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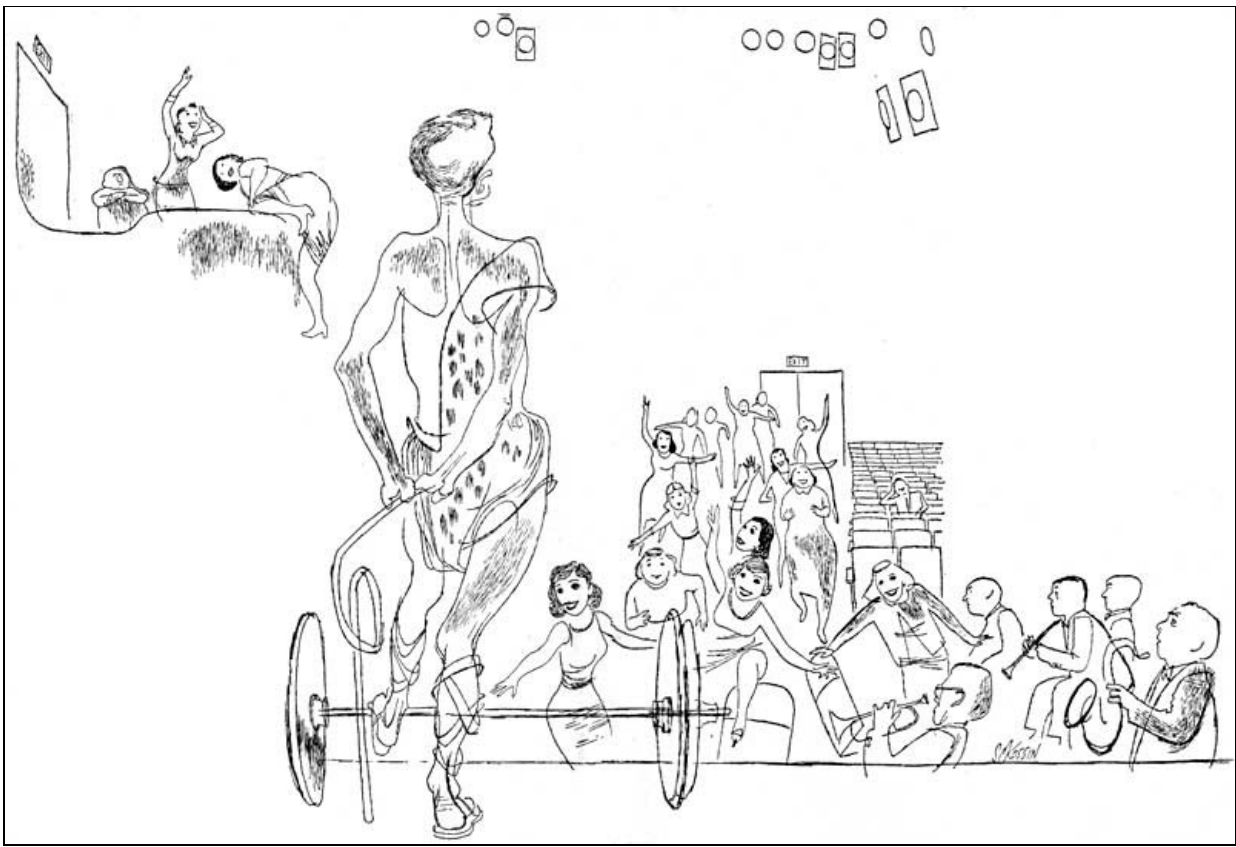
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DOUBLE SPY ***

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THE DOUBLE SPY

By Dan T. Moore

Illustrator: Sanford Kossin

Meet the man with no name. Nothing cool about this cat. He was built along the lines of a necktie rack, weighed slightly more than a used napkin, and was as shy as the ante in a crooked poker game.

No sex appeal there, you'd say. Yet within the space of a few days every woman in the country melted into quivering protoplasm at the very thought of this mystery man!

DEAR EXCELLENCY:

The communicating time will be here soon. I have started this letter early to be sure it will be ready. This is the first time I have felt safe when communicating with you. Our enemies at home can solve such extraordinarily complex ciphers that I have always been uneasy before. They cannot possibly solve an entirely new language like this one; a language based on an utterly different theory from our own; with new symbols; and even set down with a different writing instrument. Our long periods of study together have brought their reward. Your Excellency, I appreciate the rare privilege of knowing a language that only one other person at home knows, and that one person, yourself.

