

When we reached her door, she tried hard to manage a smile.

"I must be a failure all round" she said. It didn't sound as light as I suppose she wanted it to be. "First I failed you, then Rod, and now I'm failing you again."

"Stop brooding on it" I said. "Whatever happened to Rod, ~~nothingzzanzxozkxmdex~~ brooding and beating yourself won't help. You've got your own life to live, Meg, and you can't live it surrounded by ghosts of your own making." It wasn't a good speech. I was hardly in the mood for good speeches. I was in truth closer to tears when I said: "And forget about letting me down, Meg. I'm a big boy now. I can look after myself."

She patted my arm in that maternal way she has.

"And you too, if you let me," I added.

She said "Thank you, my dear", sounding moved and tearful.

"Anytime you need company or someone to talk to, call me!" I said. "Or even another stab at some Konigsberger klops."

"God forbid that!" she said with a shudder. "But I'll take you up on the rest of it. Keep well, my dear." She turned and went in.

I went back to the office conscious that I had wished the whole disastrous lunch on myself, and that I had made an unholy mess of the whole conversation. I felt about a thousand years old, miserable old.

I couldn't concentrate on work. I just sat there commiserating with myself, unsure whether to shoot myself quietly or join the foreign legion. Finally the intercom summoned me rudely to Mac's office.

He was in a raving mood. Between blasts of abuse and profanity, I gathered there had been a complaint. ~~Mac~~ I had turned in a report some days back of a talk at the University by one of their boffins, all about lasers. I hadn't rightly understood what he had been saying anyway, so it appeared I had got something wrong, which he resented.

I let Mac rant and rave while cold stabbing anger built up inside me. When he finally finished I let go, in a heavy tirade about his lousy penny-pinching rag which expected a reporter to be a bloody writing chameleon - sports writer, science columnist and travelling man in the colonies for a lousy thirty

quid a week. All the gall and frustration of the past few weeks boiled up and flowed over, and Mac - the catalyst - got the full blast. He glared at me like Barrymore, and when I finally ran out steam he barked back:

"The one department you don't run is the complaints department! I do! But you're keeping me so bloody well supplied with them these days perhaps I ought to let you take over!"

The counterattack was typical Mac. He never let anyone else get the last word - not one spoken in anger. That was his privilege, and I knew we would keep on like that till I tired. So I just shut up, undecided whether to slam the door behind me leaving him undisputed winner, or start another round. Before I could decide, he changed his voice, tacitly accepting his victory as though I had conceded it.

"What's the matter, laddie?" he asked, conversational. "The course of true love not running smoothly?"

"When I write your epitaph" I told him, "that remark will go down as your greatest unpublished understatement."

He grinned evilly.

~~"The way you're going on here, with gold bar stories and mistakes about boffins who run complaining to the boss - that way you won't live long enough to see me off!"~~

"The way you're going here, you won't live long enough to write it!" he said. "If this boffin character complains to the boss - after your gold bar effort laddie - they'll be picking ~~you~~ your body out of a ditch with six bullets through that bleeding heart of yours."

"Perhaps that's the best remedy for it right now," I said, all anger gone. I was almost touched by the lonely old fellow trying to be kind, though the manner of it had been stiff, steeped in rust from years of disuse. I went back to my cage and pattered about ineffectually, my heart not in it.

When I remembered about Tim Nicholls it was almost six. I phoned.

"I always wondered why the Herald is always last with the news" he said, rather peevishly. "What's the matter with you fellows? Don't you work by G.M.T.?"

I apologised as sincerely as I could for not phoning earlier. He said rather sourly not to worry. He had had to work through his lunch hour to get the information by four. The information was strictly unhelpful. There were dozens of planes around the Witwatersrand that could have done the flight, and perhaps another fifty which could make it if fitted with an additional fuel tank.

Did Brendan figure on the list? He looked through, and said no. No Brendan.

Glenda Glynn? No Glenda Glynn.

I didn't know where to go from there, so I asked him to put the list in the post for me to study at my leisure. Then the thought occurred to me that he might know about pilot's licences, so I asked him whether he knew either Brendan or Glynn ~~from flying~~. He had heard of Brendan, and seen him around the club occasionally. But he was certain neither he nor Miss Glynn flew regularly in light planes. If they did, he would know them.

"What about pilot's licences?"

"Forget it." he said. "You could run a check if you want to at the Department of Civil Aviation in the morning. But it doesn't mean a thing if they're not listed." Any ex-Air Force pilot could fly a light plane without a licence, and there were some hundreds, maybe thousands of them about the town. All a check would reveal was whether either of my people was licensed, not whether they could fly.

I thanked him, and went off to supper feeling even more depressed. My private eyeing had run into an immediate blank wall. I worried at what to do next, and finally after supper I made my way down the passage to a door labelled "Music - Drama." Bertie Wellish was sitting there reading a glossy magazine. The place smelt, as it always does, of after-shave lotion and Turkish cigarettes.

"What are you trying to do? Fumigate the mice?" I asked.

He waved a fat, feminine hand, nails manicured. "Take a chair, dear boy" he said in that exaggerated pansy accent that roused the worst in me. "What truth are you searching for? Musical or dramatic?".

"I guess I made a mistake" I said. "I thought it said 'Public Crapper' on the door."

He smirked.

"You can have your choice, dear boy. Culture? Or criticism. Come to think of it, in your case I think a lot of both would be called for." Having thus evened the score, our habitual sparring was, by common accord, suspended, and we could get down to business.

"Look here Bertie" I said. "I need some information from you. A certain Glenda Glynn, said to be a cabaret entertainer. Do you know her?"

