

ROBERT A.
HEINLEIN

Friday



Friday

**Robert A.
Heinlein**



Holt, Rinehart and Winston

N E W Y O R K

Copyright © 1982 by Robert A. Heinlein
All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce
this book or portions thereof in any form.
Published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston,
383 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10017.
Published simultaneously in Canada by Holt, Rinehart
and Winston of Canada, Limited.

Printed in the United States of America

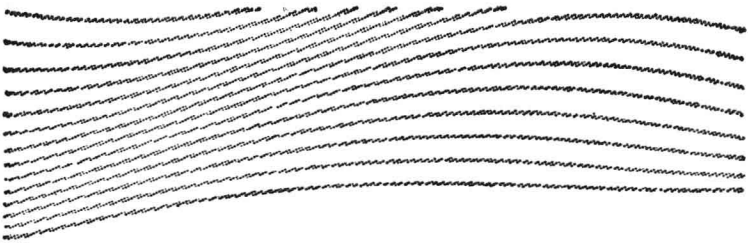
Lines from "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"
from *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, edited by Edward
Connery Lathem. Copyright 1923, © 1969 by Holt,
Rinehart and Winston. Copyright 1951 by Robert
Frost. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart
and Winston, Publishers.

This book is for

<i>Ann</i>	<i>Elinor</i>	<i>Pepper</i>
<i>Anne</i>	<i>Gay</i>	<i>Polly</i>
<i>Barbie</i>	<i>Jeanne</i>	<i>Rebel</i>
<i>Betsy</i>	<i>Joan</i>	<i>Roberta</i>
<i>Bubbles</i>	<i>Judy-Lynn</i>	<i>Tamea</i>
<i>Carolyn</i>	<i>Karen</i>	<i>Ursula</i>
<i>Catherine</i>	<i>Kathleen</i>	<i>Verna</i>
<i>Dian</i>	<i>Marilyn</i>	<i>Vivian</i>
<i>Diane</i>	<i>Nichelle</i>	<i>Vonda</i>
<i>Eleanor</i>	<i>Patricia</i>	<i>Yumiko</i>

and always—semper toujours!—for Ginny.

R. A. H.



I

As I left the Kenya Beanstalk capsule he was right on my heels. He followed me through the door leading to Customs, Health, and Immigration. As the door contracted behind him I killed him.

I have never liked riding the Beanstalk. My distaste was full-blown even before the disaster to the Quito Skyhook. A cable that goes up into the sky with nothing to hold it up smells too much of magic. But the only other way to reach Ell-Five takes too long and costs too much; my orders and expense account did not cover it.

So I had been edgy even before I left the shuttle from Ell-Five at Stationary Station to board the Beanstalk capsule . . . but, damn it, being edgy isn't reason to kill a man. I had intended only to put him out for a few hours.

The subconscious has its own logic. I grabbed him before he hit the deck and dragged him quickly toward a rank of bonded bomb-proof lockers, hurrying to avoid staining the floor—shoved his thumb against the latch, pushed him inside as I grabbed his pouch, found his Diners Club card, slid it into the slot, salvaged his IDs and cash, and chucked the pouch in with the cadaver as the armor slid down and clanged home. I turned away.

A Public Eye was floating above and beyond me.

No reason to jump out of my boots. Nine times out of ten an Eye is cruising at random, unmonitored, and its twelve-hour loop may or may not be scanned by a human before it is scrubbed. The tenth time—A peace officer may be monitoring it closely . . . or

she may be scratching herself and thinking about what she did last night.

So I ignored it and kept on toward the exit end of the corridor. That pesky Eye should have followed me as I was the only mass in that passageway radiating at thirty-seven degrees. But it tarried, three seconds at least, scanning that locker, before again fastening on me.

I was estimating which of three possible courses of action was safest when that maverick piece of my brain took over and my hands executed a fourth: My pocket pen became a laser beam and “killed” that Public Eye—killed it dead as I held the beam at full power until the Eye dropped to the deck, not only blinded but with antigrav shorted out. And its memory scrubbed—I hoped.

