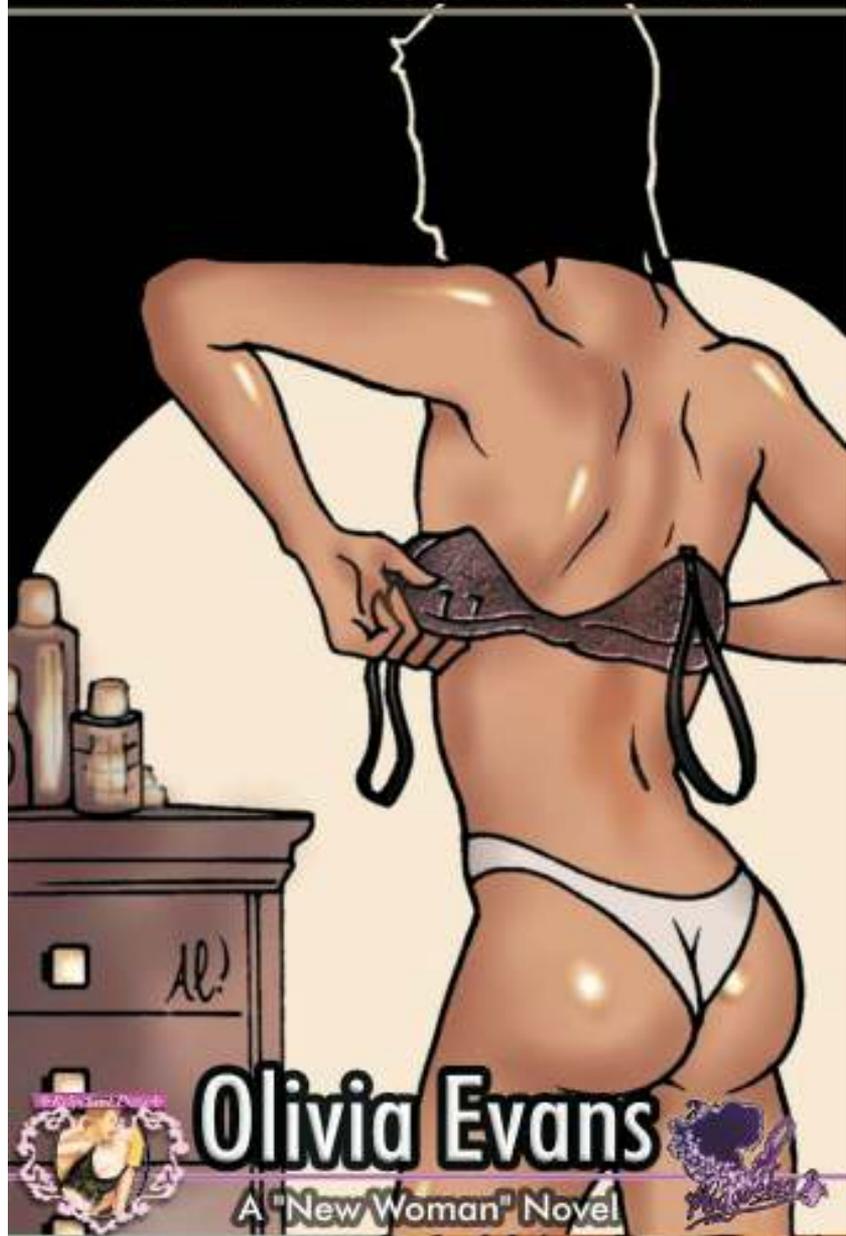


"News at Eleven"



Olivia Evans

A "New Woman" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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“News at Eleven”

By Olivia Evans

Before we get too deep into our story, I think it's appropriate to introduce myself. My name is JOHN Leslie Howard and I'm a NewsMAN for Channel 37. Mostly I do the feature stories for the local Six O'Clock News.

On occasion, when Karen Watkins is on vacation, out sick, or on special assignment, I fill in as the AnchorMAN on the Network Eleven O'clock News.

