

GAMBIT

by

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POINT-OF-VIEW THROUGH WINDSHIELD

Under a big sky the west Texas prairie spreads flat and empty, as far as the eye can see.

Wind whistles against the outside of our vehicle. Grains of sand hiss and pop against the windshield.

An upcoming roadside sign is the only vertical breaking the horizon. We hinge on it as we pass: WELCOME TO ALPINE, TEXAS.

Voice

From the name, one anticipated mountains.

Second voice

Quite.

Inside the car: it is a rental driven by the Major, fifty-ish, nattily attired, with a military bearing and a neatly cropped mustache. His passenger is Harry Deane, late thirties, Saville Row bespoke suit. He is the owner of the first voice.

They drive in silence for several seconds, Deane gazing out at the featureless landscape.

Deane

. . . A curious place, Major.

Major

Mm. . .

More driving in quiet.

GAS STATION

The car is pulling in to a roadside service station that is the only structure visible in the landscape.

INSIDE STATION STORE

Deane and the Major enter, the sound of whistling prairie wind fanning in the open door with them and then subsiding as the door swings shut.

The cashier is a grizzled sixty-year-old.

Deane

Excuse me—we were given to understand that there's an equestrian tourney in the area?

Cashier

Wul. . . we got a law attorney—don't know his religion—up downtown Alpine. He's a fairy moved here from Albuquerque it'll be five—no, six years—come May. (eyeing the two men) Not that I judge.

The two men stare at the cashier.

Deane

. . . How terribly interesting. But is there a tournament of some description, with various rowdy goings-on, uh. . .

Major

Rough-riding, bronc-busting, that sort of thing?

They take the cashier's open-mouthed stare for incomprehension:

Deane

. . . It's a competition. A test of skill involving farm animals.

The Major raises one arm to waive an imaginary rope over his head:

Major

. . . Yippee-ai-yay?

BLEECHERS

A big banner identifies the West-of-the-Pecos rodeo. Deane and the Major are seating themselves, Deane with a pair of binoculars slung round his neck, the Major with two cameras slung around his.

PA

Awright, Pecos! We got some barrel racin' bull ridin' and fancy ropin' not to mention a whole lot a nonsense an'

carryin' on!

Down in the ring the opening act is on: a chute gate opens and sheep dogs trot out single-file. Riding on each dog is a monkey dressed in chaps and other Western finery with a cowboy hat cinched tight to its chin. The monkeys, strapped to their dogs so that they won't fall off, bounce crazily with the dogs' movement.

The dogs enthusiastically chase sheep that have been placidly waiting in the ring, and gradually succeed in herding them toward an open corral at the opposite end. The bouncing monkeys look bemusedly about, heads a-bobble, their hands tied to the pommels on their miniature saddles and their arms wagging.

PA

This is the West-of-the-Pecos rodeo, featurin' Charlie Goodnight's Monkey Round-Up, hope y'all enjoyed it, brought to you by Charlie and all the other good people at Charlie Goodnight's Implements'n Feed, and let's slap some hands together for them monkeys.

A smattering of lukewarm applause.

. . . Awright, Pecos. Y'all been waitin' on a little steer-wrastlin' and a-ropin' and like it says in the necessary room We aim to please so will you please aim.

Deane has his binoculars trained on the ring.

Deane

There.

The Major squints down, then raises the camera with the longer lens and peers through it.

PA

And first outa the chute is PJ Puznowski from up Terlingua way gonna try to real quick get a rope around Rodney from the Lazy L Sickle Bar Y Ranch and folks Rodney does not look to be heppin' any.

Rodney flees a mounted cowboy waving a lariat over his head. The cowboy throws the lariat, expertly cinching the steer's rear leg and tripping him into the dust. He loops his end of the rope around theommel of his saddle and jumps down into the ring.

The Major is squeezing off pictures, quick clicks followed by the whirr of the automatic

wind. Each click freezes the action and turns the frozen image black-and-white.

The cowboy is approaching the kicking steer. He grabs the two hind legs in one hand, pulls one front leg back and quickly loops the lariat around all three, expertly hogtying the animal.

The cowboy leaps away from the struggling animal and throws his arms wide, showing that he is finished. A horn blares and a clock freezes with his time.

PA

That's a fourteen-point-two for PJ Puznowski—awright,
"Jammies"!

Genuine applause acknowledges the roper's time, and the cowboy doffs his hat to the crowd—revealing, as long hair tumbles out, that he is in fact a she—as another click of the Major's camera freezes and fixes the image.

Deane

Yes. That's her.

The cowgirl trots over to her waiting horse and leads it out of the ring.

A BAR

It is a crowded honky-tonk whose jukebox loudly plays country music. Deane and the Major sit at a small table in a corner with long neck beer bottles in front of them. They eye:

PJ Puznowski at the bar, laughing, at the center of a boisterous group.

Major

Why are you so certain she'll be game?

Deane

Good God, man, she works at a poultry processing plant for minimum wage. You think she'll turn this down?

Major

How much are you going to tell her?

Harry Deane looks at her at the bar. He considers and, with a faint smile:

Deane

As much as she needs to know.

BAR AREA

From the Major's point-of-view: Deane, out-of-place in his expensive suit, elbows his way through the crowd at the bar to reach the young woman. He gets her attention and says something to her that is inaudible at our distance. She looks at him with some puzzlement, but grabs her beer off the bar, says a word or two to her cowboy friends, and follows Harry Deane back to the table.

As they sit down:

Deane

This is my associate, Major Nigel Nelson-Wingate, retired military man, Sunday painter.

Major

Madam.

Deane

And here's the simple question: How would you like to make 50,000 pounds sterling?

She stares at him.

... You'll be meeting a man. . .

A HUNTING PARTY

Men in Ulster coats and great gumboots tread a grey, misty moor, each cradling a shotgun. The men are attended by servants and we hear the voices and movements of the beaters up ahead.

One man, Shabandar, is in his fifties, and would be attractive were his nose not red and runny. He is holding forth:

Shabandar

Mind you, this was back during the silver puts and calls. He was an inveterate gambler unfortunately and was trying

to get me to help him settle all his debts in—where was it?

Man

Singapore.

Shabandar

Singapore. I said, Look here, good fellow, why not simply—hello. . .

He has stopped walking, one of his boots stuck in the turf.

. . . Mind—there's a springy bit here—woof!

The one foot is sinking in. He cartwheels both arms—and the shotgun—for balance; the other hunters cringe and seek cover.

. . . Mmmphh. . .

He recovers somewhat and, wedging the shotgun like a crutch under one armpit, is trying to raise himself out of the bog when—BLAM!—the gun discharges into the ground.

. . . Unkh!

The recoil sends him back onto his ass, the one foot still stuck. A servant advances to grab him under the armpits and help him up but Shabandar testily bats him away.

. . . Stand easy, man!

He starts pushing himself up.

. . . Not helpless.

With a sucking sound culminating in a pop, his foot comes out of the boot. Suddenly liberated, Shabandar hops awkwardly backward, flatfooted on his shod foot and tippy-toed on the naked one. The helpful servant reaches out to steady him and gets batted at once again.

. . . Don't touch my person!

Shabandar half-hops in place, trying to keep his weight off the bare foot.

. . . Twit! Give me your boot!

The man sits in the muck to pull off his right boot.

... Where's my gun boy? I've discharged that gun. The trigger is absurdly sensitive.

There is a sound of wings beating and the caw of birds, which now become visible just ahead.

... Bloody hell! The game is effing alerted, isn't it!

Servant

Yes sir.

Shabandar

Yes, I should say! Painfully apparent!

A boy trots up with a gun.

... Never mind; t's tits-up now! Birds are on their bloody guard!

He tosses the shotgun back at the boy and—BLAM!—it discharges; again, people scramble for cover.

... Bloody hell, man, be careful!

He starts to pull on his boot.

... Lord Shabandar Shot by His Own Gunboy. I can see the sodding headline now. . .

There is the chirp of a cell phone.

... You'd be out of a job, wouldn't you. Whole damn lot of you. Serve you right, too. . .

Another servant trots up with a phone:

Servant

Call for you, Lord Shabandar.

Shabandar

Right.

He takes the phone and punches a button. Into the phone:

Yes, what, Shabandar here. . . Hello?

He looks at the phone, then puts it to his ear again.

Hello!

He looks at the servant.

It's not on, is it? The bloody thing is not operational.

Servant

Er. . . my lordship, I believe it, uh. . .

He indicates:

Shabandar

Look, I hit Play, there's no answer.

Servant

My lord, I believe you—turned it off. . .

Shabandar

I did in my brown bollocks! Look here, just take the wretched thing. (louder) Another gun!

The phone chirps again. The servant opens it.

Servant

Hello. . . right. . . sorry. . .

To Shabandar:

Uh. . . sir?

Shabandar

Just hold the thing.

Servant

. . . Sir?

Shabandar

Hold it up to my ear! You know how to run the thing! I know how to talk! Division of sodding labour, isn't it!

The servant holds the phone to his ear.

. . . Shabandar. . . Yes. . . Yes, well let's put the issue to bed. If it turns out to be innacurate, let the man sue me. I shall defend past his capacity to litigate, shan't I?

As he tries to keep all his weight off his bare foot he gives intermittent hops, and with each hop the cell phone rides up and down against his ear. He turns to bark at the man holding the phone:

. . . Hold the thing steady, can't you!

INSIDE A CAR: TEXAS

The Major drives, PJ sits in front, and Deane leans forward to peer between them at the trailer house they are pulling up to.

Deane

What a perfectly. . . lovely. . . home. . .

PANELING

The faux wood paneling wobbles as a small nail is pressed against it in close shot. One tap of the hammer punctures the surface; the next light tap sends the nail all the way in up to the head. The hammering hand leaves to put the hammer down, off, and then reenters to slide one fingernail under the nail head and coax the nail partway out.

The hand leaves again and picture wire is draped across the nail.

Wider shows that we are inside the trailer. The Major is finishing setting up a camera on a tripod.

At the wall, Deane is finishing hanging the picture. It is an ornately framed Impressionist painting, incongruously grand in this humble trailer, depicting a rustic scene: a field of haystacks, at dusk.

Deane takes one step back, looks, steps forward again to tip the frame slightly one way. He looks back at the Major, who is peering through the lens.

Deane

Straight?

A LOGO

It is a lion, rampant, engraved in black granite, and beneath it the legend SHABANDAR PUBLISHING.

Wider shows that we are on a London business-district street where a black Rolls Royce pulls up before the black granite office building. A doorman scurries to open its back door and Lionel Shabandar emerges.

OFFICE

A large open office area with lightboxes scattered about.

Shabandar is holding forth to the gaggle of executives around him:

Shabandar

You see it follows directly from the theories of Baron Gerde von Essling—Austrian chappie, turn of the century. He recognized that clothing constrains the blood vessels, pinches at them, you see, and puts the blood flow all at sixes and sevens. Well you age then, don't you? Bloody right. Forty years old your skin looks like an alligator handbag. Not. If you're a nudist, though.

Executive

Sir—I wonder if you might approve this last layout for Horse and Hound?

He is spreading a layout on the tabletop. Shabandar peers at the material but doesn't let it distract him from the subject at hand:

Shabandar

The practice of nudism—and this is medical fact, mind you, confirmed and reconfirmed in any number of controlled studies—people who loll about in the altogether have an

enhanced life-expectancy of—what is it? I can't remember the precise number of years. . .

The article he is looking at, "Rough and Tumble in Texas," appears to be a profile of PJ Puznowski. It is illustrated by the rodeo pictures we saw being taken by the Major.

. . . but it's bloody old, I can tell you that. They have a, uh, corpulary, uh, vascular system that—coo bloody Christ!

He has turned the page to see pictures of PJ at home, in her trailer. He stares.

Executive

. . . Problem, sir?

Shabandar

Great gobbins. . .

His mouth hangs open as he bends over the picture to stare.

. . . Wilson! Give me a loupe!

The executive hands him a loupe.

We are close on Shabandar as he screws the loupe into his eye and, blinking, bends down again so that his one grossly distorted eye looks straight at us.

His point-of-view: a detail, so close that grain is visible, of a shot of PJ in her home.

Back to Shabandar's enormous eye, staring.

Back to the point-of-view: the loupe slides off PJ to examine the wall behind her. Though this background is not perfectly sharp one can discern the ornately framed Impressionist oil of a field of haystacks bathed by cool dusky light.

Shabandar's great, blinking eye.

. . . Haystacks. Dusk. Jesus Christ, Haystacks Bloody Dusk!

PULLING HARRY DEANE

Through a large outer office. He smiles:

Deane

Old man just rang me up.

The reverse shows a secretary who returns Deane's smile.

Secretary

Yes, he's expecting you.

INNER OFFICE

We are on the door as it swings open and Deane starts to enter. He comes up short, however, embarrassed—

Deane

I am sorry, sir—

—and immediately turns to leave.

Shabandar

What? Come in.

The reverse shows Shabandar on the telephone, standing behind his desk, naked. The desktop phone blocks our view of his privates. Shabandar waves Deane in and goes back to his phone conversation:

. . . Yes, have them proof it quick as possible and we'll see if we can make it into next month's.

He hangs up and sits.

. . . See here, Deane, have a look at this.

He pushes the layout pages across the desk. Deane self-consciously tries to scoop them up without looking at Shabandar's body. He sits facing the desk and cups one hand to his brow to help blinker his vision as he studies the layout. Shabandar continues:

. . . Sent the plane out to pick this woman up. Arrives in Heathrow in about an hour. You'll pop round pick her up, won't you.

Deane

Yes. . . yes. . . I see, the painting. How very odd.

He looks up.

. . . But it's a reproduction, sir. In my opinion.

Shabandar

Bloody hell! Based on what!

Deane

Well. . .

He clears his throat. He looks back down at the article, turns a page.

. . . Based on. . . the fact that. . . it's hanging on the wall of a caravan, sir. In Texas.

Shabandar

Yes! Precisely! Whose caravan! You twit!

Deane

Well, uh. . . this, uh. . . cowgirl, sir.

Shabandar smiles. His smile widens. He chuckles. The chuckle rumbles and builds to a great roaring laugh.

Deane looks at him, feigning a perplexity that only amuses Shabandar the more:

Shabandar

You stupid bastard, what!

HEATHROW

At the arrivals area, Harry Deane stands next to the Major, facing an incoming flow of passengers.

The Major holds a hand-lettered placard: PUZNOWSKI.

The double doors open from the customs area and PJ Puznowski emerges in a chic travel outfit. Behind her a redcap pushes a luggage cart.

LIMO

Harry Deane sits in to join PJ and the door is slammed behind him. The Major circles round to take his place behind the wheel.

Deane

Welcome to London. Before we throw you into the thick it
I should give you a bit of the history. . .

The vehicle pulls out and Deane reaches a champagne bottle and two fluted glasses from the side bar. As he pours:

. . . Monet's Haystacks. On September 15, 1885, in the course of one very productive day, the master Impressionist executed two oil paintings, both having the same subject: a field of haystacks, seen in two different lights.

Deane's speech continues as voice-over, illustrated by very quick silent vignettes. The first shows Monet on a camp chair in a field before an easel, squinting over his pince-nez as he holds his paint brush up at arm's length towards a haystack, lining up a detail.

We see him at the same spot in different light, varying with the voice-over:

. . . Haystacks dawn, haystacks dusk. "Haystacks, Dawn" was traded among various private collectors over the years —Berenson, Duveen, et cetera; "Haystacks, Dusk" went on display in Paris in the Jeu de Paume.

Visitors file past "Haystacks, Dusk" in a large, marble-floored gallery.

. . . Until, that is, the Nazzie occupation, 1941. The Jeu de Paume, like so many museums, was looted of its treasures. .

Silver goblets, candelabras, etc. are tossed into a crate.

. . . the rape of Europa. . . and "Haystacks, Dusk" was carted off to Karinhall, the residence of Air Marshall Hermann Goerring. . .

We are in a great room, shooting past the ample gut of a man who sits with his legs stretching away to where his jackbooted feet rest propped on a middleground table. Beyond, in the flickering candlelight of the great hall, the walls are covered with artwork in ornate gilt frames. Centered, and pinlit, is "Haystacks, Dusk."

. . . for the private delectation of his eyes only.

A hand drops into frame to rest on the chair's foreground armrest, cupping a snifter of brandy and with two fingers pinched around a long, fat cigar pluming smoke.

. . . There it remained until the end of the war. In 1945 Karinhall is overrun by the first division of Patton's Army, "The Big Red One;" the point platoon is led by Sergeant Brian "Bulldog" Puznowski. . . the Killer of Kilgore, Texas. . .

