

GLORIA GOES IT ALONE

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NEWSREELDIJON, FRANCE, SEPTEMBER 16th, 1890

Augustin Le Prince was a genius. His brother Albert thought he was a king-size pain in *la derrière*. What good were brains if they didn't put food on the table? The two men were arguing on the platform as they waited for the 2:42 train to Paris. Albert would be glad to be rid of him. It was hard to say no to his little brother but he had already squandered more than his fair share of their mother's inheritance.

"Think of it as an investment," Augustin told him. "Before the year's out I will pay you back three-fold. Moving pictures, *mon frère*. It is like magic."

"Exactly," Albert had countered. "There is no such thing as magic. You've burned your own money. I won't let you burn mine."

"But I showed you the films. You've seen the proof. With your own eyes."

"A carnival trick. That's all. There's no future in it."

The train was pulling into the station.

"You won't change your mind?"

Albert shook his head. "Not a chance. I'm sorry." He opened his arms to embrace his little brother.

Augustin turned away and climbed aboard. He did not say goodbye.

The carriage was empty. Good. He did not feel like company. His creditors were not yet baying for blood, but they would be if he didn't pay them soon. He had been counting on his brother's help. He should have known better. Albert had no imagination. He was a bore. A miserly, penny-pinching bore. If he could just hold off payment until after the New York exhibition then things would be different. Moving pictures were the future and he had laid the cornerstone.

He opened his case and began working on the forms for the patents office. There were still a few niggles to iron out. The carriage door opened and a fresh faced youth entered.

"Okay by you if I sit here?" asked the youth, in English.

Le Prince was hopeless with accents but he could tell the boy was American. His lime green chequered suit was way too brash for European tastes. He nodded his assent to the request. He managed a tired smile that faded from his lips in the face of the Remington Derringer that was pointing at him.

"You are Augustin Le Prince?" the youth asked.

Le Prince thought for a moment. He was no stranger to danger. He had faced death during the siege of Paris back in 1870, but that was a long time ago. Was he prepared to fight it out with an armed man who hadn't even been born during the Franco Prussian War?

"Well?" asked the young man.

"Well, what?"

"Are you Monsieur Le Prince?"

Le Prince shrugged. "It depends."

"Whaddaya mean it depends? You either is or you ain't."

"If saying yes means you kill me, then I have to say, no, I am not."

The man frowned. Le Prince noticed that his gun hand was shaking.

"Monsieur, perhaps, while we talk, you would point the pistol away from me? I cannot help noticing you are nervous. That trigger is sensitive. It would be a shame for you to kill me by mistake."

"You are Le Prince. I know it. I seen the photos."

Le Prince sighed. This was the trouble with building for the future. The future was money and people always became unreasonable where money was concerned. He stared at the young man. He did not have the look of a killer. He had the look of a miserable overgrown child.

"So, you are a hired killer? For whom do you work, may I ask?"

"I'm not a killer," said the boy. "I'm a detective. I was hired to find you."

"And kill me?"

The boy nodded.

"You do not want to?"

"I need the money."

"We all need money. Alas, I have none."

"These people don't fuck around. I have to do it."

"So, who wants me dead?" asked Le Prince. "It is a reasonable question."

The young man shook his head. "You don't know him. He paid in advance."

"Could you not just run away with his money?"

"No. He knows where I live. He knows where my wife lives. He would kill her."

"Ah. A pity."

"He knows where your family live too. He said if this doesn't work, we were to hurt your family. Your son."

Le Prince shuddered. He needed a drink. He reached for the flask in his coat pocket. The young man did not stop him. He offered him a drink.

"For Dutch courage?"

The young man accepted and drank. "Thanks."

"So, you kill me. What then?"

"I throw your body in the river. You vanish."

"Easier said than done, *mon ami*. We are on a train. And if you fail, your people hurt my family?"

"That's about the size of it. Yeah."

"Could we work something out, perhaps?"

"I wish we could."

Le Prince had another drink. He could overpower the boy. He was sure of it. But then his family would be in danger. His boy. His wife. His daughter. Money bought protection, but he had no money.

"What if I just disappeared? You could tell this mystery man you killed me?"

"What's to stop you turning up again? Then he'd kill me."

"I wouldn't turn up again. I love my family. I don't want them to get hurt. Listen, I'm hungry. Do you want a sandwich? My sister in law made some for the journey? It's only cheese."

The young man thought for a moment. "I am hungry. It ain't that cheese that smells of cabbage is it? I hate cabbage?"

Le Prince shook his head. "Cabbage is good for you. But no. It's brie. It's good." He took the sandwich from his case and unwrapped it. It was a large stick, filled with cheese and tomato. He broke the stick in two and handed one half to the gunman.

"Thanks." The gunman opened the top of his sandwich and removed the tomato, holding it between thumb and forefinger he said, "I'm sorry to be so rude, it's just..."

"You do not like tomato? *Mon Dieu!* Cabbage, tomato...Whatever next?" He took the tomato from the gunman and put it directly in his mouth.

They both ate.

"It's good," said the gunman. "So creamy."

"Mmm. Creamy. Yes. "

They continued eating.

"We have to work something out," said the gunman at length. "We have men posted at all the stations between here and Paris. I don't want to kill you."

"I could jump out of the train."

The young man nodded. "And you won't come back?"

"Maybe you could let my family know?"

"No. Too dangerous. You disappear for good or I kill you."

Le Prince nodded. "Right."

He reached for his bags, but the young man placed a hand on them.

"No. Your bags stay with me. Proof. The man that paid me wants your bags."

"Of course he does." Le Prince had another drink. In one way this was a blessing. He didn't have to worry about bankruptcy anymore. On the other hand, he was going to lose his life's work. Then again, at least he wouldn't lose his life, and neither would his children.

He stood up and offered the gunman his hand. The gunman shook it.

"Good luck."

"And to you. A word of advice if I may?"

"Yeah?"

"You should give some thought to a change of profession. This man you work for, he is dangerous. Killing another man in cold blood is not something you can do easily. Maybe you too should disappear."

The young man nodded. "I'll bear that in mind."

The train was running through open fields. There was nobody in sight. Not even a farmer. The perfect spot to disappear.

"Au revoir."

He leaped, and tumbled down the embankment into history.

NEWSREELLOS ANGELES: 1912

Mario Marinelli waited at the roadhouse on the dirt track known as Sunset Boulevard and fantasized about fucking the wives of all the men he had killed. He had killed many men and he always made a point of fucking their wives, through fair means or foul. Even the ugly ones. Some weren't too happy about the arrangement of course, but he was always surprised at how many were. Some even seemed grateful. For Marinelli it was the least he could do. He looked on it as an act of penance.

At fifty two years of age, Mario Marinelli prided himself on his looks and figure. His employees assured him he could pass for thirty and that pleased him. Most of his victims were deadbeats, lowlife's that had lost the battle with gambling, booze or dope years ago and were dragging their loyal, faithful wives down with them. He was doing them and society a big favor. Occasionally he had to stray from his usual course and deal with honest civilians, but only as a last resort and only when they could not be relied upon to keep their mouths shut.

It was a warm evening and he sat on the porch watching the sun go down over the orange groves. He thought about the evening ahead. He would take his time with the reporter then he would go out to one of the restaurants he owned and celebrate in style before taking in a movie at the nickelodeon he was thinking of buying. After that he would drop in on the widow. He smiled. He was looking forward to it. He was one of the community's richest and most respected businessmen. Not bad for the son of an immigrant ice cream seller from the asshole of Italy. He heard the throb of an automobile drawing near and smiled. The package was bang on time. He went inside and unlocked the door to the basement. He lit the gas lamp and hung it from a hook in the ceiling. A hole had been dug in the centre of the floor, not as deep as he would like, but deep enough. He glanced at the tools on the table and ran his finger along the blade of the carving knife. Sharp. Like him.

He heard footsteps crossing the floor overhead. A man was sobbing and sniffing. The basement door opened and Rex Riley came down the stairs. He had a fresh scratch across his cheek.

"Evenin' boss," said Rex.

"You been in a cat fight?" Marinelli asked, biting the end off his cigar and spitting it into the hole in the ground.

"The little faggot put up a fight. We had to calm him down," said Rex.

The sound of sobbing grew louder. Shadows loomed at the top of the stairs. Marinelli looked up at his prey. The thin young man had been in the wars. Both his eyes were swollen and blood was crusting around his nose and mouth. He saw Marinelli and tried to back up the steps but Lou-Lou Lawson, Marinelli's hired muscle blocked his escape. Lou-Lou gave the man a kick that sent him flying down the stairs to land in a heap at Marinelli's feet.

"Hiya, kid," said Marinelli.

The young man tried to stand but something had broken in the fall and he couldn't move. "Please, Mister Marinelli. Please. I need a doctor. I... please."

"A little late for favors, Mister Weiss."

"Please? I'm sorry."

"Didn't I tell ya not to write no more horse shit about me? Did I or didn't I?"

"You did."

"An' what did you do?"

"I wrote about you."

"What did you write?"

"Horse shit. I'll tell everyone I made it up. Honest to God."

Marinelli shrugged. "Makes no difference anyhow. I got the whole city in my pocket, kid. You should'a realized that before ya tried makin' a name for yourself."

Weiss nodded. His teeth were chattering. "I know. So it won't matter. Please. I got a wife. She's expecting." A fat tear rolled down the young reporter's cheek.

Marinelli sighed and turned away. He hadn't known the wife was pregnant. This was not part of the plan at all. He would have to have words with the wife of this reporter. Not that it mattered really, but it made things trickier. His own father had died when he was just a toddler. He didn't like making kids into orphans. It fucked them up big time. He turned back to the reporter.

"I must be goin' soft in my old age."

The reporter's heart leapt. He was going to live?

"You know, I was gonna cut you up? Bit by bit?"

Weiss tried to crawl away but Lou-Lou caught him and dragged him back.

"Relax, kiddo. It's your lucky night. I changed my mind," said Marinelli. "I didn't know you was gonna have a kid."

"Thank you," sobbed Weiss. "Thank you."

"You should fuckin' thank me. I was lookin' forward to it."

He took the pistol from the band of his pants and shot the reporter in the head. He smiled as he handed the gun to Rex. It was strange how things turned out. Back in the naughty nineties he had killed Weiss's father too. Now here he was ensuring that yet another generation of the Weiss family grew up without a father.

"Serendipity, Rex," he said.

"Huh?"

It was pointless trying to explain things. He shook his head and climbed the stairs.

"Clean up in here, boys. I'm gonna pay the widow a visit."

"Have a good night, boss," said Lou-Lou. "See ya tomorrow."

MAIN FEATUREFIRST REELNEW YORK: OCTOBER 1912SCENE ONE

The big Irishman grimaced as the sun broke through the clouds over Coney Island. His clothes were too tight. One good stretch and he would bust right out of them, ruining his only good dress suit. He clenched his big labourer's hands into fists as he saw the girl of his dreams walking with another man. She was laughing, enjoying the sights and smells of the fair. Her companion stopped and kissed her hand. She fluttered her eyelashes at him. The Irishman cursed and strode forward, pushing an old gentleman out of his path. He grabbed his rival by the neck and began throttling him, shaking him back and forth like a dog with a rat in its jaws. The girl screamed and beat at his back. He turned to look at her and shoved her with one hand, while the other continued to strangle his rival. He felt his suit rip under the arms.

"Cut!"

The director stormed over to them. "For Chris'sakes, what's that suit made of? Paper? You're playing a millionaire, not a bum. Go get another suit."

The big Irishman looked down at the director's angry face. "I ain't got another."

The girl giggled at the Irishman's innocent awkwardness, attracting the director's attention.

"What's so fuckin' funny? You think this is funny? You just ruined the shoot, sweetheart."

"She didn't do nothing," said the Irishman, his voice even, calm almost.

"Exactly," said the director. "You're killing her boyfriend and she just watches. I want her screaming the place down. Imagine the big ugly Paddy here is tryin' to kiss you. Can you do that, sweetheart? Do you know what scream means? Did they teach you how to scream in Idiot School?"

The Irishman's fist connected with the director's nose, dropping him instantly.

"Go fuck yourself. "

The director held his nose between his hands as he sat on the wet sidewalk, his eyes streaming with tears. "You're fired. Both of you. You're through in this business."

The Irishman shrugged, nonchalantly, gave the girl his arm and walked away. Someone in the crowd began applauding.

"I'm hungry. You wanna grab something to eat?"

"You got any scratch?" she asked. "Only I don't think we're gonna get paid."

"Don't worry about it, I'm a regular Rockefeller." He put his hands in his pockets and counted the loose change. He could treat her to an ice cream. If it was ice cream that she wanted.

They ate their ices in the rain, sheltering under the awning of a barber shop.

"So, what you doing wasting your time in flickers?" he asked.

She frowned. "Flickers are easy money between real jobs."

He raised an eyebrow, and she blushed under the gaze of his cold blue eyes.

"Real jobs?"

"I'm an actress, daddy. I just finished *The Governor's Lady* with David Belasco."

The Irishman's huge face cracked into a grin. "Apple sauce."

"Excuse me?"

"I saw *The Governor's Lady*. I don't recall seeing you."

She swallowed.

"I'm sure I'd remember someone as pretty as you." It was added almost like an afterthought between licks of ice cream.

The smile returned to her eyes. There, he'd said it. He sure had taken his time about it though. He was a cool customer this one, used his words sparingly. Self assured too and controlled. She liked that. She looked at him properly for the first time. He was kind of cute, a real baby grand. All brawn and no brains. He was watching the people walking by and that bugged her. What was he looking out for? It wasn't gentlemanly. Men usually only had eyes for her. What was with the big dope?

"Okay," she said at length. "So, I'm not big on Broadway. A gal can dream can't she?"

He nodded. "Yep. Personally I think you're wasting your time."

She felt as if she'd just been slapped. Nobody talked to her like that. "What? Why? You don't even know me."

He carried on licking his ice. Calm. Like he had all the time in the world. "I got ears. I ain't never heard no actress on Broadway talk like you."

The rage inside her ignited. She shoved her ice cream into his face and walked away.

He caught up with her on the corner, grabbing her roughly by the arm, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

She looked at him and began to laugh. She couldn't help herself. The cone was still stuck to his face giving him a big pointy nose. She loved the fact that he had pursued her down the street without bothering to remove it. She reached out and pulled it off his face and with a finger dabbed some of the ice cream and licked it.

"I hate wasting good ice cream and you've ruined a perfectly good cone with that big Irish hooter o' yours."

He stuck out a hand, big as a spade, calloused and rough. She took it. She liked the way it felt.

"I meant don't waste time on Broadway dreams." He removed a grubby looking handkerchief from his jacket pocket and wiped himself clean. "With your looks and my brains we could make something out of the flickers."

She laughed. "My looks and your brains? Now who's talkin' apple sauce?"

He didn't laugh. The sky blue eyes, fringed with ice cream, stared at her, impassive and patient. "I mean it. You don't need a voice in pictures. And you, why you're just about the prettiest girl I ever seen."

She waited for him to make a pass at her, but it didn't happen. He may just as well have been talking about the weather. He was merely stating a fact. There was something different about this guy. He might look like a dumb mick, but there was something inside, driving him. She decided to stick around a while and find out what it was.

"I could murder a whiskey," she said at length.

He sighed. "You know what I said about Rockefeller?"

"Yeah?"

"Well I meant Charlie Rockefeller. He's a bum I know who's down on his luck."

She laughed. "I knowed it." She looked in her purse. "C'mon. My treat."

Now it was his turn to look as if he had been slapped. "I... I couldn't."

"Why? Coz I'm a woman?"

"No. It's just..." He wracked his brains for a better reason. "Yeah. Coz you're a woman."

"Consider it payback for that crack you made about my voice. You want me to forgive you, you let me buy you a drink."

He thought for a moment. There were worse ways of doing penance. He sighed. "Irish?"

"Is there another kind?" Her eyes twinkled with mischief.

He looked at her and smiled. Yes, there was definitely something about this girl.

It was a dive, but it was warm. In the corner a man was playing *'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling'* on the pianoforte. He tasted the whiskey. Savoring it. She did the same only in large gulps, like she was dying of thirst. He stared at her, taking in the view.

"You gonna teach me how to drink, Irish?" she said, slightly defensive.

"If I had the money."

She winked. "I'm buying." She downed it and ordered two more large ones before he could protest. "So, what was you saying about my looks again?"

He shrugged, non-committal, "Your looks and my brains. There's money to be made."

"I got a mirror. I know what I look like, and so far, apart from you gettin' our asses canned I ain't seen much evidence of your brains. So, 'scuze me, please, if I seem sceptical."

He looked at her with renewed interest. Maybe she was more than just an exceptionally pretty face. "Theatre's dead."

"Yeah, sure. Course it is. So tell me Brainy, if theatre's been goin' for centuries how come it's dead all of a sudden?"

"I mean it. The flickers are the next big thing. I'm gonna make you rich."

"You're forgettin' something, genius."

"What?"

"We're through in this business, remember?"

"You mean that piker back there? It don't matter what he said."

"So why d'yer sock him? Coz he called you a big ugly mick?"

"No, I socked him coz he don't know how to talk to a lady."

"I ain't no lady."

"I didn't know that at the time. He made me swear too. There were women and children present." He was blushing, ashamed of his lack of self control.

She took a cigarette out of her purse. "An Irishman who don't cuss. Now I've seen it all. Say, I can't keep calling you Irish, what's your name?"

"Joe. Joe Kelly."

"Okay, 'Irish' it is."

He watched her put the cigarette to her mouth. "You ain't gonna smoke that, are you?"

She sparked up, "Nope. I'm gonna eat it." She blew smoke at him and then offered her hand. "I'm Gloria. Gloria Fettle."

"Not any more, sweetcheeks. You wanna make it big we gotta make you sound like you look. Beautiful. Gloria's fine. But Fettle? No way. You need a name with class. How about Garnet? Gloria Garnet?"

"Nah. Sounds like a type of duck."

He looked puzzled. "A duck? What kind of duck?"

"I dunno. Do I look like a duckologist? It sounds like a duck that's all."

"Fine. Fine. How's about Graves?"

She shuddered.

"Granger? Gemstone? Grace?"

"Grace I like. Grace I could go for. Maybe."

He smiled and drained his glass, slamming it empty back on the counter like an auctioneer's gavel concluding a sale. "Grace it is. Gloria Grace. GG, siren of the silver screen."

"I could listen to you talk like that all day, but I got places to be." She got up to leave.

He remained sitting, staring at her. "Where you going?"

"I'm dancing. In a show. I gotta go home and get ready."

He laughed. "Sure."

This guy was really getting under her skin. "It's true. Come see me if you like."

"Yeah... Maybe."

"What, you can't afford it? Just tell the guy on the door you're my brother. Here's the address." She pulled a crumpled handbill out of her purse and handed it to him. "See you around, Irish."

He looked at the handbill. It was for the Olympia in Times Square. *"Thrill to the Amazing Swami Yogini. See the world's only flying dwarf. Fall in love with the Naughty Wonder Girls."* He wondered if Gloria Fettle was a naughty wonder girl. Quite possibly. With the right clothes, the right hair and a good story he could see the men of America really falling for Gloria Fettle. Hell, the girl was stunning, he could fall for her himself. He glanced at the clock on the wall. He better get moving.

SCENE TWO

Joe Kelly's lodging house was cheap. Not cheap and cheerful, alas, more cheap and nasty. He had lived there ever since stepping off the boat from Ireland back in 1908. Four years. Four years in Hell's Kitchen. Time certainly flies when you're having fun, and in a strange way, those years had been fun. Since turning his back on the family farm in Cork, he had found himself reborn in the new world. In those four years he had worked the docks from dusk til dawn, before discovering the flickers. They had changed his life and he knew they were going to change the world.

He had signed on as an extra with almost all the major New York studios, getting regular work as a heavy. The more he worked the more he realized he didn't want to pose for the cameras. He wanted to be behind them, telling the stories. In all the pictures he had appeared in he felt they were doing something wrong. He couldn't put his finger on what it was, it just didn't feel real. He longed for the chance, an opportunity to put his ideas into practise. His head was full of fantastic ideas. Of visions. He knew what the great American public wanted to see and it wasn't this hammy second rate shit being

pedalled by the studios. He would grab this fledgling industry by the balls and blaze a trail. It made his heart soar and pulse race when he had these flights of fancy. What was it someone had told him once? *The flight of fancy hath no end.* He wasn't too sure what it meant, but it sounded right. It sounded appropriate. He had made it his own personal motto.

The entrance to his tenement block brought this particular flight of fancy to an abrupt end, replacing it with one far darker and realistic. "Who the hell are you trying to kid, Irish? Film maker? Yeah right. Get on the next boat back to Cork, Paddy, you're wasting your time." He sighed. There was one very good reason why he was so driven. That reason lay dead and buried back in Cork. He could never go back. He knew if he did it wouldn't be long before he would be dead and buried with it.

Shaking his head to dismiss the dark thoughts that plagued him every day of his life he pushed open the door from the street calling out to Sandra, the landlady's daughter; "Saaaandra! You got a minute?"

A grimy face scowled down at him from over the top floor banister. "Whaddaya want?"

"To see your lovely face, sweetheart. Surely that's all any man could want?"

Sandra was the closest thing he had to a friend here in the new world. She had the face, build and temperament of a prizefighter, but Joe enjoyed her company, he had even taken in a few flickers with her when he was in funds. Joe looked on her as a pal and drinking companion rather than a possible girlfriend. She, on the other hand, loved him with a fierce and secret passion.

Sandra belched loudly as he reached the top landing.

"Refined as ever, my love."

"Fuck you." Sandra punched him hard on the shoulder, almost sending him rolling back down the stairs.

"Sandra, how d'you feel about doing me a favor?"

"If you ain't got the rent, you gotta talk to Ma, and you know it."

"It's not the rent. I'm offering you the chance to go down in history, kid."

"Yeah? Well I ain't murdering nobody if that's what you're after?" As an afterthought she added, "Unless it's you?" She cackled, delighted with her own wit.

Joe smiled. "Yeah. Hilarious. Look, you know that big break I'm always talking about? Well it's about to happen but I need your help."

Sandra had kept her feelings for Joe to herself, but deep down, she loved it whenever she caught a glimpse of him on the screen. Sure you had to watch carefully or you'd miss him, but nobody else in the neighborhood knew anyone who'd been in pictures. She was proud of Joe. She believed in him. She could see herself stepping out with him when he made it big. Maybe one day, when he was a big noise, he would ask her to be his leading lady. Why not? She knew she had just as much going for her as the Biograph Girl.

"What I gotta do?" she asked.

"Fix this." He held up his arm to reveal the rip in his suit.

Her face fell.

"Come on, Sandra." He pinched her cheeks playfully. "You know you want to."

"Do that again an' I'll rip your fuckin' head off."

Joe backed away, laughing. "Come on, please. I need to look my best."

She looked at him carefully. "What's that sticky stuff on your collar."

"Ice cream."

"Fuckin' idiot. Hand it over. I'll give it a clean."

He took off the jacket.

"Pants too. You got the cuffs all covered in shit."

He looked down. "It's not shit. It's..."

"Do I look like I give a fuck what it is? Give."

He dropped his trousers and handed them to Sandra.

"Your underwear needs a scrub too."

"My underwear's fine, kid."

"You can't blame a gal for trying."

Sandra's attempt to look playful only succeeded in making her look scary and sinister.

Joe thought it best to move the subject on. "When can I get them back?"

"When I say so." She opened the door to her apartment and slammed the door in his face.

Entering his own room, he kicked off his shoes and lay down on the lumpy bed, listening to the sounds of the neighborhood. Damn his memories. Why did they always take him back to Cork?

SCENE THREE

Gloria Fettle had been thinking about Joe all day. She couldn't get him out of her head and she couldn't understand why. Richer and better looking guys were forever throwing themselves at her and this guy hadn't even tried to kiss her. Why, if she hadn't given him that handbill, he would have just let her walk out of the bar and out of his life forever. Maybe that was what attracted her to him. There was no bushwa about him. When he said he was going to make her rich, it was like he was a hundred per cent sure it was going to happen. He wasn't just spinning her a line to get her into the sack. Making her way into the dressing room she shared with the other chorus girls, she wondered whether he would make it to the show, or if he was still stranded in Coney Island without a cent to his name.

"Something on your mind, dear?" said Lady Garrideb, a faded red-head in her late forties with a strong British accent. She was the boss's wife and it was her job to keep the Wonder Girls in line and stop them from getting into trouble with the rest of the acts on the bill. Gloria liked Lady Garrideb, she swore like a longshoreman and drank like a

fish. She was a tough ol' bitch too. None of the girls messed with Lady G and if they did, they soon learned the error of their ways.

Gloria decided to confide in her. "There's a bimbo I met today. He's a bit of a goof but I kinda like him."

Lady Garrideb smiled and placed a cigarette in the end of a long ivory holder before lighting it. "I fuckin' knew it. You're in love. Hey girls, Gloria's in love."

The rest of the Naughty Wonder Girls giggled and threw in a few catcalls. Gloria ignored them.

"It's not funny. He says he can make me rich."

This brought a renewed burst of derision from the girls.

"Oh yeah? Course he can. Different country, same old lines," sighed Lady Garrideb.

"Take my advice an' give him the old heave-ho now, before it's too late."

Gloria shook her head. "No. This guy's different. He didn't try to make me. He wants to put me in the flickers."

Lady Garrideb shuddered. "You're on the slippery slope with that fucker, girl an' no mistake. Flickers? Fuckers more like. Give him his way an' he'll have yer bloomers off before yer can raise a fart."

"I invited him to the show tonight." Gloria was beginning to wish she hadn't opened her mouth. He probably wouldn't show anyway.

Lady Garrideb stared at Gloria and thought for a moment. "Tell you what, I'll get my Stan to keep an eye out for him. He's good at spotting wrong-uns."

"No. I... Aww, go on then."

SCENE FOUR

Sandra's mother was sleeping off the effects of her afternoon drinking session. Her snores reminded Joe of a ship's engine, low and constant. If she had been awake, she would have screamed blue murder at the sight of Joe and her daughter eating the pie she had taken in lieu of rent from the family in the back room.

Joe was glad she was asleep. It was the first proper meal he had eaten in days.

"Is my suit ready? I've gotta get a wiggle on."

"Course it's ready," said Sandra, spitting pieces of pie as she spoke. "What's the rush?"

"It's a long walk."

"You can take my bike."

"Really?" Joe was surprised. Sandra had the only bicycle in the neighborhood and to her it was worth more than any treasure.

"If you take me with you."

"Sure, my pleasure. I was gonna suggest it anyhow."

Sandra beamed with excitement. "Yes! You great big Irish fucker!" She burst into an improvised little song and dance, *"We're hittin' the town, we're hittin' the town, me an' the big Irish fucker ain't foolin' aroun', coz we're hittin' the town!"*

"Shh. You'll wake your Ma." Joe covered his mouth to stifle his laughter.

"I could piss on her face an' she wouldn't stir. C'mon let's not be wasting no more time."

Joe took his suit and looked at the stitchwork. Sandra had sewn it up with bright red wool. The stitching showed up like a fresh scar, but at least the worst of the stains were gone.

"Nice job."

"Yeah. I know. You give me a minute to put my face on."

Sandra disappeared into her room to change and apply makeup. The finished result was not impressive. The lipstick smeared across her mouth made her look like something from a circus, and her dress was at least two sizes too small.

"Who am I to judge?" Joe thought to himself, looking at his reflection in the window. "I ain't no oil painting neither."

"Go on," said Sandra. "Tell me I ain't cuter than the Queen of Sheba. Go on. I dares ya."

Joe whistled. "You're the elephant's whiskers, sweetheart."

Sandra smiled and for an instant she looked almost pretty. "Stop beatin' your gums an' move. We got a show to catch."

Cycling with Sandra perched behind him was no mean feat and soon fresh beads of sweat were competing with the raindrops as they raced down Joe's neck.

"You want me to pedal?" Sandra yelled in his ear.

He shook his head.

"Then get a fucking move on, turtle."

When they arrived at the Olympia all traces of Sandra's makeup had washed away, apart from two dark circles under her eyes. Her hair hung in limp dripping strands and Joe could see her underwear beneath her dress. He shook himself, like a dog, as he looked for somewhere to stow the bicycle.

"You can't leave it out here," said Sandra. "It'll get stole."

Joe frowned. "We can't take it inside."

"Why not?"

He shrugged. "We just can't."

"Sure we can." Sandra's nostrils flared, like a bull.

"Fine. Have it your way. Oh, listen, when we're inside, could you know, try an' keep the curse words to a minimum?"

"Curse words? Whaddaya think I am, some ol' gypsy woman? I ain't never put a curse on no one."

"I mean the f word. Just try not to use it, huh?"

"Fuck you, Joe. I knows how to behave in company."

"I know you do, Sandra. I was just kiddin', that's all."

Joe wheeled the bicycle towards the stage door. He tried to open it but it was locked.

Sandra kicked at it, hard. "Open the fuckin' door, you mugs!"

At length the door opened and a pimple faced teenager glared up at them.

"What?" he asked, as if they had just woken him up in the dead of night.

"I'm Gloria Fettle's brother," said Joe.

"Who?" asked the boy and Sandra in unison. Both stared at him with suspicion.

Joe cursed inwardly. He should have mentioned Gloria to Sandra. "Gloria Fettle. She's one of the Naughty Wonder Girls."

"Oh, she is, is she?" said Sandra. She was doing that thing with her nostrils again.

"Yep." Joe smiled.

"So what?" said the boy.

"She told me I could come see the show."

The boy looked them up and down. "Wait here."

They watched him walk down the corridor towards the green room. "Boss," he yelled.

"We got a couple'a freeloaders. One of 'em says he's Gloria somebody-or-other's brother."

At length an elderly, Jewish man, in evening dress and brandishing a silver topped cane emerged from the green room. He peered shortsightedly at Joe and Sandra and then strode towards them.

"Sir Stanley Garrideb at your service," he said, taking Sandra's hand and bending low to kiss it. His accent was British, with a trace of cockney.

"Sandra Mulvaney," said Sandra, blushing.

The old man looked up at Joe. "And you I presume are Mister Fettle. You must be very proud of your sister."

"Err... call me Joe."

Sandra shook her head and punched Joe hard on the shoulder. "Quit clownin'. Your name ain't Fettle, it's Kelly. What's the big idea?"

"I..."

Sir Stanley laughed a throaty chuckle as he stared at them. "You're not Miss Fettle's brother at all, are you?"

Joe sighed. "No."

"So what's your story?"

"I met her today. I got us both kicked off a flicker we were workin' on. She told me to say I was her brother."

"Why?"

Joe felt miserable. Sandra was going to kick him all the way home. "Because I can't afford a ticket."

Sir Stanley smiled. "Ah. Then say no more. You will be my guests. Come with me. You can leave the push iron in the green room. No one'll pinch it here."

They followed him back into the green room. A wiry middle-aged Jew, with skin like worn leather was sprawled on a sofa reading the funnies.

"David," said Sir Stanley.

"Yes, boss?"

"Be so kind as to show Lord and Lady Kelly to my box. Oh, and bring 'em a bottle of fizz too. And an ice bucket."

"We ain't Lord an' Lady..." began Sandra.

Sir Stanley winked at her. "In here, my love, you're anything you want to be."

"Come on then, Duchess," said David, getting to his feet and giving them a grin that revealed a mouthful of missing teeth. "You don't wanna miss the start."

Joe and Sandra followed David out of the room and down a warren of corridors until they reached the circle in the auditorium. The audience were already taking their places.

Joe looked down at the orchestra pit where the musicians were tuning up.

"You a musician then, Paddy?" asked David, noticing Joe's interest.

Joe shook his head. "My name's Joe."

David shrugged as if to say 'so what?' "You din't answer my question."

"No."

"Then why's the boss so interested in you?"

"I'm just a friend of one of the girls."

"Well ain't that nice?" David opened the door to a box, overlooking the stage. "Make yerselves comfy. I'll be back in a tick wiv yer drinks."

"Thanks, charmer."

Joe and Sandra sat down on the soft cushions and looked at each other.

"So, who's this Gloria, then?" said Sandra at length.

Joe swallowed. He didn't want Sandra causing a scene. He knew what her temper could be like when aroused. "Just a girl I met today."

She smiled. "It's okay, Joe. It ain't like we's goin' steady. Not yet anyway. I's got lotsa other boyfriends too." She stared around her and then leaned over the edge of the box to watch the audience below. "Look at us," she sighed. "Just like a couple'a swells. He called me Lady Kelly. He thought we was married." She giggled. "And he kissed my hand. Imagine that? An English Lord kisses my hand. It's like a dream."

"If he's a Lord, then I'm Gunga Din," Joe thought to himself. Not that he cared. He was happy just to take the weight off his feet and relax in style.

There was a knock at the door and a handsome redheaded woman entered, carrying a bottle of champagne. Joe guessed she was in her mid forties and in spite of her fine clothes, he could tell at a glance that she had not been born in comfort. There was a steeliness about her. She reminded him of a tigress, beautiful but dangerous when crossed. David stood behind her with an ice bucket and glasses.

"Hello, my loves. You must be Joe. Gloria's told me all about you. I'm Lady Garrideb. But my friends call me Faye. You will be my friends, won't you?" Her voice was smoky, sensual and just a little slurred by drink.

"Course we will," said Sandra, standing up.

"Yeah. Course," said Joe, shaking her hand. He breathed in her perfume. It was strong but he liked it.

"She never told me you were such a big boy," said Lady Garrideb, sitting down between them. "So, who are you then, sweetie?" She turned to Sandra.

"Sandra Mulvaney. I'm his guardian angel."

Lady Garrideb nodded. "I'm sure you're very good at it." She turned to David. "Oi! You gonna pour us a drink or just stand there eavesdrippin'?"

David poured three glasses of champagne, glowered at everyone and left.

"Sorry about him. He's a prick, but my husband insists on keepin' him around," Lady Garrideb explained. "Down the 'atch." She guzzled back the champagne, waited for the others to do likewise before refilling their glasses.

The orchestra began playing and the curtains opened. Joe was surprised to see Sir Stanley bound onto the stage to the cheers and hoots of the audience.

"Aaaand now, my lords, laydeeeez an' genullmen. It gives me the greatest pleasure, to introduce to you, for your edification an' delight, all the way from the mother country, those sirens of seduction, the personification of perfection, those femmes fatales, those peerless paragons of perfection, the Naaaauuuuuughty Wonder Girls!"

The crowd went wild as a team of girls trouped onto the stage, skirts billowing and bosoms heaving as they danced a wild tango with each other. Joe spotted Gloria easily. She was always one or two steps behind the others, but it didn't matter because she was the one the audience were looking at.

"She's very beautiful, ain't she?" said Lady Garrideb. "Reminds me of myself when I was young. Only I knew how to dance of course."

"Which one is she?" asked Sandra.

Joe pointed Gloria out.

Sandra pulled a face. "She's not all that."

"Not compared to you, my dear," said Lady Garrideb, a mischievous smile lighting up her face. "But she does her best."

The girls finished their act and on came a tiny ancient dwarf and an aged muscle man in leopard skin tights. The muscle man began swinging the dwarf around his head to the delight of the crowd.

"Don't worry, the girls will be on again later," said Lady Garrideb. "They're the ones the young bucks want to see. Them and Yogini."

"Yogini?"

"He's one o' them magicians. Talks to the spirits an' all that. Is there anyone dead you wanna have a little chat with?"

Joe shook his head sharply. "No. There isn't."

Sandra was wide-eyed. "Is it real though? Does he really talk to ghosts?"

Lady Garrideb shrugged. "So he says, an' who am I to call him a liar?" She brought a flask out of her bag and poured a clear liquid into her glass. "Gin. Goes down better than champagne. Want a nip?"

Sandra shook her head. "I'll have some more champagne though. I never drunk champagne before. It's great, ain't it, Joe?"

Joe nodded. He could feel it going to his head.

"Gloria tells me you pose in the flickers too. You an actor?" asked Lady Garrideb, staring at him with intent.

"You bet he is," said Sandra. "I seen him in lots. He's gonna be huge."

Joe smiled. "Nah. Not really. It's not what I wanna do. I wanna be the guy behind the camera."

"Well I wish you good luck with that, Mister Kelly. I must confess to being a little ignorant about this new phenomenon. Perhaps you could enlighten me?"

While Sandra watched the acts, engrossed, Joe outlined his future plans to Lady Garrideb in hushed tones. "The flickers are the future. There's big money in it even for shit. Imagine how much you'd make with something good? When I saw Gloria today, I knew she was what I was waitin' for. My muse. The face that's gonna make our fortune. I'm planning to head out to California. They say they've got better light there. It's cheaper too. I'm gonna set up my own studio an'..."

Lady Garrideb poured another drink. "I thought you said you was skint."

"Sorry?"

"Broke. Destitute. Without a pot to piss in. It takes money to get started in business. I don't suppose these moving picture things are any different?"

Joe sighed and looked away towards the stage. A clog dancer was getting pelted with bottles by the audience. "Yeah. Well. One day. All I need is the right backing."

"I see."

They sat in silence, watching the stage as the clog dancer fled to the jeers of the crowd.

"Oh dear," sighed Lady Garrideb. "We should never have brought Fred over here. He's a bloody lead balloon. Night after night they do that to him. Poor sod."

"Why do you use him then?" asked Sandra.

Lady Garrideb shrugged. "My husband says it builds anticipation. Fred makes the other acts look so much better."

Sir Stanley Garrideb had reappeared on the stage. "My esteemed friends, prepare to be mystified and astonished. You are about to witness a sight that will haunt you for the rest of your lives. Please, put your hands together for the Sultan of Shadows, the Mage of the Mysterious, the consort of cadavers, the one, the only, Swami Yogini!"

The lights dimmed and then shrouded in smoke, a tall, swarthy figure appeared, a jewelled turban upon his head.

Joe closed his eyes. It's strange how the grandest of dreams can be toppled by the flimsiest of actions. That dismissive *'I see'* from Lady Garrideb had cut him to the core. She may just as well have thrown a bucket of iced water over him. He had been kidding himself for years. He was nothing but a loser. A bum. The worst kind of bum. The kind with a head full of big ideas, that talked grand and did nothing about it. A bum with an impossible dream. There were a million losers out there just like him, talking big. *Empty vessels make most sound*. He wished he were away from here, alone and drunk.

He felt someone shaking him and opened his eyes. Sandra and Lady Garrideb were staring down at him.

"You missed it," said Sandra. "You missed it. It was fucking amazing, you big dope."

"I..." He could see the audience filing out of the theatre below him. He looked at Lady Garrideb. "I'm sorry. I... it's been a long day."

She smiled. "I know. Do you want to come back and meet everyone? We normally have a little supper backstage after the show."

"You bet," said Sandra. "I'm starved."

His head ached. He should never have touched that champagne. "I'm not feeling too great. I'm sorry."

Sandra scowled. "G'wan. Don't be such a big baby. It'll be fun."

"You stay. I... I need air."

"Don't you worry, Sandra. We'll look after you," said Lady Garrideb.

Joe nodded his thanks and stumbled out of the theatre. The rain was lashing down. He thought of the bike and decided to leave it. Sandra would need it. It was hers after all. He buttoned up his jacket and began the long trudge home.

SCENE FIVE

Joe arrived home dripping wet and exhausted. He made his way up the stairs, and as he reached the top floor, Mrs. Mulvaney opened her door and stared at him, red eyed and belligerent.

"What have you done with my Sandra?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Joe. "She's with friends."

"She don't have no friends. Only users like you."

Joe was too tired to argue. "G'night, Mrs. Mulvaney."

He stepped out of his sodden suit and left it, puddled on the floor before throwing himself onto the bed. He tried to sleep, to lose himself in oblivion, but the bedbugs were restless. He ignored them. His thoughts turned to Gloria Fettle and his rash promise to make her rich. "I'm an idiot. A great big brainless idiot. That's what I am. Sure, together we could be rich but I need to be rich to get started. Damn it. Damn it all to hell."

He made up his mind to get a job in the morning. Something normal. In a bar or a factory. He could always go back on the docks. There was the family farm in Ireland of

course but he could never return there. That bridge had been well and truly burnt. It's a shame, he would have been a big hit with the local girls. None of them had been anywhere outside Cork. They'd be desperate to hear about his adventures in the big wide world. They need never know his dreams had ended in failure. He could have been married to a pretty Irish girl, plopping out strong boys and running the farm.

The first grey light of morning was struggling through the cracked window frame when Joe woke to the sound of whispering outside his door. He opened his eyes and reached for the baseball bat he kept by the bed in case of emergencies. The door opened and Sandra weaved inside. She was drunk.

"Wake up, you fuckin' killjoy. Sir Stanley wants to see ya. He's sent the boys to fetch you over."

"Forget it, Sandra. I ain't feelin' good." He closed his eyes and pretended to go back to sleep. Perhaps if she had said Gloria Fettle wanted to see him it would have been another story, but right now he didn't want to see anybody. He heard Sandra leave the room and whisper to someone in the hallway. Then the door opened again and a finger prodded him in the side.

"Oi, Sleeping Beauty. Shake a fuckin' leg. The boss wants to see you. Now."

Joe turned over. It was David, the leather skinned Jew from the Olympia. Two other equally tough looking brutes were standing either side of him. One of them was missing a thumb, but that didn't stop him from cracking his knuckles noisily.

"I said I ain't feelin' well."

"Aww, Boo Hoo! An' I'm sayin' I don't give a fuck, Paddy. Now get out of your pit before the boys drag you out."

Joe sighed. He might as well see what was so important. "Alright. Alright. But I'm comin' coz I wanna come. Not coz I'm scared o' yous."

David shrugged. "What ever you say Paddy O'Mick. I don't fuckin' care, so long as you get a fuckin' move on."

"Okay, charmer, give me five minutes." He sat up in the bed and looked around the room. The threadbare carpet was caked in muddy bootprints. "You didn't wipe your feet."

"Eh?" David stared at him puzzled.

"What are you? An animal? Didn't your mother teach you any manners? You don't just come into someone's house and tread shit all over the carpet. It's not polite"

David looked down at the carpet. "That ain't shit."

"You know what I mean. Why can't you wipe your fuckin' feet? Did Sir Whats-his-face tell you to mess up my room? Did he?"

"Course not." He raised one foot and looked at the sole of his shoe. Then he repeated the action with the other shoe. "It weren't me. You probably did it yourself."

"Oh, yeah. Like I'm gonna do that."

David glanced around, uncomfortable. "You're fuckin' mental. Talkin' to me about shit."

Then he noticed something sticking out from under the bed. He bent down and retrieved Joe's boots from the floor. They were caked in dry mud. "Well, I'll be buggered in one an' fucked in the other. Look at this." He tossed the boots at Joe. "Now who's a fuckin' animal? Eh? Eh?"

Joe sighed. "Sorry, charmer. My mistake."

"Yeah, well. Just make sure you know the facts before yer start pointin' fingers. Now get a move on. I've wasted enough time this mornin'." He left the room, taking his friends with him.

Joe got out of bed and pissed into the pot. What to wear? His suit was wet and filthy, but his other clothes were hardly suitable for meeting a knight of the realm, even a bogus one. He chose an old jersey and his cleanest pair of pants. They would have to do and if the old man didn't like it, that was his problem.

Sandra was waiting outside his room with David and the others.

"You're not goin' dressed like that, are ya?" she asked. "You look like a bum."

"He is a bum," David muttered.

Joe ignored him "You have a good time last night?" he asked Sandra.

"The best. You missed a treat. Gloria's a great gal. I like her."

That was a relief. When Sandra didn't like people, they had a tendency to get hurt.

"Come on, let's go," said David.

"You coming?" Joe asked her.

"Nah. I'm gonna hit the sack. Remember to bring my bike back, will ya?"

Joe nodded. Just what he needed, another cross city bicycle ride. He followed the three men out onto the street and whistled as he saw a crowd of urchins gathered around a gleaming Elmore Tonneau.

"Your boss must be loaded."

"Rich as Crassus," David nodded, climbing into the driver's seat.

"It's Croesus, actually," Joe corrected him. "Croesus was King of Lydia. Crassus was a Roman general. Sure he was rich but not as rich as Croesus."

"Spare us the history lesson, we don't give a fuck about Crassus or Croesus or any other rich foreign cunt. Now get in an' let's get going"

Joe shrugged. "Keep your wig on, I just thought you might be interested is all."

"Yeah? Well I'm not, so try not to give us any earache on the way."

Joe did as he was told, and the guy with the missing thumb squeezed in beside him.

"Between you an' me, I thought it was pretty interestin'," said the thumbless man.

"Thanks," said Joe.

"I've always liked history."

"That's nice."

The engine burst into life and the automobile pulled off with a start. The kids followed for a block and a half before giving up the chase.

"What happened to your thumb?" said Joe, trying to make conversation.

The thumbless man looked at him and smiled. "I asked too many questions."

That killed all further attempts at chit-chat until they arrived in Times Square and pulled up beside the Olympia.

David turned to face Joe. "Here we are. You know the way. We got things to do."

Joe nodded. "Shame. So much to catch up on. Next time perhaps?"

SCENE SIX

Joe knocked on the stage door and waited as the same rude kid from the night before gave him the once over.

"You here to see Sir Stanley?" he asked.

Joe nodded. "Yeah. I..."

"Save it. I don't wanna hear your life story again. I got relatives of my own."

Joe resisted the urge to kick the kid in the pants, and followed him to the green room.

Sir Stanley Garrideb was asleep on the sofa.

Joe coughed and the sleeping impresario opened his eyes.

"Ah. Joseph Kelly. You've been a very naughty boy. Haven't you?"

"Have I?"

Sir Stanley sat up. "You know you have. Miss Fettle was most put out when you didn't show up backstage last night. What happened? Didn't you like the show?"

"The show was great. I loved it. I..."

"Liar. My wife told me you was snorin' your fat head off all through."

"I... I was tired."

"Huh." Suddenly he yelled at the top of his voice. "Bobby, get in here!"

The rude kid ambled into the green room. "What?"

"Get a brush an' clean up that mess," said Sir Stanley, pointing at the trail of dried mud Joe had left in his wake. "Some folk don't know what a door scrape is for."

"There wasn't one," said Joe, blushing. "Sorry."

"Huh."

The kid sighed and disappeared to find a broom to clear up Joe's mess.

"Sit down, Joe." He pointed to a wooden chair in the corner.

Joe sat down.

"My wife likes you," said Sir Stanley at length.

"Oh. That's good. I like her too. She's a fine ol' girl."

"She won't thank you if she hears you callin' her that."

"Sorry. I didn't mean..."

"Shutup apologizin' an' show me some balls."

"Eh?"

"Metaphorical balls. Half wit. You fancy yourself as a businessman but you're afraid of your own shadow."

"What? Businessman? I don't know what... I just wanna make flickers. That's all."

"Yeah. An' you told my wife that flickers are big business. Didn't you?"

Joe shrugged. "Yeah. They are. People will watch anything. But me, I don't wanna make just anything. I wanna make something people will remember."

Sir Stanley nodded. "And you think more people will wanna see something that they wanna remember than something they don't? Is that it?"

Joe nodded. "Course they will. These pictures could be art. But art for everyone. Not just for a few snobs. No offence, yer Lordship."

"None taken. Now, Faye... Lady Garrideb tells me you think people would wanna see Gloria Fettle in these pictures. Why?"

Joe shrugged. "She's beautiful."

Sir Stanley pulled a face. "So are lots of other judies."

"Yeah. But she's more than beautiful. She... you just wanna watch her. Last night. On stage, when she was dancing. Well..."

"She can't dance," said Garrideb, cutting him off.

"I know. But it didn't matter. She was the one everyone watched. She was hopeless but she had something. Something great."

Sir Stanley nodded his head. "I agree. That's why we keep her on. It's why the wife wouldn't let me fire her. I hear you wanna set up studio in California? Why?"

"It's cheap an' the light's good."

"Cheap I understand. You're short of funds. How much do you need?"

Joe shrugged. "A lot. I'd need to rent premises. Equipment..."

"My boys can get you equipment, and from Edison's no less. No questions asked."

Joe was shocked. "You mean..."

"I said no questions asked. I'm always on the lookout for a sound investment, son. Are you a sound investment?"

"I..."

"You'll have to answer quicker than that."

"Yes," said Joe, decisive at last. "I am."

"Good. Just a minute." Sir Stanley stood up and left the room.

Joe occupied himself by looking at the posters of past shows that lined the walls. Sir Stanley reappeared with a tall, painfully thin, bald man with dark shadows under his eyes. The thin man looked at Joe in silence.

"Hi," said Joe, uncertainly. He stuck out a hand.

The thin man stared at the hand as if he had just been offered a plate of steaming horse shit. Finally, he took it in both of his. The touch was like ice. At last he let it drop and turned to Sir Stanley.

"He's fine. More than fine. He'll do well for a while. But he'll need help and..."

"And what?" asked Joe, his curiosity aroused.

"You'll find out soon enough. And I assume you will not be in any hurry to return to Ireland..." Joe did his best to try and avoid showing any emotion but failed.

"How...How do you...?"

Stanley brought that particular conversation to an abrupt end. He'd heard what he wanted to hear. "Thanks, Job."

The thin man nodded and left the room.

Sir Stanley smiled at Joe. "That was Job. You caught his act last night. The Swami Yogini."

"I think that was when I fell asleep. More fool me."

Sir Stanley laughed. "Don't tell him that. He'll quit. You know these spiritual types. Worse than bloody comedians. Right then, it's settled. I'll be your partner. You will be called Palace Studios. I supply the money. You do all the work. The cut is 75- 25 in my favor. We will renegotiate after two years if you are successful and more importantly trustworthy. Fair?"

Joe frowned. Did he want a partner? "Well..."

"Take it or leave it. I write you a bankers draft this afternoon. Then I sit back and wait for a healthy return. I think you should snap it up."

"I..." Joe stuck out his hand again. "It's a deal, partner."

Sir Stanley looked at the big calloused hand in front of him. "There's two conditions."

"Go on."

"One, you take Gloria with you and make her rich and famous."

"You bet I will."

"Two, you take my man David with yer. The wife can't stand him, an' he'll be good to have around if you run into any bother."

"David? I don't know. He's a..."

"Cunt? Yeh. I know. First time I met him he broke my finger. But I trust him. He's as loyal as a dog. He'll keep an eye on my investment and you never know, you might need him. You won't find a tougher dabeno anywhere."

"I don't know what a dabeno is but sure. Why not? I guess I could get used to him."

"Great. Sign on the dotted and then we can crack open a bottle of champagne and seal the deal."

Stan produced a contract from the inside pocket of his jacket and smoothed it out on the desk in the corner. He opened a drawer and removed a feather quill. Dipping it in ink he handed it to Joe.

Joe signed without reading a word of the contract. "I'd sooner a beer."

Sir Stanley laughed. "A man after my own heart. Come on. We'll go across the street."

SCENE SEVEN

The crowd at the Olympia were subdued that night. New York was reeling after the news came in that the Giants had just lost the World Series in Boston. The citizens had come out to drown their sorrows and weren't in the mood to put up with any shit. They howled through every act except the Naughty Wonder girls and then they erupted into a frenzy of cheers, wolf whistles and cat calls.

Joe watched from the Garridebs' box, along with Sandra and Lady Garrideb and when a drunk tried to clamber onto the stage to reach Gloria, he stood up in alarm.

"The girls can look after themselves," said Lady Garrideb placing a hand on Joe's arm.

The drunk shoved one of the girls out of his way and then embraced Gloria, kissing her neck. She tried to kick him but he was too close, giving her no room to manoeuver.

Joe leaped from the box down onto the stage and howled in agony as his ankle gave way beneath him. The crowd roared with laughter. Some of them thought it was part of the act.

The drunk was trying to get his hands under Gloria's skirts, ignoring the pain as she raked his cheeks with her nails. Joe tried to stand but he was helpless. Then a figure stepped over him, grabbed hold of the drunk by the seat of his pants and threw him off the stage and into the pit where he came to rest on top of the pianist. The audience rose as one to applaud David, who bowed to them and then did a little jig with his hands in the pockets of his waistcoat. He crossed over to Joe and helped him to his feet.

"Let me help you up there, partner," he said.

Joe used the big Jew's shoulder as a crutch to get off the stage. "We're not partners. The way I heard it you'll be workin' for me, David."

