



only a breaking gang could get at it. They were talking, after all, of events already days old. And any heist of that size would have echoed round the world by now. I expected Glenda to laugh at the figure. But all she did was to say wearily: "I've told you. I wasn't there!"

"Who was?"

"Higgs. Alone!"

"Why didn't he land anyway?"

"You ask him when you see him" she said.

"I'm asking you, baby."

"And I've told you what he told me. He came back and said he couldn't find the airstrip."

"And then what?"

"Then he went off to find a man he knew. Someone he could unload the stuff to. So he said." She was talking slower and slower now, as though weary. The beating and the grip on her arm must have been taking a lot out of her.

"And then?"

"He never came back," she said. "So I waited. For you."

Da Garda laughed again.

"He didn't find the man" he said, fatly pleased. "We found him. Tonight!"

"Then you know it all" she said. "What do you want of me?"

"Just to hear it from you, baby. He was in a hurry when we met. But Luis was too quick for him when he tried to run."

Luis chuckled, a pleased, crazy chuckle. "He didn't have time to tell us, baby!"

I could feel her droop back against the seat next to me, as though too tired to hold herself up any more. But Da Garda wasn't finished yet.

"He must be a very trusting guy, baby, to leave you all alone with a million pounds. Now what would he do that for, ~~baby~~ baby? Had you settled between you to double-cross Da Garda, hay? Or was it just for love, baby?"

His hand fell with a slobby slap on her thigh, and he squeezed violently with his pudgy wrestler's fingers. I

felt her arm stiffen with the pain, as she steeled herself to meet it. But apart from that she made no movement, and said nothing.

"Were you sleeping with the guy, baby? Or did you insist on your half share first?" he asked, his voice thick with leering.

"Payment in advance" Luis said from the front, and chuckled again at his own wit.

"You're hurting me" Glenda said, still in that flat, weary voice. "Let go, or I might miss the turn-off."

He let go.

"I wouldn't do that if I was you, Baby! Luis might get cross. And when Luis gets cross, he might pretty up your face some with his little knife."

In the mirror I could see Luis grin, and lick his lips. After that there was silence except for the noise of our wheels on the tarmac. We were almost in sight of Pretoria before Glenda leaned forward and peered out at the dark gum trees that lined the road.

"Slow down!" she said. Then a moment later: "At the next bend there's a white gate. Take it dead slow; it's almost hidden in the trees on the left."

The car slowed down to a crawl, swung off the tarmac on to the gravel shoulder, and slid to a stop in front of an ordinary farm gate. Pete got out and opened the gate. For a moment I thought of doing something desperate, I wasn't quite sure what. But before I could do anything, Pete was back alongside me again, and we were moving away from the road, down what was little better than a track, pitching about over potholes and rocks that made up most of its surface. Dust began to filter in through the doors and crevices in the bodywork. We must have travelled four or five miles like that, slow and uncomfortable.

I was feeling coldly sick, part fear I suppose and part disgust, and all the time I was trying to make some sense of the conversation. The million pounds had to be a figure of speech. Nothing could be worth that, neither the Mona Lisa nor the Soviet Government's secret ciphers. And with Brendan

dead a week, even that, or the theft of the Crown jewels would by now have created an almighty international hue and cry. They were talking telephone-number stuff, of that I was certain. But the rest was falling into place. There had been a deal between Da Garda and Brendan. Higgs was in on it, and so too, it seemed, were Steele and Glenda Glynn, though how they fitted I still couldn't quite see. At that moment, it didn't seem to matter much how Steele had died, or why. He was dead. Brendan was dead. Higgs was dead. And in a short while, by law of averages, Hayward was going to be dead too, with or without Miss Glennie to keep him cold company.

But what was Glennie up to? It was unthinkable that she could just be leading Da Garda to the prize whatever it was without a flicker of fear that she would go the way of the others when he got it. There must be other possibilities. A get-away perhaps? After a moment I discarded that one. She was a sharp, and cool witted girl. That she had shown when she had stripped my pretences away earlier in the evening at her flat. If she had been planning to make a break from these thugs, she would never have led them out here, into the dark, deserted countryside. She would have guided them into the lights, the crowds of the city, where she might have had a sporting chance. With her looks, people would have helped her. But out here, she was leading them into a scene ready-made for murder.

She could be leading them on a wild goose chase, to a place where she could claim the thing whatever it was had been, and hope to try and persuade them that Higgs or someone else had hijacked it without her knowledge, while she was back in town waiting for Da Garda. If she was, it was going to be too bad for Hayward, and too bad for Miss Glennie. Da Garda ~~wouldn't~~ wouldn't see the funny side of it, even if he laughed. He would probably beat her to pulp and leave Luis to finish her off with his shiv. It would be a case of no orchids for Miss Glennie, with Hayward to keep her company in the hearse. That one had me scared stiff. I hoped and prayed she was too intelligent for that.

Which left only one other possibility I could see. That was that she had some confederates standing guard over the place we were going to, ready to beat off an invasion by Da Garda. If they were, it was unlikely that the presence of Hayward or Glennie in the car would deter them from cutting loose with everything they had, even if they knew we were there. Which they probably wouldn't, until it was too late for apologies. In my sick imagination, I could see them lying hidden in the bushes, and cutting loose on us as we arrived, tommy-guns blazing and wind-screen shattering. I was close to panic.

