

1963

By

M. R. Klass

*This was the summer of... no, no, no. All wrong. Crap, okay. The old man lazily stepped then quickly... NO! No, no, no!! No adverbs. That's just insipid and lazy writing. You can do better, you ponce. Think, Jackson. Think.* Jackson stands to his full height. The trip didn't take long. The teak chair, lacquered to the point of fossilization, groaned. Its voice, long and haggard, now sits silent, relieved after what seemed like centuries of oppression. Jackson waddled as he paced. His hand-me-down puke-brown loafers, scuffed and worn, ruffle the natural nap of the stained and worn-to-the-concrete orange, brown, and yellow Berber.

His black Royal Epoch typewriter, beset on a spindly-legged table of unknown origin and questionable design (perhaps Danish ultra-modern foo-foo knock-off), stared at him in silent judgement. Humid, arid air blows through the open sliding glass door. The blank page within the steel clutches of the typewriter's roller waved, beckoning to him like some naked harpy luring a lonely sailor to his doom. With hands on hips and off-leg askew like an obese dancer on break, Jackson stared back. He gave the seize-machine the finger. "You have not gotten the best of me," he says, voice like a great bellowing bullhorn low on batteries.

Jackson approaches the contraption that holds his fate in its pot-marked façade. "You can't beat me. Not today." Jackson leans closer, his voice a whisper on the wind. "Prepare to be conquered." The chair, in agony, the only thing he's beaten into submission today, screams as Jackson sits. He cracks his knuckles. His hands hover over the worn keys. *Okay. You can do this.*

A light tapping on the door. "Room service," says the voice behind.

Jackson throws his hands up. “Are you kidding me?”

Jackson, again relieving the chair from its captivity, moves to the door. “I didn’t order anything,” he says. He looks through the peep hole. Thwip. Glass ruptures. In slow-motion, Jackson falls backward. With a dull thud, his body, like some jiggly heap of Jell-O wrapped in tweed on tweed, hits the floor. Blood, a dull black-red, streams from his glass-encrusted right eye. His right eye, pupil fixed, stares into the great beyond.

Flesh and bone strike the door. Once. Twice. The jamb cracks and splinters. A third time. The door bursts open. Miniature Roman spears rain down on Jackson’s body. A man and woman rush inside. The man, one hand on the door, the other twisting the knob, closes it. The woman drops an army drab duffel at the foot of one of the twin beds as she moves to the back of the room. The man tosses his silenced gun on the other bed. The woman closes the sliding glass door with a muted thud. The man removes the pillows and stuffs them under the door. Metal rings scrape across aluminum as the woman pulls the curtains shut in a single, fluid motion. Click. She locks the sliding glass door.

The man grabs Jackson’s arms. The woman grabs his legs. “Couldn’t the Director have chosen a location with a thinner person? You know how fast the fat ones begin to stink,” says the man. They drag him to the door and drop him into place like some ghoulish draft barrier.

“You talk too much,” says the woman. She looks through the shot-out peep hole. “Clear.”

The man sits in the chair, head down. He slides his hands through his slick mane of short black hair. He watches his counterpart glide to the back door and look outside through a small slit between wall and seafoam-green curtain.

“You know to never question,” says the woman.

“Maybe the problem is that we *never* question. Ever think about that, Magar-“

“No names,” she says, tone harsh and low. “Clear.” She leans against the wall, arms crossed.

“I don’t know how I feel about this,” says the man.

“Your job isn’t to *feel*. It’s to execute.” She stares at him through strands of blonde hair that obscure her blue eyes. She pulls her hair back and fashions it into a tight bun.

The man looks at the typewriter and the blank page it holds. “Life,” he says under his breath. He snorts, shakes his head.

“What was that?” the woman says, turning her head to face him.

The man stands. Exhales. “Life,” he says, walking to the door. He stares into Jackson’s lone pale eye. “We start blank like that page in that typewriter there and then we fill it with our own stories. Good. Bad. Indifferent. We’re not allowed to have our own and we just stole his.” The hairs on the back of his neck charges, rises. He turns, the woman’s glare hard-fixed on him.

