

"Williams?"

"Yes, Williams." Sessena's voice purred over the name. He exhaled cigarette smoke and looked out of the dirty window pensively. Four boys were noisily playing a primitive game of soccer outside in the cluttered street. "There is Fenester's weak link, because, you see, Williams must die. He only knows a little, but that little is too much. Circumstances give him a reprieve. Fenester must move cautiously. But sooner or later a hired killer, another Wong, will get Williams. However, while he's still alive, I think I can use him.

"We have a double agent on the CIA payroll working with the Russians. He won't know that I've been suspended. I'll contact him within the next few hours and instruct him to tip off the Russians about the bacteriological warfare secrets the Red Chinese have been getting from the Pentagon through Williams. He'll encourage them to contact Williams to buy the secrets for the Soviet Union. Williams is cut off from his cash income for military secrets. He's scared. He needs quick money to get away on, to hide out. He'll jump at the opportunity to sell the secrets again."

"When we have the doublecross set up and the time for passing the information arranged, we'll have our double agent advise Fenester of it an hour or so beforehand. He'll be in a dilemma. He knows that to be safe he must be passive, do nothing more at this time. But he doesn't know how compromised he is. Other than a few surviving thugs like Wong who don't know about Fenester, the spy ring is destroyed . . . except for Williams, the weak link. Fenester can't let a weakling like Williams pass his information to the Russians. Apart from the value of the information, it may lead the Russians to him. He might be compromised, even made the pawn in a Cold War trade. He can't risk it. He'll have to move, and if he moves, we've got him!"

"What if he's innocent?" Jiggs asked. "I still hope that he is."

Sessena spread his hands. "In that case, he doesn't show. We're proved wrong. Probar was the spy-master, and we can all go home and sleep nights."

"What do you want me to do?" Baylor asked.

"Nothing. Just take care of Jiggs and wait here for your news scoop. I'll be in touch. This is my kind of work." Favoring his ankle only slightly, he moved about the room, knotting a tie and slipping on a jacket and overcoat. He turned just before he went out the door and winked. "Have fun and wish me luck."

They did not hear from him the rest of that day or night. It was dusk of the following day when he reappeared, carrying a large paper sack filled with groceries.

"How are you as a cook, sis?" he asked putting the sack down on the table.

"I'm a good cook."

"I know, I know. But I've got some really fancy stuff in this sack. Are you a very good cook?"

Jiggs looked into the sack. "I didn't know you were a gourmet, Ernie."

"I'm not, but tonight's the night. I thought we ought to get away from the beans, bacon, and eggs routine."

"Have they bought it?" Baylor asked, an edge of excitement in his voice.

Sessena removed a jar of black caviar from the bag and tossed it at Baylor. "They've bought it and they've moved damned fast. I have to admire those guys. They have a good team and they don't waste time. They've bought out Williams. The information is to be passed tonight at eleven o'clock at the bus depot on Thirteenth Street."

"The bus depot?"

"A good choice. Several buses leave and depart at that hour, and the place will be reasonably full of people, baggage, and packages. No one will notice the exchange under those circumstances."

"How do they make the exchange?"

"The Russians invest twenty-five cents in a baggage locker. They duplicate the key. Williams has one key, the Russians have the other. Williams goes to the locker, inserts his key, opens it, and leaves a small package of microfilm. He takes out an envelope with his money. He inserts

another quarter in the slot, removes the key again, pockets it, and walks off. A Russian agent, not our double agent but an experienced gunman and judo expert who can handle fast breaking developments, goes over to the locker. He will insert the duplicate key, remove the package of microfilm, and the drop is completed. The key remains in the lock for some innocent traveler to use after he deposits his two bits."

"Just like that," Baylor said.

"Just like that."

Jiggs face was clouded. "I don't think we should give the Russians information on germ warfare even if we trap Mr. Fenster. He isn't that important." She shuddered. "I can still see that Mr. Probar dying. It's terrible, the things we've invented."

"Don't worry, sis. These secrets are already promised, thanks to Fenster. And don't be too sure that the Russians are actually going to get them."

"When will Fenster be tipped off?" Baylor asked.