Large oaken double doors are kicked in by a soldier who strides in toward us as his men stream in behind. He wears combat fatigues with sleeves cut off to reveal bulging biceps and sinewy forearms. The stenciled letters on a patch over his breast pocket spell PUZNOWSKI.

. . . Your grandfather.

The sergeant stops in the foreground and plants his fists on his hips, chewing a stubby, drool-soaked cigar. He looks around the great room until his look freezes, snagged on:

"Haystacks, Dusk."

Cut to Puznowski's descendant—the girl—raptly listening, sipping champagne.

. . . For the next fifty years the location of "Haystacks, Dusk" remained one of the art world's most tantalizing mysteries. And all the while—or so Mr. Shabandar now believes, heh-heh—it was hanging in your home. . .

Deane is sliding a pile of snapshots across the table to the girl.

. . . A modest caravan. . . in Alpine, Texas. What is all that to Mr. Shabandar? Lionel Shabandar is Great Britain's biggest publisher, and a big man, a man of outsized appetites, enormous enthusiasms, and no few eccentricities—an avid nudist, case in point. Calling him a "collector" is like calling. . . is like calling. . .

He gropes, then raises his voice:

What's it like, Major?

Major

Well . . .

We watch the back of his neck as the Major considers.

. . . It's rather like calling Anita Ekberg "some Swedish bird," isn't it?

Deane

Yes, well I think the point is, he has the most important collection of Impressionist masterpieces now in private hands. And the jewel of that collection is. . . yes, "Haystacks, Dawn," acquired at auction seven years ago. . .

Once again the speech continues as voice-over on an illustrating vignette. We are in an auction hall. Displayed on the podium is "Haystacks, Dawn"—much like its mate Dusk except that the light is golden rather than cool.

. . . in spirited bidding.

Auctioneer

The bid is with Mr. Shabandar.

We see Shabandar lowering his paddle.

The bid is six million pounds. Do I hear six-two-five?

A hatchet-faced middle-aged Japanese man in a very expensive suit raises his paddle.

. . . I have six-two-five; the bid is with Mr. Takagawa. Do I hear six and a half?

Shabandar stares daggers at the man, who impassively lowers his paddle.

Deane

Shabandar acquired the painting for eight million pounds. . .

Outside the auction hall, minutes later, Shabandar passes Takagawa who is surrounded by a posse of business-suited underlings. He gives Takagawa a smile reeking smugness. With a gong effect, Takagawa impassively takes it in and bows curtly from the waist.

BACK TO THE CAR

Harry Deane tops off PJ's champagne glass.

Deane

About eleven million dollars. His ownership of the one has only whet his appetite for the other. He has been seeking "Haystacks, Dusk" for years now with a passion bordering on monomania.

THE RAMPANT LION

The Shabandar logo is engraved in each of the two columns that flank the entry drive to a large country estate.

We adjust over to show the limo turning into the drive.

INSIDE THE LIMO AGAIN

Deane continues as the girl looks out at the stately tree-lined drive:

Deane

Once he saw that photograph, Shabandar did his own research into your family history. Best to let the fish work the hook in himself, eh Major?

Major

Much the best, Mr. Deane.

Deane

Your family history has already persuaded him; Shabandar's asked me to authenticate the painting only as a matter of form. He will want to negotiate the price with you. But I warn you: Shabandar is a shrewd businessman and a canny negotiator. You must stick at ten million. Pounds. He will pay it, however much he protests.

They enter a roundabout in front of Shabandar's country manor.

. . . Be firm. Be polite, but firm. . .

The front door opens and a doorman trots out to meet the car as it rolls to a halt.

ENTRY HALL

As the group enters, followed by two laborers carrying the crate.

Deane, voice lowered, leans into PJ's ear:

Deane

. . . He will try to impress you. He will try to charm you.
He will try—

Shabandar

Ms. Puznowski!

His voice echoes in the great hall. He is at the top of a staircase which he now descends, in a smoking jacket, to meet his guests.

. . . Quite an honor! Come in, come in! Painting in the study, men.

He strides into the hallway, his arms outstretched and grasps P.J.'s extended hand in both of his.

. . . I knew a Koznowski once, charming man, no relation I suppose, Baron Koznowski, Janusz, related to the emperor Franz Josef on one side, also quite the equestrian, man had horseblood in his veins. Mixed Cossack descent, stuck to a horse like a burr on a dog's arse. Assassinated in the early nineties, sadly enough. By the Ossetians, the swine. . . This way, please. . .

He leads the way into the study.

. . . Also know a Polish fellow name of Simic. Works as a research assistant, Stuff Magazine. Spotty young lad, no baron he, I'm afraid, but it's quite the noble race, isn't it, despite the occasional Simic? Let's have a look, shall we? Mere formality of course. Ah yes. What do you think, Deane?

The workmen are uncrating the painting and putting it up on an easel. Just behind it is "Haystacks, Dawn," framed, on the wall, next to an empty spot reserved for its mate.

Deane goes close to examine the new painting.

Deane

Yes. . . yes. . . I'll need a few minutes. . .

Shabandar stares at the painting, mesmerized. He abruptly rouses himself:

Shabandar

Yes. Quite. By all means. Lovely. Yes. Ms. Puznowski, shall we discuss terms?

Holding a hand out to indicate direction, he lets her precede him into an adjoining room. Before following her in he turns to hiss at Deane:

. . . Great gobbins!

Viva voce, as he turns away and then hastens to scoop magazines off the desk:

. . . Sorry—though I assure you, there's nothing prurient in here, these are physical culture magazines. . .

The cut-glass pocket doors muffle his voice as they are closed by a footman, who then exits. But through them we can see PJ seating herself in front of the desk and Shabandar pacing behind it.

Harry Deane rises and goes to the painting resting on the easel. He glances up at one corner of the room.

High in one corner where ceiling meets wall, a small video camera points out at the room.

Harry Deane's attention is drawn by muffled bellowing. He looks at the cut-glass doors that transmit refracted shapes of Shabandar and PJ's caucus. There is low, almost inaudible murmuring from the woman that gives rise to more expostulation from Shabandar.

Harry Deane looks at the canvas in front of him, then squints past it at "Haystacks, Dawn," hanging on the wall.

He goes over to "Haystacks, Dawn." He reaches for it.

He stops, hearing the click-clack of animal nails against marble floor. A tabby cat enters the room, ambles over to him, and, purring, winds between his legs.

Harry Deane smiles.

Deane

Hello, kitty.

He hoists the picture in its ornate gilt frame off the wall.

Immediately, alarms ring. Harry Deane looks around.

Solid partitions slide down to seal, in quick succession, the room's four windows.

The heavy double doors leading to the foyer swing shut with a slam and a solid partition slides down to cover it.

Over the cut-glass doors, as Shabandar and PJ both seem to be turning to look, yet another partition slides down.

Harry Deane stands guiltily frozen, holding "Haystacks, Dawn" as alarm bells continue to ring and the cat arches its back and hisses.

After a moment the alarm bells cut out to leave dead quiet.

Harry Deane looks at the cat. The cat looks at Harry Deane.

The quiet is broken by the rhythmic sound of a squeaky crank. The partition over the cut-glass doors rises in irregular jerks.

It reveals that the doors have been opened, Shabandar and PJ peering in as a security man to one side operates an iron hand crank that raises the partition. Other security men stand behind Shabandar.

Shabandar

What the devil are you doing, man?

Harry Deane sheepishly licks his lips.

Deane

I . . . was just . . . going to compare the canvases.

Shabandar

Well, good lord, you might've asked me to disarm the security. D'you imagine I leave the art to fend for itself?

AN OPEN SATCHEL

Full of bundled cash.

A hand reaches in to withdraw five bank-wrapped stacks of bills.

Deane

Your wages. . .

Wider shows that we are back in the limo.

. . . fifty thousand pounds. . . and your ticket home. First class, of course.

PJ opens her mouth to speak; Harry Deane hastily puts one finger to her lips.

. . . Tut-tut—don't bother to thank me.

He hands her a glass of champagne.

. . . It is the Major and I who should be thanking you. For your self-possession, your good humor, and the élan with which you have played your small but vital part—eh, Major?

The Major, driving, looks back over his shoulder and raises a plastic champagne glass.

Major

Hear hear, sir! Well played.

Deane

We'll be at Heathrow in mere minutes; the plane leaves at eight P.M. . . .

BACK IN THE TEXAS HONKY TONK

As Deane sets his long-neck bottle of beer back on the table.

Deane

. . . and you'll be on your merry way.

He smiles down at the Major.

. . . Shouldn't have to tell her any more than that.

Major

Quite right.

Harry Deane gets up.

Deane

Back in a flash.

He goes to the bar. We watch, with the Major, as he works his way through the crowd that surrounds the girl.

He says something to her, completely lost to us under the noise. She looks at him, cups a hand to her ear: What?

He repeats it, whatever it was. She shakes her head and says something back. Now it is he who looks at her with incomprehension: What? As he leans in closer, a cowboy behind him claps him on the shoulder, and we jump in close:

The cowboy smiles at Harry Deane.

Cowboy

I b'lieve the lady said fuck off.

With this he draws back a fist and socks Harry Deane to send him tripping backwards onto the floor.

On the way back he has bumped another cowboy who sloshes beer onto himself and looks up angrily at Cowboy One.

Cowboy Two

Well goddamnit.

He rises to precipitate the time-honored honky-tonk melee: people slugging each other and using beer bottles and pieces of furniture on one another's heads.

Down on the floor, with brawlers' legs churning on every side, Harry Deane looks woozily up.

The Major is in the middle of the brawl, in a classic Marquess of Queensberry stance, directing stinging punches at the nose of a bemused, much bigger cowboy.

A flung body soars overhead, arms flailing, and Harry Deane turns his head to track it. The man crashes into the bar, and, in the foreground, a leg is drawn back to deliver a kick

directly at Harry Deane—at us—and the screen goes black.

BACK ALLEY

The Major dabs at Harry Deane's battered face with a moistened handkerchief.

Deane

These people are barbarians!

Major

Other countries, other customs, Mr. Deane.

Deane

Well how do we meet this woman? She's surrounded by a hooligan Swiss Guard! This was not in the plan! How do we get back on plan, Major, if—

The back door of the honky-tonk creaks open, fanning out a wedge of light and music from inside, where things are apparently back to normal.

Harry Deane looks pitifully up into the light. Framed in the doorway is PJ.

PJ

You boys okay? Faces still on rightways round?

Deane

Why, yes. . .

He clears his throat and tries to present a picture of nonchalance.

. . . All present and correct.

PJ

Buy you a drink? It don't have to be here if you're gunshy.

DINER

The two men sit facing PJ in a booth over coffee.

PJ

I do apologize on Merle, his temper is hair-trigger. Well it

ain't temper, really, it's all in fun.

Deane

Fun.

PJ

Oh yeah, he's friends with ninety-nine percent of the people he's kicked in the face over the years, there ain't no meanness in Merle. Merle he, he loves a brawl. Nose been broke so many times, two years ago he had all the cartilage removed so there wouldn't be so much down time between bar fights.

Major

An expedient that we might consider if we spend any more time in Texas.

PJ

Well hey-ho there, friend, I wouldn't recommend it. Yeah your nose'll roll with the punches but Merle snores like a sawmill without that reinforced septum. Course I snore too on account of the sleep apnea, or maybe that's just Mama puttin' me on since in other respects I'm dainty.

Deane

I was just going to say.

Major

Hear hear.

Deane

But Ms. Puznowski, if I may touch on the matter that brought us here to meet you.

APPROACHING A TRAILER

We are looking from inside a car that is pulling up to a trailer home. The Major drives, PJ sits next to him, and Harry Deane hunches to look between them from the back seat.

Deane

Ah yes. . . here we are. . .

INSIDE

We are close on an old woman who wears thick glasses and absently works her gums as she stares at a television that we can hear broadcasting some sort of talk show, its studio audience loudly hooting and catcalling.

The old woman holds a tupperware bowl with a lid on it; her speech is slurred by something in her mouth as she murmurs, watching:

Old Woman

Shame, shame. . .

Wider shows the door opening and PJ enters with Harry Deane and the Major. They do not attract the attention of the old woman, who continues to watch the TV.

Deane

Major, if you'd like to set up the camera, perhaps we could ask your grandmother to move for a second.

The graphic supered on the television says MEN WHO HAVE SLEPT WITH THEIR SON'S WIVES.

Old Woman

Shame, shame. . .

PJ

I don't think she's gonna get up during Jerry Springer.

She raises her voice:

. . . Grandma Merle, these nice people want to take a picture in the house here.

Old Woman

AAAAHHH!

She is reacting to a shouting, shoving match that has broken out on the show.

Deane

Is everyone in this state named Merle?

The old woman looks reprovngly at the TV:

Old Woman

Shame. . .

She peels the lid off the tupperware bowl and dribbles a long stream of spit into it. She seals the bowl again and now her speech is clearer:

. . . shame. . .

Deane

Good lord! Is she. . . unwell?

PJ

Oh she's fine; Grandma Merle chews.

The old woman absently bites into a soft leafy brick as she continues to watch.

Harry Deane and the Major stare in stunned horror as she gums the chew. Still staring, and as if to convince himself:

Major

Perfectly normal. I myself indulge in snuff on occasion.

Harry Deane rouses himself as the Major does likewise and starts to set up the camera.

Deane

So. . . she won't move til the show is over?

PJ shakes her head.

PJ

Not even. Montel's on next.

Deane

I see. Well. . . if she would slide over a bit, maybe you could both be in the picture.

Old Woman

Shame, shame. . .

PJ raises her voice:

PJ

Could you scooch over Gramma Merle? Ammo sit next to

you.

The old woman gives Harry Deane a dirty look as he climbs up on the couch to unhang the picture on the wall behind her, of a bleached cow skull at the side of a Western trail. The couch springs squeak and its cushions sink very low under his weight.

Deane

Major, could you take this, uh, lovely. . .

He hands off the painting.

THROUGH THE LENS

Minutes later; the painting has been replaced by "Haystacks, Dusk," and before it sit the old woman, still holding her tupperware bowl, and PJ, next to her, crowding one side of the frame.

The Major, peering through the lens, waves one hand:

Major

. . . Mizz Puznowski, could you slide a little closer to your grandmother.

PJ does so. The old woman gives her a dirty look, and then begins to peel the lid off the tupperware again. As she does so a flash freezes the image and fixes it in black and white.

SHABANDAR'S OFFICE

We are close on some black-and-white pictures: the layout of the "Rough and Tumble in Texas" profile of PJ Puznowski. The first page shows a picture of her in action at the rodeo.

The reverse shows Shabandar, expressionlessly examining. He turns to the next page.

More rodeo pictures.

The next page: PJ at home.

The next page: sitting on the sofa, next to her grandmother peeling off the tupperware lid, "Haystacks, Dusk" hanging behind them.

Here Shabandar pauses, lingering fractionally longer than on the previous pages. His expression, however, remains neutral.

He moves on to the next page.

And the next.

ELEVATOR

Amid a few other people, Shabandar rides the humming elevator down, staring ahead, silent, hands clasped in front of him.

The elevator dings as its doors slide open on the seventh floor. No one enters, but as the doors begin to close again there is a voice:

Voice

Doors please!

Shabandar's hand darts out to tap a button on the panel and the doors reverse to slide back open.

As Harry Deane enters:

Deane

... 'k you.

Shabandar gives him a curt nod. The elevator goes back into motion.

Harry Deane, standing just behind Shabandar, studies him. There is not much to read.

Finally:

... How're this month's layouts, sir?

Shabandar brow is creased by the smallest wrinkle; it is an unusual icebreaker. His answer, though, is mild:

Shabandar

... Fine.

STUDIO INTERIOR

It is an artist's studio littered with canvases in various stages of completion. A few pictures of Old Master paintings are taped up on the walls. The Major, in white artist's smock and beret, works before an easel bearing an enormous, almost-completed "Oath of the Horatiae."

Major

I fancy a Romantic; don't you, sir?

Harry Deane paces, distracted.

Deane

Sorry?

Major

More rigor, sir. Compared to the daubings of the Impressionists.

Deane

Ah yes, quite.

Major

More line.

Deane

You know—I think we were too subtle. He didn't notice.

Major

So, you'll draw it to his attention?

Deane

How the devil do I do that? Why would I have seen it—I curate his private art collection, I don't work for the bloody magazines. And it's not as good; he's supposed to notice. On his own.

The Major shrugs.

Major

But he didn't notice.

Deane

BUT IT'S NOT AS GOOD!

Harry Deane is instantly abashed.

. . . Sorry. Frustrating, is all. Sorry.

Major

I quite understand.

Deane

Where's the girl?

Major

At home, waiting for Shabandar's call. She insists we cover her lost earnings, sir, as she felt obliged to give notice at the poultry plucking plant.

Deane

Right. Perfectly reasonable. Can't be much.

