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COMPULSIONS

by Peter Stom

Illustrated by EMSE

The computer showed that it was impossible for this mental patient to escape from the sanitarium. Fine—only the patient had already escaped!

ESCAPE impossible! Psycho - Inspector Bruce Gorgas sighed and switched off the machine, resisting the impulse to force the issue further. It was compulsory to follow the recommended procedure to the letter, and the question had been very carefully prepared—by experts—to prevent any fouled circuitry in SSA's main computer. Given such and such a set of conditions, would it be possible or impossible for the patient to escape? The tape had given the only logical answer.

Unfortunately the patient was gone!

Somehow the data was either wrong or incomplete, and called for the personal attention—almost unheard-of these days—of an human investigator from the Social

Stabilization Agency. It had been inevitable that Gorgas would get the job. He was the only man left in the organization whose experience stretched back to the time when it had been known as the Police Department.

He looked wistfully at the memory banks of the computer and sighed again. In cases such as these, it was mandatory to make a completely independent investigation, thus avoiding the false data that had misled the machines.

Leaning back in the control chair, he prodded his memory for some of the old-time techniques. Proper handling of the problem could result in one more promotion before his retirement in the coming month. Outwardly, he must present a

"He came right thr ough
the wall of Mrs. Kroll's
apartment."



picture of perfect bureaucratic efficiency; but first, he needed a check valve against the inadequacies the system might show in an emergency like this. A few moments later, a broad smile spread over his face; he got to his feet and walked jauntily out of the computer room.

WHEN HE arrived back in his office, Gorgas rang for his assistant, Psycho-Sergeant Mead. His smile faded a bit around the edges at the sight of his seedy-looking underling. He made a mental note to check a few of the books he had collected forty some years ago at the start of his public service career. It might be necessary to have several of the ancient techniques at his disposal.

"We're going to make a personal investigation," he said abruptly.

"No!" Mead's eyebrows danced. "What's the matter with the machines?"

"They give the wrong answer about Alexander Kroll's disappearance from the Euthanasium last night."

"Impossible!" The eyebrows convulsed spasmodically this time.

"You're quoting the main computer," Gorgas replied evenly. "Nevertheless the man is gone; and our main problem is to find out exactly how he did it. Kroll himself is no longer dangerous."

"Why not?"

"Because he's a very sick man. Like all the rest of those who have been assigned to euthanasia in the past twenty years, he volunteered as an experimental subject for our esteemed colleagues from the Abnormal Psychology Division. They didn't quite kill him, but they sure tried hard."

"Well!" Mead gasped, obviously relieved. "What do we do now?"

"We copy an antique art of our ancestors called 'Cherchez la femme.' In other words we visit his wife. Get out your recorder and make a note of the equipment we'll need."

"WHO IS IT?" The voice was low and tremulous.

"Inspector Gorgas of the SSA." He got a definite pleasure out of omitting the customary medical preface to his rank. After all, this was a special investigation where personal authority must be exercised.

"Oh! Just a moment, please!"

There was a click as the maximum security lock responded to whatever intimate characteristic the apartment's occupant had—after proper approval, of course—chosen as an "open sesame," and the door swung back. He blinked involuntarily, trying to reconcile the disheveled figure

with the usual cosmeticized appearance of modern women.

"Mrs. Kroll?"

"Yes."

"I'm here in regard to your husband's disappearance from the Euthanasium. I suppose you've heard about it?"

"It's been on Tri-D all day," she whimpered; "I'm scared to death."

"Why?" The Inspector's voice vibrated with surprise.

"I'm the one who turned him in. Not that I'm sorry! My social conscience just couldn't stand his unconventional attitudes. But he promised to come back if he were ever released. He might even strike me!"

"Oh," Gorgas said with satisfaction, "then you won't mind hypno-analysis on the situation?"

"I guess not," she whispered. Somehow her face went a shade whiter.

"Fine!" Gorgas smiled, whipping out a routine permission form. "I always hate to use compulsion. Just sign here; it stipulates that we confine the analysis to the subject at hand." He pushed his way into the apartment followed closely by Sergeant Mead.

AFTER SHE had affixed a somewhat shaky signature to the form, he nodded to his assistant. Mead ducked into the hall and reappeared almost immediately with a Junior Psychologist, trailed

by two technicians bearing the shining complexity of a narco-hypnosis machine.

