A man we know reported for work as usual one recent Tuesday morning to discover that overnight the company had suspended operations, and everybody was fired. A party spirit set in among the employees, and one clearly engaging chap hastily put together a large sign which read: “Help stamp out reality.” . . . We nominate Will Stanton for high office in the club.

YOU ARE WITH IT!

by Will Stanton

"The deep freeze has been acting up again," Kay Dobbs slid into the breakfast nook across from her husband. "I wish you'd call the man as soon as you get to the office."

Stanley Dobbs folded his paper to the editorial page. "All right."

"Tell him it hasn't worked right since the last time he was here." She reached across and folded back a corner of the paper to examine an advertisement for handbags. "Did you remember to call your friend about the speaker for the P.T.A.?"

"I'll do it first thing."

"Better phone the phone company too. Find out about that long distance call they charged us for."

"Yes, I'd better do that."

"I think it makes more of an impression coming from a man," Kay said.

Stanley backed his car out to the street. Kay waved goodbye from the picture window. It was the custom in Belle Acres for wives to wave goodbye from their picture windows.

At the end of the block Stanley joined a small stream of commuters winding their way down to the station. Here, along with the members of other tributaries, they were picked up by the train much like a river picking up silt to be deposited at the end of its run.

Stanley was reviewing his schedule for the day as he stepped into his office and closed the door. Immediately he was aware of certain changes. In fact the office bore slight resemblance to the room he had left the night before. It was more like a half lighted stage with
billows of mist rising from various points on the floor. In the center, seated at a small round table, was a solitary figure in evening clothes. When he spoke his voice had a hollow, artificial quality, rather like an actor rehearsing in the bottom of a well.

"How do you do?" he remarked in a faintly bogus British accent, "won't you join me? For the next 90 minutes I am to be your host."

"How do you do?" said Stanley. He hesitated and then walked over, placed his hat and briefcase on the table and sat down.

"You are now where no mortal has ever been," the Host was projecting his voice as if addressing a vast audience; "you are just over the horizon. The exact spot? Well, you won't find it on any map nor the date on any calender."

"It's the seventeenth," said Stanley. "Tuesday."

"It is twenty-five hours past midnight on the thirty-first of November," said the Host. "You are about to start your perilous journey into the unknown."

Stanley looked at his watch. "I did have a couple of phone calls to make—"

The Host smiled. "Perhaps I have been needlessly mystifying you," he remarked in a more conversational tone. "This, as you may have guessed, is a new sort of television program. It is a combination of adventure, supernatural and audience participation. A chap from Duke University suggested it."

Stanley nodded politely. "It sounds very interesting."

"It is more than interesting," said the Host, "it is voodoo, black magic and witchcraft brought into every home through the marvels of modern communication. For the first time a member of the viewing audience will actually be able to take part in the violence and terror that have brought happiness to so many."

"I'm afraid I haven't been keeping up with T.V. lately," Stanley admitted. "Since we put in the new patio we've been sitting out there a great deal."

"When the time comes you will know what to do," the Host assured him. "You are not being asked to play a part—you are going to live the part. Mr. Stanley Dobbs—You Are With It!" The last words were picked up by echoing voices and repeated in tones that faded with the light until Stanley found himself alone in the dark and the silence.

As the lights came on again Stanley discovered he was standing beneath the marquee of a night club. The doorman bowed—"The Commissioner was here looking for you," he said.

Nodding absently, Stanley went inside and sat down at a quiet table in the corner. There was a good crowd present, eating,
drinking, and listening to the music of Arabella and her All-Girl orchestra. After a moment he was joined by the proprietress—Big Yvette. “We haven’t seen you for quite a while,” she observed.

He shrugged. “You know how it is.”

“Yes, I know.” Big Yvette placed her hand on his. “I worry about you.”

“I have a job to do,” Stanley said.

“I suppose we shouldn’t complain about that,” she said, “with so much unemployment and all.”

A waiter approached the table. He was carrying a bottle of Napoleon brandy. “Compliments of Arabella and her All-Girl Orchestra,” he explained.

“Oh.” Abruptly he realized that the music had stopped.

“They’re backstage,” the waiter told him.

“I’d like to thank them,” Stanley said. He went back and entered the dressing room.

The orchestra leader looked up with a cry of delight. “Darling, we’ve missed you,” she put her arms around his neck.

“I just wanted to thank you,” he said, “before I left.”

“Before you left?”

He nodded, “I have a job to do.”

“Oh.” There was disappointment in her voice. “We were hoping you could come up to our place after the show.”

“Our place?” he repeated.

“We share an apartment,” she indicated the other members of the band. “We’ve taken the top floor of the U.N. Hilton.”

“Let’s just say I’ll make it if I can,” he said; “you know I’d like to.”

