Fox in the Henhouse, Bats in the Belfrey

by DixieDale

Summary

It was all the fault of that book Actor had started the guys reading, the one with all the idioms - especially that whole section on animal idioms. Surely that was the reason Garrison's irritated outpouring to Major Kevin Richards had sounded so odd to the confused waiter pouring their drinks. Just when Charles thought he had heard it all!

It was all the fault of that book Actor had pulled out and puzzled over, the one with all the idioms, especially that section with all the animal idioms. The ones the guys had started reading out loud and laughing over, coming up with real-life examples, while their Lieutenant was in a chair over in the corner trying to concentrate on a perfectly innocent book on medieval warfare. He'd thought he was ignoring their nonsense, but maybe more sunk in than he'd thought.

Surely that was the reason Garrison's irritated outpouring to Major Kevin Richards had sounded so odd to the British officer, (along with Charles, their waiter, of course, and Charles had heard some pretty odd things over his career.)

Well, maybe those three drinks the two officers had shared, along with a severe lack of sleep on both their parts, had something to do with it too, but it was mostly the book. Had to be, since it started as soon as they'd sat down, even before they broached the whiskey.

Charles, the long-time head waiter at the private club Richards belonged to, his father and grandfather and others had belonged to, took one look at the two when they'd stepped through the door so close to the end of the dinner hour, and immediately led them to a smaller side room off the drinking lounge, at the same time signaling one of his subordinates to bring appropriate libations, quickly. Well, both men looked like they'd had a rough day and didn't seem in any mood for suffering polite conversation with any of the other club members present.

Nodding his weary appreciation, Richards had made his way to a quiet corner of the room, the American Lieutenant following behind, slight scowl still showing on his face.

Garrison had calmed down some, but was still seething inside, that much was obvious. The slight furrowing between his eyes pointed to a tension headache, the drumming of his fingers on the table.
was an even more visible sign of pent-up frustration.

Well, pent-up until Garrison took a fast gulp of the whiskey Charles had motioned for a subordinate to bring at the experienced waiter's first sight of the two men. A second swallow, effectively emptying the glass, resulting in raised eyebrows from both his companion and the waiter, started the tirade.

"Ever had one of those jobs, Major? You know the sort, where you've planned everything out to a fare-thee-well, ferreted out all the info, got all your ducks in a row, busted your ass in making sure everything was arranged to perfection, watch the whole operation like a hawk, and then, KAPOW!!! There it goes, all that sweet perfection, all that effort, in a cloud of purple smoke, straight to the dogs, all due to some pigheaded sort up in HQ, some guy with a bee in his bonnet or a burr under his saddle. HE decides to throw us all to the wolves, let us put one of our own out there like a lamb to the slaughter, and we come back having to come up with some cock-and-bull story to even figure out what the hell was going on. THEN, we get told not to make a mountain out of a molehill! In a pig's eye!!!

"Maybe we should have smelled a rat, Major, but really, who would have expected some eager beaver to try and run his own dog-and-pony show! Better than having a fox in the henhouse, yeah, like we first thought, but bats in the belfrey can do as much damage if they go unchecked.

"Have to tell you, it makes me mad as a hornet! I think it's time to clip someone's wings, though personally, I'd just as soon step on him like an ant!! Doing our job is one thing, we know the risks involved there; but this kind of thing, that's a horse of a different color!"

"Hmmm, yes, Lieutenant. I quite understand your frustration," Richards murmured soothingly, motioning urgently to Charles to bring them more whiskey right away.

Well, it seemed the best thing to say and do at the moment; obviously Garrison was in no mood for solid reason. That was why Richards had taken him away to the club in the first place, decided to ride herd on him for awhile.

And he could hardly blame him for being angry. Some people didn't have the sense god gave a goose, apparently, would poke a beehive without even thinking twice, and anyone trying to face Garrison down before he CALMED down would find they had a tiger by the tail for sure.

He could see this being the straw that broke the camel's back for the young lieutenant, the two teams coming back looking like something the cat dragged in, loaded for bear for whoever had thought up this harebrained idea, and then being told to just let sleeping dogs lie!