I began to wonder whether I should throw myself flat on the floor as we arrived at wherever it was we were going. Or would Pete just stick his knife in my ribs, and so defeat my plunge to safety? Perhaps I should hurl myself from the car now, before it got too late. It wasn't moving very fast. I could grab the handle and dive, all in one moment. I looked out into the dark, ~~xxxxxx~~ and immediately lost my nerve.

Marlowe, I knew would have done it. He had done it often before and come up rolling in the dust with a Luger, drawn from his sock, blazing. I had only my fountain pen - if it survived the landing. I told myself there was no point in it. They would stop the car and come back for me. And either kill me there, or rough me up and save me for killing later. That thought made me less ashamed of my lack of nerve, but no happier about the prospects.

I was still thinking when the headlights picked up a pair of rough stone gate-posts. We swung through. No machine guns opened up. We passed a few hundred yards, until we came to a small, run-down farm cottage, drab grey walls, and faded white bottle-shaped columns propping up a corrugated iron verandah. All dark. Nothing moved. The road tailed off at the house into open, bare red earth, packed hard as stone.

"Over there" Glenda said, waving her hand to the right.

We turned, and picked our way slowly across the ground to a cluster of corrugated iron sheds, mainly old and rickety, with the paint peeling. At one end was a newer one, the iron siding still shining silver in our headlights.

The car slid to a stop, its headlights on the silver doors. "Leave the lighst on!!" Da Garda snapped.

We sat motionless, waiting for something to happen. I heard a click from the front. Luis getting his knife ready for action. Da Garda held a revolver in his hand nearest the window. Outside there was only the steady shrill of the cicadas, and far away somewhere the creak-creak of an iron windmill pumping water. It seemed like minutes, all holding our breath, watching, listening. Nothing.

"Okay!" Da Garda said finally. "Come on!"

We all got out, Pete and Luis with knives at their sides, Da Garda still holding his revolver.

"Where is it?" he asked Glenda.

She pointed at the new shed.

"Open it!" he said, pointing his revolver at her. She walked away from us, straight-backed, lithe, towards the door, seemingly unconscious of the revolver trained on her back.

"Its padlocked!" she said without turning around.

Pete moved back to the car, and fetched a tyre-lever from the boot. He jammed it between the hasp and the door, leaned on it heavily, and the lock tore away with an outraged shriek of iron tearing on iron. With a heave, he slid the door back on its track, keeping himself well behind it, leaving Glenda silhouetted against the dark cavern within.

Da Garda held the gun steady on her.

"Bring the car in, Luis!" he ordered, his voice taut with excitement for the first time. Luis moved the car right up to the doorway. Just inside the shed was the silver body of a light plane, one of those twin-seater executive style things that had become so popular with the local tycoons. Da Garda moved forward, little beads of sweat on his face. Pete and Luis crowded in behind me, moving me and then Glenda forward to the plane.

They swung the door open, and Da Garda heaved himself up. Pete and Luis prodded us on, and first Glenda and then I pulled myself up, into the dark cabin. Pete flicked on a cigarette lighter.

Behind the two bucket seats for pilot and mate, there was a black hole, stripped of any interior fittings. Pete held the lighter above his head. The black hole was filled with wooden trays, like the things baker's vans use for delivering bread. Da Garda was down on his knees, scrabbling to throw back some sacking that was ~~xxxxxx~~ draped carelessly over the top trays of the heap. His fingers slid rapidly over the blocks that filled the tray, caressing them, counting. Then he backed off slightly and counted the trays. Eight.

"Jesus!" he said, crooning to himself ecstatically, "Two hundred and sixteen! Jeeesis!" He stood up and dusted his hands.

"By god, baby! You kept them for Felix, huh?" He patted her on the cheek. "Just look at it!" at he told Pete and Luis. "Just look!" He stood back, and we all crowded forward, all except Glenda, who stood unmoving, uninterested.

In the light of Pete's cigarette light, the bricks showed dully yellow. I knew what I was looking at without needing to be told. Even in my sick fear I remember feeling disappointed again at the sight. Gold. Straight from the Rand Refineries, in tapered bricks, dead and uninspiring as lard. Not even the knowledge of the money they represented could make it mean anything special to me. But the quantity of it! I thought of the miserable six missing bars I had been on the trail of. And here were hundreds! A million pounds worth, they'd said. And they weren't talking in telephone numbers either. A million pounds! I knew in that moment that there wasn't a chance that they were going to let me out of there alive. Not after that!

Da Garda pushed Glenda and me out, his revolver on her all the time. Luis fiddled with the control panel of the plane, and a sickly yellow light came on overhead. By its light, Luis and Pete wrestled with the cases, moving them one by one, checking to see they were all full. Da Garda waited, sweating, grinning to himself. When they were satisfied that there were no rocks to make up weight, Da Garda snapped: "All out'." He waited to see them off the premises

before closing the plane door.

Then he came across to Glenda. Her face was still as dead and expressionless as ever, but the weals in the white mask had taken on a greenish hue which made her look quite unearthly. Her eyes were empty, black caverns. Da Garda slapped her heavily, playfully I suppose, on her buttocks, pleased with himself and his own cleverness. She showed no sign of having felt the slap, though it must have hurt.

