening. "No parents?"

"She came to me when she was twelve or thirteen. Gangly, pathetic little thing. Father had drifted away, abandoning his family. Depression years. Don't suppose you knew them. She came to me when she lost her mother."

"How did that happen?"

"Her mother was a flyer, jumper. Parachute failed to open."

And there was another paragraph of information Stuffy MacGough could add to the new-found dossier. Bolda decided to kick the trap shut—if it was a trap set up for him.

"Maybe it wasn't the chute," he suggested.

"Why think that?"

"More likely a sniper got her when she went down behind the lines."

Victor Angoff held his silence for long minutes. He betrayed no perturbation. His hands were together in his lap, fingers touching, five little church steeples of yellowed skin.

"You may be right," he said at last.

Bolda had to admire his composure.

Karen Collins came in from the kitchen carrying a cup and saucer. She put them down on the table in a certain place, poured coffee, then added a small dash of brandy. "We don't use sugar, Mr. Bolda. Mr. Angoff doesn't take cream. I'm afraid I was thinking only of myself, and again I apologize."

Bolda said, "Sure." He was certain she was lying, but

nothing could be gained now by pushing it. She and his old enemy the KGB man had something in common: in some way they each had learned the contents of his dossier. He would not be surprised if, in the next moment, his mother marched in the front door carrying a book or wearing a hearing aid. There had to be a leak at Fort Meade large enough to ram a tank through.

The woman sat down on the sofa beside Angoff and touched his hand. Angoff reached out for his coffee and found the cup without a fumble. The hot liquid intensified the odor of brandy.

"Early," he said amiably.

"Yes, sir."

"Care to have breakfast with us?"

"I've had it."

"Always like this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Admirable, I suppose."

"Habit," Bolda said. "Five or six o'clock, usually. Field hands were up and ready to work with the sun."

"Your childhood?"

"Yes, sir. Following the crops, in Poland and the Ukraine."

"Not an easy life."

"No, sir."

"Did you like the army?"

"It was easier."

"All considered?"

"No—there were tight spots. I came out alive."

"Luck," Angoff said, repeating an earlier statement.

"I had something going for me," Bolda said without elaboration. The woman was watching him carefully.

"Did you read my book?"

"Yes, sir. Six chapters."

"Like it? Speak up, now."

Bolda glanced at the woman. "Yes and no. Some of it was fun, but other parts were hard to believe. I'm skeptical."

"Usual reaction," Angoff said without resentment. "One has to be of a certain mind, have a sense of wonder. But enough people like them to make it worth my while."

Bolda asked bluntly, "Is it a living?"

"No. A hobby."

"Can the hobby afford me?"

The woman's quick frown revealed her displeasure, but the old man responded with a wrinkled grin. "Two of you if necessary, young fellow."

Bolda said, "That's nice."

The silence blanketed them again, but this time Bolda didn't allow it to upset him. He looked from one to the other of his hosts and waited for an opening.

Victor Angoff put down his cup and reached for a cigarette. His searching fingers opened the lid, touched a cigarette, paused, moved on to another. Karen Collins was staring at the box; her displeasure had changed to surprise and then alarm. The old man slowly moved his sensitive fingers over the top layer of mixed cigarettes, discovering the fullness of the box. After the merest hesitation he closed the lid, empty-handed, and returned to the coffee. Bolda was certain he read amusement on the old one's face. As before, he remained unperturbed.

He shifted his gaze to the woman. She was upset. Their glances locked and he smiled pleasantly, as if to show his appreciation of her coffee or his satisfaction at her discomfort. She was off balance again. Her mouth was partly opened, the mixture of surprise and alarm, but her eyes were dark, remote, now hostile. She was accusing him of some nameless crime.

Victor Angoff's equilibrium remained firm. He actually seemed pleased, relishing a joke on himself. The old one said cheerfully, "Glad you came back. Work to do, and so little time. I have high hopes for you, young fellow."

"That's nice. When do I start?"

"Do we have an assignment, Karen?"

She stared hard at Bolda and answered, "The Stipek case." She would have preferred to fire him at once.

"Yes. Good. Good beginning. Harry Stipek."

Bolda removed the conspicuous ballpoint pen from his pocket and fished for the notebook. "What's with him? Where is he?"

"Present address unknown. Present age unknown."

Bolda had a premonition, and waited.

"The evidence would indicate that Harry Stipek is one hundred and fifteen or twenty years old, if he is still living. It would also indicate he is a member of a family of centenarians. That needs to be verified, as well. Mr. Angoff desires a comprehensive report on the subject and his family."

Bolda was making notes, head bent over the paper. This was the same assignment the FBI man was working on when he was killed in the riverfront saloon.

"What's your lead?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"How did you find out about this character?"

"Mr. Angoff subscribes to a clipping service and maintains a file for future investigations. The lead was published in a Chicago paper several years ago."

"Is that all you have on him?"

"That is sufficient for a beginning, Mr. Bolda. Many cases have originated with less. Please remember we wish to determine your capacity for work. This should prove a fair trial."

"All right, what about old Harry?"

"When he was a very young man, in Chicago, he was tried and convicted of the murder of an army officer. He was sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison."

"The army usually shoots them," Bolda commented.

"For some reason, which is not yet clear, the army did not claim jurisdiction. The trial took place in a Chicago criminal court and the man was imprisoned by the state, at Joliet, Illinois. A sentence of ninety-nine years was a common one in Illinois, until recently; it was employed as a substitute for the death penalty when that penalty could not be obtained. I am not aware of the finer distinctions, but a ninety-nine-year sentence was legally different from a life sentence."

"Life doesn't mean much—they get out on parole." Bolda toyed with the pen. "You Americans have some funny laws."

"But *you* are an American."

"I am now—but I can't ever be President. Get on with old Harry."

"Harry Stipek was said to be a Confederate soldier held

prisoner in a Union stockade, near Chicago, at the close of the War Between the States. The incident is supposed to have happened shortly after the close of that war, when the stockade was being dismantled and the prisoners dispersed. Harry Stipek was one of a number of Confederate prisoners who made an attempt to escape. The Union officer was killed during the attempt. Some of the prisoners were shot, some were caught, some got away. Stipek was among those who were caught and convicted."

"All this happened—when? When did that war end?"

"The war ended in 1865. Lacking precise data, we may assume the escape and recapture occurred in that year or the following one. We know only that an establishment for southern prisoners was located in Chicago toward the close of the war. You will be expected to develop fuller information."

"And now you're going to tell me that old Harry was convicted there about 1865, sent to Joliet for ninety-nine years, and served out every one of them. You're going to tell me he walked out a free man a couple of years ago."

"You are going to determine that, Mr. Bolda."

"I guess I don't have the old sense of wonder."

"You have the evidence to begin an investigation."

"A newspaper clipping isn't evidence. Did you check that story with the reporter?"

"We attempted to communicate with him when the clipping came to our attention, but the reporter was no longer employed there. We were unable to locate him."

"He was fired," Bolda said. "Look, I'm not knocking the job, but this is far-fetched." And again he wanted to say "hogwash."

"That is your assignment, Mr. Bolda. I'm sure you will complete it. You appear to be a man of many talents."

Karen Collins could bite when she was riled. Bolda glanced at Angoff, found the old man smiling with inner amusement, and returned his attention to the woman. "What about the family?"

"The newspaper reporter offered two possibilities in an attempt to explain the prisoner's longevity. The first was the man's immediate family. The reporter talked to Harry Stipek and learned that almost all of Stipek's relatives

were long-lived. His parents were reported to be nearing a century of life at the time of the interview. Some of his brothers died in the same war, but those who did not were said to be still living. Stipek's paternal grandfather lived to the age of one hundred and ten; his paternal grandmother only two years less. He was out of touch with his maternal grandparents and could not offer information; apparently they were already lost to him when he was a boy in the Confederate Army. Harry Stipek enlisted at the age of fourteen."

"He ought to write a book," Bolda said irreverently. "What was the other story?"

"There is the distinct possibility that our subject was given a longevity serum during World War I. Harry Stipek, along with a number of other prisoners, offered himself as a human guinea pig for wartime medical research. New, untried medicines were tested on several of the men. To maintain proper control, the inmates were never told which of them were receiving experimental drugs and which were receiving placebos; unfortunately, the results were not always made public. We may speculate that, by accident or design, Harry Stipek was dosed with a drug which possessed the power of prolonging life. That drug now appears lost. We have no other information."

"The stories contradict each other," Bolda said. "If old Harry had *one,* he wouldn't need the *other.*"

"You will be expected to resolve the contradiction, Mr. Bolda."

"That's nice. Shouldn't take long. What's my second assignment? I might want something to do tomorrow."

"Your probationary period is one month, Mr. Bolda." Her expression told him what she thought of his levity.

"I may take Sundays off, Miss Collins."

Victor Angoff was grinning from his corner of the sofa, revealing cigarette-yellowed dentures. Twice during the briefing he had reached out for a cigarette, caught himself, and drew back from the box. If he was amused now, he should be laughing like an idiot when the transmitters began turning up in the room.

No one spoke. The coffee cups were not refilled. The

prolonged silence told Bolda this interview was at an end. He had an assignment and a job for at least thirty days; now he was expected to make some move in that time. The next development would depend on what move he made.

Victor Angoff seemed as pleased with him as Karen Collins was not. The old man was openly delighted with his initiative, with the cigarette-box trick, and the candid admission of knowledge of Karen's mother. The finding of the transmitters would please him more. The old one *wanted* Bolda to push on to something. He knew very well that Bolda had amassed information on them, as they had gathered information on him, and that too was approved. Bolda had the curious feeling that Angoff would be greatly disappointed if, at the end of the thirty days, nothing more was accomplished than a report on a man who may have served out a ninety-nine year term and left prison under his own power. Victor Angoff *wanted* something.

Bolda got up. "Time to get busy. What shall I do with this book?"

"Keep it," Angoff said. "Read the other fourteen chapters. Develop a sense of wonder."

"If I do, I'll come back and ask for your autograph."

"Good. Beginning to like you, young fellow." He turned to the woman beside him. "The suitcase, Karen."

Karen Collins obediently left the room, using a door that had not been opened before in Bolda's presence. It led to some other room away from the kitchen.

"What's with the suitcase?" Bolda asked.

"Determine that for yourself. Open it at your leisure, not here but in some private place. You may think of something."

"Does it go with the job?"

"You will have to answer that."

Bolda slipped the massive ring off his finger. He bent over and dropped it in the cream pitcher, taking care not to let it splash. It was probable the old man's hearing was acute, to compensate for the loss of vision.

"I like mysterious games and dark deeds," he told Angoff. "Just like the old days on the Russian steppes."

"Take care not to get caught. No second chance. I don't think Karen would exchange for you at some bridge."

"Karen wouldn't pay ten cents to watch me jump off some bridge. But I'll take the warning."

The subject under discussion returned through the door carrying a small suitcase. It was a tan plastic case barely large enough to hold an overnight change of clothing, and Bolda guessed it was locked. The key was tied to the handle by a piece of string.

"Bombs?" he asked facetiously.

She thrust the suitcase at him and strode to the front door without answering. The door was pulled open. Bolda thought *that* blunt enough, and followed her, toting the book and suitcase. His notebook was tucked away in a pocket, but the pen stayed behind on the coffee table.

"See you later, Mr. Angoff."

"I think you will."

Bolda stepped through the open door, hesitated, then turned to look at the woman just as he had done the day before. "The same reason, the same opinion. Have a nice breakfast, Miss Collins."

She closed the door on him. The dark eyes burned with hostility. Bolda heard a lock turn.

He rode the elevator down to the lobby and left the building without speaking to the stopper, hurrying around to the parking lot at the back. The car keys were missing from his pocket. Annoyed at his forgetfulness, Bolda snatched them from the ignition and unlocked the trunk; the book and suitcase were tossed inside, while the short-wave radio receiver was quickly pulled out. Bolda put the radio on the seat beside him and backed away in reckless haste, quitting the lot and racing down the avenue to the first cross street. He turned sharply, drove less than a hundred feet before parking at the curb, and flipped back the lid of the leather case on the receiver. A telescoping antenna was pulled out to its fullest length. Bolda dialed one of the two wavelengths assigned to the eavesdropper and snapped the switch.

Karen Collins was caught in the middle of a word.

Karen: "—ing. I don't trust him, Victor."

Angoff: "Precious little choice now. Time is running

out. Should have realized, should have started sooner by years." (Pause.) "He's sharp. Good training."

Karen: "You like him better than the others." (Flat statement made against the sound of running water.)

Angoff: "Yes—oh, yes. He won't make the same mistakes. Lubyanka frightened him, KGB taught him a hard lesson. Used his mother against him. Watch him walk on eggs. He doesn't trust anyone now, not you, me, his superiors. I think he's our man. We'll know soon."

Karen: "*Your* man, not mine. I will go with you."

Angoff: "Figure of speech. Won't ask you to do this again." (Reflective pause.) "Stocked with data."

Karen: "I thought as much."

Angoff: "He knew about your mother. Gave him an opening and he jumped in with both feet, daring me to do something. I liked that." (Finger tapping a wooden box.) "The cigarettes. Clever move, good thinking." (Angoff was still seated on the sofa in the living room.)

The water was turned off. Bolda guessed she had put the salt and pepper shakers in the kitchen. He hoped they were high on a shelf, out of direct line of sight and out of mind. One shaker was operating on the present wavelength; its twin was duplicating the signal on the reserve channel.

Karen: "I'm going to throw out those cigarettes. *That* upset me."

Angoff: "It was meant to. Pushing, teasing, trying to put us on the defensive. He's looking for chinks in our armor, you might say."

Karen: "He found them in mine more than once. He watches my face. I'm not good at acting, Victor."

Angoff: "He wanted a reaction, wanted to unnerve us. I was pleased. Think that shook him a bit, it wasn't the reaction he expected. He'll dig the harder now." (Long pause. Sound of utensils on stove. Refrigerator door opened and closed.) "Feel like working today?"

Karen: "As soon as I've had something to eat. He *would* come before breakfast."

Angoff: "Good girl. I'll get dressed, have my breakfast in the den. Owe you another hundred for that."

Karen: "An even twenty-two thousand, Victor."

The old man laughed and moved away from the table. A door opened and closed, and he was gone from the room.

Bolda spent another impatient hour at the receiver, without worthwhile results. Karen Collins cooked a meal, set out dishes and silverware on a metal tray, carried everything away into the hush of another room, came back to the kitchen humming a tune he couldn't identify, opened and closed the refrigerator, walked off into the silence a second time and did not return. He supposed the ring and the pitcher of cream were in the refrigerator. She would have found it had it fallen into her breakfast coffee, and she wouldn't be humming a tune. There was no rewarding sound at all from the apartment; even the plastic radio that had been used earlier to monitor his approach was voiceless.

Bolda switched off his equipment and closed the telescoping antenna. He steered the car away from the curb, seeking the most direct route downtown.

Bolda pushed into his hotel room, latched the door behind him, and opened the agency trunk. He put away his gun because the thing was a nuisance under his belt, then took from the trunk the transistor radio and the electronic reader used the previous evening to examine Angoff's book for metallic inserts. The radio was turned on.

"Frank? Your old buddy is back."

"This is Otto, old buddy," a new voice answered him from the floor above. "Frank sacked out."

"Otto, I've got a Christmas present down in the car, a suitcase. The Collins woman gave it to me just before she threw me out. It's locked, but she also gave me the key. The thing might burn my fingers, so I'm going to take it out somewhere and open it."

"You don't know what's in the case?"

"Not yet, but I'm going to find out. It could be anything from a stick of dynamite to the old Czar's crown jewels. Some of them are missing, you know. I'm afraid to open it here. The noise might wake Frank—he'd be mad."

"Anson, do you know what you're doing?"

"Sure—I'm playing the game, I'm calling Angoff's play. Stop worrying, I'll put a reader on it first."

"Take the transistor with you. Keep it on."

Bolda eyed the little set. "Will it carry?"

"All depends on where you go and how far you go. Keep away from downtown buildings; don't let them line up between us. Anson—I've an idea. Go south, far south on Broadway. There are a lot of little parks along the way. Or go to 6200 south, and turn west. Holly Hills Boulevard. Carondelet Park. It's fair-sized. You can dump it in the lake if it gets too hot."

"All right, Otto—will do."