{"Sleeping dogs, my arse! Sometimes I really think HQ is GOING to the dogs, but getting anyone to even talk about it? No, that's a sacred cow, obviously. Everyone is well aware of the elephant in the room, but no one is willing to talk about it, or take any action!”}

He groaned inaudibly as he ran through those creature-laden thoughts once more.

{"Now he has ME doing it!"}, motioning to their waiter standing along side with his pad in hand.

"Charles, I believe the Lieutenant needs another drink. Yes, you might as well pour me another as well. And bring us two of whatever the kitchen is putting out this evening, if you will. No, I doubt it matters what, and besides, at this late hour, I would imagine beggars can't be choosers."

Charles just looked at Richards, then at Garrison, noting once again the bruises and abrasions and that headache-frown, and sighed deeply. Yes, obviously a VERY hard day!
He turned back toward the kitchens. There was that luncheon tomorrow for some very highly-placed individuals; his staff was already hard at work with the preparations. He was sure with a little expert management he could grab a bit of this and that, a few things from the pantry and refrigerator unit, and put together something appetizing for those two who had so obviously been put through the wringer.

"Anyway, better for them to enjoy it, I'd think, than those who sit and prose on, instead of actually doing the hard work. Besides, those tomorrow will never know the difference. Never mind which side my bread is buttered on; sometimes you need to just pamper the cat that brings home the mice, instead of the lapdog that just lays by the fire."

*** The Background:

Meyers had waited a long time for the perfect shot, laying in the damp undergrowth.

"Probably crawling with bugs, from the way I'm itching. Maybe just ants. Please let it just be ants, not fleas. God, don't let it be lice! I HATE lice!" he grumbled to himself.

Still, to get a chance at their target, it was worth it. At least, that's what HQ had told Reynolds, their team leader, and Reynolds had put them through holy hell getting them here in record time in order to make a try for the German industrialist traveling from Munich to Freiburg on an inspection tour of his newest factory. Now they were all set up; Meyers had one strategic spot, Collier had the other angle. Reynolds was trying to coordinate from a slightly higher vantage spot, with Milligan watching their exit point.

Now, sweat dripped down his forehead, kept from his straining eyes only by the narrow cloth band he'd tied in place earlier. He didn't dare risk taking his hand away from the rifle to wipe it away. Hell, if he could have risked that much movement, he would have used it to scratch the small of his back, under his waistband, where he just KNEW a spider had just crawled!

"At least it's not snakes. At least, I hope there aren't any snakes! Shit, do they HAVE snakes in Germany? Hell, I don't know!!!" That had been an unfortunate thought, since now his eyes kept wanting to drift to the ground around him, just to check.

People thought being a sharpshooter was pretty much a easy job, as long as you had good eyesight and good aim. They had no idea how hard it was to keep your mind on the job. Especially now, with the heat, and the ants and the fleas and the lice and the spiders and the goddamned snakes, and oh my god, what the HELL was THAT thing? A beetle??! It was HUGE and had things like lobster claws on the side of its mouth!! Meyers watched it out of the corner of his eye while still keeping a sharp lookout down the road.

It wasn't easy, but he managed to keep at least most of his mind on the job, and then he spotted the movement, the slight cloud of disturbed dust, saw the vehicle pull up and his target get out, stretch and extend his hand to greet the men coming out of the house to meet him.

Meyers blinked rapidly, stretched his muscles carefully, without moving so much as an inch of his body, and took a deep breath, held it, and sighted carefully. This was his chance; he couldn't afford to blow it - they might not get a better opportunity.

Then, out of nowhere, there was a body next to, then on top, of his, a hand over his mouth, another
hand grabbing his rifle, blocking his trigger finger, and pulling the gun out of reach. He started to
struggle, determined to take out his opponent, which should have been easy seeing how much
larger he was than . . . than . . . Chief??? What the hell was Garrison's wheel man doing here???

Thankfully he recognized the other Special Forces team member before his struggles could have
proven harmful to one or both of them, or before the damned rifle could go off. He DIDN'T
struggle, not anymore, but as soon as Chief withdrew his hand, the cursing in a low voice started,
and admittedly it was a quite inventive stream. Well, he HAD served with Micah Davis on
occasion, and the burly Australian was a past master at colorful invective.

