

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

Fletcher Pratt



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DOUBLE JEOPARDY

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Double Jeopardy

by

FLETCHER PRATT

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3

One

The Chief's chair creaked as he leaned back in it and looked out of the window, then turned to face the young man on the other side of the desk.

“Jones,” he said, “your record shows you should know a man named Richard Mansfeld.”

Jones smiled. “I ought to,” he said. “He played left half when I was playing tackle at Cornell in '84. He hasn't gotten into anything, has he?”

Without answering directly, the Chief said:
“Kept in touch with him?”

“Seen him at a couple of class reunions, that's all. He went into analytical chemistry when I took up security work, so I wouldn't expect to. Last I heard he was a big number in it.”

“He still is,” said the Chief. “Maybe too big. That’s what we want to find out, and we’ve picked you for assignment to the case because, on the record, you should be able to approach him in a friendly way.”

“I see.” Agent George Helmfleet Jones’s face fell a trifle. “I don’t know that I would be as good as someone who was a stranger.”

The Chief lifted a cautionary hand. “It isn’t a case of betraying a friendship, and there isn’t any charge, as yet, at least. But there’s something very queer going on, and more than one government agency would like to know what it is. And Richard Mansfeld may or may not have some clue to it. Do you know what perizone is?”

Jones frowned. “One of those mould drugs, isn’t it? Good for leukemia.”

“A cure for it, and for every other type of blood disease. Also for several of the types of cancer. In fact, it marks the culmination of the progress in that direction which began back in

the '40s. Hertzberg got the Nobel Prize for it.”

Jones looked past him, through the glass wall and across the Potomac to where the afternoon rocket-jet for Europe was slowly tilting into position, waiting. It was the Chief's habit to let each part of an outline sink in slowly and be grasped before going on. He hated repeating. 4

“Unfortunately,” he said, “you don't get something for nothing, even in medicine. Perizone has a peculiar secondary effect. It releases all inhibitions. Anybody under the influence of a dose is totally incapable of refusing to answer any question that is asked them, for instance. Or if they happen to feel annoyed, they're just as likely to pick up a chair and break it over someone's head. Or if they feel cheerful, they'll sing. And they become very subject to suggestion.”

He paused again. Jones said: “In other words, the patient is completely irresponsible. I can see where a few doses of it would be a great help to the big apple of some mob who didn't

want to get in personally. Or to a shake-man, for that matter.”

The Chief’s white head nodded gravely. “That’s the point. Perizone is a dangerous drug, in spite of its value. That’s why the Federal Bureau of Medicine controls it very carefully. The regulations say that it shall be administered only in a hospital and with maximum precautions. Even the doctors allowed to prescribe it have special licenses from the Bureau, and if someone else wants to use perizone, one of these specialists has to be called in as a consultant. The restrictions aren’t generally known, because the Bureau doesn’t want people trying to steal the stuff for unauthorized purposes, and the Bureau chemists think they may work out a way to dampen these secondary effects.”

The Chief stopped again. Jones wished he hadn’t. “I should think——” he began, but the hand came up.

“Control is rendered relatively easy by the fact that the production of perizone is a very

slow and difficult process. It's a highly selective mould; won't grow on anything but the fermented sap of a tree called the Ben Franklin tree."

"Ornamental," said Jones. "We used to have one in the yard when I was a kid."

"After the mould is grown, it has to be processed," continued the Chief, "and that takes a good deal of time and rather elaborate equipment. That gives another check, at source, and the Bureau has men watching and controlling all production. In fact, there are only two firms making perizone now—Howard Chemical, out at Evansville, Indiana, and Emmett Industries of Dallas. You needn't note either; they're not important in this case."

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Jones put away the notebook he had begun to take out.

The Chief went on: "So you see, the production of perizone has been well below the demand. I say has been, because about four

months ago it began to catch up, and today it's just about an even thing.”

“Pardon,” said Jones, “but couldn't that be cyclical, or due to the disappearance of the diseases perizone is good for?”

“No,” said the Chief. “That's the first thing the people over in the Bureau of Medicine thought of. They submitted the figures to an integrator, including those of incidence of the disease over the sixty years we have accurate records for it. Integrator analysis can't give an absolutely positive result, of course, but the statistical probability is overwhelmingly against anything of the kind. On the other hand, the integrator calculates the probability of an additional source of perizone very highly.”

“I should think it would be easy to locate the source, then,” said Jones. “The doctors who use it? The retailers? The wholesalers, if there are any in the drug business?”

The Chief smiled. “Every time the Bureau has tried that, it has run into a stone wall.

Everybody who touches the stuff claims he obtains it from a perfectly legitimate source, and even if they didn't, they wouldn't admit it, because it's only a little more valuable than uranium, besides being extremely useful. And you want to remember that the personal privacy laws of '63 won't let the Bureau do too much snooping, and all the damned doctors know it. As soon as anyone starts asking questions, they simply ask what evidence there is of a violation of law, and when none can be produced, they yell 'Personal privacy' and clam up . . . Yes?"

Jones had made a movement and opened his mouth. Now he said: "I can understand how the Bureau would be worried about an extra source of perizone shedding the stuff out into general circulation instead of the controlled channels. But if that were happening, wouldn't the effect show up in general crime statistics somehow? That is, more crimes of one class or in one area?" 6

The Chief smiled. "Smart lad. The FBI thought of that, too, when the Bureau took up its

problems with them. They put that question into an integrator, too. The answer they got was that the only abnormal incidence of crime over the four-month period since perizone supply began to catch up with demand was a twenty-percent increase in swindling in the Los Angeles area. Now people may commit crimes under the influence of perizone, but swindling certainly isn't one of them. Besides, that Berghammer fortune-telling group accounts for most of the cases. What the Bureau is worried about is that we'll get a sudden, big outburst."

"Which Bureau? Medicine or FBI?"

"Both, for different reasons. Now one more thing, and you'll see why I asked you about Mansfeld. Do you know where he is now?"

"No. As I said, I only see him at class reunions."

"He's at the Braunholzer Research Institute in Geneva, New York. The connection is this: in spite of personal privacy and a general

clamming up, the Bureau people believe that if there is an additional source of perizone, it's somewhere in that region. They've graphed it off against a map and fed *that* into the integrator, too, and it seems that the supply began to catch up with the demand in a spreading circle centering somewhere around that region. Although it's fair to admit that there are indications around Evansville, too, where Howard Chemical is."

"But why pick on this Braunholzer place?"

"Because no one knows exactly what goes on there, and it's the only place in the circle indicated by the integrator about which there's any such mystery. I'll fill you in: the place was set up as a foundation by old Sebastian Braunholzer, the brewer, who had such a lot of money. About twenty years ago his only son was desperately ill with some double-jointed infection and the doctors gave him up, all but a chap named Runciman, a pathologist. He saved the kid's life at the price of cutting off one of his legs, and the story is that old Braunholzer was so grateful that he set

Runciman up in a research institute of his very own. The Bureau people tell me that since he got in there, Runciman has practically pulled the hole after him. He squeals about personal privacy every time anyone comes near the place and won't let anybody in."

"Can't they learn anything from his past record—I mean before he got the Institute?"

"What they have learned doesn't mean much. He was interested in regenerative tissue, and wrote a couple of pieces on it for the medical journals. In fact, the Bureau people say that it was by means of something like that that he saved young Braunholzer's life. The integrator rejects a calculation on the probability of his still carrying on the same line of work, on the ground that we don't have enough factors. . . Well, that's the story on the Braunholzer Research Institute, where your classmate Mansfeld works. I want you to go up there—you can be taking a little vacation—foregather with him, just hang around, and find out what you can without violating the personal privacy laws. You see, it's not a regular investigation,

just an exploratory tour. The integrator isn't by any means positive that this is the place the perizone is coming from . . . Any questions?"

Jones ran his fingers through the long haircut that was popular that fall. "As a matter of fact, yes," he said. "Isn't there any other possible place in the circle you speak of where perizone could come from?"

"Two or three, as possibilities."

"Then why so much effort on this one? And above all, what is this office doing in the case? If there's any case at all, aren't we outside it? I thought the law was very strict that Secret Service was confined to counterfeiting and guarding the President."

"It is." The Chief touched the button that opened the drawer of his desk, took out an object, and with two quick steps came around and dropped it in Jones's hand. "We're in it because of this."

It was a coin. Jones turned it over in

puzzlement, looking at the Liberty in flowing garments, marching to the right, the rising sun with its outburst of rays beneath her extended left arm, and the eagle with half-folded wings on the reverse; “1917,” he read. “Looks like one of the old Saint-Gaudens series of half dollars, rather worn.”

“That’s right.”

Jones rang it on the desk top, rubbed it tentatively between his fingers, took out a pocketknife that contained a variety of tools, including a picklock, and tried to scratch the surface, then looked at the Chief.

“Seems all right to me,” he said. “Of course, I’m not a chemist——”

“It wouldn’t do you any good if you were. The chemists are agreed that the composition is perfectly right. That’s where some of the wear comes from. Also the milling is perfect, and the micromasurements on the stamping.”

“Then what makes you think there’s anything

wrong with it? Why isn't it genuine?"

For answer the Chief reached into the drawer again, produced a second coin, and tossed it over. "Here's another one."

Jones compared the two for a moment, then looked up with an expression of utter amazement. "It's reversed!" he said.

"That's right. On a real coin of that issue, the figure of Liberty is moving toward the left and so is the eagle on the reverse. It's a perfect reproduction, except that everything is turned in the opposite direction. And that coin turned up in Geneva, New York, in the hands of a bank teller who was making a collection of the half-dollar series—you know there are a good many commemoratives—and so happened to notice it. He wrote the Treasury about it asking where there was any record of reversed half dollars of 1917, and of course they called us in."

"How many more of them are there?"

The Chief brought his fist down on the desk. “Not one. We’ve had every half dollar in Geneva checked, and in several other places, and, as far as we’ve been able to find out, this specimen is absolutely unique. Yet the thing has the right amount of bullion in the right proportions, and it seems perfectly clear that it’s not hand work. I’ve had it for about a year now, trying to run down the possibilities. There’s no record of any such counterfeit in the files of the Secret Service. There has been no appearance of similar coins, as I said before. The integrator rejects any calculation on it on the basis of an error in data. That is, the damned thing can’t exist, but there it is. I finally put it on the unsolved list for Central Security. I gather that about the same time Medicine sent in their perizone problem, and when they fed the lot into their integrator, they came out with the rather remote possibility that there might be a connection—I suppose on the grounds of geographical location. So Central Security sent me over to have a conference with Medicine, and I learned about their trouble.”

“I see,” said Jones. “And as the Bureau of Medicine doesn’t have any undercover investigating service, and the FBI can’t find anything, they passed the baby to us.”

“That’s it. When you go up there, you’ll be working on three levels. Your cover story is that you’re just on a vacation. If anyone gets funny, you’re technically trying to trace the nitwit who counterfeited one single, old half dollar and made a bad job of it. But actually, you’re really looking for a source of unauthorized perizone. I suppose you’d better use your own heli, since it technically isn’t an official trip. You can get some money from Miss Brashear, and I’ll have the records show you on vacation.”

Jones ran a hand through his hair again.
“Shouldn’t I know something about this perizone and how it works?”

“Good idea. I’ll phone Medicine and have them give you a briefing. Ask for Dr. Hall. Do you want a visual or a book?”

“Visual with sound, I think. The psychs have me listed as retaining more easily that way.”

Two

George Helmfleet Jones let his helicopter down on the resilient plastic surface of the Geneva airport, observed with a frown that there weren't any line-service cars, carried his own bag over to the tower, paid his fee, and asked for a taxi. It would have to be called. The clerk behind the desk snapped off the visi-phone and in answer to the question said the Braunholzer Institute was on the hill overlooking the lake, out beyond old Hobart College, "but they don't let nobody in there, mister. They got some kind of secret experiments going on, about frogs and things. I think it's a gov'ment project about this bacterial war."

Direct assault on the citadel could wait, Jones decided. He'd first have to try to

get Dick Mansfeld out and throw a few drinks into him, which wouldn't be too hard unless Dick had changed a lot. He said: "Who runs the place, anyway?"

"I dunno." The clerk's interest evidently did not run along those lines. "Here's your taxi, mister."

The cab slid smoothly along the rubberoid street, through swirls of dead leaves from overhanging elms that were shedding the last of their summer dress, and pulled into the discharge space under the Cushing Hotel, where a neatly uniformed girl seized his bag and placed it on a conveyor. Upon grave consideration, the clerk did have a room that could be occupied for two weeks. It had a phone with a tap check and recorder. Would Mr. Jones care to have lunch sent up? It would be there almost as soon as he was.

Mr. Jones said he would take the matter up after making a couple of phone calls, and went up to a room that had a buzz in the air-conditioning machine and a faulty rim-light

that flickered for a couple of minutes after it was turned on. The bellhop accepted his quarter and said she would send someone up to fix the light; he fished out the phone directory and dialed the number of the Braunholzer Institute. A woman answered, saying that she would try to find Dr. Mansfeld, and asked who wished to speak to him, but the visi-panel remained blank.

It was a long wait, and Jones found by trying it that the switch to turn on the wall-newspaper was just out of reach when the phone cord was stretched to its fullest extent. But ultimately there was a click, the face of Dick Mansfeld appeared in brilliant color, and his voice bellowed: “George, you hairy old horse, where are you calling from?”

“The Cushing, right here in your own home town. I’m on my vacation, and I thought maybe I could persuade you to play hooky and fly over to Ithaca with me to see the Oregon game.”

11

“I’d love it, but . . . wait a minute.” The face

disappeared from the plate, and there was another pause, at the end of which Mansfeld's voice suddenly spoke without any visual accompaniment. "Look, George, I made a date with one of the technicians here to go over to her place and watch the game on video. I've just been talking to her, and she'd be awfully glad to have you come along and furnish some real expert criticism. How about it? We'll be a lot more comfortable sitting there with glasses in our hands, than up in the stands drinking out of a bottle."

Jones considered rapidly. Two of them, and one a woman; he could probably get in a good preliminary survey. "Okay," he said. "Shall I come around and meet you?"

"Don't bother. We can go right to her place. The address is 318 Schuyler Street, apartment 8-B. Got it? Name on the door's Taliaferro. I'll be there about 14:30. What do you think? Are we going to take those web-feet?"

"We ought to if Parker can keep from throwing those passes away . . . Okay, I'll see you."

Jones disconnected, picked up the house phone, ordered lunch, and, on second thought, a bottle of whiskey to take along, and sat down to contemplate the newspaper until it was time to go. The Cubans were threatening withdrawal from the Caribbean Union, there had been a jet crash in Nebraska, Harvard was expected to win over Michigan, and the lunch was an excellent lake trout that left him still feeling a sensation of well-being when he climbed into the taxi an hour and a half later.

Three-eighteen Schuyler was one of those modern buildings with glass sun-bathing bubbles projecting from the walls like so many warts. When he pressed the button under “Taliaferro” and stood close to the visi-plate for identification, it was Dick Mansfeld’s voice that answered. “She got held up finishing an experiment, but she’ll be home any minute. Come on up.”

Mansfeld met him at the door, looking a trifle heavier than when Jones had last seen him, but abundantly cheerful. “How are you, George?” he said. “Come on in, take a

load off your feet, and tell me what brings you to our backwater? The glasses are over there. Be careful of that automatic soda gadget; it's got too much power."

Jones pumped the plunger for ice, squirted soda with the desired care, and looked around. The apartment had been decorated with a good deal of taste and care, but it looked more like a man's place than a woman's, except for the pictures. That one there was——

"Why," he said, "I had my vacation due, and I thought for once that instead of taking it in the conventional way, I'd do exactly what I wanted to. So I started by coming up here to look up a man named Leonard Marks, who has his studio over on the other side of the lake. In case you didn't know it, he's just about the best water-colorist since Winslow Homer."

"Still following the arts, eh, George," said Mansfeld. "I can't figure what ever made you take up this sleuth-hound business instead of turning into a painter."

“Not enough money in it,” said Jones. “What are you up to here, yourself? I was as surprised as anything when Cook told me you were located here at this institute. I thought you were all fixed up inventing new fabrics for Orgon.”

Mansfeld gave Jones a rather peculiar look. “If you really need a good detective in your business some time, get hold of a class secretary,” he said. “I didn’t know Cook knew about my being here. In fact, I’m still supposed to be with Orgon.”

“What’s the idea? Big-secret stuff or little-secret stuff?”

Mansfeld sipped his drink and said: “You could call it little-secret stuff, I guess, though it will be big enough if we ever work it out right. Just at present, we don’t want any governmental——”

The announcer buzzed and the red light flashed. “That must be her,” said Mansfeld. “Stand by to tackle; they’re coming through the

line.” He stepped over and pushed the door-release button. “Wait till you see our Betty-Marie. She’s my secret sorrow.”

“I don’t get it,” said Jones.

“Tell you later. Here she comes.” The outer door clicked, opened, and Jones experienced the sensation of being kicked in the pit of the stomach. The girl who came in would have stopped any show from New York to Rio de Janeiro merely by walking across the stage. Her eyes were on a level with his own, but her blond hair was piled higher. The way she walked and the shape of her legs made him think of a dancer, and her figure made him think of everything. It was in a daze that he heard Mansfeld say: “Miss Taliaferro, this is George Jones I was telling you about, the human thinking-machine of the backfield; George, this is Betty-Marie Taliaferro, the pearl of the Braunholzer Institute, and our best thinking-machine. You two ought to get along together.”

13

Jones murmured something about hoping they

would; she said: “I see you two have started guzzling without waiting for me. Why is it that all football players turn into sots in their old age?”

“It’s because women won’t pay us any attention after we quit being heroes,” said Mansfeld, and looked at his watch. “Let’s get set.”

Betty-Marie accepted the drink Mansfeld had made for her, they took their places in chairs facing the video wall, and the field at Ithaca became visible, with the two teams running through practice formations and the stands in movement. Jones said: “Are you a Cornellian or an Oregonian, Miss Taliaferro?”

“Neither. I went to Cal Tech, where they don’t have football teams, but I’m interested in it as a scientific study. The variation in the results obtained from approximately the same muscular equipment. Now if it were only really identical——”

Mansfeld said: “Sh-sh,” and then

pointed at the screen. There didn't seem to be anything particular going on, but before Jones could say anything, the rich, fruity voice of the announcer began to list the line-ups as the two teams took their places for the kickoff, and all three gave their attention to the game. Jones glanced from time to time at the lovely profile of the girl. It remained incredibly beautiful, but the more one looked at it, the colder it became, as though she were in fact the thinking-machine Dick Mansfeld had called her. Neither did she show the slightest emotion. When Parker threw a pass straight into the arms of an Oregon defender, who galloped away up the field with it, and the men groaned in unison, she merely remarked: "That was that left tackle's fault; he let that man through on the passer and he had to throw it away." When Oregon scored for the second time and the groans changed to howls of dismay, she only appealed to Jones: "Have you noticed that defensive center moves faster to his left than to his right? I think Oregon has found it out."

At half time the score was 20-0, Oregon.

Betty-Marie got up and remarked: "I observe a certain lack of cheerfulness in my guests. Mr. Jones, Dick tells me that you make an avocation of art. Do you like my pictures?"

Jones's eyes swept the room. "Very much. That Bernasco is a remarkable job. Where did you ever——" He stopped suddenly and strode across the room to where a statuette stood on a pedestal. "Why, this is Lober's Girl with Doves! I thought——"

Did he fancy it, or did he catch out of the corner of his eye a quick glance exchanged by the two? Betty-Marie said: "It's a reproduction, by a new process. A friend gave it to me."

Jones touched the statuette. "Then it's the most wonderful reproduction I've ever seen. I'd swear that was the original bronze."

Mansfeld said: "They can do some good work with those new plastics. Say, George, I wish you'd call Ithaca long-distance and tell that idiot of a coach to put in Margetsson. He can't

run and he can't tackle, but when he's in there, everybody plays their heads off."

"There are people like that," agreed Betty-Marie. "They have a kind of psycho-chemical effect on others, as though they were releasing inhibitions. I've seen the one you mean on video, and I'll bet a stop-watch timing would show the others at least a perceptible part of a second faster when he's playing. Tell me something, Mr. Jones. Do you Secret Service people find modern technical processes make it easier for counterfeiters to work or for you to catch them?"

"Catch them, I guess," said Jones. "A 15 queer bill hasn't a chance of getting past since the banks and most of the big stores put them through the automatic scanners. But the old eye is still the best. We had——" He stopped suddenly; there were too many unexplained things going on around here to let loose the story of the reversed half dollar. Not that he suspected Dick Mansfeld of anything, but experience had taught him that when there is a general atmosphere of secretiveness, it is

a good idea to keep one's own secrets.

Fortunately, a blare of band music saved him from having the unfinished sentence noticed, and a moment later the second half began. The desired Margetsson was in this time, and from the kickoff it was evident that he was making a good deal of difference. Cornell got the ball, marched down the field, and lost it on a fumble close to the Oregon goal; got it again, and moved slowly but surely to a touchdown. The Oregon counterattack picked up where it had left off in the first half, but then ground to a halt, and, just as the quarter ended, Cornell worked out another touchdown.

Both men were sitting on the edges of their chairs now, and Betty-Marie's cool comments were an annoyance. She seemed to realize it and fell silent as, with the crowd roaring from the stands, Cornell hammered its way to a third touchdown and—a tie score, for the extra point was missed. But when Oregon took the kickoff and started back up the field, the dynamic Margetsson suddenly appeared in the Oregon backfield, leaped through the air, and

snatched a pass from the fingertips of the passer and fell on it. Two minutes later Cornell had another score, and thirty seconds after that, two wild men were embracing each other in Betty-Marie's living room. She surveyed the scene calmly.

“The interesting thing about it to me is that he used to be an invalid,” she said. “When he was here——”

“To hell with that!” cried Mansfeld. “That was the greatest old play ever made in football. We're going out and tell the town about it. Want to come along, Betty-Marie?”

She shook her head. “It's all over, isn't it? Besides, I have some work to do tonight. That latest issue of *Wissenschaftliche Zeitung* has an article on Riemann math with some formulas I want to check.”

Three

Dick Mansfeld settled back, emitted a totally unashamed belch, and said: “I vote that after a dinner like that we start the evening drinking with a couple of brandies. We’ll need ’em if the chorus in this joint is going to look like anything but what they are—which is a bunch of babes who couldn’t make the grade on the High Air circuit and ended up in a country roadhouse.”

Jones wiggled his fingers at the waiter, ordered the brandies, complimented him on the pheasant with truffle stuffing, received the information that the birds were flown in daily by auto-jet from North Dakota and their contents from Paris, and turned to his companion. “I should say so,” he said. “After looking at that specimen from your lab, I won’t

be satisfied with anything less than Miss America. I couldn't keep my eyes off her."

"Nobody can," said Mansfeld. "Don't mention it; it makes me gloomy, and this is an occasion of rejoicing. I can't get to first base with her, and neither can anyone else."

"Betty-Marie Taliaferro," said Jones. "From the name you'd expect her to be a sweet little southern nothing."

"Instead of which she has a Ph.D. from Cal Tech, and eats the higher mathematics of electrical quanta for breakfast. You'd be surprised at some of the things she's done. Even old Runciman can't compare with her, though his field's mainly pathology. The trouble with her as a person is that she has so much in the way of looks and intelligence that there just isn't anything she wants except things that she has to work hard to get. Men don't come in that class—for her."

"I suppose not," said Jones. "By the way, didn't she say something about Margetsson

having been at your institute at one time?”

“I think he was there,” said Mansfield. “Had some obscure disease that he picked up in the tropics during a summer vacation. Runciman heard of it and offered to take the case on because he was interested, I believe. But it was over in pathology, and I don’t know the details . . . Here we go.”

The lights in the night club changed to the penetrating shade known as X-ray blue, and a syrupy voice announced that the guests of Reeder’s Rest were about to witness that incomparable artist, Laraine Medalie, and her snow-girls, fresh from an engagement in Caracas, Venezuela. The orchestra slid into the strains of “Bonbon”; the incomparable Laraine appeared in the center of the ceiling, in what seemed to be a cellophane wrapper, and was swung slowly to the floor as the snow-girls came pattering out in exiguous costumes of white rabbit fur. 17

“How do they do it?” asked Jones. “I can never figure it out.”

“You mean bringing her in like that?” said Mansfield. “It’s the stuff the wires they swing her on is made of, protapon. Has the quality of bending blue light, so a narrow object made of it is simply invisible. That’s what we researchers do—work our heads off on one of the most important discoveries in years so that a night club can have a new effect.”

The incomparable Laraine was swaying slowly to and fro in the paces of what was evidently going to end as a strip tease, while the orchestra worked itself into a fever and the snow-girls tossed balls of cotton at the guests. At a table at one side of that occupied by the two friends, a man caught one of the artificial snowballs neatly, tossed it back at the star dancer, and scored a direct hit, which she rewarded by blowing him a kiss. Then the man waved a hand at Mansfield.

“Seems to know you,” observed Jones, “and her, too, for that matter.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” said Mansfield. “That’s Everett Benson. He probably knows

every unattached female within a hundred miles of the place, and some of the attached ones.”

“Did you say Everett Benson?” said Jones, taking his eyes off the strip-teaser for a moment.

“Yes. Why? You know him?”

“No. Only—how do you happen to, if you don’t mind a question?”

“Why, he’s our accountant and general financial wizard at the Institute. Good man, too, I would say. Been with us a little over a year, and even if he does spend his nights chasing another kind of figures, I gather he does a pretty good job with those he handles in the daytime.”

18

“Who’s the big guy at his table, the one with the dark face?”

“Some hot-rod banker from New York. Named Di Paduano, I believe. Benson has more

financial deals going on than the Secretary of the Treasury, and some of these money men are always around. You wouldn't think it, just being here at the Institute, but he operates on his own, too."

The incomparable Laraine ended her act to a whoop from the brasses, the audience pattered its applause, and a waiter came hurrying over to take orders for the renewal of drinks; Mansfeld said: "Two scotch and sodas."