I used my shadow’s credit card again, working the locker’s latch with my pen to avoid disturbing his thumbprint. It took a heavy shove with my boot to force the Eye into that crowded locker. Then I hurried; it was time to be someone else. Like most ports of entry Beanstalk Kenya has travelers’ amenities on both sides of the barrier. Instead of going through inspection I found the wash-rooms and paid cash to use a bath-dressingroom.

Twenty-seven minutes later I not only had had a bath but also had acquired different hair, different clothes, another face—what takes three hours to put on will come off in fifteen minutes of soap and hot water. I was not eager to show my real face but I had to get rid of the *persona* I had used on this mission. What part of it had not washed down the drain now went into the shredder: jump suit, boots, pouch, fingerprints, contact lenses, passport. The passport I now carried used my right name—well, one of my names—a stereograph of my bare face, and had a very sincere Ell-Five transient stamp in it.

Before shredding the personal items I had taken off the corpse, I looked through them—and paused.

His credit cards and IDs showed four identities.

Where were his other three passports?

Probably somewhere on the dead meat in that locker. I had not given it a proper search—no time!—I had simply grabbed what he carried in his pouch.

Go back and look? If I kept trotting back and opening a locker full of still-warm corpse, someone was bound to notice. By taking his cards and passport I had hoped to postpone identifying the

body and thereby give myself more time to get clear but—wait a moment. Mmm, yes, passport and Diners Club card were both for “Adolf Belsen.” American Express extended credit to “Albert Beaumont” and the Bank of Hong Kong took care of “Arthur Bookman” while MasterCard provided for “Archibald Buchanan.”

I “reconstructed” the crime: Beaumont-Bookman-Buchanan had just thumbed the latch of the locker when Belsen sapped him from behind, shoved him into the locker, used his own Diners Club card to lock it, and left hastily.

Yes, an excellent theory . . . and now to muddy the water still more.

Those IDs and credit cards went back of my own in my wallet; “Belsen’s” passport I concealed about my person. I could not stand a skin search but there are ways to avoid a skin search including (but not limited to) bribery, influence, corruption, misdirection, and razzle-dazzle.

As I came out of the washroom, passengers from the next capsule were trickling in and queuing up at Customs, Health, and Immigration; I joined a queue. The CHI officer remarked on how very light my jumpbag was and asked about the state of the up-high black market. I gave him my best stupid look, the one on my passport picture. About then he found the correct amount of squeeze tucked into my passport and dropped the matter.

I asked him for the best hotel and the best restaurant. He said that he wasn’t supposed to make recommendations but that he thought well of the Nairobi Hilton. As for food, if I could afford it, the Fat Man, across from the Hilton, had the best food in Africa. He hoped that I would enjoy my stay in Kenya.

I thanked him. A few minutes later I was down the mountain and in the city, and regretting it. Kenya Station is over five kilometers high; the air is always thin and cold. Nairobi is higher than Denver, nearly as high as Ciudad de México, but it is only a fraction of the height of Mount Kenya and it is just a loud shout from the equator.

The air felt thick and too warm to breathe; almost at once my clothes were soggy with sweat; I could feel my feet starting to swell—and besides they ached from full gee. I don’t like off-Earth assignments but getting back from one is worse.

I called on mind-control training to help me not notice my dis

comfort. Garbage. If my mind-control master had spent less time squatting in lotus and more time in Kenya, his instruction might have been more useful. I forgot it and concentrated on the problem: how to get out of this sauna bath quickly.

The lobby of the Hilton was pleasantly cool. Best of all, it held a fully automated travel bureau. I went in, found an empty booth, sat down in front of the terminal. At once the attendant showed up. "May I help you?"

I told her I thought I could manage; the keyboard looked familiar. (It was an ordinary Kensington 400.)

She persisted: "I'd be glad to punch it for you. I don't have anyone waiting." She looked about sixteen, a sweet face, a pleasant voice, and a manner that convinced me that she really did take pleasure in being helpful.

What I wanted least was someone helping me while I did things with credit cards that weren't mine. So I slipped her a medium-size tip while telling her that I really did prefer to punch it myself—but I would shout if I got into difficulties.

