

Bernard Wolfe

The Man With the Rubber Nose

OR

ONE SOLUBLE SPOON AFTER ANOTHER

ONCE, watching the news flashes chase their shining tails around the Times Building, Al Kiefer, Broadway ghostwriter, was moved to a lyrical outburst:

“See? There you are. Sign of the times. Prosody by Mazda. Who’s our new patron saint of letters? Consolidated Edison. Need a new kind of illuminated text, boy. The novels of the future’ll be written on that sign with a soldering iron, with spliced cables, mark my words. First there was the goose quill, then the Corona portable — now the telegrapher’s key. And the punched tape. American lit’s gonna have a real punch on tape. The next Herman Melville, he’ll make with the staccato amperes. Henry James’ll give out in lilting ohms. Letters losing their fetters. Coming of age, friend, getting downright electrifying. More

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bulbose than verbose. American lit’s well lit.” (Kiefer was himself remarkably well lit at the time: not an excuse but an explanation.)

These prophetic remarks were made in the doorway of a Broadway shop called FUN, INC. (JOKES, TRICKS, GAGS, NOVELTIES, SOUVENIRS). They were addressed to the proprietor of the shop, Danny Atlas, the Salonikan who introduced the soluble spoon into American culture; Danny smiled appreciatively. More: laughed out loud, almost in homage. Not to Kiefer’s careening rhetoric, which Danny doesn’t follow, but to the *Times* sign, of which Danny is well-wisher, advocate, tout, aficionado. And student: he knows all about the sign, its inner workings. The punched tape which controls the stampede of bulletins. The man who takes the news off the ticker and prepares the tape. Anatole, the pimply-faced kid who helps with the tape. Danny Atlas knows all about Anatole. Anatole

drops into Danny's place regularly to order baby turtles for his girl — turtles with hand-drawn inscriptions like: *Gertrude, You're Gone, You're the Most, You Make Me Flip. I Dig Your Blend.* (Signed) "Real Cool." Under Anatole's tutelage, Danny has become the town's foremost lay authority on the *Times* sign. . . .

9:17, according to the clock on the Bond Clothing sign. Danny stands in front of his store, potbellied Pindarus, Prometheus in a slimjim, his centaurial moon face crumpled with smiles as he studies the ribboned auguries flashing to the south. These ambulatory headlines have something for everybody, certainly: catastrophe, caper, cliché, chitchat, claptrap. For Danny, though, they are an avalanche of the improbable — well, a cavalcade of soluble spoons, you might say. Especially tonight. Tonight the sign is going to outdo itself, it will make the leap from drab reportage to cataclasmic creativity. Going to be plenty bulbose tonight. Bulbouse as anything. Bulbouse and then some, boy. Tonight, at precisely 9:37, if all goes well, the sign of the times is going to write a novel. With, of course, an assist from Anatole.

9:17. Danny Atlas begins to quake with laughter, his yoghurt jowls go into a hula. A new headline is beginning to cakewalk across the sign: M-U-K EXECUTIVES IN EMERGENCY SESSION TO PICK

LEAD FOR OLD TESTAMENT EPIC. Beside himself, Danny Atlas takes hold of his nose, twists it until it touches his right cheek, swings it in a 180-degree arc until it touches his left cheek.

IN A SUITE on the thirty-ninth floor of the Waldorf the executives of M-U-K (Metro-Uni-Key Productions) are huddled around a humidior filled with shillelagh-sized Larrañagas. They are engaged in a highly technical activity, known in the jargon of their trade as "kicking it around."

"Who would of believed it anyway? A French accent on top of Mount Sinai?"

"I still say Boyer would have been a natural. He could play the hell out of the part."

"From the beginning I was against it. You ask me, a French accent sounds a little dirty. For a bedroom scene, a smooch, fine. But you locate it on Mount Sinai and right away people —"

"Can I get in an observation here? Boyer we haven't got — he can't go up Mount Sinai, he's booked for the whole season solid to tour with *Don Juan in Hell*. So do we talk about maybes and what-ifs or do we get down to cases?"

"A point well taken. Remember, to stick to schedule we got to start shooting Friday. We sit here until we got the exact right man for the part."

"Right. How about Clifton Webb?"