"Let me skip this one," said Jones.

"Hey, what do you mean? You can't do that! We're celebrating!"

"I know. But the food took the edge off those drinks we had before dinner, and I don't feel quite like building a new foundation. Is your friends Benson giving us the come-on?"

"Huh?" said Mansfeld. "Yes, I guess he is. Let's go over and see what he wants."

Everett Benson proved to be a thin-faced man

in the early thirties, who accepted the introduction to Jones with effusive enthusiasm and invited them to join him. “I’m all alone for the time being,” he said, “but I don’t expect to be long. In fact, I have sort of date with a couple of the performers after the next show, and I think I could get hold of another if you want to join us. My heli’s outside.”

“Come on,” said Mansfeld, “make the right finish to a big evening.”

“No, I don’t think I will,” said Jones. “Those drinks made me a little bit groggy, and I’m tired anyway. You go ahead, Dick, and I’ll slide back to the hotel. I want to get up in time to catch Marks at his studio in the morning. He’s an early bird, and he’s likely to be out in the field, sketching.”

“Okay,” said Mansfeld. “Ring me up if you need a guide to our beautiful city.” He turned to Benson: “He’s just encountered our Betty-Marie, and is taking the shock hard.”

All three laughed, and Jones threaded

his way among the tables to the door. In his room, the recorder over the phone had its red light on. He cut in the instrument, checked it to see that the message had not been tapped, and listened: “Mr. Jones,” it said metallically, “will you please call Mr. McAllister at once, no matter how late you come in? Mr. Jones, will you——”

Jones cut it off and looked at his watch—21:37; that was not too late, especially in view of the fact that Mr. McAllister, which was the name the Chief was currently using for communication with agents in the field, had something so urgent that he was willing to be pulled out of bed for it. He dialed the connection with Washington, then the Chief’s private home number, and said: “Jones calling Mr. McAllister, from Geneva, New York.”

“Put on your visi,” said the voice at the other end. “I’m going to give you a visi-flash, in case anyone should come into the room where you are. Any taps?”

“No, I checked. Let her come.”

The Chief's face flashed into momentary definition, a row of books behind it, then winked out. "Okay," said Jones, "I have you. What's the story?"

"Central Security has picked up another item in the complex you're working on. They got some unsolved items from the Treasury Department today and, in making the run through the integrator, it came up with a fairly high probability that one of them is connected with the case you're working on. The Braunholzer family withdrew its financial support from the Institute a little over five months ago, very quietly."

"For God's sake, why?"

"We're trying to find out, specifically. But I don't think it will get us much of anywhere. The old man is dead, you know, and the two sons seem to feel there are better uses for money than supporting a place like that. Treasury wouldn't even have turned it in, except that the sons seemed quite willing to pay the extra income tax."

Jones said: “That would give a reason for the Institute to be making perizone, if it is making perizone.”

“That’s what I thought. But if they are making it, how the devil are they getting it into the buyers’ hands without leaving any traces?” 20

“I think I have a lead on that. Everybody here is very cagey. Mansfeld won’t say a word about what he’s doing, they won’t let anyone into the plant, but I think it’s very significant that Everett Benson is their chief accountant.”

“Who?”

“Everett Benson. That’s right, you wouldn’t know, you were in South America when the Tolschuss case broke. I was working on it because it was suspected that Tolschuss was paying for some of his shipments with Belgian money counterfeited in this country. Look him up, will you, Mr.—McAllister. This Benson—every time we turned around in that case, we ran into him. Lovely character. Makes a

business of industrial espionage and underhand deals of every possible kind. The FBI has a file on him, but he usually stays inside the law or handles things so that nobody can start a prosecution against him without letting loose something on themselves. He's a free lance, and it might pay to see what his last connection was, if you can find out."

"Do you think it's worth asking for an integrator reading on the probabilities resulting from his connection with this business?"

"I'd rather not just yet, sir. I think I'm going to get enough more to make it really important. But I tell you what I would like. I'd like to have you send on someone else and put a tail on Benson. Apparently he spends most of his time chasing women, but that's been used as a cover before, and I think we might get something."

The phone gurked a couple of times, indicating that the Chief was considering the idea. Then: "All right, I'll send you Schneidermann."

“Fine. I’d rather have him than anyone. He’s the most invisible person I ever saw, but warn him that this Benson is a slick article. My room number here is 1221. Tell Schneidermann to leave a record for me if he picks up anything.”

“I’ll do that. Anything else?”

Jones said: “Yes, there is. I don’t know how it fits in any more than the wrong-way half dollar, but at school they always taught us that when you’re working on a case anything that seems abnormal needs to be followed up.”

21

“What’s abnormal this time?”

“I was at a girl’s apartment this afternoon, watching the Cornell-Oregon game on the video. She seems to be quite an art connoisseur, and I’ll swear I saw Lober’s Girl with Doves in her living room.”

“You’ll have to explain. The only art I know about is boxing.”

“Sir, it’s one of the most famous small bronzes in existence. Worth almost any amount of money. She said it was a reproduction, but I think I know enough about small bronzes to offer a bet that this is the real thing.”

The Chief’s chuckle came over the phone. “You’re getting a little far ahead, aren’t you, Jones? Suppose this girl is an art thief or connected with one. What has it got to do with your case?”

“A lot. She’s an unusual girl. Her name’s Betty-Marie Taliaferro, and aside from a figure that would put your eyes out, she has a Ph.D. from Cal Tech, and is a technician at the Institute, specializing in the higher mathematics of electrical reactions.”

“Oh.” There was a pause. “You want her looked up?”

“Might be worth while. More food for the integrator, when we get to that stage. But I don’t think we’ll get much along that line. What I would like to see done, though, is have

Lober's Girl with Doves looked up. If you can find out what museum it belongs in and whether it's really there, it would give a starting point. Also, it might be worth-while to get a report on recent new methods of reproducing small bronzes, and how accurate they are. I suppose someone over at the Mellon gallery could work that up without too much trouble."

"All right, I'll take care of that. Anything else?"

"No, I guess that's the batch, sir. I've only begun and I've got to spend tomorrow morning looking up a painter here, because that's my cover. There were a couple of little incidents of conversation between Mansfeld and this Miss Taliaferro, but nothing I could make a point of. I'll put my view on a record and ship it off to you by auto-jet. You have the record on this conversation, haven't you, sir?"

22

"Yes, that's taken care of. All right, then, good night and good luck."

Four

There was a record in the machine. George Helmfleet Jones checked it for taps and learned that Mr. Abe Schneidermann was visiting his cousin Pincus on Madison Street and had some aquatints from France which he would like to show to Mr. Jones, if he could drop in before noon. Jones was doubtful about the cousin Pincus, and had no confidence whatever in the existence of the aquatints, but he obediently called up and canceled his appointment for the morning with Leonard Marks, and while he was about it, ordered a cab for 9:30. After ten days, the cover story of a vacation spent looking up a single artist was wearing decidedly thin, and it was time to be getting somewhere.

To be sure, he had been around to the local

police force and planted his secondary story that he was interested in the reversed half dollar, but it was by no means certain that Moran would leak the news into quarters where it would do good, and of the half dollar itself there was no trace. It had just been there as though it dropped out of nowhere. The investigation was stone-walled.

And so, for that matter, was any attempt to obtain light on the inner workings of the Braunholzer Research Institute. Dick Mansfeld was friendly, but uncommunicative as before; simply would not talk about his work. The Washington end, stirred by Jones's memory that Betty-Marie Taliaferro had mentioned Margetsson being at the Institute, looked that up and came back with a report that made the whole thing more obscure than ever. The Cornell football star had indeed picked up an infection, mysteriously known as *periasis aurea*, which caused his finger-and toe-nails to turn yellow and drop off. There were only about six cases of it known previously in medical history. Interviewed at Ithaca by one of the FBI men, Margetsson said

simply that after two or three doctors gave up on the case, Dr. Runciman had invited him to the Institute for treatment, kept him in a private hospital room, subjected him twice a day to the emanations of what looked like an X-ray machine, and put some stuff on his hands and feet, which thereupon healed up. The X-ray machine didn't look quite like any of the pictures shown him by the agent. Margetsson was unable to say precisely what the difference was.

Washington also reported that, in spite of the cutting off of the Braunholzer funds, the bank account of the Institute appeared to be in a flourishing condition. Lober's Girl with Doves belonged to the Klett Art Museum in New York and, after a trip around the country as part of a traveling exhibit, was back there, on exhibition daily and unquestionably genuine. The Mellon gallery knew of nothing especially new in reproduction methods since the so-called "metal plastics" came in, in 1986. Betty-Marie Taliaferro had no suspicion of a police record or connection with art thieves.

Nor had she any further connection with George H. Jones. Over the phone she had declined his two attempts to date her, calmly, pleasantly, giving the impression that she held nothing against him personally, but just wasn't interested in dates, and at the same time looking good enough to eat, in the visi-panel. When Mansfeld heard of it, he merely laughed a comment that this was standard operating procedure with Betty-Marie; the only man she had ever been known to date was old Professor Strybczenin, who worked out the formula for the temperatures and pressures at the interior of variable stars.

It was a stone wall; and Jones was still wondering, as he finished his breakfast the next morning and prepared to go meet Schneidermann, whether he ought not to throw up the whole deal and ask that the ascertained facts be put back through the integrator. It would entail the loss of a certain number of the points officially credited for the solution of cases, and by that much, delay his promotion, but that would be better than having the case taken out of his hands.

He was still thinking along these lines when the taxi pulled up at the address on Madison. It was one of the old semi-dymaxion buildings, in which two panes had been broken and the gaps covered with quick-hardening plastic; the curtains were all drawn. Schneidermann himself came to the door in his shirt sleeves, accompanied by a wave of heat that reminded Jones of Abe's preference for small rooms and lots of heat, which was probably some kind of compensation to the best shadower in the department, who frequently had to spend twenty-four hours on end outdoors and in the cold.

24

“Come in, George, come in, and don't stand there letting all the freezing in,” said the shadower, and led the way in to a rather disreputably furnished living room. “Yi, yi, what a business you got me into. You want some coffee, maybe?”

“Yes, I'll take a cup if you do,” said Jones, and looking at the two doors that led out of the place, he added, “About those acquaints——”

“It’s all right, there is nobody being home,” said Schneidermann, and bustled through one of the doors to return in a moment with a chipped plastic tray on which reposed self-heating cups of the liquid with cream and sugar. He pushed one across to Jones, took the other himself, and sat down.

“You got time?” he said. “On account of that is what this takes.”

“Fire away,” said Jones. “I haven’t got a thing on this case yet.”

“Something I got,” said the other, “only maybe you have to tell me what it is.” He was small and stoop-shouldered, and as he pulled a battered notebook from his pocket, Jones remembered that he preferred that method to putting his observations on record, like any sensible man.

“On the twenty-seventh of October, in accordance with directive——”
Schneidermann began to read in a stilted voice.

“Lay off it, Abe,” said Jones briefly. “You’re not in a courtroom now. Just tell me what happened.”

Schneidermann grinned. “Okay, so we are going faster. When I got off the heli 25 here, I think maybe the best way with this Benson is pick him up where he lives and not ask for him. So he has an address in the phone book, it’s at 521 Onondaga Street, and I go out there and it looks good, it’s one of those little singles, and there’s a big double across the street with some hedges that will give me good cover. But this Benson don’t come home at all that night, so in the morning I got to pick him up at the Institute. You been out there?”

Jones shook his head.

“Okay, then. It’s got three or four buildings, all bunched together. The middle one is three stories tall and has glass walls with balconies, so I figure that’s the hospital unit they tell me about in the briefing, only it ain’t in use, because there ain’t no lights on and nobody moving around inside.”

Jones stirred. “That’s a point for the integrator, if we have to put this case in.”

Schneidermann made a mark on his notes and went on: “The building east of it is smaller, and it’s some kind of laboratory.”

“How do you know?”

“Because it’s got a big transformer station right next to it, and cables going in. Over on the other side of the hospital unit is a building, I don’t know what it is, it looks something like the laboratory, only the windows have been filled up to make it solid. I think there’s another building behind that, but I couldn’t get around on that side. The grounds go way back there, and there’s a big wall of trees behind the outer fence and the buildings. There’s a concrete walk between the laboratory and the closed-up building, only it ain’t a walk. They use it for those little electric trucks. I seen them make eleven trips the first day I was watching the place, and eighteen trips the second. They were all closed in.”

Jones said: “I think maybe that description had better go to the integrator, too.”

“I got it. All around the place they got a 26 wire fence, maybe two meters high. I think it’s warning wire, so I ain’t touching it, see? And maybe I’m not so dumb about that, because when the people begin to come, they go up to the gate in the fence and shove some kind of a identification in the check box on the gate and it opens automatic. You want I should crack the box?”

“I don’t think things have got that far yet,” said Jones. “And besides, they’ll probably have the buildings inside the gate covered. But I would like to hear about the people that went in.”

Schneidermann fluttered over a couple of pages. “I got it here. There was an old stiff with white hair, five feet eight, B-1 ears, X-5 nose, walk type 32c.”

“That’s Dr. Runciman.”

“Then there’s a big guy, five feet eleven, A-2

ears, Y-1 nose, walk type 21-d; dark complexion.”

“Don’t know him at all. If we get enough on Benson, you might tail him for a while—long enough to find out who he is.”

Schneidermann made a face. “That ain’t easy. He knows his potatoes. After I’m there for a couple of hours, he comes out and puts the run on me, and says if I don’t cut it out hanging around, he’ll turn me in for violation of personal privacy.”

“That’s the chance we have to take in this business. Go on.”

“Okay. Then there’s another big guy, medium brown hair, B-3 ears, Y-2 nose——”

“I know him. That’s Dick Mansfeld. You can skip him, and also the dazzling blonde. Who else?”

“That was all I made going in. There must be some others that live there all the time. I

noticed some of them going around, but they're so far away I couldn't get a type description before the big guy I told you about put the run on me. I made Benson going in; I had a picture of him to work from."

"What time did he get there?"

"Early, about 9:30, looking like he just 27 walked out of a tailor shop. The place sits by itself, so after I got shagged, I had to haul off to a fresh-fish stand they got along the road and cover it from there. I hire a car from one of those services and I got it stashed a couple hundred meters down, with the hood up, as though something went wrong and I was away to get help, figuring I'll have time to get in it and tail this bird whenever he comes out, see? It turns out that's a yuld play, I'm inhaling my second bowl of fish chowder when all of a sudden a heli takes off from inside the grounds, and when I can get my glass on it, I see Benson is inside. So I beat it out to the car, but like I said it's a hired heap, and the only kind of radar it's got is one of those anti-collision ground-service jobs. I get in the car

in the ditch with the front wheels up, though, and tail him enough to find out that he goes just south of Seneca Falls, so I put it down on the map this way to see where he maybe comes down.”

Schneidermann rose and produced a map of New York and New England with a black line drawn across it. Jones followed it. “It looks as though Syracuse was the only important place on that line until you hit the Atlantic ocean,” he said.

“That’s the way I figure,” said Schneidermann. “And this Benson used to work for Howard Chemical. And Howard Chemical has a warehouse in Syracuse. Nu?”

“Also some of this extra perizone seems to be coming from Howard Chemical,” remarked Jones thoughtfully. “You don’t need to be an integrator to figure out that the possibilities of a connection are fairly high. I see what you mean. Go on; when did you pick him up again?”

“I figure I don’t get nothing more out of this Institute that day, so I come back here and knock off a little sleep, and then go out to where he lives to put him to bed. Only he don’t go to bed. He comes home about 16:30, spends maybe an hour in the house and comes out all dolled up. Then he goes downtown to the Old Vienna and hangs around there for a couple of hours. I cased the joint and then made it; he was sitting in the back, drinking beer with this doll that came in. You want her description?”

“I don’t think so. Is she important?”

“Chorus stuff. After a while, they have dinner there, then they go on the town. I think the two of them must of made every night club around here between then and three o’clock in the morning, when he takes her home with him. Then I figure I’ve put him to bed all right, and go home myself, and that’s the second yuld play I make. George, if anybody ever tells you I’m a good tail, hit them on the back of the neck. I stink.”

Jones smiled. “I don’t think so. But what happened?”

“What happens is this,” said 28
Schneidermann. “When I go back there in the morning, the place looks empty, and by God it is empty. I cased it. So I get in my car and go out to that fish joint again, and me and the guy that runs it are like this by this time, so I ask him if my friend has gone by like every day, and give him a kind of description of Benson. He says he don’t think so, this Benson don’t come through every day, and then we get to shooting the breeze about the Institute, and he comes along with another line that doesn’t figure.”

“About Benson, you mean?” asked Jones.

“No, about the Institute. He says there are three of those guys that live in, and they’re triplets, and two of them are wacks.”

Jones frowned. “You can mark that for submission to the integrator, all right, but I think I’d put an ‘if true’ on it. I can’t imagine

the Institute doing serious scientific work with the help of assistants who have some of their buttons missing. Did you follow the matter up?”

“Not then.” Schneidermann consulted his notes. “I come back here and get some more sleep, because I can see I’m going to need it. Toward evening I go back to Benson’s place. He comes home at 18:05, and it’s the same routine as the day before, only this time he meets a dame in the lobby of the Beardsley Hotel, and she ain’t chorus stuff at all, but real class. They go into the cocktail bar, and after about an hour they come out and go to a place called Reeder’s Rest for dinner. It’s a roadhouse——”

“I’ve been there,” said Jones.

“Okay. After dinner he takes her home with him again. They come out at 23:42, and he drives her to a big house at 184 Bailey Avenue. We can follow that up, but I don’t think it will get us anything, because I been tailing this bird for over a week now, and I see

him pull the same with five different women, one of them twicet. George, the way I figure it is this: this bird is connected with that perizone racket, and he's slipping mickeys of it to these women to make them willing."

"It could be," said Jones. "Probably is. 29
Nice guy. That's one of the reasons why the Bureau of Medicine wants to keep the stuff under control, dammit. Go on."

"Okay. This night Benson comes right home and goes to bed. Instead of leaving him there, I figure I'll stay with it, so I cover the place all night. But he don't do nothing except come out in the morning and go down to the Institute. That night he don't have no date, but the next night he does, and so I cover him again. The dame he's with comes out about three o'clock in the morning. At 6:35 Benson himself comes out and gets in his heap. There ain't much traffic, so I give him a good lead, and he takes me right along out of town southwest to a place named Benton Center." He indicated on the map. "About two miles beyond town, he turns off up a side road. I go past, stash the

heap, and come back on foot. It ain't so good as tailing in the city where you got plenty of cover, so it takes me time to work up near the place where he goes, but he don't come back, so I take my time. It's a real old house with a lot of business around it, painted green and with low windows. From the hideout I was in I can see people moving around inside, but I can't make out who; anyway, one of them has to be Benson because his heap is still out back. George, he spends all day there, not leaving until it's 16:20, when it's time for him to get back for his date with some dame. I figure I got enough on that routine, and it's more important to find out what goes on there, so I stay. About 18:20, just when it's beginning to get dark and the lights are on in the house, someone comes out, walks around it, goes to pick some of them red flowers in the garden in the back and goes back in. And George, you can fry me for a flounder if it ain't that blonde from the Institute!"

"What!" said Jones.

"Like I say. I couldn't miss, George. Five feet

nine, B-2 ears, X-4 nose, walk type 24-e. You know me, George; I couldn't miss on that."

"But what would she be doing there? She has an apartment in town and goes to the Institute every day."

"You got me. The only way I figure it, maybe this Benson fixed her up with some of this perizone bug-juice and got her out there."

Jones got up and began to pace the floor. 30
"It still doesn't fit," he said. "I've met Miss Taliaferro. She's an extremely capable scientist, and I think it would be next to impossible to dose her with the stuff without her knowledge and consent. And on top of that, if you were briefed on perizone, you remember it makes people susceptible to suggestion. I've called her up twice and asked for dates, and she turned me down. Never mind how good I am, but if she were abnormally open to suggestions, she couldn't have helped taking me up on it."

Schneidermann spread his hands. "So?" he

said.

Jones whirled. “Where’s Benson today?”

“At the Institute.”

“Pick him up and don’t lose him. I think you’d better hire a heli, so that if he takes any more air trips, we’ll know just where he’s going. Also you better drop in at the post office and have a stop put on his mail. They won’t like it on account of personal privacy, but they’ll do it for our branch if you tell them it’s a counterfeiting case. Me, I’m going out to that house at Benton Center. Mark it on the map, will you?”

Five

The heli tilted gently, and with the vanes revolving but without power, settled amiably into a field filled with the stumps of cornstalks. George Jones swung round in his seat, lifted off the cap of the access block, unscrewed the end of the fuel feed line, thoughtfully inserted a small piece of paper, and screwed it up again. He considered his hands, decided it would look better if they showed signs of having toiled and toiled in vain, opened the door, and climbed out into mud that squished around his shoes. There were bushes and a ditch at the edge of the road, which was old-fashioned concrete, not rubberoid.

The line of trees to the right and ahead evidently marked the side road, and the

house would be over the lip of that rise. Fortunately for the story he meant to offer, there were no other buildings in sight except a structure in temporary plastic at the base of the field, obviously a barn. Jones hesitated for a minute or two, as though in indecision, for the benefit of anyone who just might happen to be watching, and then began to trudge.

The entrance to the side road held a mailbox, on which the letters “P. Hor . . .” alone remained legible. This road was not even concreted, and the shrubs which lined its edges under the trees had run wild from lack of care. The house was just beyond the edge of the hill; one story with an attic and projecting wings, across the road from a disreputable-looking permanent barn. There was an extraordinary complex video aerial; it struck him that it would pick up programs all the way to China.

Around the house the forces of decay had been arrested; the browning grass was neatly clipped and there was a flower bed holding late zinnias and asters. As he stepped up to the

door, Jones noticed that a quite modern visi-plate had been let into the wall above the bell. He stationed himself in front of it and pushed.

“What is it?” said a feminine voice.

“I’d like to borrow the use of your phone if I can,” said Jones. “My heli gave out over that field just beyond the entrance to your road.” He held up his hands in confirmation.

“But I haven’t . . . Oh.”

There was a step inside, the door was flung open, and he was looking at Betty-Marie Taliaferro.

“Why, Miss Taliaferro!” said Jones. “I didn’t expect——”

The lovely eyebrows moved up a trifle. “I’m afraid there’s some mistake,” she said. “My name isn’t Taliaferro. But won’t you come in?”

She led the way through a little hall to a long living room. Jones’s trained eyes took in the

details rapidly; a video wall with the necessary dials, and a couple of molded chairs set to face it; in the rear wall, on both sides of a door, racks and racks of recording tapes; facing it, between the windows, racks and racks of books; magazines on the low table between the chairs that looked at the video wall.

She turned. "I'm afraid I don't have a radiophone," she said. "I'm only here temporarily. The other kind is over there. Do you know how to operate it?"

32

The assumption that he might not struck him as a trifle odd. "I think so," he smiled, watching her as he picked up the instrument and began to dial the number of his hotel. She must, she must be Betty-Marie; in every detail she corresponded precisely to the systematic type-description portrait he had been so carefully trained to memorize, and yet—and yet—there was something indefinably wrong.

"Hello," he said. "This is George Jones, of Room 1221. I was out for a flight in my heli

and it's developed a bellyache I can't seem to fix. Do you suppose you could have someone come out and pick me up? . . . What? . . . Well, how about having a mechanic come out in a car, then? . . . I'll find out."

He turned toward the girl, who had remained on her feet and was staring at him with what struck him as a rather peculiar intensity.

"Where is this place, anyway?"

"The old Horan place, two miles south of Benton Center," she said.

He repeated the information, adding: "The heli's in a cornfield, near the road that goes up to the place. You can't miss it; an old concrete road. Yes, I'll wait."

He hung up the instrument and turned around. "They say they'll be here in a couple of hours, which probably means three. Those garage jockeys don't like to hurry along roads that aren't rubberoid. Well, thanks."

He turned. The girl said: "Why not wait here

instead of going back to your machine? I like you.”

Jones experienced a sense of almost physical shock. No, this can't be perizone, he thought; I haven't made any suggestions, at least verbally, and I don't think telepathy could account for it. And that “I like you” . . .

“Thanks,” he said, “it might be chilly out in that field at that. I didn't have any power so I couldn't use the phone in the heli. Have you got a place where I could wash up?”

She indicated the door at the back. “Through there and turn left. There are towels.”

The bathroom was filled with the feminine oddments one might expect, no sign of male occupancy, even of the most temporary kind. It occurred to Jones that if Everett Benson was maintaining this place as a love nest he was certainly taking pains to conceal his own connection with it—which didn't seem to be much in accord with his usual habits.

When he returned to the living room, she had swung the chairs away from the video wall to look out over the valley, and dropped the magazine she was reading. He noticed it was *Mathematical Abstracts*.

The girl said: “I so seldom see anybody here that it’s a real pleasure to talk to a live person. But if we’re going to like each other, we had better be introduced. I’m Angela Benson.”

He noticed simultaneously that she was offering the cigarette box with her left hand, and that it didn’t have any wedding ring on it. So that was the explanation—a sister, probably. But why . . . ?

“I’m George Helmfleet Jones, of Washington,” he said, “up in this country for a vacation, and to look over some of your local artists. Did you ever hear of Leonard Marks?”

The book sticking out from under *Mathematical Abstracts* was *Modern Practical Etiquette*, and that was a little odd, too. She said: “The water-colorist? I should

say so. Wasn't there a video of one of his exhibitions recently?"

"Was there? I didn't see it."

She frowned. "Perhaps it was in one of the recordings. I know I've seen his pictures somewhere recently. There's so much to remember."

Curiouser and curiouser, thought Jones. He said: "You have quite a library of them."

"I have to. And all the books I need! . . . Tell me something—are you married?"

Jones experienced another and more violent shock. "No. Why?"

"I just thought we might be married some day, if you weren't already, and might want to."

This conversation was getting completely out of hand, but the eyes were wide, candid, and innocent, the voice serious. With his head whirling, Jones said: "It's certainly not a proposition I'd reject

offhand, but you'll pardon me for saying it's not one I've received very often."