There were few people in his part of the park, despite the pleasant attraction of an early summer morning. Workmen were cutting grass a quarter of a mile away, while behind him, in an easterly direction, two boys were trying unsuccessfully to launch a kite into the still air. A teen couple were mooning on the grass in the middle distance, a pair of novices nearly screened from view by the intervening trees. Near at hand, above him, a noisy gray squirrel perched on a limb and watched with suspicion.

Bolda swept the suitcase with the magnetic reader. Two small hinges at the rear provoked a buzzing, as did the clasps and locks on the front edge; there were two small metal rings fastening the handle to the case proper. The reader went silent.

He stretched out on his belly on the grass and pushed the case around a tree, making the thick trunk a shield between him and the object. The squirrel reversed its position to watch the suitcase. Bolda reached one hand around the tree, fitted the key into the first lock and turned it. After a space he changed hands and reached around the opposite side to unsnap the second lock. When nothing happened, he pocketed the key and reached his left hand around the tree for a third time. Fitting one finger beneath a hasp, he heaved the lid up and back.

Bolda counted sixty under his breath and lifted his face from the grass. The squirrel had turned about once more to watch him. Bolda climbed to his knees and peered

around the tree. After a space he reached out to seize the suitcase and dump it upside down on the grass.

The transistor radio called him. "Anson?" The signal was weakened by distance.

Bolda turned up the gain to peak. "I read you."

"What happened? What's your location?"

"Carondelet Park. The package is open—I didn't need the lake."

"No boom?"

"Inflation, but no boom," Bolda told the man. "I haven't had time to count it; I'm not going to try. The case was stuffed—there could be anything up to a million."

"Dollars?" The distant man was incredulous.

"It isn't rubles or zlotys, old buddy."

# 10

Anson Bolda telephoned Stuffy MacGough at the agency office in Fort Meade, and reversed the charges. He was certain that touch would be appreciated; the Scotsman would react as if *he* were paying the bill rather than the taxpayers. Knowing that the agency receptionist wouldn't accept such a call at her switchboard, Bolda directed the St. Louis long-line operator to contact Stuffy's unlisted number. That phone rested in a desk drawer.

A moment later the Scotsman came on the line, after asking the St. Louis operator the point of origin.

He snapped, "You've got some nerve, mister!"

Emphatically: "There are no leaks in my shop."

"Don't you bet on that, Stuffy. I can cover any amount of money you want to put up."

Stuffy hesitated. "Money? Did you get rich?"

"I'm rich. I haven't taken the trouble to count it—that would take too long. I have a suitcase full."

"From our friend?"

"From *your* friend. His girl gave it to me. You and your queer people!"

"Why?"

Bolda's answer was a shout of derisive laughter.

"I was just asking," Stuffy said defensively. "Are you worth so much, Anse? Did they offer enough to make it worth your while to sell out?"

"More than enough. My guess is something between a half and a million—I said there's too much to count."

"Well, so!" There was a long pause on the line, and Bolda imagined the man tapping his boots on the floor. "I can't match that, Anse. I can't buy you back. What will you do now?"

"I thought I'd buy Fort Meade. There are a few people I want to fire."

"That's the spirit!" Stuffy cried. "Do you have anyone in mind?"

"The leak."

"What leak?"

"The leak who has been spreading my dossier all over the world."

"Oh, now, we're back to *that* again," Stuffy moaned. "I've said it again and again, Anse, there are no leaks in this shop. Get rid of that persecution complex, mister. Next thing, you'll be pointing the finger at me."

Soberly. "I've thought of you."

"Are you serious, warlock?"

"Dead serious." Bolda knew he had shaken the man.

"Oh, lord! Lordy, lordy, Anse. Stop that."

"I'll stop staring at you if you find that leak for me. I've jumped into something peculiar here, Stuffy. I haven't found an escape route yet. Read the reports when you have a chance; I have two contacts here who are relaying back to Section Three. Read their stuff—maybe you'll lose a little sleep over it."

"How bad is your problem, Anse?"

"Your two friends have me nailed down. They know my habits, my likes and dislikes, they know how the KGB sandpapered me in Lubyanka. Stuffy, you said once or twice you had a pipeline into that place, and I believed you. Now *you* believe *me*. This pair have a pipeline into the agency—they're dropping little details that went into my dossier *after* I was picked up in Gdansk."

"That can't be."

"Think not? Who told them my mother was hauled in to Lubyanka? Who told them I knew about the FBI man getting shot? Who told them I had the story on Collins parachuting behind the lines? Who, Stuffy?"

"I don't know," was the weak answer. "*I* didn't."

"I hope not. I'm getting the treatment again. I think the same man—or woman—who sold me in Gdansk is selling me in St. Louis. I hope to hell it isn't you."

"Please, warlock. I'm not guilty."

"Then *do* something on your end. Something drastic." Bolda let a silence grow between them. When he felt that he had underscored his point, he added information. "This

Karen Collins is the daughter of that one. She's been living with the old man since her mother jumped into the war zone. I'd like to find out how and why."

"Secretary, I suppose?"

"Secretary, cook, housekeeper, bodyguard, companion. She also does some of his dirty work, but she doesn't like it. He promised to relieve her of *that* chore as soon as something happens."

"What is going to happen?"

"I wish I knew, Stuffy. Whatever it is, it involves me. Maybe I'm supposed to sell out for this money, defect; or maybe I'm supposed to turn him in to show my loyalty. I don't know enough—I don't know which way to jump. There has to be a *third* way. Everything he's said and done is intended to push me in some direction, force *me* to make something happen. That bothers me."

"A million dollars," Stuffy said in admiration.

"I'm not worth that much. *You* know it, *he* knows it. If I was a mind to defect, I could be had for fifty or a hundred thousand—that looks as green as a million to me. And the same goes for turning him in—he didn't need to risk all that money. No, that old man wants something else; he's pushing me in some other direction, some third direction. He expects me to do something *worth* a million dollars. What do I do?"

"Well, so. Elope with his secretary."

"She wouldn't ride down in the elevator with me. Stuffy, do you believe in telepathy? Clairvoyance?"

"No. All that is claptrap, and we modern Americans reject claptrap. Remnants of the Dark Ages, absurdities. Tell me."

"I have the damnedest feeling I've traveled this road before. I've a feeling that Gdansk, Lubyanka, and St. Louis are all strung out together on the long road. I'm being shuffled from one to the other."

"Poppycock!"

"One place is connected to the other; I'm *here* only because I was *there*. Gdansk was responsible for Lubyanka, and Lubyanka was responsible for St. Louis. I'm being pushed down the road, Stuffy. What comes after St. Louis?"

"I don't know what you mean. I'm not sure I want to know."

"You sent me to Gdansk."

"I selected you for the Gdansk mission because you were the one man most suited to the job. Three or four others almost qualified but I chose you, and that was a professional choice. I would do it again."

"You sent me to St. Louis."

"Don't be impertinent, mister! You opted St. Louis. I suggested telegrams, remember?"

"You did, and then nudged me this way. Books and queer people."

"Oh, lordy, warlock! You're impossible. What do you want me to say? What do you want me to do?"

"Find that leak before I turn up in your office with fire in my eye."

"I can't admit to a leak in this shop."

"It's there. Who's been talking about me? Who's being nosey about this mission? Read those reports from the Section Three people, and sweat. I'm sweating *here*, Stuffy. Victor Angoff and Collins have me nailed down."

"All right, Anse." His voice was suddenly tempered, almost conciliatory. "I'll look into something."

"Do you think I've spent enough of your money?"

The faraway boots slammed on the floor. "I can take a hint, mister."

Bolda hung up and left the telephone booth. The booth was located on the sidewalk outside a bus station.

He eyed the car parked at the curb and decided it was time to return it to the rental agency. On impulse, he dropped to one knee and peered beneath the car, but found no bugs in the quick sweep of the underframing. A pair of idle cab drivers watched the maneuver with frank curiosity. Bolda entered the car and drove away.

The personable young woman at the automobile rental agency wasn't sure she understood.

"Is something wrong with the car, Mr. Bolda?"

"I don't like the color."

The woman scanned the rental papers spread out on her desk. "Did you request a certain color, sir?"

"No."

"Has there been mechanical trouble?"

"No."

She glanced up and found him smiling. "Are you joking with me, sir?"

"No, I'm not. I just want another car. Can't I pay you for this one, and take another one?"

"Yes, sir. What—what color do you wish, sir?"

"How about blue?"

The young woman looked through the window beyond her desk. "We have several blue models available."

Bolda followed her glance. "How about that one?"

"That blue sedan? It is serviced and ready. We have attractive rates on the compact models, sir."

"I'll take it." Bolda waited until she had completed the paperwork on the car he was returning, and on the new one he was taking out. When she had finished the chore he paid the charges. "I'll be back tomorrow for another color. Green, or white, or something."

Taken off guard, she stared at him with open mouth. "You want *another* car?"

"I'm a busy man," he told her. "I wear out colors fast. I might need two or three a day if this keeps up." Bolda read the nameplate on her desk, and watched the bright red, astonished lips resume their normal position. "Thank you, Miss Trimble. We'll meet again."

He transferred his gear to the blue car and drove away. Evelyn Trimble stared after him, then looked down at the five-dollar tip he'd put in her hand. She thought the customer was a nut—a wealthy nut, or an expense-account nut.

Bolda moved the blue car a dozen feet along the curb to take advantage of the cooling shade offered by a lawn tree. The early summer sun was higher and hotter, nearing noon. Only a burdened mailman moved along the street.

He was parked on the same side street, around the corner from Angoff's apartment building near the spot he had occupied earlier that morning. The radio receiver rested on the seat, its telescoping antenna outstretched. There were no significant signals coming from the bugged apart-

ment, no voices or sounds of movement other than the subdued humming of the refrigerator. He monitored both transmission bands to check their continued operation and heard the same soft mechanical hum from first the salt and then the pepper shaker. The several transmitters scattered about the living room offered nothing.

Bolda sprawled in the seat and stretched his long legs to the far side of the car, watching without any real interest as the mailman plodded along the hot street distributing mail. Midway along the block the man stopped, fingered a doorbell, and handed over a small package after the housewife signed a receipt book. That doorbell was an honest one.

Victor Angoff had a sneaker planted in his elevator shaft. Collins gave that much away when she pulled open the apartment door before he could announce his arrival; the sneaker said he was there, and she yanked open the door when he hesitated too long, tapping the three wires. The third wire extended from her house phone to the elevator shaft, and somewhere within that shaft—between the fourth and fifth floors—it ended on an insulated metal plate or trolley. The rising elevator made contact with the plate and shorted the circuit. The house phone would ring or buzz during the brief short-out, announcing the imminent arrival of a visitor on the fifth floor.

Bolda considered it a feeble watchdog. A bright boy could get around it just by cutting the wire.

Victor Angoff's fortress was riddled with similar weaknesses. Angoff needed a lesson on Narks. A variety of wireless Narks could be planted in the elevator cage to announce upcoming visitors; the control panel itself could be wired to sound an alarm whenever anyone punched the fifth-floor button; the elevator door could be rigged to give an alarm when it opened at that level—or it could be rigged to not open at all until someone in the apartment permitted it to move; sensors placed in the upper corridor would signal the presence of a living, moving object approaching the apartment door; a closed-circuit television system could be installed in both the lobby and the corridor to reveal callers. Those three wires running down the wall to the baseboard, the carpet, and the shaft could be

rigged to sound an alarm whenever anyone fooled with them—they would be entirely useless after the other safeguards were installed, but they could be left in place to mousetrap any snooper happening along.

Victor Angoff should have caught him that way.

The old man's ignorance of Narks left him exposed; there were two glaring weaknesses in his fortress, and either one could be exploited to advantage. Bolda had already exploited the one, and he intended to follow up the second. The cardinal weakness was the absence of any device to detect invading bugs. There should be detectors in at least the one room open to visitors. Had detectors been present, they would have howled a warning when Bolda walked in with a dozen miniature transmitters in his pocket—and they would be howling yet, betraying the salt and pepper shakers in the kitchen. The second omission was nearly as serious. Leaving the lobby unguarded twenty-three minutes while the stopper and Karen Collins walked to the grocery was a fault bordering on stupidity. Anyone could invade the building and move up or down at will. Bolda intended doing just that, after nightfall.

The mailman vanished around a far corner, and Bolda turned back to an earlier speculation.

Why was he brought back from Lubyanka? Why *him?* Why should anyone bother to bring him back? To chase after an old man in St. Louis? He knew again the nagging sense of being pushed—or pulled—down the long road from Gdansk to Lubyanka to here. Why would anyone bother?

Bolda chewed on a fingernail, staring vacantly at the distant corner where the mailman had disappeared. A sense of depression gripped him. He couldn't shake the belief that all the places were stopovers on the same long road; at first it had been no more than a suspicion, a hunch, but now it amounted to a conviction. He *was* being pulled or pushed along at someone's bidding. The idea was unsettling. He'd been deliberately sold out at Gdansk, and thrown into Lubyanka as a result; then someone bought him out of prison, and propelled him to St. Louis as a result of that. Moved in and out of Lubyanka like a piece of merchandise.

A few hours ago Victor Angoff had tried to buy him again. The suitcase held too much money to count.

Bolda almost wished for a return to the past.

There had been a happier, uncomplicated time long ago when he existed in a peaceful rut content with himself and the world; he liked the new life he'd discovered and was satisfied to drift along from one post to another at the whim or needs of his superiors. Those were the pleasant years. At nineteen, or a year younger, he'd left the Ukraine and drifted across the middle countries in search of something better than the meager life shared with his mother. He found it. The something better was the United States Army, at Brement; it was unexpected wealth and a life of comparative luxury—food, clothing, and money showered on him like rain. He moved from Brement to Fort Bragg, to become an American citizen and a radio engineer assigned to an intelligence unit. The peaceful rut of complacency swallowed him. He lived comfortably in that rut for nearly a dozen years, not understanding the bitching of native-born Americans who shared the good life with him. They had never been hungry.

Six of the contented years were spent at Fort Bragg, playing with newly developed skills, then the army loaned him to the National Security Agency and he was posted overseas; five more satisfying years were lived at Incirlik, still playing with his skills. He read American books and listened to Russian conversations; watched American movies, dated Turkish and Syrian girls, and laughed at Russian jokes picked up on the monitors. He was paid to loaf, read, listen, interpret. That was the good life, the happy time, the pleasant years.

They ended abruptly.

They ended when the NSA brought him back to the States and posted him to Fort Meade; they ended when he was brought face to face with his superior, Stuffy MacGough. They ended when he learned what his next station would be.

There. *That* was the turning point. *That* was when someone began using him, pushing him.

Stuffy MacGough had discovered a late addition to his

dossier, and decided Gdansk needed a warlock. *That* was the decision which jarred him from his contented rut. The long road began in that office in Fort Meade, ending almost a dozen years of serenity; it began when Stuffy read a bit of gossip dug out of some back-country village.

Witches and warlocks. Old World superstitions.

Some modern American who didn't believe in such claptrap decided to use him, test him; some skeptical American threw him into the cauldron to see if he could survive. Bolda survived, and the long road began there. One radio operator or another would have been sent to Gdansk in any event; the Narks were going up and the transmitters had to be ready for them, but *he* was chosen —over those four or five other candidates—because of that gossip tacked onto his dossier. Some disbelieving American began using a warlock, for some obscure reason, and the route led him from Meade to Gdansk to Lubyanka to Meade once more, and finally to St. Louis.

Victor Angoff was using him in St. Louis. He was almost ready to believe Angoff had taken him from prison. The old man seemed rich enough to buy him out of Lubyanka. The old man—and his secretary—knew his dossier, knew his recent troubles, knew his present circumstances. The two of them were waiting now for him to make a move.

But what move? Bolda wished desperately he knew what move was expected of him. Was the old man waiting for him to drop in and service his teleprinter?

The hour was past noon. He was hungry.

Bolda sat up in the seat, stretched his backbone to loosen the kinks, and shut off the receiver. The antenna was pushed down into its socket—a humming refrigerator was a boring companion at best. Bolda turned the car about and drove around the corner onto the boulevard, to park across the street from the apartment building. He ate his lunch in the same restaurant, four floors beneath Victor Angoff. Mumbled rabbit was gone from the menu, so he had to be content with an insipid businessman's lunch. The parked car was kept under surveillance.