Major

Not in the scheme of things. Of course it's a union position.

Deane

Mm.

Major

And there's the health plan. No public health there, sir.

Dean

Ah yes. Mm. Backwards country.

Major

And the pension.

Deane

We're—paying into her pension plan?

Major

Just keeping her current, sir. She insisted.

Deane

Oh, right. Mm. Great gobbins.

SHABANDAR'S OFFICE RECEPTION AREA

Harry Deane stands in front of the secretary.

Secretary

His door is rather firmly shut at the moment. D'you care to wait.

Deane

Yes yes, I'll wait.

A CLOCK

It is 4:30.

Reverse shows Harry Deane seated in the reception area, tie loosened, looking up at the clock.

He looks over at:

The door to the inner office. Closed.

He tosses aside a magazine and slouches back.

He looks at his watch, looks back up at the clock, makes a minute adjustment to his watch. He looks around, then picks up another magazine.

He looks up at the sound of the door opening.

A middle-aged man in a suit emerges. He shuts the door behind him. He pauses to wipe perspiration from his brow with a handkerchief. He stuffs papers into his briefcase with a trembling hand and walks off.

A moment later the secretary's phone chirps and she murmurs into it. Then:

Secretary

Go right in, Mr. Deane.

Harry Deane rises and goes to the door.

INNER OFFICE

Harry Deane enters, half-shielding his eyes with one hand as he attempts to avert them.

Deane

Mr. Shabandar, I, uh. . .

Shabandar

Yes, Deane.

Shabandar sits behind his desk, fully clothed, leafing through some papers.

Deane

I, uh. . . very nice suit, sir.

Shabandar

What?

Deane

Nothing. That is to say, I was looking through the advance on "Horse and Hound," the layout pages, and—

Shabandar is surprised:

Shabandar

Why on earth were you doing that?

Deane hesitates.

Deane

. . . Why was I . . .

Shabandar stares at him, closemouthed, not helping.

. . . Well, I . . .

Deane clears his throat.

. . . Quite honestly, it's uh—well, why be coy, after all—it's a simple explanation, so simple in fact that, er. . . well it's my favorite of your publications, sir. Our publications. Here at Shabandar Publishing, heh-heh.

Shabandar looks at him stonily.

. . . Maybe—not to overstate things, but may be. . . my favorite publication, ever. Without the qualifying “of Shabandar Publications” et cetera, et cetera heh-heh. . .

A long silence.

Shabandar

D’you ride?

Deane

God no!—That is, I have ridden, a birthday party, they had ponies, little Shetland ponies, we traipsed about in a circle in the garden, I was oh, six, seven, my friend Bobby Montaigne’s birthday, he’s a speech pathologist now but how well I remember it. Made a deep impression sir.

Shabandar

. . . I see.

He glances at his watch.

. . . Well, look here, Deane, is there something I can help you with?

Deane

Well yes, yes, thank you, there is, sir. You see I snuck the advance peek at Horse and Hound, as I said, and I was quite stricken—struck—by the piece on this PJ Puznowski. The Texas horseperson.—Equestrienne, not a mutant or a, ah. . . mythical figure, heh-heh. One pictures the bosom of a woman and the hindquarters of a, er. . .

Under Shabandar’s stare, he clears his throat again.

. . . At any rate, did you happen to see the article, sir?

Shabandar

Yes.

Silence.

Deane

Yes. Well. I was struck, most specifically, by one of the

pictures. One of the pictures of her at—

Shabandar

“Haystacks, Dusk.”

Deane

YES!

He catches himself:

. . . Yes, exactly sir.

Shabandar

Mm, funny that. Noticed it myself. A reproduction, of course.

Deane

Really? Do you think so, sir? Based on what, if I may ask?

Shabandar

Based on the fact that it was hanging on the wall of a bloody caravan. In Texas.

Deane sits open-mouthed as if about to speak, but silent as he formulates a rebuttal. Finally:

Deane

. . . There is that.

Shabandar

Is that all, Deane?

Deane

. . . Yes. . . Thank you, sir.

He rises, crestfallen. He turns and heads slowly for the door. He watches himself reach out for the doorknob. He turns it. He swings the door open. Summoning resolve, finally, he turns back:

. . . But sir?

Shabandar looks up from the papers to which he had already returned. He does not prompt with a question. He waits for more.

. . . Shouldn't we check, sir? After all, the painting is so rarely reproduced—don't know that I've ever seen a reproduction, in fact—and the very incongruity, hanging, as you so discerningly pointed out, in a—

Shabandar

Yes, fine, ring the woman up. Ask if she has an original Monet on the wall.

He goes back to his papers.

Harry Deane, belittled, thinks to respond but comes up with nothing that will serve his cause. He leaves.

OUTER OFFICE

Harry Deane emerges, takes a handkerchief from a pocket, and mops sweat from his forehead.

STREET

Raining. Holding his collar up, Harry Deane dashes across the street to huddle under the umbrella of the Major, who stands waiting.

Major

Did he bite, our little fishy?

Deane

He's not hooked yet but he's, uh. . . circling the bait.

Major

I'm not sure I follow you, old man.

Deane

Well, he noticed the painting and is considering being intrigued.

Major

Considering. . .

Deane

Considering being, yes. Where is the girl?

Major
Waiting for Shabandar's call.

Deane
At home?

Major
In a hotel. In Dallas.

Deane
Why in Dallas, in God's name?

Major
Passport office is there. She's never been out of the country, it turns out. Ordinarily the passport takes eight weeks, but one may expedite: pay a couple hundred pounds, they'll hurry it along.

Deane
That's considerate.

Major
Mm.

Deane
Couple hundred.

Major
Mm.

Deane
. . . Right.

OFFICE

Harry Deane walks through an open floor plan flipping through a stack of mail and messages. He abruptly stops, staring at a note.

Deane
Great gobbins.

HIS OFFICE

It is small and crowded with bookshelves bearing mostly oversized art books. He hurries in and sits behind his desk and hastily dials a number.

Voice through phone
Mr. Shabandar's office.

Deane
Is he in for Harry Deane.

Voice
One moment.

Harry Deane picks up the topmost letter on his pile of mail and looks at it again.

Handwritten on stationery under a crest showing a rampant lion:

Read your memo. Extraordinary. Call me. Shabandar.

Shabandar's voice
Yes, Deane.

Harry Deane sits up at attention:

Deane
T'is extraordinary, isn't it.

Shabandar
What's that? Oh—right. Very amusing if you should turn out to have been right.

Deane
I am here to amuse, sir. So. Shall we bring her in?

Shabandar
. . . Who?

Deane stares.

Deane
The . . . the cowgirl, sir, Puznowski. Her grandfather—and

this is all confirmed in US military records—this “Bulldog Puznowski—”

Shabandar

Yes yes, I read the memo, but why would we bring her in? If the painting is real, and if she wants to sell it, I certainly don't wish to seem overly eager. No no, ring her up and tell her if she ever finds herself in London I'd be happy to carve out a few minutes for her.

Deane

Ah-hah.

Shabandar

Let her invest in the deal's coming off.

Deane

I see, sir. Brilliant.

Shabandar

Oh nonsense, Deane; it's elementary.

AIRPORT ARRIVALS AREA

The Major and Harry Deane stand watching arriving passengers, the Major holding a hand-lettered sign: PUZNOWSKI.

After a long silent beat of staring:

Deane

. . . Unrestricted economy fare.

Major

That's what they call it, sir. Of course, they use the word “economy” with a certain. . . looseness.

Deane

Looseness! It's a positive leap of the poetic imagination!

Major

Yes sir. Well put.

Deane

Well, we can't count our pennies.

Major

No sir. Not with millions in the offing—ah, is that her?

PJ is indeed approaching, chatting with someone; they diverge as the man goes to meet someone awaiting him further up the line.

PJ smiles as she reaches Harry Deane and the Major.

PJ

... Howdy boys. That was a very comfortable flight.

Deane

Ah, excellent, welcome to London. Who were you chatting up back there?

PJ

Oh! At was Humphrey Syddons Something Something Ashdown-Thomas. He's a lord, which is like a congressman except you don't have to run for it, you just gotta have a big ol' ranch which he's got one in Sussex down southahere, 400 hectares he said and I know it don't sound like a big spread but apparently you can squeeze three acres into one hectare or maybe four with a shoehorn and the place been in his family since they enclosed the commons. How you doin', hoss?

Deane

Yes, fine thank you. How on earth did you meet him traveling economy class?

Major

Unrestricted.

Deane

But still!

PJ

Well we chatted boarding, and then I moved m'self up to the front of the plane so I could visit with him some more. There's more room up there and continuous food and

liquor. They just had me sign something on your credit card.

Deane

Miss—excuse us one moment, Major.

She gives him an inquisitive look as he draws her aside. He hisses:

. . . Now look here. It is critically important that we stay on plan in this matter and exercise a modicum of restraint, especially as regards spending. I couldn't help noticing that you ordered food—very frequently—and in large quantities, including shrimp cocktail—from room service in the hotel in Dallas—

PJ

Well cheesy, hoss, a gal's gotta eat!

Deane

Acknowledged. Conceded. This is not the point. In-room meal service is an absurdly expensive means to that admittedly practical end. Now—

PJ

That's the fun of stayin' in a hotel, good buddy! Ever heard of FUN? With a capital N?

Deane

Yes, well once we've parted ways and you've been paid, you may order all the room service and have all the "fun" you want. As long as your funds permit. For now, "fun" shall have to wait.

PJ

Mamma allus used to say, Order desert first, 'cause ya never know but what you might drop dead during salad.

Deane

Your mother's aphorisms, however profound, do not govern my business dealings. And another thing: our enterprise is extremely hush-hush. Top secret. Eyes only.

PJ

... You's only what?

Deane

I mean to say that the Major and I are to be your sole confidants; you should not be fraternizing with those you meet along the way. You are to be seen, not heard.

PJ

Well numero uno, that ain't exactly my personality. And, dos, the lord there is a heckuva nice guy and happens to own a Moe Nay hisself, so it was perfectly natural for us to chat.

Deane

Good lord. You didn't tell him—

PJ

Aw c'mon hoss, I was born at night but I wasn't born last night. I didn't tell him we were sellin' ours. Is ours an oil? I did tell him that, though I misdoubted myself. He said he owned a lotta oils, mostly of his kin. Is our'n an oil?

Deane stares at her, stupefied.

He takes her by the arm, firmly—

PJ

Easy, hoss!

—and brings her back to the Major.

Deane

Major, you shall escort Ms. Puznowski to my flat, where she shall be staying as an economy if I may have recourse to that much-abused word, whilst I go in to the office to make an appointment for our guest to see Mr. Shabandar. While she waits, you will be on guard that she does not discuss our plans with any neighbors, trade people, or members of the House of Lords.

He glares at her.

... On plan, do you understand, madam?

PJ

Well ain't we crabby this morning.

HARRY DEANE'S OFFICE

He sits at his desk with the phone to his ear.

Deane

. . . Yes yes, I'm still holding. Yes. . . Can't see her today,
any time today, the end of the day today could he see her
she needn't take long. . .

His shoulders sag.

. . . I understand. . . I understand. . . Good then. . . Right. . .
Cheers.

BLACK

In black, we hear a long, labored, snarfing inhale.

HARRY DEANE

Close, staring up at the ceiling in a darkened room.

A long silence.

Another long, labored, snarfing inhale. Harry Deane, clearly, is not the source of the snoring.

He glances over at an end table next to the couch on which he sleeps.

An illuminated clock next to a glass of water says 5:46.

He raises his head to look across the room.

Through an open doorway we see a corner of the bed. We hear another snoring inhale.

Harry Deane shuts his eyes.

There is a long, lingering fade to black, under which the snoring recedes.

IN BLACK: a rhythmic thumping sound.

HARRY DEANE

Close again. The room is still dark. His eyes fly open. The snoring is gone.

The thumping becomes faster. The thumps are separated by a brief whisking sound. Each thump is big, bassy, floor-shaking, like the footsteps of an approaching *tyrannosaurus rex*.

He looks over at the nightstand.

The surface of the water in the glass trembles with each thump.

The illuminated clock. 5:48.

Harry Deane raises his tousled head to look across the room.

Through the bedroom door we can see the arc of a rope sweeping into and out of view in time with the whisking sound.

Harry Deane gets blearily to his feet. He shrugs into a robe.

He goes to the bedroom.

BEDROOM

PJ is skipping rope in her underwear.

Harry Deane stares.

She begins to jump rope hopping on her right leg. After several cycles she switches to her left leg.

She starts an accelerated and complicated pattern, whipping her hands to either side and skipping the rope with alternate legs, the rope vigorously slapping the floor.

Without breaking stride, she explains:

PJ

Calisthenics.

Harry Deane stares.

She reacts to his mute stare:

. . . Bothering you?

Deane
(hastily)

Not at all.

She continues to jump rope. Harry Deane, coming to, grows self-conscious about staring.

. . . I suppose I should. . .

He gropes for the door jamb behind him and backs out.

. . . tea.

Eyes wide, he shuffles across the living room.

KITCHEN

Mouth still hanging open, eyes still wide, he begins to run water into a teapot.

We hear the skip-rope pattern becoming impossibly complicated with hyperfast whisks of the rope, slaps of rope against floor, and single- and double-thumps of one and two feet landing.

Harry Deane shuts off the water. He puts the kettle on the range, turns on the gas, and dazedly watches it heat.

There is a knock at the door.

FRONT DOOR

Harry Deane swings the apartment door open. The man in the hallway has red-rimmed eyes and wears a bathrobe over a ribbed sleeveless T-shirt. He is a burly man of the sort who might during the workday don an apron to wrestle great slabs of beef in Covent

Garden.

Man
Know what time it is, mate?

Deane
Why yes, Mr. Knowles, in fact I—

A blow to the nose sends him staggering back.

CLOSE ON HARRY DEANE

He is dressed now, but his chin is on his chest, his mouth hangs open, his eyes are shut, and his breathing is heavy and regular. One eye is slightly discolored and the nose on that side is slightly swollen.

A hand is shaking him by the shoulder.

Voice
Psssst. Wake up, hoss, he'll see us now.

With a light snort he rouses himself and looks blearily up.

PJ, in a dressy outfit with a Western-yoked shirt with fringes, is looking down at him. Beyond her Shabandar's receptionist stands waiting at the opened door to Shabandar's office.

Harry Deane starts to rise but, with the clicking sound of ice cubes, looks down at his lap.

His hand, which holds a hand-towelful of ice cubes, has been resting in his lap. A wet patch spreads from the towel across his crotch.

He rises and self-consciously follows PJ into the office.

Shabandar rises from behind his desk.

Shabandar
Miss Puznowski, delighted to meet you. Good grief,
Deane, what happened to you?

Deane
(affectedly jovial)

Fellow in the pub expressed a preference for Matisse over Cezannes.

He raises two fists.

. . . I had to set him straight, heh-heh.

Shabandar looks at him stonily.

. . . I'm joking, of course. Love Matisse. Use of color. No, I, uh. . . bent down, bookshelf in the way, hello, bango, ahem. . .

He lapses into silence.

. . . Well, shall we sit?

He looks around, realizes that the other two are already sitting. He sits, looks around for a place to set his ice pack. There is none.

Shabandar

So. How do you find London, Miss Puznowski?

PJ

Aw, everyone knows the answer to that one: turn right at Greenland.

Shabandar

Heh-heh, indeed. Where're you staying?

She and Harry Deane exchange glances.

Deane

Uh—

PJ

One of them big hotels downtown, can't remember the name—you remember, Harry?

Deane

Connaught.

PJ

I cannot either but it's one of the bigger—

Deane

The Connaught. It's called. The Connaught Hotel.

PJ

That's a funny name. Staff seems pretty can-do.

With an acerbic look to Harry Deane:

. . . Order up a shrimp cocktail in the middle of the night,
no problemo.

Shabandar

Mm, the service there is outstanding.

PJ

Yeah howdy. Like it is anywhere I reckon if you got the
dough-re-mi. I don't mind shellin' it out—I guess Harry
here told you I got thisahere painting I'm aiming to unload.

Deane

Yes, you see Miss Puznowski feels that in light of the
precedential value of—

Shabandar, who has been enjoying PJ, is nettled by the interruption:

Shabandar

Well you're hardly her agent, Deane; Miss Puznowski
seems capable of expressing herself.

PJ

Yes sir English is my mother tongue. But you don't have
to Mizz Puznowski me, you can call me PJ, or Jammies—
that's my rodeo handle—or Philomena, that's my real name
but what's the point a that, takes as long to chew on as
Puznowski.

Shabandar

Well thank you, PJ, and you may call me Lionel. Let's
hope that doing business on a first-name basis shall be
conducive to plain speaking and clear understanding.

