

# THE MAN THAT WOULD BE STAR

When he was born it was old-fashioned for babies to pose for the family album on a polar bear's skin. But the day he was baptized, a beautiful sunny day in June, his godfather was at hand to make portraits of the happy mother with her child among the flowers in the garden. His godfather had expensive photographic equipment, considering the times, even a camera he could make moving pictures with. So a couple of years later, when Eric and his family came for a visit on Sunday afternoon, his godfather filmed him playing among his own children. Years later, when Eric saw the film, the funniest thing for him was watching himself running backwards after they had seen the film and his godfather had it running backwards through the projector to put it back on the original reel.

When Eric was six years old his family spent a vacation at the Baltic Sea. His dad photographed Eric and his brother Matt building sand castles on the beach and fighting the surf while clutching the big rubber fish. On that beach the first color picture was taken of Eric. The family that stayed in the same boarding-house sent it to them later.

During primary school Eric had a teacher who was interested in taking pictures of her students and selling them to their parents. So Eric appeared copying words from the blackboard in first grade and playing the glockenspiel in the third. In high school he had a friend who had a rather rich and benevolent grandmother. So besides the camera and projector the friend owned he got editing equipment and was usually able to finance the expensive film material. He and Eric made a film together they called "Dreams." It was a seven or eight minute silent movie showing a boy on his way to school passing by a cinema and imagining himself to be a western hero, having nightmares about the oncoming test in math, and – while playing with matches – having a vision of his school burning. While Eric wrote the script and starred as the boy, his friend operated the camera and did the editing. They sent it in to a nationwide student film contest and won one of the 20 awards. They were twelve years old at the time.

Their next movie was a western displaying all the cliches they could think of. As backdrops they used the rugged plains of the army training grounds nearby, hills and patches of wood torn up by trucks and tanks. The movie was a

somewhat lesser success, but this time they managed a sound version that consisted mainly of background music.

When another boy filmed students in the school yard, Eric was happy to recognize himself on screen when the film was shown later because by this time he had become a movie fan. He went to the movies once or twice a week, and his greatest and most secret wish was to become a star one of these days. He had his own photo camera by now and was experimenting with it. It was a disappointment for him when he heard that a camera team was in town doing some on-location takes for a TV movie. Some of the people Eric knew had been asked in the streets to appear in those scenes as extras. They were given the date and were asked to wear their Sunday clothes. Eric was not among those lucky ones but he made sure he was on the set to watch what was going on.

Eric had a similar feeling of disappointment when he read that Kirk Douglas had come to Hamburg, shooting some scenes for his new movie "A Man to Be Respected." The location was a subway station, practically next door. What Eric did not know was that the second unit team was filming background shots in the streets and that their lenses caught him together with other pedestrians walking by. Neither did he realize that a TV camera picked him out as the anonymous face in the crowd when he was rising towards the daylight on a subway escalator among hundreds of other shoppers that spilled into the downtown shopping district. The take was later used as a background for certain statistics in a report on the economic system.

One of his conscious appearances on the home screen was during his stay in the United States when he was asked to deliver a 30 second speech of good will on a Christmas show of the local TV station. He remembered that he almost stuttered because the temperature was around zero.

A couple of years later he twice appeared in a a TV gameshow which was great fun though he lost the second time around.

On vacations Eric usually left his camera at home. He did not like the feeling of always searching for the right camera angle. But he had friends that had copies of their photographs made for him. On a trip to Southern France a friend had a film camera with him. Eric appeared walking along La Croisette in Cannes under palm branches shaken by the Mistral.

But more people took pictures of him that he would never see. When he walked across the Martian Fields in Paris he was in the foreground while

anonymous cameras focused on the Eiffel Tower. The moment he was asked by a Scandinavian couple to take their picture in front of the Arc de Triomphe, half a dozen lenses clicked shut on him standing next to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He was photographed while watching the changing of the guard at the Stockholm castle, in front of the Olympic Stadium in Helsinki, at the airport in Brussels, on the tower of the Strasbourg Cathedral, crossing Broadway on Times Square, visiting Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, leaving the capitol in Santa Fé, walking the beach in San Diego and sitting on Telegraph Hill while waiting for the clouds to lift from the Golden Gate.

He was twenty-four when he died, the same age as his idol James Dean. By that time he had appeared in more films, and more stills existed of him around the globe than the Hollywood factory had managed to produce during the two years of Jimmy's stardom.

(Sommer 1976)

# THE OMEN

Silas Sankond, a diviner by trade and a man of comfortable means which he had acquired through his successful sooth-saying for a span of several years since he was not an astrologer of the widely known kind but only used the implements of such, like the crystal ball, for he had genuine visions of sometimes accurately detailed foresights of incidents still to come, startling himself on occasions, that had drawn a certain congregation of faithful followers, believing in his oracle and taking advantage of it by being able to encounter future before she happened and thus planning ahead, thereby granting Silas a wholesome salary the amount of which was often determined by his customers, this way expressing their gratitude, had picked up a pack of Dunhills from his oak desk and was taking out and easing his finger along the length of a cigarette, caressing the golden ring that ran around its filter, as a phone call was put through by his secretary and daughter, Manto, who informed him about a customer wishing to talk to him.

Silas picked up the receiver.

“Yes?”

“Mr. Sankond? Er, his is Hugh Tolliver speaking. The reason I am calling you is... Well, my wife has been told that the wife of Senator O’Neece has been a customer of yours for years and she... Can you confirm that?”

“Mr. Tolliver,” Silas Sankond replied, “You will understand that any consultations asked of me are dealt with with the utmost discretion. So you certainly cannot expect this kind of information from me.”

“No, of course not, I do understand, sir. As a matter of fact I would not believe this of Senator O’Neece or his wife since I know them rather well, especially since he won the primaries. Well, anyway, actually I did not want to bother you; frankly, sir, if you don’t mind, I don’t believe in your profession, and I only called to prove to my wife that there is nothing to it. But if we could make an date for me to come and consult you conce, I think I would...”

“That won’t be necessary,” Silas said patiently. He had experienced situations like this more than once. Most of his customers consulted him by phone, for, strangely enough, the telephone served him as a tool of divination as well as the crystal ball that was resting on his desk in solemn presence. As soon as he had picked up the receiver and heard the voice of the customer he usually saw

everything spread out clearly and was able to tell all he would know about the person. Such was the case with Hugh Tolliver.

“Please, listen to me, Mr. Tolliver,” Silas continued. “I do understand your situation. What I can tell you need not have any consequences for you if you don’t wish. But keep in mind what I tell you. I have had a vision concerning your future. You will be engaged in a journey out of state a week from today. You will be driving a hired car. You will be involved in a serious accident that will not be your fault. The cars of both parties will be wrecked. Two persons from the other car will not reach the hospital alive. You will be unharmed.”

“You can’t be serious,” Tolliver protested. “Do you expect me to tell that to my wife? Mr. Sankond, honestly, I...”

“Mr. Tolliver, I see your problem. I’m afraid I can’t be of any more assistance. If you will excuse me — goodbye.”

Silas hung up. He had known, from experience, that it would be useless trying to impress or persuade a man like Tolliver. He would wait until what he had seen would happen. Silas knew it would happen. He also knew that Tolliver would remember when it happened. Then no persuasion would be necessary. Silas had won some of his most faithful clients this way. A thing that troubled him, though, was the fact that, as soon as a customer believed in Silas’ foresights and took action accordingly, Silas was no longer able to describe exactly what he would encounter. Silas had visions on the definite circumstances and situations and was thus able to give guidance, but whenever he tried to concentrate on the outcome of events everything went into a blur. This doubt bothered him more than his grateful followers. Contemplating, he asked himself, “Is it that, when they believe me, my influence makes their fate change through their action? Can I shape their future?”