"Mr. Belvedere on Mount Sinai? It hasn't got the right feel. You're reaching."

"Orson Welles?"

"Mm-mm. Harry Lime on Mount Sinai. William Randolph Hearst on Mount Sinai. I don't buy it."

"Laughton?"

"You going for yoks? Captain Blye on Mount Sinai? That's your idea of dignity?"

"Charles Winninger? Edmund Gwenn? Thomas Mitchell? Charles Coburn? Not necessarily in that order."

"All right, if you want to play it for laughs. I thought we were trying to get away from type casting."

"Eddie Robinson?"

"We-ell. He *could* play it. Eddie could play the bejesus out of it. But right now there's this talk about his being a fellow-traveler. He'll clear himself, sure, but right now. . . . We can't give a political tinge to this thing, it's too big —"

FUN, INC. is a demented department store, a five-and-ten turned schizoid. Behind Danny Atlas, in the window to the left, is an array of articles which dramatize the impishness of objects — the waywardness of utensils, the berserker willfulness of even the most pragmatically conceived tools. Cigars that explode. Water tumblers that leak. Ladles filled with transparent plastic so that they won't hold anything. Carna-

tions that squirt water. Rubber fingers. Forks whose tines crumble to the touch. Hatbands that leave a ring of white stain around the head. And, of course, soluble spoons, Danny's master work. Up above, racks of rubber masks by means of which any ordinary citizen can transform himself into demon, witch, drunk, hag, leper, hydrocephalic, Kallikak, bumpkin, pinhead, leering rapist or simpering adolescent. In the window opposite, three midgets: one inscribing homilies on the backs of baby turtles, another coloring portraits of Marilyn Monroe on scarves, the third painting Niagaras and nudes on beanie hats. In the corner of this window, a display of ties with slogans written across them (products of Leo Carney, manufacturer of "The Cravat with a College Education") — one of these, conceived by Al Kiefer, bears the message, *The Direst Straits Come in Jackets*. (This tie never sells.)

It is a cornucopia of non-sequiturs, this store — built on the premise that spoons can turn whimsical and even Bibles can stutter. But tonight Danny Atlas has no eyes for his wares. Almost 9:20. At 9:20 Anatole is supposed to —

"Daddy-o!"

It's Anatole, smack on the button.

"Hey, kid."

"I sneaked out, like you said. Got to get right back. Everything set on your end, pops?"

"It looks copacetic. Gil's meeting

Mort at 9:30 sharp. They should pass by here three, maybe four minutes later. If Gil gives me the wink that means he was able to swing it, they're going to Mort's hotel. We give them another four minutes. All right. Then I call you and you make with the tape, right?"

"Cool. If you make with the twenty first."

Danny pulls a bill from his pocket, hands it over.

"Anatole, you should learn not to be so mercenary. What we're dealing with here is a work of art. We are artists in a collaboration together. Like on a novel. Artists, when they talk all the time about money between themselves, it gives a false note."

"*This* better not be a false note," Anatole says, examining the twenty. "Tasty. I gotta blow now. Keep in touch."

9:23. Gil Lazarro, the one-legged general manager of Leo Carney's office, is sitting at his desk, thinking. This is the night of the great fitting-together, the universal jell, he is thinking about it. He thinks about things the way other people play tiddledewinks or go to Acapulco.

It seems to Gil Lazarro that he never began to think until he came to Broadway. Down on Mulberry Street he did a lot more running than thinking. For nineteen years, just about, he did nothing but run: first as a Western Union messenger boy, then pushing carts in the gar-

ment district, then making deliveries for a florist. A basketball scholarship at L.I.U. led him into another kind of running, and it paid off pretty well, what with the occasional fixes; then for three years he was with a pro football team and that kept him running too. In the army he ran plenty — through the African desert from Tripoli to Benghazi, then along the shore of Sicily, then up the beachhead at Salerno, then up and down Anzio. At Anzio he finally got tired. He got so tired one afternoon that he fell out for a snooze in a ditch and a half-track backed up and chewed his leg off.

