

*The biggest blackmail stunt
ever, it relied on no skeleton
in the closet. This had . . .*

the Martian in the Attic

By FREDERIK POHL

Illustrated by MORROW

DUNLOP was short and pudgy; his eyelashes were blond and his hair was gone. He looked like the sort of man you see sitting way off at the end of the stadium at the Big Game, clutching a hot dog and a pennant and sitting with his wife. Who would be making him explain every play. Also he stuttered.



The girl at the reception desk of LaFitte Enterprises was a blue-eyed former model. She had Dunlop catalogued. She looked up slowly. She said bleakly: "Yes?"

"I want to see Mr. LaF-F-F—" said Dunlop, and paused to clear his throat. "I want to see Mr. LaFitte."

The ex-model was startled enough to blink. *Nobody* saw Mr. LaFitte! Oh, John D. the Sixth might. Or President Brockenheimer might drop by, after phoning first. Nobody else. Mr. LaFitte was a very great man who had invented most of America's finest gadgets, and sold them for some of America's finest money, and he was not available to casual callers. Particularly nobodies with suits that had come right off a rack.

The ex-model was, however, a girl with a sympathetic heart—as was known only to her mother, her employer and the fourteen men who, one after another, had broken it. She was sorry for Dunlop. She decided to let the poor jerk down easy and said: "Who shall I say is calling, sir? Mr. Dunlop? Is that with an 'O,' sir? One moment." And she picked up the phone, trying not to smile.

The reception room was carpeted in real Oriental wool—none of your flimsy nylon or even LaFitton!—and all about it were the symbols of LaFitte's power and genius. In a

nook, floodlighted, stood an acrylic model of the LaFitte Solar Transformer, transparently gleaming. On a scarlet pedestal in the center of the room was the LaFitte Ion-Exchange Self-Powered Water Still, in the small or forty-gallon-a-second model. (Two of the larger size provided all of London with sparkling clear water from the muddy, silty, smelly Thames.)

Dunlop said hoarsely: "Hold it a second. Tell him that he won't know my name, but we have a mutual friend."

The ex-model hesitated, struggling with a new fact. That changed things. Even Mr. LaFitte might have a friend who might by chance be acquainted with a little blond nobody whose shoes needed shining. It wasn't likely, but it was a possibility. Especially when you consider that Mr. LaFitte himself sprang from quite humble origins: at one time he had taught at a university.

"Yes, sir," she said, much more warmly. "May I have the friend's name?"

"I d-don't know his name."

"Oh!"

"But Mr. LaFitte will know who I m-mean. Just say the friend is a M— is a M— is a M-Martian."

The soft blue eyes turned bleak. The smooth, pure face shriveled into the hard *Vogue* lines that it had possessed before an unbearable interest in

chocolate nougats had taken her from before the fashion cameras and put her behind this desk.

"Get out!" she said. "That isn't a bit funny!"

The chubby little man said cheerfully: "Don't forget the name, Dunlop. And I'm at 449 West 19th Street. It's a rooming house." And he left. She wouldn't give anyone the message, he knew, but he knew comfortably that it didn't matter. He'd seen the little gold-plated microphone at the corner of her desk. The LaFitte Auto-Sec it was hooked up to would unfailingly remember, analyze and pass along every word.

"Ho-hum," said Dunlop to the elevator operator, "they make you fellows work too hard in this kind of weather. I'll see that they put in air-conditioning."

The operator looked at Dunlop as though he was some kind of a creep, but Dunlop didn't mind. Why should he? He *was* a creep. But he would soon be a very rich one.

HECTOR DUNLOP trotted out into the heat of Fifth Avenue, wheezing because of his asthma. But he was quite pleased with himself.

He paused at the corner to turn and look up at the LaFitte Building, all copper and glass bands in the quaint period architecture that LaFitte liked. Let him enjoy it,

thought Dunlop generously. It looks awful, but let LaFitte have his pleasures; it was only fair that LaFitte have the kind of building he wanted. Dunlop's own taste went to more modern lines, but there would be nothing to stop him from putting up a hundred-and-fifty-two-story building across the street if he liked. LaFitte was entitled to everything he wanted—as long as he was willing to share with Hector Dunlop. As he certainly would be, and probably that very day.