"About nine-thirty. You kids stay here, I'll watch the last act at the bus depot. If Fenster shows, I'll telephone you the details and you can file your Pulitzer Prize story."

"I have it all written except the ending," Baylor grinned.

"Who's going to publish it?" Jiggs asked.

"Charley Diggs' wire service, if they bid high enough. I'll give them first refusal since we're neighbors in the National Press Building."

"You left me out of it?" Sessena looked to Baylor for reassurance.

"Except as an unidentified hero known as Elmer."

"Good." Sessena put an arm around Jiggs. "I have about four hours. How about that gourmet dinner?"

Congressman Sam Fenster, wearing a blue silk dressing gown, was standing at the French doors of his apartment living room at the Sheraton Park Hotel looking out over Washington. From the elevation at which he stood, he could see the ribbon of lights along Connecticut Avenue running at a diagonal across the darkened city

toward the Washington Monument glowing dimly in the mist and fog. Very faintly, he could see the lighted dome of the Capitol farther over to his left. It was a good view, even on an unsettled winter's night. In the summer, with the French doors open and his arc of view widened as he stood on the little balcony, it was a great view.

He sipped bourbon and branch water and puffed on a cigar contentedly. It was a damn good view in any season, he decided with a proprietary nod of his head. He frowned as the telephone rang. Damn it, they had orders only to put through emergency calls after nine p.m., and it was nine-thirty.

"Fenster." He spoke his name with a gruff downward inflection at the end.

"I want you to listen to something, Mr. Fenster," a low voice said.

"What? Who is this?"

The voice did not respond but a recorded conversation between two men came over the telephone wire. After thirty seconds the conversation clicked off. There was a brief interval of silence and then the low voice spoke again. "Would you like to hear the rest of that tape?"

"Yes."

"Where can I meet you?"

Fenster puffed a moment on his cigar, his face like granite. "Come here. Walk right by the reception desk to the elevators. The woman down there is usually half asleep anyway. See that no one notices you. Got that? If they do, leave the building and telephone me again. Got that?" He repeated.

"I understand. I'll be there in ten minutes. I'm nearly."

Fenster slowly replaced the telephone in the cradle. He drained his glass and then walked purposefully into his bedroom, his cigar clenched between his teeth. He emerged a few minutes later fully dressed and stood in his living room near the vestibule leading to the hallway door with his feet slightly apart. For several minutes he waited stolidly. At the first sound of the buzzer he moved quickly to the door and opened it. A nondescript, middle-aged man of

average height stood before him carrying a small tape recorder machine in one hand.

"Come in," Fenester said shortly, standing to one side. His visitor entered quickly and turned around to face him. He made no effort to take off his hat or coat.

Fenester shut the door into the hallway and appraised the man before him. "Who are you?"

"James Brown will do for a name. All you need to know about me is that I have vital information for sale. We haven't much time, Mr. Fenester. This tape will be of no value to you in another hour. I'm risking considerable to bring it to you, and I suggest that you listen to it at once."

"Turn it on."

The tape turned soundlessly for a moment, then an American voice spoke. "Hello."

"Williams?"

"Yes."

"Do you have the BW information?" a voice with a faint accent asked.

"Yes. I've got it on microfilm as you requested."

"All of it?"

"Everything we've passed on to the Chinese during the last three years."

"You have it in a single package?"

"Yes. It is about the size of a book and weighs two or three pounds."

"Good. Now note this down carefully. It is important. Tonight at eleven o'clock you are. . . ."

Brown clicked off the recorder and looked at Fenester's grim face. "Well?"

"Let's hear the rest of it."

"The rest of it will cost you ten thousand dollars."

"I don't keep that kind of money around here."

"I happened to know that you do."

Fenester puffed on his cigar and measured Brown with his eyes. "You may know more than you should know for your own good."

"I am a professional, Mr. Fenester. Don't try to frighten me."

"How do I know you won't be back for more?"
"You don't. But I don't press my luck. I have other fish to fry."

Fenester continued to eye him coldly.

"It's at eleven tonight, Mr. Fenester. There isn't much time."