I am having many dangers and horrors in America. As we both realized, it is impossible to carry out my mission without lots of their money. I could not even begin my work, nor buy the expensive equipment needed for my experiments without finding a way to make money.

In only a few weeks I discovered the quickest and easiest way to do it was to become an entertainer. The people here like to be shocked and astonished. Naturally I am well equipped to do both. I was an immediate sensation. I got into what New Yorkers call "The Big Time."

Each night at 8:30 I went to a theatre in a place called Times Square and put on my act. Thousands of people paid to see me. I was very well paid. There is a newspaper here called

"Variety." It carried an article about me. The headline said: STRONG MAN TERRIF WOW SOCKEROO 100G 3D. The numbers at the end mean the theatre took in \$100,000 during my third week. After the article appeared every seat was sold weeks in advance.

You will be amused, Excellency, when you hear what I did in this show. I came out on the stage practically nude except for an abbreviated leopard skin. I walked over to a pile of iron rods. They were half-inch concrete reinforcing bars about six feet long. I picked one out and dropped it on the floor. It made a terrible crash. This was to prove to the audience that it was real. Then I wrapped it around my neck and tied it in a regular four-in-hand necktie knot. It was a little hard to get the ends to come out even. I had to pull and haul to arrange them just right. This caused tremendous laughter. They knew no one could do this with an iron reinforcing bar. They were sure it was a trick.

I chose the man in the audience who was laughing the loudest and asked him to come up on the stage. With a little persuasion he did so. I selected another iron bar and wrapped it around his neck. Then I tied it in a four-in-hand knot and adjusted the ends until they were perfect. I asked him to take the necktie off. He grabbed it with both hands and tried. His face turned purple with effort, but of course he could not even budge it. Everyone laughed loudly. Finally twenty men from the audience volunteered to help. They all started pulling and hauling. They couldn't get the iron necktie off. Then the audience became silent. They looked at each other uneasily. There were frightened whispers.

That was the time to break the tension. I would spit on the floor. As my saliva hit the stage it burst into flames and a smell of perfume drifted through the theatre. It was my turn to look surprised and scared. Everyone howled with laughter, and the tension was broken for all but the man with the iron necktie who remained forlorn and miserable. Finally I removed his necktie and let it drop to the floor. It made a tremendous crash. Everyone was impressed all over again.

Next I grasped a horizontal bar and chinned myself fifty times with one hand. Again everyone became silent. They all knew no one has ever done that before. In many ways they are like us. For example, when they get scared their body heat rises like ours. As the heat came up to me from the audience I could feel the change in my sensors. It made my chin warm. I found that when my chin got warm it was time to break the tension. I did it by demonstrating magic tricks.

You will smile, Excellency, when you hear what they call magic here. I was tightly blind-folded. Some people came up on the stage, and I announced exactly how many there were. I pointed to exactly where each one was standing, and indicated which were males and which were females. This made a most tremendous impression. I could hear gasps in the audience. I was told that the people rubbed their eyes as if they could not believe what they were seeing. You will understand, Excellency, that I accomplished this by turning on the male principle. The women here are so exquisitely receptive to it that when it is on their excitement causes changes in their body heat. It was simple for me to sense those fluctuations in temperature and to know which of the people before me were female.

Next I put a piece of paper on a metal rack across the stage. I concentrated heat waves on it from my cupped hand. The paper burst into flames. As they say here on the street they call Broadway, that "brought down the house." They clapped and whistled and made me do it again and again. Luckily they conceived of it only as a wonderful trick.

I ended the act by choosing a very unusual looking man from the audience. He came up on stage and we went behind a screen together. When we reappeared a few seconds later the audience screamed because I had twisted my face around to look exactly like his. Believe me, the reaction was terrific. Slowly I let my face slip back to "normal." If they realized there is no normal and that I could leave my face that way permanently, that would have been too much of a shock. They would have become silent and terrified and suspicious. I might have been in danger.

I had to calculate carefully how much these people could take without realizing there was something alarmingly different about me. I learned my lesson one night. I turned on the male principle too strongly and some of the women in the audience became very agitated. Everyone was embarrassed. After the show the theatre manager came to my dressing room and asked me to have a drink with him at a little bar across the street.

When we sat down he stared at me in a queer manner. "Just exactly what happened tonight?" he demanded.

I looked surprised. "Weren't you satisfied with the act?" I asked. "The audience seemed to like me."

"They liked you too much."