“Get your head in the game. This isn’t ‘Captain Kangaroo’.”

“Fine,” says the man, walking toward her. “Timetable?”

She looks at her watch. “It’s eleven-hundred-twenty-five hours now. The mark is in place. Lace is due in the plaza by twelve-hundred-twenty hours. We need to be ready for go at twelve-hundred-thirty hours.” She grabs the duffel and places it on the bed. “Are you certain you can spot this? It’s nearly a half-mile.”

“Are *you* certain you can *make* the shot?” he says. “I heard you were why Mongoose failed.”

Teeth clack and chatter as the duffel is opened with fierce purpose. “Mongoose failed because we underestimated Castro.”

The woman removes parts of metal and wood from inside and places them on the bed with a gentle hand. A dismantled outline of a rifle takes shape. She heaves in a deep gulp of air and holds it. Each piece of the rifle is clicked into place with the dexterity of a master safecracker. The ammunition cartridge is slammed into the receiver. She slide-clicks the first bullet into the chamber. Soft snap as the safety is engaged. She places the finished weapon on the bed.

“I’m not a fan of the Carcano,” says the man, studying it.

“He chose it. We use it.” She reaches into the duffel and removes high-powered binoculars and a wind gauge. She holds them out. “Your guys at the Shadow Factory modified the barrel. Straighter shot, better accuracy.”

“Whatever makes it easier to kill innocents,” he says, taking the equipment.

The man unlocks the sliding glass door. With minimal effort, he slides the door open just enough and slips out. In the distance, behind the tall Texas birch, sits the 8-story red brick building that will soon become an important character in the history books. He checks the area with a blind eye. Using the binoculars, he locates and scans the building. He places the wind gauge on the ledge of the patio. He returns to the room and closes the sliding glass door.

“It’s clear, nearly windless, and the just enough cover to hide the muzzle flash,” says the man.

“It’s time,” says the woman, looking at her watch. The typewriter crashes to the floor with a thud and clang as she moves the table in front of the sliding glass door. She opens it wide enough for barrel. She grabs the rifle and puts it in position. Click. The gun is hot.

The man raises the binoculars. “Wind speed... negligible. Left justify... three clicks. Elevation... five clicks.” They wait.

The hotel phone breaks the tense silence where only heartbeats of crickets could be heard. “Ignore it,” says the woman. Three shrill rings. Silence. “Time?”

“Twelve-hundred-twenty-five hours.” Three piercing rings. “That’s the signal,” he says, dropping the binoculars to the bed and answering the phone. His demeanor becomes a clean slate. His eyes gloss over. He stands straighter. He places the phone back on the receiver. He takes the gun from the bed.

“Operational change. Lace to Lancer,” he says, voice flat, no feeling or emotion.

“The execute order was for the First Lady.”

“Operational change. Lace to Lancer,” the man says with a firmer tone. “Comply.”

“I will not comply,” she says, looking back to him.

Soft pop. Click-slide. Brass clangs on the floor. The table becomes a Jackson Pollock with the red bloom of blood and brain matter of the woman. He pushes her to the floor and takes her place. He sets the rifle and waits. A rifle fires in the distance. The sound bouncing from building to building followed by panicked screams. The man sights and fires. Click-slide-click. The shell is expelled as a new one is chambered. He fires.

Before the gas has dissipated, he places the rifle on the table, closes the sliding glass door, and picks up the phone. The dial clicks as it rotates. Ringing. Ringing. Click.

“It’s done.”

“Mercury rising,” says the voice on the other end.

The man hangs up the phone. He grabs the silenced pistol and places the muzzle under his chin. Click. Pop. His skull explodes in a cloud of red mist and clumps of brain. The gun drops to the floor. He follows moments later. His eyes, clear and focused, stare into the great abyss. The great abyss stares back.