Fenester turned and disappeared into his bedroom. He reappeared in a few minutes and tossed a package of new bills toward Brown. Brown caught it and put into his pocket. He clicked on the tape recorder.

". . . to enter the bus depot on Thirteenth Street. There is a row of public lockers on the right side of the door as you enter. A messenger will deliver an envelope to your home within the hour. It will contain the key to locker number 12. Insert the key in the locker. Leave your package, remove the envelope you will find in the locker, and, most important, place another quarter in the slot of the locker and remove the key. Take it with you. Leave the locker locked."

"Is that all?"

"That's all you do. Leave the rest to us."

"It's fifty thousand dollars I want. We agreed on that."

"It will be in our envelope. You understand the instructions?"

"Yes."

The tape recorded the click of the telephone receivers and spun silently. Brown turned off the machine.

"That's about it. Value for value received."
Fenester pushed out his cigar in an ashtray. "Any of these people know you?"

"No. I work the other side of the street."

"Good. As it happens, though I recognize his voice, I don't know what this fellow Williams looks like. I'll give you another five thousand dollars to come to that bus depot with me and point him out."

"You don't need me. Just watch who opens locker

12."

"He'll never go near it if I'm on top of it, and if I'm

too far away, I won't get over there in time to intercept him. I'm not a young man, you know. I need someone to point him out to me as he comes in the door."

Brown hesitated, "Cash?"

"You'll have it in the car on the way into town."

Brown licked his dry lips with his tongue. This five grand could be for himself. "All right."

Fenster nodded curtly and disappeared again into the bedroom. On reappearing, he showed Brown another package of bills. "That about breaks the bank." He studied Brown as he lit a fresh cigar and put the bills into his coat pocket. "It's not good for either of us to be seen together around here. You go out as you came. I'll go down to the garage, get my car, and pick you up on the corner of Woodley Road and Connecticut."

Brown smiled slightly. "I'm on my way. It's a good night's work."

Rain had begun to fall when Fenster swung into the curb to pick up Brown. "Miserable night," Brown said getting in. "Sorry about getting you out in it."

Fenster grunted. Otherwise he was silent as he concentrated on guiding the big sedan into the approaches of Rock Creek Parkway. Its headlights probed into the mist and rain as it dropped down the incline off Calvert Street into the narrow valley dividing Georgetown from Washington.

Brown gazed out of the water-streaked window beside him. "Rock Creek is running a flood."

"It always does with a warm rain and a thaw in winter." Fenster extended a package. "Cigarettes?"

Brown absently reached for one. "Thanks."

"The lighter is on the dashboard."

"Got it."

"I drive this way twice a day. It's the quickest route downtown or to the Capitol."

Brown held the lighter to his cigarette, a faint red glow illuminating his face. "I know it avoids" He coughed and stiffened.

Fenster glanced at him, quickly removed the ciga-

rette from his mouth with one hand, and snuffed it out against the instrument panel. He pushed two window buttons. A flood of cold, wet air filled the automobile. His eyes moved up to the rearview mirror. There were no lights behind him and none before him. He swung the automobile over the curbing, across a bridle path, and onto a large plot of grass beside Rock Creek. They were shielded from the Parkway by a heavy stand of magnolia trees. He turned off the engine and the headlights. Reaching over to Brown, he turned his head and peered into the vacant eyes with a flashlight.

"We shall wait another minute or so, Mr. Brown. You can hear me and can comprehend, but you can't move. You have inhaled through your cigarette a minute quantity of a new discovery in bacteriological warfare. It paralyzes temporarily, but it doesn't kill. American technology always seeks the humane weapon. We call them incaps. They incapacitate. You will not die from inhaling this chemical. You will die by drowning, a much more pedestrian death. The police will no doubt report you as an unidentified drunk who fell into Rock Creek."

Fenster's hands deftly ran through Brown's pockets. He extracted his wallet and the package of bills he had given to him earlier. He got out of the car with a little grunt and walked around it to Brown's side. He opened the door and let Brown fall out sideways onto the wet turf. Then he bent over and, taking Brown under the armpits, dragged him to the nearby creek. He pushed him into the cold, swirling water. The body hung at the edge of the bank for a moment. Fenster gave it a hard push with one foot and it floated slowly downstream.