PJ

Amen to that Lionel, let's get to it. I want ten million pounds for that picture—that's five thousand tons if I got my math right—and you could maybe toss in a nice four-by-four to haul it off in with an auto-trannie'n a CD deck'n a graduated tint onna windshield please and thank you.

Shabandar laughs. Deane, who has been nervously looking back and forth, adds his own nervous laughter.

Shabandar

Well that's marvelous, but tell me, PJ: what makes you think the painting is worth ten million pounds?

PJ

Well first off it's oil. Ain't it Harry?

Deane

Indeed, the medium is oil—heh-heh—and its provenance sounds . . . promising. But of course, sir, I should like to take it to your country house to compare it to its mate before I render a definitive opinion.

Shabandar

Being shipped in?

Deane

Arrives Tuesday.

Shabandar

Well that works out: you can run it up to the house and we'll all have a look at it at the Gala on Wednesday.

To PJ:

. . . I have an annual party up at the estate.

PJ

Well that sounds nice. See, and that's another thing in my favor: you got this other Haystacks goes with it and the man ain't crankin' 'em out no more what with his bein' dead'n all so if you want the set, looks like I gotcha by the short'n curlies.

Harry Deane, who has been nervously sipping at a glass of ice water, does a Danny Thomas. He recovers and, for something to do, dabs at the wet spot left on his cloth by the ice pack.

Deane

Well I don't know that it's a situation of one party trying to subdue the other—

Shabandar

Nonsense, Deane, it's a pleasure doing business with someone who knows her position and is able to clearly set it out.

He rises.

. . . Unfortunately I have another appointment at eleven o'clock, but I believe this is worth pursuing to see if there mightn't be some common ground.

He has circled his desk and now pulls PJ's chair out.

PJ

Why thank you. . .

She looks pointedly at Harry Deane.

. . . A gentleman.

Shabandar

I'm afraid I'm booked tight the rest of the day and I have a business dinner as well.

Deane

Oh my.

He is escorting them out of the office and through the reception area.

Shabandar

But a thought occurs to me: perhaps you could be my dinner companion. We'll have some time to chat and you may even be able to counsel me on my other business.

Deane

Well we'd be delighted, I'm sure we're—

Shabandar

Oh don't put yourself out, Deane; I should think PJ and I will be able to sort things.

They have reached the elevator bank. Shabandar takes PJ's hand and kisses it.

... To plain speaking.

She and Deane get into the elevator.

... Let's say eight o'clock.

The doors start to close.

... I'll pick you up at the Connaught.

CONNAUGHT LOBBY

Harry Deane and PJ enter.

PJ

Well it was your idea.

Deane

Not your actually staying here.

PJ

Well that ain't my fault neither. We told him our story and either we keep layin' on the Bamboozle-Um or we might as well pack it in and go home.—Mamacita. . .

She is gazing appreciatively around the lobby as they reach the front desk.

... Betcha this place has cable.—What're you doing?

Harry Deane has been dabbing a handkerchief at his pants near the crotch. He scowls, shaking his head.

Deane

The Major gave me a rag to dry this. . . good lord. . .

They have reached the front desk; Harry Deane rings the bell.

. . . I believe it had motor oil on it.

A desk clerk materializes.

. . . Yes, hello, have you a single room, very, very small, for one evening?

Desk Clerk

Certainly sir, let me check.

Deane

Not even the whole evening, necessarily, if we could just use it for, uh. . .

He trails off as the clerk looks up over his reading glasses. After a moment of silent rebuke, the clerk looks back at the computer screen.

Clerk

. . . We're rather hemmed in at the moment; the only thing I see for this evening is a very comfortable suite overlooking the park.

PJ

We'll take it.

The desk clerk hits the bell and a bellman, Xander, trots up.

Deane

Hold on there, what's the tariff?

PJ

Hey, you know what, hoss, if you're gonna nickle-and-dime, we could just call the whole thing off. I'm beginning to have second thoughts anyway.

Deane

Second thoughts! . . .

He hastily digs into his pocket and tosses the clerk a credit card.

. . . In God's name, why?

PJ

Well, you know, there's moral issues. Right and wrong. I mean what would my mama have said if she saw me doin' this, two-timing somebody, with you and your little Major?

Harry Deane distractedly works on his pants:

Deane

Oh nonsense—dash it, the Major's made quite a mess here, how embarrassing. . .

This prompts the desk clerk to stare, in spite of himself, at Harry Deane's crotch. PJ, meanwhile, continues to remonstrate:

PJ

Don't you feel a little ashamed? How does the Major feel?

The clerk shoots a glance at Xander. Harry Deane stops dabbing at his pants to look up at PJ:

Deane

No, no, I must say, I'm not the least ashamed. And if I'm not, believe me, the Major isn't. . . .

He chuckles.

. . . The very thought.—Go ahead and run that through, we'll take the room—

The desk clerk recalls himself and tears his eyes from Harry Deane's crotch.

Clerk

Uh, yes sir, I have. There seems to be a problem with this card. Perhaps you've exceeded the limit.

Deane

The limit! Bloody hell. . .

He digs for his wallet.

Okay, try the, uh. . .

PJ

You are so low-class.

Deane

It is a mistake, I assure you. Try the American Express.

Clerk

Very good, sir.

PJ

See, and that's another thing: you don't do much to impress a girl. You or the Major.

The clerk and Xander exchange shocked looks again, then struggle to retrieve an air of professional disinterest.

Deane

The Major is quite capable, I assure you.

PJ snorts, which incenses Deane:

... What! What does the laugh mean?! Laughing at the Major, are we? He's handled better than you, my dear! Been in any number of sticky spots! In and out! And let me assure you that should you play coy this late in the game, the Major would be aroused to the point where I could not be held responsible for the consequences!

PJ

(biting)

From what I've seen, ain't nothin' gonna arouse the Major.

The clerk clears his throat:

Clerk

Very good sir, this one worked brilliantly. Room two twenty-seven, Xander will show you up.

Xander leading, they turn and recede, still bickering:

PJ

I could jump up and down in my undies, wouldn't excite the Major. . .

INTERIOR ELEVATOR

Moments later.

Deane

Now, this evening, you must remember to stay on topic. Keep it businesslike. The man you're dealing with is not above mixing the personal with the professional to get what he wants.

PJ

Well what does that mean?

Deane

Look, don't make me say it. Well all right, the man is. . . the man is. . . he's a cad. It's obvious he's up to something, isn't it. Rather transparent, the way he excluded me from your little date.

PJ

Wuh hell, maybe I don't mind bein' seduced. Bein' chased after by a multi-zillionaire, I dunno, that don't sound so terrible.

Deane

Good God, what a depraved point of view! Are you saying that his money makes the man attractive?

PJ

Sure, money'n manners. Mama always called money'n manners the pork'n beans of personality.

Harry Deane reacts as if to a bad smell:

Deane

. . . What an odd woman.

EXTERIOR CONNAUGHT

Harry Deane emerges. He goes to his car parked at the curb, muttering as he approaches:

Deane

. . . Not a bloody ticket. . .

Something is indeed tucked under the windshield wiper. An envelope. He opens it, puzzled, to examine a piece of stationary with a heraldic crest but no name.

The handwritten text:

Sir.

You don't know me but, like yourself, I am an art lover. Especially rustic landscapes—hayricks, etc. Please go to the Westminster Club this evening at eight and identify yourself to the porter, who will direct you. I assure you: this is no jest.

The note is unsigned.

Deane

What the bloody hell?

LIMO

Shabandar is pouring champagne into a pair of fluted glasses. PJ sits beside him craning to peer up at the passing buildings.

Shabandar

It's a business thing, more or less—hope it won't be too much of a bore. Champagne?

PJ

Yeah, why not. Boy, I ain't had champagne in a limo since Aunt Hurlene's funeral.

Shabandar

Indeed.

PJ

Yeah, the liquor came with the car which was misfortunate because Uncle Marion can't lay off the hooch if it's at hand'n got liquored up to where we couldn't coax him to quit singin' the Lefty Frizzell. Mind, I like Hank and Lefty

as much as the next person but there's a time and place for everything and your wife's burial service is not open-mike night at the tavern. But I don't imagine one little glass'll hurt any. You a bachelor, Lionel?

Shabandar

... A bachelor?

PJ

I ask because, you know, the champagne, the prom car—in Texas, that's what a man'll use a-courtin'.

Shabandar

No, I—

PJ

Funerals and hot dates, the car'll be longer'n regulation.

Shabandar

Yes, I see. Well, other countries, other customs. In fact this is the car I always use—but, to answer your question, I am unmarried at present. I was married for thirteen years, to Dame Hermione Lovidge.

PJ

Well there ain't nothin' like a dame or so they tell me.

She lowers her voice in sympathy:

... Did she break your heart?

Shabandar

She broke my bloody balls.

PJ spits champagne and hoots. Shabandar looks at her and smiles.

WESTMINSTER CLUB

The door swings in to reveal an elderly Indian doorman in club livery. The foyer is old, dim, baronial, and might smell of boiled cabbage.

Deane

I, uh. . . I am. . . Harry Deane?

The footman has an impeccable Oxonian accent:

Footman

Ah yes, Mr. Deane. Lord Ashdown-Thomas awaits you in the Fortinbras Room. Just up the stairs to the left.

Deane

'k you.

He starts up the stairs; the footman calls after him:

Footman

He'll have the world as a rule, sir.

Deane

He'll—excuse me?

FORTINBRAS ROOM

It is a reading room—huge, high-ceilinged, ornately plastered, with a fire going in the oversized fireplace and Persian rugs spread across the floor and club- and wing-chairs and sagging old sofas scattered about. Relics of the Raj adorn the walls; standing lamps with tassled yellowing shades light them.

The scattered occupants of the chairs are elderly men. They all doze, heads tipped back, mouths agape, some of them snoring. Many have lit cigars, either laid aside in ashtrays or still clutched in hands that lie atop rising and falling bellies. Each has a magazine or newspaper lying either to his side or open on his chest.

Harry Deane winds among the dozing club members, looking down at each as he passes.

He comes upon a man with the tabloid *The World* lying on his stomach. Harry Deane leans down and hesitantly shakes the man's shoulder.

Deane

Lord Ashdown-Thomas. . . excuse me. . . Harry Deane,
m'lord. . .

With a complicated snarfling sound the old man fights his way to wakefulness.

Ashdown-Thomas

Hm. . . Ah. . . Deane. . . so good of you to come. . .

He adjusts himself to sit more fully upright.

. . . Interesting article on the, uh. . .

He straightens the paper and sets it aside.

. . . Where were we?

Deane

You suggested I drop by, sir. Something about. . . art.

Ashdown-Thomas

Art? Ah yes, you're the Haystacks chappie. Yes yes. Fascinating history. Just been nosing into it.

Deane

Indeed sir.

Ashdown-Thomas

Oh yes. Looted, wasn't it. Expropriated. Nazis, the swine. Nasty stuff. . . nasty stuff. . .

Deane

I'm not sure I know what you're talking about, sir.

Ashdown-Thomas

Oh I think you do, Deane. You and that charming young woman I met on the plane have gotten your hands on this painting somehow. Don't get me wrong: well done. But not quite legal, is it?

Deane

Sir—

Ashdown-Thomas

Not quite this side of the foul line. Belongs to the French, what. Oh, don't get me wrong, Deane: what Johnny Frenchman doesn't know. After all, what have the frogs done for us, lately?

Deane

Well sir, if I did have the painting—

Ashdown-Thomas

If you did and people knew, why it would be repatriated wouldn't it. Taken away from you, without so much as a pat on the back for finding the bloody thing. Mind, no worries on my account, Deane: I appreciate the need for discretion. You can count on Ashdown-Thomas. Oh yes, your secret's safe with old Ashie.

Deane

Thank you, m'lord—

Ashdown-Thomas

But you see here's my problem: the heat, Deane.

An uncomprehending beat, during which we hear only the snores of club members.
Finally:

Deane

. . . Excuse me, sir?

Ashdown-Thomas

The heat. I've got the estate don't you know, forty-four rooms, quite a responsibility. Can't let it go. Obligation to all the generations that have gone before—you can see that, can't you Deane? Well, they're after me to let tourists in. Defray the costs. Pay the heat. Just the weekends, mind, but still—punters parading through the house? The family house? That's not on, is it, Deane?

Deane

Does sound a terrible nuisance, sir.

Ashdown-Thomas

Well there you go. But you're a substantial man, eh Deane? Art baron of sorts? Surely you could contribute something, in appreciation of my discretion? Don't have to put too fine a point on it, do I, Deane?

Deane

No sir. And. . . how much does it cost to heat the place?

Ashdown-Thomas

How the hell should I know.—Oh, I see your point. Yes. Precisely. Oh, only about a thousand quid, I should think.

Deane

A thousand quid.

Ashdown-Thomas

Per month.

Deane

Per m—every month?!

Ashdown-Thomas

Forty-four rooms, Deane.

Deane

Yes sir, but—

Ashdown-Thomas

Just drop it here at the club. Once a month. Starting tomorrow, what. Cash; my name on the envelope. Ashdown-Thomas. Tarsim will take it; you met him downstairs. Good of you to drop by, Deane.

He picks up the newspaper.

. . . Good man. . .

Absently, as he leafs through the paper:

. . . Off you go. . .

INSIDE A RESTAURANT

We are tracking towards Martin Zaidenweber, a young German. He is a pale, severely stylish arts professional wearing black-framed glasses and black wide-wale cuordoroy and a black turtleneck with a heavy nickel-plated zipper up one side.

He nods at the approaching Shabandar and PJ.

Zaidenweber

Shabandar.

Shabandar

Yes, good to see you. Martin Zaidenweber, this is PJ Puznowski.

Zaidenweber

Ah yes, this is her? Good to meet you, yes?

He shakes her hand.

PJ

Well it's very nice to meet you, Martin.

Zaidenweber

Yes, I have heard about the painting, what a story, ja?
Almost incredible. Almost incredible.

Shabandar

I thought you two might as well meet; Martin here will be examining your painting. He's going to curate my private collection.

PJ

I . . . I thought that's what Harry did.

Shabandar looks pained.

Shabandar

For the moment, but, um. . . the man is a bit of an idiot, isn't he?

Zaidenweber

Come now, Shabandar, Harry iss a good man. Not much of an eye, but a good man.

DINING ROOM

Shabandar, PJ, and Zaidenweber sit over a meal.

Zaidenweber

I was five years direktor of the Kunstmuseum in Koln. Before that, I curated the collection of Baron Thyssen-Bornemesa, but the Baron's collection is heavily Flemish—Titian, Rubens. The women, so zaftig and heftig! How many years can you spend looking at the Walloons?

Shabandar

Mm.

Zaidenweber

Without going crazy, eh? The women with their immensichkeit?

Shabandar

Mm.

Zaidenweber

Yes, I prefer the Impressionists and am now considered the top man on Monet. And Manet. And Pissaro. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

PJ

Speakin' of bizarro, I like that turtleneck.

Zaidenweber

Yes? It's from Fritzi's, you know it? Little shop in the Portobello Road, for hip people? I just love it.

PJ

Say, your English is pretty darn good there, Martin—I mean, for someone from the country of Germany.

Zaidenweber

Oh yes, I speak eight languages fluently and I am internet-savvy—you have to be these days, don't you think?

PJ

Well I pluck chickens, so there isn't a lot of call for me to go traipsing around on the interweb.

Zaidenweber is puzzled.

Zaidenweber

I am not familiar with this expression, "I pluck chickens."
But tell me this remarkable thing. This painting was
hanging always in your haus, ever since you remember even
as a little kinder?

PJ

Yup. Well it was in Grandma's house. It's a trailer,
actually. Double-wide, so there's plenty of wall space.

Zaidenweber

Ah-hah.

PJ

Ain't but two kinds of house where I come from: trailer
house or basement house. Gramma has a trailer.

Zaidenweber

Ja, Castle Zaidenweber in Schleswig-Holstein is basement
haus.

PJ

Well, those're safer during tornadoes.

COMPUTER SCREEN

"Sorry. This exceeds your available balance. Your available balance is: £462.26."

Voice

Bloody hell.

Wider shows Harry Deane standing at an ATM machine. He takes out his wallet and
fishes out a credit card.

... Ready cash. . . ready cash. . .

He looks at the screen.

... No. . . over-limit. . . um. . .

LIMO

Shabandar pours champagne for PJ into a fluted glass.

Shabandar

Sorry to be hush-hush this morning about the nature of the dinner, but you see how I wasn't exactly free to talk about it.

PJ

Mm. So Harry's out on his butt, huh?

Shabandar gazes out the window.

