

# Soho Golem

**by Kim Newman**

"Of all quarters in the queer adventurous amalgam called London, Soho is perhaps least suited to the Forsyte spirit . . . Untidy, full of Greeks, Ishmaelites, cats, Italians, tomatoes, restaurants, organs, coloured stuffs, queer names, people looking out of upper windows, it dwells remote from the British Body Politic."

[John Galsworthy](#)

## 1: Spoiling the Barrel

On a fine May day in 197—, Fred Regent and Richard Jeperson stood in Old Compton Street, London N1. The pavement underfoot was warm and slightly tacky, as if it might retain the prints of Fred's scruffy but sturdy [Doc Martens](#) and Richard's elastic-sided claret-coloured thigh-high boots.

Slightly to the north of but parallel with the theatrical parade of Shaftesbury Avenue, Old Compton Street was among Soho's main thoroughfares. Blitzed in the War, the square-mile patch had regenerated patchwork fashion to satisfy or exploit the desires of a constant flux of passers-through. People came here for every kind of "lift." Italian coffeehouses had opened on this street a century ago; now, you could buy a thousand varieties of frothy heart attack in a cup. This was where waves of "dangerous" music broke, from bebop to glitter rock. Within sight, careers had begun and ended: Tommy Steele strumming in an espresso [skiffle](#) trio, Jimi Hendrix choking in an alley beside The Intrepid Fox.

Also, famously and blatantly, Soho was a red-light district, home to the city's vice rackets for two hundred years. Above window displays were neon and plastic come-ons: GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS—LIVE NUDE BED REVUE—GOLDILOXXX AND THE THREE BARES. Above doorbells were hand-printed cards: "French Model One Flight Up," "Busty Brunette, Bell Two," "House of Thwacks: Discipline Enforced."

Fred checked the address against his scribbled note.

"The scene of the crime," he told Richard.

Richard took off and folded his slim, side-panelled sunglasses. They slid into a tube that clipped to his top pocket like a thick fountain pen.

"Just the one crime?" he said.

"Couldn't say, guv," replied Fred. "One big one, so far this week."

Richard shrugged—which, in today's peacock-pattern watered-silk safari jacket, was dangerously close to flouncing. Even in the cosmopolitan freak show of Soho, Richard's [Carnabethan](#) ensemble attracted

attention from all sexes. Currently, he wore scarlet buccaneer britches fit tighter than a surgical glove, a black-and-white spiral-pattern beret pinned to his frizzy length of coal black hair, a frill-fronted mauve shirt with a collar-points wider than his shoulders, and a filmy ascot whose colours shifted with the light.

"I certainly *feel* a measure of recent turmoil," said Richard, who called himself "sensitive" rather than "spooky." He flexed long fingers, as if taking a Braille reading from the air. "It certainly could be a death unnatural and occult. Still, in this parish, it'd be unusual *not* to find a soupçon of eldritch atmos, eh? This is east of Piccadilly, *mon ami*. Vibes swirl like a walnut whip. If London has a psychic storm centre, it's on this page of the [A to Z](#). Look about, pal—most punters here are dowsing with their dickybirds. It's not hard to find water."

A skinny blonde in hotpants, platforms and a paisley halterneck sidled out of Crawford Street. She cast a lazy look at them, eyes hoisting pennyweights of pancake and false lash. Richard bowed to her with a cavalier flourish, smile lifting his [Fu Manchu](#). The girl's own psychic powers cut in.

"[Fuzz](#)," she sniffed, and scarpered.

"Everyone's a detective," Richard observed, straightening.

"Or a [tart](#)," said Fred.

The girl fled. Heart-shaped windows cut out of the seat of her shorts showed pale skin and a sliver of Marks and Sparks knicker. Four-inch stack-soles made for a tottering, [Thunderbirds](#)-puppet gait that was funnier than sexy.

"That said, shouldn't this place be veritably *swarming* with the [filth](#)?" commented Richard. "One of their own down, and all that. Uniforms, sirens, yellow tape across the door, [Black Mariahs](#) hauling in the usual [susses](#), [grasses](#) shaken down? All holidays cancelled, whole shift working overtime to nick the [toerag](#) who snuffed a copper while he was about his duty? And where's the wreath? There should be one on the street, with some junior [Hawkshaw](#) posted in that alcove there, in case the [crim](#) revisits the scene to gloat and lingers long enough to get [nabbed](#)."

Richard had put his finger on something that had bothered Fred. One of the man's talents was noticing things unusual by their absence. The [proverbial dog that didn't bark in the night](#).

"This isn't Dock Green, Richard. And DI Brian 'Boot Boy' Booth isn't—*wasn't*—[George Dixon](#)."

Now he thought about it, Fred wondered if Busy had even told the Yard about Booth. He might have thought [giving Fred the shout](#) was all duty, and a sense of self-preservation, required. In which case, there would be a load of forms to fill in before bedtime.

Usually, Fred got involved in cases by Richard. They were both assets of the Diogenes Club, an institution that quietly existed to cope with matters beyond the purview of regular police and intelligence services. Last month, it had been flower children plucked from [Glastonbury Tor](#) by "bright lights in the sky" which the boffins reckoned were extradimensional rather than extraterrestrial; before that, a Brixton [papa loa](#) whose racket was giving out [teterodotoxin](#)-cut ganja at a street festival and enslaving a cadre of zombies through the voodoo beat of a reggae number Fred still couldn't get out of his head.

This time, the call came directly to Fred from Harry "Busy" Boddey. Fred's secondment to work with Richard had been extended so long he sometimes forgot he was still a sergeant in the Metropolitan Police, with space in the boot-rack at New Scotland Yard. He hadn't seen Busy since [Hendon College](#),

which was deliberate. DC Boddey was a [trimmer](#), a taker-of-shortcuts; the cheery cheeky chappie chatter and carved-into-his-cheeks smirk didn't distract from ice-chips in his eyes. Through [rozzer](#) gossip, Fred heard Busy had landed his dream job.

On the phone, Busy hadn't sounded as if he were still smirking.

"It's my [guv'nor](#), Freddo," he had explained. "DI Booth is dead. Killed. It's one of yours, pal. One of the *weird ones*, y'know. Off the books. So far off the books, it's not even on the bloody shelf. The horror shows that bring out that long-haired [pouffe](#) with the 'tache and the clothes. Booth was *smashed*. While sittin' in his office. Looks like he was hit by a bleedin' express train. Five blokes with sledgehammers couldn't do that much damage."

Fred's first reaction was to assume five blokes with sledgehammers had outdone themselves and the regular [plods](#) could track them easily by the blood-drip trail. Gruesome, admittedly, but hardly in the same docket as [time-warping Nazi demons](#), extradimensional hippie harvesting, [spirits of ancient Egypt](#), dreadlocked rasta zombies, or [brain-bending seminars in Sussex](#). Still, the Diogenes Club had nothing on at the moment and it was sunny out. No point lazing around the flat on an [inflatable chair](#) with a slow leak, with the snooker commentator on the BBC continually rubbing it in that he hadn't sprung for a colour telly ("For those of you watching in black and white, Reardon's coming up on the pink."). Once Busy was off the line, Fred had [given Richard a bell](#) and arranged to meet him here, outside Booth's Soho HQ.

Richard arched an elegant eyebrow. "Skinderella's?"

The name was up in glittery purple letters, surrounded by silver-paper suns whose points curled like two-days'-dead starfish. The light of this constellation was reaching Earth well after the stars had burned out. In the star-hearts were photographs of female faces with hairstyles and smiles from ten years before. Once colour, the snaps were bleached to a peculiar aquamarine that made the girls look drowned. The door was wedged open, but glittery streamers curtained the way in.

