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Capitol Punishment

He's the Man Without a Secret

By Art Buchwald

After being away from Washington for 17 days I found the town completely changed. Everywhere I went, people were trading secret Pentagon papers to each other.

The first place I stopped was the National Press Club bar. It was jammed with correspondents holding up Xeroxed copies in their hands.

"I'll give you two Henry Cabot Lodge memos for one McNamara position paper," someone yelled.

"I've got a Walt Rostow pre-Tonkin Gulf evaluation I'll trade for a Tet offensive report."

"How about a Joint Chiefs of Staff contingency plan for the invasion of Manchuria?"

I drank in embarrassed silence. Finally a New York Times man next to me said, "You don't have any Dean Rusk memos to Maxwell Taylor to complete my collection?"

I replied, "I don't have any papers at all."

"I thought you were a newspaperman," he said.

"I am, but I was out of the country when Daniel Ellsberg was handing out the documents."

He turned away from me with suspicion.

I tapped him on the shoulder. "You wouldn't let me see one, would you?" I asked.

"I should say not," he said indignantly. "These are classified documents."

I saw a friend of mine from The Washington Post.

"Murray," I said, "I don't know how to put this to you, but I was wondering if I could borrow a stolen Pentagon paper until I get paid on Thursday."

Murray said, "I'd like to help you, but I need every one I've got. I know the guy from the Boston Globe has some extra McGeorge Bundy cables. Why don't you ask him?"

I went down the bar to the Boston Globe man. "Healy," I said, "I'm plumb out of Pentagon papers. Could you spare a couple until I can make contact with a traitor from the Rand Corporation?"

"You know I'd do anything for you," Healy said, "but according to Attorney General John Mitchell, these papers could compromise the government. I would be betraying a trust if I gave them to somebody from the press."

"Healy," I said. "I don't like to beg, but I'm the only guy in town that doesn't have a single stolen document. How can I hold up my head in this profession if I don't have a Pentagon paper to my name?"

Healy replied, "Look, we're dealing with top secret stuff here. I know you wouldn't do anything with the papers, and Murray knows you wouldn't do anything to compromise the country. But does J. Edgar Hoover know it?"

A man from the Los Angeles Times said, "Does anyone want to trade the CIA's estimate of Madame Nhu for the plans of a military coup in Laos?"

"I'll do it," the bartender said, bringing out some papers from behind the bar.

"You have papers too?" I asked in surprise.

"Sure," he said. "All my tips for the past month have been in stolen Pentagon papers."

"You wouldn't sell any, would you?"

"Not on your life. These papers were given to me on the condition I would never show them to strangers."

I left the bar trying not to hear the taunts of the drinkers.

A Chicago Sun Times man said, loudly enough for me to hear, "We ought to keep an eye on who comes into this place or our papers will be leaked all over town."

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