When they were in the wings, David wheeled around and pushed Joe against the wall.

"Let's get one thing straight. I already got a boss. Sir Stanley Garrideb. Not you. I work for him. Understood?"

Joe nodded. "Less of the attitude, Davey boy."

"It's David. Or Mister Flaum. Whichever you prefer. I keep my eye on you. I help out. You can give orders if you want but if I think yer wrong then I don't listen. You fuck about with Sir Stanley then you fuck about with me. Got that?"

"Sure. You're your own man."

"My own man. Yeh." David's scowl turned into a sunny smile. "You're an aggressive fucker. I like that."

"That's right, I'm aggressive. It's a good job you're calm and placid ain't it?"

The Naughty Wonder Girls had come off stage. Joe noticed Gloria watching them.

"Gloria. Sorry about last night. I had to rush off."

She smiled. "I saw what you did out there."

David snorted. "Yeh. Me too. Strong as Samson, eh? It was me that saved you, angel."

Gloria blew him a razz. "Go screw, David."

David ambled away, laughing. "See yer tomorrow. Bright an' early."

"So," she said at last. "You got your money?"

Joe nodded. "Yup. We're on our way. You're gonna be big, Gloria. Real big."

She nodded. "I never doubted it. You wanna take me out an' celebrate?"

Joe thought for a moment. "I told Sir Stanley we'd eat with them. We've got an early start tomorrow. Me an' David are headin' west to scout out some property. Then in a few weeks you join us an' we make a million."

"I'd still like to celebrate in private, you could walk me home later if you like."

"Yeah, sure. I'd like that." He smiled at her, shy as a kid. "I'd like that a lot."

SCENE EIGHT

Sir Stanley Garrideb had commandeered the Circle Bar at the Olympia to celebrate his new business deal. It was a low key event. He sent most of the company home and invited only his wife, Gloria Fettle, David Flaum, Joe Kelly and Sandra Mulvaney. There was champagne, whiskey, gin and a roast lamb on offer.

"I always get hungry when I complete a deal," he explained. "And I hate eatin' alone, so get your nosebags on and tuck in."

Sandra was the first to pile into the food, followed by Joe, who knew from experience to eat as much as he could whenever he could because he never knew when the chance to eat might come again. David drank only soda and nibbled at his lamb. Strong drink numbed his reflexes and he liked to keep them sharp and keen.

Sir Stanley had organized the seating arrangements and made sure Joe was sat next to Sandra and David, while Gloria had pride of place between him and Lady Garrideb.

"Joe," said Sandra, between mouthfuls of lamb.

"Yeah?"

"Promise you won't forget me when you're rich and famous."

Joe winked at her. "I'll never forget you. I don't think I could, even if I wanted to."

She smiled, genuinely happy, her happiness turned to joy when he leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"You're my best friend, Sandra. I never forget my friends."

Sir Stanley rose from his seat and tapped his wine glass with a spoon to get their attention. "We'll keep this short an' sweet because Joe and David have a busy day ahead of them. You'll be catching the seven o' clock train in the morning. David will look after the tickets. He's less likely to get jumped on his way home."

"I can handle myself too," said Joe, frowning.

"I'm sure you can Mister Kelly, now listen, show business is a dangerous business. I need you both working together not against each other. Save any hostility for those who deserve it and then pay them with interest. Understood?"

Joe offered his hand to David. David took it and squeezed. Joe squeezed back. Neither winced, though both felt the pain.

The meal continued and at length, seeing Gloria yawn, Joe stood up. "I'll see Gloria home, if you don't mind."

"What about me?" snapped Sandra, pulling at his sleeve. "Who's gonna see me home?"

"You can come along too," said Gloria, with a smile.

"No," said Sir Stanley. "David will take you all home in the Elmore. You don't mind, do you, David?"

David shrugged. "You're the boss."

SCENE NINE

The ride home was uncomfortable. Joe wanted to outline his future plans to Gloria, but Sandra dominated the conversation, such as it was, with a long history of her mother's illnesses.

"Mom drinks to help her pain. She's been in pain ever since she gave birth to me. She tells me she lost half her insides when I was born. Can ya believe that?"

"Poor her," said Gloria. "I drink for the fun of it. Don't you? I'd hate it if I had to. I hate all things I have to do. It's only fun if you're not supposed to do it."

"Mom ain't supposed to do it. But she says when you've lost half your organs then normal medicine don't work."

"She's using it as an excuse," said Joe.

"What do you know?" snorted Sandra. "Mom always hated you. She says you're a..."

"Yeah. I know what she says about me. The whole block knows," sighed Joe.

"She sounds like a wise old bird," said David, turning round to look at his passengers.

"Say, David, you ever done it in an automobile?" said Sandra. She had been taking a leaf out of her mother's book and had drunk more than was good for her.

"No. Why? You offerin'?"

"Course not. I'm a lady. But if I wasn't, I reckon it'd be fun. "

"It ain't," said David. "You end up with a crowd of kids lookin' in at yer. Who needs that?"

"I like an audience," said Sandra. "I bet you like an audience too, huh, Gloria? Bein' a dancin' girl."

"Sandra," said Joe. "I think that's enough. Don't you? Gloria don't wanna talk about stuff like that."

"Course she does. She's a show girl. Not a nun. Am I right? Or am I right?"

"You can drop me off here, David," said Gloria.

"But we're not there yet."

"Don't matter. I feel like walkin'."

The automobile drew up and Gloria got out.

"Don't forget about me, in California. Keep me posted boys." She blew them a kiss and tottered away into the darkness, glad to be away from David and Sandra.

Joe sighed. He'd wanted the chance for a proper chat with Gloria before he left for California.

"Hey David, you got the hots for her, ain't you?" said Sandra.

"Course I have," said David. "She's stacked. Who wouldn't have the hots for her?"

"What's she got that I ain't got?"

"I dunno," said David. "I'd have to give you a close look."

"Promises, promises."

Sandra leaned forward and ran her fingers through David's thinning hair.

"Hey," snapped Joe. "Cut it out."

"What?" said Sandra. "He likes it. Ain't that right, David?"

"Yeh."

"It's just a scalp massage. It's good for tension. Ain't it good for tension, David?"

"Oh, yeh."

"Great," sighed Joe.

They pulled up outside their tenement block.

"I'll see you in the mornin'. Penn Station. Don't be late," said David.

"You wanna come in?" said Gloria. "Mom's asleep. She won't bother us."

David thought for a moment. "Sure. Why not? Just for a minute or two."

Joe hurried on ahead. "G'night all."

When they were alone, David forced his tongue into Sandra's mouth and helped himself to a squeeze of her large, powerful buttocks.

Sandra pulled back and socked him hard on the jaw.

"Get your fuckin' tongue back where it belongs, ya big ape."

"But I thought we was gonna... you know?" David winked at her. He didn't resent the smack. He liked his women to play hard.

"Well ya thought wrong, lunkhead. I just wanted to make him jealous." She nodded in the direction of Joe's door.

David laughed out loud. "I don't think it worked, darlin'. Forget about that bloody mandrake. Save yourself for someone who cares." He tried to kiss her again, but she shoved him hard in the chest.

For a moment Sandra thought he was going to hit her. He raised his hand, but then with a shrug he lowered it and turned away. "You ain't worth it, darlin'." He trudged back downstairs, whistling a melancholy air.

"Fuck you," Sandra whispered to herself, fighting back the tears. "I'll show you. I'll show you all."

SCENE TEN

"You sure I'm doing the right thing, Faye?" Sir Stanley sat on the edge of the bed, watching Lady Garrideb remove her makeup. The sight saddened him. Age was catching up with her. Fast. Her once vibrant flame red hair had lost its lustre and the years of heavy drinking were beginning to show.

"Course you are. You always do the right thing, Stan," she said. "Mister Kelly is right. I'm sure of it, plus we can see with our own eyes that Music Hall is dying, and let's be honest if it wasn't for Job, we'd barely be clinging on."

Sir Stanley nodded. "Good, we are in full agreement, my lovely. Job can't carry on much longer. He's a spent force. Remember how full of life he used to be?"

Faye blushed. Job and she had been lovers once, many years ago. "How could I forget?"

"He's a shadow. We're killing him, Faye."

"No one's forcing him."

"Even so."

"You've always been a risk taker," said Faye, steering the subject away from Job.

"That's what I love about you, but more than that. You're a fine judge of character.

You've never been wrong yet."

"There's always a first time."

"Nah, not with Joe Kelly there ain't. I recognize that look in his eyes. I saw the same look in yours all those years ago. You've helped him realize a dream. He won't let you down."

Sir Stanley unbuttoned his collar and began massaging the stiffness out of his wife's shoulders. "I'm glad to hear it."

"Now, Gloria, on the other hand, that's a different matter entirely."

"You think so?" He knew exactly where his wife was coming from. He had been in the business a long time and seen it all before. People with genuine star quality were a very rare breed, but each and every one came equipped with their very own self-destruct button. Gloria Fettle had it. Whatever 'It' was. An unbelievable presence. You couldn't keep your eyes off her. He liked her. He knew her life had been tough, but she knew how to handle herself. She was dangerous though. He could sense it. She was like a moth drawn to a candle. He wondered how many years Joe Kelly would get out of her.

"I was thinking. Maybe it's time we went back."

"England?"

"Yes, England. We're no spring chickens anymore, are we petal?"

"You speak for yourself, yer cheeky beggar."

"I'm running out of steam, Faye. I want to go somewhere new. I always had a dream, you know, to live by the sea."

"No you didn't. Your dream was to make it rich an' splash around in high society."

"Yeah well. Dreams change. I wanna go back to England. The coast. Eastbourne. Hastings, perhaps? What do you think?"

Lady Garrideb took her husband's hand and kissed it. "It don't matter what I think. I love you Stanley Garrideb. Always have, always will. I'll follow you to the moon if that's where you want to go."

"You're a good girl, Faye."

"And don't you forget it, sunshine."

SCENE ELEVEN

Gloria Fettle stood outside her rowhouse and shivered. She didn't want to go inside. If Jake, her mom's new boyfriend was at home he would no doubt try to either hit on her or hit her, depending how much chain lightning he'd downed. If it was just Mom, then she would have to explain where she had been all night.

She didn't need to look for her keys. Jake had kicked the apartment door down a week ago and nobody had bothered to repair it. She crept inside. Silence. She breathed a sigh of relief. Nobody was home. She stripped out of her clothes and hung them on a hanger over the curtain rail. One day, she would own a real wardrobe, one that she wouldn't have to smash up in winter for firewood.

Gloria curled up under the thin blanket and dreamed of her future life with Joe Kelly. Maybe she would marry him. He would take her away from this. He had a kind face. He might even look after Mom. Whatever the woman's faults, she was still her mother. Joe would understand that. She closed her eyes and dreamed of riches and swell clothes and a nice car like the Garridebs had. Hot, sour breath on her face brought her back to reality. She opened her eyes and almost choked with fear.

"Mom?"

Mom was standing over her, eyes glinting in the darkness, teeth shining. She held the bread knife Gloria had borrowed from Mrs. Garraghty downstairs.

"Whore," Mom whispered the word.

"Mom?"

"You've been whoring."

"No, Mom." She tried to get up but Mom pushed her back down. "I haven't."

"Dancing. Making a show of yourself."

"No, Mom. Honest. I... I was at the church. Praying. For you. For us."

"God hates a liar, Gloria. God hates you. Better I kill you now. Better for all of us."

"Please. Mom. You're not yourself."

"I'll kill you. Then I'll kill myself. Things'll be better in heaven. You'll see."

"No, Mom. Stop it."

Mom raised the knife high above her head, holding it in both hands. Gloria shot out of the bed and ran to the door. Mom stared at her, eyes crazy and white. She lowered the knife and lay down in the bed. A moment later she began to snore, softly.

Gloria took the knife, wrapped herself in a coat and sat in the armchair in the corner of the room watching her mother sleep. It wasn't the first time Mom had tried to kill her. She tried not to take it personally. It was the drink talking. Nothing more. Chained Lightning did that to some people. Everything would be fine in the morning. Mom wouldn't remember a thing. She would tell Gloria not to invent things, that it was just a bad dream. But it wasn't just a dream. It was her life. A life of secrets. Mom hated show business and show people. She said they were lowlife and whores. Gloria never told Mom about her work in the flickers or the theatre. The truth would kill her. It would kill one of them anyway.

She went to the bathroom and jammed a chair against the door. She tried to relax in the bath but she couldn't sleep. Every time she closed her eyes she saw her mother's crazed face looming above her. She wondered what it would be like to have a mother who didn't wish you were dead. She guessed it would be just swell.

SCENE TWELVE

Sandra Mulvaney couldn't sleep. Her mother was snoring next to her. She thought about Joe. Her Joe. He was leaving for California in the morning. God only knows when she would see him again. She had read about the girls out west; wild, dirty and immoral. Joe wouldn't stand a chance. She climbed out of bed and went to the door. She would give Joe something to remember her by. Something to stop him from straying. She would give him the most precious thing she owned. Her body.

She stepped out into the hallway, treading softly, so as not to wake any of the neighbors. She tapped on his door. No answer. He would be asleep. She wondered if he was dreaming of her. She giggled, picturing his face when he awoke to find the girl of his dreams in bed beside him. She unlocked the door and stepped inside.

The room was dark. It smelled of Joe. She breathed in deeply. She moved towards the bed and cursed out loud as she tripped over a suitcase on the floor. So much for taking him by surprise. She lay on the floor, waiting for him to say something. Nothing, only the sounds of an old and decaying house.

She crawled on her hands and knees to the bedside table and reached up for the box of matches and the old gas lamp. She lit it and stared in surprise around the empty room.

"Joe?" she whispered, half expecting him to crawl out from under the bed.

She looked down at the suitcase on the floor. He had already packed. Where was he? The bathroom? No. He had a pot under the bed to piss in. Her surprise turned to anger. She knew where he was. With that bitch, Gloria Fettle. A stupid little chorus girl. A whore. A witch. An uncontrollable rage began to build in her. She felt like such a fool. He had been using her. All these years making out like they were best friends, like he couldn't live without her. Truth was he couldn't wait to get away. He had probably been counting the days and as soon as the opportunity arose he was gone taking that little flighty bitch with him, instead of her.

She went to his dressing table and picked up his razor. A tear trickled down her cheek. She had been prepared to give everything to Joe and this was how he repayed her. Fucking another woman. A woman he didn't even know. She thought about slitting her wrists and lying on his bed to die. No. She was better than that. Why should she be the one to die?

She emptied his suitcase onto the bed and began slicing through his clothes. Then she turned to the bed, ripping the sheets to shreds. Finally the mattress. She cut into it and pulled out the stuffing, imagining she was tearing out Joe's insides. At last, her rage spent, she pissed in the pot and emptied the contents into his suitcase.

"Fucking, dirty, Irish bastard. You're breaking my heart, you're breaking my fucking heart." She fled from the room, slamming the door behind her, no longer bothered about disturbing the neighbors. They could all go to hell. Each and every one of them.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Joe Kelly had found a bar. Too excited to sleep, his mind had been racing with a million and one different thoughts. Surprisingly not one of them was trepidation. Now that Sir Stanley had stepped in from nowhere to finance his dream, Joe felt nothing but calm certainty. The time had come. The last forty eight hours had been like a dream. He kept waiting for reality to catch up and beat him to the ground. He thought about Sir Stanley Garrideb. He was a wily old fox and he was going to cream off the lion's share of any profit but for Joe it wasn't about the money. Sir Stanley was prepared to bankroll the dream. He trusted Joe to bring in a healthy return on his investment and in exchange he would take a backseat role and not interfere. It was the vote of confidence Joe had been craving and he had no intention of letting his patron down. He would be more than happy to help swell the old duffer's coffers in exchange for his trust. Ripping him off was out of the question. Even if he didn't have David breathing down his neck, he wouldn't dream of it. He owed Sir Stanley big time. He admired him too. He seemed so pleasant, friendly, funny, but he knew beneath that benign facade was a tough old

bastard. A predator. He could see it in his eyes. He didn't think many people would get the chance to cross Sir Stanley Garrideb more than once.

"What's a gal gotta do to get a drink round here?"

The sound of Gloria's voice shook him from his thoughts.

"Gloria, what the hell? Shouldn't you be tucked up in bed?"

"Sez you. You're the one who's gotta get up early."

"Good point. What'll you have?"

"Same as you, only bigger."

Joe ordered the drinks. "I wasn't expecting to see you again for a while. This is an unexpected pleasure. How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't."

"Oh."

"You look like you've just pooped your pants. It don't mean I ain't pleased to see ya."

"Glad to hear it. Anyways, how do you know I ain't just pooped my pants?"

Gloria Fettle threw her head back and laughed raucously. "Coz you'd smell even worse than you already do."

Joe laughed too.

"How old are you, Gloria Fettle?"

"What sorta question is that to ask a girl? How old d'ya think?"

"I dunno, forty maybe, forty five?"

"Get outta here! I'm old enough to know what I'm doing an' that's all you need to know, Irish." She looked into Joe's sky blue eyes and held his gaze. "So What are we gonna drink to, Irish? You gonna make me a star?"

"Yes, I am." He raised his glass to hers and they chinked them together. "To Gloria Grace, the world's biggest star."

SECOND REELLOS ANGELES: 1914SCENE ONE

Mario Marinelli stood on the sidewalk outside the newly renovated Vogue Picture Palace. He was proud of the building. It was the biggest, swankiest, picture house in the city and it was all his. He had been interested in moving pictures from the start, and had fate not dealt him a bad hand, or rather had he not backed the wrong fucking horse, he could have been a major player by now. Marinelli would be a household name, greater than Thomas Edison by far. In those days, he had been young, headstrong and ruefully for him, rash and indecisive. It had cost him immortality. Though he was now a very rich man and head of a large, mostly criminal empire, he would have settled for half his wealth in exchange for immortality.

He smiled, looking at the long queue of excited men, women and children going all the way round the block, their conversations full of anticipation. Out of all his operations, he always found the greatest pleasure in those few that were totally legitimate. Sure, the

Vogue had been paid for by dirty money, but since when was money ever clean? He checked his pocket watch. He always made a point of keeping his Saturday mornings clear so he could be among the first to view the latest episode of his favorite chapter play. He walked into the lobby and gazed at the full length poster.

'GLORIA GOES IT ALONE starring Gloria Grace. Episode 16'

He licked his lips as he stared at the photograph of the glamorous heroine resplendent in her torn shirt, boots and riding breeches. She was standing on top of a heap of unconscious crooks, blowing smoke from the end of a pistol she held in her manicured hand. She was winking directly at him.

"Gloria Grace, what wouldn't I do for a dame like that?" he thought to himself.

He entered the auditorium, ignoring the uniformed usher who saluted him. The orchestra were still tuning up. Twenty musicians for a matinee, sixty for an evening performance. He knew he had more money than sense, but he told himself it was dough well spent. It showed the world that the Vogue Picture Palace was tops when it came to sophistication. He strode down to the front row and stopped. Someone was in his seat. A dame.

He cursed. He had always made a point of paying his staff twice the going rate. The least they could do was make sure his seat was waiting for him. He would tear a strip off the manager later. In the meantime he could deal with the intruder himself. He walked up to the woman. She was wearing a fancy hat and veil. Was she a widow? Had he killed her husband? It was possible. He cleared his throat and the woman looked up. She was young. Her shapely legs crossed in front of her, a dainty pair of red shoes on her tiny feet. He wondered if the face was as interesting as the chassis.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said. "This seat's taken."

The girl looked at him through her veil. Then she looked around the vast auditorium at all the seats that were still vacant. Marinelli didn't appreciate what that look inferred. This girl was taking the rise. Like she was saying; *There are hundreds of empty seats, what's so special about this one?* She fixed him with a sweet smile and said, "Anybody tell ya you look dishy when you're cross. Why dont'cha park yourself next to me, Daddy?"

From the sound of her voice she couldn't be much more than twenty. Some rich high hat's kid. Way too confident. He couldn't decide whether to throw her out or seduce her. "Do you know who I am?" he asked, his voice stern, his eyes glowering under fierce brows. Men had soiled themselves at that look. Not her. She lifted her veil and offered him her hand.

"Nope. Why don'tcha introduce yourself, baby? The suspense is killing me. I'm Gloria." He stared in awe and shock. Gloria Grace, his ideal woman, sitting in his movie palace, offering him her hand. Mario Marinelli wasn't slow on the uptake. He dropped to one knee and kissed her hand.

"Miss Grace, it's an honor."

"Aww, shaddap an' sit down. What's with all that one knee shit? I ain't gonna marry ya. Whaddaya say your name was again?"

"I didn't. I'm Marinelli. Mario Marinelli."

Gloria's eye's widened in shock. Marinelli couldn't decide if it was genuine or if she was teasing him.

"Mario Marinelli, the gangster?" Her voice was full of admiration.

Marinelli chuckled. "Ah, Miss Grace, please don't believe all you read in the papers, I'm a hard working businessman. Nothing more."

"Okey-dokey, Papa," said Gloria patting the seat next to her, inviting Marinelli to sit. "I'll take your word for it. Now put a sock in it for a while. I wanna see what happens to me this week."

Gloria Grace settled back in her seat as the audience took their places and the orchestra began to play. She had certainly come a long way in the last two years. Gloria Fettle, dancing girl and bit part player was history, in her place was the international star of America's top chapter play *Gloria Goes it Alone*, in which she played a resourceful girl reporter on the track of international spies and criminals. The public couldn't get enough of her and she was loving every minute of it.

She watched as her on-screen self was kidnapped by her arch-enemy, the nefarious celestial known as Quang Chu, tied up, drugged and thrown from a bi-plane over the ocean. The audience erupted in cheers as the lights came up. Mario Marinelli was still staring at the screen, his knuckles white as he gripped the edge of his seat.

"Miss Grace, ya gotta tell me. What happens next week?" he asked, turning to face her.

"Call me Gloria. All I can say is, I survive."

"You do?"

"I'm here, ain't I?"

"Listen, Miss Grace, will you have lunch with me? It would be an honor. I'm your number one fan. Really."

"Sure. I hear La Caprice does the Gloria Grace Hamburger. I don't know what it tastes like. I'm afraid to try it. It makes me sound like a piece of meat."

"No one in their right minds could accuse you of being a 'piece of meat' Miss Grace," said Marinelli whilst thinking Gloria Grace was the best piece of meat he had seen in a long while, "La Caprice it is," he concluded, licking his lips in anticipation.

As they entered the foyer, it didn't take long for Gloria's fans to spot her. Within seconds they were at the centre of a mob, all desperate to touch her, speak to her, get her autograph. Marinelli was about to call for assistance from his men but he soon realized that far from feeling threatened, Gloria Grace was in her element, chatting to her fans as if she knew them all personally. Marinelli was unsure how he felt. He didn't like it when someone else was the centre of attention. He signalled to his boys, Lou-Lou and Rex, who ambled over, shoving their way through the crowd.

"Escort Miss Grace to my office, boys."

"Who?" asked Lou-Lou.

"Gloria Grace, dummy," said Rex "That's her. In the flesh."

Lou-Lou stared in disbelief. "But I thought that chink just threw her in the drink."

"That's just a story, brains," said Rex. "It ain't real."

"But I sawed it."

It didn't take long for Lou-Lou and Rex to reach Gloria and escort her up the stairs to Marinelli's office.

"You didn't need to be rough with them, boys. They weren't hurtin' no one," said Gloria.

"They might've," said Lou-Lou. "Hey, can you sign this for me?" He pulled a dirty handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to her.

Gloria stared at it, doubtfully then shook her head. "I got a better idea. Pucker up, big boy." She leaned over and planted a kiss on his lips.

Lou-Lou burned red with pleasure. "Wow. I'm your number one fan, Miss. An' I just wanna say, if ever you need someone to sort out that Quang Chu fella, I'm your man."

"I'll bear it in mind, hotstuff."

The office door opened and Mario Marinelli stepped inside. "Say, Lou-Lou, get on the blower an' book us a table for two at La Caprice. I'm starved."

Lou-Lou beamed with pleasure. "We're goin' to La Caprice? Thanks boss. You're a diamond. Can Rex come too?"

Marinelli rolled his eyes at Gloria. "Sure. I can wash the car outside while you and Miss Grace are eating.." He turned to Gloria. "Sorry about that. The boys mean well, they just ain't too bright in the upstairs department."

"Yeah, well, ya can't have everything," said Gloria. She was studying Rex carefully, looking him up and down, like he was a store dummy dressed in the latest summer fashion. "Say, ain't I seen you down the lot?"

Rex flushed. "Err..."

"The lot over at Palace Studios. Yeah. I have. I never forgets a face. Especially one like yours."

Rex blinked. Gloria Grace was beginning to sound too much like a cop for his liking. Nobody remembered his face, ever. Having a totally unmemorable face was a bonus in this business.

"You must be mistaken, Miss Grace," said Marinelli.

"No I ain't. It is him. He's Doctor Dope. He's the guy all the extras go see when they wanna get hopped up for a big scene. My Joe says he's gonna skin ya alive if he ever catches you peddlin' dope around his set again."

Marinelli glared at Rex. "Rex. Is this true?"

Lou-Lou scratched his head and frowned. "You know it's true, boss. You're the one that sent him there."

Marinelli sighed as Gloria burst into laughter.

"So it is true?" she said. "You're a bit of a naughty boy, huh? Listen I've always wanted to try that stuff. Everybody's doing it 'cept me. Joe won't let me. He says it's bad news, but it ain't him puttin' on a show for everyone. Come on, who's gonna give me a hit?"

Marinelli looked at Rex and nodded. "Go on. She's a guest, none of the cheap stuff."

Rex felt inside his jacket pocket and produced a small envelope. "Here ya go. On the house. Enjoy it."

Gloria took the envelope and opened it. She stared at the white powder inside. She glanced up at the three men. She hated admitting ignorance of any subject, but she was at a complete loss as to what to do. "So, do I eat it or what? Help me out, boys?"

Lou-Lou giggled. "Ya sniff it."

"Sniff it?" The whole thing sounded goofy. "You gotta be kiddin' me."

"We don't kid," said Marinelli. "Lou-Lou, quit giggling an' book that table. I don't wanna have to tell ya again."

"I'm on it, boss."

"Rex, help the lady out here."

"Sure thing, boss. Here, Miss Grace." Rex took a tiny silver spoon from his pocket, dipped it in the powder and offered it to Gloria. "Here, ya go. It works best if ya block one nostril with your finger an' sniff it up with the other."

Gloria did as instructed. When she was done, Rex stoked up the spoon and she repeated the process with the other nostril. Marinelli looked on, curious. Using the tip of her fore-finger, Gloria pushed the end of her nose up towards her forehead and snorted whatever was remaining in both nostrils. She blinked twice before opening her eyes wide, like a child being presented with a coveted toy. "Oh, boy," she said looking at Marinelli. "I think I'm in love."

SCENE TWO

News spread quickly about Gloria's presence at the Vogue Picture Palace and by the time she left the building on Mario Marinelli's arm, the street was thronged with admirers, fans and newspapermen. A cheer went up as Gloria stopped to pose for photographs.

Marinelli hated crowds. He was an easy target for any of his numerous enemies and competitors. He turned to Rex and whispered urgently in his ear.

"Bring the car round. Move it."

"Sure, boss."

Rex and Lou-Lou began pushing their way through the crowds.

"Lou-Lou, stay with me. It don't take two of ya to bring the car."

"Sure, boss." Lou-Lou was happy to bask in Gloria's presence.

The people pressed closer, reaching out to touch Gloria. She in turn touched them, shaking hands, kissing cheeks and cracking jokes. Marinelli wished he could bottle her

popularity. Seeing her working the crowd was like watching a presidential candidate on the campaign trail.

Not everyone present felt love and admiration for Gloria Grace. One person stood in the doorway of the Los Angeles Trust and Savings, seething with disgust and rage.

"These people think they're bigger than Jesus. They think they're bigger than the President. Look at those sheep trying to touch her. They think she's gonna make them rich too? She's a cheat. A thief. Devil's work. That's what she's doing. That's what all these people are doing. Devil's work. Someone's gonna stop them. Someone's gonna make them pay. Someone's gonna send them back to the pit."

Rex honked the horn, forcing people out of the road as he edged closer in Marinelli's gleaming Lozier Tourer. Lou-Lou opened the door and then cleared a path through the crowd for Gloria and Marinelli.

Gloria blew kisses to the crowd. "See ya in the flickers, folks," she called before climbing into the car.

"Let's get outta here," said Marinelli, settling in beside her and trying not to appear uneasy. "Step on it, Rex."

SCENE THREE

Joe Kelly was enjoying himself. It was good to get out of the city and away from his office on the lot. Palace Studios were based in what had once been a roadhouse out on Sunset Boulevard. It was a prime location, but for some reason, the building, had always given him the creeps. It was always so cold in there, even in summer. Most of the studio's films were made on the lot, but Joe had decided to take a chance with his new series, and head out to the Pike on Long Beach. The sea air was a treat and it brought out the best in his stars, the Palace Bathing Belles, and their comedy nemesis, Myron Maitland-Mason. He had given Gloria a couple of days off. Her behavior had been a little erratic of late but Joe put that down to her work load and the consequent stress.

Maitland-Mason was in place at the edge of the pier, in full evening dress, cape and top hat. With his curled moustache and slicked back hair, nobody could tell that this was the

same actor who thrilled and repelled millions, every week as the nefarious Quang Chu in Gloria Grace's *Gloria Goes It Alone* series. Yes, Joe had unearthed a fine actor in this middle-aged Shakespearean ham from Liverpool. The trouble was, talented as he was, Maitland-Miserable-Mason was also a whining, whinging, woe-begone sonofabitch.

"Can't we get those bloody boobies in place?" Maitland-Mason drawled, peevisly. "I'm sweating like a horse and I don't want to stain this suit. It was cut by the same man who tailors for Earl Sefton."

"Come on, ladies," said Joe, addressing the Bathing Belles as they lolled around the pier, sipping iced drinks in the shade, and enjoying the attentions of the passing holiday makers.

The girls looked up at him, some eager to work, others irritated and disappointed that this big burly Irishman was intent on spoiling their fun.

"Minta," he said, addressing Minta Greene, the smallest, prettiest and most talented of the girls. "Get over there and struggle with Myron. Remember, you're an off-duty nurse and he wants to deflower you and brag about it to his pals."

"Sure thing, Mister Kelly," said Minta. She blew a bubble of gum and then popped it with her pinky and giggled before running across the pier to Maitland-Mason. "Here I come, Myron baby, ready or not."

"It's Mister Maitland-Mason to you, while we're working," sighed Maitland-Mason.

"Come on, come on for God's sake. Please, can we get this over with? I'm expected at the club for seven, so I'd appreciate spending as little time as humanly possible doing this tawdry nonsense"

"Hold your horses, we're gettin' there," snapped Joe. Christ, actors! Joe had to bite his tongue to stop himself reminding Maitland-Mason that were it not for this 'tawdry nonsense' he would still be trying to save up the fare for his passage back to Liverpool.

Maitland-Mason had arrived at the studios eighteen months ago having spent endless unappreciated years doing rep in England playing to half-arsed houses. Someone had told him about the flickers. He'd taken a chance and booked his passage to the new world in order to try his luck. He turned up on the doorstep of Palace Studios one morning and demanded that Joe put him in his movies. Not for him the cap in hand please give me a job approach. If only Miserable-Mason realized just how lucky he was. At the time, Joe had been puzzling over how the hell he could utilize Gloria's talent. One look at Maitland-Mason, the long pointed nose, the jet black hair, the tall gaunt wiry frame, and the missing piece of the jigsaw just fell into place. The idea for *Gloria Goes It Alone* popped into his head and the rest was history. Of course, Maitland-Mason was always quick to remind Joe that it would never have happened without him and was forever bending his ear about how his unparalleled acting ability was restricted by playing 'that infernal Chink'.

Joe ignored the actor and addressed his Bathing Belles. "Right, ladies, Minta's gonna struggle with Myron. She's gonna holler like hell. You girls look up. You race over. But you're too late, Minta and Miser... and Myron have both taken a tumble into the drink."

"No, no, no," stuttered Maitland-Mason, striding towards him. "I categorically refuse. I am not getting this suit wet. No. No. No."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Joe. "The suit'll be fine. If it ain't we'll buy you a new one."

"But this one was tailored by..."

"I know. I know. If it makes you happy we'll drag him away from Earl Sefton and have him tailor for you exclusively. Now, to work."

Myron Maitland-Mason sighed. He wasn't happy, but the thought of his own personal tailor was a powerful incentive. "Very well. But I shall want it in writing."

"I ain't got a pen. Positions please."

Maitland-Mason took up his position alongside Minta and began pulling her by the arm as she struggled to get away.

"Scream, Minta, scream," yelled Joe, as his cameraman set to work capturing the scene. She screamed. Boy, for such a dainty doll she sure had a powerful set of lungs. The other Bathing Belles looked up, looked at each other, and raced towards their struggling friend.

"You will be mine, my dear, all mine," leered Maitland-Mason, pulling the girl close as he showered her with kisses.

"Get off me, ya big ham," she yelled, pushing him hard. He staggered back against the railings, pulling her with him. They tottered for a moment and then fell over the side, with a splash.

"Girls, jump in after him," said Joe. "This is what the public wants. Wet Bathing Belles by the cartload."

The girls ran giggling to the edge of the pier and plunged into the ocean.

The cameraman moved closer for a shot of Maitland-Mason and the girls, bobbing about in the water. Mason had a clump of sea weed on top of his head. Perfect.

"Joe! Joe!" came a hoarse yell from the other end of the pier. It was David Flaum. "It's the dicks. We gotta run."

"Shit," groaned Joe. "Mike, can you manage the camera?"

Mike Bell, the cameraman, was a skinny black kid without a single muscle in his body.

"I don't think so. These things is heavy, boss."

Joe looked at David, who was panting heavily. "Is he far? How much time we got?"

David shrugged. "He's right behind me." He pointed to the boardwalk where a large, heavy-set, sandy-haired man in a lime green check suit was lumbering towards them.

"You think you can handle him?"

"I can try," said David. "I ain't as young as I was an' he looks pretty tough."

"I say, can we get out of the water?" came Maitland-Mason's cry from below the pier.

"Which one of you jokers is Joe Kelly?" said the heavy-set man, his face red and sweating.

"Who's askin'?" asked Joe, sticking his jaw out.

"Pierce Christiansen. Private Detective for the Motion Picture Patents Company. I believe you're in possession of a non-licensed motion picture camera." The man handed Joe his card.

Joe sighed. The film was comedy gold. He did not want to lose it. "Listen, Pierce, what say we have a drink and try an' work this out like grown-ups?"

"Let's say you hand over that camera an' pay up the fine you owe us. You know you ain't allowed to use a motion picture camera without a licence. Do I have to call the cops or are you gonna play nice?"

Joe reached inside his jacket pocket and produced a handful of bills. "Let's just forget this happened, huh? Go treat the missus to a new hat."

Christiansen took the money. "Thanks a bunch. I'm a widower."

"What if I buy a licence now?"

"No can do. The Motion Picture Patents Company was set up to stop bums like you lowerin' the tone of the industry."

Joe wanted to hit him. "But my pictures pull in a huge audience. Every week. We're the guys who make *Gloria Goes It Alone*."

"I knows who you are. You're competition for my bosses. Hand over the camera. It belongs to Mister Edison."

"I don't believe it does, Mister Christiansen," came a soft foreign-accented voice from behind him.

The detective turned to see a very tall, elderly man with large white whiskers, squinting at him. His clothes were worn and frayed, and yet he had the bearing of a gentleman and a man of action.

"And you are?" said Christiansen.

"Would you care for something to eat?" said the old man.

Joe looked on intrigued as Christiansen said, "What the hell are you talking about you old fool?"

"I thought you looked hungry and that maybe you would care for something to eat. A cheese sandwich perhaps? I have a nice creamy Brie, only this time there are no tomatoes."

The detective's mouth opened wide. It had been a lifetime since he had last seen this man and both of them had changed almost beyond recognition. But it was him. It was definitely him. "You? It can't be..."

"And yet it is." The old man smiled.

"Your family. If people know you're here..."

"They won't know. You won't tell them, will you, Mister Christiansen? I think you would find yourself in... hot water? Is that correct?"

"I..."

"I always knew who it was that took my ideas, my invention and my life but it is always good to have the confirmation. I think we had best say goodbye, *non?*"

Christiansen's florid face had turned white as paper. He looked unwell. "I... yeah." He turned to Joe. "Look, if anyone asks, I never saw you. Got that?"

Joe nodded. "Sure. Whatever you say, pal." He decided to try his luck. "You mentioned you were a widower, so I guess you won't be needing that money for the hat?"

"Oh...Yeah...Sure." The detective reached inside his pocket and gave the money back to Joe before hurrying back down the pier and into the crowds.

"So," said Joe, turning to look at the old man, "what's your name, Pops?"

"Pops?" said the old man. "Ah, yes, because I am old. Hmm. Well, that name is as good as any. You may call me Pops, Mister Kelly. May I say I am a big fan of your work."

"You may, and I'm gettin' to be a pretty big fan o' you too, Pops," said Joe. "How'd ya do that? Those guys cost us a fortune. I never managed to make one turn an' run, an' no disrespect, but I like to think I'm scarier to look at than you are. He looked like he just saw a ghost."

"A ghost?" said Pops. "Oui. Oui. A ghost. To him that is what I am."

"Oh. I see," said Joe, not seeing at all. "Look, is there anything I can do for you? I feel I owe you."

"Of course. You could give me a job."

"A job?"

"Yes."

"Doing what?"

"Technical adviser. I know all about cameras. In fact, I can help you get over the Edison problem. With me beside you, you need never worry about the Motion Picture Patents Company ever again."

"What are you talkin' about? Everyone worries about the Motion Picture Patents Company."

"Because they all need to use Edison's cameras. Non? Well, with me, you don't have to. I have my own camera. I made it."

"I..." Joe thought for a moment and his face broke into a huge smile. "Welcome aboard, Pops."

The old man kissed Joe on both cheeks and then did the same to David.

"Less o' the kissy-kissy stuff, Frenchy, that's not my scene," grunted David. "But nice work."

The old man stopped and looked at Mike Bell, who was still guarding the camera. "Forgive me, but I have never seen a black man working a camera before. Where did you learn your techniques?"

Mike nodded over at Joe. "Mister Kelly, he showed me a few things. The rest I just picked up myself."

Pops nodded his head. "Good. And you like this work?"

"Yeah. I love it."

"With me at your side, you will become the greatest cameraman the world has ever known. That, my friend, is a promise." He offered the black man his hand.

Mike smiled. He was sure the old man was full of bull, but he seemed pleasant enough.

"Appreciate it."

"Can we get out now?" came Maitland-Mason's plaintive wail from the water below.

"It's getting cold in here."

Joe looked over the edge of the railings. Maitland-Mason was treading water looking miserable, the seaweed still perched in a little mound on the crown of his head. Around him the girls frolicked, giggling and squealing with delight as they splashed him again and again.

Joe tried his best to conceal his laughter. "Come on out and we'll run that again just to be sure." He winked at David and Pops. He never ran scenes again, but with Maitland-Mason, he was always prepared to make an exception.

SCENE FOUR

"Jesus, old man, it's a good job you're here to show us the way," said David.

They had decided to give Pops a lift home, partly because Joe felt he owed him but mostly because he was extremely curious to see the camera the old man had supposedly built himself. They were well off the beaten track, driving down a dried up river bed, in orange grove country and Joe was glad that David had invested the studio's money in the Garford Stake Bed truck. It may not win prizes for comfort but it was good for lugging equipment and personnel from one place to another in a hurry.

"Park over there behind the bushes," said Pops.

David did as instructed and brought the truck to a stop. Pops jumped out with the nimble dexterity of a youth and dragged a huge net adorned with leaves and shrubs from behind the bush. Joe, David and Mike the cameraman climbed down to watch as the old man covered the vehicle in the netting, making it all but invisible from the road.

"So what's the story, Pops?" asked Joe. "What's with all the subterfuge? How come you live out here in the middle of nowhere. How do you know that dick?"

"Mon Dieu, so many questions," sighed the old man. "I first met Mister Christiansen on a train many, many years ago and talked him out of committing a very foolish act that would have perhaps haunted his conscience for the rest of his life."

"Go on."

"Go on where? That is it. He was sent to kill me. Luckily, he was more frightened than I was. I promised him that were he to spare my life and that of my family then I would disappear."

Joe whistled softly. "Why would anybody want to kill you?"

"Why indeed?" the old man looked sad. "Come. From here we must go on foot."

Pops set off at quite a pace, across country and into the woods.

"For fuck's sake," mumbled David. "If I'd known I'd be chasing some Frenchy through the middle of fucking nowhere in the hottest part of the day, I'd have asked that Christiansen to finish the job?"

Joe chuckled softly. "Now, now, charmer. Think of it as good exercise."

"When I want exercise I fuck a dolly, anything else is pointless."

Eventually they came to a large barn. It had seen better days, but those days were long gone. A large set of double doors were secured in the centre by a huge padlock and chain. Pops removed a key from the pocket of his waistcoat.

"Welcome to my home," he said removing the padlock and swinging open the doors. They stepped into something that resembled a cross between an industrial workshop and a gentleman's study. One half was chaotic, cogs, cases, screws, lenses, tools and camera parts all over the place. The other, neat, orderly and comfortable. An armchair, shelves full of books all set out in alphabetical order. A polished walnut desk and in the corner a ladder leading up to a small square opening. Joe assumed the ladder led to the old man's sleeping quarters.

"How do you get anywhere?" asked the normally reticent Mike, his curiosity getting the better of him. "Living out here like this?"

"I have a magic carpet. Would you like to see it?"

"You're kidding?" said the kid, eyes wide with wonder.

Pops looked at Mike, serious for a moment before breaking out into a big smile. "Yes I joke with you. I have a motorcycle. When we are finished here perhaps you would be so kind to take me back to where I left it."

"No problem, Pops," said Joe. "I suppose you made that yourself too?"

"Of course, though I confess, I owe much of the ideas to Fabrique Nacional. Such an elegant design. Come, I have wasted too much of your time. Let me show you what it is you wish to see." Pops led the men over to the workshop. Just off to one side was an object covered with canvas. With a flourish, not unlike a vaudeville magician, he removed the canvas to reveal a movie camera, slightly smaller and more compact than the standard camera.

"Young sir," Pops addressed Mike. "Perhaps you would like to pick it up?"

Mike Bell did as he was told. "Sheeeyit. Boss, come feel this baby. It's so much lighter than any of ours."

"May I?" Joe Kelly gestured to the camera.

"Be my guest, monsieur."

Joe ran his hands over the camera, almost as if he were caressing it, he picked it up and put it down immediately and then looked through the lens and tried the focus. Finally he turned to Pops and said, "You made this? No bushwa?"

"Oui."

"Now, I see why men were sent to kill you. This camera. It's beautiful. Way better than the others."

"That is because I invented the others. It is logical then, is it not, that I would be the one who would know how to make them better."

David poked his ear with his finger and stared at the Frenchman. "Just who the fuck are you, Frenchy?"

Pops smiled and bowed. "My friends, you see before you, none other than the celebrated Augustin Le Prince."

David, Joe and Mike looked at each other and then back to the Frenchman.

"Sorry...Who?" said Joe.

The old man sighed. "Ah. And you say you are interested in moving pictures. It was I that invented the motion picture camera. I and I alone. Well, with the help of my son and friends. But yes, in the main, it was I."

"Apple sauce," snorted Joe. "Edison invented the camera. Everyone knows that."

The old man's cheeks burned red. "That is what he would like you to believe. He and his wolves."

"So it was Edison who tried to put the kibosh on you?" said David.

"Your words monsieur, not mine. Whoever it is, they are dangerous people. Christiansen he promised me that if I disappeared, my family would be fine. But..."

"What? He ratted you out?" asked Joe.

The old man shrugged. "I don't know. My son, my wife, they fought for my invention. My wife she survived a shipwreck. In New York harbour."

"A shipwreck in New York? Baloney," snorted David.

"I am not familiar with the term, but I think I get your meaning. It is fishy, non? Then my boy. My poor boy. He died thirteen years ago. He was shot. They say it was a hunting accident. My boy did not hunt. But someone it seems hunt him."

The film makers stared at the old man. There was nothing they could say.

Eventually, Pops sniffed and looked away. "Pfwah. There is nothing I can do about the past. But one day, one day, I would like my revenge."

"I don't blame yer," said David. "You say the word an' I'll round up the gang and we can pay that Christiansen a visit. Rough him up. It'll be a pleasure."

Pops shook his head. "No. This is my cross to bear. And mine alone. One day, there will be a reckoning, my friends. On that you have my word."

They lapsed into silence once more.

Finally, Mike Bell cleared his throat. He was staring at the inventor with something approaching awe. "You really invented the movie camera? Wowee! It's like meeting Moses."

"I do not think Moses invented any cameras, mon ami. But yes. It was I. In the autumn of 1888 in the garden of my beautiful wife's family in Leeds, I shot the first ever moving picture. The rest is, how you say, history."

"You shot the first film...Ever?" Mike's eyes shone with budding hero worship.

"Yes Mike. I did."

"There's just one thing that puzzles me about all of this, Frenchy," said David.

"And what is that monsieur?"

"Where the fuck is Leeds?" asked David.

SCENE FIVE

They were driving towards the Pike at Long Beach, taking Pops back to where he'd left his motorcycle. They travelled in weary, companionable silence, each man absorbed in his own thoughts.

Finally Pops said, "Gentlemen, I have been in hiding a long time and a lot of water has passed under the bridge, but it is important to me that my identity remains a secret known only to us, d'accord?"

"Sure, Pops," said Joe. "Whatever you say."

"Swear it."

"Fine. We swear that the identity of Augustin Le Prince will remain the closely guarded secret of those of us who are in this truck and that we will not divulge his true identity to any living person, so help us God. Good enough for you? Great. On a count of three. One, two, three."

"We swear!"

"Bon! Also, the same applies for my home."

"Don't worry about that, Frenchy," said David. "I wouldn't be able to find that place again if you gave me the next ten fucking years."

SCENE SIX

Dickie Diamond. The name conjured images of someone flamboyant, larger than life, a showman perhaps or at the very least the last man to leave a wild party. If you were to judge a person by his name then in this case you would be hopelessly disappointed.

Dickie Diamond was a tough, uncompromising cop. His popularity on the force was non-existent. His talent for telling things as they were, with searing honesty, tended to go unappreciated, putting up people's backs and their noses way out of joint. Those that were more inclined to give people the benefit of the doubt were soon discouraged. Diamond prided himself on his mistrust and dislike of the entire human race. "I don't like myself, so why am I gonna like anyone else?"

The family name had at one time been Diamante but Dickie had no interest in wasting time tracing family trees. If an Italian descendant had thought losing the Italian name would give him a better chance in the new world, then good for him. He sometimes wished his intrepid ancestor had chosen a name like 'Smith' or 'Jones' but he could live

with it. At least it was memorable, and while he may not exactly sparkle, he was certainly as hard as any diamond.

It was early morning and he was stoked up on coffee. He burst into the Captain's office without knocking.

"What's your beef, Chief?"

Captain Boothe looked up from his desk and smiled. It was pointless telling his subordinate to knock on the door. He had tried countless times.

"Sit down, Dickie."

Diamond sat down opposite Boothe and lit his third cigarette of the morning. "Well?"

"I just got word from upstairs, they want somebody to look into an old case."

Diamond looked at the clock on the wall. "Big deal. Make your point, chief. This chair's killin' my piles."

"The D.A. wants our best man on it." Boothe knew flattery would get him nowhere with Dickie Diamond, but it was worth a shot. Much to his surprise, Diamond showed some interest.

"Woolwine? He's a chump. What's the case?"

"The disappearance of a journalist. Robert Weiss."

Diamond frowned. "Weiss? I don't remember no case involving anyone called Weiss. What's going on, chief?"

"Dickie, what can I tell you? The big cheese says jump, it's our job to ask how high? It ain't like we all ain't got better things to do. This guy Weiss disappeared off the face of the earth about two years ago. His boss, Harrison Gray Otis, is the editor of the L.A. Times. Heard of him?"

Diamond nodded. "Sure. Who hasn't? The guy's got stones, I'll give him that."

"Yeah, well, he's also got a bug up his ass about Weiss. At the time we had a sniff around but you know how it is, no stiff, no crime. Otis ended up carrying out his own in-house investigation. They turned up zilch."

"So? What's changed?"

"Otis and the new D.A. are close. Friends in high places can be useful to some and a curse to everyone else. He tells Woolwine there ain't no way Robert Weiss would just vanish. The kid was going places. Had a kid on the way too. No debts..."

"Jesus," Diamond grumbled, "all that's missing is the white picket fence."

"Exactly. No reason to disappear."

"Maybe his disappearance was outta his hands. An accident. He could'a driven his car off the edge of a cliff, fallen in front of a train. Anything."

"Could be, but Otis says his boy was workin' on something big. When he tells the D.A. what it was, his disappearance takes on a whole new slant."

"You gonna tell me what he was investigating, or are ya gonna keep me dangling in suspense?"

"Not what, Dickie, Who. Marinelli."

Now he definitely had Diamond's full attention. Dickie Diamond had been after Marinelli for years, but could never pin anything on him. Everyone knew Marinelli was bad news, but he was a slippery fuck too. Always one step ahead of the law, and he always came out smelling of roses.

Diamond tried to remain cool. The hunt for Marinelli was his own private Moby Dick. He could sense a captain Ahab moment. "You better give me the f... f... f..." Damn, his stammer was back. It always kicked in when he found himself getting too excited.

"Right here, Dickie," Boothe handed over a file a good five inches thick, saving Diamond the humiliation of trying to vomit out the words he needed. "The life and times of one Mario Marinelli. Knock yourself out."

Diamond took the file and kicking the chair back rose slowly to his feet. He was back in control again. "You said that Gray Otis did an in-house investigation. Any idea who that was through?"

"Yeah," said the Chief rummaging in the top drawer of his desk. "I got it written down here somewhere. Ah, here it is. They were using some private dick." He looked up at Diamond unable to stop himself having a sly dig. "That's probably why it took two years for them to unearth anything. Christiansen his name is. Pierce Christiansen."

SCENE SEVEN

Mario Marinelli was lying back, hands behind his head, well pleased with himself. He had known some girls in his time, but nothing could compete with Gloria Grace *Going It Alone* on his cock. The son of an immigrant ice cream seller, on his back in a luxury hotel, banging America's sweetheart. Life couldn't get any better. His thoughts turned to his wife Simonetta. He always thought of Simonetta in these circumstances. One reason was the guilt. After all she was a good wife and mother and he was a good Roman Catholic boy but the main reason was, the image of his wife, hairy moustache, fat white thighs and livid varicose veins always helped prolong the ecstasy and delay his climax.

Gloria was having none of it. "C'mon, Santa. Let me have it!" Her rhythm intensified and not Simonetta or even the image of his ninety year old nonna back in the old country could stop Mario Marinelli from exploding with sexual pleasure.

"Hot socks, Daddy. You wanna butt me?" Gloria disentangled herself from the spent Marinelli and leaned over the bedside table for Marinelli's cigarette case.

They smoked and kissed.

"You ready for more, hotshot?" she asked.

Marinelli placed his hands together as if in prayer. "Baby, you gotta give an old man some time to recover. Ya don't want this old heart givin' out on ya."

She pouted, and lay back beside him. In less than a minute she was asleep, the cigarette still burning between her long, slender fingers. Marinelli took it and stubbed it out in the ashtray. He closed his eyes, content and a little relieved that he would not have to perform again that night. He turned and placed his arms around her, breathing in her scent.

Something awoke him in the dead of night. He peered into the darkness. Nothing. Probably just a noise from the street. He closed them again. A noise, a swish of cloth, soft, barely audible. He reached out for Gloria, who pushed her behind towards him, snuggling in closer. His eyes opened again and widened in horror. A figure lurched over the bed.

"Rapist!" A voice, harsh and insane. The figure raised something above its head and Marinelli shot out of the bed as the axe buried itself in the mattress, inches from the sleeping form of Gloria Grace. He launched himself at the intruder, one fist connecting with a nose, the other with a soft belly. The figure groaned and collapsed to the floor as Gloria sat up in bed, screaming.

