

"It's too late. I've spilt blood on it now. So it's too late. There's no more dream left, and no more hope. I've made myself a killer for it. But I killed the dream along with those thugs." She shivered violently, and seemed to shrink smaller in my arms as though searching for warmth.

"You're drivelling!" I said hotly, trying to shock her out of her despair. "Killing those thugs was self defence!"

"Was it?" she asked vaguely. Her hand caressed my cheek. Her fingers were like ice now, moving gently but without warmth. "Was it? I didn't have to do it. I could have let them take me. I could have gone with Da Garda wherever he was going. What difference would it have made? Would it have been worse than killing men? Can anything be worse?"

"Maybe you could have gone along! But they weren't taking me. They would have killed me there before they left. You saved my life, that's what you did. In other circumstances, society would pin a medal on you."

She moved her head, and laid her cold cheek soft against mine. "Thank you for that, Hayward. I think that's the nicest thing anyone has said about me for as long as I can remember."

"It wasn't just talk" I said. "I meant it!"

"I know you did" she replied. "Thank you for trying."

She shivered again. I pulled the blanket closer about her, high around her neck, feeling the sticky heat of the closed car, and worrying. The shivers went on and on.

"How much time have we got?" she asked at last.

"It should be light enough to move in about an hour" I said, wondering if she would stay conscious that long.

"There's time enough" she said, taking both my hands and holding them fiercely against her stomach as though trying to force the warmth out of them. "I'll tell you about how it happened."

"You don't have to, Glenda" I replied, not knowing whether it would tire her out or give her something to keep her going.

"You don't have to."

But she did anyway.

The moon had risen high and bright. If we were ever going to move, it would have to be now. If she was to get to a doctor before she bled to unconsciousness. The ground around was clearly visible, the dongas she had spoken off hard black gashes which could easily be avoided.

"Its time, Glenda!" I said, I could feel her gather her strength together to pull herself upright in the seat, away from my shoulder where she had been lying and talking. It must have taken all her strength, but she did it, her eyes closed against the pain. When she had made ~~xxx~~ it she patted my hand as if to say 'Ready!'

I slipped out of the driver's seat.

"Can you move across without my help?"

She nodded, braced herself with her hands on the seat and slid across under the wheel, her left leg dragging stiffly. The pain must have got to her then, because the green pallor came back into her dead face. She grasped the wheel blindly, and willing herself to it, opened her eyes.

"Can you work the clutch pedal?" I asked.

She nodded. "With my right foot, I think!"

"You'll have to use the hand throttle!"

She nodded, tried it tentatively. It was alright.

"Put it into second!" I told her. "Steer that way, where there's a bit of a slope. Keep your foot on the clutch till I yell, then let it out fast. And if the engine kicks, rev. like hell with ~~that~~ throttle! And don't for god's sake let it die!"

She nodded again, and turned the ignition switch. She was looking at me with her great black eyes wide. I thought for a moment they looked wet as though filling with tears. But whether it was pain or something else I couldn't tell. I put a hand on her shoulder, gripped it for a moment, and went round to the back and put my weight on ~~the~~ it.

It was murder. Those big Buicks weigh a ton, and I wasn't feeling bright and strong to start off with. I managed it finally, army style, with my back straining against the boot lid, and my hands under the bumper ~~er~~, lifting and heaving. I dug my heels in, and pressed as hard as I could against the earth. ~~xxx~~

A nervous tic started one leg jerking like a mechanical thing, but I kept pushing and heaving, and at last it began to roll. After that it was easier. I turned round and pushed forwards. As it reached the slight slope it began to gather speed until I was trotting, and finally in danger of being dragged off my feet. I let out a shout "Now!" and let go. I saw the car jerk violently as she let out the clutch. The engine coughed once, twice - I thought for one dreadful moment it was going to die. And then it caught, the exhaust belched smoke at me, and she had it revving wildly, wheels spinning and biting into the hard earth.

I wondered then what she was going to do. In her place, I had thought, ever since I started to push, I would just keep on going, out through the gate and on down the track, back to the main road and to whatever chance of liberty I could find beyond it.

But Glenda never did the obvious thing. The car skidded to a halt, the engine still ticking over fast, and she sat there, waiting. I waited too. I gave her a full minute or more to move, and still she waited. There was nothing to do but go over to where she sat.

She wound the window down, and turned her head to look at me, pain showing in every line of her face. I patted her shoulder in congratulation, not knowing what to say. I knew there was only one thing I could do, and that was wish her farewell. I hated the thought of it. As I stood there in my indecision, it struck me just how desperate her chances were. She was without a handbag, no money, and god knows how much petrol in the tank.

I fished in my pockets, and gathered together all the cash I had. It didn't amount to much, a few notes and a handful of silver. I put it all together on the shelf made by the instrument panel.

"Watch over these for me" I said softly. "I have to go back to the house for a wash."

It was as sorry a farewell speech as has ever been made, but I was past being able to say anything else without breaking down.

She reached out of the window, and took my face between

ice-cold hands. It seemed to me they were trembling then, for the first time.

She stroked my face gently once or twice.

"It's been nice knowing you, Hayward" she said softly. "I'm only sorry it didn't happen earlier."