She protested that I did not have to tip her—but she did not insist on giving it back, and went away.

"Adolf Belsen" took the tube to Cairo, then semiballistic to Hong Kong, where he had reserved a room at the Peninsula, all courtesy of Diners Club.

"Albert Beaumont" was on vacation. He took Safari Jets to Timbuktu, where American Express had placed him for two weeks at the luxury Shangri-La on the shore of the Sahara Sea.

The Bank of Hong Kong paid "Arthur Bookman's" way to Buenos Aires.

"Archibald Buchanan" visited his native Edinburgh, travel prepaid by MasterCard. Since he could do it all by tube, with one transfer at Cairo and automated switching at Copenhagen, he should be at his ancestral home in two hours.

I then used the travel computer to make a number of inquiries—but no reservations, no purchases, and temporary memory only.

Satisfied, I left the booth, asked the dimpled attendant whether or not the subway entrance I saw in the lobby would let me reach the Fat Man restaurant.

She told me what turns to make. So I went down into the subway—and caught the tube for Mombasa, again paying cash.

Mombasa is only thirty minutes, 450 kilometers, from Nairobi,

but it is at sea level, which makes Nairobi's climate seem heavenly; I got out as quickly as I could arrange it. So, twenty-seven hours later I was in the Illinois Province of the Chicago Imperium. A long time, you might say, for a great-circle arc of only thirteen thousand kilometers. But I didn't travel great circle and did not go through a customs barrier or an immigration checkpoint. Nor did I use a credit card, even a borrowed one. And I managed to grab seven hours of sleep in Alaska Free State; I hadn't had any sound sleep since leaving Ell-Five space city two days earlier.

How? Trade secret. I may never need that route again but someone in my line of work will need it. Besides, as my boss says, with all governments everywhere tightening down on everything wherever they can, with their computers and their Public Eyes and ninety-nine other sorts of electronic surveillance, there is a moral obligation on each free person to fight back wherever possible—keep underground railways open, keep shades drawn, give misinformation to computers. Computers are literal-minded and stupid; electronic records aren't really records . . . so it is good to be alert to opportunities to foul up the system. If you can't evade a tax, pay a little too much to confuse their computers. Transpose digits. And so on. . . .

The key to traveling half around a planet without leaving tracks is: Pay cash. Never credit, never anything that goes into a computer. And a bribe is never a bribe; any such transfer of valuta must save face for the recipient. No matter how lavishly overpaid, civil servants everywhere are convinced that they are horribly underpaid—but all public employees have larceny in their hearts or they wouldn't be feeding at the public trough. These two facts are all you need—but be careful!—a public employee, having no self-respect, needs and demands a show of public respect.

I always pander to this need and the trip had been without incident. (I didn't count the fact that the Nairobi Hilton blew up and burned a few minutes after I took the tube for Mombasa; it would have seemed downright paranoid to think that it had anything to do with me.)

I did get rid of four credit cards and a passport just after I heard about it but I had intended to take that precaution anyhow. If the opposition wanted to cancel me—possible but unlikely—it would be swatting a fly with an ax to destroy a multimillion-crown

property and kill or injure hundreds or thousands of others just to get me. Unprofessional.

As may be. Here I was at last in the Imperium, another mission completed with only minor bobbles. I exited at Lincoln Meadows while musing that I had garnered enough brownie points to wheedle the boss out of a few weeks R&R in New Zealand. My family, a seven S-group, was in Christchurch; I had not seen them in months. High time!

But in the meantime I relished the cool clean air and the rustic beauty of Illinois—it was not South Island but it was the next best thing. They say these meadows used to be covered with dingy factories—it seems hard to believe. Today the only building in sight from the station was the Avis livery stable across the street.

At the hitching rail outside the station were two Avis Renta-Rigs as well as the usual buggies and farm wagons. I was about to pick one of the Avis nags when I recognized a rig just pulling in: a beautiful matched pair of bays hitched to a Lockheed landau. “Uncle Jim! Over here! It’s me!”

