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ROALD DAHL

BITCH

I HAVE so far released for publication only one episode from Uncle Oswald’s diaries. It concerned, some of you may remember, a carnal encounter between my uncle and a Syrian female leper in the Sinai Desert. Six years have gone by since its publication and nobody has yet come forward to make trouble. I am therefore encouraged to release a second episode from these curious pages. My lawyer has advised against it. He points out that some of the people are still living and are easily recognizable. He says I will be sued mercilessly. Well, let them sue. I am proud of my uncle. He knew how life should be lived. In a preface to the first episode I said that Casanova’s Memoirs read like a Parish Magazine beside Uncle Oswald’s diaries, and that the great lover himself, when compared with my uncle, appears positively undersexed. I stand by that, and given time I shall prove it to the world. Here then is a little episode from Volume XXIII, precisely as Uncle Oswald wrote it: PARIS Wednesday Breakfast at ten. I tried the honey. It was delivered yesterday in an early Sèvres sucrier which had the lovely canary-coloured ground known as Jon quille. “From Suzie,’ the note said, “and thank you.’ It is nice to be appreciated. And the honey was interesting. Suzie Jolibois had, among other things, a small farm south of Casablanca, and was fond of bees. Her hives were set in the midst of a plantation of cannabis indica, and the bees drew their nectar exclusively from this source. They lived, those bees, in a state of perpetual euphoria and were disinclined to work. The honey was therefore very scarce. I spread a third piece of toast. The stuff was almost black. It had a pungent aroma. The telephone rang. I put the receiver to my ear and waited. I never speak first when called. After all, I’m not phoning them. They’re phoning me.

“Oswald! Are you there?”

I knew the voice. “Yes, Henri,” I said. “Good morning.”

“Listen!” he said, speaking fast and sounding excited. “I think I’ve got it! I’m almost certain I’ve got it! Forgive me if I’m out of breath, but I’ve just had a rather fantastic experience. It’s all right now. Everything’s fine. Will you come over?”

“Yes,” I said. “I’ll come over.” I replaced the receiver and poured myself another cup of coffee. Had Henri really done it at last? If he had, then I wanted to be around to share the fun.

I must pause here to tell you how I met Henri Bione. Some three years ago I drove down to Provence to spend a summer weekend with a lady who was interesting to me simply because she possessed an extraordinarily powerful muscle in a region where

other women have no muscles at all. An hour after my arrival, I was strolling alone on the lawn beside the river when a small dark man approached me. He had black hairs on the backs of his hands and he made me a little bow and said, “Henri Biotte, a fellow guest.”

“Oswald Cornelius,” I said.

Henri Biotte was as hairy as a goat. His chin and cheeks were covered with bristly black hair and thick tufts of it were sprouting from his nostrils. “May I join you?” he said, falling into step beside me and starting immediately to talk. And what a talker he was! How Gallic, how excitable. He walked with a mad little hop, and his fingers flew as if he wanted to scatter them to the four winds of heaven, and his words went off like firecrackers, with terrific speed. He was a Belgian chemist, he said, working in Paris. He was an olfactory chemist. He had devoted his life to the study of olfaction.

“You mean smell?” I said.

“Yes, yes!” he cried. “Exactly! I am an expert on smells. I know more about smells than anyone else in the world!”

“Good smells or bad?” I asked, trying to slow him down.

“Good smells, lovely smells, glorious smells!” he said. “I make them! I can make any smell you want!”

He went on to tell me he was the chief perfume blender to one of the great couturiers in the city. And his nose, he said, placing a hairy finger on the tip of his hairy proboscis, probably looked just like any other nose, did it not? I wanted to tell him it had more hairs sprouting from the noseholes than wheat from the prairies and why didn’t he get his barber to snip them out, but instead I confessed politely that I could see nothing unusual about it.

“Quite so,” he said. “But in actual fact it is a smelling organ of phenomenal sensitivity. With two sniffs it can detect the presence of a single drop of macroylic musk in a gallon of geranium oil.”

“Extraordinary,” I said.

“On the Champs Elysées,” he went on, “which is a wide thoroughfare, my nose can identify the precise perfume being used by a woman walking on the other side of the street.”

“With the traffic in between?”

“With heavy traffic in between,” he said.

He went on to name two of the most famous perfumes in the world, both of them made by the fashion-house he worked for. “Those are my personal creations,” he said modestly. “I blended them myself. They have made a fortune for the celebrated old bitch who runs the business.”

“But not for you?”

“Me! I am but a poor miserable employee on a salary,” he said, spreading his palms and hunching his shoulders so high they touched his earlobes. “One day, though, I shall break away and pursue my dream.”

“You have a dream?”

“I have a glorious, tremendous, exciting dream, my dear sir!”

“Then why don’t you pursue it?”

“Because first I must find a man farsighted enough and wealthy enough to back me.”

Ah-ha, I thought, so that’s what it’s all about. “With a reputation like yours, that shouldn’t be too difficult,” I said.

“The sort of rich man I seek is hard to find,” he said. “He must be a sporty gambler with a very keen appetite for the bizarre.”

That’s me, you clever little bugger, I thought. “What is this dream you wish to pursue?” I asked him. “Is it making perfumes?”

“My dear fellow!” he cried. “Anyone can make perfumes! I’m talking about the perfume! The only one that counts!”

“Which would that be?”

“Why, the dangerous one, of course! And when I have made t, I shall rule the world!”

“Good for you,” I said.

“I am not joking, Monsieur Cornelius. Would you permit me to explain what I am driving at?”

“Go ahead.”

“Forgive me if I sit down,” he said, moving toward a bench. “I had a heart attack last April and I have to be careful.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Oh, don’t be sorry. All will be well so long as I don’t overdo things.”

It was a lovely afternoon and the bench was on the lawn near the riverbank and we sat down on it. Beside us, the river flowed slow and smooth and deep, and there were little clouds of waterflies hovering over the surface. Across the river there were willows along the bank and beyond the willows an emerald-green meadow, yellow with buttercups, and a single cow grazing. The cow was brown and white.

“I will tell you what kind of perfume I wish to make,” he said. “But it is essential I explain a few other things to you on the way or you will not fully understand. So please bear with me a while.” One hand lay limp upon his lap, the hairy part upward. It looked like a black rat. He was stroking it gently with the fingers of the other hand.