Shabandar

Yes, Harry is, as you say, out on his butt. I suppose I shall have to tell him at the Gala. Never pleasant having to let someone go. But it can't be helped. It's not just his competence: I simply don't trust the man.

PJ

Oh I don't know, he seems pretty—

Shabandar

Something a little desperate about the man. Always operating. I like to look a man in the eye: Lionel Shabandar, how do you do, this is what I should like, what do you fancy? Just have out with it, you know.

PJ

Well, I don't know, he's—

Shabandar

Like the lion. The Shabandar lion, proud symbol of my firm. Fierce, yes, but fair.

PJ

It's easier to live up to that kinda thing when you're rich.

Shabandar

I acknowledge that. Yes, I have money. And of course you soon will also. But character is tested in many ways; money brings its own burdens, as you shall see. And you,

my dear, I'm quite certain, shall pass every test. Deane—I don't know.

He muses; shakes his head:

... No. No. Don't trust the man.

PJ

I think you're just lookin' at superficial things. Like my mama allus said, if you can't tell the difference between a pig and a javelina, why, you could lose a chunk outa your ass.

Shabandar looks at her.

Shabandar

... She must have been an extraordinary woman.

A TABLE

At the cut, coins crash onto the table.

Wider shows that we are in Harry Deane's apartment and that he has just emptied his coin jar onto the tabletop. Empty paper coin tubes have been set out for the chore of sorting and stuffing.

A few of the coins have rolled off onto the floor. Harry Deane hastily sets down the empty jar and chases after one coin that is still audibly rolling. He stamps on it, then stoops to pick it up and gather the other stray coins, humming to himself to keep anxiety at bay.

A knock at the door makes him jump.

He swings the door open and, beaming anxiously, admits PJ.

Deane

... Ah! Is our little fish biting?

PJ

Well, he's... he's...

Deane

No problems? He wasn't rude or bullying, I hope?

He chuckles:

. . . You have to make allowances for the poor man; he's a bit of an idiot.

PJ

Uh. . . Naw, he was polite enough. I. . . What're you doin' with your quarters?

Deane

Those, madam, are pounds and pence, not "quarters." Just putting my affairs in order.

She eyes him speculatively:

PJ

Harry Deane, are you tapped out?

He laughs, too long and too loud.

Deane

Oh, hardly. I do this periodically, so as to have use of the jar.

PJ

. . . Uh-huh.

Deane

Mm, I roll the coins and donate the proceeds to charity. Yes. . .

He clears his throat.

. . . Now. Where do we stand with our little affair?—Scheme? Uh, program?

She has trouble finding the words:

PJ

. . . Lookahere, hoss. . . I don't think this is gonna work out.

Deane's smile fades.

Deane

What? Rubbish! Everything is going exactly according to plan! We have the painting—or so Shabandar thinks. And I, my dear, have that credulous boob's confidence. On plan, don't you see.

PJ

Uh-huh. Well, I guess it's just me. Having second thoughts, maybe, or—

Deane

Well it's a little late for that, young lady!

PJ

Don't "young lady" me, hoss!

Deane

Don't "hoss" me, young lady! Look here! I've invested thousands of quid in this little caper—not to mention the Major, who's painted his heart, his soul, his guts into his forgery of "Haystacks, Dusk"! You call the Major! You tell him about your second thoughts, your silly little—what is it, anyway, nerves? cold feet? moral qualms again?!

PJ

Well yeah, that's part of it.

Deane

Ptah! Shabandar has more money than he can count! Don't you see, in that sense, there is no diminishing his fortune! It's a victimless crime—if crime, even, it may be called. Why, if you started tossing into jail every grasping sod who charged too much for a painting, the entire art world would end up behind bars! And anyway, the man is a cold-blooded bully! A shrewd judge of character, perhaps, but he lacks all human sympathy!

PJ

He seems very charming.

This brings Harry Deane up short.

Deane

. . . Charming! What exactly do you mean by “charming”?

PJ

Well, you know, knows how to talk to a lady. Make her feel appreciated.

Harry Deane, hurt, is in a pet:

Deane

Well of course, yes, of course, he’s “charming” in a thoroughly calculating, reptilian, repulsive sort of way. Repulsively charming, I suppose, certainly! Good God, woman, I knew you were naive, provincial, but I—

PJ

And then look at you trash-talkin’ my origins—

Deane

No no! I respect your origins! And your entire double-wide way of life! But, to face facts, it does leave you vulnerable to certain—

PJ

Leaves me vulnerable! You’re the one who’s—Look, I . . . uh, don’t know how to tell you this but . . . Look . . . I’m sorry, but . . . You’re fired.

Deane

Ha-ha! I’m fired! Very amusing. But let me remind you who is running this little enterprise, madame: Moi. And it is you who are fired. Except that you’re not! Yes, you’d like that, wouldn’t you! Nice little holiday in London! Elegant suite at the Connaught! Quantities of seafood untold!

PJ

No, honest: you’re—

Deane

Not yet you’re not fired! I want you to march your nether quarters over to the Connaught, collect your bags, check out without tipping excessively, come back here using public

transportation and it is you, madame, who shall sleep on the davenport this evening!

In a rage, he stamps his foot to underline each point.

. . . And in due course, after Shabandar's Gala, when I have authenticated the Major's beautiful work, then, THEN, we shall discuss the termination of your employment and come to some understanding as to who bears the onus of your ridiculous expenses.

PJ stamps to match his volume:

PJ

Wrong, wrong, and wrong! You are fired, hoss, by Lionel, 'cause he told me so himself! And he innerduced me to a stuck-up Heinie named Martin Zaidenweber who's gettin' your job, and won't be authenticating your dumb old hay painting! And so I'm goin' back to the Connaught to spend the night and might even order up some surf'n turf'n I'm goin' back to Texas tomorrow to try to get m'job back at the chicken plant and maybe I'll even fly premium 'cause it ain't no fault a mine that your whole cockamamie scheme just went blooie!

She storms out, slamming the door, hard, leaving Harry Deane to stare at the spot she has vacated. He is haunted:

Deane

. . . Zaidenweber!

After a long moment, footsteps approaching and a knock at the door.

Harry Deane rouses himself. We are close on him as he mumbles, swinging the door open:

Deane

Well. . . I'm afraid it's a little too late to apologize—

Voice

That it is.

Mr. Knowles, the downstairs neighbor, socks him in the nose.

CLOSE ON HARRY DEANE

He is holding towel-wrapped ice to his face.

Deane

How could he. Zaidenweber. The man is a . . . well, admittedly he knows his way around the Walloons, but when it comes to the Impressionists the man is a helpless ignoramus. . .

Wider shows that we are in the Major's studio. The Major is in a yellow raincoat with yellow gumboots and a big floppy lobster-fisherman's hat, whipping a paint-sodden brush at a canvas on the floor.

Deane is becoming agitated:

. . . No; worse than an ignoramus, because he knows a little and fancies that he knows ever so much! This would be comical if it weren't actually dangerous! And I refer not just to my nose, which, this time I fear, might be well and truly broken!

Major

Perhaps—since our little caper is far from over, sir—perhaps we should consider removing the cartilage.

Deane

Don't be an ass, man! I'm hardly going to be hit in the face a third time!

Major

That was the third time, sir.

Harry Deane stares at him, then explodes:

Deane

This isn't maths class! The point is, what do we do about Zaidenweber, who, once hired on, will not authenticate our dumb old hay painting!

Major

Sir?

Deane

But, perhaps Major, could you not contrive to neutralize him simply with a---with a---well, with a gun of some sort with a silencer screwed onto the tip of the thing, the barrel there?

The Major looks at him sadly:

Major

Mister Deane.

Deane

Hm? Too much? Yes, you're right, too outlandish. This isn't the cinema. Well, all right, I can take care of Zaidenweber. He's almost the lesser problem. How do we get our rogue elephant out of the most expensive hotel in London?

He is flecked by the follow-through from the Major's action painting.

Major

Sorry, sir; haven't quite got the knack of it.

Deane

She is a person without vision. She cannot see the plan and so she will not believe in it. Instant gratification is her modus vivendi, Major, and "discipline" a dirty word.

Major

Though there is something refreshing about her.

He sets down the brush, picks up a paint bucket, and starts sloshing paint onto the canvas.

Deane

"Refreshing"?! Well yes, there's something "refreshing" about plunging into an ice bath and then being flogged with a birch switch!

Absently, smiling in reminiscence as he sloshes paint:

Major

Ah yes, a good flog. . .

LOOKING THROUGH GLASS

It is a long-lensy point-of-view through a plate glass window, framed on the back of a man's head which bobs silently up and down as the man runs in place. He wears a sleeveless sweatshirt and a headset whose cord trails down to a Walkman strapped to his upper arm. Our view is intermittently blocked by cars passing in the foreground.

We hear street noise only; nothing from inside the room. After a beat we hear the phone-filtered tones of a telephone number being dialed.

As we hear the call ring through, the man indoors frantically claws off his headset, gropes at the Walkman on the one arm to turn it off, and then fumbles a cell phone out of a holster strapped to his other arm and brings it to his ear.

Phone-filtered:

Man
Ja?

Present, not phone-filtered:

Harry Deane
Martin?

Man
This is Martin Zaidenweber, ja.

Deane
Martin, it's Harry!

Zaidenweber
. . . Harry Drinkwasser?

Deane
No no, Harry Deane!

We finally cut to Harry Deane, sitting on a bus-stop bench, talking into a cell phone, affectedly jovial as he watches Zaidenweber's back:

. . . From London! How's Cologne?

Zaidenweber reacts, his pace slowing so that the treadmill carries him backward until he catches himself and quickens his pace momentarily, reaching forward to adjust the machine.

Zaidenweber

. . . Koln is. . . not too bad. Ja, I'm in Koln, of course! You catch me at my gym, practicing physical culture. Gaily schvitzing away the kilos. One must fight the heftiness, eh? To live is to struggle!

Deane

Ah, absolutely. Look—I know I'm calling a bit out of the blue, but, well—this is rather embarrassing to say, but—I'm calling to ask if you might have a job on offer any time soon.

Zaidenweber

A. . . job?

Deane

I'd love to work with you, Martin, needless to say, and I'd simply die to be at the Kunstmuseum. You see, I'm going to be free soon. I'm about to kiss Shabandar off.

Zaidenweber

. . . You will kiss him off?

Deane

Yes, quitting. As I say, all a bit embarrassing, but. . . Shabandar's having problems. Business problems. I do feel, for the old man, but—it seems it's all unraveling, getting away from him, certain bank loans, I don't understand these things, but the rumor is he's built himself a bit of a house of cards. Those in the know are all—very quietly, you understand, but—they're all looking for other opportunities. And just last week my, uh. . .

He lowers his voice.

. . . my paycheck didn't clear. Drawn on Shabandar's personal account. Dreadful, having to confront him on it. Proud man. Puts up the big front and all. But it just won't do. I have my own future to think about.

Zaidenweber

Ja. . . ja. . . I can see that.

Deane

This is all very confidential, you understand, but I do hope you'll remember me if you have any personnel needs. Love the collection there. I'm not just Impressionists, you know; I adore the Walloons.

Zaidenweber

Ja, well—don't we all, Harry? Ja, okay, this is food for thought.

LOBBY OF THE CONNAUGHT

Harry Deane enters to talk to the same desk clerk who earlier checked him in. Xander, the bellman, also stands at the ready behind the desk.

Harry is more chipper now than we have seen him in quite some time:

Deane

Evening!

Clerk

Good evening, sir. What can we do for you?

Deane

Well I'm checking my friend out, sorry to say. Lovely room and she's quite enjoyed her stay but the fact of the matter is I can authorize no further charges against my credit card, so it seems we're going to have to chuck her out on her ear.

Clerk

Actually, sir—

Deane

Give her the old heave-ho. Pack her bags, out on the sidewalk.

Clerk

Actually, sir, the charges have been assumed. As of . . .

He checks the computer.

. . . seven o'clock this evening. By another party. In fact I believe she was moved up to a senior suite.

Deane
Moved up to—who the bloody hell. . .

Clerk
Lord Shabandar rang round—actually, you just missed him. He left with the young lady.

Deane
(stunned)
. . . left with. . .

Clerk
In eveningwear.

Harry Deane stares at the clerk. His mouth slowly opens and, eventually, words come out:

Deane
. . . Eveningwear. I see. Excellent. Yes. Good then.

Clerk
But I'm happy to close out your account. . .

He types into the console and a printer grinds into action.

. . . charges accumulated prior to this evening. . . let's see. .
. Yes, here we are. . .

The printer clacks on and on.

. . . just two shakes, sir. . .

One sheet finishes only to fold over so that the printing may continue onto a second. . .
And a third. . .

Harry Deane and the clerk stare at the chattering machine. Long moments pass.

Xander, the bellman, comes up with an icebreaker to fill the awkward wait:

Xander
 . . . How's the, uh. . . "the Major" doing this evening?

Harry Deane is somewhat distracted, eyes on the clacking machine:

Deane
 Hm?. . . Oh, all right I suppose.

The desk clerk winks:

Clerk
 Seems like a busy little fellow.

Harry Deane stares sadly at the clacking printer.

Deane
 Semi-retired, now.

Clerk
 I am sorry sir.

Moroseness all about.

. . . At least it's. . . "semi."

The printer stops.

A beat.

It grinds back into motion to add one more half-page, then stops again.

The clerk is sadly solicitous:

Clerk
 . . . Are we leaving that on the American Express?

RESTAURANT ENTRY

Shabandar is helping PJ off with her coat at the coat check desk:

Shabandar

Not at all—I should be thanking you for tolerating it. You have no idea how stultifying these business meetings are without your charming presence.

PJ

Oh yeah I do. Remember, I met Martin Zaidenweber.

Shabandar

Yes, Zaidenweber.

He laughs, pocketing a coat check.

. . . And it may have been a wasted dinner, at that. Sodding fellow gave me no end of trouble today about hiring on. Very odd.

LOBBY THE CONNAUGHT

Harry Deane is signing a credit-card slip.

Deane

Oh, and, uh, it just occurs to me, uh, I'm afraid I left my glasses up in the room, would the key still work for me to have a look?

Clerk

You're . . . wearing them, sir.

Deane

Excuse me?

The desk clerk points. Harry Deane reaches up and touches his glasses.

Oh—yes! These, to be sure, but my, um, other glasses. Uh, My . . . distance glasses.

Clerk

Ah. Let me run you another key.

DINING ROOM

There is a gong effect as six Japanese businessmen lined up before a table bow in unison.

The reverse shows Shabandar and PJ advancing toward them. They are greeted by one of the Japanese men, who beams:

Man

Hello good day Mr. Shabandar. I am your interpreter from the Konichiwa Publishing group. I am Chuck!

Shabandar

Very pleased to meet you. This is Miss Philomena Puznowski.

Chuck beams at her.

Chuck

I am your interpreter from the Konichiwa Publishing Group. I am Chuck!

The line of men are all fishing out business cards, beaming.

... This a Mister Katsuhara Chon, very powerful bigman of Konichiwa Group, I present Mister Shabandar and Miss Puzpowski.

They all nod and smile.

... This a Akihira Konatonu, assistant to Mister Chon Katsuhara at Konichiwa Group, I present Mister Shabandar-San and Miss Pusowpowska-San.

They shake hands and smile.

... This a Tsimshatsui Aka-aka-aka. . .

It becomes clear that the man stutters.

... Ahhhh sorry. . . Akatsumotu, special assistant to Mister Hanamura Oh, I present—

PJ points to the first man.

PJ

This one was Hanamura Oh?

Chuck

No a he not here. This a bigman Chon Katsuhara, president of—

Shabandar

I think we'll pick up the names just in the course of things, shan't we? It's a pleasure to meet you all.

Chuck says something in Japanese which elicits a chorus of "Ahhh's" from the line of men who then, for some reason, applaud.

Still smiling, Shabandar lowers his voice to PJ:

. . . As I said, these dinners can be difficult.

PJ

Don't worry about it. It beats plucking chickens.

HOTEL ROOM

The door swings open and Harry Deane enters to look around.

He goes to the armoire, wraps his arms around the television set, and tries hoisting it.

Deane

Oh. . . blast. . .

Far too cumbersome. He looks around, casting about. He looks directly up:

The chandelier—huge, many-crystaled.

. . . Huh.

After a moment's thought, he dismisses it.

He looks around, notices a large vase filled with flowers. There is a small card on the table next to the vase.

Brow furrowed, Harry Deane picks up the card and looks at it.

At its top is Shabandar's crest: the rampant lion. Below, a handwritten message:

Hoping you'll honour me this evening with another "Hot Date."

—Lionel

Harry Deane scowls, silently mouthing the words "Hot Date."

He takes the vase and absently dumps the flowers into the trash next to the bureau, and then turns the vase over to inspect its bottom. He looks the vase over carefully, then dismisses it with a—

. . . Bah.