"You're not as sorry as I am!" I said.

I leant in through the window. She put her face up to me, and I kissed her on the mouth. We held it for quite a while, but her lips were icy cold, and it never came alive. Finally, when I could bear it no longer, I backed away, saluted her sadly, and walked off. Fifty yards away I turned and stopped. She was still sitting there, her head turned back over her shoulder to watch. We stood like that, looking at each other until the tension became intolerable. And at last she turned away. The car headlights came on, dimly yellow but good enough in that light. I watched the red stop light go out as she released the brake, and then at last the car began to move. I watched it go through the gates in a swirl of dust, and I followed its red tail light bumping back along the track, until finally it passed out of sight.

I looked at my watch. Three-thirty. I turned up my jacket collar against the autumn chill, and set out to walk along the track, four miles or so to the main road. It would give her over an hour's start, whatever happened after that. It wasn't much. She deserved much more. I told myself that now the whole future, perhaps her whole life, was in the hands of the gods, kismet, fate, call it what you will. I have never walked the South African veld with less pleasure, so sad.

When I reached the main road, there was scarcely any traffic moving. What there was was moving at break-neck speed. I tried thumbing every car that passed. No one stopped or even slowed down, which wasn't surprising. No one in his right senses would pick up a hitch-hiker in a place like that at that time of night, and I looked pretty scruffy after the night I had had. I passed a house set well back from the road, dark and shuttered. I thought about trying to knock them up, but decided against it. I was more likely to get a blast from a shot-gun than a welcome. As it turned out, it didn't matter much. About a mile further on there was a filling station, lit up and advertising 'ALL-nite service.'

A lone African attendant, red eyed from fatigue, watched me arrive. He looked understandably uneasy, and kept one hand firmly on the leather pouch which held his change, the other on a tyre lever. With my coat collar turned up, no shirt, and covered in dust I must have looked rather menacing. I stood far enough away from him to show I wasn't hostile, and asked him where I could use a telephone. He prevaricated for a while, said it was locked in the office. I jugged him along with the gift of my wrist watch. It was proving an expensive Saturday night, but the watch did the trick. He reached in to the office through a small hatch-way, and brought the phone out and set it down on the ground. He stood off eyeing me suspiciously all the time I was using it.

The phone rang for several minutes before Mac answered it. He sounded mad cross, and his words were thick and indistinct. I imagine part of it was sleep, but in part it was probably because his teeth were in a tumbler somewhere by the side of the bed. When he heard my voice he exploded.

"Jesus H. Christ!" he shouted. "Five o'clock ~~on~~ Sunday morning!" I began to explain, but before I had got more than two words out he roared: "Hayward! I've had you! Ina big way! You're drunk! Go to the devil!" and he hung up.

I dialled again. I was so tired that I felt neither anger nor amusement. He let it ring until it must have driven him half mad, and then he picked it up and let out a string of abuse without even waiting for me to start. I waited in silence until he began to run out of steam. Then I cut in and shouted at him:

"Turn off that bloody noise, Mac, and listen for a minute, damn-it!"

"Get stuffed!" he screamed.

"Mac, this is the biggest story you'll ever get in your whole flaming life!" I yelled back.

"Yeah? You fall out of bed or something?" He was still livid, screameing at me.

"If you don't shut up, you silly old bugger," I shouted back, "I'll phone it to the Chronicle, so help me God!" That seemed to shock him into silence for a minute. "If you balls up this one, you'll be out on your ear on Monday morning! They won't even give you the copy boy's job!"

I was pretty hysterical myself by that time, but at least I had shut him up for a minute. I just gave him the bare outline - that I was alone with two corpses, perhaps three. That I had seen them all killed. And ~~there~~ was a million pounds of stolen gold there with them!

That must have clinched it for him!

"You are drunk! You're raving!" he shouted. "Go take your million pounds and make yourself a toilet seat!"

"Suit yourself, you silly old sod!" I shouted back, hearing my voice crack and go near falsetto in the middle of it. "It's a million pounds in solid gold bars! I give you forty minutes to get here, and then I phone the Clarion! Get yourself here, do you hear, with a photographer and a reporter! And get here fast. Forty minutes, that's all you've got!"

"What's wrong with you?" he sneered, and I could hear that some of the froth had gone out of his system, and he was taking it a bit more seriously now. "You too laden down with gold to be able to lift a pencil?"

I kept a rein of sorts on my temper.

"Listen, you bastard! In a short while the cops will be here! They may hold me, beat me up, jail me! God knows what they'll do. I won't be able to write anything up until its too late!"

That sobered him up. I gave him directions how to get to the place, and told him: "Forty minutes flat! God help you if you don't make it!" and rang off before he could argue any more.

I hung about the place. There was an automatic sixpence-in-the slot machine for chocolate. My stomach was churning from hunger. I had'nt had supper the evening before, but my pockets were empty. I chatted up the African attendant, and he finally gave me a sixpene for my watch, and I ate some chocolate. I waited a full thirty-five minutes, by his watch. And when that was over, I looked up Spike Olivier's number at home, and got him out of bed too.

I said I was calling from a filling station along the Pretoria Road.