"So, baby! You kept it all safe, for Felix huh?" he said jocosely, hugely amused.

"I told you I did" she replied emotionlessly. "Now let's share and be done with it."

He threw his head back and gave a great baying laugh of mockery.

"By god! You're good, baby!" He slapped her backside again. And then, turning the jocularly off with a suddenness that surprised, he barked: "No shares, baby! I told you! Your share came from Brendan. When he gets his, you get yours!" He brayed again.

Luis played idly with his knife, watching her as though willing her to jump so that he could use it. Pete casually took a pistol from his pocket, ~~xxx~~ holding it loosely, also watching her. It wouldn't have surprised me if her self-control had snapped. Da Garda was taunting her, and she knew it. He had slapped her about brutally. And now he was robbing her. At least that was how it felt, listening to him then. I thought she might turn and claw him like a tiger.

But we all underestimated the control of Glenda Glennie. She just looked at Da Garda, no sign of feeling, and said in a tight, fierce voice: "Felix da Garda! You'll live to regret that!" That was all. Her chest heaved slightly with emotion. Nothing else.

Da Garda sneered and turned his back on us.

"Can you fly this thing?" he said to Luis, speaking Portuguese now for the first time.

"Sure" Luis said, his lips curling with scorn, his fingers still playing with the knife. "I can fly anything! This thing -" he flicked with his knife negligently towards the plane -

"She's a piece of cake!"

"Check the petrol!" Da Garda ordered.

Luis slouched off. We could hear him pottering around inside the plane, Da Garda watching him closely through the door. He came out and shook his head. "Almost empty!" he said.

"Where's the fuel kept, baby?" Da Garda asked Glenda. She ignored him coldly, as though he hadn't spoken. He came across to her heavily. She made no move to back away. His thick arm came up, and he slapped her again, hard and viciously across the face, snapping her head back. She stood her ground.

"I asked you, baby!" He hissed at her. "Where's the fuel kept?" Silence. The black caverns of her eyes just looked back at him, empty. He slapped her again. Again her head snapped back. Again she looked at him, unmoving.

"By god, baby!" he said, with a great laugh. "I like you! You fight good, good as Felix, huh? Perhaps you come with me baby, huh?" He leered at her. Silence.

He laughed again.

"Go look for some!" he said to Pete. We stood waiting, Da Garda leering at her, smiling fatly to himself.

"There's drums of it in there!" Pete said, coming back, ~~pointin~~ pointing to one of the sheds. "But it looks like we'll have to do it all by hand."

"Okay!" Da Garda said. "Let's get started!"

Luis looked us over deliberately, playing with his knife, his eyes travelling deliberately up and down Glenda's body, his tongue flicking out over his lips.

"Perhaps I should look after these two?" he asked Da Garda, sideways, not looking at him.

My flesh crawled. This must be curtains for me, probably for both of us. Now they would have to kill us, or at least beat us insensible.

Da Garda's pig eyes surveyed us in the same/deliberate way. He took a lot longer over Glenda than he did over me.

"Perhaps you come along with Felix, huh baby? he asked and laughed.

"Perhaps!" she said, even voiced, immobile.

He laughed again.

"Take them! he said to Luis. "Keep them over there in that house. I don't want them here when my back's turned. And I don't want you getting up to any tricks with my girl, huh?"

Luis sneered.

"You keep them there till I call!" Da Garda snapped, riled. Luis looked ~~xxxxxxx~~ surly.

"You wouldn't perhaps forget to call?" he asked, sullenly. "With all that gold around?"

Da Garda let loose a violent Portuguese oath, stopped quickly across and slapped Luis with a backhander across the jaw. His pistol had reappeared, magically, in his fat hand. He held it levelled on Luis' belly.

"You dirty son-of-a-bitch!" he spat, with deadly menace in his voice. "You want I should give you back to Alvado perhaps? You like it in that stinking jail I take you from, huh?"

Luis said nothing. His face looked sullen, but his eyes were burning, no longer vacant, and the knife was no longer twirling in his hand. He held it fighter-fashion, firm and ready. Da Garda glared at him for a moment. Slowly Luis dropped his eyes, and the hand slackened on his knife.

"Watch your step, sonny!" Da Garda hissed, softly, "Or I'll have to do something about you. Now take these two away!"

"You can take them yourself" Luis said, not looking at him. "I'll stay here and fill the plane!"

Da Garda laughed.

"You sonnofabitching punk! You think I leave you two here with a million pounds, huh? On your way, sonny! Go!" He snapped out the command, and turned his back contemptuously on Luis. He knew what he was doing. Luis looked vicious enough to kill. But he turned towards us, poked his knife in the direction of the house and said sullenly; "Walk!"

We walked. Side by side, conscious every pace that Luis with the knife walked close behind. We passed out of the glow of the car's headlights, and into thick dark. Once Glenda caught her foot on something in the dark, and stumbled. Luis chuckled that death's-head chuckle. I put out a hand, and took her arm to steady her, wondering if we would ever reach the house. It was the longest hundred yards I have ever walked. But Glenda gave no

sign of concern. There was no tremble in her arm as we walked.

At the house Luis moved round us, tried the door handle, and then kicked in a pane of glass in ~~the~~ upper part of the door. Without taking his eyes off us and his knife-hand in full view, he reached in, opened the door and waved us in ahead of him. Behind us he struck a match, and we followed the flickering light down a short passage to an open room at the end.