The coachman touched his whip to the brim of his top hat, then brought his team to a halt so that the landau was at the steps where I waited. He climbed down and took off his hat. “It’s good to have you home, Miss Friday.”

I gave him a quick hug, which he endured patiently. Uncle Jim Prufit harbored strong notions of propriety. They say he was convicted of advocating papism—some said that he was actually caught bare-handed, celebrating mass. Others said nonsense, he was infiltrating for the company and took a fall to protect others. Me, I don’t know that much about politics, but I suppose a priest would have formal manners, whether he was a real one or a member of our trade. I could be wrong; I don’t think I’ve ever seen a priest.

As he handed me in, making me feel like a “lady,” I asked, “How did you happen to be here?”

“The Master sent me to meet you, miss.”

“He did? But I didn’t let him know when I would arrive.” I tried to think who, on my back track, could have been part of Boss’s data net. “Sometimes I think the boss has a crystal ball.”

“It do seem like it, don’t it?” Jim clucked to Gog and Magog and we headed for the farm. I settled back and relaxed, listening to the homey, cheerful *clomp clomp!* of horses’ hooves on dirt.

I woke up as Jim turned into our gate and was wide awake by

the time he pulled under the porte-cochère. I jumped down without waiting to be a "lady" and turned to thank Jim.

They hit me from both sides.

Dear old Uncle Jim did not warn me. He simply watched while they took me.

II

My own stupid fault! I was taught in basic that no place is ever totally safe and that any place you habitually return to is your top danger spot, the place most likely for booby trap, ambush, stake-out.

But apparently I had learned this only as parrot rote; as an old pro I had ignored it. So it bit me.

This rule is analogous to the fact that the person most likely to murder you is some member of your own family—and that grim statistic is ignored too; it has to be. Live in fear of your own family? Better to be dead!

My worst stupidity was to ignore a loud, clear, specific warning, not just a general principle. How had dear old “Uncle” Jim managed to meet my capsule?—on the right day and almost to the minute. Crystal ball? Boss is smarter than the rest of us but he does not use magic. I may be wrong but I’m positive. If Boss had supernatural powers he would not need the rest of us.

I had not reported my movements to Boss; I didn’t even tell him when I left Ell-Five. This is doctrine; he does not encourage us to check in every time we move, as he knows that a leak can be fatal.

Even I didn’t know that I was going to take that particular capsule until I took it. I had ordered breakfast in Hotel Seward’s coffee shop, stood up without eating it, dropped some money on the counter—three minutes later I was sealed into an express capsule. So how?

Obviously chopping off that tail at Kenya Beanstalk Station

had not eliminated all tails on me. Either there had been a backup tail on the spot or Mr. "Belsen" ("Beaumont," "Bookman," "Buchanan") had been missed at once and replaced quickly. Possibly they had been with me all along or perhaps what had happened to "Belsen" had made them cautious about stepping on my heels. Or last night's sleep may have given them time to catch me.

Which variant was immaterial. Shortly after I climbed into that capsule in Alaska, someone had phoned a message somewhat like this: "Firefly to Dragonfly. Mosquito left here express capsule International Corridor nine minutes ago. Anchorage traffic control shows capsule programmed to sidetrack and open Lincoln Meadows your time eleven-oh-three." Or some such chatter. Some unfriendly had seen me enter that capsule and had phoned ahead; otherwise sweet old Jim would not have been able to meet me. Logic.

Hindsight is wonderful—it shows you how you busted your skull . . . after you've busted it.

But I made them pay for their drinks. If I had been smart, I would have surrendered once I saw that I was hopelessly outnumbered. But I'm not smart; I've already proved that. Better yet, I would have run like hell when Jim told me the boss had sent him . . . instead of climbing in and taking a nap, fer Gossake.

I recall killing only one of them.

Possibly two. But why did they insist on doing it the hard way? They could have waited until I was inside and gassed me, or used a sleepy dart, or even a sticky rope. They had to take me alive, that was clear. Didn't they know that a field agent with my training when attacked goes automatically into overdrive? Maybe I'm not the only stupid.

