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They were lovely and quick to learn — and their only faults were little ones!

On page 21 of the Taine tome he happened upon a sheet of yellow copy paper folded in four. Unfolding it, he read:

Cai: Stities towms copeis
wotnid. Gind snoll doper
nckli! Wilbe Fieu Dayol
fot ig habe mot toseo
knwo—te bijk weil en
snoll doper—Klio, asdf
;lkj asdf ;lkj asdf ;lkj
asdf ;lkj

He had just taken down Xenophon's *Anabasis* when he saw the girl walk in the door.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

penchant-list. He liked old wood, too, and old paintings, not to mention old wine and old whiskey. But most of all he liked young girls. He especially liked them when they looked the way Helen of Troy must have looked when Paris took one gander at her and started building his ladder. This one was tall, with hyacinth hair and liquid blue eyes, and she had a Grecian symmetry of shape that would have made Paris' eyes pop had he been around to take notice. Paris wasn't, but Quidley's eyes, did the job.

After coming in the door, the girl deposited a book on the librarian's desk and headed for the literature section. Quickly Quidley lowered his eyes to the *Anabasis* and henceforth followed her progress out of their corners. When she came to the O's she paused, took down a book and glanced through it. Then she replaced it and moved on to the P's...the Q's...the R's. Barely three feet from him she paused again and took down Taine's *History of English Literature*.

He simply could not believe it. The odds against two persons taking an interest in so esoteric a volume on a single night in a single library were ten thousand to one. And yet there was no gainsaying that the volume was in the girl's hands, and that she was riffling through it with the air of a seasoned browser.

Presently she returned the book to the shelf, selected another—seemingly at random—and took it over to the librarian's desk. She waited statuesquely while the librarian processed it, then tucked it under her arm and whisked out the door into the misty April night. As soon as she disappeared, Quidley stepped over to the T's and took Taine down once more. Just as he had suspected. The makeshift bookmark was gone.

He remembered how the asdf-;lkj exercise had given way to several lines of gibberish and then reappeared again. A camouflaged message? Or was it merely what it appeared to be on the surface—the efforts of an impatient typing student to type before his time?

He returned Taine to the shelf. After learning from the librarian that the girl's name was Kay Smith, he went out and got in his hardtop. The name rang a bell. Halfway home he realized why. The typing exercise had contained the word "Cai", and if you pronounced it with hard c, you got "Kai"—or "Kay". Obviously, then, the exercise had been a message, and had been deliberately inserted in a book no average person would dream of borrowing.

By whom—her boy friend?

Quidley winced. He was allergic to the term. Not that he ever let the presence of a boy friend deter him when he set

out to conquer, but because the term itself brought to mind the word "fiance," and the word "fiance" brought to mind still another word, one which repelled him violently. I.e., "marriage". Just the same, he decided to keep Taine's *History* under observation for a while.

HER boy friend turned out to be her girl friend, and her girl friend turned out to be a tall and lissome, lovely with a Helenesque air of her own. From the vantage point of a strategically located reading table, where he was keeping company with his favorite little magazine, *The Zeitgeist*, Quidley watched her take a seemingly haphazard route to the shelf where Taine's *History* reposed, take the volume down, surreptitiously slip a folded sheet of yellow paper between its pages and return it to the shelf.

After she left he wasted no time in acquainting himself with the second message. It was as unintelligible as the first:

*asdf ;lkj asdf ;lkj asdf
;lkj asdf ;lkj asdf ;lkj
asdf ;lkj Cai: Habe wot-
nid ig ist ending ifeder-
erer te. T'lide sid Fieu
Dayol po jestig toseo
knwo, bijd weil en snoll
doper entling— Yoolna.
asdf ;lkj asdf ;lkj asdf
;lkj asdf ;lkj*

Well, perhaps not quite as unintelligible. He knew, at least, who Cai was, and he knew—from the reappearance of the words *wotnid*, *Fieu Dayol* and *snoll doper*—that the two communications were in the same code. And certainly it was reasonable to assume that the last word—*Yoolna*—was the name of the girl he had just seen, and that she was a different person from the *Klio* whose name had appended the first message.