Her arms tightened around his neck. “You really mean it?”

He looked down into her eyes. Turning his head he looked into the eyes of Francine and Iris and Millie-Jo and Ursula and Gretchen and Dee and Carlotta and the rest. “I mean it,” he said.

Outside the club he caught a taxi. “I got a message for you,” the driver told him, “from the Big Boy himself. He said to lay off.”

“He did?” said Stanley, coolly lighting a cigarette. “I heard the Big Boy was knocked off last week.”

“He was,” the driver said. “But I been in bed with a cold. This is the first chance I had to deliver the message.”

“Let me out at the next corner,” Stanley said. He paid the driver. “Better take care of that cold,” he said.

“They say summer colds are the worst kind,” the driver said.

Stanley went into a vacant garage, down 3 flights of stairs and rapped on the door. It was opened by a man whose face was known to no more than three, or four persons in the entire country.
“Good evening, Chief,” Stanley said, following him into the luxuriously appointed office.

“I don’t believe you have met the Contessa.” The Chief gestured toward a beautiful young woman sitting at one side of the room in an ermine wrap. “She will accompany you as far as Budapest. After that you will be on your own.”

Stanley bowed. The Chief unrolled a map. “We have learned that the secret police are holding the Professor in a fortress at this spot. It will be your job to get him out of the country unharmed. You will follow our standard procedure in dealing with the guards. As for the electric fence, the dogs and the mine fields you will no doubt wish to use your own methods.”

“It seems pretty much routine,” Stanley said. “I should think one of your regular operatives could handle the job.”

“The Professor himself presents no particular problem,” the Chief conceded. “However, smuggling his cyclotron out of the country may prove more difficult. I think it only fair to warn you that it may involve considerable risk.”

Stanley shrugged. “That’s what I get paid for.”

“So you do.” The Chief put down the map and picked up his pipe. “Is that the real reason you do it?” he inquired casually. “For the money?”

Stanley smiled a tight, cryptic, little smile. “There are certain persons who criticize what we call the American way of life. I don’t happen to be among them. And when something threatens that way of life—” he paused to smile again, “I do what has to be done.”

The Chief nodded. “How soon can you leave?” he asked.

The next morning Stanley was late coming down to breakfast. “You’ll have to hurry or you’ll miss your train,” his wife said.

Stanley swallowed his juice. “If I have to hurry I’ll hurry,” he said, “I’ve done it before.”

“I wish you didn’t have to work late so often,” Kay said, “I didn’t even hear you come in.”

“I didn’t notice the time.”

“I don’t suppose you remembered to call the deep freeze man? Well, we’re going to have to do something about the water softener too.”

“All right.”

“I’ve made out a list,” she said, “I’ve put it in your breast pocket. For one thing I think you ought to call several boarding kennels. You know how busy they’re going to be at vacation time and last year I’m sure they didn’t remember to give Mr. Toidy his grated carrots.”

“I’ll make a point of that,” he said.

“I simply can’t stand it when an animal doesn’t receive proper care,” she said; “it does something to me.”

Stanley was a little late getting
to the office but the truck was waiting. He climbed up in the cab beside the driver. "Do you know that old warehouse down on sixth?" he asked.

"Sure," the driver nodded, "but it won't be open this time of night."

"I've got a tip that they're running a brewery there," Stanley said. "How much speed can you get out of this truck?"

"Could be fifty—maybe fifty-five," the driver said. He revved up the engine. "It ought to be enough to break through the doors."

"It's worth a try," Stanley said. They rammed the doors and came to a halt in the middle of the warehouse. On both sides of them were rows of barrels. There was no one in sight.

Stanley seized an axe and handed one to the driver. "I'll take this side and you take that one," he said. Raising the axe he drove it into the top of the first barrel. Then he went on to the next. He and the driver reached the end of their rows at the same time. He leaned his axe against the wall. "How's it going?" he asked.

The driver wiped his forehead. "All the barrels on this side got dishes in them," he said.

"Same here," Stanley said. "It looks like somebody gave me a wrong steer."

"Well," said the driver, "you can't win them all."

Stanley rolled down his sleeves. "There's just one other possibility," he said.

In the gambling room Stanley moved from table to table, killing time. One of the dealers beckoned. "The Boss wants to see you," he said. "Upstairs."

Stanley nodded. Upstairs the door was opened by a hard faced man who motioned him inside. The Boss was seated at the head of a long table. On either side were assembled all the notorious names of the underworld.

"We've been expecting you," the Boss remarked in a silky tone. He moved his hand to indicate the others—"I believe you may know some of these gentlemen."


"Bakunin — Baldini — Bauman —" Stanley continued strolling beside the table—Beckhold—Bernardo—Bjornstrom—Black Eagle —"

"Let's get down to business," the Boss said. "You'll find a package at the end of the table."

