Smoke

a novel by

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Royals

Philip's cigarette burned a hole in the air. The smoke emitted a thin plume dancing up to the ceiling. Glass pendants on the chandelier above his typewriter accepted another ominous microdeposit of tarry film. After caressing the light fixture, his smoke wafted along the ceiling unseen; it ducked down at the wall to scuttle through an open window, then scurry on a breeze across Tottenham Court Road, from whence it could blow just about anywhere, maybe all the way around the world.

Philip was trying to finish a business report. As soon as the monthly was done, he would hit the street hoping to find a suitable place in the crowd to get a glimpse of the new King of England, whose crowning would be today.

For the love of a woman can change the course of the world. As Helen's face had launched a thousand Greek ships, so the affections of an American divorcée had turned the tide of royal authority from one brother to another. From one duke to another. Made ostensibly of sterner, though stammering, stuff than his older liege, Albert--soon to be called George VI--would, in only a few short hours ascend those few hallowed steps in Westminster to sit

upon the throne of Edward, James, Henry and all those other regents who had ever commanded the armies or fleets of British empire.

The American, Philip Marlowe, whose typewriter rang its final return as he completed his report, anticipated the mounting pageantry with distant, though wondrous, curiosity. He stood up, walked over to the open window, and surveyed the stream of English yoredom who now migrated south on Tottenham Court Road toward Trafalgar and beyond where the royal procession would pass in a few hours. His cigarette had died; he flipped its butt in the ever-present ashtray on the window sill.

The people of England were expectant, exultant. No mean Mr. Mustard here. No, they were ready to receive a new king, now that the whole affair of Edward's abdication had resolved itself into the ashtray of history. And all the more so, since the role of the regents was now largely ceremonial, having little effectual responsibility except to maintain that proverbial stiff upper lip with a vigilant eye upon the horizon where an eternal sun was perpetually setting, but never, of course, on the British Empire. God save the King, but it would be Mr. Baldwin, or Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Churchill, or some such privileged commoner who would ultimately compel English hearts and guts to bear sacrificial defense of their storied shores.

Only a hundred and fifty-odd years ago, Philip's yankee forebears had fired the shot heard round the world. Upstart revolutionists in that hotbed of rebellion, Massachusetts, had sparked a powder keg of free-thinking independence that had since set the whole of civilization ablaze with yearnings for liberty. But not here, no, not here in the realm, in the Albion of old. No, the very Magna Carta that had implanted, in former times, plucky zeal in the hearts of Englishmen--the very document--languished in a glass case at the British Library just a few miles from here. Who knew? These limeys were streaming like lemmings to a Dover cliff, like vassals to a gilt coronation, like white on rice. How many of them, this very hour, paraded right by the sacrosanct text unaware of the incendiary ideas embalmed within, in inky arcanity? How many?

Philip couldn't fathom these English; he had been here almost a year now, representing Brigham Tobacco Co., and getting them slowly converted from their stuffy old pipes to the new, improved method for smoke delivery, cigarettes. No, he couldn't figure these people out. The very people who had invented the industrial revolution now were so obstinate in their pipe-clinging. But Philip knew that in the midst of such tradition the wheels of

progress would inevitably turn. Slowly would they turn, step by step, inch by inch. Not like in America where everything was push coming to shove. Clang, clang, clang went the trolley, down on the street; ding, ding, ding went the bell; beat, beat went the heart of an ancient nation yearning for prosperity and security.

Someone was knocking on Philip's door. He opened the door to see Nathan Wachov's laconic face. The tall friend, flipping a shilling coin, looked down at Philip and said, "If we can get a view at Trafalgar, it'll be because we either crawled under a thousand legs, or got to an upper story window. The King's subjects are packed solid like sardines from here to Parliament and beyond." Nathan was walking into the apartment as he spoke.

"It seems we've waited too long," observed Philip. "You'd think eight o'clock in the morning would be a good start on getting to a procession that's to pass some time this afternoon. You want some coffee?"

"I think not, old chap. We'd better get a move on. The faithful have been congregating since yesterday evening. I've already tried to negotiate my way onto Oxford Street, with no success; it may be a lost cause."

"So you think we can make a go of it?"

"Sure, why not? Nothing else to do today. Shops are closed, nobody doing business. You surely won't be servicing any accounts in this mob," Nathan speculated."Grab your mac and let's see how far we can get."

Philip locked the door behind him as they started down the stairway toward the ground-floor entry."Well, what'll it be then? The crawling approach, the sardine strategy, or the high road?"

"The submarine strategy, old chap." Nathan displayed a wide grin as he retrieved two metal tubes from his satchel.

"Periscopes?"

"Righto, spyglasses, actually. I bought 'em yesterday at Steward's, over on the Strand."

"Must have been a pretty penny, eh? They look like good ones."

"Quite dear, my friend, but how many kings do we crown in one lifetime?" They were stepping from the stoop now, entering the stream of slickered humanity that was moving, not quite quickly, in the exquisitely-fine morning mist.

"Well, this is the third in my lifetime," quipped Philip, raising his voice now to overcome the din of Tottenham Court Road's passing throng.

Nathan was surging into the crowded sidewalk, leading their way. He handed one of the spyglasses to Philip. "Edward doesn't count." He laughed out loud. "...no thanks to Mrs. Simpson. His was just a dress rehearsal for his brother's coronation. But King George VI is the real thing; I can feel it in my bones, as can, I surmise, these other thousands of British citizens."

Philip wanted to look through his sypglass, but found that to be a clumsy task while moving in the wake of Nathan's tall frame.

Half an hour and six blocks later, upon reaching Oxford Street, the duo was confronted with choc-a-block humanity straight ahead along Charing Cross, or the same madding crowd if they were to opt for a westward turn onto Oxford. They chose, with the obstinacy of youth, to plow straight ahead toward Trafalgar, even though the likelihood of thinner crowds was less in choosing that route. It would be the path of more resistance. "I might have third-floor access at the Midland on Pall Mall," said Nathan.

Philip was vaguely aware, in his yankee pragmatistic funk, of the regally-directed energy that now flowed along Charing Cross. He could see, ahead and behind, a channel of motive hats-- fedoras, bowlers moving, tweedy and herring-boned, felted, folded and tilted o'er English faces, high and low, noble and yeo, tethered with silkish neck-tied cravats upon legions of liegemen, and accompanying rose-cheeked ladies festooned with beads and laced bodices, covered in shiny mac wetness, all flowing at street level in the London fog as one loyal realm, toward that coronary procession which would soon culminate like an Elgar promenade beneath their high holy spires of Westminster, and which would be validated in ancient, sacred words spoken o'er a stammering sovereign lord soon to be anointed during this very solemn hour, to receive the mantle of destiny that would-- little did they know at this gathering moment-- within just a few spare years, commission English RAF and compel British resolve to sacrificially prevail o'er the bellowing, belligerent Teutonic beast that only now began to breathe *wehrmacht* fire on the other side of the channel.

Nathan nudged Philip rightward when they arrived at Cranbourne Street. "I think we'll do more speedily along Haymarket. Let's go in that direction," said he. And when, after trudging among the horde along Cranbourne and Coventry, they turned onto Haymarket, the pair soon came upon the bowed windows of Fribourg & Treyer, a classic tobacconists' shop.

At this point Philip grabbed Nathan's arm. "Let's stop here for a minute. I want to see their most recent blend." said Philip. And so they did. Philip was gazing intently through the window at an array of snuff packages on display."Oh, what I would do to convince these old farts to accept cigarettes into their selections. I've made three visits in order to persuade them of the wisdom in adopting modern tobacco enjoyment, but so far to no avail."

"Young man," came a voice from behind, a strained voice.

Philip turned his head to see Nathan being addressed by an old white-haired man who was leaning against the rounded window storefront. The old fellow, quite dapper in a brown derby that shielded bright blue eyes over a pale, fleshy face, double-chinned over a red bow-tie, seemed nevertheless to be slowly collapsing beneath the burden of his own weight.

He clutched Nathan's arm. "Young man," he insisted, though weakly, "Would you be so kind..." He was faltering. The cataracted blue eyes closed slowly, then managed, laboriously, to open again. He looked up at Nathan's expectant face. "...currency stabilization...on the gold standard...perils...bloody monetary experiments...reverse...a calamity...Here, my boy, take this, please." The old man proffered a small notebook, which Nathan, puzzled, and attempting to support the fellow's faltering constitution, managed to accept with his left hand. Then the old fellow collapsed.

"Doctor! A doctor!" yelled Nathan, frantically. A thread of drool dripped from the old man's open mouth as Nathan struggled to lay his limp body down gently on the sidewalk. At the nearby corner on Haymarket, the lights changed, and traffic commenced.

Nathan and Philip, speechless, knelt beside the stricken man, whose portly, suited body now lay motionless on the sidewalk. His eyes stared blankly upward into the morning mist. A crowd of people stood and stared. Nathan began pressing at the man's chest in what appeared to be a vain attempt at stimulating heart operation. In a sort of desperate gesture, Nathan gently slapped the man's joweled face as if to provoke him to attention.

Then there was a parting in the crowd; a bobby was on the spot. "Stand aside, please," said the policeman, with accustomed authority. The two young men rose to their feet and backed off, allowing the bobby full access to this fallen gentleman's predicament. After conducting a few more ineffective

chest compressions, the policeman gingerly turned up the old fellow's gold watch, which now lay inside his open coat on the ground, attached to the end of a gold chain that had strayed from the vest-pocket. Philip could see that the watch showed 9:33.

The officer looked up at Nathan. "Do you know this man?" he asked, while checking the pulse at his risk.

"No sir."

"What happened?"

"I was standing here by the window, looking in. I looked to my right. He was turning away, and slumping against the window. I took hold of him, trying to give him support. But I was in no position to bear his weight, so I let him down as gently as I could. He was, uh, blubbering, and that drool was beginning to come out of his mouth. I called for a doctor, and tried to, uh, somewhat, to stimulate his heart."

The bobby stood up. He looked directly into Nathan's eyes. He had a gentle, though official, demeanor. "Did he say anything?"

Nathan thought for a moment. "He did. He was going on about, uh, about the gold standard..." Nathan turned toward Philip. "Was'nt that it?" he asked.

"Yes, he said something about the gold standard, and monetary experiments," replied Philip, looking at the policeman.

The bobby looked down again at the body. He spoke slowly, "Do you remember...what his last word was?"

Nathan and Philip looked at each other. Nathan was pursing his lips, trying to think about what had just happened. He shrugged his shoulders. "It was all so sudden."

"Calamity," said Philip.

"Yes, that was it, calamity." Nathan affirmed, with relief, as if it were a matter of importance.

The bobby cast his analytical eyes around to the gathered crowd. "Does anyone here know this man?" he shouted.

The only response was the din of Haymarket's bustle as Londoners continued their pilgrimage in anticipation of coronation pageantry.

"Have any of you people ever seen this man before, or can tell me anything about him?"

Then came a reply. "Yes. I know him. He is a member of the Travellers Club. In fact, officer, I saw him there not a half-hour ago." The speaker was a

thin gentleman, well-dressed in a blue, vested suit. His pale, gaunt face was thin, moustachioed, with spectacles.

"Step up, please, sir," the bobby commanded, gently, gesturing with his right hand for the informer's approach, as he retrieved, with his left, a notepad from his uniform pocket. Then, having another thought, the bobby looked upward and addressed the crowd. "You people would do well to move along now. Please make way for the medical team who will be here shortly."

Setting his cartridge pen to the notepad, he began to quiz the man in the blue suit. "Do you know his name, sir?"

"His name was Paul Wallris."

"How do you spell that surname?" inquired the officer, cocking his head slightly.

"Wallris. W, A, L, L, yes I think there are two L's, R, I, S."

"And you say you saw him at the Travellers Club just a while ago?"

"Yes, he was having breakfast there with some companions."

"I see." The policeman jotted for a moment, then looked up into the other man's eyes. "And what is your name, sir?"

"Greeneglass, Itmar Greeneglass."

Nathan and Philip were preparing to walk away. The officer, writing, glanced up at them. "I'll need you gentlemen to remain here for a while. Just stand aside there for a moment, please." The two younger men lit up cigarettes.

The officer directed his attention once again to the man in the blue suit. "Very well, then, Mr. Greeneglass, please describe Mr. Wallris' circumstance there at the Club this morning, if you can."

"I was not privy to their conversation, of course, as I was sitting nearby in a chair, taking tea and reading the *Times.* Mr. Wallris and the two other members were having breakfast together at a table by the window."

"Who were those other members?"

"I don't know, sir. Their faces are slightly familiar, as I believe they are both fairly new members, whereas I have been there myself for about ten years now. I do, however, know this about Paul Wallris. He was rather grief-stricken just now. His grandson was one of those seamen killed last week in the fire aboard the HMS Hunter, on non-intervention patrol off Gibraltar."