"It's okay, baby," he said. "You're safe." He reached for the light switch and blinked, in surprise at the sight of a middle-aged woman with wild grey hair, sprawled on the carpet, gasping for breath. He reached down and pulled the axe from her hands.

"Start talkin, fruitcake. Who sent ya?" he snarled, kicking the woman in the ribs.

"Mario, don't hurt her," said Gloria, putting her arms around him and pulling him away.

"Are you outta your mind? She tried to kill us."

"She can't help it," said Gloria. Her lips were trembling, her eyes full of tears. "She's my Mom."

"I always knew you was a whore," the woman sneered, wiping blood from her face as she stared up at the couple, with hate in her eyes.

"Mom. You shouldn't be here."

The woman tried to grab at her daughter's feet, but Marinelli was on top of her again, pinning her arms back behind her.

"Gimme my tie," he said.

Gloria ran to the dresser, where Marinelli had folded his clothes. She picked up the tie and handed it to him. He looped it around the woman's wrists and pulled tight.

"You're hurting me," cried the woman, bursting into tears, wailing as if her heart were broken.

"You got some explaining to do, Gloria," said Marinelli. "You saying this face stretcher is your Mom? She should be locked up."

Gloria nodded. "I know. She can't help it." Tears were running down her cheeks now. Tears of fear and shame. "She's got trouble with her nerves."

"You don't say?"

"I..." She gestured for a cigarette and Marinelli fed her one, not taking his eyes off the crazy woman on the floor. "She...Joe...Joe brought her out here, after *Gloria Goes It Alone* took off. He thought the climate might do her good."

"It's done wonders," said Marinelli.

"No. She... please, Mario. This ain't easy. We put her in that place in Glendale. It's nice there. They look after her, and it means I can visit. They're... what's the word?"

"Fucking useless? They let her come an' go as she pleases, armed with a fucking fire axe?"

"You cunt!" The woman shrieked. She was staring hard at Gloria. "I should have drowned you at birth. I wanted to. God knows, I wanted to."

Gloria turned and ran for the bathroom, locking herself inside.

Marinelli hammered on the door with his fists. "Hey, you can't leave me here with the maniac. What's the big idea?"

Gloria didn't answer. She was sat, huddled in the bath, shaking and trembling. She would never be free of Mom. Never. Why couldn't she just die and leave her in peace?

Marinelli turned to look at Gloria's mother. She was younger than he was and yet what had once no doubt been a great beauty was now a wreck, a vision from a nightmare.

He picked up the telephone.

"Get me that looney bin in Glendale."

While he waited for the men from the asylum to come, he tried coaxing Gloria out of the bathroom, but she wasn't even speaking. He sat on the end of the bed smoking one cigarette after another. He had to commend Joe Kelly and Gloria for keeping this a secret. He could well imagine the scandal if news got out that America's sweetheart was the daughter of a homicidal lunatic. He had read somewhere that insanity was hereditary. If that were true, he would have to watch himself with Gloria, he may not be so lucky a second time. And what about the next generation? What if he got Gloria pregnant? Would the offspring take after dear old grandmama?

Three men arrived to take her away. Marinelli had been expecting men in white coats, but these guys were discreet. They looked as if they were dressed for a night on the town. One of them introduced himself as a Doctor Lewis.

"I ain't impressed, Doc. This woman could'a killed me."

"Sorry, Mister Marinelli. She broke her bedroom window and was gone before anyone realized anything. It won't happen again."

"It better not. Can you get her out of here without waking up the joint? We don't want a scene."

Doctor Lewis opened his medical bag and produced a hypodermic. He knelt beside the woman, who backed away from him, cursing and spitting. Lewis nodded at his two companions who knelt beside her, holding her still while he administered the injection.

"This should calm her down for a while."

She continued struggling for a moment or two, before her eyelids fluttered and closed and she lay still. The two men picked her up and carried her to the door.

"Good night, Mister Marinelli," said Doctor Lewis. "Please give my apologies to Miss Grace."

Marinelli nodded as he saw them out of the room.

When they were gone, the bathroom door opened a crack and he saw Gloria standing there, peering out at him.

"It's all safe. You can come out."

Gloria ran into his arms. "I'm sorry. I should'a told ya."

"Yeah. You should." He held her at arms length. He wanted to hit someone. "Look, I gotta go. I'll see you around, huh?"

Gloria's face crumpled and tears streamed down her face. "Please. Mario. Please. Don't leave me. Not tonight. I... I need you to hold me. Please? Just this once."

He wanted to tell her to go fuck herself. The words were on the tip of his tongue. He held back. This was Gloria Grace. She was a prize worth keeping, at least for the moment. Gloria Grace could open doorways into the industry. If he was going to make a name for himself in that world, then he would need her by his side. At least until she had introduced him to her contacts. He looked down at her and kissed the tip of her nose.

"Sure thing, baby. You hold me. You're safe now. Daddy's here."

They woke late. Gloria sitting up to stare at the clock. Eleven thirty.

"I'm late," she said, jumping out of bed and opening a drawer in the dresser. She removed a silver spoon and a small crystal glass phial full of white powder. She poured some of the powder onto the spoon and snorted twice.

"You're getting a taste for that stuff, eh?" said Marinelli.

She nodded, and flashed him a smile. "It's better than ice cream. It makes me feel insatiable."

He patted the bed. "You got that right, baby. Let me feed the need."

Gloria shook her head. "I can't, honey lamb. Any chance you can give me a ride to work?"

"Do you have to go in? Spend the day with me. We could drive to the coast." It was an offer Marinelli hoped Gloria would decline. Now he had been introduced at first hand to the family skeleton in the closet, his passion was definitely on the wane. He had better things to do than spend his time with a would- be apprentice whackjob.

"Aw, baby boy, that's real sweet. But I gotta get back to work." The feeling for Gloria was entirely mutual. Sure, she liked Marinelli. He was dangerous. But he had seen her at her weakest. He had learned her darkest secret. That made her feel vulnerable and after last night, vulnerable was the last thing she wanted to feel.

"You wanna talk about your Mom?" said Marinelli.

She shook her head and began dressing. Marinelli was relieved. He decided to change the topic of conversation. "You know I always wanted to get into the movies. It's crazy, ain't it? Palace Studios being in one of my old properties? It's almost like a sign. If ya believe in that sort of bunk."

"I don't," said Gloria.

"Me neither. Still, maybe I'll drop by and have a little chat with this Joe Kelly."

"Swell, honey. You do that." An alarm bell went off in Gloria's head. Somehow she didn't think Joe Kelly would take kindly to a man like Marinelli sniffing around his studio. She smiled to herself. She always liked fireworks. Especially when they weren't aimed in her direction.

SCENE EIGHT

Joe, Pops, Mike and Myron Maitland-Mason were standing on top of a hill a few miles out from the studios. Joe kept peering through a pair of binoculars at the desert scrub below. He was not happy.

"Where the hell is that bearcat?" he cursed, spitting out a wad of tobacco juice. "Tom Ince's got the whole Apache nation lined up over there and I don't wanna miss the charge. Mike, can you go hold them up a while?"

Mike grinned foolishly. "How am I gonna do that Boss?"

Joe pulled a five dollar bill from his wallet. "Get word to Jim McCartney. He's one o' the stunt riders. Slip him this and tell him to stall for time as long as possible. The other's'll follow his lead."

Mike looked doubtful. "How'm I supposed to recognize this Jim McCartney? All you white folks look the same to me."

"He'll be dressed as Big Chief Kiss My Arse and riding a bloody great warhorse. You can't miss him."

Mike scrambled down the hill towards the crowd of extras assembled below, while Joe prayed that he would be successful. It had been a stroke of luck running into Jim McCartney last night. He had listened intently as the one time cowboy turned stuntman and movie extra told him about Inceville's planned shoot in the valley.

"We got four hundred of us lined up for the charge. I'm tellin' ya, Joe, Thomas Ince has got money to burn. You should try your hand at Westerns. There ain't nothin' bigger," McCartney had told him over drinks in the Gold Diggers Club.

Joe had no intention of making Westerns but the idea of four hundred Apaches on the warpath was too big an opportunity to pass up. He had sat up half the night writing the script for the next episode of *Gloria Goes It Alone*, in which Quang Chu's attempts to dispose of Gloria would be foiled by an Apache war party. It would be a sensation and it would only cost him five dollars. McCartney had given him the times and locations and Joe had sent word to Gloria telling her not to be late. Ha! Some hope. That girl was a law unto herself, and the more successful she became, the worse she got. He thought about taking her over his knee and giving her a thrashing, but somehow he couldn't imagine Gloria let anyone spank her, against her will.

"You know, I'm sick to the back teeth of that girl," sighed Maitland-Mason. "So unprofessional." He was sweating under the California sun and his heavy Oriental robes were not helping matters. His makeup was running and his Mandarin moustaches were beginning to droop.

"You an' me both, Myron," Joe agreed, squirting the cactus with more tobacco juice.

"Bloody well fire her, then. Teach the silly bitch a lesson," said Mason. "You can easily find another dumb Dora to take her place."

"The public love her, Myron. If I canned her they'd crucify me. Then I'd crack under the pressure an' tell 'em it was all your idea."

The honk of a car horn sounded and Joe turned to see a shining Lozier Tourer coming along the track. Gloria leaned out of the back window and blew kisses towards him and Pops.

"My, but when one is as beautiful as she, it is right that the world should wait," sighed Pops.

"Don't let her hear that," said Joe. "She don't need you encouraging her, you randy old goat." He strode over to the car. "What's the big idea, Gloria? You're late."

A heavy-set middle-aged man with an expensive suit and pale blue glittering eyes stepped out of the driver's seat and opened the door for Gloria before holding out his hand to Joe.

"You must be Joe," said the man. "Mario Marinelli. I've heard a lot about you."

Joe looked down at Marinelli's hand but made no attempt to take it. "Yeah? I heard a lot about you too."

Marinelli smiled. "So, how you settling in? You know I used to own the site of your studios?"

"So I heard."

"It's a beautiful spot."

"Sure." He pushed past Marinelli and began ushering Gloria towards the top of the hill.

"Come on, Gloria. We gotta be quick."

"What's your rush. Why can'tcha be nice to Mario? He's only bein' friendly." She sniffed and wiped her nose on her glove.

"You got a cold?" asked Joe.

"Nope. I'm just copacetic, Irish. Now what do I gotta do?"

Joe pointed down into the valley. "Thomas Ince is shooting one of his Westerns down there. Any minute now, the whole valley's gonna be swarmin' with Injuns. You an'

Myron are gonna be right in the middle of it. Just act natural and try not to get trampled on."

Mike came crawling back up the hill, his trousers were torn and his face glistened with sweat as he gasped for breath. "Can't hold 'em back no more. That Thomas Ince is on the warpath himself. They all set to go."

Joe clapped the boy on the back. "Then take the camera, get as close as you can and start rolling."

Pops stepped forward. "Take the camera off the stand and lie on the ground with it. You will get the motion of the horse legs as they pass. Very effective."

Joe nodded. "Good idea, Pops. Myron, Gloria, run for it."

They could see the Indian cavalry at the far edge of the valley taking up their positions.

There wasn't a moment to lose. Gloria paused to kiss Marinelli, hard on the lips.

"Be good while I'm gone."

"I'm always good, baby," he laughed, winking at Joe.

"Move it!"

As the actors and cameraman raced down the hill, Pops and Joe were left alone with Mario Marinelli, who seemed in no hurry to leave.

"Was there something I can do for you, Mister Marinelli?" asked Joe.

"Yeah. You can allow me to invest in Palace Studios. As I said, I'm a fan. I'd like to show my appreciation."

Joe was tempted. While Sir Stanley Garrideb could always be relied on to invest in the sure fire winners such as *Gloria Goes It Alone* and *The Bathing Belles* series, it didn't feel right asking him to take a chance on some of the more 'artistic' ideas Joe had bubbling away on the back burner. Perhaps some outside investment would help make

his dreams of cinematic art a reality. "Let me think about it. I'll get in touch." This time he accepted Marinelli's hand and shook it.

"You do that. It was a pleasure meetin' ya. See you around, Joe."

The gangster sauntered back to his Lozier and headed back towards town.

"I do not like that man," said Pops. "He has eyes like a snake."

"You're a good judge of character, Pops," Joe agreed. "Come on, let's watch the action."

Mike began filming before the Apache warriors arrived. Myron's Quang Chu was shaking Gloria like a rag doll and mugging furiously into the camera, while Gloria screamed for help. Mike could hear the galloping hooves drawing nearer and nearer. Then he heard something else, the furious honking of a car horn and a chorus of roars, cheers and cursing. He stared in amazement as a rickety police car, crammed full of the screwiest cops he had ever seen, came racing towards Gloria and Myron. The Apaches reared up on their horses to avoid crashing into the car. The horses towards the rear kept pressing forward, colliding with those in front, bumping the riders out of their saddles and into the dirt. Myron grabbed hold of Gloria and tried to use her as a shield, until she kicked him hard on the shin with a pointed heel. He lost his balance and went down. She only just succeeded in pulling him out of the way of a riderless horse as it charged through the chaos. The police car had braked beside them and Gloria and Myron tried to find room on the already crowded running board.

"Are you guys outta your minds?" Gloria yelled. Then she recognized the fat cop, jammed into the driving seat. "Aww, for cryin' out loud. What the futz are you doing here?"

The fat man laughed in her face. "Keystone Cops to the rescue baby! What? You think you're the only ones who can leech a good cavalry scene?"

He had a point. At that moment Joe came racing through the tangle of horses and fallen Indians.

"Hi Roscoe," he said, addressing the fat man.

"Hiya, Mister Kelly."

"Listen, here's a ten spot if you let us keep on filming. I want you to snatch Quang Chu and drive off with him."

Roscoe looked around nervously, before accepting the money. "Sure thing. We'll donate it to the mission, hey boys?"

The other Keystone Cops laughed.

"Right, keep filming Mike," said Joe. "Take him away, boys."

The Cops grabbed Myron by the shoulders and hauled him into the car.

"No!" he yelled. "How dare you! Don't you clowns know who I am? I played Hamlet in Stratford upon Avon. I gave my 'Lear' in..." His cries were drowned out as the Keystone Cops gave him the bird. They sped away, leaving Gloria to dust herself down as she stepped daintily through the Apaches, stopping at a prone warrior playing dead she placed a foot on his chest and posed triumphantly like a prize-fighter who had just knocked his opponent out cold.

"And cut! That's it, Mike. Stop filming. Posilutely brilliant, Gloria." Joe couldn't stop laughing. What a killing he'd made. At first when he had seen the Keystone Cops invading the scene he had already invaded he had been furious, but then he saw the possibilities. Gloria Grace meets the Keystone Cops. The idea was brilliant and it had the added bonus of pulling one over on Mack Sennett his biggest rival.

Two cars pulled up at the same time, driven by two angry red faced men.

"What's the big idea of ruining my scene?" bellowed Mack Sennett, leaping out of the car.

"Your scene?" cried Tom Ince, stepping out of his car. "It was my scene and you wrecked it. We'll have to shoot the whole thing again and it'll be dark soon. Do you know how long it takes to get eight hundred Apaches in the saddle?" Ince was furious, veins throbbing in his forehead and neck.

"Four hundred, Tom, don't exaggerate," said Joe, feeling smug.

"Four hundred?" Ince glared at him. "You been counting them while you plotted to ruin my movie, is that it?"

"Aw, come on, Tom, I'll treat you to dinner, tonight. Place of your choice. Calm down before you do yourself an injury."

Ince shook his head. "Eat with you? I'd sooner eat my own shit. Now get off my set. The same goes for you, Sennett. Scram." He climbed back in his car, hollered at the horsemen to get back to their opening places and sped back the way he had come.

Joe and Sennett stared warily at each other before bursting out with laughter.

"I want a share in any movie you make that has my boys in it," said Sennett.

Joe shook his head. "No dice, Mack. You want I should pay Ince too? You're nuts."

"Well you can at least buy me dinner," said Sennett as Joe started walking away.

"Yeah, I'll buy ya a hotdog next time I see ya."

"Shanty Irish," Sennett hollered after him.

"Takes one to know one."

SCENE NINE

Pops looked up from his newspaper as Joe came into the cutting room. Joe could tell the old man was troubled.

"What's on your mind, Pops?" he asked, taking a seat beside him.

"Everything and nothing."

"Can't you ever give a simple answer to a simple question?" Joe popped a fresh wad of tobacco in his mouth.

"You will ruin your teeth, *mon ami*." said Pops. He sighed and gestured to the newspaper he had been reading. "It is this."

Joe looked down at the foreign news section. There was a photograph of some grand high hat with great big comedy villain whiskers. "'Arch Duke Ferdinand slain'. Big deal. Never heard of him. He a pal of yours?"

Pops shook his head. "No. He's a member of the Austrian royal family."

"And?"

"They killed him. They're blaming the Serbs."

"The who?"

"Serbians. It spells trouble, my friend. It could mean war."

"What? Over some stiff nobody never heard of? Get outta here."

"The Prussians are gearing up for war. Believe me."

Joe shrugged. "Yeah? Well, we're safe here."

Pops shook his head. "No. If there is war, France will join. France needs me. I will have to serve my country."

Joe almost choked on his wad of tobacco. "You? Join the army? France must be desperate. You're at least a hundred. What the hell are ya gonna do, join the armored bathchair battalion?"

"I am not so old."

"Yes you are. Anyway, we got other things to worry about. Look at this." He held out a still taken from the latest reel of *Gloria Goes It Alone*. "Gloria looks old enough to be your mother. What's going on?"

Pops nodded. Joe was exaggerating but Gloria did look old. She was only now turning twenty two, but the harsh Kleig lamps were merciless when it came to showing up lines and blemishes. "She parties too much."

Joe thought it went deeper. This was a recent development. Until a month ago, Gloria had been the same carefree, sassy, bubbly girl he'd met that day in Coney Island, now she was tired, her skin had lost its glow. She was still a knockout but there was something missing. He put the blame on Mario Marinelli. Everything was fine until that greaseball showed up.

"I may have a solution," said Pops.

"I don't think she's gonna lay off the hooch," said Joe.

Pops shook his head. "That won't be necessary. Not this year anyway. No. I have been working on an idea."

Joe was intrigued. Pops was full of ideas, all of them good. "Spill it."

Pops produced a black silk handkerchief from his pocket. He held it up to the light and Joe could see that it was like a fine netting. "You see? This is the handkerchief of youth."

"You lost me, Pops."

"I place this over the camera, when we film the close ups. "

"I think you've lost it, Pops."

"Ah, that is where you are wrong my Irish friend. I did a test on Minta, yesterday. Watch."

The projector whirred into life as Pops switched off the lights. An image of Minta Greene, grinning self consciously, appeared on the screen.

"She is a pretty girl, non?" said Pops. "But not without her imperfections. You notice the lines around her eyes? The blemishes on her cheeks?"

Joe nodded, Minta was troubled more than most by acne. It was the one thing holding her back from any major film roles. "Yeah. I notice. I ain't blind."

"Now observe." More footage showed Minta still mugging and crossing her eyes, but she seemed five, ten years younger. She could pass for fifteen, the spots were gone and so were the lines.

Joe stood up in and embraced the old man. "Pops, you've done it again. I don't know what you've done. I don't know how you did it. But you've done it. How's it work?"

Pops shrugged. "The holes in this netting they are like a little makeup artist. They alter the image. Remove the blemishes. I am clever, oui?"

"Clever? You invented the word, Pops. If you were a gal, I'd kiss you."

Pops laughed. "Maybe you should kiss Gloria instead. Win her away from that gorilla." Joe didn't react, his face stern. Pops thought perhaps he had overstepped the mark and caused offence, but it wasn't that. Joe Kelly had been distracted by an article he had spotted in the discarded newspaper. A piece about the flamboyant and charismatic politician Patrick O'Brien winning over the great American public with his Irish charm, on the campaign trail, raising money for his Independent Landowners Party. Joe felt the rage burn inside him. So Patrick O'Brien had made it to America, had he? Joe knew it would only be a matter of time before their paths crossed. He had waited patiently for his chance knowing that returning to Ireland was impossible. He never thought for a minute that the chance would come to him here in America. He looked at the photo in the paper more closely. It was him alright, the obsequious grin, the cold dead eyes. The same stupid hunger for power. The Independent Landowners Party? Now that Home Rule for Ireland was set to become a reality, he supposed the old country would be full of ridiculous parties, all grabbing wildly for a slice of the pie and thinking nothing of the people they were supposed to serve.

"Joe?"

"Uh...What?"

"I said maybe you should kiss Gloria instead, win her away from that gorilla?"

Joe smiled weakly, jolted back by Pops to the here and now. Kiss Gloria? Now there was a thought. How would she react? How would he react? Would she sock him, or would she kiss him back? It might be worth finding out.

SCENE TEN

It was three in the morning, when Pierce Christiansen was woken from a drunken slumber. He had been drinking heavily for weeks, ever since that encounter with the man he was supposed to have killed a lifetime ago. He groped for the bedside lamp and squinted at the alarm clock. Who the hell comes visiting at this hour? Whoever it was, they better have a good reason. He pulled on his dressing gown and stumbled downstairs to the door. His caller was kicking at it now, probably ruining the paintwork. He took the pistol out of his dressing gown pocket.

"What do you want?" he called through the door.

"Police. Are you gonna open the door or do I have to kick it down?" came a voice from the other side.

Christiansen thought for a moment. The guy was noisy enough to be a bull. Any of the hired killers he had come across in the past were like ghosts. They certainly wouldn't draw attention to themselves. He opened the door.

Dickie Diamond barged past him, heading straight for the living room.

"Hey, you can't just come waltzing in here in the middle of the night. I'll kick your fuck...urrghh!"

Christiansen didn't finish the sentence, Diamond had swung round quick as a whip and punched Christiansen with a sickening ferocity in his testicles. He bent double and began to wretch on the carpet. What a waste of good whiskey. Diamond grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, pulled him up and threw him into an armchair. "Have I got your full attention?"

Christiansen, still stunned, could only mumble "Wha...?"

Whack! Diamond slapped him in the face. Hard. "I said, do I have your full attention?"

"Yes! Fucking yes! What do you want?"

"First off, I'll have some of what you've been drinking." Diamond made his way to the bar and poured himself a glass of bourbon. The ice in the bucket had melted, so he drank it neat. He took a sip and nodded appreciatively. "It's good. You want a nip?"

Christiansen was hung-over and sick to the stomach. The last thing he wanted was whiskey. He shook his head and stared at the intruder.

Dickie Diamond was a tough sonofabitch who thought nothing of bending the law and doing what it took to get the information he required, but he was also a damn good cop and in the time it took to charge into the house, whack Christiansen in the balls, heave him into the chair and help himself to a drink, he had made a complete inventory of his surroundings, his brain filtering and filing away all relevant information. He could tell that Christiansen was a very worried man. That was good. He should be. *"There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face,"* he thought looking into the haunted eyes of Christiansen.

"I just want a little chat, Mister Christiansen, you know how it is?"

Christiansen didn't, but he nodded anyway. It seemed the wise thing to do.

"I've been given a case I don't want so I want to wrap the fucker up as soon as I can, then I can get back to more interesting shit. You did some work for Harrison Gray Otis at the LA Times. You worked the case for two years yet you didn't find a fuckin' thing? You must be one dumb sonofabitch, if ya don't mind me sayin' so."

"Be my guest. It's a free country."

Diamond narrowed his eyes. The dick still had some spunk. He wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not. He decided to play another card. "How much do you lose a week at the track?"

"What?" Christiansen looked up in surprise.

"Look at this place. It's a fuckin' mess. Cheap shit everywhere. You took top dollar from Harrison Gray Otis as well as working for the Motion Picture Patents Company, yet you ain't got zip to show for it. I figure an ugly fuck like you won't be spending on a dame and you don't look like the type of guy who'd be sending home money to his mama in Shitsville, Fuck Town. So.."

"You from the church. Here to save my soul?"

"You'll soon be wishing I was, you dumb c-c-cunt. So what did you find out about Robert Weiss and who's paying you to keep quiet about it?"

"No idea what you're talking about."

"Let me put it another way, What did you find out about Robert Weiss and how much did Mario Marinelli pay you to keep quiet about it?"

"Mario who?"

Diamond looked long and hard at Christiansen, before turning abruptly and walking away without saying another word.

SCENE ELEVEN

Joe and Pops were locking up Palace Studios when their heads were turned by the toot from a car horn.

"Hey Joe, need a ride?" It was Mack Sennett.

"Well, well," mumbled Joe to Pops. "What's he want?"

"Maybe you should ask him, Joe."

"No kidding, Pops, and here's me thinking you were going senile. You wanna come too? My treat?"

"Non, mon ami. I have to meet someone, I will see you tomorrow."

"Okay, Pops." Joe had expected that answer. Pops was a personable old duffer and everybody around the studios had taken the idiosyncratic Frenchman to their hearts. The Palace Bathing Belles looked on him as a fatherly figure, and even Myron Miserable Mason treated him with respect, recognizing true genius when he saw it. Yet there was something very solitary about the old man. A result of his many years on the run perhaps. He was punctual as a reveille every morning, affable and friendly at work but

as soon as they were done he was gone, roaring away on his motorcycle, presumably, thought Joe, to invent something else even more brilliant and revolutionary. Joe was not a religious man. Far from it, but everyday he thanked whoever it was he needed to thank for sending the Frenchman his way. His genius was getting Joe noticed. Audiences and critics were noting the quality of Joe's work. The lighting, the camera angles, the use of two, three or even four cameras in a scene. Joe had some good ideas, but the truly great ones all came from Pops. The patents Joe had pending would soon be filling the Palace coffers too. Pops' new camera was going to change the way movies were made. Joe was also amazed that they hadn't seen that detective from the Patents Company for weeks now. Shame. Joe would love to have see his face when he realized they were not using Edison cameras. Jesus, once the film industry got to hear about Pops' black gauze and the amazing effect it had on taking away the years on the face of leading men and more importantly, ladies, then the money would come pouring in. Joe was a very fair man and knew that he wasn't really entitled to any of the profits but Pops had insisted that all profits be split down the middle. He argued that it was Joe Kelly's films and Palace Studios that allowed him to showcase his products and that had Joe not given him a chance then maybe nothing would have ever come of his inventions. Joe knew that was baloney but his scruples stopped well short of turning down Pop's amazing offer. Pops also insisted a percentage of Joe's cut be sent to Stanley Garrideb.

Joe approached the car leaning in through the open passenger window to shake the hand of Mack Sennett. They both watched Pops disappear into the evening gloom on his motorcycle.

"He should take care, a man his age whizzing about on that contraption. Those things are dangerous," said Sennett, as Joe opened the door on the passenger side and slid onto the seat.

"You can tell him, but he won't listen."

Mack gunned the engine and they set off.

"It's a pity he ain't coming. There's a few things I wanted to talk to him about."

Joe not rising to the bait remained silent.

"So did ya get some good shots of the Keystone Cops for your movie, Joe?"

Joe grinned. "I sure did, and I'll be looking forward to your next adventure too, Mack.

Whatcha gonna call it again? Ah yes, *Gloria Goes it Alone with the Keystone Cops* or was it *The Keystone Cops and the Great Gloria Grace Rescue*?"

"Alright, alright," laughed Sennett. "Point taken."

"If there's anyone you should be taking out for a drink it should be Ince, not me."

"You're taking me out remember?" said Sennett. "I'm lookin' forward to that hot dog."

"Sure, Mack. No problem. Whatever you like."

They settled on a bar off Sunset that catered to ordinary working men where they knew they wouldn't be hustled by movie folk pushing for work. They ordered beers and steaks and settled back in their chairs. Joe decided to cut to the chase.

"So, Mack, what's on your mind?"

"Nothing, Joe. You know how it is, you're doing your thing, I'm doing mine, we're both doing well, yet we ain't never got the time to talk to each other...about the business."

"I'm all ears."

"I ain't shittin' you Joe, I'm a big fan. Some of your stuff is brilliant. The angles, the camera work. How do you do it?" Mack exploded with laughter, his florid complexion, glowing with the embarrassment of complimenting a rival. "There! I've said it."

Joe was quietly amused. It amazed him to think here was Mack Sennett, the king of comedy, watching his movies and feeling jealous. The buzz that gave him fully justified his own self-belief. It was confirmation that he had been right all along.

"I ain't gonna lie to ya, Mack. I couldn't do it without Pops."

"Ah yes. The elusive Scarlet Popsicle. You keep him well away from the limelight."

"It ain't deliberate. I swear. He just likes to keep himself to himself."

"Make sure you keep your eye on him. You don't want a rival snatching him from under your nose."

Joe knew damn well that Mack was referring to himself. "It would have to be a rival not afraid to put his hands in his pockets then. Pops don't come cheap."

The food arrived and they tucked in, eating in silence for a while before Mack said, "You know how to get the best from your girls too. The public loves Gloria Grace. Hell, I love her. She's no Mabel Normand, but she's hot stuff. I hear she likes to party. What's her work rate like. You getting a full day outta her?"

"Yeah, it's good. I don't have to tell you about leading ladies, Mack. You gotta treat 'em with kid gloves and be willin' to turn a blind eye. Gloria's always liked a drink since the day I first met her. She can handle it though, and herself."

"Glad to hear it Joe, coz word is she likes a toot on the old nose candy. Once that gets a grip the only way is usually down."

"What's the story here, Mack," said Joe keeping his voice calm and level, "are you trying to give me indigestion?"

Mack looked serious. "No Joe, far from it. We're both in the same boat. We have to look after our interests. She's a wild one, maybe that's why she's so watchable, but she's kicking about with Mario Marinelli, and she's getting a liking for all things bad. Don't shoot the messenger, Joe."

Joe, toyed with his salad. He had lost his appetite. "Okay, Mack, thanks for the tip."

SCENE TWELVE

Mario Marinelli sat in his office at the Vogue Picture Palace, chain smoking cigars. He was not in a good mood.

"Who the fuck does that dumb mick think he is? Huh? Too good to shake my hand. I oughtta cut his fucking hand off and shove it up his ass."

"I'm sure he didn't mean nothing by it, boss," said Rex in his best placatory tones. "The guy was in the middle of a big scene, his head woulda been full of a million an' one different things. Maybe it just wasn't the right time."

"Who the fuck are you, all of a sudden?" Marinelli spluttered in indignant rage. "You weren't even there."

"No, boss, sorry, boss."

"The bum has no manners, no, worse than that, the man has no respect. He needs cutting down to size."

"Sure, boss. Whaddaya have in mind?"

"Well, you're Doctor fucking Dope, go administer some medicine."

"Sure, but I ain't sure he'll go for it, boss. He don't like me hanging about the studio."

"Not him, dumb-dumb. Her. That fucking whore of a leading lady of his. The way to get to him is to get to her."

"I thought you liked her, boss?"

Marinelli gave Rex a look that warned him not to try second guessing him a second time.

"You know, Rex, you are a fucking idiot. What are you?"

"An idiot, boss."

"No, Rex. What are you?"

"A fucking idiot, boss?"

"Yes, Rex. A fucking idiot. I'm done with the whore. The girl's ossified. She's a mess. A disaster waiting to happen. Let's see how cocky the mick is after his leading lady gets a taste for heroin. If it's anything like her taste for cocaine then she'll be all washed up before the year's out. See to it, Rex, give her as much as she wants, then we can all sit back and enjoy the show."

Marinelli sat back and smiled. He felt better already. "I'm gonna own that studio one day." He thought about Kelly and his gang of hangers on. "First out the door is gonna be that limey kike." He thought about the other regulars on the lot. Mike Bell, the cameraman. He would be easy to push around, but he might have to change his job. Kelly must be nuts putting a camera in the hands of a jigaboo. He'd be happier with a mop and broom. Then the old foreign guy. There was something familiar about that bozo. Something that made him feel uncomfortable. The way the old fuck had given him the old fish eye, for no reason. What was his problem? He would have to do some digging there, find out about him. In a subtle way. Rex and Lou-Lou were useless when

it came to subtle. He would need someone else. He thought for a moment and smiled.

He knew just the person. He reached for the phone.

"Yes?" came the voice at the other end, cool, husky and businesslike.

"I got a job for you. I need you to find out about someone for me."

"Why me? Why not get those bums of yours to do it?" came the reply, bored and mildly amused.

"This need finesse. You're good at finesse."

"I know I am."

"There's an old man at Palace Studios. Calls himself Pops. I wanna know more about him. Anything you can dig up."

"Why not ask your whore?" came the voice.

Marinelli's cheeks flushed red with anger. "That ain't none of your business. Just do it, huh? Be nice."

The line went dead.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Dickie Diamond poured himself a whiskey and took it over to his desk. He could have gone over the Marinelli file in the comfort of his own home, but there was something relaxing about the precinct in the small hours of the morning. He could think for a start, and he had the joint pretty much to himself. Anybody who happened to be working late, knew him well enough not to risk a foul mouthful by disturbing him. The precinct was the centre of his universe. His colleagues would have been deeply surprised, shocked even, to learn that Dickie Diamond had passions. One was Shakespeare. Call it an inspirational teacher when he was at school or call it an innate understanding of one of Britain's most famous writers but Dickie Diamond must have been the only detective on the L.A.P.D payroll with a Complete Works of William Shakespeare. It was his bible. He dipped into it when he needed to relax, he found running the great soliloquies through his head helped his stammer. In his teens he could barely string more than three words together at a time without his tongue tripping him up, these days most people didn't even realize he had a speech impediment, not unless they caught him on a bad

day. Along with Shakespeare, his other passion was home improvements. Going against every stereotype of a cop, his apartment was immaculate. Dickie Diamond had methodically studied how everything in it worked. The electricity, the plumbing, bricks and woodwork. One day he would buy himself a plot of land somewhere pretty and build a house exactly to his specifications from the ground up. Maybe his love for these things were borne from his near total lack of interest in women and sex. *"Man delights not me - nor women neither,"* is how his friend Shakespeare would put it.

When Dickie Diamond was indulging his hunger for home improvements he had to have all his tools laid out in front of him. It drove him crazy when he started a repair job to find he had to go back and forth for hammers, nails, nuts and bolts. In much the same way, when searching through a case file, he preferred the station. Then if he needed to cross reference anything, he was in the right place to do it. The Marinelli file was open in front of him on the desk. He longed for something to leap out and strike him as unusual. What a fucking snake in the grass. The United States of America was the land of opportunity but people like Marinelli took that way too far. He had made his money dealing in human misery. Drugs, protection rackets, booze, gambling, prostitution. Once he had built up his seedy little empire he made all the right noises about being an upstanding citizen. Called himself a property developer, told the newspapers how his organization was just helping to put food on the table of the honest working stiff. Next thing you know he's talking about running for mayor. Only in America. Marinelli was smart. On the rare occasions that he found himself in court, he would pay big bucks for the best attorneys in the land. *"In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt but being season'd with a gracious voice obscures the show of evil?"* Diamond had often been tempted to have done with it and put a bullet in the head of Marinelli. Preventive policing at its best. He could pull it off too. Chances are he would never be fingered.

But something always stopped him. There would be no real pleasure or satisfaction in murder. The thrill of nailing the fucker to something watertight and seeing him condemned before a jury. Now that was real motivation. A motive was what he needed if he was going to uncover whatever it was that Robert Weiss had sniffed out and its connection to Pierce Christiansen. There was no denying that Christiansen knew something important. Something that haunted him so much he had to drink himself senseless, night after night. Diamond knew it would go one of three ways. He would either try to skip town, come out all guns blazing or he would wind up dead.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Unlike Joe, who had snapped up a modest villa in Inglewood as soon as the bucks began flooding in, Gloria Grace *nee* Fettle, had never given a moment's thought to settling down in one place. She moved from hotel to hotel within the city, sampling the best they had to offer. Joe often questioned her about this refusal to put down roots.

"Don'tcha wanna belong somewhere?" he asked her one night. "There's nothing like walking in some joint, kicking off your shoes, pouring a stiff drink and knowing that the roof over your head belongs to you. Home's where the heart is, kid."

Gloria disagreed. She didn't like to talk about her past to anyone. Having a lunatic for a mother wasn't the kind of thing anyone liked to brag about. Instead she would shrug.

"My home was never so much, Joe. It was just a place I wanted to get away from."

Now that summer was here and Gloria actually had a bank account, with money in it, she decided to compromise. She rented a house on Manhattan Beach, because it was far enough away from the city to relax and because the name Manhattan still had a magical

hold over her and reminded her of the few good times she had experienced as a child in her former life.

Tonight she was throwing a full moon party. Her house overlooked the ocean and being isolated, was perfect for late night skinny dipping. It was only eight o' clock and the house was already full. She was happy that neither Joe nor Mario had shown up, after all, why would they? She hadn't invited them. She wanted to have fun, not romance. She lit a cigarette and sashayed over to Minta Greene, who had just arrived.

"Minta, you look swell. Where did you get those shoes? They're absolutely darling."

Minta grimaced. "They're the only ones they had and they're killing me. I just had to get them though. Mary Pickford came into the store after me and I swear she fell in love with them. I thought to myself, that girl gets too much of what she wants. It won't hurt her not to get these."

"Serves the bitch right," laughed Gloria. Pickford had thrown a party the week before and invited just about everyone Gloria knew, except Gloria. There was no love lost between those two sweethearts.

"Say, are you sure you're in the mood to party?" asked Minta. "You look tired."

Gloria shrugged, and then her eyes lit up as she saw Rex Riley and Lou-Lou Lawson swagger past the maid and into the house. Rex winked at her and Lou-Lou blushed.

"I'm swell-egant, Minta. Or I will be," said Gloria.

Rex restrained himself from pushing his way through the crowd. Most of the guests were his valued customers and he had to make sure that both he and Lou-Lou were on their best behavior.

"Hiya, Miss Grace," he said, nudging Lou-Lou.

"Hiya, Miss Grace," said Lou-Lou, removing his hat. "Swell place ya got."

"Make yourself at home, beef-cake," said Gloria. "Grab a drink, and get me one while you're there."

"You bet I will," said Lou-Lou, his red cheeks turning purple. "What'll ya have?"

"I'm feelin' exotic. Get me an' Old Fashioned."

"An old fashioned what?" said the baffled Lou-Lou.

Gloria laughed. "Never mind. I'll have a whiskey an' soda. No point in gettin' above myself."

"You're above all of us, Miss," said Lou-Lou, rushing away on his errand.

"You're a tough broad to track down, Miss Grace," said Rex. "I'm hurt ya didn't invite us to your party."

"Gatecrashers are always welcome," said Gloria. "How'd ya find me, anyway?"

"That Jewboy, David, the one who helps Kelly out. He told me you was havin' a do out here tonight."

Gloria found that hard to believe. David never gave out information, especially to the likes of Doctor Dope. She decided to let it slide. "Did ya tell Mario?"

Rex shook his head. "Nah. The boss is a busy guy. He don't come out to the beach."

Gloria shrugged. "You got anything for me? This party's dead. I wanna make it go with a bang."

Rex grinned. It was the moment he had been waiting for. "Sure do. It's the best." He produced a small packet and opened it up. Instead of the normal white powder, this one had a light brown tint to it. "It's new. You'll love it."

"Wanna try?" said Gloria to Minta.

"Hot socks, you bet I do," laughed Minta. Narcotics were her major reason for making the trek to the beach, she did enough swimming during the day as a Bathing Belle. She

took the spoon and sniffed, hard and long. Minta's almond eyes opened wide, the faint blush on her cheeks faded and turned to white.

"How was it?" asked Gloria.

"Gwahh..."

"That good, huh?" She turned to Rex. "Gimme some of that."

Minta's head rocked to the side and then up and then over to the other side. In the space of thirty seconds she had taken on the flexibility of a ragdoll.

"You okay, honey?" asked Gloria.

Minta nodded.

"You look kinda bent, Minta." Gloria was worried. Minta should be up and buzzing, but instead she was tottering on her feet, looking ready to drop and float away down the drain.

"I'm..." Minta retched and threw up, narrowly missing Gloria, but managing to splash Rex's shoes.

Rex danced back and tried to kick the flecks of vomit away. "Aww, man. That's deesgusting."

"Sez you, cake eater," said Gloria, rounding on the gangster. "What's the big idea? Minta looks like she's about to cast a kitten?"

"I'm fine," gasped Minta. "I just need to lie down a little. I'll be fine."

Lou-Lou chose that moment to return with Gloria's drink. "Hey, what gives with the cuddler? I've seen healthier folks in the morgue."

"Shaddap, Lou-Lou," snapped Rex.

"He's right," said Gloria, knocking back her drink. "What's going on?"

"It's new stuff," said Rex. "It's supposed to do that. It's big. It just takes some gettin' used to is all. Go on try some."

Minta vomited again and looked as if she was about to faint.

"For Chrissakes, Lou-Lou, get her some fresh air will ya," said Gloria.

"Sure thing, Miss Grace." Lou-Lou half carried Minta outside.

Gloria turned on Rex. "So? What is this bushwa? You tryin' to kill me?"

Rex was worried. It wasn't supposed to go this way. He shook his head. "It's better than cocaine. It grows on ya. First time you take it, you chuck your guts, eventually you touch the stars."

Gloria poked him in the chest. "Fuck you. Do I look like I wanna throw a puke an' spew party? Take that shit an' shove it up your ass. I want the usual. Now."

"It's your loss."

"You can either give me some dope or you can go screw."

Rex sighed. He didn't dare tell his boss he'd failed on his mission. He'd just have to lie.

He hated lying. "Go on then." He handed her a sachet of cocaine.

Gloria kissed him on the nose. "Sweet boy. I'll take this and we'll forget about the cleaning bill for the carpet. Is that fair?"

"Sure." Rex headed off to mingle. Hopefully he'd be able to unload the rest of his supplies on the other party-goers.

SCENE FIFTEEN

For Joe Kelly, the ideal start to a weekend would begin on Friday evening, running and re-running his favorite scenes from the week gone by. Alas, this Friday found his routine disrupted by Myron Maitland-Mason, who barged into the cutting room at a little after eight, a rare smile lighting up his features. He was resplendent in evening dress and was carrying another tuxedo over his arm.

"You shall go to the ball, Cinderella," boomed the Englishman in his best stage voice.

Joe raised an eyebrow. "Evening, Myron. What can I do for you?"

Maitland-Mason smirked. "How does supper at La Caprice sound?"

"It sounds like someone's got too much money to throw away," Joe replied.

Maitland-Mason shook his head. "Consider it a treat, a well deserved treat. My treat, for my beloved lord and master."

"What?"

"Change into this, I've reserved a table for two. It's about time we had a little tete-a-tete, about the future, don't you think?"

"Not now, Myron. I'm busy."

The actor stood in front of the screen and spread his arms. "I'm not taking no for an answer. I shall stay like this until you're ready."

"I..." Joe was at a loss. He could hardly throw the studio's hottest villain out on the street, no matter how much he wanted to, and yet there was no way he could continue working with the long streak of misery waving his arms around in front of him, blocking his vision and distracting him with nonsense. "Fine. But we'll have to be quick." He had never eaten in La Caprice. He hoped the food would live up to its reputation.

"You are in for a treat, Joe," said Maitland-Mason. "They serve the best lobster bisque you ever tasted. It's to die for. It really is."

"I don't even know what lobster bisque is, Myron," said Joe, switching off the projector.

"Philistine. Now, get changed. It's evening dress only. Oh and wear some of this." He took a small bottle of cologne from the pocket of his tuxedo and sprayed Joe, liberally.

"Getouttahere!" roared Joe. "I smell like a bloody Frenchy."

"It's a decided improvement," sniffed Maitland-Mason. "Now, chop-chop. Time's a wasting."

Joe took the tuxedo. "I'll get changed in my office."

"Nonsense. Do it here. We haven't got all night. I won't peek."

Joe stripped out of his work clothes and into the tuxedo. It was a perfect fit. The starched shirt fit like a glove.

"What a transformation," smiled Maitland-Mason. "You look just like the Frog Prince after you've been kissed."

"Button it, Myron. Hey, can you do this bow-tie for me?"

"It would be a pleasure."

Joe felt uncomfortable as Maitland-Mason leaned in to do up his tie.

"There you go. Perfection. You should step in front of the cameras again, Joe. The ladies would love you."

"No thanks. You know if David's still around? I'll get him to drive us."

"Don't bother. I've hired a car for the night. The Packard Six. I'm thinking of buying one."

"I am paying you too much," said Joe. "They say the Packard's a real hayburner."

"Let me worry about that," sniffed Maitland-Mason. "Ready to hit the town?"

"As ready as I ever will be."

As they walked down the corridor, Joe noticed a light burning under the door of David Flaum's office.

"I'll just tell David we're leaving," said Joe. "Make sure he doesn't forget to lock up."

Maitland-Mason consulted his pocket watch. "Fine but be quick. I don't want to lose that table."

Joe pushed open the door to David's office. It was empty, but another light was shining from the en-suite washroom. He could hear water running in the sink.

"David?"

"Jus' a tick." The water stopped running and a moment later David popped his head round the door.

Joe whistled. "What the fuck happened to you?"

David looked terrible. His left eye was swollen shut and his forehead was grazed. His shirt stained with blood and dirt.

"I ran into a door." David's legs wobbled a little and Joe rushed forward to steady him, only to be pushed back. "I'm fine. I don't need any help."

"You sure, Charmer?"

"Yeah."

Myron Maitland-Mason had followed Joe into the room. He stared at David and shook his head. "Joe, we really have to go."

"We can't leave him like this," said Joe. "David, you're coming with us."

"No," snapped David. "I'm fine. Honest."

"He'll get blood over the car," said Maitland-Mason. "I wouldn't mind, but it's only rented."

Joe shook his head in disgust. "Come on, David. A meal will do you good."

"Not hungry. I've got other plans."

Joe sighed. "If you're sure."

"I am."

"Will you lock up?"

"Yeah. Now fuck off... boss."

This last seemed to reassure Joe. "He's still his old sweet-natured self. You take care, David. You hear me?"

"Course I fuckin' hear you. I ain't deaf."

Joe waited a moment longer and then nodded. "You need anything, call me. I'll be at La Caprice."

"Very swanky. I don't need nothing. I'll lock up."

Maitland-Mason took Joe by the arm and all but dragged him out of the building.

"I'm worried about him," said Joe. "We shouldn't leave him."

"He's a big boy. He can fight his own battles. Now let's eat. The sight of all that blood and gore has given me an appetite."

SCENE SIXTEEN

When he was alone again, David Flaum opened the bottom drawer of his desk and removed a bottle of gin. He rinsed his mouth and swallowed. His whole body ached and he was having trouble seeing straight, but the drink was helping. He took another gulp. He was feeling better and better. He was just about ready to go get himself a large slice of revenge pie.

He limped over to the Garford Stake Bed truck and cranked the engine. His shoulder burned with each turn of the crank. He ignored the pain. Another shot of gin would calm it down.

After making sure everything was locked and bolted he sped away towards Manhattan Beach. His mind replayed the events of the evening. It had all started so well. He had begun by putting one of the Bathing Belles through her paces, and then sending her on her way. He'd given her the address of Gloria Grace's beach house and promised to see her later on that night. It was then that he'd noticed that fucker Doctor Dope and his knuckle-head friend, hanging around in the shadows.

"I thought I told you not to come sniffing around here no more," David told them.

The fuckers had just grinned at him and thanked him for giving them Gloria's address. There was no way he was gonna let them sell their filth at Gloria's party. He had grabbed Doctor Dope by his scrawny neck and was about to sock him when the big guy whacked him on the head, with something hard and heavy. He had spun round, and the fucker whacked him again. He'd used the butt of his gun, so in a way he could count himself lucky he was still alive.

When he was on the ground, Doctor Dope had started kicking him. He wanted the big guy's gun.

"I'm gonna blow his fuckin' Jew brains out," he'd cursed.

"The boss won't like it," said the big guy.

So, he didn't get a bullet, he just got another taste of shoe leather. He got so much of it, he passed out. When he woke up, he dragged himself inside and cleaned himself up as best he could. There were no broken bones. He would survive, which was more than he could say for Doctor fuckin' Dope an' his sidekick.

The prospect of a good fight made him smile. It had been way too long.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

Joe and Myron were ushered to their seats in the corner of La Caprice. A pretty blonde was singing on stage and Joe wondered if maybe he should give her his card and get her to take a screen test. She was certainly easy on the eye. Maybe she would make a welcome addition to the Bathing Belles. Joe noticed the other diners doing their best to pretend they didn't recognize him. What a joke, he probably earned more than any of these stuffed shirts, but they still thought the motion picture crowd were just one step removed from outlaws.

The Maitre'D bowed as he handed them the gold embossed leather bound menus.

"As I said, the lobster bisque is well worth..." Myron Maitland-Mason stopped in mid flow as he eyed the menu. His face took on a livid hue. "Gloria Grace hamburgers?" he snorted.

Joe laughed. "I hear they're supposed to be good. I'll have mine well done," he said to the Maitre'D. "And bring me an Irish whiskey. Large, straight an' no ice."

Maitland-Mason ordered his lobster bisque and a bottle of something Joe couldn't even pronounce. He sat glowering at Joe.

"What?" asked Joe.

"Gloria Grace hamburgers. Is nothing sacred? This is supposed to be a high class restaurant."

"High class people like burgers too, I'm sure," said Joe.

"No they fucking don't. It's intolerable. Why does she get a burger named after her? Why can't they name something after me?"

"Quang Chu Chow mein, perhaps?"

"No, not Quang fucking Chu. Myron Maitland-Mason. I deserve it every bit as much as she does."

"Yes, but people only really know you as Quang Chu. And you're a villain. Nobody wants to eat something named after a villain."

This did not go down well. "In that case it's your fault. Why must you insist on me playing that infernal celestial?"

Joe shrugged. "Why? What's wrong with it? I thought you were happy."

"Happy? Joe, it's ghastly. Cavorting away with those empty-headed girls. That stupid moustache. I can't take it anymore. I'm a skilled, professional, theatrical actor. My performances in some of the Bard's greatest roles have afforded me the most spectacular notices. Playing this bloody awful Chink in these cheap little films is undermining my immense ability."

The waiter returned with their drinks. He poured wine for them both. Joe took a sip and grimaced. He would stick with the whiskey.

"I'm sorry, Myron," he said, remaining calm. He was used to Miserable-Mason's tantrums.

"If you're sorry, then it's time you set things right. I thought you were an artiste. I want to do something special. Let me play to my strengths, Joe and I will make you a rich man."

"I'm already a rich man, Myron. When you came out here from England, what were you expecting? Really? In your heart of hearts?"

The burger arrived, followed shortly by Myron's lobster bisque. The sight of it made Joe feel sick.

Myron tasted it and then offered his spoon to Joe. "Try some. It's heaven."

"Nah. Have a bite of Gloria Grace?"

Myron snorted. "I'd like to bite her silly head off. I expected to be a leading light in the new and exciting medium of moving pictures. That's what I expected."

Joe nodded. "And aren't you? Quang Chu is one of the most recognizable faces in the country. More people know him than they do the President."

"Well... Yes... I suppose... It's just..."

"What, Myron?"

"Well, that scene the other day with the Apaches it was big and exciting. That's the sort of thing I should be doing. Action, adventure, derring-do."

Joe was tempted to say, "*You ain't got the nose for it!*" But said instead, "Myron, how much fan mail do you get a week?"

"Too bloody much. I can't keep up with it all. Bloody nuisance."

"And how much did you get when you were playing some of the Bard's greatest roles back in England?"

"Joe, it's hardly comparable is it? I mean that is repertory theatre. It's a different medium, and you're playing to a more discerning, educated clientele."

"Not that many then?"

Maitland-Mason pushed his plate away. "No, not that many but really, my admirers weren't the sort to write letters."

"You have a good life here, do you not, Myron? A salary other working men can only dream about. You have membership in all the most exclusive gentlemen's clubs. Would you be able to do that without Quang Chu? Would we able to dine here, without Quang Chu?"

"Maybe not. But..."

"Do you know how many letters I get every day, from people desperate to fill your shoes in *Gloria Goes It Alone*? Sacks of them. I never read them. Do you know why?"

Maitland-Mason shook his head. "No, Joe. Why?"