He was interrupted by Manto who informed him that the senator’s wife, Mrs. O’Neece, was on the phone. He knew Agda O’Neece as a woman who had rather preserved the superior beauty of her youth, features that represented a strong character with which she supported the steady and successful career of her husband, now a public figure dominating the political scene. Her strength concealed her dependence on a profession like Silas’s, generally regarded as shady, but she knew better and faithfully submitted to what advice Silas would give her. The senator knew of her consultations and, though he did not believe in Sankond’s abilities, usually followed her suggestions which she presented as her own.

“Hello, master,” Silas heard her say as he answered the phone.

Immediately he had an uneasy feeling. He saw the senator in an open limousine, smiling and waving to the crowds that lined both sides of the street. And he saw a gun pointed at him. Silas felt a nervous sensation run through his body. What will happen if I don’t tell her? Can I actually make things happen? As he hesitated to answer her, he chanced to touch the crystal ball before him. The glass turned into mercury for a second, mirroring himself. He saw himself wearing sunglasses but could not make out whether he was on the beach or someplace else.

“Mr. Sankond, are you there?” Agda asked.

“Of course, dear Agda,” Silas said, “I have been expecting your call. As it is, there is nothing I could tell you. It seems you should behave as usual and everything will be fine.”

“Oh, really? Yes... well, fine,” Agda said in a slightly wondering tone. “Thank you so much, master, I’ll be calling soon. Goodbye till then!”

A week Silas received a call from Hugh Tolliver.

“Mr. Sankond, I... I can’t tell you how... I just can’t believe it, but... You were right, you... It turned out exactly like... I will mail a check the first thing in the morning and...”

Silas heard his daughter’s voice in the next room, urging, “You can’t go in right now...” as the door was thrust open and in came Agda O’Neece.

Silas dropped the receiver and rose from his desk.

Her face was contorted. “You knew it. You knew it!” she shrieked. “Why didn’t you tell me?! Now he’s dead. They killed him — they killed him right in the street!”

She took a flask from under her mink coat and flung the contents into Silas’s face. As Silas’s hands went up to where the steaming acid was scarring his face, eating away his eyeballs, Agda took the receiver, soberly said, “You can’t talk to Mr. Sankond today,” and hung up.

The pain stabbed Silas’s brain like a bolt of lightning, and he had a vision of himself staggering along a road, wearing dark glasses and a cane.

“But I tried you, fate,” his thoughts cried out, “at least I tried!” as he crushed to the floor in agony.

(Dezember 1976 / Januar 1977)

# ARROWHEAD

As a murky dusk fell upon the park and walls of Glenlyndon Castle on the misty October day in the year 18.., Lady Glenlyndon rested her arm against one of the pillars that framed the windows overlooking the estate. The pillars met in a pointed arc high above her, enclosing ancient, lead-seamed window panes that no one ever cared to open to the rough breeze that now tore at the few remaining leaves on the tree skeletons standing scattered across the faded green of the lawn before the window. Lady Glenlyndon's dull, tear-drenched gaze lay on the evening, unseeingly.

"Will you tell me how you saw it happen, James," she inquired of her companion who had been standing near the fireplace for several minutes, silently brooding over his own bitter thoughts.

James, a lieutenant in the Indian Corps of Her Majesty's Army, had returned to Glenlyndon earlier in the day to personally bring his sister the report of the death of her husband, Lorrin, Lord Glenlyndon, who had lost his life for Queen and Country in the remoter parts of the Ranchipur province.

"Were you with him on his last day?" Lady Glenlyndon asked in a grave, quiet tone. Her chestnut curls seemed almost black as they framed her high, snow-white forehead that perfectly mirrored the milky fog above the castle which the autumn sun had vainly attempted to penetrate during the day.

James drew his eyes from the burning logs and turned to his grieving sister, Lavinia.

"I was with the patrol he was leading that day. We had been sent out to investigate the rebel activities in Ranchipur, and as we expected to contact the enemy our patrol consisted of fifty mounted men. When we left the plain to search the hills we knew to be their refuge, they ambushed us in a narrow canyon. They had bowmen placed among the rocks, and your husband was one of the first to be hit by an arrow that went through his chest." He paused.

"He was in little pain and died quickly," James added. "Of course, we overran them. Some of them got away, but we took their chief prisoner. He was wounded, his sabre was broken, so he offered me this arrow when he surrendered. It is much like the one that killed Lorrin.

“We couldn’t take our dead because it would be days before we reached camp and the heat did not allow any transport of the bodies, so we buried them on the field and marked the site with a tall stone of granite that we broke from a cliff nearby. A week later a small outfit returned to the battlefield and applied an inscription in remembrance of those heroes who died there.”

He finished with a solemn satisfaction that he wanted to share with his sister, saying, “Lorrin, as the top-ranking officer and the most virtuous one, heads the list on that stone.”

Lady Glendlyndon, as she listened to her brother’s sad tale, had moved towards him trying to comprehend the terrible truth, then became aware of that slender messenger of death James was holding in his hand. It was fashioned of strong, yellow wood topped by a barbed point of a light, grey metal. Half consciously she took it with her own hand, and when she did it slipped from her fingers and with its sharp-edged tip broke the skin of her palm before it fell to the floor.

A crimson bead rose from the cut, yet Lady Glendlyndon felt so little pain that it hardly distracted her from her sorrowful thoughts.

“What kind of a man was he?” she asked.

“Who?”

“The rebel you took prisoner.”

James’ rugged, leathery features that, despite his youth, showed the strain of the fiery climate they had been exposed to, had displayed a pitying apprehensiveness while watching the effects of his report on the tender, lovely appearance of his sister. Now they were contorted into an outburst of rage.

“He killed your husband!” he screamed, turning violently, and began to furiously pace the worn carpet that spread across the cold, tiled floor until the pain in his leg which a rebel sabre had torn open in an earlier battle slowed him down.

He saw that Lady Glendlyndon, looking for support, had glided into a chair, but her eyes revealed such an eager attraction to the subject that he reconsidered his answer.

“Indeed,” he continued in a more composed way, “I have to admit that we rarely have encountered a more valiant foe. His name is Andar, and he is said to have been the Maharajah of Ranchipur before it was annexed as a province to Her Majesty. When the defence of his country collapsed he himself became the head of the rebels that we have been fighting since. A well-educated ruler, he spent

several years in Europe but turned against his masters when we started to move into India. His cunning stratagems have strongly resisted and badly harmed our pacification efforts.

“He was leading his men when they charged in Lorrin’s last battle, and his luck would have it that a bullet drilled a hole through his hip and his horse was shot to death underneath him. That was the first time I saw his tall shape, his tawny skin, his bony forehead and his black eyes sunk so deeply in their caves that they appeared impenetrable as if he was constantly wearing a mask.”

James stopped and considered the account he had given of the Maharajah.

“Well,” he concluded, “he has got his receipt and all he is going to rule over to his dying day is ten square feet in the dungeon at the Delhi fort.”

When James looked at his sister, he saw that she had fainted in her chair.

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The disease that betook itself to Lady Glenlyndon was not a reaction to the news of her husband’s death, the hastily gathered physicians diagnosed. After they had examined the cut on her hand that had developed into an ill-colored, festering sore they thought a slow poison to be the threat to the lady’s fragile health. As Lavinia did not regain consciousness but was shaken by feverish dreams, James finally recalled the Indian arrow and produced it before the doctors. At the sight of the evidence they agreed readily enough that this might be the cause of the ill fate of Lady Glenlyndon but at the same time admitted that no known cure could be obtained to overcome a pestilence originating in so remote a part of the world as in the case of the arrow. They left the writhing body of Lady Glenlyndon in the care of her desperate brother who stayed at her bedside making no effort to hide his tears as he expected that to the loss of his comrade and brother-in-law that of his sister would be added soon.