Somewhere, tinny music played through maladjusted speakers. It could have been Melanie's "I've Got a Brand New Pair of Roller-Skates (You've Got a Brand New Key" or John Fred and His Playboy Band's "Judy in Disguise (With Glasses)" or anything with that rinky-dink, teeth-scraping rhythm.

Fred checked his note again. He guessed why Busy had given him a street address rather than just named the place.

A board propped on an easel on the street promised "Tonight's tasties—Helena Trois, the Mysterious Zarana, and Freak-Out Frankie." Black and white head-shots were pinned around the names, all of women looking back over naked shoulders. In the window stood life-size cardboard cutouts of girls who wore only sparkly G-strings and high heels, leaning in unnatural and/or uncomfortable positions. As a token of respect to the Indecent Displays Act, coloured paper circles were stuck like grocer's price tags over nipples. One or two had fallen off, leaving the girls stuck with blobby glue-pasties.

A book rack, just like the ones in a newsagent's or bus station, was chained to a Victorian boot-scrapers to prevent theft. Paperback shapes in the wire slots were wrapped in brown paper like a surrealist installation. The wrapping was partially torn off one, disclosing a title that caught Fred's eye, *Confessions of a Psychic Investigator*. He plucked the book, skinned it, and looked at the cover. A thirtyish blonde in a school-cap and navy-blue knickers, braids conveniently arranged over her breasts, did a shocked comedy double take as a "ghost" in a long sheet ripped off her gymslip with warty rubber horror-hands. The author was a Lesley Behan.

"Nice to see the field getting serious attention," drawled Richard. "You should buy that. I'm not aware of Miss Behan's contribution to the literature of the occult."

Also on offer were "films—continuous," at a ticket price well above that charged by self-respecting Odeons or Classics; this afternoon's "XXX" triple bill was *Sixth Form Girls in Chains*, *Chocolate Sandwich*, and *Sexier Than Sex*.

"Now, that's just ridiculous," exclaimed Fred. "How can anything be, well, *sexier* than sex? It's like saying wetter than water."

"Perhaps a philosophical point is intended. After all, is not reality sometimes a disappointment, set against its imagined or anticipated version?"

"One thing I guarantee is that what won't be *sexier than sex* will be these films."

"You sound like a connoisseur."

"I once spent two weeks in the back row of one of these pokey little cinemas on an undercover job. We were after some nutter who liked to throw ammonia in the faces of the usherettes. In the end, they nabbed him somewhere else. All I got out of it was eyestrain. I didn't even want to think about chatting up a bird for six months. I've actually seen *Chocolate Sandwich*. It's about this West Indian bloke, a plumber, and these housewives ..."

Richard made a face, indicating he didn't want to know any more.

Locating a panel of buttons by the streamers, Richard pressed one. A buzzer sounded inside.

"Frederick," Richard began, "this might seem naïve to someone *au fait* with the ins and outs of policing the capital, but isn't it something of a *conflict of interest* that the policeman in charge of the Obscene Publications Squad should work above—not to put too fine a point on it—a strip club?"

Fred coughed a little. The OPS was one of those embarrassments the average copper tried not to bring up if he had any intention of becoming an above-average copper.

"Don't hem and haw, man," snapped Richard.

"Have you ever heard the expression 'one bad apple'?"

"'Spoils the barrel?' Indeed."

Fred found himself whispering. "You know we don't have police corruption in this country?"

"That's the impression given by the patriotic press."

"Well, it might not be 100 percent true."

Before he could further disenchant Richard, the streamers parted. White, beringed hands reached out and fastened on Fred's shoulders. He was pulled into warm, fragrant darkness.

2: Queen of the Nile

When his eyes got used to the gloom, Fred found he was being held close by a tiny woman in a Cleopatra outfit. She had Egyptian eye makeup and a sprinkling of glitter on her bare shoulders. A rearing tin cobra stuck to the front of her stiff black wig prodded his chin.

"Steady on, luv," he said.

"You've made a conquest, Fred," commented Richard, slyly.

Fred took the girl's fingers off his shoulders and gave them back to her. She waved them about in the region of her brass bra, then put them behind her. He had an idea she was a bit embarrassed by her hands, which were large for her size.

"You're the ghost-exterminators," she said, in broad Sarf Lahndahn tones. "Thank Gawd you're here."

Richard reached behind her, took one of her hands, turned it over, and kissed her palm dead-centre.

"And you must be the Mysterious Zarana, Queen of the Nile."

Her eyes widened, cracking a black bar of eye shadow.

"[Lumme](#), you really are psychic."

Richard smiled. "Your picture is outside," he said.

She was a bit disappointed. "It's Zarana Roberts, really. Dad was out in Egypt during the War."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Richard Jeperson, and the fellow you've enraptured is Fred Regent."

Fred wondered if he was blushing. It'd be too dim in here to tell.

Zarana did something like a curtsy, with a little eyelash-fluttering smile like the one in her mug shot.

Then she was serious.

"Busy Boddey's [goin' spare](#)," she said. "Ever since the *thing* happened. He's been on [the blower](#) to half the town ..."

Which meant there *should* be more police here.

"Now he's up outside Boot Boy's office, keepin' guard. None of the girls wanted to go up there. Not even before the *thing*. I mean, taking your knickers off in public for a livin' is one thing, but Boot Boy Booth is another, if you know what I mean."

Fred had heard a few things about DI Booth.

"We should take a look-see," said Fred, trying to sound more casual than he felt.

"Rather you than me, ducks," said Zarana. "Fancy a [cuppa](#)? [Ty-Phoo](#)'s [two pound](#) to the customers, but I can get you sorted compliments of the management."

"That would be most welcome, Miss Roberts," said Richard.

"Zarana, please. No need to be formal."

"Thank you, *Zarana*."

"You too, Freddy Friday," she said, prodding him in the ribs with a knuckle-ring, finding a soft spot close to his heart and grinding it. "Come on."

"Zarana," he said.

"Not so difficult, is it?"

It wasn't, but he thought she'd left her mark on him.

She bustled off, "backstage"—which might have been called a cupboard anywhere else. The walls, floor, and ceiling were covered with brown shagpile. At the end of the corridor was a bar-theatre space, where a Chinese girl, spotlit on a dais, peeled a *cheongsam* off her shoulders. A sparse audience kept to their shadows. Fred wondered who these folk were—it was half past three in the afternoon: didn't they have jobs to go to? Mechanical moaning and oompah muzak seeped from an alcove under the stairs. The basement screening room was probably a firetrap. Booth should at least have made sure the place was up to public safety specifications.

A proper staircase led upward. Serried beside it were framed posters of strippers.

"There's your ghosts," said Zarana, returning with tea-bag teas in an ["I'm Backing Britain"](#) mug and a breast-shaped tankard. She gave Richard the Union Jack and Fred the pewter tit.

The posters were in different styles, going back through the years—Sunday supplement full-colour and psychedelic design giving way to black and white and blocky red lettering. It was like a reverse strip: the older the picture, the more clothed the girls. Over the years, standards had changed—at least insofar as what could be shown on the street.

"Tiger Sharkey, also known as Theresa D'Arbanvilliers-Holmes," said Zarana, in gossipy museum-guide tones, indicating a wild-haired blonde in a [Jungle Jillian](#) leather bikini. "Married a Tory MP, she did, and pays Boot Boy a fair slice of cake every month not to have the ["glamour films"](#) she used to make sent to the [News of the World](#). I hope you don't count that as a motive, since she's a love, honestly. Felicity Mane, the Flickering Flayme. [On the game in Huddersfield](#), poor dear. Trixie Truelove. Her proper name's Mavis Jones, and she's still here, doin' makeup and costumes. She knitted my snake-wig. Put on a bit of weight since that photo was taken."

