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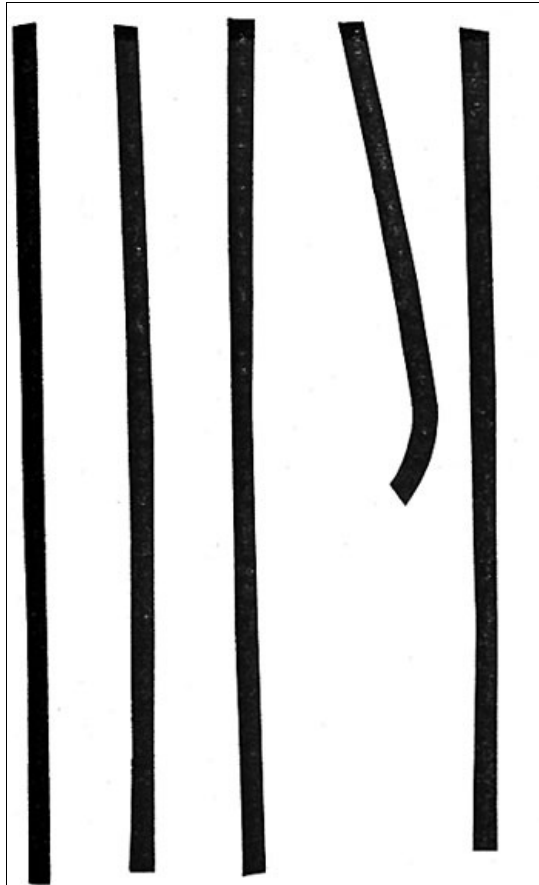
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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NOR IRON BARS A CAGE \*\*\*

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**NOR IRON BARS A CAGE....**

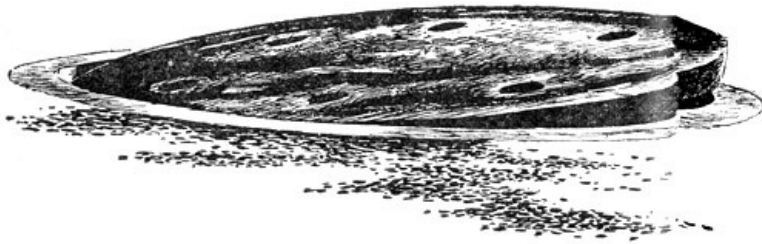
Iron bars do not confine a Man—only his body. There are more subtle, and more confining bindings, however....

## JONATHAN BLAKE MACKENZIE

ILLUSTRATED BY SCHOENHERR

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**H**er red-blond hair was stained and discolored when they found her in the sewer, and her lungs were choked with muck because her killer hadn't bothered to see whether she was really dead when he dumped her body into the manhole, so she had breathed the stuff in with her last gasping breaths. Her face was bruised, covered with great blotches, and three of her ribs had been broken. Her thighs and abdomen had been bruised and lacerated.



If she had lived for three more days, Angela Frances Donahue would have reached her seventh birthday.

I didn't see her until she was brought to the morgue. My phone chimed, and when I thumbed it on, the face of Inspector Kleek, of Homicide South, came on the

screen. His heavy eyelids always hang at half mast, giving him a sleepy, bored look and the rest of his fleshy face sags in the same general pattern. "Roy," he said as soon as he could see my face on his own screen, "we just found the little Donahue girl. The meat wagon's taking her down to the morgue now. You want to come down here and look over the scene, or you want to go to the morgue? It looks like it's one of your special cases, but we won't know for sure until Doc Prouty does the post on her."

I took a firm grip on my temper. I should have been notified as soon as Homicide had been; I should have been there with the Homicide Squad. But I knew that if I said anything, Kleek would just say, "Hell, Roy, they don't notify me until there's suspicion of homicide, and you don't get a call until there's suspicion that it might be the work of a degenerate. That's the way the system works. You know that, Roy." And rather than hear that song-and-dance again, I gave myself thirty seconds to think.

"I'll meet you at the morgue," I said. "Your men can get the whole story at the scene without my help."

That mollified him, and it showed a little on his face. "O.K., Roy, see you there." And he cut off.

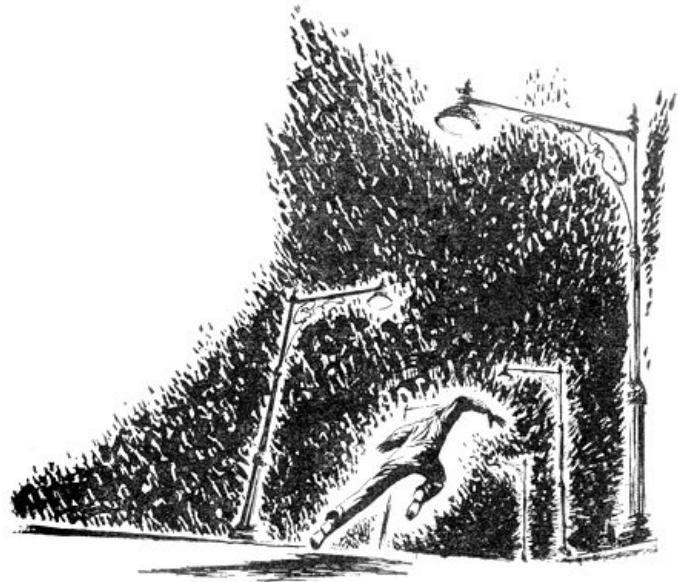
I punched savagely at the numbered buttons on the phone to get an intercommunication hookup with Dr. Barton Brownlee's office, on the third floor of the same building as my own office. His face, when it came on, was a calming contrast to Kleek's.

He's nearly ten years younger than I am, not yet thirty-five, and his handsome, thoughtful face and dark, slightly wavy hair always make me think of somebody like St. Edward Pusey or maybe Albert Einstein. Not that he looks like either one of them, or even that he looks saintly, but he does look like a man who has the courage of his convictions and is calmly, quietly, but forcefully ready to shove what he knows to be the truth down everybody else's throat if that becomes necessary. Or maybe I am just reading into his face what I know to be true about the man himself.

"Brownie," I said, "they've found the Donahue girl. Taking her down to the morgue now. Want to come along?"

"I don't think so," he said without hesitation. "I'll get all the information I need from the photos and the reports. The man I do want to see is the killer; I need more data, Roy—always more data. The more my boys and I know about these zanies, the more effectively we can deal with them."

"I know. O.K.; I've got to run." I cut off, grabbed my hat, and headed out to fulfill my part of the bargain Brownlee and I had once made. "You find 'em," he'd once said, "and I'll fix 'em." So far, that bargain had paid off.



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I got to the morgue a few minutes after the body was brought in. The man at the front desk looked up at me as I walked in and gave me a bored smile. "Evening, Inspector. The Donahue kid's in the clean-up room." Then he went back to his paper work.

The lab technicians were standing around watching while the morgue attendant sluiced the muck off the corpse with a hose, watching to see if anything showed up in the gooey filth. Inspector Kleek stood to one side. All he said was, "Hi, Roy."

The morgue attendant lifted up one small arm with a gloved hand and played the hose over the thin biceps. "Good thing the rigor mortis has gone off," he said, "these stiffies are hell to handle when they're stiff." It was an old joke, but everybody grinned out of habit.

The clear water from the hose flowed over the skin and turned a grayish brown as it ran down to the bottom of the shallow, waist-high stainless-steel trough in which the body was lying.

One of the lab techs stepped over and began going through the long hair very carefully, and Doc Prouty, the Medical Examiner, began cleaning out the mouth and nose and eyes and ears with careful hands.

I turned to Kleek. "You sure it's the Donahue girl?"

He sighed and looked away from the small dead thing on the cleaning table. "Who else could it be? She was found only three blocks from the Donahue home. No other female child reported missing in that area. We haven't checked the prints yet, but you can bet they'll tally with her school record."

I had to agree. "What about the time of death?"

"Doc Prouty figures forty-eight to sixty hours ago."

"I'll be able to give you a better figure after the post," the Medical Examiner said without looking up from his work.

A tall, big-nosed man in plain-clothes suddenly turned away from the scene on the table, his mouth moving queerly, his eyes hard. After a moment, his lips relaxed. Still staring at the wall, he said: "I guess the case is out of Federal jurisdiction, then. We'll co-operate, as usual, of course." He looked at me. "Could I talk to you outside, Inspector Royall?"

I looked at Kleek. "O.K., Sam?" I didn't have to have his O.K.; it was just professional courtesy. He knew I'd tell him whatever it was that the FBI man had to say, and we both knew why the Federal agent wanted to leave.

Sam Kleek nodded. "Sure. I'll keep an eye out here."

---

The FBI man followed me into the outer room.

"Do you figure this as a sex-degenerate case, Inspector?" he asked.

"Looks like it. You saw the bruises. Dr. Prouty will be able to tell us for sure after the post mortem."

He shook his head as if to clear it of a bad memory. "You New York police can sure be cold-blooded at times."

The thing that was bothering him, as Kleek and I both knew, was that the FBI agent hadn't been exposed to this sort of thing often enough. They deal with the kind of crimes that actually don't involve the callous murder of children very often. Even the murder of adults doesn't normally come under the aegis of the FBI.

"We're not cold blooded," I said. "Not by inclination, I mean. But a man gets that way—he has to get that way—after he's seen enough of this sort of thing. You either get yourself an emotional callous or you get deathly sick from the repetition—and then you have to get out of the job."

"Yeah," he said. "Sure." He quit rubbing his chin with a knuckle, looked at me, and said: "What I wanted to say is that there's no evidence that she was taken across a state line. Whoever sent that ransom note to the Donahue parents was trying to throw us off the track."

"Looks like it. Look at the time-table. The note was sent *after* the girl was murdered, but *before* the information hit the papers or the newscasts. The killer wanted us to think it was a ransom kidnaping. It isn't likely that the note was sent by a crank. A crank wouldn't have known the girl was missing at all at the time the note was sent."