He refolded the paper, replaced it between the pages, returned the book to the shelf and went back to the reading table and *The Zeitgeist*.

Kay didn't show up till almost closing time, and he was beginning to think that perhaps she wouldn't come around for the pickup till tomorrow when she finally walked in the door. She employed the same tactics she had employed the previous night, arriving, as though by chance, at the T-section and transferring the message with the same undetectable legerdemain to her purse. This time, when she walked out the door, he was not far behind her.

She climbed into a sleek convertible and pulled into the street. It took him but a moment to gain his hardtop and start out after her. When, several blocks later, she pulled to the curb in

front of an all-night coffee bar, he followed suit. After that, it was merely a matter of following her inside.

He decided on Operation Spill-the-sugar. It had stood him in good stead before, and he was rather fond of it. The procedure was quite simple. First you took note of the position of the sugar dispensers, then you situated yourself so that your intended victim was between you and the nearest one, then you ordered coffee without sugar in a low voice, and after the counterman or counter-girl had served you, you waited till he/she was out of earshot and asked your i.v. to please pass the sugar. When she did so you let the dispenser slip from your fingers in such a way that some of its contents spilled on her lap—

"I'm terribly sorry," he said, righting it. "Here, let me brush it off."

"IT'S all right, it's only sugar," she said, laughing.

"I'm hopelessly clumsy," he continued smoothly, brushing the gleaming crystals from her pleated skirt, noting the clean sweep of her thighs. "I beseech you to forgive me."

"You're forgiven," she said, and he noticed then that she spoke with a slight accent.

"If you like, you can send

it to the cleaners and have them send the bill to me. My address is 61 Park Place." He pulled out his wallet, chose an appropriate card, and handed it to her—

Herbert Quidley: *Profiliste*
Her forehead crinkled. "*Profiliste?*"

"I paint profiles with words," he said. "You may have run across some of my pieces in the Better Magazines. I employ a variety of pseudonyms, of course."

"How interesting." She pronounced it "anteresting."

"Not famous profiles, you understand. Just profiles that strike my fancy." He paused. She had raised her cup to her lips and was taking a dainty sip. "You have a rather striking profile yourself, Miss—"

"Smith. Kay Smith." She set the cup back on the counter and turned and faced him. For a second her eyes seemed to expand till they preoccupied his entire vision, till he could see nothing but their disturbingly clear—and suddenly cold—blueness. Panic touched him, then vanished when she said, "Would you really consider word-painting my profile, Mr. Quidley?"

Would he! "When can I call?"

She hesitated for a moment. Then: "I think it will be better if I call on you. There are quite a number of

people living in our—our house. I'm afraid the quarters would be much too cramped for an artist like yourself to concentrate."

Quidley glowed. Usually it required two or three days, and sometimes a week, to reach the apartment phase. "Fine," he said. "When can I expect you?"

She stood up and he got to his feet beside her. She was even taller than he had thought. In fact, if he hadn't been wearing Cuban heels, she'd have been taller than he was. "I'll be in town night after next," she said. "Will nine o'clock be convenient for you?"

"Perfectly."

"Good-by for now then, Mr. Quidley."

He was so elated that when he arrived at his apartment he actually did try to write a profile. His own, of course. He sat down at his custom-built chrome-trimmed desk, inserted a blank sheet of paper in his custom-built typewriter and tried to arrange his thoughts. But as usual his mind raced ahead of the moment, and he saw the title, *Self Profile*, nestling noticeably on the contents page of one of the Better Magazines, and presently he saw the piece itself in all its splendid array of colorful rhetoric, sparkling imagery and scintillating wit, occupying a two-page spread.

It was some time before he

returned to reality, and when he did the first thing that met his eyes was the uncompromisingly blank sheet of paper. Hurriedly he typed out a letter to his father, requesting an advance on his allowance, then, after a tall glass of vintage wine, he went to bed.