“Let us consider first,” he said, “the phenomenon that occurs when a dog meets a bitch in heat. The dog’s sexual drive is tremendous. All self-control disappears. He has only one thought in his head, which is to fornicate on the spot, and unless he is prevented by force, he will do so. But do you know what it is that causes this tremendous sex-drive in a dog?”

“Smell,” I said.

“Precisely, Monsieur Cornelius. Odorous molecules of a special conformation enter the dog’s nostrils and stimulate his olfactory nerveendings. This causes urgent signals to be sent to the olfactory bulb and thence to the higher brain centres. It is all done by smell. If you sever a dog’s olfactory nerve, he will lose interest in sex. This is also true of many other mammals, but it is not true of man. Smell has nothing to do with the sexual appetite of the human male. He is stimulated in this respect by sight, by tactility, and by his lively imagination. Never by smell.”

“What about perfume?” I said.

“It’s all rubbish!” he answered. “All those expensive scents in small bottles, the ones I make, they have no aphrodisiac effect at all upon a man. Perfume was never intended for that purpose. In the old days, women used it to conceal the fact that they stank. Today, when they no longer stink, they use it purely for narcissistic reasons. They enjoy putting it on and smelling their own good smells. Men hardly notice the stuff. I promise you that.”

“I do,” I said.

“Does it stir you physically?”

“No, not physically. Aesthetically, yes.”

“You enjoy the smell. So do I. But there are plenty of other smells I enjoy more the bouquet of a good Lafite, the scent of a fresh Cornice pear, or the smell of the air blowing in from the sea on the Brittany coast.”

A trout jumped high in midstream and the sunlight flashed on its body. “You must forget,” said Monsieur Biotte, “all the nonsense about musk and ambergris and the testicular secretions of the civet cat. We make our perfumes from chemicals these days. If I want a musky odour I will use ethylene sebacate. Phenylacetic acid will give me civet and benzaldehyde will provide the smell of almonds. No sir, I am no longer interested in mixing up chemicals to make pretty smells.”

For some minutes his nose had been running slightly, wetting the black hairs in his nostrils. He noticed it and produced a handkerchief and gave it a blow and a wipe. “What I intend to do,” he said, “is to produce a perfume which will have the same electrifying effect upon a man as the scent of a bitch in heat has upon a dog! One whiff and that’!! be it! The man will lose all control. He’ll rip off his pants and ravish the lady on the spot!”

“We could have some fun with that,” I said.

“We could rule the world!” he cried.

“Yes, but you told me just now that smell has nothing to do with the sexual appetite of the human male.”

“It doesn’t,” he said. “But it used to. I have evidence that in the period of the post-glacial drift, when primitive man was far more closely related to the ape than he is now, he still retained the ape-like characteristic of jumping on any right-smelling female he ran across. And later, in the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods, he continued to become sexually animated by smell, but to a lesser and lesser degree. By the time the higher civilizations had come along in Egypt and China around 10,000 BC, evolution had played its part and had completely suppressed man’s ability to be stimulated sexually by smell. Am I boring you?”

“Not at all. But tell me, does that mean an actual physical change has taken place in man’s smelling apparatus?”

“Absolutely not,” he said, “otherwise there’d be nothing we could do about it. The little mechanism that enabled our ancestors to smell these subtle odours is still there. I

happen to know it is. Listen, you've seen how some people can make their ears move a tiny bit?"

"I can do it myself," I said, doing it.

"You see," he said, "the ear-moving muscle is still there. It's a leftover from the time when man used to be able to cock his ears forward for better hearing, like a dog. He lost that ability over a hundred thousand years ago, but the muscle remains. And the same applies to our smelling apparatus. The mechanism for smelling those secret smells is still there, but we have lost the ability to use it."

"How can you be so certain it's still there?" I asked.

"Do you know how our smelling system works?" he said.

"Not really."

"Then I shall tell you, otherwise I cannot answer your question. Attend closely, please. Air is sucked in through the nostrils and passes the three baffle-shaped turbinate bones in the upper part of the nose. There it gets warmer and filtered. This warm air now travels up and over two clefts that contain the smelling organs. These organs are patches of yellowish tissue, each about an inch square. In this tissue are embedded the nerve-fibres and nerve-endings of the olfactory nerve. Every nerve-ending consists of an olfactory cell bearing a cluster of tiny hairlike filaments. These filaments act as receivers. "Receptors' is a better word. And when the receptors are tickled or stimulated by odorous molecules, they send signals to the brain. If, as you come downstairs in the morning, you sniff into your nostrils the odorous molecules of frying bacon, these will stimulate your receptors, the receptors will flash a signal along the olfactory nerve to the brain, and the brain will interpret it in terms of the character and intensity of the odour. And that is when you cry out, "Ah-ha, bacon for breakfast!"

"I never eat bacon for breakfast," I said.

He ignored this.

"These receptors," he went on, "these tiny hair-like filaments are what concern us. And now you are going to ask me how on earth they can tell the difference between one odorous molecule and another, between say peppermint and camphor?"

"How can they?" I said. I was interested in this.

"Attend more closely than ever now, please," he said. "At the end of each receptor is an indentation, a sort of cup, except that it isn't round. This is the "receptor site'. Imagine now thousands of these little hairlike filaments with tiny cups at their

extremities, all waving about like the tendrils of sea anemones and waiting to catch in their cups any odorous molecules that pass by. That, you see, is what actually happens. When you sniff a certain smell, the odorous molecules of the substance which made that smell go rushing around inside your nostrils and get caught by the little cups, the receptor sites. Now the important thing to remember is this. Molecules come in all shapes and sizes. Equally, the little cups or receptor sites are also differently shaped. Thus, the molecules lodge only in the receptor sites which fit them. Pepperminty molecules go only into special pepperminty receptor sites. Camphor molecules, which have a quite different shape, will fit only into the special camphor receptor sites, and so on. It's rather like those toys for small children where they have to fit variously shaped pieces into the right holes."

"Let me see if I understand you," I said. "Are you saying that my brain will know it is a pepperminty smell simply because the molecule has lodged in a pepperminty reception site?"