"You mean it isn't customary—oh." Her left hand flew to her mouth, her eyes were startled, and then she said rapidly: "What are you interested in besides pictures, Mr. Jones?"

No. In spite of the physical resemblance amounting almost to identity, this was certainly not the cool, the aloof Betty-Marie Taliaferro. "Oh, lots of things," he said. "Football; I used to play it while I was at Cornell. My work; I labor for the government. Music sometimes, and flying around the country in a heli, and finding queer places to camp."

She said: "I like football on the video. It's a fascinating technical performance, and I believe the results of a given game can be mathematically calculated if you put the factors into an integrator."

Jones smiled. "That's been thought of before. About eleven years ago Northwestern got itself a couple of unbeaten seasons that way

until the conference authorities got onto it. Then they broadcast what was going on, and the colleges refused to release enough data to each other for the integrators to work on. And they couldn't go prying for themselves because of personal privacy."

"But that's mostly political, isn't it?"

He stared at her. Where in the world had she been? "No. It's everything. But let's talk about you for a minute. Where have you been, and what are you doing now?"

"Oh, everywhere." She made a vague motion with her hand. "And just lately, I've been studying electronics. It's fascinating after you get through the background work."

Again, as with the football question, that puzzling, that impossible resemblance to Betty-Marie Taliaferro. "'Fraid I don't know much about that," said Jones. He looked at her, thinking how lovely she was, and suddenly there wasn't anything more to say, except the one thing he didn't want to say. "Are you a

relative of Everett Benson?” he croaked.

Her head moved slowly from side to side.
“Not that I know of,” she said. “Even though
the name is the same. Who is he?”

You beautiful, incredible liar, he thought;
now we’ll have to put a tail on you, too, 35
but I hope I don’t have the job. Why did you
have to get mixed up in this? He said: “Oh, a
chap who works at the Braunholzer Research
Institute, up in Geneva. I thought——”

Suddenly she smiled at him. “I never thought
of offering you a drink. Wasn’t that stupid of
me? What would you like? I have almost
everything.”

“I think I could do with a scotch and soda.”

While she was gone to get it, he prowled
around the room, feeling slightly savage. Why
the hell did anyone like this get mixed up with
a yegg like Benson? And what the hell did she
mean with that “I thought we might be
married” come-on? Even if Benson did

suspect he was being watched and had put her up to something, the approach was either too crude or too naive. Doubting that even an integrator could make sense out of this tangle, he glanced idly at the backs of the books. Hargraves's *Differential Variables, Quantum Mechanics and Variable Radioactivity, Piezo-electricity in Cottoids*—one might have expected those. But what was this long row of grade-school readers doing here, and that well-handled Duden, with pictures and parallel texts in German and English?

She came into the room, gracefully balancing two glasses on a tray, handed him one, lifted the other, and said: "Is it 'How' you say? How."

"How," said Jones and drank. "I think——"

He stopped, as without warning a key grated in the lock, and had a moment of panic that it might be Benson. But it wasn't. It was a tall woman, with a frozen face that might have come out of one of Grant Wood's pictures, and an accumulation of bundles in her arms.

She set the bundles down and contemplated the pair with disapproval. “Well, I must say ——” she said.

Angela Benson said: “It’s all right, Mrs. Twining. This is George Jones, and his heli broke down in the field across the road, and he’s just waiting for a mechanic to come out from Geneva and fix it.”

The tall woman was unappeased. “Mis’ 36 Angela, you know very well that the boss told you not to let anyone in here, ever. Now, like as not, he’ll blame me for it when it’s your fault entirely, and I don’t know what he’ll do.”

“I’m sorry,” said Jones. “I didn’t mean to intrude——”

“You weren’t intruding!” flashed the girl. “I asked you in, and you just came. And I asked you in because I wanted to.” She turned on Mrs. Twining. “I’ll tell him I did it, too. It just isn’t rational for him to expect me to obey all his rules and think at the same time. Now,

listen——”

Jones said: “It’s all right, and I see by the time that I’d better go anyway. That mech will be along any minute.” He downed the contents of his glass and made for the door as Mrs. Twining, with an outraged sniff, gathered up her packages and started toward the back of the house.

Angela followed him to the front door. As he put out his hand to say good-bye, she said: “I’m sorry for making that mistake, but I’ve done it now, and there’s no more use denying it than denying Dirac’s equation. If you want to marry me, I will.”

Six

The phone didn't show any face on its visipanel, but the voice that came out of it said that the store at 218 Kennedy was for sale and could be inspected any time after twelve o'clock. Jones told the voice that it must have the wrong number, received an apology, looked at his watch, switched on the light, and rolled out of bed. Abe was being supercautious in using code, but perhaps he was some place where he didn't dare use anything else; and "any time after twelve," which meant two o'clock in the morning, gave him less than an hour in which to get dressed and reach an unknown address in an unfamiliar town where there probably wouldn't be any taxis at such a time of night.

As it turned out, he did have to walk, but

Kennedy proved to be one of the water-front streets at the bottom of the hill, not too far away. A cold rain was falling; Jones turned on the heater of his plio raincoat and peered for numbers along the inadequately lighted street. Two-eighteen had a recessed entrance, in which Schneidermann was already shivering, but it was a good pick at that, because in this district and at this hour there was no one else on the street, nor was there likely to be.

“I hope you got something worth dragging me out in the rain for,” he greeted the little shadower.

“Would I be calling you if I didn’t have something?” asked Schneidermann. “I got more than that, only I don’t know yet what it means.”

“All right, let’s have it.” Being waked up, in addition to the events of the day, made Jones a trifle snappish.

“Okay, okay. Listen, it’s like this, see? I take my subject home tonight like usual, and I

wonder what dame he is going to play this time, but he don't stay in the house no time at all, he comes right out without changing his clothes and drives to the airport. I think it is a good bet that he is going to fly somewhere and I am right, only I get the heli I am renting into the air ahead of him, and have my radar on when he comes up, which is all right, as I have it on sweep so he will not know it is for him when it shows on his board, and anyway it is such a rotten evening that every other heli has its radar on also.

“He does not try to shake it off or anything as though he is suspicious of being tailed, but goes straight in the direction that will take him to Rochester if he keeps it up long enough, which I figure is very good, as he will not object if I go to Rochester, too. Now outside Rochester in the south road there is a joint called Governali's sitting up on a hill, with its own heli field behind. This joint is quite well known——”

“Not to me,” said Jones.

“This shows you live a pure life. It is known to me, as I have been there several times, and I can tell you that the place is not frequented by the kind of characters you would introduce to your sister. There is maybe even trujillo in the deal. When this Benson begins to run off line a little bit to the south, I figure that from what we know of him he is going to Governali’s, so I speed up past him, and it turns out that I am perfectly right, so maybe I am not such a ham as a tailer as I thought this morning. Anyway, when he comes in, I am already there and trying to figure out a way to put the lamp on what he does inside without going in myself, as there are altogether too many people around Governali’s who will finger me, and that will start the kind of conversation we do not wish this Benson to hear. While I am working on it a car comes up and a couple of guys with dames get out of it. One of the guys has shamus written all over him, so I take a chance on edging him aside, show him my potsy, and ask him if he’ll do me a favor. He says he’s on vacation——”

“Oh, get on with the story, will you?” said

Jones.

“Okay, okay, but remember the manual says you never can tell when a detail will be important. Anyway, he agrees to cover me, and I tip him the office on Benson, and wait around in the rain for about ten minutes, and then he comes out and tells me that Benson is very busy with a character named Socks Madden, who is strictly on the mug. This business cannot take a great deal of time, as he has hardly given me the office before Benson comes out with someone I figure must be Socks Madden. There is only one place they can be going, I figure, so once more I am in the air before Benson and on my way back to Geneva. This is the second time I am perfectly right, and I am already in a taxi at the airport by the time they come out. They drive to an apartment building at 318 Schuyler Street, and then go back to the airport without even stopping. This Madden character gets out there, but Benson turns around and goes home and I put him to bed.”

“I see,” said Jones. “Looks as though the

party's going to get rough. You know who lives at 318 Schuyler, don't you? The blonde from the Institute—Betty-Marie Taliaferro. By the way, I saw that one out at Benton Center today, and it isn't the same girl, just one enough like her to be her twin sister.”

“What do we do now?”

“I don't know yet. I think I'll call the Chief. If Socks Madden has gone back to Rochester, there can't be much planned for tonight. Suppose you go home and get some sleep, and pick up Benson again in the morning.”

“Okay. I could use some sleep.” Abe Schneidermann yawned, saluted good night under the downpour, and slipped away down the street.

39

Back at the Cushing, Jones found himself experiencing a certain curious reluctance about reporting the whole of the events of the day to Washington. It wasn't, he told himself, that he minded seeing people sent to prison or a psych laboratory as a result of his

professional actions. He never did; crooks got exactly what was coming to them, even if some of them were very charming people aside from their inability to keep some of the rules society had laid down. But he did not remember having ever met one quite so charming—and attractive—as Angela Benson. For that matter, was she a crook? Even if she had lied about not knowing Everett Benson. And what criminal act was being committed? There hadn't been a trace of one yet, unless one counted Benson's probable misuse of perizone.

And for that matter also, he couldn't believe that Angela Benson would be in on anything criminal. She knew a lot about technical subjects at least, but in every other way she was straightforward and candid—almost like a child. And she had as good as asked him to marry her on an acquaintance of a few minutes. He could do worse; a wave of something that was almost tenderness swept over him, and he sighed as he picked up the phone.

The Chief's face flashed briefly on the screen, gray hair tousled and eyes blinking with sleep.

“Sorry to bother you so late,” said Jones, “but things seem to be working to a climax here, and I’m not quite sure what action to take next.” He began by sketching Schneidermann’s report on Benson’s evening activities and his flight in the direction of Syracuse, and finished with: “I think that makes it fairly clear that perizone is being made at the Institute. But I find it hard to associate Dick Mansfeld with that kind of illegal activity, or for that matter, Miss Taliaferro. They’re both very high types, and they don’t show any of the guilt sense. You know how easy it is to spot the difference between someone who’s merely hiding something, and someone who’s hiding something damaging.”

“Yes, I know. Detective hunch; that’s why we have you people in the division. But don’t jump to conclusions. The evidence you have doesn’t mean they’re making perizone at the Institute. It might equally well work the other way. I mean Benson may be

getting perizone from Howard Chemical and the Institute be using it.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” said Jones.

“Anyway, Benson isn’t a lovable character, and it seems to me that he’s just about to pull a fast one of some kind. Schneidermann followed him over to a place called Governali’s near Rochester, this evening. He picked up a thug named Socks Madden, brought him back here, showed him the apartment house where Miss Taliaferro lives, and then sent him off again in a heli.”

“What do you make of that?”

“I don’t know quite what to make of it,” said Jones. “It would seem that Benson’s going to try something on Miss Taliaferro.”

“I agree. And he probably won’t do it firsthand, either. I suggest you shift Abe to tailing her, more as a protection than anything else.”

“You wouldn’t warn her?”

“I think not. She may be in this as deeply as Benson, though in another way. Wait a minute, though. You’re not supposed to know Abe, are you? I’ll get in touch with him from here and give him the assignment. But there’s another point that occurs to me.”

“I don’t see it, sir.”

“Something or somebody must have crowded Benson. He wouldn’t be taking the violent action that the contact with this Socks Madden indicates unless he had been worried. You’re sure he hasn’t spotted the fact that he is being tailed?”

“With Abe Schneidermann on the job? And he flew to this Rochester place straight as a string. No, I’m convinced he hasn’t spotted Abe.”

“Yet the pressure has come on him from somewhere.”

Jones suddenly remembered the American Gothic woman at the cottage. “I——” he

began, then, “I don’t know what it could be, sir.”

The Chief’s face suddenly flashed on the visi-panel again, and the keen eyes bored into his own.

41

“Do you want me to ask for an integrator reading to find out what it is?”

“I don’t think so—yet, sir. I’d hate to lose the point credit on this case.”

“I’d hate to see you lose it.” The face went out. “You’ve met Benson officially, haven’t you?”

“Yes, that was in my first report.”

“It might be worth while to follow him up on one of his nocturnal expeditions, and see if you can detect any signs of his administering perizone to his companion of the evening. I imagine the local police force will loan you a lady detective as a companion for yourself. Moran’s the chief there, isn’t he? He’s pretty

good.”

Jones said: “If I’m on that and Schneidermann is covering Miss Taliaferro, doesn’t that leave Socks Madden as a loose end?”

“It does. M-mm. I think I’ll take care of him from this end; he’ll have a record of some kind, and I’ll persuade the New York State Police to run him in for a while until the rest of this is cleared up. All clear, then?”

“Well, there’s just one other thing.” Jones found it a little difficult to get the words out.

“What is it?”

“I wonder if you could get some kind of report on Angela Benson, believed to be a relative of Everett Benson, probably sister.”

The Chief’s chuckle was distinctly audible over the phone. “I thought you were holding something out,” he said. “So that’s it! We have met the enemy and we are theirs. All right, George, I’ll get you your report and hope it’s a

good one. But hurry and break this case and gain your points, will you?”

“Why? Anything special?”

“Only slightly. Treasury wants to borrow a high-point man with good scientific background, which could be you if you crack this one. They’ve had a three million dollar robbery from one of the express rockets, and neither their own people nor the FBI can turn up a thing on it.”

42

“Haven’t I got troubles enough now?” said Jones.

“You’ll have more. Good night and good luck.”

Seven

Jones didn't sleep much during the rest of the night. The only appointment for the day was one with Leonard Marks to go see the work of a pupil of his, but that wasn't till afternoon, and he was just recovering from the groggy feeling over his third cup of coffee when one of the Cushing's girl bellhops came across the room.

“Mr. Jones? There's someone to see you in the lobby.”

Not Dick Mansfeld; he would have called. Not Abe. A wild hope and tremor filled him as he followed the girl.

It was. He saw her from clear across the lobby, and rushed toward her. “How did——”

Angela was dressed in something with straight, severe lines. “Is there some place where we can talk without anyone watching us?” she asked, and he noticed that her face was tight. “I haven’t much time, but I had to see you.”

He glanced around the lobby, thinking rapidly. “Here,” he said, and guided her round a pillar, past one of the African mimosas that had been arranged to seem to grow from the floor, and to the door of the cocktail bar, deserted at this hour. Luckily, it was unlocked; she preceded him through, and he heard the rustle of her skirts in the dark as she slid behind one of the tables. Her voice was quick and urgent.

“I must hurry,” she said. “They’re waiting for me. Listen: I’ve got to be away for a while doing some work, and perhaps you won’t be able to find me when I get back, so I want to know where I can find you.”

Jones gave her his Washington address, which she repeated. “But can’t you tell me anything more about it?”

“No—no.” She brushed aside the fingers that sought hers. “I just want you to know that I meant it, I will come and find you. Wait for me.”

“How did you find me here?”

“What a question! Didn’t you call the hotel from the house?”

He tried again. “Has it got anything to do with your brother?”

In the darkness, which was only a dimness now that one was used to it, he saw her head turn sharply. “I told you I don’t have any brothers. No, no, you mustn’t question me this way. I can’t answer.”

“Angela.”

“What is it? I must go.”

“I have the right to ask some things. You’ve given it to me.”

“No. I only promised to come back to you—if

you want me. I must go.”

She half rose behind the table, pushing against him, and he had to slide from behind the table to let her pass. But as she did so, he reached out to catch her hand and made one more effort. “Angela,” he said, “tell me one thing. Is this work connected with perizone?”

She turned to face him in the dimness. “Perizone? What is perizone? Stay here for a few minutes after I’m gone. They mustn’t know we were together.”

She twisted free and the door flashed the light of the lobby across the dark interior.

For a few moments George Jones sat with hands clasped on the table top, trying to resolve the pieces of the puzzle. She was certainly mixed up somehow with Everett Benson; the Everett Benson who had illegal supplies of perizone and who went calling on Socks Madden. And this “work” was as certainly something that she wasn’t approaching with any feeling of pleasure. She

had been genuinely upset. He felt a chill about the nature of the work; she had struck him as just naive enough to be carried along by the smooth Benson, to be used in pulling his dubious chestnuts out of the fire. And in addition there was the fact, not proved but almost certain, that he had a supply of perizone available and was quite willing to use it. Had she been dosed with it before she came? No; she had resisted his requests for information with an energy that showed she was certainly not under the influence of any drug that would weaken her will. But what ——?

There was one way to find out, and that was to get close to Benson and stay that way. It was time to call in the local forces. But by God, if Benson showed up on one of his night-club tours with Angela, there would be more than personal privacy invaded.

44

Chief Moran was a round, red-faced man, who had used a perfume with an accent of leather that morning. “Secret Service, eh?” he said,

handing back Jones's identification case after comparing the fingerprints his caller had just made with those in the metal. "All right, what can we do for you?"

"A couple of things. In the first place, have you any local record on Everett Benson, who is the accountant out at the Braunholzer Institute? I don't think you will have, but there just might be something."

"Wait a minute till I put that in the works." Moran spoke into a dictation box, and turned back. "What's your other request?"

"I want to take one of your women detectives on a tour of the night clubs in the neighborhood. Benson covers them pretty extensively, I understand, and I need someone as an excuse for tailing him there."

The chief smiled. "That ought to be a good assignment. I'll give you Madge Griffith. She puts up a good front, and will get a kick out of it. When do you want to start?"

“Can you have her ready tonight? I’m not sure of Benson’s plans, naturally, but I want to be ready in case he does make the rounds.”

“I guess so.” Moran hesitated a moment and then said: “Mind telling me what kind of a case it is? I’d be a little surprised to find any of those people from the Braunholzer shoving the queer. That’s a pretty respectable outfit, and I understand they’re well paid.”

“It’s counterfeiting,” said Jones. “Connected with that reversed half dollar that turned up here a while back.”

Moran lit a cigarette and blew smoke, as a little plastic box dropped from a chute on the desk beside him. “Here’s your dope on Benson. The only thing local is that some doctor named Rivers is suing his wife for divorce, with Benson as corespondent. That half dollar was the damn’dest thing. But we’re full of them in this town. Did you hear about our art exhibition robbery? We had a loan exhibition, from New York, out at the hall in the college. One morning the college people

came in here wringing their hands and telling us that someone had lifted about three pictures and a couple of statues from the exhibit. We rushed over there and fingerprinted everything in sight and questioned everybody, and in the middle of the police procedure, the head of the exhibit comes in to say he's very sorry, but they've just found all the missing pieces on the steps. Nobody's been able to figure out how they got there. Here's Griffith's phone number; I'll tell her you'll call her whenever you are ready."

Jones said: "Tell me something about that art robbery. When was it, and was one of the pieces Lober's statuette of the Girl with Doves?"

"About the first question, it was eight or nine months ago. About the second, I wouldn't remember. There wasn't any robbery, you see. Probably some college kids having a practical joke for themselves."

"Well, thanks anyway," said Jones, who then shook hands and left. It was still too early for

lunch, and he decided he might as well spend the time by running out to Hobart College to see whether he could obtain the answer to his question. But that was a disappointment. The professor who had charge of the art exhibit was in class and didn't want to be interrupted. Nobody else could give any details of the pseudo-robbery, except that the missing *objets d'art* had been discovered, neatly wrapped, behind a hedge of ornamental shrubbery that closely surrounded the building. The pictures were small, and so were the two pieces of sculpture.

The question of what connection this 46 might have with the statuette he had seen in Betty-Marie Taliaferro's apartment was still nagging at Jones as he stepped into his room to wash up, preparatory to lunch. The light showing a record had come in over the phone was on. He tripped the device, and the next moment was listening to:

“Washington to Agent Jones, matter of Angela Benson. FBI reports no police record, no police contact of record. Central Statistics

reports Everett Benson, born Yakima, Washington, graduate Idaho School of Business Administration, has no brothers or sisters. State reports no Angela Benson has applied for passport. Interior reports no Angela Benson has applied for government service at any time. Education reports no Angela Benson has a college record. Census designates Angela Benson of 14 Prytannia Street, New Orleans, born Baton Rouge, sixty-seven years old, maiden name Seldner, widow, no children. Please advise if this is the one you mean.”

It was an alias. Jones felt the skin drawing tight across his face. It was an alias, and she was mixed up in something, and the kind of things people use aliases to get mixed up in were usually not good. But she had been sincere, she must have been, it wouldn't have served any purpose of Benson's or her own for her to come there this morning and leave with nothing more than his Washington address. And she had promised to find him again—why? She couldn't have not meant it.

For a desperate few moments George Jones considered calling Washington back, putting the whole story on record, and asking for an integrator reading. But that wouldn't be any good either; it would only backtrack without telling him where she was now, or what was going on.

Backtrack. Of course, he should have thought of it before. It took him ten minutes to reach Leonard Marks and cancel the afternoon's appointment, and another ten to get a taxi and reach the airport. The heli needed fuel, and he couldn't get a clearance at once because so many of the local businessmen were just leaving for lunch at home. But he finally got into the air and was away for the house at Benton Center.

Schneidermann was right when he said there was "a lot of business" around the place; Jones couldn't get in close, but it wasn't a long walk anyway. There didn't seem to be any light or signs of activity inside and in any case he was not in a particularly cautious mood as he readied his palm gun and stepped

up to the door.

He stood in front of the plate and pressed the button. A metallic voice announced: “There is nobody at home. There is nobody at home. Please depress the lever at the right and leave a message. Please depress the lever at the right and leave a message.”

47

Jones pulled out the knife of many blades and hesitated. No, in spite of the age of the house, if it had a visi-plate at the door and an automatic announcer, it would probably have an electric defense against picklocks as well. He stepped off the low entry porch and went around to the side. The windows were inviting, but there would be electric defense there, too, and the back door was no better.

Wait a minute, though. Attics were not usually fitted with electric defense, and the attic of this one-story house had a small window under the sharply angled gable. The entry porch was gabled, too, but it had pillars that should not be impossible to climb. Jones stood off, took a look, and decided to risk it. He

crossed the road to the disreputable barn, which supplied a plank with a creaking protest of ancient nails, brought it back and, at the second try, succeeded in tossing it onto the roof of the entry porch. Climbing the pillar was not quite as easy as it looked, but he made it, and grasping one end of the plank, swung it hard against the tiny attic window.

The window broke with a subdued tinkle of glass inside, and there was no flash of blue fire. Several more blows were necessary to take out the shards of glass that clung to the frame, and Jones wiggled through.

It was a very neat attic, with a few boxes and plio packages carefully stacked under the eaves. At the back, a plastic bannister beside the stairs showed a renovation. The stairway led around a corner and down into a kitchen that was, if anything, neater than the attic, and the kitchen led into a dining room with an old-fashioned wooden table and four chairs. Beyond the dining room the door stood open into the living room where he had sat with Angela. The furniture

still showed the same arrangement, chairs facing out, away from the video wall, but when he glanced at the cases that had held the records, they were empty. Most of the books were gone; all of them, in fact, except the readers that had first caught his attention: an elementary arithmetic, a book on conic sections, and a history of painting. The whole living room had become as featureless as if it had been arranged by some decorator who wished to offer it for rent.

Jones stepped to the door, across the hall by which he had entered on his first visit, and through another door into a bedroom. Bed neatly made, an easy chair, another chair, and a dressing table of old design, as befitted the house, but made in modern plastic. The drawers were empty and so clean that Jones doubted whether even a dust examination would produce anything, assuming that he were to come back with legal authority to enter and the instruments to make a dust examination. A dresser here was in an equally denuded state.

At one side was a closet, also empty, except for a clothes hamper, and when he tripped its lid, that also was, as he expected, empty. Nothing. But as he turned disappointedly to leave, his foot struck the trip of the hamper, it moved, and he saw that something had slipped down behind it.

Jones bent over and pulled it up. It was a garment, a woman's jacket in bright blue Orgon fabric. And as he looked at it, memory flashed a signal that left him open-mouthed.

It was the jacket Betty-Marie Taliaferro had worn on the day of the football game.

Eight

Jones had figured on picking up Benson at his house on Onondaga Street, and seeing him installed in a bar somewhere before calling Madge Griffith, but there didn't seem to be any signs of activity around the place; as the fall twilight closed in and lights popped on in all the houses roundabout, Benson's remained resolutely black. At 20:00, Jones decided it wouldn't be fair to keep the female detective waiting any longer, and also that he'd lost Benson for the night, which was an annoyance just at this stage of the game. He made his way to the all-night automatic grocery on the corner, where there was a public phone, and dialed the number Moran had given him. A pleasant feminine voice answered.

“This is George Jones,” said the Secret

Service man. "I believe I have a date with you tonight, but the people we were going out with can't make it. Shall we make it tomorrow?"

"I'd love to," said the voice. "Are you where you can talk?"

"Well, this is a public phone——"

"Oh, then when you get a chance call your friend Mr. Moran, will you? He has a message for you."

"Thanks."

At the hotel there was a record in the box, with another request from Moran that he be called, and a number, evidently that of his home. Jones dialed it; the police chief's face appeared on the panel, ruddy, serious, and ornamented with a pipe. "Oh, hello, Jones," he said. "Say, is there another of you SS people, a guy named Schneidermann, working with you on this case?"

"Yes. Why? He been to you for help?"

“No, but one of my boys picked him up this evening in a back yard off Herkimer Street. He’d been slugged and was still unconscious. They’ve got him out at Mount Atholl hospital. I don’t think he’s in any danger, except of having a bad headache, but I thought you might want to know about it.”

“I sure do. The party’s getting rough quicker than I expected. Do you have any statement from him?”

“No, I said he was unconscious when they brought him in, and I thought anything he had to say would keep until I got in touch with you.”

Jones said: “That’s probably sound. The slugging’s a local crime, and we may need your help anyway. Want to have someone meet me at the hospital?”

“I’ll come myself. We local cops always like to see how you big numbers from Washington work over a case.” Moran chuckled amiably. “See you there in about ten minutes.”

