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## THE

## TWELVE-GRAND SMOKE



THE LOBBY CLOCK, aglow in the morning sunlight, pointed out that the hour was 9:33. Sitting amidst the boxed foliage in the reading lounge, MacKinstry made an infinitesimal adjustment of his watch. It was now exactly three days, nine hours, thirty-three minutes and a fractional second since his last cigarette, and he couldn't decide whether to congratulate himself or froth at the mouth.

As he took a stick of gum from the pocket of his rumpled suit, he watched a tall, well-tailored man saunter toward him from the news stand, a magazine in one hand and a long, thin, unlighted cigar in the other. An expensive panatella, thought MacKinstry. Probably fifty cents.

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The man selected a chair which was separated from MacKinstry's only by a glass-topped table supporting a commodious hotel ash tray. Sitting down as though he had breakfasted well, he stretched his legs, cross-ankled, in front of him and began to strip the cellophane from the coffee-colored cigar, the magazine lying on his relaxed lap. From the corner of baleful eyes, MacKinstry watched and chewed his gum.

When the tobacco was properly nude, the man absently caressed its sweet lines with thumb and fore-finger while glancing at the cover of the magazine. Finally he flipped to an inside page and then, unhurriedly, started to convey the panatella to musing lips. MacKinstry chewed tensely as the man moistly kissed the brown beauty and clasped it between white teeth.

"Ah," said MacKinstry.

"I beg your pardon," said the man politely.

"Just thinking out loud," said MacKinstry.

The long, lean panatella swiveled deliciously toward the corner of the man's mouth. "Do you happen to have a match?"

"Guess so. Let's see. Yeah, here we are." MacKinstry opened the book, struck a match and leaned forward. The tight tip of the cigar met the tiny flame half way and sipped at it gently once, twice. A current of air caught a tendril of smoke and sent its aromatic pun-

gency toward MacKinstry's nostrils. He almost whinnied. "Keep 'em," he said, dropping the matches on the table. "I don't need 'em." He got up and left.

Scratching his back against a pillar in the lobby, he tried to concentrate on something else. Gum shoe, he thought. You're just a feeble gum shoe. Or gum chew. That's more like it. A gutless gum shoe who chews gum.

Presently his eyes brought the desk into focus. Helen James was there, looking crisply competent but young and pretty withal, in conversation with Harry Potter, the senior day clerk.

Good girl, Helen James. Nonsmoker since birth. Not a gumchewer either. Complexion tells. And teeth, whiter than bleached ivory.

Harry Potter, a filter-tip addict, was now crouching behind the desk, half smiling and still talking. When he straightened out again, he held three fat manilla envelopes which he slid toward Helen. She reached across the desk and took a pen from its holder and held it poised. Harry placed a paper—the receipt—beside the envelopes, and Helen signed it. MacKinstry realized then that it was Friday. He glanced again at the lobby clock: 9:40. Just three days, nine hours, forty minutes . . .

With a sigh he watched Helen, the envelopes cradled against her crisp blue blouse, as she moved toward a waiting elevator. Bud O'Brien, the operator, gave her a friendly salute. A stout woman followed her aboard; then the Colonel, holding one of his oval-shaped Turkish cigarettes between index and middle finger at breast level.

He wasn't actually a colonel. It was one of MacKinstrys private designations; many of the guests unwittingly earned them. There was the Slob, the Tip-Dodger, the Cluck, the Goat. In the case of the Colonel, a Vandyke beard and a cavalry mustache did the trick. If an additional reason was needed, MacKinstry had obtained it from the registration card on which the Colonel—John Milton Graves—had given his address as Louisville, Kentucky.

Chicken pie salesman, MacKinstry figured. Genuine chicken colonel.

The elevator door closed on Bud O'Brien and his three passengers. MacKinstry's gaze lifted to the floor indicator without much interest. The golden arrow touched M, for mezzanine, and continued on. MacKinstry stopped chewing. Helen was supposed to get off at the mezzanine and go directly to the manager's office. Expecting the arrow to reverse itself, he watched, mildly amused and then with growing curiosity, as it crept to 1 and on to 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 . . .

Damn funny, MacKinstry thought, resuming work on the gum.