He was dawdling over a second cup of black coffee, the meal finished, when he thought of a move that hadn't been anticipated by Angoff—whatever the man expected of him. Bolda borrowed a telephone book from the cashier and searched through the classified listings. Two of the men he sought had offices on this same street, not too far distant; another was on Arsenal, to the south, and there appeared to be a school of such offices on Chouteau, to the north. Bolda decided on the latter, and left the restaurant.

The portly, middle-aged gentleman was a businessman who appeared to have just eaten his businessman's lunch and enjoyed it. He fitted himself carefully behind his desk, polished his shell-rim glasses, and beamed at his visitor. The suitcase earned a surreptitious glance.

"*That* is what I am here for, Mr. Bolda, *that* is what I am here for. Real estate is an investment in the future, an investment in America. The value can only increase. St. Louis is a progressive community teeming with progressive people, and each of us have our eye on tomorrow, our stake in America. You *can't* go wrong when investing in real estate, Mr. Bolda."

"I thought it was a pretty good idea," Bolda said.

"It is precisely that, sir, precisely that. You are to be congratulated on your foresight. The value of real estate is the *one* stable value in this uncertain world. What did you have in mind, Mr. Bolda?"

"I want to buy a building."

"Do you have a particular building in mind?"

Bolda gave him the address of Victor Angoff's home. "This one looked pretty good to me. I was there a little while ago."

"I believe I know the neighborhood, Mr. Bolda. A lovely place. Near the park, isn't it?"

"Just across the street."

"Oh, yes, yes. Quiet location, picturesque view, convenient to transportation. It sounds *ideal*. This is an apartment building, I suppose?"

"Five floors," Bolda told him. "Drugstore and restaurant on the ground, apartments above. Private lot in the

back for parking. I don't know for sure, but I think a man named Angoff owns it—Victor Angoff."

"It suggests a splendid opportunity for investment. Is it on the market now?"

"I don't know—I didn't ask. I've never owned a piece of land before, and I wouldn't know how to go about it. I thought I'd better come to an expert."

"A *sound* decision, Mr. Bolda, a *sound* decision. I have been in business thirty-seven years. Do you wish me to make inquiries?"

"Yes. Do whatever you have to do to start a sale. I like that place."

"Very well, sir, I'll begin this afternoon." A pause to clear his throat. "I feel I should mention one matter, Mr. Bolda, to prepare you for negotiations. That is a lovely neighborhood and the asking price is apt to be high. Of course, the asking price is *seldom* the closing price, but one must be prepared. Have you a sum in mind?"

Bolda glanced down at the suitcase. "I don't think I could offer more than a million—dollars, you understand."

The real-estate dealer sat in stunned silence. His glance had followed Bolda's, and his mind made an intuitive leap.

Bolda needed privacy.

He drove south on Grand Boulevard until it ended at Holly Hills, then crossed that street to re-enter the yet sparsely populated Carondelet Park. The men cutting grass had moved a greater distance away, their work taking them west. The gray squirrel and the two boys with the balky kite were gone but, surprisingly, the mooning teen couple were still at it in the middle distance. They had spread a blanket beneath them. Bolda wondered if the workmen had mowed around or under the amorous obstruction.

He opened the suitcase and began the chore; it was necessary now to know the amount. The money was banded in packets of hundreds, just as it came from a bank, but it was not new; someone had thoughtfully accumulated used bills as though anticipating a bribe or a ransom. Bolda had overestimated. Karen Collins had given him the peculiar sum of a half million dollars, minus five hundred.

Bolda rifled through a packet, watching the bills flick past his thumb. He found time to wonder why the woman hadn't made it an even five hundred thousand?

"You may think of something," Angoff has said.

# 11

Anson Bolda thought of something.

He quit the park, leaving it to the young lovers, and searched the area of South Grand and Holly Hills until he found an enclosed telephone booth. The suitcase rested between his feet while he made another long-distance call. As before, he kept the parked car in line of sight. Not wanting to offend Stuffy MacGough twice on the same day with the same needle, Bolda paid for the call after giving the operator the unlisted number. There was an unexplained delay before the distant connection was completed.

"Again, mister?" the Scotsman demanded when he came on the line. "Why aren't you working?"

"I *am* working, Stuffy. Right now I'm tapping a source of information—I have a pipeline into the agency. How's your memory?"

"Adequate," was the brusque reply. The man sounded displeased, almost surly.

"That's nice. I want to use it."

"I haven't much time," Stuffy warned him.

"I'll make my point. A week or so ago you told me how much trouble it cost to bail me out of Lubyanka. You said a New York lawyer and a newspaperman took a hell of a beating—they sweated over me for months. Remember?"

Crisply: "I said it took time, diplomacy, and sweat. I said those men endured vilification, ridicule, threats, and God knows what else for you. I said those negotiations went on for months before they were completed. I said it was so sticky, the people here were betting you wouldn't get back."

"Yes, that's what you said. Now, Stuffy, what *didn't* you say? What was left out?"

"Explain that, mister."

"What more did it cost to get me back? Who was the scared little guy you sent across that bridge?"

"The cover name was Thomas Wickers; he was picked up in Brooklyn several years ago, where he operated a photography studio. The Soviet apparat in the United Nations had been using him as a courier, message drop, sneak photographer, the dull stuff." A reflective pause. "His real name may be Yakuta. It doesn't matter."

"Small potatoes?"

"Definitely. They didn't bother to defend him."

"Did you catch the talk at the bridge? He didn't want to go back—he was scared of them."

"I shouldn't wonder. Those people deal harshly with failures, and he wasn't big enough to earn a second chance. He took your place, or worse. Is that all, Anse?" The Section Chief seemed anxious to be rid of him.

"Not yet. Who was that American who came to the bridge with you? The nervous type—he didn't have much to say, didn't speak to me on the plane coming home."

"Who was— You bloody idiot! Are you as ignorant as all that? Who was Raymond Kaufman? Kaufman is my superior, *your* superior, practically runs this shop. A career man; he's been here since the agency was organized twenty years ago; makes policy and all that. Oh, lordy! He's the First Assistant Director, responsible only to the Admiral. You didn't recognize him? Not really?"

"Never laid eyes on him before," Bolda said. "And I wouldn't know the Admiral if we met in a rowboat. Now, then, Stuffy, how much did I cost in cash?"

"Well, so." A deliberate hesitation. "The warlock is digging into confidential intelligence."

Bolda knew he'd hit home. "There had to be money involved. I wasn't swapped for a useless, third-rate agent the Soviet had written off. KBG wouldn't make a deal on those terms. You said they fought hard to hold me—you said it took several months to pry me loose. The lever was cash. How much?"

Stuffy MacGouch didn't answer immediately. Bolda had a mental picture of boots tapping a scarred floor.

He pushed the harder. "I need the information, Stuffy. I'm getting the nail treatment here and I don't like it; I

want to hit back. That man Wickers you shoved over the bridge had to be window dressing. The exchange was made for the newspapers, wasn't it? Something to satisfy the public, to pretend value for value. I seem to remember you called it a smokescreen."

"Stop twisting my words, warlock. I said somebody threw out a smokescreen called public sympathy. Petitions were circulated, a defense fund was organized. That was prior to your release. The bleeding hearts cried for you."

"They didn't cry for that poor bastard you pushed across the bridge. KBG didn't cry to get him back. *He* was the only one crying. How much was my ransom, Stuffy?"

Sourly: "Four hundred fifty thousand rubles."

Bolda frowned at that. "Not dollars?"

"Don't be an idiot. How would you explain that much money in American dollars if you were a Soviet citizen? How would you spend dollars without being caught?"

"I'd stash it in one of those Swiss banks."

"How would you explain periodic withdrawals from a Swiss bank if you were a Soviet citizen? How would you explain a foreign deposit at all? Mails and banks are watched. Confound it, Anse, you lived next door to those people, you know their suspicious natures. The transaction represented maximum security to all concerned."

"Cash in hand?"

"That was the way they wanted it, mister."

*"They?"*

"Three individuals, three equal sums. One hundred fifty thousand rubles to each. Circulated, hand-worn, not counterfeit."

"Was I worth it?"

"Not by a long shot."

"Then why was it paid? Why was I brought back?"

"I maintain my clearance because I don't question my superiors. I keep my job because I follow orders. A pity the same can't be said for you."

"Where'd you get that much foreign money?"

"Idiot! This shop provides adequate reserves for any emergency in any part of the world."

"I'll bet I can name one of the individuals." The image of the KGB interrogator was sharp in his memory.

"You could name another," Tuffy told him dryly. "She sentenced you, and she signed the release order."

"Imagine *that*—and every inch a lady."

"Don't be naïve. She named the price."

"I can't guess who the third party might be—I didn't have the freedom to move around much over there, didn't get a chance to meet all the best people."

"It won't do any good to ask, mister. I'd like to keep something to myself. Remember that all this is confidential; don't repeat it to anyone."

"You're the boss."

"And don't you forget it. Now get back to work."

"*Yes, sir.* But I'm still complaining about that leak in your shop."

"Warlock, I said I was looking into something here!" Raw irritation shaded his voice.

Bolda rang off before the boots were hurled at him. He picked up the suitcase and carried it to the car, not bothering to lock it in the trunk. He wanted to sit down on the curb and scratch his head—that hunch had gone wrong, all wrong. Perhaps he needed another suggestion from Victor Angoff, another needling from Karen Collins.

Bolda opened the car door, stepped in and sat down, and just as quickly jumped out again. The sun shining on the leather seat had baked it beyond the point of endurance. Bolda rubbed his backside with injured feeling and placed the suitcase flat on the seat, beneath the wheel. He retreated to the scanty shade offered by the telephone booth and waited for the seat to cool.

The close similarity of numbers nagged him.

A quick paging through the telephone directory gave him the number of a downtown bank. When the connection was made, Bolda asked for information on foreign currency. His call was routed to the foreign-exchange officer.

"How much is a ruble worth in American money?"

The officer inquired whether he was referring to the official rate of exchange, or to the tourist rate. There was a considerable difference between the two, and the prospective traveler could gain an advantage by buying rubles at the tourist rate.

"The official rate—a business transaction."

The bank officer informed him that rubles were officially valued at one dollar and eleven cents. That rate was established in 1961.

Bolda thanked him and hung up. He knew a wild, brief elation, a sense of something having gone right, and some rapid pencil work underscored the elation. The four hundred and fifty thousand rubles paid for his release equaled the sum in the suitcase—four hundred and ninety-nine thousand, five hundred dollars. Just five hundred dollars short of a half million.

Victor Angoff had a quaint sense of humor.

Anson Bolda paid a short visit to his hotel room, choosing equipment and a few tools from the trunk Section Three had supplied. A roll of wire and a pair of cutters made an unsightly bulge in his jacket pocket, so he transferred the cutters to a hip pocket. The five-shot revolver was again tucked under his belt. He stared for a long moment at the contents of the trunk, wondering what else he might need, and finally picked out a small tube of quick solder that needed only the heat of a match to melt. The lid was closed and locked. Bolda switched on the transistor radio to contact the men on the floor above.

"Frank? Otto?"

"Frank here, Anson. Otto is down on the lot."

"I didn't see him."

"He's there. What's the good word?"

"I'm going into the basement and the elevator shaft tonight—if there's a repeat of last night. Collins and the guy in the lobby were gone for twenty-three minutes; they went to the store for groceries. I'm going to bug hell out of that place, Frank."

"Twenty-three minutes is small margin."

"I need only fifteen; I think that will give me a leeway of three to eight minutes. If there's time to spare, a lock on the back door needs fixing. It's one of those push-down panic bars."

"What happened this morning?"

"I got my assignment and I got a suitcase—and I planted ten bugs and two decoys in the apartment. Could

have used ten more—you ought to see the size of that living room. What do you Americans want with all that space, Frank? It seems a waste. Seven bugs are in that room, the salt and pepper shakers are in the kitchen, and there's one bug in the refrigerator."

"Where?" Frank betrayed his astonishment.

"Refrigerator. In a cream pitcher."

"It won't work in there."

"Probably not, but that leaves nine. I left a pen on the table; I was hoping it would be carried into one of the other rooms. They live and work behind a lot of closed doors—that living room is for visitors, for show. See what I mean by a waste of space? You Americans are a funny lot."

"Thank you. Otto can tell that to his wife."

"Why?"

"He married an English girl during the war. She thinks we're crazy too."

"Bully for her."

"What was your assignment?"

"I'm supposed to go up to the state prison at Joliet and dig into an old soldier's history—Angoff wants to believe the man served ninety-nine years in jail and then walked out a free and healthy man. The Methuselah type."

"He's crazy."

"Crazy or not, he's full of tricks. Did Otto tell you about my suitcase?" The case now rested on the bed.

"I read it on the tape," Frank replied.

"What tape?"

"We're taping you. Faster and cheaper than written reports. We're flying the tapes back to Section."

"Nark!"

"Death, taxes, and Narks, Anson . . ."

"Well, so," Bolda said deliberately, knowing Stuffy would wince when he heard it. They were using tapes on him because written reports tended to ignore the nuances, the stray remarks, and incomplete sentences. He wondered if Stuffy had taped his long-distance calls? "Frank, I'll need help on that Joliet research. I don't want to leave town. I want to keep this fire going, but Angoff will expect

something in a few weeks. He wants information on old Methuselah and his family—all that are living."

"I'll take care of it," the radio voice promised. "We have an office in Chicago; Chicago can dig it out for you. Give me the details."

Bolda told him the story of Harry Stipek, the Civil War veteran with the unbelievable history; he told it with a straight face, but without opinions of his own. When he finished the recital the radio remained silent.

"Are you still with me, Frank?"

"He's crazy!"

"You said that. Haven't you read his books?"

"No and I don't want to."

"You'll never know what you're missing." Bolda made ready to leave. "Frank, I'm hungry. I'm going downstairs to eat, and then run back out there. Collins could leave any time—if I miss her, I'll have to wait until tomorrow night."

"Take the transistor with you."

"Hey, my pockets are full. I don't think it would work inside the building; you couldn't read me at that distance."

"Take it," Frank ordered. "Otto will tail you."

"All right. I'll be in that little park across the street. But dinner first."

Bolda reached for the transistor. He overheard the man upstairs. "Did you read that, Otto? Reservoir Park. Stay with him while he goes in and out."

A faint answering signal said, "Check."

Bolda turned off the tiny radio and carried it out with him, feeling like one of the kids who walked the streets with glazed eyes and transistors fastened to their ears.

He spotted the sagging obstacle before he'd swerved from the sidewalk. A loafer had already appropriated his bench, the bench he'd used the night before to keep watch on the lobby across the street. Bolda strolled past the sleeping man, not looking at him, not glancing up from his study of the pavement, and went on a safe distance before fading into the shadows of the park. He carried two radios, the transistor Frank had insisted on and the larger eavesdropper in the leather case. Bolda worked his way deeper

into the park, watching for other visitors as he circled an artificial hill that camouflaged the reservoir. He sought a vantage point which would provide him a view of the lobby. The search was not successful; the shrubbery concealing him from the bench and the street also blocked a direct view of those objects. The lobby was totally obscured.

Changing direction, Bolda forced his way through a ring of low shrubs and climbed partway up the man-made hill. Line of sight improved. He went higher, caught a clear glimpse of the lobby, and flattened his body on the grass. The bulky objects in his pockets made lumps on his kidneys. Bolda put the two radios on the grass beside him and squirmed to relieve the pressure on his body. He found he could also look down on the bench by shifting his position another few feet. The lobby stayed in sight.

He hoped the bench warmer was only waiting for a bus —the very next bus.

Bolda switched on the transistor radio and spoke cautiously. "Otto?"

"I read you. Parked across from your car."

"Can you see the lobby entrance?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'm on the hill across the street from it; and I've got company. There's a fat man sitting on the bench below me—between me and the lobby. He's in the way. If he doesn't leave before Collins comes down, you're going to have to move him."

"Will do. What's he like?"

"Over two hundred pounds, dark suit, white socks, and black shoes. Straw hat beside him on the bench. I think he's asleep."

"I'll move him," Otto promised. "Say when."

Bolda turned off the radio and settled down to wait. He was thankful for the gathering darkness. He knew he stood out on the back of the hill like a hump on a camel, and if anyone else followed his route through the park they'd spot him as soon as they rounded the reservoir. Traffic on the street was heavier than he'd remembered from the night before. The hospitals were handling a greater flow of visitors.