Zarana had accompanied them to a landing, where she paused.

"And here's our founder, bleedin' Royalty with tassels. If I'd half a crown for every [cove](#) who comes in here and says birds today ain't fit to tie her G-string, I'd have a villa on Capri and be payin' muscle boys to shake their bums at me."

The poster showed a slim-hipped blonde posing coyly, Venus-style. Even in faded black and white, she was a startler. A platinum rope of hair wound around her neck, across her breasts, about her waist, and fanned out to serve as a loincloth. She had huge, sad eyes and a dimple in one cheek.

"Pony-Tail," said Zarana.

Fred knew. Trev Bailey, who sat two desks along from him at school, once had a "photography" magazine with Pony-Tail's picture on the cover confiscated by a maths master. Later, the offending article was found in the rubbish bin by the bike sheds, crumpled and suspiciously stained. The teacher was called "Wanker" Lewis for the rest of his career.

Zarana considered the poster.

"You'd think she invented nudity from the way they rabbit on about her."

During that two-week stint in a porn cinema, the only film that had jolted Fred awake—and even slightly stirred his interest—was *Views of Nudes*. A scratchy black and white 1950s antique about well-spoken naked persons playing volleyball at a Torquay naturist camp, with strategically placed shrubs to save their embarrassment, it was out of place amid the bloodily colourful socks-on couplings of randily joyless Scandinavians as Glenn Miller at the Frug a-Go-Go. *Views of Nudes* was booed by raincoats, until they were stunned to a hush by Pony-Tail. In a blatantly spliced-in, gloriously faded-to-pink colour sequence, she stripped in a stable, getting out of riding habit and jodhpurs (editing tricks were necessary to manage the boots) and whipping her hair about. She frightened the horses but excited the audience; the tally-ho soundtrack was soon augmented by the chink of spare change in active pockets. Fred had to admit Pony-Tail, who could look young as twelve or old as sin, had *something*.

"Where is *she* now?" asked Richard.

Zarana made mystic gestures. "That's the ghostly part. Nobody knows. Or is saying, if they do. She vanished. She could write her own paycheques if she came out of retirement. Of course, she'll be a crone now. Bleedin' Pony-Tail. I bet it wasn't even her own hair. Nice [mince pies](#), though. I heard she might have been got out of the way, so she could really be a ghost. I think that's why you're here. It's what Busy Boddey's afraid of."

They looked upward, where the stairway narrowed. Bulbs were burned out or broken. The next landing was in deep shadow.

"I'll stay here, if you don't mind," said Zarana.

"Come on, Fred, let's get on with it," said Richard.

Zarana's fingers touched the lapel of his [crombie jacket](#), felt the fabric, and let him go.

"Careful, Freddy," she said.

"Certainly will, Queenie."

Richard was halfway up, into the dark. Fred left the girl and followed.

3: Mr. Sludge

Fred saw DC Harry "Busy" Boddey was in a right state. When Fred and Richard entered the antechamber with him, Busy jumped off his stool.

The inner door was smashed off its hinges.



The "five blokes with sledgehammers" theory looked better and better.

Neither Fred nor Richard had so much as sipped their tea, but the stench made them raise cups to their mouths, not so much for the swallow but the strong smell.

"See," said Boddey, nodding at the empty doorway.

Fred got a look into the office beyond. Something limp sat at and over a broken desk. Red splashes Jackson Pollocked over strewn papers, abused [glossies](#), demolished furniture, and pulled-down posters.

"Stone the crows," said Fred.

Busy whimpered. Fred would have marked him down as one of those joke-over-dismembered-body-parts coppers, but this took things to extremes.

Richard had his feelers out—he called them "mentacles." He stood straight and calm, eyes fluttered shut, nose raised like a wine taster doing a blind test, fingers waving like fronds.

"What's the looney up to?" asked Busy, bitterly.

Fred slapped him.

"Trying to help," he told the shocked policeman. "Now shut up, Busy Lizzie!"

Richard snapped out of it.

"No need for additional ultraviolence," he said. "There's been quite enough of that. You, Constable Boddey, give me the court report."

Busy looked up at Richard. Fred nodded at him.

"This morning, something came here and did ... *that* ... to Booth."

"Very concise. Did you find the *corpus*?"

Busy shook his head. "No, it was Brie. One of the girls. Massive knockers. Does secretarial stuff too. She's scarpered. You won't see her [Bristols](#) round here again in a hurry."

"Was anything seen of the assailant or assailants?"

Busy shut up.

"Now now, come come ... you called Fred for a reason. The Diogenes Club has a reputation. We don't involve ourselves in gangland feuds or routine police-work. We're here for more arcane matters."

Busy tried hard to stop shaking. "I saw *it*," he said.

"The murder?" prompted Richard.

"The murderer."



"It?"

"He, I suppose. When Brie screamed, I came upstairs. It was still here, standing in that doorway. It had done its business, just like that, in seconds I reckon. Thump thump thump and the show's over, folks, haven't you got homes to go to? It had a big coat, like a flasher, a dirty mac, and a hat, old-fashioned ..."

"Tricorn, shako, topper ..."

"No, one of those movie gangster jobs. Trilby."

"So, we have his clothes described. What about the rest? Size?"

Busy held his hands apart, like a fisherman telling a whopper.

"Huge, giant, wide, thick ..."

"Face?"

"No."

"No, you can't bear to remember? Or no, no face?"

Busy shook his head.

"What you said second. Just greyey white sludge features. With eyes, though. Like poached eggs."

"A mask," suggested Fred.

"Don't think so. Masks can't change expressions. Can't *smile*. It did. It saw me and Brie, and it *smiled*. How can something with no mouth to speak of smile? Well, it was bloody managing, that's all I can say. God, that *smile!*"

Busy covered his face again.

Richard looked about the antechamber. Spots of blood and something like mud dotted about the doorway, but this room was clean. Floor-to-ceiling shelves held box-files with faded ink dates on their spines. A coffee table by Busy's stool had a neatly arranged fan of girlie magazines—*Knight, Whoops!, Big and Bouncy, Strict, Cherry, Exclusive*. An undisturbed coat-tree bore a mohair topcoat, a bowler hat, and an umbrella. Savile Row, definitely. Better quality than anyone on a Scotland Yard wage could afford without going into debt.

There was a clear demarcation line. The devastation was confined to the inner office.

"Your Mr. Sludge made quite an entrance," said Richard. "Splashy, in fact. But the exit was more discreet."

Busy nodded.

Fred took the constable's chin and forced him to look at Richard.

Busy swallowed.

"It *emptied out* somehow," he said, making a swirling gesture, "as if going down a plughole, then it was just gone, coat and hat and all."

"Intriguing." Richard took another gulp of tea and put his mug down on the cover of *Knight*, blotting the chest of a girl wearing parts of a suit of armour. "So we have something here substantial enough to wreak considerable damage but capable of, as it were, *evaporating*. You were quite right to call us, Constable Boddey. If there's a phantasm, golem, or *afrit* in the case, it falls under our purview."

Fred let Busy go.

He was surprised to find he felt a sympathy twinge for Busy. He wasn't a [chancer](#) anymore, just a shell-shocked survivor who'd have to live with bad dreams.

Richard produced a scraper from a flapped side-pocket. He ventured gingerly into the office, careful not to brush against anything dripping. He took a sample of something congealed and sticky.

"Sludge, indeed," he said. "Plasm of some specie. Ecto-, perhaps. Or psycho-, eroto-, or haemo-. Then again, it could just be *gunk*."

He scraped it back onto the doorjamb.