"But certainly I know her!" he answered, smirking fatly. "From here to here, in fact". He patted the top of his head, and then the sole of his shoe. "A lovely lady, Chris. All of her lovely."

"Pardon my peeping through your keyhole, but where does she entertain, perform, exhibit or do whatever it is she does?"

"Exhibit is very apt, my boy. Very apt indeed. You really are getting to have a very descriptive turn of phrase indeed. In fact you might even get to be a drama critic yourself if you keep it up." He chuckled a phoney, theatrical chuckle. I waited. "The lady exhibits, as you say, nightly. At Gino's. In the altogether. In fact, not to put too fine a point on it, my boy, you could say she's a stripper." He gave me a lewd leer. "Is your interest professional?" he asked. "Or is it preliminary to a request for an introduction? Or a phone number?"

"When I need some pimping done" I told him, "I'll remember to call on you." That, I felt left me one ahead on points. I closed the door, went back to my cage and phoned Joe Woolf who ran Gino's.

I knew Joe fairly well. I had once been sent to cover a ~~rather~~ rather gory affair that took place on the staircase of his ~~club~~ night-club. One professional gangster in a very expensive tuxedo earved another professional gangster in an equally expensive tuxedo, using a cut-throat razor expertly. There had been a ~~slight~~ slight dispute over a brassy blonde who called herself a model, though most people who knew her claimed her profession was rather older than that.

A few of the other lovely people who are members of the club joined the dispute, including a professional wrestler with a flick knife, who was celebrating his release from prison after serving a stretch for assault, and two of his body-guard. All wore smart tuxedos. Joe had seemed upset when I arrived on the scene, after a tip-off. He felt that his club might lose prestige amongst the social set if the papers made too much of this high-spirited piece of fun. But he didn't have to worry. We played it very smooth, Mac had seen to that. All the blood, mayhem and colourful personality angles had gone into the story, but the name of the club had stayed out. Mac was never one for slander by implication. There had been nothing to show that the club had been in any way responsible for what had happened, and he had laid down the unbreakable rule long before - we don't blacken anybody's doorsteps in order to create a sensation.

Joe had been grateful about our reticence, although in the end it didn't help him very much. The Clarion got hold of the story and let the name out. Not that it mattered at all. Most of the lovely people who belong to Gino's must have known that their fellow habitués in tuxedos weren't pansies, if only for the cut-throat razors many of them carried tucked in their socks.

Joe was still grateful. I told him I would like to come down and look at his floor show. The club is strictly 'members only' so I couldn't just walk in, not without signing on for fifty guineas a year at the door anyway.

"What specially you want to see?" he grated in a voice that sounded like a hacksaw, blunt and fighting with a tough bar of iron.

"Glenda Glynn."

"Hah! Another pervert!" he grated, jeering.

"Why Joe! Don't say that, or Gino's will sue you for libel. Those lovely people you pack in there every night wouldn't like to be called perverts."

"Hayward/laddie!" he rasped. That laddie was just one of the strictly phoney mannerisms he had picked up over the years, probably from seeing too many shots of George Raft as the night-

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club mobster.

"Hayward laddie! My members pay to see the show. That makes them sports, you understand. Sassiety. Cream-deller-cream! But you wan't to see it for free. O.K. Pervert! Come along."

I said I'd be down that evening, and got the time of Miss Glynn's performance.

"Strictly soup and fish" he said. "White tie and all."

I told him to hell with it. I wasn't going to dance or anything like that. I just wanted a corner where I could see the act, and I wasn't wearing anything more than a blue suit to do that.

"Okay" he said. "But stay at the bar, see. Not the ringside. I'll tell the doorman to let you in."

I thanked him.

"And one other thing!" he said. "No notes, and no lists of who's with who, laddie. And not a word to anyone that you're from the press."

"What are you afraid of Joe? That I'll spot some con on the run, amongst your society folk?"

"Nah" he said. "But you know what it is laddie. Some guys get nervous if the press is around. Like if it happens they're not with the wife ~~the wife~~ that night. Or more like if they're with someone else's. So strictly off the record, see?"

I said I saw. I had no interest in reporting anything. I just wanted to get a good look at Miss Glenda Glynn, who seemed to be the only thread in the Steele-Brendan affair that was still around to follow. And who had been away in the country when Brendan had turned up near Bolito. It must have been a very quiet weekend in the Brendan-Steele entourage. Steele had been away a week, So had Brendan. And so, for part of it at least, had Glenda Glynn. And so - the thought came back to me - so had Brendan's other rep, what was his bloody name again? I had to go back to my notebook to recall that he was named Higgs. After Glynn, he would be the next thread.

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It was getting on for midnight as I walked down to Gino's. The town was dead and shuttered. The cinemas, where the last night movement in the city occurred, were already closed, and African labourers in wellington boots were hosing down the pavements with a fire-hose amid much noise. Red and green reflections from neon signs outside the shops floated in whorls over the wet paving slabs. I seemed to be the only pedestrian in all the city.

There were bulbous American limousines and a few English and Continental sports cars parked in the block around Gino's, ~~but~~ No one else seemed to be moving in or out of the entrance lobby which was sandwiched in between a Chinese curio shop and a camera dealer. Inside the lobby there was a doorman, standing like a wooden dummy in a box got up to look like a sedan chair on end, all upholstered in crimson velvet and white silk. The doorman was also upholstered in velvet and silk, and wore white gloves. His medals could have been hired from the same theatrical agency that dreamed up the costume, or might have been issued by the Siamese navy. There was a thick white rope barrier across the top of the stairs which led down into the basement.