Bolda lifted his gaze up the five floors of the building and studied the few lighted windows at the top. The living room, fronting on the street, stayed dark. Cautiously, fearful of attracting the attention of the bench loafer, he opened the leather case of the receiver and pulled up the antenna. The first channel gave him a raspy, scratching noise. Bolda switched to the alternate channel and found the identical noise. He hugged the ground, his ear close to the receiver. The rasp continued. After a while the hum of the refrigerator cut in, softly overriding the first sound. He was eavesdropping on the kitchen.

The scratchiness couldn't be readily identified. The only comparable sound he could think of was that of a cook grating raw carrots. It was gone when the refrigerator completed its cycle and stopped.

Bolda caught a slight movement from the corner of his eye. The man on the bench was awake and looking at his watch. Maybe the two of them were getting impatient with that overdue bus.

A door opened somewhere in the apartment, and Bolda heard the remote sound of a teletype operating at speed. Angoff—no, Karen Collins was reading the evening news. Angoff couldn't read it; the dispatches had to be read to him. Stuffy should be pleased with that bit of redundant information—the old man up there did indeed have an Associated Press teleprinter, as Section Three discovered. The old man also had another news service, an open line into Fort Meade; the measure and the minutiae of Bolda's past, including his purchase price, were common knowledge on the fifth floor. Stuffy should find that open line if he had his wits about him. If he failed to find it, the web of evidence pointing to his own complicity would tighten.

Street traffic thinned. The distant door was closed and the rattle of the teleprinter was suppressed. Someone was moving about in the kitchen. Someone was moving below him.

Bolda turned quickly to stare at the man on the bench. A moment later he grabbed up the transistor.

"Otto—!"

"I read you."

"Otto, we've got competition. The fat boy is watching the lobby."

"Are you certain? Be certain."

"Damn it, I know my own chores. He's faking—he's not asleep. The guy's a roper. He's impatient, squirming, looking at his watch. This is a stake-out, Otto."

"The Collins woman."

"But he didn't tail her last night."

"Are you certain of that?"

"He's too sloppy—I couldn't miss him."

"Might *not* be a tail. They may have set up a meeting away from the house."

"Could be. We'll know when she comes through the lobby. Damn it, Otto, if she doesn't take that stopper out with her, I'm lost."

Bolda kept his face buried in the grass, waiting. The shadow fidgeted below him, then lit a cigarette to further betray his incompetence. A bus was heard on the street. It stopped at the nearby corner to discharge an elderly couple, then thundered away from the curb spewing diesel fumes. The couple waited for the green to cross the boulevard. A soft buzz sounded in Bolda's ear. He jumped, then recognized the sound. The climbing elevator has passed the fourth floor and sounded its warning on the house phone.

Bolda looked up and found lights in the living room. His concealed transmitters had not signaled the passage of anyone through that room, nor had they relayed the sound of the front door opening and closing. He wondered if he'd missed the signals. Brief seconds passed. The descending elevator touched the short-out plate again, causing another buzz. The lobby guardian put away his newspaper and stood with his back to the street, looking at the elevator shaft.

Karen Collins emerged from the cage. She smiled at the waiting man, said a few words and gestured with her hand. The stopper nodded and darted to one side, opening a door which gave access to the drugstore. They went in together.

The fat man heaved his bulk off the bench and stamped out the cigarette. His hat was in his hand.

Bolda whispered to the transistor. "We're moving. Col-

lins and the stopper are together in the drugstore. The competition is up and ready."

"Check. I'll keep the three of them. Watch your timing. I'll give warning on the return."

"Will do. Fifteen minutes should do it." Bolda peered across the street. Below him, the fat shadow was doing the same. Karen Collins was talking to a clerk in the drugstore; they seemed on friendly terms. A purchase was handed over and paid for. The stopper walked ahead of the woman to the street door.

"Coming, Otto. Still together."

"I see them," was the crisp reply a moment later. "She's carrying a package, the man has his thumbs hooked in his pockets. Moving toward me."

"That's the pair. She walks tired. It took them twenty-three minutes last night." He glanced down. "The fat boy has left the bench. I said he was sloppy—he's crowding them. He needs lessons. As soon as he gets up the street a piece, I'll—" Bolda stopped.

"What is it?" Otto demanded.

Bolda stared after the running shadow in amazement. The heavy bulk was loping across the street, dodging cars but moving fast for his weight. The straw hat was waving in his hand, demanding passage. A horn blared, and some driver shouted an obscenity after the running figure. The fat man gained the opposite sidewalk.

Bolda forgot his whisper. "The guy is going for the lobby—he's going *up!*"

"Stay where you are," Otto warned quickly. "I see him, I see him." A moment of silence, and then, "The couple have just passed me. Hold it, Anson. Hold!"

Bolda held. The shadow ran into the waiting elevator and slammed the door. Bolda turned to the eavesdropper. A rewarding buzz told him when the elevator passed the fourth floor. There was a short, unexplained delay and then the strident sound of a doorbell ringing in the upper apartment. His bugs were operating. A chain bolt was pulled and dropped. A lock turned heavily. Bolda thought that happened too quickly—the old man must have been waiting at the door. There were no preliminaries, no ex-

change of greetings; Angoff knew his caller and they both knew the shortage of time.

Angoff: "What do you have?"

Shadow: "Three or four items." (Shortness of breath.) "Your man changed cars today. Must have got wise to the first one, now he's swapping cars. Told the people at the garage he'd be back tomorrow for another one."

Angoff: "What else?"

Shadow: "Somebody else is tailing him—somebody is doing a half-assed job of tailing him." (Heavy breathing, sucking in air.) "There's a guy sits across the street from the hotel all day, watching him come and go. Don't know who the guy is, never saw him before. Could be a tax man, maybe." (Wheezing, gulping.)

Angoff: "A tax man?"

Shadow: "Sure, your man is toting a suitcase full of money, a hell of a lot of money! It could be hot. He stopped in to see a real estate agent on Chouteau. He's dickering to buy this place."

Angoff: "*This* building?" (Sharp surprise.)

Shadow: "This building, right here. He's hot to get it, he's ready to shoot everything in that suitcase. A hell of a lot of cash, believe me! That's why his tail could be a tax man—could have followed him into town." (A lull, a measure of returning breath.) "And he bugged your house phone."

Angoff: "He did *what?*"

Shadow: "He bugged it. Look at this—telephone tap. It was hanging on the wire, right here outside the door. Let me give you some advice. If he got inside, look out for more bugs—under the chairs and behind the curtains and things."

Angoff: "He *was* inside."

Shadow: "Okay, you've been bugged. That's all I got, but I could use some money. What comes next?"

Expectant silence.

Angoff: "Kill him."

# 12

Anson Bolda sprinted across the boulevard as deftly as the man before him had done, but he enjoyed better luck; no driver swerved or cursed him for a near miss.

He had waited impatiently behind the bench for the reappearance of the fat shadow at the street level. His eavesdropper was left behind in the shrubs at the foot of the reservoir hill. The final sound had been that of the upper door closing, the safety chain moving in its slot—there was no responding buzz as the elevator came to the ground. The fat man hurried out when the door slid open. He emerged from the lobby, looked north toward the grocery, then darted around the corner of the building to the lot at the rear. Bolda came from behind the bench. Waiting only until he heard the gunning of a motor in the parking lot, he sprinted across the street.

Six minutes were lost.

He jabbed the button for the fourth floor, then yanked the gun from his belt. When the machine stopped, Bolda pulled the door a few inches and fitted the gun into the opening lengthwise. The elevator was immobilized.

A twenty-four-inch square escape hatch was above him, the hatch lid fitted carefully into the ceiling of the cage to maintain symmetry. No locking screws or bolts were visible. Bolda jumped and knocked it loose with his fist, jumped again and hooked his fingers over the exposed rim. He pulled his body through the hatch and stood on the grimy top of the elevator. Light from below illuminated the shaft and the sneaker signal.

The short-out plate was mounted on the shaft wall and positioned to give an alarm when the elevator rose about a foot above the fourth floor. It was a crude but professional installation of two or three decades before. An A-brace had been bolted to the wall, jutting outward to meet the

cage, with an insulator and a striking plate fastened on the outer tip. The third wire dropped down from above and was soldered to the plate. A short length of iron pipe, turning on a spindle, had been welded in place at the top of the cage. As the elevator climbed the shaft, the pipe rolled across the plate and shorted the circuit; the short caused Angoff's phone to buzz.

Bolda cut the wire just above the plate and skinned back the insulation. He wanted to duplicate the apparatus just above the ground floor, setting off the alarm every time the elevator moved, but there was no time now to make a new installation in the lower shaft.

He pulled the roll of wire from his pocket, peeled insulation off one end, and spliced it to the third wire dangling in the shaft. A pinch of solder and a hot match completed the splice. Black tape was hastily wrapped around the joint. Bolda dropped the coiled wire down the side of the elevator shaft and grunted with satisfaction as it hit bottom. He wrapped the wire two or three turns around the A-brace for greater security, and jumped down into the cage. The wedged gun was pulled from the door, and as it closed he sent the elevator to the basement.

Belowground, his flashlight picked out storage rooms belonging to the tenants above. A bulky carton of merchandise addressed to the drugstore was hauled out and used to again block open the elevator door. Another carton placed inside gave him a place to stand while he worked in the open hatch. Bolda found his wire hanging in the shaft and fed it past the corner of the cage toward the open doorway. The end of the wire was pushed through a crack above the door, and out into the basement. When the slack was pulled through and the wire wrapped around a water pipe to hold it taut, Bolda went back to the hatch a last time and directed his light up the shaft.

The new wire hugged the shaft wall, free of the moving cage. Only the lower end, snaking through the basement-door framing, was likely to give trouble.

Bolda carefully fitted the hatch lid into place and hauled the carton out of the elevator. Stray bits of peeled insulation were swept up in his hand. He gave the cage a thor-

ough study, found nothing to betray his presence, and fingered the first-floor button on the panel. The blocking carton was moved aside, the door slid shut, and the elevator climbed quietly to the first floor. Bolda waited a moment longer, his ear to the shaft, but the car remained stationary. The lobby was empty.

His next thought was to find an escape route.

He put the narrow beam of the light on his watch to check the time, then fanned it over the basement, seeing a stairway to the outside. A closed door stood in the west wall. Bolda ran his reader over the outer edges of the door and the door frame, seeking concealed alarms, but there was no response from the meter other than at the hinges and the knob. He eased the door open an inch, and again went over the exposed framing, searching for an alarm device buried in the woodwork. It was bare. Bolda shoved through the door and ran up the steps, to find himself at the fire door overlooking the parking lot. The fire door was mousetrapped to sound an alarm when it opened. Bolda cut the two wires of the alarm, rolled them back to prevent an accidental contact, then turned and dashed down the stairs to the basement.

All the telephone wires serving the building came through the basement wall from an underground conduit. Each pair of wires climbed the wall and were fastened to a long row of white porcelain fuse blocks mounted on an overhead joist. The company installer had made it easy for himself and those others who followed him. Each fuse block was numbered to correspond with an apartment above; the block for the drugstore was labeled *drug*, while the service for the restaurant was labeled *eat*. The number on Angoff's teletype service was 500. Two thin, five-inch-long finger fuses were snapped onto each block.

Bolda touched the tips of a testing meter to the terminals of the 500 block, but got no reading. Angoff's teleprinter was not in use. He moved the meter over to the *eat* fuses and got a flickering needle; that telephone was being used. *Drug* was silent, unresponsive. Bolda unscrewed the terminal nuts from the two blocks and switched the pairs of wires. The results would be unintelligible to both parties and should create a satisfactory confusion. Each time

someone called the drugstore, Angoff's machine would signal him but nothing more; the machine would run smoothly but it wouldn't spell out the news. Each time the drugstore clerk attempted to use the phone, he'd get nothing but garbled static-like signals intended for a teletype. The confusion should last until the next day.

There would be an added bonus *if* Victor Angoff had a phone plugged into his teletype circuit, and *if* that phone was an ordinary one operating on a common carrier wave —but Bolda was unwilling to count the bonus. Angoff would have something special if he had anything at all. An ordinary phone plugged into his teleprinter now would receive those calls intended for the drugstore—the old man, or Karen Collins, could spend the remainder of the night taking calls for pills, mineral oil, and camera film. Possibly that would teach them the value of improved security measures.

Behind him, the elevator hummed and started up the shaft. A quick glance at the time. Eighteen minutes. There'd been no warning from Otto, nor did he expect one; the transistor lacked the sensitivity to pick up signals belowground and within the foundation walls. The elevator stopped more quickly than he expected, and remained still; it had gone to only the second or third floor.

Bolda raced toward the shaft door to retrieve his wire coiled about the water pipe. He wrapped two turns of wire about the pipe to snug it and then walked backward, paying out the coil hand over hand until he was again below the line of fuse blocks. He cut the wire there, passed it above several blocks and pulled it taut against the ceiling. Stripping an inch of insulation off the end, he looped it over the hot terminal on the restaurant service connection and tightened down the nut. The resultant buzzing on Angoff's house phone should give the old man something to think about. The thing would sound off every time someone picked up the receiver in the *eat*, every time someone dialed in or out. He wanted Angoff to think the elevator was racing up and down the shaft like the lights on a pinball machine.

The elevator came down the shaft in response to a summons from the lobby.

Bolda crammed his tools and the remaining wire into his pockets, hauled the two cartons of merchandise back to where he'd found them, and ran for the back stairway. The fire door eased open under his hands and he was out in the parking lot. He wished he'd had time to work on the lock.

Twenty-six minutes.

"Otto?"

"I've been calling, Anson! Are you in the clear?"

"I'm clear. Didn't have time to do everything, but I did enough. They won't get much sleep tonight."

"The couple just came back. Get away from there."

"Take it easy, I'm going."

Bolda walked through the lot in a northerly direction and came out on the side street separating the apartment building from a hospital. He turned toward the boulevard and strolled to the corner, waiting for the light to turn green and allow him to cross over to the park. The leather-covered case rested in the shrubbery where he'd dropped it. Bolda sat down on his favorite bench and pulled up the telescoping antenna.

Karen: "—a special on liver. I brought you some liver and onions. What's the matter with it?"

Angoff: "Not working properly. Worn out, I expect. Get someone in tomorrow to look at it."

Karen: "Didn't it work when I came up?"

Angoff: "Nary a sound. But before that it—there it goes again. Just listen to it."

Bolda peered across at the restaurant. A customer was using the phone. The eavesdropper relayed a series of erratic buzzes from Angoff's living room.

Bolda said softly, "Mice." He pushed down the antenna and carried his gear from the park. Otto sat in his own car across the street, hunched down behind the wheel as he watched Bolda's vehicle. After a safe interval he pulled away from the curb and followed Bolda's blue car back to the hotel.

The drugstore clerk got up to answer his phone.

Bolda unloaded his pockets, dropping the contents into

the waiting trunk. The gun was placed on top of the pile of tools. He took off his jacket, hung it over the back of a chair, and sat down on the bed with the telephone book to look up the numbers of the two establishments in Angoff's building. The hotel switchboard operator put him through to the restaurant first.

Bolda said hello to a pleasant feminine voice and asked to speak to the manager. The man came on the line after a space. Bolda complimented him on the mumbled rabbit offered on yesterday's menu, and asked when it would be served again. The manager wasn't sure, but said they tried to schedule it every two weeks or so. Bolda asked him what would be offered on tomorrow's menu, and listened while the man read off the entire list of foods. Bolda said all of them sounded good, and he'd make it a point to stop in. The manager thanked him. They exchanged a few pleasantries and closed off the conversation.

The switchboard operator reported that his other number was giving a busy signal. She said she would try again in five minutes. Bolda said he'd appreciate that. It was likely that she would keep trying every five minutes for at least half an hour, before giving up. Sometime tonight or tomorrow, someone would call the company and report a telephone out of order.

Bolda took off his shoes and fell back on the bed. He stretched lazily, smothered a yawn, and reached for the transistor radio.

"Good evening, Frank. Did you enjoy your nap?"

The radio barked at him. "Anson, you lead a charmed life!"

"I've got something going for me," Bolda admitted. "There was this old gypsy queen, see, and she—"

"Oh, knock that off. What happened?"

"I thought you knew."

"All I heard was words, disconnected words. Signal reception was almost zero. Tell me what happened."