It became funnier as the arrow completed its non-stop sweep to 21, the top floor, which contained nothing but the ballroom. MacKinstry waited. The arrow waited. Five seconds passed, according to the lobby clock, and then the arrow began to retrace the digits: 20, 19, 18, period. It had stopped at 18. MacKinstry waited this time for ten seconds. When the arrow continued to remain stationary, he walked quickly toward the bell captain.

"Listen Gus," he said. "Pick two of your best boys right now. Send one of them to sit out back on the service stairs. Send the other outside to watch the fire escape."

"What's up, Mac?"

"No time to explain. Get going."

"Okay, I'm doing it." Gus clapped his hands twice and twice again.

As MacKinstry went toward a waiting elevator, he noticed that the arrow indicator for Bud O'Brien's cage was still stuck at 18.

"Going up, Mr. MacKinstry?"
The operator was new and hence

deferential.

"No, but you are. Shoot to eighteen and see what's stalling O'Brien."

"Yes, sir."

"And if he's not there, go on to twenty-one and look around for Miss James."

"In the ballroom?"

"That's right. And look good. Look all over."

MacKinstry headed for the desk.

Potter was on the phone, eyebrows raised in disbelief. Plainly he wasn't taking a reservation. Hanging up, he faced MacKinstry and said almost questioningly, "There's been a stickup, Mac. The pay roll."

"I was afraid so. Who called

you?"

"Mr. Sorenson. He wants you to come to his office immediately."

"All right, Harry. I'm on the way. But while I'm gone, I want you to sit over near the mezzanine stairs."

Potter slipped a filtertip between his lips, breaking on-duty rule No. 1, and lit it with a silver lighter. "What am I supposed to be doing there, Mac?"

"Just keep an eye open for that fat dame, Mrs. Balderdash or whatever her name is, and the Colonel. You know, the guy with the goatee."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Bogash and Mr.

Graves."

"Yes, those."

"And what do I do when I see them?"

"Nothing, I guess." MacKinstry sniffed a fluff of smoke drifting from Potter's cigarette. Like wet hay, that brand. "Way I figure, either of 'em has a guilty conscience and sees you there, they won't come down the stairs."

He then hove his stocky frame toward those very stairs and took them two at a time. Sorenson was pacing around his outer office exaggerating his customary nervous habits. He was snapping his fingers like a dicer and nibbling viciously at his nether lips. His voice, always high, was nearly soprano. "A terrible thing has happened, Charles. Oh, a terrible thing."

"Where's Helen?" asked Mac-

Kinstry. "Is she all right?"

"Yes, I think so. She phoned from the ballroom. She'll be here presently. Oh, I'm so upset I don't know where to turn."

"Well, just clam down, Mr. So-

renson."

"But a gunman, Charles, a gunman. In this hotel."

"They're never too fussy," said MacKinstry. "It was the Colonel then?"

"The Colonel. A military man? Incredible."

"He's a phony. Now let's get some facts together. You say Helen phoned you from the ballroom."

"Oh, here you are, my dear." Sorenson, snapping his fingers frantically, projected a wooden smile over MacKinstry's shoulder.

Helen was entering the office followed by Bud O'Brien and Mrs.

Bogash.

Before anyone else could speak, the stout lady announced indignantly that she had never been in such a position in her life and demanded a cigarette.

"I don't smoke," said MacKinstry, wincing. "Give the lady a butt, kid," he told the elevator operator. "Fine. Now, if you're feeling all right, Helen, let's have the story."

"The shock's just setting in

Mac," said Helen. She walked to the window and sat on the sill. "He was quite courteous about it, wasn't he, Bud?" Taking a tip from the boss, she also gnawed at her lip, but to keep it from trembling.

"Hell, yes," said Bud. "Beg your pardon, Mr. Sorenson. Courteous as a guy could be with a rod point-

ed at you."

"I assume you're referring to the Colonel," said MacKinstry.

"Gent with the beard and the

brogue," said Bud.

"Yeah. Now what the hell happened?" MacKinstry was opening

a fresh stick of gum.

"Well, I close the elevator door," said Bud. "You seen me do that, Mac. You was standing there in the lobby."

"I saw, yeah. Get on with it."