A STANDSTILL, suddenly. For the rest of his life he was going to get a check every month, no matter whether he sprinted, sauntered, or squatted. His concept of life as an endless relay race in which Gil Lazarro kept passing the baton to Gil Lazarro was shattered; lying in the hospital, he felt that all the clocks were melting, the metronomes drooping, and it made him dizzy. After his discharge he took to hanging around Broadway, just so he could watch lots of people rushing back and forth while he stood still in one place. He stood and watched the runners everywhere: Roseland, the Palladium, the Tango Palace. In Danny Atlas' store, too. It was in Danny's that he got to talking with Leo Carney one day. When Leo offered him this job he

took it — winter was coming on, and Leo had a steam-heated office overlooking Broadway. But Gil remained a passionate student of people in motion. When they slowed down, he felt an urge, almost an obligation, to get them moving again. Tonight, at exactly 9:37, if all goes well, he is going to get some people into some really supersonic motion.

Of course, tonight would have been impossible without a big backlog of thinking. About the way things fit together, mostly. It started a few months after he went to work for Leo, the night he took Lovis Doreen, the stripper, to a spaghetti joint on West Forty-seventh. They were sitting around drinking dago red and Lovis asked him where his folks came from. He said, "Near Anzio," and took another slug of wine, then he thought: "Hey. Anzio. Where I lost my leg. Funny, the leg's over there but when the weather changes it feels like it was right here, with the rheumatizz. So things can be tied up even when they look far apart. Hey, now. Then there's this. The old man and the old lady come from Anzio, then they go to Mulberry Street and make me and I grow up and go to Anzio and leave my leg there. It's like a circle. Wait a minute — more circles. They've got lots of vineyards over there around Anzio. Make a whole lot of wine. I drink a lot of wine, right now I'm drinking a lot of wine. They must ship a lot of wine from

Anzio over here, so maybe I drink a lot of wine from Anzio. Right *now* I might be drinking a lot of wine from Anzio. It figures. But my leg's buried over there — maybe right in some vineyard somewhere, so maybe my leg goes into some grapes that get pressed into wine that gets sent over here that I drink. . . ."

By this time Lovis was running at the mouth about how some talent scout was in the Jim-Jam Club catching her act and there was a chance, a very good chance, that she would be signed for a remake of the Salomé story. When she reached that part of her tale she saw a funny expression on Gil's face. She took it, not unreasonably, for skepticism. "Listen, sweetie," she said, "you don't think I'm pulling your leg, do you?" He watched her take a swallow of wine and he said dreamily, "Hell, no. But you could be *drinking* it." Lovis was badly shaken by the remark. Every time he called after that she had to catch a train for Schenectady.

BUT THAT NIGHT was the turning point. He'd had a revelation — about the dovetailing of odds and ends, the fusion of opposites, the oneness of the whole works. He began to keep his eyes open, looking for sneaky relations, patterns, the interweavings. "You had to get yourself torn apart," Al Kiefer told him, "to become a monist — *there's* a loony fusion of opposites for you." Gil's mind became highly trained

in the job of assembling the most unlikely jigsaw puzzles. The training hasn't been wasted. In the last twenty-four hours he has done a herculean assembly job.

The oddments he has just tenoned together! Item: M-U-K needs a lead for this Old Testament picture. Item: the *Times* sign is controlled by a punched tape — a kid named Anatole helps adjust this tape — Danny Atlas is on very good terms with this Anatole, who is chronically in need of cash. Item: the telephone company has a certain private number, Murray Hill exchange, for testing purposes — this number gives a busy signal for the servicemen — Leo Carney knows the number because his brother-in-law works for the telephone company. Item: Biff Jordan, the Hollywood cowboy, is in town, traveling incognito to dodge his wife's detectives. Item: Mort Robell, the press agent, is the only guy in town who knows where Biff is holding up — he's got to know because he supplies Biff with girls. Item: Mort Robell has a room in a Times Square hotel with a view of the Times Building, because it is his practice to study the news sign, pick off the hottest flashes and phone them in to the columnists as inside tips. . . . Most of these facts, of course, are readily available to any citizen of the greater metropolitan district who is a reasonably alert reader and listener. Maybe there are dozens of people on The Street who

have all these tidbits crammed away in cobwebbed corners of their heads. But only Gil Lazarro, the pattern-maker, has the scope and perspective to put them together in a meaningful whole. That is precisely what Gil Lazarro has done, it is what he communicated last night, in a moment of creative frenzy, to Danny Atlas. Danny Atlas, of course, immediately called young Anatole into conference. . . .