Bolda told him, beginning with his discovery of the shadow on the bench and ending with his rewarding moment on that same bench twenty-six minutes or more later. He added a postscript, suggesting that Otto continue

calling the restaurant and the drugstore throughout the night, using a phone outside the hotel to prevent tracing.

When he finished, the radio relayed Frank's comment. "Anson, they tell me you also planted a transmitter in an attic above a harbormaster's office. While the man was in his office."

"Nonsense. He was gone—the night crew was there."

Frank replied with two words generally heard from the lips of a minister.

Bolda yawned again, not bothering to smother it. "You'd better take Otto off the street. The fat boy spotted him and tattled."

"Otto will be coming in shortly. He's looking into something new."

"What?" He unbuttoned his shirt and wriggled out of it. His body was relaxed.

"That man on the bench. Otto thinks he recognized him, but he didn't know the man was out of jail. We want to examine his connection with Angoff."

"They sounded like old buddies," Bolda offered. "They didn't waste time saying hello or talking about the weather, just went *to* it—they were bucking the same deadline I was. The fat boy asked for more money—he probably got it. Angoff is loaded." He pulled off his socks and dropped them beside the shoes. "Fat or not, that man really scooted across the street. Why do you suppose they're keeping it from Collins?"

"What do *you* think?" Frank asked tartly.

"That wouldn't bother her. She'd cheerfully see me hang. I sure as the devil got under that woman's skin." He stopped to think about it. "I wonder why?"

"Ask her tomorrow night."

"I won't be around tomorrow night."

"Don't be a pessimist."

"Not that way. I'm going to take a trip, move around and see the countryside; I've never been this far west before. Do they have cowboys in Missouri?"

"Not since the last Wild West show."

"That's too bad." The trousers came off. "Thought I'd go out of town for a while, Frank. I won't be able to do anything at Angoff's place for the next couple of days;

that's going to be a beehive upside down, and when they settle down again it will be different. I don't think the stopper will leave the lobby again—I don't think I can get into that basement again. Collins will go to the store alone, or take the day man. There'll be changes made. I'm going to lay off for a little while."

"What is the real reason for leaving town, Anson?"

"To pull that fat boy out after me."

"That's what I thought."

"He's a city character," Bolda explained. "I can see him better in the open country."

"And the reverse."

"Well, sure. I think I'll get a bright red car tomorrow, if they've got a bright red car. Make it easy for him, up to a point."

"Don't overestimate the point."

Bolda felt too lazy to go after his pajamas. He finished undressing and eased between the sheets.

The voice on the radio continued. "Why didn't he spot you in the park?"

"He's sloppy—he's so sloppy he deserves what's coming to him. Pretending to be asleep! Frank, the guy was slumped down on the bench with his chin on his chest and his eyes closed. Shut tight. He heard me coming along the walk and went into his act. If the damned fool had squinted he could have nailed me right there."

"He didn't want to nail you there."

"Well, no, not yet, but he wouldn't have blown his cover—he'd have caught a bus, or played sleep until I left, or whatever." The table lamp was turned off. "He could report another night."

"There would have been more to report; he would have seen you go inside. Wait a minute, Otto's coming." The transistor relayed sounds of movement in the upper room. Otto was overheard as he approached the other microphone. "Anson, listen to this."

"I'm listening."

Brice Waldner was formerly a policeman now with a record of his own; until nine years ago, he had been a beat patrolman in University City, a suburb of St. Louis. He first came to public attention when he was suspended from

that department for thirty days, following an off-duty tavern scuffle during which he and another patron had drawn guns on each other. Six months' probation followed.

A second arrest and suspension followed within a year after the probationary period. Waldner was charged as being an accomplice in the burglary of a television store; two men trapped in the store said he acted as a lookout, and was to participate in the disposal of the loot afterward. A grand jury indicted the two burglars but returned a no-true bill on behalf of Waldner. He was restored to duty. Later in the same year, following a series of complaints, he was caught in an attempted shakedown of a motorist, fined, and dismissed from service. His police record fattened in the years afterward. He was arrested once for assault and battery, once for disorderly conduct, and again for investigation of a robbery. His next-to-final arrest, after a long period of inactivity—or undercover activity—was for investigation of attempted larceny and assault.

The final arrest was on a charge of arson. A shop selling questionable merchandise at cut-rate prices burned to the ground, but firemen discovered incriminating torch evidence before they were forced from the building. Brice Waldner was revealed as one of the two owners of the shop, and the only insurance beneficiary. He was sentenced to five years.

Otto said, "Time off for good behavior, if you can believe it. He's been out of jail two or three months."

"But you don't know how he made contact with A?"

"No, not yet."

"Maybe Angoff put another classified in the paper," Bolda said sleepily. "Be a secret investigator, follow cars and sit on park benches, earn big money."

"You're a comic," Frank retorted.

"All secret agents earn big money—I made almost half a million bucks today. How much did you fellows make?" He rolled over on the bed and pulled the sheet over his head. The transmitter relayed his muffled words. "It beats army pay. Good night, capitalists."

"Turn it off," came an answering growl. "You'll waste the batteries."

Anson Bolda stretched out his feet to the two lower corners of the bed, yawned, and sat up to look at the east windows. They were light, but the sun was not yet above the horizon. He yawned again as he left the bed, turning on the radio as he crossed the room. The shower was cold and brisk and he stayed under it several minutes, wondering if Angoff and Karen Collins had had a good night's rest. He shaved and returned to the bedroom to dress.

The radio said, "Anson, for crying out loud!"

"Milking time, Frank. Everybody up."

"Milk your own damned cows, I'm staying right here."

"Suit yourself. I'm making an early start."

Bolda tossed the suitcase of money into the closet and took out an empty one. He packed a two- or three-day supply of clothing, the gun, and a box of ammunition. A pair of ballpoint pens were included as an afterthought.

"Do you know where you are going?"

"Anywhere into the open country."

"How about the mountains?"

"In Missouri? Didn't the last Wild West show take its mountain with them?"

"These are nailed down. Swing west over to the edge of town and pick up Route 50; that will take you to Route 54, and *that* will put you in the Ozarks. Good fishing."

"Sure," Bolda told him. "I'll fish." He studied the suitcase to see if he'd forgotten anything. "But I don't want Otto following me. The fat boy will spot him."

"Then Otto will have to lose you to make it look right. We can't let Waldner know we're wise to him."

"Play it any way you want, just so Waldner's alone. Give him a decent chance to earn Angoff's money."

"Ah . . . yes. And what about Angoff?"

"One thing at a time. I'll pop in and surprise him after I get back."

"All right. Luck, Anson."

"Go back to sleep, Frank. You civilians are soft."

The personable young woman at the automobile-rental agency stared at him with some surprise. She got out of her own car, walked across the concrete parking lot to the door, then turned again to look at him as she unlocked the

office. She was the first employee to appear for work. Bolda pushed down the telescoping antenna and put away the radio receiver before leaving the blue car to follow her.

Evelyn Trimble put away her purse and took his rental papers from the same file drawer.

"Is that color worn out already, Mr. Bolda?"

"Already," he said. "It happened last night."

"I hope you haven't been waiting all that time."

"Oh, no. Just the last half hour or so."

Her surprise at his earliness had given way to amusement. "What color will it be this morning, Mr. Bolda? I think you mentioned green or white."

"Changed my mind while I was waiting. I like that reddish-pink one—the convertible." He pointed through the window.

"Dawn rose," she corrected him without turning to look. "That car has a history, Mr. Bolda."

"Good or bad?"

"Romantic, I would say. Less than a month ago a charming young couple eloped in that car. They honeymooned in the Ozarks. But they had so many things on their mind they simply forgot to bring the car back with them; they left it at a motel and came home on the bus. The young man was terribly embarrassed." Evelyn Trimble glanced up from her paperwork to see if he was smiling with her. "One of our mechanics went down after it."

"Romantic," Bolda agreed. "It must have been a robustious honeymoon. I'm going to the Ozarks today."

"Alone?"

"Unless you want to chuck all this and go with me."

"I'd probably lose my husband if I did."

He looked at her fingers. "Sorry. I didn't see that ring yesterday."

"I wasn't wearing it yesterday, Mr. Bolda. Don't apologize for an oversight on my part." She was nearly finished. "Are you taking a vacation? We can offer a special rate for two weeks or longer."

"Just for the weekend—unless I find a beautiful girl there and get carried away."

"That convertible will find them for you, Mr. Bolda."

She put the completed paper in front of him. "Sign here, please."

Bolda drove the bright convertible out of the lot, reasonably certain Waldner would be on his trail before too many hours had passed. Evelyn Trimble had performed an adequate pumping job for an amateur.

Bolda left the highway and followed a series of signs along a blacktopped road that wound through the foothills. Stands of timber appeared on either side as the road climbed, and occasionally he would catch a glimpse of sunlight reflecting on water in the valleys below him. After twenty minutes the timber was a solid wall on both sides of the road, shutting off any view except the one ahead. The trees acted as a sound barrier, closing off the world and damping the noise of his passage. Unseen birds were surprisingly loud in their perches near the road.

The signs shunted him off to the left along another blacktop road, and the road led him to a cluster of newly painted cabins at one end of a sizable lake. Not too far from the cabins was the inevitable gasoline station, and beyond that a large building which appeared to be a general store, restaurant, and tavern. The gasoline station had a neon sign reading *Office here,* and a telephone booth.

Bolda rented a cabin and stopped to telephone. He gave the operator Stuffy MacGough's unlisted number, and waited while the Scotsman had time to take it from the desk drawer. The wait was longer than necessary.

The operator came back on the line and said that number was out of service.

"Are you sure?" He repeated the number.

"That number is no longer in service, sir. Shall I connect you with Information?"

"No—not necessary. I have another number here." Bolda repeated the number of the NSA's front office. He wondered if an economy wave had deprived Stuffy of his phone, or if the number had been suddenly changed during an overnight security review.

A woman at the agency switchboard came on the line with a brief "Good morning." She offered no identification, but instead waited for him to begin the conversation.

He said, "My name is Anson Bolda. I'm on temporary assignment to Three. I want to speak to Mr. MacGough in Two, please. I can't reach his desk drawer."

There was no immediate reply, and Bolda knew she was checking his name against a card file beside her station. The woman said abruptly, "I will put you through to Mr. Kaufman."

"Why?" He was startled.

The receptionist did not answer his question.

He recognized Raymond Kaufman's voice the moment he heard it. It was the voice of the other man at the Glienicke Bridge, the man who had stood beside Stuffy and asked, *Are you certain this man is Anson Bolda?* Stuffy had answered in the affirmative, and Kaufman said, *Then get on, get on. Finalize the exchange.*

"Bolda?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were attempting to contact MacGough?"

"Yes, sir." He knew a sudden caution. "I needed information."

"That will no longer be possible. MacGough has been granted leave of absence." Kaufman stopped talking, waited for some comment, then added, "Medical leave."

Bolda was wary. "Has Stuffy been hurt, sir?"

"MacGough has been committed to a mental hospital. His doctors have ordered complete isolation. You will not attempt further contact with him. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have been assigned to Section Three, I think?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Then you will report to your proper superior in Three and obtain any necessary information from him."

Bolda couldn't miss the reprimand. "Yes, sir."

The Assistant Director hung up on him.

# 13

In the late afternoon of the third day, Anson Bolda vacated his fishing cabin and turned in the key. His luck had been bad and his planned maneuver had failed; the fat shadow had not followed him into the open. Bolda much preferred to deal with the man in the open country rather than in the streets of a city new to him; Waldner didn't deserve the advantage.

Bolda drifted along the highway toward St. Louis as twilight enveloped him. Young drivers took a perverse delight in racing past the pink convertible.

He'd caught nothing, but someone had caught Stuffy MacGough. Bolda refused to believe Stuffy had actually suffered a mental breakdown; not Stuffy, not overnight—he rejected the idea. Some people quit and some transferred, some entered hospitals, some sought release in suicide and some defected—but Stuffy was none of these. There was another explanation. The Scotsman had been caught while searching for the leak—or had finally found it—and was put aside. The mental hospital was Stuffy's Lubyanka.

He had sorely misjudged the man. Someone other than Stuffy was responsible for his predicament. Stuffy did send him to Gdansk because of that bizarre addition to his dossier, because he seemed a better risk than other men, but someone else intervened at that point. Someone else learned of Stuffy's decision, sought out the novelty in the dossier, and began using him for a separate purpose. The Scotsman was blameless.

The wild suspicion: Victor Angoff.

Either the agency had given him to Angoff, or the old man had bought him—bought him with near half a million dollars paid in Russian currency. The aged man made as little sense as anything else. Angoff amused himself with

an oddball hobby, a cover for some other activity; he was desperately anxious to close out that activity and vacate his obsolete fortress; he had an open line of communication into the agency, was made aware of Bolda's existence, and was waiting his arrival in the city. He wanted Bolda to do something, cause something to happen, yet he had given the order to kill him.

The wild suspicion: Victor Angoff's real identity.

The real identity had been following Bolda from a point just before Gdansk—from the point when it was discovered why Stuffy had chosen him for that one mission. The real identity took interest in him for the same reason and seized control without Stuffy's knowledge. The real identity discovered a warlock and maneuvered to use him. The real identity betrayed him at Gdansk, saw him into prison, and after a year bought his freedom and arranged that exchange at the Glienicke Bridge. The real identity kept surveillance over him, waited for him to grow impatient, curious, inquisitive. When that finally happened, the real identity shunted him to St. Louis, and Victor Angoff had his warlock.

The wild suspicion: Victor Angoff's game for a captive warlock.

Bolda pressed down on the accelerator.

Two letters were awaiting him at his hotel.

Bolda went up to his room, locked the door and turned on the radio, then sat down on the bed to read.

The first was a note from the real-estate broker on Chouteau. The realtor reported good progress. He said he had made an initial contact with Mr. Angoff, the present owner of the building in which Mr. Bolda was interested, and there was reason to believe a sale could be effected. Mr. Angoff had indicated his willingness to sell the property if the price was to his satisfaction. The realtor inserted a cautionary note, warning the prospective buyer that the price might be quite high, but that it was always possible to arrange a satisfactory compromise. He asked Mr. Bolda to get in touch with him at his convenience.

Bolda laughed aloud. "The price will be damned near

half a million dollars—and no compromise. You can bet your investment in America on that."

The second letter claimed his attention. It was a bulky one bearing several stamps and had been delivered by registered mail that same afternoon. The postmark was the main post office in Chicago. The only return address on the envelope was a room number in Chicago's Merchandise Mart. Bolda opened it and pulled out a dozen typed sheets of manuscript. He read the tale of the misplaced Methuselah.

Harry Stipek (1) was a Confederate infantryman held as a prisoner of war in a Union stockade at Chicago, Illinois, from the autumn of 1864 until the first week of March 1865. He was presumed to be sixteen years of age on the latter date. A record of his parents or family was not available. On March 4, 1865, Stipek joined a number of fellow prisoners in an attempt to flee the stockade; the attempt was a partial success. Several of the prisoners, believed to be six in number, did escape and were never recaptured; two others were shot as they fled, and they died within minutes; Stipek and one companion were trapped in a livery stable less than a mile distant from the scene, and returned to the stockade. A lieutenant in the Union Army and two or three enlisted men were wounded in the breakout.

The enlisted men eventually recovered from their wounds but the officer did not; he died on March 9. On March 10, Stipek and his companion were remanded to the sheriff of Cook County, Illinois. The reason for the army's failure to claim jurisdiction is not known; the available records are incomplete. On March 12, Harry Stipek and his fellow prisoner were tried together on one count of murder and three counts of assault with intent to commit murder. The trial lasted an hour and fifty minutes. Both men were found guilty, both were sentenced to ninety-nine years at hard labor in the state penitentiary at Joliet, Illinois. They were imprisoned there the following day.

On December 22, 1865, Harry Stipek petitioned President Andrew Johnson for a review of his case, asking for clemency. On February 1, 1866, Secretary of War Edwin

Stanton replied for the President. A review and clemency were denied. There is no other recorded activity in this case, save the last.

Harry Stipek died at Joliet on October 24, 1881, at the presumed age of thirty-two. The cause of death was lobar pneumonia. His companion died, of natural causes associated with old age, in 1915. Neither prisoner ever had a recorded visitor.

End of record of Harry Stipek (1).