"How about in your own bedroom, Mrs. Kroll?" Gorgas asked with a considerable show of sympathy.

The dazed woman started to nod her head, but was led away by the psychologist before she could complete the formality. Gorgas cut off Mead's questions with a firm clasp on the younger man's elbow and a forbidding frown. A stiff silence followed until, after four or five minutes, the psychologist came back to the bedroom door.

"She's completely under now, sir."

"Fine! Get started, Sergeant! And don't forget to make out the retroactive compulsion forms when you get back to the office."

Once again Mead disappeared into the hall. This time, a veritable horde of technicians followed him into the apartment. They all paused for a moment, looking the place over.

"Bug this place thoroughly!" Gorgas ordered firmly. "The usual olfacto, visio and audio, plus the new experimental emoto. Do this job right and it will solve the case for us."

He and Mead wandered aimlessly around the apartment until the technicians had finished and cleaned up, restoring the place exactly to its former appearance.

After a final check of all the installations, Gorgas stuck his head through the bedroom door.

"She knows nothing about her husband's disappearance," the psychologist said; "she'll be out of narcosis in about ten minutes."

"Take care of her," Gorgas instructed. "We're leaving now."

Outside in the hall, Mead once again opened his mouth for a few thousand well-chosen questions, but Gorgas silenced him with a gesture. Not until they were settled did he turn to explain, showing a minimum of condescension.

"This bug job should really do the trick. Kroll has no credits, no credentials—nothing. His only chance is that his wife will help him, even though she did turn him in.

"Meanwhile, we'll go through the formalities according to the book. Meet me in front of the Euthanasium at 9:00 tomorrow morning. We'll make that director sorry he was so inefficient; he may deserve a compulsory demotion."

"LET'S GET down to business!" Gorgas exclaimed, waving away the Director's offer of a Venusian cigarillo. "Are you recording, Mead?"

"There isn't much to tell," the Director replied with a faint shrug. The patient was

confined in the extreme west end of the infirmary, separated from the other physically ailing patients by a transparent safety screen. It's the usual practice in isolating a man physically without cutting him off from the outside world completely. He was just—"

"Hold it!" the Inspector interrupted, his voice flat and hard. "Let's start from the beginning—from your very first memories of Alexander Kroll."

"Hummm!" The Director rubbed his chin reflectively and seemed on the verge of objecting; then he shrugged his shoulders again. "Naturally they start with his folder. He was first committed to the Violent Ward of City Rehabilitation, where he showed negative progress to even the most drastic treatments available. He had been reported as 'antisocial' by both his wife and his fellow workers. More important, he had openly criticized the omniscience of the computers. In time, of course, he was remanded here as 'probably hopeless'.

"After the usual plasticization by two months of doubt as to his status, he was offered the opportunity of volunteering for service to the Abnormal Psychology Division. I'll have to refer you to Dr. Hanford of that department for the objectives and details of the experimental study." The Director paused

delicately and helped himself to a drink of water from the automatic dispenser on his desk.

"IN ANY CASE," he continued, "Kroll became spastic after ten days of experimental feeding, and soon after fell into a complete coma. Since his laboratory-controlled diet contained radioactives of some sort, I had been half expecting such a reaction. I ordered him into immediate isolation. He remained in the coma for fifteen days, after which he began to regain his physical mobility; but he showed no signs of mental recovery.

"He was then moved to the infirmary—behind the transparent safety screen, of course—and given the usual physiotherapy. He showed no apparent mental progress over a period of a month, but kept exhibiting unusual physical symptoms. Then on the night of April 25th, sometime between the check hours of two and three-thirty in the morning, he disappeared." The Director held out the palms of his hands.

"And that's it!"

Gorgas pulled at his lower lip and studiously wrinkled his brow. "What were these unusual physical symptoms you mentioned?"

"Well, let's see." The Director rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "There were numerous skin lesions—not so

remarkable for their appearance, as for the rapidity with which they came and went. Then on one occasion there was a curious loss of all body hair, fingernails and toenails. They were found in a neat pile beside his cot one morning."

"Any medical explanation for these symptoms?"

"Not particularly, except that radioactive exposure is liable to do anything."

GORGAS pushed out of his chair and took a turn around the office. He turned on the Director suddenly. "Is there any connection between the illness and the disappearance?"

