

Perfidia

By Lewis Shiner

"That's Glenn Miller," my father said. "But it can't be."

He had the back of the hospital bed cranked upright, the lower lid of his left eye creeping up in a warning signal I'd learned to recognize as a child. My older sister Ann had settled deep in the recliner, and she glared at me too, blaming me for winding him up. The jam box sat on the rolling tray table and my father was working the remote as he talked, backing up my newly burned CD and letting it spin forward to play a few seconds of low fidelity trombone solo.

"You know the tune, of course," he said.

"King Porter Stomp." Those childhood years of listening to him play Glenn Miller on the console phonograph were finally paying off.

"He muffed the notes the same way on the Victor version."

"So why can't it be Miller?" I asked.

"He wouldn't have played with a rabble like that." The backup musicians teetered on the edge of chaos, playing with an abandon somewhere between Dixieland and bebop. "They sound drunk."

My father had a major emotional investment in Miller. He and my mother had danced to the Miller band at Glen Island Casino on Long Island Sound in the summer of 1942, when they were both sixteen. That signature sound of clarinet and four saxes was forever tied up for him with first love and the early, idealistic months of the war.

But there was a better reason why it couldn't have been Miller playing that solo. If the date on the original recording was correct, he was supposed to have died three days earlier.

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The date was in India ink on a piece of surgical tape, stuck to the top of a spool of recording wire. The handwritten numerals had the hooks and day-first order of Europe: 18/12/44. I'd won it on eBay the week before as part of a lot that included a wire recorder and a stack of 78s by French pop stars like Charles Trenet and Edith Piaf.

It had taken me two full days to transfer the contents of the spool to my computer, and I'd brought the results to my father to confirm what I didn't quite dare to hope--that I'd made a Big Score, the kind of find that becomes legend in the world of collectors, like the first edition *Huck Finn* at the yard sale, the Rembrandt under the 19th century landscape.

On my Web site I've got everything from an Apollo player piano to a 1930s Philco radio to an original Wurlitzer Model 1015 jukebox, all meticulously restored. During the Internet boom I was shipping my top dollar items to instant Silicon Valley millionaires as fast as I could find them and clean them up, with three full-time employees doing the refurbishing in a rented warehouse. For the last year I'd been back in my own garage, spending more time behind a browser than trolling the flea markets and thrift stores where the long shots lived, and I wanted to be back on top. It wasn't just the freedom and the financial security, it was the thrill of the chase and the sense of doing something important, rescuing valuable pieces of history.

Or, in this case, rewriting history.

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On the CD, the song broke down. After some shifting of chairs and unintelligible bickering in what