"Precisely."

"But you are surely not suggesting there are differently shaped receptor sites for every smell in the world?"

"No," he said, "as a matter of fact, man has only seven differently shaped sites."

"Why only seven?"

"Because our sense of smell recognizes only seven "pure primary odours'. All the rest are "complex odours' made up by mixing the primaries."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive. Our sense of taste has even less. It recognizes only four primaries-sweet, sour, salt, and bitter! All other tastes are mixtures of these."

"What are the seven pure primary odours?" I asked him.

"Their names are of no importance to us," he said. "Why confuse the issue."

"I'd like to hear them."

"All right," he said. "They are camphoraceous, pungent, musky, ethereal, floral, pepperminty, and putrid. Don't look so sceptical, please. This isn't my discovery. Very learned scientists have worked on it for years. And their conclusions are quite accurate, except in one respect."

“What’s that?”

“There is an eighth pure primary odour which they don’t know about, and an eighth receptor site to receive the curiously shaped molecules of that odour!”

“Ah-ha-ha!” I said. “I see what you’re driving at.,, “Yes,” he said, “the eighth pure primary odour is the sexual stimulant that caused primitive man to behave like a dog thousands of years ago. It has a very peculiar molecular structure.”

“Then you know what it is?”

“Of course I know what it is.”

“And you say we still retain the receptor sites for these peculiar molecules to fit in to?”

“Absolutely.”

“This mysterious smell,” I said, “does it ever reach our nostrils nowadays?”

“Frequently.”

“Do we smell it? I mean, are we aware of it?”

“No.11 “You mean the molecules don’t get caught in the receptor sites?”

“They do, my dear fellow, they do. But nothing happens. No signal is sent off to the brain. The telephone line is out of action. It’s like that ear muscle. The mechanism is still there, but we’ve lost the ability to use it properly.”

“And what do you propose to do about that?” I asked.

“I shall reactivate it,” he said. “We are dealing with nerves here, not muscles. And these nerves are not dead or injured, they’re merely dormant. I shall probably increase the intensity of the smell a thousandfold, and add a catalyst.”

“Go on,” I said.

“That’s enough.”

“I should like to hear more,” I said.

“Forgive me for saying so Monsieur Cornelius, but I don’t think you know enough about organoleptic quality to follow me any further. The lecture is over.”

Henri Biotte sat smug and quiet on the bench beside the river stroking the back of one hand with the fingers of the other. The tufts of hair sprouting from his nostrils gave him a pixie look, but that was camouflage. He struck me rather as a dangerous and dainty little creature, someone who lurked behind stones with a sharp eye and a sting in his tail, waiting for the lone traveller to come by. Surreptitiously I searched his face. The mouth interested me. The lips had a magenta tinge, possibly something to do with his heart trouble. The lower lip was caruncular and pendulous. It bulged out in the middle like a purse, and could easily have served as a receptacle for small coins. The skin of the lip seemed to be blown up very tight, as though by air, and it was constantly wet, not from licking but from an excess of saliva in the mouth.

And there he sat, this Monsieur Henri Biotte, smiling a wicked little smile and waiting patiently for me to react. He was a totally amoral man, that much was clear, but then so was I. He was also a wicked man, and although I cannot in all honesty claim wickedness as one of my own virtues, I find it irresistible in others. A wicked man has a lustre all his own. Then again, there was something diabolically splendid about a person who wished to set back the sex habits of civilized man half a million years.

Yes, he had me hooked. So there and then, sitting beside the river in the garden of the lady from Provence, I made an offer to Henri. I suggested he should leave his present employment forthwith and set himself up in a small laboratory. I would pay all the bills for this little venture as well as making good his salary. It would be a five-year contract, and we would go fifty-fifty on anything that came out of it.

Henri was ecstatic. “You mean it?” he cried. “You are serious?”

I held out my hand. He grasped it in both of his and shook it vigorously. It was like shaking hands with a yak. “We shall control mankind!” he said. “We’ll be the gods of the earth!” He flung his arms around me and embraced me and kissed me first on one cheek, then on the other. Oh, this awful Gallic kissing. Henri’s lower lip felt like the wet underbelly of a toad against my skin. “Let’s keep the celebrations until later,” I said, wiping myself dry with a linen handkerchief.

Henri Biotte made apologies and excuses to his hostess and rushed back to Paris that night. Within a week he had given up his old job and had rented three rooms to serve as a laboratory. These were on the third floor of a house on the Left Bank, on the Rue de Cassette, just off the Boulevard Raspaille. He spent a great deal of my money equipping the place with complicated apparatus, and he even installed a large cage into which he put two apes, a male and a female. He also took on an assistant, a clever and moderately presentable young lady called Jeanette. And with all that, he set to work.

You should understand that for me this little venture was of no great importance. I had plenty of other things to amuse me. I used to drop in on Henri maybe a couple of times

a month to see how things were going, but otherwise I left him entirely to himself. My mind wasn't on his job. I hadn't the patience for that kind of research. And when results failed to come quickly, I began to lose all interest. Even the pair of over-sexed apes ceased to amuse me after a while.

Only once did I derive any pleasure from my visits to his laboratory. As you must know by now, I can seldom resist even a moderately presentable woman. And so, on a certain rainy Thursday afternoon, while Henri was busy applying electrodes to the olfactory organs of a frog in one room, I found myself applying something infinitely more agreeable to Jeanette in the other room. I had not, of course, expected anything out of the ordinary from this little frolic. I was acting more out of habit than anything else. But my goodness, what a surprise I got! Beneath her white overall, this rather austere research chemist turned out to be a sinewy and flexible female of immense dexterity. The experiments she performed, first with the oscillator, then with the high-speed centrifuge, were absolutely breathtaking. In fact, not since that Turkish tightrope walker in Ankara (see Vol. XXI) had I experienced anything quite like it. Which all goes to show for the thousandth time that women are as inscrutable as the ocean. You never know what you have under your keel, deep water or shallow, until you have heaved the lead.

I did not bother to visit the laboratory again after that. You know my rule. I never return to a female a second time. With me at any rate, women invariably pull out all the stops during the first encounter, and a second meeting can therefore be nothing more than the same old tune on the same old fiddle. Who wants that? Not me. So when I suddenly heard Henri's voice calling urgently to me over the telephone that morning at breakfast, I had almost forgotten his existence.