Musing cheerfully about the inevitable generosity of LaFitte, Dunlop dawdled down Fifth Avenue in the fierce but unfelt heat. He had plenty of time. It would take a little while for anything to happen.

Of course, he thought patiently, it was possible that nothing would happen at all today. Whatever human the Auto-Sec reported to might forget. Anything might go wrong. But still he had time. All he had to do was try again, and try still more after that if necessary. Sooner or later the magic words would reach LaFitte. After eight years of getting ready for this moment it didn't much matter if it took an extra day or two.

Dunlop caught his breath.

A girl in needle-pointed heels came clicking by, the hot breeze plastering her skirt against her legs. She glanced casually at the volume of space

which Hector Dunlop thought he was occupying and found it empty. Dunlop snarled out of habit; she was not the only hormone-pumping girl who had seen nothing where he stood. But he regained his calm. To hell with you, my dear, he said good-humoredly to himself. I will have you later if I like. I will have twenty like you, or twenty a day if I wish. Starting very soon.

He sprinted across Forty-second Street, and there was the gray familiar old-fashioned bulk of the Library.

On a sentimental impulse he climbed the steps and went inside.

The elevator operator nodded. "Good afternoon, Mr. Dunlop. Three?"

"That's right, Charley. As usual." They all liked him here. It was the only place in the world where that was true, he realized, but then he had spent more time here than anywhere else in the world.

Dunlop got out of the slow elevator as it creaked to an approximate halt on the third floor. He walked reminiscently down the wide, warm hall between the rows of exhibits. Just beyond the drinking fountain there. That was the door to the Fortescue Collection. Flanking it were the glass cabinets that housed some of Fortescue's own Martian photographs, along with the unexplained relics of a

previous race that had built the canals.

DUNLOP looked at the prints and could hardly keep from giggling. The Martians were seedy, slime-skinned creatures with snaky arms and no heads at all. Worse, according to Updyke's *The Martian Adventure*, Fortescue's own *First to Land* and Wilbert, Shevelsen and Buchbinder's *Survey of Indigenous Martian Semi-Fauna* (in the *Proceedings of the Astro-Biological Institute* for Winter, 2011), they smelled like rotting fish. Their mean intelligence was given by Fortescue, Burlutski and Stanko as roughly equivalent to the *Felidae* (though Gaffney placed it higher, say about that of the lower primates). They possessed no language. They did not have the use of fire. Their most advanced tool was a hand-axe. In short, the Martians were the dopes of the Solar System, and it was not surprising that LaFitte's receptionist had viewed describing a Martian as her employer's friend as a gross insult.

"Why, it's Mr. Dunlop," called the librarian, peering out through the wire grating on the door. She got up and came toward him to unlock the door to the Fortescue Collection.

"No, thanks," he said hastily. "I'm not coming in

today, Miss Reidy. Warm weather, isn't it? Well, I must be getting along."

When hell freezes over I'll come in, he added to himself as he turned away, although Miss Reidy had been extremely helpful to him for eight years; she had turned the Library's archives over to him, not only in the extraterrestrial collections but wherever his researching nose led him. Without her, he would have found it much more difficult to establish what he now knew about LaFitte. On the other hand, she wore glasses. Her skin was sallow. One of her front teeth was chipped. Dunlop would see only TV stars and the society debutantes, he vowed solemnly, and decided that even those he would treat like dirt.

The Library was pressing down on him; it was too much a reminder of the eight grub-like years that were now past. He left it and took a bus home.

Less than two hours had elapsed since leaving LaFitte's office.

That wasn't enough. Not even the great LaFitte's organization would have been quite sure to deliver and act on the message yet, and Dunlop was suddenly wildly anxious to spend no time waiting in his rooming house. He stopped in front of a cheap restaurant, paused, smiled broadly and walked across

the street to a small, cozy, expensive place with potted palms in the window. It would just about clean out what cash he had left, but what of it?

Dunlop ate the best lunch he had had in ten years, taking his time. When some fumbling chemical message told him that enough minutes had elapsed and he walked down the block to his rooming house, the men were there.

The landlady peered out of her window from behind a curtain, looking frightened.

Dunlop laughed out loud and waved to her as they closed in. They were two tall men with featureless faces. The heavier one smelled of chlorophyll chewing gum. The leaner one smelled of death.

