

A NOVEL

THE REFLECTING MAN

— VOLUME TWO —

D.K.R. BOYD

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Dedication

In memory of

Helen Virginia Mairs

A remarkable woman of parts

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Prologue

To anyone who believes that what Hitler was allowed to do to Europe (et al) is the fault of Joe Ball, I say, 'Not bloody likely.' Adolf needed no encouragement, I assure you; he was mad as mustard and I knew it immediately when he winked at me in the woods at Wahnfried back in 1933. The meaning of that wink took me ages to decipher and likely you, my treasured Reader, sussed its meaning well before I managed. It was a conspiratorial wink. There will be ample opportunities to mull upon it, that is a certainty.

'Not bloody likely.' I omit the exclamation mark following this saucy bit of rhetoric not because I eschew such alphabetic tomfoolery, but because it is only partially true and therefore lacks the required amount of forthrightness and insistence on my part. Joe Ball, a rotund, bespectacled, stuffed shirt who never ever polished his shoes, is certainly going to get a proper thrashing in the pages to come, I can tell you, but he won't get the full blame. There is enough to go around on this side of the channel, believe you me. This is England I am talking about and the place was practically drowning in privileged ponces when I was there last. God bless the King.

I could begin with Joe's schoolboy years in one of those storied English public schools they like to brag about, but his experience only mirrors that of most of his contemporary toffs who, having been serviced (civilly) by their prefects, then qualified for a career in the civil service thereafter. My friend and colleague Erland Echland assures me that he has observed a certain cachet when, ensconced in butter-smooth, over-stuffed leather chairs at one's Club (by this I mean virtually all of them), one looks knowingly into one's snifter of brandy and remarks (with evident pride) in one's ability to have taken six of Flashman's (or whomever's) best and that one is a better man for it. Erl says this is trite and hypocritical but, in certain circles of government, I know there are Englishmen with dream-gargoyles fashioned out of schoolboy fear-and-loathing deep inside them. Maybe that is why they keep referring to themselves as 'one' all the damn time.

I am fairly certain that Joe's gargoyle was let loose around the time he got a plum job chasing aliens for Scotland Yard and, thereafter, for MI5 (Military Intelligence, Section Five). As a matter of fact, Joe had no difficulty whatsoever in railroading anarchists, communists, or even two little old ladies and a henpecked husband into conspiracy-to-murder charges, achieving sentences guaranteeing multiple years of hard labor in prison. That was during the Great War when he was just a pup and didn't give a shit about manufacturing evidence to achieve a self-serving, self-aggrandizing, self-idolizing result. How else does one attract the right sort of people otherwise? All these years later, right up to January 1st, 1936, Joe Ball's ability to rise to unprecedented and unacknowledged heights within the British government would be the story of this age...if several documents were placed under the eyes of the right people.

Yes, Joseph Ball's maniacal expertise has allowed him to wreak havoc, obfuscate truth, and destroy his master's enemies. He has been nothing short of remarkable as a fixer and a Machiavellian of the first stripe. He is a thoroughly horrible man and everyone I know is frightened to death of him. Which is why, on a delightful winter morning just nine days ago in jolly old London town, George Joseph Ball received his knighthood from His Majesty's government.



I, Kurtis De'ath, you will recall, have decamped from Germany to England, following a host

of adventures with Adolf-and-His-Gang in my coveted position as *Herr Death*, mysterious advisor and confidant to the *Führer*. It is a fitting description and very useful, I must say, though it is far from the reality, which is more akin to a zany keeping a pet cockatoo. With me come my solid gold *Führer*-pass and three small diaries penned by Adolf's driver and (to his way of thinking) my best friend, Julius Schreck. Of these, objects and men, you will hear much more as we go along. I make the same promise for Ulrich Roller and Winifred (and the kids) Wagner in Bayreuth and for my faithful Jesuit friend, Rodolphe Dubé, in Montreal.

There is much to say. We are a mere three-and-one-half years away from the beginning of a conflagration which will dwarf all others before it. It is—and *I have said this before, but a reminder is never a bad thing really*—my duty to inform you as to how these terrible things will come to pass: who said what to whom, who did what to whom, and why objective case is never as provocative, threatening, or brutal as the subjective. Telling tales, relating events, passing on gossip, flat-out lying, and the bruited of iffy truth-like confessions will all be on display for you once again in these pages and it is your task to wallow through them all to isolate Truth, which I assure you does exist.