IN telling him that she would be in town two nights hence, Kay had unwittingly apprised him that there would be no exchange of messages until that time, so the next evening he skipped his vigil at the library. The following evening, however, after readying his apartment for the forthcoming assignation, he hid himself to his reading-table post and took up *The Zeitgeist* once again.

He had not thought it possible that there could be a third such woman.

And yet there she was, walking in the door, tall and blue-eyed and graceful; dark of hair and noble of mien; browsing in the philosophy section now, now the fiction section, now moving leisurely into the literature aisle and toward the T's...

The camouflage had varied, but the message was typical enough:

*fdsa jkl; fdsa jkl; fdsa
jkl; fdsa jkl; fdsa jkl;
fdsa jkl; Cai: Gind en
snoll doper nckli! Wot-*

*nid antwaterer Fieu
Dayol hid jestig snoll
doper ifedererer te. Dep
gogensplo snoll dopers
ensing! —Gorka. fdsa
jkl; fdsa jkl; fdsa jkl;
fdsa jkl;*

Judging from the repeated use of the words, *snoll dopers* were the topic of the day. Annoyed, Quidley replaced the message and put the book back on the shelf. Then he returned to his apartment to await Kay.

He wondered what her reaction would be if he asked her point-blank what a *snoll doper* was; whether she would reveal the nature of the amateur secret society to which she and Klio and Yoolna and Gorka belonged. It virtually had to be an amateur secret society. Unless, of course, they were foreigners. But what on earth foreign organization would be quixotic enough to employ Taine's *History of English Literature* as a communications medium when there was a telephone in every drugstore and a mailbox on every corner?

Somehow the words "what on earth foreign organization" got turned around in his mind and became "what foreign organization on earth" and before he could summon his common sense to succor him, he experienced a rather bad moment. By the time the door chimes sound-

ed he was his normal self again.

He straightened his tie with nervous fingers, checked to see if his shirt cuffs protruded the proper length from his coat sleeves, and looked around the room to see if everything was in place. Everything was—the typewriter uncovered and centered on the chrome-trimmed desk, with the sheaf of crinkly first-sheets beside it; the reference books stacked imposingly nearby; *Harper's*, *The Atlantic* and *The Saturday Review* showing conspicuously in the magazine rack; the newly opened bottle of bourbon and the two snifter glasses on the sideboard; the small table set cozily for two—

THE chimes sounded again. He opened the door.

She walked in with a demure, "Hello." He took her wrap. When he saw what she was wearing he had to tilt his head back so that his eyes wouldn't fall out of their sockets.

Skin, mostly, in the upper regions. White, glowing skin on which her long hair lay like forest pools. As for her dress, it was as though she had fallen forward into immaculate snow, half-burying her breasts before catching herself on her elbows, then turning into a sitting position, the snow clinging to her skin in a glistening veneer;

arising finally to her feet, resplendently attired.

He went over to the sideboard, picked up the bottle of bourbon. She followed. He set the two snifter glasses side by side and tilted the bottle. "Say when." "When!" "I admire your dress—never saw anything quite like it." "Thank you. The material is something new. Feel it." "It's—it's almost like foam rubber. Cigarette?" "Thanks... Is something wrong, Mr. Quidley?" "No, of course not. Why?" "Your hands are trembling." "Oh. I'm—I'm afraid it's the present company, Miss Smith." "Call me Kay."

They touched glasses: "Your liquor is as exquisite as your living room, Herbert. I shall have to come here more often." "I hope you will, Kay." "Though such conduct, I'm told, is morally reprehensible on the planet Earth." "Not in this particular circle. Your hair is lovely." "Thank you... You haven't mentioned my perfume yet. Perhaps I'm standing too far away... There!" "It's—it's as lovely as your hair, Kay." "Um, kiss me again." "I—I never figured—I mean, I engaged a caterer to serve us dinner at 9:30." "Call him up. Make it 10:30."