After two days the fury of the poison seemed to loosen its grip over Lavinia’s emaciated body. When she awoke she was too weak to eat and left the offered meal untouched but tried to communicate with her brother. As he brought his ear close to her mouth she whispered, “Fetch him!”

“Fetch whom?!” James asked in surprise.

“The Maharajah!”

James was taken aback by Lavinia's request. He was deeply moved by her thought that had also secretly gnawed at his conscience for some time. Could he who had been the cause of evil that had befallen his family and whose life now rotted away in a nameless damp cell thousands of miles to the east possibly know a cure against the hideous poison raging in the veins of his beloved sister? An unheard of idea to ask the despicable enemy for advice!

Hesitatingly he looked upon the frail figure before him. The feverish glow of her imploring eyes seemed to him like live coals on a pale sheet of linen.

Abruptly he turned, ordered his horse to be saddled and rode to town as quickly as he could. He had a wire sent off to Delhi asking his general to release Andar on the condition that he provide a cure for Lady Glenlyndon.

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Two gloomy days passed over Glenlyndon Castle before an answer was delivered. Lavinia was sitting up in a chair close to the fire when she heard the sound of her brother's boots entering the room. She rose from her seat with her stare fixed upon the flames.

"James, you promised to read the message to me regardless to what it may offer," she said in a soft, yet firm voice.

Still, James did not move up to confront her but was careful not to show his countenance. Finally, as Lavinia was waiting in silence, he raised the sheet of paper he was holding and read.

"Andar has sent a personal message to Lady Glenlyndon," James hesitatingly uttered. With a glance at his sister he continued.

"Mylady – I have been informed of the sad fate that has fallen upon you. I wish the arrow would have touched the blood of your Queen rather than yours. As it is, after all the favors your Queen has bestowed on my country you could not possibly wish to live even in her own country but rather join me to meet your husband in another realm of less worldly proportions which surely we shall do before long.

Andar,  
Maharajah of Ranchipur"

As James looked up from the paper he beheld the reflections of the flames dancing upon the lifeless form of Lady Glenlyndon prostrate before the fireplace.

(21.–24. Juni 1978)

# THE MORTAL COIL

Archibald Leitch left his hometown of East Colway, Wales, for the first time when he was seven years old. His mother and father had finally saved enough money to afford their honeymoon, and Aunt Mamie had agreed to invite Archie to her house in London for the fortnight.

Aunt Mamie set out to allow Archie a proper view of what the capital could offer to his cultural enlightenment. She scrutinized the entertainment pages of the Times, found the theatres too dear, and the only motion picture she thought fit for the edification of her nephew turned out to be Laurence Olivier's Hamlet.

Though Archie did not understand much of what was happening on the screen, the impact on him was decisive. He had been to the movies only once before (Disney's Snow White) and he had never seen a play performed. Thus the Danish prince left an indelible impression.

When Archie changed to intermediate school a few years later, he immediately tried out for the theatre group that was supervised by his English teacher, Mr Perkins. In Archie's second year Mr Perkins was moved by the enthusiasm with which Archie tried to persuade him to venture into a production of Hamlet. Mr Perkins had, of course, toyed with the idea for some time since he had had fair success with several Shakespeare productions, though mostly comedies. He felt confident as to his own abilities as a director as well as the thespian capabilities of his pupils, and he decided to draft an abridged version of the great tragedy that would be not too physically strenuous for his young crew.

Of course he was aware of the ardent glow in Archie's eyes whenever the leading role was considered, but there was no question that Mr Perkins would cast one of the older boys who had the advantage of having proven himself a convincing Petruchio or Orlando, respectively. The best Mr Perkins could do for Archie was the role of Polonius. Sad as Archie was about the chance he had missed, he took the challenge and tried as hard as he could to transform his twelve-year-old form into Ophelia's aging father.

The performance was a success, and Archie got a big hand for his toils against the odds: his make-up consisted of a beard of long threads that Archie had painstakingly glued to his face one by one. When on stage, discussing the

strange shape of clouds with the mad prince, Polonius stroked his beard and several of the threads came off in the process. That greatly added to the comical touches inherent in the role. When Polonius died his infamous death behind the curtain in the queen's chambers, who cared that Hamlet's cardboard sword was severely battered in the violent act? What mattered was that Polonius went to supper — 'not where he eats, but where he is eaten!'

If Archie had not been stagestruck before, his destiny now lay before him as clear as a Welsh mountain stream. During his last year in school he applied for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He was not accepted.

Archie tried to digest this blow that hampered a career he had envisaged for himself in the footsteps of all great Shakespearean actors: he applied for the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. The school was not what Archie thought should kindle his talent as the definitive Hamlet of his generation. But at least he succeeded in getting in.

During his education there he got his first professional chance in repertory. It was in Chichester during the summer season: Archie was gaining experience as a spear bearer in Macbeth and even finding his way back to the ramparts of Elsinore as Bernardo. On the Chichester stage he met Olive Phelps. Olive worked there as an assistant stage manager, and she shared his enthusiasm for the Great Bard.

Not quite, though. After they got married and Olive bore Archie Leitch's first son, she was able to dissuade Archie from naming the baby Hamlet. Villain Claudius as namesake was out of the question, and Olive also considered Polonius and Horatio as too old-fashioned. Laertes was a name Archie himself had never much cared for. They named their son Bernard. Archie was not honest enough to himself to admit that he had married Olive Phelps mostly because he would probably never meet a woman whose name sounded closer to 'Ophelia.'

When Archie immersed himself in his growing private library of literature concerning the Great Dane, Olive sometimes tried to resuscitate him by commenting: 'How can you bother with questions like "Why does Hamlet hesitate?" If he didn't hesitate, he'd finish the whole thing by the end of the first act!'

An exasperated Archie would then retire to his study. Olive was right, of course, dramatically speaking. But Archie knew that he was not alone.

Scholars of four centuries had tried to come to terms with the fascination of the most famous and intriguing persona in occidental drama. They could not be wrong in their search. Though in the long run they produced further questions rather than answers. There was every reason to go on.

It goes without saying that Archie's and Olive's honeymoon had led them to Denmark. Archie found Helsingør Castle, Shakespeare's Elsinore, somewhat different from what he had imagined. The palace was imposing enough, but it hardly resembled a medieval castle with ramparts or the frosty 'foul' atmosphere that had made Hamlet shiver.

While Archie plunged deeper and deeper into the mythical realm of Shakespeare lore, he was less successful as a professional. He was never able to establish himself on the London stage and, after working in several repertory companies in England, accepted an offer from the theatre in Dundee. Olive had given up her own job in order to raise their children. Following Bernard, a girl was born, and Olive made it clear that the name Ophelia was not acceptable. They settled for Rosalind: Archie had played the heroine of *As You Like It* in his boys school days.

His work with the repertory company was enough for Archie's family to live on as long as he went into Glasgow regularly and took additional jobs on radio shows and the few opportunities in TV programs that were produced in Scottish studios. On stage Archie did not rise above the supporting cast, but he never lost track of his dream. Luckily for him, Shakespeare was constantly on the agenda, and Hamlet remained the epitome of thespian culture.

Archie tried out for the leading role every time he would get a chance. After a few years it was understood that he was to fill the ranks as a spear bearer with speaking parts: he played Rosencrantz; Guildenstern twice. Once he almost was cast as Horatio, but then a rising young star named Michael Bittins won the lead role, and Archie was considered too old to play the youth's friend and fellow student. Archie had to settle for the gravedigger. It was during this production that he started to think about writing a will though he was in his mid-forties and in good health.

Hamlet remained on the roster. It was no secret to his fellow actors that Archie knew the play by heart in its entirety, and Archie was there whenever he was needed — Osric and Fortinbras being his highlights of the following years.