"That's the way it seems to me," he agreed. The color was coming back into his face. "But why would he want to make it look like a kidnaping instead of ... of what it was? The penalty's the same for both."

My grin had anger, pity, and disgust for the killer in it—plus a certain amount of satisfaction. Some day, I'd like to see my face in a mirror when I feel like that.

"He was hoping the body wouldn't be found until it was too late for us to know that it was a rape killing. And that means that he knew that he would be on our list if we did find out that it was rape. Otherwise, he wouldn't have bothered. If I'm right, then he has outsmarted himself. He has told us that we know him, and he's told us that he's smart enough to figure out a dodge—that he's not one of the helplessly stupid ones."

"That should help to narrow the field down," he said in a hard voice. He felt in his pocket for a cigarette, found his pack, took one out, and then held it, unlit, between the fingers of his right hand. "Inspector Royall, I've studied the new law of this state—the one you're working under here—and I think it'll be great if it works out. I wish you luck. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to call the office."

As he went out to the desk phone, I gave him a silent thanks. Words of encouragement were hard to come by at that time.

I turned and went back towards the clean-up room.

She didn't look as though she were asleep. They never do. She looked dead. She'd been head down in the sewer, and the blood had pooled and coagulated in her head and shoulders. Now that the filth had been washed off, the dark purple of the dead blood cells showed through the translucent skin. She would look better after she was embalmed.

Doc Prouty was holding up a small syringe, eyeing the little bit of fluid within it. "We've got him," he said in a flat voice. "I'll have the lab run an analysis. We're well within the time limit. All we have to do is separate the girl's blood type from that of the spermatic fluid. You boys find your man, and I can identify him for you." He put the syringe in its special case. "I'll let you know the exact cause of death in a couple of hours."

"O.K., Doc. Thanks," said Inspector Kleek, closing his notebook. He turned to one of the other men. "Thompson, you notify the parents. Get 'em down here to make a positive identification, and send it along to my office with the print identification." Then he looked at me. "Anything extra you want, Roy?"

I shook my head. "Nope. Let's go check the files, huh?"

"Sure. Can I ride with you? I rode in with Thompson; he'll have to stay."

"Come along," I told him.

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**B**y ten fifteen that evening, we had narrowed the field down considerably. We fed all the data we had into the computer, including the general type number of the spermatic fluid, which Dr. Prouty had given us, and watched while the machine sorted through the characteristics of all the known criminals in its memory.

Kleek and I were sitting at a desk drinking hot, black coffee when the computer technician came over and handed Kleek the results at ten fifteen. "Quite a bunch of 'em, Inspector," he said, "but the geographic compartmentalization will help."

Kleek glanced over the neatly-printed sheaf of papers that the computer had turned out, then handed them to me. "There we are, Roy. One of those zanies is our boy."

I looked at the list. Every person on it was either a confirmed or suspected psychopath, and each one of them conformed to the set of specifications we had fed the computer. They were listed in

four different groups, according to the distance they lived from the scene of the crime—half a mile, two miles, five miles, and "remainder," the rest of the city.

"All we got to do," Kleek said complacently, "is start rounding 'em up."

"You make it sound easy," I said tightly.

He put down his coffee cup. "Hell, Roy, it *is* easy! We've got all these characters down on the books, don't we? We know what they are, don't we? Look at 'em! Once in a while a new one pops up, and we put him on the list. Once in a while we catch one and send him up. Practically cut and dried, isn't it?"

"Sure," I said.

"Look, Roy," he went on, "we got it down to a fine art now—have for years." He waved in the general direction of the computer. "We got the advantage that it's easier to sort 'em out now, and faster—but the old tried-and-true technique is just the same. Cops have been catching these goons in every civilized country on Earth for a hundred years by this technique."

"Sam," I said wearily, "are you going to give me a lecture on police methods?"

He picked up his cup, held it for a moment, then set it down again, his eyes hardening. "Yes, Roy, I am! I'm older than you are, I've got more years on the Force, I've been working with Homicide longer, and I outrank you in grade by two and a half years! Yes, I figure it's about time I lectured you! You want to listen?"

I looked at him. Kleek is a good cop, I was thinking, and he deserves to be listened to, even if I don't agree with him.

"O.K., Sam," I said, "I'll listen."

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"O.K., then." He took a breath. "Now, we got a system here that works. The nuts always show themselves up, one way or another. Most of 'em have been arrested by the time they're fourteen, fifteen years old. Maybe we can't nail 'em down and pin anything on 'em, but we got 'em down on the books. We know they have to be watched. We got ninety per cent of the queers and hopheads and stew-bums and firebugs and the rest of the zanies down on our books"—he waved toward the computer again—"and down in the memory bank of the computer. We know we're gonna get 'em eventually, because we know they're gonna goof up eventually, and then we'll have 'em. We'll have 'em"—he made a clutching gesture with his right hand—"right where it hurts!"

"You take this Donahue killer. We know where he is. We can be pretty sure we got him down on the books." He tapped the sheaf of papers from the computer with a firm forefinger. "We can be pretty sure that he's one of those guys right down there!"

He waved his hand again, but, this time, he took in the whole city—the whole outside world. "Like clock-work. The minute they goof, we nab 'em."

"Sam," I said, "just listen to me a minute. We know that ninety per cent of the men on that list right there are going to be convicted of a crime of violence inside the next five years, right?"

"That's what I've been tellin' you. The minute—"

"Wait a minute; wait a minute. Just listen. Why don't we just go out and arrest them all right now? Look at all the trouble that would save us."

"Hell, Roy! You can't arrest a man unless he's done something! What would you charge 'em with? Loitering with intent to commit a nuisance?"

"No. But we *can*—"

I was cut off by a uniformed cop who stuck his head in the door and said: "Inspector Royall, Dr. Brownlee called. Says they picked up Hammerlock Smith. He's at the 87th Precinct. Wants you to come down right away if you can."

I stood up and grabbed my hat. "Sam, you can sit on this one for a while, huh? I've been waiting for Hammerlock Smith to fall for two months."

Sam Kleek looked disgusted. "And you'll see that he gets psycho treatment and a suspended sentence. A few days in the looney ward, and then right back out on the street. Hammerlock Smith! *There's* a case for you! Built like a gorilla and has a passion for Irish whisky and sixteen-year-old boys—and you think you can cure him in three days! Nuts!"

I didn't feel like arguing with him. "We might as well let him go now as lock him up for three or four months and then let him go, Sam. Why fool around with assault and battery charges when we can wait for him to murder somebody and then lock him up for good, eh, Sam? What's another victim more or less, as long as we get the killer?"

"That's what we're here for," he said stolidly. "To get killers." He scratched at his balding head. "I don't get you, Roy. I'd think you'd *want* these maniacs put away, after your—"

He stopped himself, wet his lips, and said: "O.K. You go ahead and take care of Smith. Get some sleep. I'm going to. I'll leave orders to call us both if anything breaks in the Donahue case."

I just nodded and walked out. I didn't want to hear any more.

But the door didn't close tightly, and I heard Kleek's voice as he spoke to the computer tech. "I just don't figure Roy. His wife died in a fire set by an arson bug, and he wants to—"

I kept on walking as the door clicked shut.

---

**I** was in my office at nine the next morning, after seven and a half hours of sleep on one of the bunks in the ready room. The business with Hammerlock Smith had taken more time than I had thought it would. The big, stupid ape had been in a vicious mood, reeking of whisky and roaring insults at everyone. His cursing was neither inventive nor colorful, consisting of only four unlovely words used over and over again in various combinations with ordinary ones, a total vocabulary of maybe a dozen words.

It had taken four cops, using night-sticks, to get him into the paddy wagon, and Dr. Brownlee had finally had to give him a blast of super-tranquilizer with a hypogun.

"Boy, Inspector," one of the officers had said, "don't let anyone ever tell you some of these guys aren't tough!"

I was looking over the written report. "What about this kid he accosted in the bar? Hurt bad?"

"Cracked rib, sprained wrist, and a bloody nose, sir. The doc said he'd be O.K."

"According to the report here, the kid was twenty-two years old. Smith usually picks 'em younger."

The cop grinned. "Smith had to get his eventually, sir. This guy looks pretty young, but he was a boxer in college. He probably couldn't've whipped Smith, but he had guts enough to try."

"Think he'll testify?"

"Said he would, sir. We already got his signature on the complaint while he was at the hospital. He's pretty mad."

Smith's record was long and ugly. Of the eight complaints made by young boys who had managed to brush off or evade Hammerlock's advances, six hadn't come to trial because there were no corroborating witnesses, and the charges had been dismissed. Two of the cases had come before a jury—and had resulted in acquittals. Cold sober, Smith presented a fairly decent picture. It was hard to convince a jury of ordinary citizens that so masculine-looking a specimen was homosexual.

The odd thing was that the psychopathic twist which got Hammerlock Smith into trouble had been able to get him out of it again. Both times, Smith's avowal that he had done no such disgusting thing had been corroborated by a lie detector test. Smith—when he was sober—had no recollection of his acts when drunk, and apparently honestly believed that he was incapable of doing what we knew he *had* done.

This time, though, we had him dead to rights. He had never made his play in a bar before, and we had three witnesses, plus an assault and battery charge. As Inspector Kleek had said, we get 'em eventually....

*... But at what cost? How many teenage boys had been frightened or whipped into doing as he told them and then been too ashamed and sick with themselves to say anything? How many young lives had been befouled by Smith's abnormal lust?*

And if Smith spent a year or two in Sing Sing, how many more would there be between the time he was released and the time he was caught again? And how long would it be before he obligingly hammered the life out of his young victim so that we could put him away permanently?

That was the "system" that Kleek—and a lot of other men on the Force swore by. That was the "system" that the boys in Homicide and in the Vice Squad thought I was trying to foul up by "babying" the zanies.

It's a hell of a great system, isn't it?

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I called the hospital and talked to the doctor who had taken care of Smith's victim. Then I called Kleek to see if there had been any break in the Donahue case. There hadn't.