The panel went dark and Jones, reflecting that it didn't seem to be his day to get anything to eat, called the desk for a taxi and hurried down to take it.

Moran was already at the hospital when he arrived, and Jones learned that the dark-faced detective with him was Nito Aldi, of the strong-arm squad. Aldi said he thought it sounded like a Rochester job; there were a bunch of hoods working out of that town who made a specialty of slugging people with the chemicalized gelatin bullets that leave a man unconscious for hours, and conscious but not very bright for days. The nurse who conducted them to Schneidermann's room said he had received his injections and was normal, but the doctor didn't think he ought to be moved for a couple of days yet.

Abe was leaning back in a wheel chair, with a voluminous bandage around his head. He grinned feebly as Jones came in. "Yi, yi, the things you get me into," he said. "Now it's a gelatin haircut yet."

“I’m sorry, Abe,” said Jones. “But when you play with fast boys like Benson, you sometimes catch one. How did it happen?”

“I ain’t got my notebook,” said Schneidermann, “but the best I can, I’m telling you. Last night, I’m getting some sleep like I ought to, when the Chief comes through on long-distance from Washington, and says I am to shift my tail to this blond job, Miss Taliaferro. Well, I think that is better than looking at Benson, which is a mistake I make, because Benson is not giving me no sock on the biscuit, or at least I think he isn’t. So this morning I am outside her place at 318 Schuyler, it’s one of those modern apartments, and I figure I will pick her up when she comes out to go to work. There is a blue car standing by the curb, but I don’t pay no attention to it, as there are also several other cars. Remembering what time she gets to the Institute, I have timed her leaving very well, as it is not fifteen minutes after I am there before she comes out, and she is really something to look at.

“As she comes out, one of these guys gets out of the blue car and starts to speak to her. She tries to push past him, but then another guy gets out of the blue car, and they start to stuff her into it. As this is kidnaping, which is a fed rap, even though not in our division, I start across the street to help her, but before I can get there, the lights go out, and the next thing I know, I am here. I figure they must have a third man covering them, and I walk into it.”

“That’s not very satisfactory, is it?” said Jones. “How do you suppose he got to a back yard on Herkimer Street?” He faced Moran.

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“It backs up to Schuyler. All they’d have to do is carry him down the alley past the building. A man named Walters saw him lying there in the yard when he got home from work tonight, couldn’t rouse him, and called our people.”

“There’s a dead end on that, then, but we have a kidnaping case on our hands. I think I know where to put the finger, though. Last night Everett Benson, the accountant at the Institute I

was talking to you about, flew over to Rochester, picked up a hood named Socks Madden, brought him back here, and drove to 318 Schuyler. But I didn't think they were going to work that fast. Madden flew right back to Rochester.”

“I said it was a Rochester job,” said Aldi.

“I guess you got something,” said Moran.
“Okay, Nito, let's call Rochester and put out an alarm for Madden. You might as well get a squad and raid Benson's place, too——”

“He isn't home,” said Jones. “I've been covering his place since about 17:20, and there isn't any sign of him.”

“Make the raid anyway,” said Moran. “We might pick up something. You'll probably have to get a warrant on account of personal privacy, but Graves is sitting in Magistrate's Court, and he'll give it to you on the showing of Benson's connection with Madden.”

Jones said: “There's a discordant detail. I'm

not sure we have the right picture of this case.”

“What is it?” said Moran. “Perfectly straight case of kidnaping and slugging.”

“But what’s the motive?” said Jones. “What does Benson hope to gain? Surely a man in his position wouldn’t risk trying to hold Miss Taliaferro for ransom, and if he did, who would pay it?”

Moran scratched his head. “I dunno. I’m just a local cop that likes to see somebody pulled in to tell it to the judge when they step off line. And if this Benson is in the snatch racket——”

Jones interrupted suddenly. “Something else occurs to me. Wouldn’t it be a good idea to go to Miss Taliaferro’s place and see if we can’t pick up a lead? We ought to get a three-di picture of her at least.”

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“Fine,” said Moran, rising heavily. “We ought to be doing something, anyway. Phone in that alarm from here, Nito, and we’ll go on out to

318 Schuyler.” He turned to Schneidermann.
“Don’t stop no more of those gelatin bullets.”

“Bring me back one of his ears,” said
Schneidermann, and waved a feeble hand.

The previous day’s rain had stopped and the air was filled with autumn chill as they whirled silently through the rubberoid streets to the apartment building that housed Betty-Marie Taliaferro. The outer door yielded to one of Jones’s picklocks and the elevator to another. At the door of the apartment, he paused.

“I suppose I ought to press the button just for the form of the thing,” he said, and did so.

“What the hell!” said Moran, and both men found themselves staring into the visi-plate at the image of—no, it was not Angela, it was Betty-Marie Taliaferro, and she was frowning.

“Whatever——” she began.

Of the three visitors, Jones was the first to

recover. “Something very important has come up with regard to the Institute,” he said. “Can we talk to you for a moment?”

“I suppose so, if you think it necessary.” Her voice was frigid. The face disappeared, and a moment later the door swung open.

Jones said: “This is Chief Moran of the Geneva Police and this is Detective Aldi. Miss Taliaferro.”

“I have seen Chief Moran. What is it you wanted to see me about?” She remained standing, and her voice lost none of its frigidity.

Moran said: “Weren’t you pushed into a blue car by two men in front of this building at about 8:45 this morning? Kidnaped?”

“How silly!” she said. “Of course not. At 8:45 this morning I was on my way to the Institute, and I’ve been there all day.”

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Jones said: “A detective saw the incident and

he was slugged. By the men who took you away.”

She tapped a foot dangerously. “Your detective must have been drunk, or trying to hide how he really got hurt. I never heard of such a thing. Now, if you have anything really important to say about the Institute——”

Jones glanced downward toward the moving foot, and suddenly started. “I suppose you’re asking us to go,” he said, “but we’re here as officers of the law—yes, I’m one, too—and we have one more question to ask. Would you tell us where the jacket that goes with that blue skirt is?”

Her hands went to her face. That one hit. Then: “I don’t know that it’s any business of yours where I keep my clothes. No, I won’t tell you.”

“You won’t show us the jacket? The color is really—very attractive.”

“No, I won’t show you the jacket. Or my

underwear either.” The voice held scorn.

For a moment nobody said anything. Then Moran pushed back his cap and said: “Well _____”

The lock clicked twice, and Everett Benson walked into the room.

“Hello, Betty-Marie,” he said. “Why, hello, Jones! It’s a real pleasure to see the old Cornellian again. And Chief Moran! You didn’t tell me you were having a party, Betty-Marie.”

“I’m not,” began Betty-Marie. With something like a growl in his throat, Moran said: “It’s going to be a rough party for somebody unless one or two things are cleared up, Benson. I’d like you to answer a couple of questions. For example, what do you know about Socks Madden?”

Benson’s face held only puzzlement. “Nothing. Who is he, a football player or a fighter? I don’t keep up on sports.”

Jones said: “Neither. He’s the thug you picked up at Governali’s, south of Rochester, last night, flew down here, and brought out to this building.”

“Oh, so you’re one of those April Fool
dicks with a tin star who goes around 54
with some floozy trying to work the badger
game! I thought that story about you being
interested in art was pretty phony.” He swept
the three visitors with a sneering glance. “It’s
none of your damned business what we talked
about, but just so you won’t get any queer
ideas, I’ll tell you. Madden is going into the
contracting business, and I brought him down
here to see this building because I’m thinking
of putting up one like it.”

“I said it was a Rochester job,” said Aldi.
Moran rumbled: “A minute ago you didn’t
even know him. How about that?”

Benson appealed to Betty-Marie. “Did you
invite these people here? If you didn’t, will
you please tell them they’re violating personal
privacy and can leave any time.”

Her face looked drawn and a trifle white.
“Tell them yourself,” she said, shrugged her shoulders, walked to the mantel, took a cigarette from the box there, and lit it.

“And another thing,” said Moran, “where were you at——”

At that moment memory flashed Jones another and almost incredible signal. She had lit that cigarette with her left hand. *With her left hand.* He took two steps toward the girl, poised himself, flung out an arm, and said: “Angela, I know you. Why are you doing it?”

For a two-count the room froze, then exploded into action, as simultaneously Benson’s hand came out with a palm gun and Jones’s foot went up in the swift side kick all government agents learn. There was a hiss from the gun and the cigarette box exploded in a burst of flame; Aldi dived for Benson’s knees, the accountant gave a long sighing “Ooouf!” and collapsed on the floor as Moran landed one in the pit of his stomach; and Betty-Marie-Angela was sobbing against the mantel. “I don’t care,

I don't care," she wept. "It can't be right, even if you did teach me. I won't go on with it. I want my own life."

"What is this?" asked Moran. "Keep quiet, you," said Aldi, who was sitting on Benson's stomach, and hit him hard on the side of the face.

Jones gave a wry grimace. "I don't know quite what it is," he said, "but I know it isn't Miss Taliaferro. That lug there kidnaped her, all right."

Moran bent over the prostrate man.

"Where is she?" he demanded. "No, wait a minute, Nito. Get his hands." He produced a piece of snake wire, and in two rapid motions, whipped it around Benson's wrists and clipped the seal. Aldi got up and jerked the accountant to his feet.

55

"Where is she?" demanded Moran again. "By St. Peter, if you've bumped her off——"

"She's all right," said Benson sullenly, and as

Aldi raised a hand toward the cheek already turning red: “I’ll tell you. She’s at a hide-out of Madden’s in Rochester.”

“What’s the address?” persisted Moran, and Aldi pulled back his fist again.

Benson dodged slightly and said: “Eighty-one Yates.”

“Okay, Nito,” said Moran. “Get on the phone and call Rochester—no, wait a minute, make it the State Police barracks. I think Madden has protection. I’ll take care of this goof.” He grabbed Benson by the arm and shoved him into a chair, then swung round to where Jones was helping the still-trembling girl into another chair. “If this isn’t Miss Taliaferro, who the hell is it?”

Jones looked up from his position on the arm of the chair. “That’s what I’m beginning to wonder. She says her name is Angela Benson, but according to what I got from Washington this morning, there isn’t any such person.”

The girl had put both hands to her face again and was looking down. Now she said in a low, quick voice: “There isn’t. Oh, don’t make me talk about it. I’m so frightened and ashamed.” She gave Jones one appealing glance, and he could feel her shoulder tremble slightly beneath his hand.

“Well,” said Moran, “there’s one guy that can tell us, and that’s this lug. Come on, you,” he addressed Benson, “open up. You’re already in for kidnaping, and that’s a psychiatric-hospital rap. I can maybe keep you out of the moon mines if you’ll co-operate.”

Benson seemed to be recovering in the absence of Aldi and his right hook. “You can’t send me to the moon mines, and I’m not saying a word without my lawyer,” he said.

Jones said: “I think I know a way to make him talk.” He turned to the girl: “They’re making perizone at the Institute, aren’t they?” And as she nodded, he continued: “It’s a drug which, among other things, releases all inhibitions and makes it

impossible for the patient not to accept suggestions.” He nodded toward Benson. “He’s been using it on women, and I think a little dose of it would be good for him. I’ll get Dick Mansfeld to bring some over.”

Benson followed Jones’s movements with malevolent eyes, but as Aldi had come back from his phone call he did not attempt to stir. As Jones approached him, he said: “All right, I’ll tell you what I know.”

“Make it snappy,” said Moran. “We ain’t got all night.”

“I will . . . I work for Howard Chemical. About three years ago, some of our people began to notice that the market for some of our more expensive drugs, such as hydrazone pentamide and cortexine, was dropping off to nothing. When our people looked into it, they found there wasn’t any real falling off of the market; it was just that someone was undercutting us on the price so sharply that we couldn’t meet the competition. The source was traced here, to the Braunholzer Institute, so

they put me on the job to find out how it was being done.”

“Handy to have connections with those sweet characters in Rochester, wasn’t it?” said Moran.

“Just a minute,” said Jones. “I think we’ll have Dick Mansfeld over here anyway. He ought to know about this.”

“Fine idea,” said Moran. “Call him, will you, Nito; tell him that his plant has a kidnaping case and we want him right away.” As the detective went to make the call, he said: “That was nice work, Jones, spotting her as the wrong girl. How did you do it?”

“I was at Angela Benson’s cottage this afternoon and saw the jacket that goes with this skirt there. And she’s left-handed. I saw Miss Taliaferro only once, but that time she was holding her glass in her right hand.”

Angela shivered slightly. “That’s one of the troubles with me. I can’t——” and then

stopped.

Aldi reappeared from the phone. “Be here in five minutes,” he said.

Nine

Moran answered the door. Dick came in, said, “Hello, George,” lifted his eyebrows at Benson, who stared back in sullen silence, then said, “Hello, Betty-Marie.”

“I’m not Betty-Marie,” said the girl. “I don’t know who I am.”

Mansfeld took three steps across the room and looked her searchingly in the eyes. “Thank God!” he said. “If I’d known about this, I could—I think I could have saved you a lot of trouble, George. You were here looking up the Institute, not just for a visit, weren’t you?”

“He was that,” said Moran, “and your friend Benson, who has just become one of our better kidnapers, was telling us how he got into the

racket. Go ahead, Benson.”

Benson said: “So I came here, and Dr. Runciman looked at my references, and as I understood chemical markets, he made me accountant in charge of marketing. I very soon found out that they were producing rare chemicals, the kind that sell in very small quantity. But I couldn’t find out how they were doing it. They didn’t have a big plant, like we have at Evansville, or a lot of workers. Everything came out of that one building they call the production shed, and no one was allowed in there but Dr. Runciman and Mansfeld and Miss Taliaferro. They even took the raw materials in, and I noticed that those raw materials—some of them came from our own plant—weren’t the ones we used, but stuff like CP sulphur, and carbon black, and cylinders of oxygen and nitrogen. I finally decided that they must have found some means of building up complicated chemicals from the basic elements.”

“Just a minute,” said Jones. “Would you care to say anything about that, Dick?”

Mansfeld nodded soberly. “I suppose it’s got to come out sometime, and we’ll be under government regulation and everything. It isn’t building up, it’s copying. Runciman hit on it while he was trying to replace lost and damaged tissues. That was the purpose of the Institute originally. He had a theory, you know, that lost or damaged tissue could be regenerated, the way a lobster grows back a lost claw, if we could only find the means to do it. In fact, he still has the theory; that’s one of the reasons why he didn’t want anything to get out that would hinder this research. He was making progress and getting some remarkable cures, and the Reproducer was only a by-product.”

“The Reproducer?” asked Jones and Moran together.

“It operates in a tri-phase electronic field with adjusted variables in isomorphic proportion,” said the girl, and Jones gave her a sharp look.

“I don’t understand it myself,” Mansfeld continued. “All I know is that when there’s

something to be copied, if you put the original in one part of this field, and the chemical constituents, right to the last trace, in the other, the result will be a copy. There are little outlets, which Runciman calls ‘spinnerets,’ that weave back and forth across it, and in quite a short time, there you are. It takes a lot of electric power, though.”

“So you copied chemicals,” said Jones.

“We copied everything. We even copied a half dollar once, and I carried it around as a pocket piece for a while.”

Jones said: “That was what brought me in on the case. It was left-handed, facing the wrong way.”

Mansfeld said: “We found that out. Everything was an exact copy of what we wanted to reproduce, except that it was a mirror image. If you’ll look at that copy of Lober’s Girl with Doves you’ll see that it is, too. When the loan exhibition was here from New York, I borrowed it and that Picasso on the wall and

that Derain over there for overnight, and copied them for Betty-Marie because she liked them so much. That was where I came in, getting the chemical organization right. Sometimes there were failures because it wasn't exact. I'm not sure but the Derain is one of them. If you put it beside the original, you'll see that the yellow is paler."

"Aside from it being a mirror image," commented Jones.

"Yes. Well, as I said, Runciman was more concerned with regenerating tissue than anything else. We finally had Margetsson down here, the football player, you know. He had some disease that made his toe- and fingernails drop off, very painful, and we succeeded in furnishing him with a new set. That was the first big success in that line, and after that we went on and made a mouse. It died."

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"But you succeeded later?"

"Yes, with another mouse, and then a rabbit. It

turned out to be partly a mechanical question of getting the spinnerets in the right position, and partly a mathematical question, but mostly chemical. On the first rabbit we tried, the chemicals were all right as to proportion, but I'm afraid I made a little too much quantitatively, and we got a rabbit as big as a terrier. The poor thing ran up against the square-cube law, and it could hardly move, except to eat, and that didn't last very long because the internal muscles weren't strong enough. The second rabbit was all right for size, but there was something funny about it. It hopped and ate, and did everything else, but it didn't seem the slightest bit afraid of anything. Noises or human beings. That is, it didn't seem to have any of the normal instincts. It was after this that Dr. Runciman decided that the only way really to find out what the Reproducer was turning out was to try it on a human being."

"That was me," said Angela in a small voice.

Mansfeld shook his head. "That wasn't you, at least the first time. I made up the chemical

batch, and I ought to know. Ten thousand atoms, approximately—6,295 hydrogen——”

“Never mind the technical details,” said Jones. “What happened?”

Mansfeld said: “Nothing. That was just the point. I got the batch all ready, and set to spray through the spinnerets so the chemical combination would be right, and then left for the evening. When I came back in the morning my batch was gone. Dr. Runciman was a good deal worried about it. It’s our local mystery, and he didn’t quite dare call in the police or anything, because we’re fooling with fairly dangerous stuff, and he was afraid someone might have used the batch to reproduce a human, and there’d be someone wandering around the streets without any moral education.”

“Hmm,” said Jones, then swung to Benson: “Know anything about this, you?”

60

The accountant merely growled until Aldi

raised a hand, then said: “No, not a thing. I
_____”

“Okay, Dick,” said Jones. “Give us the rest of it.”

“Well, after that punch in the eye, Dr. Runciman gave up the idea of human reproduction for about a year. But he didn’t seem to be getting far along other lines, so he finally came back to it, using Betty-Marie for the subject, and strictly controlled conditions. Well, the experiment succeeded in a physical sense. That was you.”

Angela didn’t say anything.

Mansfeld’s voice caught a bit, but he went on: “She—or rather you—lived and walked and seemed all right aside from being left-handed, but had to be taught to do everything, even eating and dressing. Betty-Marie took care of her in the beginning.”

Angela’s forehead puckered. “I’m not sure I remember . . .” she began.

“You probably wouldn’t. You were too busy absorbing impressions at the start.” He turned to the others. “She learned things, especially about mathematics, in minutes, where anyone else would have taken hours. And then one day she simply disappeared.”

He looked at the girl, and she looked across at Benson. “Now I understand,” she said. “He told me he was my brother and had come for me. I didn’t even know what a brother was, but everyone had always been nice to me, and I thought it was all right.” Benson looked uncomfortable.

Angela continued: “He took me out to the cottage. He said he was going to teach me how to live, and gave me a lot of books and records.”

“All right, Benson,” said Moran. “Come out with it. Why did you drag her off like that?”

“I—I——” began the accountant when the phone rang. Aldi answered it and came back after a moment to say: “It’s okay.”

They've got your Miss Taliaferro safe, and Socks Madden is on State ice. Let him try to crack that one. Go on, dope, why did you drag her off?"

"Perizone," said Benson in a strangled voice, "and the Reproducer."

Jones snapped his fingers. "I get it. He couldn't help but know something about the Reproducer from hearing you people talk. So he figured that since nobody would tell him how it worked, and he couldn't understand them if they did, he'd catch Angela here 'young' enough to get her to figure it out for him."

The girl opened her mouth, then shut it again. Jones said: "Go ahead. Tell on him. He was just trying to use you."

She said: "I—think you're right. He taught me that I belonged to him, like—like a dog, and that I must do everything he said. And he showed me tri-dis and movies of Miss Taliaferro and said that when she went away I

must take her place and pretend to be her, and do everything she did, and find out all about the Reproducer.”

Mansfeld said: “I see that. When she was ‘born,’ Angela, as you call her, knew nothing, but she had all Bette-Marie’s capacities. Nice trick, Benson; all you had to do was drop out all the parts of her education that had anything to do with loyalty to Dr. Runciman or the Institute, and substitute loyalty to yourself. I suppose you even had clothes like Bette-Marie’s made for her. But you must have slipped up somewhere in the educational program.” He turned to Angela. “How did you come to doubt him?”

She looked down. “I didn’t until—until George Jones came to the cottage. I liked him and I told him that perhaps we ought to get married sometime. And then Mrs. Twining came in while he was there, and she called up Everett and told him that someone was there, and Everett got furious and said that I’d have to change places with Miss Taliaferro at once. I didn’t know he was going to kidnap her; he

told me she was part of it and was just going away.”

Jones looked sheepish, Benson looked murderous, and Mansfeld burst into a roar of laughter. He turned to the two policemen. “Do you see how Benson outsmarted himself?” he said. “Betty-Marie Taliaferro is one of the most beautiful things that ever walked across a room, but she’s about as much interested in men as a bar of soap. So Benson assumed that Angela would be the same way, and since he hadn’t too much time to educate her anyway, he left out that part of her training. Isn’t that right, Benson?”

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Benson growled, and Mansfeld went on: “But he forgot that Angela had only Betty-Marie’s capabilities, not the ideas she developed through background and years of education. So when George came along, Angela was as simple and natural as a child about it. She liked him and thought she wanted him, so she said so.”

Angela nodded, started to say something, and

then blushed instead.

“What about the perizone?” Jones asked. “You know the manufacture of it is illegal without a license?”

Mansfeld said: “I suppose we’ll have some trouble about that. You know the Braunholzer children thought it was more fun to spend money on having a good time than on a research institute. So we were left without financial support just when we most needed it, when we were looking for Betty-Marie’s duplicate and afraid of what she might do. So Benson went to Dr. Runciman and explained the perizone shortage, and how much money there would be in it, and told him it was a humanitarian thing to make it, and Runciman fell for it. Benson handled the marketing, partly through Howard Chemical, and partly direct.”

“I bet he knocked down plenty on the side, too,” said Moran. “Come on, lug.” He dragged at Benson’s bound wrists. “Nito, you bring the girl along. We’ll have to put a rap on her as an

accessory after the fact in a kidnaping, though I think she can beat it, all right.”

Jones said suddenly: “No, you don’t.”

“What do you mean, we don’t?” demanded Moran.

“I’m the federal law,” said Jones, “and I think I have precedence over you. I’m going to take her to Washington—as part of my report. That is, if she’ll come.”

Angela blushed again.

Ten

“With your rating, we had to,” said the Chief.

George Jones made a sound that, under any circumstances except those of a junior addressing his superior officer, would have been considered a growl.

“I daresay,” said the Chief, smiling faintly, “you found the Shenandoah Valley a nearly ideal place for a honeymoon at this time of year.”

“One week of it!”

“And believe me, I’m sorry not to have allowed you the full two weeks promised. But in a way, it’s your own fault.”

“How do you mean?” said Jones.

“By being an eager beaver. Do you remember the report you brought back?”

“I ought to. I married the most important part of it.”

“I don’t mean that. I was referring to the detail; about the disappearance from the Braunholzer Institute of a reproduction batch from which they were going to make another human.”

Jones said: “Yes. It didn’t seem too important, but I don’t like to leave details hanging around.”

“Quite correct. The information was fed into the FBI integrator, along with the rest of the report. Well, the integrator’s memory bank instantly reacted. It came up with the idea that there is an eighteen-per-cent probability of this disappearance being connected with another case that has been giving a good deal of trouble.”

“Which one?”

“The very one I mentioned to you over the phone at Geneva. The robbery from the express rocket, the one they want you to help out on. I thought in view of the connection, you might not be too unwilling to come back and take over. We’ll make up the time to you later.”

“I see.” Jones rubbed his chin with one hand. “Eighteen per cent isn’t much of a probability.”

“It’s better than anything else in the integrator. The next highest probability of a connected case was four. And you are already on friendly terms with the people at the Institute. They ought to be pretty grateful to you for clearing things up for them, even if you did”—the Chief smiled again—“take their best product away from them.”

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Jones said: “You know, you can be damned persuasive. Do I get Abe to work with me?”

“Fraid not. It isn’t our case at all. You’ll be on loan to the FBI, operating out of their New

York office.”

“Are they going to be like that? From what I’ve seen of those Boy Scouts, they’re not too keen on having anyone chisel in on their racket.”

“They can’t help themselves this time. They asked for it. Besides, it’s a Federal Reserve case and, in a certain sense, a Treasury matter.”

“All right. Can I have till overnight?”

The Chief looked at his watch. “You might as well. You can’t reach either Geneva or New York before everything’s closed down. Which one are you going to begin with?”

“The Geneva end, I think,” said Jones, standing up. “There’ll be adequate records on the rocket robbery, whereas the one at the Braunholzer Institute is only a shadow at present, and I’d like to fill in the details and see whether there are any other points of correspondence—or inconsistencies.”

The Chief got up, too, and extended a hand.
“Good luck, and my apologies to Angela. I
congratulate you on her again.”

Eleven

George Helmfleet Jones said: “I’m sorry to bother you people so soon again, and I can quite understand how you are irritated about the controls the government is putting on, but this seems to be something a lot more serious than illegal perizone. And the line seems to lead here.”

He looked across the desk toward Dr. Runciman, with whom he had had no more than the opportunity to shake hands before rushing off to Washington, a hasty marriage, and the still more hasty acceptance of a new assignment. Dr. Runciman’s face expressed the kindness and co-operation of a granite cliff. So did the face of Betty-Marie Taliaferro, who seemed about to accuse Jones of being responsible for her kidnaping. He

wriggled in his chair.

Dick Mansfeld chuckled and said: “George, you want to remember that your status here is that of just another government man. Since you turned in that report, they’ve been showing up here every hour on the half-hour, and all of them mean trouble. Isn’t that right, Doctor?”

Runciman’s face relaxed just enough to recognize that his chemical assistant was on friendly terms with this intruder. “Some of their requests are patently absurd,” he said. “Nearly all of them want us to reproduce something absolutely essential to the continuance of the government. For example, parts for moon-rocket engines. It would take us longer than to make them by hand, and the question of assembly would remain. I really do not understand why they don’t build another Reproducer unit if they want that. Moreover, my assistants and myself are subjected to a most annoying surveillance under the name of protection.”