THE following evening found Quidley on tenterhooks. The *snoll-doper* mystery had acquired a new

tang. He could hardly wait till the next message transfer took place.

He decided to spend the evening plotting the epic novel which he intended to write someday. He set to work immediately. He plotted mentally, of course—notes were for the hacks and the other commercial non-geniuses who infested the modern literary world. Closing his eyes, he saw the whole vivid panorama of epic action and grand adventure flowing like a mighty and majestic river before his literary vision: the authentic and awe-inspiring background; the hordes of colorful characters; the handsome virile hero, the compelling Helenesque heroine... God, it was going to be great! The best thing he'd ever done! See, already there was a crowd of book lovers in front of the bookstore, staring into the window where the new Herbert Quidley was on display, trying to force its way into the jammed interior... *Cut to interior.* FIRST EAGER CUSTOMER: Tell me quickly, are there any more copies of the new Herbert Quidley left? BOOK CLERK: A few. You don't know how lucky you are to get here before the first printing ran out. FIRST EAGER CUSTOMER: Give me a dozen. I want to make sure that my children and my children's children have a

**plentiful supply. BOOK
CLERK:** Sorry. Only one to
a customer. Next? **SECOND
EAGER CUSTOMER:** Tell
me quickly, are...there...
any...more...copies...of—

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ...

Message no. 4, except for a slight variation in camouflage, ran true to form:

a;sldkfj a;sldkfj a;sldkfj
a;sldkfj Cai: Habe te
snoll dopers ensing?
Wotnid ne Fieu Dayol
ist ifederereret, hid jes-
tig snoll doper. Gind
ed, olro—Jilka. a;sldkfj
a;sldkfj a;sldkfj a;sldkfj

Quidley sighed. What, he asked himself, standing in the library aisle and staring at the indecipherable words, was a normal girl like Kay doing in such a childish secret society? From the way she and her correspondents carried on you'd almost think they were Martian girl scouts on an interplanetary camping trip, trying for their merit badges in communications!

You could hardly call Kay a girl scout, though.

Nevertheless, she was the key figure in the *snoll-doper* enigma. The fact annoyed him, especially when he considered that a *snoll doper*, for all he knew, could be anything from a Chinese fortune cooky to an H-bomb.

He remembered Kay's odd accent. Was that the way a

person would speak English if her own language ran something like "*ist ifedereret, hid jestig snoll doper adwo?*"

He remembered the way she had looked at him in the coffee bar.

He remembered the material of her dress.

He remembered how she had come to his room.

"I didn't know you had a taste for Taine."

Her voice seemed to come from far away, but she was standing right beside him, tall and bewitching; Helenesque as ever. Her blue eyes became great wells into which he found himself falling. With an effort, he pulled himself back. "You're early tonight," he said lamely.

She appropriated the message, read it. "Put the book back," she said presently. Then, when he complied: "Come on."

"Where are we going?"

"I'm going to deliver a *snoll doper* to Jilka. After that I'm going to take you home to meet my folks."

The relieved sigh he heard
was his own.

They climbed into her convertible and she nosed it into the moving line of cars. "How long have you been reading my mail?" she asked.

"Since the night before I met you."

"Was that the reason you spilled the sugar?"

"Part of the reason," he said. "What's a *snoll doper*?"

She laughed. "I don't think I'd better tell you just yet."

He sighed again. "But if Jilka wanted a *snoll doper*," he said after a while, "why in the world didn't she call you up and say so?"

"Regulations." She pulled over to the curb in front of a brick apartment building. "This is where Jilka lives. I'll explain when I get back."

He watched her get out, walk up the walk to the entrance and let herself in. He leaned his head back on the seat, lit a cigarette and exhaled a mixture of smoke and relief. On the way to meet her folks. So it was just an ordinary secret society after all. And here he'd been thinking that she was the key figure in a Martian plot to blow up Earth—

Her folks!