The doorman stared woodenly at my blue suit. He struggled to get some words out through puffy old-prizefighter lips.

"Members only!" he managed at last. And then remembering with an effort added "Sir."

"Don't come all fancy on me, Barney!" I said.

He peered at me, struggling with an idea which didn't quite surface.

"Ah! It's Mr. ah, Mr...."

"Hayward!" I prompted. "Still keeping fit, Barney?"

He moved awkwardly, as punchy as old bruisers come. He gave a ghastly caricature of an old routine, crouching, - straight right, straight left, right feint, right cross. It was a sad ~~spectacle~~ ^{reminder} of what had once been a promising middle-weight, who had been pounded to a pulp over eight rounds at Wembley some years before by a tough lad from the Bronx called Jelks, in the bloodiest encounter I had ever had the misfortune to sit in on.

"Gotta keep fit" he grunted, blowing somewhat from his exertions. "Never get a chance at a good purse without you keep fit."

I nodded. He was never going to get a chance at a purse again. Even the job of holding one end of Gino's rope barrier was too much for him. But Joe Woolf kept him for old times sake.

"Did Mr. Woolf tell you I was coming, Barney?"

His face puckered with agonising effort at remembrance.

"Don't rightly remember, Mr. ah... Mr.... Dont rightly remember."

I told him what Joe had said. He looked worried and uncertain, but eventually agreed to let me in. "D'ont want no trouble with Joe" he said.

"Don't worry, Barney. Joe said it would be okay. I wouldn't want to make any trouble for you, "

He mumbled something unhappily, but released one end of the rope anyway. I gave him my best imitation of a military college eyes-right and salute as I went past him and down. Nothing life-like responded in the scarred face.

The staircase curved regally in a wide sweep of ~~black~~^{crimson} carpet, white iron railings and walls padded in crimson velvet. It ended in another small lobby-cum-cloak-room, which gave into the main club-room. This was strictly an interior decorator's frenzy, shaped like a horse-shoe, with arched niches set into the walls, all padded in crimson velvet, and trimmed in white. In each niche a single table, half shrouded from the rest by draped white silky curtains, held back by ~~rx~~ crimson ropes and tassels. Above each arch, a strictly fake balcony jutted out, with white railing and trailing plants, as though the decorator had been undecided whether to stick with Marie Antoinette boudoir style or to go for Romeo and Juliet. There were great cut glass chandeliers hanging down from the high black ceiling, making quite a show but not giving off very much light on the tables massed around the horse-shoe below, or on the tiny dance-floor between them.

On each side of the tiny dance-floor there were white plaster busts of something that could have been Aphrodite rising from her bath against a white background of a shell which looked like a takeover from a petrol station sign. Aphrodite was lit from

below by concealed violet lights, which ~~through~~ ^{threw} obscene or sexy shadows, depending on your point of view. The statue was repeated in miniature on each table, where they glowed milky white amidst the plates and glasses.

The bar was set in under the sweep of the stairs. It wasn't intended for customer drinking; only for the rare one like me, and for the waiters to collect their orders. There were only two stools and no patrons.

Joe Woolf came across, shook my hand, and told the barman to look after me. Everything on the house. The barman poured me a scotch with a quick flick of experience.

"Uh.Uh." I told him. "That's for the paying customers. I'm a guest of the house. You can give me a full tot."

He grinned. "I'm forgetting how!" he said. "The last full one I poured was the day pa fell off the bus." ~~He~~ filled mine up. The bottle was labelled John Haig. I make no claims to being a connoisseur, but the old field-marshal must have turned in his grave at that moment.

"Where do you get this stuff?" I asked him. "The cook's swill-tub?"

"Brother, that's a genuine, honest-to-god Haig bottle!" he said. "But who filled it I don't know. The luses here don't know any different anyway."

There was something approaching a full house of luses there at the tables in and out of niches, all in stiff white shirts, and with women very coiffeured and decollete. To judge by the noise of their chatter, they must have had a fair measure of the Haig swill already. Some of them were packed in like a rugby scrum on the tiny dance floor, going through the motions of what is known as 'dancing' in a Johannesburg night club - when they could move at all. The music was supplied by a five-piece band of villainous looking Portuguese youths with sideburns and moustaches, dressed in white and crimson like Little Lord Fauntelroys. Someone, I suppose, was activating it. But from where I sat it looked as though the dancers were just locked up against each other, ~~and being moved~~ ^{floating} slowly round and round the floor as though carried along in the stream. I had never been able to discover the charm of it, but I suppose it all depends

on who you're jammed up against in the stream.

A waiter looking like a page from the Durbar at Delhi came across with a crimson velvet-clad menu as big as a table-cloth, and said Mr. Woolf had said for me to have some supper. There was enough reading matter to make a full length novel, mainly in restaurateur's French. I asked for time to finish the first chapter before ordering.

The barman looked at it over my shoulder.

"Sucker stuff" he said. "All of it comes out of the same pot, but they pour different sauces over it. Just miss the left-overs, if you want my advice, and take a sandwich. At least they're todays."

I took a sandwich.

"You're a great salesman!" I told him. "If Woolworths had you, they'd be broke in a week."

He grinned.

"The way I see it" he said, pouring drinks for the waiters to carry away, "most of these characters are so full of likker they'll feel like death in the morning anyway. I reckon its an act of charity to keep their drinks short. Less for them to sick up later." He laughed. I was a captive audience, trapped by my suit, and perhaps he knew it.

"Now you take the staff!" he rattled on. "We gotta eat here all the time. Every night, not just on our night out. We gotta right to eat decent, not that garbage they serve the customers."