I use 'wallow' specifically as this is England and there is always a great deal of muck-raking and mucking-about going on around here. Makes one feel like putting on one's 'wellies,' field cap, and tweeds to go stomping through brook and over dale, Purdey's double barrel in hand, with Jarvis, the cocker spaniel in tow. Oh, and add rain. It is always raining in this country. I said, '*It is always raining in this country!*' That is also why 'wallow' fits the bill.

Let us progress together once again then.

Have courage.

Please turn the page.

Chapter One

Here I am. London. St. Pancras station. Like any other Victorian rail terminus, it's an imposing, noisy, smelly place with a vast iron-and-glass curved roof under which ordinary souls do their best to scurry into or escape from their trains as quickly as possible. Oddly, as I have learned to despise amplified public address systems, the *Tannoy* in this station features a rather charming, erudite male voice, nothing like the screeching which pops out of Goebbels' nationwide array of public propaganda horns. The British are not told eight times a day why they belong to Hitler and National Socialism or, in their case, King George V and his Queen, Mary.

Because Erl is past fashionably late and I am famished, I am forced to find, purchase and consume a cheese-and-pickle sandwich of dubious vintage. Being my first experience of casual English cuisine, it proves to be a valuable forewarning of dodgy edibles to come. It's a struggle to chew and how I keep it down I have no idea. When I finally catch sight of Erl's cheery features aimed in my direction, I toss the last half into a bin and declare myself saved from food poisoning.

A note to the wise tourist: that the cheese-and-pickle sandwich is a fabled part of the quintessential English food experience and, to be best appreciated should have Branston chutney in it, is a load of codswallop. Makes as much sense as putting paper-thin slices of cucumber inside buttered bread, chopping off the crusts and serving four itsy-bitsy triangles; all that effort for a few seconds of chewing. Tell me truly, wouldn't you rather have a squeaking-hot bratwurst in a Kleingebäck?

Following Erl and clutching my Gladstone, we wind up outside in the chill, made tiny as mice by the vast facade of the Midland Grand hotel. As was. Now its magnificent grandeur shelters railway offices full of clerks rushing every which-way. Erl mutters something about what an opulent place it is—*try a three-storey, wrought-iron, double-sweeping staircase on for size!*—but guests were forced to use communal bathtubs and there was no running water in the rooms. Failure to get with the times and follow the tastes of the public is the clapper on the bell which signals doom to hoteliers, restaurants, newspapers, and—*pay attention, Hemingway!*—hacks who pump out sour fiction between stupors. Still, Cornelius Vanderbilt and George Pullman, the railway magnate, both put their hairy heads on pillows in this place and if you can't trust the rich to point out what's best in this world, then what are they good for?

"Sorry I'm late, Kurt. My God, it's great to see your face and hear your voice again!" The genuineness of his greeting does my heart good. I have been forgiven for poking about in his diary and we are back on an even keel again. Except that now Erl isn't technically my boss and I am no longer his editor and translator. But we share many good times and I am a wiser lad for having done so. Nobody can sniff out the secrets of the powerful better than Erl...apart from me.

"You look pretty good yourself, Erl." And he does. New suit; not bespoke but not cheap either. Snappy new hat. Cufflinks with fake diamond chips in them, and a tie wide enough to spill a bowl of soup on. He'd made a good start on that actually.

"First things first. Food and drink and lots of it. There's a lovely pub on Euston road, the 'Goat and Compass.'" He slaps me on the back, grinning. "Are you hungry?"

"The 'Goat and Compass.' I like the sound of that."

"Five minutes' walk. That way. We'll rumble back to my digs on the Tube after."

I drop my Gladstone and make a brief show of reaching deep into the left pocket of my official, suitably crumpled, foreign correspondent's trench coat, an *Anderson & Shepherd* original via *Eaton's* in Toronto and my pride and joy. Out comes a small waxed paper packet with you-know-what inside.

"*Bird Bonz!* Exactly what I need." Erl palms two and then holds one up to what passes for daylight in London. "It's a beaut!" he says. "Tell me...that stuff you put in Goebbels' chocolates... did you ever try putting it in some of these?"

Oh my! I'd completely forgotten about my clever use of Spanish fly to make a point with the Minister of Propaganda.