Dunlop linked arms with them, grinning broadly, and turned his back on his landlady. "What did you tell her you w-were, boys? Internal Revenue? The F.B.I.?" They didn't answer, but it didn't matter. Let her think what she liked; he would never, never, never see her again. She was welcome to the few pitiful possessions in his cheap suitcase. Very soon now Hector Dunlop would have only the best.

"YOU don't know your boss's secret, eh?" Dunlop prodded the men during the car ride. "But I do. It took me eight years to find it

out. Treat me with a little respect or I m-might have you fired."

"Shut up," said chlorophyll-breath pleasantly, and Dunlop politely obeyed. It didn't matter, like everything else that happened now. In a short time he would see LaFitte and then—

"Don't p-p-push!" he said irritably, staggering before them out of the car.

They caught him, one at each elbow, Chlorophyll opening the iron gate at the end of the walk and Death pushing him through. Dunlop's glasses came off one ear and he grabbed for them.

They were well out of the city, having crossed the Hudson. Dunlop had only the haziest sense of geography, having devoted all his last eight years to more profitable pursuits, but he guessed they were somewhere in the hills back of Kingston. They went into a great stone house and saw no one. It was a Frankenstein house, but it cheered Dunlop greatly, for it was just the sort of house he had imagined LaFitte would need to keep his secret.

They shoved Dunlop through a door into a room with a fireplace. In a leather chair before a fire (though the day was hot) was a man who had to be Quincy LaFitte.

"Hello," said Dunlop with poise, strutting toward him.

"I suppose y-you know why I— Hey! What are you d-doing?"

Chlorophyll was putting one gray glove on one hand. He walked to a desk, opened it, took out something—a gun! In his gloved hand he raised it and fired at the wall. *Splat.* It was a small flat sound, but a great chip of plaster flew.

"Hey!" said Dunlop again.

Mr. LaFitte watched him with polite interest. Chlorophyll walked briskly toward him, and abruptly Death reached for—for—

Chlorophyll handed Dunlop the gun he had fired. Dunlop instinctively grasped it, while Death took out another, larger, more dangerous-looking one.

Dunlop abruptly jumped, dropped the gun, beginning to understand. "Wait!" he cried in sudden panic. "I've g-g—" He swallowed and dropped to his knees. "Don't shoot! I've g-got everything written d-down in my luh—in my luh—"

LaFitte said softly: "Just a moment, boys."

Chlorophyll just stopped where he was and waited. Death held his gun competently on Dunlop and waited.

Dunlop managed to stammer: "In my *lawyer's* office. I've got the whole th-thing written down. If anything happens to me he ruh—he ruh—he *reads* it."

LaFitte sighed. "Well," he said mildly, "that was the chance we took. All right, boys. Leave us alone." Chlorophyll and Death took their scent and their menace out the door.

Dunlop was breathing very hard. He had just come very close to dying, he realized; one man handed him the gun, and the other was about to shoot him dead. Then they would call the police to deliver the body of an unsuccessful assassin. Too bad, officer, but he certainly fooled us! Look, there's where the bullet went. I only tried to wing the poor nut, but— A shrug.

Dunlop swallowed. "Too bad," he said in a cracked voice. "But naturally I had to take p-precautions. Say. Can I have a drink?"

Mr. LaFitte pointed to a tray. He had all the time there was. He merely waited, with patience and very little concern. He was a tall old man with a very bald head, but he moved quickly when he wanted to, Dunlop noticed. Funny, he hadn't expected LaFitte to be bald.

But everything else was going strictly according to plan!

HE Poured himself a stiff shot of twelve-year-old bourbon and downed it from a glass that was Steuben's best hand-etched crystal.

He said: "I've got you, LaFitte! You know it, don't you?"

LaFitte gave him a warm, forgiving look.

"Oh, that's the boy," Dunlop enthused. "B-Be a good loser. But you know I've found out what your fortune is based on." He swallowed another quick one and felt the hot burning tingle spread. "Well. To b-begin with, eight years ago I was an undergrad at the university you taught at. I came across a reference to a thesis called *Certain Observations on the Ontogenesis of the Martian P-Paraprimates*. By somebody named Quincy A. W. L-LaFitte, B.S."