I told him that next time I came in, I would make a point to eat what the staff were eating.

"You do that, and you'll be alright. Nobody'll give you topside and call it fillet, even in the dark!"

I was getting bored with him, and with the place, and was wondering what I was really hoping to find there anyway. I had almost convinced myself that I shouldn't have come and might just as well go, when the bandsmen packed up, the dancers shuffled back to their tables, and things began to buzz with anticipation. At last a roll of a single ^{drum} began somewhere in the background unseen, starting quite quietly and working its way up into greater and greater volume, and then stopped with a suddenness that left a

complete hush for a moment, broken only by a drunken belligerent voice in one of the niches. Then all the lights went out, except the miniature Aphrodites on the tables, which dimmed from milky white to blue. A single spotlight somewhere in the ceiling came on, its downward beam focussed on Joe Woolf, standing in the middle of the dance floor with his hand raised like Mussolini taking the salute. The dance floor had been raised almost to ~~table~~ table height during the black-out. A few people cheered derisively, a few clapped. He waited with his arm raised for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he finally grated out. "Gino's has pleasure in presenting to you tonight a great artist in a great act!"

He dropped his voice suddenly, ~~xaxxzzzzkzxaxxkxpxxy~~ and turning to a woman at a ring-side table grated in a loud stage whisper: "Better chain your escort to the table, lady, before it's too late." The cognoscenti laughed. He turned the volume back on again, flung both arms high and wide towards the black drapes behind him, and shouted: "Miss Glenda Glynn!"

The spotlight went off again. In the silence there was the sound of a smack from one of the tables, and a slightly liquored woman's voice shrilled: "Keep your hands to yourself, you big oaf." There was laughter, and a fruity man's voice shouted into the dark: "Hurry it up Glenda. You've got me panting!" More laughter, enough to gratify Bob Hope.

In the darkness there was a sudden sharp crack on the drum. At the same moment, the spotlight came on again, a slender pencil beam focussed straight down on the centre of the floor. Glenda Glynn stood trapped in it, motionless, one hand pointing up towards the ceiling, her head far back following. ~~xxx~~ She shimmered in a skin-tight sheath of gold, which started in a severe straight line across her chest, just below her armpits, leaving arms and shoulders bare, and rippled down to her ankles. It looked as though made of golden ribbon, which had been wrapped around her. Her face, arms and shoulders were dead white, gleaming as though oiled, and her fingernails were long, vampire, and jet black.

She held the pose for perhaps a minute, unmoving while the applause rose and died away, the only sign of life being the

rise and fall of her breathing. Her figure was magnificent, exciting. But her face looked like a mask, expressionless and white, a striking face, with high cheekbones over sunken cheeks, thick black hair to her shoulders, straight, with a severe Cleopatra cut, and lips so deep crimson they could have been black.

Some~~where~~ in that long immobile pause, a single saxophone started up in the dark, so soft and muted that one only became conscious of it gradually as its volume increased. It played to some exotic oriental-sounding tone scale, joined gradually by a pulsing drum beating a typically African rhythm. The spotlight changed almost imperceptibly from white to green. Suddenly, without warning so that the movement startled, her hand picked up a beat of the drum, flashed down across her body and up again, so swiftly that my eye could not follow in detail what was done. But as it rose back above her head, a wisp of golden ribbon followed her index finger, haggling from it in the air against the black backdrop, snaking down to the top of her ribbon dress.

She had begun to sway to the music, back and forth without moving her feet, and undulating, hypnotic motion, gathering pace as the music quickened. As the pace advanced, the spotlight began to change colour more rapidly, from green to violet, and back to white, over and over. Gradually as she swayed, her hand drew back from its upraised position, but by some trick invisible against the black, the golden ribbon hung there alone in mid-air, beginning gradually to develop a weaving, sinuous motion of its own, like a golden snake dancing.

Imperceptibly, the motion grew more and more vigorous and wild. Head and shoulders swung far back, round and forward, passing in front of the hanging golden ribbon, circling round and passing behind and then in front of it again. With each pass, a line of the ribboned dress peeled itself imperceptibly from her body and added its length to the ribbon floating and writing in the air. The dress crept down, over and down her breasts, naked save for a tiny black flower over each nipple, down over her rippling torso, down over her navel and over a third black

flower at her loins, down over her rippling thighs. The golden ribbon had risen slowly to the ceiling, coiling and flapping its growing length in large abstract whorls of light and pattern seeming to live its own life above her head. The rhythm was fast, the pulsing of the music tremendous and exciting.

I was leaning against the bar counter, mesmerised. Behind me I could hear the barman, breathing like a stallion, ready to paw the ground. The last coil of ribbon unwound from ankles. Her feet began to join the movement, beating a tattoo on the floor that rose to a crescendo, and she began to dance, really dance, a wild, oriental flashing of feet and arms and body, getting wilder and more abandoned until it was almost impossible to follow its movements. There was a final crash of drums, saxophone and pounding heels on the floor. Everything stopped, instantly. She stood for a moment arms upraised above her head again, feet stilled, music ended, while tremendous applause rang out all round. She stood waiting, looking at them with a dead, expressionless face, waiting for it to end. As it did, she started dancing again, slower, sinuous and flowing, with elaborate swings of arms and hands and belly in a graceful Indian style. There was some trick of the lights, and her whole body glowed of itself with a green phosphorescence, eerie and erotic in the shadows of the purple spotlight.