I laughed. "You mean those silly females who tried to drag me off the stage?"

He narrowed his eyes and thrust his face close to mine. "If I hadn't had the best-trained ushers in New York there'd have been a panic and a riot in there. How come?"

I shrugged. "The women in your town seem remarkably excitable."

"And in *your* town?"

"Not so," I declared truthfully. How truthfully Your Excellency well knows.

"There's something peculiar about you," he said, "something very peculiar." He leaned back in his chair and his glance swept over me. "Suppose you cut out the leopard skin," he said, "and wear a jersey and trousers."

I laughed to myself. He thought my bare body, my bulging muscles had been the cause of the trouble. What a fool! Is Your Excellency laughing too? However, I dared not disagree with him. By that time he had had many drinks. He was looking mean. He reached over and grabbed the lapel of my coat in his fist.

"What the hell kind of a guy are you?" he snarled at me.

My hands twitched. I wished I could have picked him up and tied him in a four-in-hand knot around his own neck.

"Who the hell are you?" he repeated.

I yawned and stretched and got to my feet. "Not even a strong man now," I said casually, "just a tired man."

I left the bar.

After that incident I was careful with the male principle. When the audience left each night I turned it on very slightly—only enough to be sure that the women would do their best to get back to see me again.

But before I go any further in this account of my adventures, Your Excellency, let me tell you about the women here. The greatest difference between the Americans and ourselves is in the women. They are extraordinary. Some of them are beautiful beyond belief. My researches completely confirm your much-criticized hypotheses concerning our own women. If our enemies who object so strongly to Your Excellency's statements could be here for only one hour they would become your devoted supporters. American women are the proof that your theories are correct. Your famous attempt to explain some of the incongruous and apparently ridiculous passages in our ancient manuscripts by assuming the existence of a now-vanished female principle is irrefutably demonstrated by these women, Your Excellency.

Here, the female principle exists, and as you predicted, most of the women are therefore entirely different from ours. The term used in this language is "femininity." It is a devastatingly attractive thing—but almost impossible to explain. I will make an attempt.

Senseless, reasonless, even foolish motions of the body and the hands, the expressions of the eyes and the mouth, the way the head is moved and tilted are a part of it. So are unusual tones of the voice and special ways in which things are said. Laughter, a whisper, the direction of the glance, the fingers' pressure—these, too, are parts of it.

There are infinitely various types of adornment which hang on the body, fabrics in delicate or brilliant colors which cling and flow, gleaming stones at throat and wrists. The faces are enchantingly painted, the hair shining and arranged in numerous wonderful designs. There is an aura of the scent of flowers and fruits.

I tell you, Excellency, everything about this femininity assails the senses. It is so potent that once having experienced it the mere recollection causes the pulses to pound and throb. My hand trembles as I write these words to you. I am confused and disturbed and wild with a longing I never knew at home. I wish to meet Your Excellency's high standards in preparing this report, and yet I am unable to be scientific. The logic of the laboratory cannot be employed.

As soon as I could I began to hunt desperately for the secret of the female principle. I analyzed the soil, the food, the water, and the air by our own most refined methods. I found nothing to help us. I went to the risky extreme of killing two of their women. One possessed an unusual amount of this femininity. The other, who seemed to have very little of it, was essentially like one of our own women. *There was not the slightest chemical difference in their bodies.* Dead, they were precisely the same. But alive, Your Excellency, they were overwhelmingly dissimilar.

I was able to kill the unfeminine one scientifically without emotion or regret. But, although it was clearly my duty, I could hardly bring myself to kill the other one. I had known her for several days. Her femininity almost prevented my continuing with the experiment. She told me that she loved me.

I don't know if I have the skill to explain to you what this "love" is. Briefly, it means that the woman was in a mental state—a receptive mental state, Excellency, infinitely more violent than the peak our women reach after intensive application of the male principle. Your Excellency, *she was that way all of the time.*

This brings me to another extraordinary difference between them and us. The men here lack the male principle. They obviously don't need it because of the existence of the female principle in the women. If the men had it, as we have, I leave it to Your Excellency's vivid imagination as to what would be happening here.

In general the men are enough like us to be called humanoids in our sense of the word. They have about the same intelligence quotient that we have, and are physically almost identical except for our induced modifications. As Your Excellency predicted they do not have these since they have not yet discovered the methods of inducing them. As a result, while they have the same muscular potential as we do, they are far weaker, and their life span is not more than 70 or 80 years by their calendar.