I drove through the fiendish Paris traffic to the Rue de Cassette. I parked the car and took the tiny elevator to the third floor. Henri opened the door of the laboratory. "Don't move!" he cried. "Stay right where you are!" He scuttled away and returned in a few seconds holding a little tray upon which lay two greasy-looking red rubber objects. "Noseplugs," he said. "Put them in, please. Like me. Keep out the molecules. Go on, ram them in tight. You'll have to breathe through your mouth, but who cares?"

Each noseplug had a short length of blue string attached to its blunt lower end, presumably for pulling it back out of the nostril. I could see the two bits of blue string dangling from Henri's nostrils. I inserted my own noseplugs. Henri inspected them. He rammed them in tighter with his thumb. Then he went dancing back into the lab, waving his hairy hands and crying out, "Come in now, my dear Oswald! Come in, come in! Forgive my excitement, but this is a great day for me!" The plugs in his nose made him speak as though he had a bad cold. He hopped over to a cupboard and reached inside. He brought out one of those small square bottles made of very thick glass that hold about an ounce of perfume. He carried it over to where I stood, cupping his hands around it as though it were a tiny bird. "Look! Here it is! The most precious fluid in the

entire world!”

This is the son of rubbishy overstatement I dislike intensely. “So you think you’ve done it?” I said.

“I know I’ve done it, Oswald! I am certain I’ve done it!”

“Tell me what happened.”

“That’s not so easy,” he said. “But I can try.”

He placed the little bottle carefully on the bench. “I had left this particular blend, Number 1076, to distil overnight,” he went on. “That was because only one drop of distillate is produced every half hour. I had it dripping into a sealed beaker to prevent evaporation. All these fluids are extremely volatile. And so, soon after I arrived at eight thirty this morning, I went over to Number 1076 and lifted the seal from the beaker. I took a tiny sniff. Just one tiny sniff.

Then I replaced the seal.”

“And then?”

“Oh, my God, Oswald, it was fantastic! I completely lost control of myself! I did things I would never in a million years have dreamed of doing!”

“Such as what?”

“My dear fellow, I went completely wild! I was like a wild beast, an animal! I was not human! The civilizing influences of centuries simply dropped away! I was Neolithic!”

“What did you do?”

“I can’t remember the next bit very clearly. It was all so quick and violent. But I became overwhelmed by the most terrifying sensation of lust it is possible to imagine. Everything else was blotted out of my mind. All I wanted was a woman. I felt that if I didn’t get hold of a woman immediately, I would explode.”

“Lucky Jeanette,” I said, glancing toward the next room. “How is she now?”

“Jeanette left me over a year ago,” he said. “I replaced her with a brilliant young chemist called Simone Gautier.”

“Lucky Simone, then.”

“No, no!” Henri cried. “That was the awful thing! She hadn’t arrived! Today of all days, she was late for work! I began to go mad. I dashed out into the corridor and down the stairs. I was like a dangerous animal. I was hunting for a woman, any woman, and heaven help her when I found her!”

“And who did you find?”

“Nobody, thank God. Because suddenly, I regained my senses. The effect had worn off. It was very quick, and I was standing alone on the second-floor landing. I felt cold. But I knew at once exactly what had happened. I ran back upstairs and re-entered this room with my nostrils pinched tightly between finger and thumb. I went straight to the drawer where I stored the noseplugs. Ever since I started working on this project, I have kept a supply of noseplugs ready for just such an occasion. I rammed in the plugs. Now I was safe.”

“Can’t the molecules get up into the nose through the mouth?” I asked him “They can’t reach the receptor sites,” he said. “That’s why you can’t smell through your mouth. So I went over to the apparatus and switched off the heat. I then transferred the tiny quantity of precious fluid from the beaker to this very solid airtight bottle you see here. In it there are precisely eleven cubic centimetres of Number 1076.”

“Then you telephoned me.”

“Not immediately, no. Because at that point, Simone arrived. She took one look at me and ran into the next room, screaming.”

“Why did she do that?”

“My God, Oswald, I was standing there stark naked and I hadn’t realized it. I must have ripped off all my clothes!”

“Then what?”

“I got dressed again. After that, I went and told Simone exactly what had happened. When she heard the truth, she became as excited as me. Don’t forget, we’ve been working on this together for over a year now.”

“Is she still here?”

“Yes. She’s next door in the other lab.”

It was quite a story Henri had told me. I picked up the little square bottle and held it against the light. Through the thick glass I could see about half an inch of fluid, pale and pinkish-grey, like the juice of a ripe quince.

“Don’t drop it,” Henri said. “Better put it down.” I put it down. “The next step,” he went on, “will be to make an accurate test under scientific conditions. For that I shall have to spray a measured quantity on to a woman and then let a man approach her. It will be necessary for me to observe the operation at close range.”

“You are a dirty old man,” I said.

“I am an olfactory chemist,” he said primly.

“Why don’t I go out into the street with my noseplugs in,” I said, “and spray some on to the first woman who comes along. You can watch from the window here. It ought to be fun.”

“It would be fun all right,” Henri said. “But not very scientific. I must make the tests indoors under controlled conditions.”

“And I will play the male part,” I said.

“No, Oswald.”

“What do you mean, no. I insist.”

“Now listen to me,” Henri said. “We have not yet found out what will happen when a woman is present. This stuff is very powerful, I am certain of that. And you, my dear sir, are not exactly young. It could be extremely dangerous. It could drive you beyond the limit of your endurance.”

I was stung. “There are no limits to my endurance,” I said.

“Rubbish,” Henri said. “I refuse to take chances. That is why I have engaged the fittest and strongest young man I could find.”

“You mean you’ve already done this?”

“Certainly I have,” Henri said. “I am excited and impatient. I want to get on. The boy will be here any minute.”

“Who is he?”

“A professional boxer.”

“Good God.”

“His name is Pierre Lacaille. I am paying him one thousand francs for the job.”

“How did you find him?”

“I know a lot more people than you think, Oswald. I am not a hermit.”

“Does the man know what he’s in for?”