"No," I reply. "There are mighty penalties for mortals who interfere with God's creations." *My personal opinion is less strident and resides in the category of Maybe/Maybe Not.*

"Ah, yes. '*God's Candy.*' And so they are." He pops both of them into his gob. "And so they are indeed."

I follow with two of my own. "Right," I say, "the '*Goat and Compass.*'"

Erl takes my arm and, like a couple of swells, we march away into the gloom.



Picture this: having chased and killed your hare, you must then skin and disembowel it, add spices (five peppercorns, one teaspoon allspice, rind and juice of one orange), let the carcass rest for six hours, then cut the remains into palm-sized pieces. Stick them in an earthenware jug filled with port, adding at least one cup of the hare's blood. Four hours in the oven at a low, even heat. This yeoman dish is *Jugged Hare* and is the speciality of the '*Goat and Compass.*' Not goat, not (assuredly) compass. The dark and dead purple meat of the hare, that's what you get. Served with root vegetables boiled into translucency.

Deliciously revolting. I ate almost half of mine.

After the hare, I set about quaffing a delightful ale—by name, *Greene King India Pale Ale*. I then zealously spooned a bowl of jelly trifle into my gob. Erl assures me that such gustatory excess makes me one fine "*jammy dodger*" indeed. Well now, my first day in England and I already qualify as a *jammy dodger*. So much for the ability of the English to speak their mother tongue. I declare, an image of the mooncalf *Bobo Mitford*, daughter of *Marv and Farv*, popped into my mind's eye.

What a bunch of silly buggers. As they say. In England.



Mrs. Frances Hyslap taught me in grade nine that the English language is a pure thing which is always in motion and always threatened by laziness and stupidity. Wielded by men like Shakespeare, Donne, Disraeli, and a pantheon of others, the English language is a finely-tuned instrument and one best played by experts. The language of law and government, of trade and banking, of poetry and academia, of medicine and science, according to Mrs. Hyslap, suffers immensely at-the-hands-and-in-the-mouths of all other, lesser beings, for slang is the *lingua franca* of the linguistically disabled and willfully ignorant. Mrs. H. has no time for it.

"*Ain't* ain't in the dictionary," we like to say when we don't have much else to say about English. But diction and the rules of grammar cannot be denied (and that includes the guy who wrote "*Ain't She Sweet,*" which admittedly is catchier than "*Isn't She Sweet?*").

What the English have done with their language depends upon which shires you traverse. Distinct varieties of '*Mother Tongue*' are heard in Yorkshire, Cheshire, Cornwall, Kent (both *Kentish Man* and *Man of Kent*), not to mention the cacophony of gibberish uttered on the streets of London, district by district. Imagine being told to '*Stick it up your Khyber!*' by some boney lout in a greengrocer's in the East End, only to have it pointed out to you later on that Cockney rhyming slang offers '*Khyber Pass*' as their way of saying '*ass.*' Maddening! And, not to

put too fine a point upon it, the bananas were every bit as past due as I said they were.

Personally, I cannot see any advantage in moaning and groaning about the state of the English language. People will say what they like. Let there be an end to the sermonizing about the decline and fall of proper grammar and excellent elocution. Instead, I propose using the gift of laughter to not only highlight the problem, but to take much pleasure in mocking it as well.

Stick it up your Khyber! indeed. That's one end of the scale; however, even the rich, the very rich, and the very, very rich in this country perform a litany of ignorant exercises with their language, specifically in *toff* (short for *toffee*; short for *toffee-nosed*) nicknames. Off the top of my head, it will be my misfortune during my time here to meet: Spotty, Blabby, Dubs, Jammy, Chummy, Chips, Smarmy, Tich, Gobo, Pooty, Stumps, Grummy, Nits, Swotty, Weepy, and Knobs. Not one of the foregoing is anything below a Knight of the Realm. All are public school boys from institutions wherein the general public is not allowed to be schooled because they are not rich, or titled, or entitled to a posh nickname to be used chummily years later in one's club. English, in my opinion, is utilized more clearly and with greater efficacy and charm in the Maritimes where, I can assure you, you will never meet a gentleman whose first name is St. John (pronounced *Sinjin*) who lives in Leominster (pronounced *Lemster*) with his son Buccleuch (pronounced *Buckloo*).



"It wasn't busy for a Friday evening," I say, propping two tired feet atop a large stack of Erl's magazines and books. We'd had a decent walk from the Bond street Tube station to his small but comfortable digs at #18 Portman square. I did not like the Tube one little bit for its clatter, stank air, and the awful feeling of being under a ceiling of dirt and mud.