"Because there's no point. When I read a letter saying please can I play a bad guy like Quang Chu, I think, what's the point of getting this guy in? There ain't no way he's gonna be better than Myron. Sure, you're getting a bit ground down playing the Chinaman which is why I cast you as the wicked landlord in the Bathing Belle pictures."

"Yes, but Joe, he's just another cad, another..."

Joe cut him off. "Don't you get it? There ain't no one out there who can do it as good as you. You're the best, Myron. I'm begging you, be patient. See out the end of the series, and then I swear, we'll find something more suited to your talent."

"Really?" The actor was smiling now. He poured himself another glass of wine.

"Absolutely. I've been thinking of having a crack at the bard too. You'd make a bloody great Othello."

Maitland-Mason snorted. The wine sprayed out of his nose. "Joe. You've had me playing Chinamen. Now you want me to play a bloody darky. Why can't you just..."

Joe laughed out loud. "Relax. Just my little joke, Myron. I'll find you something soon. Honest, I will." He dabbed his lips with his napkin and rose from the table. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've still got work to do. Thanks for the dinner." He walked away, shaking his head. *"Fucking actors. All the bloody same."*

SCENE EIGHTEEN

The party had spread out onto the beach. As Gloria watched the girls skinny-dipping in the Pacific Ocean, she wondered how many fans of the Bathing Belles would give their life savings to be watching this particular adventure. She laughed to herself and shimmied out of her dress, before running across the sand and into the water. The chill cleared her head and she lay back, a smile on her face. The smile faded as she heard the roar of a truck, driving along the sand. She looked up and saw the headlamps burning like the eyes of a dragon.

She heard a scream and a thud as the vehicle came to a halt. Then there were more screams. She swam back to shore.

"David? What's the big idea?" she yelled.

David had jumped out of the truck and was hauling a semi-conscious Rex out from under his wheels. He hit him again and again and then let him drop to the ground.

"David, look out!" Gloria screamed.

Lou-Lou was racing up behind him, his pistol at the ready.

Gloria bent down, picked up a rock and hurled it at the gunman. It caught him on the side of the head. The gun fell from his fingers as he spun around and collapsed beside his friend.

David picked up the gun and aimed it at Lou-Lou, who tried to scramble away for cover under the car.

"Drop it, David," yelled Gloria, racing towards the scene. "Fuck. What happened to you?" she asked as she saw David's bruised and battered face.

"They happened to me." He lowered the gun. He had dreamed of Gloria, naked many times, but the reality was a thousand times more impressive. "Wow."

Gloria glanced down at herself and then looked David in the eye. "What? You never seen a gal without her clothes on before?"

"Yeah. Just never one like you."

"I think you better leave before they wake up. Gimme the gun, David."

He did as he was asked and then knelt down beside Rex. He went through his pockets and pulled out three bags of powder. "I'll take these."

"Spoilsport," sniffed Gloria.

"You'll thank me, one day."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. You wanna drink?"

"Nah. I've done what I came to do. An' I've seen more than I thought I would. The party'll just go downhill from here."

Gloria laughed. "So long, David. An' watch out. These boys play rough."

David winked at her as he climbed back into his vehicle. "So do I, sweetheart. You mind crankin' her up?"

Gloria cranked the engine and pulled Rex and Lou-Lou out of the way before David could drive over them. She looked around. Most of the party-goers were getting ready

to leave. While, dancing, swimming, drinking and cocaine could always be relied on to give a party the goods, driving a Garford Stake Bed truck over the guests and beating them senseless was a fairly reliable way to send all but the most determined party lovers packing.

"Thanks for wrecking my party."

"My pleasure," said David, with a laugh as he sped back off the beach and back onto the road.

SCENE NINETEEN

It was late and Joe had the studio all to himself. He had stripped out of Myron Maitland-Mason's tuxedo and was editing Gloria's Apache scene, dressed only in his shorts and vest.

"Jesus," he thought to himself, "Gloria is terrific." He wondered if she knew just how talented she was. She had something that no one else had, and she had it in spades. No amount of training, technique or skill could give it to you. Hers was a unique originality, coupled with complete spontaneity. While all the others declaimed and loomed large, Gloria appeared on the screen just as she did in life, full of mischievous, impish energy. Once those cameras started rolling and she entered the scene you never knew what she was going to do next, but whatever it was, it was dynamite. Every take was different, she always found something new, she never disappointed.

Now, here she was with her dainty foot on the chest of the fallen Apache, posing like a prize-fighter in a county fair. Joe burst out laughing. The audience would eat this up.

"Sitting all alone in the dark, laughing like a mad man? Someone's gonna come an' take you away. D'ya know that?"

Joe jumped in his seat and spun round, ready for anything. Then he began to laugh again.

"Jesus, Gloria, you wanna give me a heart attack? What the hell are you doing skulking around in the dark?"

"Excuse me? Me skulking around? You're the one sat in the dark, Buster. Say, where's your clothes? You get your hands where I can see 'em." She sniffed the air around her.

"Hey, what's that stink? You been spraying crops?"

Joe smiled. "You can thank Myron for that. Guess he's not the fiendish Quang Chu for nothin'. How'd you know I was here?"

"I dropped by your place first, then I figured where else would you be?"

"I could'a been with a dame."

"Yeah, an' they say it's gonna snow tomorrow," Gloria snorted. "It ain't none of my business but I ain't seen you with a dame since the day I met you."

"You're right, it ain't none of your business." Joe stretched and yawned. "You got the time?"

"It's late."

Joe could tell she'd been drinking but she wasn't completely juiced. He kicked out a chair for her, then he gave her a sideways look. It was a look that Gloria had come to recognize and even love as it was reserved exclusively for her.

She didn't take the chair. She was still too hopped up to sit quietly. Instead, she paced back and forth.

"I can't sleep." It was easier than telling the truth. That she'd thrown a party and then

lost her enthusiasm for it after witnessing Rex administer some nasty drug on Minta. David's actions hadn't improved matters either. Neither Rex nor Lou-Lou had been in any fit state to go home, so she'd tucked them up in bed and then taken their car for a spin to clear her head. Fuck 'em. Fuck 'em all.

"So you came to find me. I'm honored." Joe was pleased that Gloria felt she could turn to him. Outside of work, he didn't see half as much of her as he would like.

She planted a kiss on the top of his head. "You're my number one guy, Joe, you know that."

"Am I? I thought Marinelli was your number one guy these days?"

Gloria looked incredulous. "Marinelli? Get the fuck outta here. He's like my ass on a bad day."

Joe shrugged. There were worse things you could be like. "I'm glad to hear it, word is he's not a good guy to be around."

"Thanks for the warning, Daddy o' mine." She looked at the man who had turned her life around. He appeared so sad. She could tell he wanted to say something but was having trouble trying to form the words. Finding the right words was never a problem for Gloria. "You look all balled up, Joe. What's on your mind?"

Joe smiled at her. He was sweating. How could he find the right words? He wanted to tell her that he worried about her. That he feared for her welfare. That he hoped to God she was not heading down the same path as her mother. That hanging out with torpedoes like Marinelli brought nothing but trouble. That the whispers about her drug abuse were growing louder and louder every day. That her days in the motion picture industry were numbered and that Pop's miracle black gauze was only going to delay the inevitable for so long. Gloria would be through by the time she was twenty four, twenty five if she packed in the hooch and all the other shit. Then what? Where the hell was he

going to find another Gloria Grace? Looks *and* talent. A rare commodity. He thought back to that day on Coney Island, they'd met on location and it was like they had known each other for years. He had promised to make her a star and boy, had he delivered. The trouble was, he was way too busy to look after her properly. He was too caught up in his work. It was so invigorating working with Pops, every day brought new and exciting innovations. His sense of guilt increased as the stories about Gloria's lust for life grew more and more frequent. Gloria Grace was Joe Kelly's responsibility and he was letting her down, badly. A girl with her addictive personality should not have been left open to all the sharks and piranhas that swam in this town. There was only one thing for it. He had to take the plunge.

"Gloria?"

"Yes, honey?"

"Will you marry me?"

THIRD REELLOS ANGELES: 1914SCENE ONE

Dickie Diamond had been asleep for just under half an hour when he was awoken by a furious pounding on his door. Only cops banged on doors like that. It was a knock intended to instil fear into the householder. Dickie Diamond did not feel afraid. He felt angry. It was a Sunday morning for Chrissakes. He stumbled out of bed and threw open the bedroom window before staring down at the uniformed bull on the sidewalk.

"Whaddaya want?"

The uniform looked up. He was new to the force, but he had heard all about Diamond. He hadn't wanted to pay a house call but Captain Boothe had singled him out for the job.

"Hi," he said. "How's it going?"

"Just great," said Diamond. "How's about you? Lovely weather we been having, huh?"

"Yeah," said the uniform. He was surprised, this Diamond character wasn't so bad. He seemed like a regular guy.

"You fuckin' idiot, what's the idea, beatin' my door down?"

"Sorry," said the cop. He hadn't meant to pound on the door, it was just instinct and training. "Captain Boothe wants to see ya."

"Fuck you!"

Diamond slammed the window down and went back to bed.

The knocking began again, gentle this time. Diamond looked at his alarm clock. It was only just gone six. It must be important if the Chief had crawled out of his bed already.

He pulled on his trousers and stumbled down the stairs to open the door.

"You wanna make some coffee, or d'ya want me to break your fuckin' wrists? The choice is yours."

The cop smiled in confusion. "I don't think we got time for coffee."

"Then I'm gonna have to break your wrists." He grabbed the cop by the arm and twisted.

The cop shrieked in fear, surprise and pain. Diamond let him go and laughed.

"Make the fuckin' coffee while I clean up an' make myself presentable."

The cop rubbed his wrist. It wasn't broken but it hurt like hell. "Sure thing."

"Kitchen's through there." Diamond gestured down the hall and went upstairs, laughing quietly to himself.

Diamond didn't bother shaving. He just splashed his face with cold water and pulled on the same clothes from the night before. He didn't smell too fresh but it wasn't as if he was looking to impress some dame. He came downstairs and took a sip of the coffee, the uniformed bull offered him. It wasn't bad. He downed it, savoring the burning sensation in his throat.

"Drink up, Ethel," he said. "You any idea what this is about?"

The cop shrugged. "Nope. The Captain just told me to bring you in."

Diamond followed him out to the car. "*Why then, tonight, let us assay our plot.*"

"Sorry, sir, d'you say something?"

"Yeah, I said let's go and see what the fuck the chief wants. Oh, and let me drive. I'm a lousy passenger."

"Sorry, sir," said the cop. "That's against regulations."

Diamond glared at him. "You want me to go to work on your wrists again?"

"No, sir, but rules is rules." The cop believed in rules.

Diamond smiled. "*O inglorious league! Shall we, upon the footing of our land, Send fair-play orders and make compromise, Insinuation, parley, and base truce To arms invasive?*"

The cop looked puzzled. "Whatever you say, sir."

The poor sap was just doing his job. Why break his balls? Because it was fun, that's why. He grabbed the cop, turned him around and pulled his arm up high against his back.

"I'm gonna ask you again. You gonna let me drive?"

"I... no. Fuck you. I..."

Diamond released him. "Fine. That's all I wanted to see. Some spirit. You're a good kid." He climbed in the back and closed his eyes. "Wake me when we get there."

"Sure."

SCENE TWO

Captain Boothe wasn't alone. He was talking to a matronly woman, who looked as if she was dressed up for a fun morning at the local Temperance Society. She turned to look at Diamond as he entered the office. Diamond noticed a faint sneer of disdain flash across her face. It didn't do anything for her looks.

"Mornin', Chief," said Diamond. "What's the beef?"

"Diamond, I'd like you to meet Officer Wells."

Diamond stared at the woman. "Officer?"

"That's right, Detective," said the woman. "Pleased to meet you." She stood up and offered her hand.

Diamond shook it briefly. It was firm and hard. She was just as tough as she looked.

"So," he said, addressing Captain Boothe. "You gonna answer my question?"

"Where were you last night, Diamond?"

"Here, workin' on that case you asked me to look into."

Boothe nodded. "The Weiss case?"

"I can see why they made you captain. Yeah, the Weiss case."

Boothe nodded again. "Did you get round to talking to that private dick? What was his name again?"

"Christiansen? Sure. I saw him a couple'a days ago."

"And?"

"And what?"

"What did he tell you?"

"Nothin'. He didn't feel like talking."

"Did you lean on him?"

So that's what this was about. The big slob had filed a complaint. "I might have. A little. Nothin' serious. I slapped him around a little. Heard what he had to say, which was squat, then I split."

"You didn't torture him?"

Diamond shrugged. "Depends on your definition of torture. I hit him in the balls. I mighta given him a tap on the cheek too. I was just playin'. That's all."

"You didn't use a razor? Or a blowtorch?"

Diamond frowned. "Gimme a break, Chief. What's he been telling ya?"

"He's not been tellin' me anything, Detective," said Boothe. "He's dead."

"Dead?"

"Yeah. Someone tortured the poor sap and then cut him a second mouth in the middle of his throat."

Diamond swallowed. This was not good. "And you think I had s-s-something to do with this?"

Boothe shook his head. "If I did, you'd be in the cells now. But City Hall wants answers. They want someone to keep an eye on you. I want someone to keep an eye on you. To

make sure you don't find yourself in a compromising situation. I don't know who killed Christiansen, but there's a chance it has something to do with the Weiss case. I'm giving you a partner."

Diamond shook his head. "I d-d-don't do p-partners. You know that, Chief."

"I'm not giving you a choice, Dickie. I'm telling you. You're getting a partner and that's the way it is."

"I pray thee cease thy counsel, Which falls into mine ears as profitless as water in a sieve."

"I'll thank you to keep your smartass comments to yourself Dickie. Meet your new partner, Officer Alice Wells."

Diamond glared at the woman. She smiled at him. A bitter smile, as if she had just chewed down on a lemon.

"A broad? My p-p-partner's a broad?"

"A police woman, Detective, not a broad," said Officer Wells. "May I say, I'm looking forward to working with you."

"Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows."

"Charmed I'm sure." Alice Wells was brisk and to the point. She had heard all about Dickie Diamond and his reputation and it did not bother her at all. She was here to be a cop. A good one, and here was a great opportunity to learn from the best, regardless of his manner. "I've been looking through the Weiss files myself," she continued. "I thought perhaps we should pay a visit to Weiss's widow. She never allowed Christiansen to speak to her. Maybe we should find out why."

Diamond nodded. He took a deep breath. He had to control that stammer. "That was on my next thing to do list."

"There's no time like the present, Detective. Perhaps we can see her before the eleven o'clock service. My husband is reading the lesson this week and I would hate to miss it."

"Heaven forbid," sighed Diamond. *"In religion, what damned error, but some sober brow will bless it and approve it with a text, hiding the grossness with fair ornament?"*

Come on then, let's move. So long, Chief."

"Be good, Dickie."

SCENE THREE

Coming down the steps of the precinct, Dickie tossed her the car keys, "Do you drive?"

"Yes."

"Good. You drive, I need to think."

They drove in silence. Diamond was not happy. Christiansen was dead and he was saddled with a partner he did not need and to crown it all, his stammer was kicking in. As they drove he recited the sonnets in his head, his lips moving silently as the words lubricated his tongue. Twenty minutes later they reached an estate of newly built houses. It was all very neat and fresh, the lawns at the front neatly manicured and well tended. Homes for aspiring middle classes. Educated people who had made a few dollars. Alice Wells slowed the car down as they approached the address.

"Keep going," said Dickie breaking the silence. "Drive past a few times, let me get a good look at everything first."

Officer Wells did as instructed driving past three times before Diamond gave the order to pull over. They drew up beside a very well maintained property. Diamond would

never admit it to anyone, but he approved. The house was well painted and the front garden tasteful and discreet. It was designed to draw admiring looks. Diamond made a secret wager with himself that the back yard would be Mediterranean in style. Whitewashed walls with plants growing up trellis, maybe grapes hanging from an overhead pergola, and running water, a fountain perhaps.

They sat in silence. Diamond was pleased that Wells did not try to interrupt his thoughts. After a while he said, "You say you read up on the Weiss case?"

"Yes, I did, Detective."

"How old was Weiss when he went missing?"

"Twenty four."

"That's young. And the widow?"

"Ingrid sir, Ingrid Weiss."

"Yeah. How old is she?"

"They married when she was eighteen."

"Jesus...So early twenties then?" Something was bugging Dickie Diamond. "Let's go."

They got out of the car and strolled up the path to the front door. Diamond didn't have to knock. It opened immediately. The widow must have been watching and waiting for them.

"Good morning, Mrs. Weiss, I'm Detective Diamond and this is Officer Wells. I wonder if we might ask you a few questions?"

Ingrid Weiss was a looker. Straight blonde hair, ice blue eyes, Swedish in origin, perhaps. Definitely Scandinavian descent anyway. She was wearing a simple dress but managed to appear elegant and sophisticated, her manner and poise belying a woman of her age. If the sight of a female police officer surprised her, she was way too cool to show it. She glanced at Diamond's badge.

"Come on in, Officers."

They followed her into the house.

"I was just taking tea in the courtyard, won't you join me?"

They passed down the corridor through a very tasteful living room with an open plan kitchen, a child played happily on a mat, toys scattered around him. The boy looked up at Diamond as he entered, but instead of looking away in that coy, shy way of most children he fixed the detective with a cool appraising stare as they walked through. For a brief moment Diamond was unsettled. There was something strangely familiar about that look. He shrugged, dismissing the thought as his brain took in all the information of the widow's house. He was surprised to find her tastes not dissimilar to his own, particularly the furniture, where his attention had been drawn to a cabinet against the wall. It stood tall and slender, the detail and workmanship extraordinary.

"Boy," said Diamond. "What a beautiful piece of furniture. I admire your taste Mrs. Weiss, what is it, seventeenth century, French?"

"Right country, wrong century, Detective. It's sixteenth century."

Diamond let out an appreciative whistle. "It's the gnat's whistle. Whaddaya keep in it. Guns?"

"I have no idea, Detective." She regarded him with a cool stare, that made Diamond think of her son. It was empty and emotionless. He had seen those eyes before. He just couldn't figure out where.

"What? You never looked inside?" Diamond found that hard to believe. He tried to open the door but it was locked.

"It was my husband's," continued the widow. "A family heirloom handed down. It's locked and as far as I'm aware there's never been a key. We did talk of breaking it open but Robert always said that would destroy the mystery."

"As well as destroying a beautiful piece of furniture," said Diamond.

"Yes. That too, Detective." The widow gestured in the general direction of the garden.

"Shall we?"

"Sure, why not?"

The child watched them pass and went back to his toys. Diamond was quietly grateful that Officer Wells didn't indulge in any of that coochy-coo bullshit.

Two large glass doors at the back of the house were wide open allowing the sunshine to flood the room. The widow led them out into a beautiful courtyard. It was exactly how Diamond had imagined, only it wasn't a fountain. It was a pipe fixed in the wall from where water fell into an old-fashioned stone receptacle. A garden table and three chairs stood in the shade. On the table a teapot with three cups and saucers. Diamond was impressed. She must have seen them driving back and forth along the street and known they were coming to see her. Diamond and Wells sat down as Ingrid Weiss poured the tea.

"We've been assigned to investigate the disappearance of your husband."

"Two years ago," said Mrs. Weiss, her tone cold.

"Yeah. Two years ago."

"My husband is dead, Detective."

"You sure about that?"

She looked at him, a look of mild amusement in those blue eyes. "Sugar?"

"No. Thanks."

"Yes, I'm sure he's dead."

"Your husband was young and yet he had a reputation as a bit of an ace. Any idea what he was working on before he disappeared?"

"Robert never discussed his work with me, Detective. He was an investigative journalist. His job was to ask awkward questions. Sometimes he upset people. He thought the less I knew about his work, the better, and perhaps safer it would be for me. Especially after..." She let the sentence trail off but gestured with her head towards the playing child.

"How d'ya know he was upsetting people?"

She took a cigarette out of her purse and fumbled with the lighter. Diamond leaned over and lit it for her.

"Thanks. Sometimes the telephone. Sometimes a car in the dead of night driving by."

"Huh." Diamond sat for a while, enjoying the tranquillity of the courtyard. He took a large gulp of his tea. "I love the sound of running water. The name Marinelli mean anything to ya?"

"Marinelli? No, I don't think so."

Too late, thought Diamond. *'Have more than thou showest; Speak less than thou knowest'*. An untrained eye would have missed the tiny furrow of the brow. An untrained ear would have missed the slight pause. Diamond could have driven a tram through it.

"Not to worry," he said, keeping his manner breezy. "We believe your husband was investigating him. Like you say, he probably thought it best not to share it with you."

"Yes."

"On the day he disappeared what happened? He went off to work and never came home?"

"No. He came home. I cooked supper. He took a phone call. Next thing he grabbed his coat and he's heading out the door."

"And?"

"Well, obviously I asked him where he was going."

"He says work," said Diamond, taking over. "You say, at this time? You don't like it. Maybe you think the call was from a dame, what with you being knocked up at the time. Maybe you weren't so keen on putting out, maybe his balls are startin' to ache an' he's looking to get it elsewhere, but he says don't be ridiculous. I love you. I can't wait for us to play Mommy and Daddy, but this is to do with the story I'm investigating. It's a good lead. I swear I won't be long. And you say, fine, I believe you, but if you won't tell me who, just tell me where. And he says...?"

"Some old roadhouse on Sunset Boulevard."

"Thank you, Mrs. Weiss. I'm done here." Diamond got up to go. "Thank you for the tea, and I gotta tell ya, this place is terrific. You got it looking real nice."

"Thank you, Detective," said Ingrid Weiss, rising to her feet.

"How much did Mario Marinelli pay you to keep your mouth shut?" Diamond looked into her eyes.

She colored slightly but didn't blink. "You will keep me informed of any developments in your investigation, I hope."

"Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind". We'll let ourselves out."

SCENE FOUR

They sat in the car outside the property of Ingrid Weiss. Wells was about to start the engine. Diamond grunted, "Leave it. Let's sit here a while, let her know we're talking about her."

"May I ask you, Detective Diamond, what your thoughts are?"

Diamond had to admit he was surprised by Alice Wells. Sure, he found it difficult to get his head around the concept of female police officers, but so long as they did their jobs and didn't talk none stop about cosmetics, shoes and shopping, he supposed he was okay with the idea. However, he had been expecting disapproval from his new partner, a nagging "don't you think you were a bit heavy handed," or a "do you think that line of questioning was appropriate?" Instead, what he got was a fellow officer keen to learn and know what his thoughts and motives were, reserving judgment until later.

"She was eighteen when they met at the LA Times. What was she, a secretary? A clerk?"

"Not even that. She was a junior typist."

"So getting paid, peanuts."

"Yes, most likely."

"In other words, she's some high hat's kid, who's slumming it for a while, huh?" Dickie knew the answer already. He'd read the report.

"No, she lived with her mother, who was divorced from her father, he ran out when she was two. The mother took in laundry to make ends meet."

"So that leaves Robert Weiss. He's talented, sure, but he's still a kid. He wouldn't have brought home much. Not with that tight ass Gray Otis as his paymaster. She could've lucked out with some life insurance policy, but I doubt it. Kids that age all think they're gonna live forever. But look at this place. This neighborhood. You need green for that. The grieving widow was getting her money from somewhere."

"And you think it was Marinelli?"

"Yeah, I do, unless the Pa who split turned up again guilt-ridden an' loaded. Might be worth digging out her birth certificate, finding out who the father was just to satisfy my curiosity."

"I already did, Detective. I found all the relevant information on Ingrid Weiss when I looked at the file and thought we might be going to see her."

Dickie stopped himself from congratulating her. It wouldn't do to go overboard with praise on her first day. Anyway, she was only doing her job. The fact she appeared to be doing it well was just a bonus.

"You got it on you?"

"Yes." She reached behind and from the floor of the backseat pulled up a large satchel. Opening it she extracted a file labeled 'WEISS' and started going through the various papers. "I put it in here to go through it all after we met her... Yes, here it is... Mother

Hannika Olsen... Father..." Alice Wells let a small whistle escape between her teeth, "Christiansen... Pierce Christiansen."

"*Lady you bereft me of all words, Only my blood speaks to you in my veins, And there is such confusion in my powers.*' Come on, let's get outta here."

"Where to, Detective?" said Wells.

"Head over to Sunset will ya? I wanna have a look at that roadhouse. See if there's anything worth seeing."

"May I remind you, Detective, that I was hoping to attend the eleven o' clock service? My husband is giving the lesson."

Diamond was clearly not one of the faithful. "Listen lady," he snapped. "I don't give a two bit fuck if your husband's putting out bush fires with his cock. We're working a case, which means we don't do half days sloping off here and there for some religious hooey."

Alice Wells was stunned. She had heard all about Diamond but up until now she had thought his reputation was unfounded. In a calm, unflappable tone she said, "My faith is very important to me."

It was quite possibly the worst thing she could have said.

Diamond exploded, " Don't bring religion up when you're working with me... not ever. F-f-f-fucking religion. Do you know how many w-w-wars are caused in the name of religion? How many people are m-m-m-m-murdered? It's Baloney. So you don't eat pork? More fool you! So cows are sacred? Moo! No lamb chops on a Friday? Don't be a fucking idiot. How many fucking God's are there for f-f-fuck's sake? Every fucker wants their own. Hundreds of religions each one thinkin' the others are cuckoo. Get the fuck outta here. Now, if you wanna w-w-w-w..." His tongue had finally given up the

battle and it was probably a good thing. He slammed his fist against the dashboard in frustration. "Enough. Gahhh... Just d-d-d-drive."

Alice Wells did as she was told. Her cheeks burning with anger. Diamond closed his eyes and tried to forget she was there. Religion. It always had that effect on him. It always reminded him of his uncle, a respected lay preacher, who had raped him, repeatedly, that summer when he went to stay with him, just after his mother had died. The lay preacher who was so full of the divine spirit he just had to share it by raping little boys and telling them they would burn in hellfire ever-lasting if they ever breathed a word. The young Dickie Diamond had sworn revenge that summer, had sworn he would kill his uncle one day. He hadn't kept that promise. His dear uncle had died of a heart attack the following year. His death had been mercifully quick. The memories of that summer had scarred Diamond, leaving him with a pathological hatred of religion and a severe stammer.

Diamond tried to focus his mind on the case. Pierce Christiansen was turning up everywhere. Not only had he been employed by the LA Times to investigate Weiss's disappearance, he was also father to the widow. Did his employer know this? Did Ingrid Weiss know this? Did any of it matter?

"Do you think Ingrid Weiss knew her father was Christiansen?" Diamond asked, breaking the frosty silence.

"Yes," replied Alice Wells, her tone showing no emotion or reaction to the earlier outburst. "She refused to let Christiansen interview her after the disappearance."

"That don't mean squat. She left the paper before Christiansen came on board, which is why I think she either got a nice payout from the insurance or was on someone else's payroll."

"Would an insurance company pay out so quickly without a body?"

"You ain't as dumb as you look. No chance. Check with the paper, see if they gave the grieving widow a payoff to tide her over for a few months."

Wells made a mental note to contact the LA Times.

"It's possible that Ingrid Weiss had no idea Christiansen was her old man. He lit out when she was two and never kept in touch..."

"Coincidence then?"

"I hate that word, Officer Wells. It don't sit right in our world. My thoughts are, if she didn't know, did her husband Robert?"

"How would he connect Christiansen to his wife, if he wasn't even on the scene?"

"Who's to say he wasn't? He's turning up everywhere and Robert Weiss was an investigative journalist. A good one, by all accounts. Like I say coincidences don't sit well with..." His train of thought became interrupted. "Here we are. Well, whaddaya know?"

They had arrived at the sight of the roadhouse, which had now been converted into Palace Studios. Alice Wells drove slowly past so Diamond could get a good look at the place. Again Diamond was tempted to vocalize his approval at his partner's initiative but again thought better of it. This broad was no idiot and in a world full of fools that in itself was a rarity. He looked out of the window and concluded that the roadhouse was in much better shape now that it had become Palace Studios. Everything looked clean and spruced up, a gatehouse with a barrier housed a concierge in immaculate uniform, behind him inside the studio gates he could see movie people going about their business. The lot was busy and had a buzz of success about it. Above the gate hung a huge sign, which read; *"WELCOME TO PALACE STUDIOS - The flight of fancy hath no end"*

Dickie Diamond felt a huge surge of anticipation. He was a secret fan of the flickers, the *Gloria Goes It Alone* series being his particular favorite. He was also aware that some of the braver officers down at the precinct had taken to calling him Quang Chu. Never to his face though. He nudged Alice Wells in the ribs. "You think we'll get to meet Gloria Grace?"

Officer Wells gave him a blank look. "Who?"

At the barrier, the concierge came to the car window with a clipboard. Leaning in he said, "Good morning, sir, ma'am. How may we help you today?"

"Police," said Diamond flashing the badge. "Who's in charge here?"

"That would be Mister Kelly, sir. Joe Kelly."

"Right. Is he here today?"

"Yes. I do believe Mister Kelly is on the lot today, sir."

"Do me a favor then, Mac, and tell him we'd like a word."

"Certainly, sir. If you would be so kind as to wait here a few moments?" The Concierge flashed them a smile before returning to his gate house and picking up the telephone.

"Manners Maketh Man," said Alice wells looking pointedly at Diamond.

"Yes, they do," said Diamond staring back at her. Then he smiled. In spite of himself he was actually beginning to like this woman.

SCENE FIVE

Joe and Gloria were in the conference room, celebrating their engagement with Pops and David Flaum. It was a little early for the hard stuff but Gloria had insisted on a champagne breakfast, which was now spreading over into a champagne brunch. As soon as Gloria had accepted his proposal, Joe had been quick to see how the event would be good for the front pages of all the major dailies and had arranged a press conference at the studios at noon. They had been busy since dawn, spreading the word. The announcement would be a star-studded affair, with all the studio's major players present. David and Pops had arrived early to congratulate the happy couple in private before the newshounds arrived.

"You should put a fresh steak on that eye of yours, David. You'll give the reporters the heebie-jeebies," Gloria said when David arrived looking like a corpse on a bad day.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I left all my fresh steaks in my other suit," he replied.

"There are plenty of steaks in the canteen," Pops told him. "I'll bring you one if you like?"

"I'll have it grilled with onions an' gravy," said David. "Forget about my peepers. Where's the giggle juice?"

Pops popped the cork on a bottle of champagne and poured the drinks.

"May I propose a toast? I will drink to life, family and friendship. You people have become my family and you have brought me back to life. For that I wish you all the happiness the world has to offer."

"Aww, you're making me tear up, Pops," said Gloria, standing on tiptoe to kiss the old man's cheek.

They drank and Pops was refilling their glasses when the phone rang. Joe picked up on the third ring. He listened in silence and then nodded. "Sure, Walter. Let them in and tell them where to go." He put the phone down and sighed. He looked troubled.

Pops was quick to pick up on it. "What is it, Joe? You have lost the color from your face."

"Cops. They want a word."

Gloria giggled. "Have you been a naughty boy, Joe?"

Joe didn't laugh. "Course not. When do I have time to do anything naughty?"

"Then there is nothing to worry about," said Pops.

The old man was right, of course, but that didn't stop the lurching sensation in Joe's stomach. He had known this day would come sooner or later. Since fleeing Ireland he had always managed to stay at least one step ahead of the law, and yet he had known in his heart that he was living on borrowed time. He forced himself to remain calm. It was probably something completely innocent and unrelated to his past. Hell, maybe they just wanted to get Gloria or the Bathing Belles to attend one of their police charity functions. Whatever it was, there was no point in delaying matters.

"Come on," said Joe. "Let's go outside and meet them."

Pops hesitated. "If it is all the same with you, Joe, I shall remain here."

"Me too," said David. "I'm allergic to bluebottles. They bring me out in a rash."

Joe smiled. They had a similar effect on him too. "Fine. Come on, Gloria. This shouldn't take long."

"Do you think they'll be in uniform?" asked Gloria, accompanying him out the door. "I love a man in uniform. When we get married will you wear a uniform for me, Daddy?"

"Whatever you say, sweetheart."

She kissed him on the lips. "You go meet them. I'm gonna freshen up. Try not to miss me too much."

"I'll be countin' the seconds."

SCENE SIX

Outside the main studio, Joe spotted the detective straight away. Even in plain clothes, there was no mistaking him. A powerful, bull of a man, all tight muscle and bristling with a dangerous energy. Joe was surprised to see a rather stout, matronly woman at his side, her dour hatchet face set permanently at 'grim', was she a cop too? He put on his most charming smile and strode confidently towards them.

"Good morning, Officers. I'm Joe Kelly, welcome to Palace Studios."

The big man shook his hand. "Thank you, Mister Kelly. I'm Detective Diamond and this is Officer Wells."

"How do you do?" Alice Wells gave Joe a curt nod. She did not approve of these moving pictures. She felt that they undermined the very fabric of a moral society.

"Is there somewhere we can go and have a chat? I promise I won't take up much of your time."

"Of course, Detective, we'll go to my office." Joe Kelly led them towards the most recent building on the lot. Joe had built it to house his new production office, the stars' dressing rooms, wardrobe and Pop's state of the art editing suite.

Diamond was impressed. It was clear to see that Palace Studios were doing good business and that Joe Kelly was investing his money wisely. If there was one thing Diamond admired it was a man dedicated to his profession. So far he hadn't picked up any stories about Kelly. No rumors or tittle-tattle had reached his ever alert antennae. This in itself was unique in the moving picture industry. Diamond concluded that Kelly must be a serious film maker dedicated to his craft. He approved.

"Here we are folks," said Joe opening the door to a comfortable, light filled office, the walls adorned with posters of all the Palace hits.

"Very nice, Mister Kelly, very nice, indeed," said Diamond. It was the closest he had ever come to gushing. He just couldn't help himself.

"Now," said Joe, pulling out a chair for Officer Wells, "can I get you something to drink, eat perhaps?"

Dickie, aware of his rumbling stomach was tempted to say, "*What have you got?*" but stopped himself. If Kelly was at work on a Sunday morning, then he probably had more important things to do than cater for two hungry police officers. "No thank you, Mister Kelly. We'll just ask a few questions if we may and then we'll be outta your hair."

"Sure. Fire away."

Joe sat down behind his desk.

"We're looking into the disappearance of a reporter, name of Robert Weiss. That name mean anything to you?"

Joe Kelly had to struggle to contain the overwhelming feeling of relief that flooded over him. "No," he said, "I can't say it does."

"No," Diamond agreed, "and why should it? But this was the last known place he visited before he pulled his disappearing act. Back then it was a roadhouse. Now it's Palace Studios. You mind me asking how you came by it?"

Joe scratched his head. "Not at all. Let me try an' remember. We came out from New York a couple of years back, looking for a suitable location, went to a few realtors, saw a few duds and settled on this one."

"Why this one?" asked Wells.

"Loads a reasons. The light. The space. The location. Most of all, it was cheap."

"Any idea who used to own it?" said Diamond.

"Yeah. A guy by the name of Marinelli, I believe."

"Really? Do you know this Marinelli, personally?"

Joe grimaced. "No. Not really. I met him once, not long ago. He was seeing one of the girls, came out here to drop her off and told me he used to own this place and that he would like to invest in the studios."

"Yeah? What did you say?"

"I said I'd think about it. Palace Studios is doing well enough without his money."

"You don't like him, huh?"

Joe shrugged. He wasn't the kind of guy to badmouth people to the law. "I don't know him well enough to not like him, but if I did then no I probably wouldn't."

Diamond smiled. He had a lot of time for men like Kelly. "So what brought you out here from Ireland?"

The question was completely unexpected and for a split second the thought crossed Joe's mind that this detective might know something after all. He tried to gather his thoughts. "The same reason millions of other Irishmen come here. I was sick of being hungry."

Diamond nodded. He knew all about hunger. "Ever hear of a guy called Christiansen?"

"Pierce Christiansen?"

"Yeah."

Joe couldn't fathom the shared look between the detective and his stony faced partner.

"He's a private detective. He was a real pain in the ass for a while."

"Why is that?"

Joe explained, patiently. "To cut a long story short the only cameras around were Edison cameras and to use them involved paying a fee. When we started out, money was short, so we'd try, you know, shooting without... you know..."

Diamond understood. "So, Christiansen was employed to keep his ear to the ground, find out who was shooting without a licence and close you down?"

Joe Kelly nodded.

"Unless you paid up?"

Kelly shook his head. "It's more complicated than that. You only get a licence if you're a member of their Guild. It's their way of monopolizing the industry."

Officer Wells pursed her lips. "So, how do you get around that, without breaking the law, Mister Kelly?"

"Easy. We don't use Edison's cameras. We use our own."

"Does Christiansen know this?"

Joe shrugged his powerful shoulders. "I guess he must. We ain't seen him around, lately."

"You ain't likely to," said Diamond looking keenly at Joe. "He's dead."

"Dead?"

"As a ducat. Tortured and murdered. Seems someone might have taken exception to him trying to shut them down."

"Not us, Detective. Like I say, we have our own cameras, that's why I figured we haven't seen him. He ain't got no reason to bother us."

Wells didn't believe him. "How come you have your own cameras? If it's that easy, why don't the other companies do the same?"

Joe laughed and offered Diamond a cigarette. "The others don't have Pops."

"Pops?" asked Diamond.

"Yeah, Pops. The guy's a genius. A lot of our most recent success is largely down to him and his innovations. We're lucky to have him."

"Right. Who else you got on the payroll?"

"There's David Flaum. He's the link between us and our main investor over in England, Sir Stanley Garrideb. I think Sir Stanley wanted his own man to keep an eye on us, to be honest. Then there's Mike Bell. Our cameraman and assistant director. He's just a kid. I'm mentoring him. He's showing lots of promise. Then there's the admin staff, security, cleaning, catering, artistes. You want all their names, I'm gonna have to take a trip over to administration."

Any further line of questioning went out of Dickie Diamond's head the moment the door opened and America's Sweetheart breezed in, a fresh bottle of champagne in her hand.

She cast an appraising look over Diamond and then at his partner.

"Hot socks! Are you really a police officer?" she asked Officer Wells. "I always loved playin' cops an' robbers. Do you get your own gun? Can I see it?"

Officer Wells was taken aback by Gloria's rapid burst of questions.

"I... yes. I..." She unholstered her service revolver and showed it to the actress.

"It's kinda cute. You ever shot anyone?"

"No."

Gloria turned to Diamond. "I bet you have, you big, strong hunk of law and order. How many bad guys you plugged? Go on, do tell."

"I..."

Much to Officer Wells's surprise and amusement, she noticed Dickie Diamond was blushing.

"Please," said Joe, moving to the other side of the desk and taking the champagne bottle from Gloria, "allow me to introduce my fiancée, Miss Gloria Grace."

"Your fiancée?" Diamond cursed inwardly. This Joe Kelly had everything, the lucky dog.

"Yeah. Joe popped the question last night," said Gloria. "He's gonna blow this year's budget on a glitzy ring. Ain't that right, Joe?"

Joe smiled and shook his head. "We'll see about that. I already got you a nice ring. I won it in a tombola. Let's see how that fits, huh?"

"Clown." She gave him a dig in the ribs.

Diamond shook Gloria's hand. "Congratulations. You make a swell couple. Don't they make a swell couple, Officer Wells?"

Officer Wells nodded and smiled thinly. "Lovely."

"We're announcing the engagement to the Press at noon," said Joe. "If there's nothing else, we've still got to get ready."

Diamond nodded. He was happy. Gloria Grace had shook his hand. Who woulda believed it? "Sure. I think we're done. Hey, Miss Grace, can I just say, I'm a massive fan."

Gloria batted her eyelashes at the detective. "You say the sweetest things. I don't suppose you'd like to stay and help with crowd control? Some of these reporters are real animals when they get a sniff of a story."

"Well, I..."

"Go on, I'll give you a guided tour of the lot while we wait for them to come."

"We really should be going," said Officer Wells, who still had faint and lingering hopes of making it back to church in time for her husband's reading of the lesson.

"That would be g-g-great," said Diamond. "I always wanted to t-t-take a behind the scenes look at what goes on here."

Gloria winked at the crestfallen Officer Wells. "Swell. Get a wiggle on, Officer. It's something you can tell your grandkids about when you get home."

Officer Wells' cheeks burned. "I'm sorry, I don't have any grandchildren. I'm only..."

"I know," giggled Gloria. "Just kiddin' ya. Seein' if I couldn't put a smile on that lovable kisser of yours. See ya later, lover o' mine?" She blew a kiss at Joe and left the room, Diamond hot on her trail.

"Have a good day, Officer Wells," said Joe.

Wells looked at him and nodded. "Good day, Mister Kelly."

SCENE SEVEN

If Dickie Diamond could have seen himself in the company of Gloria Grace he would have died of shame. He followed her like a puppy, happy as a kid in a toy shop. Even his stammer didn't bother him. He had to be dragged away from Quang Chu's hot air balloon and couldn't resist asking if they could take it for a spin.

"It don't fly," laughed Gloria. "It's just a prop. We hang it up over the cyclorama when we want to film any aerial shots."

"Over the what?"

"I can't show ya now, coz they're holding the press conference in front of it, so Joe's got all the gang cleaning up over there."

"Damn sh-sh-shame."

"Yeah. Well, maybe next time."

"What's in there?" he asked as they came to the main building that had once been the roadhouse.

"That's where the writers hang out. They do the captions and come up with the gags and plots. Then there's the canteen and the screening room. Wanna take a look? It ain't so much, really."

"If you w-w-wouldn't mind, Miss Grace. I'd like to see it all."

"No skin off my knees."

The main entrance was unlocked and they trooped inside. Diamond and Wells were impressed by the size of the kitchens and canteen.

"You could f-f-feed an army in here," said Diamond.

"Yeah. We have. The Seventh Cavalry eat like food's goin' outta fashion," laughed Gloria.

She was about to lead them back outside when Diamond noticed an unmarked door at the back of the kitchen.

"What's in there?"

Gloria shrugged. "Dunno. Wanna take a look?"

"Might as well."

She opened the door onto darkness. She fumbled around for a light switch but there wasn't one.

"Looks like it's just a basement. Smells pretty damp," said Gloria, peering into the darkness.

"I noticed a lantern over there on the shelf," said Diamond. "Maybe they use that to light the cellar?"

"Wowie! Now I see why they made you a detective," said Gloria, her eyes twinkling with mischief.

Diamond smiled indulgently, if a fellow officer had been sarcastic like that he would have socked him on the jaw. "Officer Wells, would you go get it and light it please?"

Officer Wells shrugged. She didn't see the point in exploring a dirty unused basement but she knew better than to argue.

While they waited, Diamond stared at Gloria. It had been a long time since he last kissed a girl. She made him feel like a man again. Who knows, if they had been alone, he might be tempted to make a pass at her.

"Whatcha lookin' at, Detective?" she asked.

He smiled. "You know d-d-damn well what I'm l-l-lookin' at."

"I hope you like the view."

"I like it f-f-fine."

She smiled, a sweet, almost childish smile. "Thanks. A gal never gets tired of being appreciated. Say, is she your girlfriend?" She nodded over to Officer Wells who was returning with the lantern

"He most certainly is not," said Officer Wells.

"Jeez," thought Diamond. "She's got the ears of a bat."

He took the now lit lantern and went first down the rickety wooden steps into the basement.

"Careful, these steps don't look too healthy."

When they had reached the bottom, they looked around. Packing cases filled with old costumes and props lined the walls, but apart from that and some old meat hooks hanging from the ceiling, there really wasn't much else to see.

"Hardly worth the trouble, huh?" said Gloria.

"Aw, I don't know," said Diamond. "I love poking around dark holes."

"I bet you do."

When they were back in the sunlight, Gloria shook Officer Wells' hand and gave Diamond a kiss on the cheek. Wells almost laughed out loud at the sight of her partner's

face, flushed with boyish pleasure and excitement. He was almost handsome when he was happy like this. If only he wasn't so bitter and Godless and downright ornery he would make some girl a fine husband.

"So long, folks," said Gloria. "I gotta dash. It's nearly twelve."

"Thank you so much for your time, Miss Grace," said Diamond. "We appreciate it."

"Y'welcome. See ya."

Gloria hurried away, eager to join her fiancé for the press conference. Diamond watched her depart.

"You ready?" asked Wells.

"Yeah," sighed Diamond. "I'm ready."

They began walking back to the gatehouse and the car.

"So, what did ya think?"

"Of Miss Grace?"

"No," said Diamond, "of everything."

"I think you had the best time you've had in years. That's what I think."

Diamond nodded. "You ain't wrong. She's something else, ain't she?"

"Oh, she's that all right. I'll tell you what else she is," said Wells, "she's trouble."

"All the best gals are."

"So, what else did you think?"

"I think we're gonna need to get us a search warrant."

Officer Wells stared at her partner. "A search warrant? Why?"

"That basement. Notice anything strange about it?"

Officer Wells shook her head. "Apart from the smell? No."

"Maybe your eyesight ain't so good. The floor in there. It was all uneven. You didn't notice the different patches of cement? It's like it's been dug up, filled in an' then dug up

again. Either they employed my Aunt Petunia to do that floor, or someone's been hiding more than old costumes and props down there."

Alice Wells opened the car door and smiled. So Diamond wasn't as star struck as she had thought. He still had eyes for an uneven floor as well as for Gloria Grace. She was impressed. "You think Kelly's on the level?"

Diamond shrugged. "Who is, really? It ain't Kelly, I'm thinking about. It's Marinelli. I think we got him at last."

SCENE EIGHT

Joe Kelly was greatly relieved after his meeting with Detective Diamond. They were welcome to ask all the questions they liked about Christiansen and that missing reporter. Just so long as they steered well clear of Ireland. Diamond's question about why he had left Ireland had given him a nasty shock, but looking back, Joe guessed it was asked more out of polite interest than for anything sinister.

Pops and David looked up expectantly as Joe came in. Both of them seemed worried.

"So?" said David. "What did they want?"

"They heard you'd been fighting again and wanted to ask all about your shady English past," said Joe.

"Give over. Stop taking the piss. What did they really want?"

"They're investigating some missing journalist. He was seen here before he disappeared. But it all happened long before we came along. Oh, remember that dick who tried to shut us down that day on the beach, the one that nearly had a heart attack when you threatened him with a sandwich?"

"Yes?" said Pops, his curiosity aroused.

"Someone's done him in. Tortured first, then murdered."

"Mon Dieu. Why would anybody do that?"

"Jesus," said David, "some people will go to any lengths to avoid French food."

"Ah, David," said Pops, smiling. "Maybe if your fighting was not as bad as your jokes then you would not look like you have tumbled off a cliff." He turned to Joe, "Hurry now, mon ami, your public awaits."

SCENE NINE

Mario Marinelli always liked to spend Sunday afternoons with his wife. It made him feel good playing the family man once in a while. Sometimes it was nice to be with someone and not have to worry about impressing them or being witty or charming or having to splash out on expensive gifts and meals. Sometimes he wondered why he bothered playing the field at all. Simonetta's meatballs were the best he'd ever tasted. Those alone had been worth marrying her for. Sundays were a sacred day of rest for Mario Marinelli. He made a point of never calling the boys and they were under strict orders never to call him.

"If God says we need a day of rest, then who am I to argue?" he would say.

You could argue that God also says '*Thou shalt not kill*' but Mario, who knew his Bible back to front, would always be able to find some loophole that meant killing was just fine, so long as you did it in good faith and confessed your sins afterwards. He was lucky that his parish priest just happened to be his third cousin, and could therefore be relied upon not to break the sanctity of confession by blabbing to the cops.

By six o'clock that Sunday, Mario had been to Mass, done a spot of gardening, enjoyed his dinner and even found time for a short siesta. Now he and Simonetta were settling down to a game of chess. He was lousy at chess but his wife always let him win.

As he played he thought about Joe Kelly and Palace Studios. He was going to teach that dumb mick a thing or two about respect. When he was boss of the studios he'd show that fuck a thing or two. Maybe he'd get Kelly to make a movie about his life. A sanitized version, of course, but it would still make one helluva story. His thoughts turned to Gloria Grace. It was a shame she would have to be sacrificed. She was hot stuff and one fuck of a good actress too. But she was too wild. Too unpredictable. Then there was the fear that she would crack up and turn out just like her mother. He wondered how she'd liked her first taste of heroin. He was willing to bet she had lapped it up and couldn't wait for more. He belched and reached for a cigar. She would be washed up in no time. No time at all.

"Could we listen to the news, Mario?" asked his wife, sweetly.

"Sure," he agreed, getting up to tune the wireless in to the news. He liked to keep up to date with the world's events, even on a Sunday.

The announcer was getting all worked up about Europe. Marinelli wondered if anyone listening gave a fuck about Europe or what they were doing? The limeys were still banging on about Home Rule for the Irish. It looked like it was gonna be a dead cert. He supposed that would make that big fuck Kelly cock-a-fuckin-hoop with joy. The bastard. Germany had broken off diplomatic relations with Russia and looked all set for war. Big deal. It wouldn't amount to nothing. Let the Krauts and the Ivans fuck each other over. What difference would it make?

"So much unhappiness in the world," sighed his wife. "It's all too horrible."

"Yeah," said Marinelli. "Why can't everyone just get along?"

Simonetta smiled at him with love and admiration. "I just wish we had people like you in government. The world would be so much happier."

"I know I would," agreed Marinelli.

"And today's main news story again," said the announcer. "Gloria Grace, star of *Gloria Goes It Alone*, is no longer *Going it Alone* after announcing her engagement to film director and producer of Palace Studios, Joe Kelly. The happy couple say they are planning to wed before Christmas. I'm sure you at home will join with us in wishing them all the happiness in the world."

"Mario, where are you going?" asked Simonetta, watching as her husband switched off the wireless and strode towards the door, grabbing his hat from the table as he went.

"Work," he snarled, slamming the door behind him.

SCENE TEN

Rex Riley and Lou-Lou Lawson shared an apartment in Central City East. Marinelli hated that part of town. It was full of bums. He cursed Rex and Lou-Lou for dragging him down here on a Sunday. They might feel at home here with the rats and cockroaches, but to Marinelli, the place was just a reminder of the poverty he had escaped from.

A comatose black man was asleep in the entrance to the rowhouse. Marinelli stepped over him and almost skidded in a pool of piss.

"I'll fuckin' kill those idiots," he promised himself, as he began the long climb up five flights of stairs. The walls were paper thin and he could hear families laughing, fighting, fucking within their apartments. Outside one door he could even hear someone playing the accordion. "Fuckin' stupid instrument."

He banged on the door.

"Rex! Lou-Lou! Open up!"

He could hear a wireless playing a Strauss waltz from inside. He banged again. "Quit dancin' and answer the fuckin' door, you fuckin' prom trotters."

He heard movement and whispering inside.

"C'mon, will ya? I know you're in there. I can hear you whisperin'."

He kicked the door.

"Open up or I'm gonna start shootin'."

He heard footsteps approaching the other side of the door.

"Lou-Lou? Rex? Quit fuckin' around."

"Boss?" It was Lou-Lou.

"Open the door, Lou-Lou."

"No way."

Marinelli couldn't believe his ears. "Excuse me?"

"No way, Boss. It's Sunday."

"I know what fuckin' day it is."

"You told us if you ever saw us on a Sunday, you'd kill us."

"I'll fuckin' kill ya anyway, ya big ape. Open the fuckin' door."

The door opened. It was on a safety chain. Lou-Lou peered out at him through the crack.

"Whaddaya want?"

"And to think I always thought you were the dumb one. Where's ya monkey faced boyfriend?"

"I... he ain't feelin' well."

Marinelli kicked the door. The chain snapped and Lou-Lou fell back against the wall.

Marinelli strode into the squalid apartment and found Rex laid up on the sofa, his face a mass of bruises.

"What the fuck happened to you?"

"I got hit by a truck, boss."

"Yeah? Good. Pity they didn't finish the job."

"Don't be like that, boss," said Lou-Lou. "Rex's had a bad time. He got hurt bad."

"My heart bleeds. What I wanna know is, didja give Gloria Grace that heroin or not?"

"Err... yeah," said Rex. "We sure did."

"And did she like it?"

"You bet. She couldn't get enough."

"Yeah?"

"Yup. You ain't got no worries on that score."

"Is that so?"

"It sure is."

"Then why is it that instead of bein' out of her fuckin' head, she's busy announcin' her engagement to that Irish fuck, Joe Kelly?"

