

#5 - Hoover, Tunney, Woods, The Bug

Inspector TUNNEY is at his desk, flanked by former Police Commissioner WOODS, greeting J. EDGAR HOOVER and THE BUG.

TUNNEY: It's fortunate you're here, Mr. Hoover. Something very serious has fallen into our laps—

WOODS: Oh, hardly.

HOOVER looks askance at WOODS.

TUNNEY (awkward): Oh, this is Commissioner Woods.

WOODS: Ex-Commissioner.

TUNNEY (apologetic): Arthur resigned the day Tammany Hall took over the Mayor's office.

WOODS (scoffs, beginning a tirade): I couldn't be a part of that game for one minute. It's all / influence and connections!

TUNNEY (breaking in at the /, embarrassed): He still drops by to advise us from time to time.

WOODS (nostalgic): Well, the Bomb Squad is an elite corps I take great pride in—

TUNNEY (to HOOVER, abrupt, indicating THE BUG): And this is...

HOOVER: One of my men. Under cover, you understand.

TUNNEY: Of course...

HOOVER (impatient): What can I do for you, Inspector Tunney?

TUNNEY: Yes, right... Have you seen any of these? (*handing over the leaflets; HOOVER has THE BUG receive them.*)

THE BUG (nodding, showing them to HOOVER): I picked up one of these today.

WOODS: The usual cant—nothing that serious / as I see it.

HOOVER (breaking in at the /): I beg to differ, Mr. Woods. All radical effusions are gravely serious. In fact, they are sedition.

TUNNEY: And can be punished under the new law.

WOODS: The law is vague.

HOOVER: The Sedition Act is as clear as we allow it to be. It's a crime to say or write anything disloyal or abusive about the United States, or to hinder the war effort in any way.

WOODS: But they're upset with the business in Russia, not the war with Germany.

TUNNEY: The leaflets were found this morning by four workmen in East Harlem. We managed to trace them to a man by the name of Rosansky.

WOODS: He was scared! He's just a boy—about your age, Mr. Hoover.

HOOVER: Boys my age can do a lot of damage, Mr. Woods.

TUNNEY: He gave out five names. (*reading.*) Abrams, Lipman, Schwartz, Lachowsky, Steimer. The last one's a girl. Know any of them?

THE BUG: Oh, that's Frayhayt. (*translating*): "Freedom."

TUNNEY (*anxious*): Are they important?

HOOVER: They are all important.

THE BUG (*shrugs*): They come up. (*begins searching his notepad.*)

TUNNEY: I've heard that you have created an impressive number of files.

HOOVER: We're making a little library, yes.

TUNNEY: We could use whatever you have. We're picking them up tonight. Apparently there's a rendezvous to get more leaflets.

THE BUG: Tonight? There's a meeting tonight at the Opera House. Many well-known radicals are supposed to speak.

TUNNEY (*anxious*): That's why we think this matter here might be connected to someone high up in the anarchist circles.

WOODS: Nonsense. One is just the usual blather, and the other is just some kids.

TUNNEY: What do you think, Mr. Hoover?

HOOVER: It's not what I think, but what I know. Gentlemen, since I have come to the Bureau, it has become increasingly clear to me that civilization is now facing its most terrible menace since the barbarian hordes overran Western Europe.

A beat.

WOODS: Surely you exaggerate, Mr. Hoover.

HOOVER: I do not.

WOODS: I just don't see—

HOOVER: Maybe you don't know where to look, Mr. Woods. Have you heard of the epidemic of Spanish influenza that is presently ravaging Europe?

TUNNEY: It's rumored to be a German plot.

HOOVER: It may very well be. The illness strikes without warning; a man seems perfectly well, but then within one or two hours he becomes delirious, running a fever of up to 105 degrees. He begins to cough and spit blood, every muscle and joint in his body aches; he feels as though he'd been beaten all over with a club. Death comes swiftly, often the result of choking, while large quantities of bloody froth exude from his mouth and nostrils. Some predict it will come here, that even now the germ may be on its way, incubating in the bowels of another steamship teeming with alien filth.

TUNNEY: Let us pray that it doesn't make it here.