"Very interesting" he said witt frozen acidity. "Remind me to tell the Tourist Corporation, They might want to put up a plaque!"

"I've got three bodies for you!" I said, ignoring the sarcasm. "And a truck-load of gold!"

"Put it in the gaddam fridge, and give it to the dustman in the

morning!" he snapped. "Now, do you mind if I get some sleep?"

I had enough by then.

"Okay!" I shouted. "Okay! You go to sleep, and I'll get Claasen instead. He can bugger the case up at the end just the way he bugged it up at the beginning!"

I almost slammed the phone down on him then, but before I could get my shaking hand into action he said sharply: "What case was ~~that~~ that again?"

"The Brendan case!" I shouted at him. "The Steele case! How many unsolved cases do you have in that bloody old-age home you're running? And if you like, the Da Garda case, and the Luis case! And for all I know the Pete case! And the case of the two hundred and sixteen gold bars!"

I must have soundèd like a maniac. Looking back on it, it say says a lot for him that, instead of ringing off, he said quietly: "Tell me again. Slowly!"

I told him.

"Hayward!" he said, coldly and with an edge of hatred to his voice, "If this is a leg pull, so-help-me I'll frame you for something that will keep you in jail for the rest of your life. If they don't hang you!"

"Okay!" I said wearily. "But remember, I've a witness to this call. So just stop threatening me and use your bloody brains if you have any. I'm telling you now. If you don't act on this, you're finished! They'll flay you alive and then feed you to your bloody boxers for mincemeat!"

I gave him the directions to the farm loud and clear. I didn't wait for any comment. Time was running out, and I had had enough of him. I said quickly: "And Spike! If you tip off any reporters on this, ANY reporter at all, so-help-me-Christ I'll..."

"Don't threaten me, buster!" he cut in firceley.

"... I'll leave you and Claasens to bugger up your own cases in your stupid fashion for evermore!" I finished, and hung up quickly.

It had taken a lot out of me, all that anger and frustration. I walked back along the road, cold wet sweat drying and chilling my back, almost falling asleep on my feet as I walked. I was thinking dreamily to myself how it would look on the front page, headlines so big they'd have to get out the wood. It was lucky the Sunday

papers were already off the press. I'd scoop the world with it on Monday morning.

I found myself wandering off the edge of the road into the middle. I suppose I was dozing off, although it was only about twelve hours since I had called on Glenda at her flat. But I had had a rough night. I sat down on the grass verge to wait. It would be bloody silly at that stage of the night to get myself run over, walking in a dream. I sat thinking - or perhaps I was asleep and dreaming - about Glenda, and trying to imagine where she was and what she was doing. I felt a thousand years old, and all my thoughts were wild, distorted, insane as in a dream. She was just getting off the boat at an island, it looked like Capri, when the car drew up alongside me, and I jerked back to reality.

Mac had a photographer with him, and Al Coley, one of our best reporters. I directed them back to the turn-off, and as we bumped down the track to the farm I gave them the general outlines of what had happened. Mac had simmered down by that time, and I don't know whether he or the others really believed any of what I was saying. I was probably raving slightly anyway, and almost falling asleep between sentences.

But they began to believe me alright when the car's headlights picked up the body of Da Garda lying doubled up in the dirt, with the knife still sticking out of his chest. They all piled out. I couldn't summon up the steam to get out with them. I remember seeing flash-bulbs ~~xxx~~ pop, and then I dozed off.

The cops shook me awake. It was already getting light, and in the grey of dawn I could see policemen swarming all over the place. The uniformed policeman who was shaking me said that Lieutenant Olivier wanted to talk to me. I staggered out, and walked across to the house. Flash-bulbs were still popping, and an ambulance was standing outside the house.

Inside the hall, Pete was gone, and Luis was gone from the living room, but the dark patch of dried blood was still very much in evidence on the floor. Around it there was a chalk-line marking the position ~~of~~ his body had been in. There was a mob of people in the living room, some policemen, and the three Herald men. There seemed to be some sort of argument going on between

but I didn't join in or even find out what it was about. I just dropped into the nearest seat, and almost dozed off again.

Olivier came across from the argument and pulled up a chair to sit facing me, rather close. His tone was mild, and only slightly tinged with sarcasm.

"You're not doing as well as I expected of you, Hayward!" he said by way of greeting. "Only two dead out of three!"

I didn't say anything. I didn't care about what he said or thought. I just wanted to get finished with the whole affair, and crawl into bed and never crawl out again.

"And another thing!" he went on, when he saw I wasn't rising to his patter. "That million pounds you were shouting about! We can't seem to find it anywhere. You haven't pocketed it have you."

I suppose it was all very funny to them at that moment. At least one of the copers laughed loudly. I still didn't rise.

"The gold's in the plane!"

"The plane's locked up!" he shot back. "Where's the keys?"

"Da Garda must have them!" I said. "Or had them!" I added, correcting myself.

They asked which was Da Garda. I told them. The one lying out in the dust. He took a brown envelope out of his pocket, shook the contents out onto his lap, the usual detritus of a man's pockets, and selected a loose key.

"Come on. Let's go collect it then!" he said, jocular, his tone telling me that even then he didn't believe it.