"I'm rather proud of myself. I ate jugged hare and nothing awful seems to have happened because of it."

"When you get back to New Brunswick, you'll have to show them how it's made. Try it with beaver."

The look on my face tells him precisely what I think of that suggestion.

"Not to worry, Kurtis, I won't subject you to jugged hare again but I thought you'd enjoy a traditional country squire's meal to start things off. This is our mother country, don't forget. When the Fourth Canadian Mounted shipped over here in '15, we pretty much got the old regulars and 'Spotted Dick' was no stranger in the cookhouse in Dibgate camp. That's in Kent, near Folkestone. 'Jam roly-poly' is another; we never got that more than once a month though."

Erl has succumbed to the motherland's propensity for silly sobriquets.

"When I think of British cuisine, it's more traditional beef and Yorkshire pudding on offer. That's as adventurous as I would like to be, frankly. There aren't such ridiculous dishes in France or Germany. And you should be ashamed of yourself for letting the words 'Spotted Dick' out of your mouth. There must be some German restaurants scattered about in London. *Knackwurst und Spätzle?*"

"We'll have that tomorrow night. I know a splendid place just around the corner. *Wurtzl's*."

Roly-poly things aside, I reconsidered a tad. "Mind you, I won't say no to a plate of fish and chips when its turn comes around. Or partridge...or any of its English relatives. If it has feathers, you can usually find someone who shoots and sells it."

Erl snorts. "Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie..."

"...four and twenty blackshirts baked in a pie..."

"...clever, Kurtis..."

"...yes, well. Tell you what, if you make a decent cup of tea and care to break out the cheese and biscuits, I'm ready to show you a snazzy gift from Adolf to his distinguished friend, Herr Death."

No, I'll make no mention yet of Schrecken's three little diaries. We are, each of us, entitled to a few secrets, are we not?

"You won't believe it."

"Whatever it is, I'll bet my secret cache of *Chalkley's Hobnobs* that it has his picture on it."

Point for Erl.

Ten minutes along, I have removed the gold card and am flashing it under Erl's amazed eyes. I translate the etched text for him: *Unter dem Schutz des Adolf Hitler Kanzler von Deutschland. Leisten Sie alle Hilfe sofort auf meiner Autorität.* (Under the protection of Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany. Render all assistance immediately on my authority.)

A low whistle of admiration. I know Erl well enough to recognize that he has already assessed its monetary value. He sits back, holding it gingerly. Now he's working out how such a thing might be used to our benefit; he is polite enough to think of 'our' but he means 'his.' Everyone has to make a living. Finally, Erl places it gently on the small table beside my tea mug. He sighs. This means he has moved on to consider the less appealing aspects of possessing such a thing.

"Well whoop-de-do, Kurtis. Looks like Herr Death got paid off big time. This must be worth five hundred pounds, probably more. Given it's from Hitler, you might get a thousand for it from somebody like Unity Mitford." His eyes widen. "Jesus! With this thing, the sky's the limit."

My smile is pretty thin. "It's not for sale, Erl. I'm going to need it when I go back to Germany."

"You're going back? You just got here, kid."

"No, I'll be here for some time. You know I've taken L.B. up on his offer to work for the *Express* in some capacity or other. I expect I'll have to start climbing the ladder again. I don't know my way around London. I don't know who's who." I slurp my tea. "No, I'm here for a while. Besides, I'm also on a secret mission." I waggle my eyebrows.

Erl smiles. "A secret mission. Gosh, that'll be the tenth one this month."

For the time being, I also keep Major Ball under cover. It is a time for baby-stepping, not clodhopping.

"Between you, me and the lamp post, it's just a bit of nonsense which Adolf dreamed up. He wants me to survey the Anglo-Saxon landscape of politicians and aristocrats and see who the likely candidates are for membership in his exclusive new club."

"The Brits do like their clubs," Erl says. There is a hint of a smirk.

"Think of it as the British version of his *Inerer Kreis* (Adolf's inner circle). Why he wants one here, I'm not entirely sure." By which I mean, there are so many reasons, it's difficult to fasten on just one.

"He sees the connections between the German and English people and he sees the value in strengthening their ties. Other than Austria, who is he going to be friends with? Russia? The French? Not bloody likely."

"I notice you switched from 'British' to 'English.' That reminds me of the conversation I had with Pierre van Paassen in Paris."