But why waste time by raping me? This whole operation had amateurish touches. No professional group uses either beating or rape before interrogation today; there is no profit in it; any professional is trained to cope with either or both. For rape she (or he—I hear it's worse for males) can either detach the mind and wait for it to be over, or (advanced training) emulate the ancient Chinese adage.

Or, in place of method A or B, or combined with B if the agent's histrionic ability is up to it, the victim can treat rape as an opportunity to gain an edge over her captors. I'm no great shakes

as an actress but I try and, while it has never enabled me to turn the tables on unfriendlies, at least once it kept me alive.

This time method C did not affect the outcome but did cause a little healthy dissension. Four of them (my estimate from touch and body odors) had me in one of the upstairs bedrooms. It may have been my own room but I could not be certain as I had been unconscious for a while and was now dressed (solely) in adhesive tape over my eyes. They had me on a mattress on the floor, a gang bang with minor sadism . . . which I ignored, being very busy with method C.

In my mind I called them "Straw Boss" (seemed to be in charge), "Rocks" (they called him that—rocks in his head, probably), "Shorty" (take that either way), and "the other one" as he did not have distinctive characteristics.

I worked on all of them—method acting, of course—reluctant, have to be forced, then gradually your passion overcomes you; you just can't help yourself. Any man will believe that routine; they are suckers for it—but I worked especially hard on Straw Boss as I hoped to achieve the status of teacher's pet or some such. Straw Boss wasn't so bad; methods B and C combined nicely.

But I worked hardest on Rocks because with him it had to be C combined with A; his breath was so foul. He wasn't too clean in other ways, too; it took great effort to ignore it and make my responses flattering to his macho ego.

After he became flaccid he said, "Mac, we're wasting our time. This slut enjoys it."

"So get out of the way and give the kid another chance. He's ready."

"Not yet. I'm going to slap her around, make her take us seriously." He let me have a big one, left side of my face. I yelped.

"Cut that out!" —Straw Boss's voice.

"Who says so? Mac, you're getting too big for your britches."

"I say so." It was a new voice, very loud—amplified—from the sound-system speaker in the ceiling, no doubt. "Rocky, Mac is your squad leader, you know that. Mac, send Rocky to me; I want a word with him."

"Major, I was just trying to help!"

"You heard the man, Rocks," Straw Boss said quietly. "Grab your pants and get moving."

Suddenly the man's weight was no longer on me and his stinking breath was no longer in my face. Happiness is relative.

The voice in the ceiling spoke again: "Mac, is it true that Miss Friday simply enjoys the little ceremony we arranged for her?"

"It's possible, Major," Straw Boss said slowly. "She does act like it."

"How about it, Friday? Is this the way you get your kicks?"

I didn't answer his question. Instead I discussed him and his family in detail, with especial attention to his mother and sister. If I had told him the truth—that Straw Boss would be rather pleasant under other circumstances, that Shorty and the other man did not matter one way or the other, but that Rocks was an utter slob whom I would cancel at the first opportunity—it would have blown method C.

"The same to you, sweetie," the voice answered cheerfully. "I hate to disappoint you but I'm a crèche baby. Not even a wife, much less a mother or a sister. Mac, put the cuffs on her and throw a blanket over her. But don't give her a shot; I'll be talking to her later."

Amateur. My boss would never have alerted a prisoner to expect interrogation.

"Hey, crèche baby!"

"Yes, dear?"

I accused him of a vice not requiring a mother or a sister but anatomically possible—so I am told—for some males. The voice answered, "Every night, hon. It's very soothing."

So mark one up for the Major. I decided that, with training, he could have been a pro. Nevertheless he was a bloody amateur and I didn't respect him. He had wasted one, maybe two, of his ables, caused me unnecessarily to suffer bruises, contusions, and multiple personal indignities—even heartbreaking ones had I been an untrained female—and had wasted two hours or more. If my boss had been doing it, the prisoner would have spilled his/her guts at once and spent those two hours spouting her fullest memoirs into a recorder.