“It’s slightly political,” explained Jones. “Can

you imagine what the economic effects of having any number of these Reproducers in action would be? Neither can anybody else, and they don't dare take the chance. There's also the question of foreign countries. As long as there's only one Reproducer and only you three people to watch, the government can be reasonably sure that the secret remains in this country. Remember what happened after the Russians got the formula for the atomic bomb?"

"I suppose so. I suppose so," said the Doctor. Jones observed he liked to repeat himself, and Betty-Marie stirred in her chair.

"All right," said Jones, "I'll explain why I'm here. I'm in the Secret Service."

"I have been informed of that," said Runciman, still a trifle frosty.

"Well, we've had a crime—by we, I mean the government. It isn't a crime the Secret Service would normally deal with, but the department that should handle it is stymied,

and asked for our help—that is, the help of someone with scientific background. And besides, since I turned in my report, there seems to be some sort of connection to this place. So they decided to call it a prima facie case of counterfeiting and assign me to it.”

The three faces before him expressed various degrees of indignation. “But we haven’t been counterfeiting anything!” said Betty-Marie. “Except that one half dollar,” added Mansfeld.

“I didn’t say you had, and I don’t think you have,” said Jones. “I’m perfectly sure that everything that goes into the Reproducer is checked and registered. All the same, when I reported an inexplicable disappearance from here——”

Runciman frowned, Betty-Marie looked puzzled. “The number one humanoid batch,” said Mansfeld. “I told him about it.”

“But that was a year and a half ago,” said Betty-Marie. “And it wasn’t important anyway. The experiment came out all right

later.”

“How do you know it wasn’t important?” said Jones. “Know how the crime integration people at FBI work? When they have something they can’t latch onto at once, they feed in all the data, not just what they think is pertinent, about every other crime that resembles the case in any way. The integrator develops the possibilities of a connection in terms of percentages. That’s how they cracked that bank case down in Florida last month. The integrator gave a high probability to the idea that it was someone who knew all about solar motors.”

Dick Mansfeld said: “And this puts the finger on us?”

“No. I keep telling you the finger isn’t on you. This is a case of something disappearing from a place where it couldn’t possibly have disappeared. The old man called me up about it while I was here that week. There wasn’t any similarity data to give the integrator, but when I remembered the disappearance here

and fed that in, the machine said there was an eighteen-percent possibility of a connection. That's enough to work on, so here I am, developing the theme."

Mansfeld said: "Can you tell us about the case?"

"Don't see why not," said Jones agreeably. "You're all highly classified, and you might be able to see some point that missed the others and the integrator, too. Well, it was the robbery of three million dollars." 67

Mansfeld whistled. "That's a lot of dollars," he said. "How did it happen?"

"This way. You know, the flow of business is such that occasionally one bank district will accumulate more cash than it needs, while another will run short. When that happens the Federal Reserve Bank in the district where there's an overage will make a cash shipment to the district that needs it. Well, about five months ago, on June 6 to be exact, the New York Bank decided to send the three million to

San Francisco. It never got there.”

“I didn’t see anything about it in the papers,” said Mansfeld.

“There wasn’t anything,” said Jones. “They hushed it up, and I’m going to ask you to keep quiet about it, too, at least until they find out how it was done. That’s what is worrying the big boys in Washington—not the loss of the three million, but the fact that they can’t figure out a method, and they don’t want to broadcast the fact. If the criminal knows that, he’s apt to try his little stunt again.”

Dr. Runciman said: “Well, and what is your conception of how this bizarre disappearance was accomplished?”

Jones made a gesture. “Your guess is as good as mine. The thing was simply impossible. I’ll tell you. The money, mostly in large bills, was packed in an Orlon bag by one of the cashiers of the New York Bank in the presence of one of the governors. That’s required by regulation, and though I haven’t checked on it

yet, I'm sure there must have been two or three other people standing around. The bag was then sprayed with Brockenit. In case you don't know what that is, it's a chemical which is invisible, but which comes off on the hands, thanks to warmth and perspiration. Even then it isn't visible, except in ultraviolet light."

Betty-Marie frowned and said: "How about somebody using gloves?"

"No good," said Jones. "The heat of the hands would still bring the Brockenit off and it would go right through the gloves. . . . Well, as I said, the bag was sprayed. Then it was taken to the New York rocket-port by the same cashier who packed it, accompanied by the same governor and a couple of guards. The cashier personally packed it aboard the express rocket for San Francisco, to avoid letting anyone else get Brockenit on them. The rocket was closed up and left for San Francisco immediately, while the bank men were standing there. When it arrived, it was met by similar officials of the San Francisco Bank. The moneybag was the first thing

unloaded. It was empty.”

The other three looked at him for a second. Then Dick Mansfeld said: “Ah. Did this rocket arrive on time?”

“On the dot. And the money wasn’t lifted in San Francisco, either. As soon as the people there saw the money was gone, they held up the rest of the unloading, sent for an ultraviolet projector, and rayed the interior of the rocket, the workmen as they unloaded the rest of the cargo, in fact everything in the neighborhood. Not a trace of Brockenit.”

Betty-Marie shook her shoulders slightly and said: “It seems to me that some checking up on the crew of the rocket would be the logical step.”

Jones smiled. “You people up here in Geneva should keep up with the rest of the world. I said the *express* rocket. It doesn’t have any pilot; it’s controlled by radio. Moreover, if it had a pilot, he’d be thoroughly dead by the time he got there. The express rocket takes off

at an acceleration of 8g, and comes in on a deceleration of the same. The most any human being has been able to stand is a little over 4g, except on the moon run, where they can take 6g in some of those special pressurized harnesses. But not 8; nobody ever took that.”

Said Dick: “There wouldn’t be any possibility of substituting another rocket——”

“Now you’re just making wild guesses. It was the same rocket, all right. Numbers and everything. Besides the rest of the cargo wasn’t disturbed.”

Dr. Runciman cleared his throat. “Are you suggesting the possibility that the Reproducer might have been used to duplicate the rocket and cargo both? Because——”

“Not at all. The only suggestion was from the integrator. It has a memory bank, you know; that’s one of the reasons it’s useful in a case like this. When the data on the three-million robbery were fed into it, it didn’t even remember a similar case. But when it got

the data on your case here, it came right back with a probability. So I'd like to have you tell me all you can remember about it, if you will, and take it for the record." He reached down for the recording box he had brought along. "Sometimes when you repeat a thing, some detail emerges that you had unconsciously overlooked the first time around."

Dr. Runciman sighed. "Very well, very well," he said. "I believe it was at Dr. Taliaferro's suggestion, when we were studying the possibility of restoring amputated limbs. We thought we might have rather better chances by beginning with an entire body; there was the question of grafts, you understand. The original intention was to reproduce one of the workmen; it would enable all three of us to keep a close guard on the process, and bring it to an end if it became dangerous."

"Just a minute," said Jones. "This was the first time you had tried reproducing a human?"

"The first time, yes. I may assure you it was no light task. Dr. Mansfeld had to do some

extremely arduous work in arranging the flow to the spinnerets so that the chemicals would come through in the proper order, and I myself had to design a series of anesthetic probes to be inserted in the person to be duplicated, and without damage to him, so that the bony structure would build up first. It took a matter of several days merely to make these preparations. Very well, during the night before the duplication was to be undertaken, the chemicals disappeared from the Reproducer room.”

“Without any indication of what happened to them?” asked Jones.

“With some slight indication,” said Runciman. “I trust I am enough of a scientist to investigate anything that has no apparent explanation. The power and radio-activity meters showed a consumption that would just about account for the reproduction of a human being.”

Jones felt of his chin. “And you didn’t carry it any further than that? Didn’t you make the obvious deduction that somebody

must have got in during the night and reproduced someone?”

“That was what we feared,” said Runciman. “But we have few employees, and certainly none who could operate the machine properly. Moreover, they accounted for their time on the night in question in a satisfactory manner. The whole affair left us a good deal disturbed.”

Mansfeld said: “You see, George, when Angela came out of the machine, she didn’t have any moral sense at all. That was what we suspected about the missing batch; that somehow there was a reproduced human floating around without any moral sense. But we didn’t know what he or she looked like, or what to look for, and we couldn’t very well go to the police and say, ‘Look out, there’s a mad scientist on the loose, but we can’t tell you anything about him.’”

Jones smiled. “I see,” he said. “My—wife still lacks a few things. She tried to cook an egg for me with electron bombardment.”

“That was most unfortunate,” said Runciman, without indicating whether he meant the egg or what had happened to the Reproducer. “I was not yet ready to make public the results of the experiments. It was only when other lines of research failed to yield viable results that I consented to repeat the effort.”

“All right,” said Jones, “then the material in the Reproducer disappeared overnight, and you didn’t tell anyone about it because you were afraid the authorities might come down on you or something. You’re forgiven. But what about the details? Do you just walk out and leave this place uncovered at night? I seem to remember that Benson didn’t have much trouble getting what he wanted.”

“The case is somewhat different,” said Runciman. “After all, Mr. Benson was a trusted employee. The fence is electrified, and to enter the gate it is not only required that you insert a metal identification ticket in the slot there, but also that the entrant submit to the inspection of a spy ray. The portraits of those authorized to enter are on file in the device,

and even if an unauthorized person had the correct identification, he would be rejected by the spy ray.”

“I know about spy rays,” said Jones. “There are ways of beating them.”

“Really? I would hardly have supposed it. However, that is unimportant. We also have an alarm system that awakens the watchman who sleeps on the grounds. He was not awakened on the night in question.”

Jones said: “Any chance of fouling up the alarm system?”

“I doubt it. There was no trace of any such activity, and if it had been done, there should have been.”

“I suppose you looked into the possibility of a heli landing in the grounds.”

Runciman frowned. “There is certainly that possibility. I understand that Benson used helicopters freely. However we do have

infrared beams crossing the area, attached to the alarm system, and they require the proper responses from arriving helicopters.”

“It’s sometimes possible to beat them, too,” said Jones.

Dr. Runciman smiled. “I am familiar with that. In fact, it is in my field. You can ‘beat’ infrared beams, as you describe it, only by giving them too much to do; that is, breaking them at so many points that they cannot identify the essential interruption. In this case, there was no interruption at all.”

“Once more it couldn’t have happened,” said Jones, “but I begin to see why the integrator turned up the possibility of a connection between your case and the one I’m working on. Both times something disappeared out of a place nobody could get into. Is that the works?”

Runciman nodded and so did the other two when Jones looked at them in turn. He snapped off the recorder. “All right, then,” he said. “I

think I'll take a look at the gate first. It seems to me that that offers the best possibilities. Want to come along with me, Dick, and go through the motions of getting in, so I can see how it works?"

Twelve

As they strolled down the walk, Mansfeld said: “What makes you so certain that the gate is it?”

Jones shrugged. “Logic. They give us courses in it at the training school these days. The personnel at your institute hasn’t changed, and you’ve lost something rather than gained as a result of the incident. Therefore I have to assume as a working hypothesis that you didn’t want it to happen and gained nothing from it. When we run into one of these cases, we always look for the man who quits the job.”

Mansfeld punched buttons in an irregular rhythm, and the gate swung open. “Yes, but the gate?”

“Logic again. Have to reduce things to their essential elements. Subject to checking, the guards you’ve got set on this place with the wires and infrared make up an unbroken continuity. Therefore your chemical batch, whether it was made up into a man or not, must have gone out through the one place the continuity was broken. Now, do you want to go through your routine?”

The heavy gate had swung to behind them. Mansfeld stepped up to it, produced from his pocket one of the square metal identification tags, placed it in the slot of the scanner box, and stood to one side. A pencil beam of light, bright even in the full day, shot from the box, and played rapidly across his features, making him blink as it did so; there was a momentary wait, a clicking sound, and the gate swung open.

“You see in this type the identification tag only actuates—” began Mansfeld, but Jones said: “I know how they operate. Do you always hold the tag that way when you put it in?”

“What do you mean?”

“Sort of by the edge, between thumb and forefinger.”

“Never gave it any thought. I suppose so; it’s the only way to get it into the scanner box, isn’t it?”

Jones spun slowly round on his heel, looking at the horizon. The minor road that ran past the front of the Institute and over a low hill was lined with majestic maples, beyond which was a pasture with cows considering their cuds.

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“Right about there, I think,” said the Secret Service man, pointing at one of the trees.

“Right about there for what?” said Mansfeld.

“That’s where he was waiting, in that tree. With a tele-camera. Probably a movie machine. That would give him more negatives. In fact, with the right kind of machine he could afford to repeat it on two or three different

days.”

“You mean somebody photographed me as I was going in?”

“Yep. You or one of the other members of the staff. With a tele, and enough shots, it would be easy to get pictures of the tag good enough to let them make a reproduction of it.”

Mansfeld said: “What about the spy ray?”

“Easy. At the same time he was taking pictures of your tag, he’d be getting good shots of you from all angles. With those on hand, any competent sculptor could make one of those plastic masks which would be plenty good enough to fool the spy ray. That’s how our burglarious friend got in, all right. What bothers me is how he got out. How many people know the combination of buttons that releases the gate from the inside?”

Mansfeld frowned. “Only about six. And it’s changed periodically. But I think the gate can be propped open.”

“Did anybody think of that at the time of your disappearance?”

“I don’t know. If they did, they didn’t say anything about it to me.”

Jones sighed. “And a year and a half later it’s too late to look for traces. We live and learn. The next question is who. How many people knew you were going to duplicate a human being?”

Mansfeld shook his head. “Nobody that I know of. Of course, old Runciman may have talked to some of his connections about it, like Dr. Sondergaard at Columbia. They’re great friends and correspond a good deal.”

“Was this Sondergaard ever up here?”

“Not that I know of, again. I’ve just heard Runciman mention him.”

“I wonder if I should go back and ask him? No, I think not. Well, I must get on with it. It’s been great seeing you, Dick.”

As they shook hands, Mansfeld said: “Give all the best to Angela,” and the Secret Service man stepped into his cab to begin the journey to New York.

The heli delivered him to the roof of the new Federal Offices building on Mott Street, and a few minutes later he was in an FBI office, shaking hands with the case executive and a tall, lantern-jawed individual, who bore an expression of permanent melancholy and the name of Dewey O’Neill. Introductions completed, and the explanation made that O’Neill was handling the New York end of the \$3,000,000 robbery, the executive said: “What’s Secret Service doing in this? There isn’t any counterfeiting angle.”

Jones explained about the integrator reading and the indicated possibility that there might be a connection with the Braunholzer Institute case. “However,” he finished, “in view of what I found out at Geneva, I don’t think there is any real connection. I’m not an integrator myself, but I imagine it put the two cases together on the basis of method—the

disappearance of something from a place to which no one could have gained entry. But I've established the method at Braunholzer, and it wouldn't work for the rocket robbery. Pictures of the Reserve Bank people putting the money in the rocket wouldn't be any use to the criminals. So if you want me to bow out of the picture, I will."

The case executive, Mr. Howard, had a florid complexion and the mustache of an old-fashioned bank president. Now he reached across the desk and picked up Jones's identification tag again. "Hm, you're an FBI Training School man, and a Class 3 investigator. We don't often get field men that high up the line ourselves. No, I don't think I want you out of the picture. You have different methods in Secret Service and you may be able to turn up some angle we've missed. Especially as the case has just become active again."

"I thought it was sent to the integrator because it was quiescent."

The executive motioned to O'Neill, who 75 said: "Just came off the tapes this morning. Some of the dough has started to turn up."

"It has! Where?"

"El Paso, Texas. You know they had the numbers on all the big bills involved, and sent through a general stop notice to Federal Reserve Banks——"

"Yes, I heard the record on the case before I left Washington."

O'Neill gestured. "Okay. Well, San Antonio Federal got one of the five hundreds. They traced it as far as El Paso, but since the warning only went to Federal Reserves and not to other banks the trail drops there. El Paso thinks it may have come across the border from Chihuahua, because nobody on the American side has much use for money as big as that. Southwestern District has a man on it."

“And the Mexican police at Chihuahua have been alerted to look out for big American bills,” said the executive.

O’Neill grunted. “Fat lot of good that will do. If I know anything about those Mex police, it will only give them a chance to pick up a bill or two for themselves.”

“You’re too cynical,” said the executive. “Well, Mr. Jones, you’ve heard the record on the case as far as it’s gone. Is there anything specific that suggests itself to you that we may not have followed out, or do you just want to take a general fishing expedition into the old evidence? Or would you like to have the record replayed?”

“No,” said Jones. “I have a pretty good sonomemory. There were just two points I noticed, or rather didn’t notice, when I heard the report. Did you try the *modus operandi* file?”

O’Neill drew down the corners of his mouth. “That’s standard procedure with us. But we were a little hampered by not

knowing what the *modus operandi* was. However, we assumed that it was a question of extracting something from a locked container, like a burglar-proof safe, and set it up on that basis. The file gave us four names.” He began counting off on his fingers. “One was Ed Kamienski; he’s doing ten years hard in the moon mines as an incorrigible and is very much there. One was Louie the Lug, but he had a perfect alibi for the period of the robbery; wasn’t even in New York. One I can’t give you his name because he was psyched and discharged as cured of criminal tendencies; he’s going straight all right. And one was a torpedo named Berent Arnesson, but he waived personal liberty, took a lie-detector test and even a shot of scope, and came out with a clean nose. The file didn’t know anybody else smart enough to have pulled such a job.”

“So it’s a new practitioner,” said Jones. “Well, I thought I’d ask, anyway. Second question: I don’t remember that the report said anything about whether any employees left the Federal Reserve at the time of the robbery.”

O'Neill and the executive looked at each other. Then the former said: "You think it might mean something?"

"Yes. Three million dollars would keep a man going for a long time, or even quite a bunch of them. I'd like to re-examine the case, on the basis that it may have been planned as a tremendous one-shot, a lifetime operation. If it was, then we'll probably find at the bottom of it someone with a good previous record; good enough to have a job at the Federal Reserve. That's how he'd know when the money shipment was going. After the robbery he'd quit and probably establish an identity elsewhere until he could release some of the bills."

The executive said mildly: "That doesn't exactly fit with the appearance of the \$500 bill at El Paso this quickly."

Jones frowned. "I know it," he said, started to say something more, and then stopped.

"All the same," said the executive, "we can't

do anything about the El Paso bill from this end, and I don't see any harm in looking into it."

He pressed the button on the desk phone, said into it, "Get me Di Paduano at the Federal Reserve," and switched the visi-panel on, then turned to Jones again. "Do your theories go so far as to explain how the money got out of the rocket?"

"I haven't the least idea in the world," said Jones frankly. "I started out by imagining that it had never been in, but after hearing the report I gave up that idea."

"You can say that——" began O'Neill, but before he could finish, the face of the banking man flashed on the visi-panel.

"How do you do?" said the case executive. "We're re-examining some of the features of that rocket robbery you had, and we found we needed some information. Can you tell us which of your employees have left since the robbery?"

“Which of those who knew the money was going,” put in Jones from the side.

“Did you get that?” said the executive. “Which of those who knew the money was to be shipped.”

Di Paduano’s dark face expressed acquiescence. “I think our personnel records will show that, though I can’t be absolutely certain about a given person being aware of the shipment. Want to come over for it?”

The executive looked at O’Neill, who shook his head and said, “Too damn wet on the street,” in a low tone.

“I think the phone would be adequate,” said the executive. “After all, we both have tap checks, and this is merely an exploration.”

“Let you know as soon as I have it,” said Di Paduano and his face disappeared. The three men lit cigarettes and relaxed. “What’s your idea about the background of this theoretical master criminal of yours?” said the executive.

“I doubt if he’ll have much of any,” said Jones. “He’ll need to be a technical man, though, with at least a good working knowledge of rockets. And an inventive turn of mind. I’d say also that he has probably never been psyched or, if he has, that he turned out to be psych-resistant.”

“Why that?”

“Only way of accounting for the fact that he’d go in for a large-scale crime against the state.”

“You gotta a lot of faith in these government psychs,” growled O’Neill. “Me, I think they’re a bunch of witch doctors with political pull.”

The bell rang sharply. The executive snapped the key on his phone and Di Paduano’s face reappeared. “Hello, Howard,” he said. “I’m afraid I haven’t anything for you. There haven’t been any resignations or dismissals among the people who might know about the money shipment in recent weeks. The last one to leave us was a young man named Warburton, but that was on June 4, two days

before the robbery.”

Howard looked at Jones, who frowned. 78
“May I come in?” he said, and got up to
come around the desk as he was announced as
“Mr. Jones, who is working with us on this
case.”

“Can you tell us anything about this
Warburton?” he asked. “What did he leave you
for? Where did he go?”

Di Paduano looked a certain amount of
disapproval. “I wouldn’t worry about him.
Wesley Eustace Warburton was one of our
brightest young men. We had him in the
balances department because he was so good
with mathematics, but he was really interested
in electronic chemistry and had been studying
it nights at Columbia. I understand he left us to
go to the Deering Chemical Company.”

“What about his back record? Where did he
come from? Was he ever arrested, or psyched
on order?”

Di Paduano's expression became one of positive shock. "May I remind you," he said, "that your questions are an invasion of personal privacy unless you have a court order or a prima facie case against him? I'm afraid you'll have to ask someone else. Good afternoon."

The face disappeared. Jones looked around at the others. "The last time I saw that egg," he said, "was a little over three weeks ago, and then it was in the company of a lad who's going to get at least a major psych. But what in hell was chewing his liver this time?"

O'Neill laughed. "Don't you know that the Federal Reserve Bank, like everything else that's federal and has money connected with it, is slightly political? I bet you stepped on his white-haired boy, especially with the suggestion that he might have been psyched on order."

"That may be, but this Warburton fits the picture I've been drawing altogether too closely for comfort. Look, at least he has a

good enough record so that nobody raised any objections to his getting in the bank; he knew the money shipment was going; he quit about the right time; and he has technical knowledge. Do you FBI people use probability analysis?"

The executive rubbed his chin. "You ought to know if you went through our school," he said. "And you ought to know that those are only second-order probabilities, because you haven't demonstrated that any of those characteristics are absolutely inseparable from the robbery. Except for the technical knowledge. But I agree the probability is high enough to seek a little more light. Let's see. O'Neill, you're familiar with the background. See if you can find out this Warburton's address, who his friends are, get a picture of him, the general personal investigation. It will be more efficient if you, Jones, take the other end—that is, look up the man himself at Deering Chemical. Indirectly; if he's as acute as the person you've pictured, he'll be pretty careful about new acquaintances who ask questions." He looked at his watch. "Conference at 16:30 tomorrow.

All set for the evening, Jones, or would you care to have a couple of drinks and see a tri-di at my club? Don't know what they'll have on, but it's usually pretty good there."

Thirteen

George Helmfleet Jones staggered into the bathroom, groped the bottle of hexamerone off the edge of the washbasin, poured himself a man-sized slug, turned on the shower, and sat down underneath it to wait for the dose to take effect. The building was still revolving, but at a slightly lessened rate, when the phone rang. He swore, wrapped a towel around himself, and hurriedly got back into the room in time to cut the visi-panel. As he had more than half expected, Angela's voice came out of the device: "And how is *your* hangover this morning, my dear, with the visi-panel off? Is there enough hexamerone in New York to take care of it? Or shall I——"

"Listen," he said, "I'm in a foul mood, and if you don't lay off, I'll go back to the Institute,

get another duplicate of you, and elope with her. So there.”

“If you do, I’ll have Dr. Runciman duplicate your worthless carcass and elope with the result. Remember, he’s a friend of mine, too. How’s the case?”

“It’s turned into two cases, and one of them I don’t think I’m going to win any promotions for. The other one looks fairly hot. It’s——”

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“I’ve got biscuits in the oven and can’t wait to hear about it now.”

The hexamerone was taking hold and the hangover sensations were practically gone as Jones recognized the little code he and his wife had set up for use when there was something to say but they didn’t quite trust the tap check. He made his voice cheerful and casual.

“Okay, dear, don’t let them burn. Give you a ring when I get off the job.”

That meant he would call back as soon as he could reach a safe phone. The connection clicked off; Jones finished drying himself where he was and dressed rapidly. He had taught himself not to speculate in the absence of data, and carefully tried to keep his mind a blank, but a wave of anger swept through him at the thought that somebody or something had been bothering Angela. It wasn't the first time politicians had tried to interfere with his cases in one way or another, but, damn it, why couldn't they mind their own business? Or maybe that was their business.

Outside his hotel window New York lay under a cold glare of November sunshine that promised a day even chillier than the one before. He called the desk for an air-conditioned taxi, gulped a cup of coffee from the Servo, and hurried down to the street. He gave the driver the address of the Federal Offices building. At least the phone there would be immune to taps. When he called Angela her face flashed brightly on the screen in the booth.

“Feeling better now, darling?” she said. “You should really have a recording of your voice this morning to remind you that strong drink is raging.”

“Never mind that,” said Jones. “What’s the story?”

“It’s nothing serious, I think,” said she. “Just that somebody’s been snooping around to find out what case you’re on. Last night. Cliff and Marie were over, and they told me. Cliff thinks the chap was a Treasury man.”

“Oh,” he said. “Well, don’t worry about it. I just had a momentary spat with a big pot of a banker.”

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“All right, darling. Take care of yourself. ’By, now.”

Di Paduano, thought Jones, as he clicked off the circuit. Federal Reserve Banks were under Treasury. He must have worked pretty fast, too. Which meant that he must have been plenty disturbed over the inquiries about

Warburton. Which meant in turn that there was something very peculiar going on somewhere. Jones considered the possibility of Di Paduano himself being mixed up in the rocket robbery, as he went outside for a taxi to take him to Brooklyn and the plant of the Deering Chemical Company. Three million cash might be enough to attract even a man who had worked up to the position of governor in the Federal Reserve system.