“I have told him that he is to participate in a scientific experiment that has to do with the psychology of sex. The less he knows the better.”

“And the woman? Who will you use there?”

“Simone, of course,” Henri said. “She is a scientist in her own right. She will be able to observe the reactions of the male even more closely than me.”

“That she will,” I said. “Does she realize what might happen to her?”

“Very much so. And I had one hell of a job persuading her to do t. I had to point out that she would be participating in a demonstration that will go down in history. It will be talked about for hundreds of years.”

“Nonsense,” I said.

“My dear sir, through the centuries there are certain great epic moments of scientific discovery that are never forgotten. Like the time when Dr Horace Wells of Hartford, Connecticut, had a tooth pulled out in 1844.”

“What was so historic about that?”

“Dr Wells was a dentist who had been playing about with nitrous oxide gas. One day, he got a terrible toothache. He knew the tooth would have to come out, and he called in another dentist to do the job. But first he persuaded his colleague to put a mask over his face and turn on the nitrous oxide. He became unconscious and the tooth was extracted and he woke up again as fit as a flea. Now that, Oswald, was the first operation ever performed in the world under general anaesthesia. It started something big. We shall do the same.”

At this point, the doorbell rang. Henri grabbed a pair of noseplugs and carried them with him to the door. And there stood Pierre, the boxer. But Henri would not allow him to enter until the plugs were rammed firmly up his nostrils. I believe the fellow came thinking he was going to act in a blue film, but the business with the plugs must have quickly disillusioned him. Pierre Lacaille was a bantamweight, small, muscular, and wiry. He had a flat face and a bent nose. He was about twenty-two and not very bright.

Henri introduced me, then ushered us straight into the adjoining laboratory where Simone was working. She was standing by the lab bench in a white overall, writing something in a notebook.

She looked up at us through thick glasses as we came in. The glasses had a white plastic frame.

“Simone,” Henri said, “this is Pierre Lacaille.” Simone looked at the boxer but said nothing. Henri didn’t bother to introduce me.

Simone was a slim thirtyish woman with a pleasant scrubbed face. Her hair was brushed back and plaited into a bun. This, together with the white spectacles, the white overall, and the white skin of her face, gave her a quaint antiseptic air. She looked as though she had been sterilised for thirty minutes in an autoclave and should be handled with rubber gloves. She gazed at the boxer with large brown eyes.

“Let’s get going,” Henri said. “Are you ready?”

“I don’t know what’s going to happen,” the boxer said. “But I’m ready.” He did a little dance on his toes.

Henri was also ready. He had obviously worked the whole thing out before I arrived. “Simone will sit in that chair,” he said, pointing to a plain wooden chair set in the middle of the laboratory. “And you, Pierre, will stand on the six-metre mark with your noseplugs still in.”

There were chalk lines on the floor indicating various distances from the chair, from half a metre up to six metres.

“I shall begin by spraying a small quantity of liquid on to the lady’s neck,” Henri went on addressing the boxer. “You will then remove your noseplugs and start walking slowly toward her.” To me he said, “I wish first of all to discover the effective range, the exact distance he is from the subject when the molecules hit.”

“Does he start with his clothes on?” I asked.

“Exactly as he is now.”

“And is the lady expected to cooperate or to resist?”

“Neither. She must be a purely passive instrument in his hands.”

Simone was still looking at the boxer. I saw her slide the end of her tongue slowly over

her lips.

“This perfume,” I said to Henri, “does it have any effect upon a woman?”

“None whatsoever,” he said. “That is why I am sending Simone out now to prepare the spray.” The girl went into the main laboratory, closing the door behind her.

“So you spray something on the girl and I walk toward her,” the boxer said. “What happens then?”

“We shall have to wait and see,” Henri said. “You are not worried, are you?”

“Me, worried?” the boxer said. “About a woman?”

“Good boy,” Henri said. Henri was becoming very excited. He went hopping from one end of the room to the other, checking and rechecking the position of the chair on its chalk mark and moving all breakables such as glass beakers and bottles and test-tubes off the bench on to a high shelf. “This isn’t the ideal place,” he said, “but we must make the best of it.” He tied a surgeon’s mask over the lower part of his face, then handed one to me.

“Don’t you trust the noseplugs?”

“It’s just an extra precaution,” he said. “Put it on.”

The girl returned carrying a tiny stainless-steel spray-gun. She gave the gun to Henri. Henri took a stop watch from his pocket. “Get ready, please,” he said. “You Pierre, stand over there on the six-metre mark.” Pierre did so. The girl seated herself in the chair. It was a chair without arms. She sat very prim and upright in her spotless white overall with her hands folded on her lap, her knees together. Henri stationed himself behind the girl. I stood to one side. “Are we ready?” Henri cried.

“Wait,” said the girl. It was the first word she had spoken. She stood up, removed her spectacles, placed them on a high shelf, then returned to her seat. She smoothed the white overall along her thighs, then clasped her hands together and laid them again on her lap.

“Are we ready now?” Henri said.

“Let her have it,” I said. “Shoot.”

Henri aimed the little spray-gun at an area of bare skin just below Simone’s ear. He pulled the trigger. The gun made a soft hiss and a fine misty spray came out of its nozzle.

“Pull your noseplugs out!” Henri called to the boxer as he skipped quickly away from the girl and took up a position next to me. The boxer caught hold of the strings dangling from his nostrils and pulled. The vaselined plugs slid out smoothly.

“Come on, come on!” Henri shouted. “Start moving! Drop the plugs on the floor and come forward slowly!” The boxer took a pace forward. “Not so fast!” Henri cried. “Slowly does it! That’s better! Keep going! Keep going! Don’t stop!” He was crazy with excitement, and I must admit I was getting a bit worked up myself. I glanced at the girl. She was crouching in the chair, just a few yards away from the boxer, tense, motionless, watching his every move, and I found myself thinking about a white female rat I had once seen in a cage with a huge python. The python was going to swallow the rat and the rat knew it, and the rat was crouching very low and still, hypnotized, transfixed, utterly fascinated by the slow advancing movements of the snake.

The boxer edged forward.

As he passed the five-metre mark, the girl unclasped her hands. She laid them palms downwards on her thighs. Then she changed her mind and placed them more or less underneath her buttocks, gripping the seat of the chair on either side, bracing herself, as it were, against the coming onslaught.