Finally, I called my son, Steve, at the apartment we shared, told him I wouldn't be home that night, and sacked out in the ready room.

By nine o'clock, I was ready to go back to work.

At nine thirty, Kleek called. His saggy face looked sleepier and more bored than ever. "No rest for the weary, Roy. I got a call on a killing on the Upper East Side. Some rich gal with too much time on her hands was having an all-night party, and she got herself shot to death. It looks like her husband did it, but there's plenty of money involved, and the Deputy Commissioner wants me to handle it personally, all the way through. I'm putting Lieutenant Shultz in charge of the Homicide end of the Donahue case, but I told him you were the man to listen to. He'll report directly to you if there's any new leads. O.K.?"

"O.K. with me, Sam." As I said, Kleek is a good cop in spite of his "system."

"The boys are out making the rounds," he went on, "bringing in all the men with conviction records and questioning the others. And we're combing the neighborhood for the kid's clothes. They might still be around somewhere. Shultz'll keep you posted."

"Fine, Sam. Happy hunting in High Society."

"Thanks, Roy. Take it easy."

At fifteen of eleven, the Police Commissioner called. He spent ten minutes telling me that I was going to be visited by a VIP and giving me exact instructions on how to handle the man. "I'm depending on you to take care of him, Roy," he said finally. "If we can get this program operating in other places, it will help us a lot. And if you need help from my office, grab the nearest phone."

"I'll do my best," I promised him. "And thanks, sir."

The Commissioner was a lawyer, not a cop, so he wasn't as tied to the system as Kleek and the others were. He was backing me all the way.

I punched Sergeant Vanney's number on the intercom. "Inspector Royall here, Sergeant. Do me a favor."

"Yes, sir."

"Go down to the library and get me a copy of Burke's 'Peerage.'"

"Burke's which, sir?"

I repeated it and spelled it for him. He didn't waste any time; he had it on my desk in less than twenty minutes. When the VIP arrived, I had already read up on Chief Inspector, The Duke of Acrington.

Here's how he was listed:

*ACRINGTON, Seventh Duke of (Robert St. James Acrington) Baron Bennevis of Scotland, K. C. B.: Born 7 November 1950, B.S., M.S., Oxon., cum laude. Married (1977) Lady Susan Burley, 2nd dau. Viscount Burley. 2 sons, Richard St. James, Philip William.*



*Joined Metropolitan Police (1975); C. I. D. (1976); dep. Insp. (1980); Insp. (1984); Ch. Insp. (1990). Awarded George Medal for extraordinary heroism during the False War (1981).*

*Author Criminal Law and the United Nations, The Use of Forensic Psychology (police textbook), and The Night People (fiction; under nom de plume R. A. James).*

*Clubs: Royal Astronomical, Oxonian, Baker Street Irregulars.*

*Motto: Amicus Curiae.*

I had to admit that I was impressed, but I decided to withhold any judgment until I had met the man.

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**H**e was right on time for his appointment. The car pulled up to the parking lot with a sergeant at the wheel, and I got a bird's eye view of him from my window as he got out of the car and headed for the door. I had to grin a little; the Commissioner had obviously wanted to take the visitor around personally—roll out the rug for royalty, so to speak—but he had had a conference scheduled with the Mayor and some Federal officials, and, after all, the duke was only here on police business, not as Ambassador from the Court of St. James. So he ended up being treated just as any visitor from Scotland Yard would be treated.

He was shown directly to my office, and I gave him a quick once-over as he came in the door. Tall, about six feet even; weight about 175, none of it surplus fat; light brown hair smoothed neatly back, almost no gray; eyes, blue-gray, with finely-etched lines around them that indicated they'd been formed by both smiles and frowns: face, rather long and bony, with thin, firm lips and a longish, thin, slightly curved nose. He wore good clothes, and he wore them well. His age, I knew; it was the same as mine. It was the first time I had ever seen a man who looked like a real aristocrat and a good cop rolled into one.

He had an easy smile on his face, and his eyes were taking me in, too. I stand an inch under six feet, but I'm a little broader across the shoulders than he, so the ten more pounds I carry doesn't make me look fat. My face is definitely not aristocratic—wide and square, with a nose that shows a slight bend where it was broken when I was a rookie, heavy, dark eyebrows, and hair that is receding a little on top and graying perceptibly at the sides. The eyes are a dark gray, and I'm well aware that the men under me call me "Old Flint-eye" when I put the pressure on them.

"I'm Chief Inspector Acrington," he said pleasantly, giving me a firm handshake.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Your Grace," I said. "I'm Inspector Royall. Sit down, won't you?" I gestured toward one of the upholstered guest chairs, and sat down in the other one myself, so we wouldn't have the desk between us. "Have a good trip across?" I asked.

"Fine. Except, of course, for the noise."

"Noise?" I knew he'd come over in one of the Transatlantic Airways' new inertia-drive ships, and they're supposed to be fairly quiet.

His smile broadened a trifle. "Exactly. There wasn't any. I'm rather used to the vibration of jets, and these new jobs float along at a hundred thousand feet in the deadest silence you ever heard—if you'll pardon the oxymoron. Everybody chattered like a flight of starlings, just to keep the air full of sound."

I chuckled. "Maybe they'll put vibrators on them, just to make the people feel comfortable. I read that the men in the moon ships complain about the same thing."

"So I've heard. But, actually, the silence is a minor thing when one realizes the time one saves. When one is looking forward to something interesting, traveling can be deadly dull."

It was beautiful, the way he did it. He had told me plainly that he wanted to get down to business and cut the small talk, but he'd done it in such a way that the transition was frictionlessly smooth.

"Not much scenery up there," I said. "I hope you'll find what we're trying to do here has a few more points of interest."

"I'm quite sure it will, from what I've heard of your pilot project here. That's why I want to, well, sort of be a hanger-on for a few days, if that's all right with you."

---

Before I could answer, the phone blinked. I excused myself to the Duke and cut in. The image that came on the screen was almost myself, except that he had his mother's mouth and was twenty-odd years younger.

"Hi, Dad," he said, with that apologetic smile of his. "Sorry to bother you during office hours, but could I borrow fifty? Pay you back next week."

I threw a phony scowl at him. "Running short, eh? Have you been betting on the stickball teams again?"

He cast his eyes skyward, and raised the three fingers of his right hand. "Scout's Honor, Dad, I spent it on a new turbine for my ElectroFord." Then he lowered his hand and looked down from the upper regions. "I really did. I forgot that I was supposed to take Mary Ellen out this evening. Car-happy, I guess. Can you advance the fifty?"

I threw away my phony scowl and gave him a smile. "Sure, Stevie. How's Mary Ellen?"

"Swell. She's all excited about going to the Art Ball tonight—that's why I didn't want to disappoint



her."

"Slow up, son," I told him, "you've already made your pitch and been accepted. You'll get your fifty, so don't push it. Want to come down here and pick it up?"

"Can do. And have I told you that you'll be invited to the wedding?"

"Thanks, pal. Can I give the groom away?" It was a family joke that we'd kicked back and forth ever since he had met Mary Ellen, two years before.

"Sure thing. See you in a couple of hours. Bye, Dad." He cut off, and I looked at the Duke.

"Sorry. Now, you were saying?"

"Perfectly all right." He smiled. "I have two of my own at home.

"At any rate, I was saying that the Criminal Investigation Department of New Scotland Yard has become interested in this experiment of yours, so I was sent over to get all the first-hand information I can. Frankly, I volunteered for the job; I was eager to come. There are plenty of skeptics at the Yard, I'll admit, but I'm not one of them. If the thing's workable, I want to see it used in England."

Here was another man who wasn't tied to the "system."

"D'you mind if I ask some questions?" he said.

"Go ahead, Your Grace. If I can't answer 'em, I'll say so."

"Thanks. First off, I'll tell you what I *do* know—get my own knowledge of the background straight, so to speak. Now, as I understand it, the courts have agreed—temporarily, at least—that any person convicted of certain types of crimes must undergo a psychiatric examination before sentencing. Right?"

"That's right."

"Then, depending on the result of that examination, the magistrate of the court may sentence the offender to undertake psychiatric therapy instead of sending him to a penal institution, such time in therapy not to exceed the maximum time of imprisonment originally provided for the offense under the law.

"His sentence is suspended, in other words, if he will agree to the therapy. If, after he is released by the psychiatrists, he behaves himself, he is not imprisoned. If he misbehaves, he must serve out the original sentence, plus any new sentence that may be imposed. Have I got it straight so far?"

"Perfectly."

"As I understand it, you've had astounding success." He looked, in spite of what he had said about skepticism, as though he thought the reports he'd heard were exaggerated.

"So far," I said evenly, "not a single one of our 'patients' has failed us."

He looked amazed, but he didn't doubt me. "And you've been in operation for how long?"

"A little over a year since the first case. But I think the record will stand the same way five, ten, fifty years from now.

"You see, Your Grace, we don't *dare* lose a man. If one of our tame zanies goes haywire again, the courts will stop this pilot project *fast*. There's a lot of pressure against us.

"In the first place, we only work with repeaters. You know the type. The world is full of them. The boys that are picked up over and over again for the same kind of crime."

He nodded. "They're the ones we wait for. The ones we catch, convict, and send to prison—and then wait until they get out, and then wait some more until they commit their next crime, so that we can catch them and start the whole cycle over again."

"That's them," I said. "When they're out, they're just between crimes, that's all. And that puts the police in a hell of a position, doesn't it? You *know* they're going to fall again; you know that they're going to rob, or hurt, or kill someone. But there's nothing you can do about it. You're helpless. No police force has enough men to enable a cop to be assigned to every known repeater and follow him night and day.

"In this state, if a man is convicted of a felony for a fourth time, a life sentence is mandatory. *But that means that at least four victims have to be sacrificed before the dangerous man is removed from society!*"

The Duke nodded thoughtfully. "'Sacrifice' is the word. Go on."

