

# THE RUBY RAY MYSTERY

## A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY, No. 19

### BY JOHN BLAINE

*Rick Brant and his good friend Dan Scott are attending a scientific conference in Denmark with Rick's father, Dr. Hartson Brant, when an urgent midnight phone call to their Copenhagen hotel room involves them in one of the strangest adventures either has ever encountered. A top U.S. security agency fears that Dr. Harold Keller, one of the American scientists attending the conference, may be in danger. The boys are ordered to keep him under close observation.*

*Thus begins a thrilling chase by sports car, taxi, train, and jet that spans three countries and ends in a hideout high in the Swiss Alps . But Rick and Scotty are not alone as they pursue the elusive Dr. Keller. Involved also are the mysterious "Blue Beret," "Pretzels," and "Felt Hat," members of rival organizations. Who are these men? Why do they want Dr. Keller and the ruby laser he has developed for use in delicate surgery? In search of answers to these and other questions, Rick and Scotty find their endurance, bravery, and ingenuity tested to the absolute limit in an unusual and electrifying suspense story that will have the reader guessing to the very end.*

# CHAPTER I

## The Midnight Call

The telephone in Room 395 of the Hotel Mercur in Copenhagen, Denmark, rang persistently, demanding to be answered.

Rick Brant rolled over, opened his eyes, and squinted at the luminous dial of his travel alarm clock. It was just past midnight. The telephone rang again, with irritating insistence. He debated throwing a pillow at it.

"Well, answer it," Don Scott said from the other bed.

Rick was still groggy. "Answer it yourself," he said peevishly.

"I'd have to get up. All you have to do is stretch out an arm," Scotty answered reasonably.

Rick tried. His hand connected with the phone and he picked it up, feeling foolish. "Hello?"

"Mr. Brant?" The operator had a pleasant Danish accent. "United States is calling. Mr. Ames, from Washington, D.C."

Rick's sleepiness vanished abruptly. Steve Ames of JANIG, the hush-hush security organization! He put a hand over the mouthpiece and whispered, "Scotty! Steve Ames is calling."

To the operator, he said, "Go ahead, please."

Scotty snapped on his reading light and propped himself up on one elbow, listening.

The United States operator said, "Mr. Brant on the line, Mr. Ames."

"Hello, Rick?"

"This is Rick, Steve."

"Rick, you have a Dr. Harold Keller at the meeting in Copenhagen. Do you know him?"

"I know who he is," Rick answered promptly. "Both Scotty and I have seen him, but not met him yet."

"Good. Does he know you by sight?"

"I don't think so. He was on the platform with the rest of the executive committee. We were in the audience."

"Rick, Keller and his wife are good friends of mine. I stopped in to take a birthday present to one of his kids, and found Mrs. Keller had a woman staying with her. The name doesn't matter, but this female guest is believed by us, and by the FBI, to be a foreign agent. We can't prove it, obviously, or we'd do something about it. She's tough as nails, and it was clear that she's guarding Mrs. Keller. I don't know

why. The FBI has the house and family under surveillance, but we can't take action unless Mrs. Keller asks for help. Understand?"

"Not exactly," Rick replied doubtfully. "What is she guarding Mrs. Keller against?"

"I don't know. Maybe against disappearing. In other words, she may be holding the Keller family as hostages."

"Hostages for what?"

"I wish I knew. It's just a hunch, Rick. This woman and Mrs. Keller are not friends. Mrs. Keller was clearly ill at ease. Maybe she's a hostage because of her husband. That's what I want you to find out."

"How do I find out?"

"I want you and Scotty to keep an eye on Keller. Keep him under observation, and let me know if he seems to be involved in anything, or in any danger. I can't be more specific, because I haven't any more information. Take no action. Surveillance is all I want. Can you do it?"

"Sure, Steve. Any other instructions?"

"Go to the embassy in the morning and ask for Jim Thomas. He'll give you a list of contacts in Europe, in case you need them, plus some expense funds. I wish we had an agent to put on this, Rick, but our people are all tied up in a big flap that's cooking and we can't spare a man. Just keep your eyes open. Okay?"

"Glad to do it, Steve. We'll be in touch if anything develops. Shall we call you, or wire?"

"Neither. I'll be out of touch for a few days. You can report through the contacts Jim Thomas will give you."

"All right, Steve. See you soon."

"Right, Rick. Say 'Hello' to Scotty, and your dad, and thanks to both of you."

Rick hung up and stared at his pal. "We've got a job," he announced. He reported the conversation, almost verbatim, while the husky, dark-haired ex-Marine listened silently. Rick swung out of bed, still talking, and rummaged through a pile of papers on the desk until he found the program for the conference.

"That's all of it," he concluded. "Let's see what the program says about Dr. Harold Keller."

Scotty got up and stood looking over Rick's shoulder. The two boys were about the same height, but while Rick was slender and wiry, Scotty was built for combined speed and power. Rick was brown of hair, with light-brown eyes, almost hazel in shade. Scotty's hair was nearly black, and his eyes were dark.

Rick found the place in the program. "Here it is. Keller is delivering a paper at tomorrow morning's session, at eleven o'clock. The title is, The Application of Lasers to New Techniques in Microsurgery."

Scotty shook his head. "That's a new one. So far, there have been papers on the application of lasers to

everything except patching old automobile tires.”

“They probably can do that, too.” Rick grinned. “It identifies Dr. Keller as ‘Director, Experimental Laboratory for the Development of Surgical Methodology, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.’ He’s apparently a crackerjack surgeon himself. Been Chief of Staff at Massachusetts General Hospital, Professor of Surgery at Tulane, and so on.”

Scotty sat down on his bed. “And now he’s in some kind of mess?”

“Steve didn’t say that. He only asked us to keep an eye on him. Mrs. Keller is the one in a mess. She has some tough female who may be a foreign agent living with her. Maybe Dr. Keller’s activities will be a clue to the reason.”

“We’ll see,” Scotty said. “Better go back to sleep. We’ll have to get up early in the morning and figure out what to do next.”

“Okay.” Rick got comfortable again as Scotty snapped the light off. “I’m glad we brought the Megabuck units. They may come in handy.” He lay quietly in the darkness, thinking about Steve’s call, and Dr. Harold Keller.

The two boys were attending an interdisciplinary conference on lasers held by the Bohr Institute at Copenhagen, along with Dr. Julius Weiss, Dr. Parnell Winston, and Rick’s father, Dr. Hartson Brant. Each of the three Spindrift scientists was delivering a paper at the conference.

The laser—the word was made up of the first letters of the phrase “light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation”—was one of the most important electronic devices of modern science. The conference had been called to exchange information on the use of lasers in such varying fields as astronomy, communications, biology, physical chemistry, biochemistry, quantum mechanics, satellite tracking, and medicine. It was in this last specialty that Dr. Harold Keller’s report was to be given.

Rick Brant’s home, Spindrift Island, off the coast of New Jersey, was the headquarters of the world-famous Spindrift Scientific Foundation. His father was the director. Rick and his pal Scotty, who had originally been hired as a guard, were junior technicians who made themselves generally useful to the senior scientists. Neither had ever attended a full-dress international scientific conference, and Hartson Brant had decided it would be good for them.

“You’re both getting a little too big for your britches,” he said, only half-joking. “I’ve heard you make comments which implied that Spindrift is the real fountainhead of all important scientific knowledge. You need a little humility. You’ll get it at Copenhagen.”

Rick smiled to himself in the darkness. His father had been right, as usual. Listening to scientific papers delivered by people from all over the world, he had for the first time really begun to appreciate that science is international, that no nation has a corner on brains.

Rick and Scotty had found that although Spindrift did deserve its reputation, it was only one of many equally fine and brainy scientific institutions. The Bohr Institute here in Copenhagen, Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Tata Institute in Bombay, Max Planck Institute in Germany, Carnegie Institute in Washington . . . there were dozens, all world famous, all represented by important contributions to the conference.

The Americans had come from several different institutes, industrial labs, universities, and government

agencies. Now one American, Dr. Harold Keller, was probably in some sort of trouble. It was up to Bick Brant and his pal Scotty, one-time Marine and now a full-fledged member of the Spindrift family, to find out what that trouble was.

It shouldn't be hard, Rick thought. Keller would be easy to follow in Copenhagen. Besides, they had brought the Megabuck network. The network consisted of three tiny radio transceivers operating on the citizen's band. Two were about the size of a pack of playing cards. The third was an ornamental headband, made by Rick to fit his sister Barbara.

The boys had brought them along more out of habit than anything else. The little units had come in handy so often that Rick automatically packed them along with camera, notebook, miniature flashlight, and scout knife.

The boy was pleased. He and Scotty were very fond of Steve Ames, and it was nice to know that the JANIG agent had enough confidence in them to ask for help even in a foreign country. Their last activity together, known as *The Flying Stingaree* adventure, had even led Steve to comment that they might, with hard work and plenty of training, actually turn into halfway decent agents.

Rick grinned sleepily and turned over. They had left a call for seven. That was early enough. Scotty's regular breathing told him his pal had drifted off to sleep again. Within a minute, he followed suit.

## CHAPTER II

### TheCopenhagen Shake

Rick and Scotty were ready, willing, and able to carry out their new mission at seven the next morning. A quick check at the porter's desk told them that Dr. Keller had left a call for morning coffee to be served in his room at seven thirty. It would be at least an hour before he appeared, the boys estimated.

It was safe to assume that the American surgeon would not leave the hotel before delivering his scientific paper at the morning meeting; after all, that was his reason for being in Copenhagen. Later, anything could happen. They would be ready.

The first step was to check the Megabuck network. The tiny transceivers were working, but Rick worried about the amount of life remaining in the batteries. He had found an electronics supply shop within a block of the hotel on the previous day, and resolved to pick up fresh batteries if he had a chance.

The second step was to check in with Rick's father, Dr. Hartson Brant.

In physical resemblance the scientist was an older version of his long-legged son. He grinned quizzically as they knocked and entered. "Good morning, Rick,

Scotty. Something happen during the night? You both look like the cat that swallowed the canary."

Rick grinned back. "Is it that obvious? Dad, we had a call from Steve Ames last night."

The scientist's eyebrows went up. "So? Is he in Europe?"

"No, this was from Washington. He wants us to keep an eye on Dr. Harold Keller." Quickly Rick reported the gist of Steve's call.

Hartson Brant, who had assisted Steve many times himself, listened closely. "I'm sorry Keller may be in some kind of trouble," he said when Rick had finished. "You certainly should help out, since Steve has made a direct request. But follow his instructions to the letter. Observation is what he wants, not action."

Rick smiled. He knew what was in his father's mind. The boys had been instructed on other occasions to stay out of things, but events had pulled them right into the middle of the action before they knew what had happened—well, almost before they knew.

"Well be careful," Scotty assured the scientist.

"I know you will, Scotty. How do you propose to keep an eye on Dr. Keller?"

"We have the Megabuck network," Rick replied. "We can split up if we have to."

Scotty asked, "Dad, do you have any idea about Keller's plans?"

"I'm afraid not. He and I are new acquaintances. I've had no occasion to ask about his plans."

"Thanks, Dad." Rick started for the door. "We'll keep you posted. Probably we'll see you at the morning session, since Keller is delivering a paper."

The scientist grinned. "Happy as a bird dog in quail season, aren't you, Rick?"

Scotty chuckled. "You know our Rick. Never happier than when he has a mystery to chew on."

"Scotty just goes along for the exercise," Rick explained.

"And to keep you out of trouble," Scotty added.

"Both of you stay out of trouble," Hartson Brant said firmly. "Good luck, and call if you need help."

The boys parted in the lobby. Scotty was to remain in the hotel with Keller, while Rick went to the U.S. Embassy to see the contact Steve Ames had named. Scotty would stay with Keller until further notice. Rick would join his pal at the morning scientific session, if not sooner. Both were now wearing the earphones of the Megabuck units. To a casual observer, it would seem that the boys were wearing hearing aids.

Rick hailed a taxi in front of the hotel and settled back for the short ride to the U.S. Embassy. The taxi driver, as did nearly all drivers in Scandinavia, spoke English.

The taxi pulled up in front of the attractive, modern embassy building and Rick paid the fare of six Danish kroner. The driver hurried around and opened the taxi door for him, then thanked him profusely for an extra tip of fifty Ore, a half crown, worth about seven cents. Rick smiled, somewhat embarrassed. He couldn't get used to having a man twice or three times his age open doors for him.

The embassy receptionist motioned him to a seat while she called Mr. James Thomas and informed him

that Mr. Richard Brant was in the lobby. Then she directed Rick to the elevator and told him to go to the second floor, where Mr. Thomas would be waiting.

Jim Thomas met Rick at the elevator and escorted him to a small office. Thomas was young, neatly dressed in a dark-gray suit with a blue tie. His hair was short, but not quite a crew cut. He wore hornrimmed glasses and had a friendly smile. At first glance he might have been taken for a vice-consul or third secretary.

“So you’re Steve Ames’s friend,” Thomas said cordially.

“Yes, sir. Do you know Steve?”

“Only by voice and reputation. By voice, because he phoned last night.” Thomas handed Rick a sheet of paper. It contained a list of American embassies in Europe, with the name of a person after each embassy. “You’ll have to memorize the list,” Thomas said. “We can’t risk having you carry it, for obvious reasons.”

Rick nodded. The names were intelligence contacts. The list couldn’t be allowed to fall into strange hands.

“How long will it take you to memorize it?”

Rick smiled. Steve Ames had introduced the boys to “The Kim Game” after the case of *The Flying Stingaree*. The game was named after the hero of Kipling’s famous novel and was designed to train the memory. Steve would place an assortment of objects on a table while the boys were out of the room. Then they were allowed to study the table briefly, and ushered out of sight again. They had to name each object and its position on the table quickly and accurately when asked.

At first only a few objects were used and a reasonable period of time in which to study them was allowed. Gradually the objects were increased in number, and the time was shortened. Then Steve began to substitute words and phrases for the objects. The boys enjoyed the game, and took pride in the speed with which their memories became disciplined.

Rick handed the list back to Jim Thomas. There were only a dozen embassies and names. He had memorized longer lists in a shorter time. “I have it.”

Thomas blinked, but kept his face impassive. “Who’s the man in Rome?”

“Fred Alfondre.”

“Vienna?”

“Murray Chapman.”

“Paris?”

“Victor Fontaine.”

“Brussels?”

“Eugene Dessent.”

Thomas nodded. "You've been well trained. All right, here are your instructions. Call these people if you need them. If you can't reach the man you want, ask for the Assistant Military Attache. He'll be briefed, and will help you if possible. The contacts or the attaches can send messages to JANIG for you."

Rick took the envelope that Thomas held out. "Here's expense money. If you don't use it, turn it back to Steve. If you need more, call your nearest contact. And good luck."

"Thanks. I hope we won't need the luck, but you never know."

"No," Jim Thomas agreed. "You never know."

"Mind if I make a call?" Rick asked.

Thomas motioned to the phone. "Help yourself."

Rick grinned. "With this." He took the Megabuck unit from his pocket. "Scotty?"

His pal's voice sounded faint in the earphone. "Here. Our man is having breakfast in the hotel dining room. You through?"

"I'm leaving now. See you after I pick up some fresh batteries."

"Okay."

Rick restored the unit to his pocket. Actually, he could have carried on the conversation without removing it, but he was proud of the little transceivers and he wanted Thomas to see it.

The agent nodded appreciatively. "Very neat. I assumed you were wearing a hearing aid. Are these sets official equipment?"

"No, sir. We made them ourselves."

"Wish you'd make me a set. Ours are a little clumsier than that." Thomas held out his hand. "Good hunting. If you need anything else, just call."

Rick thanked him and left. He picked up a taxi in front of the embassy. He felt fine. As Scotty had said, he was never happier than when working on a mystery of some kind. He knew perfectly well he was a long way from being a full-fledged detective or an intelligence agent, and he didn't want to be either one of these, anyway-he wanted to be a scientist like his father. But he also knew that Steve Ames trusted him and Scotty, and depended on them to carry out their assignments. Being assigned to trail a scientist in a foreign country appealed to his romantic side.

He had the taxi drop him at the corner of Herholdtsgade and Nyropsgade, only a block from the hotel. He went into an electronics shop where he lingered for a few minutes over some very fine tape recorders of German and Swiss make, then bought batteries for the Megabuck units. Then he walked back to the hotel.

Keller had gone back to his room, and Scotty was in the lobby. The boys put the batteries in the units, then waited together until nearly time for the morning session. When Keller reappeared, they followed him to the Institute and took seats while he joined the scientists who were to deliver papers that morning.



The American doctor's paper, illustrated by slides, was interesting. He described a technique for using a ruby laser that emitted a beam, smaller in diameter than a needle tip, as a surgical knife and cautery combined. The technique was particularly valuable in the repair of aneurysms in arteries. He showed slides of the instruments being used in repairing an aorta, one of the main arteries of the body.

Rick didn't get all of it, but he knew enough about physiology to understand that Dr. Keller's technique allowed the operator to perform surgery of great precision in very confined and difficult areas.

Dr. Keller had brought with him a large-scale model of a ruby laser for demonstration. From a distance of about fifty feet he projected onto the screen on the stage a sharply focused beam of ruby light. The model equipment filled a large case, and the ruby laser was larger in diameter than a heavy broomstick. Then, for contrast, he showed the surgical instrument. The power supply was about the size of a cigar box, and the ruby laser was contained in a tube no larger than a fountain pen.

The applause was heavy and prolonged. No doubt of it, Keller had something impressive.

After answering a number of questions, Keller packed up his equipment and stepped down from the stage. He walked to the back of the auditorium, carrying his case, pausing now and then to exchange a word with a colleague, or to accept congratulations. When the scientist entered the anteroom, Rick and Scotty were waiting behind a convenient hat rack.

Keller hailed a taxi and directed the driver to the hotel. The boys, within earshot, caught the next taxi and followed.

"Wonder why he's leaving the session?" Scotty asked. "Wouldn't it be more normal for him to remain and hear the other papers?"

"Absolutely. He has something on his mind. We'd better stick close."

At the hotel Keller talked with the porter briefly and handed him the demonstration case. Then he paid his bill and hurried to the elevators.

"Make a run for it," Rick said quickly. "Pack for us. He's checking out. Use the knapsacks. You know what I'd pack. I'll check us out and arrange for the rest of our bags to be taken to Dad's room."

Scotty hurried off. Rick asked for their bill and paid it. He told the porter they were leaving bags in their room, which were to be delivered to Dr. Hartson Brant's room. He got paper and envelope and quickly scribbled a note to his father, explaining that Keller was apparently leaving, and they were sticking with him.

By the time he had finished, Scotty was back. He had two knapsacks of the kind used by European schoolboys for carrying lunches and books. The boys had purchased the knapsacks for their own use at home because they were practical and easier to carry than a bag or briefcase.

"The porter took Keller's case into the other room," Rick reported. "That means Keller isn't taking it with him. But I doubt that he'd be separated from it for long. What do you think?"

Scotty shook his head. "The way he handled it on the stage, you'd think it was a new baby. I don't think he'd leave it. Does that mean he's not going?"

Keller, carrying an overnight bag, appeared as the elevator opened. He went to the porter's desk, turned the bag over to the porter, then headed for the front exit.

"He's going somewhere," Rick said swiftly. "Look, you stick with him. I'll stick with his luggage. We can keep in touch by Megabuck, just in case he's pulling a trick of some kind."

"Okay. Here, take your knapsack."

The boys had been careful to remain out of sight, behind a display stand of Danish wood carvings. Rick took the knapsack and pushed through a door leading to the hotel dining room. Scotty went in the other direction, hurrying through the front door to the street, well ahead of Keller. Rick knew that Scotty would manage to keep out of sight and step into a convenient doorway, and pick up Keller the moment Keller emerged.

Through the glass dining-room door, Rick watched Keller for a few moments as he walked to the front of the hotel. Then, moving cautiously, Rick followed him into the street. Keller had turned right and was walking briskly up the street. A moment later Scotty appeared, on the other side of the street. Rick watched Keller, trailed by Scotty, turn the corner in front of the railroad station. Then he went back into the main lobby, bought a copy of the overseas edition of *The New York Times*, and settled down on a bench from which he could keep an eye on Keller's demonstration case and bag. He hoped it wouldn't be a long wait; he didn't care much for long waits. But his pal Scotty was on the move. He wondered how Scotty was making out.

## CHAPTER III

### Garden of Pleasure

Scotty watched Dr. Keller cross the street in front of the railroad station, turn left, and walk to the front of the airline terminal building. Keller stopped in the doorway and surveyed the street, paying particular attention to the way he had come.

Scotty had taken up a position at the kiosk in front of the railroad station, concealed from Keller's view by a group of schoolgirls. Scotty waited until Keller was apparently satisfied that no one was showing undue interest in him. The tall scientist walked around the corner into Vesterbrogade, while Scotty hurried across to the corner opposite and watched the long-legged American hurry toward the entrance to Tivoli Gardens, one of the famous places of Europe. The boys had visited Tivoli on their first day in Copenhagen, so Scotty was on familiar ground. He knew that the combination of a public park-with woods and ponds, a number of excellent restaurants around its outer rim, an outdoor theater, scenic rides throughout the park on tiny trains, stagecoaches, or horseback-and a large amusement-park area would offer plenty of places for Keller to meet someone.

Scotty saw that Keller was keeping an eye out for a possible follower, and kept his position on the opposite side of the street, almost abreast of the doctor.

The American went through the Tivoli gate and Scotty hurried after him. Scotty paid his kroner and went in behind a huge German tourist and his well-fed family. Keller headed for the amusement-park area, a

street of rides, arcades, and the Danish equivalent of hot-dog stands.

Rick's voice came through Scotty's earphone. "Scotty, the porter just put Keller's luggage in a taxi and told the driver to take it to the airport. I'm following."

Scotty moved into the shadow of a building. "Okay, Rick. I'm in Tivoli. Keller is worried about being followed."

"Roger. Keep in touch."

"Okay."

Keller stopped in front of a ride and glanced around; then he drew coins from his pocket and bought a ticket. Scotty watched from a safe place, wondering. He couldn't tell the name of the ride, which was in Danish, but he recognized the type. The rider got into a chair for two, which traveled on a track. The chair lumbered through double doors and disappeared into the building. Scotty gathered from the signs that it was a chamber of horrors of some kind.

The building had a balcony. As Scotty watched, a chair carrying two screaming kids came out of doors, crossed the balcony, and moved slowly through doors on the other side.

Keller went up the ramp and got into a chair. Scotty noted it was decorated with dragons, and had number 15 in gold on the side. Keller's chair moved off, and disappeared through the double doors.

Scotty shook his head in bewilderment. He could see why Keller might come into Tivoli. It would be a good place to meet someone. But why take a ride in a chamber of horrors? The tall American surgeon didn't seem the type who would do it for fun—at least not alone.

The minutes ticked by. Scotty watched chairs cross the balcony and disappear through opposite doors. The chairs were filled mostly with yelling youngsters. Suddenly the boy stiffened and ran for the entrance. Chair 15 had just appeared—and it was empty.

Scotty thrust money at the ticket seller, took his ticket, and hurried up the ramp. He handed the ticket to the attendant and got into the chair. What was going on? Why had Keller gotten out of the chair?

The chair started moving and pushed through the double doors. Scotty found himself in darkness. The chair lurched along, turned a corner, and pushed through another pair of doors into a chamber lighted with lurid fluorescent red light. A pair of devils lunged at him with pitchforks. Something gibbered and screamed in the background. The chair turned sharply and climbed into what seemed to be roaring flames. Suddenly the lights went out and he was in darkness again.

The chair continued on its track, climbing sharply. Now and then some horrible figure was illuminated briefly—a man jerking on the end of a rope; a headsman dropping a huge ax on the neck of a screaming victim—then darkness again. The chair pushed through more doors and entered a large chamber filled with greenish ghosts that reached out as if to grab him.

Suddenly a dark figure lunged across the room, hands outstretched. The hands grabbed for him.

Scotty let out an involuntary yell as a powerful pair of arms jerked him from the chair. He landed sprawled, and instantly rolled over and away. The moment of surprised shock was gone, and he was in full possession of his senses. Someone had seen him following Keller, and was waiting for him!

The greenish glow from the gibbering ghosts gave him enough light to see the dark figure dive for him. Scotty reached up, grabbed, and thrust upward with his feet. He felt the impact of a heavy body on his feet, and felt the roughness of cloth in his hands. He put all his weight into a throw and the man sailed over his head and smashed into one of the ghosts. The figure collapsed amid sounds of splintering wood and ripping canvas. Scotty jumped to his feet and got set. The dark figure struggled up and came at him again.

It wasn't Keller. The American wasn't short and wide. Keller wouldn't have something metallic in his hand, with green light glinting from the blade.

Scotty reacted. When someone comes at you with a knife, that's no time to fight by the Marquis of Queensbury rules. The boy slipped off his knapsack and threw it at the man's face, then as the figure recoiled, he stepped in and lifted his foot in the *savate*, the French blow with the foot. His heel caught the attacker under the chin, lifted him, threw him backwards into the wall of ghosts. Again there were the sounds of splintering wood. This time the figure collapsed in a heap and didn't move.

Scotty jumped forward and grabbed for his knapsack. Whoever the attacker was, he would be out for a long time.

Where was Keller? Scotty searched quickly. There was no one else in the chamber. Wherever the scientist had gone, he was no longer here. The question now was how to get out. Scotty had no desire to try to follow the chair track. There were too many chances of crossing an electric line and getting killed.

A rumble warned him that another chair was coming. He'd have to ride it, occupant or no, or he'd never find his way out. He put his knapsack on and waited.

The chair lumbered through the doors, carrying two girls who screamed at the sight of the remaining ghosts. Scotty stepped to the chair side and said pleasantly, "Excuse me, may I ride with you?"

The screams went up several octaves and increased in volume. He stepped on the side of the chair and held on. "It's all right," he shouted. "I won't hurt you."

