

THE DELIVERANCE OF HARRY GULLIVER

There is a nursing home in New Jersey called “The Eagle’s Nest”, an odd name for an institution whose residents can barely walk, much less fly - in fact, that’s the very reason those poor unfortunates were in that shabby joint, right? To this day, no one has been able to determine what perverse idea gripped the mind of whoever gave the place that name, but we do know that, in 1991, during a power failure, the letter “N” was zapped out of the garish neon sign fastened on the roof, and since the management was slow to replace it, the inhabitants got accustomed to calling the place “The Est” – which they still do to this very day.

Harry Gulliver got an idea, too, a bizarre one, when he was an inmate there. Harry was eighty three years old. He was a tall rangy guy with a hooked nose and arctic blue eyes that you wouldn’t want to have to look at if he was angry with you – which didn’t happen often. Harry was amiable enough if he wasn’t disturbed. He was at the Est because he had banged up his body so much during his lifetime that, in a good day, it took him half an hour to put on one of his shoes. In his youth, he had been a wide receiver with the old Brooklyn Dodgers when they had a football team in the 1940s. Harry had been hit pretty hard there - the uniforms were only good enough to drag the guys off the field to the meat wagon – until he was drafted into the Army, where he helped to build airstrips and other construction projects. Out of the service, he did construction work in New York and New Jersey, until he fell in with some guys who, they say, made a living by shooting at each other. How true that was, nobody knows, but the result of all that physical exertion was that Harry’s damaged body suddenly fell apart real bad, and he had to go into a nursing home pretty fast because if he needed regular care from his wife Gladys he’d be dead in a week.

It was a gloomy day at the Est the morning this story begins, with a low sullen overcast and a steady rain falling on the flat roof of the building. Harry was in the cafeteria eating his usual bowl of Cheerios when Leo Moss, sitting across from him, suddenly shook a huge dose of pepper into Harry’s breakfast.

“What the hell is this, Leo?” Harry barked, holding the bowl out to him.

Leo, who was a nervous, fussy guy who had gone into the Est to escape his indomitably healthy mother, who was not inclined to acknowledge any wrongdoing. “I beg your pardon”, he said with some hauteur. “You must have done it yourself.”

“Since when do I put pepper on my Cheerios”?

“I’m not familiar with your eating habits, Harry,” Leo said blandly. “If you choose to do strange things, that is your problem.”

Harry reached over, and seizing Leo’s plate, violently poured a mound of pepper into his scrambled eggs. “Here. Now it’s your problem.”

“Look what you’ve done!” wailed Leo. “You’ve ruined my eggs.”

“You must have done it yourself”, shrugged Harry.

It did not appear that Leo was going to let the matter drop, and fortunately for him, Julia Bennington came rolling up in her wheelchair. Julia was a woman in her very late eighties, who, notwithstanding the havoc which time had wrought on a face that had once held the very great and very famous at her command, still retained a charm and beautiful blue eyes that worked wonders.

“Now, boys,” she said, “control yourselves. The guards are looking your way.” The attendants in the Est were also called the “guards”, depending on whether they were helping or hurting you. “They’d like nothing better than to put you to sleep for a month”.

Leo, still pouting, gestured at Harry. “He ruined my eggs.”

“You can always get more,” she coaxed, putting her graceful hand on Leo’s arm. “You’re the only one who eats them.” Julia had said the eggs in the Est were worse than in the Jap prison camps during the war, and she should know, having been in one of them when they captured her and the other Army nurses. “Come on, let bygones be bygones. Come on boys, shake hands. Or you don’t get a kiss from me.”

“Well, that’s another story!” Harry said, who had sort of a crush on Julia. “Right, Leo? Shake. I apologize. I’ve got a lot on my mind.”