Philip took a long pull on his cigarette, a *Bullseye*, his best- selling brand. The smoke of it swirled upward into London mist, disappeared into the cloud, and wafted his thoughts far above and far away from the ancient gray city in which he now stood. Across an ocean, and across many miles of verdant, productive earth on both sides of that vast water, he had traveled, about ten months ago. Leaving the hardscrabble North Carolina hills and furrowed fields behind, he sought fortune and a better day, and maybe some adventure along the way. It was a reversal of the sojourn taken generations ago by his ancestors.

The old man's sudden demise reminded Philip of one dark day, back home in North Carolina, when his grandfather had died. Right in the middle of his burdens grampa had given up the ghost, in a half-plowed rocky field behind the business end of a crotchety mule, while breaking up red clay earth for the season's tobacco planting.

A foreboding pall crept across Philip's young consciousness--a kind of smoky wet blanket. Unanticipated, the mood now cast over his strappy vigor a condensing gravity. In the dampening London fog this portly gentleman had just been ferried to wherever it is that people go beyond the pale. Philip had, for whatever reason he did not know, just witnessed the passing.

It was a death. It arrested Philip's youthful attention more obtrusively than his grandfather's passing had done; and yet he didn't even know the man-- this old chap, Mr. Wallris, who now lay still and cold by the quaint, dusty window of a tobacco shop. The old fellow's collapse was noticed by a hundred curious eyes as strangers trundled by, but none of them commemorated it. No memorial for Mr. Wallris' passing, so far.

This stalking death could arrive at any moment, thought Philip, and yet it seemed that one would want to make some minimal arrangements for the dreaded appointment. Had the old fellow made an appointment? Had someone else made arrangements for his passage? Would a man meet God like a prospective client? More likely, the man was the prospect.

His grandfather--Bucky they had called him--had toiled many a growin' season between those spring plantings behind the mule and the 'baccer harvesting in the fall. Ah… the fall, the bright autumn. It seemed for a moment that Philip could almost smell the flue fires, curing and toasting golden leaves in their loggy barns, back on the other side of the Atlantic and

the other side of childhood. But no, it was nearby aromatic Turkish, stoked in a gentleman's briar pipe, which now beckoned to Philip's olfactory.

Smoldering within his pipe dream was a pungent memory of grampa's ole back forty, and how their collective toil would later be soothed with the smoky warmth of family and hearth. That's how the laboring farm family laid to rest another damp autumn day of layin' baccer into the barn, after mama had at long last called them in for supper, reminding the young'uns to wipe their feet.

But death wouldn't be like that. Death wouldn't be like some impressionist painting softened with the dappling of romanticism.

No, death, he had just seen today, is a rude and cruel thing, an intruder. Death is an unholy fire, with unwelcome smoke to screen its noxious consequences. Its burning destructiveness was set quite apart from those gentle, flickering home fires of his memory. Death would be something like the bonfires which now blazed in the east direction from England, across the channel, beyond the Rhine and the black forest, in a Berlin stadium, where nazified extravaganzas now prepared to set ablaze national pyres of incendiary hate. The flames of those fires would ultimately cauterize Saxon conscience with a scarring beyond civilized sensibility in the smokestacks of Dachau.

But Philip didn't know that. Few people did, not even the soon-to-be-anointed King of England.

There's quite a lot that people do not know about what they do in this world. Why, Philip couldn't even fathom the lethal power of the thin cylinder between his two fingers.

But now the policeman was speaking to him.

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Notes

The policeman asked Nathan if there was anything else he had noticed about the deceased.

"He handed this to me," said Nathan, "even as he was falling to the ground." It was a folded white paper, with this handwritten message largely scrawled in black ink:

Wallris--
John Bull's ransom will smoke out the black shirts tomorrow. If not, your bridge could burn. Chapman

The bobby, raising his eyebrows, looked up at Nathan. "Mr., uh..., your name sir?"

"Nathan Wachov, of Islington."

"Mr. Wachov, did the gentleman, Mr. Wallris, did he display any signs of struggle?"

"He was struggling to stay on his feet, sir, but was incapable of it. He was losing strength rapidly when I went to his aid."

"Did his death appear to you to be, ah...natural?"

"He was gasping for air, and then the mucous was dripping from his mouth. I don't know; I've never had anyone die in my arms before now."

"Gasping?"

"Yes. Wouldn't you say that would be a natural response of anyone who is taking his last breaths?"

"Yes. Quite so." The policeman looked down at the body again. "I'll need to take this note, you know. Since this incident has resulted in a death, I'll need to retain any items that could be evidence."

"Evidence... of what? He gave it to me."

"While he may have handed it to you, that doesn't mean he gave it to you for keeping. This is routine procedure, I assure you, Mr. Wachov, in such a case as this."

"Certainly, do your duty, sir."

Two medics arrived with a gurney. Officer Morley began to facilitate their task of removing the body. "Stand aside, now," he commanded to the onlookers." The bobby raised his arms to shoo them away. "Move along now. We've a new king to crown today. Better get on with it."

Stepping aside, Philip looked quizzically at Nathan. He was curious about the note. "Black shirts?"

"Fascist renegades," replied Nathan, "Mosley's rabble upstarts." He spoke flatly, while gazing blankly at the body. The medics were preparing to carry the deceased man's rotund body away from the point of his last stand on this earth. Nathan began thinking out loud. "But who knows if contentious politics—the infamous black shirts group--has anything to do with this man's passing? That's doubtful. I mean, look at the old guy. Does he look like a man who would have anything to do with radical politics? He probably had a heart attack. My guess is that note is a random scrap of paper that he happened to have in his hand when the final moment came."

"He looks like a man," observed Philip, "who might be the object of some radical's discontent. He looks like, well, like a John Bull."

"Ha. You mean the blackshirts might have been out to get the old boy?" asked Nathan. A corner of his mouth turned up in a faintly incredulous grin. " He wasn't shot, or stabbed. He just. . . . died."

"A fat Tory," said Philip. "Look at him. He's not the sort of man who has ever stood, I daresay, for one moment, in an employment line."

"He hasn't missed any meals," agreed Nathan, looking up and around for the first time since they had suddenly encountered the unfortunate Mr.

Wallris. "I'm thinking, though, about that note: '...your bridge could burn,' it said."

For a perplexing moment, the loud murmur of the Haymarket crowd eclipsed their pensivity.

"His bridge to eternity," mused Philip.

Nathan's green Moravian eyes flashed with mild amusement. His wide mouth registered a thoughtful grin. "Perhaps he managed to cross that bridge before the burning..."

The man in the blue suit caught up with Nathan and Philip as they commenced their slow plodding through the crowd down Haymarket Street. Nathan felt a tug on his arm.

"You were the last person to talk to Paul?" the man blurted as Nathan stopped to turn around.

"If you can call it that," said Nathan, inspecting the speaker's face. It was a gaunt face, gray-bearded and etched with a testament of some affliction. A canopy of bushy eyebrows hung like a tallith over his expressive brown eyes. Nathan was standing still now, looking at this man in the blue suit, the man who had spoken to the policeman about Paul Wallris. Carefully, slowly, as if he were unsure of this circumstance's propriety, Nathan explained, "He said a few words. I didn't speak to him. I didn't know what to say." Nathan used a long pause to assess his questioner. "And then, well, you know..." Nathan started to turn away, as if to continue his walk, though he knew the man's persistent demeanor would prevent it.

"Sir, I need to talk to you. This was no insignificant man whose death you witnessed today," the man insisted.

Nathan reversed his direction again. "I knew this man for about one minute." He looked intently into those large brown eyes, eyes brimming with a need to know.

"What did he say to you?"

"I didn't hear it all. It was more like a mumble than...Who are you, anyway? Who gave you permission to ask so many questions?"

"I am Itmar Greeneglass, and Paul Wallris was a friend of mine."

"Well I am sorry for your loss, sir. But I must be on my way."

"What is so urgent that you cannot soothe an old man's curiosity about his deceased friend's passing?"

Nathan's decision to move forward was again arrested. "The crowning of an English king, sir."

"I see," said Itmar, "and is it you who are going to crown George the sixth?"

Nathan felt a sudden inexplicably defiant levity. He looked over at Philip's rather dumbfounded countenance, and registered an odd mirth, as one corner of his mouth turned up in a smirk. "I do bite my thumb at thee sir," said Nathan. He gestured with an upraised thumb, but he didn't bite it, and turned again as if to attempt another departure.

Philip was plumbing the depths of his understanding for some accounting of his friend's prickly reticence to accommodate the stranger's entreaty.

"He gave you something, didn't he?" Itmar was undeterred.

"That's none of your business, ,sir," was Nathan's awkwardly resolute response. There was mild a quiver in his voice. "Who are you anyway? Who appointed you the inspector on this case?"

Philip heard in Nathan's voice a subtle modulation toward cooperation; it seemed that Nathan was posing an authentic question to which he really wanted an answer.

"I told you, Nathan, Paul was a friend of mine."

Nathan looked long and hard at Itmar Greeneglass. Their eyes were locked together for a few seconds, until Nathan blinked.

"I need to talk to you, Nathan. Please come up to my office for a few minutes; it is just down the street here. Would you like some tea? Or something stronger if you prefer."

"How did you know my name?"

"You spoke it to officer Morley when he asked you the same questions that I've been asking."

Philip interjected. "I think we should do this, Nathan. Men don't just die on the street every day, you know. There may be something going on here that needs...a follow up, or something."

"I realize that, Philip. That's what concerns me. I wasn't expecting an inquisition, after I've already had one from the officer." He looked intently at the stranger again. "So if this deceased fellow was a friend of yours, how have you...how long have you known him?"

"I've known Paul for a year or so, met him in the Travelers club. Recently, though, he has helped me greatly, or I should say, he has helped some friends of mine greatly. He was a very generous man." Itmar offered a hesitant smile.

"How so?"

The stranger lowered his voice a bit. "It is a matter of some confidence. These are precarious times, you know. My office is just up the street, and we can speak with some privacy."

Nathan was thinking. "Come on, Nathan," urged Philip. " I could use a cup of tea." He pulled out a cigarette. The dull roar of a thousand footsteps and voices became for a few seconds a surreptitious covering for the stranger's next statement.

In yet a lower voice, the intruder drew his face closer to Nathan's and spoke quietly, yet deliberately. "Mr. Wallris had furnished two ships from his fleet for refugees to escape from Guernica, and from Sprain, to France."

That got Nathan's attention. His eyes widened. Surprised, he looked askance at his friend. "How about one of those cigarettes, Philip?"

" Better yet." Itmar looked at Philip and gently put his hand on Philip's sleeve. Then his eyes riveted back to Nathan's. "I've got a Cuban cigar with your name on it." He thumped Nathan lightly on the lapel.

"With my name on it," repeated Nathan, skeptically.

"So to speak." Itmar offered the little grin again, and shrugged. "Come on, Nathan. Three minutes, and you're in my office where we can talk." He slid past the tall man as if to lead the way.

"I don't know you from Adam," protested Nathan, with what seemed to Philip a touch of humor. "How do I know you're not one of them?"

Itmar wheeled around. "One of who?"

"I don't know, ah...one of the blackshirts."

The stranger, speaking low again, asked, "Mr. Wallris said something about the blackshirts, did he?"

"Not exactly," quipped Philip.

There was the silence of street noise again as Itmar considered his words. Then he said, "Maybe you don't know me from Adam, my friend." He stuck his face at Nathan's again. "You've heard of Moses, *n'est ce pas*? He was my great uncle."

Nathan laughed, and began walking in the direction Itmar was suggesting, down Haymarket Street toward Pall Mall. Despite the drizzly weather, a festive atmosphere inhabited the crowds of people who moved steadily as one mass of humanity, on both sides of the street, in the street, and just about everywhere you could see. The British people were gathering expectantly to crown their new sovereign. After a few minutes, the newfound man in the blue suit diverted Nathan and Philip to a clothing shop

with its name, *Greeneglass*, painted in green and gold script letters on the display window. Itmar pulled out his keys, opened the door, and the three men entered a small, well-appointed store that smelled of fabric and dye. The sudden quiet as Itmar closed the door behind them was startling.

Although the shop seemed small to Philip, his survey of it presented a richly impressive inventory of goods, mostly women's blouses and dresses, in a variety of rich, though sedated, colors--lace here, wool there, a plaid or two, cream and burgundy, forest green, a burnt orange hat tilted upon a mannequin with a string of pearls beneath,. a compact mens' selection over on one wall, colorful children's on the other. A folded ivory card with sizably printed script rested on a glass case; it read: *We assure you the best fit in London. Our alterations are guaranteed to please.* But Itmar wasted no time in conducting them to the back, through a draped doorway where they ascended a creaky stairway to an upstairs apartment. "My wife has our grandchildren out on Trafalgar to catch a glimpse of the royal procession," explained Itmar.

