

Foreign Parts

BY

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FOREIGN PARTS

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*"When you wake on
an asteroid, then
at least you'll know
you've come home"*

Anon

Foreign Parts

Part the First

Dear Diary,

this is one of the times I'll bet that you wished I'd not forgotten you because.... Strewth! Where do I start?

Imagine, morning. Clunk. I came to, sitting all cramped-up in the sleeping compartment; well, I had to arrange my arrangements.

Austria?

But no, as you know, I wasn't born in Austria: actually, they first had the inkling of me during a storm in the Gulf of Darien. Warm and cozy like. Well, what would you do in a storm?

My father would have called me something completely different had the captain's daughter, the other person in the bunk incidentally, not had the upper hand, intimately involved in the proceedings as

she was.

So she called her daughter Darien.

Here I am, and I'm sticking with the story.

Accident, happily.

My father being a sailor, you might expect me to be similarly gifted [from a genetic point of view] but twenty years later, on a journey over an awful churning grey choppy sea, and then the long overland drag on a procession of pungent trains I had junked all the theories.

Yup. Dear Diary I was very jet-lagged.

very jet-lagged indeed.

Well travelworn, anyway.

Well, now my story opens on a dusty blue train with pretty brown tinted windows, and, hey presto, we're at 12°30'E, 47°S. Europe to you. Austria, sort of.

Action!

Imagine, if you will then, this rather handsome and dusty train trailing through the South Tyrol loaded with laughing light green drunks, and tired Après-Ski aficionados.

Houselights - on!

I, your reticent hero, am one of them. I have just rolled out of my schlafplatz, and having banged my head against someone else's skis, am rubbing the resultant bruise.

The compartment is full of crushed-up newspapers and empty sandwich packages, and also of course our rucksacks. My friends and assorted others are discussing the price of coffee, sorting through their pockets for odd Euros and, well, well, finding Cents, Szloti, Pennies, buttons, condoms and almost anything else that you can find apart from stone rings - but no Euros.

Well, that's sod's law, isn't it!

In Austria, March is often a brilliantly sunny month, and I had arrived there not only for the skiing, but for the Sun too.

Not exactly: back to the present: at this precise moment I am reading the banner headline on the Oesterreicher Zeitung in front of me. I understand more than I speak, which is a certain limited selection of

Austro-German, the words 'No, not at all', 'Never,' and of course: 'Get lost - those are my pockets and I am wearing the jeans they belong to so why don't you get your hands out of them' - and some other rather less elegant phrases, being my most active vocabulary.

No.

What had caught my attention was the lurid report in the papers: 'Autobahn Maniac Strikes Again' Apparently, Ha! Ha! - an unknown lunatic was tempting people into leaving their cars in the middle of the night by putting a shop-window mannequin on the motorway, which prompted them to stop, then waylaying and killing them. Only passing motorists in the other lanes of the motorway had seen these things happening. 'People Are Talking About It All Over Austria!' cried the 'Osterreicher Bild Zeitung'. Well it's obvious; the story or whatever it was had become a subject of well, discussion.

Or sort of, well, panic. Just then, as I rummaged amongst all the things on the floor looking for a plaster to soothe my

fevered kaboodle while simultaneously trying to find my travel insurance receipt, the train began to apply its brakes and I looked out of the window. The snow and the mountains were breathtaking as the dawn, came up, soft and gentle. My breath was sufficiently taken for me to sit there for some moments. Then all at once we'd arrived at wherever it was, and everyone rolled out of their assorted compartments, smeared the wrong lipstick on and applied an erroneous combination of eyeliners from the mixtures they found in the tousled bags - then trooped out and confronted a New Austrian Day.

The Aussies *of course*, had found some tinnies somewhere, and were starting on the 227th verse of a bawdy version of 'Waltzing Matilda'.

Well, for my part I went to sleep in-between verses on the bus which was gently swaying along the road, and woke up at our hotel.

"See you downstairs in ten minutes", said the boys, full of what I suspected was their idea of fun.

"Sure Boys!" said Trixie, ever willing for some of it.

I made a mental note to strangle her as soon as we were back from Foreign Parts. For the time being, being useful, she could live.

We checked in. Somehow Trixie and I had been double-booked, so they gave us adjoining singles on the first floor (does that sound right?) I hate singles. Rooms. I mean. In hotels. Besides, single rooms in hotels create a whole continuum of problems for which my vocabulary is quite inadequate. I'll leave your mind room to reel on about it. Well, you have to live with it don't you?!

"Come on! Hurry up!" says Trixie.

"Okay, Okay!" We'd left the doors of our rooms open and were shouting to each other. My voice had been as cracked by the journey as was the flower vase and the mirror in my room; but I said nothing.

Foreign Parts

Part the Second

Outside, and after all, that's what we were there for, the snow was just what a true red-blooded skier desires with all her heart. The snow conditions were still so deep that the dense blanket thus formed started just below my window. It had that delicate crust of ice which the best snow must have, to accommodate the fanatic just adequately. Skiing fanatics, you know...

Now let me tell you about the place. Our rooms looked out onto a back garden and an ornamental pond which must have been very pretty in summertime, but which was frozen at this time of year. At the back were some lovely woods from where I could distantly hear the sounds of the small motorway we had come along in the bus (it was a feeder road actually, that cut through the wood). That was the basic geography.

Anyway, I had to get out of my clothes, which, by then were beginning to smell distinctly Ukk, and I threw them off and rushed into the shower.

The cold water brought me to with a start. But of course that was before I screamed, because there was a friendly plumber in my bathroom. It was rather a tight fit. He smiled, but said nothing... It just wasn't the right time to start a conversation. You have to agree, really. You never knew, perhaps he did this all the time.

But I'm the logical type so I asked myself; 'Is this covered by my insurance?'

I suppose he was fixing the hot water, because it rarely ever worked in my room again. Perfect Eh?

I rushed back into the part of my room that was not visible to the plumber. Cursing, probably.

"What was that all?" said Trixie, amused. "Oh, you should have just wrapped yourself in a towel and been polite...you never know he could turn out to be a really nice person!"

That was Trixie.

Dear reader, do I have to explain what *nice* means when it comes from the mouths of... Trixies?

"Knickers!" she said laughing, holding some pink toweling ones out in front of her. "They'll be your downfall!" [She must be psychic!]

Well, there wasn't much choice, or for that matter much time left, to get to our inaugural Après-Ski and try the local vino-reddo before chucking-out time, so, time being short, I struggled into her emergency absorbents.

Never could skate, better at skiing (that's what I was there for) and all those Austrians are so clean that they always shine the floor under the rug. Did you know that? Crash!

I'd slipped over on the perfectly polished floor. A masterpiece.

Sheila was a dear; she found a big piece of cotton wool and a foot of sticking plaster and fastened my eye in, just to make sure it wouldn't fall out prematurely.

"Oh what a shiner!" she laughed.

I reserved my opinion. That was upstairs. Later, however: by the time we arrived downstairs the rest of the party was quite well away on the first (what's the opposite of après?) ski party.

The Aussies were still somewhere in-between Bangkok and Sydney, to judge by the gaiety.

"A bit previous, isn't it?" someone, probably Trixie, said.

At that point I discovered that I had somehow been parked with someone else's rucksack. Dead ringer for mine.

I peeked in. Whoops! Wearing some smelly Aussie's mangled Y-fronts was not to my taste. Back to Trixie.

The party wended its way.

As they do.

After a few minutes I noticed that some big lug was giving me his version of The Eye. On my blind side, naturally.

"Hullo Dullin'", he intoned. Foreign accent, in case you hadn't noticed. Trial shot across the bows. Handsome brute, actually.

I ignored him. In fact, I couldn't see

him too well; and the combination of jet lag and throbbing eye had affected my hearing [negatively].

"You want drink?"

Trixie arrived all of a sudden.

"My friend's tired - Why don't you talk to me?" said the ever helpful tart with a part, Trixie, that is. Or was the word Hopeful?

I was left alone while the party became more and more festive.

You get used to being one-eyed really pretty quickly, you know!

At length it was well after lunchtime and I had finally located my rucksack, so I left the gaily maddening crowd and hauled it up to my room.

I washed my undies, (wouldn't you?), hung them on a bit of string by the window over the radiator and opened the window to clear the room of closed-up fogg.