“Mind? Who has a mind in here?” she said, giving each a kiss, with a bit more emphasis to Harry’s, who came around the table to receive his. Just then, Willie Frapp came shuffling up, pushing his walker ahead of him with remarkable speed. He was in his late seventies, with a kindly face, and an ample body rumpled like a pillow. He had worked without letup at his small store in the Bronx for zipper repairs, the “Zipper Hospital.” He had had a lot of back pain, but couldn’t spare the time to get to the doctor, and when he finally did, his spine was wrecked. Everyone liked Willie, whose good nature seemed so sublime that nothing of the pettiness that was the most painful thing about the Est was able to touch him.

“Am I too late? Don’t I get one?” he lamented.

“I always have one for you, Willie.” Julia held out her frail arms to him, breaking into a warm smile. “Such a sweet fella,” she said, kissing him.

“So?” Willie said. “Who’s in for pinochle tonight? Harry? Julia? Leo?”

“Not for me,” Leo said. “I’m feeling tired. I’ll take a nap.”

“I was thinking about tonight; seven thirty,” persevered Willie, whose kindness often irked his friends when they’d rather see people like Leo go to bother someone else.

“I’ll be asleep,” Leo said.

“Why do you even bother to wake up?” marveled Julia.

“I don’t”, he rejoined. “It just happens.”

“Good night, Leo”, sighed Harry, as Leo’s penguin shape rocked away from the table. “I heard that Leo wrote his own obituary when he was thirty years old.”

“I believe it,” Willie said. “Okay. So who’s in? Julia? Harry?”

“I’ll play if I can,” Julia said, frowning as she ruefully held up her hands to look at them. “These darned fingers sometimes don’t let me.”

“I got too much on my mind,” Harry muttered. “But then again, maybe it’ll be good for me.”

Julia, who was very fond of Harry, looked across at him with concern. “What’s bothering you, Harry?”

“My wife’s coming in two weeks,” he said, the way a boat’s keel sounds when it’s dragged over a gravel shore. “She’s gonna try again to worm out where my money is hidden.”

“Just tell her to take a long leap off a short pier,” was Willie’s advice.

“Nothing stops Gladys,” grumbled Harry. “I think she’s gonna give me a sickness – bowels probably.”

“Don’t be silly, Harry,” cried Julia. “How could she?”

“She’s doing it; I can feel it,” Harry said. “She sends me lawyer’s letters; threatens taking me to court.”

“She is unpleasant,” acknowledged Julia. “I’ve seen her. Why did you marry her?”

“What? You think I did it on purpose?” Harry replied with grim humor.

Julia was about to reply when everyone suddenly stiffened tensely as a woman in a blue flowered dress appeared at their table. It was Eloise Marshall, and she was badly afflicted with Alzheimer's disease. She was a pretty woman for her age, in her late fifties, who had been brought to the Est about six months ago by her distraught husband.

"Hello, everybody. I'm Eloise." She was beaming with good nature as she introduced herself, and it was easy to assume that she was perfectly fine, if you didn't notice the tenseness at the corners of her mouth, and the restless movement of her eyes, flickering endlessly from one face to another. Her light brown hair had been pulled back nicely in a bun, but much of it had worked its way out and had fallen loosely down her left shoulder.

"Hello, Eloise", Julia said, careful to speak slowly and cordially to her.
"I'm Julia.

"And I'm Willie."

Harry rose from his chair, and offered it to her, but Eloise, still smiling, did not seem to see it.

"Sit down and join us, Eloise, please," Julia said.

"Hello, everyone! I'm Eloise." She said brightly, nodding down at them. And the three at the table, with the saddest of courtesies, identified themselves once again. Julia invited her again to sit down, when Eloise noticed some other table nearby, and moved eagerly over to the people there.

"She's really going downhill," Harry said, as Eloise's eternal and fruitless invocation began again.

"Yes, poor thing," Julia said, following her with troubled blue eyes.
"They'll transfer her very soon."

"Wait a minute! Everybody stop!" Willie said, his eyes practically bulging from his head. "I got an idea. But I won't mention it until you both promise not to say a word about it. It's got to be secret. Wait! Don't lean forward," he rasped, as Harry and Julia were doing just that. "You don't want to act like we're talking secrets! Lean back and laugh, or something like that."