We walked out to the plane. I stood with the mob while he climbed up and opened the door and went in. He flashed a torch around inside, feet clattered on the floor, and then for a moment silence. Finally he raised his voice, high pitched and sounding slightly hysterical. "Christ almighty!" he shouted. "Just look at this!"

They all rushed to get a look, cops, photographer, reporters and everybody. I sat down on the ground, my back against the wheel. I must have dozed off again - I suppose it was delayed shock reaction; it couldn't have been lack of sleep. But the next thing I knew the plane was all closed up again, and two uniformed cops were standing stiffly on guard close by.

Olivier had me by the arm and was leading me, almost dragging me back to the house. As we got to the house, I said to him:

"There's four dead already. Who guards the guards?" and cackled inanely.

He didn't seem worried about that. He pushed me into a chair, and got one of his aides to bring in a table from the kitchen. A shorthand writer got into position to take it all down, and he said to me:

"Okay, Hayward. Let's hear all of it!"

I felt ~~kink~~ as though I was on a stage. They had formed a close packed ring all around the table, two-deep in places, with every eye focussed on me, staring as though I was Dracula. I tried to tell him the story, just as Glenda had told it to me, just the bare facts and none of the interpolations. I wasn't very lucid, and I had to keep going back and filling in a piece I had left out. But I got to the end, with Higgs going off, and went straight on to the evening's events, starting with Da Garda and his thugs barging into Glenda's flat. I went right through to Da Garda's death, - with one exception. I said nothing about Steele's keys, I was still lucid enough to omit that. It had nothing to do with the story, and somehow that seemed to me to fall under the heading of private business, not police business.

And when I got to Da Garda's death I stopped.

There was a moment's silence. Gielgud may be used to that sort of thing. I wasn't. I imagined they were waiting for me to go on and tell them what happened after that. But when it dawned on them I had stopped and wasn't going on, there was no applause. Just a barrage of questions, everyone shouting at once.

Olivier cut them short with a harsh snap of command. In the silence he asked the sixty-four dollar question:

"So where's the girl, Hayward?"

"Gone!" I said, trying to sound apologetic. "I came in to wash my hands, and when I came out she had gone. Driven off with the car!"

I could hear people all round drawing in their breath and muttering. Olivier stood up as though stung, his fists knotted.

It seemed to me a toss-up whether he would hit me or have an apoplectic fit. His face was dark with anger.

"So you just let her go!" he exploded. "Just like that. When you had a gun in your pocket all the time!"

There wasn't anything to say. I just nodded. His bull voice seemed to be coming to me through a layer of cotton-wool. I was about ready to pass out again.

I heard someone in the mob say: "Perhaps you slept with her too, huh?" and another, mean voiced, squeaky, say "Why not? Everyone else in the case seems to have!" It didn't mean anything to me any more, just cop-talk, crude cop-talk. Glenda wasn't around to hear it. It couldn't do anything to her.

I gathered up all my energy. I should have said it in hot anger, but passion ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ seemed beyond my capacity.

"You can all go to hell!" I told them. "I've given you the gold. I've given you the guys who did and the way they did it. What more do you want?"

"We want Glenda Glynn!" Olivier snapped.

"Well buy yourself a bloodhound and go find her!" I told him, snarling wearily, without any bark left. "I'm going home!"

"You'll go when I'm good and ready to let you!" Olivier said heavily. "Not before!"

I hadn't noticed Mac in the mob up to that moment. I knew he was there somewhere, but I was too pooped to look. At that moment, he elbowed a policeman rather underemoniously out of the inner circle round, and leant over towards Olivier.

"If you're arresting him, say so!" he barked. "And if you're not I'm taking him home. Right now!"

"Oh Christ! Another bloody lawyer!" Olivier said, with heavy sarcasm. "I can hold him for forty-eight hours without charge, for questioning or on suspicion. And you know it too!"

Mac nodded. "Too true you can!" he barked. "But if you do, Lieutenant, you'll get your picture on the front page, four columns wide and a foot high! Captioned by me: 'The cop who sat on his backside, while Hayward solved his case!'"

He paused for a moment, and then added rather quieter: "Alongside some of your boxer dogs, just to prove there's some intelligence in your household!"

Someone sniggered. Olivier turned purple. He looked about ready to have a thrombosis. Mac on the other hand looked calm and unperturbed. He clamped his dead pipe between his teeth, pushed his way over to me and said loudly: "Come on Chris! We're going home!"

I got up a bit shakily. He took my arm and we began to walk away from them. I thought it was even chances someone would slug me with a baton from behind, But no one moved. We walked out of the house and across to the car. No one followed. We left Al Coley and the photographer to see the fun out and make their own way home as best they could afterwards, and drove back to town.

The sun was up. I didn't hear any birds sing, or any Sunday paper sellers cry their wares. I slept all the way. I was half asleep as he guided me up the stairs. I was half asleep as I staggered into the flat, and just made it to the divan without falling on my face. I passed out.

CHAPTER 8.