"Now, the type of crime we're working with—the kind we expect future laws to apply to—is strictly limited. It must be a crime of violence against a human being, or a crime of destruction in which there is a grave danger that human lives may be lost. The sex maniac, the firebug, or the goon who gets a thrill out of beating people. Or the reckless driver who has proven that he can't be trusted behind the wheel of a car.

"We can't touch the kleptomaniac or the common drunk or the drug addict. They're already provided for under other laws. And those habits are not, *by themselves*, dangerous to the lives of others. A good many of our kind of zany *do* drink or take drugs—about fifty per cent of them. But what they're sentenced for is crimes of violence, not for guzzling hooch or mainlining heroin."

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**M**y phone chimed. It was Lieutenant Shultz, of Homicide. His square, blocky face held a trace of excitement. "Inspector Royall, Inspector Kleek told me to report to you if there was any news in the Donahue case."

"What is it, Lieutenant?"

"We're pretty sure of our man. Scrapings from the kid's fingernails gave us his blood type. The computer narrowed the list down quite a bit with that data. Then, a few minutes ago, one of the boys found the kid's clothes stuffed in with some trash paper in the back stairwell of a condemned building just a couple of blocks from where we found her last night."

"And—get this, Inspector!—she was wearing a pair of those shiny patent-leather shoes, practically brand-new, and they have prints all over them! His are over hers, since he was the last one to handle them, and there's only the two sets of prints! We just now got positive identification."

"Grab him and bring him in," I said. "I'll be right down. I want to talk to him."

His face fell a little. "Well, it isn't going to be as easy as all that, sir. You see, we'd already checked at his last known address, earlier this morning, before we got the final check on the blood type. This guy left the rooming house he was staying in—checked out two days ago, just a short time after the girl was killed. I figured that looked queer at the time, so I had two of my men start tracing him in particular. But there's not a sign of him so far."

I untensed myself. "O.K. What's his record?"

"Periodic drunk. Goes for weeks without touching the stuff, then he goes out on a binge that lasts for a week sometimes."

"Name's Lawrence Nestor, alias Larry Nestor. Twenty-eight years old, six feet one inch, slight build, but considered fairly strong. Brown hair, brown eyes. Speaks with a lisp due to a dental defect; the lisp becomes more noticeable when he's drinking." He turned the page of the report he was reading from. "Arrested for drunkenness four times in the past five years, got off with a fine when he pleaded guilty. He molested a little girl two years ago and was picked up for questioning, but nothing came of it. The girl hadn't been physically hurt, and she couldn't make a positive identification, so he was released from custody."

"Officers on duty in the neighborhood report that he has frequently been seen talking to small children, usually girls, but he wasn't seen to molest them in any way, and there were no complaints from parents, so no action could be taken."

Lieutenant Shultz looked up from the paper. "He's had all kinds of jobs, but he can't hold 'em very long. Goes on a binge, doesn't show up for work, so they fire him. He's a pretty good short-order cook, and that's the kind of work he likes, if he can talk a lunch room into hiring him. He's also been a bus boy, a tavern porter, and a janitor."

"One other thing: The superintendent at the place where he was staying reports that he had an unusual amount of money on him—four or five hundred dollars he thinks. Doesn't know where Nestor got the money, but he's been boozing it up for the past five days. Bought new clothes—hat, suit, shoes, and so on. Living high on the hog, I guess."

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I thought for a minute. If he had money, he could be anywhere in the world by now. On the other hand—

"Look, Lieutenant, you haven't said anything to the newsmen yet, have you?"

He looked surprised. "No. I called you first. But I figured they could help us. Plaster his picture and name all over the area, and somebody will be bound to recognize him."

"Somebody might kill him, too, and I don't want that. Look at it this way: If he had sense enough to get out of the local area two days ago and really get himself lost, then it won't hurt to wait twenty-four hours or so to release the story. On the other hand, if he's still in the city or over in Jersey, he could still get out before the news was so widespread that he'd be spotted by very many people."

"But if he's still drinking and thinks he's safe, we may be able to get a lead on him. I have a hunch he's still in the city. So hold off on that release to the newsmen as long as you can. Don't let it leak."

"Meanwhile, check all the transportation terminals. Find out if he's ever been issued a passport. If he has, check the foreign consuls here in the city to see if he got a visa. Notify the FBI; they're back in it now, since there's a chance that he may have crossed a state line—unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

"And tell the boys that do the footwork that they're to say that the guy they're looking for is wanted by the Missing Persons Bureau—that he left home and his wife is looking for him. Don't connect him up with the Donahue case at all. Have every beat patrolman in the city on the lookout for a drunk with a lisp, but tell them the same story about the wife; I don't want any leaks at all.

"I'll call the Commissioner right away to get his O.K., because I don't want either one of us to get in hot water over this. If he's with us, we'll go ahead as planned; if he's not, we'll just have to call in the newsmen. O.K.?"

"Sure, Inspector. Whatever you say. I'll get right to work on it. You'll have the Commissioner call me?"

"Right. So long. Call me if anything happens."

I had added the bit about calling the Commissioner because I wasn't sure but what Kleek would decide I was wrong in handling the case and let the story out "accidentally." But I had to be careful not to make Shultz think I was trying to show my muscles. I called the Commissioner, got his O.K., and turned my attention back to my guest.

He had been listening with obvious interest. "Another one of your zanies, eh?"

"One that went too far, Your Grace. We didn't get to him in time." I spent five or six minutes giving him the details of the Donahue case.

"The same old story," he said when I had finished. "If your pilot project here works out, maybe that kind of slaughter can be eliminated." Then he smiled. "Do you know something? You're one of the few Americans I've ever met, outside your diplomats, who can address a person as 'Your Grace' and make it sound natural. Some people look at me as though they expected me to be all decked out in a ducal coronet and full ermines, ready for a Coronation. Your Commissioner, for instance. He seems quite a nice chap, but he also seems a bit overawed at a title. You seem perfectly relaxed."

I considered that for a moment. "I imagine it's because he tends to look at you as a Duke who has taken up police work as a sort of gentlemanly hobby."

"And you?"

"I guess I tend to think of you as a good cop who had the good fortune to be born the eldest son of a Duke."

His smile suddenly became very warm. "Thank you," he said sincerely. "Thank you very much."

There came the strained silence that sometimes follows when an honest compliment is passed between two men who have scarcely met. I broke it by pointing at the plaque on the front of my desk and giving him a broad grin. "Or maybe it's just the kind of blood that flows in my veins."

He looked at the little plaque that said *Inspector Royal C. Royall* and laughed pleasantly. "I like to think that it's a little bit of both."

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**T**he intercom on my desk flashed, and the sergeant's voice said: "Inspector, a couple of the boys just brought in a man named Manewisz. A stolen car was run into a fire plug over on Fifth Avenue near 99th Street. A witness has positively identified Manewisz as the driver who ran away before the squad car arrived."

"Sidney Manewisz?" I asked. "Manny the Moog?"

"That's the one. He's got a record of stealing cars for joyrides. He insists on talking to you."

"Bring him in," I said. "I'll talk to him. And get hold of Dr. Brownlee."

"Excuse me," I said to the Duke. "Business." He started to get up, but I said, "That's all right, Your Grace; you might as well sit in on it." He relaxed back into the chair.

Two cops brought in Manewisz, a short, nervous man with a big nose and frightened brown eyes.

"What's the trouble, Manny?" I asked.

"Nothing, Inspector; I'm telling you, I didn't do nothing. I'm walking along Fifth Avenoo when all of a sudden these cops pull up in a squad-car and some fat jerk in the back seat is hollering that I am the guy he seen get out of a smashup on 99th Street, which is a good three blocks from where I am walking. Besides which, I have not driven a car for over a year now, and I have been in all ways a law-abiding citizen and a credit to the family and the community."

"Do you know the fat guy?" I asked. "The guy who fingered you for the boys?"

"I never had the pleasure of seeing him before," said Manny the Moog, "but, on the other hand, I do not expect to forget his fat face between now and the next time we meet."

At that point, Dr. Brownlee came through the door.

"Hello, Inspector," he said with a quick smile. He saw Manewisz then, and his eyebrows went up. "What are you doing here, Manny?"

"I am here, Doc, because the two gentlemen in uniform whom you see standing on both sides of me extend a polite invitation to accompany them here, although I am not in the least guilty of the thing they say I do which causes them to issue this invitation."

I explained what had happened and Brownlee shook his head slowly without saying anything for a moment. Then he said, "Come on in my office, Manny; I want to talk to you for a few minutes. O.K., Inspector?" He glanced at me.

"Sure." I waved him and Manny away. "You boys stay here," I told the patrolmen, "Manny will be all right." As soon as the door closed behind Dr. Brownlee and Manewisz I said: "You two brought the witness in, too, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said one. The other nodded.

"You'd better do a little more careful checking on him. He may be simply mistaken, or he may have been the actual driver. See if he's been in any trouble before."

"The sergeant's already doing that, sir," said the one who had spoken before. "Meanwhile, maybe we better go out and have a little talk with the guy."

"Take it easy, he may be a perfectly respectable citizen."

"Yes, sir," he said. "We'll just ask him a few questions."

They left, and I noticed that the Duke was looking rather puzzled, but he didn't ask any questions, so I couldn't answer any.

The intercom lit up, and I flipped the switch. "Yes?"

"I just checked up on the witness," said the sergeant. "No record. His identification checks out O.K. Thomas H. Wilson, an executive at the City-Chemical Bank; lives on Central Park West. The lab says that the driver of the car wore gloves."

"Thank Wilson for his information, let him go, and tell him we'll call him if we need him. Lay it on thick about what a good citizen he is. Make him happy."

"Right."

I switched off and started to say something to my guest, but the intercom lit up again. "Yeah?"

"Got a call-in from Officer McCaffery, the beat man on Broadway between 108th and 112th. He's got a lead on the guy you're looking for."

"Tell him we'll be right over. Where is he?"

The sergeant told me, and I cut off.