"Light the lamp " he said to me, lighting another match himself before the first died. The thought crossed my mind that if there was ever going to be any chance to jump him, it would be as the second match died, while he was alone and far from the others. But whatever resolution I might once have had, had expired during that walk in the dark, expecting execution with every step. And he made me very aware of the knife in his hand. I ~~struck~~ <sup>struck</sup> a match, and lit ~~the~~ a paraffin lamp that stood on a battered sideboard against one wall.

There was a battered settee and a couple of chairs in the room. The place didn't look much used. There was a small portable radio on the sideboard.

He pointed at the settee with his knife. "Over there!" Glenda and I sat side by side. The settee felt dusty and unclean. Luis sat in a chair opposite, knife dangling before him. His eyes studied Glenda slowly, insolently. Five minutes passed in silence.

"Let's have some music" Glenda said, deliberately, rising slowly to her feet as she spoke. The knife stilled for a moment. He watched every move. She seemed unaware of it, ~~moving~~ <sup>going</sup> slowly across to the sideboard, careful to move smoothly not to startle him to action. With her back towards us, she switched the radio on, and twiddled the knobs. There seemed to be more wobble to her walk than I had noticed before. She fiddled with, getting snatches of sound and static, until she located the Lourenco Marques station giving out pop music.

Then she turned, not looking at Luis or at the knife hanging between his knees. She stood with her back to the sideboard, swaying slightly to the music, twitching a shoulder swaying a hip.

Luis watched her, mesmerised. She was something to look at, even after the beating she had taken, her figure showing to full advantage in the shadowy light. Almost imperceptibly the swaying became a little dance, her feet taking tiny steps back and forth, so that she scarcely moved from where she was. Her hips swayed, and her torso swayed. Luis watched her with his mouth open. She watched Luis.

"Do you dance?" she said to him, not breaking her rhythm.

"Sure!"

"Are you good?"

"Sure!"

She nodded as though she thought he would be. She was putting a bit more body movement into it now, the hip swaying getting rather sexy, interspersed with a few slightly suggestive bumps and grinds. She seemed to have her eyes half closed, dreamy, as though not aware of what she was doing.

"Have you seen my act?" she asked dreamily, extending her steps inches further as she spoke.

His tongue flicked his lips, and he shook his head.

"Pretty good act!" she said casually, swaying more, moving her feet more widely.

"I hear its a hot one!" he said.

She shrugged, indifferently, "She was moving quite considerably now, putting more sway and movement to her dance, imperceptibly building it up, using her body to the full, hips, thighs and bosom, still carefully hanging back against the sideboard. He licked his lips again, and his eyes seemed to burn hotly.

"Give us a showing of it!" he grated, almost in a whisper.

Glenda gave no sign that she had heard, but the dancing changed subtly. She moved forward to give herself room to swing her feet, room to swirl her skirt so that it rose up over her thighs. She was really dancing now, in the middle of the room, changing the tempo, and gradually dropping into the rhythm of her act at Gino's. She leant far back, torso rippling, bosom and thighs flashing to the rhythm of the music.

Her face was no longer expressionless. It was dead, with

the deep-frozen frigidity it had had under the club spotlights. So it hadn't been a trick of the lighting, I realised. It was part of the dance. I was watching her face closely to see what was happening to it. She had moved so the light was behind her now. And as I watched I saw her eyes open gradually from the dreamy, almost closed position they had held before. Those eyes were concentrating on only one thing now. Luis. They never left him for a moment, whichever way she swayed.

Luis' eyes were fixed somewhere else, not on her face. I could appreciate why. At close quarters like that, her dance was a sexy invitation. If I hadn't been sick inside with ~~the~~ fear, I suppose it would have had me panting and biting the carpet too. Sick as I felt, I was watching her face calculating, measuring him, and him ~~watchingxbulgyxeyed~~ staring pop-eyed at her body.

I wondered whether I could cross the room and jump him before he could get his mind back to business, and his knife in action. Perhaps that's what Glenda was enticing him on for? Her body writhed. Her shadow writhed even more grotesquely against the walls, rousing the imagination. Luis was sitting not even noticing me any more, eyes popping as though hypnotised, breathing jerkily through his open mouth, his neck gorged with blood.

I was moving my arms on to the arms of my chair to give me a flying take-off ~~xhnxixjumpedxhim~~ to jump him, when her eyes flicked across to me, and she shook her head at me warningly. Luis wasn't watching her head or her eyes. He was watching her torso, and her hand moving teasingly upwards across it to the white sash at her shoulder. She fiddled it loose as she danced. Slowly, without a break in her rhythm, she drew the white sash down across her bosom, down to her waist, loose. The top of her violet dress came with, peeling slowly down across her. Under it she wore a tiny white bikini-style bra, revealing more than it hid.

Luis was getting close to apoplexy. He had forgotten I was there at all. He had forgotten that Glenda was moving inch by inch closer to him as she danced. He looked as though in a moment he would jump her himself. But she moved as though

unaware of her danger, unafraid. Only by close concentration could I assure myself that she was moving ~~==~~ slowly, ~~=~~ smoothly in on him.