Finally, sensing Reynolds now crouched close at hand, whispering a sharp demand for answers, he
calmed down enough to listen as the team leader snapped out the question Chief had damned sure
better have a good answer for!

"Had to stop him," was the unsatisfactory answer, and Meyers blurted out his own question.

"Stop me??! Shit!! What the fuck are you doing??! I was lined up on Krueger! Another few
seconds and . . ." he sputtered.

And the young man nodded, "yeah, another few seconds. The problem is you were lining up on
Patterson. He's one of ours. We got Krueger tied up in a safehouse a mile or so away. We pulled the
switch last night, two towns back, just like we were ordered to. Lucky the Warden decided to run
parallel, just to make sure the switch worked past a few checkpoints, before we headed out. Saw
you, figured it was all going south.

While Meyers gaped in disbelief, Craig Garrison, now somehow at their side, turned to the
incredulous team leader Reynolds.

"Wouldn't you think, if they are going to send two teams out after the same guy, but with different
instructions, that they would have the common courtesy to inform us we are likely to meet? It
would be nice, before someone gets their throat cut or their head blown off! And a hell of a lot of
wasted effort for us to pull that switch only to have your team shoot our man. A little rough on
Patterson, that's for damned sure! Makes you wonder what they're thinking, Reynolds. Maybe even
wonder if we have a fox tucked up all nice and cozy in HQ."

For a voice that calm, the Lieutenant's eyes were anything but, and frankly, Reynolds wasn't in
much of a better frame of mind from the looks of it. Well, making that switch had cost Garrison's
team heavily, just like Reynolds' determined push to get in position in time had cost him and his
men. The idea of them going through that and end up cancelling out each other's efforts, killing one
of their own, that just made their heads want to explode.

They had pulled back, Reynolds and his team together, Garrison and Chief sprawled alongside.
Meyers was indulging in the good intense back-scratching Collier had automatically rolled over to
give him, Meyers already having done the same for his team mate. Yeah, taking a look at the bites,
fleas, maybe chiggers, and the little moving critters being removed were lice. SHIT!!!

"Patterson? I don't think I know him," Reynolds remarked, almost casually, if you overlooked that
white-knuckled grip he had on his pistol and the icy glare in his eyes. Oh, not at Garrison; he and
the Lieutenant got along okay, respected each other. But the whole situation was just such a fuck-
up!

"I doubt you'll get the chance now. Hopefully, anyway, not til this is all over anyway. He's to
replace Krueger for as long as he can get by with it, do as much damage as he can for as long as he can. With the connections Krueger has, the industries he controls, that could be a hell of a lot. He'll try to bail for Switzerland, some factory tour or something, if he thinks it starts looking bad, but who knows if he'll get the chance. You know as well as I do, sometimes you don't see it start going wrong til it all blows up in your face, and by then it's usually too late."

"Krueger knows everyone in the High Command; everyone knows him. You think this Patterson can pull it off? For how long??! It's suicide!"

Garrison nodded solemnly. "Yes, more than likely. But Krueger has been pulling back from the social side of things a lot, ever since that bout with his heart. And don't think THAT was easy to manage!! One of our agents managed to slip him a little something, get whatever the hell it is incorporated into his daily pattern, so he's not going to recover fully anytime soon. Makes a good excuse. And they look enough alike. Well, that's perhaps understandable; they're first cousins, after all; their mothers were sisters, twins, I believe. And for Patterson, it's not just duty, but personal. There's very bad blood between them, it seems."

"Bad blood? Money, family, a woman?"

Garrison snorted, "most likely, at least one of the three and possibly all. Well, it usually is, isn't it. Add the politics into the mix, and Patterson seems to think the possibility of getting dead real fast is worth the damage he can do to Krueger, and incidentally, to Hitler and his crew. Like Casino says, nothing like making it personal to give you a little motivation."

"You know, when we get back, I think I'm going to have a few words to say to whoever thought up this ring-around-the-rosy," Reynolds muttered grimly.

"You and me both. This wasn't easy to set up, it almost went south a couple of times. I don't like it if it was carelessness; I sure as hell don't like it if it was something more!"