"We don't want to deter you from joining them," said Nathan.

"No worry, my friend. I'll be joining them at the appropriate time. We have some arrangements with friends who have a third-story view of the square. I can assure you there is nothing more important for me right now than to hear from you, if you willing to tell it to me, what my friend Paul said before he passed...Cigar?" He offered the hand-wrapped smoke which he had just retrieved from a humidor.

"Don't mind if I do," said Nathan, accepting.

The spritely gentleman offered a cigar to Philip. "And your name, sir?"

"Philip Marlowe, thank you."

"Pleased to meet you, Philip...Itmar Greeneglass. May I ask, what brings this American to London?"

"I represent Brigham Tobacco Company."

"I see. I hope this Cuban wrap is to your liking."

"Surely it is. You were saying earlier, sir, that Mr. Wallris had provided some boats for evacuees from Spain."

"That's right, Philip. You understand," said Itmar, getting right to the point, "...don't you, that Franco's rebels in Spain would be powerless without the Italian and German support."

"I've gathered that from reading the papers. It seems that all of Europe is getting involved in this Spanish bloodletting."

Itmar was boiling some water for tea. The two visitors had followed him into the kitchen. "Please sit down, gentleman." He issued them to chairs at a quaint wooden table appointed with a ceramic vase of fresh peonies. "There's much more to that war than meets the eye. The rebels don't have an air force to speak of. The bombing of Guernica two weeks ago was carried out almost entirely by the German *luftwaffe*, and it was inhuman what they did there."

"I have read that almost the entire town was destroyed." said Nathan.

"It's true. Five thousand people, or more, were massacred under the German bombs. Very few survived, but those who did fled to Bermeo on the coast, about twenty miles away, which is one location where Paul Wallris' two ships stopped to retrieve refugees, eluding the blockade, of course. Most of the refugees who've been able to get out, though, came through Bilbao."

"Mr. Wallris owned two of those boats?" asked Philip.

"His company did. He himself had given the order for their use in this rescue operation. So you see, we do not know how his death will affect the availability of those two ships. And I daresay we need every available vessel to get those people out before the damned Germans get back to their wicked destruction."

"Who is 'we'?" Nathan posed the question.

"We who support the legitimate government of Spain--the very government that is now standing solely against this rising tide of German and Italian militarism." He was pouring hot water now into their teacups.

"Communists?" asked Nathan.

Mr. Greeneglass laughed. He set the kettle back on the stove, turned around and faced his visitors again. "Do I look like a Communist?" he asked, shrugging.

"No," replied Nathan. "Obviously, you're not a Communist, nor a Spaniard, because it is not likely that a Jewish tailor fitting clothes in the heart of London would be either of those. So, whom do you represent?"

"I represent anybody who is willing to stand against Hitler and Mussolini, and their beastly stormtroopers who are trying to take over Spain, and probably all of Europe. It is bad enough we've got two dictators on the Continent without them setting up a third one. Furthermore, I have documentation, gentlemen, that my people--the Jewish people who are unfortunate enough to be citizens under the Third Reich--are being systematically arrested in large numbers, deprived of their property, forced

to relocate into appalling places, and even, in some cases, murdered by Hitler's SS."

Nathan's spoon clattered noisily against the saucer as he had dropped it after stirring in sugar and milk. "Sorry," said he.

Mr. Greeneglass continued. "So, no, my friends, I am not a Communist, and I do not represent or support them. There are a few of their stripe who are part of the coalition that supports the Spanish government against those bloody Fascist insurgents. Most of the Spanish who are trying to retain their government of the center are just hard-working folk who do not want to be ruled by a dictator or a corrupt king. And they need help from outside if they're going to protect themselves and their government from being taken over by the beasts." He set a few scones out on a dish for them, a mere formality with the cigars already being fired up. It was something his wife had taught him to do. "Furthermore, the urgency of this situation is why I was so insistent that you accompany me here. If you have any information about Paul's last communications, I need to know what they were, if you are willing to help us overcome the effects of his untimely death. I gather from observing your talk to the policeman that there was a note. Can you tell me what was in it?"

"The officer had to take the note," Nathan obliged. "He said it was legal procedure in this circumstance that the police should retain it, as evidence, or some such. However, I can tell you that it was brief; it was addressed simply to 'Wallris', and it said that the black shirts would be smoked out...what was it, Philip?"

"The note said," offered Philip, that 'John Bull's ransom would smoke out the black shirts...ah...tomorrow.' ...and 'If not, your bridge would burn.' "

" 'If not,' " Nathan corrected," 'your bridge—meaning presumably Wallris' bridge—could burn.' It said the bridge *could* burn. And it was signed, 'Chapman.' Do you know who Chapman is?

"I do not," said Itmar, his brow wrinkling.

Their puzzlement over the Chapman signature lapsed into a lazily long silence, as cigar smoke curled upward. Itmar was not smoking, though his guests were 'raptly appreciating their Cuban rarities. The two young men found themselves punctuating this morning in unexpected smoky meditation over the deathly appointment. Finding themselves, after a blur of sidewalk events, at a toasty kitchen table, they began to ponder the significance of it all. The pumping empire heart of the old city swirled

roundabout them outside; it teemed with mounting anticipation for the sacred coronation. There was today, in all England, a rare, sovereign presence that seemed to inhabit every lad and maid, every lord and lady of their ancient kingdom; it hung upon the London mist in glistening magnificence, even unto this very room, and proclaimed with silent certainty that all would be well in the realm of George VI.

The telephone jangled. Itmar answered it. "Hello...Yes, love...I am still at home...Soon, dearest. I'll explain later. I may bring some guests."

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Far beyond the coronary flow of Coventry, Piccadilly, Haymarket and Westminster, long distant from Albion shores, westward across the thousand miles of Atlantic expanse, past a few hundred miles of North American coastal plain and piedmont, nestled between greening Appalachian ridges, a low fire was licking through two acres of bottom land. Smoke of a different weedy aroma crackled quietly upward into brisk Blue Ridge mountain dawn. Philip's brother Robert was burning fields, preparing their ground for this year's tobacco crop.
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3

Plants

Only a few ridges and valleys from Robert Marlowe's controlled burn, in the sleepy North Carolina town of Trail, Heidelberg presses cranked out the weekly edition of the ***Trail Ledger***. Pete the pressman inspected the first impressions as his whirlygig printing machine turned pages out with rapid mechanical efficiency. On page 6 was a photograph of the soon-to-be-coronated king of England with his queen and two princesses, a lovely family. The half-tone looked good; there was no story here about King George, just a picture with caption, an item of some passing interest for provincial American curiosities. The page was properly registered and the type was sharp. Having surveyed his work, Pete the pressman approved it, and cranked the press speed up to make its run. With familiar relaxation that accompanied the soon completion of his early morning's work, he began to comprehend the informational content of his May 12 newspaper product.

One item of interest was, he noticed, in the Agricultural News column. It was a notification to farmers about documenting tobacco acreage, with information about participation in the new federal conservation and allotment program. Upon obtaining some paper forms from the local

Agricultural Extension office, the article said, the farmer could . . ."fill out a worksheet, and find out just what he needs to do to get the most out of the program. Then if it suits him to do whatever he must do to earn his payments he can do it and get paid for doing it."

"Hmmm," thought the pressman, "I'll have to remember to do that." As he was planning to set out an acre of his own on the old home place to generate some extra cash, come fall.

In the next room, Henry the typesetter was hurriedly composing, from the leaden trays of his typographic and photogravure armature, an ad for this edition's last page soon to be printed. The large display ad read:

Mr. Kool will broadcast the Kentucky Derby Day, May 21.

Accompanying the message was a background photo of a racehorse and jockey poised for their speedy start.

Being almost done with his work for this edition, Henry's mind began to wander, having been prompted, even by the lead-gray cast image not-yet committed-to-paper, by the galloping prospect of Derby day on a warm spring breeze, Henry could almost taste the mint juleps that would be imbibed by attendees in celebration of that annual contest, only a few weeks from now in a bluegrass eden far away, but not *very* far away, only a couple of hundred miles or so. Such was the power of a well-composed advert upon a man's imagination, furtively competitive imagination, which could be readily ignited by the suggested equestrian scenario.

Of course there was, in the black/white iconoture, no *Kool* cigarette dangling from the jockey's mouth, as he was, no doubt, pretty intent on what he was about to do—spur his prancing mount onward through Kentucky wind, dirt, cinders, and the other steeds' pistonating arses, past thousands of screaming spectators, toward that gloriously-fleured necklace of victory—certainly that bouquet of triumph—rather than, rather than the agony of defeat that would inflict tragic dismay upon a host of his wagering fans. If the jockey were to partake of a *Kool*, surely it would be after the occasion of jubilation, during some moment of reflective celebration after that ground-thundering event had rendered the powerful steed and his cool jockey champions.

But the *Kools* were surely being enfumed by so many excitable horse-watchers in the grandstand, most likely the coiffed and costumed women, whose appreciation for newfangled flavored filtered cigarettes far surpassed

that of their men, whose smoking preference generally wafted toward the Lucky Strike, the Chesterfield, or the manly Bullseye.

It was damn-sure a lucky thing, anyway, for the nation and for, indeed, the whole eastern half of Kentucky that they even a had a Kentucky derby anymore, after what had happened just a few miles from that derby track not even thirty years ago. The renegadin' night riders had near'bout destroyed that middle third of the bourbon state with their fiery protestations and midnight raids burning barns and tobacco warehouses, casting forth terror and soiled britches as they rode nocturnally incognito, in rebellious upstart Ku Kluxy hurly-burly to compel Mr. Duke and his Trust to turn loose the tobacco market like it used to be before their monopolizin' capitalist asses had rumped the prices down to 3-2-even 1! cents a pound on the hogshead. The whole string of incendiary events had pret' near ripped the great state of Kentucky into shreds, like the 'baccer leaves that were even now being packed into godforsaken Bonsack machines driving Buck Duke's factories and escalating fortunes, even though the big magnate man himself had passed on to that great golden leaf patch in the sky about ten year ago. The old bull would have bucked all the leaf farmers across southern 'baccer belts into scurrilous servitude, given half a chance, if the Lord hadn't taken him on home into Methodist gloryland.

Henry's daddy had told him about it, the Kentucky Black Patch tobacco war, on account of Uncle Ralph had told them about it, seein' as how he had unfortunately unawares moved right into the middle of the so-called Black Patch region of Kentucky, just before all that goings-on had gone down. Why if it hadn't been for Teddy Roosevelt and the Supreme Court in 1911 the farmers today might be a-payin' the Tobacco Trust to take the blasted leaf off their hands just to get shed of it!

But all daydreamin' about horses and smokin' women and Uncle Ralph's misadventures aside, Henry and Pete and a few other dutiful newspaper personnel managed to crank their weekly *TrailLedger* out and get it loaded onto the backs of trucks to carry it to every nook and holler of Wataboudit county. So about nine o'clock in the morning of this fine May the twelfth day in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and thirty-seven, the two good ole boys stepped out onto King Street with a hankerin' for a cup of coffee and some biscuits and gravy from Joe's drugstore diner only a minute-walk away.

"I'm gonna stop in here a minute, if'n you don't care, to pick up some smokes, and I need some .22 shells for the crows." said Henry, in post-

Elizabethan English, though not the Kings' version. Entering Marlowe's Store, the two men greeted a well-fed woman behind the counter. "Good morning, Sylvie."

"What makes you think it's so good, Henry?" replied the portly lady, her cheeks rosy with some indeterminable emotion. Sylvie's expression was deadpan serious, as if she were truly posing the question, not just making small-talk.

"Well sweetie," replied Henry. "All of Wataboudit county gets to read another excellent edition of the *TrailLedger*, for one thing. "What's got you looking so worried?"

"Somehow, I just never thought I'd see the day. . ." she said.

"The day that what?" asked Henry.

"The old man didn't wake up this morning."

"Mr. Marlowe? He didn't wake up this morning?"

"Nope."

"You mean he died, Sylvie?"

"That's. . .that's what I'm sayin'. He died." Her eyes were tearing.

"Last night? in his sleep?. . ." Henry reached slowly across the counter, put his hand gently on Sylvie's shoulder. "Oh honey, I'm so sorry. . ." Sylvie began to weep.

"My gran'ma always said we'd all wake up dead one morning," said Pete.

Henry cast a wary look sideways at Pete, and furrowed his brow. He moved around the cash register to the end of the counter. Sylvie instinctively moved in the same direction to meet him there, and Henry administered what they call at church a holy hug. "Oh hon', it happens to all of us, some time or other. We've all got our appointed time to go be with the Lord." Henry spoke with reassurance, in an appropriately mournful tone. He rocked the grieving woman gently side to side with the holy hug. "Ole Roby was a great man; he lived such a life here! A lot of people gonna miss him. How old was your grandfather, Sylvie?" He stepped back and looked upon her with compassion.