"That talkative bore."

I wag my finger at him. "I value his opinions as highly as I do yours, Erl."

He doesn't have a clever riposte for that.

"Van Paassen said that the English run things lock, stock, and barrel and they are only British when they need the Welsh or the Scots or the Commonwealth to fight their wars for them."

"You forgot the Irish Protestants."

"Everyone forgets the Irish Protestants. That's not the point. I'm saying that van Paassen's opinion, in light of the fact that you seem to casually switch between the 'English' and the 'British,' means that you are evincing some sort of unconscious recognition of the same thing. That it's the English who are in the driver's seat."

"And the dish ran away with the spoon...okay, I take your point...or Pierre's point. I won't say I disagree with it but I don't agree with it either."

"And, as we are both aware, King George and his family are the *House of Saxe-Cobourg-Gotha*."

"But *Windsor* rolls off the tongue so much more fluidly, and you can spell it easily. Again, I take your point. There are strong connections between the two countries and they start at the top of the Royals and work their way down to the dukes, viscounts, knights, and probably even the *Yeomen of the Tower*. If you're looking for friends for Adolf, I predict you won't have a great deal of difficulty finding them. In fact, I can probably point you in the right direction."

I tip my imaginary hat to him. "I kind of figured that you might. Tell you what...more tea, more of these *Chalkley's* biscuits..."

"...*Hobnobs*. All the way from Winchmore Hill, not far from Sevenoaks. I'll take you along there one day. They also make *Eccles* cakes which are worth the journey alone."

"And you aren't offering me one of those now because..."

"...I already ate them all. But tell me the '*nobs* aren't a delight on their own."

"...very nice they are...and now, besides munching biscuits, you can tell me all about what you've been doing over here. I want to hear all about this popular Prince and his Yankee lover. I'll bet there are some Adolf admirers on that side of the fence, eh?"

And that, my dear Reader, ain't the half of it...but I have no anchor in the ground as yet and I must keep my wits about me. How widespread the gossip about *Herr Death* is in this kingdom is also an unknown and I can think of only one man who will know: my new employer, Lord Beaverbrook. Max Aitken, fellow New Brunswicker, as was. And to some unfathomable degree, still is.

I am counting on it.



When I was a cub reporter for the *Toronto Star*, I once said, '*Never criticize anyone until you know the facts and are certain whether or not the intended victim of your remarks has actually earned them.*' This is the opposite of what L.B. will be asking me to do for the *Daily Express*. It is Britain's largest selling newspaper and is full of vile, salacious, despicable, annoying, shocking accusations with, as a rule, only the merest shred of fact to pin under them. Upon this shred is constructed an edifice of innuendo which approaches the ridiculous. Only fools read this newspaper and expect erudition and knowledge out of it. In many ways, it is just like *Der Angriff*, Goebbels' rag, though the wicked, conniving Jews are here displaced by the *Express'* wicked, conniving *aliens*.

I am assured by my experiences in this sceptre'd isle that an Englishman only detests different races and religions (thus, *aliens*) because Britannia's sons are superior beings of taste, class, wisdom, experience, largesse, and power. You do not create an Empire with damp squibs and rafts lashed together with Black Bryony ivy. No, it is the Englishman's God-given right to regard all strangers as threats and bad eggs. Rest assured that, should you transport your Englishness to, say, one of the colonies—let's choose Canada—you will find many similarities in language, edibles, and comforts, including a reverence for the Royal family. Mind you, you will be surrounded by *colonials*. But you can make do if you have to and many have. Some of our Governor-Generals have actually liked our wintry dominion, though they instantly vanish back home when their shift is done.

The preceding diatribe, which oozes sarcasm and meanness—most of it unwarranted where the *Express* is concerned, I grant you—is what bubbles to the surface after a colonial attempts and fails to infiltrate the Kingdom. Erl has a bad case of it (though now he thinks himself an American because he's working for *TIME* magazine) and it affects his writing, for a Yank always sees himself above a Brit. Beaverbrook, a real Colonial, suffered from it in a very public fashion but, in the ultimate form of revenge, now makes a great deal of money out of it. 'It' is class, and

there are so many types and levels of it here that it is impossible to remember them all. I believe you should know that I hate it also. Everything, of a certainty, begins with the King and it's all downhill from there, ending most likely with the Royal Turd Remover (*Regius Turd Aufero*). You can bet your buttons that he'll have his own uniform in the King's colours.

