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Millionaire Powers?

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Airborne Alert Begins

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AGENT: We were pretty discouraged by the way the whole mess was handled. But bear this in mind: Ike said no more U-2 flights. U-2 is old stuff—subsonic, relatively low altitude for what's coming up, vulnerable to our missiles, and therefore perhaps some day vulnerable to the Russians—though not yet by any means. Our Nike-Hercules can hit a plane going three times the speed of sound, well above 100,000 feet. The Commies haven't anything approaching this. And remember: thanks to the U-2, at this moment we can pinpoint every grade-crossing in the Soviet Union. And we have something that'll replace the U-2—and I don't mean we'll have to wait for Tiros.

GUEST: Will U-3 be Powers-proof?

AGENT: You bet. One of the things that makes us think Powers must have defected is that the U-2 cockpit can't be opened manually from the inside. The only way the pilot can jump out is by pushing the ejection button which also sets the trigger for blowing the plane up. Otherwise, the pilot has to be let out from the outside. But now we know that's not enough. In the future, our planes will be triggered to explode automatically when they fall below a certain altitude—except when they are being homed in to the prearranged landing spot.

U. S. Intelligence Officer. (off in a corner, at a Washington cocktail party): Powers? No, he wasn't. We're convinced he wasn't a double agent in the strict sense of the term.

GUEST: What do you mean?

AGENT: We feel sure he hasn't been working for the Soviet Union right along. But we do think he sold out—in connection with that particular flight. I know Powers intimately—I've known him for five years. I feel morally sure he was not a double agent, but we think that, at the end, he went over voluntarily . . . But we had to take our chances, and we did. We figured from the beginning of the U-2—209 flights ago—that the odds were we'd be caught or blown after six months. Instead it went four years. We were pushing our luck.

GUEST: But why would Powers defect?

AGENT: Money. We figure they offered him a bribe—a million dollars or something like that. (We tried the same thing in Korea, you remember.) He was probably in a bad emotional state—and even must have thought he'd become a national Soviet hero.

GUEST: Did he need the money, or was he just out for a capital gain?

AGENT (laughing): No—you wouldn't think he'd need the money. We were paying him \$2,500 per month and a bonus per flight of \$30,000! I figure he must have averaged an income over the past two years of \$175,000!