—and sets it back on the bureau. He heads for the door.

HALLWAY

He walks down the hall, dolefully shaking his head. His eye is caught by:

A pedestal holding a large Chinese vase pinlit by a fixture in the ceiling.

Deane leans in to examine the vase more closely.

Deane

Hm. . .

He runs appraising fingers over it.

He looks one way up the hall: Empty.

He looks the other way up the hall: Empty.

He turns back to the vase and tips it on its base to examine the underside.

Um-hm. . .

He stares at it, brow knit, biting his lip.

One more quick look either way along the hall and he gingerly lifts the vase off its base, surprised at its weight.

He hurries down the hallway cradling the bulky vase but is brought up short by the sound of a door opening down the hall in front of him.

Midway down the long hallway we see the ample behind of a chambermaid as she backs into the hall pulling a service cart.

We pull Harry Deane as he turns, panicked, and hurries down the hallway from whence he came. Behind him we can see the maid struggling to get the cart out of the room into the hallway. Just as she turns toward us, Deane exits left.

LINEN CLOSET

Deane cautiously shuts the door behind him. It is a long service closet stocked with linens and room supplies and dimly lit by a small window at the far end.

Deane listens at the door. We hear the squeak of the the service cart as it approaches and stops outside the door.

Deane presses himself back into an alcove holding a small slop sink with a mop propped in it. We hold on him as we hear the closet door opening.

The maid enters. She pulls a couple of rolls of toilet paper off a shelf and puts them on her cart. She takes a bottle of Gordon's gin from where it is hidden behind a boxful of shampoo tubes and takes a slug off it. She replaces it and leaves.

Harry Deane cautiously emerges from the alcove.

We hear a key turning in the door and the unmistakable CLACK of the lock snapping into place.

Deane

Good lord.

We hear the cart squeaking away.

Harry Deane goes to the door, encumbered by the vase, and awkwardly tests the knob with one hand. It is indeed locked. He rattles it vigorously, to no end.

. . . Bloody hell.

He looks quickly about, places the vase behind some towels, and returns to the door to bang on it.

... Hello!

No response.

He backs up to get run-up room and then launches himself into the door, taking the impact on one shoulder.

No give. Harry Deane massages his shoulder.

He looks desperately around. His look settles on:

The small window at the far end.

He goes to it and opens it with some effort, and then steps up onto a vacuum cleaner to get sufficient height to peer out.

His point-of-view: three stories below, the street. It is a long way down. Off to one side is the awning of the hotel's front entryway. A doorman, very foreshortened, strolls back and forth.

Harry Deane goes back to the door, bangs on it:

... Hello?

RESTAURANT

Shabandar, PJ, and the Japanese executives are seated around a low table eating shabu-shabu. The men, ties loosened, have been drinking.

Chuck passes a glossy magazine over to Shabandar.

Chuck

This a "Rolick" magazine, aim at young professional man
of general interest. . .

Shabandar politely flips through it.

Shabandar

Mm.

Chuck

This a "Sunny Outdoors" magazine, aim at a man and woman all old ages recreational and middle professional. . .

The magazine has pictures of young women in bathing suits in natural settings.

Shabandar

Mm.

Chuck

This "Let's Young!" magazine, for young teenage student and household offspring. Combined circulation for Konichiwa Group: forty-two million sometimes, I think, yes.

Shabandar

Yes yes, mm, very impressive, and of course I'm familiar with the figures.

He looks around the table.

. . . Very impressive magazines. Very good.

A brief translation from Chuck brings a murmuring, smiling reaction.

. . . However.

This gets a one-word translation from Chuck. The tableful of men sobers.

. . . My offer for the Group was made in pounds sterling, not yen, though you may well have discussed it internally in terms of yen. But the recent drop of your currency relative to the pound would raise my cost fully ten percent if I were to cover it, and that, gentlemen, is an obligation I never undertook, and do not propose to undertake now.

The men, including Chuck, stare at him.

When Chuck rouses himself and speaks in Japanese all heads swivel to him. When he lapses into silence, all heads swivel back to Shabandar. They look at him now in various attitudes of shock, horror, and disbelief.

After a moment of silence, dark murmurings begin.

Bigman Chon Katsuhara portentously clears his throat.

The men fall silent and look at him.

He speaks, at some length.

As he finishes there is much murmuring and nodding in agreement.

Chuck, also nodding, turns to Shabandar.

Chuck

There is snow on the mountains in the winter and man, in despair, cannot walk to the next valley, but in spring, snow melts and is remembered in tranquility.

Shabandar stares.

PJ, however, is nodding:

PJ

Yeah, sure.

Shabandar's look to her tells PJ that he is in the dark.

. . . Yeah, see, I think the Bigman here is tryin' to tell ya that, okay, he may a been tough on the price and a real sonofa-bitch up til now but if ya kinda party down with him so he don't lose face maybe things'll go your way although he ain't about to say it straight out and look like a wimp.

Shabandar appraises.

Shabandar

. . . That's an extraordinary feat of explication. I think you're absolutely right.

She lowers her voice:

PJ

If you really wanna butter these boys up you outa have 'em all out to the house, you know, break bread, mano a mano? Have 'em out for the Gala, why dontcha?

Shabandar

Mm, what a bore, but—I'm sure you're right. Yes, let's.

PJ raises her voice to the executives:

PJ

Hey boys, we got a poem too: Through arroyos and llanos,
wherever we roam, be it ever so humble, they ain't no place
like home.

The executives turn to Chuck and await translation. Chuck stares at PJ.

LINEN CLOSET

Harry Deane sits on the floor, knees up in front of him, elbows on knees, the Gordon's gin in one hand. His tie is loosened, his shirt is rumpled, and he is very lightly sheened with sweat.

He glances at his watch. He gives a halfhearted bang at the door.

He sighs. He looks over at:

The open window.

He caps the gin, sets it aside, and rises, sighing:

Deane

All right. . . not so terribly difficult. . .

He picks up the vase and goes to the window and reaches through to place the vase on the ledge outside, and then slowly, reluctantly, gingerly, using the vacuum cleaner as a step, he hoists himself up and out, muttering:

. . . Just one foot in front of the other. . .

EXT LEDGE

He is crouched on a very narrow ledge. Legs trembling, he slowly stands. He does a tentative kneebend and picks up the vase and then slowly straightens again with the vase hugged to his chest.

Back pressed against the wall, he edges his way along the ledge, with occasional glances down, until he arrives at an obstacle: a quarter-circle of iron grillwork with pointy spokes, bolted into the right angle formed by the ledge and exterior wall.

He leans cautiously over the obstacle to place the vase on the far side of the ledge, then carefully swings one leg over the grillwork to plant it on the far side. He gives a couple of short, shuffling hops to open up a little space to plant his other foot.

He hesitates a moment, then swings the other leg up and over. Just as he starts to lower it, the pants leg snags on one of the spokes.

He wiggles his leg sideways, trying to unsnag it. No go. He reaches carefully out with one hand to tug upwards on his pants leg. This also accomplishes nothing.

He slowly, fearfully, begins to hop up and down, jiggling his leg with each upward hop to free it. This too fails.

He unbuckles his belt, unzips his pants, and starts to wriggle out of them.

LIMO

Shabandar is pouring PJ yet another glass of champagne.

Shabandar

I must thank you for all the help you've given me. I do so hope you'll stay on a bit, even after the Gala. I could use somebody with your. . . qualities.

PJ

Yeah I guess I got qualities at that.

She reacts to the liberal pour:

. . . Pete's sake, Lionel, this time I think you really are tryin' to get me drunk. On top a all that rice wine.

He chuckles.

Shabandar

Well, why not. No more business this evening; this is the strictly social part of the date.

HARRY DEANE

Now with his pants off, he stands in shorts and shoes on the ledge.

Deane

Great gobbins.

He snaps the pants, whiplike, to try to free them. Still stuck. He gives one more snap, very vigorous, and the pants come loose and fly out of his hand.

... bloody...

They flutter away towards the awning below. As we follow them down we see the doorman going out to meet an arriving limo.

GROUND LEVEL

We are close on the doorman as he opens the limo's back door. Behind him we see the pants falling into the background and snagging like a parachute on the limbs of a potted tree—one of two that stand to either side of the awning.

PJ and Shabandar climb out of the car.

HARRY DEANE

His high point-of-view shows the pants draped on the tree far below, and Shabandar and PJ talking. Harry Deane is outraged enough to momentarily forget his predicament:

Deane

... What the...

His own vulnerability registers and he presses himself back against the wall, trying to make himself invisible.

GROUND LEVEL

Shabandar stoops to talk in to the chauffeur:

Shabandar

I'll ring you.

He straightens as the limo pulls out.

PJ

Well, Lionel, it's been—

Shabandar

I hope you shouldn't think me too forward if I should do this.

He takes her in his arms and kisses her. Her eyes widen. Her angle up toward Shabandar makes her eyes climb, and they lock on:

Her point-of-view, steeply up: three stories above, Harry Deane stands on the ledge in his undies, hugging a Ming vase to his chest. He returns her goggle of surprise.

PJ backs away from Shabandar, who takes in her dumbfounded look. She seems to have lost control of her eyes, which dart up and down.

Shabandar is smug:

. . . Well that seems to have had the desired effect.

He kisses her again.

HARRY DEANE

Gazing down.

Deane

Why that bloody. . . that. . . that tart!

GROUND LEVEL

As PJ breaks away:

PJ

Lionel, this ain't the place—

Lionel

Nonsense, madame. This is what hotels are for.

He takes her arm and starts leading her inside. She lags slightly, her look rising again.

HARRY DEANE

Watching her, outraged. He gesticulates and stage whispers:

Deane
My pants! My bloody trousers! Right there!

From high we see her head tilt back to keep him in view as she is pulled towards the door—

. . . In the tree! You tart!

—until she disappears under the canopy.

. . . Out snogging about! While I'm . . . I'm bloody . . .
trying to stay on plan! Acch!

He starts inching along the ledge, murmuring:

. . . This is . . . absurd . . .

He comes to a darkened window. He cups his free hand at the window and peers in.

From inside the room: Harry Deane stares in, his breath rhythmically fogging the glass.

Outside: Having satisfied himself that the room is empty, he crouches, curls his fingers at the window sash, and lifts. He climbs cautiously in.

INSIDE

He looks around. A sitting room: sofa and chairs, a desk. He advances quietly across the carpet towards the door.

Halfway there he is frozen by a knock. He stands, paralyzed.

The knock vigorously repeats.

A side door is thrown open and the overhead light is switched on to bathe the room in light. The woman who is entering from the bedroom in response to the knock is middle-

aged. She wears a nightrobe that covers an ample, dowager-like body. She also wears some jewelry even in nightwear, and has hair set in cast-iron waves.

Harry Deane stands rooted to the middle of the floor, holding the vase, in plain view.

The woman would see him were she to turn her head, which, however, she does not do. As she proceeds to the hall door Harry Deane looks wildly about for a hiding place. There is none.

The woman opens the door.

Standing in the hallway is Xander the bellman.

Xander

Evening, ma'am. I'm terribly sorry, but they're telling me tomorrow evening's Kirov ballet is quite sold out. And it's the last performance.

The woman has a fluting, tremulous, aristocratic voice:

Woman

Oh, my.

Behind the woman's back as she faces the door—and a mere couple of steps away—stands Harry Deane, having summoned sufficient sang-froid to place the vase on the desk, where it looks not unnatural. He is looking pensively down at a guest magazine lying open on the desktop and, though pantless, he seems to be unself-consciously absorbed in the article. He looks up to give Xander a nonchalant wave.

Xander smiles in response and addresses the question to whomever:

Xander

Shall we try "The Cherry Orchard" at the Duke of York?

Woman

Yes, let's.

Xander

. . . Still just . . . the one ticket?

Behind her, Harry Deane gives a shrug of disinterest in the theater.

Woman

Yes. . . Just the one.

Xander

As you please. Have a good evening.

Woman

Yes, I shall try. Straight back into bed, you know. My husband doesn't arrive until Thursday.

Behind her, Harry Deane gives a smile of smug proprietorship. Xander's smile is equally knowing:

Xander

Well, two days.

He slips the Do Not Disturb sign off the inside knob, waggles it at the woman, and then places it on the outside knob and withdraws.

Harry Deane watches as the woman goes back to the bedroom door, turns off the sitting room light, but then freezes, hand on the doorknob, without exiting. She is staring straight ahead into space, concentrating, a statue. Harry Deane stares at her in suspense.

At length, a fart.

With this the woman relaxes and proceeds through the door, shutting it behind her.

HALLWAY

Seconds later. We are side-on on Harry Deane as he backs out of the room into the hall, easing the door shut. Beyond him we see the long, empty stretch of carpeted hallway.

He coaxes the door gently. . . gently. . . into latching shut with barely a sound, and then, relieved, turns to go, but—immediately stops, reacting to:

An open door directly across the hall. A man and woman stare at him, frozen in the act of exiting their room. They are of late middle-age, dressed for dinner, the man with a walking stick, the woman with a heavily brocaded handbag.

Harry Deane, pantless, tries to summon an air that is matter-of-fact, yet friendly:

Deane

Evening. Uh. . .

After the briefest moment's thought:

. . . uh. . . Just nipping down the hall for some ice. . .

He delicately clears his throat. The couple gapes he strolls down the hall and turns a corner.

As soon as he is out of sight he trots at double-time down the new stretch of hall. Passing the elevator bank he is brought up short by the ding of an arriving car.

He avails himself of the only hiding place at hand: the stairwell next to the elevators. He enters it just as the elevator door opens.

STAIRWELL

Harry Deane stands just inside the stairwell door, listening. His eyes widen:

Shabandar's Voice

—of course you can fly private, but then you have to spend the time, don't you. Whereas with the other, yes, the compartment was small, but you didn't lose a working day. Three hours across the Atlantic. Gone now. All those trans-continental memories. . .

Harry Deane cracks the door to peer out.

His point-of-view shows Shabandar's and PJ's backs as he escorts her down the hall.

They arrive at PJ's door which she opens, and then turns to face Shabandar:

PJ

Uh-huh. Well thanks for escorting me up, Lionel, but I'm pretty tuckered—uh. . . out. . .

She has lost her concentration, looking over Shabandar's shoulder directly at the cracked-open stairwell door, her eyes widening.

Harry Deane, having caught her eye, points animatedly at Shabandar's back and turns his palms up with a broad look of inquiry: What's going on?

PJ's attention is split:

... I should really, uh—

Shabandar

Oh nonsense, let's have a nightcap.

Harry Deane vigorously shakes his head, mouthing No. PJ squints at him.

PJ

... Wha?

Shabandar

A nightcap. That's code, really, for a little more conversation. . .

Harry Deane desperately shakes his head again. He jabs his finger toward Shabandar's back and then jerks his thumb over his shoulder: Get rid of him.

PJ

I, uh. . .

Shabandar

... and then, who knows. . .

Harry Deane even more vigorously jerks his thumb, and then saws his hand across his throat, his jaw clenched and his eyes rolling.

PJ's eyes shift back and forth.

PJ

... Yeah, okay, cool.

She takes care to let Shabandar precede her in and uses the brief moment behind his back to crane enquiringly toward Harry Deane. She squints down at where his pants would be were he wearing any, and then back up at him with a disbelieving shake of the head.

He stares at her horrified, both hands held up to his face: What are you doing?

Her door finishes closing. Harry Deane shakes his head.

He opens the door wider and sticks his head out.

Xander, who has been waiting for the elevator, smiles.

Xander

Evening, Mr. Deane.

Harry Deane once again musters the same nonchalant wave of greeting that he deployed in the dowager's room.

His attention is drawn by the sound of a door: the one next to the door PJ just entered has swung open. PJ peeks out: apparently it is another door to the same suite. She hisses at Harry Deane and with a wave signals that he should join her.

Xander looks from her to Harry Deane, who smiles.

Deane

Evening.

He crosses the hall, pantless, and enters as directed by PJ's arm waving him in.

PJ'S BEDROOM

She shuts the door after him. Pocket doors separate this bedroom from the sitting room where, presumably, Shabandar waits. And indeed we hear his voice booming in:

Shabandar's Voice

Quite an extensive bar. What're you having?

PJ projects:

PJ

Uh, well, lemme think. . . I'll be right there.

When she turns to Harry Deane she speaks in an urgent whisper:

. . . What're you doing here? What happened to your pants?

Deane

They're hanging on the tree downstairs. What're you doing with Shabandar?

PJ

They're what?

Deane

Hanging . . . on . . . the tree. Downstairs. Good lord, I could hardly put it more plainly.

Booming in from the sitting room next door:

Shabandar's Voice

Let's see, there's scotch, gin, champagne, Jagermeister. . .