"I just need to know one more thing," said Richard, addressing Busy. "Who else have you told?"

Busy looked up, a sparkle of the old cunning reminding Fred he *was* still the same [flash git](#) he'd known at Hendon.

"Um," began Busy.

There was a commotion downstairs. People arriving.

"Not the police," Richard observed, instantly.

His hawkish brows narrowed. Busy shrank, trying to slip back into shivering wreck status to avoid answering for his actions.

A yelping and ouching indicated someone was being dragged upstairs.

Zarana was pushed into the room. This time Fred caught hold of her. She put her face to his chest so as not to look into Booth's office.

A beef-faced, big-bellied man in a dark suit that had fit him better in 1965 was at the top of the stairs, wheezing. Charging up two flights was something he hadn't done in a while. Someone (almost certainly a young woman) had persuaded him that a paisley scarf worn under an open violet shirt would make him look less behind-the-times—the sweaty *foulard* flopped on his sternum like a dead (but [with-it](#)) herring.

A pair of heavy lads backed him up.

The newcomer was so used to being a hard man he hadn't bothered to keep in shape. People were still

afraid of him for things he'd done years ago. If half what Fred had heard about Mickey "Burly" Gates were true, people were right. Gates had apprenticed as a meat-cutter at [Smithfield's](#) before joining [the firm](#). Throughout his career, Gates had been in meat of one sort or another.

Allegedly, he kept his hand in with his old chopper.

Gates took in Richard, from pointed boot-toes to tumble of long hair.

"Who the bloody hell are you?" he demanded. "And what the bleeding hell do you think you look like?"

Richard shrugged his eyebrows and commented, "Charming."

Then the meat-cutter saw Boot Boy Booth.

"Jesus wept!" he said, involuntarily crossing himself.

"Friend of yours?" asked Richard, casually.

Gates tore his gaze away from the red ruin in the inner office and looked again at Richard, squinting.

"This is them, Mickey," said Busy Boddey—it didn't surprise Fred that a DC in the OPS was on first-name terms with Burly Gates. "Specialists in ghosties and ghoulies. The Odd Squad."

Richard cocked an eyebrow. "I haven't heard that one before. Not so sure I care for it."

"I understand about specialists," said Gates, making an effort to calm down. "I use them a lot. Like plumbers. If they do a [diamond](#) job, I'm a happy chappie and the packet of notes is nice and thick. If they don't ... well, they forfeit my custom and, as it happens, tend to retire early. Clear?"

"Crystalline," drawled Richard, not really listening.

A framed photograph had caught his attention. Pony-Tail, again—in [St. Trinian's](#) uniform, with hockey-stick and straw boater. Ten years gone, and the girl was still all over Soho.

"Diamond," said Gates. "So, get on and specialise. I don't really care what happened, just so long as it don't happen again on [my patch](#). Track down who ..."

"*What*, most likely."

"... or *what* did this, and make sure they get put out of business."

Richard looked at Gates and did something shocking. He giggled.

Gates's red face shaded toward crimson. Sweat steamed off his forehead.

Richard's giggle became a full-throated King Laugh. He made gun-fingers and shot off all twelve chambers at Gates. Fred had to swallow a smirk.

Gates searched his waistband for a chopper. Mercifully, he had left it at home.

Richard shut off his laugh. "You've made a fundamental error in assessing this situation," he told Gates. "I

am not a plumber or a cabbie. I am, as it were, not for hire. I cannot be suborned into serving your interests—or, indeed, any but my own. Call me a dilettante if you wish, but there it is. I am here as a favour to my good friend, Sergeant Regent, and because the matter has features of uncommon interest."

Gates goggled in amazement.

"You evidently consider yourself a *power* in this district," observed Richard.

"I could have Eric and Colin snap you like a twig, sunshine."

Gates's heavy lads pricked up their ears. They cracked hairy knuckles.

"You could have them try," said Richard, amused. "It wouldn't advance your cause one whit, but if you feel the need, go ahead. Powerlessness must be a new, disorienting condition for you. I understand your need to attempt to reaffirm yourself. However, if upon second thought you'd rather not annoy me further and leave me to continue my investigations, kindly quit my crime scene. This isn't your fiefdom any more. This is where the wild things are. Is that, ah, *diamond*?"

Gates's mouth opened and closed like a beached fish's.

He grunted and left. Eric and Colin directed the [full frighteners](#) at the room, but only Busy cringed. Richard waved at them, a flutter of farewell and dismissal.

["Toodle-oo](#), fellows."

Eric and Colin vanished.

Fred breathed again. He hoped Zarana hadn't noticed him trembling.

#### 4: Local History

"Let's see if I have this straight," began Richard, setting his thimble-cup down on the red Formica table. "Skinderella's is *owned* by that irritable gent Gates, but was *managed* by a serving police officer? Setting aside that puzzle, I understand that Mr. Gates is a big fellow around these parts?"

Zarana nodded. "He has a ton of clubs. Chi-Chi's, the Hot-Lite in Dean Street, Dirty Gertie's (at Number Thirty), the Prefects' Hut, the National Girlery ..."

She had taken off her [Carry On Cleo](#) gear (on stage, not that Fred had caught her turn) and now wore a lime green mini with matching knit waistcoat, [Donovan hat](#), and shaggy boots. She had nondescript, shortish brown hair—pinned so she could get the wig back on quickly for her 5:30.

They sat in Froff, a Greek Street café. Gleaming, steam-puffing espresso machinery was held over from when it was called Mama Guglielmi's. A new vibe was signalled by deep purple tactile wallpaper, paper flowers stuck to mirrors, and sitar muzak. Waiters wore tie-dye T-shirts and multicoloured jeans wider at the ankles than Fred's [sta-presses](#) were at the waist. The staff were wary of Fred. His just-growing-out skinhead haircut (a "suedehead") made him look like the natural enemy of all things hippie, but he sussed that they had Soho antennae that twitched if there was a non-bent policeman about. He had pointedly been asked if he'd like a bacon [sarnie](#). As it happens, the one that turned up was excellent, even if he had to make a conscious effort to blank out the memory of Boot Boy Booth's death-site to face his [nosh](#).

Two tables over, a rat-faced [herbert](#) in a fringed [Shane jacket](#) two sizes too big for his thin shoulders sold silver-foil slivers to fresh-from-the-country kids who were going to be disappointed when they tried to smoke the contents.

"Mr. Gates strikes me as somewhat *traditional* for these environs," said Richard.

Zarana drew four corners in the air and sniggered.

"Indeed," said Richard. "The original Soho Square."

"Burly Gates started out as a meat-cutter," said Fred. "Then as a bouncer, for Schluderpacheru."

"Yeah, Popeye," said Zarana. "Now there's a *real* creep."

"Fred, you are familiar with this foreign-sounding person."

"Konstantin Schluderpacheru. Vice Lord back when we had rationing. Soho was overrun by [demobbed](#) blokes with money in their pockets and bad habits picked up in the War. No one's sure where he comes from, but he claims to be Czech. Besides the striptease places, he was—probably still *is*—landlord for a lot of first- and second-floor properties with single female tenants."

"[Knockin' shops](#)," said Zarana, with distaste. "Don't gawp, Freddy. I show it, I don't sell it."

Richard patted a hand over Zarana's large fist.

"I'm amazed you have such a command of local history," Richard told Fred.

"It's what Every Young Copper Should Know. Faces and statistics. At the Yard, they print them on [cigarette cards](#)."

Fred was pleased that for once he was filling in Richard on arcana. Usually, it was the other way around.

"Pray continue, Frederick."