9:26. Gil puts on his hat and heads for the elevator, on his way to meet Mort Robell. In another eleven minutes a whole lot of lovely oneness is going to erupt with a woosh from the Times Building. Times Square is going to drip away like a soluble spoon, in Danny Atlas' view. The whole borough of Manhattan is going to be drinking its own leg, in Gil Lazarro's view.

"All right. Bing Crosby? How's about Bing Crosby?"

"Nice guy, they don't come any nicer. Yet and still, you definitely don't want a crooner for this part. It takes away from the dignity. Besides, Bing's a sports-shirt personality. You take and put a cassock on him, like in *Going My Way*, he's still got definitely a sports-shirt personality. What you going for, saddle shoes on Mount Sinai?"

"Raymond Massey?"

"He makes it as an Honest Abe. In a log cabin, in a coonskin cap, socko. But listen, get in step with

the project. Try to think along Mount Sinai lines."

"Vittorio Gassman? Audie Murphy? Understand, I'm just thinking on my feet —"

"With your feet. Both clubbed."

"Rex Harrison? Adolphe Menjou? Say, now, Adolphe —"

AL KIEFER is in Benny Bliss's office at the Astor. He has finished drafting Benny's column for tomorrow, the copy's been sent off; now he is standing at the window, looking down at the mammoth Adam and Eve on the Bond Clothing sign and thinking large, brooding thoughts. Only 9:27. He would like to get some air but he can't leave — promised he would stay put until Gil Lazarro called. This hufty-maguffy stunt can't be pulled unless he, Al, can be reached by phone. He is sorry he got sucked into the whole brannigan. He is getting very, very tired of practical jokes.

Al Kiefer thinks he understands the difference between himself and his friends Gil and Danny. *He* lives in a petrified world, a world of bone and granite and molybdenum: bang your head against it and you wind up with a splitting headache. *They* refuse to accept a structured universe — they live in a world of sponge rubber, as malleable as Danny Atlas' nose — they are forever kneading it and forever being amazed by the unlikely shapes that spring up: humpbacks, ram's horns, gargoyles,

manatees, Loch Ness monsters. His world is fossilized, fixed, theirs is a fluid movie trance full of dissolves and process shots and improbable montages. Where they allow for miracles, he expects only pratfalls. It is their dedication to the miraculous, of course, that makes them incorrigible practical jokers. Both of them, each in his own way, are stalking the great melt, they are camp followers of the unexpected. And the practical joke is merely their way of precipitating the wonders they feed on. As for Al Kiefer, he has about exhausted his faith in miracles. His profession has soured him: when he sees a miracle he wants to examine the byline. Crouching behind the byline, he suspects, is a ghost writer. . . .

9:29. Why the hell doesn't Gil call? Al Kiefer needs some air.

9:29. Danny Atlas, too, is studying the Bond sign. Swinging his nose now to the left, now to the right. Thinking how, in the old country, things are hard, fixed, unstretchable, tagged, while here everything is like putty. In America a man's got to be a quick-change artist. He's got to make himself over every morning, keep trying on rubber masks for size. Here a man is never a finished product, always raw material, always ready for alterations.

Danny Atlas was ready for alterations at the tender age of seventeen, the day he stepped off the steamer

at Ellis Island. Back in Salonika, because his father was born a shoemaker it meant he was born a shoemaker too; no unfreezing allowed. Once he got used to the great American thaw, the first thing he did, by way of overhauling himself, was to change his name from Ionopoulos to Atlas. The next step, naturally, was to change his nose — and the plastic surgeon took out too much cartilage, giving the organ its extraordinarily high mobility. When the bandages were removed and Danny found he could touch either cheek with his nose he was transported. Suddenly he glimpsed the impermanence of things: Europe was a dirty plot to hide the great truth that man is an eternal work-in-progress and that within any object's rigid shell of appearance is a Bronx cheer. Beggars could become kings — from which it followed that carnations could squirt water at you. The moment Danny Atlas caught on to all this, he knew he had a calling. A few months later he established FUN, INC., basilica of the soluble spoon.