Then came the day when Archie finally recited Hamlet's monologue to an audience — not on stage but at the open grave of his father. The grieving family listened in silence, nobody was particularly annoyed, nobody showed any emotion at all as Archie was carried away by his trembling pathos breaking loose through a dam of expectancy and worn composure. He moved himself to tears when he addressed the famous lines to the coffin:

'... what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause...'

The mourners discovered that the text was fitting enough if one was to accept anything other than the Bible. And although they acknowledged Archie's position as the son of the deceased, they wished someone else had spoken those words. None of Archie's family were, like him, working in the theatre, and they hardly ever came near one. But still they couldn't help noticing: a new Olivier he was not.

Archie's own death was untimely, but he would have liked it, had he been able to comment on it. With the years he had gained weight — he had never been the sporting type. The one exercise that he always continued since his academy days was fencing. When he had moved to Dundee he had been delighted to learn that the two private local acting schools regularly offered fencing as part of their curriculum. Archie soon joined the lessons whenever he could. He offered to teach classes, being a fair craftsman of the sport himself. Soon it became obvious that teaching requires more than going through the motions. Archie was refused as an instructor but continued to work out with the students. The points of the rapiers they used were blunted with little balls to avoid injuries. Yet one day it came about that the thrust of a hapless youth struck Archie near his throat and ripped open his carotid artery. Archie was still alive when the ambulance arrived at the hospital, but he never regained consciousness.

Two days before the funeral Olive found Archie's written testament. At the time she was too dumbfounded to think about it, and so the text was made available to the theatre company. Thus the board members discovered that Archie had willed his own skull to the theatre — to be used as a prop in Hamlet's gravedigger scene.

The board was appalled. They agreed with Archie's statement only by acknowledging that the prop in use on stage was old — a plaster cast of a skull that had seen better days. It was dented and battered even more than what Yorick's remains might have looked after these twenty-odd years in the grave.

Still Archie's last request was dismissed unanimously — nobody would speak for him. Consequently his body was buried intact. Few of his colleagues cared to attend the service because the contents of Archie's testament had been subject to some snickering. 'Distasteful' was the nicest thing they found fit to comment on Archie's request. The idea of it!

But, actually, most of his colleagues had already forgotten about him. Little could he do to impress them when he was alive, less did he achieve by dying. What Archie did achieve: the ancient plaster skull ended its career of being the subject of Hamlet's musings about poor Yorick. The Dundee property master bought a new skull from a supply company for medical school displays, very lifelike and — made of unbreakable plastic. The set decorator gave it a coat of earthy brown paint and added a few touches of dirt in the eye sockets and along the grinning teeth to cover the clinical look.

Nobody was aware that the post-Leitch-era on the Dundee stage had dawned when Michael Bittins donned the black cloak of the prince once more, picked up the skull, remembered his childhood companion Yorick and asked, 'Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing. Dost thou think Alexander looked of this fashion in the earth? And smelt so? pah!'

(1990)

# GARDENS OF PROMISE

Hoy Yow wiped the sweat from the corners of his eyes. He measured the depth of the hole he had drilled into the vertical cliff while sitting in his rope swing. The swing was secured on to the mountain high above — two hundred feet of perpendicular rock and one hundred more feet on the slope beyond the edge where Ah Quee and Guan Chung waited for him to pull the signal rope. They would pull him to safety.

Hoy Yow hardly looked below to where he could see the Shotover River a hundred and fifty feet beneath his naked soles. He unfastened a stick of dynamite from the inside of his shirt, inserted it in the hole in the rock and tucked it tight. He stretched the fuse that had been wound around the stick as straight as he could. The fuse was long enough to burn for three minutes, a little longer than his mates needed to pull him up to the top and into the safe zone beyond.

Then Hoy Yow wound the signal rope around his left hand while his right felt for the lantern with the live candle that was dangling beneath him. He took a deep breath, checked his working tools fastened to his belt. Then he dipped the end of the fuse into the flame. When he heard the hissing of the fuse and smelt the sulphuric stench, he violently jerked the signal rope. At once he noticed that it did not give way as usual — maybe it had become stuck on the edge, maybe it was entangled in the ropes of the swing. Hoy Yow frantically pulled again. When there was no reaction he reached for the fuse to rip it out of the charge. But before he succeeded he felt himself lifted in his swing, his heavy knee paddings scraping the smooth rock. He kept jerking at the signal rope and bent to the side to watch the burning fuse. He was still close enough to see it when the small trace of blue smoke disappeared in the hole. Hoy Yow gripped the ropes of the swing with both hands. The sweat on his neck was cold. Then the sudden black cloud engulfed him. A giant fist grabbed his swing and tossed it into space.

He remembered the eyes of his firstborn son, Xiaoxian, staring at him in wonder why his father would not give him food. The wind was sweeping the dry soil from the terrace on the hill that had been Hoy Yow's rice field. This winter the rains had not come. Hoy Yow's seven brothers had left their fields and gone

for the river. But Hoy Yow knew he would never get his field back once he abandoned it. Last year the mandarin who owned the valley had taken six out of ten bags of rice from Hoy Yow's harvest. Now all the rice was gone. His family was too weak to leave.

When he dug a small hole to bury Xiaoxian's frail body in the slope above the hut, a dullness came into the eyes of Hoy Yow's wife Suyun. A few days later Suyun's second baby was stillborn. After that Suyun never got up from her mat. The next morning Hoy Yow put the two bodies to rest in the ground beside Xiaoxian's grave.

The ropes of Hoy Yow's swing held him. The belt around his chest did not give. When the giant decided to release him Hoy Yow swang back and crashed into the jagged rocks.

Hoy Yow saw the dusty huts of his village, Sah Cheung. He never looked back to the graves he had dug. He threw his wooden shovel into his hut, climbed down into the valley and walked for two days until he reached the great river Xun xi that the Long Noses called the Pearl River. He followed the banks until he reached the city. The streets were crowded with gaunt peasant faces and beggar gangs.

Soon Hoy Yow found the administration building of the steamship company. He knew his third uncle, Tung Yung, was working there as an accountant. A few days later Hoy Yow had a job as a stoker on the river beats. Thus for the first time he travelled to the big city called Guanzhou, in the Pearl River delta. He learned that the Long Noses called it Canton. Many foreign words he learned on the boats; there was constant talk of young men leaving the country to seek their fortune overseas. The legendary Gold Hill was mentioned, in the land of California, where immense riches could be made. Though nobody knew any Flowery People who had returned wealthy.

The latest news were from Sum Kum Shan, the New Gold Hill: ships with thousands of Flowery People were leaving Canton Harbour for the South and a city called Sydney. The diggings in New Gold Hill seemed to be even more promising. So desperate was the urge to escape the clan-feuds and poverty at home and seek new means of making a living, that the support in emigrating, lending money for the passage was known among the Flowery People as 'li shung' — to give life.

Hoy Yow opened his eyes. He saw the dancing pigtail of a man busying himself at a stove. The man was shaking a pot of boiling rice to keep the grains separate. Then he took strips of dried pork and dropped them into another pot, preparing a hot soup.

The man turned, and Hoy Yow's sight was clear enough to recognize the grin of the sharply protruding teeth of Lee Nang, second son of his fourth uncle.

'The Gods be praised', Lee Nang said happily, 'your spirit has returned, son of first uncle. And with the help of the Gods, you will survive. Ah Quee and Guan Chung send their best wishes. They humbly apologize for not accompanying you in the hour of need. But, you know, they would have lost their jobs in Mr Pincher's road gang if they had departed early. I am told that Tse-hui Teh took over your job.'