Just ten minutes nirvana, that's all!

Gentle, almost soundless, snore.

It's wonderful to lie down when you're really tired, you know, relax.

Ah! But not for long, for *in my dreams*, as it were, I heard the door knock. Dreams - I have such vivid dreams. I naturally thought that this must be Trixie and, it being by then eight-ish at 12:30'E, I flung (flang, fling, flong?) open the door not really thinking what I was doing in the dark, expecting as I said, the visage of the shifty one, probably with the usual story to tell ('well, he's really awfully nice, as a person, I mean, and I thought I'd give it a try, I mean if you don't give it a try you'll never know if you missed anything!')

I'd thrown myself into bed in absolute exhaustion, and was naked, you see. Wouldn't you be? And that was the nub of the matter, for there at the door with a profile against the light, redolent of Frankenstein's first cousin Herk, and clutching a bottle of schnapps and two glasses, was OhmiGod! He. You know, the handsome one...

"Dulling", he lunged at my naked goods and I did that clever sidestep they teach you in judo, rolled back over the bed in a perfectly tectonic and elegant circuit of space, bearing... well, having borne Maria-

Rudolf, who achieved an unlikely first in the Olympic style swoop, combined with a gymnast's forward roll, a cyclist's break fall and a Spitfire's stall turn, and with a horrible shriek vanished through the (helpfully) open window.

Oh, incidentally, taking all my knickers and their bit of string with him. Well, not quite the whole collection, thank God, no he left me the purple ones with the pink and green lace and the khaki battledress ones.

There was the inevitable pause, during which my entire life flashed before me, followed not too quickly by the sound of a big base drum going **Boing!** Followed by much laughter and then the squeal of what I could swear was a mangy chicken being torn asunder by mad hands.

Yes, that was Maria—Rudolf all right. I recognized his breath.

And I'd never realized before that monsters could achieve almost perfect falsettos.

Foreign Parts

Part the Third

Oh, fer chrissake Dar", said Trixie, "Ole K-R's probably really awfully nice, and if I was you I'd give it a try, I mean you never know maybe you've missed the chance of a lifeti..." upon which I slammed the door and sought the security of my own underwear. What remained of it.

Well, finally then I dressed and stomped downstairs, leaving the hotel by a side door. Disgust, dudgeon, you know. I thought I'd find a nice friendly 'Raststatte' and maybe also some other less demonstrative company.

I walked down the main street, but tourists (and tourist's bars) are not an attraction for me, and I walked into a side road, following it for some minutes. Now I was about a kilometer or so from the edge of town, which I could see clearly as an oasis of lights in the winter darkness. It had been a clear night, but now it began to spatter a

little with snowflakes, and the wind began to rise a bit. I could see a scatter of lights up ahead of me and I saw the lights of cars on the road heading into the gloom.

Finally, I reached the lights, and to my relief they were of one of those very lovely restaurants which you sometimes find scattered around in the forest. I located my Euros and drank a gluhwein and a few vinos', which warmed the cockles of my heart. In fact I drank several, and they cheered my spirits endlessly. The company was quite good, that is to say neither drunk nor pushy, and I enjoyed a pleasant couple of hours.

Finally I decided to get back to the hotel to get some sleep. I like to rise as early as possible to get some skiing in, on clear runs.

So I started back along the road.

Well I'd had rather too many Gluhweine, so my knees were a little spongy, but what the hell, it was a very quiet night.

Now unexpectedly I could hear my footfalls echoing amid the snow and ice which was piled at the sides of the road. Quite ghostly. Or Creepy. Actually, very creepy.

Trees swishing, wind moving, foliage clicking, moving. Now my radar detected a slight attack of the screaming willies. I began to get hot and sweaty, but for all the wrong reasons.

I began to slow down my accelerating breathing ... God!

I suddenly recalled the headlines I'd read... began to remember the stories about that famous maniac motorway killer, the infamous Graz AutoKiller. Then I thought about Frankenstein, Dracula and bats and... God!

And now I was walking fast, but not too fast, controlling my breathing admirably well, considering... the horror that was to come!

What did I say? To come?

What did I mean by that?!

My breathing was perfect, but when by chance I counted the heartbeats that I could hear perfectly clearly in my ears (Perfectly clearly (Funny?) my heart was doing about one hundred and eighty!

Well, subtracting, [or should I say adding], the percentage of heartbeats that the average female has, in addition to the average heartbeat rate of the male, multiplying by two hundred and twenty five and taking away the

number you first thought of, to my amazement etcetera, it was still over one hundred and three beats a minute out!

It occurred to me that either I had suddenly developed acute heart disease or there was someone following me (if I was unlucky it could be both, but one thing at a time!); but I dared not stop.

Anyway, now I knew that my heart would explode with a ghastly thwack, any moment! Gosh, I knew it!

Oh, Golly. Stop. 'Are you mad, he'd catch me easily then! No, but it's he who is mad. ...homicidal ...nuts - bonkers..! I knew with a dreadful clarity at that moment, that I was doomed.

I wouldn't say that I panicked, but I knew in my bones, with great earthstopping urgency, that I had to have a leak really soon.

Now I was streaking through the darkness like Concorde late for its tea break; Ahhh! Zigzagging!

I arrived at the hotel - sweet relief! - and realized that I was still alive.

Wonderful! I went through the back door, and like a bat out of hell up the stairs. I pushed

open my door. I turned on the light.

Nothing?

Nothing! By that I mean, darkness. No light.

I make my way down to the reception. Well, to tell the truth I trip on the top step and fall down the stairs, ending up in a heap.

Somebody, a shadow perhaps, picks me up.

Drama, *Thrum, Thrum!*

"Who?...Oh, you're one of the party...."
(Strikes match) "Oh yes well.The Ski Party that you're with has gone out"

"Yes I know, but what's wrong with the lights?"

"Oh that!" *(Oh, That?)* "The lines are down; the service will be back in the morning".

Foreign Parts

Part the Fourth

I rushed back upstairs, as the hotel was almost empty, and sat on my bed.

Well, what would you do?

The hotel was empty, dark, I had been closely followed by a thousand demons and here I was sitting on my bed, alive. Being an old-fashioned and philosophical girl I decided to get some sleep.

But, think clearly now; first I must prepare my body for that certain charming stranger, well just in case - I mean you never know do you? And it would save time, save us both getting into an awful lather. (Oh and it's an ancient Après Ski Tradition, as old as a MacDonald's hamburger.)

Shave legs, prepare eyes for delicate kisses, do exercises for bust. 'Ouch! Ruined the left one,

pulled all its muscles - that nipple will never raise its head again!'

Okay, enough of that.

Face pack. Wrong order, who cares! I love hot mud.

Fortunately the shower was working just this once, and, wonderful! - There was no plumber to be seen, even at one-o'clock in the morning, and even more wonderful, and increasingly rare too, there was warm water. Lovely!

Mind you I was so hot from all that running I was boiling hot. Itchy.

I showered, mudded, and lay down. You know, to relax. Silence, how rare! - for...forty-five seconds...

*Down the corridor a window banged open.
...the wind was rising.*

Ghosts? I shivered. But not with cold.

I was loathe to move, but I thought I'd close the window.

'WhoooooHooo', the wind whistled and shrieked. If I'd been the type who developed such ideas, I'd have felt freezing cold. Well, I didn't,

anyway. I just lay there itching all over and hot, listening to the wind. Covered in cracked mud. Charming. All-over, mind you. Stranger things've happened after a few drinks. If you're lucky, that is.

Crash! The window in the corridor had come open.

Noises off of splintering. Crash bang <gc.>. Me?, I thought I'd just get some sleep.

I turned over.

Clunk, Whoooooooooooo Whooooo hooooo!

"Blast!"

At this point I decided to get up and close the [expletive deleted] window.

So naturally I opened the door, and wrapped in some of the bedclothes, made for my goal.

Ah, but its Mice and Men on this one isn't it? **** it!

Suddenly there was this group of shadows approaching along the corridor, shuffle shuffle, their ghastly breath outlined against some poor lost light beams who were only trying to go home and get some sleep like me.

I know it sounds crazy, but suddenly I knew in my deepest marrow that, they had come for me.

God!

I fell back into my room.