"He would have been eighty-four today," Sylvie sad, composing herself. Just a hint of recovery smile crossed her countenance.

"Today? Roby died on his birthday?"

"That's right." Now she produced an actual smile, and wiped tears away.

"How did you hear about it?" asked Pete.

"Robert called on the telephone about an hour ago. He had just come in from burning off their field, and grampa hadn't got out of bed yet. Robert went in and found him, said he looked as peaceful as he could be."

"When it's my time to go, that's the way I want it to be," offered Pete.

"Yes, yes," agreed Henry, "and I've heard it said among the wise that the best a fella can hope for is to die in his sleep."

"And to know where he's a-goin' when he wakes up on the other side," added Pete.

"Why, sure." Henry put his arm on Pete's shoulder. "He's gone to be with the Lord now, Sylvie. You can rest assured of that. What about, uh, what about the family, all the young'uns, and the grandchildren?"

"Justine has called everyone on the telephone, except maybe Philip. He's all the way over in London, England now. She said she was going to send him a telegram." Sylvie retrieved a hankie from her blouse pocket, wiped the tears away. She shook her head as if to wipe away the emotional distraction. Customers were walking in the door. Recovering, she looked up and managed a smile. "Well, that's neither here nor there, Henry. People die every day, and we've got a store to run here, thanks to grampa. . . I mean, thanks to the hard work that he put into this place, and it wouldn't even be here if he hadn't worked and sweated all those years after papa, I mean. . .his own son, never came back from Flanders field. . ."

"He and Emma sure did do right by all you youn'uns, didn't he, Sylvie? He was a fine man. I think God broke the mold after he created your grandfather," Henry said softly. His effort to comfort her had met with success.

"Thank you. But what'd you come in here for, Henry? What can I get for you?"

"Are you sure you're alright, Sylvie?"

"I'm okay. I appreciate your encouragement, and we really do have a business to run here. Its what he would want done. . .its what he did every day of his life—get up do what needs to be done."

" In that case, you can get me a pack of Camels, and I'm going over here to get me some .22 shells to keep the crows off my seed corn."

Other customers stepped up to the counter. Sylvie checked them out with a courteous greeting and restored sense of duty. Henry ambled over to the shelf he was looking for, picked up his box of bullets, and returned to the

cash register, paid for the purchase. “You’uns will call me if we can help, won’t you?”

“We will, Henry. Thank you so much, you too, Pete.”

“We’ll see you at the funeral home, then, Sylvie, if not before. Don’t hesitate to call if you need to,” Henry assured her. Then he and Pete were out the door and back on Main Street. “That’ll be one helluva big funeral,” said Henry to his friend. They crossed the street, entered Joe’s drug store and went back to the diner area. Henry took a seat on his usual stool at the corner of the counter. An old fella was sitting on the stool at the other side of the corner. “How you doin’, George?”

The man nodded minimally at Henry and Pete. He slurped coffee. “Can’t complain, nobody listen,” said George, curtly.

“You’re right about that, George. There’s no point in complaining about anything. We oughta just thank the good Lord we’re here for another sunrise.”

A matronly waitress reached around the napkin holder and condiments, placed two coffees on the shiny formica. “The usual for you boys?” she asked.

“Your hair looks lovely this morning, Maybelle.”

“Why thank you, Pete.”

“I’ll have waffles,” returned Pete.

“No biscuits and gravy for you this morning?” said the red-haired woman of dignified maturity.

“No, ma’am. I’ve got a hankerin’ for the waffles this morning, and some blueberries.” He smiled.

“I’ll have the biscuits and gravy,” said Henry.

“Comin’ right up.” With no wasted effort, Maybelle whisked to the other end of the counter to refresh coffee cups for here charges there.

“Yeah, George, we’re lucky to be alive today, don’t ya know,” said Henry belatedly.

“I guess you heard about Roby,” said George.

“Yessir. We were just in the store and Sylvie told us he died in his sleep.”

“He was a fine man. I’d like to have a dollar for every time he extended credit for folks around here.”

“I hear ya, George. I wish we had more like him.” lamented Henry.

“Roby was a generous man. He just about kept this whole town going, six year ago when burley prices went down to nine cents,” said George.

"Tell me about it. I think he spent that whole year selling our papers and never took a dime for it. We were cutting in pretty close back then," Henry agreed.

"That was when Roby gave a peppermint stick to every kid that walked in the door after Thanksgiving, clear on past Christmas," Pete recalled.

George chuckled. "Yeah boys, I remember that. I had to stop my grandkids from going in there so much, so's they wouldn't abuse the privilege."

"He was generous to a fault. I don't know how he ever managed to prosper so well," wondered Pete.

"Make no mistake about it, Pete. Roby was as shrewd as they come. He was merciful on the small change stuff, but he knew how to keep his accounts. I mean. . .you see that place across the street. That kind of enterprise don't just happen without some mighty skillful wheelin' and dealin," George said.

"What year was it he started the store?" asked Henry.

"1893."

". . .when I was ten years old," mused Henry.

"Yep. I was 22, and I think Roby was about ten years ahead of me. Boys, I'll tell ya, it was a hard day for him when he got the word about Clint."

"You're talking about Sylvie's daddy. He never came back from the war."

"That's right. Clint died on Flanders field, in Belgium. Our boys, under General Pershing, drove the Germans back to the Hindenberg Line—and that was the beginning of the end for them."

"The beginning of the end for the Germans?" asked Pete.

"Yeah, but it was the end of the line for young Clint Marlowe, God bless 'im."

"Yeah, that's a damn tragedy," Henry lamented.

George continued his tale of World War woe. "But really, the damnedest part of all was that Sylvie and Philip were just little ones when their daddy joined the army." George turned a little wistful, looked deeply into his half-full coffee cup. "Boys, I tell ya, it ain't right that a young man like that should have gone off to a goddam terrible war like that was over there, and then never make it back here to raise them young'uns. Its tragic, and him with a beautiful wife."

Maybelle eased the breakfasts onto the counter for Henry and Pete. Silently, she filled their coffee cups. The terrible cost of armistice was heavy upon that corner of her gleaming short-order domain this Wednesday

morning of the year of our Lord 1937. You could have cut George's sudden solemnity with a diner knife, but she didn't . Lifting her coffer urn, she retreated to other duties.

"Yeah, it's a damn shame," George continued. "And now that little Hitler fella is stirrin' up the German hornets' nest again. You've heard about the bombs they're dropping in Spain?"

"Up in the Basque, up in the mountains, you mean?" asked Pete.

"Yeah, that big bombing a couple weeks ago, the village—what was it?"

"Guernica."

"Yeah, that place—those were not Spanish bombs coming out of the sky. It was Nazi bombers doing Franco's dirty work."

"Isn't General Franco trying to run the communists out of the Spanish government?" asked Pete.

"Hmmph," George let out a big incredulous grunt. "Who cares about the wimpin' communists when you've got the Germans disregarding all the treaties that our boys died for—the peace that Clint Marlowe died in Flanders field for." George stuck his finger up in the air, pointing eastward. "I tell you boys, this ain't good—what's happening over there between that little German mustache and his bald dago sidekick. They're trying to set up another dictator just like them in Spain, so they can take over the whole continent of Europe, maybe the whole world."

Another diner walked to the counter, set a wet raincoat aside, and occupied the stool to George's left. His raincoat was dripping, and it was obvious to all that rain was falling outside.

"Well all I can say, George, is I hope you're wrong. I hope Hitler and Mussolini and Franco don't take over the world. "Where did you hear that about those bombs being from Germany?" asked Henry.

George let out a big sigh, a tension-breaker. He took a gulp of coffee. "Hell, I don't remember. I heard it on the radio, and I think I read it in the Charlotte paper a couple days ago. Some congressman, I think, or one of them fellas in Washington was saying that it was the German air force."

"The Luftwaffe," added Pete.

"Right. That's what they call it. For all we know it's the Baron von Richthofen ghosts come back to haunt the French and the Brits.

Heavy silence fell upon the three men as they listened to the newcomer at the counter order ham and eggs.

"Maybelle?" called Henry.

"What, hon?" The dignified waitress stepped sideways in their direction.

"Do you think Baron von Richthofen could come back to haunt the world?" asked Henry, raising his eyebrows.

"Oh, God, no.' She flashed a slight smile, did an about face and returned to her life's mission. "God forbid," she called, turning her head back slightly as she walked away.

"Well, George, that was a great sacrifice that the Marlowe's made, sending their young Clint over there."

"Yes, it was. And then, in spite of his terrible loss, Roby took Clint's widow on, and them two kids, and raised 'em up. And he had a heart of gold, even though he knew full well how to make a dime or two. He knew how to walk that fine line between mercy and judgment."

"Like God," Pete spoke. "Behold the mercy and the severity of the Lord."

"Yeah, Pete, a little like God. It's a dam good thing there's little bit of God's work spread around in this world; otherwise the place would be all shot to hell," George opined. "And Roby was a true saint, in spite of what he had to go through. He could have turned real bitter. But he didn't. Instead of turning bitter, he got better."

"Right, George, a good man he was. And he did carry a lot of folks in these parts, back in '31 when the burley went down to nine cents, and the cabbage wasn't too plentiful either that year,"

A mischievous smile crept across George's face. "Ah, boys, but we don't need to worry about such things as that any more."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Roosevelt and his gang of New Dealers got it all figured out. They're gonna take care of the farmers now."

"They will, George," chimed in Pete. "I saw that this morning as I was printing our paper. The County Agent is going to have paper forms for all the leaf producers to fill out, so they can get paid a decent amount for their crop no matter what happens in the weather and the fall market."

"Really, now. Who says they got money enough to insure everybody's tobacco crop?" asked George.

"That fella in Raleigh—I think his name is Cobb, Billy Cobb or something like that—he says the AAA is getting set up to protect all the farmers against hazards, and guarantee them cash at the end of the season—"

"Yeah, buddy, what do they have to do get that guv'ment deal, huh?"

"Well, I think they have to cut back a little on their crop, plant a little bit less, so there's not too much 'baccer being traded come November. That way the price will be decent, and the Agriculture administration won't really have to pay out that much, because the price will stay high."

"Hmmph," George grunted. I think you're dreaming if you think that's gonna work the way it s'posed to. How much 'baccer will you be plantin' this month anyway?

"Just about a half-acre," answered Pete. "I don't do near what dad used to do, what with my job at the Ledger and all."

George laughed out loud. His earlier sombriety had definitely swung around now to something lighter. "Why, you're just a fly on the wall, boy, to those fellas in Raleigh, and in Washington. You think all that crop-bustin' shenanigans is gonna do anything for the little guy like you? No. It's the warehousemen, and the big growers down east, 'round Greenville, Wilson and those parts. They're the ones gonna rake in on that deal."

"And the tobacco companies," Henry tossed in.

George laughed again. "Yeah, buddy. They've got it figured out."

Maybelle was just now setting a plate of ham and eggs on the counter for the gentleman in the seat to George's left. "Can I get you anything else with that, sir?" she asked.

"No, thank you," said he. But before he got into the food, he turned toward the other three diners and said, "The Supreme Court ruled in January that the Agricultural Adjustment Administration is unconstitutional. So how are they going to run such a program if the highest court in the land has ruled against their power to do so?"

George was laughing again.

"Oh, they'll figure out a way to do it," said Henry. I think the state Ag agents and the Farm Bureau are going to come up with something that will work along those lines."

"That Cobb fella is a director of the AAA, as the Charlotte paper reported yesterday, and talked like they were just going right ahead with the plan. Do you know how they're going to do that?" asked Pete.

"I do not," said the man, with a wry smile. He sliced a piece of ham, lifted it to his mouth on the fork, and consumed it.

Henry pulled out his new pack of Camels, opened the cellophane, put the cigarette in his mouth and lit it.

4

Dreams

A hundred miles from where Henry unwrapped his pack of Camels and lit up to partake of its smoky pleasure, the manufacturer in Winston-Salem was busily churning out thousands more of those same packets. A piedmont gal named Glenda Brown was inspecting the little finished boxes that had been made attractive to the eye with camels and pyramids printed on their fronts; she operated a machine that collected the units into cartons of ten packs each. From that eastern US location the Camel cartons would be shipped all over the world.

A shipment of dreams they were-- millions of little white cylinders to enflame smoky flights of fancy and nicotinal moments of repose from here to Shanghai and Shangri-la and everywhere in between. What had been in ages past magical pipe dreams were now being conjured *en masse* from the little white cylinders.

The most potent cloud of smoky profitability in the history of the world was wafting market-to-market, continent-to-continent, clueless of the surgeon general's report that would be issued decades later. Such are the historic enterprises of ***homo sapiens:*** They go and go, they run and run in frenzied productivity until their business plans are exposed one day to be a

mere wisp of metastasizing smoke that contributes to dark clouds of gathering futility.