It seemed to take for ever. Her feet flashed and flickered; her skirts whirled high above her thighs, above her tight white pants. Her bikini became a flashing, weaving blur of light and shadow. Luis hands clenched fiercely as though to crush his knife to pulp between his hands, his eyes bulged hotly, and a vein throbbed in the side of his neck. She was getting close to him now and to one side, her dress swirling loose about her waist. I could feel the sweat pouring off me with the tension, wondering what she was going to do, waiting tensely for it so that I could jump for the knife when it came.

It came so suddenly that I didn't even move from my seat. One minute her feet were flashing on the floor. The next a foot swung out without warning, high and fast. A white stiletto heel hit Luis on the side of the head just below the ear before he could move an inch. There was a moment of frozen stillness, as though the moving picture had been stopped dead. No one moved, neither Luis, Glenda nor I. And then he gave a mixed cough and grunt, black blood spurted out over his jacket and collar, and ~~and slowly~~, like a thing in slow motion, he slumped down and down until he rolled out of his chair. His head hit the floor with a crash, and he lay still.

It took me a moment to recover from the shock enough to pick his knife off the floor. My hand was clammy and shaking. Glenda leant with her back against the wall, her eyes closed, her face a ghastly green. Her chest heaved spasmodically as though she was about to be sick. I lifted the sash as gently as I could from where it hung, drew her dress back over her and refixed the clasp at the shoulder. She was trembling violently. I held my arm across her shoulder, trying to still her shaking. It seemed to take several minutes before she could will herself to open her eyes and look at Luis. Somewhere in that expressionless mask I caught a glimpse of horror. She looked deathly sick.

"I suppose we'll have to tie him up", she said at last, slowly struggling with that iron control she had over herself, winning the battle to stand upright and move again. It wasn't necessary.

Luis wasn't going to move again for a long time, if ever. And the thought of having to wrestle with his bloodied body turned my stomach.

I had no idea how long we had before someone came for us. I had lost track of passing time, but I doubted if they could be much longer over the plane. I took Glenda's arm.

"They'll come for us soon" I told her. She nodded. "Do you want to chance it with me - a dash into the veld?"

She shook her head, not looking at me. "I'd never make it in the dark in these shoes" she said in a dead, disinterested voice.

"They'll kill you if they find you here with him!" I said, pointing to Luis on the floor. She nodded again. I was about to argue with her when I heard a shrill whistle from outside, one of those two-fingers-in-your mouth style whistles that carry a long way across the veld. It could only be a call for Luis. If we were going to make a move, it had to be quick.

I grabbed her firmly, and began to pull her with me towards the door. She came without resistance but without volition either. We were in the dark of the passage, the lamplight behind us. I realised, almost too late, that when we reached the doorway we would make a perfect target for anyone with a gun. I froze. I hadn't any plan, just a sick realisation that our time had come.

Glenda gathered her wits before me. She stepped over to a doorway leading off the passage, opened it and pulled me in. It was coal-black. We could see nothing, neither furniture nor window. She leaned back against the wall as though spent, unable to move further.

Another whistle, closer this time, followed by Pete's voice calling: "Hey Luis! Vamos!"

I put my hand on Luis knife in my pocket. I doubted if, even then, I would be able to use it in cold blood on anyone, even Pete. Perhaps if he attacked I would be able to use it on him. But I daren't wait to be attacked. I had to attack first. I had to. But I couldn't use the knife.

I had only one thought. I bent and slipped off one of my shoes, and held it firmly by the toe. It felt heavy enough for a good bashing, hard leather and harder iron-tipped heel. I took

up my position just inside the doorway, backed against the wall, waited. My hand was shaking.

Glenda must have summoned up some last reserve of strength. She came across to me. I could barely hear her move above the tinny sound of the ~~xtikzplaying~~ radio in the next room. She had slipped off her shoes. Leaning against me she whispered: "Give me the knife!" I shook my head, put her hand on the shoe for her to know what I was doing, and whispered back: "Leave it to me."

"They may be together!" she breathed in my ear. "Give me the knife!"

I gave it to her, ~~thinking~~ wondering whether she would be able to use it any better than I. But there wasn't time to argue. I whispered "Me first!" She patted my arm in assent, and we both shrunk back against the wall. I could feel the jamb against my right fist which held the shoe. She was still breathing unevenly and heavily. My heart was thumping so loud it seemed to me they would hear it outside. We waited.

There was another shout from outside, very close to the door this time. "Hey Luis! What the hell you doing in there?"

Careless footsteps sounded on the veraddah, came through the front door and down the passage towards the music and the light. Pete's dark shape passed by our doorway without pausing to look. No one followed.

I stepped out into the passage in my stockinged feet. He began to say again: "Hey Luis..." as I raised my hand high and crashed the heel of my shoe on the back of his head with all the force I could manage. He let out a half-shout, and fell to his knees on the floor. I hit him twice more, trying not to think about. He slumped and lay still. I reached into his pockets, found the pistol and took it.

Glenda was close behind me, the knife in her hand.

"Out quick before Da Garda comes!" she said softly. We went back into the living room, stepping over bodies, lifted a sash window at the back of the house, and climbed through into the dark beyond.

"One each side" I whispered to her, "Whoever can takes him!" She nodded. In the ~~windows~~ light <sup>from the windows</sup> I could see her shocked and staring eyes looking at me, as though measuring whether I were big

enough for Da Garda. It was no time for pride. I showed her the pistol.