Rex and Lou-Lou stared at each other.

"Ya must'a heard wrong, boss," said Rex.

"Yeah, coz the news service always fucks up its main stories," said Marinelli. "On account of them not havin' you two in their service." He pulled out his revolver and pointed it at Rex. "Give me one good reason not to plug ya."

"He ain't well," said Lou-Lou.

"Then I'll be doin' him a favor," said Marinelli.

"Coz, we're still the best people you got," said Rex. "Give us another chance, boss. We won't let you down."

Marinelli thought for a moment. It was heartbreaking. The dumb fuck was right for once. They were the best people he had. He tucked the gun back in the waistband of his pants.

"Okay. You're lucky I'm in a good mood."

"You are?" said Lou-Lou, surprised.

"Yeah. Now get up and walk me to my car. This neighborhood ain't safe."

"Do I have to?" said Rex. "My ankle. It's sore. I can hardly walk."

Marinelli sighed. "Alright. Alright. Forget about it. But if I get whacked on my way out, it's gonna be on your head an' I'll be back to fuckin' haunt you to the grave."

"Go with him, Lou-Lou," said Rex. "I'll be fine. But hurry back."

SCENE ELEVEN

Monday morning found Dickie Diamond and Alice Wells in Captain Boothe's office.

"You wanna do what?"

"Get a search warrant and dig up the floor at Palace Studios."

"For God's sake, Diamond, you're supposed to find out what happened to a missing reporter and in less than a week a person you questioned ends up tortured and killed and now you wanna dig up the floor of one of the city's most prestigious movie studios. Why for Christ's sake?"

"Captain, could you please refrain from taking the Lord's name in vain?" said Alice Wells. She knew she could do nothing to stop her partner's flood of profanity but she was not about to let her Captain descend to such depths.

"Sorry," muttered the Captain, before turning back to Diamond. "Go on, Dickie. Tell me why?"

"The floor ain't right."

"The floor ain't right?"

"Yeah, the floor ain't right."

"Whaddaya mean the floor ain't right?"

"Have you ever leveled a floor, chief?"

"Course not. I don't even know what it means."

"Then shut the fuck up."

Alice Wells' eyebrows seemed to rise of their own volition such was her shock at Diamond's insubordination towards his superior officer. She wondered how Boothe would play his next hand in the face of such disrespect. She was shocked to find that he didn't react at all. He took it on the chin, as if he expected such behavior from Diamond. He just stared at him, waiting for an explanation.

"Look, Chief," said Diamond at last, "the floor ain't level, but it's not like someone did concrete halfway and then did the other half not quite right. It ain't level everywhere in great big rectangular patches."

"So?"

Diamond looked to the heavens like he was talking to a simpleton and said the next sentence slowly so his chief could understand clearly. "Big rectangular patches just like ya get in the cemetery, Chief. With the top two inches or so covered in concrete."

"So you're saying this basement's been used to bury bodies?"

"Bingo! The fog finally clears. You got it in one, Chief. An' they must'a been pretty damn sure that at no time soon the floor was ever gonna be disturbed. If they were gonna do a proper job they should'a coated the whole floor in a leveling compound and smoothed the whole lot over, but leveling compound don't come cheap an' it's a skilled job. They probably thought no one would ever go snooping down there. C'mon Chief, they use it for storage. We wouldn't be interrupting anything at all. An' I'll betcha any money you like we find our missing boy, down there."

Alice Wells realized then why Captain Boothe indulged this angry, rude, insolent, detective. If he had given the case to any other man there was no way they would have unearthed so many answers in so little time. Dickie Diamond took his job seriously. He was straight in there banging heads and tipping over tables, not afraid to unsettle anybody, be it the sad widow, the motion picture director or the private detective. Alice Wells realized that this created ripples and caused reactions, and from those reactions answers emerged. He never missed a trick, provoking suspects and witnesses and then studying their reactions like a great bird of prey. Whether or not she approved of his methods or his manners, there was no denying that he got results. She may not like the man, but she was loving every minute of working with the detective.

"Very well," sighed Boothe. "I'll get on to the powers that be and get you a warrant."

Diamond got up and with a curt, "Come on," to Alice Wells strode out of the office.

Captain Boothe looked up at Alice Wells as she hurried after her partner. "Tell him it was my pleasure."

Outside the office, Diamond rounded on Officer Wells. "Alice, I gotta go see a man about a dog. I want you to check out whether the LA Times paid off the widow. Dig up all you can about Joe Kelly, personally I think he's a nice guy but in my experience there are no nice guys."

Wells dug out her notebook and pencil and began scribbling away furiously as Diamond continued.

"I wanna know more about this Pops. Who the fuck is he? Fix up another meeting at the studios if you have to, see if you can speak to him directly. Did he know Christiansen? Finally the grieving widow."

"Yes, sir?"

"Let's get a tail on her, see what she does and who she sees. Do it yourself if you fancy the overtime. I'll square it with the Chief."

"Thank you, sir, and where will you be, sir, should I need to contact you? Does this 'dog' have a name?"

Diamond debated with himself for a moment. Should he trust his new partner? "Yes it does, Officer Wells. It answers to the name of Mario. Mario Marinelli. He bites."

SCENE TWELVE

Quang Chu had Gloria Grace, intrepid girl reporter, strapped to a table in the back room of his dockside opium den. He smiled his inscrutable smile as she struggled in vain against the ropes that held her. He produced a large syringe from within the folds of his robes.

"They tell me adultery is all the fashion these days, Gloria. Do I have to wait until you're married before we have a passionate steamy affair, or should we jump the gun and just go for it tonight?"

"Myron, I'd love to, but I simply can't spare the time. I'm too busy balling Pops, David, Mike and Mack Sennett." Gloria giggled at the shocked look on the actor's face.

"Cut!" Joe was not happy. "Gloria, you're fighting for your life here. It ain't funny. Myron, you've got your arch enemy in your clutches at last, so stop lookin' like ya just swallowed a hornet's nest. Again, from the top."

Quang Chu produced the syringe and leered at the helpless girl reporter as she struggled to escape.

"Of course, if we are gonna have an affair, you have to pass the cock test first. No smaller than nine inches. A gal in my position's gotta be choosy."

Quang Chu snorted and his moustache slipped off onto the floor. "Oh, buggeration. I simply cannot work in these conditions."

"Cut! Gloria, lay off, will ya? Let's get this right, for God's sake. Action."

Quang Chu raised the needle and laughed his maniacal laugh. "There is no way Joe Kelly's pizzle is nine inches long."

Gloria burst out laughing. "Pizzle? Pizzle? You slay me, Myron. Maybe I will have an affair with ya, after all."

"Cut! Look, let's take a break for lunch and see if we can't clear our heads and get what ever it is out of our systems, huh?"

"Sure thing, Joe, baby," said Gloria, casting a sly wink at Quang Chu.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Dickie Diamond sat in the car outside Mario Marinelli's home. As he waited, he began piecing together all the elements of the case so far. Let's start at the beginning. A reporter goes missing. Then the shamus who works the original case ends up dead and not of natural causes. Turns out the dead shamus is the father of the reporter's wife, a cool customer if ever there was one. The wife, former secretary for the LA Times, doesn't know the shamus is her daddy. Or does she? She says the last place the reporter visited was the roadhouse out on Sunset. The same roadhouse that is now Palace Studios. Strange how she never told nobody that at the time. She refused to talk to the shamus. So why offer up the info now, two years later? Why was it the reporter's employer who wanted the case opened anyway? Why not the grieving widow? Too many questions and nowhere near enough answers. The roadhouse, now owned by Joe Kelly, who also knows the shamus. Does he know about the little secret graveyard in the basement?

Diamond sat up straight. The door of the house was opening. Yes, there he was. Mario Marinelli, immaculate as ever, with his oily haircut and top dollar suit. Just the sight of him filled Diamond with fury. He found himself muttering, "*And since you know you cannot see yourself, so well as by reflection, I, your glass, will modestly discover to yourself, that of yourself which you yet know not of.*"

Marinelli strode down the path, towards the car. Without a word he opened the back door and climbed inside.

"Whaddaya want Diamond? This is a respectable neighborhood, you're lowerin' the tone."

"Too late for that, pal. The tone went down the Swanee the day you moved in here, desperate to buy respectability with your blood money."

Marinelli shot Diamond a thunderous look, before checking his temper. He had known on approaching Diamond's automobile that the detective would do his best to needle him. He promised himself that he would rise above it.

"As charming as ever, I see, Detective, now what is it that you want?"

"Just driving through the neighborhood. Thought I'd drop by and say hello."

"Yeah? Well, h-h-h-hello to you too, you stuttering freak. Was there anything else?"

Diamond took a deep breath. He would not allow that cheap crack about his stammer to hit home. "You're living on borrowed time, Marinelli. I'm working a case and guess what? The stink trail is leading me right to your door."

Marinelli sneered and lit a cigar. "Yeah? Sure it is." He blew out smoke, filling the car with the strong smell of Havana. "You're pathetic, Diamond. You wake up with a cold and you think it's from one of my sneezes. You can't stand the fact I've done well for myself. I might have to have a word with Captain Boothe if you're going to start harassing me... again. Maybe he could get you reassigned to traffic duty."

Diamond wasn't bothered. "Who's harassing? Maybe if I called you a greasy two bit killer or a twisted cold blooded snake, profiting on the misery of others, I guess that could be called harassment, so I'll take care not to."

Marinelli gave a mirthless chuckle. "Very funny. You're a loser, Diamond. You're obsessed. Maybe your real name's Ethel and all this is coz I won't let you suck my dick? Well, I'm sorry, Dickie, but a guy's gotta have standards. Now, if you ain't got nothing interesting to say..."

Marinelli reached for the handle of the door, but remained seated as Diamond turned to speak.

"This case is kinda interesting. It's funny how your name keeps on popping up. Now, we can either talk here, nice an' friendly, or I could bring you down to the precinct. You wanna go inside an' call your lawyer?"

"My lawyer's a busy man. He ain't big on lowbrow slapstick. Let me have it, Diamond. I'm all ears."

Diamond bit the end off a cigar and lit it. He blew the smoke back at Marinelli.

"It's a story about a reporter who goes m-m-missing, a roadhouse on Sunset Boulevard and bodies buried in the basement. Tell me if you've heard it already, I hate repeatin' myself."

Marinelli smiled his most charming smile. The effect was spoiled slightly by the smoke making his eyes water. "I don't believe I have. Do go on, I love a good mystery."

"A private investigator hired to look into the missing reporter ends up dead. The roadhouse, which incidentally used to belong to a no-good thieving piece of shit, becomes a leading motion pictures studio. The no-good thieving piece of shit, who likes to think he's done well for himself, decides he wants a slice of the pie, but the head of

the studio knows a bum when he sees one and tells him to go screw. Ringing any bells yet?"

This time Marinelli could only manage a curt "No."

"Oh, well, keep on listening. Stop me if it gets complicated. So, the studio head, ends up with the girl too. America's sweetheart on his arm, looking up at him like love's young dream. Say, someone told me you was seeing one of the girls up there. Anyone I'd know?"

"I'm a happily married man devoted to my wife and children."

"Sure, you are. *Assume a virtue if you have it not.*"

"You've wasted enough of my time." Marinelli opened the door and climbed out onto the sidewalk.

"We're digging up the floor, Marinelli."

Marinelli slammed the car door without saying another word and marched back up the path towards the house. Diamond, feeling so much better about himself fired up the car, gunned the engine and set off for the police station. He almost burst into song.

SCENE FOURTEEN

After completing the scene in the opium den, Joe allowed Gloria and Myron Maitland-Mason to go home early, while he and Pops viewed the daily rushes.

"You really love each other, don't you?" said Pops as they edited the film.

Joe nodded and helped himself to a plug of tobacco. "I think we were made for each other, Pops."

"Of course you were."

The depths of Joe's feelings surprised him. They had come a long way since Coney Island. He had always told himself that it was her talent he admired more than anything, but now he wasn't so sure. Maybe Cupid had sent his arrow hurtling into his Irish ass the very moment he first laid eyes on her. It would certainly explain his immediate dislike for Mario Marinelli and any other guy who happened to get too close to her. Of course, these feelings brought a whole trainload of problems. Ever since his flight from Ireland he had steered well clear of any romantic involvement with a woman. It had been easy. His memories were the perfect deterrent. Even so, Gloria had visited him regularly in his dreams, making him wish that things could be different. Now, seeing

her surrounded by sharks like Marinelli, he decided that things could indeed be different. This wasn't Ireland. This was America. Anything was possible. Marrying Gloria would bring her protection. It would help to steer her away from the self-destructive path she had been running along all her life.

He wondered if she loved him. Did a girl like Gloria ever really love anyone? He would like to think so. He knew she liked him and he hoped that would be enough. Maybe he should take her out tonight? Just the two of them. He knew she liked La Caprice. Maybe he would take her there. They could talk and enjoy each other's company. Afterwards, who knows?

He reached for his notepad and jotted down a few ideas. That Detective Diamond had given him an idea for a new movie. A tough no-nonsense cop who always got his man. If he could just find the right actor with that same mix of brooding menace and intelligence, he would be on to a winner. Perhaps he could work the character in to the new mystery story his writers had presented him with a few days ago. He yawned and stretched in his chair. The telephone rang. He glanced at Pops.

"You expecting anyone?"

Pops shook his head. "Nobody wants to talk to me."

Joe picked it up. "Joe Kelly."

"Joe Kelly, you say?" said the voice on the other end. "Would that Joe Kelly sometimes go by the name of Joe Behan?"

Joe felt his chest tighten as the blood drained from his face. "Who?"

"Ah, come on now, Joe," said the voice, the Irish brogue soft and lilting. "Still bullshitting after all these years?"

Joe knew the voice. It was a voice he had crossed the Atlantic to escape from.

"You still there, Joe?" said the voice.

"Yeah."

"Ah, good. You see, I think you and me could be friends. Let bygones be bygones. I could be a very valuable friend to you, Joe. That is, if you make it worth my while."

The rage that Joe had kept buried for years returned in a rush. "Fuck you." He slammed the phone back in the cradle. He was aware of Pops looking at him. He stood up, finding it hard to breathe.

"I'm gonna go see Gloria," he said.

"What is wrong?" asked Pops. "You need to talk?"

Joe shook his head. He needed air. "No. Can you finish things off for me?"

"Of course. Remember Joe, if you need me, you know where to find me."

Joe nodded and hurried out of the room.

SCENE FIFTEEN

Mike Bell had also been allowed to leave early, though he was less enthusiastic about this than Maitland-Mason and Gloria Grace. He loved being around Joe and Pops in the editing suite and gladly gave up hours of his time unpaid just to watch and learn. Both Joe and Pops noticed and admired that aspect of Mike's character. Pops in particular, took it upon himself to nurture the boy, spending hours patiently explaining and showing different techniques in both the filming and editing process. Mike found those sessions amazing. He couldn't believe his luck. Free master classes in film making from the inventor of film itself. Joe too was pleased with the boy's progress and encouraged their shared obsession with the world's newest industry.

The hard work was paying off too. Mike was beginning to show great initiative and was much less timid on set. Of course, Myron Maitland-Mason and the Bathing Belles took delight in giving the boy the runaround, but with his increasing experience, Mike was gradually exerting his own authority in the studio, showing flair and confidence. The jibes about his color were just a distant hurtful memory. Now, the actors and crew

treated him with respect. Joe even trusted Mike to shoot whole scenes on his own, without any supervision. Mike was certain that it wouldn't be long before he was given his own projects to handle from start to finish.

He would have preferred to stay behind with Pops and Joe, but he fully understood that sometimes the two older men needed time to themselves, to discuss business, finance and all the dull stuff that goes with running a studio.

It was too early to go home. There was nothing waiting for him there anyway. Just four walls, a bed and a chair. He headed to a bar not far from the studio. It was a new one that had sprung up to cater for the movie crowd. He had never been there before but Maitland-Mason had told him they served black folks together with whites, and how it was always swarming with bright young things, eager for a break in the flickers. With a bit of luck he might get the chance to flirt with one or two of the Bathing Belles.

He opened the door and walked in. Swarming? The place was empty. The barman was reading the funnies and looked irritated when Mike ordered a beer. After a minute of desultory talk about the weather and the government he retreated to one of the booths to read up on the script for tomorrow's Bathing Belles picture.

After about ten minutes he became aware of a presence at his table and looking up he did a classic double take that would not have been out of place in one of their rivals, Mack Sennett's movies. Looking down at him was a beautiful young white woman, elegantly dressed, straight blond hair, high cheekbones, and a pair of ice blue eyes that seemed to look right into Mike's very soul.

"I hope you don't mind me disturbing you," she said, her voice soft and husky. "But I'm supposed to be meeting someone here and they haven't showed. Would you mind awfully if I sit with you until they come? I don't feel safe sitting in a place like this on my own."

Mike stared around the empty bar and then smiled with shy pleasure. "My pleasure. Can I get you a drink?"

"You're too kind. What are you drinking?"

"Just beer."

"Just beer," she said, with a smile, mimicking Mike. "Well, I'll have just a beer too."

"You sure?" She didn't look like the kind of girl who drank beer. Wine, maybe, champagne, more likely. This woman had class written all over her.

"I'm sure," she said, sitting down.

"One brewski, coming up."

"One thankski, right back at you."

He slid from the booth and headed to the bar.

"You buyin' a drink for the lady, huh?" said the bartender.

"That's right."

"Well, keep your hands where I can see 'em. Some of my regulars don't approve of darkies getting close to their girls."

Mike wanted to tell him to go to hell, but he kept his peace and bought two drinks instead. When he returned he was almost surprised to find her still sitting there.

"Your friend still didn't show?"

"No."

"I'm Mike."

"Hello, Mike," she said, offering her hand, "I'm Ingrid."

"Nice to meet you." He took her hand. It felt soft and warm. He noticed a ring on her finger. "You're married? Are you meeting your husband here?"

"No. I'm a widow."

Mike looked down at the table. Why did he always say the wrong thing? What business of his was it if she was married or not, anyway? She would probably get the wrong idea.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It was a long time ago. Nice beer."

He took a sip. "Yeah. One of my favorites. Not too strong."

"Not working today, Mike?"

"Just finished." Then, hoping to impress her, he added, "I work down the road, at Palace Studios."

Her face lit up. "Oh, how exciting." Then, in a teasing tone that Mike really liked, she asked, "Are you a big star Mike?"

He laughed modestly. "No such luck, Ingrid. I'm a big star maker."

"Get out of here." Dismissive.

"It's true." Defensive.

"I don't believe you." Incredulous. "You're way too young."

"And way too black?"

This time it was the lady's turn to look uncomfortable. "No. I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. I..."

Mike was beginning to feel giddy. This beautiful woman liked him. He could tell. "No sweat. It's true. I'm a cameraman. I get to direct some of the scenes in *Gloria Goes It Alone*."

"Goodness. I've never been in the company of a film maker before, would it be awfully boring for you to tell me all about it?"

"Boring? No. I... I'd love to." Mike couldn't remember the last time he had enjoyed himself so much with a girl, let alone one that regarded him with obvious interest and seemed to hang on his every word. An hour passed in the blink of an eye and after his

third beer, he decided to impress her more by ordering champagne. He regaled Ingrid with anecdotes about Gloria Grace, Myron Maitland-Mason, Minta Greene and the rest of the Bathing Belles.

"I bet you have your pick of the girls, a handsome, brilliant man like you?"

"No. Not really," said Mike, not knowing how to reply to such a question. She thought he was handsome and brilliant. Did life ever get any better than this?

"I guess you're too busy making movie magic?" Ingrid suggested, offering Mike a way out, without losing face.

"Yeah," he said grabbing the lifeline. "That's right, way too busy making movie magic." God he could fall in love with a girl like this. So understanding. What would his folks think if he brought a girl like her home to visit?

"So let me get this straight, your boss is Joe Kelly and his boss is this man 'Pops'. Is that right?"

Mike laughed. "No, no. Pops ain't no boss. Mister Kelly is the boss. He is Palace Studios."

"So, Pops is some old man that Mister Kelly feels sorry for. Is that it?" Ingrid looked lost and bewildered. Mike just wanted to reach out and kiss her.

"No," Mike lowered his voice as his tone became conspiratorial. "The thing is, Pops is a genius. One of the most brilliant men that ever walked the planet, he just kind of showed up one day and Joe gave him a job. He's the real brains behind the whole operation."

Ingrid now had Mike's hand in both of hers as she leaned forward, her lips so close to his that he could feel her breath on his face. Suddenly she leant back releasing his hand and breaking the spell. "I don't believe you. I've heard of Joe Kelly. The whole town knows him. How is it I never heard of this Pops? You're trying to make a fool of me."

"No. I would never do that. I promise you it's true."

"You want me to believe this old bum is a moving picture genius?"

"He ain't no bum. He's a distinguished gentleman."

"American?"

"No, French."

"French? Now I know you're making it up." She had a look of triumph on her face, as if she had caught Mike talking baloney and now wanted to make him eat it.

Mike was confused. He didn't want to frighten the girl away, or appear bad tempered, yet her teasing was getting to him and he felt duty bound to defend Pops' honor. He decided to try a different approach. "Okay, Ingrid, tell me, who invented the moving picture camera?"

"Easy," she replied, her eyes dancing with delight at playing a new game, "Thomas Alva Edison."

"Wrong."

She looked at him puzzled, Mike noticed her nose wrinkling up in a way he found impossibly cute.

"The first moving pictures were captured over in England by an inventor called Augustin Le Prince."

"And your point is...?" She teased.

Mike smiled and sat back in his chair. "Augustin Le Prince? Does that sound like an American name to you?"

Ingrid's eyes widened in surprise. "No!"

"Yes!"

"No! You mean to tell me... Pops?"

"Oh, I couldn't possibly say," said Mike, unable to keep the triumphant tone from his voice.

"Well, how exciting." Ingrid leant across the table and cupping Mike's face in both her hands gave him a gentle kiss on his lips. "You learn something new every day. Listen, honey, I've just gotta go to the little girl's room, any chance you can see me home?"

"Err... yeah. You bet."

"I'll be right back."

Mike watched her go. He could still feel that kiss on his lips, making his body tingle all over. He noticed the bartender watching him, shaking his head in contempt. Mike winked at him and then looked away, not wanting to get slung out on his ass before she returned. While he stared at the wall, he felt a sudden pang of anxiety over revealing Pops' identity. The old man had sworn him to secrecy. He dismissed it. Pops was French. He would understand. He would probably laugh about it and congratulate him, if he thought his secret had helped bring romance into Mike's life. It wasn't anything to reproach himself over. Ingrid was just a young woman. She wasn't really bothered about Augustin Le Prince. She was just a lonely widow in need of company. He was sure of it. After ten minutes he was feeling a little less sure. Where was she? After twenty minutes he was no longer sure at all, and when half an hour passed and she still didn't return, he realized he should have kept his big mouth shut.

SCENE SIXTEEN

Alice Wells was sitting patiently inside the Oakland, a short distance from the bar. Following Diamond's instructions, she had been tailing Ingrid Weiss for the better part of the day. Most of the time had been spent waiting outside the widow's home and Wells had been ready to give up the watch when at last her quarry had left the house, walked fifteen yards down the road and driven away in a brand new gleaming yellow Stutz Bearcat.

Wells was impressed. Where did the widow of a young reporter find the money for a set of wheels like the Bearcat? Why park it on the street instead of outside her own home? She followed Ingrid Weiss across town and down Sunset until she came to a halt at a very familiar location. Palace Studios. Once there she did nothing. She just sat in the automobile, waiting and watching the gates. Officer Wells quickly jotted down everything in her neat, small handwriting, the times, a description of the automobile and a full description of the widow's appearance and clothing. Alice Wells was not leaving anything to chance.

For almost an hour both women watched the Palace staff coming and going. There was a commotion at the gate as a group of fans surged towards Maitland-Mason's new Pierce-Arrow. Wells saw the man lapping up the adoration, smiling, joking and laughing as he signed autographs, before speeding off down the Boulevard towards his club. Wells noticed how quickly Maitland-Mason's charming smile disappeared as soon as he thought nobody was looking. It confirmed what she always suspected about actors and show people. Shallow and insincere. The noise level grew and Wells felt the sense of excitement in the air, as Gloria Grace emerged from the studio, on foot. Standing outside the gates, the fans flocked around her small, diminutive figure. Wells noticed the warmth and respect the crowd gave her, making sure she wasn't jostled or manhandled. She felt a grudging admiration for the way Gloria Grace treated the fans, noting down that the actress spent twenty minutes with them, talking, joking and even kissing babies. She really was America's Sweetheart as far as this crowd were concerned. Eventually, another actress pulled up in a Ford Model T. Once Gloria was satisfied that she had spoken to everybody present, she climbed into the front passenger seat and blew kisses as they departed, the crowd bursting into spontaneous applause as they cheered her on her way. Finally, Mike Bell, the young black cameraman emerged. The crowd were leaving, they had seen their idol. Only one person approached the cameraman to ask for his autograph. Wells supposed this person must be a true aficionado of the flickers. Mike stood, chatting with the fan for a while and Wells could tell from his hand gestures that he was talking cameras. Eventually, after a brief handshake, Mike left the studio on foot. Wells watched him cross the road and disappear into a bar.

It was ten minutes later that Ingrid Weiss made her move, emerging from the Bearcat, and following Mike Bell into the bar. Wells was puzzled. Was there some kind of

connection between Ingrid Weiss and the shy, young negro? She longed to leave the car and see for herself but she knew Ingrid Weiss would spot her straight away. She decided to sit tight and wait. It was a long wait and Wells hoped Diamond's promise to square any overtime with the chief wasn't just an empty gesture. She wasn't particularly driven by money, but spending a whole day watching someone do nothing would be stretching conscientiousness too far. At last, she saw Mike Bell emerge alone. He appeared unhappy and confused. She watched him until he was practically out of sight. Fifteen minutes passed and still there was no sign of Ingrid Weiss. She decided to find out for herself. If the widow saw her, she could always explain herself by saying she had been questioning someone over at the studio. As soon as she entered she knew was wasting her time. The barman, still not in the mood for hearty welcomes, barely looked up from his paper. Wells headed straight for the restrooms, and wasn't surprised to find them both empty. Where had the widow gone? Why had she left the car behind? How would she get home? On foot? Not a chance. She rushed out of the bar and back onto the street. The Bearcat was gone.

She walked back to the Oakland, sighing with frustration. Sometimes, just when she thought she had what it takes to be a proper cop, like Diamond, fate would come along and trample over her dreams, bringing her back to reality with a bump. Ingrid Weiss must have marked her from the start and gone about her business anyway. She had probably been watching her all along, waiting until she broke cover and went into the bar, before speeding away. So much for discretion. She cringed at the prospect of confronting Diamond with her report. She would do it in the morning. There was no need to crown a bad day with a nasty scene and a torrent of foul language. She took one last look at the studio gates, before starting the engine and setting off for home. If only she had waited just ten more minutes, she would have been a star witness...

SCENE SEVENTEEN

Joe stepped outside and said goodnight to Walter the concierge. His spirits rose as he breathed in the warm air. He loved the evenings here in California. The warm, balmy nights, the gentle breeze, the smell of the orange groves. It was so far removed from the wet and unpredictable summers of his homeland. For a moment he forgot all about the phone call from the Irishman. He noticed a small gathering of fans gathered underneath the 'Welcome To Palace Studios' sign. He waved and strode towards them. He enjoyed signing autographs and chatting with the public.

"Congratulations, Joe," said one young man, handing him a notebook to sign. "Gloria's one helluva gal."

"You can say that again," laughed Joe.

He signed an assortment of posters, fliers and schoolbooks and then as the fans went their separate ways, he walked over to his automobile, a modest Ford Model T. He still didn't feel comfortable behind the wheel of a car, but David had insisted that the tax

kickbacks on the deal meant he had to have one, for the good of the studio if nothing else.

"Mister Kelly?"

For a moment Joe thought he recognized the voice. He turned, a smile on his lips. Then he hurtled backwards into the side of the car as two shots rang out.

"I'm shot," he gasped, stupidly, as he slumped to the ground.

The figure stood over the fallen director, the gun pointed at the head. Another shot rang out. Then another, and another. The assassin span round and ran out of the studios and across the road.

Pops thought about giving chase but decided against it. He would never catch the killer. He knelt down beside Joe.

"Joe. Joe. Speak to me. Speak to me."

Joe's eyes flickered open and he smiled. "Someone must really hate my pictures." His eyes closed and his head slumped forward onto his chest.

"Drop the weapon!"

Pops spun round, his pistol at the ready. Then, seeing it was only Walter, the concierge, he lowered the gun to his side.

"You must call an ambulance, Walter. Mister Kelly he has been shot."

"I said drop the weapon, sir."

Pops dropped the gun. "Please. The killer is escaping. We have no time"

"That gun's been fired," said Walter. "It's smoking."

"I shot at the killer. Please. You cannot think that I had anything to do with this."

"I know what I see and what I see is the boss, shot and a Kraut with a gun."

Pops scowled. "What did you call me?"

"A Kraut. Hun, Bosche."

A raging fury overwhelmed the old man. "Moi? Bosche? Imbecile!" He flung a punch at the concierge, catching him on the chin and making his knees buckle as he fell to the ground next to Joe's unmoving form.

Pops bent down and picked up his pistol, then leveling it at the concierge, he backed away towards the street. "You are lucky I have more important people to shoot. Now call that ambulance before it is too late." He turned and ran, following in the footsteps of the real assassin.

FOURTH REELLOS ANGELES: 1914SCENE ONE

Joe's eyelids flickered open and then, dazzled by the light, they closed again.

"He opened his eyes," came an excited voice from nearby. A voice he knew. "He's awake. Doc, he's awake."

He braced himself for the pain and cracked his eyes open. All he could see was a ceiling. There was a spider's web dangling from the electric light overhead. He turned his head to the side and cried out in pain. God, his shoulder hurt to hell.

"Baby." Gloria's pale face came into view. Her eyes full of concern. "Are you outta your mind? Don't try an' move. Lie back down."

He was too weak to do anything else. He tried to speak but his normally deep voice came out as a feeble croak. Gloria held a glass tumbler to his lips. He swallowed the water. Even swallowing hurt. He took another gulp and almost choked.

"What happened?"

"You're pretty balled up, Joe. You got shot. Twice."

"Huh?" It was crazy.

"I can't believe it, neither. That crazy old bird. Do ya think he was goofy for me and the thought of you an' me together pushed him over the edge?"

"Who? What?"

"Pops. They say the old futz was gonna finish you off but Walter heard the gunshots and scared him off."

"That's enough, Miss Grace. You'll have to leave now," came a voice from the doorway. Joe knew better than to try turning his head, so he swivelled his eyes over to the doctor and nurse standing there, armed with an arsenal of pills and needles.

"Wait," said Joe. "Tell the cops, it wasn't Pops."

Gloria bent down to kiss him. "Sure I will. Wanna tell me who it was, lover of mine?"

"I don't know. I thought I knew the voice. But I didn't get a good look. It was dark. It..."

"C'mon, Mister Kelly, you save that for the police," said the doctor, moving forward and taking his pulse. "Right now, I want you taking it easy. Good evening, Miss Grace."

Gloria came back and planted a careful kiss next to the wound in Joe's shoulder. "Night-night, sheik. Don't do nothing I wouldn't."

Joe smiled. "You tell 'em it wasn't Pops. I need Pops to take care of things for me."

"You betcha."

SCENE TWO

Gloria hurried straight to the ladies room and locked herself in a cubicle as the tears began to flow down her cheeks. Thank God he was going to be fine. It would take more than a hail of lead to kill her boy. She felt weariness come in waves. It had been late when she got the call over at her beach house and she had hightailed it over to the hospital as quick as possible. All the crew and cast from the lot had descended upon the hospital along with the press, and the doctor wanted to send them all away but Gloria had insisted on staying, alone. David had wanted to stay too, but Gloria had told him to go home. She would let him know as soon as there was any news.

The crying jag ended as soon as it had begun. Joe had looked so pale and still while he was sleeping. She had imagined herself a widow before she was even wed. But now she knew he was going to be fine. The wound was nasty but it wasn't life threatening. Although he had lost a lot of blood, he had been treated in time. He would heal up, good as new. She opened the door to the cubicle and walked over to the washstand. She looked at herself in the mirror. What a fright. Make-up smeared, face grey with fatigue

and worry. She looked older than her years tonight. God, what she wouldn't give for a little pick-me-up from Doctor Dope. She shook her head. She couldn't. Not now. She needed her wits about her. *All the more reason to call him*, a little voice in the back of her head told her. *Just a little, to help set you up and see you through the crisis*. Nah. *Yeah. Go on. Aww what the heck. Why not? Tomorrow was gonna be hell, may as well buy a little bit of heaven.*

She reapplied her make-up and stopped in the lobby of the hospital to use the payphone. She could see a crowd of press waiting outside. She did not want to face them, not tonight and not looking like this.

The operator put her through to Rex Riley.

"Doctor Dope?"

"Who is this?"

"You know full well who it is, genius."

"Gloria?"

"Give the man a cigar. You got something for me? And none of that poison from the other night."

"Sure. You wanna come round?"

"Can you come get me? I'm kinda in a sticky situation. I'm downtown at the hospital. Joe's been shot."

"You're kidding."

"Yeah. Coz that's the kinda jokes I always make. Just get here, Ethel. Quick."

SCENE THREE

The doctor was a big fan of Joe's movies. So was the nurse. They talked non-stop as they prodded and poked and re-dressed his wounds and doped him up.

"You're a bit of a mystery man, Mister Kelly," said the doctor. "The police want to know more about you. There was one detective who kept on insisting it was only right he inform your next of kin, just in case you didn't make it."

Joe winced. "So, you telling me I nearly died?"

"Nah," laughed the doctor, spreading out his hands. "Not a chance. You're in good hands here. That's what I told the police. Didn't do much good though."

"Why not?"

"The cop still thought he should tell someone. He sent his old lady to check up on your family. See what she could find."

Joe closed his eyes and groaned.

"Hey, at least if she finds something, she can tell 'em it was a false alarm. A couple of weeks rest and you'll be back on your feet good as new."

"A couple of weeks?"

"You lost a lot of blood. The body needs time to heal."

"Yeah. Thanks, Doc."

Joe tried to sit up but he was too weak. He lay back, helpless. He thought of the cops. Diamond and the woman with the face like a rusty hatchet. He wondered how much they would be able to dig up. Even a little would be too much. Then he remembered the phone call. The ghosts from a past he had tried to bury. Had he escaped the bullet only to face death from something much worse? If only he weren't so weak. He closed his eyes again and floated away back into the dark.

SCENE FOUR

Rex Riley almost drove straight on past the hospital when he saw the crowd of press photographers, reporters and fans. He didn't like crowds, but he liked upsetting his boss even less. Marinelli had instructed him to bring Gloria straight back to the apartment he kept above the Vogue Picture Palace. He was most keen on learning all about what had happened to Joe Kelly and if he was going to pull through.

The security on the door wouldn't let him through. He thought about pressing his gun under the guy's nose to change his mind, but was saved when Gloria appeared in the doorway.

"It's okay, handsome," she said to the guard. "He's with me."

Flashbulbs lit the night as the pressmen went wild.

"Miss Grace, is it true that Joe was shot by an ex wife?"

"Is he gonna make it?"

"Does this have something to do with Irish Home Rule?"

"They say he was shot in the groin. How will that affect your wedding plans?"

Gloria stood on the steps, looking tiny, yet defiant.

"Joe wants me to thank you all for coming," she said, her voice strong and clear. "He's gonna be just fine and he's looking forward to sinking a few beers with all of you when he gets out."

"Miss Grace, the police think he was shot by an employee of Palace Studios. Can you give us your views on that?"

"Sure. It's bushwa. Joe wasn't shot by anyone working for the studio. He told me so."

"Did he recognize his attacker?"

More flashbulbs went off.

"I really have no more to say at this time."

Rex took her arm and led her through the reporters to the automobile parked across the street.

The assassin watched from the back of the crowd. There were too many people. Too many witnesses. Patience. Better to follow the bitch and wait for the right moment.

Rex opened the car door for Gloria and climbed into the driver's seat. The engine wouldn't start.

Gloria stood up and called to the reporters.

"Oh, boys? Crank her up will you? A girl has to get home for her beauty sleep."

The assassin thought about obliging, stepping up close and firing point blank through the windscreen. There would be no mistakes with this one. Too late, a dozen reporters were elbowing each other out of the way, each fighting for the honor of starting the car for Gloria Grace. Moments later and with a wave and a kiss, she was gone.

SCENE FIVE

When the news of Joe Kelly's attempted murder reached Dickie Diamond he was not altogether surprised. The list of suspects regarding Joe Kelly were endless. Dickie knew how dangerous it was to cloud his mind with speculation at a time like this. The city was full of lonely people, the shooter was probably just some crazy psycho fan, in love with Gloria Grace and determined to rid the world of a rival in love. Maybe the crazy sonofabitch really believed it when they said all was fair in love and war.

The door burst open and in bustled Alice Wells. Diamond knew she must be pretty keyed up to charge in without knocking. If there was one thing this puritanical dame wasn't short of it was impeccable manners. One look at her excited face confirmed his suspicions.

"There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face," he said, smiling at his partner. He gestured to the chair. "Sit down, and spill it. What's getting you so wet in the pants?"

Ignoring his remark, Officer Wells pulled a large envelope from her leather school ma'am satchel. She placed it on the desk in front of her partner, the whole gesture, smooth and fluid, as if she'd been practicing it at home. "I just had a visitor."

"Who? The postman?"

Wells shook her head. "No. One of Joe Kelly's countrymen, a fellow called Dermot Flynn. He wanted to give this to the officers in charge of the Kelly shooting. You should read it."

Diamond looked down at the file. There was a picture of Joe Kelly. He was younger, his hair longer and his face thinner, taken a good ten years ago perhaps but it was Kelly alright. Except it wasn't. According to the note attached to the photograph, this was a picture of a guy called Joseph Behan. No mistake. Diamond read with interest as Wells looked on, her grin frozen on her face, like some demented maniac. He finished reading and closed the file.

"Good work, Alice. I guess we better hightail it round to the hospital. We don't wanna keep Mister Kelly waiting."

"Don't you mean Mister Behan?" asked Alice, a smile of triumph on her face.

"Let's talk to him first, before we decide what to call him."

Diamond felt good. The hunt was on. He had the scent of the fox in his nostrils. As he reached for his hat, he fought the temptation to give Alice Wells' ample behind a hearty slap. Life was good.

SCENE SIX

Mario Marinelli bathed in water scented with rose petals. He was going to take full advantage of Gloria Grace's helplessness and give her the works. Tonight he would provide a sanctuary for the beleaguered star, a port in a storm. He had decided against stringing her out on heroin. He no longer felt the need. He was about to realize his life's ambition and become a big movie mogul. If Joe Kelly died, then surely the Irishman's partners would welcome fresh investment, from a man both feared and respected in the area. If he ever found out who had shot Kelly, he would make sure they were properly rewarded for their services. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to sink down in the deep oyster shell bath. There was a lot of truth in that old saying about all good things coming to he who waits. Patience of course had never been his strongest virtue, but now things were coming along nicely.

He thought back over the years to his early twenties, when he had run across a Jewish scientist who had owed him money. The man was working on a miracle. A machine that made photographs move. Mario had put aside all thoughts of torture and extortion and watched the image of a horse running in a field, over and over again, spellbound.

Instead of smashing up the workshop and breaking the scientist's bones he had given him money to complete his research. If things had panned out the way he had hoped, Mario Marinelli would now be a household name. But no, things had gone wrong. The boffin, was too slow, too much of a perfectionist. He let others beat him to it. First there was that French guy, who had succeeded in making moving pictures of his family and a busy street scene over in England. Marinelli had no choice, he was way too close to let some foreigner fuck things up for him. He had given the order to put the Frenchman out of the way and steal his research. They got to the Frenchman, they stole his research. But it was all in code. His egghead couldn't understand it. Even so, he had thought at the time he had done enough to buy his man some time. But oh no, the fink was slow as a snail. Fucking Thomas Alva Edison stole a march on him and brought out his own camera and projector. The race was lost, the rest was history. The scientist had promised him that his invention would outstrip Edison's and so, reluctant to turn his back on his investment he had ploughed more money into the scheme. Eventually, he had lost patience, and the luckless egghead had become one of the first permanent residents under the floor of the roadhouse basement.

Marinelli came up for air. It was strange how events had a habit of coming full circle. Now, here he was, on the verge of making his name in the world's hottest industry. All he had to do was remain patient and the world would be his for the taking.

The water was getting cold. He heaved himself out of the bath, sprayed himself with French cologne and pulled on a bathrobe. No need for anything else, he would only have to take it off again before long. He brushed his teeth and combed his hair back across his forehead.

"Not bad," he thought. "If I was a dame, I'd go for you, no problem." He poured himself a drink and made his way into the bedroom. "Come on, Rex. Where are you?" He

climbed into bed and his thoughts turned to that detective. Diamond. What a fuck up. He should have whacked him years ago, but whacking cops was always bad news. Now the fucker was gonna dig up the basement in the studios. He would definitely have some questions to answer. Maybe, the law would pin it all on Kelly. It would be easy for everyone if Kelly died. That way, the cops would have solved their little multiple murder mystery and wouldn't have to go through the expense of a trial. If Kelly survived, though, that would be a different matter. He sighed. His dick felt limp in his hand. How was a guy supposed to perform when he had a world of problems on his shoulders? Gloria should be able to lick him into shape. That is if she ever showed up. No, those bodies were going to return to haunt him, he knew it. He should never have sold the roadhouse. Or he should have insisted on disposing of the bodies far away from home, instead of keeping them under his feet like a souvenir. He took a deep breath. He had friends in high places, if the worst came to the worst, they would help him. Those bodies were a minor nuisance and nothing more. He heard the door to the suite open.

"Boss," came Rex's voice. "You got company."

Marinelli climbed out of bed and entered the living room. Rex was pouring drinks for them all.

"Gloria," he said, his arms open to embrace her. "You poor thing. Come to Daddy."

Gloria came to him and hugged him tight. He looked at her face. Not bad, considering.

"Rex, you wanna fix the little lady up?"

"Sure thing, boss."

Rex handed them their drinks. Bourbon and ice. Gloria downed hers in one.

"Another."

"You heard the lady," said Marinelli. "Come on, take the weight off." He led her to the settee and sat beside her.

Rex gave her another drink and then took a small sachet of cocaine from his jacket. He gave it to Gloria.

"On the house. It's the least we can do."

"You're an angel, Rex," said Gloria. Her hands were shaking, so Marinelli did the honors, scooping up a small amount of powder onto the silver spoon and holding it up to her nose.

"There you go, baby. You look all in, wanna go to bed?"

Gloria shook her head. "I can't sleep."

"It ain't sleep, I'm talkin' about."

She shook her head again. "Mario, please. My fiancé is in hospital."

"And you're here."

"L..."

"Come on. It'll do ya good. Rex, that'll be all."

"Sure, boss. G'night, Miss Grace."

She waved at him, distractedly. "Good night, big boy."

Big boy? Marinelli didn't like the sound of that. Had Rex been dipping where he shouldn't? It would explain how it took him so long to get here. If he had, then there would be consequences. There would most definitely be consequences.

Rex let himself out. Marinelli stood up and moved around the back of the settee. He began massaging Gloria's neck.

"No, Mario. Please."

"Whassamatter? You like this."

"It's not right."

"You been balling Rex?"

"Excuse me?"

"You heard."

"Me and Rex?" Gloria laughed. "You're outta your mind."

Marinelli resisted the urge to tighten his grip around her slender neck. "I'm sorry. You wanna tell me about Joe? How is he?"

"He'll live. He's in pain, but he'll live."

"Thank God." Marinelli cursed, inwardly. "Tell him, I been praying for him."

"Thank you. That's very kind. I never took you for a praying man, Mario."

"Things like that, they get you to thinking. That's all."

Gloria nodded. Her hands were steadier now. She helped herself to more snow.

"I feel almost human again."

"You ain't human, baby. You're a goddess. Now, come on, let's go to bed."

"No. I mean it, Mario. It ain't the time or the place."

"The place is through there," said Marinelli, pointing to the bedroom. "Come on. Then I'll run you a nice hot bath."

She shook her head. "I said no."

"And I said yes." He reached over and tore at the front of her dress. He would show the bitch. He would show them all. His dick was hard now. He reached into the dress and squeezed her breast. "You know you like it, you fucking bitch."

Gloria reached for the glass of bourbon and smashed it hard into Marinelli's face. He shrieked in anger and surprise, as blood and alcohol mixed together, blinding him.

Marinelli staggered forward, his foot coming down on a jagged shard of broken glass.

He shrieked in agony. "My best cut glasses, you whore," he cried. "They was my Papa's."

"Fuck you, Mario." Gloria hurried to the door.

He made a lunge for her but she easily dodged aside.

"You're getting blood on the carpet Mario. I'd get that seen to if I were you."

"Whore."

She snatched the sachet of cocaine from the table, grabbed her coat and stormed out of the apartment and down onto the street. She was a long way from nowhere.

The cocaine helped her nerves. She remained calm. It wasn't the first time a man had tried to force himself upon her, that honor belonged to one of her mother's old boyfriends, back when she was just fourteen. He had threatened to slit her throat if she ever breathed a word. She had believed him. She began walking, singing to keep her spirits up.

She passed a policeman on duty outside a drugstore.

"You okay, Miss?"

"Fine thanks."

"Hey, are you...?"

"Yeah. I am."

"I'm a massive fan. Sorry to hear about your boyfriend, Miss Grace."

"Thanks."

"Say, could I have an autograph?"

He pulled his notebook out of the breast pocket of his tunic.

"What's your name, Officer?"

"Howie, Howie Gant."

She signed 'to Howie, my favorite ever policeman'. Then she kissed his cheek.

"See ya, Howie."

"You want me to walk with ya, Miss Grace?"

"Sure."

"Where ya going?"

Good question. She had no idea. She looked at the street sign. She was only a block and a half away from Myron Maitland Mason's apartment on Glendale Boulevard.

"Just down the road a piece."

SCENE SEVEN

Dickie Diamond and Alice Wells were sat in a diner not far from the precinct. Diamond was impatient and the endless flow of coffee was not helping him calm down. The doctors had not allowed him access to Kelly. They had told him the injured man was in no state to answer any questions and to come back later.

"All this w-w-w-waitin's doin' h-h-hell for my ulcer," he grumbled, helping himself to the last slice of apple pie.

"You could try not stuffing yourself with pie and coffee," suggested Wells.

"Pie's good for ulcers. I read it somewhere. So's c-c-c-coffee."

"Your stammer's getting worse, Detective. I don't think coffee does it any good."

Diamond glared at her, angrily for a moment. Then he shrugged. "You n-noticed my s-s-stammer? I thought I had it under control."

"Not when you're tired. You need to sleep."

"*To sleep, perchance to dream*."

"What is it with you and Shakespeare? It is Shakespeare, isn't it?"

Diamond signalled the waitress to refill his coffee. "He gives me peace. M-m-makes me think. You should try it. Hey, I got the w-w-warrant through to dig up the studio. We c-c-could always make a start on that."

Officer Wells shook her head. "It's the middle of the night, Detective. It can wait til morning and so can Joe Kelly. He's not going anywhere."

Diamond looked at his watch. "Maybe I can ask you to keep an eye on him, that way I'll hang around the back of the hospital and follow him when he comes out."

Officer Wells gave him a sharp look. "Not funny."

"I'm not trying to be f-f-funny, Officer. Just when you think you know what you're doing, this job has a funny way of biting you in the ass. Listen, I think you're doing okay, but let's be honest, the eyes of the city are on you. A lady cop. There will be people out there, desperate for you to f-f-f-fail, d-d-desperate to say I told you so, that this ain't no job for a lady."

"What is your point, Detective?" Her tone was a bit too brusque for Diamond's liking.

"My point is ya fucked up. The widow played ya like a fish. She eyeballed you from the start and didn't give a fuck, then to make matters worse Joe Kelly gets shot, practically in the s-s-same spot you had parked your fat ass for two hours, only you were no longer there. Not only did you miss the shooting you didn't get to see who the fuck it was."

Alice Wells felt the sting of tears, welling up and struggled to control them. "My job was to tail the widow. She had gone. I can't see the future."

"What about instinct? Didn't you feel anything?"

"No," said Wells, "obviously not."

"I'll tell ya something else. If that had been me f-f-fucking up like that, you'd have told the Chief, wouldn't you?"

"No. I...No, I'd like to think I wouldn't."

Diamond fixed her with a stare. "Alice..."

"Okay. Yes. I would." Her cheeks burned with shame.

"Why?"

"Because it would be the right thing to do."

"The right thing to do," Diamond repeated. "Is it the right thing to do, Alice?"

Alice thought about the last few days. Her promotion. Working a case that had started small and was spiraling. She thought about the people involved and all the secrets and lies that were flying around, then she thought about who you could and couldn't trust.

"No, Dickie, it would not be the right thing to do."

"No. And that's w-w-why I ain't never gonna tell nobody that you were t-t-t-tailing the widow and m-missed the sh-sh-shooting by ten minutes. It's all about trust, Alice. If I don't trust you and you don't trust me, then we're fucked and we may as well go home and report for traffic in the m-m-morning."

She nodded. The tears were there now. "You're right, Detective. Thank you."

Diamond nodded. "Think nothing of it. You're gonna be a good c-c-cop, Alice, but Rome wasn't built in a day. I'm gonna check up on him before we call it a night. I'll sleep better that way."

"No you won't. The coffee will keep you up."

Diamond stared at his partner. "Anyone ever tell ya, nobody loves a wise-ass?"

"It's not my ass that's wise, Detective Diamond. Leave Kelly. We'll pay him a visit first thing in the morning. The doctor will be more helpful then. Come on, I'll give you a ride home."

Diamond sighed. "I'll drive."

"No. Your place is on my way. I'll drive."

SCENE EIGHT

Gloria ran up the stairs to the penthouse suite and knocked on the door. There was no answer. She banged on it heavily with both fists.

"Myron! Wakey-wakey! This is your early morning call!"

She heard movement from within.

"Myron?"

"Who is it?" came a sleep heavy voice from inside.

"The Virgin Mary, who d'ya think?"

Myron Maitland-Mason opened the door. He was dressed in a red velvet smoking jacket and black silk pajamas. On his feet were a pair of Turkish slippers that turned up at the end.

"Ya look like one of Santa's little helpers, Myron."

"What time is it?" asked Myron, stepping aside to allow his guest to enter the apartment.

"Two. Three. Who cares?"

"I care. I need at least eight hours sleep. They say if you get any less you are cutting your life expectancy by ten minutes a night."

"I'll cut your life expectancy if ya don't get me a drink. I'm parched."

Myron fixed Gloria an Old Fashioned and helped himself to a glass of milk. "Any news on Joe?"

"He woke up. The doc says he's gonna be fine."

"I'm glad. To what do I owe the honor?"

"I was in the neighborhood. That's all."

Myron smiled. "I'm glad to see you, Gloria."

Myron Maitland-Mason watched as she removed her coat and lay back on the chaise longue, kicking her shoes off. He noticed the rip in her dress. "Oh... you're... you're showing."

"Hmm?"

"Your... orbs. They're on show."

Gloria glanced down and felt herself going red. "Oh." She pulled the torn fabric together. "I'm sorry. You got a pin?"

"No."

"Got anything else I can wear?"

"Don't trouble yourself on my account, Gloria. I'm enjoying the view."

"I bet you are." She put her coat back on and buttoned it up. "I should be going."

"But you only just got here."

Myron Maitland-Mason sat down beside her on the edge of the chaise longue. "Kiss me. You know you want to."

"What?"

He leaned over her and kissed her hard on the lips.

"Lovely."

He tried to kiss her again and she pushed him off onto the floor.

"Bank's closed, hot stuff. What's the big idea?"

Myron sat on the floor, his face flushed and angry. "I could ask you the same thing. You waltz in here in the dead of night with your bubs showing. What's a chap supposed to think?"

"I was attacked, Myron."

The anger left his face. "Really? Who? Where? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. It was that bum, Marinelli. He tried to take advantage. He didn't get far."

"Oh." Myron felt ashamed. He couldn't look her in the eye. "I... I'm not like him. I didn't mean to... I'm sorry."