All is vanity, saith the Teacher.

An imaginative marketer in the employ of the tobacco company had, at some point in the product's development, figured out that tobacco ruminations could be kindled even at the points of sale, before a purchase was made by any eager smoker. Why, just the sight of those strange humpy-backed mammals on the package was sufficient to vastly initiate wild imaginations among the legions of smokers. *Give me some Turkish tobacco* said the smoker to his wallet, upon seeing the camel and his mysterious background pyramid.

This little scenario had worked quite well for the Winston-Salem company. Although the rich heritage and reputation of Turkish tobaccos was actually found many hundreds of miles from Egyptian pyramids, the scene depicted on the packet's cover had accomplished exactly what it was intended to do—inspire the sales of millions of cigarettes.

What an odd-looking creature was the camel to the American eye, quite exotic.

It might be just such a golden-hued camel as that one on the cigarette packet. Probably just such a camel was, at this moment, tromping through real, Egyptian sands. It might be transporting a young officer-in-training, a young Egyptian of humble origin whose saber-sharp mind would one day embark upon a great destiny—a *coup d'etat* to depose, fifteen years from now, the very king of Egypt. That military trainee, Anwar el-Sadat, would ultimately preside over the Arab independence that would extricate itself from John Bull's colonializing exploitation, although the Brits would call it civilizing.

It might have been just such a sauntering camel that transported the dutiful cadet, almost in the shadow of the great pyramid, from his barracks to a class in military discipline that was a part of his training with the honorable Egyptian army. The camel's rhythmic pace may have pumped young Anwar's active mind into a forceful understanding of the task that was, even now, being passed to him across the muezzined Arabian world. The legacy of Kemal Ataturk was mobilizing in his direction. Magnifying its urgency was his childhood remembrance of the ballad of Zahran. Perhaps even now, at this early phase of his life, the ambitious officer-to-be was

pondering plans for Arab unity that would someday solidify Mohammedan unity between Turkey, Egypt, and all points between and beyond.

Alas, in the distance, northward from ancient Egyptian pyramids, across the waters of Suez and the Sinai sands, there labored a young American-born Jewish woman whose cigarette-fueled life mission was parallel, though at-odds with, Sadat's. Golda worked tirelessly toward actualizing the dreams of her displaced people-- dreams of an Israeli socialist state that would someday somehow exist, miracle of miracles, on that same narrow ***eretz Israel*** which was now unfortunately connecting Turkey and Syria to Egypt.

A square peg in a round dreidel was this long-hoped-for eretz Israel, saddled inconveniently between a fading Turkish star and the Camel on the Nile.

He the plus, she the minus—together they would spark brightly between a charged volatility of rival Abrahamic elements. Even now, their reactivity began to bubble up in intense heat of middle-easterly human strife.

In the Germanic fatherland of the next continent over, a contentious little Austrian usurper with a stunted moustache was wildly maneuvering to become, among other things, catalyst in the incendiary reaction between impetuous Arab and wandering Jew. In recruiting the grand Amin el-Husayni of Jerusalem, der fuehrer would entertain no tolerance for Jewish dreams of statehood, and no sympathy for wailings at the Wall.

Their strangely swastikified collusion was soon to be direly opposed by sacrificial Allied effort. Between a resolute British bulldog, an intrepid Russian taskmaster, and a consummate yankee politician with a cigarette-holder jutting from his jaw, the unholy duo would be snuffed out on the ashtray of historical disgrace. But that was still a long way off.

Back in the wilderness, in the midst of pyramidic antiquity, a camel's plodding pace was about to kick up a triple-stranded fuse to ignite all hell breaking loose:

-Ataturk, Abdullah, mufti al-Husayni, Hitler

- Herzl, Weizmann, Rothschild. Ben-Gurion

- Balfour, Lloyd George, Allenby, Churchill

The resultant smoke plumes would darken skies for many years to come, but not yet. It was still only 1937, and a king was being crowned in England, probably at this very moment.

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His loyal administrators were striving to walk a global line somewhere between the constructs of civilization and the perquisites of exploitation. On this day, a merely mortal man sat expectantly upon an 870-year-old chair in Westminster Abbey in London. He sought the relative immortality of that functional anointment into which he had been born. But more importantly, he sought the endorsement of his enduring government, the fealty of his people, and the very unction of God.

For, as the ***Times*** would reflect a week later, there resided in the anointing of the British sovereign an "obstinate unanimity beyond the power of republican rationalism to touch." And while the principle of kingship seemed to some an "outworn superstition," and to others in the wide world a perpetual enabling of classic injustice, it nevertheless persisted among the resolute Britons as a "permanent instinct in human nature itself."

And so a stammering prince was awaiting, this afternoon, an endowed authority that would draw its strength from "powers outside human life." The ***Times*** of London could still opine, with resolute naïveté in the year of our Lord 1937, this conviction. The King would accept those powers not for himself, but for the life of his tribe. And yet, along with the timeless noble aspirations of his monarchy and its trained empire, all the base and selfish manipulations of humankind would surely accompany the king's subjects wherever they would set foot to represent their collective interests.

This was the perpetual problem that confronted his highness' loyal subjects in all the dominions of his vast empire--this the confounding yoke that vexed men and women throughout the wide world who found themselves beneath the "civilizing" thumb of John Bull's heavy, though benevolent, hand. It was the same oppressive power-gathering hegemony that had provoked us Americans to reject, one hundred and sixty-one years prior, the authority of George's namesake. It was the same meddlesome administrative tinkering that now irked Muslims and Jews in the holy eretz land of Palestine. It was the empire-wielding, irksome administrative intrusions that so frustrated the king's hapless subjects in every duchy, province and state from Hong Kong to Bombay to Bethlehem, and even unto Birmingham and Belfast.

Such feckless authority, though quite calculated and systematic, was nevertheless all too arbitrary and oppressive in its effects upon colonialized populations. In spite of all efforts, whether well-intended or ill, from the

King's dutiful minions, the consequences of their empire-building generally proved just about as predictable as rising smoke.

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Back in London, continents away from the labored shuffle of camels' feet through Judean sands, far from the breezy flap of elephants' ears in distant Asian dominions, and landward from the decks and draughts of all His Majesty's ships at sea, here, here in the very heart of the empire, the American Philip Marlowe stood at a window, watching crowds go by. The cigar that Mr. Greeneglass had provided for him emitted a pungent aroma trail, curling upward and seeming to disappear into the thick, indeterminable haze of striving civilization that enveloped the city. An incoming tide of expectant Brits, one floor below them on Haymarket Street, sent up low rumbles of pedestrian noise, mutedly audible through the window glass. Hundreds of hats, slickery macs and dripping umbrellas passed beneath the dry warmth from which he surveyed their bottlenecking passage. Most were headed from his right to left, north to south, in a slow stream toward Trafalgar Square, as if there were still enough room in that cobbled expanse to accommodate them all.

Itmar Greeneglass had guided their conversation to an explanation of the deceased man's maritime assets, especially two freighter ships, and his use of them to transport food to the refugees from civil war in Spain.

"The Government's non-intervention policy is, whether our comfortable MPs will admit it or not, working against the good people of Spain, and most assuredly working against their progress toward democracy," said Itmar. "Mr Wallris' bold willingness to support the Basques, in spite of the blockade, will strengthen their fight against Franco's Fascist insurgents."

Nathan said, "I've always thought that those cranky Basques in the north fancied themselves independent from the government in Madrid. Are you sure they are acting in the wider interests of Spain? They could be fence-sitting up in the Pyrenees, just waiting for this thing to blow over."

"While that is true, Nathan, the Basques are starting to feel the heat of Franco's push in a big way. The bombing of Guernica two weeks ago clarified the issue for them. And since that time—and especially since Franco's assault on Madrid was repelled, General Mola has unleashed a fierce attack, but the Basques have, so far, managed to drive them out. Now Mola is besieging Bilboa and trying to starve the people into submission. Hell, there are 400,000 people driven into Bilbao; more than half of them are
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women and children. This is precisely where Paul Wallris' two ships, the *Brickburn* and the *Olavian*, made such a big difference. His crews were able to, almost at a moment's notice, get those two carriers into the Bilboa river loaded with food and supplies—and who knows, maybe a gun or two down in the hold—and then after unloading them, pulling two full loads of refugees back out, and over to France at St. Jean de Luz."

"And the British government is working against this effort?" asked Philip.

"They've been debating in the House of Commons, but the Guernica destruction has made the truth painfully obvious what is really going on in Spain. The people of Britain should have no interests in abetting Franco in any way, whether by non-intervention or otherwise, especially when it becomes clearer every day that the insurgents are getting heavy military support from Mussolini and Hitler."

"And you think the Basques are siding with the government in Madrid?" Nathan queried again.

"The autonomous government of the Basque country is being represented in London by the Spanish ambassador," insisted Itmar.

A moment of silence crept in; they could hear the low rumble of the people in the street. An ambulance passed by with its whooping Doppler horn crescendo and then waning as the vehicle managed to crawl through the street.

"You know," said Nathan softly, "the Basques helped us greatly in the War. They are a brave, hearty, God-fearing race of fisherman and peasants. They got food and raw materials through to us in their own ships when our danger was very real, so I've been told. And they lost thirty ships in doing it."

"Exactly so, Mr. Wachov, and this is how we, a generation later, express our gratitude? By standing aside and allowing the Luftwaffe to bomb hell out of them? By pretending that Mussolini's goons aren't being sent in there to install another fascist *coup d'etat* on the Continent?"

Philip, standing at the window, noticed that two men who had been let out from the rear doors of the ambulance were now standing at the curb in front of the Greeneglass shop, and looking upward in his direction. It seemed as if in a dream, but suddenly he could see, without explanation, one of the two men was pointing at him, directly up at him—Philip Marlowe, and trying to get his attention.

Philip blurted out loud, "Me?" He pointed to himself, and he spoke again to the window, "You wanna talk to me?"

The man, dressed sharply in brown suit and bowler hat, pointed upward at him again, and then back at himself, and was mouthing a silent, though quite understandable message. He wanted t o talk to Philip. Philip reached for the window lock, carefully removing a blue glass star of David artpiece that hung on a string, as he did so. With a somewhat clumsy motion, he opened the window sash. "Mr. Greeneglass, I hope you don't mind me opening your window, but there's a man out there who…uh…"

Then Itmar and Nathan were beside him at the window. The three of them looked down at the unexpected sight of this man in brown, with an unopened umbrella in his raised hand, pointing toward the shop door and obviously communicating a request to be admitted therein.

Philip, not an audacious sort in this nation of unfamiliar proprieties, was clueless. Itmar put his head out the window and yelled, "Certainly, sir. We'll be right down."

Without closing the window, Itmar turned on a heel, proceeded toward the door and the stairway. "I can tell by his suit, he's a policeman, probably a detective. Come along now." Philip and Nathan followed, back through the door of the flat, down the creaky stair, and through the clothing shop to the front door. Itmar opened it with a broad gesture. He stood aside as the two men entered, their clothes sparkling with London fog. "Good afternoon, gentlemen. Welcome to the Greeneglass shop," said he.

"Good morning," said the man in the light brown suit. He took his hat off. "I am Inspector Neville Crosbough, of Scotland Yard. This is my assistant, Dr. Harold Pepper."

"Do come in, gentlemen," said Itmar, and shut the door behind them.

"Thank you," the tall man obliged, stepping in, with Dr. Pepper following.

The inspector was a wiry man of about 60 years. He was wearing a starched white shirt, and necktie of deep scarlet background with small, leonine emblems of gold patterned on it. The khaki brown of his suit seemed to meld seamlessly with a ruddy complexion. Beneath untrimmed, arched brows that were darker than his sandy hair, the inspector's penetrating eyes assessed the young men skillfully. He spoke first to Nathan. "You, sir, are, I take it, mister. . . ah, Mr. Wachov?" He glanced at an open notebook in his hand, then back up, planting his eyes firmly on Nathan's.

"Yes, sir."

"So you are the man in whose arms Paul Wallris expired just two hours ago?"

"That's correct."

"I know you have given an account of that incident to Officer Morley. I am the detective whose task it is to correctly document his untimely death. Would you mind describing for me what happened back there in front of the tobacconist's shop?"

"Not at all, sir. He had gotten our attention with what seemed to be an incoherent statement about monetary policies, or some such. I could not really understand what he was trying to say. He did mention the gold standard." Nathan looked at Philip and continued. "But before he got too far into it, the next thing I know he's collapsing. He would have hit the sidewalk quite heavily if I hadn't grabbed him. Then I. . .well, I eased him down slowly. It seemed like the best thing to do. When he was down on the sidewalk, he opened his hand and the note fell out. He was. . .uh. . . gasping, and drooling. And then the life just passed out of him."