"Don't shoot it out from in front!" s\_he whispered fiercely. "He's a dead shot!" She patted my shoulder farewell, and disappeared off to the right. The dark swallowed her up instantly. Her stockinged feet made no sound.

I edged round the house to the left, giving my eyes time to adjust to the blackness.

They had pushed the plane out into the open. The car's headlights were still burning, rather dim and yellow. Near the plane I could see Da Garda still pottering about with something. Something of my old army training came back to me from years before. I slid down on to my stomach. From that level I could see a patch of dark brush not much more than a foot high some way in front of me. Any cover would be better than the awful nakedness I felt exposed out there in the open. I crawled over to it, hugging the dry red dust, until I lay with my head almost in it. I trained the pistol on Da Garda. My hand was shaking, and I knew he was too far away for me to try a shot. I had fired pistols in the army under less stress than this, and I knew that my range was only a matter of yards.

I looked to see where Glenda had got to, but couldn't make out anything in the dark. There was nothing for it but to wait.

The tension got unbearable. Wherever Glenda had decided to go she must have reached by now. And still Da Garda pottered. I couldn't last much longer. Something in me would snap! I scrabbled around in the dirt with my left hand till my fingers closed on a stone. I lay back carefully, using the old grenade-bowling action that seemed to come naturally to mind in that place of blood and violence, and threw it as far as I could.

It fell with a light click half-way between me and Da Garda. He spun round, and his pistol was in his hand. He moved quickly back behind the plane, peering into the dark to see where the sound had come from. I knew that all the advantage was with me as long as he had the light behind him. I let out a single quickly extinguished groan. He stepped like a panther out of the light, into the darkness, moving towards the sound. I had him still silhouetted against the patch of light.

For a big man, he moved very quietly. He was moving towards me warily, one step at a time, stopping between steps to peer and listen. From where I lay his bulk loomed up larger and larger. He was a great menacing shadow, bearing down. I waited for him to get into range, hearing Glenda's words: "He's a dead shot!" in my head, and my hand shaking.

I began calculating the distance. Could I hit him at ten paces? Could I bear to wait there till nine? Eight? Be sure! He's a dead shot! I rested the pistol on my forearm, keeping the sights trained on his heart.

He was not moving my way any more! He was making for the house door. He was going to pass to my side, but at fifteen paces or more! Should I try it at that range? Should I let him go and then run for it? The sweat was pouring coldly down my face and back. If I groaned again, would he come closer, or just plug me from where he was. A dead shot!

Then behind him something moved. It flickered silently across my field of vision like a shadow, passing between him and the light. I don't know how she got there. But she was behind him now, trailing him. For me that was the end. I couldn't pull the trigger now, knowing that I could well miss him and kill her. I was out of the chase. But the menacing bulk of him was still moving, one pace after another, remorselessly <sup>closer</sup> ~~towards me~~. He would have to see me, before long.

He stopped, stood silent for a moment, listening. Then he called softly: "Pete!" Silence.

Then Glenda's voice, said softly, hoarsely: "Here!"

He spun round, fast. But not quite fast enough. There was a flash of silver through the air, and Luis knife aimed at his back caught him full in the chest, just above the heart. At the same moment the pistol in his hand flashed and a shot crashed out. Then he grunted, caught at the knife-handle with his left hand as though to wrench it out, stopped, buckled at the knees, and crashed over on to the ground.

Glenda was standing not more than three yards behind him. I raced over, and caught her before she could fall. Perhaps with that wonderful self-control I need not have bothered. But she

was swaying as though near to collapse, and as I reached her she staggered, and I took her full weight on my arms. I kicked Da Garda's pistol away from where it lay near his body. It disappeared in the dark. If Da Garda moved again he would never find it. Then, with my arms supporting her, she walked - staggered on her own feet, over towards the small pool of orange light that still came from the failing car head-lamps. Only then did I realise she had been hit. There was blood flowing freely down her left leg and over her shoe.

She lifted her skirt and turned to the light. Da Garda's bullet had torn a deep gash high on the outside of her thigh, just above the purple bruise left by his fingers. The blood gushed out.

I made a pad of my handkerchief, and she pressed it over the wound. I ripped off my tie, and tied it round her thigh to hold the pad in place. Through it all she remained silent, without a gasp or cry of any sort. She looked half dead, her face green and drawn as though she had aged suddenly twenty years, and her eyes burnt-out sockets in her head. By the time it was done, the car's battery had almost given up. The lights had faded till there were only glowing red filaments, casting no light at all. I helped her across to the front seat of the car. She slumped in so heavily I thought for a moment she had fainted.

Instead she said in a low voice, almost mumbling: "I had to do it to his face! I couldn't manage it any other way!" Whether she was talking to me or herself was not clear. I told her to sit still and rest, while I fetched a blanket.

I had to pick my back to the house with only the tell-tale glimmer of the house-lamp to guide me. In the passage, Pete was groaning and thrashing about, but Luis lay where he had fallen, still as a corpse, the blood congealed into a great black patch in which his head lay.