IN THE THIRTY ODD years since, Danny has become an addict of that most American of romps, the practical joke. He is a student, even an historian, of the subject. He has made a pilgrimage to the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, N. Y., to see the Cardiff Giant — the ten-foot-tall "petrified man" who was dug out of a Cardiff well in 1869 and

exhibited for years until somebody discovered it was a hunk of solid gypsum planted by a playful farmer named Stubb Newell. Standing outside his store, he loves to think about the day, back in the thirties, when a gang of Columbia students, dressed in overalls and carrying shovels and pick-axes, came down to Broadway, closed off a block with men-at-work signs, spent the day tearing up the pavement, and then disappeared into the night.

9:30. H-hour. Danny Atlas stops caressing his nose, looks expectantly up the street. There they are! On the button!

"How's it, Gil. What you say, Mort."

The two men stop.

"Hey, Danny," Gil says. "How's tricks. Can't stop now — going over to Mort's place to talk business. Trying to cook up a promotion stunt for Biff Jordan to push our ties."

"Great idea!" Danny says enthusiastically. "A cowboy with a name, he can sell merchandise like hotcakes. Even hotcakes. You take all these Hopalong Cassidy products."

"We'll kick it around," Mort says. "See you."

"Watch it," Danny says.

"Take it smiling," Gil says. His left eyelid closes, flutters significantly.

Danny watches as they cross the street and head for the hotel. He gives them another hot minute — 9:34 now — then waddles through

the store to his office, reaches for the phone, twisting his nose.

WELL, Lewis Stone." "Great. Judge Hardy on Mount Sinai. You want to laugh it up, how about Abbott and Costello on Mount Sinai? Martin and Lewis?"

"Yule Brynner."

"For the King of Siam, sensational. On Mount Sinai, a dog. He's half Chinaman or something, right? We don't want an alien in this thing, it's too big."

"Mickey Rooney."

"If you're going to gag it up —"

"Anatole?" Danny Atlas's voice is quavering. "They just went to the hotel. Give them three more minutes. Then get going."

"Crazy, dads. Tasty. I'm with it."

Anatole is not doing this for the money. He is indebted to Danny Atlas, he owes his job to Danny. Anatole would do just about anything for Danny. Although the twenty doesn't make him jump salty, exactly. He's got eyes for that twenty. With the twenty he can get those crazy blue suede shoes with the white stitching, also pick up on some real crazy pot that a pusher on Forty-seventh just got in from Nuevo Laredo. . . .

Anatole cases the situation — tasty, boss nowhere in sight. Whistling "How High the Moon," he takes the tape from the desk drawer, sneaks back toward the machinery. . . .

"You can't oink Biff into just anything," Mort says. "He don't need the loot, understand."

"We could play his name up on the ties," Gil says from the window. "Make up slogans about him, like *When You Get Killed by Biff Jordan You Stay Dead*. That way —"

Gil straightens up, galvanized.

"Mort! Holy! Holy jumping! Come here, quick! I can hardly — you see what I see?"

Mort has jumped up from bed, he peers out. "What's eating you, kid? Where — what's going —"

"The sign, man! Down there on the sign!"

A headline is traveling around the Times Building: M-U-K EXECUTIVES IN EMERGENCY SESSION PICK BIFF JORDAN FOR LEAD IN TECHNICOLOR BIBLICAL EPIC, TRYING TO LOCATE COWBOY STAR. . . .

"This is the greatest!" Gil shouts. "Biff cuts Gable, Tracy, Boyer, all of them! You got to get hold of him right away, Mort, you got to let him know!"

"Sure, sure." Mort blinks, he's a little dazed. "But — look, where do I tell him to call? Where are these M-U-K guys *at*?"

"That's a point." Gil frowns; then his face brightens. "Tell you what, suppose I call Al? They know everything over in Bliss's office." He rushes to the phone, dials, waits. "Al? Gil Lazarro. Emergency, Al — you have any idea where these

M-U-K guys are meeting? Got to reach them right away. . . ." He slides a pencil from his pocket, writes on the wallpaper. "Right. . . . Murray Hill Seven . . . Nine . . . Three. . . . Got it. Solid. Thanks a million, Al. . . ."