Of course, the 'Poison Dwarf' in Germany positively loathes Beaverbrook's *Express* and the feeling is vice-versa, for they constantly insult, malign, and excoriate each other in print in bold type. Both papers sell like crazy and generate huge piles of cash for their owners, who demand their readers honour the flag. Remarkably, they get away with it. In Goebbels' case, his power can be brutally enforced, but what the 'Beaver' lacks in stormtroopers, he makes up with the unbridled determination to eviscerate anyone brave (or foolhardy) enough to challenge him, by laying waste the man's reputation on one million front pages every day, for as long as it takes. The methodologies certainly fit the style of government, wouldn't you say? And the effects would appear to be very similar, which begs a question that no one seems to be willing to ask. Where is that curious, innocent child in *The Emperor's New Clothes* when you need him?

Having agreed with Erl that I may kip at Portman square with him for the time being, while I establish myself, I boldly set forth the very next morning before he woke to walk to Fleet street and the offices of the *Daily Express*. There is no better way to get the lay of the land than a brisk walking-journey and I paid due deference to Wigmore street, leading into Cavendish square, and then Oxford Circus, where I dawdled along Oxford street's shops—*John Lewis*, the mighty *Selfridge's*—to Tottenham Court road, Holborn, and Chancery Lane.

I could have done this in half the time if I had simply used the Tube, that underground clew of trains wending their way like conquering worms through the soft entrails of this city. Suicidal citizens regularly choose the hour of eleven o'clock in the morning to step off the platform and greet the engineer face-to-face. What ugliness ensues! Besides, would I have chanced upon Dr. Johnson's former habitation in Gough square if I had used the wormhole? No, certainly not. The chief collector of the English language deserves recognition and how amusing it is that he resides within a stone's throw of the greatest muddle of newspaper folk in the known world.

Fleet street is macadamized pavement on top of centuries of detritus where once the river Fleet did flow, carrying its *mélange* of animal carcasses and a never-ending syrup of human waste in a slow, meandering journey to somewhere else. Isn't this the spot where Alexander Pope, the hunchback poet with the nasty pen, set Colley Cibber, his more famous rival, in a (not to put too fine a point upon it) swimming race through shit? I think it is. Cibber was the '*King of Dullness and Stupidity*' in the mid-1700's, crowned by a malcontent-with-a-birth-defect, an acid tongue, and access to a printing press. Were Alexander Pope alive today, I would personally supervise his introduction to Josef Goebbels. And then let them have at each other till only feathers remained.

The *Daily Express* building, where my walk ends, is new as of five years ago. Planted at #120 Fleet street, it is a formidable edifice in the style known as *art deco*. What this really means, if I may be so bold, is that geometry is permitted to overwhelm common sense and simple natural beauty in favour of lines and curves and, where they intersect, spaces filled with bold, unnatural colours. It is a formidable building, a kind of futuristic penitentiary owned by a demon lord and filled with the devil's acolytes. Vitrolite, glass, chromium...just a bunch of new, mechanically-processed materials which fly in the face of quaint, old *Londinium*.

A ten minute walk around the neighbourhood will show you structures much more fitting: the Temple with its Inns of Court, the Royal Courts of Justice, and even the Central Criminal Court they call the 'Old Bailey.' That's architecture built to last and not some ridiculous architect's bad dream put to paper and paid for by rich men with more money than taste. There, I've had my say; think what you will. Johnson, Milton, Burke, Lamb, and Dickens would agree with me if they were here. *Argumentum ad absurdum*.

I arrive early enough to bump into the night editor, Alan Jones, who is just leaving. I mean bump literally, for I wasn't looking where I was going and my head plunked into his midriff and sent him flying backwards, landing on his keister and putting a scowl on his face that could warn off a dragon.

"You stupid bastard!" is pretty much all I could get out of him in the time it took to get him replanted on his feet and cadged along to a spare seat in the small café off to the side of the main foyer. There, with some choice phrases, he made me aware of his name and position as well as the fact that he hadn't actually been leaving but—*surprise!*—had been waiting for me.

"The Old Man told me to collect you and bring you upstairs. Christ, doesn't my arse hurt!"

"I am sorry. It certainly wasn't intentional."

"Yes, well..."

"And how did you know whom to look for?"