"Never mind the idea," Harry said sourly. "Don't tell us."

"It concerns you!"

"Maybe he's found a way to get you coffee cake after lights out," Julia laughed.

"It's bigger! Listen. It's how to get your wife to drop the whole money thing."

“Now, I’m listening.”

“You see? Now he’s listening.” Willie leaned forward, forgetting momentarily the secret nature of their conversation. “You gotta convince her that you got the Alzheimer.”

“You’re crazy!” Harry bellowed, getting halfway out of his seat. “I think you got it.”

Willie put his cautionary finger again to his lips. “It just takes practice,” he whispered. In two weeks when your wife visits you, you just give her the Alzheimer; she goes home and doesn’t come back. You know how it is. You just got to tell someone in your family you got the Alz, and the next thing you – most of them will claim they’re Koreans and they never heard of you.”

“He’d have to fool everybody,” interposed Julia. “Including the attendants.”

“Why not? Willie insisted. “I’ll train him. It’s progressive, right? One step at a time.”

Harry listened impatiently to this exchange, knowing damn well that he could straighten everything out by getting somebody outside to whack Gladys for him, but the lofty ethical code of his compatriots absolutely forbade such a thing unless the wife was out gunning for him, which Gladys was too smart to try. So, sighing wearily, he considered Willie’s idea again, and tried to envision himself wandering around from table to table, like Eloise, and giving out with the spiel. “Naaah, I couldn’t do it,” he said helplessly.

“Would you rather see your wife with diamonds hanging off her face, on your money?” taunted Willie.

“Hell, no!”

“Why don’t you just say you refuse to see her?” asked Julia.

“I got to string her along”.

“That’s what this does!” Willie said triumphantly. “Except she never finds the other end!”

Julia thoughtfully stirred the coffee the Est provided, weakish, of course, to restrain any high jinks. “But if he has Alzheimer’s, doesn’t she get to be custodian of his money?”

“OOOhhh, yeah,” moaned Willie, “I forgot that.”

For the first time, a mischievous smile danced lightly on Harry's hawkish face. "So what? She can get control of *that* money,yeah; but of *the* money, nothing doing!"

"Oooooohhhhh", sighed Julia and Willie in unison, as they saw the light.

"She wants the money that you hid somewhere," whispered Julia.

Harry had known them both over three years, and knew he could trust them, at least to the extent of telling them about the hidden money, but not, of course, where it was. "That's the ticket."

"Okay, then we're cleared to go," Willie said, holding out his hand to Harry. "Do we start training tonight?"

"I'm in." he said, shaking their hands on it. "And if it works, there's a chunk of benjamins due to you guys for thanks."

Now that Harry had agreed to impersonate someone with Alzheimer's, he grudgingly recognized that the job would be as difficult as he had expected. Like anyone else who had been the Est for three years, he had seen a number of hard luck people who had the Alz, and to his surprise, Harry, who had always been of the view that your social obligations were limited to looking after yourself, was strangely moved by his encounter with them. They seemed to be just pleasant, ordinary people, who were caught up in something hideous that they had not brought upon themselves, but were the victims of a malevolent fate that had sought them out for no reason whatsoever. When, like Eloise, they approached him with their eager mindless smile and greeting, or worse, their confusion and anxiety as they recognized that something terrible was happening, Harry burned in a fury because he could not help them. He wanted to halt their tragic decline, to grab them by the shoulders and turn them back to where they came from, or whack whoever it was behind it, but there was nothing he could do. They were on the slide and going down and there was no stopping it.