Abruptly the full implication of the words got through to him, and he sat bolt-upright on the seat. He was starting to climb out of the car when he saw Kay coming down the walk. Anyway, running away wouldn't solve his problem. A complete disappearing act was in order, and a complete disappearing act would take time. Meanwhile he would play along with her.

A station wagon came up behind them, slowed, and matched its speed with

theirs. "Someone's following us," Quidley said.

"Probably Jilka."

Five minutes later the station wagon turned down a side street and disappeared. "She's no longer with us," Quidley said.

"She's got to pick someone up. She'll meet us later."

"At your folks?"

"At the ship."

The city was thinning out around them now, and a few stars were visible in the night sky. Quidley watched them thoughtfully for a while. Then: "What ship?" he said.

"The one we're going to *Fieu Dayol* on."

"*Fieu Dayol*?"

"Persei 17 to you. I said I was going to take you home to meet my folks, didn't I?"

"In other words, you're kidnapping me."

She shook her head vehemently. "I most certainly am not! Neither according to interstellar law or your own. When you compromised me, you made yourself liable in the eyes of both."

"But why pick on me? There must be plenty of men on *Fieu Dayol*. Why don't you marry one of them?"

"For two reasons: one, you're the particular man who compromised me. Two, there are *not* plenty of men on *Fieu Dayol*. Our race is identical to yours in everything except population-balance between the sexes. At

periodic intervals the women on Fieu Dayol so greatly outnumber the men that those of us who are temperamentally and emotionally unfitted to become spinsters have to look for *wotnids*—or mates—on other worlds. It's quite legal and quite respectable. As a matter of fact, we even have schools specializing in alien cultures to expedite our activities. Our biggest problem is the Interstellar statute forbidding us the use of local communications services and forbidding us to appear in public places. It was devised to facilitate the prosecution of interstellar black marketeers, but we're subject to it, too, and have to contrive communications systems of our own."

"But why were all the messages addressed to you?"

"They weren't messages. They were requisitions. I'm the ship's stock girl."

APRIL fields stretched darkly away on either side of the highway. Presently she turned down a rutted road between two of them and they bounced and swayed back to a black blur of trees. "Here we are," she said.

Gradually he made out the sphere. It blended so flawlessly with its background that he wouldn't have been able to see it at all if he hadn't been informed of its existence. A gangplank sloped down from an open

lock and came to rest just within the fringe of the trees.

Lights danced in the darkness behind them as another car jounced down the rutted road. "Jilka," Kay said. "I wonder if she got him."

Apparently she had. At least there was a man with her—a rather woebegone, wilted creature who didn't even look up as they passed. Quidley watched them ascend the gangplank, the man in the lead, and disappear into the ship.

"Next," Kay said.

Quidley shook his head. "You're not taking *me* to another planet!"

She opened her purse and pulled out a small metallic object. "A little while ago you asked me what a *snoll doper* was," she said. "Unfortunately interstellar law severely limits us in our choice of marriageable males, and we can take only those who refuse to conform to the sexual mores of their own societies." She did something to the object that caused it to extend itself into a long, tubular affair. "*This is a snoll doper.*"

She prodded his ribs. "March," she said.

He marched. Halfway up the plank he glanced back over his shoulder for a better look at the object pressed against his back.