Ready for blue murder! I seized the first thing that fell into my hand, a heavy object, about ten centimeters thick and twice as big as a large hand. It was all I had, all that was between me and....or worse! Oh, God! I almost screamed. Not quite though, rather I reckon I sort of gurgled. Hush!

Defence, you know.

This was the bottom line, I knew it - her finest hour - now the crazy assassins were poised to strike right near my door, they were shining-up their weapons, or loading their tritons, right here in the corridor!

My heart, liver kidneys and spleen all sank to new lows....my throat went dry. ..Drier than a dead dingo's dangler... I went hot all over... it just could be the Gluhwein still coursing through my veins... blood... Blood red, .Oh no, not to die in a foreign field!

I decided that there was only one thing for it.

Clutching the comfortably heavy inlaid

object by its leather (Leather?) cover (Cover?) I rushed into the corridor, whooping the Antipodean version of 'Death or Glory,' the better to take the bastards by surprise!

With perfect timing and at precisely that moment the sky decided to flash wild lightning, and an enormous clap of thunder.

I do admire perfect timing, especially in movies, don't you?

I took a wild swipe at their collective heads <all thousands of them>, let out my version of the famous whoop meaning 'Death or Glory, boys' and... Incredible, but at that blood-red moment my assassins suddenly all shrieked (It must have been effective, when in retrospect, with thunderclap and lightning.)

Anyway suddenly I knew I'd won. Well, almost.

Aha! Now they were in full retreat! The demons rushed back along the corridor, and I heard the shrill shout 'The Graz AutoKiller!'

So that's who it was! So that was it!

I told you I knew, didn't I!

There was no time to be lost; I must rid the world of this scourge!

I rushed along the corridor to help; no time

to encloth myself, no, this bedsheet would do fine. And this... eh? Bible? Well that would do just dandy, thank you. Have a nice day! After all, I had them in full flight.

There was horror and ghastliness abroad, let me tell you: the whole hotel was rent asunder by the horrified screams in the darkness and occasional lightning flashes on all three of its occupants.

No, but seriously, Now I was in hot pursuit.

Hot pursuit knows no boundaries. After all it was my duty. And I had a tankful of Gluhwein to drive me. Boots On!

Wonderful. No shortage of fuel, vroom.
Patrol **Forward!**

Whoosh. Klumpa. Klumpa.

I arrived at the reception, but apparently the receptionist had taken a powder. And people looked at me as if they had just seen the AutoKiller.

Wow! I was close, really close. All my fear was gone. Where was he/she/it?

I looked around me. Silence, then thunderous darkness. Well, silence can't be thunderous, can it?

The sounds of an awful crashing upstairs.

I fastened the sheet around me with a spare bit of old cord I found behind the reception desk, and clutching my bible in one hand, a passing bottle of brandy in the other for a little extra Dutch courage, made my way back upstairs.

Thumpa thump.

Of course I was looking for the Motormaniac. Suddenly I heard a weird splashing crunching sound, almost at my elbow.

That must be he/she/it!

I rushed in. Skidded to a halt: but too late.

Golly.

Then.

I fell in the bath.

In the dark.

Simultaneously, perfect timing, all the remaining lights went out. Well, they still haven't marketed waterproof candles. Not for hotel use, anyway.

Next!

There was an awful scream broken by the sound of the mouth attached to it being immersed in... well bloody **What?** ...I thrashed around on the floor, horrible wetness everywhere.

Panic grabbed at my vitals, but then a long slug of brandy straightened my imaginary bow-

tie.

An awful voice was gurgling, I mean shrieking at the top of its voice. Blimey. I panicked too: "The Graz AutoKiller" somebody shrieked. Oh, dear!

I made to rush downstairs but some fool had left the tap on somewhere, and the stairs were like a waterfall.

Klumpa Klumpa.

I skidded at the top and cascaded down faster than the water, five steps at a time, like a hallucinating mime artiste.

A perfect Par-des-Deux straight through the madding crowd which purported to be the remains of the inmates of the hotel.

More shrieks. Boots first. Bonka Bonka.

I screamed despite myself - "The Graz AutoManiac!" but magically the lobby was empty ...They knew. Ahah!

It was somewhere...and I was red hot on the trail, I was certain that the trail was still warm.

Somewhere in the background police sirens were shrieking.

I was determined to get there first. I was first (or was it last?) out the door and rushing

through the bushes, thumpa thumpa, through the pond, into...

Foreign Parts

Part the Fifth

Oops!

Where the hell was I?

I clutched my rags about me and took another pull at the brandy, holding the book under my arm. I thrashed around in the darkness... I could hear voices and screeching tyres...

Ouch. The ground was uneven.

I was obviously close to my goal, because the Police, or whatever, were close behind.

Much later, well, a few seconds can seem like an age, can't they?

Scrape clumpa thumpa bonka.

Now was The Time! I gritted my teeth. I struck out boldly, suddenly sensing cold air, space - in the awful brilliant greyness of a

sudden uncanny flash of lightning I realized that I must be flying through the air... to complement all this there was a perfectly placed Boom! of thunder.

Oh, I do like neatness!

After a few seconds I felt soft earth around my ankles.

Now I was among trees and bushes, and the night was blacker than ever.

Everything faded to a point.

Beep!

Cut, Print

Foreign Parts

Part the **S**ixth

I awoke. My rear end as cold as ice. To avoid acute cystitis it had to be moved.

Damn it, I was sitting in a stream.

Or something.

Suddenly I remembered where I was (or approximately, anyway.).

Hauling my naked butt out of the stream (thoughts of Blue-Arsed Fly, perhaps?), I realized that the Graz Automaniac might well be sitting next to me!

I jumped clear to the bank, despite the rumbling, crashes and flashes.

Crunk Crunch...I whapped through the bushes and started to run. (Oh, I should explain, I was wearing something, apart from the remains of the sheet; my ski boots.)

Anyway, I pounded through the forest flourishing first the bottle and then the book until at length I screeched to a halt.

Then, as I rounded a turn I was confronted by a very decorative forest-house kitsch as you could only imagine in your wildest burbling's.

Dear reader, at this point you have to imagine the clanging thunder, wild lightning at theatrically perfect intervals, and the occasional flurry of snowflakes. Or you won't get it at all. I just thought I'd mention that.

To get things straight. After a decent interval I looked up to make sure that there wasn't actually an A.S.M. sitting in the nearest tree scattering tiny bits of torn up 'Queensland Tribune's.

Thumpa. Klumpa, klumpa *bonk*.

Then I gave my nose a scrape and rapped sharply on the door. Well, it was more of a scrape really, as my hands, and most of the rest of this previously perfectly prepared Corpus Delicti were rapidly turning what looked in the scattered flashes and the reflected light of the windows a series of shades of neon blue to Day-Glo grey. Not to mention the orange. Oh, and there was a

decorative wisp of lichen or sea weed or whatever fringing my ex-perfect makeup job.

I leaned against the doorway with my book (for some reason it had become my safety blanket) in one hand, and my first-aid kit of brown liquid in the other. I took a deep breath.

At that exact moment, someone opened the door.

I had had no time to even begin to announce well worn phrases such as 'Avon calling', when the face disappeared and the door slammed.

I banged on the wood with the butt end of the bottle.

The cold was beginning to affect my judgment.

I took a quick, protective swig from the brandy. After a moment the door opened a crack, but only to display the large black muzzle of a shotgun.

My God again! Was this it, the maniac?

Unfortunately I didn't have time to ask, for next there was a dull bang, and part of a tree fell around me, nearly breaking my neck.

No, I tell a lie, it was the upright of the

porch! They're getting rare, you know.

The house gave a delicate twang, like any well tuned lute, and then the entire front portion began to ease its way towards mother earth.

There was a further series of bangs. Someone screamed-

"Der Graz AutoManiac!" came the awful scream.

Blood-curdled, I spun around. So it was here! But where? You mean...here! I spun round again. I spun round once more. I positively pirouetted.

Foreign Parts

Part the Seventh

Ski boots are not perfectly suited to walking, as you know, and thus suddenly I sat down rather hard, fortunately just avoiding the demise of the front of the house, from which a string of oaths issued, which had they been pennies, would have meant that suddenly I'd won the State Lottery.

However. The increasing discomfort of my lower portion goaded me.

My first aid kit was getting low.