Why the emphasis on the “man” part of my job titles? I've also found that my situation can seem a little strange and confusing to the uninitiated, therefore let me set the record straight right out front.

Contrary to popular belief and in spite of how I may look to you, I AM a man. As much of a man as you or Henry Jenkins in the Sports Department.

What? Oh, sorry, maybe Henry was a bad example at that, but you know what I'm trying to tell you.

You say you're still confused? Okay, let's try it again.

The answer is really quite simple, ever since I did that piece we called “Strong, Stranger than Fiction” about six months ago, I’ve found it more convenient to wear a dress to work. Actually I wear more than just a dress, I wear a bra, panties and everything else that you would normally find under a dress.

Off the job, it’s another story. Unless it’s for a special occasion, I won’t go near a dress, preferring more casual wear of jeans and a tee top or whatever else that is both casual and comfortable depending on the weather. Of course, I have to admit that I usually wear a bra and panties under my casual clothing as well.

Why do I wear a bra and panties, when I was born a male? It’s both quite simple and very complex, you see I’ve found, as countless others have before me, that a well fitting bra is essential to keep my boobs from flopping around whenever I walk or run. It also keeps them appearing uplifted and youthful, taking years off of my real age o...

Well never mind, I have to have some secrets.

So why wear panties instead of Jockey shorts when I insist that I’m a man? Well, having or not having a fly in my underwear is quite irrelevant at the moment for two reasons. When you are expected to use the lady’s restroom, a fly is just slightly this side of being totally useless. That’s one reason, the other? Quite frankly, I’ve grown to love the feel of soft panties next to my skin.

That’s the simple answer. If you have an hour or so, I’ll tell you all about the more complex reason.

It all started when Jim Wilson, the managing editor of the Channel 37 News came into my office and offered me a story that “would knock my socks off”. Had I known then what I know now, I would have knocked his block off and quit the station right then and there.

Maybe not, in spite of everything that happened since that day, the story was headline news for nearly a month. In our business of 30 second or less sound bites, a story that lasts that long is saying quite a bit. To further add to the fun, I understand that I've been submitted for this year's Pulitzer.

Imagine, me winning the Pulitzer Prize just because of that little piece I did on Professor Strong and his incredible research! Karen says that she has just the gown she'll let me wear to accept it in too!

Whether or not that occurs will depend on the decision of the Committee. As to why I wear women's clothing, well, that's what's known as the story behind the story.

As I was saying, Jim had just come into the little cubby hole I call my office.

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"John, would you please take your feet off of the desk and listen to me for once," Jim Wilson said to me tiredly as though he'd said the same thing a thousand times, which I think he actually had.

I opened one eye a little and regarded him through the narrow slit. "Boss, I've only had three hours sleep since covering that big arson fire over in the Hancock district. I'm beat," I said fighting the urge to yawn. There are some things you can get away with around the news room, but yawning in the boss's face isn't one of them. Not even if you are the best investigative field reporter in the business, which I am.

"I don't care if you haven't slept in a week. I've got a lead for you that may be the biggest story of the year," Jim said as he pushed my size Ten EE's out of his way and sat down on the edge of my desk. I would have offered him a chair, except I didn't have one, and if I had, it would have had files piled deeper than they were on my desk.

“That’s what you always say,” I replied, wanting him desperately to tell me to go home and get some sleep.

“Look John, I know you’d like nothing more than to go home and get some sleep, but this is important.”

I opened my eye all the way and wondered how he knew what I had been thinking. Was he clairvoyant or did I just talk in my sleep? Probably the latter, I decided as I yawned. Jim frowned but didn’t rise to the bait.

That deserved opening the other eye.

“John, listen to me. If you get this story, I’ll let you have that week’s vacation you wanted.”

Now I knew I had him, the story must be something really risky or special if he was willing to grant a week’s vacation. I decided to try my luck. “Three weeks!”