The chair crossed the chamber and pushed through double doors that almost brushed him off. The screams went up almost out of audible range. A handbag crashed across the side of his head.

"Don't," he protested. "I won't hurt you." He thought, "Never again will I take a ride like this!" An elbow smashed into his stomach and the handbag caught him across the face. It hurt. He held on like grim death as the chair lurched along on the track.

The chair bumped into double doors and light flooded in. They had reached the balcony! Scotty waited only long enough to clear the doors, then called, "Thanks for the ride!" He didn't stand on ceremony. He went over the balcony and dropped lightly to the ground in the midst of an amazed group of tourists. This was no time to linger. He threaded his way through the crowd and hurried into the safety of a comfort station. Once inside, he took a few deep breaths. He had to grin. Those poor girls probably would never recover. At least they would have something to tell their friends.

He took his Megabuck unit and held it to his lips. "Rick, where are you?"

Rick's voice was very faint in the earphone, and it was obvious he was talking to someone else. "How far is it to the airport, driver?"

That was the clue Scotty needed. “Okay, Rick. I’ve lost Keller. I’ll follow you to the airport.”

“Fine,” Rick said. “It’s a pleasant ride.” Scotty knew his pal was talking to the taxi driver and to him at the same time.

“Got it,” he said.

A quick survey of Tivoli showed no sign of the American. Scotty hitched his knapsack higher on his shoulders and headed for a gate. It was perfectly clear what had happened. Keller was involved in something, with someone. That someone had wanted to make sure Keller was not being tailed, and had instructed him to go to Tivoli and take that particular ride.

Very probably Keller’s contact had spotted Scotty, and had put the plan into effect. Keller had gotten out of the chair and had left the ride on foot through one of the passages used by the maintenance men. The contact had waited, to take Scotty out of action.

The unknown person had apparently been thoroughly familiar with the ride. It might be possible to get some information by talking with the ride operators. But Scotty shook his head. That could wait. The important thing now was to find Keller again. The laser demonstration case was the ace in the hole.

It didn’t seem logical that Keller would leave the laser behind. It was the only one of its kind, and too valuable to leave among strangers.

Scotty grinned. Rick would stick to the luggage like glue. If Keller rejoined his demonstration outfit, they would have him again. If he didn’t. . .

# CHAPTER IV

## Three Tickets to Paris

Rick Brant was worried. He didn’t blame Scotty for losing Keller. Of course he didn’t know how it had happened. But he knew Scotty’s skill as a tracker, and realized something unusual had taken place. What, though, if Keller didn’t rejoin his bag and demonstration case? Suppose he was carrying out some plan Steve Ames would want to know about, and planned to pick up the luggage after it was all over?

Rick had instructed his taxi driver to hurry. Luckily the driver had passed the taxi carrying the demonstration case and bag, so Rick was waiting when the driver with the luggage arrived. He saw the luggage turned over to an attendant, who carried it to the Air France ticket counter.

The Air France employee accepted the bag and case and placed them behind the counter, first tagging them. Rick would have given much to see the tags, but when he sauntered over, one tag was out of sight and the other was facing the wrong way. He retired to a corner of the main floor and worked out a plan of action.

Keller would arrive at street level, check in at the Air France counter, and get his ticket or have it

stamped. The luggage would be checked through.

Keller would then go up the flight of stairs to the balcony, pay his airport tax, and then enter through passport control to the main waiting room.

Rick decided that if he could be on the balcony when Keller arrived, he would see Keller's every action ... if only he had binoculars, he could even read the American's ticket. The purchase of binoculars certainly would be a legitimate expense. He walked swiftly along the line of shops on the main floor until he found what he wanted, a shop that specialized in electronic and optical equipment. He chose binoculars of Swiss make, paid for them, and hurried up the stairs to the balcony.

As he picked a vantage point from which he could watch the entrance and the Air France ticket counter, he heard Scotty's voice in his ear. "How much farther to the airport, driver?"

Rick grinned. Scotty was on his way. Was Keller?

Two minutes later his question was answered. Keller came through the entrance door. The surgeon walked straight to the Air France counter and took out his wallet.

Rick's binoculars were ready. The agent issued a ticket, then tagged both the overnight bag and demonstration case with labels marked ORL. That, Rick knew, was the symbol for Orly Field, International Air Terminal at Paris, France. He watched as the ticket agent stamped a green boarding pass with TOURIST CLASS in large black letters.

That was all he needed to know. He ran down the stairs and moved out of Keller's line of vision. He cast a quick glance at the departure schedules. The next AirFrance flight to Paris left in forty-three minutes from Gate 7. After that, there wasn't another flight for several hours.

Rick waited until Keller mounted the stairs to go through final departure procedures, then hurried to the Air France window.

"Two first class to Paris on the next flight," he requested.

The agent filled out the tickets, then asked, "Baggage, sir?"

"None," Rick said.

The agent pulled out two orange first-class boarding passes and marked them for Gate 7, then accepted the bills Rick pushed across the counter. The boy received a handful of silver kroner and Ore in return.

Rick walked outside and found a corner where he was unobserved. He took out the Megabuck unit and held it close to his lips. "Scotty, are you close to the airport?"

He heard Scotty ask, "How much farther, driver?" Then, after a brief pause, "Oh, only about five minutes? . . . Fine."

Rick smiled and settled down to wait.

It was closer to ten minutes before a taxi pulled up and Scotty got out. Rick walked to meet him.

"Any sign of Keller?" were Scotty's first words.

“Yep. He’s in the waiting room. Let’s go.” Rick led the way to the balcony, explaining as they went. They paid their airport tax and checked through passport control, then showed their boarding passes and pushed cautiously into the main waiting room.

The waiting room was enormous, very modern in design and furniture, spotlessly clean, and crowded with lounges, shops, and a snack bar that served the famous Danish open-face sandwiches called *smfirre-brød*. Rick looked quickly around the vast terminal but saw no sign of Keller. The boys moved into the waiting room slowly. Rick looked up at one of the many television screens that dot the room and saw that their flight was still posted for the same gate and time. It should be called in a very few minutes, he thought. Boarding was normally twenty minutes before departure time.

They walked with caution, ready to step back at the first sight of Keller. Rick was not afraid that Keller might know them; he had no reason to think Keller was even aware they existed. But there might be times later when they could not avoid being seen, and if Keller realized that two boys with knapsacks kept showing up wherever he went, it would be easier to shake them.

Keller was not in the waiting room. He probably had gone right to Gate 7. Rick led the way to the long corridor where Gate 7 was located. Four men were visible at the gate entrance far down the long stretch. He unslung his new binoculars and focused them. Three men were reading newspapers. The fourth was Keller. He was standing a little apart from the others, staring out the window at the waiting jetliner.

“He’s there,” Rick said with satisfaction. “Good. What’s the play?” “Let’s have a sandwich. I’m hungry.” “Amen,” Scotty said promptly. “Then what?” “We’ll have twenty minutes after the flight is called. We’ll wait until ten minutes before departure, then board. Since tourist class goes aboard via the rear and first class through the front, we won’t go past Keller.”

“If he’s aboard, he can be looking out the window. He might see us.”

“True,” Rick agreed. “But he might be on the side of the plane away from the entrance. And even if he’s on our side, he might not be looking. It’s worth the risk.”

“Okay. I’ll buy it-after I’ve bought a sandwich.”

Danish sandwiches are made up of choice, tasty foods placed on one small piece of bread. The boys settled for one apiece of a high mound of tiny Baltic shrimp with mayonnaise, and one apiece of thin-sliced Danish ham with a topping of mulberry jelly. A tall glass of fresh milk completed the meal. In the midst of the meal, the loudspeaker sounded. As Rick and Scotty looked at the nearest TV screen, the list of flight schedules disappeared from the screen, and a very pretty girl came on. She announced the departure of AirFrance 101 at Gate 7 in Danish, English, German, and French. The girl vanished and the departure schedules took her place again.

The boys bolted down the rest of their meal, slung their packs over their shoulders, and walked to the ramp. Then down it to Gate 7. Two people were going through, but Keller had disappeared. The boys got into the first-class line, separated from the tourist-class line by a pipe railing, and handed their boarding passes to the stewardess. “The front entrance, please,” she said.

They walked down the covered stairs and emerged on the concrete parking area. In a few steps they were in the shadow of the plane’s wing, out of sight of tourist-class passengers until they started up the stairs to the front door.

“See Keller in any of the windows?” Scotty asked.

“Not a sign of him. Move up the stairs quickly.”

“Right behind you, chum.”

Rick led the way into the plane and handed his boarding pass to the steward at the entrance. Scotty followed on his heels. They were shown to seats at the very rear of the first-class compartment.

The sliding door leading to the tourist compartment was partly open. Rick took a quick look, then ducked into his seat. Scotty had already taken the window seat.

“Keller is about halfway back, on the starboard side. He couldn’t have seen us.”

“Anyone sitting with him?”

“He’s alone.”

Scotty grinned. “Maybe we’re getting lucky. For a while, I sort of wondered.” He outlined the events at Tivoli for Rick’s benefit.

Rick listened thoughtfully. “So he’s working with someone who doesn’t want him followed. That’s sort of odd. I mean, the way they handled it. You were taken off his tail very neatly, but I haven’t been spotted. I’m sure of it. There were no taxis in front of me or behind me, except the one with Keller’s belongings, and that had only the driver.”

“Maybe the driver was a plant,” Scotty suggested.

Rick didn’t think so. “The porter flagged down a passing taxi. No, I suspect Keller’s buddies just wanted to check him out and see if anyone was showing undue interest.”

“Maybe,” Scotty agreed. “Anyway, I was spotted. Otherwise the guy in the ghost chamber wouldn’t have known who to grab. So they have my description.”

Rick rubbed his chin in thought. “I suppose you’re right. But there’s been no chance to pass it on to Keller.”

“My pal in the chamber may not be able to pass it on, either,” Scotty commented. “I gave him the *savote*, and my heel connected with his chin like a sledgehammer. If he hasn’t a broken jaw, he’s made of iron.”

“Did you have to hit him so hard?” Rick asked.

Scotty smiled mirthlessly. “He came at me with a knife. I didn’t figure it was the right time for sweet gentleness.”

“I was just asking,” Rick said quickly.

“It’s okay. I don’t like to hit people, and I hate to hurt anyone. But people shouldn’t jump me in dark corners, either.”



Behind them, one of the jet motors started up with a whine that increased in pitch until it passed through the range of audible hearing, then the second engine started. The plane taxied out for take-off. The boys settled back to enjoy the ride.

By the time the jetliner leveled off at thirty-five thousand feet, the steward had offered them a choice of newspapers in several languages and promised to find them two bottles of coke.

“When we get to Orly,” Rick said, “I’ll get out as soon as the door opens, clear through immigration, and be waiting in front. You get on Keller’s trail again and follow. That way we’ll have him bracketed.”

“Keep an eye open for interested parties,” Scotty warned. “And if I go by you, check to be sure I haven’t a tail of my own.”

“Will do,” Rick promised. He settled back and closed his eyes. A nap would be helpful if they ended up without sleep for any reason. He was content. They were with Keller, but Keller didn’t know it

# CHAPTER V

## The Ploy at Orly

Rick awoke from his nap as the jet slowed for the descent. He rummaged in his bag. His hand touched the third Megabuck unit, the one shaped like a headband for Barby, then moved until it located a chocolate bar. Like most Americans, Rick had quickly developed an appetite for Swiss and Dutch chocolate, preferably with hazelnuts. He shared the bar with Scotty and watched as the roofs of Paris slid by on the approach.

When the seat-belt light went off Rick was ready. With a wave at Scotty, he headed for the door, and was the first one out. A stewardess waited to lead them into the terminal, but Rick ducked past and hurried in. A huge sign read “*Douanes-Customs*” and he followed the arrow. He knew he had a good lead, but there was always the possibility of being held up by a slow-moving line. The terminal was crowded with arrivals from all over the world.

The customs official in his typical French uniform with cape waved him past after a single question, “Anyzingto deeclar?” Apparently he took Rick for a student. Many students were traveling in Europe, and most of them carried knapsacks like Rick’s.

The immigration official riffled through Rick’s passport, stamped it, and handed it back without a word. He was now officially in France. He hurried to the nearest bank window and bought twenty dollars worth of NF’s, or New Francs, then paused to survey the situation.

The main doors of the terminal stretched along a wide arcade. He went out through the center door and found himself in front of a row of taxis. Buses to the Paris air terminals within the city were a short distance away.

In the direct center of the loading area, in front of the taxi line, was a Citroen limousine with a uniformed chauffeur. He had parked where a taxi should have been waiting, and it was obvious that the French taxi

drivers resented it. Their comments were directed at the chauffeur, who ignored them completely.

Then, as a tall man with gray hair emerged, the chauffeur stepped forward and inquired, "*Monsieur le docteur Keller?*"

The man shook his head. Rick stopped in his tracks. His mind raced. He had hoped Keller would take a bus to the terminal, so the boys could get there ahead of him in a taxi. How they were to trail Keller through a city where neither of them had ever been was a real problem. Now here was a car waiting for the American. If only there were some way . . . .

As he thought about ways to keep up the trail, his hand caressed the outline of the Megabuck unit in his pocket. There was a way! He moved swiftly down the line of taxicabs, unslinging his knapsack. He took the third Megabuck unit from the knapsack and stuck it into his pocket. Then, grinning, he fished out a handful of change, mostly 0re coins, the most valuable worth less than eight cents.

Prepared, he walked back to the head of the line of taxis, where a knot of drivers were gathered. When he reached the head of the line, he stumbled. Coins cascaded from his hand and rolled in all directions, and some of them went under the Citroen sedan.

Berating himself aloud for a clumsy idiot, Rick knelt and picked up those within reach, then attempted to reach under the rear of the Citroen. Finally, he had to crawl under to get his money. Looking up, he saw that the chassis was made of perforated steel channels. He pulled the Megabuck unit from his pocket, then took the handkerchief from his rear pocket, and using the handkerchief as a rope, he tied the unit firmly to the steel between two of the holes, close to the exhaust pipe. He pushed the button to "On," picked up the coins, and crawled out.

The French taxi drivers had also picked up some coins. They handed them to him, grinning broadly. Rick grinned back, and gave them a polite "*Merci, messieurs,*" then he retired back down the line of taxis, keeping the taxis between him and the chauffeur.

It wasn't long before Keller appeared, followed by a porter with his bag and demonstration case. The chauffeur stepped forward and Keller nodded. Rick kept a sharp eye out for Scotty as the bag and case were being loaded into the car. Keller climbed in and the chauffeur started the motor. Rick heard the roar of the exhaust in his earphone. The gadget was working.

Scotty emerged as the sedan pulled away. Rick ran to the first taxi in line, and yelled for Scotty. His pal joined him and Rick directed the driver, "Paris, monsieur."

The taxi pulled away.

"Suppose he's not going to Paris?" Scotty asked.

"Then we're sunk. How's your French?"

"About like yours. Hello, thank you, and goodbye."

Rick leaned forward and addressed the driver. "Do you speak English?"

*The driver looked back. "Non, monsieur."*

"That's a big help," Scotty said. "What's that roaring in my ears?"

Rick explained that he had planted Barby's Mega-buck unit on the sedan and Scotty chuckled with pleasure. "This will be known to history as the Orly Ploy. Another example of the Brant genius."

"What's a ploy?" Rick demanded.

"Halfway between a play, like in a game, and a plot, like in the movies. What happens if the chauffeur shuts off the engine?"

"We lose him," Rick admitted.

The Citroen was in sight. They hadn't lost him yet.

The superhighway to Paris was heavy with traffic, so there was no danger Keller would suspect he was being followed. In fact, Rick thought, he wasn't really being followed by the taxi-the driver was merely taking them to Paris.

The miles rolled past, and the taxi topped a hill. The boys saw Paris spread below them. Rick felt a thrill at the sight of the Eiffel Tower, so often seen in pictures but never before in the flesh-or, rather, in the iron. Ahead of them, the sedan took a turn to the right.

Rick wished he had taken French in school instead of Spanish. The first year in junior high he had been given a combination course-a few weeks each of Latin, French, Spanish, and German. It was supposed to help him choose his language major in high school, and it had. He had chosen Spanish. But at least he knew a word or two of French, if he could only remember. He tried to recall the French for "right," but could only think of the Spanish *derecho*. What was that old French motto? ... He had it! "*Dieu et mon droit*! -God and my right!" He yelled, "*Monsieur, a le droit*!"

The driver understood. He took the right-hand turn, following the Citroen.

Scotty sat back and took a deep breath. "Good going, ol' buddy. I could see us heading for Marseille or something."

"We're not out of the woods yet," Rick warned.

They were in Paris itself now, in heavy traffic on crowded streets. A truck intervened between them and the sedan. When the taxi had passed, the Citroen was gone.

For an instant Rick felt panic, then he realized the sound of the Citroen exhaust was still fairly loud in his earphones. The tiny antenna of the Megabuck unit was directional. Rick turned his set until he found the direction in which the exhaust was loudest. It was clear the Citroen had turned off, but which way? To right or to left? He had to make up his mind quickly. Then a sign loomed on the next street, an arrow that pointed to the left. It was a one-way street.

Rick's smattering of French came to his rescue without thought. "*Gauche*," he called. "*A la gauche*." He wasn't sure whether *gauche* was masculine or feminine. Maybe he should have said *le gauche*. No matter. This was no time for niceties of language.

The taxi driver obediently swung left, and Scotty gave Rick an admiring grin. "I take it back. You know five words of French."

“And I know my left from my right,” Rick added. “When you’ve said that, you’ve exhausted the Brant reservoir of knowledge.”

The signal in the earphone was growing louder, and Rick smiled in triumph. It had worked out. He peered ahead, but there was no sign of the Citroen.

“Keller must be ahead of those cars,” Rick said confidently. “We’ll catch up.”

“Hope you’re right,” Scotty said. “You’d better be.”

Rick’s confidence slipped a notch. The exhaust noise was getting fainter. Quickly he turned the Megabuck unit, and the sound picked up slightly. The Citroen had turned again. But where, and which way? The sound grew fainter, and then stopped entirely.

“It cut off!” Scotty exclaimed.

“It was too sudden to be attenuated by a building or anything like that,” Rick said, with more sureness than he felt. “We’d better stop. But how?”

Scotty’s few words of French came to the rescue. He leaned forward and said, “*Void!*”

The driver understood that one word, “Here!” He pulled over to the curb. Rick took out a fifty-franc note and handed it to him. The driver found an old-fashioned purse and rummaged for change. The boys waited impatiently. Finally the taximan counted an endless number of tiny bills into Rick’s hand. The boy took several and handed them back as a tip, not at all sure he hadn’t doubled the fare. The man accepted them graciously and drove off.

For a moment the boys just looked at each other. “What do we do now?” Rick asked finally.

Scotty pressed his Megabuck earphone more tightly into his ear. “Hear that?”

“Sounds like the Battle of Bull Run,” Rick muttered.

“Battle, nothing!” Scotty exclaimed. “I recognize the sound. It’s an air hammer, Rick. Someone’s tearing up a street next to where the sedan is parked!”

Now that Scotty had identified the sound, Rick knew that his pal was right. Somewhere in the city of Paris, where the Citroen was parked, a construction job was in process. There was only one thing to do, and that was to walk, using the Megabuck units as direction finders.

The boys got going. A few blocks up the street and the signal faded. They retraced their steps. A few blocks down the street and it faded again. They went back to where it was the loudest. The Megabuck units indicated that the noise was most intense at an angle 90 degrees to the street.

There was a cross street a few hundred feet away. They walked to it and turned right. The signal began to fade again. They walked back, crossed the street where they had left the taxi, and the signal began to gain in strength.

Another block and another cross street. The signal began to fade. They went back to the intersection and tried the opposite direction. The signal grew louder. They kept going, and it faded again.

Step after weary step, by trial and error, the boys finally found the right street. It was the Rue St. Germaine. Halfway down the street, workmen were opening a sewer, using air hammers. A few yards from the sewer was the Citroen.

The boys stopped long enough to shake hands.

“As I said earlier,” Scotty stated, “this affair will be known to history as the Orly Ploy. And why will it be remembered?”

“Only because it worked,” Rick said. “Well, we know now where the sedan is. But where is Dr. Keller?”

Scotty added, “And, if I can toss in a question, how do we get the Megabuck unit back?”

# CHAPTER VI

## Rue St. Germaine

The Rue St. Germaine was lined with apartment houses of great age but attractive appearance. Keller was surely in one of the apartments, but which one? The boys hazarded a guess that the Citroen had parked in front of the building into which Keller had been taken.

“It’s reasonable,” Rick pointed out. “There isn’t much traffic on the street, and there are plenty of parking places. The driver would try to get as close to the building as possible.”

Scotty nodded. “I’ll buy it. Now what?”

They had retired to the corner of the street, out of sight of anyone in the apartments near the Citroen.

“I wish we knew more about the back alleys of Paris,” Rick said. “We could work our way behind the apartment houses.”

“How about the building across the street from the sedan?” Scotty asked. “Couldn’t we get into that one, somehow, and keep an eye on the front door of the apartment house nearest the car?”

Rick shrugged. “I suppose so. I’d rather go prowling, to try to locate Keller, but the chances of finding him are pretty remote, and we might get spotted. How do we get into the place across the street?”

“Let’s try the alleys,” Scotty suggested. “There probably are alleys behind these buildings.”

Rick led the way across Rue St. Germaine to the other side of the street from the parked Citroen. The building on this corner of the block was a substantial one, containing several stores. It was possible, Rick thought, the building had an alley for truck deliveries. He walked to the rear of the building, Scotty beside him.

There was an alley. The boys grinned at each other. They were in luck! The alley ran parallel to the Rue

St. Germaine, behind the entire block of apartment houses.

“Here we go!” Scotty said.

They walked down the alley, counting buildings, until they arrived at the one directly opposite the Citroen sedan. The rear of the building was a mass of balconies and stairs. Each balcony was almost hidden by bedding and clothing that waved in the slight breeze. Apparently it was washday in Paris.

Rick surveyed the situation. “Guess we might as well go up the stairs. The question is, Does each floor have a single apartment, or several?”

“Only one way to find out,” Scotty said practically. “Go and see.”

There were people on the balconies, but they paid little attention to the boys other than wishing them a polite “*Bonjour*,” to which the boys responded in kind. The top-floor balcony was deserted, and they paused to take stock of the situation. A long corridor ran from the center of the balcony to the front of the building. Apartments opened off the corridor, three on each side.

“Let’s see what’s in front,” Rick said. Entering the corridor, they walked to the front of the building and arrived at a stair landing. The stairs ran down the front center of the building. On the landing was a window.

The boys hurried to the window and looked down to the top of the Citroen. They shook hands gleefully. It was an ideal vantage point.

“Only one small problem,” Scotty said thoughtfully. “Suppose Keller is at his final destination and doesn’t have to travel any more. We could wait here for a couple of days, and then follow him back to Copenhagen -or even back to the United States.”

“It’s possible,” Rick agreed. “If that’s it, we’ll just report to Steve that he went to Paris, got picked up by a sedan at the airport-with full description and license number, which I’ve memorized-was taken to the Rue St. Germaine, number so-and-so, which we’ll get, and then returned to Copenhagen. At least we’ll have done our job.”

Scotty nodded. “Okay. But we’d better settle in for a siege. It will be tiresome standing here at the window for hours. Besides, the apartment occupants might get curious and call the gendarmes, or whatever they call the police here.”

“What’s your idea?” Rick asked.

“You stay here. I’ll go reconnoiter some more. If we can get to the roof, it will be even better. Then one of us can go get some sandwiches.”

That made good sense to Rick. “I’ll be listening. If you find a location on the roof, just call and tell me how to get there and I’ll join you.”

Scotty nodded and hurried back down the corridor to the rear balcony. Rick settled down to wait, eyes alternately on the sedan and on the building entrance directly behind it.

This was a curious business, he thought. Keller had checked out of the hotel, and ordered his demonstration case and bag sent to the airport by taxi. Then he had walked to Tivoli, where a

confederate had tried to take Scotty out of the action.

Rick shook his head. Using an amusement-park ride to cut off a tail was pretty cute, but it also seemed pretty senseless. Anyone wanting to track Keller could do so simply by following his luggage. The only reason for the amusement-park-ride affair would be to find out if Keller actually was being tailed-and to get rid of the tail temporarily.

He followed the thought further. Getting rid of a tail temporarily must mean that Keller was only interested in gaining a little time, without trying to cover his tracks permanently. So, whatever he was involved in must be of only short duration, perhaps a day or two. Once it ended, he didn't care whether he was tracked down or not.

Maybe the whole affair was coming to an end right now, in one of the apartments across the way. If so, the report to Steve Ames would be pretty short, and they would have no real idea of what had happened. Rick wondered if they would ever find out what the tall American was up to.

Scotty's voice broke into his thoughts. "I'm on the roof, Rick. It's easy. Go to the rear balcony, and you'll find a ladder at the extreme left. Up and over."

"Coming," Rick said briefly.

He found Scotty stretched out at full length, looking down on the street from between a pair of ornamental stone blocks which were part of the coping that topped the building.

"Pretty neat," he said. "We can watch lying down."

Scotty rolled over. "After we get some supplies in. I'll toss you to see who goes."

"Okay." Rick produced a coin. "Heads or tails?"

"Heads."

Rick flipped. "It's tails. You lose. Make mine a juicy hamburger with tomato and lettuce and lots of mayonnaise."

"Not in Paris, son. I suspect the French consider hamburger a wanton destruction of good beef. I'll get what I can."

Rick took Scotty's place, binoculars handy, and made himself comfortable. The construction crew was still working on the sewer, and now and then a pedestrian walked by, but there was no sign of life in the apartment house opposite. He surveyed the street, noting that a man in a blue beret was seated in the doorway of an apartment house four doors away from the sedan. Far up the street, near the corner, a vendor waited for customers. He carried his wares in a knapsack. In his hand he held a stick on which was strung what appeared to be oversized pretzels.