"I see." The inspector was silent for a moment. He looked at Dr. Pepper, then back at Nathan. "How old are you, Mr. Wachov?"

"Twenty-eight, sir."

"Have you ever seen a person die before today?"

"No, sir."

"Was it what you expected?"

"Nathan wanted, for some strange reason, to laugh a bit, but stifled the impulse. "Well, no, I, uh, I didn't expect to have a man dying in my arms today. I mean, I never. . . no, it wasn't what I expected. Death is not a welcome event. It was quite disturbing, actually."

"Did his death strike you as . . . natural? Was it, do you think, a natural death?"

"I really have no idea. I mean, the way he was gasping was quite alarming, bordering on something like, like some internal violence. But then, like I said, I don't have anything to compare it too. Isn't death, by definition, a kind of. . . a kind of tearing away, a wrenching away?"

Inspector Crossbough was gazing intently at him. After an uncomfortable pause, he responded slowly, "Yes, yes I suppose it is." Then he shifted his gaze to Philip. "What about you, Mr. Marlowe? Is that the way you saw it?"

"Pretty much, sir. Yes, and like Nathan, I was on unfamiliar ground with this. I don't think I've ever even seen a dead person, unless they were in a casket."

"How old are you?"

"The same. Twenty-eight."

"How long have you been in England?"

"About ten months, sir. I arrived on the White Star line last July."

"Is there anything more you can tell me about this man's demise, then?"

The two young men, looking at each other, shook their heads. Nathan said, "That's about the whole of it sir."

"I may, of course, have more questions for you at some other time, you understand?"

"Certainly, sir," Philip responded readily, as Nathan agreed with a nod.

The inspector looked at Itmar. "I do have a few questions for you, Mr. Greeneglass, but I prefer to ask them in private."

"Surely," agreed Itmar.

"Then, with your permission, I will dismiss these gentlemen from your shop, and we'll get on with it." Turning again to the younger men, he offered a formal smile, though it seemed quite benevolent.

Though he was a little surprised with the brevity of the Inspector's enquiry of them, Philip addressed Itmar. "Well, we know where you are, Mr. Greeneglass. I will certainly visit your shop again some time."

"As will I," added Nathan. "Thank you for your hospitality."

"You are both most welcome any time. In fact, I will likely be calling you on the telephone soon. You may need my services some time. Certainly, Philip, you will need a tailor's speciality at some point, as I know you are a salesman." He smiled broadly, and shook their hands.

Inspector Crossbough and Mr. Pepper stepped aside. The two younger men departed. Itmar Greeneglass closed his shop door gently behind them. Philip, turning left, southward, toward Trafalgar, entered the pedestrian stream behind Nathan and they were once again engaged in that same slow, crowd-encumbered walk, and in the same direction, that they had been doing before all this unexpected deathly occurrence had been thrust upon them. It seemed like a bad dream as Philip's feet, or the flow of humanity and hats and faces surrounding them, swept him along, almost involuntarily. Maybe death itself, he thought, is something like this—just drifting suddenly, without sufficient explanation or forewarning, into some kind of moving confluence.

With an unfamiliar perplexity, he looked back at the Greeneglass shop, and almost wondered if the whole string of events had really happened. Looking back, he noticed they were late, and a final image of the shop door

with its green and gold letters gilded itself upon his memory. Even as every step took Philip further away, his gaze lingered upon the shop where he had found his way upstairs and had a smoke. Then somebody spoke and he went into a dream.

A dream shared by an entire nation, yea, an entire empire, a broken empire, a faltering realm, a fractured commonwealth of stumbling dominions. It was a dream of peace, almost seen. Yet the British people would be slowly discovering, beneath the luster of this giddy coronation euphoria, an unwelcome truth that there would be no peace in the continent of Europe. The 1918 Armistice dream was slowly being cast down, beneath a million uncaring feet, and trodden into the gutters of history.

It had been a dream of peace. Now it was being slowly ripped apart by two marauding beasts—two fiercely animalistic entities of communism and of fascism. While English bankers and politicians appeased a rising blitzkrieg of Hitlerian genocide, a red blaze of arbitrary Stalinist cruelty gathered unnoticed intensity to incite a tinder box of despairing European order. Spain would be the magnifying glass that now focused deadly rays of explosive power on their shrinking world. *I read the news today, oh boy, the English army had just won the war. A crowd of people turned away, but I just had to look, having read the book.*

"For in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste! And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?'"

Nathan, plodding along just in front of his friend Philip, looked down at his watch: 11:55 a.m. At this moment, only a mile or so from here, a vulnerable man of faltering speech—though he was a man of pre-ordained, ancient authority—was taking his seat at Westminster, and preparing to take a sacred oath. The appointed man was about to take upon himself the ceremonial masthead of a most seaworthy vessel—a warship that would turn back that tide of dreadful smoke, for a generation or two, or three.

5
Ghost

Oliver Cromwell found no eternal rest at Westminster Abbey. Soon after his burial there in 1658, the son of the king whose death warrant Cromwell had signed nine years earlier ordered Cromwell's body to be taken out of the sacred ground and publicly humiliated. Such heathen practices are nonetheless an undeniable part of Christendom's culpable history.

Oliver Cromwell's ghost wasn't an actual haunting spirit, of course, but rather the ever-present vulnerability of accumulated human power and wealth to be overthrown and redistributed by some upstart band of rebels. Since the royalist supporters of King Charles II of England had proclaimed Cromwell a regicide, or king-killer (along with the other 58 souls who had signed King Charles' death warrant in 1649), the presence of his contentious body, though dead, could not be tolerated in Westminster Abbey.

So Cromwell's body was not there beneath the pavestones of Westminster Abbey. Such was not the case for Charles Darwin, whose body was buried there at Westminster Abbey, along with a host of many other foundational persons whose life's works had formed the character of Britain's legacy to the wider world. Although the subsequent effects of Darwin's 19th-century biological research had done much to undermine orthodox church theology, his body nevertheless had been interred beneath those hallowed gravestones, along with so many other luminaries, notable

persons, and kings and queens of England. Darwin's impact having been of a different quality than Cromwell's, his ghost exposed a different vulnerability to the institutions of human power and wealth.

Despite all that Cromwellian displacement of politics and all that Darwinian unearthing of sacred orthodoxy, the kings and queens of England were still, in this year of our Lord 1937, managing to reign over their people. So they were quite fortunate, yea, even abundantly blessed, when compared to, say, Alfonso of Spain, who had been deposed from his monarchy by a republican movement a scant six years ago. So today's overwhelmingly popular coronation in London was no small feat for a royal house.

The seven thousand or so people who had gathered at Westminster Abbey were entranced in the occasion's grandiose solemnity and magnificence. It is not likely that most of them entertained thoughts of the ghostly vestiges inhabiting this millennial edifice. On the other hand, it could be that many of them were aware of the lingering ethereal legacy of powerful personages from ages long ago. So many of the congregants at Westminster today had to sit for hours, perhaps contemplating the historical and ecclesiastical meaning of the cavernous hall, as they awaited the crowning of King George VI.

Langlis Afton, a very notable lady among the contemporary crop of British potentates, sat expectantly among those who had been invited to enter the cathedral. She listened carefully to the momentous passing of every sacred second during the ceremony. Attentive intuitions had attuned her to those ghosts of the former ages, though she was fully aware of the imminent gravitas of what was happening right here, right now, and quite thankful to be a part of it. Though she had been born a common American, Langlis' skillful conductions of intrigue among English societal and parliamentary potentates had propelled her far into the gilt halls of power. Her magnate husband, Sir Wilbur Afton, sat beside her. As an endowed aristocrat who had expanded his fortunes toward ever greater horizons, he was quite pleased with the proceedings. But Sir Wilbur had not yet heard that a partner in one of his companies had, only three hours ago, passed into eternity while babbling incoherence to a startled young stranger up on Haymarket.

Now began the coronation.

With all the King's promenade having entered from the west door and been ceremoniously positioned, a small, strong voice broke the Abbey's

expectant stillness. The Archbishop proclaimed, "Sirs, I here present unto you King George, your undoubted King: Wherefore, all you who are come this day to do your homage and service, are you willing to do the same?"

"God save King George!" shouted those people present in the east parts of the building.

"God save King George!" affirmed those present in the south of the church, in response to the Archbishop's second call.

"God save King George!" pronounced the people in the west of the church, when the priest had sent forth his third call.

"God save King George!" spoke Sir Wilbur and Lady Langlis, along with all others in the north of the church.

Wouldn't Alfonso of Spain have welcomed such proclamations, had they been spoken over him by his own people in these turbulent times!

Wouldn't Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, have been comforted by such agreements if they had been likewise shouted by his own people in the midst of today's perpetual revolutions! But instead, his defunct Qing Manchurian rulership was being puppetized at this very moment by invading Japanese overlords.

This 20th century was no friend to monarchies, except the one in England.

Now the most solemn moment of the service was upon them. With the people having affirmed their allegiance to the King, it was time for, as the *Times* would later report, "the contractual to be lifted to the sacramental level." And so this prayerful song wafted through the air, "Let my prayer come up into Thy Presence as the incense; and let the lifting of my hands be as an evening sacrifice."

But listen! Listen to the small, strong voice, ascending as if smoke, with shouting affirmations and gentle melodies.

The Britons had been o'ertaken ages ago by a greater presence, an inhabiting spirit that manifested a longevity infinitely more pervasive than that of such mortals as these humans be. Occupied long ago, they were, with sprite more spunky than Darwin's or Cromwell's ghostly legacies, or even that of long-dead Archbishops of Canterbury. This holy strengthening ghost would be one whose Lordship, when entreated, can from time to time make straight the contorted sinews of human institutions.

This spirit's incisive tweaking had supplanted the genetic birthright of a distracted prince, displacing it with the resolute character now arising

within his younger brother--an appointed brother, now to be an anointed brother, whose stuttering speech would by divine means ensure a most essential humility. And such humility would be sufficient, when supported with the liberty and good will of a resourceful people, to ultimately beat down a brutally destructive arrogance now rearing its beastly head on the continent. It would defeat, with blood, sweat and tears, the intrepid *wehrmacht* foolishness of a usurping so-called Aryan maniac whose militarizing horn was even now rising beyond yonder Channel in the lands of Anglo-Saxon origins. Such were the raging torrents of a flood that would soon engulf old Europe with modern warfare.

Sitting in Westminster Abbey, Langlis' Afton had, as yet, no understanding (though she thought she had) of the immensity of those historical forces. Those forces were presently mustering iniquity into a ghoulish pile somewhere beyond the cold currents that separated Dover from Dunkirk. She had been, like so many other Britons of her persuasion, looking quizzically at the newspaper mirage of an unannounced colonel from some Austrian abyss. It was naively hoped among her circle of influential friends that his vehement reassertion of German power would erect some kind of effective barrier against the Bolshevik menace to the east. Alas, one evil against another does not a defeated evil make, as the world would learn, the hard way, in years to come. But Langlis could not know that now.

"*Veni Creator Spiritus*," sang the choir.

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"Come Holy Spirit" must be the prayer of a civilizing people. Surely it is the heart-cry of an ancient kingdom that seeks protection against that dreaded malady of old—barbarism. The people of the King, knowing that the reprobate dragon had long ago been slain, nevertheless understand that the beast periodically thrusts his ugly head from misty bogs of obscurity. It then threatens mankind with odious devourings. As superfluous as the ceremonial Holy Spirit entreaty may sound, it rises now as a primal response. Some suspect odor of lurksome carnage, having drifted across the Channel waters on fierce winds of anarchy, hath provoked it.

Now Westminster Abbey functions anew, as in ages past, as a great cultural nest from which the wild Anglo child, having crawled out from beneath a bloody Saxon rock, cries again for safe nurture.
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Deliver us from evil had been the instructive prayer of their religion's founder, the saviour whose crucified body had been nailed upon a Roman cross nineteen centuries ago. A stylized likeness of that torturous cross was positioned high in their cavernous space of architectural grandeur. It hung, almost camouflaged, amidst the high pomp and ceremony, as symbol of some primeval yearning for deliverance from savagery. Ironic icon of death and hopeful resurrection, the damned thing had been erected by the church of England upon a stony Golgotha of every English heart—except, of course, those red-pumping cardiacs of the communists. And the atheists. They were on their own. And the Catholics. But never mind about that now.

Deliver us from barbarity. Give us, by God, a King! Now within this great cathedral of ascending visual splendor, beneath its converging spires of triumph over hell and death, a mere mortal man of unsure speech knelt before his priests and among his peers to accept the royal commission. It had been laid upon him long ago by his people and by his blood.