Gloria sat up and took his hands in hers. "Don't cast a kitten, Myron. It's all copacetic.

You stopped when I said no. That's the important thing."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"You can get me another drink."

"Of course. I think I'll join you."

The cocaine buzz was wearing off. Gloria finished her drink and closed her eyes.

"Will you give me a ride to the hospital in the morning?"

"My pleasure."

Maitland-Mason watched her sleep. He wished she were his, although he realized in his heart that a girl like Gloria Grace would never truly belong to any man. He settled back in an armchair his eyes never leaving her.

"I could look at you forever," he whispered. Then he thought about Marinelli and how he'd like to castrate the man for what he had tried to do.

He continued to watch her through the night, until dawn's first light broke through the blinds, illuminating her face.

Her eyes opened. She felt rough. She could sleep for a week.

"You want breakfast?" asked Myron.

She shook her head. "Just coffee. Mind if I freshen up?"

"You go ahead. There's fresh towels in the closet just outside the bathroom."

"Thanks."

While she bathed, Myron Maitland-Mason shaved over the kitchen sink and chose his favorite blue blazer. He was ready to leave when she emerged from the bathroom in a cloud of steam. It was as if she had been reborn.

"You ready to hit the road, bunny?"

"At your service, milady." Myron bent over her hand and brushed it with his lips.

"You charmer. Keep that up and I may have to break off my engagement to Joe."

Myron Maitland-Mason knew she was only joking, but the words gave him hope.

SCENE NINE

Alice Wells picked Diamond up at a little after seven.

"You're late," he snapped.

"No I'm not. So, the studios or the hospital? Take your pick?" said Officer Wells.

"The hospital. We do the studio after. And I'm driving."

Alice Wells stepped closer and sniffed. "No you're not. You were drinking last night after I left you. You're in no state to drive."

"I had one drink. One lousy drink."

"That's what they all say. I'm driving. You coming or do you want to sleep it off?"

"Very funny."

Diamond squeezed into the passenger seat and closed his eyes as Officer Wells drove them across town towards the hospital.

"The circus is in town," she said, waking him as they arrived.

Diamond looked across the street at the crowd of reporters and fans on the steps of the hospital.

"There's even more than yesterday," he sighed. "Where do they come from?"

"I guess it's a big story."

"Sure. Tell me Alice, what is the connection between Mike Bell and Ingrid Weiss?"

"Gosh, I really don't know. You have any ideas?"

"Maybe," said Diamond, reaching for the handle of the car door.

They battled their way through the scrum of press, fans and patients up the steps to the entrance. Several reporters recognized Diamond and began bombarding him with questions. He ignored them all. Once inside the hospital Diamond expected things to be calmer. They weren't. There was an atmosphere. Diamond picked up on it immediately.

"Something ain't right here. Come on, let's go see our boy."

Diamond headed for the stairwell showing surprising fitness and dexterity as he took the stairs two at a time. Reaching Joe Kelly's corridor, Diamond's worst fears were confirmed as he looked into the eyes of the cop who had been left on duty to watch over the wounded director.

"Well?" he barked at the cop, towering over him.

"Gone, sir."

"Gone, sir! Whaddaya mean, gone sir? You fuckin' prick. How hard can it be to stand outside a fucking door and make sure no one comes out?"

"But, sir, there was a situation. A lady got locked in the john down the corridor. They needed someone to break the door down. I..."

Diamond had heard enough. Kelly was even smarter than he had thought. He must have got wind of what was happening and gone to ground. He stared hard at the cop. "Get the fuck outta here before I start to remember what you look like."

Needing no second invitation the cop turned on his heels and sped down the corridor. Wells emerged from the stairwell, red in the face and gasping for breath. "Gone?" she asked.

"Yeah. Gone. F-f-fuck it. Let's duck in here w-where it's quiet."

They entered the now empty room of Joe Kelly. Diamond closed the doors behind them shutting out the commotion of the hospital, the sudden peace and quiet of the room brought a sigh from Alice Wells this being her first opportunity to catch her breath. Diamond, busy scanning the room for anything untoward misread the sigh.

"Don't beat yourself up. We'll find him. Where the fuck's he gonna go? He's head of one of the hottest studios on the West Coast and he sure as shit ain't going back to Ireland."

As if on cue the almost inaudible babble in the corridor outside started to build again, the sort of excited crescendo usually associated with the appearance of a celebrity. Wells and Diamond exchanged a look as the faint 'clickety-clack' of high heels on a squeaky clean, hard hospital floor became louder and louder until the door burst open and Gloria Grace entered, slamming it shut behind her.

Gloria squared up to Diamond, hands on hips as she demanded, "What the fuck is goin' on?"

Diamond was taken aback. He wasn't used to women using his own brand of coarse language. "I thought maybe you c-could tell us."

A flicker of confusion crossed her brow. "You mean all this baloney ain't got nothin' to do with you?"

Diamond was about to reply when the door opened again and Myron Maitland-Mason sidled in. He had been busy in the corridor signing autographs and lapping up the love from his adoring public.

"Thank you, thank you, my darlings, bless you. Bless you all," he declaimed back into the corridor as he struggled to close the door. He turned and saw Gloria, Diamond and Alice Wells staring at him. He looked around, noticing the empty bed.

"Where's Joe?" he asked, looking at Diamond with casual interest.

"Who the fuck are you?" snapped Diamond.

"I beg your pardon?" Maitland-Mason replied, affronted.

"I said who the fuck are you?"

"I'm Myron Maitland-Mason, you foul-mouthed ignoramus."

"No kidding?" said Diamond shaking the actor by the hand. "Quang Chu. In the flesh. How you doin' Mister Chu? I love your work. Boy, you are one big bad ass."

"Why thank you, sir," said Mason, lapping up the compliment. "To whom do I have the pleasure?"

"Detective Diamond and this is my colleague, Officer Wells."

"How do you do? I say, how very novel. A lady police officer."

"I gotta tell ya, you look completely different in the flesh Mister Chu."

"Please, Detective, call me Myron."

"Of course, Mister Mason, of course. I'm just not used to m-mixin' with the great and the good."

"Oh, I assure you, I'm really not that good," said Maitland-Mason, with a fruity chuckle.

"Hey," snapped Gloria, "if you two wanna carry on like a couple'a lolly-gaggers don't let me stop you, but I've got more important things on my mind, like where the fuck is my fiancé?"

Diamond stared into her eyes. "He's taken off, Miss Grace. You trying to tell me you ain't got no idea why?"

"Taken off? No. Of course I don't know why. And before you ask, I don't know where, either. Why you so interested?"

"Your fiancé is a wanted man, Miss Grace."

Gloria Grace snorted, "You got that right, flatfoot. Just wait til I get my hands on him, running out on me like that." Suddenly the penny dropped. "Say, whaddaya mean a wanted man. Wanted by who?"

"By whom, Gloria. Wanted by whom," said Maitland-Mason.

"He's wanted back in Ireland," said Diamond. "Seems he's been a naughty boy and rather than face up to his responsibilities he lit out over here."

"No way," said Gloria, trying to sound defiant as she felt her world crumbling around her. She was hurt. She did not want the people in the room to see just how hurt she was. Joe Kelly was her man now. The man she was supposed to grow old with. They had been through this adventure together. He was supposed to look after her.

"Does the name Joe Behan mean anything to you?" asked Diamond.

Gloria shook her head. "Nope."

"You really don't know your man, do you?" said the Detective opening up the file.

"Here is Joe Behan. Look familiar?"

Gloria nodded.

"Wait til ya see what they want him for. Go on. Read it."

The words leapt out at Gloria as she read the file. 'Rape' and then worse, 'Murder'. She appeared calm, almost serene. It was the performance of her life. Her man, a rapist. A murderer. He was no better than Mario Marinelli. No. It couldn't be true. She knew her man. She knew her Joe better than that. She passed the file back to Diamond without a word. She didn't trust herself to speak.

"So you can see why he took off?" Diamond asked, his eyes burning into hers.

She nodded. "He never done those things. Never."

"All the more reason why we have to find him, Miss Grace. So I'll ask you again. Have you any idea where he could be?"

She shook her head and turned to Maitland-Mason. "Say Myron, any chance you could give me a ride home?"

The question shook Maitland-Mason from his almost trancelike state. Up until then his thoughts had been full of Joe Kelly and the crimes he was accused of. He could picture the scandal and the infamy, once the news broke. The Kelly story would be a sensational. A movie about it would be a smash. A movie with Maitland-Mason playing Joe Kelly would be dynamite. It was the role he had waited his life to perform. Luckily, Gloria mistook the look on Maitland-Mason's face for shock and sympathy.

"I'm sorry," he said, looking down at her. "Did you say something?"

"I said will ya take me home?"

He nodded. "Of course."

She hooked her arm through his as they prepared to run the gauntlet of press and fans waiting below.

"Miss Grace," said Diamond, "let me and Officer Wells go on ahead and clear the way."

"Thank you, Detective," Gloria replied, treating him to a fleeting smile. "Glad to see your manners haven't run out on ya."

"Don't mention it. It ain't you accused of these crimes, is it?" Diamond's motives were not entirely honorable, of course. He knew he needed to find Joe Kelly, and fast. On the steps of the hospital the questions came thick and fast and flashbulbs popped incessantly.

"Is it true the shooter was a man dressed as a woman?"

"Are you pregnant, Miss Grace?"

"Is this the end of your career?"

A shot rang out. The bullet hit the door to the left of Diamond's foot. He felt the spit of dust as his shoes were covered in particles of wood and glass. He glanced up as another shot rang out. He threw himself in front of Gloria and glanced wildly around. There were too many people. At once it was a curse and a blessing. He couldn't see the shooter, but it also meant the shooter couldn't get a good shot at them.

"Get behind me," Diamond yelled at Wells. "And keep your eyes open."

"Hey," yelled Wells as Maitland-Mason grabbed hold of her, instinctively using her as a shield.

Two more shots whistled through the air. The shooter must be across the street. Too far to get a good bead on them.

Diamond shoved Maitland-Mason away from Alice Wells as he grabbed Gloria by the hand and dragged her down the steps towards his waiting car. Wells and Maitland-Mason hurried after them. There was more gunfire and just as Maitland-Mason was climbing into the car he shrieked in pain.

Diamond was already at the wheel, he turned round and stared at the actor who was clutching his head.

"Where you hit?"

"My head," sobbed Maitland-Mason. "My head."

The car wouldn't start.

"Miss Grace, are you hit?" Diamond didn't dare turn to face her.

"No," said Gloria, leaning across the back seat to check on Maitland-Mason. "I'm fine.

We need to get him back into the hospital."

Diamond noticed that some of the braver photographers were gathering around the car, taking pictures. Diamond wondered if getting the scoop of their lives was worth taking a bullet for.

"I need a doctor," moaned Maitland-Mason. "I'm dying."

"I can't see any blood," said Alice Wells, moving Maitland-Mason's hands away from his face. "Just a nasty bump on his forehead."

"I wasn't shot," said the actor. "I bumped my head on the roof of the car."

Diamond burst out laughing. "Take it easy tough guy. You'll live. The shooter missed his chance. He'll be long gone now."

"I was trying to protect Gloria," said Maitland-Mason. "I think I may have saved her life."

"My big brave boy," said Gloria, joining in with Diamond's infectious laughter. "Let me kiss that boo-boo better." She gave him a kiss on the forehead.

They sat in the car, surrounded by more and more press and onlookers. Diamond didn't like it. They were too exposed.

"Can I go home now?" asked Gloria.

Diamond stared at her. "I can give you a police guard. It looks like somebody wants to hurt you, Miss Grace."

"I think they may have been after me," said Maitland-Mason, still rubbing his head.

"They nearly got me too."

"I'll drive him home," said Gloria. "He'll be fine with me."

"You need anything, call me," said Diamond, handing her his card.

"You betcha."

SCENE TEN

Gloria drove straight past Glendale Boulevard.

"You missed my turning," said Maitland-Mason, in between anguished moans.

"Clever boy."

"Turn back. I need my rest."

"What you needs is fresh air, Myron."

"Where are you taking me?" he bleated.

"You'll see."

Myron was not happy. If a madman was trying to kill Gloria and not him, then sitting beside her was not in his own best interests. He was fond of the girl, yes, but his one true love was himself. Then again, what if the lunatic really was after him? If that were the case he most certainly did not want to be alone. Oh, what a quandary.

"You told the police you were taking me home."

"You wanna file a complaint, go ahead. Me, I wanna find Joe and I need your wheels to do it."

Maitland-Mason was horrified. "Don't joke about such things. They aren't funny."

"Who's jokin'?"

"I don't think it's wise. He could be dangerous."

"He's my fiancé."

"He's a deranged rapist and murderer. He never even told us his real name."

Gloria gave him a look of pure venom. "Say that again an' I'll give you a matching lump on the back of your head."

"It's you I'm worried about, that's all."

"Sure. You're all heart, Myron."

They pulled into the lot beside Palace Studios.

"He's hardly going to come here, dear."

"He might have left a message with David. Come on."

Maitland-Mason climbed reluctantly out of the vehicle and cursed. "We're in trouble now. I knew we shouldn't have come. Look."

Dickie Diamond honked the horn of his vehicle and waved cheerfully.

"I didn't know you lived in the studio, Mister Mason."

"It's Maitland-Mason."

Gloria walked over to Diamond's vehicle. "Are you following me?"

"Nope. She is." He pointed over his shoulder as another automobile pulled up, with Officer Alice Wells at the wheel. "I'm here on business. Who's in charge while the boss is away?"

Gloria shrugged. She wasn't sure. "David Flaum, I guess. Come on. I'll take ya to him."

Diamond, Wells and Maitland-Mason followed Gloria through the gate. Gloria stopped to speak with the concierge.

"Is David around?"

"No, ma'am. How's Mister Kelly?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Where is he?"

"Who, ma'am?"

"David."

"Couldn't say, ma'am. He didn't show up today. You could ask Mike Bell. He's filming the Bathing Belles on the back lot."

"This I gotta see," grinned Diamond. "Lead on, Miss Grace."

SCENE ELEVEN

They found Mike and the Bathing Belles at the far end lot of the studios. The Belles were lining up for a beauty pageant, always box office gold.

"Say, here comes Gloria," said one of the girls, taking the opportunity to spark up a cigarette. "How's the boss, Gloria?"

"No news, girls," said Gloria. "Mike, this is Detective Diamond. Detective, this is Mike Bell. He's one of our main cameramen. Where's David, Mike?"

Mike shrugged. "I ain't seen him all day."

"So, does that mean you're in charge?" asked Diamond, looking at the skinny young black man. He couldn't believe his luck. This guy was barely out of his teens, he would have no trouble with him.

"In charge?" said Mike. "In charge of what?"

"The studios," said Gloria. "I guess you are, huh? While David and Joe and Pops aren't here."

Mike frowned. "I dunno. I mean I ain't never thought about it."

"Listen," said Diamond. "I can see you're a busy boy, so I won't take up much of your time. I got a warrant here." He pulled the warrant sheet out of his jacket pocket.

"Am I under arrest?" Mike swallowed, hard.

"Why? You wanna be?"

"No."

"Good. Just do as I say an' you won't be. I got a warrant here to dig up the floor in the basement under the canteen."

"Oh."

"Don't cast a kitten. I ain't askin' you to do no diggin'. I've got some boys from the precinct coming over. Just let us get on with our job an' we'll let you get on with yours."

"Oh. What do you think, Miss Grace?" Mike turned to Gloria for advice.

Gloria shrugged and accepted a cigarette from one of the Bathing Belles. "I don't think you got any choice, Mikey. Do as the man says. Let him get on with it."

Diamond gave Mike a wink. "Copacetic. Come along, Officer Wells. Let's get digging."

Officer Wells followed him towards the old block.

"Don't you want me to keep an eye on the Grace woman?"

Diamond shook his head. "Nah. She's wise to you now. She don't know nothing. And who knows, maybe if we leave her alone, she might even find Kelly for us."

"And help him get away."

"I don't think so, Alice. She'll want him to clear his good name."

"I'd like to see him try," snapped Officer Wells.

"You already found him guilty, huh?"

"Why else would he run away? Of course he's guilty."

"Sure. We'll see."

Gloria watched the police officers walk away before turning back to Mike Bell. "So, you really don't know where David is?"

"No."

"Shame. I hoped he could give me a lead on Joe."

"Joe? Ain't he in the hospital?"

Gloria laughed. "That would be the sensible thing, wouldn't it? You're forgetting one thing. Joe ain't sensible."

Some of the Bathing Belles tittered. Maitland-Mason frowned and shooed them away.

"That's enough, girls. This is management talk."

"You ain't management," said Minta Greene, who was beginning to think of herself as fully-fledged star in her own right, now that the Palace Bathing Belles vehicles were proving a hit.

"It's okay, girls," said Gloria, giving them her most delicate smile. "Take the rest of the afternoon off. Me an' Mike have got business to discuss."

"But, we're behind already," said Mike. "Joe will kill me."

"If what we've heard is true then you're probably right," said Maitland-Mason.

Gloria shot him a look. "It ain't true, button it, Myron."

"Go on, girls, but be back here at eight tomorrow morning," said Mike.

"Do we still get a full day's pay?" said Minta.

"Sure. Now scram, bearcat." said Gloria.

When the girls had gone, she turned back to Mike. "Can you call David? If I do it, he'll think I'm asking him for a date or something."

"He ain't got a phone," said Mike. "Says he don't need one, coz he spends all his time here. What's going on, Gloria?"

"Joe's wanted for murder," said Maitland-Mason. "Rape too."

Mike laughed, thinking this was one of the actor's unfunny jokes. "No, really."

"He didn't do it," said Gloria. "But that flatfoot thinks he did. When we got to the hospital this morning, Joe was gone. I thought maybe David might have some idea where he could be."

Mike was stunned. He couldn't take it in. "Murder? Rape? Not Mister Kelly. I won't believe it."

"I'm sure Joe will be delighted to hear that," said Maitland-Mason. "Of course, Kelly isn't his name either. It's Behan. I suppose it's because he's *behan* a naughty boy." He laughed at his own joke. Mike and Gloria stared at him, stone faced. "What?" he said. "It's a joke. If you don't laugh you cry."

"I think I might know where he is," said Mike. "It's a long shot but it makes sense. It's where I would go, if the cops was after me."

"Where?" asked Gloria.

"Pops' place. Months ago, when we first met him, he took us to a hideout he has out in the woods. The cops won't never find it."

"Can you take us?" said Gloria, her eyes bright with excitement. She had long since come down from her cocaine buzz, but now she didn't need a fresh hit.

"I don't got a car."

"Myron does," said Gloria.

Maitland-Mason groaned. "No. No. No. Really, this is too much. My head hurts. I feel faint. I really think you should take me home."

"Aww don't be such a big baby. Come on, Mike. I got the keys."

Mike and Gloria headed off to the parking lot.

"Wait," Maitland-Mason called after them. He had just had a thought. If he was going to play Joe in the story of his downfall, then it wouldn't hurt for him to have a ringside seat for the final act. Who knows, maybe he would have the chance to surprise Joe and turn him over to the law. He would be a real hero. He climbed into the backseat.

"Drive on, Gloria, but if we could swing by a drugstore on the way, I'd appreciate it. I want to get a poultice for my head."

"Don't worry, I'll boil it for ya," laughed Gloria. "Hey, get out an' crank the engine, will ya?"

SCENE TWELVE

"Darling, if you could just ease up on the speed it may assist in my feeling a little less queasy," groaned Maitland-Mason from the back seat.

"Can it, Myron. Maybe you should rest your peepers. It's important for Mikey here to try and find the joint, before it gets dark."

Miserable Mason's constant bleating was beginning to get Gloria down and if he didn't stop soon she was going to turn him out of his own car in the middle of nowhere. Her head was swimming. Whoever shot Joe seemed to be after her too. She was no fool, she had been on intimate terms with trouble all her life and knew how to handle herself, but recent events were beginning to unsettle her. It had to be a crazed fan. The shootings began straight after the engagement was announced. Since taking her position in the public eye as America's sweetheart, Gloria had been surprised at how many goofballs wanted a piece of her. Her daily fan mail revealed an alarming number of people 'not quite straight in the head' from the sad and lonely who wanted to be like her to the downright sick twisted and perverted. One particularly creative chef had written her,

informing of his plans to cook and eat her for Thanksgiving. He even sent her the recipe, complete with hand drawn illustrations. Such was the power of these silly little flickers she appeared in. Of course, she shouldn't discount the possibility that the shootings were not the work of a fan. Mario Marinelli was a dangerous friend, but he was a lethal enemy. There was nothing she could do about it for the moment. All she could do was concentrate on finding Joe.

She didn't believe for a minute that her fiancé was guilty, but why hadn't he said anything to her? She thought back to the night when he had asked her to marry him. She wondered if he had even thought of telling her. Maybe it was her fault. Maybe she had never given him the chance to truly open up. She knew two things about her man; one, that he was innocent and two, that he needed her help.

"Mikey," she turned to face the young cameraman sitting beside her, "are you sure you know where we're going?"

Mike shrugged. "Not really, Gloria. I only come here the once. But whenever I used to go on a journey with my Daddy, we used to play a game called 'fixed points'. You know it?"

Gloria shook her head.

"For the love of all that's holy," cried Maitland-Mason. "I've got a fractured skull and you want to play some bloody stupid niggery nursery game out in the middle of the wilderness. Let's turn around now and go home."

Gloria ignored him. "Tell me about it. It don't involve takin' your clothes off does it?"

"No," said Mike. "Course not. Daddy would say to me, 'son, whenever we go somewhere new, you gotta look out for things that stick out, just in case you gets lost and can't find your way home."

"Attaboy, Mikey. Seen anything you recognize yet?"

"Nah."

From the back of the car Maitland-Mason emitted a despairing moan.

"I remember we drove down this road for at least an hour."

"So what's the first thing we gotta be looking out for?"

"A barn. On its own in the middle of a field, all beaten up and run down. It'll be on the left. No. On the right. It'll be somewhere."

"I knew you wouldn't let us down," sighed Maitland-Mason.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Back at the studio, Diamond and Wells supervised events as three uniformed bulls attacked the floor of the basement with pickaxes and sledgehammers.

"Put some beef into it, fellas," said Diamond, "We don't wanna be here all day."

"I still think you should have left me with Gloria Grace," said Wells. "I don't trust her. She knows where Kelly is. I'm sure of it."

Diamond shook his head. "Nah. She's in shock."

"She could still lead us to him."

"Not if she thinks we're following her. She'll find him. We just gotta wait, is all. Then we put the pressure on that Quang Chu guy. He'll spill all he knows, just as soon as he knows anything."

"Sheeeyit!" gasped one of the uniforms. "I got something. Looks like a shoe."

Diamond peered down into the hole.

"Keep digging. But be careful. Yup. That's a shoe. And a leg. We got us a body, boys."

"We got us two bodies," said another uniform.

"Make that three," said the third.

Diamond grabbed a shovel and climbed down into the pit. "Whaddaya know, we got another one here too."

SCENE FOURTEEN

"Stop!" Mike Bell bellowed at the top of his lungs.

Gloria slammed on the brakes bringing the automobile to an abrupt halt in the middle of the road. The sudden stop slammed Maitland-Mason forward, his chin catching the back of Mike's head.

"Careful back there, will ya?" cried Mike, rubbing his head.

"I think you broke my jaw, boy," groaned Miserable Mason. "You're trying to kill me. You're all in on it."

"Your jaw's fine, Myron," snapped Gloria, turning to look at him. "You can still bellyache, can'tcha?" She turned her attention to Mike who was rubbing the back of his head. "How you doing, baby? Let me take a look at your head."

"I'm fine," said Mike.

"Great," muttered Maitland-Mason. "Give him the attention. He's only got a head made of concrete. Forget all about me, why don't you?"

"If only we could," sighed Gloria. "What did ya see, Mikey?"

Mike pointed back down the highway. "There's a turning down there. We just missed it."

"I didn't see no turning."

"I told you the place was difficult to find. Back up a hundred feet or so."

Gloria did as instructed, backing the car up slowly.

"Great. Stop. Turn off here."

A dried up riverbed cut across the road, twisting and turning through the brush.

"Wait a minute," said Maitland-Mason from the back. "You can't turn off here. It's not even a road. That surface will ruin the suspension."

Gloria didn't even acknowledge him with a biting retort as she turned the automobile off the road and headed along the rocky surface of the old river bed, bouncing the occupants from side to side.

"Just like sex, ain't it, boys?" laughed Gloria.

"Remind me never to get into bed with you," said Maitland-Mason.

"I will, don't worry. Say, you ain't wrong about the suspension, Myron baby. Whoops! There goes a spring." Gloria was beginning to enjoy herself. "Where now, Mikey?"

"Just keep going. The track bends away to the right after a mile or so and then we'll come across some trees."

"Trees? As in a wood? Here in California?" Maitland-Mason snorted with derision.

"Yeah, here," replied Mike, getting defensive. "We do got trees in California, you know?"

Ten minutes later, Mike was proved correct, as up ahead they saw a small wood.

"Might I suggest we walk?" said Maitland-Mason. "You've already ruined the suspension. Those trees are going to scratch the paintwork."

"Don't cast a kitten, Myron honey. I'll getcha another car when we're done."

"Do you have any idea how much a breezer like this costs, Gloria?"

"Honey, who cares? I'm on ten times more money than you. I'll buy you three cars in red white and blue if that'll shut your big limey mouth."

"Well!"

That statement along with Mike's giggles was enough to quieten the affronted Maitland-Mason, leaving Mike and Gloria to concentrate on the task in hand.

"We're almost there."

"You're doing great, Mikey."

SCENE FIFTEEN

The press had been gathered outside Palace Studios ever since it became clear that Joe Kelly was no longer in the hospital. No official statement had been released yet about the shootings or the reason for Joe's disappearance, but the rumor mill was working over-time. When more and more police began pouring into the studios, the rumors became wilder and wilder. As the first covered bodies were brought out of the canteen block, the scene descended into chaos with photographers breaking through the thin police cordon, desperate to take pictures destined for the front page of newspapers across the globe. Reporters began scribbling down their own theories as fast as they could, each desperate for a new angle on the story that would eclipse all tales of the outbreak of war half a world away.

"ACTORS FED HUMAN REMAINS"

"GLORIA GRACE SUCCESS DOWN TO SATANIC HUMAN SACRIFICE"

"GLORIA GRACE TIED TO MURDEROUS GERMAN SPY RING"

"IRISH PRODUCER MURDERS BABIES"

Dickie Diamond emerged from the charnel house of the basement and blinked in the late afternoon sun.

"Someone get those fucks out of here," he said, motioning towards the press.

A flashbulb went off in his face. He fought the urge to throw a punch at the photographer and went back inside. Officer Wells was taking notes as the uniformed bulls carried the bodies out of the basement for their trip to the morgue.

"Eighteen bodies," he sighed.

"Joe Kelly doesn't do things by halves, does he?" said Wells, her face grim.

Diamond shrugged. "Come on, girl. You don't think Kelly did this, do ya?"

"He's wanted for murder in Ireland. Course I do."

Diamond shook his head in disgust. "You disappoint me, Alice. I thought you had brains. You seen the state of those bodies. Some of them have been down there for years. Who owned the place before Kelly? Marinelli."

Alice Wells shook her head. "It'll be easier to pin it on Kelly. Boothe will want this case solved, nice and easy. Pin it on a known murderer and we solve it like that." She snapped her fingers to illustrate her point.

"Marinelli's a known murderer."

"No he isn't. You've got your suspicions, but nothing that will stick. Take my advice, blame Kelly. That way, Captain Boothe is happy. The District Attorney is happy and the Press is happy."

"Yeah? Well I ain't in this for them and pinning this on Kelly don't make me happy."

Wells sighed. "Detective... Dickie, please. Do it this way. Get Kelly in the frame. Marinelli relaxes, maybe he makes a mistake. Then you get him. If you don't, you still clear the cases as far as everyone else is concerned. It's a win win situation."

Diamond looked at her. He didn't like what he was hearing, but it made sense. "I take it back, what I said about the brains. You got a point, Alice. Look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under it."

"Thanks."

"No problem. Say, why don't you go grab a cup of joe? Maybe bring me one too. I just wanna have a word with Doc Miller before he leaves."

"Coffee? Sure. Black with gasoline?"

"You got it."

Diamond watched her depart and sighed. It would be stretching it too far to say he had enjoyed working with Alice Wells but he had appreciated her organization and her methodical approach. But her haste in trying to wrap up the case by pinning the whole thing on Joe Kelly gnawed away at him. He was wrong about her. She was just like the others, sloppy and obsessed with statistics. Diamond hated the politics of his job. He much preferred to dig deep and answer the questions his colleagues preferred to leave unasked. Joe Kelly didn't look like a murderer, or a rapist. Then again, they never did. If he had a nickel for every angel faced deviant he had arrested in his long career, he would be richer than William Randolph Hearst. Sure, Marinelli used to own the building, but he was connected. He had friends in high places. He also had the smartest attorneys money could buy. It was more than possible that not only would Marinelli beat the rap, he would also sue the city for defamation of character and make sure that Diamond and Wells ended their careers on foot patrol. He couldn't blame Alice Wells. She was acting in the same way that everyone on the top floor wanted her to act. She was crunching numbers. So long as the department could claim a case was solved then everyone in the precinct looked good. It made sense blaming Kelly. He was a much

easier target than Marinelli. For a start, nobody trusted movie people. One step up from vagrants.

Diamond decided to let things play out however they would. He would answer all the questions in his own good time, even if it took years. First, he would make sure that one of the eighteen bodies he had unearthed belonged to the missing reporter Robert Weiss. That was, after all, the case he had originally been assigned to crack. Then, even if he was reassigned, he would continue asking questions and finding answers. It was the part of his job that he loved. In the meantime, he decided to give Officer Wells the benefit of the doubt. She meant well. This was her first major case. Of course she wanted to impress the top floor. Who wouldn't? Maybe, given time, some of his own knowledge and work ethic would rub off on her. Maybe he would be able to teach her that the one thing that made a good cop was being just that, a good cop.

He walked over to the meat wagon and watched as two attendants loaded up yet another body. He noticed with satisfaction that the uniformed police officers had cleared the reporters back to the studio gates. He lit a cigarette and lay a hand on Doctor Miller's shoulder.

"Hey Marty, your boys are gonna need to make a few trips. Anything you can tell me?"

Doctor Miller, who was one of the few senior city employees that actually liked Diamond, smiled as he accepted a cigarette.

"Seven ages of man here, Dickie, that's all I can say without having a proper look. Some of them go back years."

"Sure. Listen I know I don't need to teach grandma how to suck eggs here, but can you make sure whatever you find on or around each stiff stays with that particular stiff and doesn't get mixed up?"

Doctor Miller smiled patiently. "Like you say Dickie, you don't need to teach Grandma how to suck eggs."

"Thanks, Marty. I'll catch up with you later."

SCENE SIXTEEN

"Pull over, Gloria. We walk from here."

Gloria pulled over and looked at Mike with admiration. "Honey, how on earth do you remember? Everything looks the same."

"Nonsense," grumbled Miserable Mason, climbing out of the vehicle and massaging his lower back while he stretched. "It's perfectly straightforward. Any fool can pick it up in Baden Powell's 'Basic Principles of Scouting.' Anyway, before you go around praising the boy to the skies, may I point out that we haven't actually found anyone yet?"

Gloria stared at Maitland-Mason hard and long, before blowing a raspberry. "Come on, Mikey, let's leave laugh-a-long, to his own devices. Which way?"

"Over that hill. Come on."

Mike began to run, leaving Gloria and Maitland-Mason to hurry after him.

Gloria was up for the chase, unlike Mason, who left them to it and began ambling towards the wood on the look-out for shade. He was hot, irritable and his head hurt. He

was tempted to drive away, after all, they were here now and he was sure Gloria and Joe would have a lot of talking to do. Let them find their own way home. He was starting to feel a little under-appreciated. All this fuss about Gloria like she was so special. *He* was the main reason Palace Studios were so successful. He carried '*Gloria Goes It Alone*' and the '*Bathing Belles*'. As if the real public gave two hoots about that silly little slut batting her eyelashes and mugging through every frame. He was an actor of immense skill and talent and the discerning American public recognized this. Even the title, '*Gloria Goes It Alone*' stuck in his craw. The series should be called '*The Fiendish Quang Chu*' or '*Myron Maitland-Mason and the Adventures of the Ghastly Quang Chu*.' He shuddered when he realized what a lucky escape he had outside the hospital. Everybody presumed the bullet was meant for Gloria, but what if it was intended for him? Some brainless American idiot thinking it was all real and trying to save Gloria from his evil clutches. God these Americans, just like big babies, over-reacting to everything, always letting their emotions run away with them. Desperately lacking in class or manners. Maybe he should return to England? Now he had the fame that his talent deserved, perhaps he could set himself up like his great hero Henry Irving and run his own company. Imagine the surprise and admiration his fellow countrymen would feel given the chance to see the creator of Quang Chu brilliantly portraying all the classics. He would be a sensation.

He stopped walking and looked around. He had been so lost in his own thoughts that he had wandered deep into the woods. He was lost and his bladder was full to bursting. Should he unbutton himself and find relief here against a tree? Good Lord, no. He was an Englishman. What if Gloria was spying on him, ready to play one of her silly pranks? He would have to find somewhere suitable and then try to find his way back to the car. He thought about calling out for Gloria and Mike but that would never do. He

wasn't a common market trader, calling out his wares, he was Myron Maitland-Mason. Anyway, if he let them know he was lost, he would never hear the end of it. He pressed on and eventually came to a clearing. In the middle stood a rundown barn. To one side he saw a small secluded area. The perfect spot to relieve himself.

He unbuttoned his trousers and closed his eyes, watering the ground at his feet. There was a click in his ear and then Mason felt something cold and hard press against the back of his head.

"Monsieur, you are pissing on my vegetables. I think perhaps they would prefer water."

Maitland-Mason span round in shock, piss splashing down Pops' trousers.

"Cochon!"

"Pops, you senile old fool. What's the meaning, sneaking up on people with a loaded gun? It's me, Mister Maitland-Mason."

"I know who you are and it is you doing the sneaking, n'est pas? What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

"Nothing to it, old boy," said Maitland-Mason, doing up his trouser buttons. "I am an Englishman old chap, calm in a crisis and unerring when faced with a task. Somewhere around here you will find Gloria and Mike who, unlike myself, are hopelessly lost. Now put the gun down, there's a good chap and perhaps, if possible, a nice cup of tea?"

Pops lowered the gun.

"Thank you." Maitland-Mason smiled. "That's the second time today I've almost been shot."

The old man raised an eyebrow. "You? Who would shoot you?"

"You. Is it true that you shot Joe? If it is, I'm sure you had your reasons. But there's no need to make a habit of it."

Pops shook his head. "Of course I didn't shoot Joe. He never pissed on my vegetables. I don't have tea. Coffee? I make it from dry potato husks."

"Sounds delicious. Got anything stronger?"

"Follow me."

As they were about to enter the barn, Pops heard Mike calling out from the woods.

"Pops! Joe! It's us!"

"You, go to them. Tell them to shut up and show them the way," said Pops.

The actor thought about arguing, but remembered the gun in Pops' pocket and did as he was asked, rushing off towards the voices.

He found them struggling through a thicket of prickly shrubs. Gloria's dress was torn and she looked tired and exhausted. Mike didn't appear much better.

"Hello, troops," he cried with a wave. "I found him. Good job you brought me along, eh? Myron Maitland-Mason the human bloodhound. Come along, Pops is going to give you a cup of his delicious potato husk coffee. That should put hairs on your chest."

SCENE SEVENTEEN

Maitland-Mason led his companions towards the barn. Now that they had found Pops' secret place, his spirits were revived. He would use his powers of persuasion to talk Joe into turning himself in and after the trial he would sell his story to the world. There would be movie deals, book deals, serialization rights. He would be a hero, the man who brought the devilish Kelly to book.

"Ladies first," he said, with a bow as he stood by the open barn door.

Gloria was too tired to say thank you. She stepped into the barn and shrieked as Pops confronted them, a double-barrelled shotgun in his hands.

Pops glared at Mike Bell. "You gave me your word you would tell no one of this place."

Mike raised his hands. "I'm sorry, Pops. It was kind of an emergency."

"Lay off the dramatics, Daddy," said Gloria. "You ain't gonna shoot us. Where's this cup of joe, Myron was gassing about?"

Pops lowered the shotgun, and smiled at Gloria, ashamed by his treatment of her.

"Forgive me. Cherie. Welcome to my home. Please, make yourselves comfortable." He

led them through the workshop to the study area and sat down in a battered armchair.

Gloria, Mike and Myron squeezed together on the couch.

"So, where's Joe?" she asked.

Pops shrugged. "Why ask me?"

Gloria stared at Mike. "You said he would be here."

Mike shrugged. "That's why we came, Pops. I figured if the cops was looking for him, he'd hide out here."

"Why are the cops looking for him?" asked Pops. "He was the victim, non? You Americans have a crazy way of doing things."

"They say he's wanted for rape and murder in Ireland," said Myron Maitland-Mason.

"It's all pish of course, but still, not the kind of thing that one likes to hear."

A strange smell of burning began wafting over from the back of the barn. Pops got up to prepare the coffee. "Tell me more."

"There's no more to tell," said Gloria. She felt herself falling apart again. While she had something positive to do she had held things together. Now she was back at square one.

"You sure you don't know where he is? That shooter tried to kill me this morning."

Myron cleared his throat. "He could well have been trying to kill me, Gloria. I keep telling you, stop jumping to conclusions."

Pops returned with the coffee. It was black, and what appeared to be dried flowers floated around in it.

"I can fully understand people hoping to kill you, Myron," said Pops, passing him a cup.

"I curse myself for letting the gunman escape. But I am old and not so fast as I was."

"Did you see him?" asked Mike. He grimaced as he tasted the coffee, but said nothing.

Pops shook his head. "Non. Only from a distance and he had his back to me."

"So why go into hiding, Pops?" asked Gloria. "Joe needs you. The studio needs you."

Pops shrugged. "I have been busy. I am making arrangements to leave here. I doubt that I shall return."

"Eeeew! Bloody hell!" cried Myron Maitland-Mason, springing up from the couch and spitting a mouthful of coffee onto the wooden floor. "This is foul, Pops."

Pops sighed. "It is an acquired taste. I do wish that gunman had succeeded in shooting you, Myron. First you piss on my vegetables. Now you spit on my floor. What next?"

"Get a towel and clean it up, Myron," snapped Gloria, putting her own cup to one side.

"Where are you going, Pops?"

"France. The Bosche swine have declared war upon my country. I go to them in their hour of need."

"Make sure you bring plenty of that coffee," said Myron, on his knees as he mopped up the mess on the floor. "Drop it in the German water supply and it'll all be over before Christmas."

Mike glanced out of the window. "We should be making tracks. I don't want to be out here after dark. So, when are you leaving, Pops?"

"Soon. In a day or two. I have some unfinished business to attend to first. Good luck, Mike. You will be a very good director one day. I can tell. Adieu, Gloria. Give my regards to Joe when you see him. I wish him well."

Gloria kissed the old man on the lips and walked to the door. She hated goodbyes. She struggled not to cry. He was going to be missed. Especially now, when everything seemed so uncertain.

"So long, Pops. Come on, boys." God, she needed a hit.

"Go now, Myron, before you cause any more damage," said Pops. "I wish you all well."

"Same to you, Pops," said Myron. "But I'd think twice before going over to Europe. I hear England is all set to join the war too. You won't catch me fighting." He noticed Gloria staring at him. "Not that I'm scared of course. It's just that we can do so much more for morale, over here. Making films. Propaganda, for the war effort. Entertaining the troops and such. You should give it some thought, Pops."

The old man nodded. "Yes. You are very wise, Myron."

SCENE EIGHTEEN

Pops watched them leave and then went into the workshop. He pulled the tarpaulin off his motorcycle and checked the oil and gas. He wished he had more time to help his friends. After all these years of solitude and hiding things were now moving too quickly for his liking. He had lied to Gloria. He did not think he would be leaving America just yet. His business was likely to take longer than a day or two. Perhaps if his rotten run of bad luck came to an end and he was successful, he would have time to help Joe Kelly before returning to Europe. Or, perhaps, with God's grace, his countrymen would have prevailed over the Prussian threat before he had to leave. After all, the newspapers did say it would be over within weeks.

He topped up the gas on the motorcycle and wheeled it outdoors. He shut and locked the barn door. He wondered if perhaps his business was related to Joe's problems or to the mysterious assassin who seemed to wish ill on Joe and Gloria. He thought not, things were seldom so simple.

He walked into the woods and removed the camouflaged netting from the ground to reveal a coffin-sized hole, filled with weapons. He withdrew a small Remington Derringer. It was, he thought, the very same pistol that Pierce Christiansen had threatened him with on that train to Paris, all those years ago. It felt good in his hand. He had modified it himself, improving its aim and efficiency.

"Soon, you will taste blood," he promised the weapon, patting it, gently, before stuffing it into his jacket pocket.

SCENE NINETEEN

Gloria could have stayed closer to town but she needed a break. She wanted to be alone. She asked Mike to drop her off at the place on Manhattan Beach. It was a long drive out and Maitland-Mason never stopped moaning about the punishment they were putting his beloved motor car through. She knew she should ask them both inside for a drink, but she couldn't face it. She'd had a bellyful of Maitland-Mason's egocentric babbling and Mike Bell's earnest musings on the future of the industry. She needed a drink, a hit, and a long bath.

Mike dropped her off outside the beach house and she waved them off into the distance. It was by now completely dark, save for the light of a silver full moon, high over the Pacific. A lone figure, lay on the sandhills, watching her as she opened the door and went inside.

She ran the bath and helped herself to the last of the cocaine. She wondered where she would go for her supply in future. She could hardly visit Marinelli again, not after last

night. Maybe she would give it up. She knew it sure as hell wasn't doing her no good. She fixed herself a whiskey and lay back in the warm water and felt herself relaxing.

"Oh, Joe. Where are you?" she said to herself. She realized now that she had taken him for granted. He had transformed her from a hopeful street waif into one of the most famous faces in the world. In return, she had driven him to distraction, running around with the likes of Mario Marinelli, fooling around with Minta and the girls, wasting time and costing the studio money. He had seldom raised his voice to her, although she knew just how much her clowning could burn him up. It hadn't stopped her, it had encouraged her. She would have done anything to get a reaction out of him. She was ashamed of her behavior now. Joe was alone, hunted like a dog. Did he have any idea how much she loved him? No. How could he? Until the shooting, she hadn't even known it herself. Now, whoever it was that had shot Joe was after her. She didn't feel afraid. She felt excited. She wondered if she would ever live to be married and have children. Probably not. She was lucky to be alive now. Her mother had tried to kill her. Her mother's boyfriends had tried to kill her. And now there was someone else, lined up to take their place. Marinelli? More than likely. She knew how ruthless he could be. She had seen his dark side first hand. It was all part of the game of life, this love of danger, the narcotics, the drinking. She was irresponsible because she knew she wouldn't live long. People like her never did. Perhaps, with Joe, things would have been different. He was the only man she had even come close to loving. Now, even he had run away. Just like everyone else.

The mix of alcohol, drugs and exhaustion overwhelmed her. A large tear trickled down her cheek and fell into the water. She was cold and her skin was crinkling up. She climbed out of the bath, grabbed a robe and taking her drink, she crossed into the bedroom and threw herself down on the bed without bothering to turn on the lights.

"Oh, Joe. What am I going to do?" she wailed, sobbing uncontrollably.

"I don't know baby cakes," came a familiar voice from the other side of the room. "You could always fix me one of those drinks?"

Gloria peered into the shadows.

"Joe? What's the meaning of sneaking around a gal's bedroom in the dark?" She jumped from the bed, launching herself on Joe, wrapping her legs around his waist and hugging him tight.

"Aaaaargghhh!" Joe wailed in pain.

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry. I forgot." She disentangled herself from his huge frame and reaching up, cupped his face in her tiny hands. "I've been so worried about you. What the fuck is going on, Irish?"

"Pour your fiancé a nice big drink an' I'll tell you all about it."

She kept a bottle of Irish in her bedside cabinet. She headed back to the bathroom and came back with the glass she kept her toothbrush in. She refilled her own glass, and filled his to the top.

"There's no ice."

"It's a crime to spoil a good whiskey with ice," said Joe, taking it from her and sipping. They lay together on the bed, Gloria curled up against her fugitive fiancé, enjoying intimacy of the dark, both knowing that their happiness was not to last. Gloria was afraid to break the spell. She wanted to forget their troubles, pretend they didn't exist. Joe, always practical, was the first to break the silence.

"Okay," he said. "You ask, I'll answer."

"Fine," said Gloria. "What's your favorite color?"

He shifted her position slightly so he had access to her ass and gave it a slap. "Behave yourself, Gloria Fettle."

"Didn't your Ma ever tell you to keep your hands to yourself?"

"My Ma ain't here, I'm happy to say."

He kissed her, roughly on the lips. She responded by tearing at his clothes as he pulled her robe apart.

Afterwards, they lay naked and spent, smoking cigarettes and drinking whiskey.

"Did you like that?" asked Joe. He was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

She had liked it. She had liked it a lot.

"It was, okay, I suppose," she said with a sniff.

Joe laughed. God, he loved this girl.

"Where've you been all day, baby? I been waiting here for hours. You weren't with Marinelli, were you?"

She blushed. She didn't want to tell him about Marinelli and what he tried to do to her.

"No. He's history. I been looking for you. Over at Pops' place."

Joe laughed. It felt good to laugh. "You found it? Christ. David sprung me out of the hospital late last night. We spent all morning trying to find the place. How the hell did you do it?"

Gloria thought about spinning him a yarn about a woman's instincts, but decided to opt for the truth. "I didn't find it. Myron did."

"That puts me in my place. Wait til I tell David. How did he do it?"

"He pissed on Pops lettuce patch and the old goat nearly shot him."

Joe laughed again. "I wish I'd been there."

"Me too. Where's David now? He's not here is he?"

David still gave Gloria the creeps, even after all this time. The thought of him sitting in her home listening to them making love was too much to bear.

"No. I sent him home. He's needed at the studio. Besides, if the cops catch me with him they'll screw him too. Aiding and abetting. I told him to steer clear for a while."

Gloria poured another drink.

"The studio needs you, Joe, not David. It needs you. David and Mike can't run the place. They don't know how. If you ain't careful, Myron will start sticking that big British hooter of his where it don't belong."

Joe laughed. "Myron's the least of my problems."

Gloria sat up and kissed him. His wound was bleeding again. "I ain't good at playing nurse. You should get it seen to."

"You're all the tonic I need, Gloria."

"Joe, you've worked hard for this. You can't let it all go down the can."

"I'm a wanted man, Gloria, I can't do anything if I'm locked up."

Now was the moment. "What the fuck do you mean, talkin' like that? You tellin' me you wanna be locked up? You tellin' me you deserve to be locked up? You tellin' me you really are a rapist and a murderer?"

"Of course not," said Joe, angry and indignant. "You don't believe that shit do you, baby?"

"Don't matter what I believe, baby grand. You're a wanted man, and you can't do nothing til you clear up all the poop that's flyin' around."

Silence.

"Don't keep it all balled up, Joe." Her voice was gentle.

Joe sighed. "Fate is a strange thing. Sometimes I think our destiny is completely out of our hands."

"Is this the plot for a new movie, Irish?"

Joe smiled. "It could well be. The story of a simple, young naïve Irish boy who fell in love with his childhood sweetheart. Framed for her rape and murder he flees for his life across the water to the land of the free. Only he ain't free right? Not a day goes by when he ain't tormented by guilt. A dead girl, justice abandoned while her lover makes a big name for himself in America. How long will he leave it until he brings down the real murderer so her spirit can be set free?"

"Do you know who the murderer is?"

He nodded.

"Shit. Is it Myron?"

Despite himself Joe snorted with laughter. "No, Gloria. It's not Myron."

"Well make sure you cast him when we film it. It's a part he was born to play."

"Myron will want to play me, you know that?" said Joe.

"Leading men have gotta be tall dark and handsome. Myron only ticks two of those boxes."

"That ain't gonna stop him," laughed Joe. "You know what actors are like."

There was a long silence. Gloria realized if she kept her big mouth closed for just a few more minutes Joe would finally open up. She was right.

"It was a lifetime ago," said Joe, at last. "I was a different person in those days..."

INTERMISSIONCORK, IRELAND, 1908SCENE ONE

Joe Behan was driving his father's wagon back from the market, down a small country lane, when he found his path blocked by a six cylinder Standard motor car. There was only one man in the region who owned such a thing. Gerald O'Brien, the landowner. Joe's father had bought their farm off him a few years back and O'Brien had been on their backs ever since, saying they still owed him money. It was lies of course, but then, the O'Briens lied like most normal people breathe.

Joe looked closely at the car. It was driven by his old classmate, Dermot Flynn, though the term classmate could be used loosely in this instance. He looked like a dog's dinner, all smart in his gray chauffeur's uniform. In the back sat O'Brien's son, Patrick. It was no surprise to Joe that Dermot Flynn now worked for the O'Briens. Like attracts like. Flynn was a bully, a nasty, sadistic piece of work. One day a few years ago, he had

taken his bullying a little too far beating a boy two years his junior. Later on the way home from school Joe had laid in wait for Flynn and beat the shit out of him telling him in no uncertain terms that there was plenty more where that came from should Flynn do it again. There was no love lost between these three young men.

"Back that old nag up and let us pass," yelled O'Brien.

"You back up," said Joe. "Your Daddy don't own the roads." He was running late and didn't want to waste time on O'Brien.

Dermot Flynn honked the brass horn on the side of the vehicle. The noise startled Joe's horse, making it rear up. Joe decided to back up. Better to lose face than have the horse do itself an injury or spill the leftover vegetables all over the road.

O'Brien spat out of the window as he passed. The glob of phlegm landed on Joe's boot. He resisted the urge to retaliate. It was best to just ignore thugs like O'Brien.

He carried on until he came to a small row of cottages. They were all owned by O'Brien and leased out to local workers. They were shoddy and badly built. Every winter they had to be more or less rebuilt from scratch, at the tenants' own expense. He pulled on the reins and climbed down.

"Siobhan?" he called, walking up to the battered door of the end cottage and peering in through the window. It hurt him that the girl of his dreams had to live in a place like this. His father's cows lived like royalty in comparison. Even so, he had to admit that Siobhan's mother kept the place clean and tidy. It wasn't much, but to Siobhan it was home. Siobhan opened the door, a smile on her pale face, as she showed him into the one roomed dwelling that served as kitchen, bedroom and living room.

"Where's your Ma?" asked Joe.

"Out with Dervla O'Keefe. She had her baby last night. A little boy."

"God help him," sighed Joe. He kissed her and then held her at arm's length to get a good look at her. He never tired of looking at Siobhan. He had been staring at her since she was six years old when he had first decided that she was the girl he would marry. With her dark green eyes, raven black hair and milk white skin, she really was a work of art. He noticed the flowers in a cracked vase on the windowsill. They weren't local flowers. He frowned.

"You been to Holland picking flowers?" he asked.

"Give over. You know I haven't."

"Where'd they come from then?" He felt a twinge of jealousy. That was the trouble with courting the most beautiful girl in the village. As soon as you turned your back some other buck would try and win her heart.

"Patrick, gave them to me."

"Did he now?"

Joe wanted to pick the vase up and smash it on the floor, trampling the flowers into the earth. He stopped himself. The vase was Siobhan's and the flowers weren't to blame.

"You're angry," she said.

"Not with you."

"Good." She stood on tiptoes to kiss him. "You taking me to the dance tonight?"

"Sure."

There was a dance every Friday night in the summer months. There was little else to do in the village.

"We'll make that Patrick O'Brien green with jealousy," she laughed.

Joe laughed too. Siobhan wasn't quite as angelic as she looked. She could be a minx when she wanted. "You bet we will." He fumbled in his pocket. "I bought you something from the market." He produced a dark green silk scarf. It matched her eyes.

She took it, smiling, and wrapped it around her slender neck. "You spoil me, Joseph Behan."

"Nothing could spoil you."