With the aid of the paraffin lamp I found a piece of electric flex in the kitchen, attached to a toaster. I ripped the flex out of the toaster, and did a quick but not very thorough job of tying Pete's hands together behind his back. I thought of attaching them to his ankles, which seemed to me what was always

being done in the movies. But the flex wasn't long enough. And in any case Pete didn't look very strong at that moment, while Glenda's condition could well be desperate for all I knew.

I picked a blanket off a bed, got a jug of water from the kitchen and went back to the car, taking the lamp with me. On the way, I retrieved my shoes and hers.

She still looked deathly, but she was sitting up and conscious. The blanket around her, and a few gulps of water seemed to work an improvement of sorts. Leaving the lamp on the ground, I got into the drivers seat. The keys were still in the ignition switch. I tried the starter, knowing nothing would happen. Nothing did. I searched the boot for a starter handle without success. The only other thing to do was to try pushing. That meant she would have to drive, if she was up to it. And I would have to get up enough speed by pushing on my own to turn the engine over. I doubted if I could manage it alone, but tried a few shoves anyway. It rolled, but only just.

Glenda said in a weary voice, grown small now: "What are you going to do?" No tremor in her voice at all, only pain and great weariness.

"What is there to do?" I asked. "If I push the car, can you try and get it started.?"

"There are dongas out there somewhere" she said. "I can't remember where. We'll probably hit one in the dark."

We will have to wait for the light" I said. "And then get you to a doctor."

"Doctor?" she asked, wonderingly. I suppose she had expected me to say 'cops'. I let it go. I wasn't in a mood to argue anything with her. I felt only a great pity and a great admiration for her. Cops didn't figure in it anywhere. Or rather, when the thought of cops did figure, it filled me with nausea. It didn't need much imagination to foresee what they would do with her.

"So you've got yourself your story!" she said after a long silence. Her fingers rubbed softly across the bruise on her cheek. I didn't care a damn about the story. I was feeling old and beat, wallowing in sorrow, for her.

"To hell with the story!" I said. "How's the leg?"

She felt the bandage with her fingers.

"I think its still bleeding!"

I fetched the lamp and had a look. The handkerchief was soaked through and useless. I stripped off my shirt, tore it into strips, and made a better job of the bandaging this time. I suppose it hurt her fiercely, but you wouldn't have known it from anything she said or did. She touched my fingers with hers in a 'thank you' gesture. They were cold. The night air was cold, and a thin highveld wind was getting up, biting edges prickling my skin as the sweat dried.

I wound up the window. The car interior gradually warmed. We sat so long that I began to wonder whether she was asleep, or perhaps fainted. I said softly: "Does nothing frighten you? Ever?"

She opened her eyes and looked at me.

"You mean guns and things?" she asked, speaking in a voice that seemed to come from a great depth.

I nodded. "Yes. And thugs. And men like Da Garda. And getting hurt." ~~Or even killed?~~

She shook her head.

"You know, Hayward. There's only one thing that has ever frightened me. And that frightens me so much that I'll never shake it off." I thought she must be talking of dying. It seemed a bad moment to take her up on it. But she waved a hand vaguely in the direction of the plane and said: "Does all that - all that gold out there mean nothing to you?" I thought that she too wanted to change the subject. And in truth, I had almost forgotten about the gold. It had become somehow unimportant in the whole battle of just staying alive.

"Not much" I said, and thought about it. "Not on that scale. It's beyond my range. Like the Crown Jewels. In small pieces, I suppose it means something - clothes, a place to live, freedom to travel. But not like that."

"I envy you!" she said, and laid her head back against the seat and closed her eyes.

"Why? Does it mean so much to you?"

"I envy you" she said, as though I hadn't interrupted, "and ~~in~~ the way you talk of freedom, as though you buy it with gold. ~~?~~

I said nothing. It wasn't a night for philosophy. She sat with her eyes closed for a long time.

"I used to think the same," she said at last. "Well I've got it now, the gold. And this is where it's got me."

"What did it mean to you?" I asked.

"That gold? Freedom, I suppose. Just freedom."

"From what?"

"From fear, Hayward. From fear, that's all."

"Fear of what?" I asked, knowing that I had never met anyone who seemed to be unafraid.

She went off on a tangent. Or so it seemed at first.

"Have you ever been hungry?" she asked. "Really hungry. So hungry that it hurts even to think about it?"

"Not really" I answered, thinking that she was beginning to wander. "A bit pinched now and again. But never anything desperate."

"They say that once you've learnt to ride a bicycle you never forget. Being hungry is like that, you never forget. I don't suppose you'll be able to understand that. But as long as you live you never forget what it's like, tearing in your insides and in your mind till you can't think of anything else or feel anything else."

"And this gold would get you free of that?" I asked.

"Not of that" she said sadly. "Not of that. But of other things. Of things you do to fight the hunger off. Things like this -" she waved a hand to encompass it all, Pete, Luis, Da Garda, the gold - "Things like dancing! Things like Brendan and Steele! ~~Things like~~ Things like Gino's! All of it."

"Dancing?" I said, surprised. "But you dance so wonderfully! How can you want to be done with that?" I wasn't sure that I understood her well. But I wanted then desperately to understand, to get behind that mask and find out what made Glenda Glennie the way she was. I wanted to reach out and touch her somewhere where she would feel ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~human~~ touch of sympathy and warmth, to warm her away from her frozen immolation within herself. I was trying to find the key, so that I could breathe life back into her. It wasn't that I thought she was dying from her wound, but that

inside she was already dead. Only the flame of her courage remained, burning in the ashes. That was how it felt.