I took out my gun and spun the cylinder, checking it from force of habit more than anything else, since I always check and clean it once a day, anyhow. I slid it back into its holster and turned to the Duke, who was already on his feet.

"Did the Commissioner give you a Special Badge?" I asked him.

"Yes, he did." He pulled it out of his inside pocket and showed it to me.

"Good. I'll have the sergeant fill out a temporary pistol permit, and—"

"I don't have a pistol, Inspector," he said. "I—"

"That's all right; we'll issue you one. We can—"

He shook his head. "Thanks, I'd rather not. I've never used a pistol except when I've gone out after a criminal who is known to be armed and dangerous. I don't think Lawrence Nestor is very dangerous to adult males, and I doubt that he's armed." He hefted the walking stick he'd been carrying. "This will do nicely, thank you."

The way he said it was totally inoffensive, but it made me feel as though I were about to go out rabbit hunting with an elephant gun. "Force of habit," I said. "In New York, a cop would feel naked without a gun. But I assure you that I have no intention of shooting Mr. Nestor unless he takes a shot at me first."

Just as we were leaving, Dr. Brownlee met us in the outer room.

"All right if I let Manny the Moog go, Roy?"

"Sure, Doc; if you say so." I didn't have any time for

introductions just then; Chief Inspector the Duke of Acrington and I kept going.



Eight minutes later, I pulled up to the post where Officer McCaffery was waiting. Since I'd already talked to him over the radio, all he did was stroll off as soon as we pulled up. I didn't want everyone in the neighborhood to know that there was something afoot. His Grace and I climbed out of the car and walked up toward a place called Flanagan's Bar.

It was a small place, the neighborhood type, with an old-fashioned air about it. Two or three of the men looked up as we came in, and then went back to the more important business of drinking. We went back to the far end of the bar, and the bartender came over, a short, heavy man, with the build of a heavyweight boxer and hands half again as big as mine. He had dark hair, a square face, a dimpled chin, and calculating blue eyes.

"What'll it be?" he said in a friendly voice.

"Couple of beers," I told him.

I waited until he came back before I identified myself. Officer McCaffery had told me that the bartender was trustworthy, but I wanted to make sure I had the right man.

"You Lee Darcey?" I asked when he brought back the beers.

"That's right."

I flashed my badge. "Is there anywhere we can talk?"

"Sure. The back room, right through there." He turned to the other bartender. "Take over for a while, Frankie." Then he ducked under the bar and followed the Duke and me into the back room.

We sat down, and I showed him the picture of Lawrence Nestor. "I understand you've seen this guy."

He picked up the picture and cocked an eyebrow at it. "Well, I wouldn't swear to it in court, Inspector, but it sure looks like the fellow who was in here this afternoon—this evening, rather, from six to about six-thirty. I don't come on duty until six, and he was here when I got here."

It was just seven o'clock. If the man was Nestor, we hadn't missed him by more than half an hour.

"Notice anything about his voice?"

"I noticed the lisp, if that's what you mean."

"Did he talk much?"

Darcey shook his head. "Not a lot. Just sat there and drank, mostly. Had about three after I came on."

"What was he drinking?"

"Whisky. Beer chaser." He grinned. "He tips pretty well."

"Has he ever been in here before?"

"Not that I know of. He might've come in in the daytime. You'd have to check with Mickey, the day man."

"Was he drunk?"

"Not that I could tell. I wouldn't have served him if he was," he said righteously.

I said, "Darcey, if he comes back in here ... let's see—Can you shut off that big sign out front from behind the bar?"

"Sure."

"O.K. If he comes in, shut off the sign. We'll have men here in less than a minute. He isn't dangerous or anything, so just act natural and give him whatever he orders. I don't want him scared off. Understand?"

"I got you."

His Grace and I went outside, and I used my pocket communicator to instruct a patrol car to cover Flanagan's Bar from across the street, and I called for extra plainclothesmen to cover the area.



"Now what?" asked His Grace.

"Now we go barhopping," I said. "He's probably still drinking, but it isn't likely that he'll find many little girls at this time of night. He's probably got a room nearby."

At that point, a blue ElectroFord pulled up in front of us. Stevie stuck his head out and said: "Your office said you'd be around here somewhere. Remember me, Dad?"

I covered my eyes with one hand in mock horror. "My God, the fifty!" Then I dropped the hand toward my billfold. "I'm sorry, son; I got wrapped up in this thing and completely forgot." That made two apologies in two minutes, and I began to have the uneasy feeling that I had suddenly become a vaguely repellant mass of thumbs and left feet.

I handed him the fifty, and, at the same time, said: "Son, I want you to meet His Grace, Chief Inspector the Duke of Acrington. Your Grace, this is my son, Steven Royall."

As they shook hands, Steve said: "It's a pleasure to meet Your Grace. I read about the job you did in the Camberwell poisoning case. That business of winding the watch was wonderful."

"I'm flattered, Mr. Royall," said the Duke, "but I must admit that I got a great deal more credit in that case than was actually due me. Establishing the time element by winding the watch was suggested to me by another man, who wouldn't allow his name to be mentioned in the press."

I reminded myself to read up on the Duke's cases. Evidently he was better known than I had realized. Sometimes a man gets too wrapped up in his own work.

"I'm sorry," Stevie said, "but I've got to get going. I hope to see you again, Your Grace. So long, Dad—and thanks."

"So long, son," I said. "Take it easy."

His car moved off down the street, gathering speed.

"Fine boy you have there," the Duke said.

"Thanks. Shall we go on with our pub crawling?"

"Let's."

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**B**y two o'clock in the morning, we had heard nothing, found nothing. The Duke looked tired, and I knew that I was.

"A few hours sleep wouldn't hurt either one of us," I told His Grace. "It's a cinch that Nestor won't be able to find any little girls at this hour of the morning, and I have a feeling that he probably bought himself a bottle and took it up to his room with him."

"You're probably right," the Duke said wearily.

"Look," I said, "there's no point in your going all the way down to your hotel. My place is just across town, I have plenty of room, it will be no trouble to put you up, and we'll be ready to go in the morning. O.K.?"

He grinned. "Worded that way, the invitation is far too forceful to resist. I'm sold. I accept."

By that time, we had left several dollars worth of untasted beers sitting around in various bars on the West Side, so when I arrived at my apartment on the East Side, I decided that it was time for two tired cops to have a decent drink. The Duke relaxed on the couch while I mixed a couple of Scotch-and-waters. He lit a cigarette and blew out a cloud of smoke with a sigh.

"Here, this will put sparks in your blood. Just a second, and I'll get you an ash tray." I went into the kitchen and got one of the ash trays from the top shelf and brought it back into the living room. Just as I put it down on the arm of the couch next to His Grace, the buzzer announced that there was someone at the front door downstairs.

I went over to the peeper screen and turned it on. The face was big-jawed and hard-mouthed, and there was scar tissue in the eyebrows and on the cheeks. He looked tough, but he also looked worried and frightened.

I could see him, but he couldn't see me, so I said: "What's the trouble, Joey?"

A look of relief came over his face. "Can I see ya, Inspector? I saw your light was on. It's important." He glanced to his right, toward the doorway. "Real important."

"What's it all about, Joey?"

"Take a look out your window, Inspector. Across the street. They're friends of Freddy Velasquez. They been following me ever since I got off work."

"Just a second," I said. I went over to the window that overlooks the street and looked down. There were two men there, all right, looking innocently into a delicatessen window. But I knew

that Joey Partridge wasn't kidding, and that he knew who the men were. I went back to the peeper screen just as Joey buzzed my signal again. "I buzzed again so they won't know you're home," he said before I could ask any questions. "Freddy must've found out about my hands, Inspector. According to the word I got, they ain't carrying guns—just blackjacks and knucks."

"O.K., Joey. Come on up, and I'll call a squad car to take you home."

He gave me a bitter grin. "And have 'em coming after me again and again until they catch me? No, thanks, Inspector. In one minute, I'm going to walk across and ask 'em what they're following me for."

"You can't do that, Joey!"

He looked hurt. "Inspector, since when it is against the law to ask a couple of guys how come they're following you? I just thought I oughta tell ya, that's all. So long."

I knew there was no point in arguing with Joey Partridge. I turned and said: "Want some action, Your Grace?"

But he was already on his feet, holding that walking stick of his. "Anything you say."

"Come on, then. We'll take the fire escape; the elevator is too slow. The fire escape will let us out in the alley, and we won't be outlined by the light in the foyer."

I already had the bedroom door open. I ran over to the window, opened it, and started down the steel stairway. The Duke was right behind me. It was only three floors down.

"That Joey is too smart for his own good," I said, "but he's right. This is the only way to work it. Otherwise, they'd have him in the hospital eventually—or maybe dead."

"He looked like a man who could take care of himself," the Duke said.

"That's just it. He can't. Come on."

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The ladder to the street slid down smoothly and silently, and I thanked God for modern fire prevention laws. When we reached the street, I wondered where they could have gone to so quickly. Then the Duke said: "There! In that darkened area-way next to the little shop!" And he started running. His legs were longer than mine, and he reached the area-way a good five yards ahead of me.

Joey had managed to evade them for a short while, but they had cornered him, and one of them knocked him down just as the Duke came on the scene. The other had swung at his ribs with a blackjack as he dropped, and the first aimed a kick at Joey's midriff, but Joey rolled away from it.

Then the two thugs heard our footsteps and turned to meet us. If we'd been in uniform, they might have run; as it was, they stood their ground.

But not for long.

The Duke didn't use that stick as though it were a club, swinging it like a baseball bat. That would be as silly as using an overhand stab with a dagger. He used it the way a fencer would use a foil, and the hard, blunt end of it sank into the first thug's solar plexus with all the drive of the Duke's right arm and shoulder behind it. The thug gave a hoarse scream as all the air was driven from his lungs, and he dropped to the pavement.