“One week, with full pay,” he countered. The story must have been both risky AND good if Mr. Jim “Tightwad” Wilson was willing to give me a week’s pay. A week’s vacation with full pay was always his bottom line bonus for difficult assignments. I was already ahead of the game, but I wanted to try my luck again, and see how difficult the story really was.

“Two weeks with full pay,” I countered his counter. He shook his head, not a good sign.

“Two weeks, half pay for both weeks,” he countered my counter. “Consecutive.”

Two consecutive weeks, even without pay was almost unheard of at Channel 37! I knew I had nothing to gain and everything to lose by further attempts at negotiation.

“All right, for two weeks with half pay, I’ll do the story,” I sighed.

“Great! I knew you would see it my way,” Jim grinned and walked out of my cubby hole and back toward his office. I suddenly began to doubt my negotiation skills.

“Wait!” I called after him, “what’s the story?”

He didn’t hesitate or look back, merely reached up with his hand over his shoulder and beckoned me with a wave of his crooked fingers. Sighing to myself, I got up and followed him to his office.

Jim was already at his desk, feet up on the polished plastic top and grinning at me as I walked through the door. “Close it,” he said simply in the way of a greeting. I closed the door and started to sit down.

That was when I noticed that we were not alone, Karen Watkins, the Eleven O’clock Anchor was sitting in a chair. “Karen! What are you doing here? I thought you Eleven O’clock prima donnas never got up before nine in the morning.”

Karen and I had met at a “welcome aboard” party being hosted in honor of her being hired as Anchorperson for the Eleven O’Clock News five or six years ago. It was mutual animosity at first sight. I knew it, she knew it, Hell, the whole damned station knew it. The only ones who didn’t know were our loyal viewers. They didn’t know anything unless we had a sound bite on it.

“I just wanted to see if you really did shave, or that five o’clock shadow of yours is just some dirt rubbed off of some of your more lurid stories,” Karen replied with a tight little smile.

She had never been one for a snappy retort, but that particular one stung. I’d tried everything short of electrolysis to keep my dark beard under control. I had even volunteered to try out a triple blade razor one time. It shaved close, but as with every other type of razor, the shave didn’t last long.

“Karen, if you ever fell into in to a lake, you wouldn’t need a life preserver, those padded bras you wear would keep an army afloat,” I shot back at her.

Her impressive “C” cup breasts were real, but I knew that she was sensitive about them. It was the one sure come back that I knew would get her mad. And if she got mad, I’d win this round. I braced myself for her next shot. It never came, Jim chose this moment to intercede.

“If you two are through, we’ll get down to business,” Jim said. I glared at Karen, who glared back at me.

“Does this have anything to do with her? If so I’m out, I want nothing to do with it,” I said sullenly. She probably will get all the credit for it anyway, I thought.

Karen turned to Jim and I’ll swear it was like she’d turned on a switch or something. The tears began to stream out of her eyes. “I told you that the asshole wouldn’t do it,” she sniffled.

“There, there now, Karen. He hasn’t even heard what the assignment is, he’ll change his mind once he has,” Jim said soothingly.

Want to bet? I thought to myself. “Okay, okay! I’ll listen to what you have to say. Just shut that sniveling broad up for a few minutes will you?”

Much to my disgust, Karen immediately dried her tears. The woman was a better actress than I thought.

“Are you two through with your act?” the boss asked as he looked at each of us in turn, a look of annoyance on his face. “Good! You might be able to fool everyone else, but just remember this, I know the truth.”

Karen and I exchanged glances and shrugged.

“Okay, boss, what’s the assignment?” I sighed as Karen reached over and affectionately squeezed my knee.

“Karen here has come up with an interesting tip from a confidential informant about this mad scientist who claims to have unlocked the Secrets of the Universe. Another CI says that the old guy is nothing but a crackpot and we should ignore him.”

“Except?” I interjected. When someone starts a story like this one, especially someone like the boss, there’s always an “except”.

