Page-One Hoax from a Cloak & Dagger Duo

It was the day after Halloween. There was a full moon. Not just any full moon, but the most potent of them all, the one that signals harvest time—the change of seasons, and the cruel lunar tug on many a soft brain. It brought a huge influx of God's errant creatures to 100 Centre Street. The army of field mice that occupies the judges' roof garden had been driven inside by the first frost. One of them, a reckless adolescent, was caught terrorizing a panel of prospective jurors on the sixteenth floor. A squad of court officers executed him, summarily and ignominiously, by flushing. Downstairs in arraignments, John "Lawrence of Arabia" Lawrence, the professional anti-Semite, accused Judge George Roberts, whose ancestors fled from the Cossacks, of participating in a Zionist conspiracy to muzzle him. "I consider that a personal affront," said George Roberts, with a violent twitch, and gave Lawrence of Arabia 30 days for contempt (which he later reduced to five). Meanwhile, Cochise stalked the lobby in bare feet, declaring he was no man's slave. Cochise is a black man who wears nothing but red loincloth and fur anklets, and claims to be suffering from a dozen terminal diseases. Ejected by the court officers, he went over to one of the 78 photographers awaiting the arrival of Watergate veteran Frank Sturgis, and pissed on him. Cochise go Bellvue.

But the most bizarre event of all happened just before midnight on Halloween, when two of the most notoriously unreliable sources in America magically turned into a front-page news story that lasted four days. How else but with the aid of occult powers could Marita Lorenz have convinced the Manhattan district attorney that Frank Sturgis had phoned from Miami to threaten her life? Maybe with a little help from Sturgis himself, the press, and even the police.

The sequence of events went like this. On Saturday, October 29, Marita Lorenz told Gaeton Fonzi of the House assassination committee that a few days before Kennedy was shot she had driven from Miami to Dallas with a hit team that included Frank Sturgis and Lee Harvey Oswald. On Sunday, October 30, in a phone conversation which she tape recorded, Marita called Frank Sturgis in Miami, invited him to New York, and agreed to pay for his plane ticket. Around noon on Monday, October 31, Marita and her friend Paul Meskill, a reporter/rewrite man for the New York *Daily News*, informed the 23rd precinct that Marita's 15-year-old daughter, Monica, had bought a gun in order to protect Marita from Frank Sturgis. Two detectives arrested Monica outside the apartment building where she and her mother live on East 88th Street. (Marita used to be an auxiliary policewoman in the 23rd precinct, interpreting for Spanish- and German-speaking defendants; she became well acquainted with several of the cops there, and was quite close to a deputy inspector.)

Later, on Monday evening, Paul Meskill introduced Marita to a couple of detectives from police intelligence, James Rothstein and Matthew Rosenthal. The four of them had some drinks at a bar on 43rd Street. Since May, Rothstein and Rosenthal had been assigned to the New York Senate Select Committee on Crime, which is conducting a massive investigation into pornography. Marita was supposed to give the detectives information concerning child prostitution; she also told them that Frank Sturgis had threatened to kill her. They accompanied her back to 88th Street and arrested Frank Sturgis when he turned up at her apartment around 11 o'clock. Curiously, they failed to take with them the one piece of evidence that could presumably have corroborated Marita's story—the tape of her conversation with Sturgis. That tape somehow fell into the hands of Paul Meskill, who took off for a three-week vacation in Taiwan the next day (Tuesday, November 1), leaving the tape with his son.

On Tuesday, the press descended on 100 Centre Street in record numbers. Frank

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

By Timothy Crouse

Judge Tyler's favorite flower shop, where he never bought any flowers

GOOD ANALYSIS

Sturgis was bigger than Mark Rudd. The reporters milled around in front of the building, Cochise did his thing and got carted off, night fell, Frank finally got arraigned. Frank's windbag attorney, Henry Rothblatt, was unable to persuade Judge Milton Samarodin to set bail lower than $25,000. Frank had to go to jail on Riker's Island. On Wednesday, Walter Gorman, an Irish judge with a sense of humor, reduced bail to $10,000, which Frank was able to raise. No sooner had he left Riker's than he gave an exclusive to Steve Dunleavy of the *New York Post*, speculating that Marita had to be under tremendous pressure from the KGB. It was not until Thursday at 5:45 that the police finally managed to get the crucial tape to the D.A.'s office. Upon listening to the tape—which contained no hint of a threat—district attorney Robert Morgenthau ordered the case dropped, which it was, on Friday morning, at another press-crammed hearing. A free man, Frank held forth for the media in the courthouse press room, opining that Lyndon Johnson had played a large part in the cover-up of the Kennedy assassination. "Johnson was supported by many communist parties in his career," said Frank.

Meanwhile, the *Daily News* had built him into a villain of the first rank. On Tuesday, November 1, the *News* headlined its brief, straight-faced story: NAB WATERGATER IN THREAT TO WITNESS IN JFK PROBE. The next morning, a story by Paul Meskill and two other *News* reporters revealed that " . . . Miss Lorenz broke down under interrogation by Robert Blackie, general counsel to the House Assassination Committee, yesterday and tearfully maintained that she had 'documentary and photographic evidence to prove that Sturgis fired at Kennedy.' "

The *New York Post* took a somewhat softer line, stressing the long-standing friendship between Frank and Marita. With incredible celerity, the amazing Steve Dunleavy produced a full history of the couple entitled CLOAK AND DAGGER DUO—a feat he was able to bring off because he had interviewed Frank and Marita for the *National Star* on September 12, 1976, at the West Side Holiday Inn, paying $1200 of the *Star*'s money for the privilege. It was very much Frank and Marita's version of history that Dunleavy bought. They told him how in 1959, the ravishing 19-year-old Marita had steamed into Havana harbor on a German luxury liner; how Fidel Castro himself boarded the ship and was entranced by the blushing *Fraulein*; how she came to make his cigar glow; how she later grew discontent when Fidel forced her to become his "live-in prisoner" on the top floor of the Havana Hilton. Frank was working for both Castro and the CIA at the time, according to this account; seizing on Marita's discontent, he approached her in a hotel labby and recruited her for the Americans within earshot of Fidel. Marita stole some papers from Fidel's desk, which turned out to be groundwork plans for the the Russian missile sites. Together they escaped to Florida, but Marita, the fate of the Free World weighing on her mind, insisted on going back to kill Fidel. Brazenly, she returned to Havana and let herself into Castro's suite, only to discover that the two poison pellets with which she intended to dispatch the hirsute tyrant had dissolved in her jar of cold cream.

Over the years, Marita has told, and sometimes sold, her life's story to a lot of reporters. It doesn't always come out the same. As Steve Dunleavy told me, "The only consistent thing about Marita is that she's inconsistent."

Came Halloween and Marita got a chance to run through the whole thing and so did Frank Sturgis, who shares her love of fame.

Commissioner Codd has ordered a departmental investigation into the whole affair. Will the cops dig up information linking Marita Lorenz, Frank Sturgis, the *Daily News* and certain members of the New York Police Department? Will a conspiracy be uncovered at last? Or will the police report conclude that the whole brouhaha was the work of a single dingbat acting alone? Where is Mark Lane now that we need him?