I was having another of those heeby-jeeby nightmares, filled with elephantine pythons wreathed into obscenely heaving knots. They were climbing mountains of gold bars leaving trails of phosphorescent slime on which strip-tease girls were gyrating and slipping and screaming out to get away. A great sweating wrestler with drooping moustaches was slashing at the snakes with a knife as big as Excalibur, and blood was spurting out over everything, cascading down the mountain sides over snakes, gold and dancing girls, and over a dead juvenile delinquent with pale hair and pale vacant eyes who had a hole through his head from ear to ear. I was shooting at them all with a revolver that fired endlessly, shot after shot, my hand shaking like a leaf in August, and dancing girls were going down like ninepins into the black pool of blood that lapped around everything including my ankles. Lights were flashing on and off, faster and faster and police sirens from a dozen cars were screaming, coming closer and closer. I was searching frantically for somewhere to hide the gun, scrambling over slabs of dismembered snakes and corpses of fat Portuguese men, shrieking madly at the dancing girls "Run! Run! Run!"

I woke in a cold sweat, panting with fear, my heart beating like a sledge-hammer.

The telephone was ringing again. By the time I had realised what it was and groped my across the room to get to it I had made up my mind to get ~~xx~~ rid of it for ever. The flat wasn't big enough for both of us. It was a wrong number.

I felt weak as milk-water. But it was dark outside, and my watch said seven-thirty, which made it Sunday evening or after, if I had slept more than a day. I felt like a walking corpse, and almost crawled back on to the divan to die. But there were two more things I had to do before I died quietly. I had to write the story up - or at least check what Mac and Coley had written. And I had to talk to Meg. I had to! I had to! I told myself that over and over again. But it took me all of fifteen minutes sitting on the edge of the divan convincing myself before I could make it to the bathroom and have a shower.

I felt hollow as a drum. But when I got to the kitchen and made myself a piece of toast, I couldn't get it down. It just turned to sawdust in my mouth. I thought for a while about a brandy but finally talked myself out of it, and dragged myself downstairs to the basement garage, got out my car and drove three blocks to the office. I parked in a no parking place outside the door, not giving a damn whether they ticketed me or carted the car away to the municipal pound.

I expected the red carpet to be laid all the way down the stairs and into the street for me, and half expected to find the whole staff, editorial and printing plant, to be lining the aisles applauding and shaking my hand as I came in.

But it was just another dreary Sunday evening. There weren't many people about. Those there were nodded to me or said 'Hi!' in quite normally casual fashion and went on about their business. No one came up to speak to me. Either the news hadn't reached them yet, or I was being the victim of a very sick joke. Whatever it was I didn't like it.

I went straight to Mac's office to find out what had been done with the story. I was in a mood to let him have it straight between the eyes if he started to brawl with me about anything. But he too let me down. He just nodded at a chair, and went on reading some papers, while I sat down and waited, beginning to boil up inside. After a while he finished reading, and passed the papers across to me without a word. They felt ^{damp} as though they had just come up from the press room below.

The top galley ~~was~~ was datelined "Nelspruit, Sunday." And ~~was~~ below that: "From our own correspondent." I read it slowly, my heart turning to ice. After the first paragraph I began imagining the rest, and my hands began to shake so badly I had to put it down on the desk to finish reading. It said:

'Glenda Glynne the well-known Johannesburg cabaret dancer, was killed in a car crash near Krokodilbrug early this morning. The car, which ran into a tree beside the road to Lourenco Marques, was a total wreck.

'No witnesses to the accident have come forward. Nelspruit police were called to the scene by a passing motorist, who

saw the wreckage. The indications are that the car left the tarmac more than a hundred yards from the tree, careered across the shoulder of the road and on to the veld before the impact.

'There were no other passengers.'

The second sheet was a report phoned in during the afternoon. It said that medical examiners were of the opinion that Miss Glynn had been unconscious at the time of the crash. She had apparently been lying sprawled across the front seat. She had a wound on her leg which had apparently been inflicted some time before the accident, and had been roughly bandaged. "The District Medical Officer told our representative that Miss Glynn had lost a great deal of blood from this wound, and could well have collapsed and lost control of the car as a result. Death was instantaneous.

'The car is understood to be the property of a car hire company, and was hired out two days ago to a visitor from Angola. Police are investigating.'

I don't know how long I sat there, with my head in my hands, trying not to think of it, and thinking of nothing else. Part of the time I was praying that the report was right, and she had been unconscious in those last awful seconds before the end. She had had her share of pain, and more.

I wasn't really shocked. I had known ever since I watched her tail-lights disappear into the night that whatever happened after that would be tragedy. Deep inside me, ~~even~~ when I willed her, even incited her to go, I knew that for her there was no real escape from what she was fleeing. Except perhaps to something worse, to some sleazy honkey-tonk in Mocambique or somewhere like that, without any hope and without any money. To another heel like Brendan, or perhaps even Da Garda. No escape, except downhill, losing her beauty, her youth, her figure. Till finally she would lose her courage; and then there would be nothing more, except an overdose of seconal, or a quick dive from a high window,

I had known it all. So now it was over, so quick. I prayed it had been painless. I felt too drained to even cry, like the chief mourner at a delayed funeral.

Mac broke the silence eventually.

"Why did you turn her loose Chris?" I almost didn't recognise his voice. For the first time since God knows when he spoke like a human being, without a bark or a shout.