LaFitte nodded faintly, still smiling. His eyes were tricky, Dunlop decided; they were the eyes of a man who had grown quite accustomed to success. You couldn't read much into eyes like those. You had to watch yourself.

Still, he reassured himself, he had all the cards. "So I l-looked for the paper and I couldn't f-find it. But I guess you know that!" Couldn't find it? No, not in the stacks, not in the Dean's file, not even in the archives. It was very fortunate that Dunlop was a persistent man. He had found the printer who had done the thesis in the first place, and there it was, still attached to the old dusty bill.

"I remember the w-words,"

Dunlop said, and quoted from the conclusion. He didn't stutter at all:

"It is therefore to be inferred that the Martian paraprimate at one time possessed a mature culture comparable to the most sophisticated *milieux* of our own planet. The artifacts and structural remains were not created by another race. Perhaps there is a correlation with the so-called Shternweiser Anomaly, when conjecturally an explosion of planetary proportions depleted the Martian water supply."

LaFitte interrupted: "Shternweiser! You know, I had forgotten his name. It's been a long time. But Shternweiser's paper suggested that Mars might have lost its water in our own historical times—and then the rest was easy!"

Dunlop finished his quotation:

"In conjunction, these factors inescapably suggest a pattern. The Martian paraprimate requires an aqueous phase for development from grub to imago, as in many terrestrial invertebrates. Yet there has not been sufficient free water on the surface of Mars since the time of the Shternweiser explosion theory. It seems likely, therefore, that the present examples surviving are mere sexed grubs, and that the adult

Martian paraprimate does not exist *in vivo*, though its historical existence is attested by the remarkable examples left of their work."

"And then," finished Dunlop, "you b-began to realize what you had here. And you d-destroyed all the copies. All, th-that is, b-but one."

IT WAS working! It was all working the way it should!

LaFitte would have thrown him out long ago, of course, if he had dared. He didn't dare. He knew that Dunlop had followed the long, crooked trail of evidence to its end.

Every invention that bore the name LaFitte had come from a Martian mind.

The fact that the paper was suppressed was the first clue. Why suppress it? The name attached to the paper was the second—though it had taken an effort of the imagination to connect a puny B.S. with the head of LaFitte Enterprises.

And all the other clues had come painfully and laboriously along the trail that led past Miss Reidy's room at the Library, the Space Exploration wing of the Smithsonian, the Hall of Extraterrestrial Zoofarms at the Museum of Natural History, and a thousand dusty chambers of learning all over the country.

LaFitte sighed. "And so you know it all, Mr. Dunlop. You've come a long way."

He poured himself a gentlemanly film of brandy in a large inhaler and warmed it with his breath. He said meditatively: "You did a lot of work, but, of course, I did more. I had to go to Mars, for one thing."

"The *S-Solar Argosy*," Dunlop supplied promptly.

LaFitte raised his eyebrows. "*That* thorough? I suppose you realize, then, that the crash of the *Solar Argosy* was not an accident. I had to cover up the fact that I was bringing a young Martian back to Earth. It wasn't easy. And even so, once I had him here, that was only half the battle. It is quite difficult to raise an exogenous life-form on Earth."

He sipped a drop of the brandy and leaned forward earnestly. "I had to let a Martian develop. It meant giving him an aqueous environment, as close as I could manage to what must have been the conditions on Mars before the Shternweiser event. All guesswork, Mr. Dunlop! I can only say that luck was with me. And even then—why, think of yourself as a baby. Suppose your mother had abandoned you, kicking and wetting your diaper, on Jupiter. And suppose that some curious-shaped creature that resembled Mommy about as much as your mother resembled a tree then took over your raising."

He shook his head solemnly.

"Spock was no help at all. The problem of discipline! The toilet training! And then I had nothing but a naked mind, so to speak. The Martian adult mind is great, but it needs to be filled with knowledge before it can create, and that, Mr. Dunlop, in itself took me six difficult years."

He stood up. "Well," he said, "suppose you tell me what you want."

Dunlop, caught off base, stammered terribly: "I w-w-want half of the tuh—of the tuh—"

"You want half of the take?"

