**Stage Door**

The Stage Door guard didn't look like he's gone to Yale. At 6'3" he looked like a typical bouncer. But he had played first base for the Elis, George H. W. Bush's old position. And he'd sung bass for the Whiffenpoofs. Hw was no effeminate Cole Porter.

His father was class of '37, the year Stage door came out, highlighting class difference in the the theater world. He didn't know or care if his father had seen the movie first run, but it was easy to imagine that a bunch of well-to-do college seniors had gone to the movies rather than studying. This was the world of the "Gentleman's C," where too much studying could make one a pariah.

His father had gone on to make even more money than he had inherited, in finance. The country was just starting to emerge from the Depression, not that it had affected the family so much. There had been losses but there was so much more to lose. Smart people in finance could see where to invest. Industrial machinery was a thing, as the factories that still ran had to replace aging equipment.

The Stage Door guy himself was class of '69, that year of protest, Brian Dowling, Kingman Brewster, and Garry Trudeau. Nothing made sense the spring of his senior year; even football was off-balance with the sudden 29-29 "loss" to Harvard the previous Fall.

He took his degree without honors of any kind. He drifted into working with Daddy, or, rather, Father, and kept sitting at the desk he made look tiny, making nice with the clients. Many were fathers or uncles of his classmates. They liked him because he was one of them, or so it appeared. He made a lot of money, both for his clients and for himself.

Until he couldn't do it any more. He quit, or retired, or whatever you call it when someone stops working at a job they hate. He became one of those people who just hang around the theatre. Not necessaily an actor or director. Sometimes they start as gofers for a stage manager. But more than one high school drama teacher has "retired" to take on old person character roles, not Driving Miss Daisy, but maybe Polonius. Sometimes they were an aged Shylock in a community theatre production, but that wasn't fulltime or fulfilling enough. The play's not the thing, the company's the thing. Every pack of dogs has room for one more; every army has room for another spear carrier; every baseball team has room for another clubhouse aide, at least for home games. Every building needs a Stage Door guard.

He hadn't sung for years, except in the shower, his voice unnaturally cramped from having to duck his head to get it below the shower head. (Once visiting Barcelona he'd stayed in a place where the shower heaad was almost eight feet up the wall, "a shower tall enough for Pao Gasol.") He was too tall for the chorus, anyway. But there are lots of roles beside the ones on stage. He bought a fedora and filched a vest from one of the three-piece uites he'd worn to his finance job, added a gold watch and chain, and an unlit cigar. His role becase Stage Door Guy.

"Hiya!" he greeted the actors and musicians who filtered in, some early, some late. Outsiders got "Hiya, fellas!" "Hiya, sir," was reserved for the Producer. The Director got "Hiya, boss." Always "boss."

He studied movies from the thirties. He started speaking out of the corner of his mouth, just a little. He watched Key Largo, but decided not to take on the Edward G. Robinson voice. He might have subconsciously imitated one of the goons, just a little.

Late one night he had a run-in with the police during one of the building's infrequent concerts. They had seen him open the door to a small group. That looked suspicious. It wasn't, though. A few of the musicians, realizing that they weren't going to play for another hour or so, decided to sneak out the back for something to eat. "Tell ya what, fellas," Stage Door Guy said, when ya get back knock two times, then once, then twice, OK. 2-1-2, like the area code.

"Area Code?" one asked.

"Yeah, you know, the parts of the phone number before the exchange, says what city you're calling."

"Exchange?"

"Ah, you fellas don't remember. It used to be that to make a long distance call, you got plugged into the long-distance operator. "Get me New York," you'd say, "Pennsylvania-6-5-thousand. Pennsylvania was the exchange. Nowadays it's, what, 736 5-thousand. You guys are just too young to remember." He was too young, too. It was a scene he'd watched in a dozen old movies, *Palm Beach Story* or *Flying Down to Rio*. It was part of his act.

The musicians ate, and came, back, and tapped 2-1-2, and he let them in. "Good to see ya, fellas, better get ready for the show." They headed to the dressing room.

The next knock was a pair of policemen. "Hiya fellas, what's up?" But the cops weren't in the mood for role-playing. "Who'd you just let in?"

"A couple of the musicians, they'd gone for something to eat."

"You're not letting people in free, are you?" The cop tried to glower, but he was glowering up to a man 6 inches taller. It was making him nervous, his partner, too.

"No, officer, officers," looking from one to the other, "they were some of the musicians, I swear. They went to get something to eat."

"You work here?' one asked him."

"Yeah, nine years, maybe ten. You guys new on this beat? I don't remember seeing you before."

"Yes. No. Sort of. We're actually from Vice." He pulled out a business card, the "call me if you find out anything else" card.

"You got some ID?" the other asked.

"Yeah, I guess, my wallet's inside," he said, miming patting down his vest pockets, there being no place for a wallet. It was the Jewish sign of the cross, spectacles, testicles, wallet, and watch, and it came up empty.

"Name?" He had a small notebook.

"My name?"

"Yes, your name, wise guy." The cop sounded sarcastic.

The Stage Door Guy didn't use his name much. It reminded him of his time on Wall St., pushing paper, making money he didn't need. It was a cool evening and when he sighed the moisture in his breath spread into the alley, a visible sign of discomfort.

"Horace Albert von Fletcher, the Third." He hated the name.

"Say, didn't we arrest a von Fletcher, a john, last week?"

"That would be my -- " he paused and let out another sigh. "--cousin, probably. Much as I would like to be the black sheep of the family, I'll never match him in depravity."

"You got that right," one of the cops replied. "Depravity don't begin to describe it."

"Please, spare me."

"Don't worry, we will. Listen, Horatio, --"

"Horace. If you must use my name at least get it right."

"OK, Horace, it looked suspicious, you gotta be more careful, OK?" This was meaningless. He had obviously been careful, he'd let in people who should be there, but he also knew enough to shut up.

"Sure, fellas."