Rick went back to his earlier line of thought. When Keller left the hotel, someone had been watching to see if the doctor had anyone following him. Keller had gone straight to Tivoli, and to the amusement section, probably following earlier instructions. The unknown watcher had hurried ahead as soon as he spotted Scotty, and was waiting when the boy arrived in the chair. The unknown watcher probably had been very familiar with the ride, and had taken Keller from the chair in one of the chambers and ushered him out through a back door.

The events of the whole affair argued that Keller had an organization behind him. Was he the boss, or a victim, or an accomplice of some sort? Anyway, Rick thought with satisfaction, the organization couldn't possibly know that Keller had been followed to the Rue St. Germaine, even if they knew or suspected that he had been followed to Paris. Rick doubted that they knew even that much.

Scotty returned in less than twenty minutes. He brought ham-and-cheese sandwiches on French bread, and two bottles of spring water. The boys ate with pleasure, alternately keeping an eye on the street below.

"I have a couple more in the knapsack," Scotty said. "No telling when we may need rations."

"You're so right," Rick said gratefully. "Now I can watch in comfort."

A half hour elapsed. The sewer crew packed up and went home, leaving red lanterns on sawhorses to mark the excavation. A French gendarme in his colorful cape and pillbox hat walked past, swinging a club easily two feet long.

Suddenly Rick gripped Scotty's arm. The chauffeur had emerged from the building opposite, and he was carrying Keller's bag and demonstration case!

"Stay," Scotty said quickly. "I'll try to follow. If Keller comes, too, you hurry down and pick up the trail."

"Okay," Rick agreed. "But hurry."

The chauffeur loaded the case and bag into the front seat of the Citroen, climbed into the driver's seat, and started the motor. Rick heard the sudden roar of the exhaust in his earphone. He tensed, ready to run if Keller appeared, but the chauffeur put the sedan in gear and drove off alone. Rick waited for Scotty to appear on the street, but there was no sign of his pal as the sedan moved sedately down the Rue St. Germaine, turned the corner, and disappeared.

The man in the blue beret had risen, showing some interest in the sedan, but as the chauffeur drove off he sat down again. If Keller had come out, would the man have tried to follow? Rick wondered. He focused the binoculars on the man's face. The angle was wrong for a clear view, but the man seemed pretty ordinary.

Rick settled down to wait again. The sound of the sedan's exhaust was growing fainter. He turned the Megabuck unit, and brought it in a bit louder. Scotty still hadn't appeared on the street below. Either he was hugging the buildings, so Rick couldn't see him, or he had gone down the alley.

After about ten minutes the faint sound of the exhaust suddenly cut off. The sedan had stopped somewhere fairly close.

A man emerged from the apartment house opposite. He was a stranger, neatly dressed in a blue serge suit, with a gray felt hat. As he watched the man survey the street, Rick noted that Blue Beret had drawn back into the shadow of his doorway where the man couldn't see him.

Felt Hat walked up the street in the direction opposite to where the sedan had gone, toward Blue Beret. Blue Beret moved back, and through the door, out of sight. Felt Hat went on by, glancing into all doorways. He reached the corner. Rick noted that the pretzel vendor was no longer there.



Felt Hat turned and walked back down the street, again surveying doorways. He continued his walk past Keller's hideout, to the end of the block, and back again. Clearly, he was casing the street. Rick felt a surge of excitement. The pattern was repeating.

Keller's demonstration case and overnight bag had gone on ahead. Now a confederate was checking. Keller himself should emerge.

Felt Hat was apparently satisfied. He went into the apartment house for a moment, then emerged again. This time he walked down the street in the direction the sedan had taken.

Rick stiffened. Keller came out of the building, turned left, and followed.

A third man, hatless, in gray slacks and sport jacket, appeared in the doorway of the building and waited a moment, surveying the street.

Blue Beret had appeared in his doorway, but was keeping out of sight.

Hatless, satisfied, followed Keller, about a half block behind.

Scotty's voice was in Rick's ear, faint and far away. "I'm at a railroad station. The Gare de Lyon. Keller's bags were just turned over to a porter, who is carrying them to a train."

Rick responded swiftly. "Keller just came out with a guard in front and a guard behind. Keep in touch."

"Okay. Incidentally, I used your gag and dropped some coins under the Citroen after the chauffeur left. I have the other unit."

Rick grinned. "Great. I'm on my way."

Pausing for one last look, he saw Blue Beret emerge from his doorway and follow Hatless, keeping close to the building walls, ready to duck if Hatless should turn.

Rick shook his head in puzzlement. Quite a parade. If only he had some clue as to what was happening!

Scotty spoke again. "If they go the way the sedan went, run down the back stairs, turn left, and follow the alley. They'll go right past you. I got to the alley exit in time to jump on a bus and follow the Citroen. The station is right down the street. No turns. Traffic is so heavy the bus moved as fast as the car."

"Here I go," Rick said. He hurried across the roof, down the ladder, down the stairs to the alley-then stopped short and hurried back up one flight.

The pretzel vendor was running down the alley, too!

"Holy Toledo," Rick muttered under his breath. "What's going on here?"

He waited only until the pretzel vendor was past, then followed. A few cars parked in the alley served as a cover.

Felt Hat and Keller were out of sight, but the boy saw Hatless go by the alley entrance, followed after a moment by Blue Beret. Pretzels stayed in hiding until Blue Beret was gone, then he vanished, too.

Rick hurried to the alley entrance and peered around the corner. Pretzels was sauntering along the street as though he had nothing on his mind but selling his wares. Rick stepped out into the clear and saw Blue Beret a little distance ahead. He joined the chase, wondering if he was really the tag end of the parade, or whether someone was following him. He stepped into a doorway and examined foodstuffs in a window, using the window as a mirror. No one appeared.

Scotty's voice was a little louder. "The porter put tags on Keller's luggage. The tags say 'Berne.'"

"Got it," Rick answered swiftly. "Keep an eye on them."

A lady emerged from the store in time to hear Rick's reply. She asked a question in French, probably something about what he said. Rick smiled, bowed, and hurried off.

Ahead, Blue Beret and Pretzels were held up by a traffic light, but did not seem perturbed. Moving out to the curb, Rick saw why. Hatless was still in sight down the long street, and Keller could be seen occasionally, towering over most of the pedestrians.

Rick moved ahead. He stopped when he had closed the gap enough, and turned to look into the nearest window—in case Pretzels looked back. It was a toyshop window, already under examination by a boy about fourteen years old. The boy was whistling "Sidewalks of New York."

Rick looked at him with interest. He asked impulsively, "Are you an American?"

The boy turned. "Non, *monsieur*. I have learned the song in a class for English at the *ecole*. The school, *hein*?"

Rick asked, "Do you know where the Gare de Lyon is?"

"But of a certainty, *monsieur*. It is near."

"Would you like to make some francs?" Rick saw an opportunity and took it.

"How, *monsieur*?"

"I'm afraid I may have trouble making the ticket seller understand. Would you run ahead to the station and buy me two tickets?"

"I will do that for you."

"Good." Rick had no idea how much two tickets to Berne should cost, but he thought two U. S. twenty-dollar bills would be enough. He asked, "Will they take American money?"

"Certainly, *monsieur*."

Rick handed him two twenties. "Good. Now, run as fast as you can. Buy two first-class tickets to Berne. I will walk along toward the station. When you get the tickets, run back and give them to me. All right?"

He was taking a chance, of course. The boy might simply run off with the cash and never be seen again, but Rick didn't think so. The kid was dressed neatly, and had a clean-cut look about him. Anyway, he had to take the gamble.

The boy took off as though he had wings. Ahead, the traffic light had changed, and Pretzels was across the street. Rick followed.

The railroad station was in sight when the French boy returned. Rick drew him into a doorway, and accepted the two tickets and the packet of francs. He peeled off the equivalent of five dollars and handed it to the boy. "Thank you very much."

"A pleasure, monsieur. Never do I make so much money so easy."

"You earned it," Rick assured him.

He watched until the boy was out of earshot, checked to make sure he could talk in privacy, and held the Megabuck unit closer to his lips.

"Scotty, I have two first-class tickets to Berne. How are you doing?"

"Okay. What compartment numbers?"

Rick studied the tickets. "Carriage number five, compartment eight."

"Just a minute." There was a long pause, then Scotty came on again. "The seats are two carriages away from where Keller's things were placed. Listen, Rick, come into the station, and keep to the left-hand wall. You'll see the trains in kind of a big shed. Ours is the one farthest left. Passengers enter on the right side, so go down the left side, and around in front of the engine, then go into the first open door you find. Counting that first carriage as number one, ours is the fourth back from the engine. I'll meet you in our compartment."

"Got it," Rick said. He restored the unit to his pocket. Since he first conceived the idea of the Mega-buck network as a joke, during the adventure of *The Electronic Mind Reader*, the little units had come in handy many times, and had even been instrumental in saving their lives. This job would be impossible without the Megabucks, he thought. Look where they had already led the boys—from Copenhagen to Paris to Berne, Switzerland.

Rick wondered where the trail would finally lead.

# CHAPTER VII

## Five Tickets to Berne

Rick followed Scotty's instructions to the letter. He hurried into the station, keeping to the left, and saw Felt Hat and Keller just leaving a ticket window. Hatless was nowhere to be seen. He caught a brief glimpse of Blue Beret behind a steel pillar, but Pretzels was not in sight.

He hurried into the departure area and down the left side of the train as Scotty had directed. It was a long train. He ran, since there was no one on his side to wonder at a boy running, but slowed down as he

reached the engine. Cautiously moving around the front of the big diesel-electric, he saw that he needn't worry. A number of passengers were boarding the train, and they would act as a screen between him and Keller. Behind the diesel engine was a baggage car, and then came the first passenger carriage. He climbed aboard. As he stepped up, he looked across the heads of the crowd and saw Felt Hat and Keller walking leisurely in his direction.

Rick went into the carriage and found that it was divided into a series of compartments, with a corridor running the length of the train on one side. He hurried down the corridor, through connecting doors into the second carriage, down the corridor and through more doors, and into a dining car. He went through the dining car and emerged into his own carriage. Scotty was in sight at the far end, looking out a window.

Rick joined him. "How is it going?"

"Fine. Keller and another man just got into their carriage."

"Man in a felt hat and blue suit?"

"That's the one."

"Keep an eye out for a man in a blue beret."

Scotty looked at him. "Part of Keller's party?"

"Nope. This is a funny deal, Scotty. You should have seen the parade." Rick described it.

"Is the pretzel man connected with the blue beret or the Keller group?" Scotty asked.

Rick shrugged. "How can you tell? Pretzels and Blue Beret didn't seem to be working as a team. They were both on the same side of Keller's apartment house. A team would have split up and bracketed the place. I think they're separate, but I can't be sure."

Scotty chuckled. "If Pretzels isn't a rear guard for Keller, that means four separate groups are in the act. Keller's, Blue Beret's, Pretzels', and us."

"Don't make it more complicated than it is," Rick pleaded.

"I'm not making it complicated," Scotty replied. "It's just the way things are happening. Maybe if we really knew what was going on, it wouldn't seem complicated at all."

"Do you suppose any of our chums besides Keller and Felt Hat got on the train?" Rick asked.

"Could be. Well probably find out."

The passengers were all aboard now, and the conductors were showing signs of restlessness. It was about time for the train to leave. The boys waited on the platform between cars until the train actually started to roll, then went to their compartment and took off the knapsacks. Scotty held out the third Megabuck unit. "That coin gag of yours works fine. Gives a good excuse for getting under strange automobiles."

"Let's hope we don't have to use it again," Rick said.

“Amen to that,” Scotty agreed.

The boys settled back for a long ride. Fortunately, the seats in their compartment had not been sold to other passengers. On a busy weekend, the compartment would have held six people, three to a seat, facing each other. But the train was not crowded; and there were even some empty compartments in their carriage.

Rick elected to ride backwards and got comfortable, watching the Paris countryside speed by. The train was out of the city in a surprisingly short time, rolling through farmland dotted here and there with whitewashed farmhouses. He was pleased at the turn of events. Keller’s wanderings enabled them to see something of the countryside. He was looking forward to Switzerland.

The conductor came into their compartment and asked for tickets in French. Rick inquired, “Do you speak English?”

“A leetle , monsieur. What do you weesh ?”

“What time do we get to Berne ?”

“After one o’clock . First you must change, at Dijon .”

“Change trains?”

“Yes, monsieur. Eenperhaps t’ree hour.”

After the conductor had left, Scotty commented,

“Well have to keep an eye on Keller. He might have bought tickets to Berne just for a cover. Maybe he plans to get off somewhere along the line.”

“We can watch the platform at every stop,” Rick agreed. “If we have our knapsacks on, we can jump off, too, if he leaves.”

“Sure. And now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to to catch up on my sleep.”

The kilometers sped by while Scotty napped and Rick read. Now and then he glanced up as someone passed by the compartment. When the conductor passed by, Rick hurried out.

“Are there any stops before we reach Dijon ?”

“Non, *monsieur*. Zees ees an express.”

Rick settled down again, relieved. There would be no need to jump up every time the train slowed. Scotty could sleep in peace.

A functionary came through the train sounding a gong. Dinner call, Rick guessed. It was six o’clock . Passengers began to file by, en route to the dining car. Suddenly Rick lifted his book and bent his head. Keller and Felt Hat, without the hat, were going by en route to the dining car.

He shook Scotty. “Our lads are going in to dinner. Do you suppose we should take a look at their

compartment?”

Scotty had awakened instantly, as he usually did. “What for?”

“Maybe they left something that would be useful. Like a marked timetable, or doodles on a pad. How do I know?”

“I suppose it’s worth a look,” Scotty agreed. “We can go through the compartment without anyone seeing us. It’s a fully closed kind.”

Rick led the way down the corridor, through the connecting carriage, and to the entrance door to Keller’s carriage. He was about to push the handle that would open the door automatically, when he froze. Coming from the other end of the carriage was Blue Beret.

“Out of sight,” he said urgently.

The boys faded back into the gloom of the vestibule, ready to beat a retreat if Blue Beret was on his way to the dining room. But the man paused in front of a compartment door, looked both ways to be sure he was unobserved, then slid the door back and went in.

“Keller’s compartment,” Scotty breathed.

“Now what do we do?” Rick asked, not expecting an answer.

Scotty replied promptly. “Nothing. Did you notice how his coat bulged when he turned and went in?”

“No. What does that mean?”

“Your chum in the blue beret is either rich and has a fat wallet or he’s packing a roscoe in his hip pocket. I doubt that he’s rich enough for his wallet to make a bulge like that, so it must be a gun.”

Rick said thoughtfully, “Anyway, he’s not one of Keller’s group. So that makes five of us on the train, representing three different interests. I wonder what his is.”

“I wonder what Keller’s is,” Scott retorted.

Rick grinned. “Be interesting if a pretzel salesman came down the corridor about now, wouldn’t it?”

Scotty grinned back. “Let’s keep an eye on the compartment until he comes out. Then we can go in -if you still want to.”

“Might as well,” Rick replied. “He probably wouldn’t take anything of interest. He’d just look at it and take the information. Like us.”

Scotty scratched his chin, a habitual gesture of bewilderment. “This is a funny deal. Why did they send Keller’s things by car, then have the principal character walk?”

Rick had thought about that. “I think it was to check on a possible tail again. That’s easier on foot than in a car in traffic. Keller had a front guard and a rear guard. They checked, but not thoroughly enough. Actually, it would have taken several people to check completely, and even then they couldn’t have been sure. My guess is that the check was routine. They had no reason to think anyone had trailed Keller

from Copenhagen . After all, you got taken out in Tivoli . Chances are a guard followed Keller to the airport, a different one than the man who spotted you in the first place.”

“Sounds reasonable,” Scotty agreed. “Unless I had actually been seen tailing Keller, no one would suspect a couple of kids toting knapsacks and looking like student tourists. The man who grabbed me in Tivoli was in no condition to report.”

Two men approached from the direction to the diner and brushed past them.

“Dinner may be over,” Rick said worriedly. “Why doesn’t Blue Beret get out of there?”

Scotty snapped his fingers. “He’s waiting for them! If inspecting the compartment was his only interest, he’d have been gone long ago. Maybe he’s one of the gang after all.”

“Then why wait until the dinner gong to join them? I can’t buy it.”

Scotty took his arm. “Let’s get out of here. Back to the compartment.”

Rick followed his pal. He realized that Scotty didn’t want Keller and Felt Hat to find them standing in the vestibule, looking with interest at their carriage.

The boys reached their own compartment and pretended interest in reading materials, keeping an eye on the passers-by. Keller and friend passed in due course; then the corridor filled with people as the dinner gong sounded again. The boys ignored the call to dinner. They were not hungry, nor did they want to get involved in a meal when fast action might be needed.

The train sped on toward Dijon as night fell. Once Scotty made a brief reconnaissance and reported that Keller’s compartment door was closed and all seemed quiet. The rest of the time they read and dozed.

The train began to slow down, and a moment later the conductor came by, looked in and said, “Dijon, messieurs.”

Time to change. The boys put on their knapsacks as the train lost speed rapidly. It was quite dark outside.

“Let’s get to the vestibule and be ready to leap,” Scotty said. “If we hurry, maybe we can get a look into Keller’s compartment.”

Rick agreed, and the boys hurried to the vestibule nearest Keller’s carriage. Scotty opened the door, and air rushed in, along with the sound of bells, as the train came to a shuddering stop. Scotty looked out.

“We’re at the platform. Let’s go!” He dropped to the concrete and ran, with Rick close behind him.

They reached the platform outside Keller’s compartment in time to see Blue Beret leave. His hand was in his jacket pocket, and the bulge showed clearly that there was a gun in the hand. The boys drew back and watched as passengers dismounted, followed by Keller, Felt Hat, and Blue Beret.

There was no doubt of it—Keller and Felt Hat were prisoners. But of whom? Of what group?

Rick Brant knew only that Keller was a famous American surgeon whose wife had an unwelcome guest.

Apart from that single fact, he had only his feelings to go on. Those feelings said he did not like Blue Beret's face.

"Can we take Blue Beret out for Keller?" Rick demanded swiftly.

Scotty looked at him in surprise. "Sure. Do we want to?"

"I think so."

"Okay." Scotty moved like a shadow, with Rick closely behind. Fortunately, for them, the weather roof above the platform was supported by many pillars. The boys used these for cover, closing the distance between themselves and the three ahead. The connecting train was waiting on the opposite side of the platform, but it soon became clear that Blue Beret and prisoners were not heading for it. The man with the gun was taking Keller and Felt Hat to the stairs leading down to the station.

Scotty got within reach, took a quick look around to be sure no one was watching, and swung a stiff judo chop at the side of Blue Beret's neck. The man folded like wet cardboard. Scotty and Rick ducked out of sight behind a pillar, then hurried across the platform.

It had happened so fast that neither Keller nor Felt Hat realized their captor had dropped out of the party. As the boys watched from a vestibule on the connecting train, Felt Hat looked back, saw no one, grabbed Keller's arm and tugged him toward the train for Berne .

A conductor dismounted from the train they had left, saw Blue Beret, and bent over him.

The whistle of the connecting train blew. The conductors waved their lanterns, and wheels began to turn. The boys watched until the platform was out of sight. Several men had gathered and were lifting Blue Beret to his feet.

"Might as well find our compartment on this train," Scotty said.

Rick agreed. "Uh-uh. Well, here we are. Five tickets to Berne, and only four passengers. And what's nice about it is that Keller and company still don't know we exist!"

# CHAPTER VIII

## Nighttime in Berne

The express roared through the darkness, interrupted only by a stop at the Swiss border. The customs and immigration officials stopped at the boys' compartment, stamped passports, asked the routine question "Anything to declare?" and went on.

Rick looked at Scotty, sound asleep on the seat opposite, and grinned affectionately. Scotty was the gentlest soul in the world, always considerate of others. But when the time came, as it had at Dijon , the ex-Marine could move surely and swiftly, and when he hit anyone, they stayed hit.



Scotty, feeling Rick's gaze, opened his eyes and was instantly awake. He gave Rick a grin. "I feel better. Why don't you take a nap? I'll sit up and keep alert, just in case."

Rick felt a little droopy. "Okay. Call me if anything happens." He closed his eyes and let his head rest on the high seat back. The rhythmic click of the wheels was soothing.

He awoke at the touch of Scotty's hand on his arm. "Coming into Berne, Rick. I'll go to the front of the train and get off first. You pick up Keller and friend and follow them out. Okay?"

Rick blinked sleepily. "Okay. Megabuck unit in place?"

"Sure. See you outside."

Scotty slid back the compartment door, looked briefly up and down the corridor, then started through the train to the front carriage.

Rick yawned deeply. He left the compartment long enough to get a drink and to splash cold water on his face; then he ran a comb through his hair and checked his knapsack. It seemed odd that no change of clothes had yet been necessary. Had they really left Copenhagen only that morning? Actually, the flight to Paris had taken off only two hours after Keller finished his lecture. They had arrived in Paris about four p.m., and departed by train at seven fifteen. He wasn't sure whether they had passed through a time zone or not. Anyway, it really didn't matter. He knew only that he was tired and that it was early morning, sometime between one and two A.M.

The train was slowing rapidly now. He waited until it came to a full stop, then followed the handful of passengers in his carriage to the vestibule, staying a little distance behind them. They went down the train steps to the platform, but he lingered in the gloom of the vestibule, watching the faces passing by. Keller and Felt Hat went past. Rick waited a moment before going down the train steps far enough so he could look out. Keller and his companion paused to let people go by until the crowd had thinned out. Then the two followed the other passengers to stairs that led down into the station.

Rick watched Keller and Felt Hat go down the stairs, and moved the moment their heads disappeared below his level of vision. He ran to the top of the stairs and looked down in time to see them turn a corner into a vast, whitewashed tunnel. He went down the stairs swiftly and silently, and peered around the corner they had turned.

They were in a sort of huge arcade, dotted with pillars, occasional doors, and a newsstand. It was easy to keep the pillars between him and them.

A short, heavy-set man wearing a black Homburg and carrying a walking stick stepped out of a doorway and joined them. Keller and his friend paused long enough to shake hands, then the three moved off together, toward a rise in the tunnel.

Rick could see that the tunnel led under the tracks and up into the station proper. There was little traffic now, and he stepped out from behind the pillar where he had paused, but quickly drew back in again. A man Rick had never seen before had emerged from the shadow of the newsstand. He was obviously interested in Keller and company.

The new man was dressed like a workman, in denim pants, a collarless cotton jacket, and a leather cap. He moved to the shadow of a pillar, then made his way through the tunnel keeping pillars between him and the Keller group, as Rick was doing.

Rick remembered the parade in Paris . Did this man in the leather cap match up with Blue Beret, or with Pretzels? Was there still another watcher somewhere in the station? He stepped into a convenient doorway and waited.

Two trainmen in light-blue overalls came by, but they seemed interested only in the heated conversation they were carrying on in German-Swiss. Rick decided he probably was the last one in this present parade and moved swiftly after Leather Cap.

The tunnel opened into a barnlike structure that was obviously the main part of the station. Keller and company were halfway across the floor. Rick saw Walking Stick detach himself from the group and hurry toward doors that apparently led to the ticket counters. Leather Cap walked along the left side of the big room, showing an interest in travel posters on the walls. Most of them advertised the merits of vacation spots in Italy . Several showed water skiing, swimming, and just plain lolling around at Lake Como .

Rick moved to the left, too, and looked around to see if anyone was within earshot. No one was. He didn't want to take the Megabuck unit out of his pocket, because that might attract attention. So he simply lowered his head and spoke at the unit in his breast pocket.

"Scotty, where are you?"

"Outside on the street." The answer came instantly. "I'm in an areaway outside some kind of shipping room. There's a taxi stand with three taxis waiting if we need one."

"Keller and Felt Hat are on the way. They picked up a companion in a black Homburg, carrying a walking stick. He just left them. They also picked up a tail, a husky type in denim pants, tan cotton jacket, and leather cap. You know, the kind with a visor, like sports-car buffs wear. He's trailing them now."

"Okay. I've got my eye on the main door. Don't let them spot you."

"I won't."

Keller and Felt Hat reached the main doors and went through. Rick saw them through the glass. They paused for a moment, then turned right.

"Got 'em," Scotty said. "They just came out."

"Okay."

Leather Cap waited until Keller and friend were out of sight, then hurried to the door. Rick was about to follow when he saw Walking Stick step from the doorway into the ticket room and follow.

Rick looked around again, then spoke to the Mega-buck unit. "Walking Stick has spotted Leather Cap. He just got into line."

"Roger. Keller and friend just passed me. They're walking down the street as though they owned Berne ."

"Maybe they do," Rick said. "Can you be spotted?"

“Not without a flashlight.”

“Okay. Walking Stick just went through the doors. I’m coming.”

Rick walked to the main doors and stepped through, taking a cautious look around. Keller and Felt Hat were just turning a corner, a block away. Leather Cap and Walking Stick were not in sight. Rick waited. Presently Leather Cap appeared from some nook into which he had ducked, and followed Keller and friend around the corner. Leather Cap was no sooner out of sight, when Walking Stick stepped out of a shadow and followed. Walking Stick was no longer holding the stick at the top like a cane; he was carrying it like a club, knobby end upright.

Rick followed as soon as it was safe to do so, and Scotty stepped out of a deep entryway and joined him.

“Wonder if those guys have a permit for a parade?” Scotty asked whimsically.

“We don’t, and we’re in the parade, too. Let’s go.”

They reached the corner, but instead of turning it, they crossed to the corner directly opposite and glanced down the street. It was a short street, with three-story wooden buildings on each side. Keller and Felt Hat had crossed diagonally and were nearing the next corner; they turned it and disappeared. Leather Cap hurried directly across the street and vanished into an alley. Walking Stick hurried after him.