There was one guy whom Harry had particularly liked, a huge hearty Irishman, Brian O'Connor, who had played linebacker with the Pittsburgh Steelers when Harry was with the Dodgers, and who gave Harry one of the heaviest hits he had ever take during his football years. But off the gridiron, Brian was a guy with the sweetest temperament you ever met. And when he came to the Est, he hadn't changed; for example, when he'd be losing at pinochle, he never flew off the handle like so many other losers, but would sing "Mother McCree" or Makushla", in a mournful tenor that brought a sad smile to everyone's face. He was great company, and Harry was looking forward to a lot of years when he and Brian could play cards, shoot the breeze, and be real pals. But then, all too quickly, Brian underwent that deadly change, and instead of his quick laughter and jovial remarks to his right and left as he shuffled the cards in his big hands, he would now be found standing woodenly through the whole game, his big head thrust forward, his lips moving but uttering nothing. Harry would sometimes maneuver him into one of the

chairs so he could watch the game; he seemed to like that, but when he did speak, he couldn't connect the words called up from the depths of his wrecked mind with what was going on. And then one day Brian got into a fracas with the guards; no one knew what started it, but he was throwing those big boys around like Barbie dolls. The people standing around knew that the guards would be looking for something real heavy to knock him out, so they sent for Harry, who came limping down as fast as he could. He went right up to Brian, right between the guards who already had a massive lamp at the ready, and standing there, calmly looking into Brian's red, explosive face, he said, "Hey Brian! It's me, Harry. Sing for us, huh? Give us "Mother McCree." And, Harry, who has a lousy guttural voice, started off, when Brian suddenly gave him a big smile, like the sun emerging from a dark, lightning scarred cloud. "For shame, Harry," he said, with mild reproach, "you're killing a lovely song." Then he sang the whole tribute to his mother in his sweet tenor voice, and everyone there stood silently, listening; you could hear a pin drop.

The next day, Brian was gone. Where, nobody knew. Maybe transferred to the fifth floor, where the "special cases were"; maybe farmed out somewhere. Wherever, it was bound to be bad. What the hell. Life was tough when you were old. And you had to be tough, if you were going to make it. Start crying, maybe you'd never stop. So, Harry was going to fight to keep his wife's fingers out of his dough. For inspiration, he thought of Brian; he knew that Brian would have clapped him on the back if he thought imitating him would help; that's what Harry would do if the situation were ever reversed, as it might well be someday.

For the next two weeks, Harry practiced assiduously with Willie in getting ready for big day, when he'd confront his wife. As Willie had indicated, the process in the Est had to be taken gradually, with Harry manifesting new and strange behavior each day, but escalating in weirdness as the days progressed. There was also the need to adopt facial expressions correlating with his altered conduct, or someone was bound to finger him as a phony and blow the whole scheme. Harry found the facial aspects most difficult; for example, anybody can grab someone's hat and shove it into a microwave, but the really hard thing was to do it with a straight face, like nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

It turned out that Leo Moss became the goat in Harry's plans. Shortly after Harry had begun by doing something simple in which he confused the day and time, Leo began a whispering campaign that Harry had the Alz and that he ought to be taken away. Though Leo's view of the matter certainly advanced Harry's credibility, at the same time Harry was outraged because he and his buddies had bent over backwards for Leo for years. "I can't bear these people; why do they let them stay here," complained Leo, ostentatiously moving his chair elsewhere, or getting up and leaving the room in disgust. As a result of this mean-spiritedness, Leo became the object of Harry's most ambitious stunts. Harry would, for example, sit down across from Leo and stare at him fixedly as long as it took until Leo fled into another room, into which Harry would shortly wander, and sit down across from him again. Sympathetic residents were moved to say that it's understandable that Harry would seek out human contact during this period. Emboldened, and feeling that his position as an Alzheimer was growing apace; Harry stood up

suddenly in front of Leo and overturned his Cheerios on Leo's head – a reckless move but a successful one, drawing laughter and applause for Harry. His greatest triumph was the time he was found sleeping in Leo's bed when Harry Leo returned to his room to retire, and Leo's shrieking flight brought half the Est into the hallways, and uproar which firmly established Harry as a bona fide Alzheimer as he was gently led back to his own room. The manager of the Est, Dr. Curtis, regretfully designated Harry as an Alz, provided him with special attendants, and cleared the way for his interview with his wife as a patient suffering from that condition.