Mort takes the receiver and dials. "Biff? You know what I just saw on the *Times* sign? They picked you for the lead in that new M-U-K picture! You're in, kid! Biff, you're gonna play God! They're looking for you right now, I got a number for you to call. Murray Hill. . . . That's right. *Murray Hill*. Seven. Nine. Three. . . ."

HERBERT MARSHALL?"
 "He looks like he should part his hair in the middle."

"Walter Pidgeon."

"In tweeds, with a briar pipe, he's convincing. On Mount Sinai, in flowing robes, with a scepter, he's Walter Pidgeon at a costume ball somewhere."

"You know, it's too bad about Leslie Howard. If he was alive he —"

"Cute little actor, sure. But Pygmalion on Mount Sinai? Besides, there's the question of the accent."

"The accent could make the part. You take a poll, you'll find a lot of people figure God to talk with a British accent."

The phone rings. One of the conferees removes the Larrañaga from his mouth and picks up the receiver.

He listens. He listens for a long time. Then he says, "No. Oh, *no*." He puts the receiver down and breaks out in hysterical laughter. Minutes later, wiping his eyes, he gasps, "Gentlemen, you won't believe it. *I* don't believe it. One of our cameramen was walking down Broadway and he just saw a news flash on the *Times* sign. Said we just picked the man to play God — Biff Jordan!"

Wild hilarity around the table, howls, guffaws, a lunatic whinnying. It takes a long time for the outburst to subside.

Then, a pregnant silence.

Then —

"Well, now. Look, fellows. *I could* be crazy. This is just off the top of the head, see? I'm just throwing it out for discussion, understand. It's in a tentative spirit, but . . . Maybe there's a thought there? Shouldn't we kick it around a little? God as Will Rogers — I don't know, there's a folksy down-to-earth touch there, it just *might* work. . . ."

"Will Rogers on Mount Sinai. Well. Without the lariat, of course. Just keeping the folksy touch. . . ."

"Could be. *Could* be. It's a twist. . . ."

"After all, in *Green Pastures* they showed Heaven as a Louisiana fishfry and De Lawd was a levee Negro. Who beefed? It was standing-room-only all around the country. . . ."

"You'd throw out the sombrero, that's for sure. The spurs, too. What

you'd keep is just the drawl and a kind of just-folks, straight-shooting approach. Maybe we've finally got our teeth into something —"

Excited buzz around the table, more cigars are lit. Then somebody suggests a difficulty:

"One thing, if we want to stick on schedule. Where do we find this joker? I see by Benny Bliss's column that he's here in town but he's hiding out somewhere, his wife's got detectives on his tail. . . ."

"Cinch — we call Benny Bliss. They know everything in Benny's office. . . ."

AL KIEFER's office. Danny Atlas and Gil Lazarro have dropped in on their friend, they are holding a post-mortem.

"It's after ten," Danny says. "How many busy signals you figure Biff's got by now?"

"Keeps calling to be cast as God," Gil says. "Keeps getting the busy signal. It's too beautiful."

"Where are they going to shoot this epic?" Al Kiefer says listlessly. "On location? De Mille would do it on location."

He observes his friends, their faces are lit with exaltation. Danny bobbing on a sea of quickchangery, bloated with miracles; Gil gloating over the great hodge-podge, seeing dovetails and astonishing overlaps everywhere. They have vaulted the firmament tonight, they are toasting each other with pigeon's milk.

"All right," Al Kiefer says, "you pulled it off. The spoons are all dissolved, the hyphens are all riveted in place. Can we go home now?"

The phone rings, Kiefer answers. "Hello. . . . Yes, this is Benny Bliss's office. . . . No, Benny's gone for the night. This is Al Kiefer. . . . Who'd you say? M-U-K? . . . Sure, glad to help if I can. . . ." He listens, his mouth unhinges. "Yes. I see. Hold on a minute, will you?" He puts his hand over the mouthpiece and addresses himself to Gil. "This is a guy from the M-U-K meeting. You'll be pleased to know that they've solved their problem — they just picked Biff to play God. They want Biff's phone number."