Hoy Yow could not move. He closed his eyes twice to signal his approval. Lee Nang told him how Ah Quee and Guan Chung had pulled his bloodsoaked body over the edge after he had crashed into the torn cliff. Bourdeau, the sturdy Canadian who regularly ran his transport service along the footpaths through the mountains between Arthur's Point and Skipper's, had arrived at Pincher's Bluff after they had patched Hoy Yow up to stop the bad bleeding from his leg. They had put him on a mule cart, rigged one of Bourdeau's packhorses to it, and on the finished section of the road beyond Maori Point Bourdeau had brought Hoy Yow's lifeless form to Skipper's.

There was no doctor in the township, but two undertakers. When Hoy Yow regained consciousness he was lying on the working table of Lee Nang who found the work as a carpenter and cabinet maker more profitable than washing gold from the river. Wooden tail races and riffle boxes were in constant demand on the claims along the Shotover, and he had sold more than one coffin to the hundreds of Flowery People in the canyon. Most of them worked up Skipper's Creek beyond the township.

Lee Nang took care of his cousin Hoy Yow. He decided that Hoy Yow's leg did not have to be amputated though fragments of the exploding rock had shredded his thigh and knee like shrapnel. Lee Nang picked the largest splinters from the bloody limb and dressed the wounds, likewise Hoy Yow's head where the scalp had been ripped from his temple. Then he set the bones in Hoy Yow's upper left arm and the collar bone that had snapped like twigs when Hoy Yow had met the rock.

Hoy Yow swallowed some spoonfuls of Lee Nang's soup. He felt little pain except a smouldering fire in his knee, but he could not even bend down to ease the hurt with his good hand.

He had much time to think. His thoughts returned to his days on the Pearl River, to the soot and the heat of the furnaces deep in the belly of the steamer.

One day in Canton Hoy Yow was arrested, allegedly because he had not obtained a permit for working on the river. He did not know about permits, nor did he understand that he was supposed to bribe the mandarin in charge. He spent six weeks in gaol, and not even Tung Yung could get him out. Fortunately the money Hoy Yow had saved so far was not lost. It was secured beneath the floorboards in Tung Yung's room.

When Hoy Yow was released he had made up his mind. Nothing kept him in the Celestial Empire, not even filial obligations. Both his parents and those of his wife had died years ago. His uncles had many sons to look after them. Hoy Yow's money did not pay the fare to New Gold Hill, but it was not very difficult to invest it in a partial ticket and find a spot as a stoker on the same vessel. The ship belonged to the Long Noses, several of his workmates at the furnaces were Europeans, and Hoy Yow was eager to learn their language — his future was uncertain enough. The thought of being stranded deaf and dumb among the Long Noses was unbearable.

When the ship reached Sydney Hoy Yow never set foot on the New Gold Hill, never even touched the ground. The appalling news that reached him were in his own tongue, and there was no uncertainty about them: on the New Gold Hill the Long Noses had shown open hostility towards the Flowery People, they would not have their competition on the gold fields. There had been many killings, and Sydney Harbour was packed with Hoy Yow's countrymen, desperately seeking ships to take them away. In fear Hoy Yow held on to his job. And he heard of a new hope. There was gossip of more gold found on another island. The gold mountains could be reached from a port called Dunedin. And, incredibly, the Flowery People seemed to be welcome there.

Hoy Yow disembarked at Port Chalmers near Dunedin a week later. With the other passengers from Canton he found his way to Walker Street, where the cheapest quarters could be found and where most of the Flowery People lived.

He learned that to travel inland to Rees' station, where the gold was found, would cost him 13 pounds. He did not have the money, but he found a relative, Ah Gum, a nephew of his father-in-law, who had been hired as a cook in Dunedin. Soon Hoy Yow was employed in the kitchen of the Glasgow Arms Hotel, later in the Octagon Hotel. A few weeks later he ventured west.

Rees' station was a rapidly growing township, soon to be renamed Queenstown in honour of the reigning empress of the Long Noses. In the mountains above the station Hoy Yow saw Skipper's Canyon for the first time. This was the New Gold Hill, and Hoy Yow was eager to go to work.

He found helping hands in the small community of Flowery People at Stony Creek. Then he moved on to Skipper's Creek, another tributary of the Shotover River that had formed Skipper's Canyon.

It did not take Hoy Yow long to find out that his hardships were far from over. His new friends, among them several distant relatives, told him that the banks of the river had been worked over by the Long Noses a few years back. They had washed out all the easy gold and soon left when more gold was found on the west coast across the mountains. That was why the Flowery People has been invited into the country: the region of Otago was threatened with depopulation — manpower was needed to fill jobs in the orchards and agriculture.

The era of the 'duffers,' the rich and easy claims, was a legend of the past. Yet there was gold to be found. And like his kinsmen Hoy Yow settled for 'making tucker,' hard labor of washing gold from claims that promised no great riches but provided a modest living, and even some savings one might send home to a wife waiting in Canton. The Long Noses had left when the gold they could wash from the river bed in a week was worth less than three pounds. The Flowery People were ready to work strenuously for an average of one pound a week — and still saved some of the money.

Hoy Yow understood it would be a long time before he would return home. He despised the draughty calico tents of the Long Noses. Like his mates he built a hut of turf and grass sods, found some corrugated iron to cover it and used rice bags to make the roof complete. The Flowery People were fit for hard work in the summer heat, but several died in the snow when they tried to walk the foot path from Skipper's to Arthur's Point and Queentown during the icy winter months. 16 of them perished when heavy rains surprised a party

camping down in the gorge and a devastating flash flood twenty feet above the normal level washed tents, men, equipment and gold down the canyon.

The time came when Hoy Yow would get only 10-20¢ a week in exchange for the gold he extracted from the creek. That was the time some businessmen decided to build a road from Arthur's Point through the canyon, 15 miles up to Skipper's. The banks of the Shotover consisted mainly of nearly vertical cliffs rising from the river bed up to 500 feet. Many diggers had slipped off when they tried to work their way upstream. Others had been washed over the edges when sudden showers turned the hillsides into avalanches. Yet the road was not built to make travelling safer, but to introduce heavier mining equipment to the valley — the only way to extract more gold from the mountain on a profitable basis: dredges, water races, sluice nozzles were needed to wash the alluvial river banks through the tailboxes in an industrial fashion. Nobody believed that the gold still left could possibly be worth more than the money needed to complete the Skipper's Road. And still the road was built.

Hoy Yow was among the first to volunteer for the labor gang that was to blast the road out of Pincher's Bluff. For one pound a day most diggers were eager to leave their claims.

Pincher's Bluff did not claim the life of Hoy Yow. But it was a new life that his battered body mended to. Under Lee Nang's care he regained his health, but his knee remained stiff — his mining days were over. Hoy Yow could feel a bony knot where his collar bone had broken. And several small rock fragments in his leg continued to cause pain and kept reminding him of his closest encounter with the Gold Hill.

Yet the crippled man wasted no thoughts of returning home. He did not have the money. And unlike most of the Flowery People he had no immediate family that were dependent on him or waiting for his return.

Hoy Yow was happy to accept Lee Nang's offer to work with him in the carpenter's shop. He quickly demonstrated his ability to deal with the customers. He stayed in the shop, doing the odd chore, while Lee Nang was free to go out on business in the steep gullies. For most of his supplies Lee Nang could rely on the beech trees that grew in the shady gullies along the river. For larger projects timber had to be ordered from Queenstown.

The most profitable aspect of the enterprise were the Gardens of Promise. Lee Nang had chosen that name for the cemetery he had established

on the banks of Skipper's Creek. Only Flowery People were interred there — the unfortunate ones who did not make it home before their death. It was the dictum of the Gods that Flowery People could gain immortality only after burial in the soil of the Celestial Empire. Also, none of the expatriates brought their wives to the New Gold Hill. Capital punishment threatened women who ventured to emigrate from the Flowery Land. Thus family, eternal rest and also the less than friendly attitude of the Long Noses in the Otago region of New Gold Hill (which remained the postal address of Australia AND New Zealand for many years) firmly directed all thoughts of the Flowery People towards the country of their fathers.