The night before the meeting with Gladys, Willie and Julia met in Harry's room. Speaking in whispers, Julia handed around one of those miniature whiskey bottles which she had obtained when a bus they'd been on broke down near a busy commercial street, leaving them for three hours. The three friends knew that it would be a tough meeting; Gladys was anything but a pushover, not to be trifled with. A mistake with her would undoubtedly result in hell to pay. They went over Harry like trainers over a prize fighter. They encouraged him, warned him to keep up his guard, not to alter his approach no matter what. They couldn't be in his corner at the fight, but they did everything they could to get ready. After the ceremonial drink, they reluctantly left him, and Harry slept better than he thought he would because, whatever happened, he knew that he wasn't alone, and that was always a deep comfort.

At 10 a.m. the next morning, Gladys Gulliver entered the "Visitor's Lounge" in the Est, and proceeded to a room to meet with Harry. Ordinarily, she would not even be awake at that hour, and she smoldered with resentment that she was compelled to drag herself to this dungeon in order to meet with that lout, who could never give her enough money to compensate her for all she had done for him. Angrily, she sat down at the table, yanked a cigarette from her purse and lit up, giving a finger to the sign which stated in huge letters that smoking was not permitted there. She had once been a good looking woman, and traces still lingered in her fifty three years of age, but they had transmuted into something of a fierce beauty: iron grey shoulder length hair, cold steely eyes, long carmine fingernails, and a cruel, bitter mouth.

The door opened and an attendant brought Harry in and leaned him against the wall. "Mrs. Gulliver?" he inquired. He was a slender young man, with a gentle soul, a rare figure in this occupation.

"That's me," she said, scowling darkly when she saw Harry.

"Okay if I leave him with you, ma'am?"

"You could leave him with the garbage for all I care, except I've got words in private with him."

“Yes, ma’am”, said the astonished attendant, his eyes bulging out of his head. “And no smoking, ma’am. That’s the rule here. I’ll be outside.” He left hurriedly, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

“What’s with him?” Gladys snapped. “Why is he hanging around outside?”

Harry walked idly to the table, and looked benignly down on his wife. “Hi! I’m Harry. What’s your name?”

Gladys regarded him with an awful frown. “What do you mean, what’s my name?”

“Do you want to play backgammon?”

Two or three seconds passed. “No,” she said, grinding her teeth.

Harry, still standing, gave her a sunny smile. “Hi! I’m Harry. What’s your name?”

“I’ll hit you with my brassiere if you say that again.”

Harry nodded vigorously. “Hi! I’m Harry. What’s your...”

“Shut up!” shouted Gladys, getting to her feet. “I know who you are, you low life, and as God is my witness I wish I never did. What crooked scam are you working now?”

Harry’s eyes fluttered in confusion, and uncertain and alarmed at the woman’s outburst, he paced twice back and forth in front of her, struggling to find a response to her. Then, he brought out a glorious smile.

“Let’s play backgammon”.

Gladys picked up her handbag, and loaded as it was, it knocked Harry back against the wall. “Aaaaaaaahhhh”, he howled helplessly. The door to the Lounge opened slowly, and the attendant looked in fearfully. “What’s the ruckus, ma’am? Did he attack you?”

“The bum says he doesn’t know my name - can you believe it? I clobbered him to set him straight.”

“Ma’am, “ said the guard, aghast. “Your husband has Alzheimer’s disease. They can’t remember anything. Didn’t they tell you?”

“There was some voice message”, she mumbled. “I thought you were selling something.” She looked sharply at the guard. “Has he really got it?”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. He does.”

“Do you want to play backgammon?” Harry interjected, grinning broadly.

“You shut up! I don’t believe it!” She hurtled around the table like a mad dog. Harry fell to screaming again, backing up against the wall and hiding his head from her. The guard was appalled, the color draining from his face. “Mrs. Gulliver, if you keep upsetting our resident, I will have to terminate the visit.”