The boxer had just passed the two-metre mark when the smell hit him. He stopped dead. His eyes glazed and he swayed on his legs as though he had been tapped on the head with a mallet. I thought he was going to keel over but he didn’t. He stood there swaying gently from side to side like a drunk. Suddenly he started making noises through his nostrils, queer little snorts and grunts that reminded me of a pig sniffing around its trough. Then without any warning at all he sprang at the girl. He ripped off her white overall, her dress, and her underclothes. After that, all hell broke loose.

There is little point in describing exactly what went on during the next few minutes. You can guess most of it anyway. I do have to admit, though, that Henri had probably been right in choosing an exceptionally fit and healthy young man. I hate to say it, but I doubt my middle-aged body could have stood up to the incredibly violent gymnastics the boxer seemed driven to perform. I am not a voyeur. I hate that sort of thing. But in this case, I stood there absolutely transfixed. The sheer animal ferocity of the man was frightening. He was like a wild beast. And right in the middle of it all, Henri did an interesting thing. He produced a revolver and rushed up to the boxer and shouted, “Get away from that girl! Leave her alone or I’ll shoot you!” The boxer ignored him, so Henri fired a shot just over the top of his head and yelled, “I mean it, Pierre! I shall kill you if you don’t stop!” The boxer didn’t even look up.

Henri was hopping and dancing about the room and shouting, “It’s fantastic! It’s magnificent! Unbelievable! It works! It works! We’ve done it, my dear Oswald! We’ve

done it!”

The action stopped as quickly as it had begun. The boxer suddenly let go of the girl, stood up, blinked a few times, and then said, “Where the hell am I? “What happened?”

Simone, who seemed to have come through it all with no bones broken jumped up, grabbed her clothes, and ran into the next room. “Thank you, mademoiselle,” said Henri as she flew past him.

The interesting thing was that the bemused boxer hadn’t the faintest idea what he had been doing. He stood there naked and covered with sweat, gazing around the room and trying to figure out how in the world he came to be in that condition.

“What did I do?” he asked. “Where’s the girl?”

“You were terrific!” Henri shouted, throwing him a towel. “Don’t worry about a thing! The thousand francs is all yours!”

Just then the door flew open and Simone, still naked, ran back into the lab. “Spray me again!” she cried. “Oh, Monsieur Henri, spray me just one more time!” Her face was alight, her eyes shining brilliantly.

“The experiment is over,” Henri said. “Go away and dress yourself” He took her firmly by the shoulders and pushed her back into the other room. Then he locked the door.

Half an hour later, Henri and I sat celebrating our success in a small cafŽ down the street. We were drinking coffee and brandy. “How long did it go on?” I asked.

“Six minutes and thirty-two seconds,” Henri said.

I sipped my brandy and watched the people strolling by on the sidewalk. “What’s the next move?”

“First, I must write up my notes,” Henri said. “Then we shall talk about the future.”

“Does anyone else know the formula?”

“Nobody.”

“What about Simone?”

“She doesn’t know it.”

“Have you written it down?”

“Not so anyone else could understand it. I shall do that tomorrow.”

“Do it first thing,” I said. “I’ll want a copy. What shall we call the stuff? We need a name.”

“What do you suggest?”

“Bitch,” I said. “Let’s call it Bitch.” Henri smiled and nodded his head slowly. I ordered more brandy. “It would be great stuff for stopping a riot,” I said. “Much better than tear-gas. Imagine the scene if you sprayed it on an angry mob.”

“Nice,” Henri said. “Very nice.”

“Another thing we could do, we could sell it to very fat, very rich women at fantastic prices.”

“We could do that,” Henri answered.

“Do you think it would cure loss of virility in men?” I asked him.

“Of course,” Henri said. “Impotence would go out the window.”

“What about octogenarians?”

“Them, too,” he said, “though it would kill them at the same time.”

“And marriages on the rocks?”

“My dear fellow,” Henri said. “The possibilities are legion.”

At that precise moment, the seed of an idea came sneaking slowly into my mind. As you know, I have a passion for politics. And my strongest passion, although I am English, is for the politics of the United States of America. I have always thought it is over there, in that mighty and mixed-up nation, that the destinies of mankind must surely lie. And right now, there was a President in office whom I could not stand. He was an evil man who pursued evil policies. Worse than that, he was a humourless and unattractive creature. So why didn’t I, Oswald Cornelius, remove him from office?

The idea appealed to me.

“How much Bitch have you got in the lab at the moment?” I asked.

“Exactly ten cubic centimetres,” Henri said.

“And how much is one dose?”

“We used one cc for our test.”

“That’s all I want,” I said. “One cc. I’ll take it home with me today. And a set of noseplugs.”

“No,” Henri said. “Let’s not play around with it at this stage. It’s too dangerous.”

“It is my property,” I said. “Half of it is mine. Don’t forget our agreement.”

In the end, he had to give in. But he hated doing it. We went back to the lab, inserted our noseplugs, and Henri measured out precisely one cc of Bitch into a small scent-bottle. He sealed the stopper with wax and gave me the bottle. “I implore you to be discreet,” he said. “This is probably the most important scientific discovery of the century, and it must not be treated as a joke.”

From Henri’s place, I drove directly to the workshop of an old friend, Marcel Brossollet. Marcel was an inventor and manufacturer of tiny precise scientific gadgets. He did a lot of work for surgeons, devising new types of heart-valves and pacemakers and those little oneway valves that reduce intracranial pressure in hydrocephalics.

“I want you to make me,” I said to Marcel, “a capsule that will hold exactly one cc of liquid. To this little capsule, there must be attached a timing device that will split the capsule and release the liquid at a predetermined moment. The entire thing must not be. more than half an inch long and half an inch thick. The smaller the better. Can you manage that?”

“Very easily,” Marcel said. “A thin plastic capsule, a tiny section of razor-blade to split the capsule, a spring to flip the razor-blade, and the usual pre-set alarm system on a very small ladies’ watch. Should the capsule be fillable?”

“Yes. Make t so I myself can fill it and seal it up. Can I have it in a week?”