Harry Stipek (2) was and is a minor hoodlum with police records in Chicago, Illinois, and Gary, Indiana. On August 11, 1909, he shot and killed a Chicago police officer during an attempted robbery of a southside beer garden. He was apprehended the same day. On February 10, 1910, Stipek was tried for murder and found guilty; he was sentenced to ninety-nine years at the Joliet penitentiary. Stipek appealed the sentence, asking for a new trial; he remained in the county jail four months, lost the appeal, and was transferred to Joliet on June 2, 1910. By chance or caprice, he was assigned the same number as Harry Stipek (1). It is common practice to reassign numbers after a suitable lapse of time.

During the months of July, August, September, and October, 1917, Harry Stipek and a number of his fellow prisoners voluntarily cooperated with army medical authorities seeking relief from wartime military diseases. The research was extensive, and the experiments were concerned with influenza, trench fever, dysentery, etc. Stipek was bedridden for the several months named. He recovered at or near the end of the experimentation and did not thereafter show ill effects. Each of the inmates participating in the research had their sentences reduced by a number of months or years.

Harry Stipek had a moderate number of visitors, almost all of them relatives from Chicago, or Gary, Indiana. On April 5, 1954, he was interviewed by a reporter from the Chicago *Daily News*, Boyd Warner. The results of the interview were published a week later, on April 12, and provoked a mild reaction from critics, skeptics, and ready believers among the readership.

The burden of the published story was that Harry Stipek (2) was supposedly a hundred and five years old.

He claimed the identity and history of Stipek (1) and announced his intention of serving his full term of ninety-nine years, to spite President Andrew Johnson, his Secretary of War, and the jury who had weighed him. Stipek said the sentence would expire in 1964, and in that year he would leave the prison as the sole survivor of all the persons connected with his case. He expected again to appeal to the Government, seeking clemency, and at the same time would request a pension as a veteran of the Civil War. He thought modern officials would be more lenient. He cited his good prison conduct and his role in the wartime medical experiments.

The newspaper reporter published a brief resumé of the trial of Harry Stipek (1), and an even briefer history of the prisoner-of-war stockade which existed in Chicago. The general tone of the article was that of a believe-it-or-not marvel. The reporter neither supported nor debunked the claims of Stipek (2).

A reply and a denial by penitentiary officials were published in the same paper four days later, but they were not given the same prominence as the original story. The reply contained the accurate facts as stated above, but said that Stipek's sentence would normally expire in 1964 because of adjustments made for good behavior, and for his cooperation with army medics.

The reply said that the record of Harry Stipek (2) indicated he was twenty-six years of age when he entered prison, and that he would be nearing eighty if released on the contemplated date. Regret was expressed, but there was no hint of disciplinary action against him because of the claim or the subsequent publicity.

The inference is that Harry Stipek became acquainted with the aged companion between the years 1910 and 1915. He may have been sought out because of the similarity of names and institution numbers. It is noted that the prison library is reasonably large and contains several volumes pertaining to the Civil War. After the companion's death in 1915, Stipek was free to claim what he wished without fear of immediate contradiction. The newspaper

story is the only known claim or public assertion of this nature. Stipek's prison behavior thereafter was unblemished.

Harry Stipek was released from Joliet on September 1, 1964, after serving fifty-four years of his original sentence. He was given ten dollars cash and a railroad ticket to St. Louis, Missouri. He is now believed to be living there with a nephew, a John Bancliff or Bentcliff.

End of record of Harry Stipek (2).

Bolda read the closing paragraphs a second time, then folded the manuscript and put it in a clean hotel envelope. There was nothing on the typed pages to betray their source; the Chicago office was resolutely anonymous.

His predecessor must have uncovered much of the same information, and then traced the released prisoner through his nephew. It would account for the presence of a teetotaler in a riverfront saloon. John Bentcliff was the bartender in the establishment where the former FBI agent was slain; his name had been mentioned briefly in the newspapers following the shooting.

Bolda dropped the letter on the bedside table and crossed the room to the bath. He stopped suddenly at the door and turned back to look at the transistor radio. It hadn't spoken to him.

"Frank?"

The radio remained silent.

Bolda got fresh batteries from the trunk, inserted them in the radio and turned up the volume.

"Frank, old buddy—?"

He carried the radio to the window and searched the street below, seeking a particular parked car.

"Otto—do you read me, Otto?"

No answer.

Back to the center of the room. *"Frank!"*

Silence.

Bolda grabbed up the telephone and asked the hotel operator to ring Room 421. The ringing continued for a length of time.

"I'm sorry, sir. They don't answer."

"Can you tell me if they checked out?"

"What was the name, sir?"

Bolda made a wild guess. "Frank Otto." He waited while the operator consulted some information file.

"Mr. Otto checked out yesterday, sir."

"Did he leave a message? A forwarding address?"

"No, sir."

Bolda put down the phone. His contacts were gone. Section Three—or Victor Angoff—had pulled them off. Was the mission ended? Or did they expect him to be dead by this time?

# 14

Anson Bolda put the Chicago letter in his pocket, tucked the gun under his belt, and carried the electronic eavesdropper from the hotel room. The pink convertible was waiting in the hotel parking lot, its engine still warm, but Bolda didn't take the time to check it out for hidden bugs. If the fat shadow was again following him, two birds—one stone.

Bolda left the lot and drove east until he picked up Broadway, then swung south. John Bentcliff's saloon was about 8300 south, near the corner of Marceau and Van Buren. The map showed a railroad yard between that location and the riverfront.

Lightning flashed in the southwest, followed later by a low rumbling of thunder. Bolda glanced at the sky to find the stars obliterated.

He parked the conspicuous car on Marceau, just off Broadway, leaving it near an old brick building that might have been a warehouse or a former factory. It was a four-block walk to the saloon.

The inevitable neon window sign read *Tiny's Tap.*

Bolda stopped across the street and backed up to a blank wall to study the place. The ground floor was one long room stretching from the sidewalk to the alley behind; it might have been any kind of a store or storage room in times past. Two windows, partly obscured by advertising and ratty curtains, fronted the building; a loose-fitting screen door hung between them. The second-floor windows were covered on the inside with plywood.

A twenty-foot-long bar began just inside the screen door, and ended at a partition which probably shielded the rest rooms. A tall, rather thin man wearing a loud sport shirt was sitting on a stool behind the bar, talking with

two women who gave the appearance of hookers. Bolda could see no other habitués in the place.

He crossed the street.

Three faces turned to the door as he entered, stared at him curiously and then with a trace of suspicion. The faces of the women became set, withdrawn. The bartender slid off the stool and watched him carefully.

Bolda ordered a bottle of beer, looked the women over carefully, and pretended to make up his mind.

"My name is Bolda. I'll buy the ladies a drink."

They accepted the offer but failed to warm up.

"I'm just down from Joliet," he said next. "Old Harry asked me to look him up if I ever got to town."

The bartender stared at his clothing and let his face mirror the disbelief.

"How's old Harry getting along? He okay?"

Grudgingly: "Harry who?"

"Harry who?" Bolda stared at the man with simulated surprise. "Harry Stipek, that's who. The old man himself. The guy that took care of our books. Say—I'll bet you're his nephew—you're John."

"My name's John."

"Well, sure. John Bentcliff, he said. He was coming down here to stay with his kinfolk—he told me he was going to put up here." A glance at the two women, and then back to the suspicious bartender. "Say, now, don't get me wrong—I'm not here to sponge, I'm not looking for bed and board. I can take care of myself."

"You're a cop," Bentcliff said flatly.

"I'm not a cop," Bolda retorted with equal hardness. "I just dropped in to say hello to old Harry; he asked me to do that. If he don't want to see me, well, okay."

"You still look like a cop. You sound like a cop."

"All right, all right, if that's the way you feel about it, we'll drop it. I'm not making trouble."

*"That's* the way I feel about it."

"Okay—I just wanted to visit with old Harry."

"Harry ain't here."

"I can see that. I wish he *was*—he'd put you straight about me, he'd tell you who I am." Bolda drank beer and let his gaze wander to one of the women. She returned his

glance with total disinterest. He returned to the bartender. "Will you tell old Harry I was here? Will you do me that much of a favor?"

"If I see him."

"Okay. Just tell him Bolda was here to look him up. Tell him I've been home for a couple of months now. He knows where that's at—he can come over to see me, if he wants."

"I'll tell him if I see him."

"Okay."

Bolda finished his beer and quit the saloon. He stopped outside the screen door and looked both ways along the darkened street, appearing to decide on a direction. Flashes of lightning came again, followed more quickly by the thunder. The air had turned sticky. Bolda walked south to the corner. He paused again, turned to look behind him, then quickly darted across the street and ran back the way he had come. He put his back to the brick wall and watched the interior of the saloon.

The two women were still seated at the bar, heads averted, looking and listening as John Bentcliff made a hasty phone call. He was a man who talked with his hands when excited. The telephone was at the far end of the back bar. Bentcliff began talking rapidly when the other party answered; he gestured with his free hand, pointing to the street, the screen door, the bar, the empty bottle, the onlookers. He shot his hand above his head and then threw out his shoulders to aid in describing the visitor's appearance. Bentcliff finally ran down, and stopped talking to listen. His head jerked and nodded.

In a moment he turned quickly, pointed to the door, and spoke to one of the women. She jumped off the stool and ran to the door to search the street. Bolda covered his face with his arm to conceal the white patch in the darkness. The woman turned back to Bentcliff with a shake of her head. The conversation went on.

When it was finished the bartender hung up with a bang and went back to the women. He banged his fist on the bar and then shook an accusative finger at the door. Bolda guessed that old Harry had denied all knowledge of him, strengthening the suspicion he was a cop.

He settled down to wait. If Harry Stipek was coming down to the saloon, Bolda wanted a glimpse of him. It would make a fitting capper to the Chicago report.

He was still waiting an hour later.

The thunderstorm was overhead. Shafts of brilliant lightning followed one another in rapid succession, forcing Bolda to move away from his post for fear of being seen through the saloon windows. The heavy thunder shook the ground and the old buildings around him, and a few early drops of water pelted his face. He waited at the corner, ready to give up his vigil and return to the car. A few men had entered the tavern—rivermen, local characters, a truck driver—but none of them carried sufficient age to be Harry Stipek. No one came out. A diesel locomotive hooted in the darkness behind him, near at hand.

Light rain began falling. It rained for perhaps thirty seconds, and stopped as suddenly as it began. Bolda left his post and broke into a trot. The next fall would be a downpour. He remembered he had left the top down on the convertible, and it was four blocks to the parked car. Harsh bursts of lightning sheeted the sky.

Bolda was two blocks from the car when he put his hand in his pocket and found it empty. The other pocket held nothing more than a box of cartridges for the gun in his belt. He'd forgotten the keys again, left them hanging in the ignition. His pace increased to a run.

He spotted the man from a block away.

Rapid, recurring discharges of lightning spaced by seconds of utter blackness gave an illusion of jerky motion. The man was bending over the side of the car, looking in, looking down, finding the key, reaching for the handle, opening the door, stepping forward. Bolda shouted a warning, but his shout was lost in the rolling thunder. The man at the car was moving in, sitting down, pulling the door, touching the wheel. Lightning flared.

Bolda shouted again, with as little result, and damned his oversight. The eavesdropper had been left on the seat. His first thought had been Brice Waldner; he thought the fat shadow had caught up to him, but the stealthy figure in

the car was too small, too wiry. The convertible had fallen to a car thief.

Alternating black and white limned the flickering movement. The figure in the car bent down, released the handbrake, reached out, touched the ignition, turned the key—

The car exploded in a bomb-burst of flame.

Bolda was tumbled backward to the ground. Searing heat from the explosion washed over him, and the thunder competed with the booming in the sky. Nearby windows shattered and fell. Debris like shrapnel rained down on him, and he rolled over in an instinctive motion, covering his neck with his hands. An acrid odor touched his nostrils.

When he could get his wind, Bolda crawled painfully to the nearest wall and hugged it for shelter, then found it denied—something was still falling on him. He accepted that without thinking and rested on his side, his face to the wall and one hand protecting the back of his neck. Thunder shook the building above him, and lightning ripped the heavy clouds. He squeezed water from his eyes.

Bolda rolled over on his back. Rain pelted him. He didn't know how long it had been raining.

He looked back to the street and found a crater blown into the pavement, surrounded by debris that had once been an automobile. The hole was already collecting water. There was nothing discernible at that distance to indicate the presence of a man. Another flickering sheet of lightning revealed a gun lying on the sidewalk, and he recognized it as his, loosened from his belt when he fell. Lights were coming on along the street. Window glass was heard again, and somebody shouted an alarm through an empty frame.

Bolda grabbed up his gun and fled.

He kept to a parallel side street, sometimes walking, sometimes running a distance of eight or ten blocks before going back to the better-lighted Broadway. In the light, he found blood on his hands and washed it off in the falling rain. Mud on his jacket and the knees of his trousers was brushed off easily, but the stains remained. He hadn't worn a hat, and his clothing clung to him like a damp

sheet. Bolda took refuge in the doorway of a night-lighted store and waited for a cab.

The driver stared at him in the poor illumination of the dome light.

"Man, you've *had* it!"

"Man, you don't know how long I waited!" Bolda shot back in half truth. "I was dry when I started out. Every cab in town disappears when it rains."

"Everybody in town and his grandmother wants a cab when it rains," the driver said. "The rest of the time, we just sit and wait. Where you going?"

Bolda gave him the address of a hospital on Grand, in the next block below Angoff's place.

"You going to be sick?"

"I'm going to work. Night shift this month."

Bolda entered the hospital by a side door because the cab was slow in pulling away from the curb. When it had gone, he came out again and darted across the street, circling the block to come in on Angoff's parking lot from the rear. The rain had not lessened.

He moved stealthily through the darkened lot, feeling the hood of each car for heat. Brice Waldner had to be there ahead of him—if he hadn't already come and gone. Bolda had lost so much time on the ground after the explosion, so much time running and so much waiting that the fat shadow had a long lead. Waldner should be here. Bolda was certain the man would follow one direct action with another; he would come running to Angoff to report the blast, come running for a pat on the head and a handful of money, unwilling or unable to wait another day when Karen Collins was absent from the building.

His probing hands found a warm hood.

Lightning flared again and he froze beside the car, not moving until the darkness returned. The car was a fairly expensive make, not more than two years old. Bolda knelt beside the front wheels to feel the sidewalls, and found them less warm than the hood. He tried the nearer doors and discovered they were locked. Dissatisfied, he moved on. Another car, closer to the building, revealed warmth. The sidewalls were hot to his hands, and the doors were

unlocked. The car was five or six years old and of a much less expensive make.

Bolda examined the remaining cars in the lot and came back to the suspicious one. He lifted the hood and pulled loose the distributor cap, throwing it under an adjoining car. Then he crawled into the back seat to wait.

The wait was short. Bolda had lost more time than he realized.

Brice Waldner ran through the light at the front of the building and immediately disappeared into the areaway beside it. He was running toward Bolda, moving in his characteristic heavy lope. One hand was clutched to a trouser pocket. A burst of lightning found him again, already half the length of the building and nearing the lot. The heavy mouth was open, sucking wind. Bolda pulled the handle on the opposite door, unlatching it but not permitting the door to open more than a fraction of an inch; he wanted a quick escape route if the oncoming man discovered him too soon.

Waldner yanked open the front door and fell into the seat. He was breathing in noisy gasps. He jabbed a key at the ignition, missed and cursed his miss, then tried again and fitted the key into the lock. The starter motor ground. Waldner pumped the accelerator, flooding gas into the engine. The starter continued to grind but the motor failed to turn. The fat man swore at it, swore at his luck and slammed the accelerator to the floor. Lightning revealed him hanging on the wheel with both hands while he peered at the floor beneath his thumping foot.

Bolda eased up into the back seat and waited for the man to run out of breath.

Waldner shouted an obscenity at the stalled car, an impossible coupling of man and machine.

Bolda said, "Now, *that* would be worth watching."

The startled man began a turn in the seat, not recognizing the voice. He caught the whiteness of Bolda's face in the mirror, saw it limned by lightning in the next blink of an eye, and struggled to reverse the turn. One hand dropped to his lap. He lunged to one side, pulling the bulk of his stomach from under the wheel and throwing his shoulder against the door.