“Okay, okay; I get it.” She said, her chest heaving. “I’m out of line.” She paused, and then slouched to her chair and sat down, her fingernails rapping tensely on the table, her eyes fixed coldly on Harry as she thought the matter over. Then she noticed the presence of the guard. “Are you still here?” she said venomously. “I want to be alone with my husband. This is terrible news. Now will you get lost?”

“Yes, ma’am, I surely will.” Once again, he opened the door and backed out, looking at the two of them through the steadily closing aperture. “Okay,” he said, “But I’m right outside.”

“Good. Goodbye.” She said. The moment the door closed, Gladys smiled at Harry in a vast grin, as though to devour him. “Now, Harry,” she began sweetly, “now we’re alone. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know there was nothing in your brain – I always knew it, really, but still... I’m sorry. Now, see if you can listen to me carefully. Tell me: where’s the money? I can make life really nice for you, Harry. Nurses, 24/7, condos in Vegas, bubble baths every day so you can play with your toys, your rubber ducky - isn’t that what all you retarded people like to do? It’s yours, Harry, all yours! But I can’t do any of these things for you unless you tell me where you put the money. Where’s the money, darling? She wheedled. “Tell your momma,” she crooned, getting up and cuddling him from behind, cradling her head on his.

“Do you want to play backgammon?”

“I’d love to, sweetheart,” she choked, as her blood pressure took such a terrific leap in her neck that she thought her veins were going to burst through her nose. “As soon as you tell me about the money.”

Harry looked over his shoulder, and gave her a set of doe’s eyes. “Hi! I’m Harry. What’s your name?”

“That’s it! shrieked Gladys, in a voice that crashed through the cheap wallboard to terrify the inmates on the floor. She seized Harry by the hair and pulled out a large handful. She hopped a few paces and pulled off one of her spiked heels. “You no good, brainless...” she shouted, putting dents into him. Harry screamed too, until the guard came in screaming too, struggled with Gladys, trying to pull her off Harry. Three other guards, alerted by the bedlam, rushed in and after quickly resolving the question whether

Gladys was the patient and Harry the visitor, the four of them managed to detach her from Harry.

“Stop that, Mrs. Gulliver,” said one of them in restraining the raging female, “This visit is now terminated.” They dragged her to the door and pushed her through it, hurling her handbag after her. As she went, biting the arms of her captors, she had one last shot at Harry. “Don’t look at me to take over your payments, deadhead! Call Alzheimer – let him pay!”

A week later, Harry was summoned to the office of Dr. Curtis, the Chief Administrator, to shake his hand and to receive his congratulations on returning to normal life at the Est. The Chief, a tall guy in his mid- thirties, tanned and in good shape, clapped Harry on the back, and directed him to one of the opulent leather chairs across from his desk. “You know, Harry,” he said, “you’re a lucky man. We were just about to transfer you, when we learned that the damned nasty conduct of your wife broke the hold of your disease.”

“Yeah, I guess I am lucky,” Harry said carefully. “I don’t remember much about that whole period.”

The Chief had not sat down, but stood, leaning against the front of his desk, his small eyes narrowing to slits as he looked sharply into Harry’s. “This was a form of recovery we’ve never seen before; no one in the industry, as far as I can tell, has ever seen such a thing.” Harry met the Chief’s searching gaze with his own cold, unwavering arctic blues. It was the Chief that blinked. “Well,” he shrugged, “the thing about Alzheimer’s is that you can’t predict it; nobody knows how the damned disease will jump.” He thrust out his hand, and Harry took it. “Good luck,” the Chief said. “And, hey, let’s all us guys remember: once in a million years, a nagging wife can do you a good turn.” Harry guffawed, two dudes sharing a men’s moment between them, and then he was out, on the other side of the door.