Ernie Sessena sat at the counter in the bus depot restaurant, a half-drunk cup of coffee before him. Through the glass walls that separated the restaurant from the waiting room, he could see the row of baggage lockers that contained locker number 12. The bus depot clock showed five minutes to eleven.

The double doors to the street opened and Con-

gressman Sam Fenster walked through them. He stood a moment, blinking in the bright lights, orienting himself. Then he walked over to the row of lockers. He located locker 12 and looked about him. Reassured, he sat down nearby on the waiting room bench. He looked relaxed, but his eyes never left locker 12. Both of his hands remained palm down on his knees.

It was two minutes past eleven when Williams entered the bus depot. He looked frightened. He hesitated at the door, moistened his lips with his tongue, and walked over to the lockers. Fenster got to his feet with a cat-like agility and stepped up behind Williams. Williams seemed to flinch slightly, but he did not turn around. Fenster spoke intensely, then both men left the locker and walked down a nearby flight of stairs. At its foot, an electric neon sign pointed to rest rooms and telephones.

Another patron of the restaurant counter got abruptly to his feet and left the restaurant. He ran rapidly down the stairs after Williams and Fenster. Sessena recognized the stocky figure of Vladimir Shapkin, one of the First Secretaries of the Embassy of the Soviet Union. Sessena waited ten seconds, then he leisurely followed the others down the staircase. He turned left at the foot of the stairs. He saw no one. He walked over to the men's room. There were two entrances, one in a near wall and one around a corner. He carefully pushed at the closest door. He was not surprised to find that it was blocked. He pushed at the other door. It gave. Sessena took a pistol from his shoulder holster and cautiously entered. On his left was a line of white lavatories. He glanced in the mirror over them. They reflected a row of pay toilets around a corner. On the floor near the end of the lavatories was the body of Williams, face downward in a pool of blood. Sessena edged around the corner. The body of Shapkin was crumpled in a corner against a refuse container.

Sessena paused, listening, his eyes rapidly darting over the small, fetid room. He didn't see Fenster. Then he heard a faint gagging and a sawing rasp of breath.

It came from one of the pay toilets. He edged slowly down the row, his pistol drawn, until he found its source. Fenster was on his knees, blood trickling from the side of his mouth, struggling with the wrapping of a package. It appeared that he was trying to unwrap it so that he could flush its contents down the toilet.

Sessena's foot lashed out and caught Fenster under the chin. His head snapped back but he continued to cling to the package. He stared stupidly at Sessena, tried to rise to his feet, then collapsed, falling sidewise, his head striking the side of the toilet bowl. A smear of blood appeared on its side. Sessena leaned over him. He was dead.

Sessena walked back toward the door. He pushed through it as a young man in blue jeans and a red and blue sport shirt tried to enter. In one hand he held a vest pocket radio from which the frantic voice of a radio huckster could be heard. When Sessena didn't move aside, he stopped. "What's up?"

"There's been an accident. This toilet is closed. Do me a favor. Run like hell and get a cop."

"It's like that, huh?" He shifted the gun in his mouth and shoved out one hip in a relaxed stance.

"It's like that."

The young man spun around and ran up the stairs. In a few minutes, he returned with a uniformed policeman.

"Is there trouble here?" The policeman asked. Sessena opened his wallet and showed him his identification. "This is a Federal matter. I want you to guard this door and see that no one enters. I'll report it, and we'll take it off your hands as quickly as possible."

"Anyone inside need help?"

"No. There are three corpses. They equalized each other with pistols equipped with silencers. They don't need help from anybody."

Sessena stepped into a nearby telephone booth and dialed a number. The familiar voice of the Man Behind the Desk answered.

"I'm sorry to bother you at home."

"That's all right, Ernie. Where are you?"

"The Thirteenth Street Bus Depot."

"Just getting in from New Orleans?"

"No. I've been pooping around Washington. I've got a present for you."

"You aren't drunk, Ernie?"

"No. Maybe that comes later."

"Go on."