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Another thing that had happened long ago was the reign of King George VI's great, great, great grandfather, George III, whose powdered-wig authority had been laid on the chopping block of history by a bunch of upstarts in America, one of whom—not this time a turbulent priest but rather a zealous colonial patriot, had said, "Give me liberty, or give me death!

Thus had the demise of the British empire begun, even as its great machinery of colonial development was gathering full steam a century and a half ago, on the unruly New World coast. Those infamous words from the mouth of one Patrick Henry had sounded forth beneath the reverberating rafters of a different kind of English church--a Virginia assemblage much humbler in structure, but a lot cockier and more impetuous—than its Westminsterian forebear. Mr. Henry and his compatriots were tindering within discontented colonial hearts a strange new fire, a blaze of republican revolution.

Nor would it be the last time in the next century or two that such a conflummucks would erupt. It was a new summoning spirit, a democratic *zeitgeist*, that had set the world aflame with yearning pangs for liberty. Although not the holy spirit for which good Anglicans prayed, there was something sacred about its demand for freedom among the opinions of mankind.
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King George III had married a German princess, Charlotte, of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, in 1761. And so it happened that, during the next year, 1762, the young queen's name, Charlotte, was chosen in her honor as the name of a frontier town in the colony of North Carolina. Also in honor of the Queen's heritage, the name Mecklenburg had been selected for the county in which Charlotte town was located.

Alas, the Carolinians' obeisance toward King George III and his queen was short-lived. A mere fifteen years later, and they had been caught up with their American brethren in the hotspur spirit of the age. The Mecklenburgers' untethered frontier freedom generated America's first formal declaration of independence from Great Britain, May 20, 1775. General Cornwallis later referred to the place as a "hornet's nest of rebellion." Subsequent history revealed that Charlotte/ Mecklenburg would not be the only problem spot for King George III and his soldiers. A year later, and all thirteen colonies had agreed to a unified Declaration of Independence. When American sovereignty had been firmly established by defeat, in 1783, of the King's armies and his colonial intents, the citizens of that energetic North Carolina region hit the ground runnin'. They didn't miss a beat of that manifest destiny drum beginning to be heard between Atlantic and Pacific. Setting out on multiple paths of exploration, ground-breaking, crop-cultivating, animal-raisin' high-falootin' shenanigan-shootin' expansion like you never seen, why, 'afore anybody knew what was a-happening folks was well-established with farms and ranches out in the tamed parts of the wild land. Mercantiles and blacksmiths, cobblers and coopers, and all manner of enterprises on main street, prospered in one of the fastest expansions of human free market productivity in the history of the world.

By 'n by, after the Americans had confounded themselves into a civil war—even as their English progenitors had done three centuries before—after the rebs and the yanks had bled into their forefathers' verdant American dirt on account o' that contentious revolutionary zeal not dyin' down for such a long while, and after they had fought the damn thing out to its bitterest Antietam end and then buried their dead four score and seven or so years later, and after things had settled down a bit and folks was feeling a little bit normal again...one enterprisin' young fellow by name of Cornelius

Wolden saw some opportunities pertaining to money and wealth in the city of Charlotte.

Before the war fever had stricken the nation in 1860, a better kind of infection had earlier broken out—gold fever.The precious yellow metal was discovered in California in 1849, which led to the gold rush most folks know about, because everybody wants to be, you know, in California.

Not everybody, though. There had already been some serious, and productive, gold prospecting down in North Carolina, and it had been going on for nigh onto fifty years. That Mecklenburg hornets' nest of rebellion previously mentioned by General Cornwallis had of course wound down their rebellin' ways, and then also reined in their wild streak of civil war contentiousness, and had henceforth converted, by n' by, their feisty revolutionary zeal into evolutionizin' wealth acquisition. By late 19th-century, Charlotte had worked itself into a honey beehive of intense money-making buzz. They even established a US mint there to coin all the gold that was coming out of them Carolina hills.

So this Cornelius Wolden fellow set up shop right in the middle of Charlotte, selling clothes for every member of the family, from baby to granma, because keeping young'uns in threads was something that he and his wife Virginia knew something about, especially since their first four were girls. They didn't have a boy until the fifth child came along, and then another girl after that—six children altogether: Cornelia, Langlis, Emma, Roberta, Spencer, and Adele. The whole lot of them were excellent young folk, as children go, but daughter number two was an independent filly of what seemed to be a different breed.

Langlis Wolden, born in 1886, having eagerly availed herself of her parents' business acumen, caught an early whiff of what would later become suffragette liberality. In 1904, she attended the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Having earned an English degree from that school in 1908, she returned to Charlotte and worked in Wolden's, her parents' thriving enterprise, which had now expanded to three stores. Unlike most of her southern sisters, still unmarried, Langlis departed for New York City in September 1910, ostensibly to hone her merchandising skills at a department store on 5th Avenue. By 1912, the fair auburn-haired beauty with flashing blue eyes had met, and captured the heart of, a dapper Englishman seven years her senior, Wilbur Afton, who happened to be an MP in the House of Lords.

Seated now beside her husband, Lord Afton, Langlis watched, silently with the seven thousand other invited guests, as the Archbishop of Canterbury placed a crown upon the head of King George VI. The bonds of English-American fealty, previously broken a hundred and sixty-two years ago by her ancestral Mecklenburg neighbors, were now in a state of repair.

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Back in the USA, a hundred foothill miles from what had formerly been the Mecklenburg hornet's nest of anti-George III fever, Adele Higgins was training schoolchildren. Adele was the youngest of the Wolden brood. Born sixteen years after Langlis, she was a smart woman possessed of an exploratory nature. While her older sister had followed a path of worldly wealth, ultimately positioning herself among the movers of London society, Adele's diligent curiosity had found its focus in that sphere of influence *oh so much* safer and more predictable than business and politics—the universe of knowledge. She loved passing it on to others, especially children. Adele was hearing the call to the teaching profession.

Having worked busily in the Wolden stores through most of the '20s, Adele's growing passion for the advance of literacy got the best of her. In 1928, she headed up the mountain to Appalachian Teachers' College, in the town of Trail, to obtain the Grammar Grade Education degree and a state teaching certificate.

While the blooming schoolmarm was being prepared at College, an old childhood friend, Harry Higgins, had found himself inextricably drawn away from Charlotte's bustle, toward the nippy winds and wild mountain thyme life up at Globestone. But mainly it was the presence of one sweet Adele in that rarified Appalachian air that drew him up there. Trail, the town where Teachers' College was located, was only five miles up the road from Globestone. During childhood summers near the resort town, he and Adele, along with their respective families, had together cultivated a love affair with the crags and coves and sweetwater steams of the land of the sky. Harry had, by and by, uncovered a truth with reasonable certainty that his pining for life up on the mountain probably had as much to do with Adele's placement there as with any other magical aspect of that elevated place.

Harry was a well-heeled Charlotte business prodigy whose family had prospered in textiles since before the war. After honing a sharp eye for business opportunity under the tutelage of his hard-at-it father, the four-year stint at Harvard hadn't done him any harm either, in propelling him
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headlong into the 1920s wheelin'-dealin' world of money, fabrics, and properties. Not only that, but after the mudhole that he'd been dragged through in France , and the bloodbath he had managed to live through in Belgium, in order to defeat the Kaiser and his minions, this American life was high cotton, comparatively speaking.

But in the fall of '29, all that whoop-fiz high-stakes dealing changed big time, for some folks a lot more than others. Harry's family was one of the "others" that had managed, fortunately, to come out on the receiving end of whatever maelstrom of trouble it was that had stricken the world of stocks and bonds into hopeless disarray in 1929.

Consequently, when the dust and what was left of the Wall Street dollars had settled in 1930, and Harry's sharpened opportunity eye had seen a shining lining around a dark cloud that hung over a blue mountain a hundred miles from Charlotte, it turned out, lo and behold, that the silver-lining opportunity was a hotel up in Globestone. On October 29, 1930, one year after the Crash, and himself at the tender age of thirty-three, Harry Higgins bought the old Globestone Inn for a song and a prayer and a pile of cash that his dad had helped him get. He wrangled a deal with the heirs of Adolphus Stringman, who had been, back in the day, the legendary timber king of western North Carolina.

So from 1930 on, Harry was spending a lot of time in that resort town in which Adele had fertilized so many summer dreams during his youth. Patching together his version of the hospitality business that had been established by the Stringmans, he found himself in need of a helpmate and a little tenderness.

In 1932 Adele obtained her degree and teaching certificate from Teachers' College. They had a big wedding at Myerson Park in Charlotte, went to England for a honeymoon and a visit with sister Langlis and her Lord husband. Harry and Adele returned to their aerie Globestone home, sharing not only a bed and a new household, but also the fulfillment of all those youthful longings that together they had felt during long walks in the peaks and meadows of the Blue Ridge.

It was there in that magical place that Adolphus Stringman had constructed his mountain gateway getaway in 1875. Now it was the sole proprietorship of Harry and Adele Higgins. Adolphus had called the place *Valhalla.* But Harry, with a more popularizing intent, had chosen to rename the place the Globestone Inn.

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This morning, Adele asked her class of tenth-graders to write their names and today's date, May 12, 1937, at the top of their papers. She was instructing the students in the proper construction of a sentence in English.

She wrote a sentence on the blackboard. It was:

Come their time men is to the for country now good all the aid of to.

Adele's eyes displayed a subdued mirth as she observed the puzzlement in her charges' faces. After allowing the better part of a minute for the message's impact to register in their hairy heads, she posed a question:

"Who can tell me what the subject of this sentence is?"

Jane in the first row raised her hand.

"Go ahead, Jane," said the teacher.

"It doesn't have a subject," spoke the pig-tailed girl, with self-assurance.

"Oh, no?" queried Adele, raising her eyebrows. "How do you know that?"

"Because it doesn't make sense. A sentence has to make sense."

"Is that so?" replied the teacher. "Well, why not? Why doesn't it make sense?"

Johnny, in the third row, raised his hand.

"Go ahead."

"Because it doesn't have a subject.' A few in the class chuckled; Johnny was pleased with himself.

The teacher also laughed. "Okay, then. If I told you that this collection of words *is* a sentence, and that it *does* have a subject, what would be your guess as to which word is the subject? You don't need to raise your hand; just speak, and have respect for your classmates."

"Men"

"Time"

After a moment, Adele said, "Those are good answers. Tom, why do think that 'men' is the subject of this sentence?

"It's a noun," said Tom.

"Very good," Adele responded. She wrote on the blackboard: *The subject of a sentence is most likely a noun.*

Jane asked, "Why do you write 'most likely'? Isn't the subject always going be a noun?"

"Good question, Jane. We'll talk about that in a later lesson, when we learn about gerunds. But let's just say for now, that 'men' and 'time' are both
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good possibilities for being a subject because they are nouns. What about 'country'? It's a noun. Could it be the subject?

"It's too far back in the sentence to be the subject,' Roby opined.

"Hmmm..." The teacher folded her arms, furrowed her brow, and displayed a melodramatic scowl. "Who says that relative position in the sentence has anything to do with whether a noun can be the subject, or not the subject?"

"I do," responded Roby. "Plus—it's got a preposition it front of it. It must be the object of a preposition."

"That's good," said Adele. "I like that."

"Now!" blurted Elizabeth, excitedly. "'Now' is the subject!"

"Oh, yes? How do you know that?" Adele challenged, turning on her heel to respond to the student.

"Because I rearranged the words to make sense. It is a coded message. It should read like this: Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country."

Adele was laughing. "How do you know that?"

"I saw it on a poster, pinned to the wall at my granmpa's house. There was a picture of the Uncle Sam fella, and underneath him on the poster was that sentence."

Adele was still laughing. "Very good, Elizabeth Marlowe. Your are correct. 'Now' is the subject of the sentence. And our lesson today is, sometimes you have to put your thinking caps on and figure things out. And even if you don't know what is correct, it is always good to try something out—something that you think will work. In this case, Elizabeth was able to combine her prior knowledge of a patriotic phrase with her understanding of the meanings of English words, and come up with something that makes sense."

"But you taught us, Mrs. Higgins, that the subject of a sentence would always be a noun. Is 'now' a noun?" asked Tom.

"That's a good question, Tom. The word 'now' is a kind of noun, in this case. . . although most of the time it is not. Most of the time it is an adverb. . .er. . .well, never mind. This English language we speak is quite precise enough, most of the time, to communicate our meaning, but not always. Our language is, you see, a hotch-potch of several languages—German, Latin, French. It all goes back to 1066—well, even before that—when William of Normandy conquered England. But . . .you'll learn that in history class. Your

homework for tomorrow is to diagram this sentence that we just talked about."

A gentle knock was heard, Turning to the classroom door, Adele saw through its glass portal the face of the school Principal, The students were busily writing the formerly-scrambled sentence in their notebooks. Teacher walked to the door, saw that Miss Prutin wore an uncommonly somber expression. Adele stepped into the hall and closed the door behind her.