Jones lifts a furry eyebrow up a notch, likely because of my excellent grammar, and looks at me. "He has a pair of binoculars and nothing better to do." After a good long pause, he remarked, "You're the same height as the Old Man."

That is acceptable to me. I am, after all, a tad nonplussed about this incident and itching to get it all behind us. Knocking about your (presumed) night editor on your first day isn't the wisest course of action for a new employee. Fortunately it does occur to me that a few of *God's Candy* might ameliorate things and of course they certainly do. Once he's popped two of the pink beauties into his gob, I explain the process whereby he might gain the highest peak of satisfaction and we remain sitting at the café until they do their job. His groan of satisfaction and delight is reassuring and makes things right between us.

"My God, I don't think I've ever had anything as remarkable as this. What are they? Where can I get more?"

I answered his questions, and many more, while we exited the lobby and entered an impressive elevator which took us up to L.B.'s lair. There, Mr. Jones and I shook hands, promised to meet again, and parted on excellent terms. With one hand, he pocketed the small packet of *Bird Bonz* I offered him and, with the other, pointed down a hallway to a door of polished oak.

I pause a moment in order to tip my hat to Alan Jones, a newsman who relishes rich news stories with the same gusto as a rugby-half knifing a grilled steak after demolishing his opponents on the pitch. I am not the only one who remembers hearing Jones bellowing in the newsroom at three o'clock in the morning: "Any babbies dead? What, no babbies dead? Damn your eyes, man; go and get us a dead babby story then." Once you got the hang of his accent and understood that a 'babby' was his version of 'baby,' his desire for shocking, tragic news became clear: death sells and nothing sells like dead babbies. Such is journalism in the heart of the Empire and it is very profitable indeed.

Down the hallway I scuttled and, with no small amount of anticipation, thumped my fist against the door and waited. When it opened, it unveiled the presence of a mastodon. It wore shoes and an expensive/expansive suit and tie, of sizes you would expect to find in Paul Bunyan's closet. For a moment, I imagine myself back in Toronto at the Arcadian Grill with Gordon Sinclair and the immense John Muldoon, up to that time and place the largest human being I had ever seen.

A familiar, grinning goblin pops round the other side of this beast. Beaverbrook.

"Ah, Kurtis, the boy wonder! Come in, lad. Come in and meet my great friend and colleague, Lord Castlerosse."

Valentine Edward Charles Browne (aka. Viscount Castlerosse) has one other name: *Huge*. It is the one which fits him best, just like the size 64 suit jacket he wears and the size 60 pantaloons which cover his tree trunks. I asked him once what his shoe size was; he told me that they were custom-made by John Lob the boot-maker in Jermyn street, where the aristocracy and the wealthy (not always two distinct groups) have their fashion bespoke, and that the size of his is a state secret. Good sense of humour has Huge. With Erl's assistance, for he is good with numbers, we once calculated that the cloth used in just one of Huge's suits would make five of them for me or four for Erl, who further reckoned that a huge suit for Huge would top a whopping two hundred pounds.

My reaction to this greeting surprises both of them.

"You're the *Wix* man. Smoother, richer, mellower flavour."

Lord Castlerosse (whom I never addressed as 'Huge' in his company, although L.B. always did) beams. "Yes, that's right. *Wix* cigarettes. Damnable things actually. I much prefer one of these." He waves a cigar the size of chair leg. L.B. has his own locked into the corner of his mouth and he grins while motioning us into seats. Huge's chair is, I think, specially made and positioned in pride of place opposite L.B.'s impressive desk. My fellow Maritimer holds Huge in great respect and not long ago persuaded him to dispense with his aristocratic, slothful existence on his estates somewhere outside London—I do believe they're in Ireland—to become an opinion columnist for the *Sunday Express* and to write three thousand words a week. This keeps the great man in close contact with L.B. and they have become thick-as-thieves. Indeed, during the time I shall relate to you, their two became our three, for the attraction of *Herr Death* as a willing ear and a sober counsellor proves impossible for Huge to resist. For L.B.'s part, I am already deemed one of the brethren being a Maritimer as I am.

"Huge makes a decent wage peddling their cigarettes, don't you?"

"Indeed. The *Wix* people pay very well."

"The advertisement I viewed was in the *Sunday Express*, I'm sure. You are described as a famous journalist and peer." I look at L.B. "That's a really snazzy deal on both sides of the fence."