PJ

Why'd you hang 'em on a tree—it ain't Christmas, Harry Deane.

Deane

I didn't hang them there; why did you invite Shabandar into your room? Do your orgiastic impulses know no limits—yes, you've been drinking, haven't you?

PJ

How would you know?

Shabandar's Voice

Best not to mix, eh? Stick with the champagne?

PJ

All right, so what if I have? I didn't call nothin' on you even though you stink a gin. And anyway I had to ask him in here so he wouldn't see you. And if I wanna have a nightcap, well, I'm of drinking age and votin' age and the age of consent and we ain't in a dry county and I can have anyone I want up to my room 'cause it ain't no boarding-house and you ain't payin for it no more anyways.

There is the loud POP of a champagne cork launching, and it shoots into the room.

Shabandar's Voice

Ha-ha-ha. Sorry. Love the pop of a champagne cork. Coming out? Or are you—heh-heh—slipping into something more comfortable?

PJ

Yeah, I'm—that's right.

She starts to strip. Harry Deane is appalled. He hisses:

Deane

Well. Apparently your sense of shame is well and truly atrophied. Not only do you not seek to excuse your wanton behavior, you—

PJ

My behavior! Why don't you go first: why were you out on the ledge, what's in that vase, and why're your pants in a tree?

Harry Deane is resentful:

Deane

You know, you're a very suspicious person really. There was nothing in the vase. As for the rest of it, well, look—I—it's involved, but—you know, unlike your shenanigans, there's a sensible plan governing my behaviour, it's—if you'll remember old Ashie, the uh the uh the uh codger you met on the airplane since you had to travel first class and eat special little lobster salads and various things en crouete, fine, well I went to his club and it seems you were absolutely right about his estate but it's dank and nasty as I suppose most of those places are and the greedy old bastard—

Shabandar's Voice

Ready or not, here I come!

PJ shrieks:

PJ

Hang on, Lionel, I ain't decent yet!

Shabandar

Fear not. . .

The pocket doors slide open and Shabandar marches in. Harry Deane stands rooted in place, next to PJ, in plain view. Shabandar does not slow:

. . . I need to use the head, but shall respect your modesty.

He is crossing the room, eyes averted, and indeed with one hand cupped to his forehead to prevent peeking.

He enters the bathroom and closes the door.

Crisis averted, Harry Deane and PJ's looks return to each other and they stare for a dumb beat, both semi-clad.

Deane

. . . I suppose it would be out of the question for you to dash down and grab my trousers.

PJ

Harry Deane, you get outa here. . .

She shooshes him toward the door.

. . . You go get your own damn—

As she opens the door we see the backs of the well dressed couple as they stand waiting for the elevator. The man turns toward us and squints in.

Harry Deane turns to PJ. Viva voce, as he reaches for the door to close it:

Deane

You, uh, haven't any ice then?

Door closed, PJ squints at him:

PJ

. . . What?

Shabandar's Voice

What did you say?

PJ tries to find her voice's deepest register:

PJ

Do we have ice?

Shabandar's Voice

No darling, not for champagne! Are you decent? Coming out. . .

Harry Deane hastens to the window and throws it open.

PJ

Harry!

Deane

It's all right, I've practiced.

He clammers out just as the bathroom door opens and PJ sweeps the drapes shut behind him.

LEDGE

Harry Deane has a view through the crack between the drapes:

Shabandar is emerging in a white terrycloth Connaught bathrobe with an ascot suavely knotted at his neck, holding a bottle of champagne. Muffled, we hear:

Shabandar

I've never told you—have I?—the story of the Shabandar lion?

Deane

Ugh!

He creeps away. Once he has achieved some distance he cautiously stands, and then shuffles over to the next window, which is dark. He cups his hands at the window.

From inside: Harry Deane looking in, his breath rhythmically fogging the window.

His point-of-view: a darkened sitting room.

Outside: Harry Deane stoops, curls his fingers under the sash, noiselessly lifts the window, and enters.

INSIDE

He is creeping silently towards the door when he notices something on the desk he is passing:

The vase. Where he left it. The dowager's room that he left many minutes ago.

Deane

Huh.

He goes over, wraps his arms around it, and is just straightening when he is frozen by a knock at the door.

Like a recurring nightmare, the side door once again swings open and the overhead light is again switched on; the nightrobed woman heads for the hall door.

When she opens it to Xander and we again cut back around to her, we see that Harry Deane this time has seated himself next to the desk where, legs crossed, he once again pretends to be absorbed in the guest magazine.

Xander

Stroke of luck, madam. One ticket left for "The Cherry Orchard," third row orchestra, aisle seat.

Woman

Ah, wonderful.

Xander

Well, I'll book that straightaway—

He stops short, staring at something.

. . . Tsk. That's where it is.

He enters the room, shaking his head as he darkly murmurs:

. . . Housekeeping.

He goes to the desk and leans past Harry Deane toward the vase:

. . . Excuse me, Mr. Deane.

Deane smiles graciously, then goes back to the magazine.

The woman's look, following Xander, has landed on Harry Deane. Neither now pays any attention to Xander, who wraps his arms around the vase and carries it to the door, still shaking his head:

. . . Sometimes I think they tipple.

He reaches out with one hand to close the door:

... Shan't bother you again. And I'll tell the switchboard
to put a Do Not Disturb on room 418.

The door closes.

The woman continues to stare at Harry Deane, too stunned to speak.

Harry Deane looks innocently up. He looks at the woman for a beat. His eyes narrow
and his brow furrows:

Deane

... Four eighteen?

LOBBY

The clerk is behind his desk, sorting through some letters. He looks up as the lobby
elevator bell dings.

The door opens and Harry Deane emerges and strides through the lobby, still pantless.
His demeanor is matter-of-fact as he passes:

Deane

Evening.

Clerk

Good evening, sir. Find the eyeglasses?

Deane

Yes yes. . .

He slaps at his breast pocket, not breaking his stride:

... Got them right here.

The desk clerk glances at Harry Deane's bare legs.

Clerk

... Not forgetting anything else, are we sir?

Deane

Hm? No, shouldn't think so.

Harry Deane disappears out the front door, and the clerk murmurs:

Clerk

Extraordinary fellow. . .

FADE OUT

FADE IN: MORNING

Harry Deane paces back and forth on the sidewalk opposite the Connaught, rumpled and unshaven. He notices:

PJ, emerging from the hotel, wearing sunglasses, looking a little the worse for wear.

Deane

Hey!

She sees him, rolls her eyes, but trots across the street. Harry Deane's manner is cold:

. . . Our friend Mr. Shabandar left the hotel at 3:18 this morning with a rather smug expression on his face.

PJ

Harry Deane, are you spying on me?

Deane

Very far from it. No, it's something I just couldn't help noticing as I sat—huddled, I should say—on this bench all night. Seducing Mr. Shabandar was not, need I remind you, part of our plan.

PJ

Well, like Mama always used to say: you should scratch it if it itches, even if it's in your britches.

Harry Deane stares at her.

Deane

. . . Miss, I've heard sufficient of your mother's gnomish utterances! I—

PJ

Aw relax, Harry Deane. Look. Face it. Our "plan" ain't exactly operational any more. Lionel's been showin' me a good time, treatin' me like a lady, and there's this party tonight, and it's dressy, and I aim to enjoy that too—all of it—before I gotta go back and resume pluckin' chickens. And why not? Huh, Harry?

Deane

No, you're wrong. We do have a plan. Everything is on track—

PJ

Harry Deane. . .

She is exasperated but, gazing at him, her tone softens:

. . . Siddown. Come on.

She sits on the bench and pats the space next to her. He grudgingly sits. She takes off her sunglasses and folds them.

. . . We gotta have a little talk about who's who in the world here. Look, there's two kinds of people: big shots like Lionel, with big deals and big cars and manners and all. And then there's commoners. Like us. You look at yourself, running around all desperate and cockamamie and at loose ends pretending you're gonna make millions and millions of dollars. Harry Deane, it ain't gonna happen. You're not Lionel. I like you fine, but you gotta quit trying to be something you're not. I don't; I know I'm goin' back to that chicken plant. That's okay. You just bein' you is okay.

Deane

That was a lovely, heartfelt sentiment. And I can appreciate how certain unforeseen wrinkles in my plan—the blame for which cannot be laid at my door—may well have conspired to diminish your confidence in me. However. Consider that you may still have an obligation to me, having incurred not insignificant expense, having pledged a certain level of cooperation, and having. . .

He gropes, uncomfortable, clearing his throat.

. . . having wounded me personally by. . . fraternizing with a man who does not deserve your respect, who is a cynical manipulator of those less powerful, and a degenerate nudist at that—

PJ

Look, Harry Deane, the only person I seen traipsing around London in his underwear is you.

Deane

That is not the point—

PJ

I just think it would be nice spending some time with you when you wasn't all wrapped up in your crazy scheme and could maybe ungrit your teeth a little bit.

Deane

That would be lovely. After this evening. . .

PJ

Okay, okay, I get it.

She looks at Harry, disappointed.

. . . I think it's trouble, but I'll play along at the party tonight. I don't agree about Lionel, but I'll play along if that's what you want. Will that end it?

Deane

Thank you, madam. Yes. That is all I ask.

She leans forward and kisses him.

He is at first surprised by the kiss but then warms to it, returning it.

At length:

. . . And perhaps after tonight we shall be able to do that with my teeth ungrit.

She laughs.

PJ

Maybe.

Deane

Oh, I'm certain of it. As I am certain that, after tonight, you shall have reason to admire the skills of a reborn, reinvigorated, surprisingly capable Harry Deane.

He ambles off.

A NEW STREET

Harry Deane turns onto the new street, whistling.

Voice

'Ere!

A middle-aged man in a jogging outfit, stockily built and with a broad genial face, is approaching. He holds an ice cream cone.

. . . Mister Deane, is it?

Deane

Well. . . yes?

Man

Won't be a second, kids!

He has shouted this at a car parked across the street in which three children sit waiting, each holding an ice cream cone. The man chuckles:

. . . Bloomin' kids won't let me pass an ice cream parlor wifout I pops in and buys 'em one. Course I always break down and gets one meself. Do I need to be eatin' ice cream!

Deane

Yes. No. I suppose it is highly caloric; look—excuse me—who are you?

Man

Oh, just a friend of a man wants to be friends wif you. All very friendly, 'e was hopin' it would be. But then yesterday you never give 'im 'is wittle present, and 'ere 'e is now finkin' was we friends a wasn't we?

Deane

Ah yes. Lord Ashdown-Thomas.

Man

That's the one.

He glances at the street. A bus is approaching.

... 'Ere we go. Hold this for me, would ya?

He is handing over the ice cream cone. Harry Deane reflexively takes it, and looks at it, puzzled.

Deane

Thanks, I don't really—woof!

The man has socked him in the nose.

Man

Fanks ever so.

The bus clears to restore our view of the children in the car still watching, holding their ice creams.

The genial man reaches and takes back the cone.

... Didn't want the nippers to see that. They're exposed to enough voilence on the telly, are nay? I wanna frow the bleedin' fing out, but the wife won't wet me. Why should she be deproived, is 'er point.

Harry Deane touches a finger to his nose and sees that it is bleeding.

Deane

Bloody hell!

Man

Well, marriage is compromise, idden it?

Deane

Great gobbins. . .

Man

So 'is Lordship wanted me to remind you about 'is wittle present. Not much considerin' you got the bleedin' Haystacks, hey? I mean! It's a bloomin' masterpiece, idden it? Crikey, the treatment of loit! And a real picture, I mean, figurative-like, none a this abstract rubbish, Mark Bleedin' Roffko and that lot. I mean by roits the fing should be hangin' in the Jeu de bloomin' Paume! Now, 'is Lordship, 'e don't begrudge you enjoyin' it inna comfort of your domicile; let's not begrudge 'im 'is wittle present. Idden at roit, matey?

Deane

Yes. I think I understand.

Man

Roit. You don't wanna be seein' me and the kiddies again.

Deane

I don't mind the kiddies.

Man

Heh-heh.

He chucks Harry Deane on the shoulder.

. . . Good riposte, mate.

THE SHABANDAR LION

On the gate at Shabandar's country house. Headlights play over it. It is evening.

ENTRYWAY

Rolls Royces and Jaguars and other luxury vehicles clog the roundabout in front of the main door. Partygoers emerge from their cars in evening dress, donning or adjusting

ornate, heavy Venetian masks as they get out. A masked ball. Much excited chatter.

One chauffeured car discharges PJ, who is wearing an elaborately spangled dress of vaguely Western cut. Her facewear is a simple black Lone Ranger mask.

She takes in the opulence.

PJ

Zowie.

BACK ENTRANCE

Off the kitchen. Servants scurry about prepping trays of food. Harry Deane and the Major, dressed for the party but with their masks pushed back on top of their heads, supervise workmen who are unloading a large flat crate from the back of a truck. One laborer hoists a large reinforced tube.

Workman

This the painting?

Deane

The painting is in the crate; that's my easel so I can look at the bloody thing. They both go up. You can uncrate the painting in the gallery, I'll have a look at it up there.

Footman

I'm sorry, Mr. Deane, but that's not possible.

Deane

Excuse me?

Footman

The gallery's closed. With all the people in the house we've had to, er. . . "activate" the security system, if you catch my meaning.

Deane

Yes, fine, no matter—do go ahead bring it up. . .

As he heads out towards the noise of the party:

. . . I'm authorized up there, I'll just pop out and ask

Shabandar to disarm the security.

THE GREAT ROOM

A small orchestra plays. People mill about, some drinking, some dancing.

Someone wearing a lion mask approaches PJ. He tilts the mask up—it is, of course, Shabandar—to greet her.

Shabandar

Hello my darling. I'm so pleased you could make it, and that you've decided to consummate our little transaction. Perhaps, by way of celebration, you will allow me to try again to consummate our other little, er, affair.

PJ

Aw, Lionel, you can try all you want. But it's like my mama used to say: ya can't breed a steer with a starling.

Shabandar

Ha-ha. You think we're so terribly different?

PJ

Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed it last night, hearing about your business deals and the food on the Concorde and such. But—

Voice

Shabandar-san!

It is a man wearing a kabuki mask.

. . . It is I, Chuck!

Behind him, a line of men in kabuki masks bows.

. . . We wish to thank you for extending the hospitality of your home!

Shabandar

Oh quite, I'm so delighted that you were able to come. I see you've managed to find the bar. . .

The men in kabuki masks do indeed hold rock glasses full of amber liquid.

... There's also a quite extensive buffet in the still room.

Chuck bows:

Chucks

Many thanks, Shabandar-san.

They drift off.

Shabandar

I do hope you were right about all of this making them more tractable. The trouble with dealing with a foreign culture is that they're so difficult to read. Without the common Judeo-Christian frame of reference, you see.

Harry Deane is joining them.

... Ah, Deane.

PJ

Well, they probably think you're pretty strange too, Lionel. What with your being a nudist and all.

Shabandar

What with my—being a nudist, did you say?

Deane

Yes sir, nothing wrong with that, is there?

Shabandar

What the devil are you talking about?

Harry Deane clears his throat.

Deane

Well—I understood you to say once that you attend the, uh, Eden Retreat?

Shabandar

T'isn't a nudist gathering. Someone's been having you on, Deane. The Retreat is an adjunct to the economic summit

at Davos.

He shakes his head, pained by Deane's idiocy.

. . . Good lord, it's one of the most formal gatherings one could possibly imagine. Once again, you seem to have gotten things back-to-front.

Harry Deane is mightily embarrassed:

Deane

Yes, er. . . I see. Sorry, sir.

Shabandar

Oh, it's nothing, but, uh. . . Deane, we need to have a private talk. Something I have to—blast, here they come again.

The kabuki-masked men are once again approaching.

. . . What do I do with them, PJ?

PJ

Aw, I can handle these old boys.

Deane

Well, I shall pop up and examine the painting. . . Cheers, everyone.

Ignored by Shabandar, Harry Deane takes the opportunity to slink off.

Shabandar greets the approaching Japanese:

Shabandar

Gentlemen! Found some tuck, have we?

PJ

Say, any a you boys ever hear of live karaoke?

IN THE CROWD

As Harry Deane approaches the foot of the central staircase his elbow is touched by a

man in a Venetian mask that rather resembles the sad side of the mask of Janus. A voice issues from beneath the fixed frown:

Weepy Face

I say, I really must trouble you for that thousand quid, Deane.

Deane

I—er—Lord Ashdown-Thomas. . .

Ashdown-Thomas

I'm a patient man, Deane. Slow to anger. Faithful friend. Valuable ally. But. Once provoked, an implacable foe. Don't have to put too fine a point on it, do I Deane?