They joined up, made their way back to that small abandoned house on the outskirts of town where the rest of Garrison's team waited. Garrison had been expecting to be greeted by one prisoner and three team members, two of them in less than pristine shape. Well, his team was still there, their condition not much changed, but the prisoner?

Garrison stared at Krueger, shirt stained somewhat with blood, not much, proving he hadn't survived the wound for more than a few seconds. {"Amazing how Goniff's aim improves when the chips are down,"} he thought abstractedly.

"Krueger tried to make a break, Warden. I know you wanted 'im alive, but it all 'appened too fast. Couldn't risk it." Goniff acknowledged Garrison's disappointment with a rueful shrug, but wasn't overly apologetic. Well, with Casino out of action, and Actor moving at half-speed, he didn't really feel he'd had much of a choice. Was hard enough getting that blanket folded around his pistol to muffle the shot and still hit Krueger before he was out the door. A dead Krueger had to be better than a live Krueger running around screaming for help and bringing the Germans down on top of them.

Yes, Garrison had wanted him alive, but looking down at the limp body laying on the wooden floor, he knew he needed to rethink the whole plan. The others waited, even Reynolds knowing to keep still, let the wheels grind.

Then there was a twitch along Garrison's jaw, a rapid blinking of his narrowed eyes.
Goniff and Chief shot an amused look at each other. "Yeah, there it is," Chief said laconically.

"There WHAT is?" Meyers asked with a puzzled frown.

"The idea, mate. See, w'en the Warden starts thinking, it's like watching the workings of a clock, things shifting around, gears turning, connecting, til, there it is. Everything is in just the right position and the clock chimes and the birdie pops out. Or, with the Warden, the idea pops out. Just wait," Goniff grinned in anticipation.

The slow satisfied look on Garrison's face seemed to bear out that notion. Reynolds frowned, suspicious. "Just what are you thinking, Garrison?"

Garrison laid it all out for them.

"Look, we have three sets of expectations to deal with, at least. Our Handler expects us to have swapped out Patterson for Krueger, hopefully bringing Krueger back; as far as we know, Richards, who's running our show, doesn't know about your guy's project at all. One man left here with the Germans, one NOT with the Germans, in any case, not able to interfere with the one left behind."

"YOUR Handler expects you to take out Krueger, doesn't seem to have taken us into the equation; if he knows about our job, about Patterson, maybe he figures we'd never figure out how to make it happen. Again, HE also expects one man left with the Germans, but a very dead man. And if he knows about our man, he expects him to come back with us, not be left to bollocks up the works."

"The Germans, they expect, need to see that this trip of Krueger's went nice and smooth; whatever else, they can NOT get suspicious of a swap being made. They need to only worry about the one man they are aware of, be secure in the knowledge that he is safely with them."

That slow smile was enough to make Garrison's team chuckle; they'd seen it so many times, after all.

"So, we make everybody happy, more or less. At least til we figure out what the hell is going on at HQ. One man left with the Germans, Krueger or at least, 'a' Krueger. Supposedly dead, at least to your Handler, but anyone can miss a shot and not realize it, right? Meyers probably just missed him by a hair and the target fainted and it sure LOOKED like he was dead! Yeah, yeah, Meyers, I know, don't scowl! We'll repair your wounded reputation later, I promise!"

That got a few laughs.

"See, we have the Germans nice and happy, which is ALWAYS our goal, right, guys?" getting some more laughs in return. "Their big shot is nice and safe and they are heroes."

"We have YOUR guy happy since you did what he said you should do and 'Krueger' is dead. Now, we have to deal with the fact that your guy, if he IS a fox, just might be in contact with the Germans, so we have to account for how you made your hit, but Krueger is still in place. That's a little complicated, and makes US look like idiots, but it can be done."

"The way it all happened, we did our part, made the swap, grabbed Krueger, leaving the substitute 'Krueger' in his place. That all happened back a couple of towns ago."

"Krueger, the real Krueger we'd snatched? He escaped, and believe me, I'll be having a word or two with my men about that. No, wait, better it was ME he tackled and got away from; yeah, that'll cause less blowback on the team. We tracked him back to the German support convoy, in THIS town, but there was some sort of flap, guns firing, and we had to ditch any more tries at him. Won't
look great for us, but understandable under the circumstances. We manage to get Patterson out, but he got hit in the gunfire and didn't make it. We got rid of the body so no one would get wise, and headed back out."