Bolda's first blow caught him against the side of his head. Waldner's skull struck the car window on his left side, cracking the glass. He bellowed with rage and pain, shoved the car door open and fell out onto the lot. Bolda kicked open the unlatched door on the opposite side, jumped out into the rain and sprinted around the car. Waldner was on his knees, a gun in his hand, peering into the darkened interior. The left side of his face was running with blood, interfering with sight in that eye.

Bolda came up on his right. Waldner found him, turned on his knees and lifted the gun. His mouth was open, laboriously pulling in wind. Bolda kicked him in the armpit, jolting the weapon from his hand and all but paralyzing the arm. Another blow caught him on the chin and Waldner went over backward.

Bolda dropped onto his rib cage and dug in with his knees. His opponent gasped, struggled to throw him off, then countered with a similar strike; he brought up one massive leg, his knee jolting Bolda in the small of the back. Bolda fell forward, smothering the man under him. Waldner was fighting to get his free arm around his body and crush the backbone. His grip was like a noose. Bolda braced both hands against the rain-drenched pavement and forced himself up, tearing away from the noose. Waldner's body dropped heavily. The enveloping arm slipped its purchase and Bolda kicked outward with both feet. He let the full weight of his body fall on the man as his feet came down hard on the fleshy belly. Waldner collapsed beneath him, a strangled cry of excruciating pain dying on his lips.

Bolda rolled off the flaccid body and sat beside it to recover his spent breath. Water running over the lot swirled around the two objects. The lightning was less frequent, seeming to move ahead of the storm to the northwest, but the rain fell steadily. Bolda stared around at the nearby buildings to make sure there were no new windows lighted, no faces watching.

When he was ready to move again, Bolda hauled the unconscious man to his car and dumped him into the back. He turned out the trouser pocket Waldner had been holding as he ran, and discovered a roll of bills fastened with a rubber band. Payoff money. Bolda put the roll in

his jacket pocket and continued the search. Waldner's gun had come from a tight-fitting holster strapped inside the fat man's leg, between ankle and knee. Bolda retrieved the gun, emptied it, and tossed it into the back seat.

His final task was to recover the distributor cap he'd thrown under the adjoining car; a change of mind made it useful again. Bolda wiped the cap dry and replaced it. There was no sound or movement from the fat shadow as Bolda drove his car from the lot and turned south on Grand Boulevard.

He was walking again.

Bolda hurried through the doors of Union Station, ostensibly to escape the rain, and looked about for the public-telephone booths. His jacket was pulled up tight about his body, again for protection. He stepped into a booth and searched for the number of the local office of the FBI. The directory gave an alternate, night number. Bolda dropped in a coin and dialed.

A cool, professionally assured voice answered the ring almost at once.

Bolda said, "Go take a look in the back of an old car, just inside the main gate at Tower Grove Park. You'll find something interesting."

"Do you want the police, sir?"

"I called *you*. You'll find a fat character in the car; somebody you've been looking for over the past two or three months. One of your men was shot in a saloon out on the southside—Tiny's Tap. Remember that?"

The voice quickened. "Who's calling, sir? There may be a reward posted for the information."

"And then again, there may not," Bolda retorted. "Buster, if you want to catch that fat boy before he bleeds to death, you'd better stop stalling and move."

"Where are you calling from, sir?"

Bolda said, "Tiny's Tap, of course," and hung up.

He walked out of the station and found a few cabs waiting in the line. Bolda took the first one, discovering a driver who was not inclined to talk. Marveling at that, he returned to his hotel.

The desk clerk stared at him as though he'd been walking in the rain for a lark.

"I'll take off my shoes before I go to bed," Bolda promised him.

He stretched out his feet to the two lower corners of the bed, yawned noisily, and sat up to stare at the bright sunlight filling all the windows. Traffic was audible on the street below. A sleepy glance at his watch surprised him; it was the first time in years he'd slept into the middle of the morning. He yawned again as he left the bed, then caught himself absently reaching for the transistor radio. "Go fly a kite, Frank."

Bolda stood in the shower for long minutes, thinking of nothing at all; it felt good to be alive, to be there absorbing the comfort of a warm shower, to anticipate a big breakfast. He was enormously hungry. He came out after a while, dried himself, and shaved.

The rain-soaked suit was ready for the cleaner. One more thunderstorm and he'd be without clothing; he had brought two suits with him, the only civilian clothes he owned. Bolda opened the Chicago letter and examined the pages for water damage; the outer sheets were stained and wrinkled but they were readable. He transferred the letter to another envelope and made ready to leave the hotel room. The gun was again tucked in his belt, and covered. Bolda pulled the suitcase from the closet, inspected the still green contents to make sure Frank or Otto hadn't played a practical joke, and started for the door.

A second thought stopped him, turned him around and sent him to the trunk. Much of the gear was now useless to him with the eavesdropper lost, and he hesitated, seeking something of value. Bolda decided on a pair of wire cutters. He closed and locked the trunk, debating whether to send it back to the agency or call for another receiver. There was the possibility he wouldn't need it after today.

He went down to a late breakfast.

The attractive young woman at the automobile-rental agency looked up from the newspaper and revealed her

surprise. She peered around Bolda, saw his cab leaving the door, and came back to him with a quick concern.

He put down the suitcase and smiled at her.

"I'm back for another color."

Evelyn Trimble looked again to reassure herself the rented car wasn't on the lot.

"Where is the convertible, Mr. Bolda? *You* didn't leave it in the Ozarks, surely."

Bolda looked down at the newspaper she had been reading. He recognized the photograph of a street scene and placed the tip of his finger on a hole in the street.

"There it was."

The young woman stared in momentary confusion, not understanding the reference. She followed his pointing finger, examined the picture again, read the caption under it, returned her attention to him. He was still smiling.

"Mr. Bolda! That was your—*our* car?"

"The bright pink one. Regrettable, isn't it?"

"But *what* happened? What in the world happened?" The young woman was losing her poise. "What happened to our car?"

Bolda said, "It really did blow up." He turned the newspaper around to read the caption and the two or three opening paragraphs of the news story. "The police are baffled, it says here. They suspect a gangland slaying; something about a southside gambling empire." He put the paper aside. "That car certainly had a colorful history."

"Mr. Bolda, we . . . we . . ." She was helpless.

"We aren't in the habit of losing cars that way," he finished for her. "Me neither, Mrs. Trimble. I was taken by surprise too. Imagine how I felt."

"But that car cost nearly four thousand dollars!"

"Was it insured?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"But the insurance doesn't cover that kind of hazard. I can take a hint."

Bolda counted out four thousand dollars of Victor Angoff's money and offered it to her. The young woman stood behind her desk in lifeless immobility, gaping at the suitcase. Bolda gently pried open her fingers, forced the

money into her hand and closed the fingers over it. She was still gaping.

After a space of patient waiting he said, "Please, Mrs. Trimble—another car?"

Evelyn Trimble reached for a rental form. She seemed to be moving in her sleep. "Are you going out of town again, Mr. Bolda?"

"Not today," he responded. "Today I'm calling on one of the city's most influential citizens—an admiral. An admiral without a rowboat. I'd ask you to go along, but your husband wouldn't approve."

# 15

Anson Bolda strode into the lobby of the building and paused beside the stopper. The man kept his place on a stool but folded a newspaper and looked up at the newcomer. The suitcase was passed over.

"I remember you." And an afterthought: "Sir."

"Mr. Angoff and I are discussing the sale of this place," Bolda told him. "Have you heard that on the grapevine?"

The stopper said, "No, sir." His expression said he lied.

Bolda removed the wire cutters from his pocket. "The first thing to go is this." He cut two inches from the telephone cord at the stopper's elbow.

"Hey—you can't do that!"

Bolda said, "It's done." He walked to the elevator and pushed the button for the fifth floor. The door closed off the guardian's belated anger rising on a sullen face.

He wanted that much of a lead on Karen Collins. Let her guess at the signal from the rising elevator.

Bolda stepped from the cage at the fifth floor and looked around him. Nothing had changed. The three wires had not been moved from their previous position, although they were loose near the baseboard where he had pushed the telephone tap behind them. Bolda inspected a window at one end of the corridor and found it locked, then retraced his steps to examine a fire door and a flight of steps going down to the floor below. The fire door had the same sort of alarm system he'd found fastened to the basement door. Bolda pushed it open and held it for a few moments, knowing an alarm was ringing somewhere.

He went back to the apartment and pressed the buzzer.

The door was opened slowly.

Bolda said cheerfully, "Good morning, Miss Collins."

She backed away from him, both hands covering her mouth. Bolda followed her into the apartment and pushed

shut the door behind him. Karen Collins kept her distance, staring with disbelief; her eyes were impenetrably dark and her stance rigid. Bolda waited for the reaction.

Karen Collins cried, *"Victor!"*

Victor Angoff appeared from one of the inner rooms. He was wearing a lounging jacket and held one hand in a pocket. His face was turned toward the door, but he was listening intently for any sound, any movement.

Bolda said, "Good morning, Admiral."

"I knew you!" Angoff's hand came out of his pocket empty. He pushed forward in sudden animation and stumbled into a chair. "When that alarm rang, I *knew!*"

Karen Collins said quickly, "The lobby didn't call."

"Somebody cut the wires," Bolda told her.

"You see, you see!" The old man was delighted. He advanced into the room and paused at the end of the sofa. "Karen, make our guest comfortable. A chair, please."

The tired woman didn't move. She was looking at Bolda with an expression he couldn't read. Bolda pulled up a chair and sat down near the coffee table.

"Make yourself at home, Admiral."

"No, no." The wrinkled face was grinning at him. "Close, but no." Angoff turned his head to where he supposed Karen Collins was standing. "I told you."

"Not the Admiral?" Bolda questioned doubtfully. He was reluctant to discard the wild suspicion.

"Close," Angoff said again, and came around the sofa to sit down in his usual place. "So very close."

"You'd better not be Harry Stipek."

Angoff clapped his hands. "Stipek! Have you found Stipek already?"

"I found two of them." Bolda pulled the Chicago letter from his pocket and dropped it on the coffee table. "You've just lost a chapter in your new book."

Victor Angoff picked up the letter and examined it with his fingers, feeling the weight and thickness and turning it end over end. He seemed preoccupied with some inner speculation. After a length of time he put down the report and allowed his fingers to stray along the table until they reached the wooden box. The cigarette ritual began. There

had been only the merest hesitation while the fingers counted the cigarettes.

Bolda wrinkled his nose at the perfumed aroma and turned to see what the woman was doing. He disliked not having her in a direct line of sight. Karen Collins was standing where he'd left her, but the disbelieving stare had softened. Her facial expression offered a tenuous reading. Bolda pointed to a place on the sofa beside the old man.

"Sit down, Miss Collins. There."

She obeyed the order.

The old man started, "Karen could make coffee—"

"Not now," Bolda interrupted.

Victor Angoff nodded and sat very still.

Bolda reached into his pocket and brought out the roll of bills wrapped in a rubber band. He let it fall to the table and waited for the yellowed fingers to reach it, examine and appear to recognize it. The fingers coiled about the roll and waited for what was to come.

"Waldner can't spend that. Keep it."

The woman's glance drifted to Angoff but lingered only a moment. The tired dark eyes returned to Bolda.

Angoff asked curiously, "Where?"

"In your lot, out back."

"Here? You caught him here?"

"I heard you give the order—I knew he would come running back when he thought it was finished. I waited for him." Bolda studied the lined face across the table. "What was your reason? I'll listen to one answer—just one."

"To determine if you could survive."

"You already knew that."

"Once could be luck. I needed to know if it was more than luck. You put it quite well. You said you had something going for you. Had to know that, test that. I needed desperately to test that."

"What if I hadn't survived?"

The old man opened his hands in a weary gesture. "We would have had to begin again. New man."

"The man before me didn't survive."

"And so we began again, with you." Angoff bent forward, his voice deepening with emphasis. "If you had wasted any more time we would have pulled you in. Don't

have the time to spare. Waited too long. *Look* at me, young man."

"I've looked; I was briefed at the Agency. For a little while I thought you might be Harry Stipek—the imaginary one in the newspaper clipping."

"A pity I'm not." Angoff hesitated, dwelling on that subject. "False trail, you said?"

"Stipek died in prison when he was thirty-two, but another man with the same name and number stole his record; passed himself off as the old original. The newspaper writer fell for it."

"A failure," Angoff remarked sadly.

"That makes two of us."

"Don't understand you."

Bolda eyed the pair. "I said I would kill the man who betrayed me in Gdansk. I said somebody made a deal with my life, traded me, sold me for some other thing. I said I would catch up to the man who did that and kill him." His fingers were tightly locked in his lap. "I've found him —or them. And I haven't got the guts to kill them. They're not what I expected."

Karen Collins had dropped her gaze and was looking at nothing in her lap. She kept silent. Victor Angoff put out his cigarette and failed to light another. His probing fingers touched the box and drifted away. Silence stayed in the room for an extended length of time.

"That is victory, not failure," the old one said at last. He was manifestly pleased.

"For you."

"And you," Angoff insisted. "If you don't yet recognize that, you will. Grow older, you will." His hand reached out on the sofa, found the woman's smaller one and closed over it. "I judge a man by the sound of his voice, the way he walks, what he does or doesn't do. Have been wrong, but not often. Not wrong about you. We know that now. We are content."

Bolda remained wary and watchful. "You could have been wrong. Were you prepared for that?"

Karen Collins flashed him a quick glance and then

averted her eyes. Bolda found his answer in that, but waited for Victor Angoff to put it in words.

"Prepared," the aged man said. His voice was firm and quiet. "Karen would have put your talent for survival to the severest test. The disadvantage would be yours, not hers. Thankful it didn't come to that." He paused, then added an afterthought. "New man waiting."

"Who?" Bolda demanded. "Where?"

"Man operating in Sinkiang. Been there seven years, never caught. Survival talent. Worth watching."

Bolda looked at the woman and guessed at Angoff's meaning. He would put himself at a fatal disadvantage.

"Would you sell him to the Chinese?" he asked bitterly. "Throw him into jail; buy him out again? Make him feel he owed you something?"

"No. No time for that. We would bring him in directly, if you had failed."

"Why was I sold at Gdansk. What was I traded for?"

"You were traded for a promotion in the KGB."

"Whose promotion?" He knew astonishment.

"His name is Kasnakev. Remember that, it will be useful to you. Before Gdansk, he was only another field agent, one of hundreds, ambitious, anxious to make his mark. You made it for him. You were thrown to him. He went up. Your discovery and capture earned him a promotion, your successful interrogation and more successful trial won him a transfer to Moscow. Into the Commissariat office. There now, working. Quite pleased."

"You *should* be pleased!" Bolda declared. A reluctant admiration weakened his bitterness. "Sacrifice one agent to promote another, buy the first man back and keep them both. I hope to hell Kasnakev is worth the hard time you gave *me*." That ancient nightmare haunted him.

"Kasnakev is one of two men in the KGB working for us. Better two than one. Tenure is uncertain."

"All right, you sold me out and bought me back. Why? Why *me?* There are better men in jail."

"Dispute that. Stop underestimating yourself. We chose you because of what you are. Communications expert, fluent in three languages, exposed to Polish and Soviet patterns, behavior patterns. You are still a Pole, still Ukrai-

nian in a sense. Valuable insights." The old man turned to the woman sitting beside him; he was still holding her hand. "Karen chose you because of your background, your mother's background. She suspected an extraordinary talent for survival, something uncommon. You proved that. I suspected an uncommon mentality. Proved that. We chose you for what you are."

"Karen told me she hadn't read my dossier."

"Truth. A quibble, but truth. It was read to her on the phone. She repeated it to me."

"You do have something rigged on that teletype."

"Still proving us right, Anson." He had a new thought. "What did you do with the suitcase?"

Bolda pointed to the door.

Karen said, "He brought it back, Victor."

"Not enough?" the old man asked.

"Too much," Bolda retorted. "If I was selling, I could be had for a small chunk of that."

Angoff's smile reflected his satisfaction. "You can't be bought, you wouldn't defect, and you are unable to harm the people responsible for your torment. We chose well. A pity you can't ever be President."

Bolda came out of his chair with sharp annoyance. He deliberately turned his back on the pair and strode to the window to look down on the park across the street. His bench was empty. On an impulse, he reached to the top of the window frame and ran his fingers along the ledge. The bug was gone. The ledge was even clean of dust. Bolda moved to the bookcase and took out the volume he had dummied to resemble a bug. Karen Collins hadn't found that one. He glanced over his shoulder to find her staring at the book in his hands.