“Why not?” Marcel said. “It is very simple.”

The next morning brought dismal news. That lecherous little slut Simone had apparently sprayed herself with the entire remaining stock of Bitch over nine cubic centimetres of it, the moment she arrived at the lab! She had then sneaked up behind Henri, who was just settling himself at his desk to write up his notes.

I don’t have to tell you what happened next. And worst of all, the silly girl had forgotten that Henri had a serious heart condition. Damn it, he wasn’t even allowed to

climb a flight of stairs. So when the molecules hit him the poor fellow didn't stand a chance. He was dead within a minute, killed in action as they say, and that was that.

The infernal woman might at least have waited until he had written down the formula. As it was, Henri left not a single note. I searched the lab after they had taken away his body, but I found nothing. So now more than ever, I was determined to make good use of the only remaining cubic centimetre of Bitch in the world.

A week later, I collected from Marcel Brossollet a beautiful little gadget. The timing device consisted of the smallest watch I had ever seen, and this, together with the capsule and all the other parts, had been secured to a tiny aluminium plate three eighths of an inch square. Marcel showed me how to fill and seal the capsule and set the timer. I thanked him and paid the bill.

As soon as possible, I travelled to New York. In Manhattan, I put up at the Plaza Hotel. I arrived there at about three in the afternoon. I took a bath, had a shave, and asked room service to send me up a bottle of Glenlivet and some ice. Feeling clean and comfortable in my dressinggown, I poured myself a good strong drink of the delicious malt whisky, then settled down in a deep chair with the morning's New York Times. My suite overlooked Central Park, and through the open window I could hear the hum of traffic and the blaring of cabdrivers' horns on Central Park South. Suddenly, one of the smaller headlines on the front page of the paper caught my eye. It said, PRESIDENT ON TV TONIGHT. I read on.

The President is expected to make an important foreign policy statement when he speaks tonight at the dinner to be given in his honour by the Daughters of the American Revolution in the ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria.

My God, what a piece of luck!

I had been prepared to wait in New York for many weeks before I got a chance like this. The President of the United States does not often appear with a bunch of women on television. And that was exactly how I had to have him. He was an extraordinarily slippery customer. He had fallen into many a sewer and had always come out smelling of shit. Yet he managed every time to convince the nation that the smell was coming from someone else, not him. So the way I figured it was this. A man who rapes a woman in full sight of twenty million viewers across the country would have a pretty hard time denying he ever did it.

I read on.

The President will speak for approximately twenty minutes, commencing at nine p. m. and all major TV networks will carry the speech. He will be introduced by Mrs Elvira Ponsonby, the incumbent President of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

When interviewed in her suite at the Waldorf Towers, Nits Ponsonby said.

It was perfect! Mrs Ponsonby would be seated on the President's right. At ten past nine precisely, with the President well into his speech and half the population of the United States watching, a little capsule nestling secretly in the region of Mrs Ponsonby's bosom would be punctured and half a centimetre of Bitch would come oozing out on to her gilt lamŽ ball-gown. The President's head would come up, and he would sniff and sniff again, his eyes would bulge, his nostrils would flare, and he would start snorting like a stallion. Then suddenly he would turn and grab hold of Mrs Ponsonby. She would be flung across the dining-table and the President would leap on top of her, with the pie a la mode and strawberry shortcake flying in all directions.

I leaned back and closed my eyes, savouring the delicious scene. I saw the headlines in the papers the next morning: PRESIDENT'S BEST PERFORMANCE TO DATE PRESIDENTIAL SECRETS REVEALED TO NATION PRESIDENT INAUGURATES BLUE TV and so on.

He would be impeached the next day and I would slip quietly out of New York and head back to Paris. Come to think of it, I would be leaving tomorrow!

I checked the time. It was nearly four o'clock. I dressed myself without hurrying. I took the elevator down to the main lobby and strolled across to Madison Avenue. Somewhere around Sixty-second Street, I found a good florist's shop. There I bought a corsage of three massive orchid blooms all fastened together. The orchids were cattleyas, white and mauve splotches on them. They were particularly vulgar. So, undoubtedly, was Mrs Elvira Ponsonby. I had the shop pack them in a handsome box tied up with gold string. Then I strolled back to the Plaza, carrying the box, and went up to my suite.

I locked all doors leading to the corridor in case the maid should come in to turn back the bed. I got out the noseplugs and vaselined them carefully. I inserted them in my nostrils, ramming them home very hard. I tied a Surgeon's mask over my lower face as an extra precaution, just as Henri had done. I was ready now for the next step.

With an ordinary nose-dropper, I transferred my precious cubic centimetre of Bitch from the scent bottle to the tiny capsule. The hand holding the dropper shook a little as I did this, but all went well. I sealed the capsule. After that, I wound up the tiny watch and set it to the correct time. It was three minutes after five o'clock. Lastly, I set the timer to go off and break the capsule at ten minutes past nine.

The stems of the three huge orchid blooms had been tied together by the florist with a broad oneinch-wide white ribbon and it was a simple matter for me to remove the ribbon and secure my little capsule and timer to the orchid stems with cotton thread. When that was done, I wound the ribbon back around the stems and over my gadget.

Then I retied the bow. It was a nice job.

Next, I telephoned the Waldorf and learned that the dinner was to begin at eight o'clock, but that the guests must be assembled in the ballroom by seven thirty, before the President arrived.

At ten minutes to seven, I paid off my cab outside the Waldorf Towers entrance and walked into the building. I crossed the small lobby and placed my orchid box on the reception desk. I leaned over the desk, getting as close as possible to the clerk. "I have to deliver this package to Mrs Elvira Ponsonby," I whispered, using a slight American accent. "It is a gift from the President."

The clerk looked at me suspiciously.

"Mrs Ponsonby is introducing the President before he speaks tonight in the ballroom," I added. "The President wishes her to have this corsage right away."

"Leave it here and I'll have it sent up to her suite," the clerk said.

"No, you won't," I told him. "My orders are to deliver it in person. What's the number of her suite?"

The man was impressed. "Mrs Ponsonby is in five-o-one," he said.

I thanked him and went into the elevator. When I got out at the fifth floor and walked along the corridor, the elevator operator stayed and watched me. I rang the bell to five-o-one.