"Everyone did what they were told; part worked, part, not so much."

"We made the swap, it was going great, then it went to hell and Patterson ended up dead and Krueger back with the Germans, alive and well."

"You tell your Handler you made the hit, just as ordered. You don't mention anything about whether or not it was the real Krueger; you'd have no reason to think it WASN'T, after all. I don't think he's gonna ask whether you ran across us out here; doesn't seem he thinks that far into the picture. If he does, you can mention that we ended up at the same exit point, but you didn't discuss your mission, of course. That would hardly be appropriate, after all. And Special Forces, Special Ops, we're all ABOUT 'appropriate'!"

No, it wasn't a laughing matter, but it still garnered a few knowing snickers from everyone.

"Now, we just have to get word to Patterson about the cover story, set up the sting, make a near-miss assassination attempt. Then, the Germans know we were trying something, so they'll make sure 'Krueger' has protection. They would hardly doubt his bonafides, or his value, when there was an attempt on his life, would they?"

"Using Krueger's body as proof, like he's Patterson? What about any identifying marks, scars, fingerprints?" Reynolds asked, trying to follow that highly convoluted plan in his mind, wishing he had paper and pen to diagram all the workings.

{""How he does all that on the fly, just with a stick and the dust on the floor, I never will understand!"}"

From the eye rolls coming from the other men, he wasn't the only one trying to get the pieces to fit in their own minds. Garrison's team were used to this circle-within-circles thinking, and exchanged a warning glance. They knew that sometimes they had to stop their young Lieutenant when he got so wrapped up in the sheer beauty of the complexity that he could see in his mind that he went overboard.

"No, Craig, there is too much risk that way," Actor interjected from his position against the wall. "You've built in too many moving pieces when it's not necessary. We don't try a two way con, well, a three-way perhaps, not totally. We get rid of Krueger's body, that is 'Patterson'; after all, HQ would hardly expect us to bring it back with us. That means burying him, very, very deep; it can NOT be found! And Craig, I see no reason for contacting Patterson at all. He's an intelligent man, will know it is best to just be the 'innocent victim' of an assassination attempt, luckily one that missed. One hurdle at a time, and that one, making another contact with Patterson, isn't really even necessary to make it look good, is it?"

Garrison squinted into the air, thought, then firmly nodded. "That's right; I was making it more complicated than it needed to be," ignoring the snorts of amusement coming from around the room.

Casino dryly said what they were all thinking, "yeah, Warden, let's not go making it all complicated!" that causing at least Goniff to make a sound of amusement deep in his throat.

Garrison shot a rueful look at his men, ending with Goniff and giving the pickpocket a slightly reproving look. Somehow, from that flicker of a grin he got in return, the reproof hadn't really sunk in. Ignoring that, Garrison continued.
"As far as OUR general report, not the real one but the one we use to flush out whoever set up this mess, we made the switch, Krueger escaped. YOU didn't know about the switch, naturally. Then Krueger showed up; we manage to get to Patterson and get him away before anyone realizes there are TWO of them. You take the shot, think Krueger's dead and hightail it out. We hightail it out, but Patterson ends up dead.

"Simple, easy, believable if unfortunate; we both did our jobs, but it all went to hell. Sometimes that just happens.

"On the German's side, Krueger had an attempt made on his life, validating his identity and importance. No need for anything else there."

Seeing the doubting looks, even the 'what the hell!' looks on the faces of Reynolds and his crew, Goniff spoke up, trying to explain.

"Don't want to even give the Jerries the notion there ever WAS a double, that we tried to make a switch, see? You give them even a 'int of that, one a their brighter blokes might start thinking too deep, start asking Patterson a few questions. Don't want that. Keep it sweet and simple, nothing to get their brains to working."

Reynolds took a look around, seeing Garrison's men accepting that statement calmly, like it actually made sense. He shook his head.

"You know, Garrison, I think these guys have been working with you too long; they're starting to think in circles like you do. 'Sweet and simple' my Aunt Fannie!"