HOOVER: Ah, but it already has, Inspector Tunney. Our intentions were good, opening our doors to the outcasts of other lands to man our machines and plow our earth. But they have betrayed us. Pry open the walls, and you'll find them in their secret dens, eating away at the fabric of our institutions.

THE BUG (holding up his notepad): Frayhayt gives free English lessons that turn into Anarchist rallies. *(reading):* "At the end of the hour they led us into a crowded hall, which had a distinctly foreign atmosphere, to say nothing of the odor, which was like a cross between a garlic garden and gefilte fish."

HOOVER: You see? Even something that seems benign on the surface is rotten black inside.

THE BUG (reading): "The speaker whined on and on about the evil capitalists. 'Wake up!' he shouted. 'You live like rats four and five in a room, while they spread out their fat in thirty or forty, maybe even one for their dog. A landlord buys some ground and we build him a house. But what right has he to buy the land? Did he create it?'"

TUNNEY: A flagrant attack on property.

HOOVER: Precisely. Our most sacred right.

WOODS: Come on! No one's denying that they talk big. But most working people don't agree with all this rot. And when they do, maybe it's because they've been laid off and don't know where else to turn. Hey, Thomas, remember that one winter, there were no jobs anywhere—you should have heard

the talk then! Well, we got the whole force together and in a few weeks we raised thousands of dollars for the jobless, a lot of it from our own pockets. Oh, there was good feeling on all sides—

HOOVER: And see how unappreciative they are.

TUNNEY: The times have changed, Arthur.

HOOVER: Yes! The times are a gathering storm.

THE BUG: He went on to call for Revolution. (*reading*): “It’s marching East and West, it’s right at our door. Not in a thousand years, but right now!”

TUNNEY: And he gets away with it!

HOOVER: Because we let him.

THE BUG (*fueling them*): I’m for hanging them, no sunrise about it.

WOODS: Whatever are you saying?

HOOVER: We’re saying such men are good talkers and ought to have their mouths stuffed.

WOODS: But it’s all talk! They don’t have any weapons.

TUNNEY: Some have bombs.

WOODS: A few crackpots, yes. But we easily take care of those.

TUNNEY: Rosansky had a gun.

WOODS: A gun. And maybe tonight you’ll find *a*-nother. But this is all nonsense, Thomas. Have you forgotten your sworn duty as an officer? People in this country have a constitutional right of free speech and assembly, and it is your duty not merely to permit this but to protect them while they exercise it. We handled all kinds of rallies my first year, some of them were pretty stormy; you’d have thought a revolution was going to erupt any second! And sometimes people on the streets would complain to my men, they’d say, “Hey, how can you let those bastards say those things against the government?” Naturally my men felt exactly the same way—we *all* do—but they always said just the right thing back: “If you want to hold a meeting, go over to the other side of the street and we’ll protect you too.” Now that’s America, my friends, that’s what I believe in. This isn’t Russia; we don’t want a reign of terror here, a secret police like the Cheka, do we?

A pause.

HOOVER: There is only one way to deal with anarchy and that is to crush it. Not with a slap on the wrist, but a broad-axe on the neck.

TUNNEY (to WOODS): You forget a war is on.

WOODS: But we have to respect the delicacy of the situation. We're fighting the Germans, not our own people.

TUNNEY: These are not our own people.

HOOVER (rising): Is there anything more, Inspector Tunney?

TUNNEY: No, thank you, you've been more than helpful. We'll have full confessions by dawn.

WOODS: Oh, Thomas, really. At least leave the girl out of it.

HOOVER: Spare the girl? No, sir, that's the mistake they count on. They hide behind their womanhood, preying on the deference we show them out of respect for our mothers and sisters.

TUNNEY: She'll crack like the rest of them. You know your way, Mr. Hoover.

WOODS: Thomas, wait—think a minute. (*They go out.*)

HOOVER (more to himself): Such women are the most dangerous of all. The dark poison goes straight to their blood, congealing it, coiling in their wombs like a dirty snake.

THE BUG: Are you finished with me, Mr. Hoover?

HOOVER: Yes. Stay with Inspector Tunney and wire me tomorrow.

THE BUG: Yes, sir.

HOOVER: Oh, and one more thing. Start a file on Mr. Arthur Woods. (*THE BUG nods and makes a note*). It pains me to see a man begin to drift.