"Congressman Sam Fenester is down here. Dead. His fingerprints are all over a package which contains most of the bacteriological warfare secrets of the United States."

There was a long silence, then the voice, half smothered, came over the wire slowly. "I'll be down, Ernie. I'll be there right away."

"Do that and bring your faint-hearted friends. You'll find Fenester in a pay toilet in the men's room. He always went first class."

Sessena hung up, a broad grin on his face. He went up the stairs to the street level and bought a fifty-cent cigar at the cigarette counter. He lighted it carefully, rolling it deliberately between his fingers. He then returned to the telephone booth and dialed the telephone number at which Tony Baylor was waiting.

IT WAS SNOWING heavily outside the windows of the office in the CIA building. The metronome swung slowly back and forth before the Man Behind the Desk.

Ernie Sessena spoke from the sofa. "I thought that was for Linda."

"I bought this one for the office. I rather like the damn thing."

"Marking the inexorable march of time? It's like tapping the fingers."

Sessena deliberately unwrapped a piece of chewing gum and put it in his mouth. "There was nothing in the morning newspapers about Fenester," he said in flat tones.

"Did you kill the story?"

The Man Behind the Desk rocked back in his chair with a creak and folded his big hands behind his head. "In its cradle," he said cheerfully.

"I didn't know that you swung that kind of weight."
"I don't. The transcendental needs of the national

security came into play. Everybody cooperated, including a number of people who do swing weight. It was a busy night. By dawn, we learned that Mr. Fenster, beloved and revered senior member of the Congress had died early this morning in his bed at home. You'll read about it in the afternoon newspapers. I don't think it will make the front page."

"What about Shapkin and Williams? Where did they die? On the merry-go-round at Glen Echo?"

"Shapkin and Williams?" The tone was vague.

Sessena grimaced ironically. "I'm glad I've got my name tag on. I might find that I'm a chronic case of mistaken identity."

The Man Behind the Desk deliberately filled his pipe with tobacco. "You deserve to know, Ernesto mio. The Russians wanted to tidy the story up a bit, too. Their man was retrieved by the Embassy. They'll report the death and ship the body home with due observance of diplomatic protocol. No questions asked. We'll forget that they were naughty boys."

"And Williams?"

"I believe that he was shot on location, so to speak, at the bus station by a Red Chinese agent named Wong. I understand that the shooting had something to do with the Probar spy case." He broke into a rasping laugh of amusement.

"Oh," Sessena said with dry surprise, "you aren't going to rehabilitate Probar?"

The eyebrows of the Man Behind the Desk arched. "Of course not. Evil doing and treason must come to light."

"Leaving out Fenster?"

The voice was soft and patient. "You see the difference, don't you, Ernie? The spy ring was destroyed. That was good, even though a prominent lawyer and a politician were involved. But what Fenster did was beyond treason. He used a high position of public trust as just another counter in a dirty game of international espionage. He degraded the Congress of the United States and everyone who honored him and trusted him. We can't tell that story.

"We have to protect the sanctity of our public institutions."

He paused and smiled. "Things have worked out rather well. The spy ring is destroyed and Fenster is honorably dead. Words of appreciation for our agency, a promotion for you, and a kick up in salary." His smile broadened. "I do all right, too. A good show all around."

"What about Baylor? He knows the truth."

"Does he? He'll get all of the kudos he needs or deserves telling the story of the Probar spy case. If he talks about Fenster, he'll destroy his credibility."

"Has he thought about that?"

"It's been pointed out to him." The words came drily.

"He's a smart young man, and his gal, too."

"The cop saw three bodies come out of that men's room."

The grey eyes were steely. "He was mistaken."

"They say that the truth will out."

"There are some amusing old sayings people repeat. I sometimes wonder how they got started."

There was a pause.

"That leaves me."

"Yes."

Sessena returned the direct, hard stare of the Man Behind the Desk. Slowly, a sardonic grin touched his lips. He shifted the gun in his mouth and put a cigarette at one corner of his lips. Snapping a kitchen match into flame with his thumb nail, he touched it deliberately to the cigarette end. "What's the next assignment?"