"I wondered about that myself," the other shot back. "But Dr. Hanford said no, and I couldn't think of any logical connection. Can you?"

Gorgas snorted. "That's not what I mean. Obviously this was an inside job; which of your doctors or attendants might have had misguided feelings of sympathy for him?"

"I suggest, the Director said softly, exhibiting his first smile of the morning, "that you consult the hypnoanalyses already made concerning that subject. They cover everyone from myself down to the lowest apprentice attendant."

"Oh!" The Inspector was momentarily confused. "Were they reliably done?"

"I believe our Dr. Brecht is considered the originator of the most recent improvements in the technique, and I handled his own analysis personally."

"I see," Gorgas floundered.

"In addition," the Director continued gleefully, "all of the patients in the infirmary on that particular night were also examined, with negative results—all except one, that is."

"Ah! Gorgas exclaimed, "and why not that one?"

THE DIRECTOR'S palms flew out. "He's an old man and has been here a long time since his volunteer work with the Abnormal Psychology Division. There were no living relatives to sign the permission papers, and he refused to do it himself. The question of compulsory analysis has been passed on to higher authority for resolution. There hasn't been time for a reply yet although, in view of all the other evidence, I can't imagine what the old man could add."

"I see." The Psycho-Inspector had regained his composure now. "May I see him personally? I can authorize compulsion if necessary."

"Of course." The Director gave some instructions over his private visi-com and turned back to his visitors. "Let me warn you that Old Fuzzy—Mr. Coleman, that is—plasticizes with difficulty."

An embarrassed silence settled down in the office until the door finally opened to admit an attendant guiding an electric wheel chair. The figure in the chair, dressed in chrome yellow of the chronic patient, was thin and frail. It was topped by an extremely wrinkled face that somehow escaped the usual ugliness associated with old age. In general the wrinkles all curved upward, complimenting a set of twinkling blue eyes.

"I'm from the SSA," Gorgas said severely.

"Delighted to meet you," a reedy voice replied.

"I understand you refused to sign a permission slip for hypno-analysis on the disappearance of Alexander Kroll. Why?"

"What good would my signature be? I'm supposed to be crazy!"

"You're a patient!" Gorgas barked in sudden exasperation. "You came under the same rules and regulations as any other patient. Don't you know we can compel you?"

"I suppose so!" The old man shrugged his shoulders. "But if you were me, you would probably try to refuse, too. Don't you know why I'm here?"

"No! Why?"

I HAVE THE...er... gift of visual imagery. Years ago when I used to describe what I see in verse, I

was known as a poet. I hate to think of what I'd see or say under the influence of those damned drugs of yours."

"Bah!" the Inspector growled. He knew there was nothing to be gained from an ancient patient with hallucinations, but he forced himself to continue along formal lines. He wanted an impressive report about his thoroughness to go in from the Director's office.

"You are in no position to diagnose your own ailments. The State has tried to help you out of your difficulties, and now it demands help from you in return."

The old man pondered for a moment. "If I tell you what I know," he asked suddenly, "will you promise to spare me the needle?"

"You know something?" It was the Director's turn to show temper.

"I think I saw something." The upturned wrinkles curved a little more.

"We can promise nothing definite," Gorgas said imperiously. "Tell us what you saw!"

The old man chuckled to himself. "I couldn't sleep the night Kroll left and I was watching him through the transparent safety wall. It was about three o'clock in the morning when he took his nightgown off."

Gorgas grimaced in disgust and motioned the attendant

to take the patient away.

"Wait a moment, Inspector!" the Director interrupted. "Kroll's nightclothes were found beside the cot. Go ahead Coleman; what happened next?"

"He just stood there breathing real deep for a while. Then he walked through the outside wall."

"What?"

The old man looked at each of the other four faces in turn and tittered softly. "That's right! He took off his nightgown, took a few deep breaths and walked through the wall. Incredible, isn't it?"

"Garbage! Gorgas threw his hands in the air and stalked out of the office, followed by his assistant. In the corridor, Mead kept tapping his shoulder until he nodded shortly.

"Should I turn the recorder off, Inspector?"