"So as soon as the door's closed, this bearded gent shows a rod and tells me to express it to the roof. What he says, talking with that southern brogue, he says, 'Boy, let's fly till we see the sky.' Ain't them his words, Helen?"

"Yes, Bud. And I thought it was

a joke until I saw the gun."

"Some joke," said Mrs. Bogash. "I always thought this was a high-class hotel."

"Nothing like this has ever happened before, I assure you," said Sorenson. "Nothing like it, madam. Oh, dreadful."

"So you pilot the cage to the ballroom," pursued MacKinstry.

"Then what?"

Bud shrugged "That's about it. He takes the registered mail from Miss James and tells me to open the door. Then he tells us to get out, so we get. The door closes, and that's it."

Helen came forward, under control now. "I used the phone in the foyer to call Mr. Sorenson."

"I still can't believe it," said Sorenson, running a finger through the inside of his collar. "What's our

next move, Charles?"

MacKinstry had already hoisted the phone from Helen's desk. "Police headquarters," he said; and to those present: "Maybe we're lucky. Maybe we got our bird boxed in . . . Hello, sarge. Put me through to Lieutenant Marino. Thanks . . . Morning, Pete. This is MacKinstry . . . Yeah, well, we got a rumble on the docket this morning to the tune of about twelve thousand . . . That's right, it's a week's pay . . . Good, I'll be waiting." Breaking the connection with a finger, he waited a moment, then spoke into the mouthpiece again: "The room for John Milton Graves . . . No, don't ring it. Just give me the number . . . Thanks."

"We must be discreet, Charles," said Sorenson. "That goes without saying."

"I'll be back later," said Mac-Kinstry, heading for the door.

"Be careful, Mac." That was Helen, meaning it, by God!

He took an elevator to the eighteenth floor, discouraging the excited questions of the operator, who had already heard a piece of scuttle-butt. Room 1818, into which the Colonel had checked on the previous afternoon, was directly opposite the wells. Convenient. MacKinstry first knocked on the door as a sop to Sorenson's sense of discretion. Naturally there was no answer. Taking a passkey from his pocket, he inserted it in the lock and was giving it a twist when a jocular voice interrupted him.

"Somebody skipped with the towels?"

It was the News Bag, a semipermanent guest named Eliot Bernholt, who had been registered at the hotel several times in the last few months, each time for about a week. During his visits, the current one being no exception, he spent most of his free time discussing other guests with the bellhops, imputing immorality to the chambermaids and, on one occasion, even invading the kitchen to supervise the concoction of Roquefort dressing for his salad. He was a general nuisance and now, standing beside MacKinstry, he was right in character.

"I think you better run along, Mr. Bernholt."

"Don't you require a search warrant to open up a room?"

"All I need is a key," MacKinstry said. "You just run along and see the chef for somebody."

"We're not very gracious today, are we?" said Bernholt.

"And getting worse by the second." MacKinstry walked to the elevator bank, pressed a button and caught a down-going car. When the door opened, he stepped aside and said, "At your service, Mr. Bernholt."

"I think I'm going to take offense at this," Bernholt said, but he got aboard and disappeared.

MacKinstry went back to the door of 1818, unlocked it and flung it open.

"Anyone home?" he called.

Getting no response, he went inside, closing the door with the heel of his shoe. The room was empty. He went to the bath. A few damp towels were draped over the edge of the tub. There was nothing in the medicine cabinet — neither toothbrush or paste nor razor or blades. The Colonel likely didn't shave much anyway; probably trimmed the whiskers once a week.

MacKinstry returned to the room and glanced at the bag on the luggage rack as he went to the closet, which proved to be bare. He opened all the drawers in the bureau, finding nothing but emptiness.

He stepped over to the bag. It was made of leatherette and opened to his touch. Inside was an array of timetables and travel folders held in place to prevent their rattling around by at least ten yards of excelsior.

The Colonel traveled light, thought MacKinstry. Yeah, light

but not giddy. That's the Colonel.

A stale acridity assailed his nostrils. Turkish tobacco. Even when he was eating three packs of cigarettes a day, the smell of Turkish tobacco never agreed with him. Too sweet and heavy, and it lingered. He inspected the ash tray on the lamp table beside the unmade bed. It was overflowing with the ovalshaped butts, some quite long, that the Colonel seemed to prefer. He was stirring the debris thoughtfully with a finger, fighting down the impulse to smoke one of the longer snipes, Turkish tobacco or not, when he uncovered an American cigarette of a popular brand.