Miss Prutin whispered, "I've received a telephone call from Hattie Marlowe. Elizabeth's great grandfather, Roby Marlowe, has passed away this morning. Her father will be here to fetch her home within a half-hour."

"Oh! That's Roby. I'm sorry to hear of it. He—he operated the store in Trail."

"Yes, he founded that store, over fifty years ago."

"Roby was. . .the great grandfather?"

"He was the grandfather of Elizabeth's father, Robert Marlowe. Roby raised Robert , and his sister and brother, after their father had been killed in the war, in Belgium."

"Have they made arrangements yet?"

"No. This came to light just a few hours ago. Roby had been living with Robert at their old home place when Robert found him this morning. He must have died in his sleep."

"I'll send Elizabeth out. Should I announce this to the class?"

"Please wait until we have gotten back to my office. I will tell Elizabeth when we get to my office."

Adele hesitated, then spoke a thought that was crossing her mind. "So her father never returned from the war. He gave, to his country, his *last full measure of devotion.* We were just analyzing a sentence about good men who come to the aid of their country. Elizabeth's father must have been. . . one of those good men."

"He was." Miss Prutin offered a gentle smile, and placed her hand on Adele's. "And his father, Roby, who passed this morning, was surely a good man too. He had come to the aid of his country—actually, his county, by operating that store for all those years, before his granddaughter took it over. That Marlowe store made Trail the town that it is today."

"What was the son's name?"

"Wallace. Most folks called him Wally, growing up. Then he was gone, and never returned until they brought him home in a box. He would have

been—or he was—Elizabeth's grandfather. It seems strange to think of a young man like that, who never made it home alive, as a grandpa. But he was, though he never knew about it."

"I suppose there is a lot that goes on in this world , a lot that we never know about, after we ourselves pass on," mused Adele, introspectively.

"Now you sound like a teacher of English literature," Miss Prutin remarked. Again, the gentle smile.

Adele sighed. "Better get back to it. Maybe I'll have them write a little poem about what it means to "come to the aid of " one's country."

"Maybe you will."

With that, Adele slipped quietly back into the classroom, just in time to redirect that ancient entropy which possesses young fourteen-year-olds when left for too long to their own devices.

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Civilizations

"Civilizations are founded upon such men as Paul Wallris," said Inspector Crossbough to Dr. Pepper. "And now they've up and killed him." The dapper detective raised his eyebrows.

"What makes you think that?" queried the assistant.

"Oh, well, the great deeds—and what I mean by that is, the *necessary* deeds, be they small or great, that must be done so that properly civilized life can endure the slings and arrows of misfortune—*those* deeds. They are initiated and carried out by bold men, men who are willing to buck the tide of their own era's habitual mindset, and undertake new ventures of great import."

Dr. Pepper inspected his friend's face with an amused skepticism. "I was meaning to ask, sir, what makes you think that someone has 'up and killed' Mr. Wallris?"

"Ah. . .forgive my aside, This note that was recovered from the deceased man's hand contains the sentence: **If not, your bridge could burn**."

"And?. . ."

"Mr. Wallris did not have a bridge, The writer of this note—this 'Chapman'—may have been referring to the deceased man's life itself, metaphorically. This was, perhaps, a veiled threat, or, more precisely, a coded threat."

"Seems a bit of a stretch, Inspector. How do you know that Mr. Wallris did not a have bridge?"

"His home was at Montpelier Square, #49. There is no bridge at Montpelier."

"Had he, perhaps, another property in the country, with a bridge?"

"I think not, my friend, although we will be expecting the fuller report , listing his properties, from our people upstairs. "

"I hardly think our records personnel are working today. More likely, they are out there on the street, waiting with these other thousands of English souls for the King's procession to pass by."

"Well, ***we*** are working, aren't we? And what about those thousands of bobbies keeping peace out there today! Some dedicated policemen have got to ensure the safety and security of this delicate realm while the royals rearrange their roles.'

"Certainly, Inspector, but the men and women of the records department have, I believe, for the most part, taken the day off, although many have undoubtedly re-donned the uniform to beef up the security details."

"What time, by the way, are we expecting the Coronation procession to pass by here?"

"That could happen in less than a half-hour sir. The time now is 2:40. The King and Queen were expected to be leaving the Abbey at about 2:30."

Inspector Neville Crosbough walked over to the window. He peered out through the gray afternoon mist, looking first across the Thames, then to his right at the peopled expanse of the Westminster Bridge, with the clock side of Big Ben barely viewable from his third-story window. The Embankment street below was completely lined on both its side, as far as could be seen in both directions. Down and to his left, he could see what appeared as a strangely bare sidewalk, in front of the Scotland Yard main entrance. Its small but passable area having been maintained as pedestrian-free, the sidewalk there was in fact the only pavement he could see, apart from the street itself, where the royal procession would soon pass.

"I'm wondering, Dr. Pepper, if Mr. Wallris was, perhaps, building a bridge before he died—a 'bridge', as it were, to Spain, whereby those Spanish citizens who are defending their government from Franco's rebels can be supplied with food and essentials."

Dr. Pepper drew on his pipe. "Yes, I suppose that would be a 'bridge' of sorts. Mr. Greeneglass said that two of Wallris' vessels—that is to say, two

of the previously idled *Thames-Chesapeake* freighters—had been loaded with relief supplies and sent to Bilbao. And you are suggesting that some devious person, or persons, may have wanted to put a stop to Mr. Wallris' supportive activities, by killing him?"

"Just thinking out loud, old chap, and considering the note's mention of the blackshirts, and so forth, it all seems a bit sinister."

"Indeed, and with the 'John Bull's ransom'. That word, ransom, is the very definition of trouble. What do you make of it?"

"Haven't a clue yet. This is tomorrow's enquiry, when some normalcy returning to London will enable a more informed pursuit of the facts. But. . . I wonder, is John Bull the ransomed one, or the one providing a ransom, or some extortionist demanding a ransom?" The inspector furrowed his expressive brows and looked again at the street below. "Ah, here we go. Here comes King George now."

Dr. Pepper joined Inspector Crosbough at the window. They watched quietly for a few moments, from the privileged third-floor perspective of Scotland Yard, as the King's Coronation procession passed on Embankment street below them.

Preceding the King and Queen were multiple horsemen, with exquisitely measured gaits: Headed by the Colonial Contingent, with Burmese regiments at the fore, followed by Rhodesians in their inclimate shorts, then the South Africans, New Zealanders, the Australian contingent, the Canadian Mounties with added splendor of their crimson tunics, and rifles at the ready. The Royal Air Force marched in a disciplined display of ceremonial drill, followed by colorfully exotic sentries of India, wearing pugarees and tunics of gold, white, blue and crimson. Then came small detachments from the Chaplains, the Nursing Service, Territorial Army in new uniforms of dark blue. Naval and Marine detachments proceeded dutifully in anticipation of the royal arrival. Most regally impressive in their high, prancing gait were the 'K' Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery. Interspersed among the military units were visiting dignitaries, Prime Ministers, Sultans, and Emirs.

Then came the State Coach with crowned King George VI, and Queen Mary, newly-enthroned within. Their equipage was drawn by eight magnificently reined Windsor greys, driven by four postilions in short red jackets and jockey caps. Beside and behind the slow carriage were numerous attendants, upwards of a dozen groomsman, footman, Life Guards.

Red, gold, red, gold, red, gold, white. Their uniforms shone with brilliant gold and crimson through the dreary London not-quite-foggy atmosphere. The State Coach itself rolled in as an absolute visual symphony of shining gold ensconcement, opulently ornate and lavishly overstated in its 18th-century baroqueness, with large rear spoked wheels, bearing an elongated carriage mythically propelled by muscular Poseidon-spawned tritons. The gargoylish god-figures, displaying facial expressions of obsequious dumbness, held golden tridents in ceremonially upraised chivalry. Sculpted golden royal palms adorned the four corners of the royal box in which the King and Queen could be dimly seen, as, at last, they paraded past their ogling citizenry with a pompously joyful solemnity. George III had spared no expense in 1761 with the commissioning of this elaborate, royal conveyor. The carriage embodied a gilt Bourbonic excess of some former age.

The man and woman within, however, were of nobler intent than their pomp and circumstance might indicate.

"I think the 'John Bull's' ransom' in the note must be some sort of encoded threat to the continuity of our British empire," mused Inspector Neville Crosbough.

"What makes you think that?" asked Dr. Pepper.

"I don't know; it's just a feelin' in me bones."

Dr. Pepper considered this for a moment. "Methinks you discern correctly. . .John Bull's ransom. . .if not a threat to the empire, a threat, in some way, to our English way of life."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Inspector, with exasperated emphasis. "We're making too much of this. Tomorrow is another day. The King will be safely installed at Buckingham Palace, and life will go on. Let's go home to the missus; I'm ready to call it a day." The clock on the wall read 2:55.

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But on the other side of the world, everything was quite different.

Here's a young man who would have been emperor of China, if the smoky purgatory of revolution had not removed it from him when he was only two years old. That was twenty-six years ago, in 1911.

Tonight, in this waning last hour of what had been a fretful day, Puyi Aisin-Gioro could not get to sleep. He lay in bed wondering what his next move should be to preserve the last ounce of his royal family's Qing dynasty dignity. But his plight was not going well. What Puyi did not yet understand was the worldwide death shroud now being lowered upon ancient royal
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dynasties by twentieth-century militarism and politics. And while his own family's legacy of Manchurian Chinese leadership was collapsing into the dust-heap of historical irrelevance, across the sea in Japan the death-throes of empire were convulsing differently. The climax and collapse of Japanese Hiro-worship would inflict a much more explosive destruction of Asian culture—a much more profuse shedding of Oriental blood. Its nightmarish offal was as yet still covered in gauzy future obscurity. But of course Puyi could not know that now. He had been a pampered royal child, fed, even after his deposition, with a silver spoon and a carefully controlled stir-fry of zombifying courtly artifice.

In recent years, the militarizing Japanese had invaded northeast China, and they were setting up a government to serve the many requirements of their widening Hirohito empire. Naming their new mainland state Manchukuo, the fierce Japanese overlords sought to make exploitive use of what was left of Manchu royal authority. And pretty much what was left of it was just this one person—this one frail, confused 28-year-old Qing would-have-been-emperor—who possessed very little political clout and no formidable followers, except for a diminishing household of inbred, eunuchian devotees whose days of delusive self-importance were numbered. And so Puyi's withering Qing dynasty authority was being manipulated by the pushy Japanese taskmasters. They were jerking him and what was left of his emperor identity around, like a puppet on silken strings.

Even as Hitler's Germany was striving, in the other world hemisphere to bring Europe under its demoniac control, so was Hirohito's Japan imposing similar military-industrial bondages upon the eastern half of the world. Only a few years ago, *Der fuhrer* had absconded the German Hohenzollern mantle of authority; now he was coveting an association with the imperial sword that had long held sway in the land of the rising sun, the land in which great reverence was shown for the ancient *manji*, or swastika, which his thulish Nazi ruffians had lately inverted and misappropriated as a symbol for their ghoulish campaign to extinguish European Judeo-Christian civilization.

Five months had passed since Hitler had tightened his constrictive designs on the wide world by forging a treaty with Japan. The agreement expanded a trans-world military axis by uniting European nazi/fascist power with the house of Hirohito in the form of an anti-communist pact. Japan's Foreign Minister Mushokoji and the Nazis' Ribbentrop had signed the Anti-Comintern pact in Berlin in Novermber of 1936. Their peace-

shattering axis of evil intent, being global in scope, had covered a lot of political and geographical territory. One part of it was on the Chinese mainland; Germany recognized what was left of the Qing Manchu legacy as the puppet state Manchukuo, with Puyi Aisin-Gioro, the last Chinese emperor, as ceremonial regent, and Japan as its protector.

It was this young Puyi who now lay captively sleepless in a bed in the provincial capital, Changchun. He was trying to figure a way to outsmart Yasunori, the Japanese lieutenant-general who had been assigned as the erstwhile emperor's handler. So far, though, the impotent ruler's strategies to outwit his controller had met no success. Puyi's dynastic downfall had retained very little of the trappings of royal power. His Chinese countrymen—both the Chiang Kai-shek Nationalists and the Mao Communists—had seen to that.

There was, for instance, no golden coach into which he would be ushered and then transported to points of great ceremonial and political import. His condition as a twentieth-century potentate had been immensely diminished compared to that of, say, George VI of Great Britain, whose coronation was being celebrated by millions today on the other side of the world. How and why such a vast difference of respectful legitimacy should exist between the two great monarchies is a mystery. But the smoky underpinnings of royal authority were not really what worried Puyi so much. His troubles were much more practical, more immediate, than that, like wondering what food would the Japanese lords of war provide for his household's meals tomorrow.