Straw Boss even took the trouble to police me—led me into the bathroom and waited quietly while I peed, without making a production of it—and that was amateurish, too, as a useful technique, of the cumulative sort, in interrogating an amateur (not a pro) is to force him or her to break toilet training. If she has been protected from the harsher things in life or if he suffers from excessive amour-propre—as most males do—it is at least as effective as pain, and potentiates either with pain or with other humiliations.

I don't think Mac knew this. I figured him for basically a decent soul despite his taste for—no, aside from his taste for a bit of rape—a taste common to most males according to the kinseys.

Somebody had put the mattress back on the bed. Mac guided me to it, told me to lie on my back with my arms out. Then he cuffed me to the legs of the bed, using two pairs. They weren't the peace-officer type, but special ones, velvet-lined—the sort of junk used by idiots for SM games. I wondered who the pervert was? The Major?

Mac made sure that they were secure but not too tight, then gently spread a blanket over me. I would not have been surprised had he kissed me good-night. But he did not. He left quietly.

Had he kissed me would method C call for returning it in full? Or turning my face and trying to refuse it? A nice question. Method C is based on I-just-can't-help-myself and requires precise judgment as to when and how much enthusiasm to show. If the rapist suspects the victim of faking, she has lost the ploy.

I had just decided, somewhat regretfully, that this hypothetical kiss should have been refused, when I fell asleep.

I was not allowed enough sleep. I was exhausted from all the things that had happened to me and had sunk into deep sleep, soggy with it, when I was roused by a slap. Not Mac. Rocks, of course. Not as hard as he had hit me earlier but totally unnecessary. It seemed to me that he blamed me for whatever disciplining he had received from the Major . . . and I promised myself that, when time came to cancel him, I would do it slowly.

I heard Shorty say, "Mac said not to hit her."

"I didn't hit her. That was just a love tap to wake her up. Shut up and mind your own business. Stand clear and keep your gun on her. On her, you idiot!—not on me."

They took me down into the basement and into one of our own interrogation chambers. Shorty and Rocks left—I think that Shorty left and I know that Rocks did; his stink went away—and an interrogation team took over. I don't know who or how many as not one of them ever said a word. The only voice was the one I thought of as "the Major." It seemed to be coming through a speaker.

"Good morning, Miss Friday."

(Morning? It seemed unlikely.) "Howdy, crèche baby!"

"I'm glad that you are in fine fettle, dear, as this session is likely

to prove long and tiring. Even unpleasant. I want to know all about you, love."

"Fire away. What will you have first?"

"Tell me about this trip you just made, every tiny detail. And outline this organization you belong to. I might as well tell you that we already know a great deal about it, so if you lie, I will know it. Not even a little white fib, dear—for I will know it and what happens then I will regret but you will regret it far more."

"Oh, I won't lie to you. Is a recorder running? This will take a long time."

"A recorder is running."

"Okay." For three hours I spilled my guts.

This was according to doctrine. My boss knows that ninety-nine out of a hundred will crack under sufficient pain, that almost that percentage will crack under long interrogation combined with nothing more than raw fatigue, but only Buddha Himself can resist certain drugs. Since he does not expect miracles and hates to waste agents, standard doctrine is: "If they grab you, sing!"

So he makes sure that a field operative never knows anything critical. A courier never knows what she is carrying. I know nothing about policy. I don't know my boss's name. I'm not sure whether we are a government agency or an arm of one of the multinationals. I do know where the farm is but so do many other people . . . and it is (was) very well defended. Other places I have visited only via closed authorized power vehicles—an APV took me (for example) to a practice area that may be the far end of the farm. Or not.

"Major, how did you crack this place? It was pretty strongly defended."

"I ask the questions, bright eyes. Let's have that part again about how you were followed out of the Beanstalk capsule."

After a long time of this, when I had told all I knew and was repeating myself, the Major stopped me. "Dear, you tell a very convincing story and I don't believe more than every third word. Let's start procedure B."

Somebody grabbed my left arm and a needle went in. Babble juice! I hoped these frimping amateurs weren't as clumsy with it as they were in some other ways; you can get very dead in a hurry with an overdose. "Major! I had better sit down!"

"Put her in a chair." Somebody did so.

For the next thousand years I did my best to tell exactly the