I suddenly remembered that the maniac ...could... be... here!

What! And where was my insurance policy? Did it exclude maniacs? ...Were maniacs considered acts of God?

Such thoughts reeled through my brain, and so I took another blast of the brown poison, further to settle the matter.

I thrashed around in the darkness with my bottle. No contact.

Beep!

Time was that I should find the maniac and bring him/her/it to rights. It would be no less than poetic.

Momentarily I could see myself, carried shoulder high by cheering, admiring, crowds, dressed in a mixture of ski-elegance and casino chic.

Adoring faces, suntanned hunks and not a few hunkesses (just for balance). I could see it all.

Ah, so that is what it's like to be famous!

I stopped as my boots hit hard surface, and then skidded a few metres as I realized that whatever the surface was, it was now wreathed in a thin skin of ice.

Where was I? Almost complete darkness.

I turned right, then left. Silence.*

At last then, I saw a distant light approaching rapidly.

A motorized appliance!

The car was travelling so fast that the

**the logical alternative. Ed.*

light became blinding, before the engine could be heard. No sooner had I vainly tried to flag it down, than it was almost upon me, and then past,

"Blast!" I doubted that the driver had even seen me.

I decided to wait on the road, whichever it was, until the next car came; then I could get back to the hotel real fast.

I took a slug of the first aid kit, and discovered that it was perilously low.

So, the bottom line was approaching at breakneck speed!

Part the Eighth

I didn't have long to wait. Within two or

three minutes other lights approached, much to my relief, and this time I took no risks and started to wave early (well, I didn't want to be missed, did I?)

Oops! I'd fallen over.

Oops! I couldn't get up for a whole bag of reasons. Skid, skid.

Blast the ice on my boots!

Now the car had halted and I was caught full in the lights. I continued my attempts to verticalise. Skid, skid. Running on the spot.

Just at the moment that I was beginning to feel thankful, I glanced towards the driver, new out of the car and peering at this slightly (I

thought) odd/battered/raggy figure when:

"AAAAHHHHHHHHhhhhh!" The driver gave me a very strange look, for reasons too impossible to imagine, screamed, leapt in the air and simply dematerialized, leaving several pens and pencils in the road. Odd?

I was non-plussed, naturally.

Now, what to do?

Well, what would you do?

I hung around for a few minutes, and then heard a crashing and thrashing in the forest which reminded me of the famous Maniac, that is to say, its existence; so I suddenly got the willies, and made off as they say, in a westward direction.

I drove into town of course.

You know, I really didn't know what to do with the poor blighter's car, so I left it with a thankyou note scribbled with my totally frostbitten' fingers on the back of a letter I found in the glove compartment on the driving seat, and put the keys in the glove box too. Then I left

the car nearish the hotel, and slunk through the back entrance and up the stairs in my by now, multicoloured, rags.

Clump clump clump.

Amazing, you know, I was still clutching that bible. Funny how you do things like that at moments like those. Phew!

Well. I had a lovely shower, took a couple of aspirins and snuggled down to sleep. I slept really well. And I didn't have sore feet the next morning.

I had a sore *derrière*, though.

Part the Ninth

"Hullo!", said Trixie brightly, "There've been ructions going on round here all night - its just as well you were asleep..they think that somehow that loony they were talking about was in town last night ...all kinds a' things... but anyway, we had a lovely time down at the disco...!"

We had breakfast together. The whole town was abuzz with the stories about the famous maniac. I kept mum. After all, my plans were hardly off the ground vis-à-vis maniacs, the catching of...and I wasn't going to tell anyone that I had been near as a whisker...

Would Sherlock Holmes tell you the secret before the story was out?.... Not on your ...Ouch!

The **paper** had banner headlines:

'Was this the Graz AutoKiller?' and further: 'Graz AutoKiller seen in Forest - Graz

AutoKiller carries tailors mannequin onto main Graz-Linz Autobahn, drops it when attacked by courageous motorist'. Then a report "Georg Braun, the courageous motorist attacked by the mad Graz AutoKiller, stood ground bravely, until, threatened by a butcher's cleaver reportedly sharpened to the viciousness of a razor blade, he at last parried many blows' (Picture of Braun, with dazed expression and **black goatee beard**, large thick spectacles and heroic pose against a reproduction of a gaunt Teutonic Madonna with a gunmetal crucifix." Yes, heroic Herr. Braun parried the savage blows of the maniac, almost won and then was defeated by the extreme violence of his attacker, "As they say", said Herr Doktor Braun "He actually had the strength of at least ten men, maybe more - it' was useless to struggle against such odds. I decided instead to raise the alarm in order to save the lives of innocent motorists. But one thing that will remain with me until the day I die is that horrible face! My God! Such a ghastly mangled face stripped of all humanity; those red eyes looked at me through a wild mask of destroyed and rotting flesh and ghastly exposed nerve ends covered with mud,

and, urghh! I can't speak any more; I must go for a Kur in order to recover from this awful experience!' Herr Doktor Braun is a filing clerk at the Ministry of Social Order in Linz and was visiting his mother-in-law who is a Registered alcoholic.' End of report.

Another report; this time on the radio.

'Pyotr Podgorny, who lives in a forest dwelling near the autobahn concerned was today claiming exemplary damages from the Ministry of Health after he was attacked by the Graz AutoManiac not two hundred metres from where the motorist you have doubtless read about, Herr Professor Doktor Georg von Braun was similarly dry-gulched. The sadistic maniac involved, says Herr Podgorny, was at least two and a half metres tall and was enormously strong. After a short but awful struggle with the maniac, Herr Podgorny drove him back: but displaying awesome power the maniac (apparently in a fit of pith after being somehow, doubtless with the help of God alone, repulsed by the sturdy Burger, who is even now offering a Novena at the cathedral in Linz in thankfulness for his deliverance) managed to partly destroy his homely dwelling by tearing

away part of the roof supports, thus reducing the entire front of the house to wreckage.

At an emergency session to discuss the horrific events of last night, the council has already granted the entire rebuilding of this house in gratitude for the courage of Herr Podgorny. The council is also reportedly considering the award of the Grand Cross of St Vinicius (<7th Class) to Herr Professor Doktor Doktor Georg von Braun a senior executive at the Ministry of Health, for Civilian Heroism.'

Later:

"Have you seen that blonde man...what's his name... Er-...?" said Trixie.

"What man?"

"The one I eh, met last night"

"No".

"Listen to this", said a blonde person of the opposite persuasion, sitting down and putting his hand on Trixie's thigh.

'Monster seen near Hotel Grimwold'. He read 'A bizarre creature dragging a tailor's dummy swathed in rags and bandages and

holding an awfully symbolic Transylvanian bible was seen by a terrified housewife last night as she put out the cat. The hunchbacked creature was seen walking crab-fashion and reportedly cursing under its breath - 'Said Frau Stein.' It reeked of something, likely molten pitch, but possibly even rum or brandy ... I shudder to think what obscenities it thought as it looked through the window as I undressed to go to bed. Fortunately, I was not alone.' Frau Stein will sleep more secure tonight with her husband's pistol under her pillow. Sadly, the cat was reported to have later been found strangled, Could this be an awful warning?'

"Have you met Henri?" said Trixie, suddenly needing to feel ever so casual. Well, anyone would, if Henri's hand was exploring their inner thigh, wouldn't they!

Finally, after Trixie and Henri had disappeared for a 'Few Minutes' while she 'Refreshed her Makeup' I actually put my butt onto the seat of the chairlift, and managed to get to the top of the first slope that I was prepared to risk my all on. Battered though it was.

My all, that is.

The nursery slopes were soft and slow;
quite nice to warm-up on.

Far off I saw yesterday's (yesterday, it
seemed years ago!) Romeo, the redoubtable María-
Rudolf chatting-up a hapless maiden or two.
Well, so long as he was out of eyeshot, the better!
Then on to the higher, faster slopes.

Blast! On the fastest slopes they had posted
danger notices; apparently there was a danger of
snow avalanches because of deep drifted snow.

Well, we missed that one out.

And then, in the distance I saw a great
moving wall of powder. It took a few seconds for
the deep hissing rumbling rustle of the movement
to reach me.

Strewth! That was an Avalanche.

That's all fer now.*

* Writers Cramp

Foreign Parts

Part the Tenth

Hello again.