“Except that he’s developed quite a following that believes that he has found something. He has a ‘staff’, for lack of a better word, of about a hundred or so,” Karen added. “They’re located in a big compound just north of town. For a crackpot, he’s well organized and well financed.”

“Any drugs, or something like that?” I asked curiously.

Both Jim and Karen shook their heads. “Not that we’re aware of. He won’t let anyone on the property.”

“Then what’s the story angle? From what you’ve said there doesn’t seem to be anything illegal about what he’s doing. He just likes his privacy,” I said to Karen. She nodded back to the boss.

“Karen tried to infiltrate the organization a month ago. Her identity was uncovered almost instantly and she was thrown out of the compound,” Jim said.

“And received a broken nose for it too,” Karen added bitterly. “A big blonde threw me out the front gate. I think she broke my nose when she had me in a head lock.”

Some woman had broken Karen’s nose? I had thought that it had happened in a minor car accident, at least that’s what we said on the local report that night. I studied her face for a moment. The sur-

geon had done an excellent job. Karen's nose looked as cute and pert as ever.

"I see. They found you out because you're a television personality?" It was as much as a statement as a question.

Karen looked at the floor, a look of disgust on her face such as I'd never seen before. "No, because I wasn't a man!"

And for that I'll be eternally grateful. "Because you're a woman? What difference should that make, unless he's running a monastery or something?"

"Quite the opposite. From what we can tell through a 2,000 mm telephoto lens from nearly a thousand yards away, his entire staff is female. Other than Professor Strong, there isn't a single male in the compound."

"Lucky guy," I said dryly. "I wonder how he works the bathroom scheduling with all those pantyhose hanging up to dry?" Karen gave me a dirty look. I grinned back at her. "But if his staff, and everyone else on the compound is female, what does that have to do with me? I'd be stopped faster than Karen was. Unless I wear a dress and even six weeks vacation couldn't make up for that. No, I'd be kicked out even faster than Karen was."

"I don't think so, you see, Karen walked thought the front door and was ejected because she was a female. Other than that, they didn't give an explanation. So we are making the assumption that entry through the front is out. However, that doesn't matter, John I want you to sneak into the compound in the middle of the night."

"What! You've got to be kidding! Jim, I'm getting too old for something like that. Send one of the younger guys, like Johnson in the weather department."

Jim brushed away my objection with a look of disdain. "John, I've give this very careful thought. You're the only one with the experience that can make the

difference. You'll be able to get away with this, just as you have in the past. Trust me, you'll be alright."

I tilted my head back to stare at the ceiling. Where had I heard the term "trust me" before? It was a rhetorical question. Ironically, the last time I'd heard that was right here in this very office.

That time, the "trust me" line landed me in jail for three months until Jim could prove that I hadn't been an accessory to the swindle I had been documenting. Still, I'd come away from the assignment with a five thousand dollar bonus and the satisfaction of knowing that a bunch of crooks would be out of the business for a long time.

"Three weeks, with pay!" I said looking Jim dead in the eye.

Jim looked surprised while Karen covered her mouth to conceal a small smile.

"Okay. Anything else?" Jim sighed as though I had just drained the last corpuscle of blood from his veins. But I wasn't through yet.

"Yeah, court costs and medical fees if any," I replied, wondering if I was doing the right thing. What I was being asked to do was only slightly illegal, not to mention potentially very dangerous to living things such as myself.

"Done! Karen can give you what she has on the cult, and I'll give you a voucher to buy what ever equipment you'll need." Jim rose from behind his desk and walked to the door, giving us an unmistakable dismissal signal.

We followed his lead and filed out of his office into the hallway. Jim turned toward the control room, where the tapes for the Six O'Clock News were going through the first edit while we turned in the other direction.

I hesitated just a second. “Jim, before we get too deep into this, just what exactly will I be looking for once I do get inside?”