"Come the late '50s, Mickey Gates is a jumped-up [teddy boy](#) rousting drunks at Schluderpacheru's places. He was a double act with a cove by the name of Grek Cohen, who used to be a wrestler. One of those man-mountain types. The story went that you could stick a [flick-knife](#) into him over and over for five minutes and he wouldn't even notice. Burly and Grek worked up a nice little protection racket, originally targeting Schluderpacheru's competition. Also, they started smut-peddling—brown-paper-wrapped little mags and pics. Gates calls himself a 'publisher' now, which means the same stuff on glossier paper. You saw his stuff in Booth's reception area. *Knight*, *Whoops!*, *Cherry*. Those are the 'respectable' ones."

"You're well up on this."

"Where do you think all the stuff confiscated in raids winds up? Night shifts at police stations get very boring."

"I was in *Knight* once," said Zarana. "A Roarin' Twenties set, shimmerin' fringes, long beads."

"Schluderpacheru thought porn was peanuts, and let Burly and Grek scurry around picking up grubby

pennies. Big mistake. Pennies add up to a grubby pile. They acquired leases to half the district. They were the new Vice Lords."

"How did their erstwhile employer take that?" asked Richard.

"That's the funny part. Schluderpacheru was in the [Variety Club of Great Britain](#) by then. He got into the film business, as an agent and then a producer. He leased his 'talent' to [quota quickies](#). Pony-Tail played the victim in a murder mystery, *Soho Girl*. After she got killed and before Zachary Scott found out Sid James did it, audiences lost interest. But when she was on the screen, they sat up to attention. Schluderpacheru reckoned he had the next [Diana Dors](#) under exclusive contract. Well, maybe the next [Shirley Anne Field](#). Blonde and British, you know. This made him feel like the unpronounceable answer to [Lew Grade](#). He planned to build a whole film around her ..."

"*Brighton Belle*," said Zarana. "Mavis was goin' to be in it."

"He was going to give her a proper name. Gladys Glamour, or something. But it didn't happen. Schluderpacheru became a producer, but not with Pony-Tail as his star. She disappeared about that time—presumably wriggling out of the lifetime contract and making things easier for Shirley Anne Field. Burly and Grek were taking over the clubs, and Schluderpacheru had to put up some sort of fight or lose face. If people weren't respectful, which is to say terrified, of him, his empire would tumble. But he also knew he needed to ditch girlie shows if he wanted to be invited to the [Royal Film Performance](#). So, in 1963 or thereabouts, Soho had a not very convincing gang war. In the end, Schluderpacheru divested himself of the clubs—retaining enough of an interest to claim a stipend from Gates."

"And Grek Cohen?"

"When the dust settled, Grek was nowhere to be seen. His missing persons file at the Yard is still open. In order to make friends again, Schluderpacheru and Gates had to agree neither was to blame for their disagreement. But someone had to be, to satisfy pimps' honour or whatever. Grek was handy, stupid, and expendable. That said, God knows how they got rid of him. Not with a flick-knife, obviously."

"Mavis says it was *her*," blurted Zarana.

Richard and Fred looked at the girl. There was a long pause.

"I'm not goin' to be a grass," she said. "Life expectancy is short enough in this place."

"I'm not a policeman," said Richard. "And Fred barely counts as a plod. Look at the crimes he's ignoring just by sitting here."

The rat-faced bogus dealer pricked up his ears, took a good look at Fred, and headed for the hills.

"This is all gossip. Mavis tells it different every time. She gets it mixed up with Samson and Delilah. The big thing is that Grek Cohen was besotted with Pony-Tail, devoted like a kid to a kitten, the whole *King Kong* scene."

"It wasn't the airplanes," quoted Richard. "'T'was Beauty killed the Beast."

Zarana nodded. "How else could Popeye and Gates get to Grek? They took Pony-Tail away, threatened to carve her face up unless Grek turned himself over to them, lay down for whatever was comin'—an express train, most likely. Then, the bastards probably did her in anyway, no matter what they say about

her now."

"So, at the bottom of it all, there's an unwilling *femme fatale*, a lure, and a sacrifice."

"It makes sense," said Fred. "The two mystery disappearances about the same time. Bound to be a connection."

Richard clicked a spoon against his teeth.

"It seems singular to me that this Pony-Tail person is so frequently mentioned. As if she were a presiding spirit, patron saint of stripteaserie, the Florence Nightingale of ecdysiasts."

Fred remembered the girl in the stables. He slowed the film down in memory. Pony-Tail was looking beyond the camera, fixing her eye on one face in the darkness, undressing just for him.

"She can't have been *that* good," said Zarana. "She just took her clobber off to music. It's not astrophysics."

Richard and Fred still thought about her.

"Men," said Zarana. "What a shower!"

Something exploded against the window like a catapulted octopus, splattering black tentacles across the glass.

"Interesting," said Richard.

## 5: The Festival

The girl Fred had scared earlier staggered into Froff, one heel broken, halter torn, hair dripping. Tarry black stuff streaked her face and arms.

Outside the star-splattered window, a black-uniformed army marched down Greek Street, lobbing paint grenades. Advance scouts whirled plastic bull-roarers. Voiceless screaming and sticky missiles generally cleared the way.

A waiter tried to shove the [tom](#) back onto the street, but she wasn't shifting. A runnel of blood mixed in with black on her face.

"Assault with a deadly weapon, miss," said Fred, raising his voice. "Could you identify the culprit?"

She shook her lopsided head and said, "I don't want to get involved. It's not healthy."

"Nothing you do seems healthy. Have you considered going home to mum?"

"Who do you think put me out in the first place, PC Plod?"

She sat down at a table and asked for tea, spilling odd coins from a tiny, long-handled purse to prove she could pay for it. She fished out some safety pins and made emergency repairs to her top. Then she picked at her hair. The drying, setting goo made unusual spikes. If she kept at it, she might set a new fashion.



A second wave of marchers passed, waving banners. It was less like a parade of protest than a show of force.

"They do this once a bleedin' week," groaned Zarana.

Fred saw slogans—"Down with Sin!" "Heed the Wrath," "Harlots Out," "Smite the Flesh-Peddlers."

"Booth went spare about that little lot," said Zarana.

"The late, lamented?" prompted Richard.

"Someone must lament, though you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone to own up to it."

"We never did establish why the Obscene Publications Squad was headquartered in Skinderella's. If you remember, I did ask."

Zarana looked to Fred for the nod. He gave it.

"It was a payoff to Boot Boy from Mickey Gates. Booth took a fat profit out of the place. In Soho, the coppers are full partners in the smut rackets. They get all the perks. Law's in the way of folk who want to sell and other folk who want to buy, so who's to complain if the law ducks aside? Then sticks out its greedy hand?"

Richard looked disappointed. His battles took place beyond the ken of the rest of the world, and he hadn't kept up on tediously everyday crime.

"She's right, guv'nor," said Fred. "It's an open secret. Every new broom at the Yard promises to sweep clean, then lifts the rock in Soho, takes a look at what's squirming, and decides to do something else. More parking meters."

"You're telling me that the squad charged with *regulating* obscenity is actually responsible for *disseminating* it?"

"More or less."

"Good grief," said Richard. "I assume our friends in black take objection to this *laissez-faire* situation?"

Zarana nodded. "When this mob showed up, Gates bent Booth's ear off. He *was* payin' for protection, so he thought he was entitled to it."

The marchers wore plain unisex boilersuits and wound black scarves around their heads and lower faces. It must get steamy in those outfits on a hot day, but they were also indistinguishable from each other come an identity parade. They were well-drilled—placard-wavers, bull-roarers, and paint grenadiers all in place and working with brisk, brutal efficiency.

"You can't buy them off," said Zarana. "Booth tried that straightaway. They're god-bothered loonies."