Well, Dear Diary, we had a perfect day, skied from peak to peak and slope to slope, the sun hot and the surface snow beginning to turn to ice; a perfect mingling of sensations, ice to burning sun heat.

Well, that's one of the attractions of skiing. There are others of course, mostly with legs. The air makes you tired, though, 'All that Ozone' they say. Shame.

But when we got back to the hotel Trixie was in a zappy mood. No tiredness for her.

"Beat you to change... there's an Après-Ski later!"

Well, as I told you before, I felt really tired, I wasn't very quick that day. I put it down to my

nocturnal exertions.

First I had to change the plaster over my eye (which had assumed a ghastly dark cherry colour,) managing incidentally to blot-out any remaining vision on that side.

Operating one-eyed and one-sided too, can be very awkward, can't it? Oh, ho!

But anyway, finally I got down to the party, and began to sup the local poisons. They are good! (That was a government morality warning.) Actually, I've always been partial to a drop of the hard stuff. But, unbeknownst to me, I was beginning to be overcome by tiredness.

Anyway, after an hour or three, which must have meant around at eleven or midnight local time, so to speak, I went outside and sat on the edge of the decorative pool, to freshen-up. You know.

It was a clear night, as different from the stygian gloom of the last one as you could imagine. The moon was out and the clouds had cleared away. It was cold, too.

You already know the next bit, so you can

miss a page here if you like.

But.

Yes, well, it wasn't long before Maria-Rudolf hove over the horizon, this time on my sighted side.

"Vell, Hullo!" said Maria-R, for all the world as if we were the firmest of companions.

I gave him a vague frown.

"Ah!" said M-R "I see that you have been attending ze party!"

"Uhm"

"Vell, zen you vov't mind if I sit here besei chew!"

Silence.

Crafty old M-R managed to work his way round my blind side, sensing some arcane gothic advantage. He clutched a container of some unspeakable liquid. I wasn't that blind, though.

He lunged, just as I was making to lurch up and...

Splash!

Dammít.

Contrary to plan we were both in the

ornamental pond; to the cheers of a group of revellers by the disco door.

Fortunately, however, my weight had hardly broken the ice, so to speak so to speak, and as I attempted to rise, the combined threshing of M-R and the freezing water as the ice bent and began to crack at the edge, drove me to new heights of exertion, and I thrashed away wildly, finally propelling myself like an ice-skater on her arse and in brogues, across the mysterious pond.

I knew that the water would be deep in the centre, and the ice was giving bizarre and interested rumblings, so terror prevailed and I blundered onward, arms thrashing, gathering warp speed.

Suddenly the edge of the pool arrived, and I was confronted by a wall on the far-side which I had not reconnoitered previously, though I could hear the muffled sounds of vehicles somewhere behind it.

Anyway, as M-R was threshing round, and my speed was showing no increase in it's decrease, it occurred to me that I could jump now... There was a sound of cursing - and I knew

Caramba! that my future beckoned, so I crashed over the wall and found myself suddenly - in metallic darkness!

I crunched around in this new found mystery, and then tripped over I know not what, and banged my bonce...

I awoke. I had been blurred for some moments. Actually, everything had been blurred for some minutes. And now something was rumbling round me, and I knew that whatever it was, was moving at lightning, well, lumbering speed.

Rumble crunch crash!

Thump!

The machine clunked along a locating edge of some kind and disengaged for a second. Then it continued its symphony; now hastened on its way by a chorus of screams and shouts.

I finally disengaged from the cables and metal bit on the floor, and realized that I was in a vehicle of some kind.

My head had begun to develop a large lump just on the inside of my hairline, (*indicates bump*)

zone) which had in its turn begun to expand skywards at an alarming rate. In the flickering light of things like police searchlights and warning maroons, beacons, burning cars, crashing planes and the like, I could see that this thing was bright Day-Glo orange, striped in yellow. Next years colours, perhaps?

But then - my memory reeled back....My God! I vaguely remembered a snow mobile thing, used for scooping drifted snow from the roads; I peeked over the bonnet and at that angle could see the scoop, angled nicely to destroy parked cars by elegant rip-tearing... (Crunch.! Another reason for being shot at dawn) Oh, and the elegant, heavy, extremely flat, caterpillar tracks.

Well of course you can compress just any old Mercedes into a meter square bit of scrap iron in just a moment with just such a labour-saving device!

I looked back. Fatal, really.

A new ex-Jaguar soft-top had suddenly increased in length by twenty feet and decreased in height to three and a half inches.

'O, woe is me', I thought. 'But boldly into

the breach dear friends!

I ducked down, my James Bondian mind moving at the speed of a ... a frying banana and with the elegance of a rusty tin can.

Well, something like that.

Crunch crash wail scream.

"One thing is clear, 007, if they catch you they'll..." The tractor lurched over something and temporarily became airborne.

Would my insurance cover me? Such moments of clarity are really quite rare. Now I remembered; my ever-patient mother had said: "Now Dear, remember, whatever you do, you must be well covered by insurance."

I'll leave you to work that out.

Legal advice crowded my brain.

There had to be a way out of here... I looked once again through the windscreen, now wreathed with bits and pieces of leaves and twigs, to add to its camouflage of pieces of cars and the odd brick bouncing around on the bonnet, and saw that my vehicle was now exploring a swimming pool. "An attractive feature of this vehicle is the Mercedes-Benz radiator that has been carefully placed over the radio aerial".

"Oh! No!"

I panicked, slightly, began to fool around with the levers and things, hearing only an answering user—friendly electronic beep and then a whirr. Was this thing about to take off? Actually it then turned sharp right - through a garage and (Wallop clunk crash!) started off up the nearest hill.

Finally, we ('We?') had clambered through a few more back gardens, when all at once, the mad machine started at quite a trot along the high street, familiar probably. As it passed near the lights which I recognized as being my hotel's, I bailed out, landing this time on my butt.

Phew!

Well, that made sure I wouldn't sit down for a week.

Black and blue, I was.

Anyway, then I walked in using the established routine, through the back way, and began the work of, dragging my damaged head up the stairs.

"Oh, there you are!" said Trixie, coming

down the up-stair with Sheila.

I made an excuse. Glib, aren't I!

"You must come out front, there's something crazy happening and we're all laughing. The police are simply livid!" said Sheila.

So I retraced my steps. Well, it's all part of the fun, isn't it?

M-R was standing in the lobby in a pool of water, holding forth to a group of admiring admirers.

"Oh, Zere you are my little Kaninchen!"*
said M-R with a spare, admiring glance at my bruised behind, "You've missed all the fun!"

Well. The party waxed.

I poured more fuel into my tanks.

You know what a Ghoul is, don't you? Well, laughing ghouls were all over the disco, kissing ghouls flooded out on to the Patio by the pool. I sank into a rocking-chair, artfully placed there by one of them. Well, what the hell, it had a raffia

* 1 Rabbit bunny

* 2 No Comment

seat, perfect for a bruised part.

"No, don't sit there", someone said "I'm convinced it's inherently unstable!" (Snigger, snigger, snigger.)

"Oh, Bugger off", said Trixie, laughing, "Shall I rock you?" She rocked me. It was nice. My sore head, my bruised pride etc..

Aha! But the chair was inherently unstable.

Ha, Ha!

Wait!

Yes!

For a brief moment I saw the inevitable stars and heavens, then mother earth; I had that extraordinary sensation of lightness..... lovely really.

"Oh, God!.. That's so funny!" said a Ghoul as they hauled me shrieking out of the freezing Danube, or whatever the blasted water of that pool was from. And to prove it they started to throw themselves en-masse into the freezing water.

"Haha! Haha!" they screeched gaily.

Well, one thing about cold water; it keeps the bruises down!

Part the Eleventh

I awoke the next morning feeling absolutely crook*, coupled with more aches and pains than I had experienced before at any one moment in my life.

I mean, I'm sure I actually creaked.

This is a problem, isn't it, dear? Well, there was nothing for it but to straighten myself out a bit before breakfast, so I decided to use the pool, which was a sort of shared arrangement with the other hotels. To get there you walked down these corridors on the ground floor, and then followed the signs, which I did.