The door was opened by the most enormous female I had ever seen in my life. I have seen giant women in circuses. I have seen lady wrestlers and weight-lifters. I have seen the huge Masai women in the plains below Kilimanjaro. But never had I seen a female so tall and broad and thick as this one. Nor so thoroughly repugnant. She was groomed and dressed for the greatest occasion of her life, and in the two seconds that elapsed before either of us spoke, I was able to take most of it in the metallic silver-blue hair with every strand glued into place, the brown pig-eyes, the long sharp nose sniffing for trouble, the curled lips, the prognathous jaw, the powder, the mascara, the scarlet lipstick and, most shattering of all, the massive shored-up bosom that projected like a balcony in front of her. It stuck out so far it was a miracle she didn't topple forward with the weight of it all. And there she stood, this pneumatic giant, swathed from neck to ankles in the stars and stripes of the American flag.

"Mrs Elvira Ponsonby?" I murmured.

"I am Mrs Ponsonby," she boomed. "What do you want? I am extremely busy."

“Mrs Ponsonby,” I said. “The President has ordered me to deliver this to you in person.”

She melted immediately. “The dear man!” she shouted. “How perfectly gorgeous of him!” Two massive hands reached out to grab the box. I let her have it.

“My instructions are to make sure you open it before you go to the banquet,” I said.

“Sure I’ll open it,” she said. “Do I have to do it in front of you?”

“If you wouldn’t mind.”

“Okay, come on in. But I don’t have much time.”

I followed her into the living-room of the suite. “I am to tell you,” I said, “that it comes with all good wishes from one President to another.”

“Ha!” she roared. “I like that! What a gorgeous man he is!” She untied the gold string of the box and lifted the lid. “I guessed it!” she shouted. “Orchids! How splendid! They’re far grander than this poor little thing I’m wearing!”

I had been so dazzled by the galaxy of stars across her bosom that I hadn’t noticed the single orchid pinned to her left-hand side.

“I must change over at once,” she said. “The President will be expecting me to wear his gift.”

“He certainly will,” I said.

Now to give you an idea of how far her chest stuck out in front of her, I must tell you that when she reached forward to unpin the flower, she was only just able to touch it even with her arms fully extended. She fiddled around with the pin for quite a while, but she couldn’t really see what she was doing and it wouldn’t come undone. “I’m terrified of tearing this gorgeous gown,” she said. “Here, you do it.” She swung around and thrust her mammoth bust in my face. I hesitated. “Go on!” she boomed. “I don’t have all night!” I went to it, and in the end I managed to get the pin unhooked from her dress.

“Now let’s get the other one on,” she said.

I put aside the single orchid and lifted my own flowers carefully from the box.

“Have they got a pin?” she asked.

“I don’t believe they have,” I said. That was something I’d forgotten.

“No matter,” she said. “We’ll use the old one.” She removed the safety-pin from the first orchid, and then, before I could stop her, she seized the three orchids I was holding and jabbed the pin hard into the white ribbon around the stems. She jabbed it almost exactly into the spot where my little capsule of Bitch was lying hidden. The pin struck something hard and wouldn’t go through. She jabbed it again. Again it struck metal. “What the hell’s under here?” she snorted.

“Let me do it!” I cried, but it was too late, because the wet stain of Bitch from the punctured capsule was already spreading over the white ribbon and one hundredth of a second later the smell hit me. It caught me smack under the nose and it wasn’t actually like a smell at all because a smell is something intangible. You cannot feel a smell. But this stuff was palpable. It was solid. It felt as though some kind of fiery liquid were being squirted up my nostrils under high pressure. It was exceedingly uncomfortable. I could feel it pushing higher and higher, penetrating far beyond the nasal passages, forcing its way up behind the forehead and reaching for the brain. Suddenly the stars and stripes on Mrs Ponsonby’s dress began to wobble and bobble about and then the whole room started wobbling and I could hear my heart thumping in my head. It felt as though I were going under an anaesthetic.

At that point, I must have blacked out completely, if only for a couple of seconds.

When I came round again, I was standing naked in a rosy room and there was a funny feeling in my groin. I looked down and saw that my beloved sexual organ was three feet long and thick to match. It was still growing. It was lengthening and swelling at a tremendous rate. At the same time, my body was shrinking. Smaller and smaller shrank my body. Bigger and bigger grew my astonishing organ, and it went on growing, by God, until it had enveloped my entire body and absorbed it within itself. I was now a gigantic perpendicular penis, seven feet tall and as handsome as they come.

I did a little dance around the room to celebrate my splendid new condition. On the way I met a maiden in a star-spangled dress. She was very big as maidens go. I drew myself up to my full height and declaimed in a loud voice:

“The summer’s flower is to the summer sweet,

It flourishes despite the summer’s heat.

But tell me truly, did you ever see

A sexual organ quite so grand as me?”

The maiden leapt up and flung her arms as far around me as she could. Then cried out:

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

Shall I…Oh dear, I know not what to say.

But all my life I’ve had an itch to kiss

A man who could erect himself like this.”

A moment later, the two of us were millions of miles up in outer space, flying through the universe in a shower of meteorites all red and gold. I was riding her bareback, crouching forward and gripping her tightly between my thighs. “Faster!” I shouted, jabbing long spurs into her flanks. “Go faster!” Faster and still faster she flew, spurting and spinning around the rim of the sky, her mane streaming with sun, and snow waving out of her tail. The sense of power I had was overwhelming. I was unassailable, supreme. I was the Lord of the Universe, scattering the planets and catching the stars in the palm of my hand and tossing them away as though they were ping-pong balls.

Oh, ecstasy and ravishment! Oh, Jericho and Tyre and Sidon! The walls came tumbling down and the firmament disintegrated, and out of the smoke and fire of the explosion, the sitting-room in the Waldorf Towers came swimming slowly back into my consciousness like a rainy day. The place was a shambles. A tornado would have done less damage. My clothes were on the floor. I started dressing myself very quickly. I did it in about thirty seconds flat. And as I ran toward the door, I heard a voice that seemed to be coming from somewhere behind an upturned table in the far corner of the room. “I don’t know who you are, young man,” it said. “But you’ve certainly done me a power of good.”