Stanley gave it a casual glance, "What's in it?"

"What does it look like?"

Stanley opened the package. "It looks like two and one-half million dollars," he said, "in small bills." He tossed it back on the table.
“It's yours,” the Boss said. “Take it. Go on a vacation somewhere.”

“Perhaps I forgot to tell you,” Stanley said; “I have a job to do.”

The Boss studied him, his eyes narrowed. “We’ll double it.”

Stanley returned the stare. “There is such a thing as the American Dream,” he remarked softly, “and when any group or organization threatens to destroy it—well—” he smiled briefly— “there are a few of us who do what we can.”

“So?” the Boss’s voice was dangerously low. “You would really like to believe we would all allow you to leave here alive?”

“Say that again—” Stanley was playing for time. He shot a lightening glance around the room, calculating the odds. He had gotten out of tighter corners and the element of surprise was on his side. He closed his eyes for a moment, his mind rapidly formulating a plan.

When he woke up, Kay was in the kitchen. He could smell the coffee. “Did you remember to check with the man about the garage door?” she asked when he was at the table.

“He wasn’t in.”

“I wish you didn’t have to spend so much time at the office,” Kay said.

He reached for the marmalade. “I have a job to do.”

“I know, but you don’t have to kill yourself.”

He put marmalade on a piece of toast. “That’s true.”

“The insurance is due today,” she said.

At the door of his office he paused for a moment and then went in. The Lieutenant looked up from his desk. “Sorry to bother you,” he said, “but this one really has us stopped.”

“Is that so?” Stanley sat on the corner of the desk. “Fill me in.”

The Lieutenant lifted his hand helplessly. “What is there to tell? The man was found on the steps of Grant’s Tomb. Young, well dressed, no signs of violence—no identification—no witnesses. The autopsy showed him to be in perfect health—if he’d been alive, that is.”

“I see. Then you don’t have any idea what killed him?”

The Lieutenant got to his feet, pacing across the room. “I've stopped having ideas,” he said. “Maybe we killed him. Society—maybe that did it. There seems to be a new sickness now—no goals—no ideals—nothing to live for. Maybe one of these days we’ll all just stop living.”

“Well, Lieutenant,” Stanley remarked, “I don’t see why you don’t just throw in the sponge. Enjoy yourself while you can.”

The Lieutenant gave him an irritated glance. “Don’t talk crazy. I’m getting paid to do a job.”

“You say there was no identification on the body?”
The Lieutenant shook his head wearily. "No wallet, no keys, no letters—nothing but this." He picked up a slip of paper from the desk. "This was in his breast pocket. It appears to be some kind of code, but the boys in the cipher room haven't been able to break it yet." He tossed it across the desk.

Stanley picked it up and started to read. "Deep fr.—board ken.—P.T.A.—phone phone co.—gar. Dr.—pay ins—" His eyes traveled to the bottom of the paper—there seemed to be about 40 entries. Somewhere in the back of his mind was an elusive wisp of meaning.

"Does it mean anything?" The Lieutenant asked quickly.

"The pieces are all here," he said slowly, "or most of the pieces. If I can put them together—"

"Sorry gentlemen—I'm afraid it's all over—" the two men looked up, startled, to see a shadowy figure in the doorway. It was the Host.

"All over?" The Lieutenant stared. "What do you mean?"

"The show," replied the Host. "At the last minute the sponsor changed his mind."

"The sponsor?" Stanley said.

"Actually the sponsor's wife, I believe, but that is neither here nor there. At any rate you are now free to return to your normal everyday lives."

Stanley turned slowly toward the Lieutenant. "Our normal, everyday lives."

"Quite right," said the Host briskly. "And now if you will turn in any props you may have—"

Stanley reached in his pocket and drew out the pistol.

"Is it loaded?" the Host inquired. "You'd better empty it."

"Yes," Stanley said, "perhaps that would be best." When the gun was empty he dropped it on the desk.

The Lieutenant looked thoughtfully at the figure on the floor. "Sometimes we have to do things we don't like," he observed; "It's all part of the job."

"I know." Stanley picked up the slip of paper from the desk. He folded it carefully, then leaned over the body, and tucked the paper in the breast pocket.

"There is such a thing as the American Dream," the Lieutenant continued softly, "and when someone threatens to destroy it—"

"We do what has to be done," Stanley said. He put the gun back in his pocket. "I guess that wraps it up."

The Lieutenant frowned. "There's still one detail—I hate to ask you but we have to get telephotos of a certain office. The only place they can be taken from is the top floor of the U.N. Hilton. It will mean being confined there for a week or more—"

Stanley shrugged. "As you said, Lieutenant, it's all part of the job." He turned then, and walked slowly into the night.