“Beats the Hell out of me,” he shrugged, “but I know you’ll know what it is when you find it. You always have before.”

He smiled and walked away, leaving me with my mouth open and kicking myself for not demanding four weeks’ vacation with pay.

“John, stop by my office and I’ll give you the folder on Professor Strong. Its not much, I’m afraid,” Karen apologized.

“Well, anything will help,” I smiled gamely. I quickly changed my mind when I saw the contents of the slim folder. I quickly scanned it then tossed it back on Karen’s desk in frustration. “How far did you actually get before you were discovered?”

“About twenty yards inside the main gate, there’s a small building with a metal detector. At least something that looks like one. Odd thing though, I wasn’t wearing an ounce of metal, other than the hooks on my bra and the fillings in my teeth when I walked through that thing. I stepped through and wham! Lights and bells all over the place!”

“Your clothing didn’t have a zipper, did it?” I asked.

Karen shook her head, “No, I was wearing a pull over knit turtle neck dress, the belt was cotton webbing and the buckle was plastic. There wasn’t enough metal to melt down into a safety pin. And no, I didn’t have one of those either,” Karen said almost defensively.

I had smiled when she described the dress she’d been wearing, I knew which one she had worn. I had always thought she looked fantastic in it, and she was right of course, there wasn’t an ounce of metal in it. I glanced down at her shoes. As usual she was wearing a pair of high heels. “Were you wearing those?”

She glanced down at her feet. “Ones just like them, different color though, teal doesn’t really go with navy blue.”

“That was it then, there’s a piece of metal inside each of your shoes.”

Karen regarded her feet for a second. “John, be careful.”

“Sure, beautiful. I’m always careful, you know that.”

She shook her head, and looked worried. “John, honey, I’ve got a bad feeling about this one. That big Amazon wasn’t exactly gentle when she threw me out.”

For the second time within an hour Karen had surprised me. She hadn’t used the word “honey” since we’d broken up two years ago. Our break up had been by mutual agreement. With our crazy schedules, any kind of meaningful relationship was out of the question.

We still had tremendous amount of affection toward each other, when we were alone. In public we fought like a couple of junk yard dogs over the same trespasser.

I made sure the blinds covering her window over looking the “bull pen” were closed before I kissed her. When I left her office a few minutes later, she was crying softly. God, I hate it when she does that for real.

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It took me two days to formulate my plan of attack and work up the list of equipment that I would need to take with me. I had studied every photo and every inch of tape the station had on the Professor’s compound until I could draw the layout in my sleep.

There wasn’t much detail, but enough for me to determine the best way in.

The compound had been bigger than I expected. Sitting mostly on top of a hill it extended several hundred yards down into a shallow saddle then up the side of another hill to the opposite ridge.

Inside the compound was a dozen wood frame buildings built in a half circle around a large, two story office building. Off to one side, but still in the circle of buildings was a medium sized building that appeared to be a community center and dining room. In the back of the office building was a structure that appeared to be a small warehouse and maintenance shops.

The staff, apparently all women as Karen had said, slept and lived in the smaller out buildings, ate in the medium sized one and worked, or what ever it was they did, in the office building.

The grounds appeared to be well tended, professionally landscaped and utilitarian. Small clumps of low shrubbery lined most of the paths and around what looked like small covered picnic areas. Scattered here and there were a few survivors of the scrub oak forest that covered the surrounding hill sides. There was little that would be helpful in the way of concealment.

Surrounding the entire compound a hundred feet from the edge of the circle of outbuildings, was a chain link fence about 8 feet high and topped with a double row of very nasty looking razor wire. Outside of the fence was a "no man's land" strip of wild grasses about two hundred yards wide. The wide grass strip was known in the military as the "kill zone".

I hoped that no one in the compound had read the manual on tactical defense and took the term literally.

In all likelihood, there would be some kind of sensor alarm attached to the fence. To further add to the problem, at least three well-armed female sentries

constantly roamed the compound from dusk to dawn.