Bolda tore it open at the center to show her the decoy, then slapped it shut and put it back on the shelf. He sensed her gaze following him as he went to the kitchen. Something warned him and he stopped in the doorway, looked in, and turned back without revealing his purpose. He instinctively knew she would never forgive him the salt and pepper shakers if he revealed their true purpose. He wasn't too sure he could forgive Angoff that sellout in Gdansk, even considering the advantage won. A KGB

man—an insider, working for the agency—promoted at his expense was a bittersweet pill to swallow.

Bolda strode back to the table.

"If you're not the Admiral, who—?"

"The Admiral never heard of me," Angoff declared. "If he has, I am a failure. I have taken pains not to be seen, heard, known. Like that from the beginning."

"What beginning? I'll listen to one answer, old man."

Victor Angoff had repressed himself for as long as he was able. The crinkled fingers flew to the wooden box, and the cigarette routine began again. He stopped at Bolda's words, held the lighter poised in the air, and turned unseeing eyes on the woman.

"Karen . . ."

She said, "*Please* sit down, Mr. Bolda."

MI-8 was the designation given to the Cryptographic Bureau operating within the State Department after the end of World War I; its function was to handle military intelligence. Intelligence activities during that war were so sparse as to be almost nonexistent; the nation relied on British and French espionage activities for information, and often suffered because it got no information at all. At the close of the war, the persistence of a handful of men was responsible for the creation of MI-8, and it operated for about ten years thereafter in narrowly restricted fields of investigation and cryptoanalysis.

MI-8 was destroyed during the administration of President Hoover, and the nation was left with nothing.

Frank L. Stimson, a new Secretary of State under Hoover, discovered the Bureau and was outraged at his discovery; he considered it something unclean, repugnant, an enterprise associated with European abasement. His wryly classic excuse was, *Gentlemen don't read other people's mail.* MI-8 was abolished and its personnel fired. Victor Angoff was one of the code clerks turned out. The United States for many years thereafter had no organized central intelligence bureau, other than minor structures operating within the armed forces, and the debacle at Pearl Harbor was one result of the vacuum.

A reversal began in 1942.

President Roosevelt created the Office of Strategic Serv-

ices, and placed Major General Donovan at its helm; this office was an outgrowth of an earlier information center, also headed by Donovan. The OSS began the task of putting together a new espionage and intelligence system, and at the same time embarked on unorthodox-warfare activities. Victor Angoff joined it at the beginning. The first Karen Collins was recruited near its end. The Office operated for the duration of World War II.

It was closed out in 1945, by an executive order of President Truman, but before it was disbanded a step was taken to prevent another vacuum. The step was unprecedented in its audacity.

The year before, General Donovan notified President Roosevelt that some steps should be taken to protect the interests of the nation in the postwar period. Donovan expected the abolishment of the OSS, but thought that some form of intelligence activity should be continued because certain problems would not end with the war; certain foreign organisms would continue to exist and expand. He foresaw the need for a continuing central organization, reporting to and directly under the control of the President. He may have been acutely aware of the emotions of a future Secretary of State, or some like official.

Roosevelt agreed. A week before his death, he directed that preliminary work be started for the eventual establishment of a postwar agency.

Victor Angoff became the keystone.

In the final year of the war, Angoff was moved from Washington, and every physical token of his presence there was destroyed. Documents bearing his name or signature were recopied and other names inserted; records containing his name were altered or replaced; his dossier was burned. His associates were scattered at war's end, and time was relied on to erase their memories. Victor Angoff deliberately ceased to exist as an employee of the Government; no trace of his passage was left in the OSS or MI-8.

Instead, he waited in seclusion for the vacuum that might return.

Administrations change each four or eight years; cabinet members and political liege men in teeming number

change with them, creating a periodic instability. Career officers of the armed forces reach positions of critical responsibility only when they are within firing distance of retirement. The tides of public opinion flow first this way, then that, consistent only in their inconsistency. In contrast, durability was desired. A stable, firmly rooted individual was required; an irremovable steward capable of surviving the many changes of political climate and public vagaries, capable of preserving the network against recurring rupture. Victor Angoff was immutable.

Had the void returned, had some future President or angry Secretary again destroyed the existing system, Angoff was directed to continue the work in secrecy. He was provided with funds, a base of operations, duplicate files, and a means of communication; he was directed to hold together whatever remained of an intelligence network, to maintain and operate it to the utmost of his ability, to keep it in readiness against the day an openly operated central agency could be re-established. He was ordered to always ensure that a future vacuum would never be a complete vacuum. Victor Angoff obeyed orders.

History had not yet repeated itself.

Although President Truman's order ended the OSS in 1945, the need for some system was clearly recognized, and only a year later the President created a new organization, the Central Intelligence Group. Another year, another refinement, and that Group was replaced by two separate bodies: the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency. CIA was responsible for foreign espionage of conventional nature, although its unconventional innovations often earned it prejudicial publicity. NASA assumed jurisdiction over the newer form, electronic espionage, and absorbed the cipher agencies of the armed forces. It maintained radio and radar intercept stations across the world, aloft, at sea, and on the ground; it operated certain reconnaissance satellites for audio probing; it broke the codes of every global government capable of inventing one, friend and foe alike; and it was rarely mentioned in newspapers.

Victor Angoff stayed at his post.

The security disaster of 1929 was not repeated nor did

it seem likely to recur in the foreseeable future, but Angoff stayed on as directed, an aging sentinel working in anonymity to protect and promote the networks he helped build. He was a supervisor who was never seen, a director who was seldom heard, a proprietor who was all but unknown.

Bolda knew incredulity. "You're the—the—"

"The what?"

"Mastermind."

"Of course not! Absurd, silly." Angoff went to the table for a cigarette. "A caretaker, no more."

Karen Collins said, "Each of the agencies operates under a table of organization; you are in a position to know that. CIA functions under a director appointed by the President; a team of assistant directors program the work. NSA is headed by the intelligence chiefs of the armed forces, rotating the directorship among them; the agency assistants are the unifying managers. Victor is known only to two men in each agency, two career men with long tenure. He is not known to the appointees."

"But you give orders."

"No," Angoff contradicted. "Advice, suggestions, recommendations. Never an order. Be a mistake."

"And this had been going on for how long? Twenty years?"

"More than twenty," was the reply. "*More* than twenty."

"But now you want out?"

"We want out." The cigarette was not lighted. "Have been involved for fifty years, since Wilson, Lansing, the First War. I was a code clerk in the State Department during the Wilson administration. Karen has been involved since she was a child, since her mother fell in the Second War." Again his hand sought hers and covered it. "*We* want out."

"Do you think you can push me in?"

Angoff hesitated, playing with the cigarette. At length he said, "You will come in voluntarily, or not at all."

"What happens if I don't?"

"That fellow in Sinkiang will be recalled."

"Damn it, old man, I'm not asking for the job."

"If you *had* asked, you wouldn't be wanted."

"But you ran me through Lubyanka for this!"

"To test you, to find if you could survive, to let you see what *they* were like. Must know your opponent."

"I lived there as a kid; I listened at Incirlik."

"But you didn't *know* them until Lubyanka."

Bolda said, "I hate to think that rattler got his promotion because of me."

" 'That rattler' has become very useful to us because of you. He will be useful until he is found out."

"And then he will be dead," was the harsh reply.

Victor Angoff finally lit the cigarette. "You know your opponent."

"Tell me something," Bolda demanded after another of those irritating silences. "What happens if I don't want to be a mastermind—if I tell you to go fly a kite? Never mind that guy in Sinkiang. What happens to *me?*"

He caught the hand signal passed to the woman.

She said, "You will be free to leave, Mr. Bolda. You may return to your station, or you may have a discharge from service if you wish. There will be no reprisals or recriminations. We will expect you to keep silent, but other than that you may do whatever you wish. You may take the suitcase with you to repay you for your trouble."

"As easy as that?"

"Yes."

"Almost half a million bucks, and as free as a bird?"

"Yes."

"The agency won't jump on me? The army won't haul me back to Fort Bragg?"

"No."

He pushed out a hand. "I think you people are crazy."

"That may be."

Bolda kicked the suitcase. "I don't want your damned money." He looked at the woman and again read the new expression on her face. "What am I supposed to do, Karen?"

Victor Angoff said happily, "We chose well."

# 16

He was alone on the fifth floor.

Karen Collins and the old one were gone, taking a small amount of luggage with them. That was all they wanted or needed. Collins said they had prepared for a departure on the morning after Bolda gave them that sleepless night, the morning after he invaded the building and threw their lines of communication into a hopeless snarl. The old man was that certain of him. They'd packed what they wanted in trunks and shipped the trunks to a previously selected destination; of course, he could trace their flight if he wished, but she hoped he would not. They wanted out; they wanted to cut every tie with the burdens of the past.

Karen Collins removed the salt and pepper shakers from a kitchen shelf, gave him a brief, sidelong glance and stowed them away in her luggage. Bolda kept silent. He wondered if anyone, other than the old fellow, had ever brought her a gift.

Bolda had repeated querulously before they left, "What am I supposed to do?"

"Make cover for yourself," Angoff told him. "Cover yourself as well as you did between East Berlin and Gdansk, cover better. Leave that hotel, send back your gear, make a false trail pointing to some other place. Camouflage, misdirection. Transfer those two men who worked with you, don't run the risk of meeting them on the street. Close out the assignment you're supposed to be working on now, prepare a covering solution, submit it, ask the Section to accept it, close the matter. If you've done anything else, alter it, substitute for it, erase it. Must have anonymity.

"Pull your dossier from the security files back there, burn it, have it sent here if you wish. Take out all marks of your past from Brement, Bragg, Meade. Cover your back trail."

"Cease to exist," Bolda said dryly.

"Just that," Angoff had agreed.

The old man seemed to look at him—the blind eyes appeared to be staring directly into his. "Start hunting for the man who must follow you. Search thoroughly, judge carefully, choose well. With luck you might find him in twenty or thirty years. *I* did."

Victor Angoff had opened the remaining rooms of the apartment to him, threading his way through them with as much assurance as he displayed in the outer room. Two bedrooms received only a passing glance, a storage room swift scrutiny; there was a file room with storage racks filled with microfilm and an electric scanner for reading the films. Bolda's closest attention was given to the chamber variously called a den and a workroom by the old man.

It contained an AP newsprinter and a telephone.

The printer was housed in a dark-green cabinet about five feet high and no wider than a two-tiered filing case. A modified electric typewriter was set into the upper part of the cabinet, spelling out wire dispatches on a roll of paper feeding into the machine. Bolda bent down to read, and found the machine printing the probable line-ups of the afternoon ball games.

The telephone rested atop a smaller cabinet. Bolda recognized the assembly. It was a conventional scrambler, built by one of the national electric companies and used world-wide by the American Government. The telephone was connected to the scrambler, and the scrambler was plugged into the teletype circuit with a phone jack.

He said, "I'm disappointed."

"Why?"

"I expected a special rig; something custom-built."

"Build it," Angoff told him. "Do what is best."

Bolda eyed the assembly with some doubt and swung back to the man. "This rig should be booby-trapped. I could have busted in here with just a little more trouble than I had in the basement; I could have got to this and played hell with your circuits—" He broke off, looking at the wrinkled grin on the other's face. "Excuse me. I've underestimated you. It *is* booby-trapped."

Angoff said, "It will go up like your automobile. Take care when you use it."

Bolda turned to study the two machines. "Where's the destruct?"

"In the base of the cabinet, below the printer."

"Tamperproof? Something to stop a guy with a screwdriver?"

"Oh, yes. First turn of a screwdriver will set it off. Destroy the room, you."

"I feel better," Bolda said. "How do I use it without blowing myself up?"

"The printer is harmless, turn it on or off. Take care with the telephone. Look at the dial."

The instrument had but three numbers.

"You are Station One. CIA is Two, NSA is Three. One of two men at each station will always answer; those men are the only ones who know this. Only four know."

"Tight." Bolda nodded his satisfaction. "And they should have the means to stop the wrong guy on this end. How does that other man trigger the destruct?"

"He keeps a finger on the red button when he answers your call. If you don't belong, the button will send a high-frequency something or other."

"High-frequency pulse," Bolda supplied. "Press the button, the teletype wire transmits the pulse, the pulse triggers the destruct. Neatly done. How do I keep on living?" He regarded the machines with a new respect.

"When you call either station, wait for the other man to speak first. He will ask, *Is the door closed?* Tell him your name, say *I hold the key to the door.*"

"I have the key to the door."

"I *hold* the key to the door," Angoff said sharply. "When they call you, the reverse applies."

"Every time?"

"Every time. Recognizing your voice isn't enough."

"How often do they call?"

Angoff shrugged. "Whenever they have a problem. Once got five calls in a week, another time didn't get five in a year. When they have a problem. If they ask for advice, give it."

"I'm not much for giving advice."

"You will learn."

Victor Angoff had left him with one suggestion, one recommendation for future work. There was a problem of faulty surveillance in Southeast Asia. Satellites and aircraft bearing heat-sensing instruments were not working as well as they did in more open country; dense forests blunted the effectiveness of heat sensors, concealing the movement of motor-driven vehicles, while the photographic satellites were all but useless except on the plains. A new means of electronic surveillance was wanted; troops there suffered because of faulty intelligence.

Karen Collins had left him in a different manner.

She'd said, "Goodby, Mr. Bolda. I am thankful for you." She appeared less tired than before.

"I'm sorry for the hard time I gave *you*."

"Please don't apologize. Each of us acted as we thought best. Victor is satisfied."

"Are you going to stay with him?"

She betrayed surprise. "Of course. As long as he needs me, as long as he lives."

"And after that?"

Karen studied his face. She recognized a meaning in his question. "I will give it thought, Mr. Bolda. I will consider it carefully and make a decision."

He knew a wild impulse to kiss her, but didn't. Karen Collins gave him a white gloved hand and left.

Victor Angoff tarried only a moment longer. The old man paused in the open doorway, looking back at the dim room as though he were seeing it, listening to it. The blind eyes turned toward Bolda, to where Bolda was standing behind the sofa.

"Luck, warlock."

Angoff gently pulled the door shut behind him. A few moments later the house phone buzzed, signaling their descent in the elevator.

He was alone on the fifth floor.

Anson Bolda stalked through the rooms, impatient to be doing something.

He examined the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, peered into the food-storage cabinets, tested a burner on

the stove. He toured the bedrooms, looking to see if the woman had left anything behind; stopped in the file room only long enough to pick up a spool of microfilm and put it down again. A solitary fly was buzzing about in the storage room. Bolda strode into the den and studied the teleprinter. He flicked on the switch, and the machine rattled off the Dow Jones averages as of noon, New York time. The printer was turned off.

There was a chair against the wall, beneath a window; sunlight from overhead warmed the window ledge. He pulled the chair near the phone and sat down. An unsteady finger reached out and dialed Three.

He knew the answering voice at once. The man had stood on the West Berlin side of the Glienicke Bridge, waiting for the Russians to release him. Cold wind, snow in the sky, hunger. Raymond Kaufman had also reprimanded him a few days ago for calling the agency on a personal matter.

"Is the door closed?"

"My name is Anson Bolda. I hold the key to the door."

A minute hesitation—a second of silence on the line. Bolda closed his eyes, wondering if he'd put it wrong, wondering if Kaufman's finger was closing on the red button. He waited for the destruct.

"Glad to hear that. Congratulations, sir."

Bolda's eyes snapped open at the *sir.* "Thank you. I'd like to ask a favor."

"Yes, sir?"

"Will you pull Stuffy MacGough out of the hospital and put him back on the job?"

"Yes, sir. It will be done today."

"Thank you. Thank you very much."

Sir.

Bolda put down the phone, supremely pleased to be alive on a summer day. After a moment he cocked his feet up on the scrambler cabinet and looked through the window at the agreeable sky. He fell to wondering when—not *if,* but *when*—Karen Collins would make a favorable decision.

How short a time would he be alone on the fifth floor?

# THE CURIOUS SPY

Polish-born Anson Bolda was reputedly the son of a witch, a man who couldn't be killed.

*But why would an old-world superstition concern the 20th-century C.I.A.?*

Bolda's first mission to Poland, his capture and release from a Soviet prison, and his subsequent treatment at the hands of his superiors in Washington seem to be links in a chain meant to crush him.

*Why? Is he being tested by the C.I.A.?*

*Or sold out?*


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