"There's no explicit mention of God in their various slogans," mused Richard.

"They call themselves The Festival of Morality," said Zarana.

Richard looked at the protesters. He steepled his fingers and closed his eyes, reaching out to get a deeper impression of them. Then he snapped to.

"Frederick, are you up to date on this movement?"

"Only what I read in the papers. You can imagine why they're here—to take a stand against immorality and licentiousness. They're a reaction to the 'permissive society.' When blokes like Booth get too blatant, and stop keeping seamy stuff out of sight, someone else will step in and call for a Bonfire of the Bleedin' Vanities."

"Lord Leaves," said Zarana.

"Of course," said Richard. "Algernon Arbuthnot Leaves, Lord Leaves of Leng. Him, I know of."

"That's the bloke," she said, pointing. "High Lord Muckety-Muck of Killjoy."

An open-top black limousine decorated with white symbols crawled along at the centre of the procession. Seated on a raised thronelike affair in the back was an old, old man in long black robes and an ear-flapped skullcap. It struck Fred that he really had copied his look from Savonarola. His hands were liver-spotted and gnarled, but he could hold up a megaphone and bellow with the best of them.

"Is he *singing*?" asked Fred.

"Not exactly [Gilbert O'Sullivan](#), is he?" sniped Zarana.

"You have to applaud the effort," said Richard. "He's not afraid of seeming ridiculous."

Zarana, who obviously took the Festival personally, kept quiet.

Lord Leaves continued to give vent. In the front passenger seat, next to a uniformed chauffeur, sat a twelve-year-old blond boy with a black blindfold around his eyes—presumably to save him from sights that might warp his little mind. The lad strummed an amplified acoustic guitar, accompanying the Father of the Festival. Looking up beside His Lordship was an adoring young woman dressed like some sort of nun, hair completely covered by a wimple, blue eyes blazing with groupie-like adoration.

Fred made out the words.

*Sin and sodomy, lust and lechery ... bring about man's fall,  
Filth and blasphemy, porn and obloquy ... I despise them all!*

The woman rattled a black tambourine. It struck Fred that she was the most genuinely *aroused* person he'd seen all day—certainly more turned on than the tarts and punters on the streets.

The insight gave him a weird thrill, which Zarana noticed. She tugged his sleeve, drawing attention to herself with a cattish little frown.

"Not often one hears the word 'obloquy' used in a lyric," said Richard. "I shall consider writing a letter to *The Times*."

The tambourine woman's electric gaze passed over the street, as if scouting (quite sensibly) for assassins, and hit on Froff. Fred thought for a moment she was looking exciting hatred directly into his bowels, but then sensed the attention was for Zarana.

He put an arm round her (again).

"Don't let them bother you, luv," he said.

"Easy for you to say," she sniffed. "It takes a week to get that gunk off, and you can't work. In my line, there ain't exactly paid sick days or invalidity benefits."

"Is that Leaves's granddaughter looking daggers?" Fred asked Zarana. "High Priestess in charge of ripping out hearts."

"You should glance at the society pages when flipping through the paper to the racing results," said Richard. "That is Lady Celia Asquith-Leaves. His Lordship's wife."

"Dirty old sod," breathed Zarana.

"One mustn't rush to judgement," said Richard, which was quite comical in the circumstances.

An image of His Lordship's wedding night sprung up in Fred's mind. He did his best to try to expunge it completely.

"I bet they *read* the magazines before throwin' them into the fire," said Zarana, not helping at all. "Then get worked up into a lather and ..."

"You're making our Fred uncomfortable, Queen of the Nile," said Richard.

"Sorry, I'm sure," said Zarana, wriggling close to him.

Fred wished he were somewhere else. Say, sinking knee-deep into freezing mire on Dartmoor with hooded slime-cultists puffing poison thorns at him through blowpipes and ichorous elderly things summoned from the bog-bottom padding after him on yard-long, mossy feet.

The parade came to a halt. Uniformed police constables moved in. Their path was blocked by serried ranks of bull-roarers and placard-wavers. The Festival had a solid grasp of demo tactics.

Lord Leaves finished his song and tossed his megaphone to a minion.

He flung back his robes like the Man With No Name tossing his poncho over his shoulder. He wore what looked like a black body stocking circled with the white symbols that were also marked on his car. He picked up something that looked a lot like a sten gun fed by a thick hosepipe.

Zarana darted under the table.

Fred realised the girl knew more than he did and was probably being sensible, but he couldn't resist the street theatre.

Soho residents—"denizens," really—mounted some sort of counterattack, [ponces](#) linking arms with toms,

bruisers emerging from sex shops and strip clubs to put up a stout defence. They jostled the foot soldiers of the Festival.

Lord Leaves of Leng twisted a nozzle on his gun.

A high-pressure stream of black liquid squirted in an arc, splashing down on the counterprotesters—who scattered.

A disciplined, scripted cheer rose from the black-clad ranks.

"I defy," yelled His Lordship, unamplified but booming. "I shall smite."

He played the jet spray against windows and hoardings.

Wheeling around, back and forth, Lord Leaves scrawled thick, dripping lines across signage and come-on posters, upping the flow whenever an image of an unclad woman got in the way. The black liquid was thinner than paint but lumpy and staining. Neon tubes fizzed and burst. He aimed his jet at a porn-broker's window, pushing in the glass and smashing down racks of 8 mm film loops, Swedish magazines, plastic novelties, and brown-paper-bagged glossies. An angry manager lost his footing as he tried to protect his merchandise. He scabbled around in the wet mess, falling heavily.

The cheers became more genuine. Harsh, mocking laughter.

Zarana peeped up again. "Tell me when it's over," she said.

"His Lordship enjoys taking the fight to the fallen," observed Richard. "He is something of a showman."

"You know what these Jesus freaks are like, guv'nor."

"Those white symbols on his suit and car have nothing to do with Christianity, Frederick. Which is interesting, don't you think? Lord Leaves is a man of great faith, evidently. An inspiration to followers. A black beacon of morality in an age he might deem is going to the dogs. Yet his faith isn't one hitherto associated with *morality* in the limited sense expressed here. The only thing I've seen in Soho that really goes with those symbols was your dead policeman. Lord Leaves is a great one for *smiting*, and the late DI Booth was certainly *smitten*."

Fred looked again at Lord Leaves, who was exulting as liquid filth poured down upon harlots and whoremongers. He considered the blue-eyed priestess, the blindfolded minstrel, the well-drilled troops. The Nazis had been against decadence, too.

"That, my dears," said Richard, pointing at Lord Leaves of Leng, "is a Suspect."

## 6: Repeat Offender

By nightfall, the street looked as if the Luftwaffe were blitzing again. Lights came on by fits and starts, many broken or sparking. The pavement was shiny, as black goo congealed into plasticky, pungent shellac.

Fred tried to avoid getting any on his Docs.

The march turned into a torchlight rally in Soho Square. Lord Leaves sang more songs—"Cast the First

Stone" was surprisingly catchy—between other "turns." "Concerned parents" made halting speeches, and "fallen souls" recanted previous harlotry at great length and in explicit detail.

Zarana had popped back to Skindy's to see if she needed to go on again. The management might dim the lights this evening, if not in tribute to the late DI Booth then to avoid attracting an angry mob of torch-wielding zealots. She had invited Fred to come watch her Queen of the Nile routine sometime when all hell wasn't breaking loose. A snake was involved, apparently.

Richard pottered around ruins, trying to pick up "impressions." Fred gathered it wasn't easy. At the calmest of times, Soho was awash with emotional discharge. Now it was a maelstrom of mixed feelings. If all this energy could be piped to power stations, the United Kingdom wouldn't need North Sea oil.