None of them would die in peace had he not known that every effort would be made for him to 'go home after death.' The communities of the Flowery People soon established funds to secure passages to Canton for paupers who had grown old with the futile longing for a return. If they succumbed to death before their voyage the Gardens of Promise assured them: their rest in the New Gold Hill would not be permanent — one day their bones would be collected from the Gardens and sent on their ultimate journey to the Celestial Empire. Lee Nang's sad and empathic grin proved to be the pivot of his growing business as an undertaker. He organized Gardens of Promise in other townships. And he soon found that among his people money for their ultimate trips would be raised no matter how desperate their financial situation was. There was a strong need to observe the ancient festivities of Qing Ming, the 'Clear and Bright Festival', on the occasion of which the dead were honoured and remembered. On these ceremonial visits to the Gardens of Promise it was custom to sweep the graves of those men who had no relatives — they must not be forgotten, not as long as they rested in foreign soil.

Daily exposure to the longings and dreams of his countrymen did not deepen Hoy Yow's own religious beliefs. For himself he had nothing to expect from a return to the land of his fathers. And rumours that reached Otago made him refrain from nostalgic thoughts even more. He heard of the fate of a Chick Wee who had made a comfortable living as a gardener in Conroy's Gully. As an old man he had sold everything he owned and returned to the Flowery Land with his earnings. Once there he had failed to pay a blackmailing mandarin. Consequently he had been arrested on a trumped-up murder charge. Chick

Wee found neither justice nor sympathy, was robbed of his belongings, and executed.

Other rumours told the story of Aik Chye. Under normal circumstances returning home with 400 pounds would secure a lifelong and comfortable retirement in the Celestial Empire. Aik Chye and three companions had washed 4000 pounds from the river within a few months. He was afraid to be robbed of his sudden wealth and decided to embark on the passage home secretly, by entering a coffin as part of a shipment of bodies to be buried in home soil. Neither the coffin nor Aik Chye nor the money ever reached Canton.

Though Hoy Yow found it easy to take care of the needs of his people, and though Lee Nang's and his business prospered, he was disillusioned about their homegrown traditions. The explosion at Pincher's Bluff had literally driven the new land into his body. After the accident Hoy Yow never wore his old garments, the long blue tunic reaching down to his knees. He bought clothes in a store of the Long Noses, he cut off his pigtail like many of his countrymen did.

He came to know the Presbyterian missionary Alexander Don who visited all camps of the Flowery People in Otago, travelling on foot. The Long Noses called him 'Jesus Don' while the Flowery People named him 'The Cross and the Beard.' Don had many friends among the Flowery People, he could converse in their tongue. Hoy Yow listened to him speak, and though he did not want to be baptized in the new faith, he was moved to hear Don say of the fate of the Flowery People: 'The golden hopes of their hearts turned to iron in their souls.'

Hoy Yow never cared for the pastimes of his people when they tried to relieve the boredom of their isolated life. He despised the illegal gambling den where they played Pak-a-poo and Fan Tan, he never touched the opium pipes that provided oblivion to many Flowery People and even more Long Noses. He did not go to the temples of the Gods though he had seen many on his business trips through Otago. Yet he distrusted the world of the Long Noses just as their suspicion persisted when they encountered men speaking little English, carrying their belongings on bamboo shoulder poles and using inverted sacks over their heads as rain gear. Hoy Yow welded the iron in his soul.

With the years the community of the Flowery People declined ostensibly. Those who stayed worked as cooks, market gardeners, orchardists, hoteliers, they opened shops and laundries. Lee Nang's carpenter and undertaker business continued to flourish. Once Hoy Yow travelled officially as far as

Dunedin. There he retrieved the body of Ah Lee who had been sentenced to death for murdering Mary Young, a 60-year-old white lady. Ah Lee had been convicted because he had signed a confession. But it was so obvious that he, knowing little English, did not understand what the paper said. Even European lawyers felt the urge to reopen the case — to no avail. Hoy Yow was present when Ah Lee, with the noose around his neck, said his last words, 'Me no killee Missi Young!' Hoy Yow took Ah Lee's body back to Queenstown, as his cousins had wished, to be buried in the Gardens of Promise.

It was after the turn of the century; Hoy Yow had witnessed more than seventy New Year's celebrations. He was content to end his life on the New Gold Hill though the traditional firecrackers had failed to scare off the evil spirits.

Yet chance would have it that he return to the Celestial Empire. It was about the time when the third, the largest suspension bridge across the Shotover was completed, connecting Skipper's Road with the township and spanning the river 300 feet above the water. At that time the Flowery People everywhere in New Zealand combined in a great effort to have those deceased in foreign soil seek their final rest at home. Many bones were extracted from the Gardens of Promise, many new coffins were furnished. Lee Nang, his polite and hesitating smile reduced to one prominent tooth in his mouth, asked Hoy Yow to accompany the remains on their promised last passage.

Grunting, Hoy Yow rubbed his aching knee. But he acknowledged that the business occasion was too solemn to be delegated to one of their junior officers. So Hoy Yow accompanied the caravan of the dead as they were transported to Port Chalmers on coaches and carts. There they were secured in the innards of the chartered 's. s. Ventnor.' On this ship Hoy Yow and other elders of the community travelled to Wellington via Christchurch. When all the shipments had been gathered 474 coffins were stored below the deck of the 'Ventnor.'

Three days later the 'Ventnor' left Port Nicholson and sailed for Canton. But the journey home lasted only one day: a storm threw the vessel onto the reefs off Cape Egmont. Hoy Yow and several others of the few passengers were saved. They reached the shore with nothing but their lives. The captain and twelve crew members died as the mast of the 'Ventnor' dipped into the breakers.

Hoy Yow, in his soaked travel suit, struggled out of the lifeboat, limped onto the beach, sat down on a rock and tried to catch his breath as he watched the hulk of the ship disappear in the bellowing surf. He grimly stroked his leg. If he had ever believed in signs, this was the one.

Yet he stayed in New Plymouth for several days and supervised the organization of a rescue action that had been called for by the Wellington elders. Money was raised to salvage the coffins from the wreck. But all attempts failed, and Hoy Yow returned to Otago. He was satisfied when, in view of the 'Ventnor' disaster, it was decided to discontinue the 'journeys home after death.'

In his late seventies Hoy Yow still went to Queenstown regularly when timber for the shop had to be purchased. One day he was leaning against a wall in the small community of the Flowery People on the corner of Camp street and what they call the Little Lane, resting his aching leg, when some children ran past him, chanting 'Ching Chong Chinaman.'

Hoy Yow didn't notice them, he had become used to verbal abuse by the Long Noses many years ago. The Flowery People had been called 'John Chinaman' or simply 'the Chows,' while politicians and officials regarded them as 'leprous Mongolians,' accusing them of infesting the country with many evils: infectious diseases, immoral conduct and heathen beliefs.

Yet the children's rhyme called the old man to the attention of a passer-by, Lionel Terry, known for his firm stand against 'the Mongolian Filth'. He had been a founding member of the Anti-Chinese League even before the first 'Celestial' had been admitted to the country. He had strongly lobbied for the poll tax of ten pounds per Chinese head that passed the House in 1881, and he was quite pleased when Minister Richard Seddon increased the poll tax to 100 pounds per head in 1896. Still Terry felt that the 'Yellow peril' was far from over.