According to the information in the surveillance team's reports, whoever had written the post orders for the sentries knew what they were doing, not one followed a set time schedule or route.

My only unanswered concern was why the sentries patrolled the compound with dogs. A human sentry is easily fooled, and can usually be bypassed without much problem no matter how alert he, or she, may be. But dogs?

I had tangled with a couple of trained watch dogs once before, and despite the name of the popular book, once had been more than enough for me. I questioned the men that had been assigned to take the surveillance photos about any sign or sounds that would indicate there might have been dogs.

All three men looked thoughtful and shook their heads. "In fact, I got the distinct impression the sentries weren't even sentries as such. More like a roving fire watch," one man had volunteered. "Although, it does look like they use handitalkies to report in to a central command post."

A fire watch made sense, the compound was located at least five miles from the nearest volunteer fire department. A fire, if left undiscovered too long, would be a disaster.

I had seen nothing so far that would slow me down much.

Getting in however, would be a hell of a lot easier than finding whatever it was that I was supposed to find. I decided that I would ignore the smaller out-buildings and go straight for the office complex. That was obviously where the action was.

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By the dark of the moon. That's the traditional time for CIA clandestine activities like the one I was embarking on. The only problem was that operations that had CIA backing generally had a fail safe, an avenue of escape built into the plan. I didn't, but then again, I didn't expect to need one either. Not against a bunch of women.

One of the men who had been assigned to surveillance drove me out to their vantage point nearly a mile away from the compound. The three were good at what they did, even in the late afternoon sunlight, I could find very little evidence that anyone had been there.

We parked our carryall in a small depression in the ground and crawled to the reverse slope of a small hill that looked over the compound. Through a pair of very powerful binoculars, I saw in person for the first time the compound I was to infiltrate in another ten hours.

The vantage point had been well chosen. I could see most of the important things, the fence, the route I would take to the office building and of course, two sides of the building itself.

I was astonished by the lack of security. Other than the razor wire, I could see nothing in the way of high tech security, no sensor wires or flood lights on the chain link fence to deter intruders, nothing. In fact, there wasn't anything that would indicate that it was anything other than a very private retreat.

"Piece of cake, huh?" my companion said softly looking at the compound through his own binoculars.

"Looks that way, but looks can be deceiving," I whispered back. We whispered because the sound of the human voice can carry astonishingly long distances, if the conditions are right.

Satisfied I seen enough for the moment, I indicated that we could go back to the carryall for a quick meal and some refinements to my plan.

We fixed a light lunch, heating our meals with small alcohol stoves. We probably could have built a fire, but no sense in advertising your location with a plume of smoke. I savored my freeze-dried meal of poached salmon. I knew that it would be my last hot meal of the day.

After we disposed of the remains of our meal by simply dumping the plastic dishes into a hole and covering it up, I crawled back up the slope to go over my route again.

I focused my binoculars on two women who were walking slowly around the fence with something between them. A dog?

The hair on the back of my neck rose when I saw something that was even worse than a pack of sentry dogs. Dogs wouldn't be necessary, not when they had a 600 pound Siberian tiger wandering around loose!

This put an entirely different light on the matter.

I crawled back down the slope to think. Killing the animal was out of the question, if for no other reason than because the only "weapon" I had in my equipment bags was a pocket knife with a very sharp two and a half inch blade. I didn't think the tiger would stand still long enough to allow me to fillet it to death.

I returned to the carryall and my sacked out driver. I didn't bother to wake him as I snatched the cellular phone from the dash and angrily punched the telephone number of one of the phones on Jim's desk. Naturally, I called the unlisted number.

"You need a what?" Jim asked incredulously.

"I said, I need a tranquilizer gun and at least four loaded darts capable of putting a full grown adult tiger to sleep." I repeated. I was mentally figuring how much of a bonus I could demand. With a tiger in-

volved, it should be considerable. “How soon can you get it here?”