"Once" she said, "I loved dancing more than anything. I would rather have danced than eat or speak or see. But now, I hate it worse than anything I've ever done, worse than anything I can think of. If you asked me to dance now, I think I would be sick.

"But hunger's a disease, Hayward. Once it gets you, there's no cure."

"And it got you?"

"It got me. So bad that it hurts to think of it, even now. So I danced for money, and I ate. And that took the joy from it; but the fear of hunger stayed on. So I danced more. I worked at it. I danced better and better, but the fear was there, always driving me on, further, further, never leaving me alone."

I wanted to tell her this was sick talk, scream at her, shake her, make her see that she had made her way to the top rungs of her trade where she was safe, assured. But I couldn't find the words to do it softly, gently. She had been battered enough for one evening. I put out my hand and took hers. Her cold fingers curled around mine. It was small help.

"There's no end to it you see?" she said. "'You go on and on and on. As far as your talent will take you. And then you're a star at Gino's."

"It has its compensations" I said. "Clothes, security, a flat with a view looking down on the world!"

"Finished!" she said. "The only thing you ever loved to do is killed, finished. You've got your compensations, and you hate the thing that got you there. You hate your dance, you hate your audience. But most of all you hate yourself."

"So this was to be a way out of that?" I asked.

She nodded, wordless. I began to understand now that deadness that came over her face as she danced. She must have been screwing herself up against her self disgust and her hate of it, just to keep on.

She seemed to be slumping in her seat, as though the weight of her body was becoming too much for her to support. I freed my hand from hers, slipped my arm around her shoulders and drew her

over to me, so that she was resting against me, her head drooped on my shoulder. She took my hand in hers again.

"You're a person, Hayward!" she said, inconsequentially. I said nothing.

"Do you know what it is to be a non-person?". I shook my head. She thought for a while.

"I was a person once. When I started. People talked to me. They either liked me or didn't like me. But I was a person. Human. But then I danced and became a star, you see? A name in lights. People stopped talking to me. They talked about me, stared at me, competed for me. I became a trophy, a piece of property, like a yacht or a country estate or something, something you try to grab and carry away with you. No one liked me any more, or disliked me either. I just stopped being a person. They grabbed at me. They tried to get their claws on, to own me. I became a graet gold-spangled property to take out and dangle before the envious eyes of others - 'See what Ive got!

"So I'd killed it all you see?" she said in a sad, far-away voice. "I'd killed my love for dancing, and I'd killed myself. I'm not alive any more, not as a person. ~~I'm~~ I've made myself into a king-size trophy to hang on a chain, like that thing on Steele's key ring!"

"Brendan?" I asked.

"Brendan!" she replied hollowly. "And others before him. And ~~there would be~~ others after him, ~~on~~ on. Once you're hooked on a golden chain, cased in glamour, ~~there~~ there are no more people near you. Only hungry little men like Steele, flashy showy men like Brendan, queueing up to take over where the last one loses interest."

It was as bitter a speech as I had ever heard, said in sad, unembittered, just deathly weary tones. I held her close, not wanting to say anything, wanting only to cry and to feel her hands warm up under my touch.

The paraffin lamp had burned down and finally gone out by that time. It was still very dark, and outside only the soft sighing of the wind. On the horizon I could just make out a lighter strip of sky. It would soon be light enough to move. And I knew that I didn't want to move, then or ever. Moving meant

doctors. And doctors led to cops. The thought of that courage and strength and beauty withering slowly from despair in a grey police cell blotted every other consideration from my mind.

"So all this?" I asked, "All this gold? What difference could it have made?"

"It was the end of it all," she answered, heartbreak in her voice now. "It was a dream I'd dreamed ever since I became a property. If this had gone right, I would have taken my share and gone. Far away somewhere, where no one knows me. Where I would never dance again. Where I would become just a person again, so that people would talk to me, and treat me as though I were human."

"You could have taken it!" I said. "Before Da Garda got to you. You could have taken it and gone!"

"It was too late then. Too late. Before I could get at it, Steele was dead and Brendan was dead. And the dream had got all slimed over with jealousies and killings, <sup>so</sup> that I didn't want it any more. It couldn't have done me any good. Just something else I had dreamed of which had turned hateful in my hands. I didn't want it any more."

"That wasn't the impression you gave Da Garda!" I pointed out, trying to temper the tone of accusation in my voice.

"Do you think its so easy, Hayward, to give up a dream you've dreamed and worked for for months and months. Even after it's gone sour, do you think it's easy to give up altogether? Right up to tonight, when already I had decided I didn't want it any more - right up to tonight, something hung on in my mind, telling me 'Perhaps it will be possible. Perhaps you can still make it.' ~~Hope~~ Hope!" she said sadly. "Hope! That's all that hangs on, long after your mind has told you that there's nothing in it for you. So still, right to the end, I had a little hope, just a little, that perhaps the dream could still come true. Perhaps!" She sounded so hopeless as she talked of hope, that she had me close to tears.

"It's still all there" I said. "You could take it now, and go."

She looked up at me, and slid her hand up to stroke my cheek gently.

"It's too late" she said, infinitely sad, her voice hollow.

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