I looked past and across her at some of the guests. They looked ghostly in the pale bleuness of their private Aphrodite totems. The women seemed to me to be sitting cold and stiff, great eyes staring at Glenda Glynn. I wondered whether their postures spoke of shock in the face of unlimited eroticism, or the awakening of their own secret dreams. Alongside these cold still women, the men looked like satyrs, bulging eyes, necks and faces thick and coarsened with pounding blood. They had their mouths open, panting like the barman, hypnotised. From time to time one would let out a shout, involuntarily it seemed, to release the mounting passion.

The movements of the dance grew faster, the shouting grew louder, more regular. Feet, hands and body flshed so fast, the phosphorescent trail seemed to hang like an afterglow in the air after they had moved on. The shouting and the panting

all male, all hoarse, began to coalesce into a single rhythmic shout - 'Take it off! Take it off!' over and over, louder and louder. Male faces bulged, veins stood out throbbing in necks and temples, while female forms seemed to shrink back into stony whiteness. It was beginning to make me feel sick. I was telling myself if they went on any longer I would have to rush for the door, when there was a sudden crash of cymbals. Glenda Glynn's right hand flashed across her body, and ~~the~~^{one} black flower disappeared from her breast, into her palm. Another hand flashed, and the second flower disappeared. She moved, both hands flashed together, crossing over each other, and the third flower vanished. She stamped her feet in a crashing Flamenco type rattle on the floor, and stood stockstill, both arms raised above her head. The music stopped with her. There was a single, breath-drawn moment of absolute immobility. Then the lights went out, and the applause and the hoarse male shouting rose up in a deafening roar. When the lights came on again, she was standing there cloaked in a long, high-necked white robe, her body rippling with her heavy breathing. She waited for the applause to die down, her face as frozen and expressionless as ever. And when it was nearly ended, without smiling she bowed gravely, turned and disappeared through the black back-drop.

The barman let out his breath with a long-draw 'HooooH', as though he had been holding it right through the act.

"Jeeeesus!" he said. "Jeeezus!"

"Push your eyeballs back!" I told him, "And pour me a drink."

"Boy oh boy!" he said, still panting and snorting. "I seen that babe every night for weeks and weeks, and she just gets better and better. Boy oh boy!" His hand shook as he poured.

Joe Woolf came across.

"Well laddie" he rasped. "You like what you see?"

I told him it was great act for those who liked that sort of thing.

"And you don't, huh?" He sounded very unbelieving.

"It's a great act!" I said, sincerely meaning it, not trying to appease. "She's a magnificent performer, and a great dancer. But it's just not for me, that's all."

"You some sort of a pansy or something?"

"To me Joe, its like Cairo belly-dancing, or pro boxing, fun for someone else maybe, but not for me. I like my sex and passion strictly in private, not trotted around in public like a tenpenny brothel show."

I don't think it meant anything to him one way or the other. I wasn't a prospective member of his club, and he wasn't trying to sell me. Just making conversation when he replied: "Hayward laddie. I still think you must be a goddam fairy if you don't like that act."

"The act's great Joe!" I said wearily. "I told you that and meant it. If you put it on in my flat, just for me, you'd have me snorting and pawing the carpet like your lovely mob out there. But here, like this, it makes me sick to my stomach."

"Those lovely people out there never had so many kicks for their money in their lives!" he said, angry now. I tried to explain it to him.

"Do you remember the night Barney got carved to a piece of beefsteak at Wembley, Joe? The night he met Jelks?" It didn't need an answer. Joe would remember everything about Barney, all the way back to their childhood when they had become close as blood brothers in junior school. They had come up ~~together~~ from the tough slum districts together, Joe looking after Barney whenever the need was for brains and speed, Barney looking after Joe when it came to fists and brawn. ~~Joe~~ Joe was still looking after Barney. He had managed him as a fighter, promoted his fights sat at the ringside ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ during them, and made ~~dear~~ sure Barney didn't blow ~~his~~ his earnings in one glorious spree immediately after them.

"I remember that night" I said. "There were lots of lovely people there too, getting more kicks for their money than they ever got before, screaming like crazy for excitement whenever the blood flowed fast. Where were you?"

He looked upset at the memory. "In the mens' crapper!" he replied. "After the third round I went in there and sat. I couldn't watch any more. And afterwards, when I saw how he looked, I went back in and puked."

I said nothing, just letting him think about it. He puffed furiously away at his cigar, before admitting at last: "You may have a thought there, Hayward."

"There's nothing personal about this, Joe," I said. "But any time I've got to get my titillation at fifty guineas a year plus twenty joining fee, I'll go out and shoot myself."

"Well don't be in such a damnded hurry that you do it on my Axminster" he grunted without any amusement.

"With the kind of scotch you serve here" i said, "it would be a public service if I did it in the middle of your dance floor as a form of protest. With green spotlights, and brass band and all."

I thanked him for the visit, and went off in search of fresh air. I shouldn't have wasted my time there. I knew no more about Glenda Glynn than I had before I got there, except - like Bertie Wellish - I knew she had a magnificent body"from here to here." And she could dance magnificently with it. It didn't mean anything ~~ix~~ in the search I imagined I was making.

The next morning I ~~had~~ sat over breakfast and tried to make a list of things to do. By the time I was finished breakfast, there were only two items. ~~xxxxx~~ I looked up a number and dialled.

"Woodrow P. Brendan's office. Good morning!" a bright young voice answered breezily, the death or absence of Woodrow P. Brendan casting no gloom over ~~his~~ Miss Jill Harris.

I dropped my voice to a sepulchral whisper.

"Della" I croaked, "Drop everything! Get a notebook, call Paul Drake, and rush around here in a taxi - Waldorf Astoria suite 713. We're going to take a confession."

