

Glazer Rises to the Top

Doctor Manfred Glazer, a former dentist of outstanding reputation, had recently been awarded both the certificate of Retirement, and the rank of Alzheimer, First Stage. There is nothing whatsoever in either status to warrant thrusting one's chest out to the world, as this case will amply demonstrate.

To begin: At his sister Deidre's command, Dr. Glazer had been forced to proceed with her to a book signing to take place in one of the few remaining bookstores in Washington, DC. The author was a close friend of Diedre's who had somehow managed to persuade the management to give her three hours of priceless time to display her historical study, "Hurrah! Hooray! The Battle Cry of Women Locomotive Drivers on 19th Century Railroads". Unfortunately, the sunshine friends of the writer had failed to come out to help in arranging things, so Dr. Glazer had been thrust into the breach to distribute leaflets while Diedre helped her friend in ordering matters at the signing desk.

Unfortunately, the task had not gone well for Dr. Glazer. While some people took a leaflet for honest consideration, too many used the opportunity to make fun of the former outstanding dentist. This was because the writer had set out several large post board photographs of Marigold Ward, depicting a massive railroad woman, with a grinning set of teeth that looked as though she could bite into the very steel of the train itself. And her huge head and shoulders would convince anyone that she could lift the 4:50 just out of Omaha and hurl the locomotive at the unfortunate person gazing at her. For those looking at Dr. Glazer, eighty years old, standing very near to offer his leaflets, the contrast was too great to ignore.

“You looked better a hundred years ago,” said one wit as he passed by. A group of girls later said, “Marigold, you shouldn’t have sat on him.” A third said, “Let’s hook up.” And there were a whole lot of others.

It was not Dr. Glazer who objected to their banter; in fact, he thought they were amusing. But Deirdre was horrified. She took severe measures shortly afterward, when she heard a girl ask the doctor, “Was Marigold disappointed when she saw you were her child?” Deirdre rushed furiously upon the troupe of them, shoos them away like geese, and snatching the leaflets from Manfred, consigned him to languish in the rear of the store.

And henceforth she gave every approaching young person a withering look as they came near, yet she could not be free of the possibility that they were smothering their giggles laughing at her behind her back. Finally, she gave up, and surreptitiously kicked the grinning pictures of Marigold Ward under the shelves of the calendars for the season. But nothing seemed to work. At the end, they had sold only four books, two of which were those purchased by the Glazers. Tired of the whole matter, Manfred and Deirdre said farewell to the writer, and started for the Metro and the way home.

But when they were about to reach the train at last, his sister saw something new which gave her spirits a new zest. She saw the great store, Lord and Taylor’s, and being at the least an impulsive woman, she suddenly broke away from him and ran madly across the street, shouting over her shoulder that she would return in “two minutes”, and that he must “Stay!” where he was. Yes, she spoke loudly to him; she acknowledged it and was totally without qualms. Her brother had a penchant to wander ever since he

contracted Alzheimer's, and she was convinced that the only way to contain him was by the equivalent of a terrific salvo of gunfire threatening him from going anywhere.

Dr. Glazer was, however, impervious to her commands. In his view, the whole uproar of this Alzheimer fellow was an absurdity- as though the famed doctor would not have a grip on everything, every day! Nonsense! But he was not going to quarrel with his sister, who meant well; moreover, he had always been an easygoing man who found in his seventy nine years that arguing with people is just not worth the time.

Looking over the building where she had abruptly left him, he found that he was standing outside a posh hotel which he had heard about but had never had occasion to enter. Nor would he have time to enter now; he would spend his two minutes of leisure by leaning against the wall to observe the fine men and women emerging from their taxis or surrendering their cars to the valet. So pleasant was it, that he suddenly realized after looking at his watch that he'd been waiting there for over twenty minutes! Sighing, he assumed that Deidre must have buried herself in mounds of clothing, as she had done on other occasions when the madness was on her. Worse, there was no telling when the fit would be over, but he couldn't wait outside any longer, as it was getting dark and had begun to rain. He would have to wait in the hotel, and would have to find a phone as he'd forgotten to take his cell with him.

The clerks at the desk were fully occupied and rather peevish, and therefore unlikely to jump over the parapet to see that Mr. Glazer was satisfied. The search for the phone would have to go elsewhere. Looking vaguely about, he noticed a nearby corridor where there seemed to be a movable can of red paint wobbling against a wall. However, in adjusting his glasses, he was relieved to see that the apparition was no more than the

costume of a young man directing people into an elevator. Here, thought Manfred, would be help.

“Excuse me,” he said, panting up to the young fellow, whose lurid red uniform with its gold hotel insignia reminding him of Halloween. “Can you tell me...” he began, when immediately stopped by the irritable youth. “What’s your name?” said the boy suspiciously. “Name?” thought Manfred. He didn’t know how that came into the picture, but he always complied wherever possible, and so told him, “Manfred Glazer”. The name seemed to possess an occult power, as the boy seemed impelled to whirl about and flip rapidly through the pages of a massive document until he spun about again. “You’re not Mr. Lapgarden Glazer, are you?” he said darkly.