The boys melted into the shadow of a doorway. “The alley or down to the corner?” Scotty asked in a whisper.

“The corner. We don’t know the alleys here.”

“Okay.” Scotty started to step out of the doorway, then pushed Rick back. “Hold it.”

Rick waited. The men must have reappeared. Scotty was peering around the corner with extreme caution. Rick let his glance roam over what he could see of Berne. One thing was certain: night life in the Swiss capital was at a minimum, and so were lights. Berne had gone to bed hours ago.

“Come on.” Scotty led the way. “Walking Stick came out of the alley again. No sign of Leather Cap. Walking Stick was, polishing the head of his stick with a handkerchief as he turned the corner.”

The boys hurried down the short block and reached the mouth of the alley. They were about to pass when Rick heard what sounded like a groan.

The two looked at each other, then by tacit consent hurried into the alley. It was dark. Scotty struck a match and they saw the form of Leather Cap huddled on the ground. They made a swift examination, then stood up.

“He’s bleeding from the ear,” Scotty said grimly.

Rick knew what that meant—a high probability of a fractured skull. “We can’t let him stay here until morning,” the boy stated flatly. “Get on the trail again. I’ll go back to the station and find a phone. At least we can call a hospital.”

“Don’t get trapped,” Scotty warned. “Make the call, then get out. Let me know when you’re ready and I’ll direct you to where I am.”

“Okay.” Rick turned and ran out of the alley and back the way he had come. Whoever these pals of Keller’s were, they played rough. The walking stick had been an effective weapon. Leather Cap wouldn’t be interested in further trailing for some time. It was a grim warning that the Spindrift kids had better watch their step.

Back in the railroad station, he was faced with a problem. He had French francs, but no Swiss francs. Before making a phone call he would need change. The station was deserted now except for a charwoman who was swabbing the floor with a mop the size of a tabletop. He pushed through the doors into the room where the ticket windows were located. They were closed. So was the bank window and the newspaper kiosk.

Rick debated, then decided to take a different approach. There was certainly a policeman on the beat, and he must pass the railroad station, at least once an hour. Or, other trains might come in at intervals. Anyway, there had to be some kind of traffic either through or by the main doors.

He went to the ticket counter and used it as a desk. His notebook provided paper. He printed in big letters, “HELP.” Underneath he printed, “Injured man in alley. Over” On the other side he drew a map. Finally, he took out his handkerchief and wiped the paper carefully to erase or smudge any fingerprints.

He spoke softly. “Scotty, where are you?”

His pal’s voice sounded faint. “Turn right as you did before, but don’t turn down the street where the alley is. Go straight for two blocks, then turn right. Go two more blocks and turn right. You’ll see a high board fence. I’m behind it.”

“Okay. Coming.”

Rick walked to the main entrance and looked around. He was alone. Even the charwoman had disappeared, mop and all. He looked for a prominent place to put his notice and found a bulletin board with nothing on it. But there were two thumbtacks with shreds of paper under them where a notice had been torn down. He took the thumbtacks, then with a quick look around to make sure he was unobserved, he used them to tack up the notice right over the crack where the main doors came together. The doors could not be opened from either side without disturbing the paper. It was the best he could do.

## CHAPTER IX

### From Behind a Fence

Rick reached Scotty’s side without seeing anyone, and without being seen so far as he knew. Scotty was seated comfortably behind a fence, using a convenient knothole as a vantage point.

“They came to the apartment house across the street,” Scotty reported briefly. “It was dark. They went

upstairs, then a light came on. You can see it now, on die third floor. It's the only lighted window in the building. Nothing has happened since."

The street was dimly lighted. There were three-story apartment houses of wood on the opposite side. On the side where the boys sat was a vacant lot surrounded on three sides by the board fence. The fourth side of the lot was the rear of a series of warehouses or loft buildings of some kind, none of which showed a light.

Only three cars were parked on the street. Two were Italian Fiats, but the third had caught Rick's eye at once. It was a Mercedes-Benz sedan, parked in front of the apartment house that Keller had entered.

The boys waited in silence. There was nothing else they could do. If Keller and friends came out, they would follow-unless, Rick thought, they took a car. In which case the boys would be stuck. By the time they could find a taxi, probably impossible at this time of night, the Keller car could be halfway to the Austrian border. Or the French border.

A faraway sound made Rick sit upright. It was the distinctive whistle of an ambulance or a fire truck. He had learned that the Europeans did not commonly use sirens. Their signal was a variable tone whistle of penetrating qualities.

The sound was coming nearer. It began to die down, but now they could hear the vehicle's motor in the quiet night. Then the motor stopped, too.

"Sounds as though it stopped about at the alley," Scotty said softly.

Rick nodded. He thought so, too, and felt relief that Leather Cap was being cared for.

In about five minutes the motor started again, followed by the whistle, diminishing in sound as the ambulance increased the distance from the boys. Finally the silence flooded in again.

Scotty, who was watching through the knothole, suddenly tensed. He squeezed Rick's arm.

Rick found a gap between the boards and watched. Walking Stick, without his Homburg hat or his stick, had come through the front door of the apartment house, closely followed by Felt Hat, also hatless. Walking Stick surveyed the quiet street, then went to the Mercedes-Benz and unlocked the door. Felt Hat slipped into the driver's seat, took the key, turned on the dashboard light and inspected the instruments. He started the motor, sat listening to it for a moment, gunned it briefly, then shut it off. He turned off the dashboard light, slid out, and relocked the car. The two men went back into the apartment house.

"What did that mean?" Scotty asked.

"Just what you think it did," Rick retorted. "Felt Hat is a suspicious type who trusts no one. He wanted to check the car himself, to see if the gas tank was full and if it ran smoothly. Wouldn't take Walking Stick's word for it, I guess."

"Uh-uh. That's the way I figure it. Felt Hat is the man in charge, since he's traveling with Keller. Walking Stick is the local representative. Local rep supplies car, boss checks. Which means they're going to use the car, probably to take Keller somewhere. "

"But when?" Rick asked. "If they take off now, we're sunk. I don't think they will, though--"

“Because they came down without Keller, and without hats or luggage,” Scotty finished. “Looks like a trip in the morning. So we have to get a car sometime between now and then . . .”

“. . . and we have to plant the Megabuck unit on the Mercedes-Benz,” Rick finished.

Scotty chuckled. “Once a gag is working, keep it going as long as possible, I always say.” He applied his eye to the hole again. “Hey, they’ve turned out the lights!”

“Probably snug in bed,” Rick said.

“Probably,” Scotty agreed. “But we’d better watch for a while until we’re sure they’re not coming out.”

“Then what?” Rick asked.

“We start hunting for an automobile.”

“Uh-uh.” Rick had checked his watch against the railroad-station clock. “A half past three in the morning.”

Scotty swung his pack around and rummaged inside. He brought out two sandwiches and a bottle of spring water. “I’ve been saving these for an emergency. Is this an emergency?”

“It’s the only kind where we’ll have time to eat.” Rick reached for a sandwich. “Thanks, pal. I’ll do as much for you someday.”

The boys ate and drank. The minutes passed, with no sign of the men from the apartment across the way. Rick thought enviously that they probably were asleep in comfortable beds under a warm blanket. He took a pullover sweater from his knapsack, slipped off his jacket, and put it on. The sweater helped. Scotty followed suit.

“Time for the Megabuck unit,” Scotty said. “Let’s go—”

They walked the length of the fence and slipped out through the gate to the street. It was barely possible someone was watching from the darkened window of the apartment, Rick thought. So far, they had been out of sight of the apartment. He took Scotty’s arm. “Let’s cross the street to the apartment side and stay close to the buildings while we get to the car. Then anyone sitting at the window can’t see us. When we get to the car, I’ll go underneath and put the unit on, then we’ll retreat the same way. You keep a watch, and cover me if necessary.”

Scotty nodded. “Got something to tie it on with?”

“You packed a good supply of handkerchiefs. I’ll use one.”

“Fine. Come on.”

They were far enough down the block, so anyone in the apartment would have to lean out to see them. Scotty led the way across the street, then, hugging the buildings, they made their way back to the Mercedes-Benz. Rick had the Megabuck unit and the handkerchief ready.

He dropped to hands and knees, still close to the building, and crawled across the sidewalk, into the

gutter and under the car. It was dark, and he could see nothing. His groping hands found the chassis, but there were no convenient holes as there had been in the Citroen. His fingers traced a cable, either a hydraulic brake line, or the rear light wire. He couldn't tell which. Anyway, it would do. He touched the exhaust to locate it, then tied the Megabuck unit as close to it as possible. They would get maximum noise now, but there wouldn't be enough heat to harm the little transceiver. He crawled back out and joined Scotty against the building.

Without a word Scotty turned and they retraced their steps to the corner, then headed back toward the center of town.

"We might bump into a policeman," Scotty ventured. "He'd stop us at this time of night. What's our story?"

Rick thought it over. "We've been waiting in the railroad station since our train arrived. Now we're hoping to find a restaurant that opens early."

Scotty grinned. "Better keep your hands in your pockets. I can't see clearly, but I think you picked up some grease under the car."

After getting under the Citroen, Rick had gotten away with only a smudge of dirt. This time he hadn't been so lucky. "Maybe we'd better head back to the station so I can wash up."

"Good idea. Only let's go easy and be ready to duck out of sight if we see a gendarme."

"Uh-uh. Lead on."

Berne obviously closed up tight for the night. They were alone on the streets, not even a sign of traffic. They saw no police, nor any other pedestrians. Rick had the feeling that they were alone in the world.

Lights burned in the station, but there was no sign of life. Undoubtedly there must be some station employees on duty, but they were probably taking a nap somewhere out of sight.

They found the men's room, identified as such in German, French, and English. Rick washed up, then sponged dirt from his trousers and jacket. Scotty cleaned up, too, and both had a long drink of water.

"And now, my friend?" Rick asked. "It's ten minutes past four. How do we find a car?"

Scotty grinned. "The hard way. With the classified section of the telephone book."

Rick sighed. "And you expect a rental agency to be open this time of morning?"

"Nope. But we can be ready. A town that goes to bed as early as Berne must get up early in the morning. Just say a silent prayer that the rental agencies open before our buddies in the Mercedes-Benz take off."

They walked out of the rest room and into the station proper. A police officer was just coming through the door. He eyed them with interest. "Guten Mor-gen, junge Herren."

"Good morning," Rick said. "Do you speak English?"

"Some. I ask what you do here so early?"

“We came in on a late train,” Rick explained. “We’ve been waiting around for things to open.”

“But we have hotels open all the night. You did not want a room?” There was a hint of suspicion in the question.

Scotty gave him an apologetic grin. “We will be leaving as soon as we can. It did not seem thrifty to spend money for a room for such a few hours.”

“We slept some on the train,” Rick added. “Sir, we want to rent a car and have some breakfast. Can you tell us when a rental agency opens, and where there is a restaurant?”

The officer smiled. “You are students, *nicht* ? Ah, to be young and not to need a bed to sleep in! You will show me your passports, please. A formality.”

The boys obediently produced passports. The officer inspected them, compared the pictures with the faces before him, located the entry stamp received at the border, then handed them back.

“The Swiss Motor Service opens at six o’clock. If you have driver’s licenses from America, they will rent you a car. You have them?”

Rick answered. “Yes, both of us have licenses. We won’t need an international license or anything like that?”

“*Nein*. Many countries in Europe allow driving on a national license. In America I understand you do not have Federal licenses, so we accept those of your states. There is no problem. Now, you wish to eat. The rental agency is only three blocks away. You turn to the left as you go out the front door, walk two blocks, then turn right one block. There is a restaurant in the same block, and sometimes it is open even earlier than the agency. Perhaps you will be lucky. Until then, I think you wait here. It is better not to walk the streets at night.”

The boys thanked him and retired to one of the back benches in the waiting room. Rick was surprised the officer hadn’t asked if they had seen anyone put a sign on the door. Probably the police assumed the sign maker was far away by this time. They stretched out, and alternately dozed and turned restlessly until it was five thirty by Rick’s watch. Time to look for an open restaurant.

Rick had no fear that they might have slept through the departure of the Mercedes-Benz sedan. The first roar of the exhaust in the Megaphone earphones would have been an effective alarm clock. “Time to go prowling,” he said. “Hungry?”

“Not especially,” Scotty replied. “But I could drink a gallon of coffee.”

“I could join you.”

The policeman had given precise directions. In a few minutes, they were standing in front of the Swiss Motor Service. A sign in French, German, and English announced cars for rent, including Fiats, Renaults, Saabs, Taunus, and Mercedes. The agency was not yet open.

There was a restaurant a few doors away, but without signs of life. The boys sat down on the front stoop and waited. It was growing daylight rapidly. Berne should soon be awakening.

It was five forty-five by Rick’s watch when the restaurateur arrived. He looked at them in surprise.



*“Messieurs?”*

“Do you speak English?” Scotty asked.

“Non, monsieur.”

Rick tried his few words of French. “*Nousdesirous cafe.*”

*The man nodded.* “Le petit déjeuner, messieurs?”

Rick recognized the phrase, one of many he had forgotten. Breakfast! He said quickly, “*Out, monsieur.*”

The proprietor unlocked the door, turned on lights, and waved them to seats. “*Dix minutes, messieurs.*”

Ten minutes, Rick gathered. Well, they could wait that long.

The estimate was optimistic. It took fifteen minutes before steaming mugs of coffee arrived. Sign language added eggs and bacon, and the proprietor included rolls automatically. He accepted French francs in payment.

The rental agency was just opening when they arrived. The proprietor spoke minimum English, but gathered that they wanted to rent a car. He kept asking for *lee-* sawms, then finally Rick gathered that he wanted to see their licenses. They produced them, with passports, for a detailed examination. Satisfied, the proprietor led them out back to a shed where the rental cars were kept.

Scotty took over. He wandered down the rows of cars, and finally beckoned to Rick, pointing at a Mercedes 300 SL roadster.

“That’s a real bomb,” Rick said admiringly.

“Might as well have something that will keep up with that other job. I don’t see anything faster.”

The proprietor frowned. He searched for a word and managed to get out, “Expenseeve.”

Rick produced his wallet. “How much?”

In a short time the paper work was completed, the Mercedes gassed, and the oil checked. Scotty slid in behind the wheel, tossing his knapsack into the baggage well behind the seat. Rick got in on the passenger side and adjusted his knapsack to serve as a pillow.

Scotty had already selected a spot where they could wait. He moved smoothly out into the street, drove back to the station and past it, then parked the car in the street that ran parallel to the street in front of the apartment house. The Mercedes roadster was facing in the same direction as the sedan parked a street away.

“Now for a nap,” Scotty announced.

“I’ll beat you to it,” Rick challenged. He made himself comfortable with the knapsack as a pillow and closed his eyes.

He never knew whether he or Scotty had fallen asleep first; he only knew that they woke up at the same instant, jarred from their sleep by the sudden roar of an exhaust in the Megabuck earphones.

Rick glanced at his watch. It was 8:25. They had slept almost two hours. He felt the difference. He was still groggy, but waking up fast. Scotty already had the car in gear and was moving slowly ahead. Rick took the Megabuck unit from his pocket and shifted it back and forth, trying to determine direction. At first the noise was loudest when he held the unit so the antenna was parallel to the street, broadside to the sedan in the next street. Then the angle began to change. The other Mercedes was moving! Since he knew where it was, he could tell the direction easily. It was heading toward the railroad station.

"Toward the station," he said.

Scotty immediately picked up speed.

Rick moved the unit. "They made a sharp turn to the right," he said. "They're coming up the cross street directly in front of us."

Scotty instantly pulled over so that a casual glance down their street would not show a moving car. The Mercedes sedan swept by the street, and the boys had a second's glimpse of Keller, with Felt Hat driving. Walking Stick was not in the car.

"We're on our way," Scotty announced, and pulled back into the street again.

# CHAPTER X

## A Tour of Switzerland

Berne, being a small city with a population of little more than a hundred and fifty thousand people, there was no traffic congestion. Scotty was able to follow the sedan easily, keeping well back.

Rick had taken the Swiss road map from the materials supplied by the rental agent and was trying to follow their route. It was difficult while they were in the city, because only major streets were shown on the large-scale map. But in a short time he saw they were heading generally east. The nearest large town in that direction was Lucerne.

Scotty trailed Keller's car to the edge of town and onto a blacktop highway. The houses had thinned out, and there was considerable open countryside. The Mercedes slowed while Scotty let the other car get completely out of sight, then asked, "Where are we heading?"

"Toward Lucerne," Rick answered. "There are a few turnoffs toward other cities, but this seems to be the main road. Why not let them get far ahead? If we reach a turnoff, the Megabuck units will tell us which turn they took."

"Far ahead?" Scotty glanced at him. "Afraid of being spotted?"

Rick said what was on his mind. "So far, we have at least one other bunch, and maybe two, interested in following Keller. I'd be surprised if we were the only car tailing him."

A horn blasted behind them. Scotty was rolling along at an easy 60 kilometers an hour, and he pulled over to let the speed demon pass. It was a dark-blue Peugeot sedan, with only a driver.

"Not much traffic," Scotty commented.

"That makes tailing more difficult," Rick pointed out. The Peugeot was drawing away from them rapidly, and in a few moments it was out of sight around a curve.

The roar of the Keller car's exhaust in their earphones was still strong. Scotty let the roadster drift along at moderate speed. When the sound became slightly fainter, he speeded up a bit. "I'll try to keep the sound level about where it is," he explained. "You check me on it. If the sound gets louder, I'll slow down. If it gets fainter, I'll speed up."

"Good," Rick agreed. He listened for a moment, then removed his earphone. "I'll just listen in once in a while. That way, I won't get used to the sound, and I'll be able to check better."

The boys fell silent. Rick watched the scenery as they rolled through the Swiss countryside. The hills were gentle in this part of the country, green-clad and well kept. There were many farmhouses, and each had its woodpile. The tidy Swiss stacked their wood with mathematical precision, placing the end of each piece of firewood exactly even with the rest. No brick wall could have been more even.

The houses and yards were equally neat. The roofs had a steep pitch, and eaves that extended far out from the walls. Rick thought they were constructed in this way to allow the heavy snows to slide off and drop some distance from the walls.

The character of the country slowly changed. The hills grew steeper, more rocky, and gradually became mountains. The boys topped a mountain, and had to descend via a road that wound sharply around the mountainside. Rick caught a glimpse of a magnificent waterfall cascading down into a valley nearly a thousand feet below.

He put his earphone back in place and heard the sound of Keller's exhaust vary as the winding road made abrupt changes in the direction of the Mega-buck antenna.

"Wonder where they're heading?" he mused aloud.

"And why," Scotty added. "What do you suppose this is all about?"

Rick shrugged. He had asked himself the same question many times. "If I find out, you'll be the first to know."

"Thanks," Scotty said dryly.

The boys fell silent as the miles ticked away. They went through lovely little villages, past dozens of lumberyards, past herds of cows that looked like Holsteins to Rick's inexperienced eye. Except for the twists in the road, the exhaust sound remained constant.

Then, as they reached a twisting road up a mountain, the Mercedes-Benz motor dropped to a faint purr. Scotty slowed quickly. "Sounds as though they stopped and the motor is idling." He pulled over to the

side of the road and killed the engine.

The boys listened to the gentle purr, wondering why the Keller car had stopped. Suddenly over the sound of the purr they heard two loud bangs, like pistol shots.

“Was that shooting?” Scotty asked quickly.

“Sounded like it to me. Let’s get going. Keller may be in trouble!”

As Scotty switched on their motor again, the Mercedes-Benz exhaust suddenly roared. Keller’s car was on the move again, at high speed!

Scotty stepped on it. The roadster took the turns like a Grand Prix racer, climbing at high speed.

At the top of the mountain the road leveled off, and ahead on the straight stretch they saw the Peugeot that had passed them earlier. It was pulled over to the side of the road, the driver standing alongside.

Scotty slowed down, and Rick kept a sharp eye open as they rolled past. He saw two close-spaced holes in the Peugeot’s hood, about where the side of the motor would be. And he heard the driver, who apparently was swearing a blue streak in German or Swiss.

“Two holes,” Rick reported. “Looks like Felt Hat shot through the hood.”

“The only handgun I know of that could drive a slug through a car motor is a Magnum,” Scotty said grimly. “The FBI carries them, but they’re not common.”

“These guys play rough,” Rick commented. He tried to reconstruct what had happened. “Keller’s car was ahead. They must have seen the Peugeot trailing them. I don’t think they jammed on the brakes and blocked the road, because we’d have heard the tires squeal. Besides, it’s hard to block a road completely. My guess is that they slowed down and forced the Peugeot to pass. We wouldn’t have noticed, because the motor noise was changing due to the twisting road and the way the antenna turned. Once they forced him to pass, Felt Hat could catch up and push him over to the side of the road and idle down long enough to slam a couple of Magnum slugs through the engine.”

“It could have worked that way,” Scotty agreed. “Now we need to be sure it doesn’t happen to us.”

Rick fell silent, going over every detail of the events since Paris. The only way in which they might have attracted attention to themselves was when Scotty knocked Blue Beret out of action. But neither Keller nor Felt Hat had noticed. On this leg of the trip, their own car had not been visible except at a distance for a very brief period. They had been too far away for Keller or his friends to see faces, or license plate.

“They can’t know we’re trailing them,” Rick said at last. “Unless there’s someone behind us we don’t know about keeping an eye on us.”

Scotty shook his head. “No cars have been pacing us. There have been stretches where I could see behind us for one or two miles. And we can be sure this wagon isn’t bugged.”

“It was pretty smart, knocking out the car instead of the driver,” Rick said thoughtfully. “He’s in no position to complain to the police, but he’s effectively out of action.”

They passed through the town of Wolhusen, and Rick checked their position on the map. According to

the map, the Alps weren't far away. Without so much haze in the air they should be able to see them.

Another hour passed, and Scotty said, "We'll need gas shortly. So will they."

Rick put his earphones back in place. "Then we'd better listen carefully. Do we stop when they do?"

Scotty didn't know. "It depends. If we're near a gas station, we can stop. If we're not, we'll have to go right on by until we reach one."

The road hugged the side of a mountain, climbing steadily, but fairly straight. They were nearing the peak when the Mercedes-Benz exhaust noise suddenly dropped in pitch, purred for a moment, and then ceased. Scotty promptly slowed to near-crawling speed. "Unless we see a gas station before we see them, we'll have to keep going."

No gas station came into sight. The car went over the highest point in the road, onto a level stretch, and then downward again. There was a village ahead, a small place. Scotty kept his speed moderate. They entered the outskirts of the village, passed a sawmill and a couple of stores, and saw a gas station sign up ahead.

"Watch it," Rick said quickly.

Scotty maintained speed. They passed the gas station and saw the Mercedes-Benz pulled to one side. Attached to the gas station was a restaurant which Felt Hat was just entering.

"Anywhere they could turn off?" Scotty asked. Rick had been keeping an eye on the map. "Not for another few miles."

"Okay. We'll keep going to the next station-and maybe we can get some lunch, too."

"Go, boy, go! I could eat an alp."

Scotty stepped on it. On the far side of town, about a mile from the main section, they found a gas station with a small restaurant a hundred feet beyond it. They gassed up, then found a parking space behind the restaurant, out of sight of the highway.

The place was small, with only four tables, and they were the only customers. The proprietress, a huge woman, served them veal stew. It was good.

They insisted on paying in advance and then proceeded to eat slowly and with relish. If necessary, they could leave in a second. But the Mercedes-Benz motor did not start up again, and they took time for a second cup of coffee.

Finally the exhaust noise in their ears told them Keller was on the move once more. They watched out the window, heard the sound increase in volume, and finally saw the car go by. Only then did they finish the last of their coffee, bid farewell to the proprietress, and continue the journey.

The trail led through the resort city of Lucerne, and in the direction of Zurich. For a while Rick thought that might be their destination, but the Keller car took a fork in the road at the town of Cham, rounded the northern end of Lake Zuger See, passed through Zug, turned north to Baar, then northeast to Lake Zurich. From there the way led around the eastern end of the great lake toward the Alps.

“Looks as if we’re in for a mountain vacation,” Scotty said.

The road was climbing steadily now, occasionally dipping into a valley, then climbing steeply. There were so many twists and turns in the road that the Megabuck units were almost useless as direction finders. Only the sound of the exhaust, changing constantly in intensity, told them they were still on the right trail.

They reached a section of road that curved around the base of a cliff. Ahead, the Alpine foothills—actually substantial mountains—rose peak after peak toward the true Alps, the backbone of southern Europe.

The Mercedes exhaust became steadily fainter, then suddenly cut off entirely. Scotty braked to a stop. “What happened?”

Rick checked the map. “No villages for another dozen miles. The only turnoff is behind us about a mile. Maybe they stopped to admire the view.”

“Not likely. Besides, the motor sound was becoming fainter. They weren’t getting that far ahead of us, I’m sure. Which means they were putting distance between us some other way.”

“Like taking that turn back yonder,” Rick agreed. “Only the turn leads into a dead end. Maybe we’d better keep going.”

Scotty started up once more. “All right. We can check ahead a few miles, but I’ll bet we won’t find them.”

Ten minutes later Rick gave up. “They didn’t come this far. We’d have lost their signal long before this. Better turn back.”

Scotty maneuvered the car around and went back at the highest speed the winding road permitted. They reached the dead-end turnoff, and Scotty swung into it.

The road climbed steeply, going up the cliff along which the main road ran.

“This is why the signal got weaker,” Rick said. “They were putting both rock and distance between us and them.”

Scotty shifted into a lower gear as the road turned a corner and then straightened out again. At the top of the cliff the land widened somewhat, but it was clear that they were on a shelf on the mountainside. The craggy ridge rose above them, on their left.

The paved road ended suddenly in a wide spot, apparently a combined viewing place and picnic ground. There was no sign of the Mercedes-Benz. Scotty drove to the edge of the paving and found that a seldom-used dirt road continued onward.