"YES, I REMEMBER the case," Dr. Hanford said in a deep but softly modulated voice. He was short and fairly stout, with a moon face and lank dark hair. Only his snapping black eyes made an impression of active intelligence. "Too bad it turned out the way it did," he continued. "We had such hopes for propitious results."

"Is that so?" Gorgas growled, turning to make sure Mead was recording the interview. The whole affair was beginning to get under his skin.

"Did you know Kroll had disappeared from the Euthanasium?"

"No!" The doctor allowed expression to touch his features momentarily and then shrugged. "Not that it makes any difference! He was in very bad shape the last time we examined him.

"I'm afraid it makes a lot of difference to us at SSA."

"Well," Hanford smiled, "you people are prone to take the wrong things seriously. It's obviously a case of inefficiency at the Euthanasium. The man was completely incapacitated mentally—and almost as bad physically."

"The investigation has been very thorough, Dr. Hanford; there is evidence that he was not incapacitated."

"NONSENSE!" The doctor's face was suddenly very red. "Are you suggesting he actually made a premeditated escape?"

"Perhaps."

"Good Lord, man, what kind of evidence are you talking about?"

"His body had not been found," Gorgas replied uncomfortably. He could visualize Hanford's reaction to the fantastic tale from Coleman; he didn't believe it, himself, yet analysis had confirmed the old man's story. Unfortunately the technique could not distinguish between experience and a strongly-em-

bedded hallucination—not without weeks of further work on the ancient patient.

"Admittedly the evidence is not very strong but, on the other hand, our routine tracing procedures are usually one hundred percent effective. It makes it necessary for us to check every detail of what happened."

"Very well," Hanford glared, his face still red, "but you can be sure your office will hear about this." He turned his attention to his auto-file and dialed a series of numbers. The mechanism clicked a few times and a fat folder popped out of a slot near his left hand. He lifted it out carefully and the feel of it seemed to soothe his temper magically. He leaned back in his chair as calm and imperturbable as when the interview had begun.

"When Kroll was diagnosed as socially hopeless," he said smoothly, "we were automatically notified. As you must know—the doctor let a faint sneer show through his serenity—"We use such cases for our advanced experimental work, not because their voluntary cooperation is easy to get, but because positive results on extreme deviates are much more convincing to the ultimate authorities.

THE DOCTOR glanced at his two visitors as he warmed to the subject at

hand. "Since the '50s," he continued, "all our major strides in corrective psychology have been achieved through the use of biologically active chemicals. I believe one of the first was glutamic acid, which seemed to have beneficial results on the intelligence of certain classes of retarded children. Then there was adrenolutin which helped in the study of schizophrenia by inducing its symptoms artificially and, discovered in the same general period, reserpine which had remarkable curative effects on depressive disorders."

Hanford paused a moment and checked the attentiveness of his audience. "In order to study the action of these effective chemicals in the body, we soon resorted to the radioactive tagging technique, usually incorporating Carbon-14 into the molecule we were studying. Gradually it became apparent that the radioactive form of some of these substances—particularly those that distributed themselves widely throughout the nervous system, rather than concentrating in a particular type of ganglia—had peculiar side effects."

"Please go on," Gorgas encouraged as the physician's attention seemed to wander.

"Ah, yes," the little man continued blandly. "In the small concentrations used at first, they seemed to equalize synaptic resistances through-

out both the brain and the general nervous system. Thus they had the effect of weakening old habit patterns, making the patient more amenable to change—a result very much desired by the higher authorities.

"We wanted to experiment with similar treatments at a higher concentrations of radioactive drugs—not only to prove the point, but to possibly cure a case as stubborn as Kroll's. Naturally we were aware of the element of risk involved."

"What kind of risk, Dr. Hanford?" Gorgas was suddenly alert.

"PERMANENT damage to the patient, of course!" Hanford smiled with obvious pleasure at the attending dampening effect on the Psycho-Inspector's enthusiasm. "The effect of radioactives on the human organism is still not entirely predictable and, even though Kroll was carefully treated both by injection and a special feeding diet, obviously the basic theory governing the experiment was—at least partially—in error."

"Well, what happened?"

"Three weeks after the treatments began, Kroll suddenly collapsed into a spastic state. He progressively lost control of his functions, until only his involuntary responses were operative. He remained in a deep coma for

about thirteen days as I remember."

"What was your diagnosis?"