“No. Why?” replied the retired dentist, who was always interested in possible relatives. “Was he from Latvia?”

The boy shrugged questions of genealogy aside. He was faced with something inconsistent here. He had been told that no spurious guest shall be admitted, but he had also been plainly told not to eject or even to quarrel with a guest unless he was certain that the suspect was a fraud and should be thrown out of the hotel at once. The boy looked at Glazer thoughtfully. “Lapgarden” didn’t sound like a legitimate name anyway; he shuddered at the thought of having to bear it. Maybe he’s the phony run out of ordinary names. Of course, the old guy was not your everyday moniker either, but then he liked the old man, standing there waiting with a smile. Hey, let the geezer have a little fun! He’s not a bum. He was certain.

“You’re okay,” said the boy. Go on up. Twelfth floor. ”

“Up there? In the elevator?”

“Yep!”, the boy said absently, already beginning the interrogation of a woman wearing a green hat and yellow trench coat who was quarreling with a man. As the elevator began to close upon the scene, Dr. Glazer called out, “Are there phones up there?” “Sure, lots!” shrugged the boy. But he really had no idea at all.

The elevator closed and swept him upstairs together with some very showy people. He was reminded of one fellow whom he treated with implants and who, in gratitude, had taken Dr. Glazer up one day in his private plane, resulting in a near disaster when the doctor had been frantically relieved of the controls just in time to avoid a landing on a toll road at the height of rush hour. As a consequence, this gentleman had later refused to speak to him in the elevator just like this one at a later ceremonial event.

The light then came to jolt Dr. Glazer. He had noticed without interest when negotiating with the boy downstairs that a placard had referred to the honor of someone or other. Now he realized that he was on the way to join the applause! And there would be scant hope in finding a phone in such an environment. As a respected dentist, he had gone to a number of these occasions, and had never seen a phone set down at the plate of each guest as a surprise. But if not that, where would such phones to be found? And then the elevator door flung itself open, instantly revealing that his concern was plainly justified. It was still early, only a few people were there. He was almost alone. A cavernous ballroom rose above him, chandeliers hung dazzling from the ceiling, and the tables, a vast sea of white, just like a series of ice floes in the Arctic.

He put his hand to the remains of his hair, baffled what to do next. For a moment, he thought he might ask some of the guests who were already laughing and joking at the bar, but to do so might simply provide them with crude entertainment at his expense. He

then tried to signal a group of waiters clustered at the very far end, who performed remarkable feats such as somehow failing to see him and then magically disappearing. He was defeated. The boy downstairs was mistaken. He would now have to return to the lobby and start again.

And then, a woman's voice, heavy, rich and warm, floated through the ether. "You seem at such a loss. Can I help you to find your friend?"

He turned, and his heart swelled at the sight of her, sitting alone at a nearby table, smiling at him sympathetically. She was about fifty years of age, glowing with health, and statuesque in a black evening dress set off by her fine white shoulders. He looked for a moment behind him to be sure she was really talking to him.

She glanced at him with amusement. "In fact, I would like it if you would join me. It isn't right for a woman to sit alone – like a pariah."

"Oh," he burst out, "no one could possibly say that. You're so beautiful."

"Me? Beautiful"? She laughed, tossing her long dark hair, stippled with grey. And as she watched him further she smiled again, saying, "You don't have to sit across from me as though we were playing bridge. Come here, sit with me – I hope I'm not making a mistake; you might think that I'm not beautiful after all."

The chairs had been were grouped tightly together expecting a large crowd, and he was now intimately close to her, to the heavy scent that delighted him. "What's your name?" she asked. "And how can I help you?"

And that is when it happened. Dr. Glazer's mouth opened in response -and stayed open. Not a sound emerged. He had forgotten his name. As well as his search for a phone, even forgetting his sister altogether, and even forgetting why he had come to the

ballroom. And there he was, his jaw dropped, facing this beautiful woman, sitting close, and waiting expectantly.

He didn't want to lose her, the only person left that he recognized, and she was so kind. He was going to find an answer to her questions, and miraculously, he did. He cleared his throat, and said, "Let's not talk about names. Something artificial begins, don't you agree? – it sets up barriers."

"Oh, no, we mustn't have barriers!" she chuckled. "But I'm not afraid of them. Not from you." She held out her hand. "I'm Lenore. There, you see! And , weren't you looking for someone?"

"I might have, but not now," he said. She looked away from him for a moment, taken aback, and then looked at him again, seriously now; he was not simply an old man looking for a handkerchief.

"Tell me," he said, fighting for time. "What brought you here?"

"Oh, it's all right for me to expose my life while you remain a secret! But all right. I'm here only to keep a friend company. Eddy. He knows what this gathering is all about. I don't." A flush of annoyance imbued her cheek. "And now he's not here. And it's only because of you I don't take off and run away. It's aggravating, isn't it?"

"But it's still early, isn't it?" a remark which his many years should have warned him against.

"No it isn't!" she retorted. "He told me to be here right when it opens. 'We want to meet everyone!', he told me. I waited a half an hour before they opened the doors on this funeral home."