"Oh Chief!" she wailed, playing it even more hammy than me, "Are you cutting corners again? Please don't take any chances."

"And bring the file, "I said. "The case of the Pianotuner's Peanut."

She dissolved into laughter, not the polite social stuff, but real laughter, young laughter. She must have enjoyed the act. For me it had been just some more of the flip patter that grows on one in the news-chasing game, a cynical, know-it-all way of saying hello. I wished I were young enough to once ~~again~~ be able to get a laugh out of simple games. I said I had called to find out if the office was still open.

The insurance company, she said, had asked her to hold the fort till the end of the month, to collect any money coming in and tidy up the files. I said I'd be down to see her.

She was still reading ^a/Perry Mason paperback when I got there.

"You were cheating" she said. "With the ^apinotuners' peanut. The rules are that you have to use the hard letters. Like Q. or Z, or something like that."

"How about the ^Case of the Xylophonist's Zither?"

"Without a dictionary, I can't be sure that passes. It sounds a bit off to me."

"Well substitute the Quiltmakers Quincetree," I suggested, getting slightly bored with the joke.

She made a "pooh" type of noise, with appropriate face pulling. She must also have tired of it, because she went on without

any lead in: "Wasn't it creepy? All these accidents, I mean - first Mr. Steele, and now Mr. Brendan."

I agreed. It was.

"And I was almost right about you being a ~~det~~ective investigating us, wasn't I? I mean you found them both, didn't you? You should have told me you were from the papers."

"I see you've been reading the Herald", I said. "Very bad habit, very bad indeed." I explained that a lot of people didn't like talking to the press, especially when the press was poking its nose into their ~~me~~ employer's business. Which was why I had pitched her such a tall story on my last visit.

"Do you carry a whole lot of fake visiting cards too?" she asked. "You know, to get you into places where you're not wanted?" She was serious about it too, her eyes large with excitement. She was such a nice, naive and jolly girl, I almost said yes, just to please her. But then I thought she might ask to see them, which would need another bogus story of explanation, so it seemed best to just explain that I was one of the old-fashioned squares, no modern gimmicks. She seemed disappointed.

"Has your other rep been back?" I asked.

She said he hadn't, not since that week they all went away together.

"Together?" I said sharply.

"Well, not actually together" she answered. "I mean, at the same sort of time." Her eyes grew as round as saucers again, and she looked at me through them and asked huskily: "You don't think something awful has happened to him too, do you?"

I said I doubted it, but she looked worried. I asked if she happened to have his home address. She said she'd have to look through the files for it. I said I'd help her. "Or even look on my own, if you're busy, or have something else to do."

She looked at me again.

"I could get so involved in that book that I wouldn't have time to help you," she said. "Or even notice what you were up to if anyone comes in." She grinned, and reopened her book.

There wasn't much in Brendan's files. I have never really understood book-keeping, and it took me a little while to get the hang of his ledger cards. Jill answered a few of my questions without looking up from her book, and gradually I pieced the general picture together - though I may have missed some of the finer points. It boiled down to a fairly simple transaction Brendan received the premiums from his clients, and paid them in to Marine and Mercantile Insurance, or MMI received them and paid the commissions over to Brendan. I didn't bother with the individual accounts, though it seemed fairly clear that Brendan had been carrying some of his clients for the last year's payments.

I did a rough totting up. By my reckoning, Brendan in the past year had netted about three thousand pounds in commission of which some eight hundred was still owing to him by clients he had carried. It didn't seem like much of a living once you deducted the overheads, rent salaries and things like that. And it certainly didn't seem to justify the smooth decor, wall-to-wall carpeting and concealed lighting.

I scratched around in the filing cabinet, but found nothing much of interest there, except Higg's personal file from which I learnt his home address and precious little else. Jill Harris was still busy with her book. So having got that far there seemed every reason for carrying on and making a thorough job of it. I didn't know what I was looking for, but I went over to Brendan's office, and went through the drawers of his desk. Nothing there either, but the bottom drawer was locked.

I went out and asked Jill if she knew where the key was.

She considered a moment, and then said: "Seems to me I might be doing, you know..." she clicked her fingers twice, as though to conjure the missing word from the air... "You know. What Paul Drake's always warning Perry Mason about."

I wasn't well enough up in the intricacies of Mason to help. She frowned for a moment, and then her face lit up.

"Got it!" she said in triumph. "Compounding a felony!"

"Ah, hell. It's the D.A. who uses that one. But Mason always ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ wriggles out of it," I replied.

"Maybe Mason does. But what about Hayward?"

"Lady" I said, "I wriggle like crazy. Just try tickling me."

She laughed, and took a bunch of keys from the drawer of her desk, and laid them on the desk top.

"I just have to to the ladies for a moment," she said. "Will you look after things for me?" She walked out without looking back. I took the keys, and after a few false starts unlocked the drawer. There were a few used diaries of previous years, a box of cigars, a number of letters, still in their envelopes though opened, mostly adressed in handwriting, and a brown manila envelope stuffed with papers.

I debated over the letters. Some of them seemed to smell of perfume, but over the taint of cigar it was hard to be sure. I knew Marlowe wouldn't have any qualms, but after a moments irresolution I passed them up, and opened the manila packet. It contained bank deposit slips, and personal Woodrow P. Brendan cancelled cheques, together with a statement on his personal bank account. Most of the deposits seemed to be cheques from bookmakers or stock-brokers. His takings seemed fairly substantial but I didn't check to try and find out what portion of that had to be set against losses. Then I turned up a deposit slip which said simply; "Da Garda. £1,000."