"That's ruh—that's—"

"I understand. In order to keep my secret, you want me to give you half of everything I earn from my Martian's inventions. And if I don't agree?"

Dunlop said, suddenly panicked: "But you *must!* If I t-t-tell your secret, anyone can do the same!"

LaFitte said reasonably: "But I already have my money, Mr. Dunlop. No, that's not enough of an inducement . . . But," he said after a moment, "I doubt that such a consideration will persuade you to keep still. And, in fact, I do want this matter kept confidential. After all, six men died in the crash of the *Solar Argosy*, and on that sort of thing there is no statute of limitations."

He politely touched Dun-

lop's arm. "Come along. You deduced there was a Martian in this house? Let me show you how right you were."

ALL the way down a long carpeted corridor, Dunlop kept hearing little clicks and rustles that seemed to come from the wall. "Are those your b-bodyguards, LaFitte? Don't try any tricks!"

LaFitte shrugged. "Come on out, boys," he said without raising his voice; and a few feet ahead of them a panel opened and Death and Chlorophyll stepped through.

"Sorry about that other business, Mr. Dunlop," said Chlorophyll.

"No hard f-feelings," said Dunlop.

LaFitte stopped before a door with double locks. He spun the tumblers and the door opened into a dark, dank room.

"V-r-r-rooom, v-r-r-room." It sounded like a huge deep rumble from inside the room.

Dunlop's pupils slowly expanded to admit more light, and he began to recognize shapes.

In the room was a sort of palisade of steel bars. Behind them, chained to a stake, was—

A Martian!

Chained?

Yes, it was chained and cuffed. What could only be the key hung where the Martian would be able to see it always

but reach it never. Dunlop swallowed, staring. The Martians in Fortescue's photographs were slimy, ropy, ugly creatures like thinned-out sea anemones, man-tall and headless. The chained creature that thundered at him now was like those Martians only as a frog is like a tadpole. It possessed a head, round-domed, with staring eyes. It possessed a mouth that clacked open and shut on great square teeth.

"V-r-r-room," it roared, and then Dunlop listened more closely. It was not a wordless lion's bellow. It was English! The creature was talking to them; it was only the Earth's thick atmosphere that made it boom. "Who are you?" it croaked in a slobbery-drunk Chaliapin's boom.

Dunlop said faintly: "God b-bless." Inside that hideous skull was the brain that had created for LaFitte the Solar Transformer, the Ion-Exchange Self-Powered Water Still, the LaFitte Negative-Impedance Transducer, and a thousand other great inventions. It was not a Martian Dunlop was looking at; it was a magic lamp that would bring him endless fortune. But it was an ugly nightmare.

"So," said LaFitte. "And what do you think now, Mr. Dunlop? Don't you think I did something great? Perhaps the Still and the Transducer were his invention, not mine. But I invented *him*."

Dunlop pulled himself together. "Y-yes," he said, bobbing his head. He had a concept of LaFitte as a sort of storybook blackmail victim, who needed only a leer, a whisper and the Papers to start disgorging billions. It had not occurred to him that LaFitte would take honest pride in what he had done. Now, knowing it, Dunlop saw or thought he saw a better tactic.

He said instantly: "Great? N-No, LaFitte, it's more than that. I am simply amazed that you brought him up without, say, r-rickets. Or juvenile delinquency. Or whatever Martians might get, lacking proper care."

LaFitte looked pleased. "Well, let's get down to business. You want to become an equal partner in LaFitte Enterprises, is that what you're asking for?"

Dunlop shrugged. He didn't have to answer. That was fortunate; in a situation as tense as this one, he couldn't have spoken at all.

LaFitte said cheerfully: "Why not? Who needs all this? Besides, some new blood in the firm might perk things up." He gazed benevolently at the Martian, who quailed. "Our friend here has been lethargic lately. All right, I'll make you work for it, but you can have half."

"Th— Th— Thank—"

"You're welcome, Dunlop. How shall we do it? I don't

suppose you'd care to take my word—"

Dunlop smiled.

LAFITTE was not offended. "Very well, we'll put it in writing. I'll have my attorneys draw something up. I suppose you have a lawyer for them to get in touch with?" He snapped his fingers. Death stepped brightly forward with a silver pencil and Chlorophyll with a pad.

