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Spy a la Mode



Arthur Hoppe

MR. FORD issued a 32-page list of new rules for our spies last week and my old friend, Mata, Harry, promptly announced he was getting out of the business.

"Would you like to buy some of this powder that makes your beard fall out?" Harry asked at his Close-Out Garage Sale. "Or what about this trick cigar? You light it and it blows your head off."

"Are you really quitting? Say it isn't so, Harry."

"They've taken all the fun out of the game," said Harry. "Did you see where the President is even going to ask Congress for legislation barring plots to assassinate foreign leaders?"

"But you could still assassinate one," I said.

"Only if it were unpremediated," he said, shaking his head. "And that would be awfully tough to bring off."

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HARRY SAID he didn't object too strenuously to the President's banning burglaries and illegal use of tax return information.

"Laymen don't understand what a lot of work burglaries are," he said, "particularly if they're second-story jobs. And going through a stack of tax returns is sheer drudgery, even if it is illegal."

"But what I'd really miss is using drugs on unsuspecting persons. I mean there goes the old office party right there. And I can't tell you how much valuable information I've gotten over the years from some young thing back

in the files who thought she was a swallowtail butterfly. Did you know they make bras that unhook in the front now?"

"It's about time."

"I guess I could put up with all that," said Harry with a sigh, "if the President hadn't made it so hard for us to spy on our fellow Americans. Do you realize he even ordered us to stop illegally opening your mail?"

"If you don't know what our side's doing," I said, "how can you possibly know what the other side's doing?"

"Exactly," he said. "Besides, it's always been the most pleasant, rewarding part of the business. Let's say I've illegally tapped your phone. I have no problem whatsoever understanding exactly what you're saying and precisely what you mean."

"But these foreigners! Unless you have an encyclopedic knowledge of Russian slang and Chinese four-letter words, you've got a real headache on your hands."

"I can see why you'd spend more time spying on us than on them," I said.

"Right!" he said. "The easier it is to gather information, the more you'll obviously get."

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BUT THIS 33-page list of rules is only a presidential order," I said. "Couldn't you ignore it?"

"Certainly," he said. "But it's a straw in the wind. Once the President has brazenly told us to stop our illegal activities, the next thing you know they'll make our illegal activities against the law."