"Why? Why?" I had been asking myself that question, not as a quest for information, which is how he asked it, but in self-accusation. "I don't think I know why, Mac. I suppose I hoped she'd get away, somewhere, and never come back, that's all."

He looked at me, expecting more.

"She was a wonderful woman, Mac" I tried to explain. "Only something went wrong somewhere, way back. And after that she never had a chance to come right again. I suppose I thought I might give her the chance."

He sucked on his empty pipe and said nothing.

"Christ! I don't know, Mac. All she wanted was just to be a person! That's all. So I thought - I suppose - I could give her the chance. Maybe she'd laugh one day. Maybe she'd love or be loved, like a person." ¶

He thought for sometime, before saying quite soberly: "I must be a bit old fashioned. But in my book, people who commit crimes ought by rights to have to face the music for them." It was said without malice.

"Maybe" I said, feeling no sympathy with his view. "Maybe I suppose somewhere down here my reason told me she would never make it. But just in case, just in case I was wrong, I had to give her the chance. She was a quite wonderful woman in her way."

"Who am I to judge?" I said later, after he sat silent again. "Maybe if I'd been in her shoes I'd have done what she did to get out. Or worse. Who in hell am I to judge? God? So I decided I was just another human being, who could do something she seemed to think no one had ever done for her. And that was to treat her like she was human. So I tried. The chips fell wrong!"

"That's a nice speech" he said, still gruffly gentle. "A good speech. For anyone else. But no damn good for a reporter, Chris! You start thinking that way, and you're finished as a reporter. You'll never be able to write another story that's

worth a damn! You can't let your heart break with every story, Chris, no matter how its told. If you do, you'll never be able to tell it the way its got to be - straight, just the facts, No passions, no sympathies, no feelings!"

I looked at him.

"It's no good, Mac. I'm not a reporter any more after this one is told. Told my way! Then Ive had it! Finished! I can't go through it any more, writing, editing, striking out the feelings from records of other peoples' tragedies. Like a bloody recording machine without a heart. That's it, Mac - no heart! That's what makes a reporter. But for me it's what's putting me outside the human race. Well I'm through with it. I'm finished with it for life, Mac. This is the end for me. I'll see this one through - the murders and the gold bars and all. And then 'Finis!' Mac, I'm putting in my time in this racket. For ever."

I fully expected a tirade of abuse. But he seemed to shrink, and looked suddenly like a tired and lonely old man, grey faced as though someone in his family had died. He got up slowly, painfully, and walked over and closed the door. Then he crossed to a cupboard, brought out a bottle of Scotch and slammed it down on the desk as though he hated both. He poured two very stiff tots, and passed one across to me.

"Drink it down!"

I didn't want to. But there was something in his manner that waned me I ought to. I was feeling too sick and hollow to argue. I said a silent toast to Glenda, closed my eyes, and took it like unpleasant medicine. He downed his fast, like a man who had been hungering for it badly.

"If you mean what you're saying, Chris, " he said, slowly, each word coming out reluctantly, "Then you're finished right now! There isn't going to be any story of the gold bars at all!"

At first I wasn't sure if I had heard him right. Then I thought it must be another of those savage, sadistic jokes of his, and I considered throwing my glass at him and getting out. But then I looked at his face, sagging and greyer than it had ever been, with bitter lines of pain, agony almost, about his mouth. I realised he was in earnest.

I tried not to let hysteria rise in my voice.

"What the hell are you on about Mac? What do you mean 'No gold bar story?'"

He sucked fiercely at his pipe.

"This would have been the greatest scoop the Herald ever carried!" he said bitterly. "The greatest ever! And with your by-line right cross it, in letters that big!" He spread his hand, thumb and forefinger an inch apart. "It would have made you a name, right up there at the top, with the great reporters, Chris. Anywhere in the world!" His hand rubbed wearily across his brow, almost as though brushing tears from his eyes.

"But there were no gold bars, Chris! And so no story!"

For a moment I thought I was back in one of those dreams, and the phone would soon ring to jerk me out of it. But inside me I could feel a cold sickness growing up, and my hand shaking started all over again.

"For gods sake, Mac! The gold bars were there! I saw them! So did you! Everyone saw them!" My voice was rising shrill. I suppose I was shouting, though I don't really remember anything except the sick cold in my innards.

He rubbed his brow with his hands again, fiercely, not looking at me. "No gold!" he said at last heavily. "No gold, Chris. Just lead prettied up to look like gold!"

My tongue didn't seem to operate any more. I was choked in my throat, wrestling with the effort to get my words out, wildly clutching at ~~ideas~~ thoughts that I knew deep inside were false as soon as I conceived them. Higgs must have double crossed them all, and substituted the fake bars for real! Or Brendan before he died! Even as I thought them, I knew they were wild ~~ix~~ nonsense.

Mac passed across another stiff drink. I didn't touch it. I was afraid if I did I would sick it up on his carpet. When I finally managed to get the words out, all I could say was to repeat obstinately: "The bars were there, dammit! Who substituted the lead?"

"No one substituted anything!" he answered flatly, downing his own drink in a single swallow. "No one had to. There was

never any gold there in the first place."

"But Jesus Christ! They took it right from the pile at the Rand Show. In the middle of all the bells and alarms and safety gimmicks! It was the best guarded square yard in the whole continent!"