But no, it wouldn't fit, he decided, as the cab slid smoothly into the old Brooklyn tunnel. Di Paduano would have no opportunity to establish the alternate identity for the enjoyment of the proceeds, which his theory required. Also there was the slight matter of physical accomplishment. Jones's memory readily yielded from the record the name of the governor who had seen the money aboard the rocket; it was not Di Paduano, it was Morton. If Di Paduano had monkeyed with the moneybag, it must have been before the money was packed, which didn't seem likely. It was conceivable that somebody might have worked some version of the gypsy switch in packing

the bag, but in that case the bag would have been full of newspapers or something when it reached San Francisco, and it wasn't; it was just empty. It was not conceivable that Morton had allowed an empty bag to be placed in the rocket. The whole thing made up one of those departures from the norm which the Chief was always warning him to look for as indications that there was something more to look for; but as yet there was no explanation, or at least none that satisfied the equations.

The Deering Chemical plant sprawled along the harbor front, neat and very clean, with the smoke-disposal caps on its chimneys looking like exaggerated onions. The taxi swung past an ornamental hedge and stopped before a door of classical simplicity. Inside, the conditioned air was perfumed with the fragrance of pine forests. It would be, thought Jones, as he gave his name to the goddess with a neckline cut away down to here, and asked to see the personnel manager.

82

The goddess said they weren't hiring except for second-class technicians, blinked rapidly

at Jones's credentials, did something with the whisper-phone, and told Jones he could go in —second door on the right.

He found a fat man in a pink-striped suit, who offered a hand without getting up, announced his name was Esselstein, and ostentatiously switched on his desk recorder.

“Just to make certain that you don't try to trip me into violating the personal privacy laws,” he said amiably. “I've met you federal people before.”

Jones said: “I don't want to ask you anything that would violate P.P.L. Just wanted to ask whether your records included a picture of a young chemist who joined your organization recently. Name of Warburton.”

“Warburton!” Esselstein reacted so violently that it seemed likely the elastic chair would pitch him over the desk. “No, we don't have a picture of him, and I'll tell you why; he doesn't work here and never did.”

Jones lifted his eyebrows. “He left his previous place of employment on June 4, saying he was going to report to you on June 5.”

For answer, Esselstein pressed a button on his desk, said, “Bring me that Warburton file, will you?” and then reached over and switched off the recorder. “I’m glad to see that somebody’s looking him up. Has he been up to something?”

“Not that we’re sure of,” said Jones, as a girl brought in a brown file, which Esselstein opened.

“I’ll be glad to give you all I can about him,” he said, “and since he never actually joined us and completed his employment records, there’s no violation. The fact is that he applied for a job here, got it, and then never showed up to go to work. You’re wrong about the date, though; it was June 12 he was to report, not June 5.”

Jones made a note. “Here we are,” said Esselstein. “Wesley Eustace Warburton.

Gave his birthplace as Lubbock, Texas. Unmarried. Graduated from Columbia, night course, with honors. Current employment when applying, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which recommended him highly. That much we checked, but to get any more about his background, we'd have to wait until he was actually employed here. Now he applied to us some time in April, here it is, as an electronic chemist. We have a very complete system of psychological and technical examination at this place, and Warburton passed everything with the highest grades, almost, of any prospective employee we ever had. I was convinced that Deering was getting a real prize, and he seemed very happy to join us. But on June 12, when he was due, he never showed up, didn't answer phone calls or letters, and when we sent someone to where he lived, they said he had moved. All the Federal Reserve would give us was that he had left there. He seems to have just disappeared."

"Did you try Lubbock?" asked Jones.

“That would be pretty close to a violation of personal privacy, wouldn’t it?” asked Esselstein.

“No,” replied Jones, who then asked, “Where did he live?”

“Three-fifteen West 28th Street, New York. Phone Ashland 42-6817. But the number was disconnected,” said Esselstein, glancing at the folder.

“You saw him yourself, I suppose? What did he look like?”

Esselstein closed his eyes. “Medium height, about five feet seven, I would say. Very pale blond hair. Quite well set up.”

“You don’t know the Echols system of describing a man by his walk rhythm, do you?”

Esselstein chuckled. “No, I’ve tried fooling with it, but it takes a little too much memory work and is a little too complicated for me.”

“Too bad. And you haven’t anything else about

him?”

“Not a thing. The research department here was not very happy over missing out on someone who promised to be a star chemist. There aren’t very many in the electronic end, you know, but we just supposed he had a better offer somewhere else, and as he hadn’t signed any contract, there was nothing we could do about it. Want to tell me why you’re trying to trace him?”

84

Jones hesitated. “I’m afraid I can’t tell you very much. It’s a federal case with quite a few involvements. But I’ll tell you what I will do. If we find him, or find out what happened to him, I’ll phone you even before it’s released to the newscasts. And thanks.”

“It’s a deal. I’ll tip you off if anything else turns up.” This time Esselstein stood up to shake hands.

Back at Federal Offices, case executive Howard opened the conference. “I have two pieces of news, one negative, and one not very

good. Southwestern District is almost certain that \$500 bill came through from Mexico; and the Treasury Department has put through a request to know by what legal warrant you are on an FBI case, George.”

Jones shook his head. “You know the answer to that. Can they have me pulled off?”

“In time, no doubt. Meanwhile, I can delay matters for a week or more with an application for your services on technical features of the case. In fact, I’ve already taken care of that. I presume we owe this to our cooperative friend, Di Paduano.”

“I wish I could see some connection between him and the case, or between him and Warburton, for that matter,” said Jones. “Did you find any, Dewey?”

O’Neill studied the ends of his fingernails gloomily and shook his head. “I didn’t find any connection between anything and nothing,” he said. “The first thing I done was go around to the bank about lunch time. There was two-

three of the guys there I got in pretty good with when I was fresh on the case, and I figured on maybe taking one of them to lunch and opening him up with a couple of swift drinks. The first part worked swell; I got two of them instead of one, and when I told them one of the bills from the robbery turned up, they started to talk like hell, but as soon as I said something about Warburton, they looked at each other and then clammed up.”

“It would seem to me,” said Howard,
“that there’s a distinct difference in the
way those bank people approach the two
questions—the robbery and Warburton.”

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“It’s an inconsistency,” said Jones, “and it will have to be cleared up. What next?”

“Next I took the Columbia angle. They knew all about him up there. He was one of Sondergaard’s star pupils in the night class. I got an address from him——”

“Three-fifteen West 28th Street?” asked Jones.

“That’s right. Haven’t had time to check it yet. I also got a good description but no picture, and none of the profs knew the Echols system, but I did show them the ear cards and got them to agree that Warburton’s were B-4s. They said he never mixed with the other students or went in for the regular college business. He was older—late twenties, they guessed. But he was a hell of a hot-shot in a classroom and even pulled some experiments that scared the profs.”

“What kind?” asked Jones with interest.

“Didn’t say. In fact, I got the idea they were clamming up on me a little on that. But that’s the works. What have you got?”

Jones gave an account of his visit to Deering Chemical, and the descriptions were compared. They checked. Howard said: “I think I’ll ask Southwestern to put a man on the backtrack at Lubbock. We might turn up something there, and this disappearance of Warburton at the time of the robbery certainly gives us adequate reason to violate his privacy

a little, even if he's not our man. Now——”

Jones held up a hand. “There's one more discrepancy I'd like you to note,” he said. “And it's one that enormously strengthens our case on the personal privacy angle. Warburton left the Federal Reserve on June 4, before the robbery. But the first time he was due anywhere else, that is, the first time people began looking for him, was on June 12. That covers the period of the robbery and still gives him time for a getaway.”

“I agree,” said Howard, and then 86 frowned. “We can't get over the question of method, though. . . . Well, I think the next thing is to try farther along the backtrack. Maybe we can find someone at Lubbock to make a complaint that will bring Missing Persons into it; they have a good line of stools and could help us out a lot. In the meanwhile, George, suppose you spend the evening checking that address where he lived, and you, Dewey, try to get hold of one of those bank employees by himself and do a little roping.”

“I see it another way,” said O’Neill. “This Warburton seems to be the fair-haired boy everywhere. What if we got a murder or a snatch case on our hands—hooked up with the money somehow?”

“The possibilities are——” began Howard when the phone rang and a secretary’s voice said: “Can Mr. Jones accept a call? The man says it’s urgent.”

“Put him on,” said Howard, and moved from behind his desk to let Jones come round. The chubby face of Esselstein looked from the panel as Jones turned the voice up to room amplification.

“Oh, hello, Jones,” said the chemical-firm man. “With regard to that person we were discussing today, Miss Kirsch tells me something I didn’t know when I talked to you. On the fourteenth of June, two days after he was due here, some woman who wouldn’t show her face called for him on the phone, and then again the next day. And the receptionist says that about the eighteenth there was a man

around inquiring for him. She thinks he might have been a detective, but he didn't show any credentials, and you know how those girls are.”

“Thanks a lot,” said Jones. “I'll let you know if I find anything.”

He switched off and turned to the others.
“Maybe it is a snatch at that,” he said.
“Confound it! I'd like to put this whole business into an integrator. It's getting too complex for me to handle.”

Case executive Howard grinned wisely. “The integrator won't accept human theories or emotions,” he said. “That's why they pay us our salaries.”

Fourteen

Three-fifteen West 28th Street proved to be one of those buildings of down-at-the-heel magnificence, built during the '70s, when the rage for colored glass brick was on. The chrominum flashing was ripped here and there, the door to the under-building garage would not quite close, and the walls bore the marks of the inexplicable games children play with chalk and balls. There was no visi-plate at the door, only a row of bells, over the bottom one of which was a tag that might at one time have said "Supt."

Jones pushed it; after a wait of more than appropriate duration, there was a sound of feet within, and the door came open on an individual who had apparently not been able to afford his depilatory for the last three days.

“What is it?” he said.

His breath smelled, too. “I’d like a little information about a man who used to live here,” said Jones.

“Which one?” said the individual, and scratched.

“His name is Wesley Eustace Warburton.”

“Oh, him. He moved away. Didn’t leave no address.”

“When did he go?”

“I dunno. Sometime in June, I guess.”

“How far was his rent paid up?”

“I dunno. You have to ast the agent that.”

“Did he have much stuff with him?”

“I dunno. Wasn’t here.”

“Look here, my friend,” said Jones, in an

exasperated tone, “it strikes me that your memory is pretty poor. Isn’t there anyone around here that knows the answers to these questions?”

The thick lips came out in a pout and the eyes shifted. The Supt. murmured: “The last guy that ast, he gi’ me five dollars.”

“Well, I’ll give you a trip in the pie wagon.” Jones flashed his identification. “This is a government case, and you can talk or else.”

“You can’t make me talk. I got my personal privacy.”

“Save that one for the birds. I’m not asking you anything about yourself— unless you had something to do with his going away. Now are you going to talk to me here, or come down to the Federal Building and talk under a machine?” Jones felt for the handle of his needle gun; sometimes these sterling characters turned nasty.

The Supt.’s eyes followed his motion. “What

you want to know?" he said.

"When did Warburton leave?"

"Night of June fourth."

"How did he go?"

"I dunno. Honest, I don't. I think he went down to the corner and just took a taxi."

"Did it look as though he were going away for good?"

"He had two big bags with him. When I went up to his room afterward, there wasn't nothing in it. Not a thing."

"But he didn't tell you in advance that he was moving out or anything?"

"I'm telling you, mister, I don't know nothing about how long he was going away for or what. He just comes down in the elevator with them bags and goes out the door. Nobody called for him or nothing."

Jones had questioned enough unwilling witnesses to be fairly certain that he was getting as much of the truth as he could obtain without a lie detector. He switched the line: “Well, while this Warburton was living here did he have many people visiting him?”

The thought appeared to strike the Supt. as new. He cocked his head and considered for a moment. “Not many. There’s one guy I notice, comes around two-three times and they go out together. Some kind of a spick, I think. At least he looks like one, but I never hear him talk.”

“All right, what else did he look like? Tall or short? Fat or skinny? Tell me about him.”

“He’s about medium height, not very fat, and he looks—well, I dunno, he just looks like a spick, you know.” The voice ended on a note of indignation over the effort required by the obviously impossible task of describing another person.

Jones said: “Did they seem to be very friendly?”

“Mister, I dunno. All I know is he comes here two-three times, and oncet he brings one of them frozen dinners and takes it up.”

“Did Warburton have any other regular visitors? Women for instance?”

“I never seen none. He used to go out a lot—every night almost.”

“Yes, I know. He was going to college at night. How did he live otherwise?”

“I do’ know what you mean, mister.”

“Well, you or someone must have been in his room to clean it up. What did it look like?”

“Oh, I get it. Just like a room, you know. He didn’t even have a television. Only some books and tapes.”

“What became of them when he went away?”

“I dunno.”

“Well, could he have carried them all in the two bags you saw him with?”

This appeared to cause Supt. another spasm of thought. After giving it reasoned consideration, he came out with: “Maybe not. There was a lot of them tapes, and the machine to work them. He had some kind of electrical machine, too.”

“I see,” said Jones. “Now, there’s just one more thing. You said that someone came here asking about him after he left. When was it, and who was it?”

“There was two of them. The first one was a dame, about a week after he leaves.” The Supt. gave an arch sidelong glance and gestured with his hands to indicate a shape of appreciable form. “Some babe! She drives up in one of them Cardigan two-seat bubble cars, the kind with the one wheel in front.”

It was no use asking him to describe her. Jones asked: “Had she ever been here before?”

“Not that I seen.”

“Okay. And who was the other one that asked for him?”

Supt.’s voice held contempt. “One of them correspondence school dicks. About two-three days after the dame comes round. He’s the one gi’ me five bucks.”

Jones reflected that he probably didn’t get his money’s worth, but people who work on expense accounts can afford not to care. He asked: “How’d you know he was a private eye? Show you his tag?”

90

“Listen, mister, I been around, see? He even tries to get me to leave him alone in the room, see? I dunno whether he wants to put in a tap or make one of them dust collections, but he don’t get away with it.”

Yes, I’ll bet not, thought Jones; if another five dollars followed the first, there probably isn’t a speck of indicative dust left in that room that could be taken out with a high vacuum. He

said: “Okay. Thanks. I’ll put it in the record that you’ve been very co-operative. What’s your name?”

Back at the hotel, the light was on beside the phone, and when Jones switched it to get the record, the voice of case executive Howard came out: “If you get in before midnight, call me at my apartment, Eldorado 72-6636.” The voice that answered when he obeyed this injunction said that Mr. Howard had gone out, but would the caller make a record? Jones did so; then deciding that going out to a tri-di would only cause another miss and that he couldn’t be bothered with any of the programs offered by the television, he put in a call for Angela, talked to her for a few minutes, and then sat down for a rather disconsolate wait, with a scotch and wonderfizz for company.

The possibility that Warburton’s disappearance had been involuntary was pretty much out of the picture now, he decided; the fact that the chemist had denuded his room of the tapes, books, and electrical machine that couldn’t have gone in the bags pretty much

kicked that out the window. It was a planned operation, a real disappearance, which made his own theory that it was somehow connected with the rocket robbery stronger and stronger. Moreover, the thing had been carefully rigged, and for some time back. The care that Warburton had taken to cover himself at the Deering Chemical Company showed that. He had pretty obviously used that to gain a week's head start. A check from the bank to Deering would have shown that he really was being employed there, and one from Deering to the bank would similarly have shown that he was leaving to take the new job. It would hardly have occurred to anyone at either end to ask about the precise date, and even if the discrepancy were noticed, it would probably be assumed that Warburton simply wanted a week off before taking up his new job. Jones began to feel a certain amount of respect for Mr. Wesley Eustace Warburton's brains. And there was the distinctly indicative, if tenuous, fact that Warburton had been Sondergaard's star pupil at Columbia, and Sondergaard very possibly knew about the Braunholzer Reproducer.

But if Warburton had robbed the rocket, how had he done it? Jones swallowed 91 some of his whiskey the wrong way and had a fit of coughing as he considered this absolutely insoluble problem. No; much better to concentrate on the really solid features of the case; to find Warburton, and connect him up with the robbery afterward. It suddenly occurred to Jones that this was the third mysterious disappearance he had encountered since beginning the case, but all of them under circumstance so different that there didn't seem to be any connection, except that they were disappearances.

Also, finding Warburton did not promise to be easy. In his life at home, as at college, he apparently kept pretty much to himself—except for the “spick” who brought a package of frozen dinner. At this point in his meditations, Jones's memory was jogged by the fact that one of the bills had turned up on the Mexican border. A spick was a Mexican; and Warburton had come from Lubbock, Texas. Was there a connection? A triple coincidence yielded about a sixty-six-per-cent

probability that there was, as Jones knew from his training, but he decided he didn't have enough information to work out where the connection lay, only that it was there and needed investigating.

Moreover, Warburton's disappearance had disturbed someone else enough to make them put a private detective agency on the job. In spite of the fact that the agencies could and did keep their records secret, the right people in the police could usually find out about them, and Jones made a mental note to ask someone in the New York police to find who was interested in Warburton. A woman, pretty clearly; the unknown female voice that had called Deering and the "some babe" who had asked for him on 28th Street were obviously the same, and the private investigator who followed up her own failure to obtain anything definite was quite as obviously the by-product of that lack of success.

Now there are various reasons for which a man wants to get away from a woman, even when he is not married to her.

(Jones made a mental note to have the marriage records checked; there was just a possibility that the babe might be quietly married to Warburton, after all.) The trouble was that any one of those reasons furnished an adequate motive for the disappearance all by itself, without bringing in the robbery. This multiple motivation, in fact, furnished one of those inconsistencies the Chief was always talking about. Either both were operative, and the woman was in some way connected with the robbery, or only one of them was; and since his disappearance was somehow connected with the woman, this would mean it was not connected with the robbery.

A little dismayed over the fact that his reasoning was threatening to take him right out of the case, Jones got up to put it on a record for the next conference with the case executive, when the phone rang.

“Hello, George,” said the voice at the other end of the line. “I’m not putting this on visual. This is a public phone without a check. But some more of that stuff has been turning up,

right here in New York City. I'm working on it now, and so is Dewey O'Neill. Meet you in the automat drugstore at the corner of Broadway and 72nd as soon as you can get here."

Fifteen

The pink and blue enamel booths of the automat drugstore were full of high-school youths chattering feverishly, mostly about the day's World Series game between the New York Giants and the Los Angeles Angels and the pitching of Alinda Kenny, the Angels' new girl star. Jones passed one in which Howard was sitting alone, gloomily contemplating a cola drink. The case executive did not look up, so Jones pushed on past to the rows of vending machines, picked out something that advertised itself as "Caribbean Star-apple," inserted his coin, and took the drink back to Howard's booth.

"Mind if I sit here?" he said in a sufficiently loud tone, and as the other shook his head, slid in, and not looking at him,

lowered his voice. “What’s the pitch?”

“One of the fifties came into the Federal Reserve this afternoon. They checked back and found that some of the ones and twos had been coming through, too, which is all right, you couldn’t expect them to keep a warning on bills that small.”

“Here in New York?” Jones asked, sipped his drink, and made a face as he found it was just as bad as he expected.

“Yeah. The fifty came from the branch of the Chemical on West End Avenue. I got the city police on it, and they traced the bill to a store over on the Drive, at 78th Street.”

“Why the cover?”

“I picked up a tail at the store.”

“Where is he?”

“Three booths down.”

Jones pursed his lips in a soundless whistle,

then, still without looking round, said: “Okay, I’ll take it. Put the dog to bed.” He dropped the remainder of the Star-apple and its discardable container into the chute, slid out, and walked rapidly to the door; then he slipped around the corner, and stood. The only persons to follow him out were a pair of teenagers. The probability that they would be shadows was low; nevertheless Jones decided to forego the comfort of a passing taxi and set out on foot westward through the chill of a November night.

It was not an assignment he particularly cared for in that section where the magnificent apartment buildings of an earlier day had run down into many-storied rooming houses, crowded with Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and Chinese. Officers of the law had been known to get a gelatin slug in the back of the head, and to be relieved of everything they owned, merely because they were the law, and Jones did not flatter himself that his cover was so good as to make him unrecognizable.

The streets were full of children

screeching over their games, and on the steps were groups of boys and girls. As he passed one of them, there were furtive glances at the Secret Service man, and Jones saw a bottle passed rapidly from one hand to another. It was probably trujillol, a terrible mixture of liquor and dope, but that was none of his business at present, and he pushed on without appearing to notice.

The lawns along the Drive were covered with more groups; the store on the corner of 78th proclaimed it was a “Charcuteria” in hot red electric letters that wiggled. It wouldn't be much use putting his question directly in a place like that Jones decided, and taking his subject in would lose too much time; he would have to plan a campaign.

The place was darker inside than it looked from the outside, with cheeses in bags hanging overhead like sleeping bats, and bins of fruit. A fat woman with a slight mustache regarded him with some disfavor as he looked over the goods in the plastex case. He indicated one of a series of closed dishes marked “*Arroz con*

pollo—to heat” and asked: “How much?”

“Seventy-fi’,” said the mustached woman.

“I’ll take it.”

She produced a bag to insert the merchandise. Jones pulled out his wallet, looked in it, and gave an exclamation. “I’m sorry,” he said, “but I don’t have any change. Can you break a twenty for me?”

The woman extended her hand across the counter, accepted the bill, and took it toward the light at the back to scrutinize it. “It’s all right,” said Jones. “Though I don’t blame you. You probably don’t get too many big bills here.” He was cudgeling his brain for a better lead, when she surprised him with: “You goin’ ask about that, too?”

“You mean the fifty-dollar bill? Has somebody else been asking?”

“You gi’ me money, I tell you.” The hairs of the mustache trembled slightly.

“How much money?”

“Fi’ dollars.”

She was a Latin. “Too much,” said Jones. “I’ll give you two.”

They batted it around for a while, finally reached an agreement that three and a half would be a fair price for the information she had to dispense, and she leaned across the counter.

“All ri’,” she said, “this fifty-dollar bill is gi’ me by Jesus Perez. He’s a no-good man; I think he sell trujillol.”

95

“Is he a Mexican?”

“I do’ know. I guess maybe.”

“Did you ever see him with a blond American?” Jones described Warburton as nearly as he could without having seen him.

“No, never seen him.”

“Where does this Jesus Perez live?”

“I do’ know. Round here, somewhere.”

That was a setback, and it was no use asking for a description of him either. However, if his name was really Jesus Perez and if he was enough of a character to merit the description of “no-good,” he probably had a record. But that would take time.

“How often does he come in?”

She gave an expressive shrug. “Sometimes, sometimes not. Most late night.”

“Has he been in tonight?”

“Not yet.”

Jones made a sudden decision. “Look here,” he said. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ve got to find this Perez, and if you help me, I’ll make it worth your while. I’m going across the street, where I can watch your window. If Perez comes in, I want you to move one of those melons into the window. If you’ll do it, I’ll

give you five dollars now and five more after I find him.”

An expression of peculiar craftiness spread across the woman’s face. “All right, I do it,” she said and held out her hand.

Outside children were still running and little groups still walking about the street, but he selected a stoop across from the Charcuteria, settled himself with the air of a man who could do no more in such weather, lit a cigarette, and began his vigil, meanwhile turning over what he had learned. The tail Howard had picked up was probably an agency man; the same agency that had been looking for Warburton. And, almost unquestionably, whoever had been asking about the fifty-dollar bill before Jones himself had also been an agency man. But how had the agency learned so quickly of the appearance of the fifty-dollar bill from the robbery? There seemed only one satisfactory answer to that. They must have received the information from Di Paduano, governor of the Federal Reserve Bank. But why had he put a private agency

onto the case while reporting the appearance of the money to the FBI? The answers to that were a good deal less satisfactory; in fact, they were not present at all. Then Jones remembered something else; he himself had already made the connection, within a high degree of probability, between the agency and the mysterious woman who was looking for Warburton. If the agency now stood convincingly connected with Di Paduano, then Di Paduano and the woman were connected. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. Something to check.

Across the street, the woman with the mustache stepped to the window, took out a bottle of vinegar, and replaced it with a melon.

The man who had come out of the Charcuteria with a plastic bag in his hand was short, and in the red glare of the light, looked extraordinarily broad-shouldered. Probably a shiv man, thought Jones, as he threw away the remains of his second cigarette, got slowly to his feet, and began sauntering east on 78th, not looking too often at Perez, but often enough to

catalog and classify his walking rhythm according to the Echols system. The man didn't seem to be in any hurry and at the corner he waited patiently for a bus to go by. In the next block, he went to the second building and ducked in. Jones waited for long enough to make sure it wasn't a trick, which it might be if Perez had any idea he was being followed, then slipped over and noted the building number—353; the word “Rooms” appeared over the row of bells in the hall. If Perez had the three million, he certainly wasn't making much of a splash with it.

Jones turned into the avenue, located a down-at-the-heels drugstore of the non-automat type, and found the phone—one of the old kind, without a visi-panel. The duty man at FBI said Howard was still out; Jones told him that the big deal was nearly closed, but that he needed a witness, and gave the address. “The name on the door is Jesus Perez,” he said, and drew from the duty man the answer that he would have the local office take care of it.

That meant that a police squad would be

on hand to cover any exits at the rear, and that Howard was probably still entertaining his shadow, the agency man. Jones felt good as he rounded the corner again to keep an eye on 353, stepping toward the curb to avoid a group of three men coming along abreast.

It happened so quickly that he didn't even have time to react. The group apparently split to let him past; then, as he stepped forward, a line of snake wire whipped from one to another and was around his body, pinning his arms to his sides as they closed in.

“Don't worry, Fed,” said one of them. “We aren't going to hurt you; just keep you on ice for a while, till we do some business.”

Too late Jones remembered that the proprietor of the Charcuteria had taken a bottle of vinegar out of the window when she put the melon in. The agency boys must have reached her first. That was why she had smiled.

“Some of you dime-store dicks are going to

find yourselves without licenses,” he said bitterly.