SCENE TWO

Patrick O'Brien was jealous. He was angry too. He watched as Joe and Siobhan danced together in the village hall. His village hall, the same hall his father had paid for. Dancing to music played by musicians paid for by his father. He had spent a fortune on those tulips too. And for what? Nothing. He hadn't been able to get near the girl.

He couldn't understand it. Sure, Behan's dad owned his own farm, but it was tiny. Joe Behan would never amount to anything. He wasn't even that good looking. Why was the stupid cow so besotted with him? She was doing it on purpose. To get under his skin.

O'Brien hated Behan. He had hated him all his life. He was the one boy who could beat him at everything, but worse than that Joe Behan never lost control. He had that calm, easy going manner that made him so popular with everybody, non-judgmental and happy-go-lucky, it all came easy to Joe. Physically strong as an ox he was a natural leader, respected by elders and the young alike. It made O'Brien seethe with envy. How could the village look up to this big simpleton? He was the village fucking idiot. Did

they not realize it was they, the O'Briens that were the proper village statesmen? He wished his father had never allowed the Behans to buy the farm. If he was just another tenant he could evict him. Instead, he was forced to watch, helpless, as he danced with the prettiest girl in town. A girl, who should by all rights be his. He took a large gulp of poteen and winced. Horrible stuff, all it did was add fuel to his fury.

He nodded at Dermot Flynn, "Stick with me. We're gonna have some fun tonight." Dermot's face lit up. Was this to be the night he finally paid Behan back for his humiliation?

For the next two hours Joe and Siobhan danced as though they hadn't a care in the world. All thoughts of poverty and hardship dismissed, lost in the swirling rhythm of the band. Finally, hot and in need of refreshment, Joe headed to the bar for drinks. He was joined by Brendan Kewell, his lifelong friend, they had grown up together, even born on the same day.

"Brendan, can I get you a drink?"

"Thanks, Joe, that'll be grand. Listen Joe, will you be walking Siobhan home tonight?"

"Aye. Course I will."

"That's good. That's good."

Joe was perplexed by his friends strange behavior. "What's up Bren? What's on your mind?"

"Look, Joe, I think you should watch yer back. O'Brien and Flynn are pissed as maggots and they're up to no good, they been saying all sorts o' shite like how they's gonna teach you a lesson you'll never forget."

Joe laughed. "Jesus, Bren, they've been talking that shite for as long as I've known them. Don't worry about it, they've not got a single bollock between them."

"Even so, I reckon I should walk with you, just to be on the safe side."

"What, and ruin your chances with beautiful over there?" Joe nodded in the direction of a young and attractive girl looking keenly at Brendan, hoping he would return to her before some other girl made her move.

"Aye, she's that all right. Well, if you're sure..."

"Course I'm sure." He collected his drinks and made off to where Siobhan was sitting without giving the matter a second thought.

SCENE THREE

Joe took Siobhan home after the dance. He was in good spirits.

"You can come in if you like. Ma's staying with Dervla. Just til she gets back on her feet."

"You don't have to ask me twice." He waited til they were inside before kissing her.

"So, you thought anymore about what I asked you?"

"Course I have."

"And?"

"And yes. I'll marry you, Joe. I'd love to, but in a couple of years. You're still young.

I'm still young. I'm not ready to start having babies."

"Well I'm sure ready to start making them," said Joe, kissing her.

"Naughty. You'll have your way with me and then run off and forget me."

"No one could ever forget you."

They kissed again.

"I just want that O'Brien to know you're spoken for."

Siobhan waved the green scarf in his face. "Of course I am. I'm wearing your scarf, aren't I?"

"It ain't the same as a wedding ring."

"It's better."

Joe stared at her. Siobhan stared back. They held that pose for a long time until they both burst out laughing.

"I better be going," said Joe. "I promised Ma I wouldn't be too late."

They kissed goodnight and Joe stepped outside. He took a deep breath of the fresh country air and set off on the path back to his house. As the path passed some bushes he heard a strange whistling sound. He stopped in his tracks, straining his ears. Again the sound. Definitely a whistle.

"Who's there?" Joe demanded. "Come on. Show yourself."

"Right here."

The voice came from behind him and as Joe turned he felt the full force of the blow as Dermot Flynn brought a rock down on the side of his skull. Joe dropped to his knees, fighting to remain conscious. Flynn stood above him raising the rock high above his head determined to administer the killer blow.

"What the fuck are you doing Flynn?" snapped O'Brien stepping out of the shadows.

"Teaching the big fucker a lesson he'll never forget."

"Don't be a fucking eedjit all your life, we need him alive."

"Why?" bleated Flynn, sulking like a spoilt child.

"Because I'm going to punish that spoilt little bitch of a girl of his and I need Behan alive to take the blame for it." With that he booted Joe hard in the side of the head, knocking him out cold.

Dropping the rock, Flynn trailed after his lord and master, towards Siobhan's cottage. O'Brien didn't bother knocking, he just kicked the door open and barged straight inside. Siobhan stood open mouthed in the centre of the room. O'Brien slapped her viciously across the face and flung her, stunned, to the floor. He leaped astride her and began tearing at her dress. She screamed and tried to scratch at his face but he swatted her, with an open hand as he turned to grin at Flynn in the doorway.

"Don't stand there like a useless cunt, come over here and hold the bitch down."

Flynn didn't need a second invitation. He bounded over and knelt on Siobhan's arms, holding her fast, his face a mask of sweating lust. Siobhan opened her mouth to scream and O'Brien slapped her hard.

"Shut up, slut."

Undoing his trousers, he raped her. It was over within less than a minute. He pulled away and nodded at Flynn. "Your turn."

Flynn took full advantage. He wished she would struggle more, but Siobhan had long since given up the fight. With a grunt, Flynn withdrew. He stood buttoning up his trousers. "What now, boss?"

"Now we show Behan what it means to cross an O'Brien."

Taking the green scarf that hung around her neck, he began pulling it tight. Siobhan tried to scratch him but he was too strong. One last supreme effort and she stopped struggling. Another tug on the scarf, just to make sure. Her tongue lolled from her mouth.

"Right," said O'Brien. "Let's go find the constable. The story is we heard screams and saw Behan running out of the cottage. We fought with him and knocked him down. When we looked inside the cottage we found her. The dirty beast raped her and killed

her. If we tell the same story it's our word against his and nobody's gonna believe him over me."

The two men ran out of the house laughing and climbed into O'Brien's father's motor car. A few moments later a breathless Brendan Kewell burst on to the scene. He had walked his girl home but when he saw O'Brien and Flynn drive past, heading in the direction of Siobhan's cottage he had feared the worse. He had run all the way, but was too late to stop the horror that had ensued. Looking inside, he saw Siobhan. Dead. He went in search of Joe and came across him still unconscious on the path. He began shaking him, finally resorting to slapping him hard to try and bring him round.

Joe opened his eyes. "Wha? Brendan ? What you hit me for?"

"Joe, you've gotta get away. Something terrible's happened."

"What?"

"Siobhan. O'Brien..."

Joe's eyes cleared. "What?"

"He's killed her."

Joe hauled himself to his feet and staggered towards the cottage. He saw his beloved lying on the floor, his scarf tight around her neck, her face blue and dead, her clothes torn. He removed his jacket and used it to cover her body.

"He'll pay. Brendan, call the guards. I'll stay with her."

"I can't Joe. They're already on their way. He's saying you did it. You've gotta get away. Quick. Get the fuck out of here. Leave the country. England.....Anywhere."

"No way." Joe was struggling with the uncontrollable rage building inside of him. "I'm gonna kill him. I'm gonna fuckin' kill him."

"Joe. Please. He'll win. You'll be throwing your life away. She wouldn't want you doing that."

Joe looked at Brendan, his eyes wet with tears. "You let him do this."

Brendan looked at the floor. "I was too late. I was too late," he said softly. "I didn't know. Please Joe. You've gotta run away. You can't do fuck all for Siobhan if you're hung for her murder."

Joe was thinking a lot clearer now, the shock had completely sobered him up. "No, you've got to get out of here too. They'll kill you. If they realize there's somebody out there that knows the truth, they'll kill you."

"They don't know that I know, Joe. We can't both go. That" They could hear the sound of voices coming down the lane. O'Brien was coming back and it sounded like he had half the town with him.

They ran into the darkness.

SCENE FOUR

Joe thought seriously about suicide that night as he tramped across country, unsure of where to go. The one thing that stopped him was the dim prospect of revenge. One day, O'Brien would pay.

Brendan was right, he should leave the country. If he stayed, O'Brien would win. The O'Briens owned the magistrates. They owned half the bloody county. Joe made tracks towards the port but then stopped. That would be the first place they would look for him. If he was to survive and have his revenge, he would have to be careful. He turned and began walking in the opposite direction.

It took him the better part of a month to reach Dublin on foot, travelling only by night, sleeping in ditches and empty cottages, stealing food from the farms he passed. One night he broke into a pub on the edge of the city. He helped himself to money and food and left as quietly as he came.

Hanging around the docks, he befriended a sailor on a merchant ship and asked him if there was any work going as he had a hankering to visit the New World. The sailor introduced him to the captain of a broken down vessel bringing in whiskey to America. The skipper told him he could work his passage. He had been as good as his word and once they arrived in New York, the skipper had even greased a few of the right palms at immigration and Joe had found himself alone in the land of the free.

FIFTH REELLOS ANGELES: 1914SCENE ONE

Joe stopped talking. He was worn out. So was Gloria. Neither of them had slept in two nights and now it was almost dawn.

"Jesus. This O'Brien," said Gloria, "is he the same guy I seen in the papers? The dishy one? He's in town raising funds for some nutty Irish thing."

Joe glared at her. "He ain't dishy. He's a snake."

"Snakes can be dishy."

Joe pulled away from Gloria and sat up on the side of the bed, his head in his hands.

"That man ruined my life," he said softly. "He's a rapist and a murderer. Find him dishy if you want to Gloria, but leave me the fuck alone."

Gloria cringed inwardly. Her stupid great big mouth. She reached out a hand and touched Joe's bare shoulder. He winced.

"Stickin' your fingers in my bullet wound ain't makin' me feel better, Gloria."

"I'm sorry. I made you use the f word. I'm worse than that little creep on Coney Island. Remember him? The day we met? You socked him and got us canned."

Joe smiled at he memory. It was impossible to stay mad with Gloria for long.

She poured another drink. She was quite drunk now, her body running on alcohol and little else. What she wouldn't give for another hit of Rex's white powder.

"I've got an idea."

Joe looked at her. His eyes were bleak, devoid of hope. "Yeah? Do yourself a favor and put a lid on it. You'll only get yourself hurt. Don't mess with Patrick O'Brien. I learned that the hard way."

"He's into politics these days, ain't that so?"

Joe nodded. "Yeah. The Independent Land-Owners Party. They ain't got a hope in hell, but they appeal to rich folks who are scared of the true republicans in Ireland. Some say they'll be good for business, but the only business they'll be taking care of is their own."

Gloria yawned. "I love a man who talks politics. Listen, baby, you sleep. There's a couple'a people I gotta see."

"No, Gloria." Joe's hand caught her wrist. It was hard and firm.

Gloria looked at him. What was it with guys thinking they could use force to stop her doing what she wanted? Didn't they realize she was unstoppable? "Let me go, Joe. If you don't, I'll wait til you're sleeping and then I'll pee all over your wound. It'll hurt like hell."

Joe stared at her, a look of disbelief on his face. He slowly released her arm, and smiled.

"I really believe you would."

"Oh, you know I would."

"Why don't we both sleep first? Ain't no one up at this hour. No one I want you talking to anyway."

Gloria nodded. She was dead on her feet. "One hour. Then I go. Any funny business and you get a pee bath."

SCENE TWO

Neither Joe nor Gloria were aware of the intruder, who had spent the evening watching the house from the beach. As the hours wore on, the figure crept closer, working up courage. The night was clear. A shower of meteors rained across the heavens. The stranger removed a pistol from a long overcoat. The doors, both front and back were locked. The intruder thought about breaking a window, but decided against it. Surprise was the key ingredient of success. One more walk around the house paid off. There was no need to break anything. A window was open. There was even a trellis with some kind of creeping ivy on it, to use as a ladder. The assassin placed one foot on the trellis, testing its strength. A noise broke the still night air, the metallic click of a gun as the safety was lifted.

"Turn around, slowly, fuck face," came a voice from behind.

The assassin recognized the voice. David Flaum, the limey Jew. What was he doing here in the middle of the night? Was he a fucking guard dog?

"I said turn around."

The assassin turned, and hurled the gun at David Flaum. It caught him on the forehead and he staggered back. The assassin ran for the beach. David fired twice but he was dazed and the shots went wide. He thought about giving chase, but the would-be killer was younger than him and twice as fast. He would only give himself a heart attack.

Lights went on in the beach house, but nobody came out to look. David was glad. Maybe Gloria and Joe weren't as dumb as he thought. He stooped to pick up the fallen weapon before calling out to Gloria to open the door and let him in.

Gloria looked terrified. Joe serious and tired. They showed David into the kitchen and Gloria offered him a drink.

"We got gin, whiskey, or gin."

"I'll take coffee," said David, rubbing his forehead. "At least one of us needs our wits about us."

"I told you to go home," said Joe.

"Good job I never listen to you. Or you'd both be dead," said David.

"Who was it, David?" said Gloria. "Was it one of Marinelli's boys?"

David shook his head. "Didn't get a good look. Too dark. But one thing I'd give me affy david on, that gunman's no man. She's all woman."

"You sure?" said Gloria, shocked.

"Yeah. Well, almost. She wore a hat. Couldn't see her face. But I did see her tits. Like fuckin' mountains." He glanced at Gloria. "Scuze my French. I been spendin' too much time with Pops."

Joe sat down. His shoulder hurt. "I think it's the same person who shot me. I never got a close look but I think it was a girl too."

Gloria boiled coffee. She was never going to sleep now. "A girl, huh? You been playing around, Joe?"

"You know I haven't. What about you? Could it be the jealous wife of some husband you've been running around with."

"I don't run around with married men." It wasn't strictly true. In fact it wasn't true at all but a girl couldn't afford to let comments like that slide.

"I feel better knowing it's a girl," said Joe.

Gloria didn't. She knew that a woman could be much more ruthless than any man. Men either did such things for money or in the heat of passion. That passion could soon blow over, like a summer storm. Not so with women. A woman could hate forever.

"David, I need you to take me somewhere."

David looked over at Joe, who merely shrugged his shoulders.

"So now I'm everyone's fuckin' driver. Can I at least finish my coffee?"

"Stop gripin', David. Joe's gonna catch some shut eye while you and me clear his name."

"Fair enough. It's not like I had any better things to do." He emptied the contents of the sugar bowl into his cup and downed it in one gulp.

"Joe, get to bed," said Gloria pointing to the bedroom. "And try not to get shot."

Joe was too weary to argue. He waved them away as he trudged off to the bedroom. "I'll do my best."

SCENE THREE

Gloria and Joe weren't the only ones going without sleep. Dickie Diamond had spent most of the night at the morgue while Doctor Miller examined the bodies from the amateur cemetery under Palace Studios.

"We don't have any one MO," said Miller, offering Diamond a cigar. "Some of them have a neat little bullet to the head. Death would have been instant. Others were chopped up. Some were stabbed and there's one or two, I can't figure out at all. Could've been strangulation or even poison. They're in too bad a state to really tell. I guess it's safe to say they were all murdered."

"What would I do without you?" sighed Diamond. He sometimes wondered why doctors had such a high standing in society. All they seemed to do was poke around for hours and then tell you what you already knew from the start. "Any of them carrying any identification?"

Marty Miller shook his head. "Nope. Most of them had wallets on them. The money was still inside, a little moldy but still useable. Looks like our killer took any forms of

identification though. Got plenty of these." He was referring to keys. There were about eight different sets neatly laid out on the table. Each set had an identity tag corresponding with the body they were found on. Diamond worked his way down the line picking up each set and studying them closely.

"You looking for any key in particular?" said Marty Miller. He had been watching Dickie and his curiosity was aroused.

"Kind of," said Dickie. "Just speculating what each key might open." He held up a set on a gold Star of David keychain, spending a long while studying each key. Looking at the label he said, "Where's corpse eight, Doc?"

"Down the far end, Dickie." He followed Diamond to the body on the end of a row, reaching past the detective to pull away the sheet covering the corpse. The body was in remarkably good condition.

"One of the easy ones this," said Miller. He could have been talking about the crossword in the newspaper not a slowly rotting murdered body. "Quick death for our boy, a single bullet to the head, though there were signs that he may have been roughed up prior to being shot."

"Age?"

"Twenties."

"Yeah. This looks like my boy, alright." Holding up the keys he said, "I'm gonna take these. You okay with that?"

"Sure. You'll have to sign them out, if you're taking them away," said Miller.

"You do it for me. I get writer's cramp."

Diamond left the morgue and stopped off at a bar. He needed something strong to take away the smell of death. As he drank he looked at the bunch of keys. Weiss was Jewish.

Having seen the corpse he was pretty sure the keys were his. There was only one way to find out. He paid his tab and hailed a cab over to Ingrid Weiss's home.

SCENE FOUR

Alice Wells couldn't sleep either. Her husband had been proud when she became the city's first female police officer, but now he was beginning to grumble about the hours she was keeping. Wells had begged him to be patient and his opposition had wilted. When she asked to borrow his suit and hat, he had looked at her with a worried frown and when she had taken the keys to his beloved Ford Model T, he had asked if he could come with her.

"No," she told him. "I'll be fine. I'm checking up on some leads. It's perfectly safe. You'd only be bored."

Reluctantly, he allowed her to leave, and now, here she was back at what was becoming a home away from home, the sidewalk, fifty yards from the house of Ingrid Weiss. It was late, already gone eleven pm. She pulled the hat down low over her face and settled in for a long vigil.

After an hour or so a car pulled up in front of the house. Wells didn't recognize the make but she did recognize the driver.

Rex Riley climbed out of the vehicle and opened the passenger door for his boss, Mario Marinelli. The two men talked for a while and Alice Wells reached for her gun. She didn't know what they were doing here but she wasn't about to allow them to kill a possible witness. She waited as Riley climbed back into the car and Marinelli crossed the street and walked up the driveway to the house. He knocked sharply on the door and after a moment it opened to reveal Ingrid Weiss still dolled up to the nines in spite of the hour. Then, to Alice Wells' astonishment, Ingrid Weiss kissed Marinelli on both cheeks before stepping aside to allow him to enter.

What to do now? Wells was puzzled. The Weiss woman was evidently on friendly terms with Marinelli. But why? If he was the man responsible for her husband's disappearance then surely he would be the last man on Earth she would welcome into her home. Could the two of them be having an affair? It was possible, yet that kiss had not been a lover's kiss. She waited. Diamond would tell her it was pointless trying to solve a puzzle without all the pieces. If they were lovers then she would probably have a long wait. She glanced across at Marinelli's car. Rex Riley was standing beside it, smoking.

Less than ten minutes later the door opened again and Marinelli and Ingrid Weiss stepped out. They were deep in conversation as they strolled back towards the car. Ingrid Weiss's infant son was asleep in Marinelli's arms, his legs wrapped around the gangster's torso, his head resting gently on a broad shoulder. Rex Riley stood waiting with the door open. Placing the child onto the backseat, Marinelli gave the sleeping boy a gentle kiss. All three then got in the car.

Alice Wells watched them depart. Should she follow them? She waited for the car to turn the corner before climbing out to start the engine. The engine throbbed into life. She got back in to the driver's seat.

"Going somewhere?" said Diamond from the back seat of the car.

"Detective," said Wells. "You gave me a shock. She's just left."

"Good," said Diamond, producing the house keys on the Star of David chain. "I want to check if these fit."

"You'll never guess who she left with."

"Mario Marinelli."

"Yes. How did you know that?"

Diamond smiled sweetly at Alice Wells. "Because I saw the whole thing. It makes sense now. It all makes sense."

Alice Wells cursed herself. Some undercover officer she was. She had no idea Dickie Diamond had been watching her watching them. She hadn't even seen him sneak into the back seat whilst she was cranking it up. He could have been a murderer or anybody. She was so wrapped up in watching the Weiss house she had become totally blind to everything else. She appreciated the fact that Diamond hadn't yet gloated about the ease in which he could have killed her. Turning her attention back to the case in hand she asked, "What makes sense?"

"Nothing and everything. I'll tell you when I'm sure."

He hurried across to the Weiss house and inserted a key into the lock. Nah. He tried another. The key turned. He pushed and the door swung open. He entered the house, Alice Wells following on his heels.

When the door was closed again, a motorcycle chugged past, the rider, glanced at the house, making a note of the number on the door, before speeding away in the same direction as Mario Marinelli and his companions.

SCENE FIVE

"Hit the lights, Alice."

"What if they come back?"

"We're police officers, dummy. We got a call saying there was an intruder on the premises, when we got here the front door was open. Taking our lives in our own hands we entered to investigate."

"But..." Alice Wells stopped herself. She was beginning to realize that in some cases going by the book could be a drawn out affair that may even favor the criminal. Diamond was right. Sometimes you just had to go by instinct, bend the rules, and sometimes dispense with them all together. If Diamond's instincts were telling him to break into Ingrid Weiss's home in the middle of the night, then she was fine with that. She trusted his instincts more than she trusted her own.

"Let's start with the obvious, shall we?" he said, heading over to a writing desk. He tried the top drawer. It was open.

"Thought as much," he grunted. He sat back in the office chair thinking.

"Shouldn't you check all the drawers?"

"Nah. No point. They're open already."

Wells got the impression he expected her to comment, but she didn't know what to say.

She raised an eyebrow and waited for him to continue.

"Remember when we were here the first time? I remarked on that cabinet." Diamond nodded in the direction of the antique leaning against the wall.

Wells nodded and pulled out her notebook. She flicked back the pages to the relevant entry.

Diamond smiled, happy in the knowledge that should he require any information on the case so far, a dollar would get you a dime that Alice Wells had it scribbled down somewhere.

"It was a family heirloom," Wells said, reading from the book. "It belonged to her husband. She said it never had a key but they kept it because it was such a nice piece of furniture."

"An exquisite piece of furniture," said Diamond. "That's the important bit, coz if it was just a piece of shit, you'd break the lock to see what was inside. So they keep it, even though it ain't of any practical use."

"Right," agreed Wells, unsure where the conversation was heading.

"So after a while, this thing of beauty claims a rightful place in the home and the fact that ain't nobody in the world can open it becomes its little idiosyncrasy. It adds to the charm."

Wells shrugged. If it had been hers, she would've dumped it. The thing was probably riddled with woodworm.

"Now, imagine you're an investigative journalist working on some big scoop that you want to keep hush. Where would you keep anything important?"

"In the bank."

"Yeah. Maybe. Where else?"

"At work."

"Sure. Tell me, Alice. Where do you keep that notebook?"

"It never leaves my side."

"Why not keep it in the bank?"

"Because I need access to it. I use it daily. I don't want to go down to the bank every day."

"Why not leave it at work then?"

Alice snorted, "You're kidding me, right?"

Diamond smiled. "How's about keeping it in a priceless piece of furniture that doesn't have a key?"

Wells looked at Diamond, then looked over at the cabinet. "But..."

"Please, don't insult your own intelligence by telling me it ain't got a key. Just picture it. You inherit this fine piece. You tell everyone it's as old as the flood and it's been in your family for years. There's no key. It's empty, anyhow. You love it though. It's a family heirloom. Nobody's gonna doubt your word, let alone try to smash it open."

Wells agreed. "It'd be pointless, and callous."

"But if you had a key all along, you could use it whenever you liked."

Wells nodded.

"So," said Diamond, removing a small key from the keychain and tossing it to his partner, "knock yourself out."

She looked at the key. It was black with a bit of green mould on it. "Did you always know?"

"Yeah. That cabinet? It's a piece of shit. My ass is older. And probably worth more. When I spoke to her about it and she gave me all that sixteenth century heirloom bullshit, I got to thinking that Robert Weiss maybe wasn't such a gullible sap after all. He spun her a line about the cabinet and she bought it. Made me figure what the fuck is this marriage? Like they had nothin' to do with each other."

"She's certainly a cold fish alright. Surely she'd be curious, though?"

"Ain't nothin' to be curious about. As far as she's concerned there's never been nothing to find. Why don't you quit yackin' and open the fuckin' thing?"

"No need for profanities, sir." She put the key in the lock and sure enough it turned easily and the door opened.

"Notebooks? Files?" Diamond asked from across the room.

Officer Wells spent a few moments feeling around inside the cabinet, then taking her torch she illuminated the interior before finally poking her head in to see if anything was stuck to the top. She looked back at Diamond, disappointed. "It's empty, sir."

Diamond leapt from his chair, crossed the room and barged his partner aside as he peered inside. This was not what he had been expecting. "Fuck. I was wrong. I'm never fucking wrong." He punched the side of the cabinet in frustration.

"Please, Dickie, calm down," whispered Alice Wells, beside him. "The neighbors will hear you."

"F-f-fuck the neighbors." He began knocking on the interior of the cabinet with his hand, searching for any secret compartments. He then took a step back, viewing the item of furniture carefully as he made sure the dimensions of the interior corresponded with the exterior. At last, his shoulders slumped as he accepted reality. He looked at Wells, half hoping against hope that she would offer up a satisfactory explanation. She

didn't. He made to thump the cabinet again, but stopped himself. He laughed bitterly.

"It's a good thing I ain't a b-b-betting man."

Alice Wells closed and locked the cabinet door.

"Leave the k-key in it," he said, his voice quiet and dispirited. "Let her know we've been here, snooping."

He stood in silence, staring down at the cabinet. Alice Wells kept glancing at the clock on the wall. She did not want to be here when Ingrid Weiss returned home. At last, he seemed to shake himself back to life.

"C-c-come on, let's g-g-get the f-f-f... Let's get outta here."

SCENE SIX

In the car Diamond said, "*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy*". Did it n-never strike you odd that the widow seemed so unattached to her husband?"

Alice Wells nodded. "Yes, but I don't see the connection between that and Hamlet."

Diamond gave her a sharp look and thought he detected the hint of a smile in her eyes.

"Don't start developin' a sense of humor, Alice. I don't think my heart could take the s-s-strain. You wanna know what I think?"

She did, very much. "I suspect you're going to tell me, whether I do or not, Detective."

"Damn right I am," said Diamond. "Marinelli f-fixed it for Ingrid Weiss to work at the LA Times. That way, he knows what's g-g-going down in the city, soon as it happens. More important, he gets to keep his eye on Weiss."

"Do we know that he knew Weiss?"

"He must have. He k-k-killed the p-poor sap. I'm sure of it. There is a connection, there's gotta be. We just ain't f-f-found it yet. So, Weiss falls for Ingrid. I'm thinking she went out of her way to reel him in. "

"Why? Why should she care?"

"The LA Times were digging around. Going through Marinelli's dirty laundry. She was reporting back to Marinelli and when Weiss got too close. Bang, bang, thank you ma'am. Bye-bye, Bobby Weiss."

Wells was not convinced. "Why's she gonna do this? How does Marinelli know Ingrid Weiss?"

"Ain't you worked that out yet? She's his d-d-daughter."

If Alice Wells were a cussing woman she would have turned the air blue. "No way. She's Christiansen's daughter. We already established that."

"On paper, Alice. Look at her eyes. Look at her kid's eyes. L-l-look at Marinelli's eyes. They're the same, only they l-l-look a helluva lot more attractive on a broad than on that big gorilla."

"So is that what you were hoping to find in the cabinet. A connection between Marinelli and Ingrid Weiss?"

"I was hoping I'd find Robert Weiss's research. He was a newspaperman, on the trail of a big story. He would have kept notes. I was sure they would be in that f-f-fucking cabinet."

Wells shrugged. "Maybe there's two keys. Maybe someone else opened it and took them."

Diamond yawned and stretched. "Yeah, there's two keys, or Ingrid Weiss finds his notes while she's snooping around the paper, gives them to Marinelli and they're long g-gone. Just like her husband."

They drove on in silence for a while until Diamond said quietly, "There's another possibility. Pierce Christiansen wasn't the hopeless dick everybody made him out to be."

Wells looked at him, sceptical.

"Think about it, Harrison Gray Otis had him investigating Robert Weiss's disappearance. He spends two years on it and comes up with zilch."

"Therefore he was just as useless as everyone says," said Wells, her upper lip curling in a sneer of disdain. "He was a booze hound and he gambled. He probably couldn't believe his luck that someone would keep him on the payroll for two years."

"Or he found Robert Weiss's notes." Diamond, his head full of a thousand different theories suddenly found the thread he was looking for. "He found Weiss's notes. Either in that fucking cabinet or somewhere else, it d-don't matter. He found them, read them and didn't like what he read. Maybe he read that Ingrid Weiss, wasn't really his daughter, maybe he read all about Marinelli, maybe he read something that implicated him, who knows what he read? All we know for sure is he decides to keep schtum until he winds up dead."

"So he wasn't schtum enough."

"No, he wasn't schtum enough. Drive over to Christiansen's place."

"There's nothing there. Our boys would have found it if there was."

"Humor me Alice."

SCENE SEVEN

The only thing missing from the Christiansen house was the body of Christiansen. Other than that it was in exactly the same mess. Nobody had come by to clean up, no loved ones or next of kin to grieve and sigh and box up his belongings, remembering the dearly departed through a mist of tears.

"Jesus," said Dickie Diamond breaking the oppressive silence. "If Ingrid Weiss did know that Christiansen was her old man..."

"I thought you just told me he wasn't."

Diamond shook his head. "You know what I mean. If she knew he was supposed to be her father, it's clear as day she don't g-give a f-f-fuck about him."

"I think it's clear as day that Ingrid Weiss does not give a... doesn't care about anybody."

Diamond smiled, he had almost got Wells to utter an expletive, the thought pleased him. It was the only thing about this mess that did please him. His famous 'hunches' were

letting him down. He was off his game. The apartment was just how it was the last time they were there.

"Goddamn it!" Diamond muttered.

"Please, Detective," Officer Wells admonished him.

"Sorry, Alice. F-f-fucking Goddamn it!"

They stood in silence for a while, both surveying the mess.

"I don't understand why you thought Robert Weiss's notes would be here," said Wells, at last.

"He was t-t-tortured and killed. Th-th-there's a reason for that. He knew something. I'm sure of it."

Officer Wells shrugged. It made sense but Diamond was wrong. "They're not here, Dickie. C'mon, let's go."

Diamond sighed, wrong again. He better get his form back soon. He had his reputation to consider. "Yeah. Let's go."

Returning to the car, Alice Wells gestured towards the mailbox. "I don't suppose...?"

Diamond flipped open the flap on the mailbox. It was surprisingly full, but then, if Christiansen had no next of kin or benevolent neighbor to collect for him, there was no reason why it wouldn't be. There, amongst the various utility bills and handbills was a big brown envelope marked in clear bold letters, 'L.A.P.D'.

"Goodness gracious," exclaimed Alice Wells.

"You took the words straight outta my mouth," said Diamond.

Diamond walked back up the path to the house, ripping it open the moment he was through the door. Inside were a collection of notebooks, some very old and frayed, stuffed with drawings and diagrams and bits of paper, some more recent, the writing neat and methodical.

As Diamond poured over their find, Wells, thinking aloud, said, "So, somebody had a score to settle with Christiansen. Found the necessary evidence in the notebooks, then sent them back for us to find. Why? You think he wants us to know why he did it?"

Diamond nodded slowly. "That makes sense, Alice, yeah. Someone with a conscience. If a murderer can have a conscience. I think whatever's in those notebooks is gonna be well worth reading."

SCENE EIGHT

Lou-Lou was up in the projection box at the Vogue Picture Palace. He had all the chapters of *Gloria Goes It Alone* ready to go as soon as the boss arrived with that blonde baby vamp and her kid. A private screening. Some folks had all the luck. As he waited, he promised himself that one day he would own his own picture palace and have guys running around arranging screenings in the middle of the night. Showing a flicker when everyone else was in bed and asleep was one of those things that showed you were ridiculously rich. It was a sign to the world that you had arrived.

The lights in the auditorium came on and Rex walked down to the front and looked up at him. He gave him the thumbs up.

"Ready to roll," he called.

Lou-Lou gave him the thumbs up right back. Mario Marinelli was carrying the kid in his arms down to the front row. The lady walked at his side, not saying a word. The kid was fast asleep. That annoyed Lou-Lou. What was the point in having a private screening if the kid you were doing it for was off in dreamland?

Marinelli hadn't bothered calling in the orchestra, so he had to make do with Rex on the piano, as the first episode of *Gloria Goes It Alone* began. Rex wasn't bad. Sure, he'd never make it as a concert pianist, but he sure had the hang of this modern ragtime shit.

"Play it soft," said Marinelli. "I don't want you wakin' the kid."

He placed the little boy on the seat beside him and gestured for Ingrid Weiss to sit beside him.

"I wish we could do this in the daytime," she said in a low voice, so Rex wouldn't overhear.

"Me too," said Marinelli, reaching for her hand. "But we can't. I can't take the risk. It would break Simonetta's heart."

Ingrid looked away. "You think more of her than you do of me."

Marinelli sighed. Why were women so possessive? "You're my daughter. She's the mother of all my other children. I love you all equally."

"You spend more time with your other kids and they don't do half the things I do for you."

Marinelli agreed. It was true. He had five legitimate children. All of them straight as a die. Marinelli had been determined once the dirty money started rolling in that his children would never be subjected to the same upbringing he had, nor would they ever have to do the things he had done. Not one of them knew anything about his business and if they had any idea where his money came from, they pretended ignorance. It was easier for everyone that way. Marinelli was glad that privately educating his children and shielding them from all things bad and evil would make them decent, polite, successful upstanding law abiding citizens of the United States. However, for Marinelli it was proving to be a double-edged sword. He now had five children soft as butter. No street cunning and certainly no stomach for a fight. How

could any child of his have no balls? Generations of Marinelli's changed, practically overnight. If this is what going straight in America got you he sometimes wondered if it was worth it. He longed to see in any one of his children that fearless, ruthless devil may care spirit that had driven him to the top. Ingrid was different. She always had been.

"I loved your mother too, you know? I would have married her..."

"Only she was already married." They had spoken of his relationship with Hannika Christiansen many times before. It always left both of them with a bitter taste in their mouths.

"I sent her husband abroad. I had hopes for him. I wanted to make sure you were well provided for."

Ingrid Weiss nodded. She knew the story. Her mother had eloped to marry. She was young, barely out of her teens at the time. She was a waitress and Pierce Christiansen had aspirations to join the police force. Then he had brought Mario Marinelli home from a poker game. Within weeks, Christiansen had a job as a private detective tracing missing persons. The job kept him out of town a lot, which was just what Marinelli had in mind as he seduced the young wife.

Then things had gotten steamy. Marinelli's heart began to rule his head. He resented the fact that Christiansen got to sleep with her every night, even though it was him putting food on the table for them all. He sent him off to Europe to track down and kill the Frenchman, Augustin Le Prince, an inventor who threatened to beat his own man to the golden goose of producing a moving picture camera and projector. Marinelli hadn't believed Christiansen would pull it off. He thought he would wind up getting caught and then be out of the way for good. No such luck. Christiansen hadn't been gone more than a month before he had received the wire that the job was done. By the time he

returned, Ingrid had already been conceived. Christiansen never took to the child. He probably knew the truth. He only had to look in his daughter's eyes to know who the real father was.

"So, you said you needed to see me," said Marinelli, hoping to change the subject.

"You bet I did, Daddy. You know how you always thought you were so much cleverer than Mom's husband?" She always referred to Christiansen that way, never as Dad, or Pop, or Father.

"Don't say that. We were friends."

"You murdered him."

Marinelli jerked back in his seat. Did she really think that? Sure, there were times he had wanted to, but most of the time he had felt protective of Pierce Christiansen. "I didn't. I swear it."

Ingrid nodded. "Really?"

"Cross my heart."

"Then I think I know who did."

Marinelli looked at his daughter and frowned. He had always known she was clever, but how could she know who had killed him. He had half the Los Angeles Underworld and a quarter of the police department trying to solve the mystery and he had come up with zilch. "You're kidding, right?"

"I never kid, Daddy. You know that." She looked at him with those cold blue eyes and he restrained a shudder. "You thought Mom's husband was a loser. Admit it."

He shrugged. He had never been able to lie to Ingrid.

"He was a loser. But he wasn't stupid. He never killed that man you sent him to kill."

Marinelli bit his tongue and cursed as he tasted blood. He undid the stiff collar he was wearing and loosened his tie. "And you know this how?"

"Because Augustin Le Prince is alive and well and living in Los Angeles." Ingrid smirked, it was the closest she ever came to a genuine smile.

"Play louder, Rex," said Marinelli, before turning to his daughter. "Go on."

"He lied to you all these years. He couldn't do it. He wasn't like us. He let Le Prince live."

"You're dreaming, sweetheart. He wouldn't dare."

Ingrid ignored him. "I spoke to a nigger at Palace Studios. Mike Bell. He's a cameraman. He filmed this." She pointed to the screen. It was still showing the first episode of *Gloria Goes It Alone*.

"So what?" said Marinelli.

"Tell Lou-Lou to skip the next few chapters and show one from some time last month."

Marinelli stood up and waved towards the projection box. "Skip a bunch. Go to some of the recent chapters."

He sat down and waited. They watched in silence. The techniques were better, but that could be down to Mike Bell's experience and confidence. But no, Gloria looked younger too. The use of light and shadow was different. He looked at his daughter.

"When you were seeing Gloria Grace, did you ever see an old guy on set?" she asked.

Marinelli nodded. "Yeah. She calls him Pops. He's a French..."

"That's Augustin Le Prince."

"You've gotta be kiddin' me."

"Like I already told you, Daddy. I never kid."

The news was unbelievable and yet if there was one person in this world that Marinelli trusted above anyone, it was Ingrid. He told her that he loved all his children equally, but it wasn't true. Deep down, he knew that she was his rightful heir. She was everything he wished his sons could be.

"Do you need money?"

She shook her head. "No. The police have been watching me. Diamond and some bitch."

"Just play it cool. You'll be fine."

"I know, Daddy."

She laid her head upon his shoulder. She loved her father. She would do anything for him. She had even married a man she felt nothing for in order to please him. She hadn't even complained when her father killed him. She had known it had to be done. Her husband had hated criminals and corruption. That was fine, up to a point, but then he had gotten too friendly with Mom's husband and found out the truth about her real father. If that had been all he had discovered, he would probably still be alive today, but no, he had to dig up evidence linking her father to several unsolved murders and corruption in city hall. Finally, he had gone a little crazy. He had told her that Mario Marinelli murdered his father and that he was going to find the proof. In the end it had been a case of either the father of her child or her father. She had the prospect of raising her child on a journalist's pay or having everything she wanted whenever she asked for it. It had been an easy choice to make.

"Why did you want to kill this French guy, anyway, Daddy?" she asked.

Marinelli shook his head. "It doesn't matter. You better get home."

She looked at him and shook her head. "There's something I want to know. I should've asked years ago."

"What?" Marinelli hated moments like this.

"Robert told me you killed his father. Is it true?"

Marinelli nodded. "Yes. Yes it is."

Ingrid looked troubled.

"It had to be done. He was bad for business."

She nodded. If Daddy said it had to be done, then no doubt it had to be done.

"Goodnight, sweetheart."

"Goodnight, Daddy." She picked the sleeping boy up in her arms. In some strange way, her father's confession made her feel good. Her dead husband hadn't been crazy. That was some consolation.

SCENE NINE

Alice Wells drove Diamond home. She was looking forward to her own bed. It was not to be.

"Fancy a nightcap?" Diamond asked.

"You know I don't drink."

"I'll drink for both of us."

"It's late, Dickie."

"I can tell the time. "

Wells was not comfortable about visiting an unmarried man in his home in the middle of the night, but she could tell he needed to talk.

"Fine. But make it quick and no funny business, understand? I'm a married woman."

Diamond found the notion that Alice Wells thought he might pounce on her ludicrous, but he decided it would be impolitic to reveal his true feelings.

"I'll keep my hands to myself. Cross my heart."

If Officer Wells was finally getting to know and understand Dickie Diamond the man, as opposed to Diamond the detective, then one look round his home made any further judgement about him very cloudy indeed. It was not what she expected after working in close proximity with him. Firstly, it was immaculate. Did he have a cleaner or did he do it himself? The image of Diamond with an apron and feather duster brought a smile to her stern matronly face. Next came the furniture. Beautiful and very tasteful. No wonder he recognized the cabinet in Weiss's house as a fake. Every piece in Diamond's home looked fabulous, blending superbly with the color schemes of the walls and the décor.

"What a beautiful apartment, Dickie."

"Thanks. They say an Englishman's home is his castle. I guess the same is true for an American."

"You have no family then?"

"No." That was all she was going to get regarding the private life of Dickie Diamond. He left her in the living room while he prepared coffee in the kitchen. To Wells's surprise, when he returned he was carrying not two mugs of coffee, but a tray with cookies, the coffee in a proper china pot, with china cups, saucers and silver teaspoons. Even the sugar came in a Regency china bowl. He placed it all on the coffee table without ceremony.

"You are a man of many surprises," she said.

"I just like doing things proper," he replied.

Alice sipped her coffee. It was delicious. She sighed. "The Chief's going to be pleased. Those keys prove beyond doubt that one of those bodies is Robert Weiss. I guess we've got enough to bring Marinelli in. You must be very happy."

Diamond smiled. "I won't be happy til the Judge finds him guilty and pronounces sentence."

"Are you going to tell the Chief?"

Diamond nodded. "In the morning. I want to read those notebooks first."

Wells opened her satchel and handed over the notebooks they had taken from Christiansen's mailbox.

"You wanna read them with me?"

Wells shook her head. "Too tired. I'll read them tomorrow."

Diamond stood up. "Good work, Officer Wells."

"Thanks. Do you think we've got enough to bring in Ingrid Weiss?"

Diamond shrugged. "For what? So we think she's Marinelli's daughter? Big deal. We can't prove it. Even if we could, being Marinelli's kid ain't a crime."

Alice Wells nodded. "It should be. I'd like to bring her in."

"Me too. Good night, Officer."

This was her signal to go. She couldn't make up her mind whether she was disappointed that Diamond hadn't tried to seduce her. Maybe he really was a gentleman underneath all that vulgar bravado.

"Good night, Dickie."

SCENE TEN

Over in Glendale, Myron Maitland-Mason had been dreaming a pleasant dream in which he was the proud owner of Palace Studios and married to Gloria Grace, America's sweetheart. He was not happy to be woken by someone kicking at the door to his penthouse apartment.

"I'm going to see that doorman gets canned," he muttered to himself, wishing he hadn't bothered tipping him last Christmas. What use was a doorman who allowed people to come in off the street and start banging on his door in the middle of the night.

"Open the fuckin' door, you fuckin' quiff," came a voice from the hallway.

Myron opened the door. "David, always a pleasure to see you at the crack of sparrow fart. Hello, Gloria. Sleep out of fashion with the in-crowd these days is it?" He stepped aside to allow his uninvited guests inside.

"Put the coffee on, Ethel," said David. "And make it strong. I'm cagged."

"Cagged?"

David looked at him. "I thought you actors was supposed to be great with words. Cagged. Fucked. Knocked out. Tired."

"Oh, tired. Really?" Myron made the coffee while David sprawled out on the chaise longue and Gloria paced up and down, restless and eager for action. "Any news? Any scandal?" he asked.

"You betcha, bunny," said Gloria. "Say, you got a coffin nail for me?"

He pointed to the onyx cigarette case on the coffee table. "Help yourself."

David reached out and took five, pocketing three, putting one in his mouth and the other behind his ear.

"Bless yer, Myron. Spark me up?"

Myron handed him a mug of coffee. He wasn't going to waste his fine china on this animal and Gloria looked too jittery. She might drop it.

"Sit down, Gloria," he said, "and try not to spill. We don't like stains here."

"That's good to know," said Gloria, perching on the edge of the chaise longue. "Nice coffee."

"Don't tell anyone, but it's Dutch. I have it specially imported," said Myron, sitting opposite his guests in the red leather easy chair.

"You are an actor, aren't you, Myron," said Gloria.

Maitland-Mason frowned. "Are you trying to be funny?"

Gloria shook her head. She didn't want to offend the man's brittle feelings. She needed him on-side for this. "No. I mean an actor as opposed to someone who poses for flickers, like me."

"Oh." He appeared mollified. "Quite. Yes. I suppose so. Of course, I always try to bring as much of my craft into my work in the flickers too but it's not the same thing."

"Well, tonight you are going to give the performance of your life."

David cleared his throat and spat on the floor.

Maitland-Mason glared at him but said nothing.

"Gloria, I don't know what you're planning, but it'll have to wait. We're gonna need the two of you on set today. You're behind schedule enough, as it is."

Gloria shook her head. "No can do. Get Mike to shoot more of the incidental stuff. Tell him we'll be in bright and early tomorrow."

David nodded and rose to his feet, stretching. He knew from experience that it was pointless arguing with Gloria when her mind was made up. He could always strong-arm her back to the studio, but there was no way he could force her to act for the camera if she was set against it. "Hey, Myron, old pal. You got a spare packet of that coffee? I think I'm gettin' the taste for it."

Myron pursed his lips. "No. That was the last of it."

"You tellin' me porky-pies?" David strode into the kitchen and began opening cupboards looking for the coffee.

"David, please," said Gloria. "Leave the coffee. I'll get you some later."

"Yeah, yeah. It's always later with you and then you forget all about it. I'll be at the studio if you need me." He stomped out of the apartment.

Myron Maitland-Mason shuddered. "I wouldn't mind him so much if he bathed once in a while. He stinks."

"Give him a break, he's had a long day."

"So have I," said Myron. "But a gentleman still finds time to bathe. It's what separates us from the beasts."

"I found Joe." Gloria decided it was time to bite the bullet and get down to business.

"We need your help to clear his name."

Maitland-Mason almost spilled his own coffee on the Persian carpet. "Is he under arrest?"

"Don't be screwy. He's hiding out at my place."

Myron frowned. He was genuinely fond of Gloria and the idea of a wanted murderer and rapist hiding in her home unsettled him. "Are you sure that's wise?"

"Since when did I get wise, Myron? You ready for another ride? I'll tell you what you're gonna do on the way."

"I... very well. Wait here while I throw something on."

He sashayed into the bedroom and through to the en-suite bathroom where he turned on all the taps. Then he picked up the telephone on the bedside table.

"Hello, police? I have information on a fugitive... Yes, Joe Kelly. Yes, that Joe Kelly. He's hiding out at his fiancée's house on Manhattan Beach... No, I don't know the exact address... I've never needed it. It's Gloria Grace's place it's not hard to find. You're the police, do some detecting for God's sake." He placed the phone back in the cradle and smiled to himself. He was saving Gloria and removing Joe from his power base. The studios would need a strong pair of hands at the helm from now on and what better candidate for the job than Myron Maitland-Mason?

SCENE ELEVEN

Diamond was in bed reading Robert Weiss's notebooks. He had meant to just browse through them before catching up on some much needed sleep, but once he began he could not stop.

The journalist had been meticulous, cataloguing a list of crimes and misdemeanors against Mario Marinelli dating back over twenty years. Bribing public officials, illegal gambling, prostitution, unaccounted sums of money going in and out of numerous bank accounts held in the names of various members of the Marinelli clan, and most importantly, a long list of men who had crossed Marinelli and subsequently vanished without trace from the face of the Earth. The lists filled two notebooks, but nowhere could Diamond find any concrete evidence that would hold up in a court of law. Finally he opened another book. This was older than the others and bigger too. Half a sheet of paper was attached to the cover by a paper clip. On it Robert Weiss had written 'Dad's Journal.' Diamond opened it, doubtful that it would reveal anything he could use. It had probably found its way into Weiss's cabinet by accident and had nothing whatsoever to do with the case. He scanned through the first few pages.

'This Journal belongs to Isaac Weiss'.

The journal began in 1888 and was full of diagrams of what appeared to be some kind of primitive projector and camera. One of the cameras had a total of sixteen lenses. Then on the tenth page he came across a familiar name. The entry was for August 16th 1888.

'Thought all was lost. Had a visit from Marinelli. He wanted his money. He was going to smash my projector but I asked if I could show him what it did. V.funny. He is like a child, watching the pictures of the horse running. He made me show him the same sequence fifteen times. I swear he believes I am a wizard. He has promised to invest in the project. My problems are over. I was wrong about Marinelli. He is a very bright young man and quite innocent. It will be a pleasure working with him.'

Diamond got out of bed and made himself a strong cup of coffee. He would not be sleeping now.

The next few pages were filled with more diagrams and notes. It seemed that Isaac Weiss was on the verge of something with his cameras but he was worried about the competition. There was mention of Edison and several other names he did not recognize, including an Augustin Le Prince, both of whom seemed to be further ahead in the field.

He made a note of the entry for September 21st 1890.

'Marinelli in good spirits today, which is a relief for me. He tells me not to worry about Augustin Le Prince. He is out of the picture. At first I feared he may have done something rash, but the idea is ridiculous. Le Prince lives in Europe and I know Mario has not left the country. He has been too busy watching me work. I made a joke about it and told him it is a pity Thomas Edison can't be put out of the picture too. Marinelli

does not have a great sense of humour, alas. He told me he had tried but Mr. Edison is too well protected. I wonder what he means.'

Diamond had a good idea what he meant. He rubbed his eyes and felt a pang of pity for the scientist. So clever and yet so dumb. Did he not realize he was playing with fire?

He read on.

'Marinelli gave me some notebooks. He tells me they belonged to Le Prince. I was excited at first, until I read them. They must be written in code. I hate codes. There must be a way to crack it, but it will take months. Maybe I should concentrate on my own research rather than stealing the ideas of another. I am sure my ideas will be better than his.'

Diamond smiled. Isaac Weiss was a man of integrity and little common sense. He turned the pages.

'May 10th 1893

Marinelli furious. He has read reports of Edison's Kinetograph at the Brooklyn Institute, which was shown to the public yesterday. I tell him my work will be far greater than this and to be patient. He agreed but I must finish my work soon. He is growing restless.'

'April 20th 1894

I think my luck maybe running out. Marinelli is full of the news about the kinetoscope parlour in Broadway. People paying a fortune to see these films. I told him we could have done the same years ago but we want something special. He slapped my face and told me he was in the business of making money and so far I was only spending it. I tell him that soon I will have something to knock our competitors out of the water. Moving pictures and sound. Of course, I am exaggerating, my research is not complete but it

calmed him down. Especially when I told him people will look on him as a genius. He agreed to continue investing.'

"Deeper and deeper in the shit," sighed Diamond. "Why didn't the poor mope run for it while he had a chance?" Diamond read on. He felt as if he were reading the rough draft of a Shakespearean tragedy. He knew the scientist was on the road to destruction and there was no way out. He skimmed the next few pages, which contained more indecipherable diagrams and notes of strange devices. Finally, he came to the last entry.

'December 31st 1899'

'Promised to be home for midnight to see the New Year in with the family. Marinelli wants to see me. He hasn't been around much lately, thank God. He has been most unhappy about Edison's success and that of Robert Paul. He told me I was a thief. Now, he seems happy again. Maybe he had a good Christmas. He says he will give me a bonus for the new century. I am to collect it at his roadhouse. I would sooner stay here with my work, but sometimes you have to charm people. Especially important investors like Marinelli. Without him I would be lost.'

A loose paper fell from the back of the book. It contained a brief note, written in Robert Weiss's hand.

'The last time my mother saw my father was the morning of December 31st, 1899. I do not know if he kept his appointment with Marinelli, but I do know he was never seen again.' I mean to see Marinelli's roadhouse for myself.'

"Oh, dear," sighed Diamond. "Don't you worry, Isaac Weiss. I can't bring you back to life but I can make that fucker pay. I'm bringing him in today."

He lay back and closed his eyes. He was drifting off to sleep when the phone burst into life beside him.

"Yeah?"

It was Captain Boothe at the precinct.

"I thought you might like to know, we're bringing in your boy."

"Marinelli? Can you hold off? I want to be there."

"No. The flicker guy. Kelly. We had a tip. He's hiding out at Gloria Grace's. The uniforms are on their way."

"You g-g-got the address?" He reached for a pen. Damn. His reckoning with Marinelli would have to wait.