Gil Lazarro gawks. Slowly, gingerly, almost prayerfully, he nods at Kiefer. Kiefer shrugs helplessly, nods back. He talks into the phone again. "You're in luck. A friend of Biff's is sitting in my office right now — I'll put him on." He hands the receiver to Gil, muttering "I wash my hands of it, it is God's doing."

"Hello," Gil says tensely. "Sure, sure I got his number. Glad to give it to you. You understand that it's confidential, of course. . . . It's Murray Hill. Seven. Nine. Three. . . ."

He hangs up, his hands trembling. The three of them sit silently, avoiding each other's eyes.

"You mean," Danny stutters finally, "M-U-K keeps trying to reach God and *they* get the busy signal too? This we got too?"

"You pattern-makers," Kiefer says, "you have builded a thing of mutton-brained magnificence. I bow in humility."

Gil Lazarro's eyes are glazed with reverential awe.

"My God," he whispers. "It's all too beautiful."

To everybody's surprise, including his own, he puts his arms on the desk, buries his head in them, and begins to sob uncontrollably.

10:13. . . .

"Nnngah, nnngah," Donald Perry says, looking down over Times Square.

He is sitting in a Chicago-bound DC-6, in a G.I. uniform with a Korea service bar on the tunic, folded hands swathed in bandages, head entirely domed with taped gauze. Through two narrow slits he is looking down at the shimmering lights of Times Square. What he is trying to communicate is that he would like very much to get out of this plane.

This is "legal kidnapping week" on the Columbia campus, where Donald Perry is a freshman. At precisely 3:30 this afternoon, as Donald was leaving his Spanish class, six students yanked him into a car and brought him to a nearby apartment. There they dressed him in this uni-

form, tied his hands and covered the ropes with bandages, gagged him and wrapped his head completely in gauze. At 9:43 they carried Donald aboard a plane at Idlewild, strapped him securely in his seat, explained to the stewardess and nearby passengers that their friend had been horribly burned in Korea and was going to the Mayo Clinic for special treatment, and disappeared. Donald has just now remembered that he has a Spanish exam coming up tomorrow morning and he still hasn't learned his irregular conjugations. "Lemme out of here!" he yells, thinks he's yelling. "If I don't learn the pluperfect of *hacer* by 8:40 tomorrow morning I'll —"

"Nnngah, nnngah, nnngah," the prim, matronly lady sitting next to him hears. She leans over and pats the young man on the knee. "Poor boy," she says. "You must be suffering terribly. It isn't easy, I know."

HER MIND is made up. The moment she gets back to St. Paul she's going to sit down and write a strong letter to her congressman. She begins to phrase the letter in her mind: "The housewives of America have reached the end of their patience. We demand the immediate bombing of all airfields north of the Yalu, in this hour of decision. . . ."

LETTER FROM TANGIER:

The Phoney Gold Rush

John V. Taberner

TANGIER apparently has everything a man could wish for: sun-drenched villas garlanded with flowers, hillsides glowing with red hibiscus and purple bougainvillea, tessellated minarets smiling down on one of the loveliest of Mediterranean bays. People go swimming almost the year round, yet even in summer the climate is not unbearably hot. Living is easy, business flourishing, and taxation practically nonexistent. It seems like an earthly paradise.

Yet those who know Tangier have no love for the place. The same phrase is repeated to me again and again: "You're lucky; you don't have to *live* in Tangier." Around the legations, and in the offices of the American and European companies located here, men and women say it with pent-up exasperation, thinking of the time when their release will come; in the large colony of

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foreign residents who have staked everything to get here and now have no place else to go, it is said with hopelessness, and sometimes with despair.

You soon begin to understand what they mean. Once you delve beneath the surface beauty and charm, you find nastiness and even horror. There is no pity in Tangier, and no milk of human kindness. It is a lonely furtive place where each man distrusts his neighbor and dog eats dog, or whatever else he can get his teeth into. As you walk the street, strangers eye you calculatingly, as though trying to size you up and figure out your angle. Even among the professional people stationed here, who have no particular ax to grind, the poison has apparently spread, and there is little of the easy social intercourse and friendly getting-together that one expects in foreign service. A charming American girl confessed to me that she dreaded the evenings and often went back to work at the office because there was nothing else to