“Give me an hour.” he replied briskly.

I have to hand it to Jim, when the need arises, he comes through, although it actually took an hour and a half for the gun and darts to arrive. It was even better than what I had asked for. In addition to the gun and the tranquilizer darts, Jim had included a half dozen practice darts and extra CO 2 cartridges.

It was a good thing I had the extra darts and cartridges to practice with, for I soon found that the range was far less than what I would wish for, and the gun shot slightly to the left of center.

My target practice over, I settled back to wait. Old habits gained in the military, no, I won't tell you which branch, came back and I quickly fell asleep. I awaked shortly after dark to crawl up the slope again to check the position of the lights in the compound.

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Pete, the member of the surveillance team that had accompanied me, woke me up again just before midnight. “It's nearly time, Mr. Howard.”

I shook the sleep out of my eyes and made my way in the dark to the carryall for my gear. Pete was already wearing his night vision goggles and followed close behind me.

The first thing I did was to put my own night vision goggles on. The small depression we had parked the carryall in instantly lit up with a ghostly green light.

Pete helped me on with my backpack that I had packed the low light minicam and several 8 mm tapes in. I had also packed three days worth of rations and two quarts of water in a silent collapsible canteen. I didn't really expect to need the food, but was taking it along in case I had to hide out in the compound for a while.

If anyone could have seen us at that moment they would have laughed their heads off. I stood ramrod straight while Pete checked my equipment. It was reminiscent of the old World War II movies of paratroopers checking each other's equipment out before the big jump. When he had nodded his approval, I jumped up and down a couple of times to make sure nothing rattled or fell off.

Finally satisfied, I held out my hand and Pete placed the pre-loaded tranquilizer gun in it. The three other darts went into my big hip cargo pocket, where they would be instantly available if I needed them.

Pete took one more quick look at me, snapped to attention and gave me a perfectly executed salute.

It was just the right thing to ease the tension. I laughed and shook my head as I returned the salute, although no where as precise as Pete's. Pete responded by rubbing the slightly bald top of my head for luck. I did mention that I suffer from male pattern baldness, didn't I? No? Well, I do.

Good luck? I had a feeling that I would need plenty of it before the night was over.

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Thanks to the night vision goggles, I had no problem crossing the "no man's land" to the fence.

I had given the fence a lot of thought during my planning. I had finally decided that the direct approach would be the quickest and most efficient use of my limited time. I made two cuts with the heavy duty wire cutters and unraveled a single strand of wire about 18 inches in length.

Most people don't know this, but as strong and as secure as a chain link fence appears, cut one wire in two places, and you can open a hole in it almost as easily as if it had a zipper. Which I did. I removed my

back pack and slipped it though the hole then wiggled through behind it.

Once I was through the wire, I took the time to reweave the wire I'd cut. If a sentry happened upon my entry point tonight, he would have to have exceptionally good eyesight to see the breach. I didn't care if it was spotted in the morning. With luck I'd be long gone.

The whole operation from the woods to inside the compound took exactly one hundred sixty three seconds. Well under the time I'd allotted myself.

Now all I had to do was try to avoid the next problem, that damned tiger. With any kind of luck at all, it would be locked up tonight.

The low shrubbery along the paths provided surprisingly good cover, as long as I was willing to crawl. It was nearly 150 feet from the nearest living quarters to the center of the circle, and I soon inspected every inch of it, from a closer advantage than I really cared for.

The first obstacle I ran into was not the tiger as I had feared, but two very attractive young women sitting at a table in one of the picnic areas. They were wearing shorts, t-shirts and sandals, and were in a heated discussion about some kind of mechanical process.

"I tell you that's the only way it will work! In order to control the linear flow, you have to install the relief valve at the point where..."

The other girl snorted in disgust. "That might work with liquid flow, but remember you're dealing something with entirely different here. If you install the valve at the point of intake..."

I lost interest in their conversation as two more girls, equally attractive, joined the twosome.