One of them laughed. “Leave us take care of that,” he said, “and come right along and get your lollipop. And don’t start yelling copper. It’ll get you a pop on the head in this neighborhood.” They were urging him gently up the hill, away from 353, surrounding him closely so that the snake wire would be invisible. One of them said heartily, for the benefit of passersby: “That’s all right. We’ll get you home.”

Jones formed a mental picture of the police squad arriving just in time to let Perez slip through their fingers because they didn’t know whom they were looking for. He filled his lungs desperately, and at the top of his voice shouted: “Fire!”

The one on the right hit him. The one on the left let go.

Jones yelled: “Fire! Fire! Fire!”

All down the street, people were turning, heads were being thrust out of windows. A couple of lights went on. One of the trio said rapidly: "I'll cover it, Larry. Get this yap out of here." He vanished as a little group began to gather. Jones felt the snake wire whipped from around him, and his arms were gripped hard. One of the agency men addressed the group of five or six: "It's all right, everybody. He's just loaded up with trujillo."

"I am not," cried Jones. "There's a fire in 353. These guys started it!"

The group was nearer ten than five or six now, and he was beginning to get them. In a crowded tenement district, the arsonist is a deadlier enemy than the policeman. Someone said: "What for you hold him?"

Unfortunately, one of the agency men was quick on the uptake, too. He swept his free arm around in a sweeping gesture. "Listen, everybody," he shouted, "this guy is just a nut. Somebody beat it up to the corner and turn in

an alarm, and we'll see if there's a fire. You!" He pointed at the objector, who glanced over his shoulder, shrank back a step, and then under the impulsion of that monitory finger began to move in the indicated direction.

In a conversational tone, Jones said: "You guys won't get away with this; this is federal heat."

"Yeah?" said the other one. "You don't know how much punch we got behind us. If you _____"

Somebody yelled: "Look! Cops!" And Jones saw heads swinging toward a point behind and over his right shoulder. The man on that side let go, and Jones swung round just in time to see the big plastex bubble swing gently down from the helicopter overhead, and a pair of blue policemen leap out, riot guns ready. The bubble whirled upward again, and a day-light stabbed down brilliantly onto the doorway of 353, just as it swung open and two men dashed down the steps. One of the policemen tried to halt them. There was a flurry of action, the

policeman went down, Jones saw a hat come off a head so brightly blond that it looked white in the day-light, then the pair were lost in the shadows and the crowd that immediately began to gather. He pushed aside a gaping Chinese and rushed forward, waving his identification tag.

The cop who had been knocked down was on his feet. “Get that blond guy!” cried Jones.

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“Not in this neighborhood, chum,” said the cop. “You pick him up later. You the guy that called for the squad?”

“Yes, but it’s probably too late,” said Jones. “Let’s go in anyway, though. I think I have a big-time hood stashed in there. Have you people got the back covered?”

“Yep. Roof, too. We always make the cover drops first on these jobs. The lieutenant turned on the heat as soon as he saw what the address was.”

“All right, let’s see what we got left,” said Jones.

He stepped into the hall, followed by one of the policemen, while the other put his back to the door and faced the crowd in the street, which was already beginning to murmur.

Before either of them could ring, the inner door was opened and a thin woman with a robe clutched around her was saying: “If you want Mr. Perez, he’s in 3B.”

Jones glanced at the arrangement of the hall. “You come up the stairs,” he told the cop. “I’ll take the elevator.”

It was ancient and decrepit enough to belong in a museum, one of the old self-service type of fifty years before. Jones produced his needle gun and stepped out just as the officer made the head of the stair well, riot gun held purposefully forward. “No use knocking,” he said, and strode forward to grip the door handle of 3B.

It opened without resistance on what had once been the living room of a small apartment, now chiefly occupied by a bed, dirt, and disorder. The lights were on, but unless there was someone under the bed or in the bathroom, the place was empty. The window was open.

Jones had taken two steps toward it when someone came over the sill with raised hands, and behind him a policeman in blue. As classified by the Echols system, his walk was assuredly that of Jesus Perez. But the utterly astonishing, the rather frightening, thing was that Perez was wearing the head and face of Dr. Richard Mansfeld, chemist of the Braunholzer Institute.

It worried Jones for only a moment. Then he said: “Let’s get that plastic mask off and talk business . . . Even if the best fish got away.”

Sixteen

The short man in the chair by the window was named Swigart; he was a New York detective.

He said: “We did everything we could, but we couldn’t get a crack out of Perez. He sticks to it that he got the \$950 playing the races.”

Howard permitted himself a faint smile. “And all the bills in the lot were new and came from the missing rocket shipment,” he said.

Swigart snorted. “What can you do? The first thing he did was yell for a mouthpiece, and the springer won’t even let us put the lights on him. Personal privacy laws!” He snorted again.

“I’d expect anyone with a record like his to know all the loopholes,” said Howard. “You

know it, don't you?"

"I knew he had one, that's all," said Swigart.

"It came through about an hour ago. This will be news for you, too"—he addressed Jones—"Jesus Perez, Mexican descent, born in Lubbock, Texas. Twice given psychiatric treatment and eventually sent to the moon mines as an incorrigible. Served four years of a five-year sentence."

"The case is tightening up," said Jones.

"Warburton is from Lubbock, too. As though we needed that item of proof."

Howard said: "Yes, and there's something else. Southwestern District reports that Warburton has a record, too."

"He has! What is it? What for?"

Howard shook his head. "That is what I'm afraid we're not going to find out unless Warburton tells us himself. It was for something that happened while he was under

age. He was psyched and discharged as cured of criminal tendencies, so the record comes under personal privacy. The people at Southwestern only found out about it by accident. He hasn't any relatives there, and they were tracing general records at the city hall when they found a closed-case card for him. By the way, there's no educational record for him beyond high school."

"What beats the hell out of me is this," said Swigart, "if this Perez was in on the rocket robbery, what did he do with the rest of the money? Besides what he spent, \$950 is an awful small dose to have left out of three million." 101

Howard said: "I have a theory that will furnish a partial answer to that. The first bill that turned up was a five hundred, in El Paso, thought to have come across the border from Mexico. I think we'll find that Mr. Jesus Perez has parents, or perhaps a sweetheart, south of the border, and that he has passed part of the money over for safekeeping. At least, we're having the Mexican police check. I don't

suppose he said anything about his contacts down that way?”

“Not a thing,” said Swigart. “The only thing he was willing to talk about was the robbery. He said he had an alibi; that he was in Chicago the day it was pulled. We asked Chicago to check that, but I’ll bet all the tobacco in Kentucky that it turns out to be right. He wouldn’t have been so willing to come out with it unless it was airtight.”

“What’s the next step?” asked Howard. “I take it you established those agency people were from the Owl, all right?”

“Oh, yes,” said Swigart. “The two that were holding Jones didn’t have time to make their getaway before the fire truck closed in, in answer to the alarm, and the locals turned them in. They had to do some fast talking and show their identification to keep from being hooked on the false-alarm rap. But the Owl wouldn’t tell us who they were working for. Must be somebody with plenty on the ball, though. The Owl is usually pretty

cooperative.”

Jones said: “Would three million dollars be enough on the ball to make a difference? From the description, one of the men who ran out of that joint just as I got there could have been Warburton.”

Swigart shook his head. “Three million would fix you quite a few operatives, but it would be peanuts for the agency as a whole. And it’s the agency that’s making the trouble.”

Howard said: “By the way, Jones, did you get enough of a look at the one you thought was Warburton to set up a classified description?”

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Jones shook his head. “I wasn’t near enough to get his ears or nose. I think his walk would fall in the JM 22 group, but he was running and I only got a short glimpse of him, so I couldn’t carry it any farther than that.”

“All right,” said Howard, “now before we go any deeper into the matter of the Owl and who

hired them, I'd like to get the Perez matter cleared up. You searched the place, Swigart. What did you get that might furnish a lead?"

"Practically nothing. No weapons, no tools, nothing we could put the bee on him for having except that money. We've got him booked for receiving stolen goods, but even that's weak. The only tie-up with the robbery, if it is one, is this." He laid a piece of paper on the desk.

Howard picked it up. "A receipt for the shipment of one box, special handling, from New York to San Francisco by rocket express, addressed to Juan Fernandez, 2303 Noriega Street. Did you ask him about this?"

Swigart said: "Yes. It certainly made him nervous but he didn't know anything about it. Said it must have been left in his room by the guy that had it before."

"You noticed the date on it? The shipment must have been made on the rocket that was robbed, or the one before."

“I did that.”

“What about Juan Fernandez?”

“I called Frisco myself on it. There isn’t any Juan Fernandez at 2303 Noriega.”

Jones said: “There’s an angle I’d like to have you people consider. That entry at the Braunholzer Institute, and the disappearance of a batch of materials for duplicating a human means there’s something more than a strong probability that there is a duplicate of either Perez or Warburton wandering around somewhere. In fact, the existence of that plastic mask of the chemist at the Institute practically proves it. The use of the mask is the only way anyone could have gotten into the Institute; I established that myself. Now Warburton’s a chemist and could have operated the machine, especially since he was Sondergaard’s pupil. Perez isn’t. I think it was probably Perez who was duplicated. In that case, either the Perez with the alibi in Chicago or Juan Fernandez, who received the box out in San Francisco, could be the duplicate. That

would be a natural name for him to take.”

“What is this other case?” asked
Swigart.

103

Howard told him, then said: “Let’s see, is Perez, the one with the moon-mine record, right- or left-handed? . . . Right-handed. What about the one you have down there in the pokey?”

Swigart said: “He’s right-handed, too.”

“Then you have the original article, none genuine without this signature. The one who showed up in Frisco as Juan Fernandez must be the left-handed twin.” The executive wrinkled his forehead. “There’s also the possibility that the bill in Mexico came from this left-handed Juan Fernandez. He’d have to be in for a cut of the dough, even though he’s not strictly human——”

He stopped suddenly, looking at Jones. The Secret Service man only smiled. “Don’t mind,” he said. “My wife and I are both used

to cracks like that. But I do think you're pushing the line of deduction pretty hard here. We don't know there was a Juan Fernandez in San Francisco, either Perez or his duplicate. And there isn't anything in the report of the arrival of the express rocket to indicate that there was any hocus-pocus at that end. In fact, it's hard to fit Perez into the picture at all, even though it does look as though Warburton duplicated him, and the time since the disappearance at the Braunholzer Institute is just about right for training the duplicate. All we have along that line is this shipment of the box. Warburton may have worked some kind of sleight of hand so the box, instead of the bag, held the money, though at the moment I don't just see how. Everything seems to come back to him."

Howard made a note. "And he's missing. Anybody got any ideas on turning him up?"

Jones rubbed his chin. "If we're right, and it's an arranged disappearance, it's going to be hard," he said. "I think there's one possibility, though. This whole thing shows

long and careful planning; it was a year and a half ago that the business at the Institute took place, and there must have been a planning stage even before that. To my mind, this means that Warburton must have been arranging a duplicate identity he could slip into, after the robbery, at least that long ago. Right?”

There was a nodding of heads around the desk, and Howard said, “Right.”

“Well,” Jones went on, “then we have to put ourselves in his mind, and figure out how he would lose himself. I think anyone smart enough to have worked out this plan so that we don’t even know how he did it would also know there’d be a warning out for the bills, and would plan on not spending any of them for a long time, perhaps a matter of years. Agreed?”

“Seems plausible,” said Howard.

“In fact, his visit to Perez looks as though he somehow got wind of the fact that Perez was spending some of the money, and was trying to

put a stop to it. But that's a side issue; the main point is that he'd have to hide out some place where he could earn enough money to live on. Now, he's got two professions—bank clerk and electronic chemist. But banks check pretty close on their employees. Moreover, chemical firms pay more. So I think we'll find him quietly working at some chemical plant, where he began building up an identity for himself a while back.”

Howard commented: “It would have to be fairly near here, too, for him to have come calling on Perez. That narrows the field down considerably. You'd suggest covering the chemical firms?”

“I think there's an easier way than that. The American Chemical Society keeps a register of chemists at the research level because special jobs sometimes turn up. They can tell us what firms hired an electronic chemist back in June.”

Howard shook his head. “I don't like it very well. These big industrial firms will do

anything rather than produce their personnel records, and if we raid one of them and it turns out we've grabbed the wrong man, we'd be in a hell of a jam on personal privacy and personal security both."

"Won't do any harm to find out what we can, will it?" asked Swigart. "Let me try this society."

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"Go ahead," said Howard. "It's about all we can do for the present about locating Warburton. Now let's take up the Di Paduano angle. How did your job of roping one of the bank employees come out, Dewey?"

O'Neill, who had been sitting silently, spread his hands. "Not a tumble. I picked up a guy named Christy, we went to a bar together and then to a leg show, and I gave him the old song and dance about how there'd be some dough in it if we could turn up Warburton. Hell, I might as well of been talking to one of them stone lions out front; it wasn't that he was clamming up, he just don't know from nothing."

Jones said: “I think I can give you something on the Di Paduano angle.”

“The hell you can!” said O’Neill. “What have you got that we ain’t got on that?”

Jones told them about his deduction while sitting on the steps at 78th Street, waiting for Perez. “So it seems to me,” he finished, “that the Owl must be working for Di Paduano. That would explain the dough behind the Owl. Or for someone connected with Di Paduano, who would answer to the description of ‘some babe.’ All we have to do is find the babe.”

“Think you’re smart, don’t you?” said O’Neill with a grin. “Well, here’s one for you; you don’t gotta find her; I done it for you.”

“Huh?”

O’Neill waved a hand and enjoyed himself. “I been hanging around that bank, see? Yesterday noon, when I’m meeting my contact, out comes this dame, built like a fire engine, you know, the kind that has them chemical knobs out

front. I looked at her long enough to classify her walk in case it might come in handy sometime, and said to my contact how would he like to swap jobs so I could have something like that around when I got to feeling low, and he says that ain't for me, that's the boss's daughter, Dolly Di Paduano."

There was a momentary silence. Then Jones said: "That would explain a lot, all right. One of our inconsistencies has been that Di Paduano, who stands to lose by the robbery, has been so unco-operative about trying to find Warburton. But if his daughter is mixed up with the guy——"

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Howard nodded. "I agree. It could be that the two Di Paduanos are afraid that Warburton is mixed up in the robbery, but aren't sure, and don't want to take any action until they find out. Or it could be that they're afraid that Warburton innocently let loose some tip that made the robbery possible. Hell, it could be any kind of a hookup, but one thing's for sure. We know how the Owl found out about the bills on 78th Street even before we did. Di

Paduano must have tipped them off.”

O’Neill said: “Okay, we got it, you don’t have to rub our noses in it. What next?”

“I think the next thing is to make assignments,” said Howard. “Swigart will try to trace Warburton through his connections. You, Dewey, better take 78th Street; you haven’t been seen there, and you can pick up any leads floating around about Warburton and Perez, especially about the getaway during the raid. George, I’m afraid I’ll have to send you to Frisco. I’m not in the least satisfied with that Juan Fernandez angle.” He looked at the three of them. “However, you can take the night plane and be comfortable. Somebody’s got to find this Di Paduano girl, and since you’re the Chesterfield of this bunch, I guess you’re nominated.”

Before he left, another idea occurred to Jones, and he put through a call to Angela to ask her whether her “brother Benson” had ever known anyone named Warburton. The answer was no.

Seventeen

The voice said Miss Di Paduano was not at home, but the visi-plate didn't go on, and Jones had enough experience with society people to be perfectly aware that this meant she wasn't at home unless you could prove you weren't going to ask her embarrassing questions. Like that dame mixed up in the Atlanta counterfeiting case, social register and all, who had defied him to prove that she had known the bills she had undoubtedly purchased from a "shover" were queers.

It would have to be a campaign, then. 107
He wished he had Angela with him as he got into a taxi; having a wife who looked like a tri-di star was a great help when you wanted to get into some place where you wouldn't normally be admitted, under guise of

making a social call. But the idea he needed still hadn't jelled out when the cab wheeled to a stop where the East thirties meet the river; here a screen of African hedge was intended to give the occupants of the monolithic buildings beyond the illusion that they were living in a park. The Di Paduanos' house would be the third one down, one of the detached units. They could afford to pay for privacy.

Jones paid off his taxi and turned toward the building, deciding he would have to depend upon the inspiration of the moment. The number woven into the ornamental gate was 16; as he entered and started up the path toward the monolith——

“Where y’ going, Mac?”

Jones turned to face a man who had just stepped out of a watchman's kiosk inside the hedge, and in the same moment recognized the man as one of the pair who had tried to drag him up 78th Street the previous night. In a flash so swift that it had not time to be a

conscious thought, his inspiration reached him.

“Going to give you a present,” he said, and brought his left up from the waist.

It was no knockout. The Owl man staggered, snarled and countered with a left of his own that showed he had at least some boxing training. Not enough, though; Jones slipped the punch, crossed a right over it, and followed up with another terrific left to the pit of the stomach. The Owl man gave a grunt and sank to his knees. Before he could recover, Jones had a hammer lock on him and was whipping out a snake wire to lock his wrists in position behind his back.

The man said thickly: “I’ll put a personal security rap on you for this, you lousy fed.”

“Come along and get your lollipop,” said Jones, jerking him into the kiosk.

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There was a phone in there and a chair; he would have to take a chance on the Owl man’s reaching the instrument somehow, but at least he could make it pretty difficult. A jerk

brought the private eye into the chair; a couple more turns of snake wire had him fixed firmly to the legs. The Owl man said balefully: “You won’t make it, stink-eye. I gotta give them the office from here.”

“I’ll take a chance on that,” said Jones, then he swung the door of the kiosk shut and started toward the house, hoping that the little encounter hadn’t been seen and that the Owl man had just been trying to upset him with the story about notice from the gate being needed to get in.

The building was one of those with a blank lower story, door set flush into the wall, and visi-plate flush into the door. When he pushed the bell the woman’s voice that answered was cold enough to have formed ice on the East River: “Yes?”

“I’m from the Owl,” said Jones, and rapidly flashed his identification past the plate, his hand held partly over it so she wouldn’t see the “U.S.”

“I’m afraid I can’t—no, wait, come in,” said the voice, and the door swung open on an entry with a long-haired carpet and indirect lighting. The voice said: “On the left, please.” Jones went down the hall to where thick curtains hung in a door on the left. They parted at the bidding of an electric eye, and he found himself looking down into a sunken living room which had been transformed into an Italian garden by the use of modeling in the recessed walls. The lighting had been arranged for that of a serene twilight, and out of the center of it, a voice that seemed to have the same quality as the light said, “Please sit down.”

Dolly Di Paduano was not tall, but even in the low chair behind the low table, her dark face had a regal quality that seemed to make a crown of the mass of black hair. Jones felt awkward and out of place as he came down two steps, crossed the room, and took the chair opposite hers. He said: “They sent me up from the office. One of our people has been pinched for obstructing an officer while doing his duty.”

She remained as cool as before. “I am sorry to hear it, but I don’t see why I should be concerned. Your people should be more careful.”

Jones leaned forward. “Yeh, but he got there for helping your friend Warburton make a getaway. The boss thought that maybe your father could tell someone to have them lay off. It’s the feds.”

109

She gave him a long level look, then without stirring from her position or losing her poise, said: “You’re not from the Owl. Who are you?”

Jones grinned, and abruptly changed his manner. “No, I’m not,” he said. “My name is Jones, and I’m from the U.S. Secret Service.” He flashed his identification again, visibly this time. “Frankly, we’re very anxious to find Warburton and ask him a few questions, and we thought you might be able to help us.”

“I see. You haven’t any charge against Mr. Warburton.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Not now, but he’s disappeared, and there are several things we’d like to have him explain. Including his connection with a man named Perez, who has been spending some of the money stolen from an express rocket.”

“But that’s assuming——” Her gaze shifted suddenly past his head and her tone of voice changed: “Look, why not have a drink with me and talk this out?”

“I——”

“Please do.” She leaned forward and touched his arm with a gesture of surprising warmth. “It won’t take a minute.” She was on her feet and through the curtain at the side of the room before he could stop her, and from behind it he heard a few words and the tinkle of glass.

In a moment she was back, her manner a graciousness that contrasted strangely with the way she had received him. “Look,” she said, “I do know Wesley Warburton quite well, but it’s silly to think that he would have anything to do with a robbery. It’s just that he——You

can put the tray on the table.”

Jones glanced up to see a man approaching with the sedate gait of a butler, carrying a tray with a shaker and glasses. There was something . . . “He’s had some family troubles,” said the girl, “and there are times when all of us want to get away from our families. I have myself. This is a specialty of the house. I mix them with dry ice.”

She moved the shaker and poured as Jones watched the plume of carbon dioxide come from the mouth of the shaker. He reached for one of the glasses and she took the other, and opened his mouth to say something when his fingers suddenly went dead and the glass slipped to spill its remaining contents on the floor; he was caught in a frightful and frightening paralysis, and he realized that it hadn’t been carbon dioxide in that drink, but paraethyl triazine.

110

She had it, too. Across the table, her head was still a trifle lowered and to one side, as though she had tried to avoid the impact of the

paralyzing gas when it hit her, her fingers still locked around the stem of the cocktail glass from which she had never intended to drink. And as Jones stared, mouth half open for the remark that had never been uttered, he remembered what it was he had almost noticed about the butler. It was something just a trifle unnatural about the features, invisible unless one looked for it carefully, that showed he was wearing a plastic mask.

Warburton—and it wasn't much comfort to sit there and figure out that his walk analyzed as a type JM 22-16-8.

A small sniff of paraethyl triazine paralyzes the motor nerves for a good four hours. Long before it was over, Jones heard the phone ring insistently, then the click over as a record was made; and then the doorbell began. If he could have smiled he would; a relief man had evidently come to replace the one he had left trussed at the gate and was trying to pass the word. Jones wondered if there were any servants in the house to find them, and decided

there probably weren't; if the girl had Warburton in the place, she probably arranged for them to be out. There was nothing to do but wait for the stuff to wear off; as the phone rang again, Jones settled himself philosophically to calculate the prime numbers as far as he could do it in his head.

The girl began to move first, unclasping her fingers from around the glass. Jones hoped she wouldn't make it soon enough to get away on him, but at the same moment, his jaws came together with a snap and aching, and then life began to flow from the center of him, out to the numbed extremities. As Dolly Di Paduano sat back in her chair, he stood up and produced his gun. 111

"Lady," he said, "I want you to get out and get away from that thing. I think it's mostly evaporated, but I'm not going to take any chances, because you and I are going to have a little talk."

"If you wish," she said, and stood up with catlike grace. The cold mood was back. "May

I get the records from the phone?”

“No,” said Jones. “I’ll get them myself, and later. Come over here.”

He kept her in front of him until they had reached another corner of the Italian garden and sat down. Then he said: “I could arrest you, and I think I probably will, but you can save yourself a lot of trouble by telling me a few things. That was Warburton, wasn’t it?”

“I haven’t anything to say.”

“All right, that wraps it up. You’re under arrest.”

She stood up indifferently and held out her hands as though expecting the snake wire to be put on them. The door clicked, and Di Paduano came into the room. “Dolly!” he said. “Why didn’t you answer——? What’s this?”

He was looking at Jones’s gun. “This,” said the Secret Service man, “is an arrest. Your daughter has just enabled the escape of a

suspected criminal by dosing me with paraethyl triazine.”

The banker’s face flushed. “If you think you can invade a private home like this——” he began, but his daughter took three quick steps to him and laid a hand on his arm.

“Don’t, Father,” she said. “It’s true. I did it, and I’m glad I did it.”

The banker put an arm around her as he addressed Jones: “I think that we had better talk this out,” he said, in an almost startling reproduction of Dolly’s words. “Please sit down.”

The perpetual twilight of the Italian garden was close around them. Di Paduano turned to Dolly: “Why?”

Two little red spots came into her cheeks, but her head was still held queenly high. “Because I love him. Because he’s my lover. You might as well know it right now; he spent the night here.”

Jones said: “Warburton?”

“Yes, Wesley Warburton.”

Di Paduano said: “I think you had better tell us about it, dear.”

Her hands came up to her face. “I’ve been so afraid, and I didn’t like that Perez, and——”

Jones interrupted: “Perez is in jail. He was spending some of the money from the rocket shipment. And we know he and Warburton both came from Lubbock.”

Dolly said: “I know. He told me. But he wouldn’t stop seeing Perez. He said Perez needed him, and it was just prejudice to be down on a man, and not fair, because he’d been in the mines for something he really didn’t do at all.”

“Mmmm,” said Jones. “It seems to me that the record shows Perez was fairly guilty.”

“I know,” said the girl again. “But it was just like that business Wesley himself went

through, about the heli.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Jones.

“Oh, it was a long time ago, but Wesley told me perfectly frankly, soon after we first met. One of the boys stole a heli, and took some of the others for a ride and smashed it up. And it really wasn’t fair; Wesley didn’t know the heli belonged to someone else, but they sent him with all the others to be psyched. And it was so unfair that he resisted the psych, and then they sent him to a social development school, and before he got out, his parents died and he couldn’t go to college.”

“I see,” said Jones. The picture was becoming clearer in his mind—Wesley Warburton, embittered by what he considered the unjust treatment he had received from the government, determined to make the government pay him for it. Keeping in touch with Perez, the expert in armed robbery. Working out a plan over months and even years. Using his connection with Dolly Di Paduano. Jones decided he didn’t like

Warburton, a cold-blooded and rather repulsive character. He said:

“Why did you help him to get away this morning? I only wanted to ask him some questions.”

113

“Oh, but that was just the point! As soon as he saw you here, he knew that you’d probably hold him for questioning. And he couldn’t afford that. He said there was something so dreadful going on that a lot of people would suffer and maybe die if he were kept overnight, and he was the only one who could prevent it. I think it was because of Perez. Wesley had some influence over him and was going to prevent him doing something. So he put that—that stuff in the cocktail shaker. He said it wouldn’t hurt either of us, and it would give him a chance to prevent what Perez was going to do.”

Thinking to himself that a woman in love will believe anything, Jones said: “Perez isn’t going to do anything but count bars for a while.” He swung to Di Paduano: “Did you

know about all this?”

The banker looked lofty. “If you wish a statement for the record, I shall have to consult my lawyer.”