I hadn't been expecting that. I sat looking at it for some time before going on. There were two others, each for a thousand pounds, spaced neatly at intervals of one month. And there was one - the first instalment, - for five thousand pounds. All the deposits had been by cheque, drawn on the Bank of Lisbon.

I noted the dates and amounts, and put the whole lot back in the drawer.

"Well, hawkseye" Jill Harris asked when I gave her the keys back. "Did you find any more bodies?"

"Gosh, Della. I can't involve you in this. When Sergeant Holcomb arrives, tell him you've been advised to say nothing irrelevant, incompetent or immaterial."

"Oh Chief" she hammed again, wringing her hands in anguish. "How can you taks chances like this, just for the sake of the Officeboy's Oboe."

We both laughed in a silly, carefree manner I couldn't recall

experiencing in years. I offered to take her to lunch, but she said primly that she was meeting "a friend", in a way that told me quite surely it was a boy. I felt vaguely let down. It was a long time since I had been with a simple, uncomplicated girl, having simple fun. I told her to let me know if I could be of any help in finding a new job when the Woodrow P. establishment finally closed. But she shrugged it off, as though cares of that sort didn't touch her. So I went downstairs, and from a nearby shop I sent her up a couple of pairs of nylons, with a note of thanks for the help, and the fun.

On my way to the Herald plant, I stopped off at the post office and composed a cable to Alvado about Da Garda's payments to Brendan. Then it occurred to me that the postal clerk could well be in Da Garda's pay. And even if he wasn't, Bolito was the sort of place where he would know that the contents of the cable could be revealed to Da Garda for a suitable fee. So I took it back with me to the office, and during a lull in the afternoon's work, I wrote out a short note setting out all the facts, and posted it off airmail instead. I doubted if anyone in Bolito, Da Garda included, would have the gall to steam open Alvado's private mail.

* * * * *

The next morning at about ten I got out the car, and drove out to Braamfontein, to a cheap and jazzy building called Burlington Court. It was jammed narrowly in between two larger and later apartment blocks. I suppose someone had decided that its personality must be made to impress itself even in that crowded setting, so the balcony fronts had been painted in random sized lozenges of red, black and yellow. The paint had already faded somewhat, and begun to peel. So had the painted wainscoting in the entrance lobby, which was got up to look like marble. The peeling didn't help the illusion.

I found Barry Higgs name on the notice board, and rode up to the eighth floor in a lift that shook and groaned, as though the grease had long since worn off the guides. On his floor there wasn't a sign of life, which wasn't surprising. Bachelor flats like this tend to ^{be} utterly deserted by day, overpopulated and over noisy by night.

Somewhere on one of the lower floors a gramophone was pouring out trumpet blues, very loud. One of the night-shift workers or one of the unemployed having himself a ball.

I leaned on Higgs' bell push for some time. I could hear it shrilling away inside the flat, but nothing stirred.

The caretaker lived on the ground floor, just off the entrance lobby. I tried her bell, and after a short wait she opened the door. She was fat, bulging grossly everywhere, threatening to burst out of the soiled grey-pink overall she had tied on over what could have been a night-dress. Her skin looked as grey and unwashed as her hair which hung untidily about her ears. She was in a foul mood.

"Whatyawant?" she screeched in a high-pitched voice, as though I was just the latest in an endless stream of callers.

"Barry Higgs?" I began.

She cut me short.

"Look on the notice board! Over there!" She jerked a thumb in the direction of the entrance lobby and began to close the door. I put my foot in the way.

"I know" I said. "821. Eighth floor. I've tried. There's no answer."

"So what am I supposed to do about that?" she screeched, working herself up into a fury about it, and pushing against the door.

Being a reporter accustoms you to foul people with manners to match.

"I thought you might know.. " I started off.

"I don't" she snapped. "And if I did, I wouldn't tell personal matters to anyone who comes asking!"

"Pity!" I said. "In that case there's nothing for it but to repossess the furniture."

I turned as if to go. The door didn't close. She looked shaken.

"Who did you say you were again?" she asked.

I hadn't. But it didn't seem a matter to dispute.

"National Credit Furnishers!" I told her, trying not to look too shifty. "He owes us a couple of instalments."

"Oh God! 821 huh?" She looked worried. From the back of

the door she took down a clip-board with a sheaf of papers clipped to it. Her dirty finger ran down the list.

"He's a month behind with us too!" she squeaked. Her eyes got meaner, and her voice fierce. "You don't move a damn thing from here till we've been paid!" She was almost screaming. I supposed the owners would give her hell if they lost a month's rent.

"When did you see him last?" I asked.

"How in hell should I remember. I wouldn't know one of these tramps from another!!" She lifted her head and let out the most god-awful screech I have ever heard. "Chaaar-lee!" It echoed down the passages like a fire alarm. An African cleaner in standard short-trousered khaki uniform with red stripes down the seams came silently up from somewhere, barefoot.

She squeaked at him, separating each word clearly as though addressing a mentally defective child.

"Is there any furniture in 821 any more, Charlie?"

"Yah, missus. All there," he answered gravely.

Something of relief crossed her face.

"We've got first claim on that!" she squeaked, turning on me fiercely. "Don't you try and jump us on it, or we'll have the police on you."

I had had enough of her. I turned my back and began to walk off when another thought crossed my mind. I ignored her, and asked the cleaner whether there was anyone living in the flat.

"No one sleep there for long time!" he said with certainty. How long? He thought about that for a moment, and then said it was about last payday. He hadn't seen Higgs or anyone else there since. That made it just about right - two weeks back. Steele, Brendan, Glenda Glynn and Higgs, all leaving town together. It seemed a pretty long coincidence, even around Easter time. I saluted Charlie and went out into the sun, the old witch watching me in case I tried to steal the door-knobs.