"Overdose!" the little doctor tittered. "That's invariably the cause of discouraging results with radioactives. Our concensus was that an unintended high degree of radioactivity completely equalized most synaptic resistances in his body, thus wiping out all habit patterns and learned responses. From a neurological point of view his nervous system reverted to that of a newborn baby—perhaps even further. By use of proper chelating agents, we were able to scavenge most of the activity out of him before it destroyed the more deeply rooted involuntary reflexes; but not before major harm was done.

"We had lost interest in the case by then, but I understand he responded sufficiently to physiotherapy, as any baby would, to feed himself again and not be too much of a nuisance to his caretakers."

"Then you can think of nothing connecting his experimental treatment with his disappearance?" Gorgas asked, rising to his feet.

"Nothing!"

"Well, you'll be hearing from us." The two SSA men turned to leave.

"You'll be hearing from me, too," the little physician

remarked as he shut the door gently behind them.

ABOUT MID-MORNING, three weeks later, Psycho-Inspector Gorgas returned to his desk from a meeting with the Commissioner. He was unhappy, embarrassed and scared. The Commissioner was also unhappy. Complaints had poured in from both the Euthanasium and the Abnormal Psychology Division. High officials were displeased and something had to be accomplished quickly. In fact the Commissioner was on his way to a special conference called by the Governor.

Insidiously the case had changed from an opportunity to become a hero into a mess that threatened to end Gorgas' career in failure. Somehow, in the very short time left to him, he must find a key fact that would relieve him of responsibility for the situation and relegate it back to the domain of the computers where—as usual—its resolution would be automatic.

Most disconcerting of all was a grim figure that kept stalking through the innermost corridors of his mind, walking through solid walls in defiance of all rules and regulations. How could the principles of compulsion be applied to such an individual? What other powers might he have?

GORGAS JERKED his thoughts up short, reminding himself that the only evidence was from an insane witness. Chances against such a thing were fantastic. Warily he reached for a switch on his desk. "Anything from those bugs at Mrs. Kroll's?"

"I'm not sure, sir." The technician's voice was uncertain.

"What's that mean?"

"We've got a three-hour record of Kroll and his wife together, but—"

"What! Why wasn't I notified immediately?"

"We just finished the first run through the main computer, and the data was rejected as invalid."

"Set it up again!" Gorgas yelled. "I'll be right down!"

Five minutes later he was sitting tensely over the pickup of the senso-player, absorbing the first part of the previous day's record tapes. Gradually his mouth fell open and his eyes glazed with astonishment. It took hours to finish the job, particularly since he had to back track and check some of the more incredible parts. Finally he turned the pickup off and leaned back in acute distress.

"That old man, Coleman, was right!" he muttered to himself. Suddenly he shook off the intense befuddlement and headed for the nearest visiphone. It took almost

fifteen minutes to get through to the Commissioner at the Governor's mansion.

"I've got all the answers on the Kroll case," he said grimly. "The bugs in Mrs. Kroll's apartment finally did the job I expected." He listened for a while before continuing.

"I'd rather tell you personally, sir. It's a little—ah—startling." He listened again before signing off. Then he returned to his desk and rang for Mead.

"Pack up the Kroll recordings from yesterday and a sensoprojector. We've got to present the results at the Governor's mansion this very night." He grimaced at his slouching assistant. "It sounds like they have an inkling of what has happened."

Mead shrugged his shoulders and left to attend to his duties.

GORGAS slouched silently in his reclining seat all during the helio-jet trip to the executive house. He did some independent thinking for the first time in years. It was like waking up from a nightmare only to find oneself in a concentration camp. What on earth happened to the wonderful world of his boyhood?

For a moment, as the memories flooded back, he blamed the computers; but his conscience finally got the better

of him. As usual, mankind itself was really to blame. It had made logic its new god, with computers merely as mechanical high priests.

"Too often," he thought to himself, "logic is the inflexible bond connecting the mist of a bad assumption with the stink of a bad conclusion. When 'Man is an animal' was fed to the computers, the result was social husbandry.

"Kroll, himself a product of compulsion, may destroy that pattern; by God, I'm beginning to hope that he does!"

The slight bump of the landing refocused his attention. He hopped out of the helio-jet and helped Mead carry some of the equipment into the Governor's study—a remarkable gesture on the part of a Psycho-Inspector toward a Psycho-Sergeant.