The second man came in with his blackjack swinging. His hand stopped suddenly as his wrist met the deadly stick, but the blackjack kept on going, bouncing harmlessly off the nearby wall as it flew from nerveless fingers.

That stick never stopped moving. On the backswing, it thwacked resoundingly against the thug's ribcage. He grunted in pain and tried to charge forward to grapple with the Englishman. But His Grace was grace itself as he leaped backwards and then thrust forward with that wooden snake-tongue. The thug practically impaled himself on it. He stopped and twisted and was suddenly sick all over the pavement. Almost gently, the Duke tapped him across the side of his head, and he fell into his own mess.

It was all over before I'd even had a chance to mix in. I stood there, holding an eleven millimeter Magnum revolver in my hand and feeling vaguely foolish.

I reholstered the thing and walked over to where Joey Partridge was propping himself up to a sitting position. His right eye was bruised, and there was a trickle of blood running from the corner of his mouth, but he was grinning all the way across his battered face. And he wasn't looking at me; he was looking at the Duke.

"You hurt, Joey?" I asked. I knew he wasn't hurt badly; he'd taken worse punishment than that in his life.

He looked at me still grinning. "Hurt? You're right I'm hurt, Inspector! Them goons tried to kill me. Let's see—assault and battery, assault with a deadly weapon, assault with intent to kill, assault with intent to maim, attempted murder, and—" He paused. "What else we got, Inspector?"

"We'll think on plenty," I said. "Can you stand up?"

"Sure I can stand up. I want to shake the hand of your buddy, there. Geez! I ain't seen anything like that since I used to watch Bat Masterson on TV, when I was a little kid!"

"Joey, this is Chief Inspector the Duke Acrington, of Scotland Yard. Inspector, this is Joey Partridge, the greatest amateur boxer this country has ever produced."

Amazingly enough, Joey extended his hand. "Pleased t'meetcha, Inspector! Uh—watch the hand. Sorta tender. That was great! Duke, did you say?" He looked at me. "You mean he's a real English Duke?" He looked back at Acrington. "I never met a Duke before!" But by that time he had taken his hand away from the Duke's grasp.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Joey," the Duke said warmly. "I liked the way you cleaned up on that Russian during the '72 Olympics."

Joey said to me, "He remembers me! How d'ya like that?"

One of the downed thugs began to groan, and I said, "We'd better get the paddy wagon around to pick these boys up. You'll prefer charges, Joey?"

"Damn right I will! I didn't let myself get slugged for nothing!"

It was nearly forty-five minutes later that the Duke and I found ourselves in my apartment again. The ice in our drinks had melted, so I dumped them and prepared fresh ones. The Duke took his, drained half of it in three fast swallows, and said: "Ahhhhhh! I needed that."

We heard a key in the door, and His Grace looked at me.

"That's my son," I said. "Back from his date."

Steve came in looking happy. "You still awake, Dad? A cop ought to get his sleep. Good morning, Your Grace. Both of you look sleepy."

Stevie didn't. He'd danced with Mary Ellen until four, and he still looked as though he could walk five miles without tiring. Me, I felt about as full of snap as a soda cracker in a Turkish bath. The three of us talked for maybe ten minutes, and then we hit the hay.

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**T**hree and a half hours of sleep isn't enough for anybody, but it was all we could afford to take. By eight-thirty, the Duke and I were in my office, sloshing down black coffee, and, half an hour after that, we were cruising up Amsterdam Avenue on the second day of our hunt for Mr. Lawrence Nestor.

Since we were now reasonably sure that our man was in the area, I ordered the next phase of the search into operation. There were squads of men making a house-to-house canvass of every hotel, apartment house, and rooming house in the area—and there are thousands of them. A flying squad took care of the hotels first; they were the most likely. Since we knew exactly what day Nestor had arrived, we narrowed our search down to the records for that day. Nestor might not use his own name; of course, but the photograph and description ought to help. And, since Nestor didn't have a job, his irregular schedule and his drinking habits might make him stand out, though there were plenty of places where those traits would simply make him one of the boys. It still looked like a long, hard search.

And then we got our break.

At 9:17 am, Lieutenant Holmquist's voice snapped over my car phone: "Inspector Royall; Holmquist here. Child missing in Riverside Park. Officer Ramirez just called in from 111th and Riverside."

"Got it!"

I cut left and gunned the car eastward. I hit a green light at Broadway, so I didn't need to use the siren. Within two minutes, we had pulled up beside the curb where an officer was standing with a woman in tears. The Duke and I got out of the car.

We walked over to her calmly, although neither one of us felt very calm. There's no point in disturbing an already excited mother—or aunt or whatever she was.

The officer threw me a salute. I returned it and said to the sobbing woman, "Now, just be calm, ma'am. Tell us what happened."

It all came out in a torrent. She'd been sitting on one of the benches, reading a newspaper, and she'd looked around and little Shirley was gone. Yes, Shirley was her daughter. How old? Seven and a half. How long ago was this? Fifteen minutes, maybe. She hadn't been worried at first; she'd walked up and down, calling the girl's name, but hadn't gotten any answer. Then she saw the policeman, and ... and—

And she broke down into tears again.



It was the same thing that had happened a few days before. I had already ordered extra men put on the Riverside and Central Park details, but a cop can't be everywhere at once.

"I've got the rest of the boys beating the brush between here and the river," Officer Ramirez said. "She might have gone down one of the paths on the other side of the wall."

"She wouldn't go too near the river," the woman sobbed. "I just know she wouldn't." She sounded as though she were trying to convince herself and failing miserably.

Nobody said anything about Nestor; the poor woman was bad enough off without adding more horror to the pictures she was conjuring up in her mind.

"We'll find her," I said soothingly, "don't you worry about that. You're pretty upset. We'll have the police doctor look you over and maybe give you a tranquilizer or something to make you feel better." No point in telling her that the doctor might be needed for a more serious case. "Keep an eye on her till the doctor comes, Ramirez. Meanwhile, we'll look around for the little girl."

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I walked over to the wall and looked down. I could see uniformed police walking around, covering the ground carefully.

Riverside Park runs along the eastern edge of Manhattan Island, between Riverside Drive and the Hudson River, from 72nd Street on the south to 129th Street on the north. In the area where we were, there is a flat, level, grassy area about a block wide, where there are walks and benches to sit on. The eastern boundary of this area is marked by a retaining wall that runs parallel with the river. Beyond the wall, the ground slopes down sharply to the Hudson River, going under the elevated East Side Highway which carries express traffic up and down the island. The retaining wall is cut through at intervals, and winding steps go down the steep slope. There are bushes and trees all over down there.

I thought for a minute, then said, "Suppose it was Nestor. How did he get her away? It's a cinch he didn't just scoop her up in broad daylight and go trotting off with her under his arm."

"Precisely what I was thinking," the Duke agreed. "There was no scream or disturbance of that kind. Could he have lured her away, do you think?"

"Possible, but not likely. Little girls in New York are warned about that sort of thing from the time they're in diapers. If she were five years old, it might be more probable, but little girls who are approaching eight are pretty wise little girls."

"It follows, then, that she went somewhere of her own accord and he followed her. D'you agree?"

"That sounds most reasonable," I said. "The next question is: Where?"

"Yes. And why didn't she tell her mother where she was going?"

I gave him a sour grin. "Elementary, my dear Duke. Because her mother had forbidden her to go there. And, from the way she was talking, I gather the mother had expressly directed her to stay away from the river." I looked back over the retaining wall again. "But it just doesn't sound right, does it? Surely someone would have seen any sort of attack like that. Of course, it's possible that she *did* fall in the river, and that this case doesn't have anything to do with Nestor at all, but—"

"It doesn't feel that way to me, either," said the Duke.

"Let's go talk to the mother again," I said. "There are plenty of men down there now; they don't need us."

The woman, Mrs. Ebbermann, had calmed down a little. The police surgeon had given her a tranquilizer with a hypogun, Officer Ramirez was getting everything down in his notebook, and his belt recorder was running.

"No," she was saying, "I'm sure she didn't go home. That's the first place I looked after she didn't answer when I called. We live down the block there. I thought she might have gone home to go to the bathroom or something—but I'm sure she would have told me." She choked a little. "Oh, Shirley, baby! Where are you? Where *are* you?"

I started to ask her a question, but she suddenly said: "Shirley, baby, next time, I promise, you can bring your water gun with you to the park, if you'll just come back to Mommie now! Please, Shirley, baby! Please!"

I glanced at the Duke. He gave me the same sort of look.

"What was that about a water gun, Mrs. Ebbermann?" I asked casually.

"Oh, she wanted to bring her water gun with her, poor baby. But I made her leave it at home—I was afraid she might squirt people with it. But I shouldn't have done that! She's a good girl! She wouldn't squirt anybody!"

"Sure not, Mrs. Ebbermann. Does Shirley have a key to your apartment?"

"Yes. I gave her her own key, a pretty one, with her initials on it, for her seventh birthday, so she

wouldn't have to push the buzzer when she came home from school."

"Where's your husband?" I asked taking a look at Ramirez' notebook to get her address.

"Shirley's father? Somewhere in Boston. We've been separated for two years. But I wish he were here!"

"Would you give me the key to your apartment, Mrs. Ebbermann? We'd like to take a look around."

She gave me a key. "But she's not there. I told you, that's the first place I looked."

"I know," I said. "We just want to look around. We won't disturb anything."

Then His Grace and I got out of there as fast as we could.

---

**I** keyed open the front door of the apartment building, and we went inside. Neither of us said anything. There was no need to. We knew what must have happened, we could see it unfolding as plainly as if we'd watched it happen.

Nestor had seen Shirley sneak off from her mother and had followed her. In order to get into the building, he must have come right in with her, right behind her when she unlocked the outer door. Then what?

The chances were a billion to one against his ever having been in the building before, so it stood to reason that all he would have been doing is watching for an opportunity and—the right place.

The foyer itself? No. Too much chance of being seen. The basement? Unlikely. He must have followed her into the elevator, and she would have pushed the button for the seventh floor, where her apartment was, so there wouldn't be much likelihood of his getting a chance to see the basement. Besides, there was a chance that he might run into the janitor.