“Let’s go,” Rick said. “But keep a sharp eye open.”

The dirt road wound between fir trees for perhaps five hundred yards, then entered a gate in a fence made of iron rods with spear tops. The gate was closed. The sign on it said “Private” in four languages.

“We have arrived,” Rick Brant announced.

# CHAPTER XI

## Dead End in the Alps

Rick Brant studied the map, wishing he had one that showed topographic features more clearly. But even from the road map he could see the situation.

They were on the side of a rocky mountain. It wasn't much of a mountain compared with the Alps, of which it was only one of the foothills, but it was pretty respectable at that. It rose perhaps three thousand feet above the valley floor. The side road they were on came up a gradually ascending shelf until the shelf leveled off about one thousand feet above the valley floor.

The shelf varied in width. At the bottom, where the road entered, it was just wide enough for the road. At the top, it was just about two hundred yards wide where the paved road ended at the picnic grounds, then it narrowed slightly until it was only about one hundred yards wide where the fence blocked it off.

"The shelf probably widens out again inside the fence," Rick said. Since the dirt road wound through dense fir trees, they couldn't see very far.

"Probably," Scotty agreed. "There must be a house in there. Well, what do we do now? Crash the gate?"

Rick shook his head. "I think we'd better go to the nearest city—that's Zurich—and phone the embassy at Berne. We can report that the fox has gone to ground, so to speak, and ask for further instructions."

"You make sense as always, ol' buddy." Scotty turned the car expertly and headed back toward the paved road. "We still have no idea what Keller is up to, but at least we know his destination. If this is his destination."

"It is," Rick said. He could not prove that Keller was at trail's end, but he felt certain of it.

"Company ahead," Scotty announced.

A huge car blocked the road ahead. Rick recognized it as an American Packard, a car that hadn't been manufactured for many years. There was a man waiting by it. As they approached, he waved his hand, flagging them down.

"We'd better get out and flank him," Scotty said. "Just in case."

Scotty nosed the Mercedes right up to the man before stopping. He opened his door and got out as Rick followed suit on the other side. They came around to the front of the roadster, getting the man between them.

Rick doubted that this tactic would do much good if it came to a fight. The man was about six feet six inches in height, and probably weighed close to three hundred pounds, none of it fat. He was hat-less, with sandy blond hair and a red complexion. He had a tough face, but a pleasant grin. The grin was

turned on as he waited for the boys.

“Can we help you, sir?” Rick asked politely.

“Possibly. I was wondering if you expect to see very much of Switzerland just by trailing Dr. Keller.”

Rick knew that their faces had registered surprise at the direct approach, but maybe the expressions would be misinterpreted as bewilderment. “We’re tourists,” he explained. “Students.”

The big man leaned against the side of his ancient Packard and grinned. “No doubt,” he said. “At your ages most boys are students, eh? But do tourist-students cover so much ground? I think not.”

“What do you mean-cover so much ground?” Scotty demanded.

The man waved a hand the size of a ham. “Let us not play games, young gentlemen. It is better to be direct, eh?”

“Are you a friend of this Dr. Keller?” Rick demanded.

“No. I do not have that honor.” The man had an accent Rick could not place.

“Who is Dr. Keller?” Scotty demanded.

“Please do not try to play with me. Listen, if you please. Yesterday you were in Paris . So was Dr. Keller. He and a companion took the train to Berne ; we watched him go aboard. We also watched you go aboard. Or, let me be precise. One of you was already aboard, and the other went around the wrong side of the train and got aboard, eh? I do not know which one. The descriptions were not so complete.”

Rick listened with mixed apprehension and astonishment. He had been so certain they were unobserved! But this man had the facts. He demanded, “How do you know all this?”

The big man smiled. “You are surprised, eh? You did very well, I must say. Only the fact that one of you came around the train the wrong way attracted our attention to you. I suppose you had been following Keller even before that, perhaps even from Copenhagen ?”

Rick asked bluntly, “Was one of your contacts injured in Berne ?”

Bushy eyebrows went up. “Injured? No.”

His voice had the ring of truth. Of course the big man might be lying, but Rick didn’t think so. He shot out, “Then you had a man knocked out at Dijon .”

The big man shook his head. “We had no man at Dijon . It was not necessary. We knew Keller was heading for Berne . Why should we have a man at Dijon ?”

“You had no one on the train?” Scotty demanded.

“No one. But I can see from your questions that someone did. Obviously Keller’s friends had additional men covering him. It must have been those you saw.”

Rick didn’t press the point. His mind raced. Blue Beret and Leather Cap must have been connected



somehow. If they were not part of this man's gang, that left only one possibility he knew of. He asked, "Did your man in Paris sell many pretzels?"

The big man chuckled. "Wait until I tell him he was spotted by two boys I He will be mortified. Frankly, I don't think he sold a single pretzel."

"Let me understand this," Rick requested. "The pretzel man saw Keller off on the train, and spotted us, then reported to you without following any farther?"

"Precisely."

"You received the report in Berne?"

"No. Enough of this. I will tell you exactly. I received the report in Zurich, and alerted my people in Berne. It was not necessary for them to follow Keller because we knew where he would be taken. This morning my people observed him leaving the apartment. They also observed you parked parallel on the next street, and watched as you followed when Keller left. Later, one of our people saw Keller's car coming this way, as expected, with you following some distance behind. Since we knew Keller was coming here, there was no need to trail him, you see? We were interested only in who else might be behind him."

"Who else is behind him?" Rick asked quickly.

"No one. A Peugeot started out, but did not finish the journey. I do not yet know why. Do you?"

Scotty snapped, "Just who are you, and what do you want?"

The big man waved a hand. "Who I am, personally, is of no importance. But I will tell you this. As you see from our knowledge of your movements, we are well organized and capable. Also, we are the members of a group with one aim in life, and that is to stamp out the menace of Communism. You probably have never heard of us, since we operate quietly. Our organization is called ACTION."

"What has Dr. Keller to do with Communism?" Rick demanded.

The question surprised the big man. "You have been following him, and you do not know?"

"We've been following him," Rick admitted. "Why, is none of your business. But I doubt very much that Dr. Keller is involved with Communism in any way."

The man's eyes narrowed. "I think you mean that. What would you think if I told you I have positive proof he is helping the Communists?"

"We'd have to see the proof," Scotty stated. "But you haven't said what you want with us."

"Very well. I will put the cards on the table. You are Americans, and it is well known that the great majority of Americans, all but a very small group, are strongly anti-Communist. I do not know your interest in this matter, but it is clear you have one. It may be you represent some branch of U.S. Intelligence. No matter. Since you trail Keller, you are not working with him; it may be that you are working against him. At most, you are neutral. I stopped you because I think we might profitably join forces."

“Join forces to do what?” Rick asked. He was uneasy because he couldn’t see where all the palaver was leading, and it was disturbing to realize they had been spotted.

“To act against the Communist menace. That is ACTION’S mission.” The man pointed toward the iron fence. “In there is a dangerous pocket of Communism. We will take action against it, but I have not yet decided how, or when.”

“Where’s the proof?” Scotty wanted to know.

“The proof is this: Keller’s companion, the man who drove him here, is the leading Soviet agent in Free Europe. His name is Kratov. You know as well as I that Keller reported to Kratov in Paris, and then accompanied him here. You also know that Keller obviously came of his own free will. He was not kidnapped.”

Rick thought it over. The big man’s statement about Kratov could be checked easily. They needed only to get to a phone and call the embassy in Berne. “What you say may be true,” he said. “But that still doesn’t prove Keller is helping the Communists. And the fact that he wasn’t kidnapped doesn’t mean he came of his own free will. They may have some other hold on him.”

“Possibly, but unlikely. We have found out that your Dr. Keller is here to meet one of the most important Communist scientists in the world.”

“Who?” Rick demanded.

“We are not certain. It could be any one of four men. Our information is not yet complete. We do know positively, however, that the meeting will take place here.”

“How do you know?” Scotty asked.

“The information came from one of our men in the Soviet Union. He is highly placed in the Communist Party there, and he informed us of Keller’s name, and the meeting place. He has not yet been able to obtain precise information about which of their scientific chiefs will be involved. You see, I am candid with you. I expect equal candor. Are you Communist sympathizers?”

Both boys exclaimed, “No!”

The big man smiled. “That was certainly an honest reaction, and what I expected. Now, who are you?”

“Perhaps we’ll give you our names when you give us yours,” Rick said evasively. The big man might be candid, but the boy wasn’t happy with the situation.

“I can find out easily enough,” the man warned.

“Then do it,” Scotty said tartly.

“I will. Now, will you join forces with me? Share information fully?”

Scotty looked at Rick, who shook his head. “No. We won’t join forces with anyone. We’re not really in this. In fact, we may be leaving Switzerland tomorrow or the next day.”

The big man contemplated them, his face expressionless. Finally he nodded. “As you will. But let me

warn you. You are either anti-Communist or pro-Communist. You cannot take a stand somewhere in the middle, not where ACTION is concerned. If you will not help us, do not dare to hinder us. There is only one way to eliminate the Communist menace, and that is to be as ruthless as the Communists are. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly," Rick said. He could sense the fanaticism behind the statement. "Now, may we pass?"

"Yes. If you change your mind and decide to cooperate, call this number in Zurich ." He scribbled a phone number on the page of a notebook and tore it out. "Just remember. You are for us, if only to the extent of not hindering, or you are against us-in which case you will have to take the consequences. They may not be pleasant. Is that clear?"

It was.

## CHAPTER XII

### Zurich

"Wheels within wheels," Rick said. He scowled at the road ahead. "We need some advice, and we need it badly."

Scotty agreed. "The best advice would be to go back to Copenhagen . We're up to our hips in some kind of mess, but I can't really see what kind."

"Maybe the embassy can shed some light.How much longer to Zurich?"

"You've got the map. How far is it?"

"Another ten miles, more or less."

The boys fell silent. The big man had released them readily enough. How much of what he had said could they believe?

Rick ticked off the points in his mind. He could easily believe there was an anti-Communist organization called ACTION, and that it had sympathizers and helpers all over Europe , and even behind the Iron Curtain. He could also believe that the man called Kratov, Felt Hat, was a Communist agent. The big man would not have made a statement like that if it could not be verified easily.

How about Keller's meeting a top Soviet scientist?

Rick puzzled over that point. There had been Soviet scientists at the meeting in Copenhagen . There were Soviet scientists at just about all international scientific meetings. Why would Keller have to go to a remote place in Switzerland when the meeting could have taken place in his hotel room at Copenhagen ?

Rick knew he was up against a dead end on that point. He didn't have enough information to guess intelligently. But the fact that a suspected woman agent had moved in with Keller's family lent credence

to the statement that Keller was involved with the Communists.

He reviewed the activities of the past two days. Apparently Pretzels, representing ACTION, had spotted him going down the wrong side of the train, and had kept an eye on him until he saw the two boys get together. Rick could see how that had been done. If Pretzels had followed him down the wrong side of the train, he could simply have looked through the carriage windows. The two boys had been watching the side on which passengers were boarding. They hadn't guarded the other side. He made a mental note not to get caught that way again. His motto would be to keep an eye out behind.

Pretzels had then phoned their descriptions to the big man, along with whatever information he had collected on Keller. If ACTION knew that Keller's meeting was to take place in the Alpine foothills, they would also know that a train to Berne was one way of reaching the rendezvous. In effect, Pretzels had just seen Keller off. Rick wondered why Keller had not simply changed planes at Orly and flown into Zurich. There could be two reasons, he decided. Either Kratov had wanted to take him by land as a simple way of seeing whether they were followed, or a direct flight would have gotten him there too early.

Scotty said, "You're pretty deep in thought, ol' buddy. Want to share the brainstorm?"

Rick did so, and added, "At least we know now who some of the groups are. There's JANIG-that's just us, unless Steve had some other troops we don't know about working on this-and there's ACTION. Of course there is also the Keller group. Maybe we ought to call that one the Keller Commies."

Scotty shot a glance at him. "Your tone of voice is bitter. Don't jump to conclusions, Rick. Maybe Keller is clean as a whistle. We still don't have enough information to make sense out of this. Now, who's the fourth group?"

Rick shrugged. "Blue Beret and Leather Cap. It's a hard-luck group, whatever it is. You knock out Blue Beret, then Leather Cap gets his skull fractured in an alley."

"We'll probably find out that the two lads who got clobbered are innocent members of CIA or military intelligence, or something like that."

The thought had occurred to Rick, too, but he had quickly pushed it aside. He didn't want to think that he and Scotty had been instrumental in knocking a U.S. agent out of the play. "Anyway," he said, "what would a U.S. agent be doing holding a gun on Keller and Kratov? If he wanted to arrest them, he'd call the local cops. U.S. Intelligence doesn't go in for kidnapping American citizens, does it?"

"That's the best argument against their being any of our boys," Scotty agreed. "So, what is Group X?"

"No answers," Rick said. "Not yet."

The Mercedes rolled through the outskirts of Zurich and was caught up in the heavy midtown traffic. They passed the railroad station and in-town airline terminal, then pulled up in front of a hotel called the Suisse, which was French for Swiss.

Rick looked through the entrance doors. "Not too fancy, but fancy enough. We can get a room, make a phone call to the embassy, then take a shower and eat. Okay?"

"You've read my mind. Here comes a flunky. Let's turn the car over to him. I don't feel like contending for a parking space while my stomach's empty."

The uniformed doorman accepted the keys to the car, then ushered the boys to the desk. They registered, turned over their passports so the hotel could register them with the police, and followed a bellhop to a room on the third floor.

It was a pleasant, high-ceilinged room with twin beds, modern furniture, and modern plumbing. The boys tossed their knapsacks on the beds, then Rick put in a call to the U.S. Embassy at Berne.

When the embassy operator answered, Rick said, "Mr. Owen Stack, please." After a frustrating ten minutes he hung up. "Nobody home," Rick reported to Scotty. "But nobody. No Stack, no military attache."

"We'll just sit tight until tomorrow," Scotty said. "Right now I'm going to have a shower. Toss you to see who gets the bathroom first."

Rick waved toward the door. "Help yourself."

An hour later, changed and refreshed, they emerged from the hotel to the street. Rick looked around him with interest. Except for the obvious age of some buildings, Zurich might have been one of the older sections of a large American city. Most of the buildings were multistory, but were not, for the most part, more than five or six stories high. Their ornamentation, however, was what Americans would call "Victorian," with a predominant German influence.

They found a restaurant and went in. They puzzled over the menu. A waiter who spoke English came to their rescue and helped them to order.

They talked little over dinner. As they finished their coffee, Scotty said softly, "There's a man across the room who is interested in us, but trying not to show it. He came in right after we did. The waiter tried to seat him near us, but he went over to where he could watch us from a distance."

"Which group does he belong to?" Rick asked whimsically. "JANIG? ACTION? The Keller Commies? Group X? Or the League of Indignant Old Ladies? Or maybe The Friends of Antonio Glockenspiel?"

"Who is this Antonio Glockenspiel?" Scotty asked. "A well-known member of SPICSO?"

Rick grinned. "I give up. What's SPICSO?"

"Spindrift Confusion Society."

"And we're the co-chairmen," Rick finished.

Scotty beckoned to the waiter. They paid the bill and rose to leave, noting that the watcher was also paying his bill.

On impulse, Rick walked over to him. "Why not join us?" he invited cordially. "It's so difficult trailing someone. If you come with us, it will be much easier."

*The man blinked. "Bitte, Mein Herr?"*

"Never mind," Rick said. He turned and followed Scotty, leaving the man staring after him. The boys went out to the street, turned right, and ducked into the nearest doorway. In a moment the man from the restaurant hurried past. They fell into step with him.

“We’re going to our hotel and to bed,” Rick said gently. “It is not necessary to follow us. Just go sit quietly in the lobby. We won’t be down until morning.”

There was a hint of a twinkle in the man’s eyes. He said again, “ Bitte, Mein *Hen*?”

Rick asked, “Is that the only German you know?”

The man shrugged. “No. I know a little more than that. Very well, Mr. Brant and Mr. Scott. I accept your word. You are going to bed.”

“Correct.” Rick made a guess. “ACTION has nothing to worry about. For your information, we will leave a call foreight o’clock tomorrow morning. You can join us for coffee, if you’re still on duty.”

“Thank you. I may do so.” The man turned and walked off.

The boys watched until he turned a corner, then reversed course and headed for their hotel. “So ACTION knows our names,” Scotty commented.

“Easy to find that out,” Rick said. “Once we registered at the hotel, any one of a dozen people could either have checked the register or sneaked a look at our passports. That’s why I guessed he was from ACTION. The big man on the mountain didn’t seem disturbed when we wouldn’t give him our names. He knew he could get them easily. Besides, we have no evidence either of the other groups knows we’re on the trail.”

They left a call with the porter foreight o’clock , asking that coffee and rolls be served at that time, then took the elevator to their rooms. Rick looked at his watch. It waseight o’clock . Twelve hours’ sleep would be just about right, he decided.

First, though, he wanted to send a note home, and one to his father inCopenhagen . Taking some paper and envelopes from the desk drawer, he got busy.

Scotty undressed, brushed his teeth,then walked to the windows, across which long heavy draperies had been drawn. The windows, which were French style, opened on a small balcony.

Scotty took a long time getting the windows adjusted. Rick’s sixth sense alerted him; he stopped writing and watched while Scotty stepped onto the small balcony. In a moment he was back in the room again, whistling a tune.

“I want plenty of fresh air tonight,” Scotty said. “Aren’t you through writing those notes, yet?”

“Almost,” Rick replied.

“Let’s see what you’ve written.”

Scotty came over to the desk, picked up the pen, and scribbled on a blank sheet of paper, “Bug behind drapes. Wire goes to edge of our balcony.Into balcony next room.”

Aloud, Scotty said, “Be sure to give the folks my best. I’m going to take a shower before going to bed.”

He got quickly into his clothes, then turned on all faucets in the bathroom. Rick sealed the note to his

mother into an envelope and addressed it, then joined Scotty. He knew what his pal was doing. The sound of rushing water would help to conceal any noises they made. Scotty was getting dressed so they could pay a visit next door.

Rick slid back the door bolt and unlocked the door.

When Scotty was ready, he opened the door cautiously and let it close behind them softly, leaving it unlocked.

They walked to the next door and Rick pointed to himself. Scotty nodded, and got into position for a rush. Rick knocked on the door.

In a moment a voice asked, “Who is it?” Rick put on his best French accent. “A message for Monsieur.” They heard the bolt slide back, then the key turn in the lock. The doorknob turned and a crack showed. Scotty slammed into the door like a battering ram and crashed in, with Rick close on his heels.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A Cliff to Hang From

The occupant of the room lay sprawled on his back, Scotty lifted the man quickly to his feet while Rick patted his clothes and took a snub-nosed pistol from a shoulder holster. The pistol was a Smith and Wesson, of American manufacture.

Scotty released the man, who was shaking his head groggily from the impact, and pushed him to a seat on the bed.

“We’re interested in knowing why you bugged our room,” Scotty said coldly. “Talk.”

The man was young. He looked like an American. His nose was bleeding, and swelling rapidly. Apparently it had caught the full weight of the impact. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and held it to his nose.

“I’m not a betting man,” he said, “or I’d put money on this. You two are Rick Brant and Don Scott.”

“You’d win,” Rick said. “And who are you?”

The man sighed. “I’m a professional idiot. Name of Walter Benson. I’m the Assistant Military Attache at the American Embassy, in Berne.”

Rick and Scotty stared in astonishment.

“I tried to call you this afternoon,” Rick said. “If you’re really the Assistant Military Attache, that is.”

The man went to his coat and reached into a pocket. Rick, taking no chances, covered him with his own automatic. But the man only took out a card case and handed each of the boys cards. They read, “Major

Walter Benson, USA, Assistant Military Attache, Embassy of the United States of America, Berne."

"Then why did you bug our room?" Scotty demanded.

Benson sighed again. "Sit down, please. Would you care for a drink? They have coke in this hotel."

"I'll have a coke, please," Rick said, and watched as Benson went to the phone and ordered cokes for all three of them. Then he took a seat on the bed again.

"I got into Zurich late this afternoon and called one of my contacts here. He said two strangers had checked in at the Suisse Hotel, Room 308, and that a clerk who is a member of ACTION had immediately notified his headquarters of their arrival. My man didn't get your names, but since ACTION was interested, I was, too."

"Then there really is an outfit called ACTION," Rick said.

"You bet. My man is one of the janitors here. He found out from the housekeeper that 310 was empty, and let me know. So I asked for it when I checked in. Said I'd had it before and liked it. The housekeeper also said the two in 308 has gone out. Well, as the clerk who's with ACTION was on duty, I could not risk trying to find out who you two were. So, as a precautionary measure, I started to bug your room, working from the balcony. You came in before I had a chance to hide the bug and the wires and I had to skip. Then in you barged. The moment I saw you, I knew you must be Brant and Scott. That's it."

"What qualified you as a professional idiot?" Scotty asked.

"Getting caught in the act of bugging your room. And on top of that, letting myself be taken in by that old gimmick-'A message for Monsieur'-then get clobbered!" He touched his nose tenderly. "How much more of an idiot can you be!" He was obviously chagrined and very angry with himself.

Rick grinned sympathetically. "It can happen to anyone-and it has happened. Even some of the old pros don't make all the right moves all of the time, do they?"

The young major brightened at Rick's kindness. "Well, I'd better start making the right move right now. May I see your passports?"

"We can show you our passports tomorrow," Rick said. "We turned them in for police registration, of course. Have you any other identification? Anyone can carry a printed card."

"Sure." Benson produced his Army I.D. card, complete with photo. "How's that?"

"Good enough," Scotty said. "Now, have you any instructions for us?"

Benson shook his head. "The only word I have is to keep an eye out for you and lend a hand if necessary. You're supposed to be following a Dr. Keller, and your presence here means he must be nearby. Do you need money?"

"No, we have plenty," Rick answered. "What we need is information."

"Such as?"



“What is ACTION?”

The young major held up his hand. “Hold it until we get the cokes. I hear the rattle of glassware.”

There was a knock on the door, and he opened it to admit a waiter with glasses, a bucket of ice, and three cokes. When they were all served with drinks, Benson answered the question.

“ACTION is a militant anti-Communist group headed by a committee of ten, composed of refugees from behind the Iron Curtain. Their philosophy is that fire must be fought with fire. They’re extreme fanatics. Murder means nothing to them. They would even kill the innocent to get the guilty. If Communism is the extreme left, politically speaking, ACTION is the extreme right. In other words, they’re about equivalent to Nazis or Fascists.”

“Do they have many members?” Scotty asked.

“We don’t know the exact number, but it’s probably close to five or ten thousand throughout Europe. They also have members still behind the Iron Curtain.”

“How do they operate?” Rick wanted to know.

“Mostly by murder. Their theory is that if the chief Communists are picked off, the rank and file will dissolve. Quite a few unexplained disappearances of Communist leaders have been traced to ACTION.”

Rick didn’t like the sound of it, and said so. He added, “If ACTION is in the picture, that means Keller is in danger.”

“Very likely,” Benson agreed.

“Can’t we do something about it?” Scotty demanded.

“I don’t know what. Keller hasn’t complained about being held or anything, apparently. The embassy has no official knowledge of his presence here, and no basis for action. But look, you haven’t told me what you know. First of all, how do you know about ACTION?”

“We’d better start at the beginning,” Rick said, and launched into a concise report of their activities. Benson listened with interest. Scotty elaborated now and then.

When the boys had finished, Benson looked at them in frank admiration. “I can see now why JANIG put you on the job. All right, here’s what I can tell from your story. First of all, the big man you met, who represented ACTION, is undoubtedly one of the leaders, by the name of Anton Zaretsky. He escaped from Bulgaria and became one of the founders of ACTION. He recognized Kratov, and your description of the man you call Felt Hat fits perfectly. Georgei Andreyev Kratov is a Russian. He poses as a member of a Soviet trade mission to the Common Market, but actually he is one of the leading Soviet agents in Europe. He operates relatively openly, and the European intelligence community lets him alone for that reason. They keep an eye on him, and use his contacts to lead them to others.”

“Any idea who Group X might be?” Rick inquired.

Benson shook his head. “None at all. If we knew why Keller had come here, it might give us a lead. Maybe Zaretsky was right, and he is here to meet with an important Soviet scientist. ACTION has very good sources, and they’re apt to know about such things.”

Scotty asked, "What brought you to Zurich?"

"Some completely unrelated business. I just checked in with my contact routinely, and ended up on the floor."

Rick grinned sympathetically. The young major was obviously still chagrined. "What do you want us to do now?"

Benson didn't know. "I'd better go back to Berne and ask Washington for instructions. Do you want to send a message to JANIG?"

"I think we'd better," Rick said. "Will you make a report?"

"Yes. I can include yours."

Rick quickly wrote a brief report to Steve Ames, stating that they had trailed Keller to a hideout in the foothills near Zurich and that two additional groups were interested in Keller's activities, one group identified as ACTION. He ended with a request for further instructions. He showed the message to Scotty, then folded it and handed it to Benson.

"When will you go back to Berne?"

"Right now. I'll call you the moment I have any instructions from Washington." Benson wrote numbers on a piece of paper. "Here are phone numbers where I can be reached if you need me. The top one is the embassy. The next is my apartment. The third is my secretary's home phone. You can leave a message there if I'm not at the other two."

They shook hands all around, and the boys returned to their room. Within a few minutes, they were in bed. Benson appeared on the balcony long enough to retrieve his microphone, waved at them, and disappeared. Scotty, as an afterthought, got up and locked the windows. "We'll depend on the air conditioning," he said. "Good night."

"Good night," Rick murmured. He turned over, got his pillow into the proper position, and composed himself for sleep.

Refreshed after a good night's sleep, the boys were ready for action by eight thirty the next morning. They had discussed plans at breakfast. Somehow, they had to get to the house where Keller had gone, to obtain more information about the American surgeon's mysterious actions.