I went to Marshall Square. Spike Olivier seemed to be in rather friendlier mood than last time.

"Look fellow," he said as I came in. "It's Friday. It's my weekend off duty. If you've found another body, just go straight on down the passage and tell someone else about it, will you?"

I told him to stop worryi~~ng~~. I was a true believer and wouldn't touch flesh on Friday. Any bodies I found I just wrapped in newspaper and popped them in the fridge for a few days so as not to spoil his weekend.

He grinned and polished his glasses.

"So then what's it this time?" he asked.

I asked him if he had ever heard of a character called Barry Higgs. "Should I have?" he said, looking vague.

I said ~~Higgs~~ worked for Brendan. With Steele. He sat very quiet.

"He hasn't been seen at his office or his flat since before Easter!"

"Hasn't he now?" he said, musingly. He thought for a moment, sighed, then flicked the button on his inter-com and asked for the Brendan file to be brought up to him. He looked through it in silence, sighed again, and seemed to be getting red about the neck as though on the verge of choking.

"Goddammit!" he said, angry, talking more to himself than me. "You send a bloody rookie cop on a case like this and you'd have a report on every man woman ~~wom~~ child for five miles around. But that's not good enough! We send a bloody Captain. So the whole thing's a complete and utter balls-up!"

"Maybe you need me on your payroll," I suggested. He was not amused. He stood up, reached his hat off the peg on the back of the door, and said: "Come on. Let's go and look!"

We drove back to Burlington Court. The longer we were in the car, the redder his neck seemed to get. I warned him what to expect by way of caretakers.

"Just ask me nicely," he said bitterly, "and I'll slap her teeth in with my baton. For your sake!"

"You don't have to do anything for my sake," I said, trying to cool him down. "I'm quite happy just so long as I don't have to look at her. She's the original Medusa woman. Might turn me to stone."

I didn't have to look at her. Olivier did the talking, while I waited near the lift. It took him less than two minutes and he was back with the pass-key in his hand. From the colour of his neck, it didn't appear that those two minutes had done

anything to improve his temper.

Higgs flat was a single-room affair, standard pattern of entrance hall, kitchenette, bathroom, livingroom-bedroom and pocket-sized balcony. It was furnished in off-beat style for places like that, lots of fake Chippendale, and regency red-and-white striped upholstery. There were tassels on everything except the kitchen sink, and red silk on lampshades and cushions.

Olivier sneered.

"Another bloody pansy! D'ont put your hands on anything!" I followed him around as he opened doors and drawers, and prodded around. It didn't seem as though Higgs had ^{moved out.} ~~left~~. The cupboards were filled with his clothes, most of them looking in pretty good shape. In the kitchen there were tins of food, and scraps of dried up meat and dried up cheese on plates. A bottle of milk in the refrigerator had clotted and turned deep yellow, and there was butter and bacon in opened wrappings.

In the entrance hall was a small semi-circular table, ball-and-claw legs, on which the telephone stood. There were a few unopened accounts, which had presumably arrived in his absence and been placed carefully by the cleaner. In the table was a small locked drawer. Olivier rattled it fiercely, but when it didn't give he opened it with a gadget on his key-ring. There was a batch of letters in it. He sat down to read them, making notes, I suppose of the names and addresses he found in them, and absent-mindedly smoking black Balkan Sobranie cigarettes with gold tips which had been lying in an open box on the table. He didn't offer to show me the letters.

"The girls seem to have found him irresistible!" he said sourly. "Or so they say, if you can believe any of them!" From a long envelope he shook out a driver's licence, showing a handsome young man with air-force moustache, and soft, feminine eyes. It was ten years old. There was also an army discharge certificate, which said that Higgs, Barry Evans Brian, had served three years in the South African Air Force, and had been honourably discharged with rank of Lieutenant (War Substantive) in 1948. By my reckoning that made him at least thirty-five years old. And almost certainly a pilot.

There was nothing else of interest. As we rode down in the lift Olivier said acidly: "Aren't you forgetting to bring the furniture?"

I didn't register at once. I must have looked quizzical, because he added with a sneer; "You know! Your right of repossession and all that."

"She told you that, did she? It was just to make conversation"

"Don't you guys ever learn that its an offence to make false representations?" he snapped.

"Look Spike! Just stop snarling at me, will you?" I was beginning to be properly fed up with being on the receiving end of his liver attacks. "You know as well as I do that it's no offence unless used for wrongful purposes."

"Don't throw your legal knowledge around with me buster!" he replied threateningly. "I might slap a charge on you that'll land you in a cell!"

"Yeah? And who the devil will do the detective work for your department in my absence?" I snapped back, fed up with him.

"Captain Claasens?"

He looked at me with real anger in his eyes. "That kind of remark I can make" he said, tapping my chest with a hard finger. "But from you, I don't like it!"

I told him that was just too bad. I'd worry myself sick about his dislikes for the rest of the day. After that we drove back to town in a frigid silence. He dropped me outside my office.

As I got out I asked casually: "Any people on that list of letterx writers that I might know?"

"What do you want to know for?" he asked icily. "Blackmail?"

I wasn't going to take that from him, not after all the leads I had given him in the past few days.

"You and your whole brilliant department" I said ~~xxx~~ deliberately, enunciating each word carefully, "have sat with Higgs' name in your file for days. But you've been too goddam thick to do anything about it. Now you've got another list to put in your files, maybe with the name of someone who did the lot of them - Brendan, Steele and Higgs as well. And you'll probably

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