---

The Duke and I went into the old-fashioned self-service elevator, and I pushed number seven. The doors slid shut, and the car started up. The roof? No. Too much danger of being seen from other buildings higher than this one.

Where, then? I looked at the control panel of the elevator. The button for the basement was controlled by a key; only the employees were allowed in the basement, so that place was ruled out absolutely.

I began to get the feeling that we were on a wild goose chase, after all. "What do you think?" I asked His Grace.

"I can't imagine where he might have taken her. We may have to search the whole building."

The car stopped at the seventh door, and we stepped out as the doors slid open. The hallways stretched to either side, but there were no apparent hiding places. I went over to the stairwell, which was right next to the elevator shaft and looked up and down. No place there, either.

Then it hit me.

Again, I could see Nestor, like a scene unfolding on a TV drama, still following little Shirley. Had he spoken to her in the elevator? Maybe. Maybe not. He was still undecided, so he followed her to the door of her apartment. Wait—very likely, he *had* made friends with her on the elevator. He saw her push button seven—

*Well, well! Do you live on the seventh floor?*

*Yes, I do.*

*Then we're neighbors. I live on the seventh, too. I just moved in. Do you live with your mommie and daddy?*

*Just my mommie. My daddy doesn't live with us anymore.*

And, since he knew that mommie was in the park, he could guess that the apartment was empty.

All that went through my mind like a bolt of lightning. I said: "The apartment! Come on!"

The Duke, looking a little puzzled, followed me to the door of 706. I put my ear against the door and listened. Nothing. Then I eased the key in and flung the door open.

No one in the living room. I raced for the bedroom. No one in there, either, but the clothes closet door was shut.

When I opened it, we saw a small, dark-haired girl lying naked and unconscious on the floor.

Then there were noises from the front room. The sound of a door opening and closing, and the

clatter of hurrying footsteps in the hall outside.

We both turned and ran.

In the hallway, we could hear the footsteps going down the stairwell. The slow elevator was out of the question. We took off down the stairs after him. He had a head start of about a floor and a half, and kept it all the way down. We saw the door swinging shut as we arrived in the foyer. Outside, we saw our man running toward the corner. I started to reach for my gun, but there were too many people around. I couldn't risk a shot.

And then that amazing walking stick came into action again. The Duke took a few running steps forward and hurled it like a javelin, the heavy silver head forward. Robin Hood couldn't have done better with an arrow. When the silver knob hit the back of the running man's head, he fell forward to the sidewalk.

He was still struggling to get up when we grabbed him.



**T**he Duke and I were waiting for Dr. Brownlee when he came back from talking to Lawrence Nestor in his cell. "He's one of our zanies, all right," he said sadly. "A very sick man."

"He's lucky he wasn't lynched," I said. "Did he tell you what happened?"

Brownlee nodded. "Just about the way you had it figured. He had the little girl's clothes off when her mother came back. He heard her putting her key in the door, so he grabbed Shirley and dragged her into the closet with him. The mother didn't search the place at all; she just went through the main rooms, called her daughter's name a few times and then left."

"That's what threw us off at first," I said. "We both accepted Mrs. Ebbermann's word that Shirley wasn't in the apartment. Then I realized that she wouldn't have taken time to look in all the closets. Why should she? As far as she knew, there wasn't any reason for Shirley to hide from her."

"It's a good thing Mrs. Ebbermann did come back." Dr. Brownlee said. "That was the only thing that saved the girl from rape and death. Nestor was so unnerved that he just left her in the closet, still unconscious from the blow he'd given her."

"Any normal man would have gotten out of there right then. Not Nestor. He went looking for a drink. Fortunately, he found a bottle of whisky in the kitchen. He was just getting in the mood to go back in after the girl when you two came charging in."

"He saw you run to the bedroom, so he knew the girl's mother must have called for help. He decided it was time to run. Too late, of course."

"Too late for a lot of things." I said. "Much too late for Angela Donahue, for instance. And, as a matter of fact, we were so close to being too late with Shirley Ebbermann that I don't even want to think about it. I should have let Shultz go ahead and tell the newsmen. At least people would have been warned."

"There's no way of knowing," said the Duke, "But I think there's just as good a chance that he'd have gotten his hands on some other little girl, even if the warning had gone out. There will always be parents who don't pay enough attention to what their children are doing. They may blame themselves if something happens, but that may be too late. As it happens, we *weren't* too late. Let's be thankful for that."

"By the way, am I wrong in assuming that Nestor will not get your psychotherapy treatment?"

"No, you're right," I said. "The warden at Sing Sing will be taking care of him from now on." I turned to Brownlee and said: "Which reminds me—what's going to be the disposition on the Hammerlock Smith case?"

"I talked to Judge Whittaker and the D.A. Your recommendation pulled a lot of weight with them. They agreed that if Smith will plead guilty to felonious assault and agree to therapy, he'll get off with eighteen months, suspended. When I release him, he'll never bother young boys again."

The Duke looked puzzled. "Hammerlock Smith? Odd Name. What's he up for?"

I told him about Hammerlock Smith.

He thought it over for a while, then said: "Just what is it you do to men like that? How can you be so sure he'll never hurt anyone again?"

Brownlee started to answer him, but a uniformed officer put his head in the door. "Excuse me, Dr. Brownlee, the District Attorney would like to talk to you."

Brownlee excused himself and followed the cop out, leaving me to explain things to His Grace.

"Do you remember that, a couple of centuries ago, the laws of some countries provided the perfect punishment for pickpockets and purse-snatchers?"

He gave me a wry grin. "Certainly. The hands of the felon were amputated at the wrist. Usually with a headsman's ax, I believe."

"Exactly. And they never picked another pocket again as long as they lived." I said. "Society had denied them the means to pick pockets."

"Go on."

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"Do you remember Manny the Moog? The little fellow who was brought in yesterday?"

"Distinctly. I thought it was odd at the time that you should release a man who has a record of such activities as car-stealing and reckless driving, especially when the witness against him turned out to be a perfectly respectable person. I took it for granted that he was one of your ... ah ... 'tame zanies', I think you called them. But I did not and still don't understand how you can be so positive."

"I let Manny go because he's incapable of driving a car. The very thought of being in control of a machine so much more powerful than he is would give him chills. Did you ever see what happens when you lock a claustrophobe up in a dark closet—the mad, unreasoning, uncontrollable panic of absolute terror? That's what would happen to Manny if you put him behind the wheel of a running automobile. It's worse than fear; fear is controllable. Blind terror isn't."

"Manny had one little twist, in his mind. He liked to get into a car—*any* car, whether it was his or not—and drive. He became king of the road. He wasn't a little man any more. He was God, and lesser beings had better look out."

"We got to him before he actually killed anyone, but there is a woman in Queens today who will never walk again because of Manny the Moog. But there won't be any more like her. We took the instrument of destruction away from him; we 'cut off his hands'. Now he's leading a reasonably useful life. We don't need to sacrifice another's life before we neutralize the danger."

"What about Joey Partridge?" His Grace asked. "He's one of your zanies, too, isn't he?"

"That's right. He couldn't keep from using his fists. He liked the feel of solid flesh and bone giving under the impact of those big fists of his. Boxing wasn't enough; he had to be able to feel flesh-to-flesh contact, with no padded glove between. He almost killed a couple of men before we got to him."

"What did you do to his hands?"

"Nothing. Not a thing. There's nothing at all wrong with his hands. But he *thinks* there is. He's firmly convinced that the bones are as brittle as chalk, that if he uses those fists, *he* will be the one who will break and shatter. It even bothers him to shake hands, as you saw last night. It took a lot of guts to do what he did last night—walk over to those two thugs knowing he couldn't defend himself. He's no coward. But he's as terrified of having his hands hurt as Manny is of driving a car."

"I see" the Duke said thoughtfully.

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"There are other cases, plenty of them," I went on. "We have pyromaniacs who are perfectly harmless now because they have a deathly terror of flame. We have one fellow who used to be very nasty with a knife; he grows a beard now because the very thought of having a sharp edge that close to him is unnerving. The reality would send him screaming. We have a girl who had the weird idea that it was fun to drop things out of windows or off the tops of high buildings. Aside from the chance of people below being hurt, there was another danger. Two cops grabbed her just as she was about to drop her baby brother off the roof of her apartment house."

"But we don't worry about her any more. People with acute acrophobia are in no condition to pull stunts like that."

"What will you do to this Hammerlock Smith, then?" His Grace asked.

"Actually, he's one of the simpler cases. A large percentage of our zanies lose control when they're under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Alcohol is by far the more common. Under the influence, they do things they would never do when sober."

"As long as they remain sober, they have control. But, give them a few drinks and the control slips and then vanishes completely. One of our others was a little like Manny the Moog; he drove

like a madman—which he was when he was drunk. Sober, he was as careful and cautious a driver as you'd want—a perfectly reliable citizen. But, after losing his license and the right to own a car, he'd still get drunk and steal cars.

"He has his license back now, but we know we can trust him with it. He will never be able to take another drink.

"Smith is of that type. So, apparently, is Nestor. When we get through with Smith, he'll be sober, and he'll stay that way to his grave."

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"**A**stounding." The Duke looked at me again. "I can see the results, of course. I'm going to see that some sort of similar program is started in England, even if I have to stand up in the House of Lords to do it. But, I still don't understand how it can be done so rapidly—a matter of hours. What is the technique used?"

"It all depends on the therapist," I said. "Brownlee is one of the best, but there are others who are almost as good. Some of the officers have started calling them *hexperts* because, in effect, that's exactly what they do—put a hex on the patient."

"A *geas*, in other words."

I'd never heard the word before. "A what?"

"A *geas*. A magical spell that causes a person to do or to refrain from doing some act, whether he will or no. He has no choice, once the *geas* has been put on him."

"That's it exactly."

"But, man, it isn't magic we're discussing, is it?"