Irritably, she snapped open her handbag in search of her makeup, turning her head away when she began to apply it. This offered Dr. Glazer an opportunity to find out what had been irritating him under his sleeve, something which might at least allow him to scratch. But it proved far more valuable than that. Indeed, it was a treasure of priceless value.

A wristband appeared on the underside of his arm, written in small but capital letters, containing information which he had been hungry to obtain. “My name is Manfred Glazer,” for example. And not only that, other nuggets of important information were now his: such as his age, address, the cell phone number of his sister and his own blood type, and the admonition that he stay where he is until the police arrive. Unfortunately, he still did not remember anything about his sister and her voyage into Lord and Taylor.

He now felt that he possessed a place in the world just like everyone else. “I think I should tell you my name,” he said to her. “I’d like you to know it.”

She received it with approval. “That’s a very nice, very strong name”, she said. Brooding, she played with two gold bracelets on her left wrist, spinning them back and forth with her fingers. “Oh, why don’t I find someone like you!” she burst out. “Do you have three wives, Manfred? Would you like a fourth?”

He had none, actually, his wife had passed away several years ago. But he suspected that she only intended a metaphoric statement, so he did no more than smile. He was right.

“The brat!” she said. “He’s probably sleeping. Or drinking. Or eating ramen noodles by the ton. Sometimes I find them in my bed – cold and slimy. I wake up screaming, thinking they’re snakes. Why do I stay with him?”

“Well”, he said thoughtfully, “if you put your foot down and tell him: ‘No more ramen noodles’, everything will be fine, I think.”

She looked coldly at him. “You disappoint me, Manfred. I thought you had more imagination than that. Eddy? He’s younger than I am, so he thinks he can do whatever he wants, that he’s so good looking. Ha! Ha! Believe me, he has the face of a toilet seat.”

As they were talking, other guests had been steadily infiltrating their table, encroaching upon their privacy, surrounding them, even having the audacity of a fat and pompous couple who made it clear that her characterization of her boy friend’s face was not appropriate among cultured people. Worse, the inevitably crushed hotel salad had now made its appearance, which incited Lenore to take a handkerchief from her handbag and hold it to her nose. “I don’t eat in hotels”, she announced. “Once I had the misfortune to witness the seamy side of it. Salads such as this one had been reposing in a dumpster until called out for an emergency. And as for the file mignon medallions soon to come, you can find their equal under the shoes of a taxi driver.”

The subsequent cold response from the table irritated her. “I cannot stand this place, Manfred,” she said, taking a very large quaff of the white wine recently arrived. “This is a perfect hell. Did I even want to come here? No. Have I been abused? Yes.”

She suddenly seized his hand in her warm and very large clasp, gazing at him with her shimmering dark eyes. “Will you take me to your home, Manfred? Please? You are the only friend I have now.”

What could he do but agree? And anyway, Manfred always had a streak of gallantry in his soul, and he was quick to say, “Sure, certainly.” But he was nervous because he didn’t know where he was. He knew he wasn’t in Paris, but little more than that, and if he didn’t know where he was, how could he take her somewhere else? Lenore, however, sensed his difficulty, though it rested on different grounds. “We’ll take a taxi – share. We’ll stop off for wine – and better than this crap – and go on our way.” She took his hand and brought it to her lips. “Thank you, thank you, sweetheart. Now let’s go.”

They got up quickly to leave, a vast figure of Lenore looming over the pocket sized Manfred. She stopped a moment to exchange scorns at the table, and was about to continue when Lenore suddenly screamed, jerking her hand away. Baffled, he looked up and found her weeping in the arms of a young man. “Oh, my angel!” she cried, kissing him over and over again. “My puppet dear! You came after all!”

“Ahhhh,” thought Manfred, “her son has come to rescue her. I should disappear tactfully into the night.”

But when she cried out, “Eddy!” he realized that this gangling young man with a mass of curled hair, holding with difficulty the titanic woman leaning against his shoulder, was the man she vilified not long ago.

Lenore, beaming and triumphant, brought the youth over to Manfred. “Eddy, I want you to meet Dr. Glazer, a very dear friend.” Eddy put out a weak hand. “Okay,” he murmured. He was only a few years more than a boy, with a pleasant youthful look, difficult to identify with the face Lenore had denounced earlier. “Darling,” she said to

Eddy, “do you want to stay here or go home?” “Oh, here, yeah,” he replied. “These are the guys to hear!”

She looked at the filled chairs and glanced at Dr. Glazer. He felt a little tired now, and the thought of going home was compelling. “Take mine, Eddy,” he said. “And by the way, can you tell me where we are?” Eddy proved to be a nice and bright guy. “You want to go out the east door,” he ended, “there’s a department store out there, Lord and Taylor.”

He stopped Eddy right there; everything became clear – and appalling. Anxiously, he borrowed Eddy’s phone and called his sister. He braced himself for an apocalyptic fury. But the sister he heard was a rarely contrite woman, who said to him, “I’m so sorry, Manfred, but the time has gone by so fast, I hardly knew. Can you forgive me? And can you wait for another few minutes?”

He told her he forgave her completely, but he couldn’t give her any more minutes.

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