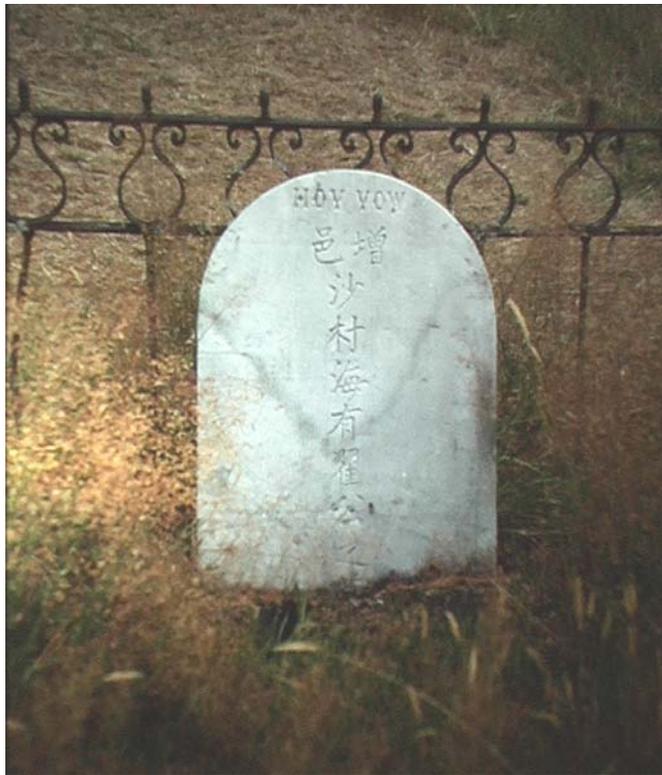
Looking at the stooped man Lionel Terry decided to remind his countrymen of the urgent problem. He took a gun from his pocket, pointed it at Hoy Yow's chest and pulled the trigger twice.

Hoy Yow tried to grab his cane, but it slipped from his fingers and clattered to the ground. Hoy Yow slid down with his back against the wall and sat heavily. He looked at his leg. The pain was gone.

Lionel Terry spent the rest of his days in a Dunedin asylum. Hoy Yow's body was brought back along Skipper's Road on a mule cart. The Gardens of Promise above Skipper's Creek had not been in use for some years. Lee Nang knew that, in any case, Hoy Yow did not want his remains to rest there. Lee Nang respected the will of the son of his first uncle. He went to his workshop and built the coffin himself.

Thus it came that Hoy Yow was the only 'cousin of the moon' to be buried in the European cemetery at Skipper's. Lee Nang bought a marble headstone and set it on the grave. On top he had Hoy Yow's name engraved in Latin lettering. Then characters in the tongue of their fathers followed. They read: 'The tombstone of Hoy Yow of the village Sah Cheung, province Jung Yep.'

(August 1990)



# SCHULAUFSATZ (9. Klasse)

## Berichte von einer interessanten Filmszene!

Die Leinwand ist schwarz. Langsam wird aufgeblendet. Man sieht jetzt das Bild in ungewisses Grau getaucht. Kein Ton lässt sich aus dem Lautsprecher hören, als sich jetzt die Wände eines großen Zimmers unterscheiden lassen. Der Raum ist bis auf fahles Mondlicht, das sich durch zugezogene Gardinen zwängt, nicht beleuchtet. In der hintersten Ecke steht ein Lampe mit dunklem Schirm. Sie leuchtet plötzlich auf. Durch das dunkle, warme Licht, das jetzt den Raum durchfließt, lassen sich im Vordergrund ein niedriges Rauchertischchen und das Profil eines großen Sessels erkennen. Ein Schwenk der Kamera bringt die Frontalansicht desselben. Man sieht einen Mann, der reglos, halb liegend in dem Sessel hängt. Seine Augen starren an die Zimmerdecke, der Mund ist halb geöffnet. Sogleich erkennt man den Grund dieses sonderbaren Verhaltens. Vor ihm steht auf dem Tischchen ein großer Aschenbecher in Form eines Fisches, der jetzt mit 14 Stummeln abgerauchter, schwarzer Zigaretten gefüllt ist. Seine Gesellschaft sind ein Glas, halb gefüllt mit einer dunklen Flüssigkeit, und drei leere, dickbauchige Flaschen mit der Aufschrift Whiskey, 48 %, auf dem Etikett.

Wenn man bei dieser Betrachtung angelangt ist, beginnt die Musik leise und gleichmäßig.

Jetzt öffnet sich die schwere, eichene Tür, und es tritt ein Mann ein, der dem Betrunkenen sehr ähnlich sieht. Während aber der Sitzende mit offenem grauweißem Hemd bekleidet ist, trägt der Neuankömmling einen dunklen Maßanzug mit ausgesuchter Krawatte. Seine Handschuhe trägt er noch in der Hand. Nachdem er einen Blick in den großen Sessel geworfen hat, setzt er sich dem anderen gegenüber. Er ruft einen Namen, und sofort erscheint ein Bediensteter mit einer Schale Wasser in der Hand. Während dieser sich zurückzieht, nimmt der feine Herr die Schale, tritt an sein Gegenüber heran und lät das Wasser über dessen Kopf ab. Der Betroffene springt hoch, sinkt jedoch gleich wieder apathisch in seinen Sessel zurück. Der Herr setzt sich wieder und beginnt ein Gespräch, aus dem hervorgeht, dass man es mit Brüdern zu tun hat. Der Betrunkene wirkt teilnahmslos, bis sein Bruder das Wort Geld erwähnt.

„Du willst schon wieder was?!“ Er springt auf.

Ruhig antwortet der Angeschriene: „Warum sollte ich sonst kommen?“

„Ich habe es satt, dass du dauernd bettelst. Mach', dass du fortkommst, ich will dich in meinem Haus nicht mehr sehen.“

Die Züge des Besuchers verwandeln sich in Eis: „Du wirst mir etwas geben.“

Er hat plötzlich einen kleinen Revolver in der Hand. Der Trinker knirscht mit den Zähnen vor Wut, aber er starrt bewegungslos auf die kleine schwarze Waffe.

„Lass uns darüber reden“, meint der Herr der Situation.

Sein Bruder steht immer noch bewegungslos. „Nein...“, bringt er heiser hervor.

Die Musik wird unheimlicher, die Geigenbögen springen über die Saiten, und die Töne schrauben sich immer höher. Dann peitscht ein Schuss durch den Raum, nachdem die Musik plötzlich abgebrochen ist.

Die Kamera blendet schnell ab.

Durch das dunkle, warme Licht, das eine in der hintersten Ecke stehende Lampe ausstrahlt, lassen sich im Vordergrund ein niedriges Rauchertischchen und das Profil eines großen Sessels erkennen. Ein Schwenk der Kamera bringt die Frontalansicht desselben. Man sieht einen Mann, der reglos, halb liegend in dem Sessel hängt. Seine Augen starren an die Zimmerdecke, der Mund ist halb geöffnet. Sogleich erkennt man den Grund dieses sonderbaren Verhaltens. Einen Zentimeter über der Nasenwurzel sieht man ein kleines, rundes Loch. Zudem liegt auf dem Tischchen auf einem Paar Handschuhen eine kleine, schwarze Waffe.

# BIO

Derek Cotton las den Zettel ein zweites Mal. Dort stand nur: „An Boris“. Es folgte eine Anzahl von Ziffern.

Cotton überlegte. Als er seinen Entschluss gefasst hatte, trug er den toten Russen zu seinem Wagen. Hinter Wilhelmsburg warf er ihn in den Straßengraben.

Zwei Wochen später hatte er Boris entdeckt. Zwei Wochen, nachdem man den toten russischen Geheimagenten aufgefunden hatte, war Boris in Bonn angekommen. Seitdem war Cotton auf seiner Spur. Er hatte vor, Boris in den nächsten Tagen in die Mangel zu nehmen.

Als Boris in Hamburg auftauchte, überraschte er Cotton in einer Nebenstraße am Funkturm.