"Yeah, gimmicks!" he said. "Gimmicks galore! But they didn't tell you about the last gimmick! Lead bars instead of gold in case some joker found a way to beat all the others!"

The tone of his voice, its flat finality, drove the last faint flicker of disbelief from my mind. I couldn't even hold my head up any more. I just sat with my face in my hands, thinking over and over: 'And for this, five people died!' I must have said just that at last.

"Yeah!" he said sombrely. "Four men and a woman. You can't risk a million pounds just to give the public a show, lad."

I stumbled out to the lavatory then, and was sick. I sat there on the seat for a long time, sick in spirit and in body, before I could gather up my strength to move. I made the journey back to my glazed wooden cage by holding on the passage walls as I went, like an old, old man.

I didn't hear the noise that must have been humming in the news-room as it always did before the paper was bedded down. I didn't hear anything at all. If any one spoke to me, I didn't register. I just sat there at my typewriter, hammering away at the keys with a savage hatred, writing steadily without any back-tracking or xxxing out, ~~xxxx~~ In all the years I had spent in that place, it was the first time I wrote in unrestrained heat and passion, with my nerve-ends rather than my brain.

When it was done, I crawled back to Mac's office, and laid the bitter, savage epitaph on his desk. He was still sitting just as I had left him, sagged and grey, looking at nothing. He read it through without a word. Then he wrote in a headline: "The Death of a Dancer" at the top, and underneath: "Chris Hayward", rang for the messenger and sent it down for setting.

"Let's go out and get drunk" he said, raising himself from his seat with difficulty.

"What about the paper?" I asked, mechanically, not really thinking about it, but hearing the early noises of the printing

shop down in the basement, and knowing without thinking about it that the frenzied build-up towards the deadline when the first edition begins to roll was close at hand.

"To hell with the paper!" he said. "Let Miles handle it!" Miles was assistant editor, a quiet, university-trained character, very literate, very reliable, but without a spark of imagination. Everything he did was formal, neat and thoroughly dull. Mac must have been half drunk at that stage to even think of turning his love-child over for the night.

We went across the street in silence, back to the club where the gold-bars story had started what seemed to me to be light-years before. It was like a wake. We had nothing to say, and no one to share our misery with us except a couple of lonely old codgers like Mac, who hadn't any homes worth going to. We sat drinking quietly, steadily, and nibbling cubes of cheese and little cocktail sausages served on toothpicks. It took a long time for alcohol to loosen our tongues.

"Are you serious, Chris? About leaving the Herald?" Mac asked at last.

"Dead serious. Not just the Herald, but the whole lousy stinking newspaper racket."

"But look! There'll always be another story, Chris. Something that can be told, better maybe, more important maybe than this one."

"You don't understand, Mac!" I said. "It's not because this story is dead. That's not the thing. The heart has gone out of me for this sort of stuff. I've been reporting stories of all sorts, like this one - some big, some small - but like this one in essentials, for god knows how many years. Last night for the first time I wasn't on the outside, looking in. It makes a difference, Mac. To be on the inside. You see it differently. You don't just see the straight, hard facts! You feel! You feel for people, and with people. And when that happens, well you're just no damn good for telling the crisp, hard facts. You've got sympathies, and bias; you begin to hush up what will hurt those you like, and blow up what will hurt those you don't. So now I know what its like to be in the story, I'll never again

again be any good as a reporter!"

He shook his head.

"You're not making very good sense!" he snapped, with some of the old fierceness coming back. "That's a lot of crap, and you'll know it tomorrow, when your heads a bit clear!"

"It's no good, Mac! I won't change tomorrow, or the day after or ever. I've just had enough, that's all. I've had enough of crude cops and hard-boiled reporters. Christ, Mac! You've seen it as well as I have, the young chaps who start to learn the ~~xxxx~~ trade. The first thing they learn is to be hard-boiled, cynical, too tough to be moved by anything they see. Just getting the facts down! Some get tough, really toughened, until they haven't got any heart at all anymore, unless it's case-hardened and encrusted with flint somewhere inside the machine. And others just pretend they haven't, bury it under a protective shell of hard, fast talk, and hard know-it-all cynicisms. Well that was me too, until last night. Last night was a sort of shock treatment, that jerked me back to reality for a moment. I was ~~xxxx~~ on the way to becoming a non-person, a recording machine, Mac. Well I went. I'm getting out, while I'm still part human. And I'm never going to set foot in a newspaper office again as long as I live!"

He sat there looking old and sad. He swallowed another ~~xxxxxx~~ Scotch before he said:

"I'd always thought you'd take over the editor's chair some day, Chris, when it's time for me to move on. It's a hope I've had for a long time. I'd still like you to do it, son. You'd be good at it!"

It was first time he had ever called me son. There had always been some special sort of relationship between us at the office, which perhaps explained his use of the word. It wasn't a relationship that extended outside the Herald. But I suppose for him, the Herald was almost the whole of life, and our special relationship something as meaningful as family.

If I hadn't had so much liquor on a very empty stomach, I would never have said what I did say then. And even now, I'm not sure whether to feel sorry or glad for having said it.