They do not have heat sensors, so they stumble around in the dark and trip over things like children. They squander more energy on electric lights than on anything else in the economy. Also, their hearing and eyesight cannot be compared to ours. I am always hearing and seeing things without their suspecting it. A low conversation across the room is perfectly audible to me. Much of my best information comes this way. Naturally, since they completely lack heat generators, they cannot set things on fire.

To get back to the account of my activities, Excellency; my biggest mistake was in killing the two women for the femininity research. This got me into terrible trouble. They feel strongly about killing women here. Now that I appreciate their women, I can see why.

The local police were not hard to handle, but they have a central police system called the F.B.I. It is comparable to Your Excellency's organization in techniques and training, and in some ways even superior to it. When the F.B.I. started investigating me, things got serious immediately.

One day my heat sensor detected a man standing outside my front door. He was a huge bulky man. I sensed a mass under his left arm pit. My heat sensor analyzed it. It reflected heat like iron, but there seemed to be some small pieces of lead there too.

The man was polite and apologetic when I opened the door. He tipped his hat. He said that he had come to the wrong apartment. Then he asked, "How did you know I was standing outside the door?"

Without thinking, I uttered the first thing that came into my head. "I saw your shadow."

His eyes widened only slightly. He had good control of himself. "How could you see a shadow through a wooden door?" he asked softly.

I was exasperated at my mistake but I smiled the way people here do when they are at a disadvantage. "I do not explain my tricks," I told him. "I earn my living by performing them at the theatre."

I closed the door.

The next night I was experimenting with the male principle. I sat on a bench in a place called Central Park and practiced on the women as they went by. I discovered that the more feminine the women the greater the effect the wave has on them. Some would hesitate and look around as they walked by me. Some would stop and stare at me in a puzzled fashion. I was growing tired and ravenously hungry. I decided that when the next attractive woman passed me I would generate one last powerful wave, and then go on to a restaurant.

I allowed a few unfeminine ones to go by. Then I saw her, a lovely blonde girl about twenty-five years old. Her hair was a mass of short curls that covered her head with a uniform thickness like the styles in our Second Renaissance Period. She had on a black dress and was carrying a black bag in her hand. I sensed small pieces of different types of metals in her bag. She was walking slowly and weeping. Occasionally she dabbed at her nose with a piece of white cloth.

She was so beautiful, Excellency. Her warmth started flowing over my chin when she was at least sixty feet away. I decided to wait until she was quite close and then to engulf her with the full force of the male principle. I was shaken and impatient. Even at the highest point of excitement, though, Your Excellency should know that the importance of my mission was in my mind. When she was on the sidewalk directly in front of me I did as I had planned. She stopped. Her handkerchief dropped to the ground, and then her bag. She looked at me wildly. She ran over and sat on the bench beside me. She put her arms around my neck and kissed me.

"Why were you crying?" I asked.

"I don't remember," she said. "I don't care."

I closed my eyes. My senses were responding to her warmth and her scent. Suddenly there was a blast of male heat on my chin. I started and stared. There standing above us was the huge heavy man of the night before. The mass of metal was still under his left arm pit. He had an odd expression on his face. He was watching the girl as if her condition was answering a question for him.

In a sudden flash of intuition everything was clear to me. The girl was a decoy. I had fallen neatly

into a trap. I had thoughtlessly demonstrated my power to the F.B.I, man—a power I could not explain by saying it was a trick.

I pushed the girl away and stood up. The man's eyes were fixed upon me with horror. I saw that he knew there was something monstrous and menacing about me. Something he did not understand. Something that meant terrible danger to him and his kind. His right hand started to creep towards the mass of metal under his arm. I cupped my hand towards him and started accumulating a heat charge. His glance dropped fearfully. It fell to my hand, and his temperature went up. He had undoubtedly seen me burn pieces of paper in the theatre.

His right hand fumbled in his pocket and he drew out a little package. "Have a cigarette?"

I shook my head. He put one in his own mouth and lighted a match. In spite of the strongest effort of my will I jumped back. I jerked my hand up over my chin. A little stick of wood with a flaring flame on the end of at least 600 degrees Centigrade, right in front of my heat sensors, took my breath away. The searing heat burned right into my brain. It was like some of the tortures in Your Excellency's Force Number Five.

The heavy man observed all of this, but he did not understand it. He looked at the girl, who had risen and was leaning against me, oblivious of everything.

"You've got quite a way with women, haven't you?" he said. He dragged on his cigarette. The tip flamed up painfully. I shrank back and again brought my hand up to protect my chin.