Fred showed his warrant card to a stray constable and asked for a report. The copper had a splurge of black across his uniform and was looking for his lost helmet. He was in a state of high pissed-offness.

"If this had been a student demo at the Yank Embassy," complained the constable, "the [Special Patrol Group](#) would be out in body-armour, with CS gas and riot-shields. A hundred arrests before suppertime, commendations all round. Because it's bloody prudes, it was just me and poor old Baxter trying "move along nicely now" on an army of roaring dervishes. Bastards said they'd march tomorrow, then switched schedules. That Lord Leaves is a menace. I'd rather have Hell's Angels any day."

Fred remembered he still hadn't called New Scotland Yard to share the sad news about DI Booth. At this rate, they would read about it in the morning papers. Richard said a forensics team would only get in the way. It was nice having such pull in high places that he could conduct his own private murder investigation.

Among those who came out to peep at the mess was Mickey Gates.

Through the rolled-down window of an I've-got-money Rolls Royce, Gates watched, a hard-faced dolly bird in each armpit, foot-long cigar in his [gob](#). Eric and Colin, his monkeys, supervised damage control at a couple of Gates's enterprises—a private cinema club and a "sex arcade." They chased off scavengers.

"Mr. Gates is having a bad day," said Fred.

The PC cheered up a bit.

"Isn't his Roller illegally parked?" said Fred. "See if you can rustle up a traffic warden. Get him ticketed."

The constable laughed. "Wouldn't I like to see that."

Gates caught sight of Richard and frowned, even more furiously. He was on the point of shouting something.

Suddenly, with an almighty *whump!*, a giant invisible boot came down on the Rolls. The roof caved and windows burst. Side doors buckled, ejecting the matched set of dollies. They crab-walked away, awkward in [hot pants](#) and fishnets, scraping knees and elbows, hairdos loose. At least, they were well out of it.

Fred saw Mickey bite off a chunk of cigar and swallow it.

Then metal folded around him. The car lifted off the street, and *bent*. Metal crumpled with dinosaur

screams. Dents appeared in the bodywork. The boot ruptured, vomiting a stream of bright, shiny paper—torn girlie magazines.

Richard was nearer than Fred. He considered the sight with cool interest. Sometimes, the guv'nor just plain forgot to be sensibly scared—that was one of the talents Fred brought to the team.

Eric and Colin just stood and gaped, like dozens of others. None of them tried to get too close.

Whatever was crushing the Roller wasn't quite invisible.

Greyish stuff swirled up, from the street and the rubble, lacing out of thin air, forming a giant, squat man-shape. Mr. Sludge had a domed lump of head but no neck. The bubble body, thick and smeary, distorted light. Power flexed in trunklike limbs.

Red dripped from the car, which buckled and compacted as if in a press at a wrecking yard. As the Rolls was abused, the giant became more solid. Fred had no doubt this was the phantasm, golem, or *afrit* that had killed Booth. The MO was unmistakable. Mr. Sludge glistened, glowing almost. Blood-squirts shot into its body, lighting up a nerve network of red traces. Girlie pictures clung to its torso, plastered like papier-maché layers, smoothing over an enormous musculature. Bright smiles and airbrushed curves, pink tits and bums, faded to grey leatheriness. Dozens of nipples stood out like scabs for a few seconds, then healed.

Like a Herculean weight lifter, Mr. Sludge hoisted high a rough cube that had been a car and its occupant.

Richard tried gestures and incantations, which got the thing's attention but little else.

The grey giant looked down at the Man From the Diogenes Club.

Fred remembered what Busy Boddey had said about its mouthless smile. Here it was again. Eyelights shone.

The car-lump was bowled at Richard.

Fred ran and jumped, shoving his guv'nor out of the way. They sprawled on pavement as the heavy cube tore into the road. The Spirit of Ecstasy bonnet ornament stuck up from the mess, undamaged, wings shining. Solid workmanship, that. Gates had known enough to buy British.

Mr. Sludge bellowed triumph, an unearthly sound produced by leather lungs and aeolian-harp vocal cords. The roar rose into the skies. Fred's eardrums hurt, and the noise invaded his skull, sprouting pain-blossoms behind his eyes. The giant's *substance* flowed into *sound*, and departed with the dying echo. The killer flew up, up, and away, passing from this plane of existence. Detritus showered from the space it had occupied. Stiff, faded foldouts fell like autumn leaves.

Richard sat up, fastidiously flicking bits of filth from his clothes.

"So, it's a repeat offender," he said. "Naughty, naughty."

7: Go-Go Golem

"What *was* that?" Fred asked.

"As I said, a phantasm, golem, *afrit*, revenant, whatever. An energy presence."

"It came out of *nothing*."

Richard raised a finger. "No, Frederick, not nothing. It accumulated matter, *stuff*. It displaced air. It had a physical effect on this world."

Fred looked at the metal lump in the road. Workmen with acetylene torches were trying to crack it open.

"I'll say it was physical."

An ambulance was on the scene. No one had hopes for the "patient." Ordinary police took witness statements, then quietly tore pages from their notebooks. Reports of the day's business had been made to Euan Price, Fred's contact at New Scotland Yard, and the Ruling Cabal of the Diogenes Club, Richard's notional superiors. Assistance had been grudgingly offered, but there was a sense that since Fred and Richard got into the case by themselves—thank you very much, Busy Boddey!—it would be as well if they did the heavy lifting and got it tidied away as quietly as possible.

"It came from nothing, though," said Fred. "Empty air."

"There's no such thing as *nothing*," said Richard. "All sorts of stuff washes about. And it can change form, just as water solidifies into ice. Our Mr. Sludge gets punching weight from what comes to hand. Very neat and efficient. It's probably tethered to the district. You heard Lord Leaves, 'sin and sodomy, lust and lechery.' Potent stuff, that. Especially if you stir in the *frustration*. Tantalising come-ons whip up the imagination. Then, there's the letdown of finding out that what's on offer can't match what was hoped for. That's what's really wrong with porn, by the way—not that it's against morality, but that it always delivers short measure."

Fred wasn't so sure. Richard had never seen Pony-Tail.

He thought of Zarana's snake dance—and had an inkling that her reality might live up to what he could imagine. At least he had something to look forward to.

"There's so much surplus emotion around here," said Richard, "strewn like used paper tissues. It's a wonder these things don't spontaneously generate all the time."

The cube cracked. Someone swore.

"It'll be closed casket," said Fred.

Dark, silent figures joined the crowds, members of the Festival. They watched the cutting-crew extricate the former meat-man from his car. The rally in Soho Square was over. To the faithful, it must seem as if Lord Leaves's prayers produced impressive instant results.

A banner unfurled, proclaiming the wages of sin as death.

"The most interesting thing about our go-go golem," said Richard, "is that there's *someone* inside."

"A dog-handler, setting the beast on its prey?"



"There is such a person, undoubtedly. A *summoner*. We'll get to him or her later. But what interests me just now is that some *personality* persists inside our Mr. Sludge. An earthbound spirit, doing the summoner's bidding. It's not easy to get a ghost to follow orders. There has to be some sort of shared purpose. You can't just invoke, say, Henry the Fifth, dress him in ectoplasmic armour, and send him out to murder the [Bay City Rollers](#) for offences against humanity."

"But you could get him to fight the French?"

"Precisely. You're learning."

"It rubs off after a while. So, you've got His Bloody Lordship, who hates the porn barons ..."

"And dresses like a high initiate in the sort of religion with a solid track record in revenant-raising."

Fred remembered Lord Leaves's stern, aged features as he sang or hosed. And his wife's ecstatic excitement. These people loved smiting more than they hated sin.