“Damn it!” cried Jones. “If you want to play it that way, go call him up. I’ve seen you before in company that was more than questionable. In the meanwhile, I’m placing your daughter under arrest and taking her down to be questioned under the lights. I’ve got a charge of obstructing an officer against her, and, by God, I’ll make it stick.”

Di Paduano looked as though someone had asked him for a loan. “I resent your methods,” he said, “and I shall make complaint against them in due course. My connection with Everett Benson was purely a business matter. However, to avoid unpleasantness, I will inform you that when my daughter informed me that her fiancé was missing both from his home and the place where he was supposed to be employed, I retained the Owl agency to find him, with instructions to report to her. She

seemed apprehensive over something this Perez person might do.”

“Never occurred to you to ask the police, did it?” said Jones. “I suppose it was one of the Owl men who brought Warburton here last night?”

The girl nodded. “I told the Owl men about Wesley knowing Perez when they first came, and they’ve been looking for him. They phoned me yesterday morning that they had found Perez, and then last night Wesley went to see him, but the police raided the place, and Wesley had to go, so the Owl detective brought him here.”

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Then Di Paduano hadn’t tipped the Owl off about the money. Jones grinned inwardly at the thought that he had reached the right result by the wrong deduction. He stood up and stepped over to the table. “Do you have a piece of flex plastic?” he said. “I’m going to take this tray with me.”

“But why?” asked the girl.

“Warburton handled it. I saw him. I’d like to have some record of his prints, that’s all.”

Dolly’s face tightened a little, and Di Paduano said: “I don’t think that carved silver will give you any recognizable prints.”

“Don’t want fingerprints. They’re all right for you commercial people, but in police work we haven’t used anything but pore prints for about fifteen years now. The pattern’s just as specific for every individual, and you don’t need a whole set, just a small section from almost any part of the body. But you have to have molecular dust and a micro-camera to bring them out.”

Eighteen

George Jones had to live through a good deal of kidding about being caught by paraethyl triazine, but he did that. He arranged for Warburton's pore prints and walk description to be added to the dossier on him, and a lookout to be set for him as wanted for questioning. There wasn't any basis for a charge against the elusive chemist as yet, so a general arrest warning couldn't be put out. Then he arranged for a tap to be put on Di Paduano's wire and a tail on his daughter; that would make the banker sore, but he was sore already, so it didn't matter.

By that time, Dewey O'Neill was back with a report that he hadn't been able to pick up the Warburton trail on 78th Street, but that during the day before he was arrested

Perez had called in an expressman and shipped away a big trunk or box, the meaning of which piece of information was obscure, though it must fit in somehow. Where had he shipped it? Under personal privacy the express company declined to say without a court warrant. Howard would apply for one in the morning on the grounds that the trunk might have contained some of the missing money, but the prospects didn't look too good.

The night plane only took five hours to make the trip, but thank God, they let you sleep aboard until you were ready to get up. Jones stepped out onto the concrete of Oakland airport on a morning milky with fog, and asked for a heli taxi to take him to the landing ground of the rocket express, in the hills at San Ramon. There was a delay and a phone call to make sure that no rocket was due to take off or land immediately; contact with one would be bad for the heli taxi.

At the port itself, a busy official named Baker was glad that the government wasn't giving up on the rocket robbery. Of course, insurance

covered most of the loss; “But you understand, Mr. Jones, it isn’t the loss itself that disturbs us, half as much as how it took place. The success of our enterprise is built, in a sense, on the fact that we give absolute security to all shipments. Once anything is sealed in the rocket, it can’t possibly be tampered with until it has been receipted for at the terminal. And now it has been tampered with. Speaking as an individual, I’d be willing to pay the three million to anyone who can tell us how it was done.”

“Make me an offer,” said Jones. “In the meanwhile, I suppose that all your people have been over this a dozen times, but I’d like to see the people who handled the shipments when the June 6 rocket arrived—not those who were to get the money, that’s all been gone into, but those who handled the other shipments on the same rocket. Also, I’d like to know how the shipments are handled.”

“That’s easy enough,” said Baker, and snapped up the screen from the wall.

“See that hill over there, the one that looks as

though something had been sliding down it? Well, something has; that's where the rockets come in. The main radar station at Grand Island, Nebraska, picks them up at *Brennschluss*, coaches them along to the stations at Nephi and Ely, and then the homing station brings them in on this hillside. See? There isn't a chance of substituting another rocket for the one that starts out. You'd have to have powerful radar stations and a landing somewhere, and our own stations would register the difference in flight."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Jones. "What I want to see is what happens to the shipments after the rocket is opened."

"I'm coming to that. The rockets come down the hill against a baffle which you can't see from here. We always have a truck with a crane waiting, because some of the shipments are pretty heavy. When there's a particularly valuable shipment aboard, there may be someone waiting to receipt for it the moment the rocket is opened. If there isn't, the work crew puts everything into the truck and takes it

to the warehouse building, back of this one. Everything has to be logged and registered before being delivered. But the bank people _____”

“I’m not interested in the money shipment for the moment,” said Jones. “I’d like to talk to the crew that handles the log of deliveries.”

“All right,” said Baker, “let’s go around. You don’t mind walking?”

He led the way out of the office to a low building with a crane and loading platform at one end and a heli ramp and another loading platform at the other. Inside the loading platform was an office, where Baker introduced a muscular checker named Hinrich and explained that Jones wanted to look at the records for the day of the rocket robbery.

“It may have been the rocket before or after the one that was robbed,” said Jones, and produced the receipt for the shipment to Juan Fernandez. “I’d like to know who signed for this when it was delivered.”

“AG-11-87-63,” Hinrich read off. “That would be on the rocket that was hijacked all right. I’ll see.” He snapped open the case containing the records, and began to turn the microfilm. “Here she is—signed for by the addressee. Came for it in person, no delivery.”

“Remember anything about it?” asked Jones.

“No—o—o,” said Hinrich, gazing at the record. “Wait a minute, though, that was that special handling parcel. Yes, I do remember now. See, we were supposed to deliver it, but he came for it instead. Sure I remember. He came in here while all the yak was going on about the money and put up a stink because he couldn’t get his parcel right away.”

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“What did he look like?” asked Jones. “Would this be a picture of him—if you remember?” He handed the checker identification photos of Perez.

Hinrich turned them around slowly, frowning as he gazed at the three-dimensional images.

“No, this don’t look anything like him. I never seen this guy before.”

“You couldn’t be mistaken?”

“Mister, I certainly couldn’t. There was so much yak going on that day that I remember practically everything, even what I had for lunch. This picture here looks like a real Mex, see? And this Juan Fernandez that came for the parcel looked about as much like a Mex as the King of Sweden. He was one of them lemon blonds about middle size, and I remember wondering where he got the Mex name.”

With a shock Jones realized that the description, while it eliminated Perez or his double, was a pretty good picture of Warburton. He asked: “Do you remember whether he was left-handed?”

“I wouldn’t fool you, mister. That I never noticed.”

“All right, what about the parcel? What was it like?”

Hinrich closed his eyes, frowning, and then said: “I ain’t a hundred per cent on this, but I think it was a big thing, sort of like a coffin, but without any handles. Sorry I can’t remember no better, but we handle a lot of parcels.”

“You’re doing all right. How did it happen you turned it over to him? Can anyone just walk in here and pick up a parcel that’s supposed to be delivered?”

Baker said: “We’re very careful——” And Hinrich: “I should say not! When a parcel is claimed here, instead of being delivered, we make them put up enough identification to get past St. Peter into heaven. I don’t remember what this guy had, but it must of been plenty good.”

“The shipping address is 2303 Noriega Street. Would your identification go far enough to make certain he actually lived at that address?”

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“With a name like Juan Fernandez? Don’t

make me laugh; half the Mex in California are named like that. I say I don't remember how I tied it up to the same guy, but I bet I did."

It occurred to Jones that some of his vehemence was for the benefit of the boss, but that didn't make any particular difference. There was somewhere a shadowy connection between Perez, Warburton, the mysterious "coffin," the rocket-express robbery, and, ultimately, the batch of chemicals stolen from the Braunholzer Institute. It seemed fairly clear that Warburton had taken delivery on the box and that Perez had shipped it; but why?

Could it be that the money had been transferred from bag to box by some impossible system of teleportation? His mind played wildly with the thought as he took leave of Baker and got into a heli taxi for San Francisco. The next step was clear enough; it was to go to 2303 Noriega Street, where the police inquiry had been limited to establishing that no one named Juan Fernandez lived there. He wished he had a picture of Warburton, but the missing chemist had evidently taken

particular care that there shouldn't be any. On the way to Noriega, it occurred to him to send a message to Washington to have government physiologists asked whether it was possible, by any system of bracings or injections, to protect a human body against an acceleration of 8g, and to have the same question put into an integrator, and he took care of that detail first.

2303 Noriega turned out to be one of the featureless identical houses on the identical streets surrounding the Sunset Reservoir; a boardinghouse, by its appearance. The proprietor was a thin man with lusterless eyes, who had apparently let all his energy run out into the enormous mustache that flowed across his face. Nope, he didn't mind answering a coupla questions. Nope, nobody named Juan Fernandez ever lived there; the police had asked him that before. Nope, no one got mail there under that name.

Jones tried a description of Warburton, or as much of a one as he could give, with the date. The boardinghouse keeper put

his head to one side. “Oh, him. Yeh, I remember him. Only stayed a short while. Then the other fellow came, and he left. Name of Wharton, or something like that.”

“Would it be Warburton?”

“That’s it. Funny thing about him. He had dinner sent up to his room, and boy, he et enough for four people, I’m telling you. Then this other fellow came, and they were yelling at each other up in the room, and the next day he was gone. Left some kind of trunk behind him, too.”

Jones produced the pictures of Perez again. “Would this be the other fellow?”

The man let his jaw drop open as he gazed. “Can’t say for sure,” he finally decided.

“All right. Have you still got that trunk he left behind? And can I see it?”

“I guess so.”

The thin man solemnly led the way to a

basement; where an old fashioned bulb light shed insufficient radiance on piles of junk, in the midst of which was an object that could have borne the description of a trunk or a coffin—an oblong box, about three feet high, two and a half feet wide, and five feet long. There was a lock, broken; the lifted lid showed an interior lined with asbestos cloth over some kind of padding, through which projected a series of paired metal rings.

Jones gazed at it blankly, unable even to guess at the purpose of this singular container. But that hardly mattered beside the fact that, after he had borrowed a molecular dust insufflator from the nearest police station, the micro-photos of the lining showed that it bore the pore prints, not only of Warburton, but also of Jesus Perez.

Nineteen

“Our Chief,” said Jones, “always has us looking for contradictions—facts that will only add up to an impossibility. He says that a case in which there aren’t any can be handled by an integrator, and the only reason for having a human detective on the job is that he can resolve problems where the machine would reject all proposals as having zero probability.”

Case executive Howard said: “And we have some contradictions here.” It was a statement.

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Jones said: “We don’t have anything else. Perez couldn’t have been in San Francisco at the time of the robbery, but the case is full of his pore prints.”

“That ain’t no contradiction,” said Dewey O’Neill. “He shipped the case, didn’t he? He could of got the prints in there when he packed it—if he didn’t travel in it himself.”

“No, he couldn’t do that,” said Jones. “The box is too short, or too low, to hold a man. And the money couldn’t have moved from the bag to the box during flight, but I’m convinced that’s what happened, somehow. And we expect to find Perez, or his duplicate, using the name of Juan Fernandez; but it’s Warburton who uses the name.”

“There’s still another one,” said Howard. “The reply to that request you sent Washington is back. The physiologists say it’s absolutely impossible to rig up a man so he can stand 8g.”

“I didn’t expect much from that, anyway,” said Jones. “But there’s one other thing. The boardinghouse keeper in ’Frisco couldn’t identify Perez as the man who called on Warburton there and quarreled with him. I think it must have been, though, and I suggest

that we ask little Jesus not for his alibi for the date of the robbery, but for the following week.”

Howard frowned. “We can do that, but I want to point out that clearing up these back details of the case gets us exactly nowhere. It’s all five months old now. What we need now is a foolproof method of finding Warburton. And we haven’t even got a Locard description of him.”

“We have his walk,” Jones pointed out. “I saw it myself. And his pore prints. And we have the fact that he is almost certainly living somewhere under the name of Juan Fernandez.”

“That doesn’t do us much good right now. We can’t very well put out a nationwide alarm for all persons named Juan Fernandez, or for all those with JM 22-16-8 walks, either.” He swung to Swigart. “What did you get on the lists of people who hired electronic chemists in June?”

The city man made a face. “My contact got a list all right, but it’s got about twenty names on it, and they’re scattered across the country from hell to breakfast.”

Howard took it. “It isn’t much,” he said, “but it’s the best thing we have, and maybe we can parlay it into cracking the case. I see a line; each of you take one of these places and plant himself outside before they open up in the morning. Keep looking for someone going in with a JM 22-16-8 walk, until you’re satisfied he’s either there or he isn’t. I wouldn’t lay too much stress on Warburton’s bloneness; it’s so distinctive that he’ll probably have his hair done over, and I wouldn’t be surprised to find that’s why he took the name of Fernandez.”

The phone rang.

“Who is it?” said Howard.

“Mr. Di Paduano calling,” came the operator’s brassy voice, and the next moment the banker’s face flashed on the screen, distorted with emotion.

“My daughter’s gone!” he said. “She’s gone to join him!”

“Who—Warburton?” asked Howard.

“Yes. She left a note saying that she had to make the choice some time and had decided to make it now, and that though she might be unhappy with him, she’d be more so if she didn’t follow her impulse.”

“Do you want us to find her?” asked Howard.

“Yes.”

Jones asked, “Can I get in the act for just a minute?” and as Howard motioned to him, took his place at the screen. “Mr. Di Paduano,” he said, “do you have anything to indicate where your daughter might have gone?”

“Not a thing,” said the banker. “When I came home for lunch, she was simply gone, and left this note.”

“Did she take your car or heli?”

“No, neither one; not even her own car.”

“We’ll do our best for you, Mr. Di Paduano. Also, we’ll send someone down to get any tridis or photos of your daughter you can spare. Good-by.”

As the banker’s picture faded, Jones turned to the others. “It worked,” he said. “Where’s that list that Swigart got? Here, Howard, see? Chasing around to all those firms isn’t going to be necessary; the place where Warburton is hiding out is right across the river, at the Fairfield Reducing Company in Bayonne, New Jersey.”

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The other three said “Huh?” simultaneously, and then Swigart asked, “How do you know?”

“Because I set this up by leaving a hole for it. When I came to from the paraethyl triazine and began questioning that wench, she started out by being just as tight as the skin on an apple, and even proud of helping Warburton make his getaway. Then her father came in, and she got very co-operative. It was one of those

contradictions I've been talking about. And the more she told her story about believing in Warburton's innocence, the less convincing it became. I began by thinking that he was putting one over on her; but the farther along I got, the more I began to see that she was putting one over on me. So I left her a couple of easy outs. I kept from asking whether she knew where Warburton was, or raising any discussion about him, to keep papa from getting suspicious. I was pretty sure when she opened up that much, but held out the details, that she'd go right to him and lead us that way."

Howard said: "Good psychology. You Secret Service boys work it hard. But what makes you think of Bayonne?"

"The layout of that place of Di Paduano's," said Jones. "Look, she didn't take the car or the heli. We haven't any report from the tail taxi that was sitting on the gate for her, so she didn't take a taxi and the normal exit. But I've cased the joint. If you walk a block and a half north along the river front, you come to the foot of 42nd Street, and there's a water-

scooter service there. I'll bet you three million dollars against a piece of cheesecake that she took a water-scooter and went to Bayonne. It's the only place on Swigart's list she could reach that way."

Howard said: "No, it isn't. She could have gone to an airport or anywhere."

"Nothing doing. The place where she's gone has to meet two requirements. Remember, it has to be a place where Warburton could live a double life, establishing an identity as Juan Fernandez, while operating in New York. So he had to get back and forth quick. And now we know in addition that it has to be a place that can be reached by water from New York." 123

Howard gave him one glance, then picked up the phone and pushed a button. "Hello, Assignments?" he said. "Have someone get in touch with the man covering the front of the Di Paduano house—I think it's Reichert—tell him to go up to the house, get a photo of Dolly Di Paduano, which her father will give him, and

take it to the water-scooter service at the foot of 42nd Street. I want to know if she rented one this morning.”

He turned to the others. “I don’t think, with a bird who moves as fast as Warburton, it will pay to delay.” He pressed another button. “Traffic? I want a heli with full raiding equipment prepared immediately.”

The Fairfield Reducing Company sprawled, but sprawled with a certain grace, across what had once been part of the Jersey flats, its low work-buildings facing the apartments for the executives across a wide heli landing platform. The receptionist was cool, and the big man in the office laid down his dicto-typo with an annoyed air as the four filed into his office. “What can I do for you, gentlemen?”

Howard flashed his identity. “We would like to ask a few questions about an electronic chemist you hired, probably in June.”

“Our personnel records are closed.”

Jones leaned forward. “We think his name is Juan Fernandez.”

The big man favored them with another look, touched the intercom, and said: “If Mr. Fernandez isn’t running an experiment, will you ask him to step into the office a moment?”

They could all hear the voice at the other end of the line saying: “Mr. Fernandez got a phone call about an hour and a half ago, and said he was going to step over to his apartment. He hasn’t come back yet.”

“Where’s the apartment?” asked Howard.

The big man said: “It’s Number 6 of those semi-detached buildings across the field. I hope you don’t intend——”

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“Haven’t got time to discuss it,” said Howard. “Come on, gang.”

The buildings were in the so-called Brazilian style with aerated roofs that had come in about fifteen years before. Howard dispatched

O'Neill and Swigart to cover the back and he himself stepped under the overhand and up to the visi-plate, which would have looked very strange on a real Brazilian house, to press the button.

There wasn't any answer.

Howard said: "I hope it hasn't got an electric guard, but I'll have to take the chance. Stand back." He produced his needle gun, twisted it open, dropped the charges in his pocket, replaced them with a shaped-charge cartridge, stepped back a little, knelt to get on a level with the lock, and fired. There was a burst of flame and a boom! The door slammed open.

Jones whipped out his gas gun and, Howard by his side, made for the aperture. There wasn't any light, but as soon as they had fumbled one on they realized that their long search for Wesley Eustace Warburton was probably over, but it wasn't going to do them much good. The man who lay with his face pressed into the rubber-plastic floor covering was extremely dead, the whole back of his

head bashed in.

“He has dark hair,” observed Jones, with mild interest, “but I’ll bet it isn’t permanent.”

“Looks like you were right about the Di Paduano wench being tougher than she looks,” said Howard. “Go through and let in O’Neill and Swigart, will you? I’m going back to the heli for dust and a camera.”

Jones started down the hall to where three doors offered him a choice of routes. The one in the center was a closet; but that on the right led into a tiny dining room with a gleaming kitchen beyond, and as soon as Jones opened it, he was aware that Dolly Di Paduano hadn’t been so tough after all. She was lying in the kitchen, her head against a partly opened packing box which was leaking insulation, and she was quite as dead as Warburton, though not so messily.

Jones stepped to the door, noted that it was locked on the inside, and called to the other two. O’Neill whistled when he saw

the body. “Boy friend did her in, huh?” he said. “Looks like a windpipe job.”

“I would say so, yes,” said Jones. “But it wasn’t the boy friend. He’s in the front hall with a hole in his head. Get your guns ready; the doors were locked, so whoever did it must still be in the building. I’ll take the lead; you cover me.”

He stepped to the pantry and freezing closet off the kitchen and flung it open. Empty. So was the bedroom that had a separate entrance to the pantry. And the bathroom. And the closets. And the living room.

“Must of got out a window,” said Swigart, dusting away. “I think I’ll put dust on them and see what we get.”

“But why should he?” demanded Jones. “When there were perfectly good doors, and the windows only give on those alleys between the buildings.”

“That ain’t all,” said O’Neill. “Who the hell

done it? They couldn't of killed each other.
This case is nuts.”

Howard, pulling the rapidly developed prints from the back of the camera, said: “Those pore prints on the inside door handle are Warburton’s. Same as the ones on that silver tray you got, George.”

“Yeah,” said Swigart, “I got a look at the roots of his hair while I was dusting. They’re blond.”

Jones said: “Then get the button on the phone. It seems to me that whoever did it had probably already knocked Miss Di Paduano off, and the phone call was a decoy to bring him over here. Only——”

“Only what?” asked Howard.

“Only there aren’t enough people in this case to go round. Two of them are dead, and one’s in jail, and they’re the only ones who knew about the robbery.”

“It rates as one of those impossibilities you were talking about,” said Howard. “The prints on that phone are different from Warburton’s all right. Okay, let’s try the kitchen. If she was strangled, there ought to be prints on her throat.”

He led the way into the other room, followed by Swigart with the insufflator. O’Neill said: “How we going to get the money back now?”

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Jones said: “I think we’ll find that Warburton has it stashed away somewhere under the name of Fernandez.”

Howard’s camera snapped; he reached in the back and drew out the print. “George, Dewey,” he said in a funny voice.

“What have you got?”

“There are prints on the girl’s throat, all right. But I’ve seen them before, and so have you. They belong to Jesus Perez.”

For ten seconds there was a silence of amazed faces and dropped jaws. Then Jones said, “Get back!” and raced for the other side of the room, whipping out his gas gun and aiming it at the corner of the packing box where it was spilling insulation. The shell hit with a little whiff!

As though it had been a signal, the whole side of the box cracked open; something about the size of a terrier emerged, poised, and—as Jones yelled, “Shoot!”—launched itself at Swigart’s head. Swigart fired and missed it in midair. O’Neill fired twice and there was a burst of flame from inside the box as Jones flung himself on what seemed to be a midget clinging with its legs to Swigart’s neck and striking at him with a blackjack. The two went down across a chair with a crash. The midget was unbelievably strong; Jones could not drag it loose, but O’Neill got his gun against its head and pulled the trigger.

Swigart sat on the floor, one hand to his head, and Howard and O’Neill bent over the creature the latter had killed. About two feet

high, dressed in something loosely belted around its middle, but with arms bare, it had the muscles of a vest-pocket Hercules and the features of a man of about thirty.

“What is that little horror?” asked Howard.

“That,” said Jones, “is one of the duplicates of Jesus Perez. There’s another one that’s half out of the box, where O’Neill shot it, and I think you’ll find the third inside.”

Twenty

“It was like this,” said Jones, lifting his glass and squinting through it at the azure bar lights of the Caverne Bleu. “The square-cube law was responsible for the whole business.”

“Why don’t they repeal it, then?” said O’Neill.

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Jones sipped and raised a hand. “The square-cube law goes roughly something like this: as you increase the size, or mass, of an animal by the cube of its previous figure, its strength only goes up by the square. A man thirty feet high would be almost too weak to walk around; that is, if he had the same proportions. On the other hand, very small animals, like a mouse or a marmoset, are prodigiously strong for their size, and when you get down to an ant, it can

walk around with a load of ten or twenty times its own weight. Try lifting fifteen hundred pounds sometime.”

“You could do it one pound at a time,” said O’Neill.

“Shut up. The small ones are on the right end of the square-cube law. That’s the fact Warburton used to steal the money shipment from the rocket. The first thing he needed was someone with incorrigible criminal tendencies, like Perez. He got into the Braunholzer Institute and put Perez in the Reproducer; but he didn’t just make another Perez. He made three, each a third of Perez’s size. That reminds me, I must go up there and find out if Dick Mansfeld knows how it was worked. I’ll bet it was a new technique Warburton worked out.”

“He isn’t in a position to tell us,” remarked Howard.

Jones went on: “Anyway, when Warburton got through with the Reproducer, he had three

two-foot Perezes, left-handed, physically powerful—did you see how that one came right across the room at Swigart in a single jump?—and with inherent criminal tendencies. It took the pair of them about a year or so to educate their midgets and locate the right money shipment. Then Perez shipped the midgets to Juan Fernandez in that box and Warburton, who had already established the identity, was on hand to meet it. The box held the three little duplicates of Perez when it started; when it arrived, it held them plus the money. They simply climbed out and took it from the bag.”

“I thought the acceleration would kill anyone,” said Howard.

“The acceleration was 8g,” said Jones.

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“It would kill a full-sized man. But the midgets gained strength by losing size. The 8g of the rocket would only affect them the way 1½g would affect us.”

“Then the money was aboard the rocket all the time!” said Howard. “That is, up to the time

Warburton's box was taken off. But why didn't he do away with those little nightmares?"

"It's easy enough to figure out what happened. We know Warburton went to see Perez in New York—probably to get him out of the country, or make him stop spending the stolen money or something. We broke that up, but before we did, Perez must have shipped his little companions to Warburton, with instructions to do him in. It's easy enough to reconstruct what happened in that kitchen. The Di Paduano girl arrived, called Warburton at his office—those were her prints on the phone button—and then either got curious about that box, or else the little Perezes acted on their own initiative against her before taking on Warburton."

Swigart said: "What made him pick the name of Juan Fernandez?"

"That's another thing we don't know positively," said Jones, "but I rather think he didn't trust Perez much, and chose it so that if anyone did get on the trail, they'd take it as an alias for Perez—just as we did at first."

O'Neill insisted: "Come on, give us the dope, old master. What tipped you off about those three guys in the box?"

"Had to be that way," said Jones. "Perez is in jail, but there were his pore prints. If we'd been looking for fingerprints, they'd have been in reverse, but the pore pattern is symmetrical. I thought of a duplicate Perez early in the game—remember? But there didn't seem to be any trace of one. Then I remembered something else. Asbestos cloth is awfully peculiar material to use for packing; too expensive for one thing. But that box out in San Francisco was lined with it, and it was full of Perez prints. Here we had another box with asbestos and Perez prints around. They had to be connected. And then I remembered the square-cube law."

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.
- Added a Table of Contents and wrote chapter descriptions for it.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in underscores (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)

[The end of *Double Jeopardy* by Fletcher Pratt]