"What's the matter with you?" the man asked sharply.

I did not know how to answer. I stood mute and waiting.

"I want to go now, and I want to take that girl with me. Do you understand?" The man's voice was harsh with anger.

I shut the principle off. The girl lifted her head, but she appeared to be in a trance. The man took her arm and they walked off through the park. A murderous rage against the heavy man filled me. I cupped my hand. He was well within range—but then I thought of my mission, Excellency, and let him go. For hours afterwards that lovely girl who was taken from me was in my thoughts.

Your Excellency, two suggestions come out of this experience. They both concern our induced modifications. Any of us who come to America should be able to shut off the heat sensor at will. With everyone here smoking and lighting cigarettes and turning on 300-watt light bulbs in one's face, with automobiles approaching at night shooting out two searing heat beams in front of them, the environment is too full of shocks. It is too easy for us to be spotted because of this weakness.

Also, Your Excellency, a change must be made in the connection between all of the induced modifications. When I accumulate a heat charge, that means that the male principle is automatically on. When I was accumulating a charge to kill the heavy man, the principle was affecting the woman, and she was reacting to it. The combination was not desirable at that time. When I light the paper at the theatre, the male principle is also on, and affects the women in the audience. We can use the male principle without using the heat ray. Why can't we use the heat ray without using the male principle? This modification should be induced.

The next afternoon there was a matinee performance at the theatre. It was crowded. The management had even provided for standing room at the back of the theatre. I started, as usual, by selecting an iron reinforcing bar and tying it into a four-in-hand around my neck.

To my surprise, although it looked exactly the same, it was much harder to bend. I never did get the ends quite even.

I had just put the second bar around the neck of the stooge from the audience when I noticed something queer. Although this was usually the place for hilarious laughter, everyone was silent. I looked out over the audience. A man was standing in the aisle, just a few feet from the stage. He was pointing a gun right at me. It was the heavy man.

As I turned around he said, "Put up your hands."

I put them up.

He spoke in a loud, deep voice, "This is no gag, ladies and gentlemen. This man on the stage is the most dangerous and cold-blooded murderer in America. He is the murderer of Lydia Davis and Genevieve Scott."

Several other men stood up. They all had masses of metal under their left arm pits. The heavy man gave them an order. "Go up on the stage and handcuff him. Use five pairs of handcuffs."

Then he spoke to the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, today we substituted tempered steel bars for the reinforcing bars. Twenty ordinary men couldn't have bent one of those bars. What you have witnessed was no trick. The man you see on the stage is not like us. He has the strength of at least forty men. Please remain in your seats. We can handle this situation."

The audience gasped and murmured. A woman screamed.

The group of men started walking towards the stage. My hands were up. I cupped my right one and gave the heavy man a full charge of heat. His hair went up in a bright orange flame. He dropped the red hot gun from his smoking hand, and fell to the floor. He frantically rolled around the aisle trying to put out his flaming clothes.

One of the other men shot at me. The little piece of lead came toward me, flew over my shoulder. It was going at about 900 feet per second. This was enough to kill me, Excellency. I became panic-stricken. I fled into the wings. I was followed by a storm of little whistling lead pellets.

The stagehands scattered hysterically before me as I ran down the steps and out the stage door entrance. The street in front of the theatre was packed with police cruisers and athletic-looking men in blue uniforms.

Before anyone saw me, I cupped my hand, and fired the gas tank of the nearest police cruiser. The ray of the male principle went out with the heat ray. As I ran by the flaming car, all of the women in the street felt something important. They all turned and looked at me.

Policemen started shooting. They piled out of their cars. The street was echoing with yells and shouts. I was terrified. I exerted an enormous effort of will and mustered every atom of energy at my command. I sent a full-power heat blast up the street. I have never marshalled a bigger blast, even in the contests at our training school in Area Twelve.

Fifteen automobiles burst into flames. Twenty or thirty men and women fell screaming to the sidewalk, their clothes burning. A flock of roasted pigeons fell smoking out of the sky. A black cloud condensed over the street, and a forked tongue of lightning flashed from it. Every woman within a quarter of a mile felt the hot electrical force of the male principle. I dived into the Times Square subway entrance and sprinted down the stairs. There was a men's washroom at the end of the platform.

I heard the wild tumult of pursuit behind me. I pushed open the door. A man was there washing his hands. I strangled him, tore off his clothes, and put them on myself. Hastily, I twisted my face about so that I looked like an entirely different person. I opened the door and started walking slowly back down the platform.