A study of the map convinced them that there was only the single road; they knew ACTION was guarding it. But there might be another way—if they could find it.

Scotty drove, and led any would-be pursuer a winding trail through Zurich. When he was sure that anyone who might be on their tail was lost, he turned in the direction of the airport while Rick navigated by street signs and the map.

The Zurich airport was in a valley so long and wide it was more like a plain. The airport building was modern and attractive, but it held no interest for them. They wanted a private flying service. Finally they found one, in a hangar next to the long row of commercial aircraft facilities.

Scotty parked and the boys walked onto the concrete apron. There were planes in sight from all over the world. Naturally, Swiss Air with its distinctive white cross on a red field-the reverse of the famous Red Cross flag-dominated. Rick remembered from somewhere that the Red Cross flag was taken from the Swiss flag, and the colors reversed.

There were also planes carrying the markings of England, France, Italy, Spain, Israel, the United Arab Republic, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Germany, the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Nigeria, Greece, Eire, and Holland. Scotty pointed to a huge turboprop marked with Cyrillic letters, and carrying the emblem of Aeroflot, the official Soviet airline. It was a reminder that they were on neutral territory.

In a small office in the hangar they found one of the owners of the private flying service. He shook his head when they asked about renting a plane.

“*Nein*. It is against the law. You may enter Switzerland in a private plane, but we cannot rent one to you here.”

Crestfallen, Rick looked at Scotty. Their plan had been to rent a plane and take a look at Keller’s hideout from the air.

“Can you take us for a sightseeing trip?” Scotty asked.

“Ja. That I can do. We are a charter service also. Where do you wish to go?”

“We thought a look at the foothills of the Alps would be interesting,” Rick said. He put his road map out on the table. “Yesterday we drove around here, and thought it would be fun to see the area from the air.”

“Ja. It looks so different. When do you wish to go?”

“Now,” Scotty said.

“Ja. Wait, please.”

The operator summoned a pilot and conversed with him briefly, and in a moment a light plane was rolled out of the hangar to the concrete ramp. The boys inspected it with interest. It was of French make, and it looked clean and fast. It could carry four, including the pilot.

Rick compared it with his own Sky Wagon, of course, and found that it did not suffer by comparison. Since he had a camera with him, a 35-millimeter with an excellent lens, the boys agreed that he should ride alongside the pilot.

The pilot was introduced as Mr. Desales. He shook hands, consulted Rick’s map, and nodded. “I know the area. It is-what is the word-scenery?”

“Scenic,” Scotty offered.

“Is so. We go now?”

Within a few moments they were buckled in and rolling to take-off position. They had to get in line behind Scandinavian, BOAC, and KLM jets. One by one the bigger planes roared down the runway and were gone; then there was a wait while an Alitalia jet swooped in for a landing. Finally they rolled down the runway and took off.

Rick grinned at Scotty. The runway below was for the biggest jets. Their little plane was already a thousand feet up, and still over the runway. Then the pilot banked to a new course, and they concentrated on the scenery below.

The pilot flew out of Zurich toward the area they wanted, and in a short time, they picked up a road below. Comparison with landmarks told Rick it was the one they had traveled yesterday. He kept his eyes open, and soon picked up the turn Keller had taken.

The road ran along a gradually ascending shelf that projected from a razorback ridge. At its highest point, the shelf was about a third of the way up the mountain. Rick saw the spot where the paved road ended, and the dirt road leading to the gate. Then, among the trees at the shelf's end, he saw a Swiss chalet, looking like something out of a travel guide. That was Keller's hideaway.

He turned to the pilot. "Can we come back this way? I want to take a picture of that chalet."

"Certainly."

They flew on, over terrain that gradually increased in ruggedness, over razorback ridges to which snow clung, and over lakes like jewels among settings of pine and birch. It was breathtaking scenery.

After an hour of swooping among peaks and over hidden valleys, the pilot turned on the homeward course. "Be ready," he suggested.

Rick was. The moment the chalet came into view he started snapping pictures. The pilot obligingly turned in close to the cliff, and only a few hundred feet above it. Rick shot pictures as fast as he could throw the film advance lever.

There was a car hidden among the trees back from the viewing area at the end of the pavement. Rick suspected it was Anton Zarestky, of ACTION, keeping an eye on the comings and goings of visitors to the chalet.

"Get some good ones?" Scotty asked over Rick's shoulder.

Rick turned. "Pretty picturesque place, don't you think? I got a few that should turn out well."

An hour later the film was in the hands of a processor. The boys sat in a nearby cafe and drank coffee and ate Swiss pastries until they were near to bursting. Rick kept an eye on his watch. The man had promised blowups of the clearest photos in an hour if they would accept wet prints. They had assured him that they wanted the pictures as soon as possible, wet or dry.

The photographer was as good as his word. The boys paid him, adding a substantial tip for the speedy service, then hurried to the hotel with the still-damp pictures. While Scotty took the precaution of checking the room for bugs-in case someone else had decided to wire the place-Rick spread the photos on a towel on the bed.

They were clear and sharp. He could see the Mercedes-Benz parked next to the chalet, and the figure of a man on the porch under the low eaves. In another photo, he examined the sheer rocky wall that rose above the chalet to the razor ridge high above -a good two thousand feet, he estimated.

Scotty pored over the photos with him. They found the best one of the cliff on which the chalet rested,

and examined it with interest. It was rough, and steep, although not as steep as the upward thrust of the cliff above the shelf.

Their eyes met.

“It could be climbed,” Scotty said.

“By night?” Rick asked.

“Partly. We’d have to start during the daylight hours. Once we got above the first hundred feet, we’d be invisible from the road below, and from either side. Also, there’s a slight overhang at the top; we’d be invisible from above, until the last few minutes.”

Rick studied the ascent and shivered. It could be climbed, but it wouldn’t be easy.

“Isn’t there any other way?” he asked.

Scotty shrugged. “I don’t see any. I’d hate to come down from the ridge above. Getting across that ridge would be murder, even by daylight. We can’t get in through the gate, and you can bet the fence is guarded at all times. The cliff is the only really vulnerable spot.”

Rick was nothing if not persistent when on a case. “Well,” he said finally, “I’ve been hearing the term ‘cliff hanger’ for wild adventures all my life. Now it looks as though we’re going to hang on a cliff of our very own.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### High Rise

Rick slowed the Mercedes as the road curved sharply through a pass between two ridges. He asked, “Do you suppose we should have waited for a call from Benson?”

“There were no messages when we got back to the hotel and no calls while we were there,” Scotty pointed out. “I doubt he’s heard from Washington.”

The boys had decided against waiting. They were certain the game, whatever it was, would be played to a finish very soon. If they were to find out what Keller was doing, it had to be now.

“Benson isn’t in a position to be of much help,” Rick observed. “He knew about Kratov and ACTION, but he didn’t know a thing about how Keller was involved.”

The roadster sped past a narrow opening in the rock wall. Rick put on the brakes, stopped, and backed up. He saw that the opening was the entrance to a rock pit, and that the road leading in was clear, then he backed the Mercedes in until it was hidden from an approaching car. “We’ll wait a bit and see if anyone is following,” he explained, and cut the motor.

Scotty put his Megabuck unit earphone in place. "Let's see if there are any interesting noises from the chalet."

The boys had listened off and on, but except for an occasional unidentifiable sound and the murmur of a distant voice all seemed quiet. At least the sedan with the Megabuck unit hadn't started, or gone anywhere.

No cars passed the opening. Apparently no one was tailing them. "Wonder what our ACTION buddy is doing?" Rick mused. "He must be pretty upset about losing us twice in one day."

The follower they had spotted in the restaurant had picked them up again shortly after their return from the airport. He had watched while they had lunch, then trailed them to the hotel. There, the boys had separated. Rick, trying hard to act suspiciously, had drawn the man away from Scotty. Scotty had followed a devious route through a department store, another hotel, and a restaurant with multiple doors. When certain he was not being followed, he had gone to a sports store and purchased climbing boots, hammers and pitons, safety belts, ropes, and other gear.

A taxi had driven him directly into the garage where the Mercedes was parked. Scotty put the climbing gear into the trunk, then went to the room to wait for Rick. After Rick's arrival, the two had again taken a devious route and had lost the ACTION follower. Then they got the car out and headed in a direction opposite to that of the road to the chalet.

Rick had been certain no one was following them. He took a long, roundabout route, following the map northeast to the city of Winterthur, then to the town of Wil and south to Biitschwil. From there his route led west again, through towns with the names of Mosnang and Miihlriiti, up a fantastically steep and curving road, through a mountain pass where snowbanks were piled on the roadsides, and then downhill again on a road that would have made an inch-worm dizzy.

The rock pit where Rick had stopped was only a short distance from the chalet. They had timed the trip to arrive in the late afternoon.

"Guess all's clear," Rick said, and started the motor. He poked the Mercedes' nose out cautiously, then headed for the stretch of road below the cliff on which the chalet was located.

The moment the cliff came into sight Scotty had the glasses on it, covering every visible inch. The car dipped downward into the valley, and Rick drew to a stop under the cliff itself. On the side of the road opposite the cliff stood a thick patch of pine trees. Rick's eyes searched for an opening. He found one where, at one time, loggers had evidently hauled out lumber. He drove into the opening, the Mercedes bouncing somewhat over the rough surface. Rick kept going until he found a glade among the pines into which he could back.

"Stand by. I'm going to do a little reconnaissance," Scotty said. "You might get the gear out of the trunk."

"Will do." Rick turned off the motor and got out and stretched. He saw that the twists and turns in the road had put a heavy screen of pines between the car and the passers-by. He could see nothing in any direction except the deep green of pine needles and the brown of trunks and the carpet of needles underfoot.

Satisfied with the spot he had chosen, he got the gear out of the trunk. He put on his new climbing boots and safety belt, with hammer suspended from its loops. He was inspecting the pitons, tempered steel

spikes for hammering into the rock, when Scotty appeared silently through the trees.

“All’s quiet,” Scotty reported. “Not a sign of life in any direction, including up.”

“Don’t you suppose the people in the house guard the cliff?” Rick asked. He wasn’t at all sure they might not complete the climb only to walk into the hands of guards.

Scotty shrugged. “Maybe, but probably not very carefully. That climb is no cinch. I doubt that they expect visitors to come that way.”

“Guess you’re right,” Rick agreed. “Well, let’s get going.”

Rick had found an old towel in the car trunk, which had been used for wiping grease. He cut it into strips and handed a couple of them to Scotty. “Better pad your hammer head. If we have to drive in any pitons, we don’t want the hammer to sound an alarm.”

They completed their preparations: slinging coiled ropes from their belts, checking the rope snaps and belt loops, and finally suspending full canteens in place after taking a small swig.

Rick’s heart was beating faster than usual. He had never admitted it, even to Scotty, but high places bothered him. He knew it wasn’t an unusual reaction, and it had nothing to do with cowardice. But he was determined to overcome it, or keep going in spite of it. There had been other adventures in which he and Scotty had climbed, and he had managed. This time would be all right, too. Just the same, he felt his nerves twitch in anticipation. “Let’s go,” he said.

At the edge of the pines, the boys stretched out at full length and studied the cliff, comparing notes on various features. Step by step, they plotted the route to a point where the inward curve of the cliff blocked the terrain from sight. Beyond that point it would be “ad lib,” as Rick put it. Then, with a final glance in both directions, they trotted across the road to the base of the cliff.

Rick took the lead. He snapped one end of the safety line to his belt and handed Scotty the other. Then, roped together, they began the ascent. The start was easy because centuries of falling rock had made a slope at the base of the cliff; but above the slope, the way grew steeper.

Soon they were climbing almost vertically. The rock face was seamed and irregular, and Rick had little difficulty in finding handholds. He kept his eyes resolutely upward, knowing that a glance downward might mean vertigo and leave him clinging to the rock half paralyzed with fear.

About one hundred and fifty feet above the initial slope, he found a small shelf that would provide a resting place. He called to Scotty to join him, and sat down. Now, with a firm ledge under him, he dared a look down. His stomach turned over and he shrank back as far as he could on the shelf. He kept his eyes focused on the distance after that, and saw that the sun was about to drop behind the peaks far away.

Scotty joined him on the shelf and sat resting while he scanned the area with binoculars; then he leaned out and looked down at the route they had ascended. Rick watched him, wondering if his pal had any nerves at all. If so, he had never seen a sign of them.

“Not bad so far,” Scotty commented. “It will get harder in another fifty feet, where the cliff slants outward.”

“We’ll find a way,” Rick said. They fell silent, enjoying the brief respite.

“We’d better get moving,” Scotty suggested finally. “There’s a long twilight in the mountains, but we have a long way to go, too.”

“Okay.” Rick stood up and looked upward. He spotted a handhold and a foothold and went up. The next fifty feet were not bad, although once he had to traverse sideways for twenty feet before he found a route. But then they reached the start of the overhang.

There was no way to clamp himself against the wall where the cliff tilted outward. Rick decided it was time to use the pitons. Holding to an outcropping of rock with one hand, he took a spike from his belt and poked it into a crack. Then, with the same hand, he took his padded hammer and drove it in. He had to be careful not to swing so hard that he loosened his grip. Then, taking their shortest rope, he secured it to the piton and used it as a safety line while he drove in another one slightly higher and to the left. Step by step, piton by piton, they made their way upward. It was hard, wearing work, and Rick’s arms ached. He kept on doggedly, even when the muscles in his right arm burned like fire from the constant swinging of the heavy hammer.

At last they rounded the upper end of the outward incline. Rick drove four more pitons, secured his rope to the last one, and lay back against the rock with his foot looped into the safety line to support his weight. Scotty came up the rope and lay alongside.

“That’s the worst of it,” Scotty said. “Easy going from here on.”

Rick grinned, but there was little humor in it. “Easy for what? A mountain goat?”

Scotty looked at him with concern. “Too tired to continue?”

“Nope. But I don’t think it’s exactly easy from here on.”

“Compared to that last stretch it is. It will be even easier than the stretch above the lowest slope, because the wall tilts inward more. We won’t have any problems until we get to the overhang at the top, and that can’t be more than twenty feet of hard climbing.”

“I hope you’re right,” Rick said.

“Okay. I’ll take the lead,” Scotty offered.

Scotty hadn’t exaggerated. The climb was easier. Or perhaps it was that Scotty was more skillful in finding holds. Rick followed where his pal led, pleased with the speed they were making.

The twilight faded slowly. Actually, the sun was not yet below the true horizon; it had only dropped behind the peaks. The sky was still light. Visibility was quite good.

They reached a vertical section. Scotty stopped long enough to drive a piton for a handhold, then continued climbing upward. He took hold of an outcropping and tested it, but as he transferred his full weight to it, the wall cracked and the rock gave way in his hand.

Rick heard his pal’s gasp and reacted instantly, belaying his safety line around the piton and taking up slack as Scotty fell. Rick grabbed for Scotty as he slid past and managed to hold long enough to take up all slack and throw a few half hitches over the spike. He asked hoarsely, “Are you all right?”



“One skinned knee and an attack of heart failure,” Scotty gasped. “Just let me hang here for a few minutes.”

“A good thing you drove this piton,” Rick said feelingly.

“Funny,” Scotty replied in a whisper. “I drove it because I knew you were getting tired and I wanted to give you something solid to hang onto.” He reached upward on the safety line and pulled himself up again. “Have to keep going,” he said.

“I’ll take the lead,” Rick stated. “You follow for a change. Come up with me and stand on the piton while I move ahead. I’m going to drive some more as we go.”

“Okay. But make sure your hammer is muffled. We’d better keep voices down, too. We’re getting within earshot.”

The way grew easier once more. It was getting darker rapidly now. This time it was true darkness, not just the sun dropping behind the peaks and leaving the cliff in shadow. Rick looked upward and estimated that they had another one hundred feet to go before they reached the final overhang. He speeded up as much as his aching muscles would allow, and made good progress. More and more, however, he depended on pitons. He could have found handholds, but he doubted his judgment in selecting them, knowing that much of the grip was gone from his fingers. Once he had to wait until Scotty joined him, to get more pitons from his buddy. He had used up his own supply.

Rick estimated that darkness would overtake them just as they reached the bottom of the final overhang. That wasn’t good, he thought. An outward slope was no cinch under the best of circumstances. Yet, they had known it would be like this. They couldn’t very well arrive at the top of the cliff in daylight.

“Just one bad move,” he thought, “and it will be curtains for us.” He had started, many feet below, to double loop his safety line over each piton or projection. There was nothing he could do but continue. Below him, he knew, Scotty had the safety line secured, too. Scotty moved only when Rick was in good position, safety line fixed securely. When Rick moved, Scotty stayed still, line held firm against a possible accident.

Darkness fell a few minutes before they reached the final overhang. Progress slowed to a few inches a minute. Rick felt for handholds now, and drove pitons only a foot or two apart. Once he tied himself in place and rewrapped his hammer, because the cloth over the hammer face had worn through.

Rick knew by touch when he had reached the overhang. He secured himself to the last piton, then tugged at the rope in a signal for Scotty to follow.

Scotty climbed and joined him. Cautiously placing his lips close to Rick’s ear, he whispered, “I’ll take the lead. You stay here and keep the safety line secured. I’ll go over the top alone and find something to hitch the line to.”

Rick whispered back, “Be careful. I’m afraid they’ll hear us driving pitons. He secured his end of the safety line to the piton, then took up the slack and made a couple of turns over the spike. Getting a good grip, he held up a hand and pressed Scotty against the wall.

The boy groped upward and found a crack at maximum reach. He drove a piton, secured his line to it, and pulled himself up.

Rick heard the tap of Scotty's hammer as his pal drove another piton into place. It was a muffled thud, not too loud, probably not audible more than a few feet. A short time later Rick heard the tap of the hammer again, then a scraping sound. The scraping continued for a few minutes, then there was silence. But Scotty was still moving, he knew; the line in Rick's hands continued to pay out. Then the line stopped . . . then started again . . . stopped . . . and jerked, in the signal to ascend.

Rick found strength to brace his feet against the wall and go up hand over hand, walking up the wall in the approved manner. He rounded the bulge of the overhang, then used the safety line to pull himself along on his stomach until he felt Scotty's hand on his shoulder.

Scotty's voice in his ear was faint. "Welcome to the top, ol' buddy. Now flop down and let's rest for a few weeks."

Rick said fervently, "I hear you talking!"

## CHAPTER XV

### The Chalet

Scotty had stopped behind a screen of spruce. Rick stretched out flat on his back, secure for the moment in the knowledge that they could not be seen from the chalet, or even by any guard who might pass nearby.

The climb was over. Rick knew they had been lucky. He reflected that the two of them could probably win a joint prize for the most foolhardy pair in recent history. Nowhere in their instructions from Steve were any orders, nor was even permission given, to risk their lives in obtaining information.

He closed his eyes, feeling the warmth of Scotty, stretched out beside him. Rick drifted off into a troubled sleep.

He awoke from a dream of falling endlessly, every nerve in his body tingling. As he opened his eyes and looked up at the shadowed branches, he suddenly realized the meaning of the dream. They had climbed the cliff, but the job was only half done. The climb down still remained.

Scotty whispered in his ear. "Just a thought. Suppose there had been dogs here?"

Rick shuddered. "We'd better start looking," he whispered back. "Remember that if we're not at least partway down the cliff and under the overhang by sunrise, we'll be spotted for sure."

"Let's go," Scotty answered. He turned on his stomach and crawled through the small stand of spruce. Rick followed, then drew parallel with Scotty as the boys came to a stop. They were at the edge of the spruce, looking out on the chalet.

It was a low building, only one story high, with the low roof and long overhanging eaves of typical Swiss mountain construction. It appeared to be of weathered wood. A porch, well-protected by the

overhanging eaves, stretched along the full length of the front of the chalet. Several windows, which at the moment were lighted, looked out upon the porch. Below the porch was a thick growth of shrubbery.

The shrubbery would give some cover once they reached the chalet, but they would have to cross fifty yards of grass before reaching it. To the left of the chalet Rick could see the gleam of starlight on two cars. He couldn't make out details, but he thought one was the Mercedes-Benz sedan carrying the Megabuck unit. Beyond the cars, pine woods began. Rick knew the woods continued right up to the fence. There would most certainly be guards in the woods. He hoped the guards kept their attention focused on the most probable point of attack-the fence itself.

"Here we go," Scotty whispered. He rose to a crouch, then keeping low, he covered the distance to the house like a fast-moving shadow. Rick waited until he saw Scotty's arm lift, then he followed, trying to keep low. He ran on tiptoe over the springy turf and joined Scotty in the shrubbery below the porch.

They waited while long moments ticked away, but there was no sign of alarm or pursuit. No one had observed their coming. Moving with extreme caution, they stood up, heads and shoulders emerging from the shrubbery.

Rick shook his head in disappointment. The porch was too high. The lighted windows were above their heads. There was nothing else to do, but to go up on the porch. First, though, they ought to try to find a vantage point that was less exposed.

"Let's make a circuit of the house," he whispered to Scotty.

"Okay. But let's separate. I'll go left and you go right. Keep going until we meet."

Rick squeezed his arm in acknowledgment. Scotty stepped out of the shrubbery, and keeping low, he crossed the open space in front of the porch steps, then vanished into the shrubbery again. Rick turned right, and got down on hands and knees. He crawled through the tunnel formed by the arching shrubbery branches overhead-shrubbery to his right and the porch foundation to his left. The tunnel smelt of cultivated earth.

He reached the end of the porch and turned left around the corner of the chalet. The ground on the side of the chalet was clear of shrubbery. He stood upright and held perfectly still while his eyes probed the darkness around him. The pulse throbbed in his temple and he thought he could hear his own heart beat in the silence.

There was movement inside the house, more sensed than heard. The chalet was well insulated from the weather, naturally, and that meant it was unusually soundproof-or so he reasoned. He could see lighted windows in the side of the chalet, but they were above eye level. He guessed the windows were placed high to keep them clear of the snow in winter. But no matter what the reason, they were too high for him to see into.

If he could get some distance from the house he might be able to look in, he decided. Off to his right was the very end of the cliffs; but it was screened by low trees, probably more spruce. Between him and the trees was open ground.

Looking down the side of the house he could make out some sort of small building in the rear. Beyond the outbuilding the cliff rose almost sheer into the sky. There was no one in sight in any direction. Rick turned away from the house, and keeping out of the light from the windows, he ran swiftly to the trees.

Once in the shelter of the trees, he moved until he could see through the windows. He clenched his fists in disappointment. He couldn't see much. The room nearest the front appeared to be a bedroom. It was wallpapered like a bedroom, he thought, and he could see a big wardrobe closet. The room nearest the back was more interesting. For one thing, the illumination was unusually bright, and the walls were white and unpapered. Rick could see a tall cabinet of white enameled steel, and a rod of chrome that thrust up at an odd angle, and that was all.

No one appeared in either of the rooms. He waited for perhaps three minutes, then decided he had to start moving again. He moved away from the revealing light toward the back of the house, then with a final look to be sure no one was in sight, he ran to the side wall again and moved directly under the brightly lighted window.

The sill was about a foot over his head. He reached up and felt for a grip, but the sill was flat and smooth. His fingers would have to take his weight. He gave a little spring and chinned himself on the sill . . . and looked into an operating room!

For a moment he held on, then had to drop to the ground again. He leaned against the wall. An operating room! There was an operating table, a sterilizer, tanks of gas that probably were anesthetic and oxygen, and a huge light that cast a brilliant white glow over everything.

Keller was a surgeon. But what was the connection between Keller and an operating room high in the Alps ?

It was time he joined Scotty. Rick moved to the rear corner of the chalet and looked around cautiously. About midway down the length of the chalet, light was coming from some opening, but he couldn't tell if it was a door or window.

He could see the outlying building a bit more clearly now. It looked like a shed, probably for tools. Against one wall was firewood, a cord or more of logs set with mathematical precision in a high stack. Behind the house and shed was the sheer wall of the upper cliff.

Rick rounded the corner of the chalet and moved down its length toward the light. He stifled a gasp as a figure rose from the ground and faced him. In the same instant he knew it was Scotty.

The dark-haired boy leaned close. "Nothing but bedrooms on the other end. The light is the kitchen door. There's a cook in there working at a counter. Everyone must be in front."

"What do we do now?" Rick whispered, and was afraid that he knew.

"We'll have to get up on the porch."

It was the answer Rick expected. He turned without a word and led the way back. Under the operating-room window, he paused and whispered into Scotty's ear.

"That's an operating room overhead, fully equipped."

"I hope the operations in there were more successful than the one we're on," Scotty whispered back.

Rick grinned. Scotty was so right!

The boys moved swiftly to the corner of the chalet and crawled into the shrubby tunnel, not stopping

until they reached the porch steps. They lifted their heads above the shrubbery cautiously, searching for any sign of life. There was none.

Scotty stood up to his full height, gripped the porch rail and tested it, then drew himself up. He stepped over the rail onto the porch. Rick joined him, his pulse racing.

The boys moved sideways until they were in a position to see into the room. Rick saw that it was a large room, dominated by a stone fireplace on the back wall. In front of the fireplace, in which a small fire was burning, was a huge U-shaped couch on which two men reclined, holding glasses in their hands. Leaning against the mantle beside the fireplace was Dr. Harold Keller.

As the boys watched, a fourth man and a very attractive young woman of about twenty-five came from the direction of the room Rick had identified as the kitchen. They were carrying trays, but the boys did not think they were servants. The man with the young woman, who appeared to be in his thirties, was dressed in slacks and a tweed sports coat with open collar.

Rick studied the group. One of the men on the couch was Kratov, the Soviet agent. The other man, whom they had never seen before, was bald except for a fringe of hair shaped like a horseshoe.

The boys could hear the murmur of voices from inside, but they could not make out the words. Rick tiptoed to the wall between the window on the right and the door and put his ear against the wall.

Scotty joined him, head bent to listen.