Harry rolled his eyes to the heavens in gratitude, murmuring “Thank you boss!” He was free; they couldn’t touch him now. The money was his, to do with as he liked. And Gladys was gone, like bad breath. The world as he knew it was open again. He took the elevator down the three floors to his corridor. “Maybe,” he thought, “maybe I’ll get out of here, and set up somewhere else. Florida, maybe. Rent a place, maybe get a car. What the hell, why not!” He was so excited that he had to have a cigarette. He always kept one on him, just in case, and he turned into a narrow corridor off the main runway, which led to a small room, used only for janitors to park cleaning materials. He’d have one there.

He turned quickly into the janitor’s room when he saw the wheelchair and the figure in it, slumped forward, as they so often were. He clenched his fists in outrage that some sonofabitch would leave a person in a situation like this. Since the room was poorly

lit, he couldn't identify the person, so he moved cautiously forward, until he saw who it was.

"Rose!" Harry called to her. "Hey, Rose!"

The figure jerked suddenly, her head turned to the sound, her chin lifted defiantly to meet whatever challenge might be presented. "What?" she said fearfully.

"It's me, Harry", he said soothingly, "Harry. You know me."

"Harry," she said, a broad loving smile chasing all of the tension from her face, as she glowed with pleasure to see him. "Harry."

Harry had met Rose when he first arrived at the Est; she was an old timer, even for that place, and she had been the first to take him around; they used to play bingo together every Sunday, nudging each other when the calls went their way. She used to call him "big shot", in a wry chiding manner that always made him laugh. He had not seen much of her recently, and he was shocked when he saw how much she had failed; she was so tiny, and so frail! Like a little wisp, that could blow away if you weren't careful. Her hair was now almost white and very thin, and shook with the tremor of her head. She probably never left her wheelchair anymore. He saw with indignation that she had been neglected. Her nightgown was so thin it might have been newspaper; her robe wasn't much better, and it was spattered with something that should have been removed.

He wanted to do something for her. And right away. "Hey, Rose", he said, leaning over her with excitement, "I've got a great idea. I've come into some dough, Rosie. Big money. You know what? I'm gonna get you a new nightgown, and a new robe too. From the best department stores. Cashmere, I'm thinking. Real warm and real soft. Would you like that, huh?"

Again, the broad, warm smile looking up at him, adoringly. "Harry," she said, holding out her hands to him. "Harry". He took them into his, finding them like a bird's gentle grasp, so light and quivering. Then he had a real doozy of an idea. He had in his life thrown his money away on all sorts of women – why not? "Hey, babe, you know what?" he said eagerly. "I'm gonna get you jewels too. You like that? A necklace, a bracelet? And not cheap plated stuff either. What do you say?"

Rose nodded happily to him, holding his hands a little more tightly. And then, as he watched, the light began to dim from her face. He could see it, something dark and malevolent stealing her mind from her and taking it deep down, far away from him and from her. He called out her name, but she was gone, and he was standing there, his long arms swinging back and forth, back and forth helplessly, as her face settled into a flat calm of indifference.

He looked down at his friend, when a wave of fatigue struck him, unlike anything he had ever felt before. It fell so heavily upon him that he groaned at the impact, which

was so strong that he thought he would never move again. He stood motionless for several minutes under the massive weight of it until he felt the deadly weariness begin to pass from him. Still struggling with it, he noticed that Rose's nightgown was loose at her neck, and, muttering reassuringly to her, he very slowly and carefully bent over her to button it. He then tied the loosened belt of her robe. "Okay, kid," he whispered, when it was done, "C'mon. I'll take you home." He could have gone for an attendant, but he was sure he could manage it. He knew, though, that the wheelchair would be a problem. Fortunately, the chair was facing the corridor, since his right leg was dead, which would have made it very difficult to bring it around. But he had to put all his weight behind his left leg to get the chair moving, which sent a sudden fierce pain flashing across his back. He shook off the pain, as he did in his football days, and pushed the chair into the main corridor. It was not heavy, but as they moved, the pain in his back attacked him again. He went on though, limping behind the chair, his grey head leaning over hers, down the corridor until some kindly soul came over and, seeing his extremity, gently took the handlebars from him.

THE END