That got a general laugh, even from the battered Casino, who was hurting too much to be adding much to the conversation. Though Garrison ruefully admitted, "yeah, well, it's been suggested we are a bad influence on each other, so I guess it works both ways."

Reynolds frowned in thought. "And when we get back? You said your 'general report' will say we both succeeded, but that unfortunately Patterson is dead and Krueger very much alive. What keeps someone from making another try on Patterson, thinking he IS Krueger? And how do we figure out if this was just a matter of two hands not knowing what the other was doing, or something more?"

Garrison's reply of "let me think on that, Reynolds. I'm sure we can come up with something" might have satisfied his men, though left Reynolds and his team a little less so.

Well, the guys knew Garrison a lot better than Reynolds did, that was true. They were sure he'd come up with something. He almost always did.

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Back at HQ, they each reported to their own Handler, Reynolds spinning the tale as Garrison had laid it out, Richards actually getting the actual story.

An incredulous Major Richards immediately went into action figuring out just what the hell was going on. His mood wasn't good to begin with after two other missions had gone awry; this put him over the cap, and Private Jeffrey Ames had raised wary brows when he was abruptly summoned into the office. That look on his boss's face promised something highly unpleasant in the works.

"Jeffrey, we have a problem. I need you to do some very quick, very discreet snooping about. Check with your sources, your contacts, and NO, I do NOT want to know who they are, if you please. I'll bail you out if you get into trouble over this, but there's no time to waste. Here is the
situation...

Now, two days later, Garrison and Reynolds listened in total disgust as Richards explained.

"So, no, we don't have a 'fox in the henhouse', merely a 'bat in our belfrey'. Actually, yes, we probably do have a fox. I'm sure, probably several, in fact, but not in THIS instance. We have, instead, an unmitigated idiot with bats in his belfrey, which can cause quite as much damage. Well, for the moment, we will just call him Major Willows; that probably looks better in the reports, though the first is certainly how I intend to think of him from now on."

Reynolds snarled, "so this guy hears about Garrison's operation and figures the original plan won't work, that Garrison and his team can't pull it off, and he - what? Just independently puts his OWN plan in action? Not even considering what would happen if Garrison DID make the switch?! Without saying a word to YOU, when you're the one Handling Garrison's team on this one? Who the hell put him in charge of a team anyway? WE'VE never worked with him before, I know that! And sure as hell won't again!"

"Yes, it would appear Major Willows has a very low opinion of the Lieutenant and his team, AND of me as a Handler, and a very high opinion of himself. In his eyes, lack of experience on his part does not indicate lack of ability, nor did he think it should serve as a detriment to his enacting his own plans. On a positive note, he DOES view you and your team, Lieutenant Reynolds, as quite effective, if that is any consolation," Major Kevin Richards offered. "And we are still figuring out how he managed to get you assigned to him. The Colonel whose signature appears to be on that paperwork swears he had nothing to do with it, though that might be more 'discretion is the better part of valor' considering the outcome."

Reynolds snorted, "somehow, that is less than comforting, that he thinks we're all that great, considering how fucked up his thinking seems to be."

"Yes, well, there is that, but don't let that depress you. I ALSO have a very high opinion of you and your men, especially since you were willing to adjust to the abrupt change in circumstances in the field. That would not have been the case with every team leader, I am sad to say."

"So, all in all it really WAS a successful mission, thanks to you both and your men. We have Patterson safely where he needs to be. Krueger's death was not what we would have preferred, but we always knew that was a possibility. From what I gather, Patterson will be weeping no tears over that part of it. The Germans do not have any idea of the switch. AND we have our Major Willows now reassigned to somewhere managing laundry inventories, or some such vital activity, back in the United States, safely away from where he can involve himself in our activities."

"So, gentlemen, we really do have cause to celebrate. Would you join me at my club for a round of drinks?"

Reynolds had to decline, saying he needed to go mollify Meyers and the others, explain that their reputation was once again pristine.

Garrison agreed to accompany Richards, thinking a drink sounded like a damned fine idea. And if that drink, or maybe the next one, allowed him to express some of his intense frustration, well, that was surely understandable. As was the mild hangover they both experienced the next morning. Well, okay, so not so mild perhaps.

And, this is where our story started.
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