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I Spy

By H.E.B.

There was a period, both in literature and in the cinema, when things were always what they seemed. Black was black, and white was white. The hero was upright and clean-limbed, the heroine innocent and demure, and the crippled sister consumptive, saintly and self-sacrificing.

The villain, above all, was unmistakable. He had a drooping moustache, a salacious eye, and a cunning look.

Nowadays, things have changed. The villain of the film or novel of to-day is more often a suave and well-dressed charmer with an ingratiating smile. If it is a murder story and if he is the murderer, then he will probably recite Kipling and dandle babies on his knee, just to throw us off the scent.

The public, in other words, have become more sophisticated in their requirements. They are no longer put off with the obvious. This makes it all the more remarkable that in the matter of fifth columnists and enemy agents, they seem to have lost none of their gullibility.

Why is it that they expect a spy to be suitably camouflaged in their entertainment, but always expect him to look just what he is in real life?



Look at P/O Waffle over there, in the corner of the private bar! He is giving that affable stranger the whole story of his squadron's activities, over a pint of beer, for which the A.S. has paid.

"Dash it," he would say, if you remonstrated with him. "Dash it, my dear chap, I mean to say! The fellow is wearing a Guards Tie—and besides, he's just stood me a glass of beer."

But pause to consider for a moment what you would wear if you were a Nazi agent, out to get information from the members of

your squadron in the local pub. Clearly, you wouldn't put on a false moustache and whiskers, and mutter "Ach Himmel" whenever you got an evasive answer.

On the contrary, you would see to it that everything about you invited confidence. The old school tie, an A.R.P. badge in the button-hole, last war ribbons on the waist-

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coat, and a bluff and hearty manner. Plenty of talk about a son in the Navy and another in the R.A.F. A casual reference to "high-up friends in the War Office." Possibly even a show of reluctance when anything "hush-hush" is being discussed. "Don't tell me if you feel you can't trust me. After all we can't be too careful."

The inevitable answer to a remark like that is protestation of faith in the speaker's integrity.

One of the major causes of careless talk these days is this high-minded but fatal faith in our fellow man: faith not only in his integrity but also in his discretion. One of our private conceits is that we are "pretty good judges of character" and that we are not easily fooled. Ask any confidence trickster what he thinks of a man who talks like this, and he will tell you he's easy money. The fellow he can't swindle is the one who's a mug—but knows it.

Even a uniform is not an infallible guarantee. The man sitting in the corner seat of the carriage, with marmalade all over his hat and stripes all the way up his sleeve,

may have borrowed the rig-out for the occasion. This is not to suggest that Air Marshals should be viewed with suspicion and looked upon as possible fakes. In the early days of the war, quite a few people were walking about in uniforms to which they were not entitled. But this has largely

been stopped. The gentleman in the corner seat is probably genuine, in which case it would be wisest not to molest him. But even if he is an Air Marshal, there is really no reason why you should unburden your soul to him. He will be minding his own business and expecting others to do the same. The fewer people who know a secret, the better it will be kept.

Keeping your mouth shut should become a habit, no matter who you are with. So next time a gorgeous blonde gazes at you with

her innocent blue eyes and murmurs, "Tell me, darling, where you go and all you do in that great, big aeroplane of yours," just change the subject, remembering that in love, as in war, actions speak louder than words.