"BOIL IT down!" the Commissioner growled as the two SSA men started setting up the projector. "We'll check the records only if necessary." Gorgas grinned inwardly, he expected to be quite blunt.

"As a direct result of the experiments of the Abnormal Psychology Division," he stated gently, "Kroll now possesses supernatural—or at least superhuman—physical powers. He has complete conscious control over every characteristic of his body, including such basic physical

properties as density and refractive index. He is limited only in that the control does not extend to a single atom outside those of his own living tissues.

"Consequently, he can become invisible, ooze through keyholes as a liquid—or a gas—and interpenetrate other matter such as the wall of the Euthanasium. Naturally it is impossible to follow him, impossible to restrain him—impossible to kill him."

"So that's how he did it!" the Governor exclaimed hoarsely.

"Nonsense" the Commissioner shouted. "No one could acquire such powers, regardless of what was done to him!"

"The radioactive drug destroyed all but the involuntary synapses in his nervous system," Gorgas continued. "I'd prefer you to hear what happened afterwards in his own voice. Would you dim the lights please?" He turned and busied himself with the projector.

AS THE lights faded, a three-dimensional view of an apartment bedroom appeared at the far side of the study. Gorgas struck a tab and the scene blurred with insanely rapid motion until it settled on a still-life of a woman in a nightgown, and a naked man, sitting on the edge of the sleeper. The man, whose long angular face

glowed with inner serenity, had a restraining hand on the woman's shoulder to quiet her obvious fear. Gorgas struck another tab and the man began to live and speak.

"—and gradually my sensory perception faded completely and I entered a black, silent oblivion. I spent an infinite time nowhere, doing nothing, feeling nothing...

"I had no way of knowing how long the blackness—a sort of consciousness of unconsciousness—lasted. I simply became aware of the passage of time again. Later I sensed more specific signs of a world outside myself, but there was little correlation with what I had once known as reality. As I began to remember things more clearly, I came to realize that the last words I had heard Hanford say to the other physicians were true. I was inhabiting the unformed body of a newborn infant—but, unexpectedly, with a full-grown adult mind.

"Suddenly the uniqueness of my condition, and the tremendous opportunity it offered, became apparent. If I were to recover at all, I would have to learn over again every voluntary physical motion of an human being; but this time I could learn better than any per-

son had ever done before.

"Once the idea occurred to me, it became an obsession. I practiced diligently, focusing my attention on each individual bone, muscle and nerve until, one by one. I gained perfect conscious control over it. I practised in secret, in the dead of the night, when the other infirmity patients were asleep, and there was only an occasional check by the attendants.

"Soon I could perform physical manipulations of my body that no other human would have imagined possible—but still I was not satisfied. I threw the full force of my hate against the social system I lived under into the effort. I tried and tried and—finally the dam broke.

"I gained control of the individual cells of my right hand. I spent hours one night amusing myself by reshaping that hand into a fantastic succession of hooves, claws and talons. I kept extending that conscious control until it included each molecule and, finally, each individual atom of my living body. It meant—"

GORGAS touched a button and the incredible scene

died. The study lights automatically brightened, revealing the pale, rigid faces of the two high officials. The Commissioner breathed deeply for a few moments and then turned stiffly to face Gorgas.

"You are to be congratulated, Inspector," he said in a trembling voice. "This is a remarkable piece of work; it explains how this man has been able to invade the strictest privacy of the Governor and actually threaten him if certain changes weren't initiated in the rules for our daily existence. If this monster continues his activities he may ... ah ... cause considerable trouble."

The Commissioner paused and, with a great deal of effort, summoned a weak smile. Gorgas, suddenly knowing what was coming, smiled back with more inner contentment

than he had felt in thirty years. Of all the problems he had ever faced in life, this was the one he was happiest to solve.

"The State will never forget the great service you have rendered, but"—the Commissioner's voice acquired substantial heartiness—"the problem isn't completely solved yet." He paused again, wiped his brow and continued. "Go out and bring Kroll into custody!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I won't have time."

"What!" The Commissioner's heartiness was buried in a sudden avalanche of indignation.

"My retirement starts at midnight tonight," Gorgas interrupted. "It is now 11:48 PM." He smiled and started for the door of the study. "It's compulsory, you know."