It was frustrating, to put it mildly. Now and then Rick could make out a word, sometimes in English, and sometimes in German. He couldn't understand the German, of course, but he recognized the language. Then the young woman's voice came through clearly. Because of its higher pitch, the words were not difficult to make out. She spoke in English.

"I am so anxious to see this marvelous ruby ray."

The answer was inaudible.

The girl again: "We have all heard much of the laser, of course. Is it true it may be used as a death ray?"

Keller replied, almost inaudibly. Rick made out a word or two: "... spec ... vast power ... much ...". He strained to hear, his entire attention focused on the conversation within. Scotty was straining equally hard. This was important! A conversation about death rays would interest Steve Ames, even though Rick knew converting a laser to a death ray was impossible at the present stage of development.

An unmuffled, too clear voice snapped out a command in German-and the voice was from the porch steps!

The boys whirled, and faced the muzzle of an automatic shotgun!

## CHAPTER XVI

# Dr. Keller Explains

Four hands shot high in the air. The shotgun wielder was not within reach, and from the expression on his face, it was clear he would not hesitate to use the weapon.

He grated out a command in German.

“We only speak English,” Rick said, trying to suppress the quaver in his voice.

“ Ja. Place hands on tops of heads. Turn and face the door.”

The boys did so. Rick was sick with chagrin. One of them should have kept guard, but they had wanted so desperately to hear the conversation within. . . .

The shotgun carrier walked up on the porch and tapped with one hand on a window. The boys kept eyes straight ahead on the door.

The man in the tweed jacket opened it, and looked at them in surprise. The shotgun carrier spoke over their shoulders, in French. To the boys, he said, “In you go. Be careful. I do not wish to shoot, but I will if you make a false move.”

Tweed Jacket spoke in German to the group around the fireplace. They were all standing as the boys entered, their guard behind them.

The shotgun carrier spoke briefly in French, and the man with the bald head stepped forward and addressed the boys in English.

“You were listening on the porch? How did you get here?”

Neither boy answered. Rick’s eyes sought Keller’s face. The American doctor was watching with interest.

The bald-headed man made a gesture of impatience. “I cannot believe you came over the fence. The alarm is in working order and three men are patrolling at all times. Therefore, you must have come down from above, or up from below. I should say the latter.”

“We climbed up from the road,” Rick said. There was nothing to gain by remaining still.

The bald-headed man shook his head. “An act of desperation. It is such a difficult climb we do not even bother to guard it. Why would two boys be so desperate as to make such a climb?”

Rick shrugged.

The bald man asked the shotgun carrier, “Are they armed?”

“I have not yet checked. Kurt, will you come around behind them? You two will stand quiet. We search you. Keep your hands on top of heads.”

The man who had helped the girl carry trays went around behind them. In a moment Rick felt his clothes briskly patted, with special attention given to his belt, underarms, thighs, and boot tops. His wallet was

lifted from his buttoned hip pocket and tossed to the bald man.

Scotty received similar treatment. A hand patted Rick's breast pocket, unbuttoned the flap, and extracted his passport, which was also tossed to the bald man, along with Scotty's.

The bald man beckoned to them. "Come and sit down in front of the fire. You may take your hands down now, but keep them still." He opened the passports and compared pictures with faces.

"Richard Brant and Donald Scott," he said. "Americans. Address given as Spindrift Island, New Jersey."

Dr. Keller's eyes opened wide. "I thought you looked familiar," he said to Rick. "You are Hartson Brant's son!"

Rick nodded. There was no point in denying it.

"I met your father in Copenhagen. You were there with him?"

"Yes, sir," Rick replied.

A new voice spoke from a doorway. Rick turned his head. A tall emaciated man in a thick woolen robe was standing in the doorway of what was apparently a bedroom. The voice was accented. "Spindrift? I know that name. It is the famous scientific foundation, yes?"

Dr. Keller answered. "Yes, Doctor. One of these boys is the son of the director, Dr. Hartson Brant. This is extraordinary! Exactly what are you doing here, young Mr. Brant? What led you to undertake such a climb? Did you follow me here from Copenhagen?"

Rick was sensitive to atmosphere; he sensed no menace in the room. With the possible exception of Kratov and the shotgun carrier, the men were curious but not threatening. Keller was clearly astonished, but he seemed friendly enough. Rick decided to admit a few things.

"We followed you from Copenhagen, yes, sir. We climbed the cliff because it was the only way we could get in, to keep track of you."

"But why would Hartson Brant's son want to keep track of me?" Keller asked with obvious bewilderment. "Does your father know of this? Did he send you?"

"He knows," Rick said. "He didn't send us."

Kratov spoke for the first time. "If these two trailed Dr. Keller from Copenhagen, they are not amateurs. Furthermore, they are not simply two curious boys." He shot at them, "Who do you represent?"

"Dr. Keller," Scotty said calmly.

Kratov snorted. "It is clear that Dr. Keller is not aware of this. Come now. Do not make it hard on yourselves. Who do you represent?"

Rick spoke up. "We represent a friend of Dr. Keller, a man who is concerned about his safety."

"But why should anyone be concerned about my safety?" Keller asked. "I am in no danger."

Rick addressed the American directly. "Sir, while you were in Copenhagen, a woman moved in with your family. This woman is a dangerous person who is believed to represent one of the Communist countries. Our friend visited your family and suspected this woman was holding your family as hostages. He asked us to keep an eye on you. That's all."

Keller's reaction was instantaneous and angry. He turned on Kratov. "You did this? You assigned someone to stay with my family, even though I had agreed voluntarily to try to be of service?"

Kratov shrugged. "A routine precaution."

Keller's face grew livid. "How dared you! Even though I agreed without hesitation to try to assist a distinguished colleague who happened to be Russian, you had to insert your cursed police-state tactics and hold my family as hostages! You listen to me, Kratov. Call off your dog and do it now! There will be no further activity here until a phone call from my wife has assured me that your guard has been removed. Do you understand?"

Rick listened with interest. One thing was perfectly clear. Keller was no Communist, or even much of a sympathizer-if he sympathized at all. That business about 'try to assist a distinguished colleague' fitted in with the story about meeting with a Russian scientist. Who was the scientist? The man in the robe? Rick looked at the gaunt face and felt a tug of familiarity. He had seen the face before. But who was the man? What was his name?

The bald man spoke reprovingly to Kratov. "I will never understand why you Soviets must view everything with suspicion. Even a simple, humanitarian act of friendship such as Dr. Keller has agreed to perform. You are a fool, Kratov."

The man in the robe spoke heavily. "Indeed he is a fool. Kratov, go to the phone now and issue the necessary instructions to carry out Dr. Keller's wishes. Then place a call for later to Mrs. Keller, allowing enough time for your instructions to be carried out. Go at once."

Kratov did so, without a word. Rick watched with curious interest. If Kratov was the chief Soviet agent in Europe and he took orders from the man in the robe, that man must be someone of very great importance. He studied the man's face. It was that of a scholar, with keen intelligence in the gray eyes. But it was also the face of a man in poor health, probably suffering pain. Again he tried to connect a name with the face and couldn't.

Keller spoke to the boys. "Thank you for telling me. I suspect that our mutual friend is called Steve."

Scotty replied, "That's the one, sir."

"I'm grateful to him. But, boys, I still don't understand how you could possibly have followed me. Kratov insisted on complete secrecy, although it was of no concern to me, and he said his men would make certain that no one followed us."

"The insurance just wasn't very good," Rick said.

The bald man asked suddenly, "Have you eaten?"

The boys said together, "No, sir." Both of them had noticed the thick sandwiches and snacks on the trays.



“You must be starved after such a climb. Forgive my failure to be hospitable, but it is not too late to make amends.” He spoke to the girl. “Gretchen, would you be so kind as to serve our young guests?”

So they were guests, and not prisoners, Rick noted with interest.

Keller was smiling at them. “You’re an amazing pair. Tell me, were you on the train from Paris?”

“Yes, sir,” Scotty answered.

“Hmmm. We returned from the dining car to find a man waiting for us in the compartment. A very unpleasant man who had a pistol. He insisted that we leave the train at Dijon with him, and we could not very well refuse under the circumstances. Then, with no warning, we turned to find him lying on the platform. Did you, by any chance, see what happened?”

“Who was the man?” Rick asked.

“I don’t know. Kratov said only that he was an enemy.”

Rick grinned mirthlessly. “If he meant an enemy of Communism, that covers most of the civilized people of the world.”

The man in the robe said gently, “I’m sure you don’t wish to engage in a philosophical political discussion, Mr. Brant. Perhaps we should stick to facts of the case and refrain from making political statements.”

Scotty spoke up. “I’m beginning to gather that there are both Communists and non-Communists here, and that the non-Communists are not necessarily Commie sympathizers, either.”

The bald man nodded. “A fair conclusion, Mr. Scott. In fact, Communism has nothing whatever to do with our presence here. Does that put your mind at rest?”

Rick and Scotty looked at Keller. He met their glances and nodded emphatically.

“I think it puts our minds at rest,” Rick answered for both of them. “Dr. Keller, would it be out of line to ask what you are doing here?”

“Ah. Now we come to the heart of the matter, insofar as Mr. Brant and Mr. Scott are concerned,” the robed man said in his thick accent. “Why not answer them, Dr. Keller?”

“I will, Doctor. Thank you for the implied permission to be candid.” Keller sat down and turned to the boys.

“This gentleman in the robe is Dr. Leonid Blanovich. Does the name mean anything to you?”

Rick gasped. He stood up without thinking, an automatic gesture of respect. “Sir, I should have recognized you!”

Scotty stood up, too. He coughed in embarrassment. “I’m sorry. I’m not as well informed as Rick. Should I know you, sir?”

Dr. Blanovich smiled. “Only if you are a follower of a rather obscure field of science.”

Dr. Keller came to Scotty's rescue. "Dr. Blanovich is the world's leading authority on modern gravitational theory. A few years ago he won the Nobel Prize for physics. He is also a past president of the International Council of Scientific Unions, a past president of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics, an academician of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and an honorary member of the British Royal Academy and of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. I might also add that he is one of the best-loved scientists on the international scene, and a hero to his own countrymen second only to the leading cosmonauts."

Scotty murmured softly, "Wow!" In a more normal tone of voice, he said, "It's a privilege to meet you, sir."

Blanovich smiled and turned to Rick. "It's also a privilege to meet the son of my colleague Hartson Brant. If the resourcefulness you and your friend have shown in following Dr. Keller can be translated into scientific creativity when you're grown, Mr. Brant, you may yet be as great a man as your father."

Rick returned the smile, responding immediately to the Nobel scientist's warmth and charm. "Thank you, sir."

Keller picked up his story where he had left off. "The moment I arrived in Copenhagen, one of the Soviet scientists approached me. He explained that Dr. Blanovich was suffering from a potentially lethal aneurysm of one of the carotids, the two main arteries of the throat. An aneurysm, I should explain, is a sac formed by the dilatation of the walls of an artery that have been weakened. It distends, like a balloon, and may rupture at any time. Both carotid arteries are essential, since they supply blood to the head. If one ruptures, there is a high probability of death, and if the patient survives, certainty of severe brain damage. Do you follow me?"

The boys nodded. "But why all the secrecy and cloak-and-dagger stuff?" Rick asked.

Dr. Blanovich said, "I can explain that even better than Dr. Keller. You may be aware that there is at present a very serious split in the ranks of world Communism. I'm sure you have heard of the—shall we call it a difference of opinion?—between the Chinese and the Soviets. Essentially, the difference is a philosophical one, based on two different interpretations of Marxism-Leninism. But no matter. To you in America, it means the difference between an opinion that we can live peaceably together—coexistence is the term our Chairman uses—and an opinion that there must be war."

"We keep up with the news, sir," Rick assured him. "Please go on."

"Very well. The difference is not just Soviet versus Chinese. Within the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties you will also find this difference. In the Soviet Union, there are forces attempting to gain the supremacy, forces that believe as the Chinese government does, that war is necessary for Communist victory. I am aligned with those who do not believe war is inevitable. Also, due to my age, no doubt, I have a certain amount of influence."

Rick thought age had little to do with it. It was the Soviet scientist's tremendous intellect that gave him influence.

Blanovich continued. "I know that you in America do not believe public opinion matters in the Soviet Union. This is wrong. It may not matter to the same extent it does in America, but it carries weight. Without false modesty, I can say that my own stand on war has influenced public opinion in our country."

"I'm beginning to see," Rick said thoughtfully. "It was necessary for your illness to remain secret so that the . . . should I call it the balance of power?"

"Precisely."

"So the balance of power would not be upset because you were no longer . . . you know what I mean."

"The term is 'politically effective,'" Blanovich said, "You have stated the case very well. So, you see, my friend Kratov brought Keller to me with some degree of secrecy. Not complete secrecy, of course. That was not necessary. We needed only a few days, and full security would have posed problems. We arranged with our mutual friend Dr. Gustav Schell to meet here at his summer home, and to use the operating room he so generously equipped, for which I am very grateful."

The bald man, Dr. Schell, smiled warmly at Blanovich. "We cannot afford to lose you, Leonid. It was nothing." To the boys, he added, "By 'we,' I mean the whole world. I, like your friend Dr. Keller, am not a Communist. I am merely one of the scientific disciples of Leonid Blanovich." He gestured toward the young woman, who was serving refreshments to the boys, assisted by the man in the tweed jacket. "Fraulein Gretchen Stein is an extremely capable surgical nurse. Dr. Louis Veronde is an anesthetist of great skill. Both, likemyself, are Swiss. Neither is a Communist."

"On the other hand"-Dr. Schell gestured toward the shotgun carrier-"Monsieur Jacques is a French Communist who was brought here by Mr. Kratov. His linguistic talents have been useful. So you see, we are what the English would call quite a mixed bag. We have only one purpose in common, and that is to assist Dr. Keller in repairing the artery of Dr. Blanovich."

"Thank you, Dr. Schell," Rick said gratefully. "Now we understand why Dr. Keller left theCopenhagen meeting. And the woman in his home was strictly Kratov's idea?"

"Yes," Dr. Blanovich agreed. "It was extremely foolish of him. But a man reacts according to his training, and Kratov has not learned to be unsuspicious."

"And I don't expect to learn," Kratov growled, entering the room. "Dr. Keller, the woman will leave your house beforemidnight, your time. You will have a call placed for you to your wife ateight a.m. our time, which will betwo a.m. in your home. I am sure Mrs. Keller will not mind being awakened for such a call."

Dr. Keller nodded. "Thank you."

Kratov, Rick decided, was strictly a cold-blooded Commie professional. The man surveyed the two with a frosty eye, then asked, "Where did you pick up the trail?"

"Copenhagen," Scotty said.

"Ah.So? Did you, by chance, follow Dr. Keller to the amusement park?"

"It was my privilege," Scotty said.

"It was fortunate for you that my man accidentally fell through the scenery."

Scotty and Rick grinned. "He had help," Rick stated.

Kratov's eyes widened very slightly. "Do you mean that it was not an accident?"

"He tried to grab me," Scotty explained. "I may have resisted a little."

Rick, with a mental image of Scotty applying a *savate* with enough force in his muscular leg to fell an elephant, had to suppress a grin.

"I see. And in Dijon. Did the man who fell on the platform also have an accident?"

"Was he your man?" Rick asked.

"He was not! He was an agent of the Chinese, and perhaps of certain Soviet traitors who act against the Party."

So that explained Group X, Rick thought. The group was composed of agents of the Chinese-Soviet prowar party.

"He had the same sort of accident that happened to that poor man in the alley at Berne," Scotty explained, "although not so severe."

Kratov permitted himself a wintry smile. "I must congratulate you. You seem to know everything that has gone on, which means you very cleverly observed our actions without yourselves being seen."

"It was nothing," Rick said modestly. "We also thought you were clever to disable the car of the man who followed you from Berne instead of injuring him. It was just as effective."

"You could not have followed us from Berne," Kratov protested. "I watched the road with great care. I saw only the man in the Peugeot."

"We were there," Rick assured him. "We had you under observation at every moment." Remembering that Kratov was a big fish in Soviet espionage in Europe, he couldn't refrain from adding, "Of course we're only a couple of kid amateurs. If we'd been real American professionals, we could have ridden in your back seat and you'd never have known it."

"The gifted amateur is often more dangerous than the professional," Kratov growled. "Are you also aware there is another group involved?"

"ACTION," Scotty said promptly. "And Anton Zaretsky is probably camped outside your gate right at this moment."

Kratov sighed. "Not quite. He has gone into Zurich, doubtless to hatch up something. His place has been taken by his deputy."

"It seems to me," Rick said thoughtfully, "that you've put yourselves in a spot. There's the Chinese gang, and ACTION—all after your scalps. They must want to wipe you out because they don't seem to have anything to gain by being nice. Wouldn't you have been better off inviting Dr. Keller to Moscow?"

Blanovich shook his head. "Too much danger of information getting out. It was essential that my condition remain secret."

"It didn't," Scotty pointed out.

“We don’t know that,” Kratov corrected. “ACTION obviously found out this house was to be a rendezvous. For the Chinese group, it would be enough that Dr. Keller was with me. They have made several attempts to get me. So we must assume that the real reason for this is still not known. But our time is running out.”

“When is the operation?” Rick asked.

“Tomorrow morning,” Dr. Keller replied.

“I suppose you were chosen because of your new technique?” Scotty queried.

“Yes. My ruby ray is precise enough for such delicate surgery. I am grateful that it can be of use.”

Rick looked at Kratov. “What do you intend to do with us?”

Kratov shrugged. “Obviously, we cannot let you go. You must stay here until Dr. Keller is finished. Then you can leave with him.”

“Aren’t you afraid we’ll talk?” Scotty asked.

“No. Talk all you want to, after it is all over and Dr. Blanovich has returned to Moscow. Secrecy is only important until the operation takes place. If it is a success, let the world know. If it fails, we have at least postponed action by the enemy for a few days.”

“Speaking of action,” Scotty said, “do you think Zaretsky and the ACTION gang are going to remain quiet that long?”

“Zaretsky worries me,” Kratov admitted. “Normally, I would have enough people to keep track of him. But we have tried to keep this operation small, and I have no men to spare.”

A distant burst of gunfire brought them all to their feet.

Dr. Keller said dryly, “Your question is answered, Mr. Scott. Apparently Zaretsky and ACTION are starting to act!”

## CHAPTER XVII

### Danger From Above

The rattle of gunfire slowed to an occasional shot, and then there was silence outside again. The group in the chalet waited, a little apprehensively. Kratov and Jacques had rushed outside. Rick looked at Scotty and shrugged. If Zaretsky turned out to be the winner, they were in the same bad spot as anyone else. Zaretsky wouldn’t try to separate the sheep from the goats. They’d all get it.

But it was Kratov who came in the door. “A try at testing our defenses,” he reported. “They withdrew

quickly as soon as we started a concentrated fire.”

“What can we expect next?” Dr. Schell asked.

Kratov shook his head. “It’s hard to say. If Zaretsky only had some piece of artillery, his problem would be an easy one.”

Dr. Blanovich spoke up. “Kratov, we will not keep these young men here.”

“We can’t run the risk of their talking until the operation is over,” Kratov stated.

The distinguished Soviet scientist looked at Rick and Scotty. “Will you give us your word that you will say nothing for the next twenty-four hours?”

“Yes, sir,” the boys said in chorus.

“There you are, Kratov. I will take the responsibility.”

Kratov’s eyes locked with those of the scientist, and after a moment, the Soviet agent looked away. “I will send Jacques with them,” he said. “He can be sure they are safe.”

“Is he a good climber?” Rick asked.

Kratov gave them his humorless smile. “During the summer he sometimes acts as a guide on the Matterhorn.”

“I guess he’ll do,” Rick said with a grin.

“I suggest you get some sleep, as I am about to do.” Dr. Blanovich nodded “good night” to all, then turned and went to his own room. The nurse and anesthetist retired to the kitchen, and Kratov went back outside, leaving the boys alone with Keller.

“You’ll operate in the morning?” Scotty asked.

“Yes. I have been rehearsing my small team ever since my arrival. A very professional group. But frankly, I would not want to attempt the operation without the laser.”

Rick had thought about the laser. “It seems odd to be operating with a beam of light,” he said.

Keller smiled. “Yes. But the tiny beam is a tool of really marvelous precision.”

“Wish I knew how it worked,” Scotty said.

“Perhaps I can explain,” Keller said. “As you know, light is made up of waves. Light from an ordinary source, like the sun and electric bulbs, is a haphazard mixture of waves. The waves travel at random, causing the light to spread out. They have different wave lengths; in other words, the light is a mixture of many colors.

“The beam from the laser, on the other hand, consists of waves that are very regular. All the waves travel in the same direction. They are also coherent; that is, each wave keeps in step with all the others. And all have the same wave length. This means the laser beam is made up of one color. The single

direction, the coherent radiation, and the single color keep a laser beam from spreading out and dissipating its power.

“Can you see why my ruby laser produces a tiny beam no longer than the tip of a very fine needle? So tiny that I have to wear a pair of special magnifying glasses, very much like a jeweler’s loupe. The tiny beam cuts and cauterizes at the same time.”

Kratov came back, shaking his head. “Zaretsky’s group is still outside the fence. They’re rigging up something, and if I had to guess, I’d say they’re going to try to break in by swinging around the fence, over the cliff. There are trees they can use as anchors, and with ropes and plenty of nerve, they can jump over, swing in an arc, and reach the cliff top on our side of the fence.”

“But you could pick them off easily with guns!” Scotty exclaimed.

Kratov gave his humorless smile. “In the darkness, with trees on both sides of the fence? If they get two or three men across, they’ll outflank us. Besides, you can be sure they’ll pour in enough covering fire to keep our heads down.”

“Too bad you can’t use your ruby ray on them, Dr. Keller,” Rick observed.

The surgeon’s eyes widened. “Maybe we can! Listen, boys, have you ever heard any speculation about lasers being used as death rays?”

Both of them had. Such speculation had appeared in many newspapers and magazines. “But such stories are silly,” Rick protested.

“Certainly. It would take far more power than we have just to create enough of a laser beam to keep Zaretsky warm,” Keller agreed. “But how many people know that? Could we persuade Zaretsky and friends that we have a death ray here?”

“Not unless they saw some evidence of it,” Scotty observed.

“You could use the demonstration unit,” Rick said excitedly. “That will throw a ruby beam they can see, won’t it?”

“Yes, but it’s entirely harmless.”

“Let’s not admit it,” Rick said, grinning. He turned to Kratov. “Do you have any explosives? Even a small amount?”

As Kratov hurried to find their host, Rick outlined his idea. “If we have a little dynamite, we can plant it on the edge of the cliff where they can see an explosion. Then we can aim the laser into the sky and show them the ruby beam, bring it down-and explode the charge. They won’t know whether it was exploded electrically, or whether the ruby ray actually blew up part of the cliff!”

Scotty looked at him admiringly. “Leave it to you. We’d better make the charge real small, though.”

“Very small,” Rick agreed. “Like an oversize firecracker. It should be convincing.”

Dr. Schell emerged from the rear of the house with Kratov. “I keep a bit of dynamite here. Sometimes the road down is closed by a rockslide and we have to blast a way through.”

“Perfect! We need only an inch or so from one stick. Do you have a way of setting it off electrically?”

“I have caps that are wired, but no dynamo.”

“How about extension cords?” Scotty asked.

“Enough to reach the edge of the cliff near the fence from the nearest outlet?”

“We can manage that.”

“Good!” Rick exclaimed. “Let’s get busy!”

Within fifteen minutes, Keller had his demonstration unit ready, and Scotty and Rick had laid extension cords to a point on the cliff’s edge visible from the other side of the fence. There was a cleared area on each side of the fence, a strip of grass about two yards wide. Then they ran into a problem. Keller needed power for his unit. Rick needed power to set off the charge. That meant there must be a switch somewhere in the circuit beyond Keller’s unit.

A small lamp was borrowed, the shade removed, and the bulb unscrewed. A male electrical plug was found and screwed into the lamp socket.

Rick plugged the lamp into an extension cord. Keller plugged his unit into the same cord. Rick then took a 15-meter extension cord, about 45 feet long, plugged one end into the lamp fixture, and cut the female plug off the other end. He stripped the ends of the wires and connected them to the wires attached to the dynamite cap, first making certain the lamp switch was off.

The lamp was hidden behind Keller’s demonstration case, and the extension cord with the dynamite on the end was carried to the very edge of the cliff. Rick tucked the dynamite into a crevice and pushed dirt over the cord.

Meanwhile, Kratov and his men had been patrolling the fence. Dr. Keller called to the Soviet agent, “We’re ready.”

Rick sensed that Schell, the nurse, and the anesthetist had taken up vantage points in the trees at the edge of the clearing through which the fence ran, but it was so dark he couldn’t see clearly. Scotty was invisible a few feet away.

Kratov raised his voice. “Zaretsky! Can you hear me?”

“What do you want?” someone bellowed from the other side.

“A truce.”

The voice came nearer. “What for?”

“We don’t wish to kill you,” Kratov said. “We want to show you that you have no chance if you try to go around the fence.”

“Do you have artillery in there, then?”



“Something better. We have a death ray.”

There was a bellow of laughter.

“Listen, Zaretsky. Have you ever heard of a laser? It is capable of being made into a death ray. The newspapers have reported this.”

“I have read something about it, but you don’t have one. What is this, Kratov? Another of your dirty Communist tricks?”

“See for yourself. We want to show you the death ray. You don’t have to show yourself. Crawl under the trees to where you can see the cliff at the edge of the fence.”

“I must see this,” Zaretsky answered. “A real death ray! What nonsense!”

“Tell me it’s nonsense after you’ve seen it.”

Something in Kratov’s voice must have convinced the big man. “All right, I will get to where I can see. Give me five minutes. Naturally, I will not say anything further. I know that giving away my position would mean a bullet.”

“You’re safe enough now. But we’ll give you five minutes.”

Silence fell. Rick watched the luminous dial of his watch. The five minutes took forever to pass, but Kratov, who had been keeping track of the time, spoke up.