A platoon of policemen with drawn guns was sprinting down the platform towards me. They were followed by a yelling mob of civilians which included hundreds of women. They swept by me. I was safe, but shivering with fear, Excellency. I was spent. I couldn't have mustered up a heat ray strong enough to warm the end of my nose.

I stumbled around the corner and away from that neighborhood. Then I went into the first restaurant I saw, and gorged. After a five dollar plank steak, three glasses of milk, one glass of beer, and apple pie a la mode I was still ravenous; still energy-minus.

I went a block up the street, into another restaurant, and bolted down exactly the same meal again. Strength started to flow slowly through my veins. After one more meal in still another restaurant, my confidence returned.

The newspapers handled the affair with amazing restraint. The facts brought in by their reporters naturally sounded fantastic to the editors, so they rearranged them to "make sense." The reticence of the authorities, particularly the F.B.I., helped to convert what might have caused a national panic into just an unusually spectacular chase after an escaped murderer. The burning cars were laid to hooliganism on the part of the bystanders. The people who got burned, so the stories explained, were hurt by the gasoline explosions of the burning cars. The mass hysteria of the women was caused by the excitement. The papers said that the steel necktie worn by my stooge at the theatre had to be cut off by a water-cooled electric saw. They said that however I did it, it was a clever trick.

The next few days, Your Excellency, were the most difficult of my stay here. I knew that the full power of not only the F.B.I., but of the whole national government, would be concentrated to destroy me. I had to hide—hide, and get a new start.

The money in the pockets of my borrowed suit didn't last long. I couldn't possibly risk presenting myself as a strong man or a magician again. I became a ditch digger and a day laborer, and finally drifted into the professional wrestling racket. Many of the top wrestling promoters live in Washington, D. C. I rented a little white clapboard house with green shutters, out in the country beyond Silver Springs, Maryland.

I was careful to keep myself a second-rate wrestler. This was exasperating, Your Excellency. At any time I could have beaten three or four of their best wrestlers simultaneously. Everything was fixed so I won and lost when they told me to. We even practiced how we were going to win or lose before each match. I was very obedient and very scared.

I did everything *not* to attract attention. I started to use the male principle again, but so sparingly that everything looked natural.

I tried to fit into the life of the community and become an American. I joined a Bowling League. I learned to play a game called "Canasta."

I got to be great friends with a man named Nat Brown, an automobile mechanic. He lived with his extraordinarily beautiful wife, Helene, in a house about a half mile away.

The Browns used to ask me to dinner, and I would meet their friends. I grew very fond of them. We would sit around and drink beer and play cards and talk until late at night about politics and philosophy and love and everything else on earth. It was by far the swiftest part of my education in America, living with these lighthearted, charming people who obviously liked me.

The only disadvantage was the problem raised by my increasing fondness for Helene Brown. She was a vivid incarnation of the female principle, and yet I knew I must not touch her. I had a constant battle with myself to maintain the disinterested relationship necessary to continuing with these people without complication.

Both Nat and Helene Brown used to come to see me wrestle whenever I had a match in Washington. Whether I won or lost we would go out and drink beer together. I would sometimes bring another girl along. More and more I started to feel like a real native American. A couple of close friends, Excellency, did a lot for your humble servant.

Three days ago I was riding along Connecticut Avenue in my new car. When I stopped for a light, I saw a familiar face in the crowd crossing the street. It was the tall heavy man, the F.B.I. agent who had tracked me down and tried to capture me in the theatre the night of the big battle. I could sense the mass of metal carried under his left arm.

He was hurrying along with another man. When I saw who it was my blood froze in my veins. It was my neighbor, Nat Brown. He also had a mass of metal under his left arm.

It was clear to me then that, in spite of my precautions, the F.B.I. had spotted me weeks ago. How, I do not know. Nat Brown was their surveillance agent.

I drove home immediately to finish this letter and get it off to you. I may not be alive tomorrow. The launching apparatus is concealed in a tool shed about a half a mile behind the house. I am going to put down my recommendations and get this off immediately—before it's too late.

As I see it, Excellency, there are only four courses available to us:

(1) A chemical or other isolation of the female principle, followed by an attempt to synthesize it at home to see what its effect would be on our women. This might save us. Unfortunately I have yet been unable to isolate what causes the female principle here; so this is not a possibility yet.

(2) Kidnap some of their women. This would be delightful fun for Your Excellency and a few others; but it would not solve the main problem. Transportation difficulties would make it impossible to get enough of them. Also, if the basic element which creates the "female principle" is lacking because of some soil or other deficiency at home, their women would soon become like ours. All of our trouble would go for nothing, and our doom would continue to approach.

(3) Conquer them, kill the men, take their women, and live with the women here. This, in my opinion, should not be attempted for the following reasons. Americans are extraordinarily efficient in warfare. They have atomic and hydrogen weapons, and they know how to use them. They are very warlike, although they constantly deny it. Some of their other weapons are fully equal to ours, in some respects, superior. Our communications would be far too long to enable us to prevail. This should be attempted only if the fourth alternative fails; and even then only after long expensive preparation. Also, there is distinct danger if we disclose ourselves by attacking them. They may find a way to attack us, and cause considerable damage. As things are now, with our vanishing birth rate, we can't afford to lose people in a war.

(4) The fourth alternative is to breed their race out of existence by planting our blood here—in other words, an invasion from within. This will depend upon our two races being inter-fertile. I am almost certain that they are. If I can stay alive for seven months longer I will give you a definite report. I will carry on the experiment as swiftly as possible.

Since these people have such a short life span our descendants will live hundreds of years longer than theirs. The present race will slowly be bred out due to the infirmities of its men. Our men and their women will create a race superior to both.

If I can find a way to escape from the F.B.I., and establish myself once more in safety I will try to justify Your Excellency's confidence in your humble servant.

I put the letter down on my desk. It certainly told most of the story. It needed only a final paragraph. Then I sat down at the typewriter and added it:

I am closing now, Your Excellency. Tomorrow will be the transmission date for this letter. I may not communicate with you again for some time, but please understand, Excellency, that I am your humble and devoted servant and have tried to carry on in strict accordance with your wishes.

I put the letter into an envelope and put it in my pocket. Then I got into my car and drove down through the city to the northwest wing of the Department of Justice Building. The elevator girl smiled. "Haven't seen you for a long time, Nat. Don't you work for the F.B.I. any more?"

I smiled back at her, "The Chief has had me up to a lot of out-of-town devilment."

I passed Jack and Tex in the hall, and we waved to each other. They wanted to talk, but I was in too much of a hurry. "The Chief wants me," I said, without slowing down.

When I reached the Chief's office Mrs. Sperling gave me a broad grin. "Hello, Nat. The Chief's been waiting for you."

I went down the little corridor into the Chief's room. He was sitting at his desk looking grim and tense. On the wall behind him was a huge map of the United States. It had clumps of vari-colored pins all over it. His deep voice boomed across the room.

"Hello, Nat. How is the Chief of the Venusian Desk?"

"Well, if you want to know the truth, Chief, I'm pretty god damned relieved. Some jobs are fun. But my hair has been standing on end so much since you gave me this job that it's going to need about a year's rest. No man wants his hair to have a nervous breakdown."

The Chief looked at me fondly. "Well, I can't say you carried your mission out quietly. It practically blew me out of bed, and I live at least ten miles away."

"Joe did a hell of a good job with the TNT," I said. "How the hell he ever got twenty tons of it down in the basement in three hours I'll never find out."

A slight frown came over the Chief's face. "Are you sure our Venusian friend was there?"

"Absolutely."

"How—absolutely?"

"I called him on the telephone. When he answered I pressed the button. I heard the explosion over the wire, half a second before it practically tore down my own house. When I got over there a big crowd was collecting." I took a deep breath. "Not much for them to look at, though—just a big black smoking hole in the ground."

"And our inter-planetary friend?"

"Well, I don't know about his soul, Chief, but his body isn't around anywhere. I guess it just turned into steam with the rest of the house. A lot of women are going to be sad as hell."

I saw the Chief's fists clenched on the desk. He was still taut from the strain of the last few hours. Finally he reached for the silver cigarette box on his desk. His fingers jerked crazily as he put a cigarette in his mouth. He passed the box to me. I took one and started fumbling in my pockets for a match. The Chief snapped open the top of his big desk lighter, and held it over to me. I put the cigarette into the flame and drew deeply. The flame was at least three inches high. The Chief leaned forward, his eyes riveted on me. There was a queer, expectant look on his face. I stared back at him, puzzled. Finally he snapped the lighter shut, and turned to the wall. "It's all right, boys," he said.

A door with grille-work along the front opened up. I saw Joe Evans and Tom Hardy and Jim Reid standing there with tommy guns, pointed right at my head.

The Chief laughed at my expression of bewilderment.

"I wasn't taking any chances, Nat. You can't afford to in a situation like this. No matter how sure you are, you can't gamble the whole future of your own world. I wanted to be damned certain that you really were Nat Brown, and not His Excellency's humble servant from the planet Venus. If you had flinched so much as one eyelash, Nat, when I held that lighter up to your face, three tommy guns would have opened up on you—all at one and the same time."

I felt suddenly limp. I uttered a long audible whistle of relief.

The Chief's voice was low and solemn. "Think what we've escaped, Nat—think how close he came to getting loose on our world!"

I took the letter out and threw it on his desk. "After you read this, Chief, you'll appreciate it a little more. The last paragraph is mine. I picked up the letter while the boys were loading the

TNT down in the basement."

While the Chief was reading the letter I got up and looked at the map of the United States behind him. Each of the colored pinheads had names printed on them. Grouped around Silver Springs, Maryland, were two pins. One was labeled "Chief." The other was labeled "Nat Brown." I turned to the Chief. "I wish you would do one thing for me."

"I'll do anything for you."

"Instead of calling us 'Chief' and 'Nat Brown,' call us 'Excellency' and 'Your Humble Servant.'"

The Chief chuckled. "There has never been any humor on that board, and by God, it's high time there was." He rang the buzzer. "Mrs. Sperling, change the 'Chief' and 'Nat Brown' pins to 'Excellency' and 'Your Humble Servant.'"

Her eyes widened a bit, but the labels were changed on the spot.

When the Chief got to that part about the recommendations he read them out loud. Then he began to pace the room.

"Nat," he said, "I'm going to see that you get some very special recognition for the job you have done. I mean recognition from the White House itself. Of course we can't give it any publicity—at least not yet—but it will mean a lot more money for you."

"Thanks, Chief, I can use it."

"In your opinion, what should we do now, as our next step?" He paused. "Or should we just do nothing?"

"I think we've got to be careful that they don't send anyone else down here. Or maybe it is 'up' here. We've got to get messages back to his 'Excellency' every once in a while from 'Your Humble Servant.' I know how to do it now. The launching tube is still intact in its shed. There are ten rockets, so we can send at least ten messages. Time plays in our favor—since they have apparently lost the ability to reproduce themselves, they are dying out. If we can hold them off for a long enough period, we'll be safe forever. The most important thing, Chief, is to be sure we know it if they land any more 'humble servants' on the earth."

The Chief nodded approval. "How can we make sure we'll know it?"

"It's hard to make absolutely sure, but why not send me out on a roving mission to set up an international organization to detect such a creature? What we want is information about anyone, anywhere, who is unusually strong or unusually attractive to women, or eats six or eight meals a day, or who has the other queer powers they have. I could get all the information coming in from all over the world, process it here, and only bother you when we found something suspicious."

The Chief was enthusiastic. "You've thought yourself up a job, Nat. Take three weeks vacation to get yourself rested up, and then get started."

I walked down the long marble corridors away from the Chief's office, and went down in the elevator and out into the street. As I walked along in the crowds I felt the warmth of bodies as they passed me. I suddenly realized the novocaine was beginning to wear off. I didn't get out any too soon. My chin ached and throbbed. That hot searing flame had come so close ... from now on my nightmares would be of that moment when the Chief was holding the lighter to my cigarette. But one thing sang through my being; the battle was won. In a month my world travels for the F.B.I. would start.

Like a phoenix, I, the new Nat Brown, had risen re-born from the ashes of the Nat Brown vaporized by the explosion. What could his thoughts have been, lying tied up on the living room floor waiting for twenty tons of TNT to go off? Waiting, while I held the mirror in front of me and slowly made my face into an exact replica of his. He must have known then that I would get his job, and get his wife, Helene, and finally get his world. He realized then that His Excellency would send down hundreds more like me and that I would be the screen between them and the F.B.I., that I would instruct them and encourage them and give them aid and safety for their missions.

As I neared the Cathedral I looked west on Massachusetts Avenue. The sun had just set and the Evening Star was hanging like a lantern in the sky—my homeland, the radiant planet which men on earth call Venus. Venus, they have told me, means love. What a superb and cosmic joke that is! I looked at the beautiful orb on the horizon and was filled with the triumphant excitement of being the earth-man, Nat Brown, of going home to my wife, Helene, one of the thousands who would breed thousands who would breed thousands.

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