L.B. grins again which, though repetitive, accurately describes one of the two facial expressions he is able to generate; the other being a close-lipped downward frown. "That's my boy, Kurtis. You haven't lost that plain potatoes assessment of things, have you? I'll bet you had your hands full with Goebbels. It's a wonder you didn't kick him in the cobbles instead of Karl Hanke."

Admittedly, I blush. An instant later I give him the hairy eyeball, making it clear that I indeed recognize that the Gnome has excellent sources. Of the three people who were inside Goebbels' hotel room that afternoon during the Nuremberg gathering in '33, it could only have been Goebbels himself who let loose the fact that I kicked his secretary, Herr Hanke, square in the hoopers for mocking me. Of course, a secret is never a secret unless you are the only one who carries it. Knowing Goebbels and his dislike of his own secretary, I am not surprised he told tales out of class. No, the real interest which L.B. just piqued is *how did it get this far?* I will, I assure you, eventually discover the answer but, at this time, it is early days yet.

"Yes, Hanke. Right in the nuts. Not a bad fellow actually and a great admirer of *God's Candy*. I am happy to say that my rash"—*but justified*—"action has not impaired his ability to cuckold the *Giftzweg* by way of his wife."

L.B. roars, sending a cloud of smoke into the air, immediately followed by Huge's contribution, so I pick up my chair and move it closer to the open window.

"That's my boy," grins L.B.

"Bloody Nazis," remarks Huge. "You know, I almost sat on that blatherskite von Ribbentrop at the *Savoy* last week. Damned man refused to move until I uncorked a rather nasty vintage." Smoke pours out of his nostrils.

L.B. guffaws. "Huge means," he says to me, "that he farted on the insufferable fellow. Ha, ha!"

"One of my best, I must say." More smoke ensues. More chuckles from the two buddies.

"You need a fan in this room," I say matter-of-factly. "As soon as possible."

At that moment, the door receives a curt knock and opens to reveal a sturdy, middle-aged gentleman with a receding hairline and thick glasses. His shirtsleeves are rolled up to his elbows and he carries numerous papers. A pen protrudes from atop his right ear like an Indian feather. A quick look at me, a quick nod at Huge, and he addresses himself directly to L.B.

"I am all for unusual stories on page one, Max, but I will not read stories titled '*Thieves gag, tie up woman.*' Incidents such as these have become standard fare in our competitors' papers because people are always tying up and gagging women. It is as common as suicide by gas oven."

L.B. slaps a hand on his desk. "I completely agree, Arthur. I couldn't agree more. We need more stories on diseases, not suicides."

Huge waggles his cigar tucked inside a fist large enough to throttle a horse. "Another reason

why the gas industry has gone straight to hell in this country. If people want to kill themselves, there's lots of rope and plenty of trees." He looks at us, apparently expecting someone to say 'Amen.'

"Well," I say, in an effort to fill the void, "who would ever want to cook a roast goose after something like that?"

"Too right, my boy," replies Huge, emitting a distinctive, lumpy sound which the word 'chortle' was coined to describe. "Too right."

Christiansen, whom I recognize by name as the chief editor of the *Express*, examines me. "You're the new fellow. What's your name?"

I clear my throat and enunciate as best I can. "Kurtis De'ath, sir."

"I thought it was Herr Death." He glares at L.B. "I thought you said..."

"...yes, well, we're keeping the *Herr Death* business to one side for the time being, Arthur. As you will appreciate, I'm not overly enthused about telling our readership that we're employing Nazis."

"I'm not a Nazi," I exclaim, and assume a look of calculated fury, a reflection of Victor McLaglen's face in RKO's 'The Informer,' when the I.R.A. accuse him of betraying his friend, Frankie. It seems to work well enough and Mr. Christiansen nods.

"No, he's not a Nazi," repeats L.B., presumably meaning what he says.

"Or, if he is, he's our kind of Nazi," amends Huge, exhaling smoke. There is more chortling.

I do not know what to make of that, so I make nothing.

"Send up Tom if he's about," says L.B. to his editor. "And do take Huge with you, if you don't mind. I know he's practically bursting at the seams to have a go at the typewriter."

"Am I?" says Huge. He begins the laborious process of extricating his bulk from the chair and, with a lurch, forces Christiansen out the door by way of his stomach. "The *Londoner's Log* awaits. Today I shall wax eloquent about the *foie gras* at Claridge's, which was decidedly off the other day and though I said as much to the waiter, nothing was done."