“All right, Zaretsky. This scientist will show you. First he will point the ray at the sky so you can see it, then he will sweep it down until it touches the edge of the cliff. You can watch what happens.”

Rick tensed, hand on the lamp switch. He crouched behind Keller and waited.

Keller held the laser tube in his hand and threw the switch. A ray of brilliant, deep-red light shot into the sky.

“That is the death ray,” Kratov said in a voice charged with emotion.

Keller lowered the ruby beam with dramatic slowness until it was horizontal.

“Watch when it touches something,” Kratov called out.

The beam moved downward with agonizing slowness as Keller drew the last bit of suspense from the demonstration.

The ruby ray came within an inch of the silhouetted cliff edge, and Rick threw the switch.

There was a sharp boom and a blaze of brilliant light that faded, leaving only the ruby beam, now pointing upward again.

Then Keller switched off the beam, and there was only darkness-and a silence so complete Rick could almost hear Zaretsky’s frightened thoughts!

# CHAPTER XVIII

## The Whirlybird Gambit

Back in the living room, the group exchanged grins. “There was no further laughter from Zaretsky,” Rick said. “In fact, not a sound!”

Rick looked at Scotty and saw that his pal was frowning. He asked sharply, “Scotty, what is it?”

Scotty drew in a deep breath. “The demonstration did the trick for now, but I’ve been putting myself in Zaretsky’s place. If I were convinced that the people here are Communists, and they have a death ray- and if I knew that an American and a Soviet scientist were meeting here, what would I think?”

Rick stared, aghast. His racing mind went ahead of Scotty’s words. “That Keller is here to turn the death ray over to the Soviets!”

“Yes. And I’d do something about it.”

“What?” Dr. Schell asked. “You know that if you try to cross the fence, the death ray will be turned on you.”

“Sure,” Scotty agreed. “So I don’t cross the fence. Instead, no matter how hazardous it is, I’d climb to the ridge above the chalet. And I’d drop dynamite or some other explosive until I was certain the menace was destroyed forever.”

“But the ridge is a fantastically difficult climb,” Schell pointed out.

“Is it impossible?” Rick asked.

“No, not impossible. But extremely difficult, and slow. I doubt that even a very good climber could make it to the top, starting from bottom on the other side, in much less than six or seven hours.”

“Zaretsky doesn’t care much about hazards,” Scotty said. “Besides, to a dedicated man-which he is-the risk is worth the chance of wiping out such a menace.”

“Mr. Scott is right,” Keller said flatly.

All hands got into the discussion, except for Rick, who sat quietly thinking. Scotty had hit the nail on the head. Zaretsky would *have* to act.

Rick accepted Scotty’s analysis. It made sense. The question now was what to do about it. He didn’t think much of ACTION’S tactics, even though he sympathized with their anti-Communist views. But he didn’t want Zaretsky and company to be picked off by Kratov and his men, either. Keller had come to operate on Blanovich from purely humanitarian motives. Politics had nothing to do with it. There must, somehow, be a humanitarian solution to this problem, too.

If only Zaretsky could be persuaded by some ruse that Blanovich and the death ray were gone from the chalet, he'd no longer have reason to drop explosives. But how could it be faked? Zaretsky was guarding the road too closely. Rick's thoughts went racing on. The only other possibility was using a plane. He reviewed the flight that he and Scotty had taken, and the view of the cliff from above. There was no room for a plane to land. But-

"A helicopter! That's it! A helicopter could get in!" he exclaimed excitedly.

The buzz of conversation stopped as the others looked at him.

"Listen," he went on excitedly. "Suppose a helicopter lands here in the morning, and carries off someone with a big case. Then we calmly drive up to the gate and collect Keller! Zaretsky would think he'd lost his chance, and drop the bombing idea."

"It could work," Scotty said quickly.

"I can't leave my patient," Dr. Keller objected.

"It wouldn't be for long," Rick pointed out. "Look. Suppose you operate at dawn. Shortly after dawn, as soon as it's full daylight, a helicopter comes and picks up a man and a demonstration case."

He paused. Did Zaretsky know anything about the operation? They had to assume he had learned from his Soviet sources that the Soviet scientist was ill.

"We'll make it an ambulance copter," he went on. "One of Kratov's men will be put in a stretcher and loaded aboard. The laser demonstration case can go in the whirlybird with him. The bird takes off. An hour later Scotty and I come rolling up to the gate and collect Dr. Keller. The gate is left open. Kratov and the remaining men can barricade the house. Maybe Dr. Schell leaves, too, in the Mercedes sedan. So far as Zaretsky knows, no one in the house is afraid any more. All the principals have gone."

"I'd better be seen leaving instead of Dr. Schell," Kratov said. "That will convince Zaretsky more than anything else."

Rick knew from the Soviet agent's comment that his plan had been bought. "We have to assume that Zaretsky and his men will start at earliest light, but it's safe also to assume he'll leave someone on guard.

We can have the helicopter fly across the ridge on the way to the airport. Whoever is on guard is bound to see it."

"How long would I be away?" Dr. Keller said anxiously.

"An hour. Maybe two. It depends on how fast Zaretsky buys the idea and gives up. My guess is it won't take long, because whoever is on guard has to get word to the climbers."

"It could work," Keller agreed finally. "My patient will be in good hands if Dr. Schell stays. But two hours is the maximum. He'll be coming out of the anesthesia by then, and I must be here."

"You will be," Rick assured him.

Scotty spoke up. "This is all very fine, but did it occur to you that it means we must get down the cliff in the darkness? Someone has to arrange for the whirlybird, and we have to get the car."

Rick suppressed a shudder. “We’d better have Jacques with us. He can arrange for the bird.” He forced a grin. “Anyway, it’s easier going down than coming up.”

Scotty knew Rick better than Rick suspected. The ex-Marine said quietly, “We drove in plenty of pi-tons. We can rappel most of the way down. It won’t be hard, Rick.”

“I guess not,” Rick agreed. To himself, he added, “Maybe it will be easier when I can’t see the depths below.”

# CHAPTER XIX

## Exit ACTION

The Mercedes was bathed in a low-lying mist that clung to the lower third of the car. Rick watched the mist swirl around them, and was glad it was there. It helped to shield the car against any watchers.

He was still limp from the descent, but, as Scotty had promised, it had been easier than the climb-in one way. With Jacques helping to steady the lines, they had used the technique known as rappelling—descending by means of a double rope belayed around a piton, then passed under one thigh, diagonally across the body and over the opposite shoulder, enabling the climber to lower himself quickly and safely to the next stopping point. Fortunately, the night was crystal clear.

They had reached the bottom, found the Mercedes, and had driven at breakneck speed for Zurich. When certain that they had not been followed, the boys delivered Jacques to the airport where he had routed out a guard, obtained the home number of the charter-service manager, and had, by bullying and promise of great rewards, arranged for an ambulance helicopter shortly after dawn. The boys had left him there, found a gas station open in the city, then made the long circuit again to approach the cliff by the “back road.”

The Mercedes engine was still hot from the trip. Rick hoped the timing was right.

“We must be here ahead of the whirlybird,” he said, his voice hoarse with weariness. “It isn’t light enough for a safe landing. The sun will have to get a little higher.”

Scotty stretched behind the wheel. “We made it,” he agreed. “But there were a few times when I wondered.”

Rick suddenly sat upright. “Hear that?” There was a drone far away, and almost certainly it was the helicopter.

“Sounds like it,” Scotty said excitedly. They listened as the sound grew louder. In a few moments it was very loud, and it had the characteristic beat of a helicopter rotor. The whirlybird crossed over the ridge from the direction of Zurich, swung wide into the valley, then turned and approached the chalet. The helicopter slowed, hovered, then slid downward at an angle and disappeared behind the screen of trees on the mountain shelf.

The motor sound slowed and dropped in volume and pitch, but didn't stop entirely. The boys waited, straining to see, for perhaps ten minutes. Then the sound increased again and the helicopter lifted into view, swung away from the cliff, climbed for altitude, crossed over the ridge, and was gone.

"Let's hope Zaretsky fell for it," Rick said with his fingers crossed.

"Let's hope," Scotty echoed.

Scotty followed the road, which led downward, drove past the place where they had climbed the cliff, then turned onto the shelf road. He drove cautiously, aware that cars might be coming down, but they met no one. Finally, the sleek roadster reached the summit and moved across the end of the paving to the dirt road. Rick caught a glimpse of Zaretsky's Packard in the trees.

"There's our boy!" he exclaimed. "Either it's Zaretsky, or someone who has the car he was driving."

"We'll find out," Scotty responded. "Did you see anyone?"

"No. Just a glimpse of the car."

They entered the dirt road and moved through the winding lane between the trees. The gate was open.

Rick found himself holding his breath. Was everything all right at the chalet? He wasn't worried about Kratov or his men, but he was concerned about Keller, Blanovich, Schell, and the other two medical personnel.

Kratov and Keller, holding his overnight bag, were waiting on the porch of the chalet.

"How is he?" Rick asked as the Mercedes stopped rolling.

"Fine." Keller seemed tired. "Everything went perfectly. He's still under anesthetic, of course."

"Better get going," Kratov said briskly. "I'll follow in the sedan in a few minutes."

Scotty snapped his fingers. "That reminds me." He got out of the roadster and hurried to the sedan.

"What does he want?" Kratov demanded.

Rick knew perfectly well what Scotty wanted. He was after the Megabuck unit. "He's probably taking down the license number," Rick replied. Kratov, who had been about to follow Scotty, turned and asked, "What for?"

"If you exceed the speed limit, we can turn the number over to the police," Rick explained.

"You talk nonsense," Kratov rapped out. He hurried after Scotty. Rick got out, too, and ran after Kratov. He drew even with the agent just as he reached the car. Scotty was already dusting off his clothes.

"What were you doing?" Kratov demanded.

"Just checking to make sure you still had a transmission," Scotty said innocently.

Kratov's face grew black. "Don't joke with me. You took something from the car. I want it."

Scotty smiled sweetly. "Come and take it."

Kratov took a step toward Scotty, and Rick grabbed his arm. "Wait a minute. Do you want to give the whole play away?"

"I intend to have whatever he took from the car," Kratov said in grating tones.

"Better remember your agent in Copenhagen," Rick reminded him. "You won't get it without a fight. And Blanovich is helpless in the chalet."

Kratov shrugged loose from Rick's grip. "Later," he said. "We will settle this later."

"What I took from the car was ours," Scotty said. "You'd better just forget it."

Kratov scowled. "I begin to see. A beacon of some kind, was it? Something that enabled you to follow me without being spotted?"

"Ask us after the Cold War is over," Rick replied. "Come on, Scotty. We've got to get going. Dr. Keller is waiting."

The Mercedes was built for two, but Rick squeezed into the middle, leaving enough room for Scotty to handle the car. There was room for Dr. Keller's bag behind the seat. The tall surgeon put it in place, then got in.

"Better give us five minutes," Scotty said to Kratov. "Don't crowd me."

The Soviet agent snapped, "I have more sense than to follow too soon."

The Mercedes moved smoothly forward as Scotty let out the clutch. Both boys kept a sharp eye peeled for signs of anyone from ACTION. They still didn't know whether the gambit had worked.

Rick saw the old Packard again. This time there was someone in it, but he couldn't make out details through the pine branches. They started down the mountain.

Scotty swung wide in order to see better around a curve ahead, and in that moment the big Packard drew even with them-on the inside!

Rick divined the tactic in an instant. "He's trying to force us out, over the cliff!"

Scotty responded instantly. He shifted into a lower gear and jammed the accelerator to the floor. The Packard swerved, its long hood driving for the side of the Mercedes. The big fender scraped the side where Keller was sitting, and Rick felt the Mercedes begin to tip!

Scotty swung away, toward the cliff, moved to the very edge, then jammed the accelerator down again. The Mercedes jumped ahead, and Scotty spun the wheel. Rick felt the crash and heard the scream of tortured metal.

The Packard had the advantage of weight, but the Mercedes had ample power and the advantage of

position now that Scotty had moved ahead. The boy gripped the wheel tightly and forced the big Packard into the side of the cliff.

The Packard scraped along the cliffside, smashed into a jutting rock, and ground to a stop. Scotty instantly swung away, freeing the battered Mercedes. He pulled ahead of the Packard and stopped.

“He may have a gun,” Rick gasped.

“We’ll find out,” Scotty said grimly. He opened the door and jumped out, crouching to keep the car between him and the Packard. Then he stood upright. “Come on. He’s helpless.”

Zaretsky was the driver. The Packard had no safety belts, and the big man had put out a hand to keep from smashing forward when the car had stopped against the rock. His hand had been driven right through the safety glass. A spurting stream of red indicated he had cut an artery in his wrist.

Rick and Dr. Keller hurried to the car. Zaretsky was conscious. “Have you any tools?” Scotty asked.

“In the trunk,” Zaretsky gasped. “It’s unlocked.”

Scotty hurried back and opened the trunk while Keller leaned in the open window and used his handkerchief as a tourniquet around Zaretsky’s upper arm. Rick joined Scotty and they rummaged for tools.

Rick took a pair of heavy pliers, and Scotty a tire iron. They hurried to the front of the car.

Zaretsky’s hand had made a neat hole that had to be enlarged before the hand could be removed. Scotty battered at the safety glass with the tire iron. Tiny shards of glass fell like rain, and little by little the window gave. Rick moved in and broke off pieces with the pliers until Zaretsky’s hand could be withdrawn.

Keller already had the door open. “Help me get him out,” he said. “I’ve got to tie off that artery.”

The three of them pulled and tugged until Zaretsky came loose, then stretched him out on the road. “No broken bones,” Keller said. “I checked while you were freeing him. Rick, get me the bag in the car. I have an undershirt we can use for a temporary bandage while we get him to the chalet.”

Keller worked swiftly and efficiently. When the wound was tightly tied, he loosened the tourniquet, then asked, “Can you get up?”

The big man looked up with glazed eyes. “Why do you treat me? If you left me to die, no one would know.”

“We don’t work that way,” Keller said crisply. “We’ll take care of you, even though you did try to kill us. Why, for heaven’s sake? Why did you want us dead?”

Zaretsky closed his eyes. “When I saw the helicopter, I knew the big fish, the Soviet scientist, had got away. So I decided it was better to get Communist small fry than to have a complete failure.”

“We’re not Communists,” Keller said. “We’re not even sympathizers.”

Zaretsky opened his eyes. “But you met with the Soviet scientist. You gave him the death ray.”

“We used the laser-what you call the death ray-to operate on him. He was a very sick man. It is not a death ray. That was a fake to keep you from attacking. The explosion was dynamite.”

“If you are not a Communist, why did you operate on one?”

“For the same reason I’m helping you,” Keller said impatiently. “Because it is the duty of a physician to heal the sick, without regard to their politics. Now get up and get in our car.”

The Mercedes was battered, but still in working condition. Some body repairs would put it in shape again. Rick sat on the trunk, his feet braced on the spare tire. Zaretsky and Keller squeezed in with Scotty.

It was necessary to go all the way down before Scotty could turn the roadster around. They reached the top of the cliff just as Kratov emerged in the sedan. The Soviet agent waved them down.

“What is going on? Is that Zaretsky?”

“He tried to force us off the road and got hurt,” Scotty said. “We’re taking him to the chalet.”

Kratov was out of the sedan like a flash. He ran around to stand beside Scotty, and a Walther pistol appeared in his hand. “You will not,” he said flatly. “Zaretsky, get out. Your accident is going to become fatal. I’ve had enough of you and your mob of murderers.”

Rick swung sideways, bringing his legs over the side of the Mercedes. Kratov was intent on the big man. Rick made sure he had plenty of leverage, and kicked. His foot caught the underside of Kratov’s arm. The pistol flew into the air. Then, using both hands to propel himself, Rick sprang. His flying body hit the Soviet agent. Kratov went down as though tackled.

By the time Rick recovered his balance, Scotty was out of the car and diving for the pistol. Within a few heartbeats, the situation was under control.

“Get in your car and keep on going,” Scotty said coldly. “We’ve had enough of Zaretsky, and of you too.”

Kratov had no choice. He got back into the sedan and drove off. Rick guessed he had no other gun.

Scotty stood guard at the gate while Keller patched up Zaretsky. “We’ve got to get him to a hospital,” the surgeon told Rick. “He’s weaker than he looks. He needs plasma, and possibly a transfusion.”

“And I must stop my men,” Zaretsky said feebly. “If you can get me to a phone, I can make a call that will send someone to stop them.” He grinned weakly. “They are on the way to bomb you from the ridge.”

“They must be stopped!” Rick exclaimed. He and Keller exchanged glances.

“There isn’t room for four in the roadster,” Keller said. “Take this man to the hospital in Zurich, then come back for me. I will wait. There is no hurry.”

“Yes, sir,” Rick said. “We’ll get going right away. Sure you’ll be all right here?”



Keller smiled. "Of course. I don't think ACTION wants me any more."

"No," Zaretsky said. "Not any more. I shudder when I think of the mistake we nearly made."

"Remember it next time you start out on an assassination," Keller said coldly. "Now get started. Pick Scotty up at the gate on the way, Rick. In case you meet Kratov on the road."

"Yes, sir," Rick said. "We're on our way."

## CHAPTER XX

### The Second Midnight Call

*"Urgent," a telegram from Major Benson read, "Wait for me hotel. Have important info."*

The telegram had arrived at nine in the morning, according to the porter. Major Benson arrived at three in the afternoon. "I've been trying to get you on the phone since yesterday afternoon," Benson explained, "but the operator kept saying there was no answer. I decided to drive over and find you."

"Sorry we weren't in," Rick said. "What is the important information?"

"It ties in with Keller. Listen to this. Our entire intelligence setup around Europe has been tracking down a rumor that a senior Soviet scientist was defecting to the West. It was finally tracked down yesterday. The scientist is Leonid Blanovich!"

The boys exchanged glances.

"But he's not defecting," Benson continued. "He left the Soviet Union secretly because he's ill, in desperate need of surgery. He's in Switzerland, and I think it's a good bet he's with Keller. Keller's a topflight surgeon, isn't he?"

"He is," Scotty said, "and you're right. The operation was performed this morning, successfully."

Benson stared. "Then none of this is new to you?"

"The part about the rumor he was defecting is new," Rick told the young major. "But we found out the rest last night." He outlined briefly the events of the past twenty-four hours.

Benson sat back in his chair and shook his head in amazement. "While the entire allied intelligence service is hunting Blanovich, you not only find him but get the story from his own lips!"

Rick had to grin. "You make it sound better than it was. We were only determined to follow Keller. The rest was incidental. Believe me, our intelligence must be pretty good. You said you've been trying to call us since yesterday afternoon. We didn't know a thing until last night after we climbed the cliff, and by then intelligence had the whole story, except Dr. Keller's involvement."

"No wonder Steve Ames said his whole gang in Europe was tied up," Scotty recalled. "They were tied up on the same deal he got us into, but no one knew it."

The telephone rang. Benson picked it up. "Major Benson. . . . Oh, it's you, Owen. Listen, I have some important news. Can you come to my room? I'm in 409. There are two others with me, but they're part of the story. . . . Okay."

Benson hung up. "That was Owen Stack. He just got into Zurich from Frankfurt. I want you to tell him your story."

Owen Stack was the JANIG contact at the embassy, the man Rick had tried to reach on their arrival in Zurich. A few moments later the door opened and Mr. Stack came in. He was a small, plump man, rosy-cheeked, and twinkling of eye.

Benson introduced the boys. "You're the two Washington wired us about," Stack acknowledged. "Have you kept track of Dr. Keller?"

"Sort of," Rick said, smiling. He was enjoying this.

Stack turned to Benson. "Before you tell me your news, let me tell you something. Leonid Blanovich is right here. He's at a chalet owned by a Dr. Gustav Schell, a well-known Swiss physician. Kratov is guarding him. There is also a nurse named Stein, another doctor named Veronde, and some American we haven't identified. Zaretsky knows Blanovich is here, and ACTION has moved in. The presence of all the medical personnel verifies the report that Blanovich is sick. The Soviet leaders wouldn't want that known, for obvious reasons. That's why Blanovich is to be treated here instead of at home. Now, what's your news?"

Benson said mildly, "The American is Dr. Harold Keller."

Owen Stack slumped down in a chair. "For Pete's sake! So you two were tied into the Blanovich case?"

"Tell him the rest," Benson said, grinning.

Rick summed it up. "The operation was a success. Zaretsky is out of action, and all is quiet. Blanovich goes home via ambulance helicopter and a Soviet ambulance jet day after tomorrow. Dr. Keller goes back to Copenhagen tomorrow night. Dr. Veronde has already gone back to Berne. Nurse Stein and Dr. Schell are standing by with Dr. Keller."

Stack reached for the phone. "You're sure the operation was a success?"

"That's what Dr. Keller said," Scotty replied.

"Good. Will you excuse me while I make a phone call to the Swiss chief of police?"

Stack spoke in English. "Hello, Chief. Owen Stack here. How are you? . . . Fine. Very good. Listen, Chief, I want to give you a tip. It doesn't concern the United States, but I thought you'd be interested. A very famous Soviet scientist, Dr. Leonid Blanovich, is at Dr. Gustav Schell's chalet. He entered the country incognito about three days ago and underwent a very serious operation. He will be at Schell's until day after tomorrow. . . . Yes . . . yes, indeed. I thought you would be interested. The problem, as I'm sure you realize, is that the Chinese Communist party would like to have Dr. Blanovich out of the way. They may make an attempt. Naturally, you wouldn't wish that to happen in Switzerland. Not at all,

my dear Chief. A pleasure to cooperate.”

Stack hung up and smiled at Benson and the boys. “Now we can be sure Blanovich will be safe. The Swiss police will see to that. They can’t afford to have a prominent Soviet scientist murdered on Swiss territory.”

Back nodded appreciatively. Stack had realized, as Kratov had said, that secrecy was no longer important once the operation was over. Kratov was guarding the scientist, but the Swiss police would be extra insurance in case the Chinese Communist agents tried something. Stack also knew that Blanovich’s continued existence was, at present, in the best interests of the United States.

“We have a problem,” Scotty spoke up. “Zaretsky made a mess of our car. It was one we rented at Berne. What can we do?”

“Have it repaired,” Stack said promptly. “Leave it to me. I’ll have it fixed like new and turn it in for you. Anything else?”

“I suppose Steve Ames knows all about this?” Rick asked.

Stack chuckled. “He will. As soon as an urgent cable can travel from here to Washington. Now give me all the details. Start at Copenhagen. If the story is interesting enough, I’ll buy you a steak for dinner.”

Owen Stack not only bought steaks, but all the trimmings and one of the most luscious desserts the boys had ever eaten: fresh alpine strawberries soaked in grenadine, and covered with clotted cream. It was worth it, the intelligence officer said. Particularly Rick’s comment about the boys being only amateurs, and the skill of American professionals.

In the midst of dinner, a familiar face appeared. It was the ACTION tail the boys had shaken twice. He bowed. “Excuse me, please. Mr. Zaretsky wishes you to know the climbing party is back in Zurich. It took some time to catch them. They were already far up the ridge. Also, Mr. Zaretsky sends you his good wishes.”

The four Americans watched as the man made his way from the restaurant. Rick grinned. “I wonder what message Zaretsky would have sent had he known Blanovich was still at the chalet?”

“A time bomb buried in Swiss pastry, probably,” Scotty observed.

It was late when they got to bed, and Rick had no sooner fallen asleep when the phone rang. He groped for it sleepily and muttered a not-too-cordial “Hello?”

It was Steve Ames calling. Rick sat upright and switched on the light. “It’s Steve, Scotty.”

“Rick? ... I just got a cable from Stack. You’ve been busy.”

“Sort of,” Rick said with a grin.

“The woman moved out of Keller’s house without a word. One phone call and she was gone. Since we had taken the precaution of bugging the house, we know who the call was from. So now the FBI has a new lead. Mrs. Keller talked with her husband, and all is right with the family again.”

“We’re glad of that,” Rick said. “Dr. Keller is a very fine man. We like him.”

“I was sure you would-if you ever met him. I won’t bawl you out for climbing mountains, or getting mixed up with strange people, because you landed on your feet. When am I going to hear the whole story?”

“Come to Spindrift in a week,” Rick invited. “Well feed you a steak.”

“It’s a date. When are you going back to Copenhagen?”

“Tomorrow night. We phoned Dad earlier this evening. We’ll fly with Dr. Keller.”

“Okay. Thanks, Rick. And thanks to Scotty. I’ll do as much for you someday.”

“I hope you don’t have to,” Rick said feelingly, and bade good night to the JANIG agent.

He reported the conversation to Scotty, then switched out his light again. For a few moments he lay awake, reviewing the adventure. It was all a matter of timing, he realized. The rendezvous at Dr. Schell’s had been arranged to give Keller just enough time to examine his patient, and to work a bit with his surgical team. The schedule had been arranged so neither Keller nor Blanovich would arrive a moment too soon, or too late. That was the reason for some of the strange actions. The Soviet agent, Kratov, had wanted only a head start, not bothering to cover his trail securely. Once the operation was over, it didn’t matter whether he had succeeded or failed in covering the trail. The boys had been lucky as well as resourceful. The two of them, plus the Megabuck units, had spelled the difference between carrying out the assignment and losing the trail.

Rick grinned to himself in the darkness. He and Scotty had done well, and he knew it. He felt the pleasure of a job neatly wrapped up, with no loose ends. Now, back to Spindrift, and peace and quiet.

But, although Rick did not know it, a man had had his face slapped not far from Spindrift on that very day. At the moment that Rick was turning over to go back to sleep, the man was pacing the floor in his hotel room, brooding over the incident. He would not forget the slap as long as he lived, and his bitter memory of it would plunge Rick and Scotty into a pit of darkness in their next adventure, THE VEILED RAIDERS.

## **THE END**

THE RUBY RAY MYSTERY

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY, No. 19

BY JOHN BLAINE