Well, it was one of those modern Lido pools, very warm and rather like being by the sea. Very chic; so chic in fact that boring things like labels on doors, you know, really very boring things

*With a hangover. Ed

like Manager's Office or 'Ladies Changing' were left off.

If you're that posh you automatically **know** these things, make complex maps back to where the 'pissoir' is, to where you left your soap and towel...

'Oh Gosh! Of course dear, it's a piece of cake, a breeze!'

Well, as I said, the pool was of the large kidney shaped variety, and the water left only a small margin at three sides.

Around the edge were bathing-chairs and sun-bed Oh, and a few potted palms. Tasteful, don't you think?

Aha! Voices from the past! One of yesterday's Ghouls had obviously had the same idea as me, and was trying to lift his hands above chest height on the weights machine, but not getting very far. Another ghoul was smoking in a relaxed sort of way floating around in a rubber ring with a bored expression on his face.

Well, there you are. Me? Oh, I was wearing my bikini, which was really designed for sunbathing, you know, mostly little bits of string, and the odd price tag. But anyway, I slunk along the side in a casual sort of way, and dived in.

Terrific. Wonderful how water and motion can get your head straightened out. Despite my buzzing brain, I ventured onto the diving board and took the plunge.

I swam around casual as you like, and a few additional vacant ghouls from yesterday filtered in.

Well then, I decided to get out after a few luxurious lengths.

"Oh! No!" I suddenly realized with horror that fate had quirked once again.

Yes, dear listener, Yours truly was bottomless! Somewhere in the pool my bikini was playing dolphins with passing swimmers.

Well, to cut a long discussion short- what do you do?

As usual, (Oh! No! Creak!) I would have to move fast. No think fast. Think? Fast? No. Well.

Now, more of yesterdays Ghouls, having

woken up, had begun to filter in, apace. Panic gripped my vitals. Crípes mate!

I thrashed around in the water, but couldn't find a trace. Not a flaming dolphin- or anything. I swam around looking un-flurried and unperturbed, but then one of the ghouls whistled at my bare bum. I knew the game was up!

More famous than I already was, I didn't want to get.

Of course, I would make for the showers and a towel. Simple, isn't it.

Simple. *Ha! Ha! Ha! Ah?...Ha?*

The theory was perfect.

I exercised my massive intellect.

I had it all worked out.

Looking merely sporty, yes, dear viewer, as cas* as that, I hoisted myself out of the water and made like relaxed sort of flash for the door that should theoretically say Dusche. Shower, to you. I breathed more easily and my bosom heaved as I passed through the door.

Safety.

My slightly swollen eye throbbed, vaguely.

I closed the other in sympathy and fumbled

blurrily for the showers... I could hear

* *Casual like. Innit? Ed.* their invigorating sound, like the Victoria Falls to a thirsty explorer; I was guided by the delicious thought...

I undid the top of the bikini as I passed through the enclosure, chucked it aside and made thankfully for the hot showers... now was the saving of the...

I stood under the showers with my eyes closed.

Unaccountably the other eye throbbed.

I opened them. Both.

Four pairs of (*Male*) eyes surveyed my perfect form.

Nom de nom!

Great Guffaws.

Suddenly I was standing in the showers, knees bent, hand fending off imaginary access to private parts, other covering eyes. Caramba!

Again?

More Guffaws.

I admit I panicked this time. Ran for the nearest doorway, which was sharp left through the showers.

Turned around. Enter the nude aerobics instructress. Yes, it was an aerobics class. 28 pairs of surprised eyes met mine, and then looked elsewhere.

Great Guffaws echoed from under the closed door behind me.

No way back.

Corblimey Mate.

Once more into the breach dear friends!

"Oh, excuse me!" I said, attempting civilized unconcern as if this happened every day, "I'm looking for the changing rooms" they looked at me, blank: (this was Austria, you know and I expect they were all Austrians).

But I didn't give them the chance to answer, even if they could understand me, for then of course I lunged for the door which seemed most likely - and which brought me nicely into the middle of a previously unknown restaurant.

Breakfasts hit ties.

Wives hit husbands.

Even parrots covered their eyes.

I screeched to a halt, and made as if to grab a tablecloth, but that would have caused the entire Austro-Hungarian silver collection to crash to the floor, so, in a cacophony of silence, I cancelled the idea as being of limited usefulness and nonchalantly walked through the room...

[The essence of this could only be speed!]

.....Followed, I should say, by not a few sound effects, such as that of breaking crockery, spluttering <gc..>.... I expect that the local sales of indigestion remedies increased with lightning speed the very same day.

Once out of the room I streaked (streaked?) down the corridor, across the lobby at the narrow end, up the stairs like a banshee, and shrieked to a halt outside my door.

Speed you know. My eye hurt, and so did my bum. But it wasn't the altitude. Ouch!

But!

Ha, Ha! No bloody key!

I didn't have any pockets to search so I rapped on Trixie's door, but heard only a deep gurgle of pleasure.

'Oops; otherwise engaged!' Come to think of it, was this a double-take, or was she still 'refreshing her makeup' with Henri?

I hammered delicately on the door, but nothing happened. Another lost (gurgle) moment in history passed.

The world held its breath.

Foreign Parts

Part the Twelfth

There was a furtive movement further down the corridor;

'Shit a brick!' I screamed under my breath (I had to be quiet for obvious reasons.)

But, First things first... I had to get in... Find the damn key... cover up my parts... after all, what would my mum say?

I found an old newspaper on the floor. Lucky really. Bild Zeitung, with a naked mädchen on every page.*

Very fitting! But not big enough to cover anything really significant (am I discussing the content, or merely the intellectual capacity of its readership, I ask myself?)

Well, they don't make girls that fit behind a tabloid, let me tell you.

**A daily newspaper. Ed.*

What to do next?

What would you do?
Clutching the tabloid around little bits of
me I made for the stairs.
Loud laughter. I rushed for cover.

An idea!

Through the fire door!
My window was open...I could get through
without anyone seeing my good bits without
permission.

Nice thinking Tarzan! Eh Zorro!

That's what I would do!

I found the fire escape, and casually
wormed my way along it. Now I was within
striking distance of my quarry (well my room
has been compared to suchlike things in my
time!).

Just a foot or two more of concrete ledge -
I sidled along. Nearly there.

"Don't jump!" said a voice.

"What?" I returned, on automatic pilot. I
reached out a hand and found the window
mysteriously locked.

I looked around, and lost my protective wrapping.

I was on the third floor! Holy Moses, I was on a concrete ledge, only inches wide, stark naked, locked out on the **third** bloody floor!

How I had missed out the other two I will never know.*

And, to make matters infinitely worse there was a small group, a growing group actually, of interested bystanders and scattered perverts discussing amongst themselves the pro's and con's of my imminent demise from this height.

The prospect did not please.

"Jump!" volunteered one worthy.

"No, don't!" said another, whereupon a fight broke out on the street.

The traffic had stopped.

Well, what do you expect for Chrissake?

Some lunatic was peering upwards with a pair of binoculars.

*Austrian Architecture: Ed.

'Am I insured?' I thought... 'Mother will kill

me!'

I covered my good bits. I have a certain pride in my good bits. I nearly overbalanced.

The person, no, on closer inspection - A PARSON with binoculars, was craning his neck and focusing ever sharper... ever clearer... I hopped around, sort of avoiding the Parson with the binoc's, whereupon- shrieks and cries broke out from the crowd. Was there a monitor screen by the side of the street...could they see anything interesting?

Curiosity nearly underwhelmed me.

"Who the hell is she?" said one passer-by

"Jump!" said a helpful psychologist.

"Some celebrity I think, but I can't recognize her from this angle" said another.

Just how would you explain to a crowd of strangers that all that you wanted was a swim before breakfast?

I sidled along the concrete ledge, nearly overbalancing as a pigeon tried to make a nest in my hair. Pigeons have always found me really jolly fascinating. I think I've said that already,

haven't I?

A chorus of screams.

A swell of horror from the crowd.

I could hear a police siren in the background.

Bee Bah, Bee Bah!

The crowd was craning their necks to watch the monitor screen.

Or were they?

Maybe they were watching the news?

I craned mine and nearly overbalanced again.

But no, I had been wrong... it was...

A police car screamed round the corner and smashed at full pelt into a cartload of pretzels and gluhwein and cannoned it into a vegetable stall.