Deane

No sir. And tomorrow I shall certainly—

Ashdown-Thomas

Let's hope so, Deane. I understand you work for Shabandar. Very good friend of mine. I should hate to have to make your problem his problem. Hardly fair, that, eh, Deane?

Deane tears himself away from the weepy face:

Deane

No sir. And I promise that, tomorrow, you shall have no cause to.

Ashdown-Thomas

All right, Deane. Good fellow. . .

BANDSTAND

PJ is consulting with the bandleader who nods and then turns to strike up the band.

They begin "My Way."

Bigman Chon stands in front of the band, his mask pushed up on top of his head so that he is free to sing into a hand mike. He supplies a heavily accented vocal.

UPSTAIRS

An upstairs gallery, dimly lit. Rather grand, marble floors, unsittable furniture. We can faintly hear the music continuing downstairs.

Harry Deane is walking towards the easel on which two workmen are placing "Haystacks, Dusk." The empty painting crate and easel tube are just nearby.

Deane

Thanks, gents. That'll do.

The two men nod. Harry Deane shoves his hands in his pockets and looks idly at the painting as we hear the workmen's echoing footsteps recede, followed by the echoing slam of a door.

The door slam cues a look in that direction from Harry Deane, and his manner is now a little more focused.

He looks at "Haystacks, Dawn" on the wall just nearby, then back at "Dusk" on the easel. He is struck by a thought:

. . . Oh, shit! Security!

He looks up at the corner where two walls meet ceiling—where, he had previously imagined, a video camera would sit.

The corner is in fact empty.

Another corner: also empty.

DOWNSTAIRS

"My Way" is just ending, to polite applause. Bigman Chon beams, sweating but happy.

PJ applauds energetically and Shabandar, next to her, applauds with a little more restraint. Bigman Chon presses the microphone on Shabandar:

Chon

"God Save a Queen"?

Shabandar shakes his head, smiling:

Shabandar

No, no, I couldn't possibly. . .

Chon

"Three Times a Lady"?

Some of the Japanese loudly encourage:

Japanese

Kenny Rogers! Kenny Rogers!

Shabandar

No, my voice is no match for yours I'm afraid, and my dignity doesn't allow it.

Chon is stunned:

Chon

Aaaahh. . . .

His entourage is also stunned:

Japanese

Aaaahh. . .

Bigman Chon darkly shakes his head.

Chon

Must sing.

PJ, smelling trouble, steps in:

PJ

Well heck, you're supposed to invite the lady to sing first.

This mollifies the Bigman. PJ turns to the bandleader:

. . . You boys know "Pecos Bill"?

UPSTAIRS

Faintly, we can hear the orchestra striking up. Harry Deane looks this way and that: in

each direction, empty gallery.

He steps back over to "Haystacks, Dawn" and gazes up at it.

DOWNSTAIRS

PJ sings lustily:

PJ

Pecos Bill was quite a cowboy
Down in Texas. . .

She extends the microphone toward the crowd. From under the kabuki masks, a lusty:

Japanese

Down in Texas!

Bigman Chon, clearly delighted, raises his tumbler of scotch and salutes Shabandar.

Shabandar raises his glass in acknowledgement as PJ continues to belt it out:

PJ

And he grazed his herd
Beside the Rio Grande. . .

Japanese

Yee haw!

UPSTAIRS

Harry Deane is slowly, cautiously, reaching up to "Haystacks, Dawn." He lifts the frame and slides it up the wall a few inches to unhook it, and then freezes, as if waiting for alarms to sound.

Nothing.

Deane

Huh.

He lowers the painting off the wall. He lays it flat on a nearby table.

DOWNSTAIRS

The song is just finishing, to strong applause.

Shabandar

Marvelous. I think once again you've "saved my bacon," as you would put it.

PJ

Aw, everyone can get behind a good time. I got a friend Merle who'd be kickin' faces by now.

Shabandar

Strange expression. . . At any rate, assuming we proceed and wrap this deal up, may we conclude yours as well? The painting arrived, yes?

PJ

Yeah, I think Harry went upstairs to look at it.

Shabandar

Oh no, he couldn't possibly have.

He chuckles.

. . . My security is on, you know.

PJ

Your security?

Shabandar

Yes, quite an ingenious system; I dreamed it up myself, when—

The band is striking up again. PJ leans in to listen to Shabandar. For us the words are lost under the music, but PJ's eyes widen as she listens.

UPSTAIRS

Harry Deane is hunched over the table on which "Haystacks, Dawn" rests, whistling. He grabs either edge of the frame and tenses, about to hoist.

He freezes, listening.

Whatever it is—we don't hear it.

Harry Deane looks one way down the gallery. Empty.

The other way. Empty.

Harry Deane relaxes, and his attention returns to the painting. But he is brought up short once again, and now we hear it too:

A distant, echoing, clickety-clack.

Very, very slowly, Harry Deane turns his head.

His point-of-view up the gallery, which intersects a crossing gallery: something big and tawny-colored strolls into view at the crossing, nails going clickety-clack against the marble floor: a 400-pound adult male lion, with full mane.

Deane

Oh.

DOWNSTAIRS

Shabandar is alone facing the Japanese executives. He raises his glass in toast:

Shabandar

I am so pleased. To the deal, then: my acquisition of the great Konichiwa Publishing Group, whose mastheads shall henceforth display The Lion, proud symbol of my firm—fierce, yes. But fair.

The Japanese raise their glasses in unison with a loud:

Japanese

Bonsai!

UPSTAIRS

Close on the lion, its lips curling back to expose strong teeth, and a low, gurgling rumble emerging from its throat.

Harry Deane is giving it his best ingratiating smile as he backs slowly away.

Deane

There there. . . nice kitty. . .

He backs up. . . backs up. . . backs up. . .

The lion slowly pads forward, growling.

Harry Deane is backed into a corner next to a pedestal displaying a bust of Themistocles. He has no more room to retreat.

The lion continues to advance, closing the space between them.

A sudden, loud voice:

Voice

Haw!

Harry Deane—and the lion—turn to look.

PJ is just yanking a braided rope off a curtain rod. She starts rapidly coiling it elbow-to-hand. She whistles piercingly as she coils, and then gives one heavy foot-stomp:

. . . Git, doggie! Haw! Haw!

The lion tilts its head at her, puzzled.

She has finished coiling and now does a quick knot as she advances on the beast. She slaps the coiled rope against her leg and then makes whooshing motions at the lion:

. . . Hssst! Git, doggie! Haw!

The lion, having seen enough, is pissed off. It bares its teeth and now starts to advance on PJ.

. . . Bad lion!

The lion doesn't give a shit. PJ starts twirling the lasso over her head.

. . . Okay, Harry, he seems kinda omery. I'm gonna have to put him down.

Deane

Uh. . . yes. By all means.

The lion bounds toward her.

PJ

HeeYAA!

She tosses the lariat and ducks sideways.

The lion, leg snagged, falls awkwardly to the floor, half spun by PJ's sideways yank.

It rises awkwardly to three legs as PJ also rises:

. . . HAW!

DOWNSTAIRS

The Japanese are toasting in their turn:

Chuck

He say, To friend Shabandar! We have okayed deal with head of our great zaibatsu! He too wishes to toast your health, and will come to London for great signing!

Shabandar nods and raises his glass in acknowledgment:

Shabandar

I know him well. An estimable man.

UPSTAIRS

The lion has been hogtied. It makes pathetic whining noises as it thumps its one free leg against the floor.

PJ

Well, that's that.

Harry Deane looks on, stunned.

. . . I can handle just about anything got four legs. Like

Mama allus used to say, after ya trip 'em, they're gravy.

Harry Deane simply cannot take his eyes off the beast:

Deane

Are you quite sure he's, er, secure there?

PJ

Oh that's a double-granny, he can't work out a that.

Deane

Yes. Of course. Of course not. Well. I'll clean up, why don't I, and you can go tell Shabandar I'm ready to render my opinion.

HALLWAY

We are pulling Shabandar and Harry Deane down a great hall. Music from the party continues in the background. Shabandar is quite cross:

Shabandar

Good God, Deane, so typical of you. What on earth were you doing, larking about up there, creating a nuisance—more than a nuisance, a bloody dangerous situation! PJ could well have been mauled! And all to no end!

Deane

Well—I am sorry, sir, but you can hardly say “to no end.” It is my job, isn't it, insuring the integrity of the collection, and in fact—

Shabandar

No Deane, I'm sorry. T'isn't your job. Sorry to have to break it to you this way, but we're knocking it on the head. I've a new man, you see. . .

He is opening the door to a study.

Inside, Martin Zaidenweber stands with his hands clasped behind his back, examining “Haystacks, Dusk,” which has been moved into the room next to Shabandar's desk.

. . . Bloody chore hiring him; I had to advance him two

years' salary.

Deane

. . . Zaidenweber!

PJ, who has been waiting in the room as well, gives a small wide-eyed shrug to Harry Deane: What now?

Shabandar

But I never give up on the right man. So, been giving it a glance, Martin?

Zaidenweber turns to face Shabandar, who is easing himself in behind his desk

Zaidenweber

Ja ja. I have inspected.

Harry Deane splutters:

Deane

You have inspected. Yes. Fine. But I hardly think you're the—

Shabandar

Stand down, Deane. How does it look, Martin? What do you say?

Harry Deane and PJ exchange panicked looks.

Zaidenweber

Ja, well. Almost incredible, almost incredible. But. . .

A long silence.

. . . The painting is in order. Quite beautiful, isn't it.

Shabandar

Mm.

Zaidenweber

And the brush strokes, the impasto, quite as it should be. Certain things you cannot phoney. Gross depiction maybe, ja, but not the finer fingerprints of technique! This is really

quite bloody marvelous. Quite authentic. Not a doubt in
mein mind.

Shabandar

All right, we'll—

Deane

Bollocks.

Everyone stares at him. Harry Deane fishes a small vial from his pocket.

Shabandar

. . . I beg your pardon.

Harry Deane advances on the canvas. As he passes Shabandar he casually plucks the
breast-pocket handkerchief from Shabandar's tuxedo coat.

Deane

Anyone with an eye would see things amiss here.

He uncaps the vial, tips some of its contents onto the handkerchief, and goes to the
painting.

Shabandar

What the devil are you—

Zaidenweber

Harry Deane, do not act crazy!

Shabandar

GOOD GOD, MAN!

Harry Deane vigorously rubs the handkerchief against the canvas.

Calmly:

Deane

Fake. The impasto is a caricature of Monet's actual brush-
handling, which was infinitely more subtle. The colors are
distinctly Benjamin Moore. And to the best of my
knowledge, Claude Monet never painted over. . .

His vigorous chafing has begun to expose:

... a rather hackneyed faux-studio portrait of Andy Gibb.

The paint smearing away does indeed expose, beneath, a highly retouched photo-on-canvas of the disco star, wearing a blindingly white polyester suit.

A long beat of quiet.

At length, Shabandar clears his throat.

Shabandar

Martin, I'm . . . disappointed.

He turns on PJ:

... And as for you.

He looks at her, thinking. He starts to chuckle.

... Well. You're either rather clever—though not clever enough. Or. You're even more witless than your accent and manners would tend to suggest. I suspect the latter, though, either way, it's clear that you have nothing of use to me. Ah well. No harm done to the lion. Just a bit of a waste of time. . .

He hoists himself up.

... Well Deane. You should continue on staff. Against expectations, you rather know what you're about. Good show. I still have guests, so if you'll—

Deane

I think not, sir.

On his way to the door, Shabandar stops.

Shabandar

... Excuse me?

Deane

I think not.

He sighs.

... I'll just gather my kit. . .

He picks up the easel tube.

... and my friend.

He extends his free arm to PJ:

... Shall we?

She smiles at him, takes his arm, and they leave.

CAR INTERIOR

It is day.

The Major drives.

Harry Deane and PJ are in the back seat.

A long silence as Harry Deane stares out the window, thinking.

Deane

... Don't know. Just couldn't go through with it. Morals, maybe. Late-blooming.

PJ

Funny comin' from me, but now I wish you'd let him buy it.

Deane

Well of course now you know that I was right. Shabandar is nothing but a bloody cad.

PJ

Yeah, I was wrong about him. But I was right about you, Harry. You're a jerk, but not a big enough jerk to ever be a millionaire.

Deane

Ha-ha, well I shouldn't argue with that.

PJ

But I love you for it.

Deane

Well that's some consolation, isn't it?

They look at each other. Something is unspoken.

The silence is broken:

Major

... Hear hear.

The two rouse themselves; Harry Deane looks about.

Deane

Well, here we are. . .

They are approaching an airline terminal.

... Your ticket.

He hands it to her.

... I do regret that it's, er. . . economy.

Major

Unrestricted.

Deane

Yes, short notice. As for the fifty thousand dollars, I'll make it up to you, I promise.

PJ

Aw, Harry—

Deane

No no, you did your bit; I owe you your wages. And the moment I have it, I'll be on a plane to Alpine, Texas.

The car is easing to the curb.

PJ

Well I ain't gonna sit on a hot stove waitin' for that to happen, Harry Deane.

They both get out on the curb.

I wish you'd come with me now. It's like Mama allus used to say—

Deane

Yes, yes: always order the puds, uh, the afters, uh—dessert—first, against the contingency that one should expire during salad.

PJ stares at him.

PJ

. . . Well, not word-for-word, but. . .

They seem to have run out of things to say.

Major

Sadly, madam, you must hasten for your plane.

PJ

. . . Goodbye, Harry Deane.

Deane

I hope you shouldn't think me too forward should I do this.

He takes her in his arms and kisses her.

It is unexpected. Her eyes widen with surprise, then ease shut as she decides to enjoy it.

They separate. Harry Deane smiles.

. . . Teeth ungrit.

PJ

I noticed.

She stares at him.

. . . Forget my wages—you have enough now for another

ticket?

Deane

Not—at the moment. I'm sure I shall, though, almost before you can turn round. Trust me.

PJ struggles to hide her disappointment, and to keep her composure:

PJ

I'll . . . pretend to, Harry. How's that.

She turns and hurries away.

Harry Deane looks sadly after her.

He clears his throat. His tone now is businesslike:

Deane

. . . Shall we, Major?

The Major pops the trunk and takes out the easel tube. He carries it as the two men walk:

Major

No problems then, sir?

Deane

All according to plan. Although security was a bit tougher than I'd anticipated.

Major

But you had time to make the switch?

Deane

Oh yes. Shabandar shall never suspect. Beautiful work, Major.

Major

On which one?

Deane

Both of them! Though I had to destroy your Dusk, to prove it was fake.

Major
I understand, sir. No hard feelings.

With a nod, Harry Deane indicates a long black limo that they are approaching:

Deane
Lovely stroke of luck, the fellow coming here on business.
Saves me a trip to Tokyo.

In a row in front of the limo is a line of Japanese businessmen. With a gong effect, they all bow.

One man only does not. Hatchet-faced, severe looking, in sunglasses and an impressively tailored suit, it is Mr. Takagawa, the disappointed art-bidder whom we saw at the beginning of the movie.

Chuck approaches, smiling.

Chuck
Deane-san! Major-san! I am Chuck! I translate for Mr.
Takagawa!

Deane
Excellent.

The Major has set down the tube, opened it, and now pries off a collar around its perimeter that encloses an outer cylinder.

Takagawa talks while the Major works; Chuck grunts and translates:

Chuck
Mr. Takagawa say he has been waiting eight years for this
moment.

Takagawa nods sternly.

Takagawa
Domo. Domo arigato.

The Major tips the tube and Harry Deane helps him pull a rolled-up canvas from its outer compartment.

Deane

Not at all. Happy to do it.

Two executives help unroll the canvas so that Takagawa can look at it: Haystacks, Dawn.

The Major looks over his shoulder. He murmurs.

Major

Yes, I'm clever, but . . . mmm. Monet.

Deane also looks at it dreamily:

Deane

Yes. Inimitable—though no doubt your version shall satisfy Shabandar.

All the Japanese nod in sober appreciation of the original.

Japanese

Aaaahhh. . .

Takagawa speaks as another executive pops an attache case to display stacks of bundled cash to Harry Deane.

Deane

Oh, lovely.

He closes the attache case, smiling his thanks:

. . . Don't need to count it. I'd probably get it all bollixed, anyway, before I reached ten million.

Chuck

Mr. Takagawa say he shall hang it right beside Dusk.

Deane

By all means—they should be together.

With a gong effect, the executives bow once again.

MOMENTS LATER

Pulling Harry Deane and the Major back towards the terminal.

Major
Shall I upgrade your ticket, sir?

Deane
Yes, why don't we. And hers.

Major
Bit of an extravagance.

Deane
Yes, well.

Major
How will you, uh. . . explain it?

Deane
Oh, you know me, Major. I'll think of something.

FADE OUT