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## A Fatal Joke

by Garf Collins

“Ich frage mich, warum dein Schweigen so verdaechtig ist.” Frank bitterly recalled the words of Hauptmann Schultz after he had been picked up. He was well aware that his silence was suspicious since he was a Special Operations Executive officer who had been parachuted into occupied France. They had subsequently identified his supposedly safe house and found his portable transceiver.

He slumped forward in the chair to which he was bound. The interrogation had been going on continuously for thirty-six hours, with intermittent bouts of physical torture. He gritted his teeth and silently vowed, *They will never get me to talk. I'll die first.*

“Was ist das.” A document was thrust at him. It read; 1.14.10 6.20.15 47.8.9... Each triple set of numbers, in a specific book, identified the number of a page, line and a single character of the message. It was painstaking work, but so long as the title and edition of the book used at each end were secret, the code was unbreakable.

Remembering that he hadn't started the encoding, Frank felt encouraged that the Germans didn't have the message, and so it was still possible that the operation could take place. But only if he didn't reveal the book and the resistance cell he was working with.

“Noch einmal das Glockenspiel,” a rough voice said, and a bucket was put over Frank's head and then beaten repeatedly with a stick. Every ten minutes he was asked if he would cooperate, and, after he refused, the torture would continue.

After an hour of this treatment, Frank was almost deaf and very weak, but, as if from a distance, he heard a kinder voice offer a cigarette and a cup of coffee. When these had been provided, the voice continued, "If you will only cooperate, we can put you in a comfortable prisoner-of-war camp away from all this. Just tell us what those strange groups of numbers mean. That is all we ask."

In a feeble whisper, Frank replied, "You will never get me to talk. I know your camp is a fiction. Just as soon as you have the information you require, you will shoot me."

"Well, if that is how you feel, then I will have to let my colleagues continue. If they fail, you will next face the Gestapo."

The guards had just hung Frank up by his arms to continue with their diabolical work when the door burst open. In came Hauptmann Schultz. Frank recognised him as the captain who had first interrogated him and with horror he understood the captain's triumphant words;

"It is not necessary to interrogate him anymore. I have the answer. I went back to his room because I remembered how you can use a book to encipher a message. He had many books there, but it was easy to guess which one he used. You English should control your sense of humour. The book you are using is called *Our Mutual Friend*."