Well, well, MacKinstry thought, the Colonel had a visitor. No lipstick either. So the Colonel had a

confederate.

He dumped the contents of the ash tray on the table. He found no other American cigarettes. Whoever had joined the Colonel for a smoke hadn't hung around.

Down in the lobby again, Mac-Kinstry spotted Harry Potter where he was supposed to be, at the foot of the mezzanine stairs, but unfortunately he was being brainwashed by the News Bag. MacKinstry lumbered in their direction. As he approached, Bernholt said, "This is my cue to leave, Harry. The big sleuth cometh."

MacKinstry kept silent until Bernholt was beyond earshot. Then he said, "I hope you played dumb, Harry." Flustered, Potter said, "But he seemed to know as much as I did, Mac. Said he saw you upstairs. Knew something was going on."

"Skip it. The Colonel hasn't ap-

peared, has he?"

"No. Nor Mrs. Bogash either." "She's in the clear. The Colonel's our bird."

Just then Lieutenant Marino came through the revolving door with another detective in his wake. Waving at him, MacKinstry crossed the lobby and shook hands.

"This is Sergeant Flannery, Mac," said Marino. "What's the

scoop?"

"I'll lay it out for you in a second, Pete. Up in the boss's office. But first I want to check something with the bell captain. Come on along."

Gus was watching them from his station near the desk. "Any devel-

opments, Mac?"

"Our man's the Colonel. You know, a goatee calls himself John Milton Graves."

"That a fact? Why, I roomed the

gentleman myself?"

MacKinstry showed interest. "You know whether he asked for a special room?"

"No, not a room," said Gus. "But he did ask for that floor. Told the desk he wanted to get up above the traffic noise."

"How come he didn't get nineteen or twenty?"

"Reserved solid for the frozen food people."

"I see. Well, all right, Gus. Now I want you to check with those boys you put on guard duty and phone me a report in Mr. Sorenson's office."

"And do you want them to stay where they are?"

"Yeah, for awhile."

Ensconced on the edge of a chair in his private office, Sorenson had simmered down as much as he ever did. He was playing with an assortment of pencils when Helen ushered in MacKinstry and the two city detectives. Before he could pipe out any lamentations, MacKinstry launched into a brusque exposition of the facts.

The hotel payroll was made up every Thursday afternoon at the Bellevue Bank & Trust. It was then divided among three legal-size manila envelopes and sent to the hotel by registered mail. It arrived, with the regular mail, on Friday morning between 9:15 and 9:25 without any appreciable variance except during the Christmas jam. The registered envelopes were signed for by the senior day clerk, one Harry Potter, a bonded employe of the hotel these last seven years. At 9:30 or thereabouts, another bonded employee, Helen James, three years in the hotel's service, arrived at the desk, signed an inter-office memo for the envelopes and promptly transported them to Mr. Sorenson's quarters where the contents were audited with the aid of the assistant cashier of the corporation.

The procedure had been in effect for approximately five years, ever since Mr. Sorenson had decided that armored-car service was too conspicuous, and had gone without a hitch until today. MacKinstry then related the events surrounding the robbery, including the detail about the American cigarette among the Turkish in the Colonel's ash tray.

"Talk about your red herrings," said Marino when MacKinstry had concluded, "this guy Graves takes the cookie."

"I'll go along with that," said MacKinstry.

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you," said Sorenson.

Sergeant Flannery, who had just fired up an evil-smelling pipe, commented wordlessly by shaking his grizzled head.

"What I mean, Mr. Sorenson, is that this so-called colonel is about as noticeable as a zebra in a cocktail lounge." Marino, apparently intending to fight Flannery's fire with his own, produced a black Italian stogie and struck a wooden match against the sole of his shoe. "Most crooks like to be invisible, but not this baby. Fancy beard in a fairly beardless city, soft southern accent in damyankee country."

"And a white vest, come to think of it," said MacKinstry. "By the way, boys, it must take courage to smoke that stuff."

Marino grinned. "And Turkish cigarettes, that's another part of it.