"I don't know," I admitted frankly. "You tell me. Was it magic this morning when both you and I had a hunch that little Shirley was *not* in the park, in spite of the way it looked? Was it magic when we eliminated, without even searching, every spot but the place where she actually was?"

"Well, no, I shouldn't say so. I think every good policeman gets hunches like that every so often. He gets a feel for his work and for the types he's dealing with."

"Well, then, call it hunch or telepathy or extra-sensory perception or thingummybob or whatever. Brownlee has just what you say a good cop should have—a feel for his work and for the types he's dealing with. Within a very short time, Dr. Brownlee can actually get the feel of being inside his patient's mind—deep enough, at least, so that he can spot just what has to be done to put a compensating twist in a twisted mind.

"He says the genuine zanies are very simple to operate on. They have already got the raw materials in them for him to work with. A normally sane, normally well integrated person would require almost as much work to put a permanent quirk in as removing such a quirk would be in a zany. The brainwashing techniques and hypnotism can introduce such quirks temporarily, but as soon as a normally sane person regains his balance, the quirks tend to fade away.

"But a system that is off balance and unstable doesn't require much work to push it slightly in another direction. When Brownlee finds out what will do the job, he does it, and we have a tame zany on our hands."

"It sounds as though men of Brownlee's type are rather rare," His Grace said.

"They are. Rarer than psychiatrists as a whole. On the other hand, they can take care of a great many more cases."

"One thing, though," the Duke said thoughtfully. "You mentioned the amputation of a pickpocket's hands. It seems to me that this technique is just as drastic, just as crippling to the person to whom it is done."

"Of course it is! No one has ever denied that. God help us if it's the final answer to the problem! A man who can't drive a car, or use a razor, or punch an enemy in the teeth when it's necessary is certainly handicapped. He's more crippled than he was before. The only compensation for society is that now he's less dangerous.

"There are certain compensations for the individual, too. He stands less chance of going to prison, or to a death cell. But he's still hemmed in; he's not a free man. Of course, in most instances, he's not aware of what has been done to him; his mind compensates and rationalizes and gives him a reason for what he's undergoing. Joey Partridge thinks his condition is due to the fractures he suffered the last time he beat up a man; Manny the Moog thinks that he's afraid to drive a car because of the last wreck he was in. And, partly, maybe they're both right. But they have still been deprived of a part of their free will, their right of choice.

"Oh, no; this isn't the final answer by a long shot! It's a stopgap—a *necessary* stopgap. But, by using it, we can learn more about how the human mind works, and maybe one of these days we'll evolve a science of the mind that can take those twists *out* instead of compensating for them.

"On the other hand, we can save lives by using the technique we have now. We don't dare *not* use it.

"When they chopped off those hands, centuries ago, the stumps were cauterized by putting them in boiling oil. It looked like another injury piled on top of the first, but the surgeons, not knowing *why* it worked, still knew that a lot more ex-pickpockets lived through their ordeal if the boiling oil was used afterward.

"And that's what we're doing with this technique right here and now. We're using it because it saves lives, lives that may potentially or actually be a great deal more valuable than the warped personality that might have taken such a life.

"But the one thing that I am working for right now and will continue to work for is a *real* cure, if that's possible. A real, genuine, usable kind of psychotherapy; one which is at least on a par with the science of cake-baking when it comes to the percentages of successes and failures."

His Grace thought that over for a minute. Then he leaned back and looked at me through narrowed eyes. There was a half smile on his lips "Royall, old man, let's admit one thing, just between ourselves," His voice became very slow and very deliberate. "Both you and I know that this process, whatever it is, is *not* psychotherapy."

"Why do you say that?" I wasn't trying to deny anything; I just wanted to know the reasoning behind his conclusions.

"Because I know what psychotherapy can and can't do. And I know that psychotherapy can *not* do the sort of thing we've been discussing.

"It's as if you'd taken me out on a rifle range, to a target two thousand yards from the shooter and let me watch that marksman put fifty shots out of fifty into a six-inch bull's-eye. I might not know what the shooter is using, but I would know beyond any shadow of doubt that it was *not* an ordinary revolver. More, I would know that it could not be any possible improvement upon the revolver. It simply would have to be an instrument of an entirely different order.

"If, in 1945, any intelligent military man had been told that the Japanese city of Hiroshima had been totally destroyed by a bomber dropping a single bomb, he would be certain that the bomb was a new and different kind from any ever known before. He would know that, mind you, without necessarily knowing a great deal about chemistry.

"I don't need to know a devil of a lot about psychotherapy to know that the process you've been describing is as far beyond the limits of psychotherapy as the Hiroshima bomb was beyond the limits of chemistry. Ditto for hypnosis and/or Pavlov's 'conditioned reflex', by the way.

"Now, just to clear the air, what *is* it?"

"It has no official name yet," I told him. "To keep within the law, we have been calling it psychotherapy. If we called it something else, and admitted that it *isn't* psychotherapy, the courts couldn't turn the zanies over to us. But you're right—it is as impossible to produce the effect by psychotherapy as it is to produce an atomic explosion by a chemical reaction.

"I've got a hunch that, just as chemistry and nucleonics are both really branches of physics, so psychotherapy and Brownlee's process are branches of some higher, more inclusive science—but that doesn't have a name, either."

"That's as may be," the Duke said, "but I'm happy to know that you're not deluding yourself that it's any kind of psychotherapy."

"You know," I said, "I kind of like your word *geas*. Because that's exactly what it seems to be—a *geas*. A hex, an enchantment, if you wish.

"Did you know that Brownlee was an anthropologist before he turned to psychology? He has some very interesting stories to tell about hexes and so on."

"I'll have to hear them one day." His Grace took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. "Cigarette?"

"No, thanks. I gave up smoking a few years back."



He puffed his alight. "This *geas*," he said, "reminds me of the fact that, before the medical

profession came up with antibiotics that would destroy the microorganisms that cause gas gangrene, amputation was the only method of preventing the death of the patient. It was crippling, but necessary."

"No!" My voice must have been a little too sharp, because he raised one eyebrow. "The analogy," I went on in a quieter tone, "isn't good because it gives a distorted picture. Look, Your Grace, you know what's done to keep a captive wild duck from flying away?"

"One wing is clipped."

"Right. Certain of the feathers are trimmed, which throws the duck off balance every time he tries to fly. He's crippled, right? But if you clip the *other* wing, what happens? He's in balance again. He can't fly as *well* as he could before his wings were clipped—but he *can* fly!

"That's what Brownlee's *geas* does—restore the balance by clipping the other wing."

His Grace smiled. There was an odd sort of twinkle in his eyes. "Let me carry your analogy somewhat farther. If the one wing is too severely clipped, clipping the other won't help. Our duck wouldn't have enough lift to get off the ground, even if he's balanced.

"Now, a zany who was that badly crippled—?"

I grinned back at him. "Right. It would be so obvious that he would have been put away very quickly. He would not be just psychopathic, but completely psychotic—and demonstrably so."

"Then," the Duke said, still pursuing the same track, "the only way to 'cure' that kind would be to find a method to ... ah ... 'grow the feathers back', wouldn't it? And where does that put today's psychotherapy? Providing, of course, that the analogy follows."

"It does," I said. "The real cure that I want to find would do just that—'grow the feathers back'. And that's beyond the limits of psychotherapy, too. That's why Dr. Brownlee and his boys want to study every zany we bring in, whether he can be helped or not. They're looking for a *cure*, not a stopgap."

"Let me drag that analogy out just a tiny bit more," said His Grace. "Suppose there is a genetic defect in the duck which makes it impossible—absolutely impossible—to grow feathers on that wing. Will your cure work?"

I was very quiet for along time. At least, it seemed long. The question had occurred to me before, and I didn't even like to think about it. Now, I had to face it again for a short while.

"Frankly," I said as evenly as I could, "I doubt that anything could be done. But that's only an opinion. We don't know enough yet to make any such predictions. It is my hope that some day we'll find a method of restoring every human being to his or her full potential—but I'm not at all certain of what the source of that potential is.

"But when we do get our cure," I went on, "then our first move must be to abolish the *geas*. And I wish that day were coming tomorrow."

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**T**here seemed to be a sudden silence in the room. I hadn't realized that I'd been talking so loudly or so vehemently.

The Duke broke it by saying: "Look here, Royall; I'm going to stay on here until I've learned all about every phase of this thing. It may sound a bit conceited, but I'm going to try to learn in a few weeks everything you have learned in a year. So you'll have to teach me, if you will. And then I'd like to borrow one or two of your therapists, your hexperts, to teach the technique in England.

"Allowing people like that to kill and maim when it can be prevented is unthinkable in a civilized society. I've got to learn how to stop it in England. Will you teach me?"

"On one condition," I said.

"What's that?"

"That you teach me how to use a walking stick."

He laughed. "You're on!"

The officer stuck his head in the waiting room again. "Pardon me. Inspector Acrington? The District Attorney would like to see you."

"Surely."

After he had left, I sat there for a minute or two, just thinking. Then Brownlee came back from his conference with the D.A. and sat down beside me.

"I met your noble friend heading for the D.A.'s office," he said with a smile. "He said that any man who was as determined to find a better method in order to replace a merely workable method is a remarkable man and therefore worth studying under. I just told him I agreed with him."

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks a lot."

Because Brownlee knows why I'm looking for a cure to replace the stopgap. Brownlee knows why I gave up smoking three years ago, why I don't have any matches or lighters in the house, why I keep the ashtrays for guests only, and why, for that reason, I don't have many guests. Brownlee knows why there are only electric stoves in my apartment—never gas.

Brownlee knows why my son quivers and turns his head away from a match flame. Brownlee knows why he had to put the *geas* on Stevie.

And I even think Brownlee suspects that I concealed some of the evidence in the fire that killed Stevie's mother—my wife.

Yes, I'm looking for a cure. But until then, I'll be thankful for the stopgap.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NOR IRON BARS A CAGE \*\*\*

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