It bore a striking resemblance to a shotgun. **END**

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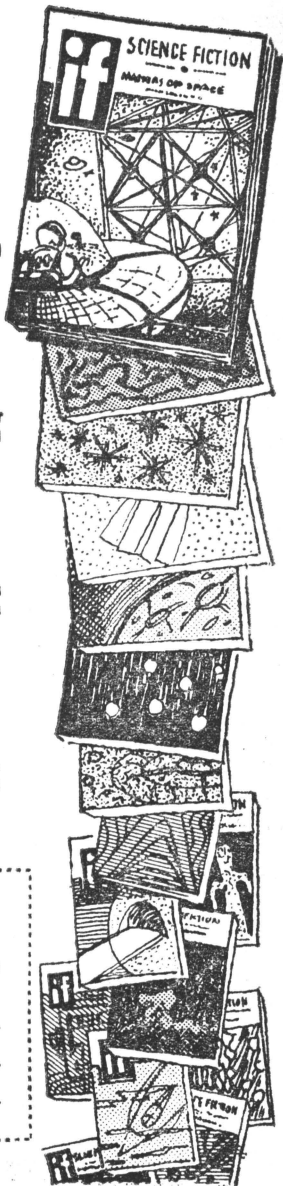
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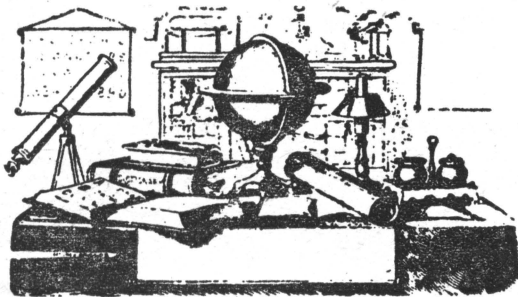
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science briefs

THEY said the atom was indivisible, and then we learned about electrons and nuclei. Now we learn that inside the nucleus are neutrons and protons, and inside the proton is a core surrounded by two clouds of positive electricity. The neutron has a cloud of positive electricity surrounding a cloud of negative electricity surrounding a core, in such a way that the electrical total is neutral. The clouds are made up of mesons. Dr. R. Hofstadter of Stamford, who informs us of all this, says of mesons that they are probably units of the force that binds the atoms to-

gether. Dr. W.H. Bostick of Stevens Institute reports that quantum theory demands that elementary particles—mesons, among some 30 others—have infinite mass, and quantum theorists just have to ignore this. Dr. Bostick maintains that the particles are toroidal, or doughnut-shaped, and says that this is the only way he can account for what physicists have called a mystery: the particles' mass, spin, charge and magnetic moment.

Lichens have no roots, and this incidental information may hold up or even cancel the most science-fictiony of

all projected science projects, the creation of a new harbor at Cape Thompson, Alaska, by means of atomic bomb blasts. It seems that lichens absorb many times the fallout that rooted plants do, since they get it right out of the air and not diluted up through the ground. Caribou eat lichens and Eskimos eat caribou. Even now, caribou show five times the strontium 90 in their bones and antlers than they should, considering that Alaska averages only about 20% as much fallout as the rest of the country abandoned.

SCIENCE NON-FICTION STORY

Once upon a time there was a clever man named Gernot Zippe who was fascinated by our efforts to get U-235 out of a mixture with U-238 so we could make atom bombs. We tried it with a centrifuge but found it would need one which would spin at 40 thousand rpm without flying to bits, so we built one of the biggest factories in the world, the K-25 plant at Oak Ridge, and did it by gaseous diffusion instead. So Mr. Zippe went ahead and designed such a centrifuge anyhow and while he was interned in Russia he built one. Then he built another one at the University of Virginia. Now he's back in Germany and has a factory all his own where he

builds lots of them. Brazil just bought two. They only cost about five grand apiece, and 50 of them could get you a hundred pounds of pretty pure U-235 in a year, which is quite enough for anyone anywhere, wouldn't you say? Talks in Geneva are designed to curb bomb manufacture by anyone, but Mr. Zippe doesn't mind; the talks take so long.

We wish this was a science fiction story.

If you drink, don't tranquilize, and vice versa, warn research scientists at Madison State Hospital in Indiana. Their tests indicate that meprobromate, the active ingredient in several tranquilizers, adds an alarming amount of muscle to that one-for-the-road.

The Argonne National Laboratory has topped every story you've ever heard about weird Government jobs. They hire squirrels. Perhaps "hire" is the wrong word; nobody pays the squirrels. Dr. T.M. Tahmisian hangs around giant redwoods until a squirrel knocks down a seed cone, which he then swipes. The purpose is to study the effects of radiation on living things, and some of this timber has been living for 30 centuries or more. The squirrels save the good doctor from having to climb some two or three hundred feet to get his pine cones. **END**