SCENE TWELVE

Maitland-Mason prided himself on his driving, but Gloria Grace's plan to clear Joe's good name was proving to be more than a minor distraction.

"You want me to pretend I'm a detective? Do you realize that's a criminal offence? I could go to jail."

"Keep your eye on the road, Myron," said Gloria, pointing out a pothole ahead of them.

The warning came too late. The Pierce-Arrow sped over it with a bump and then juddered to a halt as an explosion echoed in their ears. For a moment Maitland-Mason feared they were being shot at again. Then he heard the hiss of air escaping from his ruined back tyre. He slammed the dashboard in frustration.

"No. No. No. Bastards."

"Calm down, Myron. You've got a spare tyre."

He turned pink with embarrassment. "Could you change it? I hurt my back."

Gloria stared at him and smiled. "Myron. You don't know how to change a tyre, do you?"

"I... no. Never had call to."

"Me either."

He looked as if he were about to cry. Gloria almost felt sorry for him. "Calm down, rube. We're less than a mile away. We can walk. It's a gorgeous morning."

"I don't want to bloody walk. If I wanted to walk I wouldn't have spent a fucking fortune on this useless heap of scrap."

"Stop whining. Come on." She hopped out of the automobile and began sauntering along the side of the road, kicking off her shoes and walking barefoot.

"You look like a bloody savage. Put your shoes on. There's someone coming."

Gloria stared down the road towards the house. Two cars were coming. They were full of policemen. For a moment, Gloria wondered if Sennett was shooting another Keystone comedy.

The drivers ignored Maitland-Mason as he attempted to flag them down. In the back seat of the first vehicle, Gloria saw Joe Kelly, flanked by two uniformed bulls, his head bowed, his face grim.

"Joe!" she yelled.

The car sped on.

"Looks like they got your man," said Maitland-Mason. "It's probably for the best. I hope you won't get into trouble."

"Shutup." Gloria wanted to cry. She broke into a run. She needed to get home.

Maitland-Mason watched her run and then broke into an ungainly trot as he tried to keep pace with her.

There were two more cars parked in the driveway. Gloria cried out as two uniformed policemen came out of her house.

"Hey! What's the big idea? This is private property."

The policemen stared at her, recognizing the star instantly. One of the men went red.

"Err... sorry Miss Grace. We err..."

"It's okay, boys," came a voice from the doorway. Dickie Diamond stood there, drinking coffee from one of her favorite cups. "You can go. Let Miss Grace come in."

One of the policemen stopped her. "Excuse me, Miss Grace, but could you give me your autograph. It's for my little boy. He's a big fan."

She nodded wearily. "Sure."

The officer pulled out his notebook and thumbed through it to a blank page. "Just write it to Jonny."

She scrawled her name in the book and handed it back.

"You want mine too, Constable?" said Maitland-Mason, gasping for breath as he stopped beside them.

The cop stared at him with narrowed eyes. "Who are you?"

"Quang Chu."

"Bushwa. Quang Chu's a chink." He snapped the notebook shut and put it away in the breast pocket of his tunic.

"Hey, quit eye fucking the stars and let 'em pass," growled Diamond. "Come on in, Miss Grace. Coffee's ready."

Gloria and Maitland-Mason entered the house.

"I'm glad you've made yourself at home," said Gloria, throwing herself into a rocking chair in the kitchen.

Diamond poured two cups of coffee and handed them over. "You could be in big trouble, Miss Grace."

"I'm sure Miss Grace knows nothing about this," said Maitland-Mason.

Diamond looked at him. "Yeah. No doubt."

"Where have you taken him?" asked Gloria.

"Downtown. We'll keep him comfortable. Then he'll be extradited back to Britain to face the music."

"They'll hang him," said Gloria, staring at the coffee in her cup.

"That's what they do to murderers, Gloria," said Diamond.

"He's innocent," she muttered. "He didn't do it."

"I believe you," said Diamond.

Maitland-Mason stared at the detective. "Really?"

Diamond nodded. "Yeah. Trouble is I ain't a j-j-judge."

"I know who did it," said Gloria. "This guy hates Joe. Hated him since they was kids. Joe told me all about it."

She related the story of Joe's first love, Siobhan, and how O'Brien had murdered her and framed Kelly, forcing him to flee the country. When she came to the end Diamond whistled.

"Patrick O'Brien, eh? He's receiving an honorary fellowship from Berkeley this morning. They're putting him up at the Western."

"Can you arrest him?" asked Gloria.

Diamond laughed. "I wish I could. But we ain't got no evidence. Just Joe Kelly's say-so. It ain't good enough."

"So what can you do?"

Diamond shrugged. "Not much. Joe'll just have to take a chance that a jury believes him."

Gloria stared out of the window, her face grim. "That's not good enough."

"That's the way it is."

She stood up, her shoulders slumped.

Maitland-Mason had never seen her look so crushed. He placed a hand on her shoulder but she shrugged it off.

"I... I need the bathroom. I don't feel so good."

Diamond nodded. "Sure. You take your time."

She left the room, sobbing.

Diamond looked at Maitland-Mason. "That's quite a gal. I hate seeing her so cut up."

"Horrible business," agreed Maitland-Mason, who was beginning to wish he hadn't called the police.

"It was you that gave us the tip off, wasn't it?" said Diamond.

Maitland-Mason could not meet his eye. "That's ridiculous. Why would I do that?"

"Lots of reasons. Maybe you love her too? Maybe you hate Joe Kelly? Maybe O'Brien's a friend of yours from the old country."

"I'm English, not Irish. I never met the blighter. I... I would never hurt Gloria." His eyes were wet and large.

Diamond shrugged. "Well, you have."

They heard a noise from outside. An engine firing up. Probably the uniforms going back to the precinct. The two men sat in silence, Diamond staring at Maitland-Mason, while he stared down at his shoes.

"Maybe I should check on Gloria. See if she needs anything," said the actor at last.

"You do that."

Maitland-Mason left the room. Diamond could hear him calling her name. She was ignoring him. Good for her. After a minute he came back into the room.

"Officer..."

"Detective."

"Detective, er... I don't know how to put this, but she's not here."

Diamond rose to his feet and charged out of the house. His car. She had taken his car.

How could he have been so dumb?

"She's gone," he said.

"Looks like it," said Maitland-Mason. "She has a habit of making off with a chap's wheels when the mood takes her."

"We need transport."

Maitland-Mason nodded in agreement. "Yes. I really need to get back to the studio.

They'll be needing me."

"They can do without you. Where's your motor?"

Maitland-Mason pointed down the road. "Down there. About a mile away. She's got a flat."

Diamond sighed. "You got a spare?"

Maitland-Mason nodded. "If you put it back on I can give you a ride back to town."

"You any idea where she's heading?"

"After O'Brien, I suppose. It's what she was planning to do all along. She wanted me to pretend to be a policeman. I refused of course. I know it's against the law."

"After O'Brien? The little fool. If he really is a k-k-killer then..." He left the sentence unspoken. Both of them knew the danger Gloria was in. "Come on. Limey. We're gonna save America's sweetheart and see if we can't clear your boss while we're at it."

"But, Detective, really, I'm not giving you my car. It's a Pierce-Arrow. Do you know how much they cost?"

Diamond shook his head as he started walking down the road. "No. Tell me."

"Too bloody much. You have to treat a machine like that with respect and love."

"Great. You can drive."

"I..."

SCENE THIRTEEN

Alice Wells had wanted to hold off on arresting Mario Marinelli until Diamond returned from Manhattan Beach, but Captain Boothe had been most insistent.

"This is gonna be a high profile arrest," he had told her over the telephone. "The fact that our first female police officer brings it in will be good publicity for the department."

She agreed. It would be good for women in general, and yet part of her thought it unfair to deny Diamond his moment of triumph. Nailing Marinelli had been his life's dream and she had only been involved in the case for a number of weeks.

"Don't worry, Diamond will get his moment in court, but you'll make better news copy than his ugly mug," Boothe told her. "You'll have five uniforms with you, just in case he turns nasty."

She knew the other uniformed cops from her time on patrol. They were all good men and all of them were pleased to give her this moment to shine as they assembled on the lawn outside the Marinelli family home. She noticed the drapes in the front room

twitching. Their presence had been noted. Taking a deep breath, she strode up the driveway and rang the doorbell.

A maid answered, a worried frown creasing her otherwise youthful face.

"Police," said Wells, flashing her badge. "We need to see Mario Marinelli."

"¿Qué?"

"Is Mister Marinelli at home?"

"No hablo ingles, señora," said the Maid.

Wells sighed. "Then you better learn fast, if you don't want us to throw you back over the border. Marinelli, now."

The Maid regarded Wells with fear and alarm, stepping back to allow the police officers entry to the home.

Simonetta Marinelli was sitting in the living room, next to the window. She rose to her feet when Alice Wells and her companions entered.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked.

"Are you Simonetta Marinelli?" asked Wells.

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Alice Wells, Los Angeles Police Department. We need to see your husband."

Simonetta sat down heavily, her face a picture of misery. She had known for years that this day would come. She raised her eyes to the ceiling.

"Upstairs. In bed. You should let him sleep. He was working late last night."

Alice Wells shook her head. "I'm sorry. This can't wait."

Wells allowed the uniforms to lead the way. She knew the sight of five burly Irish policemen storming into his bedroom would unnerve Marinelli a lot more than one stout middle-aged woman.

"What the fuck? Get the hell outta here!" came a cry from the bedroom.

Alice Wells stood in the doorway. The sight that met her eyes would haunt her dreams for the rest of her days. Mario Marinelli was standing on top of a king-size four poster bed with black satin sheets and drapes. He was stark naked, and his hands were on his hips as he glared at the invading policemen.

"What are you lookin' at, bitch? Never seen good Italian Salami before?" he asked.

"No," said Wells, forcing herself to look him up and down. "Not very impressive is it, boys? I can't see what all the fuss is about."

The uniforms laughed as Marinelli covered himself with his hands. Wells couldn't believe what she had just said. She really had been spending too much time with Dickie Diamond.

"Mario Marinelli?" she asked.

"You know who I am," he said stepping down off the bed. "What's this all about?"

"I'm arresting you for the murder of Robert Weiss and seventeen persons unknown. You might want to put some clothes on."

Marinelli appeared more irritated than afraid. "I demand to speak to my lawyer."

"You can make the call down at the precinct. Are you going to get dressed or do you want to come as you are so we can charge you with gross indecency? Gross being the operative word." God, she really must control herself.

"Would ya give me some privacy?" He smiled at her. The smile may have charmed her, if those eyes hadn't reminded her so much of that bitch Ingrid Weiss.

"No."

Marinelli sneered and scratched his groin, slowly, before reaching for his shirt. He buttoned it slowly, before bending down to pick up a pair of socks from under the bed.. He sat facing her as he pulled them on, along with his shoes. Then he stood, penis half

engorged, swinging between his legs as he chose a blue tie from his wardrobe. He took his time getting it just right, before pulling open a drawer and choosing a pair of silk undershorts. He slipped into them, staring at her all the time.

"Say bye bye to the big boy," he leered.

At last he was ready. Alice Wells nodded to one of the cops, who produced a pair of handcuffs.

"Is that necessary, Officer?" said Marinelli. "I don't want my wife to see me in those things."

"Should've thought about that before you were naughty, shouldn't you, Mister Marinelli?"

"Cunt." Marinelli muttered the word under his breath.

Alice Wells was standing on the landing, watching Simonetta Marinelli climb the stairs.

"What did you call me, Mister Marinelli?" she asked.

"I called you a cunt," he snarled.

Simonetta stopped short and stared up at her husband as he emerged from the bedroom between two policemen.

"Mario. How dare you?" she snapped. "Apologize to the lady at once. The man I call my husband does not speak to women that way."

Marinelli looked at his wife and then down at his shoes. "I'm sorry. That was uncalled for."

"Apology accepted," said Alice Wells, winking at him. "Take him away boys."

A reporter and photographer for the LA Times was waiting on the lawn outside, along with several neighbors. Alice Wells smiled for the camera as she escorted Marinelli to the waiting automobiles.

"Mister Marinelli," said the reporter. "Can you tell us anything about the charges being levelled at you?"

"No comment."

"Officer Wells, does this have anything to do with the bodies found at Palace Studios?"

"Yes it does," said Wells.

"Is Joe Kelly linked to the bodies?"

"No."

"Can you tell us why Joe Kelly was arrested this morning?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to ask the detective in charge of that case."

"A lot of people feel that a woman should not be doing this job. How do you respond to that?"

"I say they better watch out or I'll be arresting them too," she said with a laugh. "No more questions, gentlemen."

She climbed into the car, pleased with herself. For a brief moment she felt every bit as glamorous and important as Gloria Grace. She did not notice the elderly man across the road, as he pulled a pair of goggles down over his eyes and gunned his motorcycle into life.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Patrick O'Brien was in fine form as he entered the Western Hotel. Today had been one of those days in which he truly felt himself blessed. He had woken to the news on the radio that his long time nemesis Joe Behan, aka Joe Kelly had been arrested and was facing extradition for murder and rape. Then he had visited Berkeley and received an Honorary Fellowship. The idea was a joke. Patrick O'Brien hadn't so much as set foot in a place of learning since his fourteenth birthday. Finally, Dermot Flynn had brought him the news that the wireless was buzzing with reports of Joe Kelly's arrest. The American public now hated the man who only yesterday they had adored. There was even a rumor that the Ku Klux Klan wanted to lynch him as a deterrent to any other foreign rapists who might be thinking of soiling their shores.

"A great day, Dermot," he laughed, walking up to reception to pick up his keys.

"That fucker had it coming," said Flynn. "I wish he'd paid us to keep quiet though. He must be stinking rich."

"He'll be stinking rich and dead, soon enough," laughed O'Brien. "Room 207," he said to the concierge.

The concierge reached for the keys and then as he was about to hand them over, he stopped, mouth open, staring towards the entrance. O'Brien could hear a collective gasp from the guests and staff in the lobby. He turned to view the young woman at the centre of their attention. Patrick O'Brien had never seen *Gloria Goes It Alone* but having spent the better part of a month travelling across the United States, he could not have helped but notice that near perfect face peering down from numerous billboards in every city and every town, advertising everything that could be advertised from cold cream to cigarettes.

"Mister O'Brien?" she said, fluttering her eyelashes as she offered her hand. "It is an honor."

"It is indeed, Miss Grace," said O'Brien, touching her hand to his lips. "And may I say, the honor is all mine."

She flashed him that dazzling smile, that was known to make strong men go weak at the knees, and lesser mortals faint in rapture. "You really are too kind. But please, call me Gloria. I gotta feeling we're going to be great friends."

O'Brien was flattered. "Perhaps you would do me the great pleasure of joining me for cocktails?" he asked.

Gloria leaned in close and whispered in his ear. "Can't we go somewhere more private? All these people, they never leave me in peace. Not for a second."

O'Brien nodded, his smile broadening across his handsome face. "Say no more, my dear. Room 207. I'll be waiting."

SCENE FIFTEEN

"Can you credit it, eh, Dermot?" said O'Brien unlocking the door to room 207. "She's Joe fuckin' Behan's fiancée. Not only do I get his neck stretched, I get to fuck his girl. It's like that French thing. Dayja something."

"Vu," said Flynn, his face stern and unsmiling.

"Eh?"

"It's deja vu. That French thing you was talkin' of."

"Fuckin' showoff. It's me that's got the fellowship from Berkeley, not you."

Flynn followed him into the room.

"Where do you think you're goin'?" asked O'Brien.

Flynn shrugged. "I was gonna fix us a couple'a drinks, Pat."

"Nah. You take off. I got me an appointment with some quality fanny. I don't want you around, crampin' me style."

Flynn shook his head. "No, Pat. You're not thinkin' straight."

"Course I am. I always do."

"You're not. She's a fuckin' star. The most famous bitch in America. What's she gonna be interested in you for?"

O'Brien clenched his fists. "Don't spoil my mood, Dermot."

"I'm not meanin' to. She's Joe Behan's girl. You think it's coincidence she shows up here the day the crushers get him? She knows. She's after something. I'm stickin' around."

O'Brien knew it was true. Sure, there were lots of rich folk over here that had fallen for his charm, local politicians for the most part, all with Irish connections. The only Irish connection Gloria Grace had was that bastard Joe. His ego was not quite prepared to accept the truth, not without certain reservations at least.

"Yeah, I know that, Dermot. I tell you what we're gonna do. You're gonna hide in the bathroom."

"What if she needs a piss?"

"Fine, under the bed."

"I'm not hidin' under the bed while you fuck her. That's not on. It ain't right."

"You and your fuckin' sensibilities. I know, go to your own room. If I need you, I'll bang twice on the wall."

Flynn had taken the room next door to O'Brien's. It made sense. The walls weren't soundproof, he'd realized that last night, listening to Flynn snoring like a banshee from dusk til dawn.

"How d'yer know I'll hear yer?"

"You'll hear me. Trust me."

"Fine."

"Go on then. Fuck off, quick."

Flynn hurried out of the room, leaving his employer to freshen himself up before the arrival of his illustrious guest.

SCENE SIXTEEN

After checking in, Gloria had sent up for a bottle of scotch. She helped herself to two strong measures. Fatigue was kicking in like a mule. It had been too long since her last blast of cocaine and her addiction was coiled like a snake in her belly, hissing, begging, pleading to be fed. "Later," she promised herself. "If I pull this off, I am gonna get so ossified. Then I'm kicking the habit for good."

The scotch felt good. Its fire calming the need for the moment. She stopped herself from pouring a third. She felt a little like a condemned woman about to face the gallows. She thought of Siobhan Malone and realized that for all she knew this may well be the last glass of scotch she ever tasted. There may very well be no more blasts of angel dust from Doctor Dope. She poured herself another shot and stared at her reflection in the window. Transparent. She looked like a ghost. She downed the liquid in one and winked at herself. She didn't need no angel dust. She didn't need no crummy Doctor Dope. Now, as ever, Gloria would go it alone.

SCENE SEVENTEEN

The door opened immediately. O'Brien stood there, a martini in each hand. He really was a knockout to look at. It was almost a shame she had to bring him down. He handed her a glass.

"I didn't know what cocktails you liked, so I made you a martini. Everyone likes a martini."

"Thanks," she said, taking a sip and trying not to grimace. She hated the taste of vermouth. Always had, ever since finding a bottle of it in her Mom's closet back when she was eight years old. She had almost died that day. She hoped it wasn't a sign of things to come. "Say, do I call you Pat or Patrick? Please say it's Patrick. Pat sounds like a verb, don't you think?"

O'Brien was unsure how to deal with this girl. Was she mocking him? All his friends called him Pat, they always had. "You call me whatever you like, girl. On your lips I'm sure it'll sound just fine."

She sashayed into the main room of the suite and glanced around.

"They pulled out all the stops for you. My room's smaller than your closet."

"Please, sit down, Gloria." He patted the space beside him on the couch.

She seemed to hesitate a little before joining him. He could feel her body heat through the thin fabric of her dress. He felt himself growing aroused.

"You know, I'm a big fan of your work, Gloria."

"You're too kind." She pulled her legs up beneath her. "I hear Berkeley made you a professor. You must be frightfully clever."

O'Brien shrugged. "Ah well. I don't like to brag too much. You're not drinking your martini. Would you prefer something else?"

She shook her head. "No. It's divine. I just like to take my time is all."

O'Brien took a deep breath, savoring her perfume. He felt the urge to kiss her, to take his old enemy's woman in his arms, but instead he looked at her. "You're even more beautiful in the flesh, Gloria."

"You Irish are sooo charming," she said with a laugh. Even to her ears, the laugh sounded brittle and false.

"So, tell me, why is it you wanted to see me? You'll forgive me if I'm wrong, but I get the idea Irish politics isn't one of your major interests in life."

Gloria felt a little sick. She didn't know what she was doing or how she should proceed. Maybe if she got him into bed he would open up. The thought repelled and fascinated her. "It's you I'm interested in. All our politicians are stuffed shirts. It's kinda strange seeing one who ain't old enough to be my Grandpa."

O'Brien wanted to believe her. He needed to believe her. He decided to test the water.

"I heard about your fiancé on the wireless. Shocking."

Gloria made a face. "Yeah. He's Irish too. I must have a thing for Irishmen. Say, you didn't know him in the old days, did ya?"

O'Brien laughed. His laughter was fake and too loud. "No. Ireland may be small but we don't all know each other. I think we probably mixed in different circles."

Gloria seemed to accept this. Good. Maybe she didn't know the connection. Maybe she was genuine after all.

"I suppose you need cheering up, Gloria?"

"You can say that again." Suddenly, those large eyes filled up with tears. "To think I spent all that time with a murderer. I thought he loved me, but..." She leaned against his shoulder, sobbing.

"There, there," he sighed, putting his arm around her. He noticed that the buttons of her dress had come undone, giving him a perfect view of two of America's most cherished sites. He kissed her neck. She moaned, softly.

"You haven't got any dark secrets, have you?" she whispered. "You won't break my heart?"

"Never." He slipped his hand into her dress, squeezing as he kissed her lips.

She broke away and fumbled inside her bag. She produced a small pistol and levelled it at his crotch. Her eyes blazed with hate.

O'Brien cursed inwardly. Flynn had been right. This was all about revenge. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

"Gloria," he said, trying to smile through his fear. "Is this a sneak preview of one of your adventures? What are you doing?"

She said nothing. She just pointed the gun at his crotch. He wanted to wet himself. Oh, shit. Too late.

"Please tell me that isn't piss," she said, her lips twitching in a sardonic smile.

"It's spunk," he replied, unable to help himself, even now. "I come like a fuckin' horse when I'm excited."

"Well, I'm glad you're happy."

He moved slowly, backing away from her until he was up against the wall.

"What's this all about, Gloria?" he asked. He thumped on the wall. Once, twice.

"You know what it's about."

"Refresh my memory."

"You killed Joe's girl."

"I thought you were Joe's girl?"

The door opened behind her. Dermot Flynn stood there, gun trained on Gloria Grace.

"Drop the pistol, Miss Grace," said Flynn.

Gloria didn't turn around. She kept her eyes on O'Brien. "No. You drop yours. If you don't I kill your boss."

"No you won't."

"Like hell, I won't."

"Please, Gloria," said O'Brien. "This is all a terrible misunderstanding." He moved towards her, slowly, one step at a time.

"Stay where you are," she said. "Tell your goon to get the fuck out of here."

"You won't shoot me, Gloria."

"I will."

"You won't." O'Brien took the gun from her hand. "Thank you."

Gloria felt her knees go weak. She had failed.

O'Brien smiled at her. Then he smacked her hard across the mouth. "Stupid fuckin' cow."

Gloria fell to the floor. He left her there.

"Keep an eye on her while I get out of these clothes," said O'Brien to Flynn.

"He pissed himself," said Gloria. "That's the kind of guy you work for, mister. A fella who pisses himself."

O'Brien moved in close and ran his fingers through her hair. She could smell the urine. It made her want to gag. His hand closed on her hair and yanked hard.

"Shut it, bitch. It ain't piss. I spilled me drink. That's all."

Flynn shrugged. It smelled like piss, but if O'Brien wanted to pretend he drank the stuff then that was fine by him.

"Go get changed, Pat. I'll watch her."

O'Brien pulled her hair again and then licked her face. His breath reeked of alcohol. Gloria moaned. She was going to throw up.

"Please," she whispered. "Please."

"Please what?" said O'Brien. "Please fuck me? Is that what you want?" He ran his tongue over her lips and up her nostrils.

She vomited, straight into O'Brien's face. He pulled back, revolted, and tripped over the coffee table. He saw the vomit, covering his shirt and wiped his face. He tried to fight down the impulse reaction to throw up himself and failed. He retched onto the carpet.

"Aww, fuck," groaned Flynn, turning away and moving a step backwards. "Go get changed, Pat, please. Have a wash while you're at it, eh?"

O'Brien nodded and got to his feet. He stared at Gloria who had sunk to her knees and was hugging herself. "Get her to clean the mess up." He hurried into the bedroom, holding his breath, not wanting to get sick all over again.

"You heard the boss man," said Flynn, waving his gun at Gloria. "Clean it up."

Gloria met his eyes. She knew she was going to die. It was like looking into the eyes of a reptile. There was no spark of compassion or humanity to be seen. "What with?" she asked.

"Take your dress off and use it," said Flynn.

Gloria shook her head.

"If I have to come over there and pull the dress off yer, I'll make you clean up with yer fuckin' tongue, so help me."

She slipped out of her dress and began mopping up the sick in her underwear. Flynn watched her every move. He was going to enjoy giving it to this one. Of course, he'd dump her in the bath first to get rid of the smell.

"Mop up Mister O'Brien's spew, now," he said.

Her dress was sodden and dripping. "I need a new cloth."

"Use yer undies."

She ignored him and carried on mopping up with her dress.

"Now drop it in the bin under the desk," he said, pointing to a small trash can on the other side of the room.

She threw the dress in his face. Flynn staggered back against the wall and hurled it to one side. He moved towards her.

"You dirty feckin' bitch." He smacked her hard with the pistol, knocking her to the floor. "Fuck the bath. I'm gonna fuck you now."

"No, you're not," came a voice from the bedroom. Patrick O'Brien stood in the doorway, naked except for a crushed velvet smoking jacket, his penis standing like a caveman's club, ready for action. "Me first."

Flynn shrugged and jammed the pistol into Gloria's back. "You heard the man. Run to daddy."

SCENE EIGHTEEN

The Pierce-Arrow pulled up outside the Western Hotel.

"I do hope you're going to contribute to the cost of petrol for this little outing," said Maitland-Mason.

Diamond was already out of the car and walking up the steps. He turned back to Maitland-Mason. "You stay here in the car. I don't want you getting in my way in here."

Maitland-Mason sat back and sighed. "No manners, these bloody yankees. No manners at all."

A small crowd of children were gathering around the car, staring at him. One of them pointed at him, excitedly.

"He's the guy in those Bathing Belles pictures," he said.

Within an instant, Maitland-Mason found himself and his car bedecked with children clamoring for autographs.

"Wait!" he cried out imperiously, opening the car door and stepping onto the sidewalk.

"Off the vehicle please. Off the private property. That's it. I'm not signing anything until you all step away from the vehicle. Now, what's your name, Sunny Jim?"

SCENE NINETEEN

O'Brien had pulled Gloria back onto the couch and was sitting astride her, slapping her face, and pinching her breasts, softening her up before completing the rape. Flynn watched from beside the door, a smile on his face.

"I'm gonna do you just like I did Joey boy's other bitch," said O'Brien.

"You can't," said Gloria. "I'm Gloria Grace. You'll never get away with it."

O'Brien laughed. "She's full of herself, ain't she, Dermot."

"She'll be full of something else in a minute, Pat," Flynn replied.

"When we're done, we're gonna load you up with pills. It'll be suicide, my dear. You just couldn't take it anymore, knowing what a creep you were going to marry."

"My friends know I'm here."

O'Brien smacked her hard. "Shut up. You ain't got any friends. You're just a whore."

There was a knock on the door.

"Room service," came a voice from outside.

Gloria screamed. "Rape!"

Flynn looked to his master for guidance.

"Open it."

Flynn opened the door and pointed the gun into Dickie Diamond's face.

"Get inside. Not a word."

Diamond complied. He stepped into the hotel suite and ignoring Flynn he produced his badge and showed it to O'Brien who was still sitting astride Gloria on the couch.

"Patrick O'Brien? I'm arresting you on suspicion of murder and attempting to pervert the course of justice."

O'Brien laughed. "Give me a break, copper. Your arresting days are over."

Flynn jammed the gun into Diamond's ribs. "You want me to shoot him now?"

"You c-can't kill me. I'm a p-p-police officer."

"I don't care, who you are, flatfoot," said O'Brien. "I'm a guest in this country. I've got friends in high places. The way we spin it, Gloria here is high as a kite. She comes in, out of her mind, you come in. She shoots you, then she shoots herself. What a tragedy. Of course, you'll have to wait while I fuck her. You don't mind, do you?"

Diamond shrugged. "You w-won't get away with it. I've got backup waiting in the lobby."

O'Brien turned back to Gloria. "He's lying. And if he isn't I'm fucked anyway. So, either way you're both dead. Now, relax. You're gonna enjoy this. You can tell Saint Peter and the angels you had at least one good fuck before you died." He pulled at her underwear, tearing it like tissue paper. "Cheap shit, eh?"

SCENE TWENTY

The doorman from the Western Hotel came down to the steps to the crowd gathered around the Pierce-Arrow.

"Excuse me, sir. Is this automobile yours?" he asked Maitland-Mason.

"That's right, my good fellow," said the actor.

"Well, you'll have to move it. We're expecting a delivery."

"But... do you know who I am?"

"No, sir."

"He's the guy in those Bathing Belles flickers," said one helpful kid.

"I'm Myron Maitland-Mason. Better known perhaps as Quang Chu."

The doorman did not seem impressed. "Indeed, sir?"

"You know, from *Gloria Goes It Alone*?"

"You still have to move the automobile, sir."

"But, I'm here on police business. I..." Where was that bloody Detective anyway. "Look, just keep an eye on her for me, will you? I'll be straight back." He handed the doorman a

dollar bill and hurried up the steps into the lobby. He clicked his fingers at the concierge.

"You, my name is Myron Maitland-Mason, International Detective. Where did my colleague go? Detective Diamond. Big fella. Ugly. Looks like he shaves with a saw."

"Room 207, sir."

Maitland-Mason bounded up the stairs. He was sick of waiting around for others. He was going to tell Diamond to hurry up or he could walk home.

SCENE TWENTY ONE

Gloria bit O'Brien's hand as he held her down. He cursed and reered back to smack her again. Just then the door swung open, and Maitland-Mason stormed inside.

"Diamond, what the hell is going on? You've been gone for..." He stopped and stared at the scene before his eyes. "Oh, hello, Gloria. I'm sorry I..."

Flynn had taken his eyes off Diamond for a second to take in the newcomer. A second was all Diamond needed. He slammed his elbow into Flynn's gut, and made a grab for the pistol. The two men struggled, barging into Maitland-Mason. Flynn's finger tightened on the trigger and a shot rang out.

Maitland-Mason screamed in agony as he looked down at the hole in his shoe. Blood began spilling out of the hole. "I'm shot! I'm shot!" He hopped to the doorway screaming. "Help! Police! Murder!"

Flynn tried to shoot again but Diamond smashed his fist into his jaw and he dropped the gun. Diamond kicked it away and twisted Flynn's arm up behind his back. All the while, Maitland-Mason's cries grew fainter as he hopped along the corridor in search of safety.

Diamond slammed the handcuffs on Flynn and slammed his knee into the small of his back. "Any more trouble from you and you're a dead man. Got it?"

"It's you who's about to die, big man," said O'Brien. He rose to his feet as he pulled Gloria's gun from the pocket of his smoking jacket. He pulled the trigger. There was a click. He pulled again. Another click. He turned to Gloria, who was pointing Flynn's pistol at his chest.

"You can drop that, buster. It's just a toy I took from the studios."

O'Brien smiled. "Gloria. Look, think about this. You don't want to shoot me. You didn't even bring a real gun. You want to put that down before somebody gets hurt."

"Don't listen to him, Gloria," said Diamond, still kneeling on top of Flynn.

"Don't worry," said Gloria. "I won't."

She fired twice. The bullets slammed into O'Brien's chest. He looked down at the bullet holes.

"For the love of..." He collapsed, tried to get up and fell back. His hands groped blindly in front of him. Finally, he stopped moving.

Gloria began to cry. She dropped the weapon and looked at Diamond. "I guess that makes me a murderer."

Diamond shook his head. "Not in my eyes, darlin'. It makes you, judge, jury and executioner."

Flynn struggled beneath him. "She's a fuckin' killer. I saw it all. I saw it all."

Diamond pulled Flynn's head back by the hair and slammed it into the floor. "Judge, jury and executioner. You wanna pronounce sentence on this piece of shit?"

Gloria reached for the gun. "You bet I do."

"No," wailed Flynn. "I didn't mean it. I saw everything. She had no choice. O'Brien wanted to rape her. He was going to kill you. It was self defence."

Diamond smiled and patted Flynn's head. "Attaboy. You'll stick by that in court?"

"Yes."

"If you don't, I got friends who can fuck you up good."

"I swear."

"And you'll tell the truth about Joe. How your friend raped and killed his girl."

"Yeah. I promise."

"Good enough for you?" said Diamond looking at Gloria.

Gloria nodded. "Yeah. Good enough for me."

SCENE TWENTY TWO

Mario Marinelli did not look like a man facing the death penalty. Captain Boothe had wanted to let Diamond interrogate him, but the Detective was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared into the ether shortly after Joe Kelly's arrest. He thought about allowing Alice Wells to question the suspect, but decided against it. She had no experience in interrogation and Marinelli would sense that. Marinelli had been closeted with his lawyer in the holding cell all day, waiting for the barrage of questions. Boothe hoped this would unnerve Marinelli, but it appeared that the man had nerves of steel. According to the guards on duty, Marinelli and his lawyer had spent the day playing cards, laughing and joking as if the cells were one of Marinelli's private gentleman's clubs. All that was missing were the scantily clad dancers and crate loads of booze.

The Police Commissioner paid a rare visit to the precinct to check on progress and wanted Boothe to head the interrogation himself.

"We're not going to sit on our asses doing nothing while Diamond chases around town with Gloria fucking Grace," the Commissioner told him.

Boothe invited Officer Wells to join him.

"Watch carefully and you may learn something," he told her.

"Thank you, sir. I'm looking forward to it."

They entered the cell. Marinelli's lawyer, Jefferson Mayne, gave him his oiliest smile and offered a damp hand for him to shake.

"Captain Boothe, we are honored," said Mayne. "How's Mrs. Boothe, may I ask? The kids must be college age now, are they not?"

"Yeah. They're fine. Thanks for asking." Boothe did not like Mayne. His past was even darker than Marinelli's. His family had drifted into California at some stage after the Civil War and they had made a fortune defending and winning seemingly impossible cases ever since. Boothe suspected jury tampering, extortion and brutality, but he had never been able to prove anything against them. He made a mental note to point Diamond in their direction once this case had gone to court.

"My client was hoping to speak with Detective Diamond," said the lawyer.

"I'm afraid the Detective is indisposed."

Marinelli leaned over and whispered in his lawyer's ear. Mayne nodded.

"Very well. Mister Marinelli says he is eager to help you in any way he can."

Boothe felt a wave of relief. For a moment he had thought the gangster was going to clam up on him. "That's good to hear. Mister Marinelli, you are aware of the charges brought against you? We are charging you with the unlawful killing of ..." Boothe's mind went blank.

"Robert Weiss," said Alice Wells, helpfully.

"Yes, Robert Weiss, and sixteen others."

"Seventeen, Captain," said Wells.

Boothe nodded. "Yes. Seventeen."

"My client is of course, innocent of all charges," said Mayne.

"I thought you might say that," said Boothe.

"He does, however, have information about the person responsible for those unfortunate deaths."

Boothe and Wells stared at Marinelli, waiting to see how he would attempt to slither off the hook.

"I know who killed those poor people," said Marinelli. "In some ways I hold myself responsible. I should have known. I really should." There were tears in his eyes.

"Go on," said Boothe.

"The killer is a highly disturbed young man, called Louis Lawson. His friends call him Lou-Lou. He has been in my employ since he was a boy. His late father was a very good friend of mine. I promised to take care of the boy. It... appears I have failed in my charge." A tear trickled down his cheek. He made no attempt to wipe it away.

"Just a minute," said Alice Wells. She glanced at her captain. "May I?"

Boothe nodded.

"If you knew about these killings you had a duty to report them. Why keep quiet all these years?"

"Good girl," thought Boothe. "We can nail him as an accessory."

"I didn't know," said Marinelli. "I only heard about it yesterday. I was going to sleep on it and then report in to you. Only you beat me to it, Officer Wells."

"Can you explain yourself?" asked Boothe.

"Sure. When I saw the news reports about those bodies you found at my old property, I asked Lou-Lou if he knew anything about them."

"And?"

"As I said before, the poor boy is disturbed. He ain't quite normal. Not like you and me, anyway. He confessed. He... I think you'll find all the victims were male. Well, it seems

he has a condition. He... I don't feel comfortable talkin' about this in front of a lady." He stared at Alice Wells.

Boothe glanced at her. "Officer Wells, would you leave us for a moment, please?"

Wells wanted to protest but she knew it would be useless. She nodded, and left the room without a word.

"Go on, Mister Marinelli," said Boothe.

"Lou-Lou is a homosexualist, Captain. He likes boys. He formed an attachment to these men. Sadly for them, they did not return his affections. He lost it and killed them. Then he buried them."

Boothe raised his eyebrows. He didn't believe a word of it. "And you never noticed someone was using your basement as a cemetery?"

Marinelli shook his head. "Nope. What can I say? I never went down in the basement. Never had no need to."

Jefferson Mayne spoke up. "Captain, I took the liberty of speaking with Louis Lawson, earlier today. He is willing to come in on condition that you don't press for the death penalty."

Boothe laughed out loud. "I'm sorry. That's out of the question. If what you say is true, he's killed eighteen men. We can't just sweep that under the carpet."

Mayne nodded, his eyes sorrowful. "Then I'm afraid he will just have to take his medicine. Is my client free to leave?"

Boothe shook his head. "Not yet. We need to corroborate this story of yours. Where can we find this Louis Lawson?"

Mayne wrote down the address of the rooms Lou-Lou shared with Rex Riley in Central City East. Boothe took it and went to the door.

"I'll be back as soon as this checks out."

"Glad to hear it, Captain," said Mayne. He stood up and turned to his client. "I may as well head home. Don't worry, Mario, we'll have you back in the bosom of your family in no time at all."

Marinelli nodded. "Yeah. If you don't mind, I'm gonna catch up on some shut eye. I'm beat."

SCENE TWENTY THREE

The world's press had been congregating outside the precinct ever since Joe Kelly's arrest earlier that morning. When Gloria Grace, Dickie Diamond, a wounded Myron Maitland-Mason and Dermot Flynn arrived, they were all hungry for a story. Some of them recognized Flynn as the right hand man of Patrick O'Brien, the charismatic Irish politician and sensed they were about to get their wish.

"Does this have something to do with the reported shooting at the Western Hotel?"

"Is this connected in any way to Joe Kelly?"

"You bet it is," said Gloria, stopping to face the reporters. "My Joe is innocent of all charges. He never raped nobody in his life an' he sure as hell didn't murder no one. This goon here knows who done it. Ain't that right, buster?"

"Gloria, that's enough," said Diamond, ushering her on.

"She's absolutely right," said Maitland-Mason, hobbling forward and letting the photographers get a good view of his bandaged foot. "I always knew Joe Kelly was innocent. He is one of my closest friends and I love him like a brother. That is why I

enlisted the help of Gloria Grace and Detective Diamond here to apprehend Patrick O'Brien. It is true, I risked my life, but you will find that when friendship is on the line, an Englishman will fight to the last drop of blood."

"Will you be enlisting in the British army to help your country in the war against Germany?" asked another reporter.

Maitland-Mason shook his head and limped after his companions. "No more questions.

We still have work to do."

SCENE TWENTY FOUR

No sooner had Diamond led his prisoner down to the cells next to Marinelli, than he was summoned to Captain Boothe's office.

"Where the hell have you been, Diamond? What's this I hear about Patrick O'Brien getting shot? He's an honored guest in this city. He has ties with the mayor."

"Then I'd advise the Mayor to cut 'em quick. He's the bozo who framed Joe Kelly. He's guilty as sin. His pal, Dermot Flynn told us everything." He handed Boothe the confession Flynn had signed in the car.

"So Kelly's innocent?"

"Yeah. Can we release him? I got his fiancée waiting downstairs."

Boothe nodded. "Yeah. Give him our apologies and make sure you tell the press we knew he was innocent all along and brought him in for his own protection. Say, did this Flynn guy confess to the shootings?"

Diamond shook his head. "Nope. But it's my guess they were behind it. We don't have to worry about that anymore. I hear you brought Marinelli in. Good work, huh? We got him at last."

Captain Boothe looked uncomfortable.

"What? Why the sour puss?"

"We may have to release him."

Diamond's face grew dark with rage. "Tell me you're y-y-yanking my chain, Chief."

"I wish I was. He says it's one of his guys that did it. I've sent Wells along to bring him in. They should be back soon."

"Fuck." Diamond hit the desk. "He's l-l-lying."

"We'll see what this guy says when we bring him in. Be patient, Dickie."

Diamond stormed out of the office. He was sick of being patient.

SCENE TWENTY FIVE

Joe was asleep when Gloria and Myron were allowed into his cell.

"Look at him, sleeping while we worry ourselves sick, getting him off the hook," laughed Gloria.

"Huh?" Joe sat up on the hard bed and rubbed his eyes. "What's going on? What time is it?"

"Bloody late," grumbled Myron. "Let's get you home, boss man. Then can someone please take me to hospital? I think gangrene is setting in. I may never walk again."

"What? But?"

"Myron here just saved me from your old friend Patrick O'Brien," said Gloria.

Diamond appeared in the doorway. "It's true, Joe. Y-y-you're f-f-free to go, with the apologies of the Police Department for taking up so much of your t-time. You know, if Myron or Gloria get tired of show biz, they could have quite a career here. They'd make Commissioner in no time."

He led them back upstairs, resisting the temptation to look in on Marinelli. He knew if he saw the man's gloating face he would do something that everyone would regret.

Outside, Captain Boothe and the Commissioner were waiting for them, in front of the Press.

"It gives us great pleasure," announced the Commissioner, "to inform you all that Joe Kelly is innocent of all the charges made against him. Thanks to the efforts of our valiant detectives, the world can rest easier tonight in the knowledge that Joe Kelly will soon be back where he belongs, filming the next episode of *Gloria Goes It Alone*."

The crowd burst into applause as Joe smiled, dazed and bewildered.

"Thank you," said Joe. "I would like to thank you all for your support. I would especially like to thank my soon to be wife, Gloria Grace, my faithful friend Myron Maitland-Mason and Los Angeles' own Sherlock Holmes, Detective Dickie Diamond."

SCENE TWENTY SIX

Rex Riley opened the door to Officer Wells and three other police officers. He noticed the gun in Alice Wells' hand.

"You should put that away," he said. "Guns ain't for girls. You could do someone a mischief."

"Thanks for the advice, chump," said Wells. "Are you Louis Lawson?"

Rex blinked in surprise. "Who? Ya must have the wrong place. I ain't never heard of her."

"Louis is a man's name," said Officer Wells.

"Ya could'a fooled me. I still don't know anyone by that name."

"Also known as Lou-Lou."

"Lou-Lou? Why didn't ya say so at first? No, I ain't Lou-Lou. He's sleeping."

"Then wake him."

Rex shook his head. "He's tired. He been working hard."

"Who is it, Rex?" came a voice from inside.

"It's the poh-leece. They wanna speak with ya." Rex stared hard at Officer Wells. "You wanna come in?"

"Thank you."

The police officers made their way into the cramped apartment. Alice Wells shuddered as an army of cockroaches scattered at their presence. The place was filthy.

"If we'd known you was comin' we'd have cleaned up some," said Rex. "What's this all about?"

Alice Wells ignored him.

"You want a cup of joe?" asked Rex.

Wells shook her head. The thought of drinking from anything in this apartment revolted her. "No. We're good."

"Suit yourself. Lou-Lou, you want coffee?"

"Sure," said Lou-Lou entering the room, barefoot and bare chested, dressed only in a pair of shorts. "How can I help, Officers?"

"Are you Louis Lawson?" asked Alice Wells.

Lou-Lou blushed as he nodded his head.

Rex began laughing. "Louis? Ya kept that quiet. What's your middle name, Christine?"

"Shaddap, Rex."

"I'm arresting you for the murder of Robert Weiss and seventeen other persons unknown."

There was a crash as Rex dropped the coffee pot.

"What's that you say?" he growled. "Lou-Lou didn't do nothing."

Lou-Lou turned to face his friend and shook his head. "It's okay, Rex. I spoke with Mister Mayne earlier. He says I gotta do this. He says there ain't nothing to it. They ain't gonna hang me or nothing."

"But..." Rex stared at Lou-Lou, tears in his eyes. "It ain't true. He never killed those folks."

"Don't listen to him. I did it," said Lou-Lou. "I killed them all." He stared at his friend, wishing he could tell him all about the meeting with the lawyer, tell him how Mayne had promised he would do a year or two in jail and then go free. Tell him how Marinelli would make sure Rex was well looked after and how he'd have a fortune waiting for him when he came out. It was the chance they had waited for all their lives. They would be able to go into business for themselves. The final clincher had been Mayne's threat that if he did not cooperate, something nasty may happen to Rex one night. He had no choice in the matter. No choice at all.

"You want me to come down with you?" Rex asked.

Lou-Lou shook his head. "Come see me in the morning. Bring me some donuts, if you like."

"Sure. You better finish getting dressed before you go," said Rex. "And don't forget your toothbrush."

SCENE TWENTY SEVEN

On the same day that Belgium finally fell to German forces, following the siege of Antwerp, and Louis 'Lou-Lou' Lawson was sentenced to death for the murder of Robert Weiss and other persons unknown, Joe Kelly married Gloria Grace on Friday, October 9th, 1914 at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament on Hollywood Boulevard.

Filming on the final chapter of *Gloria Goes It Alone* had wrapped the night before and so the actors, crew and personnel of Palace Studios were all ready and willing to celebrate.

Joe had hoped Pops would serve as his best man, but the Frenchman had not been seen for weeks and he had to make do with David. Gloria was pleased to allow Myron Maitland-Mason, his foot still encased in plaster, to give her away in matrimony to her betrothed.

Amongst the congregation were all the greats of the fledgling industry, including Mack Sennett, Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle, Mabel Normand and her friend, a small, wiry Englishman named Chaplin. In place of honor on the front row were Sir Stanley and

Lady Garrideb, who had braved torpedo attacks from the German Navy in order to attend. Dickie Diamond took his place at the back of the church, along with Alice Wells, Captain Boothe, the District Attorney and the Commissioner of Police. Outside, the street was lined with well-wishers, all hoping to see Gloria in her stunning wedding dress.

David nudged Joe as the Bridal March began to play, filling the church with organ music.

"You lucky fucker," he whispered, a rare smile on his face.

Joe turned to look and gazed in awe as Gloria approached, three Bathing Belles in white, carrying her train. The sun shone through the open doors of the church, giving her whole body a halo. If he didn't know her better, he could be forgiven for thinking he was marrying an angel. The thought of his Gloria as a heavenly body made him smile. His smile developed into a full-bellied laugh as she caught his eye and poked her tongue out at him.

The service began and all through the readings, he could feel his bride shaking with laughter beside him. He knew she was serious about the wedding, but the nerves of the day were too much for her.

At last, the priest, Father Dave, who had appeared in several walk-on roles for Palace Studios addressed the congregation, asking if anyone present knew of any lawful impediment to the union.

"I do," came a loud female voice from the back of the church.

Several members of the congregation, including Joe and Gloria laughed. Pranks were to be expected. Joe turned to see which of the Bathing Belles was the culprit. His smile faded as he saw the woman standing in the aisle before him. Sandra Mulvaney, his old landlady's daughter, from the bad old days in New York.

"Sandra?" he said. "I... I'm glad you could make it."

He hadn't thought of Sandra in years. He remembered cycling with her through the rain that night to watch Gloria in vaudeville at the Olympia. He remembered her kindness, her humour, her foul language. Finally he remembered the last time he had seen her. The night she had shot him outside the studios.

"It's me you should be marrying," said Sandra Mulvaney. She turned to look at all the nervous faces around her, many of them still convinced this was part of an act. "He was gonna make me a star. Until that whore showed up." She raised the gun.

"Take cover," screamed Myron Maitland-Mason, shoving Father Dave aside, as ignoring his wounded foot, he dived behind the altar.

Sandra fired. The bullet inches wide of Joe Kelly, slamming into the stone wall and ricocheting off into the altar. Myron screamed in panic as he crawled out to find a better hiding place.

"She's trying to kill me!" he screamed.

"I won't fuckin' miss this time," she said, leveling the gun at the bride.

"Take your best shot, ugly," said Gloria, defiant. She closed her eyes and waited.

Alice Wells tapped the woman on the shoulder and as she turned, she slapped her hard in the mouth, her wedding ring breaking two teeth. The gun clattered to the flagstones, where Diamond was quick to retrieve it.

"You want to show me your invitation, Miss?" said Officer Wells.

Sandra Mulvaney said nothing as Diamond pulled her hands behind her back and cuffed them together.

Alice Wells smiled at Father Dave. "Sorry about that. You carry on without us. We'll catch up at the reception."

"We can wait," said Gloria. She was trembling now, unsure if she could continue.

"No," said Diamond. "I ain't big on church, anyhow. You get on with the show, darling."

Diamond and Wells escorted Sandra Mulvaney back up the aisle to the resounding applause of the congregation.

"Right," said Father Dave, mopping his forehead. "You can come out now, Myron. It's perfectly safe."

Myron Maitland-Mason limped out from behind the organ and bowed. "I was just checking for emergency exits so I could make sure the women and children could get away. That's all. Then I was going to deal with her."

Father Dave smiled. "I don't think I'll ask if anyone knows of any lawful impediments to this marriage. We don't want to be tempting fate again, do we?"

SCENE TWENTY EIGHT

Mario Marinelli settled back in his private compartment on board the train to Long Beach. With his name cleared of any wrong doing and Lou-Lou Lawson set to take the fall for his past crimes, Marinelli was planning a short vacation, before announcing his plans to run for mayor. He had been sorry to lose Lou-Lou, but the sacrifice had been worth it. Detective Diamond was off his back, hopefully for good. He looked over at Rex Riley, who was reading the funny pages in the newspaper.

"Go bring me a box of cigars and a bottle of Scotch."

Rex tossed the paper aside and stood up. "Sure thing, boss. You want something to eat?"

"No. Just the smokes."

Rex left the carriage, leaving the door open.

Marinelli stared out of the window. Gloria Grace was getting married today. He had thought about attending, maybe giving her an expensive wedding gift, but he had decided against it. There was no telling what these show people might do when they had a few drinks in them. If he was serious about running for mayor, then he couldn't afford

to be seen with people like Gloria Grace or Joe Kelly. Maybe, when he was in charge, he would bring pressure to bear on the studios and drive them all out of town. They were bad for business. These show folks encouraged drunken behavior and drug taking. They were a bad lot.

"Excuse me," an old man stood in the doorway to the carriage. "Is this seat free?"

Marinelli shook his head. "No. This is a private carriage. Go on down to the back of the train."

The old man ignored him and stepped inside, closing the door.

Marinelli was mildly irritated. "I'm sorry, I said this is a private carriage."

The old man pulled an ancient Remington Derringer from his jacket pocket and leveled it at Marinelli.

"I heard you, Monsieur," said the old man.

Marinelli paled as he recognized the man. "Pops?"

"Augustin Le Prince, to you. Only my friends call me Pops."

Marinelli smiled. "Oh. And is there a reason why we can't be friends? I'm an admirer of your work."

"Save the lies. Christiansen told me all about you. Before I killed him."

Marinelli's eyes opened wide. "You did that?"

"Oui. It was not pleasant, but he had to talk. He had a lot to pay for. You robbed me of my life. You killed my son."

"No. I didn't. Your son's death was an accident. Pure and simple. I read about it."

"That is what Christiansen said too. I did not believe him. I do not believe you."

"I'm a rich man, Mister Le Prince."

"Phooey."

"I..."

The door to the compartment opened and Rex Riley stepped inside, carrying a bottle of scotch. He stared at the old man.

"Hey, you're Pops, from the studios. Remember me?"

Le Prince nodded. "Oui. Doctor Dope, non?"

"That's me." He placed the bottle down on the seat and produced a box of cigars from his jacket pocket. "Here you go, boss."

"Rex, this man wants to kill me. He's out of his mind. You gotta stop him."

Pops stared at Rex, his eyes cold and merciless. "I have no quarrel with you, friend."

Rex shrugged as he pulled his pistol from the waistband of his trousers. "He's got a good point, boss."

"What?" Marinelli couldn't believe it.

Rex trained the pistol on Marinelli. "You should never have done what you done to Lou-Lou, boss. That was wrong."

The train whistled as it entered a tunnel. Two shots rang out, briefly lighting up the compartment.

THE END