I bet you could screen a thousand average smokers in any city block and be lucky to find a single citizen who used them."

"Mac's given up smoking," said Helen, then blushed at the irrelevance.

"He looks it too," said Marino. "Well, okay, Mac, you think the guy is still in the hotel"?

"I don't know yet. The exits were covered right from the start, but—"

The phone rang and Sorenson picked it up. "Yes, he's here, Gus. Just a moment. For you, Charles."

MacKinstry listened to the receiver. "Keep at it, Gus," he said, and hung up.

"Well?" It was Marino behind a rank cloud of stogie smoke.

"He hasn't shown at the exits."
"Has anybody shown?" asked
Marino. "He could've shaved by
now, you know, and changed
clothes."

"Two people came down the service stairs. A chambermaid and one of our maintenance men. Then, in a while, they went back up. Nobody on the fire escape. Nobody like the Colonel on the mezzanine stairs or from the elevators. Gus checked with Potter before he called."

"Hell, that could be the leak right there," said Marino. "The elevators. You're looking for a goatee, a white vest and all that, and the joker walks out without a whisker and wearing a blue serge suit." The detective stood up. "We better get to work. Mr. Sorenson, we'll need detailed floor plans of the house. Linen rooms, public toilets, storage closets, the works."

"Why, yes, indeed." Sorcnson was snapping his fingers again but finally stilled them long enough to buzz for the engineer. "But we mustn't disturb the guests. We simply mustn't. I would like your word on that, sir."

"We'll do our best, Mr. Sorenson.
I'll clear everything with Mac here."

"By all means. And remember, Charles, discretion. Oh, the utmost discretion."

"Good luck, Mac," said Helen. Three hours later, MacKinstry, Marino and Flannery stood under the vaulted ceiling of the ballroom on the twenty-first floor. They were tired and hungry. Starting from the lobby level, they had searched every inch of unoccupied space in the hotel. As they had progressed upward, they had sealed off floor by floor by stationing bellhops, room-service waiters and maintenance men at all possible escape routes.

Marino was chewing the soggy butt of what was his sixth stogie, and Flannery was sucking gravely at his soupy-sounding pipe. For the first time that day, MacKinstry felt fortunate to be shaking the tobacco habit. Another few hours with these human incinerators, he told himself, and he'd learn to hate the stuff.

"Now we've got to crack the nut," said Marino.

Flannery nodded and sucked juice.

MacKinstry shrugged. "Yeah, I guess so. If he's in the house, he's in a room."

"And if he's in a room," added Marino, "he's in the room of the guy who cased the joint. The guy who preferred American cigarettes to Turkish."

"That's practically everybody, ain't it?" said Flannery, a connoisseur all of a sudden.

"Just about," said MacKinstry.
"But I think we can narrow it down to the eighteenth floor."

"I'm thinking the same thing," Marino said.

"Before we start, though, let's have lunch." MacKinstry glanced at his watch: 1:41 p.m. Three days, thirteen hours, forty-one minutes . . . "Come on, it's on me."

They found a table in the Blue Cafe, one of the hotel's three restaurants. Flannery promptly began a scowling study of the menu as if it were written in code. Marino, to MacKinstry's disgust, actually lit a fresh stogie. Across the room, a quick burst of laughter sounded above the tinkle of silver on china and the low hum of conversation. MacKinstry looked in that direction.

The source of the merriment was a rotund waiter whose belly was still quivering as he tried to pour coffee into a guest's cup. The guest was Eliot Bernholt. One of his specialties was Jokes for Waiters or any other captive audience. Mac-Kinstry continued to observe the tableau as Bernholt, saying something else to the waiter which evoked another outburst, placed a cigarette between his lips and lit it. Then MacKinstry was concentrating not on a man but a mannerism. In removing the cigarette from his mouth to exhale, Bernholt grasped it in the vertex formed by index and middle finger so that momentarily the lower half of his face was covered.

Abruptly pushing back his chair, MacKinstry said, "Be back in a minute," and left the room. At the desk he asked Harry Potter what room Bernholt was occupying.

Potter skimmed through the registration index. "He's in eighteen thirty, Mac."

The maid had already finished Bernholt's room, but one of the ash trays had been used since. It contained four snubbed-out cigarettes. Three were American and one was Turkish.