The street was red with. ...oops.

A serious bout of laughter broke out.

Friendly Austrians started fighting each other.

Part the Thirteenth

For a moment I was forgotten.

Fame is so fleeting!

I slunk back along the edge of the ledge, through the doors and down to the first floor. Yes, Sods Law, Trixie was now 'in'.

She thought it all very funny. In fact she was almost hysterical.

We opened her window and leaned out.

Great commotion in the street.

"Don't worry Dari", said Trixie, "They weren't looking at your face, so they won't recognize you!"

"Ha Ha!"

Still great commotion in the street.

By now the fire brigade had turned up and was desperately searching for the naked nutcase.

Must use camouflage.

After all, desperate situations require desperate remedies.

I pulled on the least attractive pair of tattered knickers I could find, and an odd bra with a large air hole for your nipple inserted by a thoughtful moth, and the most unappealing pair of oversize dungarees I could find.

Now nobody would give me the remotest thought. Really, I mean it.

The ladder swung out and back and the fireman looked into each room in turn, to check.

Suddenly - there was a stream of ghastly verbals and the ladder swung wildly away in recoil:

Boining!

"That's my wife!" shrieked the fireman, and glided the ladder towards us at warp speed, wildly gesticulating and pointing, above, to approximately the precise area where I had made mental notes of gurglings before.

The ladder banged against our little

balcony, and the fireman grabbed his axe and was away in hot pursuit, like a rat up a drain.

Pausing only to ask for my extension and room number.

I thought, *'That must mean something?'* And then realized that I had thought of it in italics.

Would that affect my insurance do you think?

Was I losing my marbles?

I mean this new condition, never previously described by medical science...?

Anyway, he zapped through the room, and left me holding the escape ladder with one hand, one foot on the platform to steady it, mouth open in shock, looking aghast at Trixie.

And then suddenly the almost inevitable happened. The ladder shifted, and I was waltzing Matilda - through the air!

Foreign Parts

Part the Fourteenth

How did I get into this?

You might well ask!

Well, it wasn't very far to the ground, and I'd seen María-Rudolf doing sillybuggers in the snow before, so I thought I'd let go and fall gracefully into the snow.

No such bloody luck, mate!

Strewth! Somehow I skidded on a hard crest of ice and bounced into a basement.

Banged down the stairs and through a sort of open hopper-cum-window. At speed.

Ouch!

I sat up, covered now with some icky substance.

I was sitting in the bakery, deserted because the bakers were voyeurs too, and they were out

watching the fun.

Well, to cut a long story short- I'd sunk into the dough for tomorrow's pretzels!

I screamed, 'The Machinery!', my mouth full of salty dough, expecting to be caught in some appalling machine at any moment, hopped out of the hopper - and kind of decided in my own twisted way to go home. Well, one does.

RRrip! My dungarees had decided to go Au Natur, but anyway I continued to wonder at speed along the corridor.

There was a promising door! I pushed it open.

No, the boilers!

I wandered a bit further.

I Pushed another door.

This looked possible.

I wandered through the linen store and sat down on a horizontal surface; my head was still somewhat muzzy after my latest quick trip.

Anyway, my hair, eyes &c., were full of glutinous strands of tomorrows breakfast. I began to scrape the disaster off my face &c...

But -

No sooner had sore butt touched soft flat area than everything went, as they say in the best penny-dreadfuls. White.

Well, pale anyway.

Just like that.

Foreign Parts

Part the Fifteenth

I lay there. various bits aching, strangely comfortable though, among all the white sheets, restful, almost.

(Delicate snore!)

Then, after what seemed a minute I heard bonks (but not bonking!) and clanks and things: but I was too fatigued to react.

Just as I did.... eventually <Yawn>.... Too late though, the truck I was kipping in, the one with all the laundry, was already pulling past the gaily thronged main street [courgette and pretzel stripes]- and I heard the cops still arguing with the vegetable seller ('What do you expect to pay for courgettes, Herr Kommissar?') and then the continuous whine of tyres against tarmac.

I should explain at this point. Somehow all the linen was sealed into a large sack. And there I

was, too.

I yawned, it was comfortable, warm, like I said, and the truck was rocking gently.

Yes, I slept on. Yawn. Snore. Well, what would you do then? I woke, and the truck had stopped. I climbed out of the bag

Rip rip Rrrripppp!

And surveyed my little universe.

I continued to scrape away at the mixture of dirty linen and croissant camouflaging my exterior. It was as sticky as chewing gum, as glutinous as tar, but faintly tasty too... Ouch!

The lorry had stopped by a low wall, and the driver had gone off, apparently to take a leak. Then there was a sudden awful crashing, tearing, and banging, some way off the road and then a scream. Unscheduled, like.

God! That made me nervous. And to further complicate matters, it was suddenly getting ever so chilly, so I borrowed a couple of sheets and sat on the wall to wait.

It was beginning to get dark by then. I continued to scrape away, and washed most of the

rest of the dough off my face with snow. Cold. Good for the muscles. Yes, there too. I didn't actually care where the hell it was.

Well, I get like that.

And then the most astounding thing happened.

Suddenly there was a voice at my elbow, I looked up and into the most gorgeous dark eyes you ever saw.

Yes, you might be excused for thinking that I was about ready for something really neat to happen. Well, I told him a severely shortened version of my tale, got into his car, and he drove back towards town.

We didn't quite reach it just then, because first we had a sandwich at a little forest retreat he knew, and then we sat watching the mountains for simply ages, before we.... (Romantic bit).... had our first kiss. Yes, it was kind of dreamy. And then, after all that dreaming, he took me back to town. Not quite the end of a perfect day, but heading in that direction, wouldn't you say?

I made it back to the hotel after midnight, bumped into Trixie in the bar, and told her I'd tell her what I'd tell her the following morning.

Simple really. Except that we had rather a lot of celebratory schnapps' before I left the bar.

"Goody", said Trixie, "it's tough being with a virgin, Après-Ski!" (Whatever that meant.)

I took my key from behind the reception desk, and made my way up the stairs.

I was longing to get some sleep.

I noticed that one of the pictures by my door had been moved as a result of the day's ructions. Odd? Not quite right.

Anyway, then I opened my door, ripped off my clothes, and got in to bed. Sleep is so welcome when your body aches and your limbs are bruised.

Lovely.

At first I had hardly a dream; and then one of those sexy ones that you have rather seldom. You know, REM sleep.

I could have slept for days, but then I realized that the dream I was having was not a dream....

....I'm not saying I didn't enjoy it but anyway then I woke up fully as whomever he was

finished me off for the second time, patted my left breast, turned over, and returned to sleep.

Was this a dream - was I sure?

Contented snore. **But I don't snore!**

I sat up in bed.

This was no bloody dream! **I wasn't alone!**

Chrissake - who was this?I mean his owner'd kill me if she found-out what I'd just done with him.'

Not to say how pleasant it was. What am I saying!

I mean, this was obviously a double. ...!..

Fortunately he was well away, softly snoring. Too late to double check if he was as good as my 'dream' had informed me.

Action!

No, life comes first.

I quickly slunk to the door and found my trousers, shirt, socks and boots, but couldn't find anything else in the darkness. Namely, underwear. Thrown it somewhere. Habit.

'Fortunately' I thought, 'I don't have name tags on my knickers!'

Blimey! It was so dark in the room that I

tripped over just about everything on my way to the door. I banged my elbow and my head. Ouch! Quiet! Sssshh!

But he didn't wake.

I opened the door and peeked into the passage. Clear.

I snuck out and clicked the door too. Gently!

I took my bearings.

My God! He was in the next, opposite room! Still he'd have trouble recognizing me without... with my clothes on!

I rushed to open a window at a decent distance

I let out the scream of pain I'd been saving for minutes. I rubbed my elbow.

Sssschhh! Sssssh!

There was no reason to dress, having found this room was the one opposite, and no-one coming, so I slunk across the corridor and locked myself in.

At last, glorious sleep, with the familiar (but illicit) Cheshire-cat smile on the lips!

Purrr!

Foreign Parts

Part the Sixteenth

I woke much later, my mouth furrier than a Kanga's pouch, and it would have been much, much later, but Trixie was banging on my door in high excitement.

"Hey, that famous Maniac has been seen near the hotel!"

