

The Perfect Servant, by William S. Burroughs

John J Hudson, known as Basic J to his many friends, is making a difficult decision in the Pentagon. Word has just come through from B&C . . . complete, precise and permanent programming of thought feeling and sensory data demonstrated in experimental preparations after single exposure to Virus Rover this information conveyed in a three word inter office memo . . . rover is ready.

No further need to explain excuse produce any arguments or facts in support of departmental directives. It will soon be neurologically impossible to oppose or even to question. The virus is hereditary of course a permanent chromatic formula circuits of protest closed forever. Rover will see to that. Basic J has the responsibility of releasing rover in the United States of America. He looks up at Old Glory hanging over his desk. *American* programming of course . . . he will see to that. He gets up and paces around the room.

"Gotta stay ahead of the Commies . . . if they get there first with *their* programming . . . everybody's kids will speak Chinese at birth." This he decides grimly must be made unthinkable . . . "The President is right. The President is always right. The laws are right. America is right. America is always right. The American way of life is the right way of life is the best way of life is the only way of life" from here to eternity.

His duty is clear. He salutes Old Glory. His throat is dry. He rings for Bently the perfect servant a faithful old dog of that he is absolutely sure. The psyche department checked him out and he checked so clear they used some of his bone marrow in the rover cultures. Bently stands in the door.

"Yes sir?"

"A glass of ice water please Bently."

"Yes sir."

With the speed of a conjurer Bently places a glass of ice water on a brocade napkin. "Good old Bently always knows what I need."

The perfect servant he draws the curtains. "Anything else sir?"

"No nothing else. Good night Bently."

"Good night Mr Hudson. Good bye Mr Hudson."

"What was that Bently?" Hudson put down the half empty glass.

"Good bye Mr Hudson." For a moment Bently looks at him with something like emotion. He bows and leaves the room.

Hudson drains his glass. He sits for some time in silent thought.

Suddenly he knows what to do. Reverently he spreads Old Glory on the desk. He picks up a pen right by his hand somehow and ready by a piece of parchment paper. He writes.

Dear Mary

I am taking the only way out. Please forgive me.

Basic J Hudson

Spring drawer cold .45 . . . "It's the right thing to do it's the best thing to do it's the only thing to do . . . good old Bently . . . he knew somehow . . ."

"I was on the way back to my room sir when I heard the shot sir. I found him like that sir." He nods to the desk. The side of Hudson's face is stuck to Old Glory in a paste of dry blood and seared brains. "I saw at once he was dead sir."

You can say that again" said the agent.

"It was a terrible shock for me sir."

There are two agents in the room two very special agents. They both turn and, look at Bently in a very special way.

"You expect us to swallow this crap?"

Bently draws himself up. "I have told you the truth sir exactly as it happened sir."

"And I say it's crap. Do we have to bake it out of you Bently?" Bently takes a deep breath. A button pops from his waistcoat and explodes against the agent's grey flannel suit.

"Will that be all sir?"

"Yes Bently. You may go."

"Thank you sir." Bently bows and leaves the room.

(Long pause)

"Well that puts him in the clear . . . Good old Bently."

"You can say that again. Old Bently has all the answers. Old Bently has all the right answers. If anybody says or even thinks different I'll gun the bastard down if he's my best buddy."

"I was on the way back to my room sir when I heard the shots sir. I found the two gentlemen like that sir." He nods to the floor. "I saw at once they were dead sir. Blood and internals all over the room sir. A smell of blood and excrement sir. If you'll pardon the expression sir. Quite overwhelming sir."

"You may go Bently."

"Thank you sir. I'll be in my room if you need me sir."

"Better check that guy out."

"You can say that again. Hey here's something." He picks up the pen with forceps and reads: *For James Bently in recognition of ten years faithful service to John J Hudson*

He removes the cap from the pen. There is a slight explosion followed by a long reverent silence.

"If I thought that much of him he must be all right," the agent bursts out in a voice hoarse with emotion. He turns away to hide the tears in his eyes. Another agent chokes and buries his face in a curtain wracked with sobs.

"Oh what the Hell" screams the CIA man "it's nothing to be ashamed of. Let us cry our decent American hearts out and for the Christ sake let's all get fried." He rushes the liquor cabinet and tosses bottles out to his colleagues.

"I was on the way back to my room sir when I heard the noise sir. Quite indescribable sir. I felt it my duty to return sir. I found them reeling about sir. Screaming 'good old Bently' sir. That gentleman" he points to the CIA man who is slumped in a chair between two guards sobbing out "Auld Lang Syne" "threw himself on me in a most offensive way sir. If you'll pardon the expression sir and said nearly as I can recall sir would I be his 'crying cousin' sir. Old southern custom he said it was sir. I could see he'd been drinking sir."

"Bently doesn't it strike you a bit odd that thirty of the most trusted and responsible officials in this country should with one accord and for no discernible reason become maudlin drunk over a period of two minutes?"

"That is not for me to say sir.

"You have testified that the men were quite normal when you left the room."

"Yes sir. Whatever happened sir happened after I had left the room sir."

"Things always seem to happen after you leave rooms Bently."

"Not always sir."

The new department head looks at Bently and his jaw drops.

"Why the man is smiling or snarling rather in a strange animal way. What the Hell?"

"ACHOO ACHOO ACHOOOOOOOOO"

"BLESS YOU BENTLY BLESS YOU BLESS YOU"

"ACHOO ACHOO ACHOOOOOOOOO"

"BLESS YOU SIR BLESS YOU BLESS YOU"

"Let's all go ACHOO ACHOO out into the BLESS YOU BLESS YOU beautiful American ACHOO ACHOO streets and BLESS YOU BLESS YOU bless all our fellow ACHOO ACHOO Americans BLESS YOU ACHOOOOOOOOO"

Sneezing and blessing they rushed into the street. Alone in the room Bently wipes off the grey features of a perfect servant to reveal himself as the Insidious Doctor Fu Manchu. He steps to the window.

"ACHOO ACHOO" The cities and towns of America echo back

"BLESS YOU BLESS YOU"

"ACHOO ACHOO" back from the farms crossroads and lonely sidings of "BLESS YOU BLESS YOU"

"ACHOO ACHOO" on the winds of Panhandle idiot honky tonks yodel back "BLESS YOU BLESS YOU ALLAYIHOO"

From car and plane "ACHOO ACHOO " Hell's Angels roaring back "BLESS YOU BLESS YOU"

America America "ACHOO ACHOO ACHOO" from purple mountain's majesty "BLESS YOU BLESS YOU BLESS YOU"

The doctor stands at the window waiting.

"Achoo achoo" with wind and dust "bless you bless you"

"Achoo achoo" a hoarse whisper echoes back "bless you bless you"

"Achoo achoo" spitting blood "bless you bless you"

Old record running down "achoo achoo achoo"

Dying dying dying "bless you bless you bless you"

The doctor's silent blessing falls on silent cities from sea to shining sea.