"Do you ever stop to think that in all the years I've been on the Herald you've never really talked to anyone - not while I've been around anyway - like a human being? You've barked and shouted and performed like a goddam guard at Belsen! And for what? In case someone ever got the idea that you weren't the great tough ironbound newshawk through and through, and began to suspect that you might have a slobbering heart underneath there somewhere!"

He stared sadly into the amber liquid in his glass, shaking his head in vigorous disagreement, but not saying anything.

"You've got so good at the act" I went on, warming to my theme, "that I suppose you even carried it home with you. So your ~~son~~ ^{one daughter} up and left for Australia, and your ~~daughter~~ ^{ally} for London! And here you are! Editor! With no where to go except into his club. Well its not for me, Mac! Not any more. I'm out, O.U.T."

He shook his head again.

"You're talking infantile drivel" he said, but there was no conviction in his voice, only defeat. And a long time later after another drink, he said the first words we exchanged after that. "I think its drivel! But it could just be right!"

The drinks kept on going down, seeming to have no effect on me at all. Or that's what I thought anyway. They seemed to disappear into some absorbent pit in my stomach. I imagined I was still stone cold sober. But since I've never really reckoned myself to be in top class when it comes to long, fast boozing sessions, I suppose I was really as high as a kite when my brilliant idea struck me.

"Mac! " I said, suddenly all excited, "Let's go spit in the boss' eye! All their bloody establishment eyes! Let's just go and put the whole bloody story in the paper, every word of it from end to end! We've just got time to do it before they print! By god! It'll be the greatest farewell anyone's ever given to a great career of pen-pushing. The boss'll have a stroke or something when he sees it! And the whole bloody ~~of~~ Chamber of Mines with him! "

He didn't seeme fired with enthusiasm.

"Come on Mac! Be a man! Lets go and do it now, while

we're still boozed up enough to do it!"

I was carried along with the thought. This was going to be the greatest act of public hari-kiri of the age. It was going to make Samson's feat at Gaza look like a Sunday School picnic! But Mac just looked at me with bloodshot eyes, and said:

"In words of one syllabæ, NO!"

"Why not?" I said, still wildly enthusiastic. "All they can do is fire us. Oh no! I've already resigned. But by christ! It will hit this town like Mafeking night! Only bigger!"

"You're raving mad!" he snapped. "It'll be the disaster of the year!"

"It'll be the story of the year!" I enthused. "Probably of the century!"

"You may think so!" he said sourly. "You're a reporter. I'm an editor."

"So what?"

"So I'll tell you!" he said. I could feel the glow of my excitement die away. I knew he wasn't going to do it. "Do you know how many people went through the door of that Mines pavilion this year? Perhaps half a million, perhaps more. And they hung around that pile of yellow lead with their mouths open, getting a kick out of it. Old ladies from lonely rooms, and overworked housewives with thirteen squalling brats. Even young clerks with stomach ulcers from worry and shop assistants with varicose veins. All of them willing to get blisters on their feet, to get trampled by crowds and to ruin their stomachs with cold pies and hamburgers they shouldn't give to dogs.

"And for what? For what, Chris? Just to see and gape at something that they'll remmeber for a while with a thrill, pleasure, wonder. Something that takes them out of their dreary lives and dreary world. For a fiesta! Escape! All pretty lights and music and confectionery. And especially dreams of richness, gold! Don't you see? Its the winning ticket in the Irish Sweep right there, almost at your finger tips! It's all the foot-ball pools and ninety-to-one winners and ships-coming-in that they've ever dreamed of.

"So they take a moment like that with them, back to the

grim business of living, and it helps them get through another bloody year of it!"

He stopped and sipped slowly at his drink, watching me to see if he was making any impression. I suppose it was, in a small way, but not very much. I had sobered down a bit, but my mind was ⁱⁿ really with him.

"So we write the story up and publish it!" he went on. "It will just kill it for them. Tell them they've been had. That the whole fiesta was just another lousy swindle, a heap of lead salvaged from old car batteries. It would be plain, cold-blooded murder. It would kill their hope which is the only that makes life worth living for them. For years and years, it would destroy their dreams, make them look always with cynical eyes at everything that might give them a lift, so that they would not be had again by another lousy swindle, like a bunch of rural suckers.

"Well I won't do it, Chris! And if you weren't drunk, you wouldn't want to either!"

Some of it had got through to me. But not much. I wasn't convinced, and I was still bitter about ~~myself~~ the swindle which had taken me in.

"Did you think that out first?" I asked, hostilely. "Or did you just think it up afterwards after the boss had vetoed the story?"

"He didn't veto it Chris! He didn't have to. He told me the facts, and I vetoed it myself!"

"And these monied bastards get clean away with their bloody swindle, and five people die for it!"

"You can't bring them back!" he said flatly. "Not with any story, no matter how you write it. If I thought you could, - even for those rotten no-good gangsters - I'd publish and be damned. But you can't! All you'll do is expose the fraud. But your muckraking will serve only to spread a lot of grief and disillusion amongst a hell of a lot of people who haven't got much except their dreams to cling to!"

"So this is where all the bold talk ends, is it?" I asked. "Tell the story, just straight facts, the where when how story!"

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