"What do you mean?" I let her in

"What was that?"

"It's in all the papers - the car belonging to that man the <which, as you know, was nicked> "....deep breath - then continues... ""... the other evening - has been found up the road with a note"....twitch, twitch...." They say it was written in a strange crabbed hand... Oh! Doesn't it send ghastly shivers up your back when you think of that maniac crashing around (Crashing?) "....in the hotel'...."

Stop. Think.

"Oh, by the way, **where** were you last night?"

(I explained)

"... God, Darien I thought you had a little... eh... Well anyway..." Awkward silence. "The thing is"... Eh... D'you mind if I sleep here on the floor... I'm scared of being alone!"

As this would be the first time in history that I'd known Trixie to sleep alone, I decided to agree, if only for pure scientific curiosity's sake.

We sat there for, well, for some time, while she reeled out the ghastly news. Trixie never had been a fast reeler:

"Yes, anyway, then they say they've seen the maniac running along the roof after... Well you know when you got stuck?"..... break for titter.... "outside the window..... Oh, don't worry I won't tell a soul!.. anyway they saw the maniac on the roof or something together with"... (Chillingly)... "A ghastly battered shop dummy, with"... (shake)... "a ghastly load of tattered rags, all stained with I don't know what.... bits of stuff, anyway ...and then they saw the maniac trying to clamber out of a truck on the motorway all

ghastly, with its face all sort of (err)mobile I... mean sliding as if the (ughh!) skin was like (erghhh!) sliding off its awful face. The truck driver had a fit, poor boy, and then got injured... apparently ran like a maniac (oops) when he saw the Maniac and crashed into the forest and broke a leg or arm or something"....

Shiver shiver, claw-like hand grips my arm)

"Anyway, then when he came back he thought he saw the maniac hi-jack a car....finally he called the cops, but then the maniac had pissed-off somewhere....the police are still looking and they think that... (ooh oh oh oh oh oh)... "It had murdered some poor bugger and is still driving around in the stolen car."... (Shiver shiver).

This rang a bell or two, but there were more pressing matters:

"You said they saw the maniac around the Hotel?"

"Yes, YES! Somewhere around this area!" (oohh!)

Suddenly she looked at something on the floor.

"What's that?" She reached down for whatever it was. It was one of those envelopes that

you get from photograph shops containing your holiday snaps. I didn't recognize it.

"Stupid Bugger! Must've been caught in your clobber...What is it?". She opened the envelope.

"No, No, No, it's His" (Titter) (gestures)..
"Across the corridor!" I scratched my kaboodie.

Curiosity won. Well it would, wouldn't it!

"You don't have your camera with you, do you..?"

"No", I said sensing something, "Why?"

"Well, look at this"

"It's a collection of shots..."

"Of Dress dummies..." We slowed, and then looked at each other.

"Fuck sake!" said Trixie weakly, with emphasis. Terrible grammar. "He...can't really be - The...It?!"

"Well, how the fuck....?"

"Oh, God!" Suddenly my moments of illicit and un-reportable grandeur hove into view, complete with resplendent Maniac.

I explained. Again.

"It must have been in his things!"

"You said that before"

"No I didn't!"

"Yes you did!"

"We don't have a transcript!"

"Shuddup!"

However, something more important had dawned.

"Chrissake," said Trixie "you could've banged the..."

"Maniac?!?" We both screamed in unison.

"What?" said the voice of an unknown owner in the corridor.

"Nn-Nothing!" We looked at each other. Trixie's mouth, never a thing of wonder at any time, was open, and she pointed dumbly at me....

"Cxqwraji's-sake Darien!" (Glug!)

Suddenly Sherlock Holmes stalked the stage. All my latent detective chromosomes had joined hands with the DNA and RNA and stuff and were limbering up. 'For goodness' sake Dar, we're all with yer!'

I could see bells and hear things clear as a Sumo wrestler's jockstrap. Yes, dear reader, I knew that I knew that I knew in my deepest skin that I was getting pretty close, touching even... Or

worse!

Let's face it, how else for God's sake was I always so close behind the Thing - whatever you call it, Monster - eh? Well, what would you think?

"Don't worry", said Trixie, as if I was: "I'll work it out!" She sat back and looked blank at me. One of those large black holes of history opened in front of both of us.

"I know what I'll, do!" we both said, and then stopped. I poked around the clothes on the floor for a clue, and remembered I'd left my undies behind in the room across the corridor. Well, at any rate they weren't present and correct in my room.

"What'd they look like Dar?" said Trixie

"Oh, black one's with little red bows, why?"

"Those're mine" said Trixie, deflatedly, "...they cost me a fortune, that's why...."

"Oh gosh, sorry, well I could claim them on my insurance!"

"No, I mean ..." the full horror dawned upon both of us. "They've got my name tags all over them!"

"You and your bloody knickers!"

Oh, for a convent school education! Trixie hurled the photos at my head.

"Oh, forget it, I'm sure that he'll never imagine..."

"You're probably right"

"Stupid Bugger!"

Suddenly: the door was rocked by a violent hand.

Clunk Crash Squelch!

We froze in mid sentence.

Trixie showed me her molars. Again.

Forty-two fillings? You know that must be wrong!

"Well, we've got to do something!"

"Act normal....nobody need ever know"

"That's true....uhm...do you think we qualify for Police protection? I quite fancy coppers - it's the uniforms!"

"Are you nuts? Do you want to die? ...*The moment he finds out...!*"

"Yes, of course...he has my name..."

"And my measurements!"

"Telling me!"

"Maybe he's like - *an animal...Maybe he's memorized your perfume?*"

A ghastly frisson.

"Can they...I mean...can animals, remember... like scent?"

"There's something here that's wholly un-whole, Comrade!"

"It cost me a fortune!"

"Ahhhhh!"

The door was shaken once again by a monster paw.

Scrape, scrape, scrape.

A pause. Then a ghastly voice:

"Trixie, Darien..?"

"Chrissake!" said Trixie, "it's Arnold!"

"Oh, him"

"Shall we tell him?"

"No no...We'll have to work it out alone. All alone!"

Another delicious frisson.

Well, what would you do?

We had to act normally, that was clear. So we went out with Arnold and the others and pretended to enjoy a morning's skiing.

Which wasn't at all difficult, actually.

Foreign Parts

Part the Seventeenth

After a couple of runs we all gathered in one of those delightful coffee houses they have backing onto the ski-slope, and drank lots of coffee and ate sticky things.

The sun was hot and we were drier than beached jellyfish, so we drank lots of beer and even more coffee.

The boys drank tinnies and got very jolly, and Arnold tried to remove my eye patch, so I gave him a biff in the region of his...you know what.

Anyway, finally we decided to take the lift once more and explore a little at the top of the run.

After a while we had explored enough to find a tiny secluded hanging valley with a small grove of trees at the top of one end of it. So Sheila and I sat there and actually forgot the events of the earlier hours.

You know, you can actually feel the sun's

rays giving you intravenous Vitamin 'D' at that altitude, and I'm no exception.

But.

After all those pints of sweet relief, suddenly I was desperate for a wee.

Trixie skied off and I was alone, so I skied quickly behind a bush and dropped my pants.

Its awfully awkward getting caught short while wearing skis, heavy trousers, boots &c. &c..

Then all at once I heard a helicopter, you know, that Thumpa! Thumpa! Thumpa! Sound that you hear, of rotor blades.

I craned my neck backwards. I could imagine the leery Austrians hovering over me sniggering, and spattering precious special rear with ice!

Anyway, I started. Jumped, sort of shock reaction.

And so did my skis. Nicely waxed, you see. Whoops!

In a second, with my head bent to get a better butcher's at the helicopter (which had not actually materialized yet, which is half the rub!)

the damn skis slid from under my posterior. Perfect, fast surface you see. Lovely!

I naturally bent forward to get my balance, and in a moment the three of us, the Skis and I, had taken the first in a long series of leaps down a rather bumpy, but very fast slope.

You gather speed amazingly fast at that gradient and within three seconds I had exceeded 0-60 and was making big inroads on 100. Blimey!

I wonder what was more shrill, my ghastly shriek, the sound of those perfect skis scything, or the imaginary laughter of those ghouls in the chopper, as I broke the sound barrier down that darn slope with my perfect bare bit in superb racing position.

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