"G-G-Good," said Dunlop, terribly eager. "My l-lawyer is P. George Metzger, and he's in the Empire State Building, forty-first fl—"

"*Fool!*" roared the Martian with terrible glee. LaFitte wrote quickly and folded the paper into a neat square. He handed it to the man who smelled of chlorophyll chewing gum.

Dunlop said desperately: "That's not the s-same lawyer."

LaFitte waited politely. "Not what lawyer?"

"My *other* lawyer is the one that has the p-p-papers."

LaFitte shook his head and smiled.

Dunlop sobbed. He couldn't help it. Before his eyes a billion dollars had vanished, and the premium on his life-insurance policy had run out. They had Metzger's name. They knew where to find the fat manila envelope that contained the sum of eight years' work.

Chlorophyll, or Death, or any of LaFitte's hundreds of confidential helpers, would go to Metzger's office, and perhaps they would present phony court orders or perhaps they would bull their way through, a handkerchief over the face and a gun in the hand. One way or another they would find the papers. The sort of organization that LaFitte owned would surely not be baffled by the office safe of a recent ex-law clerk, now in his first practice.

Dunlop sobbed again, wishing he had not economized on lawyers; but it really made no difference. LaFitte knew where the papers were kept and he would get them. It remained only for him to erase the last copy of the information—that is, the copy in the head of Hector Dunlop.

Chlorophyll tucked the note in his pocket and left. Death patted the bulge under his arm and looked at LaFitte.

"Not here," said LaFitte.

Dunlop took a deep breath.

"G-Good-bye, Martian," he said sadly, and turned toward the door. Behind him the thick, hateful voice laughed.

"You're taking this very well," LaFitte said in surprise.

Dunlop shrugged and stepped aside to let LaFitte precede him through the doorway.

"What else can I d-do?" he said. "You have me cold. Only—" The Death man was

through the door, and so was LaFitte, half-turned politely to listen to Dunlop. Dunlop caught the edge of the door, hesitated, smiled and leaped back, slamming it. He found a lock and turned it. "Only you have to c-catch me first!" he yelled through the door.

Behind him the Martian laughed like a wounded whale.

"You were very good," complimented the thick, tolling voice.

"It was a matter of s-simple s-self-defense," said Dunlop.

HE COULD hear noises in the corridor, but there was time. "N-Now! Come, Martian! We're going to get away from LaFitte. You're coming w-with me, because he won't dare shoot you and— And certainly you, with your great mind, can find a way for us both to escape."

The Martian said in a thick sulky voice: "I've tried."

"But I can help! Isn't that the k-k-key?"

He clawed the bright bit of metal off the wall. There was a lock on the door of steel bars, but the key opened it. The Martian was just inside, ropy arms waving.

"V-r-r-room," it rumbled, eyes like snake's eyes staring at Dunlop.

"Speak more c-clearly," Dunlop requested impatiently, twisting the key out of the lock.

"I said," repeated the thick

drawl, "I've been waiting for you."

"Of course. What a t-terrible life you've led!"

Crash went the door behind him; Dunlop didn't dare look. And this key insisted on sticking in its lock! But he freed it and leaped to the Martian's side—at least there they would not dare fire, for fear of destroying their meal-ticket!

"You c-can get us out of here," Dunlop panted, fumbling for the lock on the Martian's ankle cuff and gagging. (It was true. They did smell

like rotting fish.) "B-but you must be strong! LaFitte has been a father to you, but what a f-false f-father! Feel no loyalty to him, Martian. He made you his slave, even if he d-did keep you healthy and s-sane."

And behind him LaFitte cleared his throat. "But I didn't," he observed. "I didn't keep him sane."

"No," rumbled the thick, slow Martian voice. "No, he didn't."

The ropes that smelled like rotting fish closed lovingly and lethally around Dunlop.

END

SUPERWEAPON

Few foes have been as great a challenge to man's claim to supremacy on this planet as insects, and few, including perhaps his own kind, have inflicted such huge losses in life, health and wealth. Hands, swatters and drainage got a big assist in insect poisons, especially recently. But the tiny, deadly enemy has the advantage of brief generations; survival of the fittest has produced insecticide-resistant strains. And poisons aimed at insects all too often hit other forms of life, including ourselves, by getting into food and drinking water.

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