



***Extract from:***

**“EXCUSE ME, SIRE?  
BE THIS THE NEW WORLD?”**

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*Previous publications: The Breaking Sword. - The Battle for Badger's Wood. - Fly, bird! Fly!*

*Malvern between the Wars. - Gnor Bodi! - The Arboretum Story.*

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by Frederick Covins

The sudden buzz of noise was chopped off in the wake of six very angry people, three men and three women. The men were tall, lean and hard looking with eyes that one could believe were lidless because they rarely blinked, they were all out of the same steely-grey mould. The three women were slim, extremely attractive in grey costumes and plain, no nonsense, blouses. Relaxed they would have been beautiful, but now the faces were tight and lips compressed in indignation. The men were equally drawn and thin-lipped, their eyes like little chips of obsidian.

The shorter of the three men led his uptight phalanx forward to where the Senator, Mayor, Charlie and Richard stood.

With the smooth practised motion of a man more used to reaching for a gun the leader flipped out a small wallet for inspection, returning the same before anyone could read it. “Cabot, FBI” he said tonelessly, “Who’s in charge here?”

“Cabot?” echoed Charlie, barely suppressing a smile, “Not one of THE Cabots’?”

The black eyes of the FBI man regarded Charlie with undisguised hostility, “Very funny. Who are you mac?”

Charlie shrugged, “Just an out of work reporter earning an honest crust, mister”.

Senator Ashpeel decided it was time he asserted his presence, “I am Senator Willard Ashpeel, young man and this” he indicated Charlie, “is Mister

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Charles...". The dark eyes flickered briefly to the Senator, "I'm asking him, Senator I'll get around to you in a moment."

The wind taken completely out of his sails, the Senator huffed and puffed in outraged dignity, but resisted to the urge to put his thoughts into words.

Mayor Meyrick and Richard Warren shared a puzzled, concerned but strictly neutral expression.

Cabot addressed himself to Charlie again, "Once more, mac. What's your business here?"

Charlie grinned at him and delighted in the edge of colour creeping into the FBI man's features, "Just a ship passing through." he said.

Cabot turned to the taller of the other two men, "Okay, Nick" he said, "This one out".

The tall agent detached himself from the phalanx and moved smoothly beside Charlie. He stared unblinkingly at Charlie and nodded towards the main door, "Out" he said, barely moving his lips.

The Mayor, the Senator and Richard Warren all reacted simultaneously, "Hold it!" "Now look here, young man!" and "Sire?"

The coal-black eyes flicked over the group, "When I want your advice I'll ask for it. I'm in charge now and this bum" he indicated Charlie, "is out. Nick." The tall man called Nick took Charlie's upper arm in a firm grip, but before he could complete the move the enormous, calloused and powerful hand of Richard Warren closed over his wrist in a vice-like grip. Richard's face was tightly drawn and his blue eyes bleak, even so his voice was gentle,

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caressing, "Be thou good enough to remove thy hand friend or I will surely harm thee."

Thoroughly discomposd the tall agent looked desperately to his leader. Inexorably the grip on his wrist strengthened and the blood drained from his fingers. Despite himself his fingers relaxed their grip on Charlie's arm. The third agent moved towards Richard only to find his way blocked by the giant figure of the bearded seaman called, Simon. Simon, with others of the crew, had moved silently forward when the altercation had begun and now blocked all access to Charlie except for the agent who held his arm. Surrounded now by the tough, whipcord lean pilgrims, Cabot looked decidedly unhappy, "Hold it" he said sharply, "Okay, Nick forget it for the moment". Gratefully, Nick released his hold and Richard followed. Ruefully, Nick massaged some life back into his hand.

Cabot addressed himself to Richard, "Are you the leader of these men?" Solemnly, Richard nodded, "Captain Richard Warren, sire. If thee comes in friendship thee be thrice welcome, but if thee comes not in friendship then I warn thee thou wilt be sorely tried."

Cabot stared steadily at Richard, "This man" he said, pointing to Charlie, "is a reporter. He has no right in here. We are sent by the President of the United States of America to look after you. We cannot have nosy reporters hanging around; it will only complicate an already difficult situation. He must leave."

Charlie, thoroughly enjoying the situation, was startled when the seamen, Simon and James were violently thrust aside and the furious,

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forbidding figure of Mistress Humility Fuller planted herself almost nose to nose with the agent Cabot. Her grey, gimlet eyes bored into those of the FBI man until he was forced to glance away. She spoke evenly, but sharply, biting off each word, “Thou art a fool, sire. Indeed thee art of as little use as lubberwart.” She took a pace forward causing Cabot to fall back a pace or be knocked over, “Thou art a mere pigheaded male, like many of thy ilk who do not have the common courtesy to enquire of the problem before bellowing of thine own importance.” Again she advanced and again Cabot gave ground causing his cohort to break ranks. Remorselessly, Mistress Fuller bore down upon him heaping imprecations on his head as she forced him backward around the lounge.

Embarrassed and impotent the other agents watched open-mouthed.

“Madam!” stuttered, Cabot, “Madam...” but that was all he was allowed to utter for Mistress Humility Fuller was in full spate, punctuating each sentence with another pace forward and infuriatingly prodding his chest with a rigid, bony forefinger.

Charlie felt that never, ever had there been a more blissful day. The laughter bubbled and gurgled around inside him and judging from the faces of the Senator and the Mayor something similar was happening to them.

The forefinger jabbed again, “A ninny, sire!” another jab, “A muddle-headed male smell-sock.” Inexorably she drove him backwards, “An overbearing, arrogant boor!” Reeling from a particularly violent prod, Cabot caught the back of his knees on a couch and fell backwards. The couch slowly tilted past its point of balance and overturned.

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On his back, feet in the air, Cabot peered desperately up into the grim, red face glaring down at him. Mistress Fuller spat her final words like missiles, “Master Davenport leaves this...this place over my dead body, be thou sure of that!”

A strange strangled sound came from Mayor Meyrick’s direction as he tried manfully not to laugh, but he failed miserably. Weakly he collapsed to the carpet, tears streaming down his face, hands holding his sides and roaring with laughter. It spread like a plague. Charlie felt like the whistle of a steam train as the laughter forced itself to the surface. From his swimming eyes he saw the FBI ladies biting their lips hard whilst one had her fist pressed hard into her mouth making funny gurgling sounds. The men were in grave danger of suffocation from their efforts not to laugh at their leader’s plight. The crew of the Endeavour had no such reservations and bellowed with laughter. Mistress Fuller stood, hands on hips and somewhat red-faced both from her exertions and the knowledge that she had probably let her temper get the better of her. Gallantly, Charlie put his arm around her shoulders and kissed her lightly on the cheek, “Thank you, ma-am” he said and Mistress Fuller, now thoroughly flustered, turned scarlet.

With great self-control, though smiling broadly, Richard Warren extended a hand and helped Cabot to his feet, “Thee be not harmed, sire?” he enquired solicitously.

Cabot brushed himself down, “No” he said ruefully, “I’m okay, and I think I’ve got the message.”

“Message, sire?” queried a puzzled Richard Warren.

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Cabot glanced around at the uninhibited merriment his discomfiture had caused and nodded, "The reporter stays." he said and the tension in the room evaporated like magic.

Mistress Fuller advanced on the FBI agent who, despite himself, flinched, but her embarrassed smile reassured him, "I beg thy forgiveness sire, she said and offered her hand. Cabot smiled, a facial contortion unfamiliar to him, but he accepted the outstretched hand, "It was my error, ma-am. No apology is necessary. Perhaps we can all begin again.

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16 Chapters

Epilogue

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