MacKinstry could find nothing else incriminating on the premises. Bernholt's suitcase was open as if for customs inspection. His toilet gear was precisely laid out on the glass shelf in the bathroom. His outer apparel was aligned on plastic-draped hangers in the closet. But MacKinstry knew now that he was close to the Colonel.

At that instant, a key scraped at the lock. A few swift steps carried MacKinstry to the wall beside the door. As Bernholt entered, Mac-Kinstry slipped behind him and caught his right wrist with one hand and his neck with the other. Pulling the wrist backward and thrusting the neck forward, he sent Bernholt flat on his face and then bestrode him.

"Beesonabrr," Bernholt muttered into the carpet.

MacKinstry went over him with practiced hands. He came up with a wallet but no weapon. Still astride, he rummaged through the wallet until he found what he was looking for—a claim check from the railroad baggage room stamped at 11:03 that morning.

"Okay, rise and shine." MacKinstry got to his own feet. "Neat, mister. I got to hand it to you. While me and a couple of cops are dusting the whole damn hotel, you walk out with a package under your arm just as cool as a pig on ice."

Red in the face with anger, Bernholt yelled, "What in hell are you talking about, you idiot?"

"Nobody but you, Mr. Bernholt or whatever your real name is. Nobody but you and one other guy."

Bernholt retreated, still maintaining his anger to which he now added a dash of indignation. "If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to call the manager and have you canned, MacKinstry. You can't get away with this. Manhandling a guest in his own room. A regular guest, at that, damn it."

"Regular is right. As regular as it takes to learn where the money's buried. And all the time I figured you for just a run-of-the mill news bag. Go ahead and call the manager and save me the trouble."

"I will, I will." He touched the phone but didn't pick it up. "But just a second there, wise guy. If it's the payroll heist that's got you going, where do I come in? From what I hear around the lobby, you got a good description of the guy who did it."

"Too good," said MacKinstry, reaching for the phone himself and also getting a powerful grip on Bernholt's wrist. "He posed as a gentleman from Louisville. But I'm afraid you know him better than anybody."

"What have you been smoking,

MacKinstry?"

"I don't smoke these days. You do, though, and so does the Colonel. You had a cigarette in his room this morning and later he came over here and had one with you."

"Then where is he now, Sherlock?"

"Right here," said MacKinstry.
"Right where I can keep an eye on him." He picked up the phone.
"Mr. Sorenson, please. And then page the Blue Cafe for Lieutenant Marino."

An hour later in the managers office, Marino was saying, "Yeah, Flannery's booked him, briefcase and all. It held the money and the

entire masquerade outfit. Mustache, beard, white vest, one of these wash-and-wear suits. And, yeah, the gun. You'll admit, Mac, that I was onto the general idea that the Colonel had to be some other guy. You had the same idea yourself. But then you lost me. How come?"

MacKinstry scratched his chest and grinned with satisfaction. "The tipoff came in the Blue Cafe. It was the funny way Bernholt held a cigarette when he was taking it from his mouth. I noticed the Colonel handling his Turkish butt the same way last night in the lobby and then again this morning."

"Do you make a study of these things, Mac?" Marino raised black

eyebrows.

"Only for the last three days, fourteen hours and fifty-two minutes," said MacKinstry, winking at Helen James.

"But Bernholt didn't smoke

Turkish cigarettes, did he?" countered Marino.

"Only when he was acting the Colonel. Part of his disguise."

"Then what about the American cigarette in the Colonel's room and the Turkish cigarette in Bernholt's room? You been making a big production out of that?"

"I dope it like this, Pete. Before Bernholt left the room this morning that he occupied as the Colonel, he had smoked an American cigarette without knowing it. Pure nervous tension. Then, when he grounded the elevator on the eighteenth floor and rushed to the room he held as Bernholt, he smoked a Turkish cigarette for the same reason." MacKinstry was grinning smugly. "That's the trouble with the habit, Pete-you indulge without thinking."

"Aw, go to hell," said Marino,

lighting a real black twist.



STATEMENT

STATEMENT
REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST
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MICHAEL ST. JOHN
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Sworn to and subscribed before me this 21st day of September, 1959. [SEAL] DAVID A. FERDINAND.

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