„Bevor ich dich auslösche, du fieses Amischwein, will ich den Zettel haben.“

Cotton fragte: „Woher weißt du, dass ich dich suche?“

„Du bist wirklich zu blöde... das musst du schon geschickter anstellen. Los, sing' jetzt, oder ich schick' dich Vladimir nach!“

Cotton sah keine andere Möglichkeit, als Boris umzulegen, wenn er es auch ungern tat. Er war nun bei der Entschlüsselung des mysteriösen Zettels allein auf sich angewiesen. Er setzte sich wegen der lästigen Fahndung der Polizei für eine Woche nach Genf ab. Boris nahm er mit. Nachdem er ihn gründlich nach einem Hinweis abgesehen hatte, fand er den Code für den Zettel. Er war unter dem Vollbart von Boris auf die Haut der Wangen tätowiert. In Spiegelschrift.

Eine halbe Stunde später hatte Cotton den Zettel dechiffriert: „Auf der Schere in dem Alligator sind zwei Mikropunkte.“

Cotton warf Boris an einer Baustelle in eine Kalkgrube. Am nächsten Tag nahm er die Suche in Bonn wieder auf.

Der neue russische Schnüffler war Sergej. Bald hatte Cotton herausgefunden, dass sich das Quartier der Iwans unter einem alten Gymnasium befand. Er beschloss, sich dort umzusehen.

Er fuhr früh, wie er es gewohnt war, zum Gymnasium. Erst sah er sich im Gebäude um. Doch hatte er bei dem Alter des Baus nicht damit gerechnet,

dass er noch im Gebrauch war. Als um acht Uhr Lehrer und Schüler hereinströmten, beschloss er, sich zu verstecken, da er kombinierte, dass ein unbekannter Ausländer unnötigen Verdacht erregen könnte. Er fand auf dem mit Gerümpel angefüllten Boden einen passenden Platz. Durch Dachluken prüfte er die Lage des Geländes.

Cotton blieb gelassen, als er bemerkte, dass er auch am Nachmittag nicht sein Versteck verlassen konnte, da der Unterricht, zum Teil freiwillig, von den Schülern fortgesetzt wurde. Bei Dämmerung waren jedoch die letzten möglichen Zeugen seines Forschens verschwunden.

Cotton stieg aufs Dach. Im selben Moment fegte eine MP-Salve neben ihm über die Ziegeln. Geistesgegenwärtig ließ Cotton sich fallen und suchte Deckung. Als er zur Verteidigung überging, erwischte er einen der Schützen, der sich auf dem Dach der gegenüberliegenden Sporthalle befand. Dieser verlor den Halt, rollte über den Dachrand und schlug dumpf auf dem von vielen Sohlen festgetretenen Hof auf.

Cotton robbte im Schutz eines Schornsteins zum Dachfirst und erwartete auf der anderen Seite ein Dachplateau, das sich über dem Mittelpunkt des quadratischen Baus befand. Doch das Dach neigte sich wieder zu einem Innenhof hinab.

Cotton ruschte ab und rollte über den Dachrand. Mit eisernem Griff konnte er sich jedoch an der Dachrinne festklammern. Während er blitzschnell überlegte, wie er sich in Sicherheit bringen konnte, bemerkte er unten im Innenhof einen Russen, der den Einsteig zu dem Schlupfwinkel der russischen Agenten mittels eines Kohlehaufens tarnte. Cotton stellte fest, dass er gefunden hatte, was er suchte.

Er sprang auf einen in der Höhe des obersten Stockwerks an der Mauer entlanglaufenden Sims, und schon war er vom Feind bemerkt. Als neben ihm die Kugeln die Fensterscheiben zersplitterten, erwiderte er das Feuer, bis der Russe unten von dem Kohlehaufen rollte.

Cotton stieg durch das zerschossene Fenster ein. Nach blitzschneller Orientierung begab er sich ins Erdgeschoss. Nachdem er den Geheimeinstieg freigelegt hatte, sah er sich in dem Nest des Feindes um. Auch nach routiniert gründlicher Durchsuchung fand er keinen Hinweis auf das, was er suchte.

Er nahm eine MP mit und wollte die Schule verlassen. Im Flur wurde er von Sergej und seinen Gorillas erwartet. Cotton verschanzte sich hinter einem

Türrahmen. Weil sie fünf waren, musste Cotton sich in den zweiten Stock zurückziehen. Nur drei von ihnen erreichten lebend die Treppe. Cotton beobachtete, wie Sergej allein den Rückzug antrat. Gegen die beiden übrigen hielt Cotton die Stellung.

Dann ging ihm die Munition aus. Er ließ die beiden schießen, bis sie in der gleichen Lage waren. Als er sie herankommen ließ, fand er heraus, dass die beiden vorher bei den Japaner geschnüffelt hatten. Sie drangen zu zweit und mit Karate auf ihn ein.

Cotton handelt überlegt. Dem Ersten zerschmetterte er das Nasenbein. Bis der wieder zu sich kam, war Zeit, dem Zweiten die Fingerknöchel in die Magengrube zu stoßen und den Ellenbogen in den Nacken zu rammen. Das genügte. Als der Erste wieder stand, schlug Cotton ihm die Schuhspitze in den Bauch und brach ihm das Schlüsselbein mit der Handkante.

Da Cotton Sergejs Rückkehr erwartete, zog er sich zurück. Er bemerkte, dass er sich in den Fachräumen für Naturwissenschaften befand. Bei seinem Routineinspektionsgang sah er sich im Biologieraum unvermittelt seinem Ziel gegenüber. Sein Blick blieb an einem ausgestopften Alligator hängen. Sofort war sich Cotton über die Zusammenhänge klar. Wo man bestimmt nicht nach wichtigen Informationen suchen würde, war in diesem Krokodil.

Cotton sah sich das Reptil genauer an. Der einfachste Weg, um an die Schere in seinem Innern zu kommen, schien Cotton der durch den Rachen zu sein. Tatsächlich ließ sich eine Öffnung feststellen. Vorsichtig griff Cotton in das Innere des Tieres. Der Drahtkörper, der die Haut des Alligators in seiner Form hielt, war hohl. Cottons Arm war fast zu Schulter in dem Reptil verschwunden, als er die Schere fühlte. Sie klemmte jedoch hinter einem Draht. Entschlossen riss Cotton ihn los.

Und die Mausefalle, die nur Vladim und Boris bekannt gewesen war, schnappte zu. Durch den zerrissenen Draht wurde ein Mechanismus in Gang gesetzt. Unentrinnbar klappten die Kiefer des Krokodils zusammen. Die Zähne gruben sich in Cottons Arm. Cotton versuchte sich zu beherrschen. Dann verlor er die Sinne.

Sergej kam eine halbe Stunde später. Cotton lebte noch. Nachdem Sergej ihn erledigt hatte, schnitt er den Alligator auf. Als er die Schere hatte, machte er sich sofort ans Entwickeln. Die nötigen Chemikalien fand er im angrenzenden Chemiesaal. Den Entwickler hatte er bei sich.

Bald hatte er das Ergebnis vor sich liegen. Der Text war verschlüsselt.

Sergej beschloss, nach Hamburg zu fahren. Er fand den Flur jedoch zufällig abgeschlossen. Sofort glaubte er sich von Amis umstellt. Er hastete zurück. Er fand im Chemiesaal einen Lüftungsschacht. Im Ausguss am Grund des Schachts befanden sich einige Reagenzgläser, aus den Giftgase abziehen sollten.

Als Sergej sich zur Hälfte hochgestemmt hatte, wurde ihm schwindlig. Er fiel hinunter, und sein Genick brach mit einem hässlichen Knacken. Die Blätter des Codes wurden durch das Wasser im Ausguss für immer vernichtet.

Am nächsten Tag war schulfrei.

(8. Klasse)