"So who's he raised up? Some old-time Puritan book-burner?"

"That's a thought. [Mrs. Grundy](#) or [Dr. Bowdler](#)? I think not, though. No point going to all the trouble of ensouling an amorphous mass of power if all it's going to do is sing hymns or write complaining letters."

Fred thought about the crimes. He set aside the method—the *weird* stuff—and tried to concentrate on the motive. Maybe thinking of the golem as a plain old crim would help.

"What about a nutter? Someone 'down on whores' like that nutcase who threw ammonia in porn cinemas. He hated it that the films turned him on, but couldn't stop himself being in the front row every night. He was looking to blame someone else for his own 'urges.'"

They were outside the Dog and Duck pub now. There was a buzz about an "accident" in Greek Street earlier, and a grumbling persisted regarding the Festival's hosepipe habits. But things were getting back to Soho normal—shrill laughs, loud music (Mott the Hoople's "All the Way From Memphis" from the Dog versus Roxy Music's "Virginia Plain" from the Crown and Two Chairmen up the road), busy fillies getting close to sozzled blokes, shills from the strip-joints inviting passersby, plods looking the other way.

Richard considered Fred's Ripper theory and decided it wouldn't do. "Our victims have both been *men*. The higher-ups. The inadequates you're talking about go after women—strippers, models, prostitutes, usherettes. Our killer has been precise about who gets hurt. The girls in Gates's car got away with damage only to their dignity."

"So, we're scouting the afterlife for someone who hates bent coppers and cockney ponces?"

Richard spread his hands.

"Neither of the dead men had fan clubs, mate," said Fred.

"I can think of two Soho disappearees who might have motive for doing away with Mickey Gates. We can rule out Pony-Tail, the patron saint of striptease. Our golem is definitely a feller. Shaped like a former wrestler, bouncer, and strong-arm man. 'One of those man-mountain types,' you said. Droppeth the penny?"

"Grek Cohen?"

Richard snapped his fingers.

"Of course, it would be peachier if Cohen had some grudge against Booth."

Fred bit his lip.

"Very sharp," he said. "In '63, Booth was a rising DC, already knee-deep in Soho rackets. They say he brokered the deal between Schluderpacheru and Gates. It's what set him up for ... well, for life. I wouldn't be surprised if he was the one who snatched the girl, to lure Grek. Then, afterwards, he ... *thwick!*"

He cut his throat with a thumb.

Richard's brows narrowed. "It occurs to me that Mr. Schluderpacheru might, at present, be a worried man."

"Couldn't happen to a nicer bloke."

"Come come, now now. We frown on killing people with the Dark Arts, no matter their character defects. There are often unhappy consequences. It's proverbially difficult to get the genie back in the bottle."

That was not a comforting thought.

8: Lord Soho

Back at Skinderella's, Fred learned Zarana had done her snake dance to an audience of precisely two paying punters, plus malingerers from a clean-up crew the Yard sent round to remove Booth's body and seal his files. The ghost at the feast was Inspector Roger "No Mates" Macendale, who had annoyed someone once and been cursed with the job of investigating police corruption cases. Macendale had avoided the OPS mess for years; now, in Booth's office, he was literally treading in it.

Boddey was trying to make himself helpful, hopping from one foot to the other like a playground semi-outcast trying to get in cosy with bullies by directing their attention to even more marginalized kids. Busy hoped to cast himself as a heroic whistle-blower, soldiering on in an impossible job, never taking so much as a penny from the Vice Lords who'd suborned his guv'nor. It was going to be hard to explain away the Jaguar in the garage of his family villa in Surbiton, and the equally high-maintenance luxury-model girlfriends in rented flats from Belgravia to Hampstead.

With the corpse removed from the premises, Richard had commandeered the phone and was making calls. The Ruling Cabal had pull from the House of Lords to the councils of gangland. Richard used it to solicit backstory on the Festival of Morality, the Big Soho Carve-Up of 1963, the box-office records of Imperial Anglo-British/John Bull Films, Ltd. (Graf Konstantin Hermann Rezetsky Bolakov ze Schluderpacheru, Prop.), golem-raising rituals, the presumably late Immanuel Cohen ("Grek" was from his wrestling style, "Graeco-Roman") and the legal tangle of the Obscene Displays act.

Fred sat in the bar, skim-reading *Confessions of a Psychic Investigator*. He had slipped the book into his pocket earlier and, what with the excitement, forgotten it until now. Chapter One, "The Ghost Gets

Laid," introduced medallion-wearing open-frilly-shirt magician "Robert Jasperson" and his cheeky cockney wide-boy sidekick "Bert Royale," who ran a cleaning service to get rid of unwanted spooks. Their first big case was a summons to a posh school where a succubus was molesting older girls and younger teachers with "midnight gropings and tonguings." Fred was miffed to discover that the gormless Bert spent all his time peeping through keyholes, getting "hot and bothered" as the apparently irresistible Jasperson enjoyed "rampaging rumpy-pumpy" with the French and Biology mistresses, the girls' netball team, his "tantric sex magickian" assistant Clitoria, and a passing district nurse. At the climax, the randy git solved the case by converting the "heavily knocked" ghost girlie (a nun walled up centuries earlier for instructing the novitiates in "Mysteries of the Orgasm") to "proper hetero shaggery" with vigorous application of his "mighty shaft." Lesley Behan (which Fred suspected wasn't her birth name) made Jasperson out to be the sort of psychic detective who couldn't so much as take out an anemometer to read a cold spot in a haunted house without being pounced upon by suburban housewives, high-society nymphomaniacs, teenage virgins, Dutch au pair girls, or two-way bike chicks.

"Losin' yourself in a good book?"

Fred looked up from a scene involving an "Orgy of Bubastis" and saw Zarana, in her civvies.

"Not exactly," he said, folding the book and hiding it in his back pocket. "You heard about Gates?"

Zarana cringed. "Some of the girls from Dirty Gertie's were in after it happened. We're all worried about bein' out of jobs. A lot of us are considerin' other lines of work. Actin', mostly."

"Including you?"

She looked glum. "John Bull Films has a company to compete with Hammer, Gruesome Pictures. I've done three-day bits for them—wenches chewed by werewolves, maids bitten on the nipple by vampire queens, dolly-mops gutted by Reg the Ripper. They couldn't afford Jack, apparently. I don't much fancy gettin' killed over and over again. And those are Popeye's 'respectable' pictures. He also makes the *Sexploits* films ... you know, *Sexploits of a Long-Distance Lorry Driver*, *Sexploits of a Merseyside Meter Maid*, *Sexploits of a Quantity Surveyor*. You don't get in those unless you turn up at his palace for bun-fights they call 'trade shows' and go upstairs with fat, baldin' men who own provincial cinemas and stink of stale [Kia-Ora](#). I'd rather work in a biscuit factory in Barnet."

"There are other film companies."

"Not if you've got a John Bull brand on your bum. Popeye can get you blacklisted. So I ain't goin' to be a Bond girl or a wife of Henry VIII. It'll be back to modellin'."

Zarana held up her hands, made gestures in the air, turned her wrists.

"Glamour modelling?"

"Hand modellin'. Close-ups of washin'-up liquid bottles bein' squeezed. Fingers brushin' a freshly shaved manly chin."

She brushed his chin, reminding him that he wasn't freshly shaved.

"Don't you think I have delectable digits?"

"Absolutely, Queenie."

"You're a love, Freddy Friday. The mitts are too big for the rest of me, but in close-up no one notices."

She stuck a kiss on the side of his head, tiny tongue slipping into his ear.

Fred realised he was doing better on this case than poor old Bert Royale. