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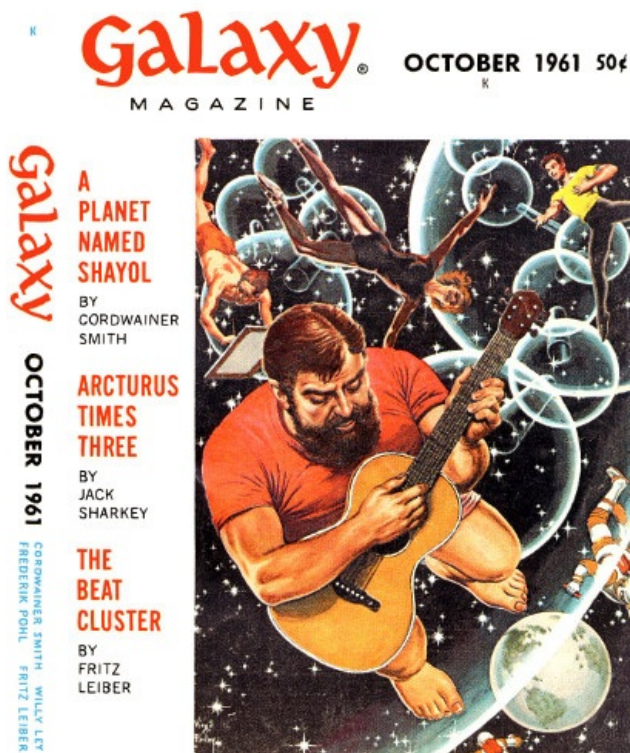
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SPY IN THE ELEVATOR ***



THE SPY IN THE ELEVATOR

By DONALD E. WESTLAKE

Illustrated by WEST

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THE SPY IN THE ELEVATOR



He was dangerously insane. He threatened to destroy everything that was noble and decent—including my date with my girl!

When the elevator didn't come, that just made the day perfect. A broken egg yolk, a stuck zipper, a feedback in the aircon exhaust, the window sticking at full transparency—well, I won't go through the whole sorry list. Suffice it to say that when the elevator didn't come, that put the roof on the city, as they say.

It was just one of those days. Everybody gets them. Days when you're lucky in you make it to nightfall with no bones broken.

But of all times for it to happen! For literally months I'd been building my courage up. And finally, just today, I had made up my mind to do it—to propose to Linda. I'd called her second thing this morning—right after the egg yolk—and invited myself down to her place. "Ten o'clock," she'd said, smiling sweetly at me out of the phone. She knew why I wanted to talk to her. And when Linda said ten o'clock, she meant ten o'clock.

Don't get me wrong. I don't mean that Linda's a perfectionist or a harridan or anything like that. Far from it. But she does have a fixation on that one subject of punctuality. The result of her job, of course. She was an ore-sled dispatcher. Ore-sleds, being robots, were invariably punctual. If an ore-sled didn't return on time, no one waited for it. They simply knew that it had been captured by some other Project and had blown itself up.

Well, of course, after working as an ore-sled dispatcher for three years, Linda quite naturally was a bit obsessed. I remember one time, shortly after we'd started dating, when I arrived at her place five minutes late and found her having hysterics. She thought I'd been killed. She couldn't visualize anything less than that keeping me from arriving at the designated moment. When I told her what actually had happened—I'd broken a shoe lace—she refused to speak to me for four days.

And then the elevator didn't come.

Until then, I'd managed somehow to keep the day's minor disasters from ruining my mood. Even while eating that horrible egg—I couldn't very well throw it away, broken yolk or no; it was my breakfast allotment and I was hungry—and while hurriedly jury-rigging drapery across that gaspingly transparent window—one hundred and fifty-three stories straight down to slag—I kept going over and over my prepared proposal speeches, trying to select the most effective one.

I had a Whimsical Approach: "Honey, I see there's a nice little Non-P apartment available up on one seventy-three." And I had a Romantic Approach: "Darling, I can't live without you at the moment. Temporarily, I'm madly in love with you. I want to share my life with you for a while. Will you be provisionally mine?" I even had a Straightforward Approach: "Linda, I'm going to be needing a wife for at least a year or two, and I can't think of anyone I would rather spend that time with than you."

Actually, though I wouldn't even have admitted this to Linda, much less to anyone else, I loved her in more than a Non-P way. But even if we both had been genetically desirable (neither of us were) I knew that Linda relished her freedom and independence too much to ever contract for any kind of marriage other than Non-P—Non-Permanent, No Progeny.

So I rehearsed my various approaches, realizing that when the time came I would probably be so tongue-tied I'd be capable of no more than a blurted, "Will you marry me?" and I struggled with zippers and malfunctioning air-cons, and I managed somehow to leave the apartment at five minutes to ten.

Linda lived down on the hundred fortieth floor, thirteen stories away. It never took more than two or three minutes to get to her place, so I was giving myself plenty of time.

But then the elevator didn't come.

I pushed the button, waited, and nothing happened. I couldn't understand it.

The elevator had always arrived before, within thirty seconds of the button being pushed. This was a local stop, with an elevator that traveled between the hundred thirty-third floor and the hundred sixty-seventh floor, where it was possible to make connections for either the next local or for the express. So it couldn't be more than twenty stories away. And this was a non-rush hour.

I pushed the button again, and then I waited some more. I looked at my watch and it was three minutes to ten. Two minutes, and no elevator! If it didn't arrive this instant, this second, I would be late.

It didn't arrive.

I vacillated, not knowing what to do next. Stay, hoping the elevator would come after all? Or hurry back to the apartment and call Linda, to give her advance warning that I would be late?

Ten more seconds, and still no elevator. I chose the second alternative, raced back down the hall, and thumbed my way into my apartment. I dialed Linda's number, and the screen lit up with white letters on black: PRIVACY DISCONNECTION.

Of course! Linda expected me at any moment. And she knew what I wanted to say to her, so quite naturally she had disconnected the phone, to keep us from being interrupted.

Frantic, I dashed from the apartment again, back down the hall to the elevator, and leaned on that blasted button with all my weight. Even if the elevator should arrive right now, I would still be almost a minute late.

No matter. It didn't arrive.

I would have been in a howling rage anyway, but this impossibility piled on top of all the other annoyances and breakdowns of the day was just too much. I went into a frenzy, and kicked the elevator door three times before I realized I was hurting myself more than I was hurting the door. I limped back to the apartment, fuming, slammed the door behind me, grabbed the phone book and looked up the number of the Transit Staff. I dialed, prepared to register a complaint so loud they'd be able to hear me in sub-basement three.

I got some more letters that spelled: BUSY.

It took three tries before I got through to a hurried-looking female receptionist "My name is Rice!" I bellowed. "Edmund Rice! I live on the hundred and fifty-third floor! I just rang for the elevator and——"

"The-elevator-is-disconnected." She said it very rapidly, as though she were growing very used to saying it.

It only stopped me for a second. "Disconnected? What do you mean disconnected? Elevators don't *get* disconnected!" I told her.

"We-will-resume-service-as-soon-as-possible," she rattled. My bellowing was bouncing off her like radiation off the Project force-screen.

I changed tactics. First I inhaled, making a production out of it, giving myself a chance to calm down a bit. And then I asked, as rationally as you could please, "Would you mind terribly telling me *why* the elevator is disconnected?"

"I-am-sorry-sir-but-that——"

"Stop," I said. I said it quietly, too, but she stopped. I saw her looking at me. She hadn't done that before, she'd merely gazed blankly at her screen and parroted her responses.

But now she was actually looking at *me*.

I took advantage of the fact. Calmly, rationally, I said to her, "I would like to tell you something,

Miss. I would like to tell you just what you people have done to me by disconnecting the elevator. You have ruined my life."

She blinked, open-mouthed. "Ruined your life?"

"Precisely." I found it necessary to inhale again, even more slowly than before. "I was on my way," I explained, "to propose to a girl whom I dearly love. In every way but one, she is the perfect woman. Do you understand me?"

She nodded, wide-eyed. I had stumbled on a romantic, though I was too preoccupied to notice it at the time.

"In every way but one," I continued. "She has one small imperfection, a fixation about punctuality. And I was supposed to meet her at ten o'clock. *I'm late!*" I shook my fist at the screen. "Do you realize what you've *done*, disconnecting the elevator? Not only won't she marry me, she won't even *speak* to me! Not now! Not after this!"

"Sir," she said tremulously, "please don't shout."

"I'm not shouting!"

"Sir, I'm terribly sorry. I understand your—"

"You *understand?*" I trembled with speechless fury.

She looked all about her, and then leaned closer to the screen, revealing a cleavage that I was too distraught at the moment to pay any attention to. "We're not supposed to give this information out, sir," she said, her voice low, "but I'm going to tell you, so you'll understand why we had to do it. I think it's perfectly awful that it had to ruin things for you this way. But the fact of the matter is—" she leaned even closer to the screen—"there's a spy in the elevator."

II

It was my turn to be stunned.

I just gaped at her. "A—a what?"

"A spy. He was discovered on the hundred forty-seventh floor, and managed to get into the elevator before the Army could catch him. He jammed it between floors. But the Army is doing everything it can think of to get him out."

"Well—but why should there be any problem about getting him out?"

"He plugged in the manual controls. We can't control the elevator from outside at all. And when anyone tries to get into the shaft, he aims the elevator at them."

That sounded impossible. "He *aims* the elevator?"

"He runs it up and down the shaft," she explained, "trying to crush anybody who goes after him."

"Oh," I said. "So it might take a while."

She leaned so close this time that even I, distracted as I was, could hardly help but take note of her cleavage. She whispered, "They're afraid they'll have to starve him out."

"Oh, no!"

She nodded solemnly. "I'm terribly sorry, sir," she said. Then she glanced to her right, suddenly straightened up again, and said, "We-will-resume-service-as-soon-as-possible." Click. Blank screen.

For a minute or two, all I could do was sit and absorb what I'd been told. A spy in the elevator! A spy who had managed to work his way all the way up to the hundred forty-seventh floor before being unmasked!

What in the world was the matter with the Army? If things were getting that lax, the Project was doomed, force-screen or no. Who knew how many more spies there were in the Project, still unsuspected?

Until that moment, the state of siege in which we all lived had had no reality for me. The Project, after all, was self-sufficient and completely enclosed. No one ever left, no one ever entered. Under our roof, we were a nation, two hundred stories high. The ever-present threat of other projects had never been more for me—or for most other people either, I suspected—than occasional ore-sleds that didn't return, occasional spies shot down as they tried to sneak into the building, occasional spies of our own leaving the Project in tiny radiation-proof cars, hoping to get safely within another project and bring back news of any immediate threats and dangers that project might be planning for us. Most spies didn't return; most ore-sleds did. And within the Project life was full, the knowledge of external dangers merely lurking at the backs of our minds. After all, those external dangers had been no more than potential for decades, since what Dr. Kilbillie called the Ungentlemanly Gentleman's War.

Dr. Kilbillie—Intermediate Project History, when I was fifteen years old—had private names for every major war of the twentieth century. There was the Ignoble Nobleman's War, the Racial Non-Racial War, and the Ungentlemanly Gentleman's War, known to the textbooks of course as World Wars One, Two, and Three.

The rise of the Projects, according to Dr. Kilbillie, was the result of many many factors, but two of the most important were the population explosion and the Treaty of Oslo. The population explosion, of course, meant that there was continuously more and more people but never any more space. So that housing, in the historically short time of one century, made a complete transformation from horizontal expansion to vertical. Before 1900, the vast majority of human beings lived in tiny huts of from one to five stories. By 2000, *everybody* lived in Projects. From the very beginning, small attempts were made to make these Projects more than dwelling places. By mid-century, Projects (also called apartments and co-ops) already included restaurants, shopping centers, baby-sitting services, dry cleaners and a host of other adjuncts. By the end of the century, the Projects were completely self-sufficient, with food grown hydroponically in the sub-basements, separate floors set aside for schools and churches and factories, robot ore-sleds capable of seeking out raw materials unavailable within the Projects themselves and so on. And all because of, among other things, the population explosion.

And the Treaty of Oslo.

It seems there was a power-struggle between two sets of then-existing nations (they were something like Projects, only horizontal instead of vertical) and both sets were equipped with atomic weapons. The Treaty of Oslo began by stating that atomic war was unthinkable, and added that just in case anyone happened to think of it only *tactical* atomic weapons could be used. No *strategic* atomic weapons. (A tactical weapon is something you use on the soldiers, and a strategic weapons is something you use on the folks at home.) Oddly enough, when somebody did think of the war, both sides adhered to the Treaty of Oslo, which meant that no Projects were bombed.

Of course, they made up for this as best they could by using tactical atomic weapons all over the place. After the war almost the whole world was quite dangerously radioactive. Except for the Projects. Or at least those of them which had in time installed the force screens which had been invented on the very eve of battle, and which deflected radioactive particles.

However, what with all of the *other* treaties which were broken during the Ungentlemanly Gentleman's War, by the time it was finished nobody was quite sure any more who was on whose side. That project over there on the horizon might be an ally. And then again it might not. Since they weren't sure either, it was risky to expose yourself in order to ask.

And so life went on, with little to remind us of the dangers lurking Outside. The basic policy of Eternal Vigilance and Instant Preparedness was left to the Army. The rest of us simply lived our lives and let it go at that.

But now there was a spy in the elevator.

When I thought of how deeply he had penetrated our defenses, and of how many others there might be, still penetrating, I shuddered. The walls were our safeguards only so long as all potential enemies were on the other side of them.

I sat shaken, digesting this news, until suddenly I remembered Linda.

I leaped to my feet, reading from my watch that it was now ten-fifteen. I dashed once more from the apartment and down the hall to the elevator, praying that the spy had been captured by now and that Linda would agree with me that a spy in the elevator was good and sufficient reason for me to be late.

He was still there. At least, the elevator was still out.

I sagged against the wall, thinking dismal thoughts. Then I noticed the door to the right of the elevator. Through that door was the stairway.

I hadn't paid any attention to it before. No one ever uses the stairs except adventurous young boys playing cops and robbers, running up and down from landing to landing. I myself hadn't set foot on a flight of stairs since I was twelve years old.

Actually, the whole idea of stairs was ridiculous. We had elevators, didn't we? Usually, I mean, when they didn't contain spies. So what was the use of stairs?

Well, according to Dr. Kilbillie (a walking library of unnecessary information), the Project had been built when there still had been such things as municipal governments (something to do with cities, which were more or less grouped Projects), and the local municipal government had had on its books a fire ordinance, anachronistic even then, which required a complete set of stairs in every building constructed in the city. Ergo, the Project had stairs, thirty-two hundred of them.

And now, after all these years, the stairs might prove useful after all. It was only thirteen flights to Linda's floor. At sixteen steps a flight, that meant two hundred and eight steps.

Could I descend two hundred and eight steps for my true love? I could. If the door would open.

It would, though reluctantly. Who knew how many years it had been since last this door had been opened? It squeaked and wailed and groaned and finally opened half way. I stepped through to the musty, dusty landing, took a deep breath, and started down. Eight steps and a landing, eight steps and a floor. Eight steps and a landing, eight steps and a floor.

On the landing between one fifty and one forty-nine, there was a smallish door. I paused, looking curiously at it, and saw that at one time letters had been painted on it. The letters had long since

flaked away, but they left a lighter residue of dust than that which covered the rest of the door. And so the words could still be read, if with difficulty.

I read them. They said:

**EMERGENCY ENTRANCE
ELEVATOR SHAFT
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL
ONLY
KEEP LOCKED**

I frowned, wondering immediately why this door wasn't being firmly guarded by at least a platoon of Army men. Half a dozen possible answers flashed through my mind. The more recent maps might simply have omitted this discarded and unnecessary door. It might be sealed shut on the other side. The Army might have caught the spy already. Somebody in authority might simply have goofed.

As I stood there, pondering these possibilities, the door opened and the spy came out, waving a gun.

III

He couldn't have been anyone else but the spy. The gun, in the first place. The fact that he looked harried and upset and terribly nervous, in the second place. And, of course, the fact that he came from the elevator shaft.

Looking back, I think he must have been just as startled as I when we came face to face like that. We formed a brief tableau, both of us open-mouthed and wide-eyed.

Unfortunately, he recovered first.

He closed the emergency door behind him, quickly but quietly. His gun stopped waving around and instead pointed directly at my middle. "Don't move!" he whispered harshly. "Don't make a sound!"

I did exactly as I was told. I didn't move and I didn't make a sound. Which left me quite free to study him.

He was rather short, perhaps three inches shorter than me, with a bony high-cheekboned face featuring deepset eyes and a thin-lipped mouth. He wore gray slacks and shirt, with brown slippers on his feet. He looked exactly like a spy ... which is to say that he *didn't* look like a spy, he looked overpoweringly ordinary. More than anything else, he reminded me of a rather taciturn milkman who used to make deliveries to my parents' apartment.

His gaze darted this way and that. Then he motioned with his free hand at the descending stairs and whispered, "Where do they go?"

I had to clear my throat before I could speak. "All the way down," I said.

"Good," he said—just as we both heard a sudden raucous squealing from perhaps four flights down, a squealing which could be nothing but the opening of a hall door. It was followed by the heavy thud of ascending boots. The Army!

But if I had any visions of imminent rescue, the spy dashed them. He said, "Where do you live?"

"One fifty-three," I said. This was a desperate and dangerous man. I knew my only slim chance of safety lay in answering his questions promptly, cooperating with him until and unless I saw a chance to either escape or capture him.

"All right," he whispered. "Go on." He prodded me with the gun.

And so we went back up the stairs to one fifty-three, and stopped at the door. He stood close behind me, the gun pressed against my back, and grated in my ear, "I'll have this gun in my pocket. If you make one false move I'll kill you. Now, we're going to your apartment. We're friends, just strolling along together. You got that?"

I nodded.

"All right. Let's go."

We went. I have never in my life seen that long hall quite so empty as it was right then. No one came out of any of the apartments, no one emerged from any of the branch halls. We walked to my apartment. I thumbed the door open and we went inside.

Once the door was closed behind us, he visibly relaxed, sagging against the door, his gun hand hanging limp at his side, a nervous smile playing across his lips.

I looked at him, judging the distance between us, wondering if I could leap at him before he could bring the gun up again. But he must have read my intentions on my face. He straightened, shaking his head. He said, "Don't try it. I don't want to kill you. I don't want to kill anybody, but I will if I have to. We'll just wait here together until the hue and cry passes us. Then I'll tie you up, so you won't be able to sic your Army on me too soon, and I'll leave. If you don't try any silly heroics, nothing will happen to you."

"You'll never get away," I told him. "The whole Project is alerted."

"You let me worry about that," he said. He licked his lips. "You got any chico coffee?"

"Yes."

"Make me a cup. And don't get any bright ideas about dousing me with boiling water."

"I only have my day's allotment," I protested. "Just enough for two cups, lunch and dinner."

"Two cups is fine," he said. "One for each of us."

And now I had yet another grudge against this blasted spy. Which reminded me again of Linda. From the looks of things, I wasn't *ever* going to get to her place. By now she was probably in mourning for me and might even have the Sanitation Staff searching for my remains.

As I made the chico, he asked me questions. My name first, and then, "What do you do for a living?"

I thought fast. "I'm an ore-sled dispatcher," I said. That was a lie, of course, but I'd heard enough about ore-sled dispatching from Linda to be able to maintain the fiction should he question me further about it.

Actually, I was a gymnast instructor. The subjects I taught included wrestling, judo and karati—talents I would prefer to disclose to him in my own fashion, when the time came.

He was quiet for a moment. "What about radiation level on the ore-sleds?"

I had no idea what he was talking about, and admitted as much.

"When they come back," he said. "How much radiation do they pick up? Don't you people ever test them?"

"Of course not," I told him. I was on secure ground now, with Linda's information to guide me. "All radiation is cleared from the sleds and their cargo before they're brought into the building."

"I know that," he said impatiently. "But don't you ever check them before de-radiating them?"



"No. Why should we?"

"To find out how far the radiation level outside has dropped."

"For what? Who cares about that?"

He frowned bitterly. "The same answer," he muttered, more to himself than to me. "The same answer every time. You people have crawled into your caves and you're ready to stay in them forever."

I looked around at my apartment. "Rather a well-appointed cave," I told him.

"But a cave nevertheless." He leaned toward me, his eyes gleaming with a fanatical flame. "Don't you ever wish to get Outside?"

Incredible! I nearly poured boiling water all over myself. "Outside? Of course not!"

"The same thing," he grumbled, "over and over again. Always the same stupidity. Listen, you! Do you realize how long it took man to get out of the caves? The long slow painful creep of progress, for millennia, before he ever made that first step from the cave?"

"I have no idea," I told him.

"I'll tell you this," he said belligerently. "A lot longer than it took for him to turn around and go right back into the cave again." He started pacing the floor, waving the gun around in an agitated fashion as he talked. "Is this the *natural* life of man? It is not. Is this even a *desirable* life for man? It is *definitely* not." He spun back to face me, pointing the gun at me again, but this time he pointed it as though it were a finger, not a gun. "Listen, you," he snapped. "Man was progressing. For all his stupidities and excesses, he was growing up. His dreams were getting bigger and grander and better all the time. He was planning to tackle *space*! The moon first, and then the planets, and finally the stars. The whole universe was out there, waiting to be plucked like an apple from a tank. And Man was reaching out for it." He glared as though daring me to doubt it.

I decided that this man was doubly dangerous. Not only was he a spy, he was also a lunatic. So I had two reasons for humoring him. I nodded politely.

"So what happened?" he demanded, and immediately answered himself. "I'll tell you what happened! Just as he was about to make that first giant step, Man got a hotfoot. That's all it was, just a little hotfoot. So what did Man do? I'll tell you what he did. He turned around and he ran all the way back to the cave he started from, his tail between his legs. *That's* what he did!"

To say that all of this was incomprehensible would be an extreme understatement. I fulfilled my obligation to this insane dialogue by saying, "Here's your coffee."

"Put it on the table," he said, switching instantly from raving maniac to watchful spy.

I put it on the table. He drank deep, then carried the cup across the room and sat down in my favorite chair. He studied me narrowly, and suddenly said, "What did they tell you I was? A spy?"

"Of course," I said.

He grinned bitterly, with one side of his mouth. "Of course. The damn fools! Spy! What do you suppose I'm going to spy on?"

He asked the question so violently and urgently that I knew I had to answer quickly and well, or the maniac would return. "I—I wouldn't know, exactly," I stammered. "Military equipment, I suppose."

"Military equipment? *What* military equipment? Your Army is supplied with uniforms, whistles and hand guns, and that's about it."

"The defenses—" I started.

"The defenses," he interrupted me, "are non-existent. If you mean the rocket launchers on the roof, they're rusted through with age. And what other defenses are there? None."

"If you say so," I replied stiffly. The Army claimed that we had adequate defense equipment. I chose to believe the Army over an enemy spy.

"Your people send out spies, too, don't they?" he demanded.

"Well, of course."

"And what are *they* supposed to spy on?"

"Well—" It was such a pointless question, it seemed silly to even answer it. "They're supposed to look for indications of an attack by one of the other projects."

"And do they find any indications, ever?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I told him frostily. "That would be classified information."

"You bet it would," he said, with malicious glee. "All right, if that's what *your* spies are doing, and if *I'm* a spy, then it follows that I'm doing the same thing, right?"

"I don't follow you," I admitted.

"If I'm a spy," he said impatiently, "then I'm supposed to look for indications of an attack by you people on my Project."

I shrugged. "If that's your job," I said, "then that's your job."

He got suddenly red-faced, and jumped to his feet. "That's *not* my job, you blatant idiot!" he shouted. "I'm not a spy! If I *were* a spy, *then* that would be my job!"

The maniac had returned, in full force. "All right," I said hastily. "All right, whatever you say."

He glowered at me a moment longer, then shouted, "Bah!" and dropped back into the chair.

He breathed rather heavily for a while, glaring at the floor, then looked at me again. "All right, listen. What if I were to tell you that I *had* found indications that you people were planning to attack my Project?"

I stared at him. "That's impossible!" I cried. "We aren't planning to attack anybody! We just want to be left in peace!"

"How do I know that?" he demanded.

"It's the truth! What would we want to attack anybody for?"

"Ah hah!" He sat forward, tensed, pointing the gun at me like a finger again. "Now, then," he said. "If you know it doesn't make any sense for this Project to attack any other project, then why in the world should you think *they* might see some advantage in attacking *you*?"

I shook my head, dumbfounded. "I can't answer a question like that," I said. "How do I know what they're thinking?"

"They're human beings, aren't they?" he cried. "Like you? Like me? Like all the other people in this mausoleum?"

"Now, wait a minute—"

"No!" he shouted. "You wait a minute! I want to tell you something. You think I'm a spy. That blundering Army of yours thinks I'm a spy. That fathead who turned me in thinks I'm a spy. But I'm *not* a spy, and I'm going to tell you what I am."

I waited, looking as attentive as possible.

"I come," he said, "from a Project about eighty miles north of here. I came here by foot, without any sort of radiation shield at all to protect me."

The maniac was back. I didn't say a word. I didn't want to set off the violence that was so obviously in this lunatic.

"The radiation level," he went on, "is way down. It's practically as low as it was before the Atom War. I don't know how long it's been that low, but I would guess about ten years, at the very least." He leaned forward again, urgent and serious. "The world is safe out there now. Man can come back out of the cave again. He can start building the dreams again. And this time he can build better, because he has the horrible example of the recent past to guide him away from the pitfalls. There's no need any longer for the Projects."

And that was like saying there's no need any longer for stomachs, but I didn't say so. I didn't say anything at all.

"I'm a trained atomic engineer," he went on. "In my project, I worked on the reactor. Theoretically, I believed that there was a chance the radiation Outside was lessening by now, though we had no idea exactly how much radiation had been released by the Atom War. But I wanted to test the theory, and the Commission wouldn't let me. They claimed public safety, but I knew better. If the Outside were safe and the Projects were no longer needed, then the Commission was out of a job, and they knew it."

"Well, I went ahead with the test anyway, and I was caught at it. For my punishment, I was banned from the Project. They kicked me out, telling me if I thought it was safe Outside I could live Outside. And if it really was safe, I could come back and tell them. Except that they also made it clear that I would be shot if I tried to get back in, because I would be carrying deadly radiation."

He smiled bitterly. "They had it all their own way," he said. "But it *is* safe out there, I'm living proof of it. I lived Outside for five months. And gradually I realized I had to tell others. I had to spread the word that Man could have his world back. I didn't dare try to get back into my own Project; I would have been recognized and shot before I could say a word. So I came here."

He paused to finish the cup of chico that I should have had with lunch. "I knew better," he continued, "than to simply walk into the building and announce that I came from Outside. Man has an instinctive distrust for strangers anyway; the Projects only intensify it. Once again, I would have been shot. So I've been working in a more devious way. I snuck into the Project—not a difficult thing for a man with no metal on his person, no radiation shield cocooning him—and for the last two months I've been wandering around the building talking with people. I strike up a conversation. I try to plant a few seeds of doubt about the deadliness of Outside, and I hope that at least a few of the people I talk to will begin to wonder, as I once did."

Two months! This spy, by his own admission, had been in the Project two months before being detected. I'd never heard of such a thing, and I hoped I'd never hear of such a thing again.

"Things worked out pretty well," he said, "until today. I said something wrong—I'm still not sure what—and the man I was talking to hollered for Army, shouted I was a spy." He pounded the chair arm. "But I'm not a spy! And it's the truth, Outside is safe!" He glared suddenly at the window. "Why've you got that drape up there?"

"The window broke down," I explained. "It's stuck at transparent."

"Transparent? Fine!" He got up from the chair, strode across the room, and ripped the drape down from the window.

I cowered away from the sun-glare, turning my back to the window.

"Come over here!" he shouted. When I didn't move, he snarled, "Get up and come over here, or I swear I'll shoot!"

And he would have, it was plain in his voice. I got to my feet, hesitant, and walked trembling to the window, squinting against the glare.

"Look out there," he ordered. "Look!"

I looked.

IV

Terror. Horror. Dizziness and nausea.

Far and away and far, nothing and nothing. Only the glare, and the high blue, and the far far horizon, and the broken gray slag stretching out, way down below.

"Do you see?" he demanded. "Look down there! We're so high up, it's hard to see, but *look* for it. Do you see it? Do you see the green? Do you know what that means? There are green things growing again Outside! Not much yet. It's only just started back, but it's begun. The radiation is down. Plants are growing again."

The power of suggestion. And, of course, the heightened sensitivity caused by the double threat of a man beside me carrying a gun that yawning aching expanse of nothing beyond the window. I nearly fancied that I did see faint specks of green.

"Do you see it?" he asked me.

"Wait," I said. I leaned closer to the window, though every nerve in me wanted to leap the other way. "Yes!" I said. "Yes, I see it! Green!"

He sighed, a long painful sigh of thanksgiving. "Then now you know," he said. "I've been telling you the truth. It *is* safe Outside."

And my lie worked. For the first time, his guard was completely down.

I moved like a whirlwind. I leaped, and twisted his arm in a hard hammerlock, which caused him to cry out and drop the gun. That was wrestling. Then I turned and twisted and dipped, causing him to fly over my head and crash to the floor. That was judo. Then I jabbed one rigid forefinger against a certain spot on the side of his neck, causing the blood in his veins to forever stop its motion. That was karati.

Well, by the time the Army men had finished questioning me, it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and I was five hours late. The Army men corroborated my belief that the man had been a spy, who had apparently lost his mind when cornered in the elevator. Outside was still dangerous, of course, they assured me of that. And he'd been lying about having been here two months. He'd been in the Project less than two days. Not only that, the Army men told me they'd found the radiation-proof car he'd driven, and in which he had hoped to drive back to his own Project once he'd discovered all our defenses.

Despite the fact that I had the most legitimate excuse for tardiness under the roof, Linda refused to forgive me for not making our ten o'clock meeting. When I asked her to marry me she refused, at length and descriptively.

But I was surprised and relieved to discover how rapidly I got over my heartbreak. This was aided by the fact that once the news of my exploit spread, there were any number of girls more than anxious to get to know me better, including the well-cleaved young lady from the Transit Staff. After all, I was a hero.

They even gave me a medal.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SPY IN THE ELEVATOR ***

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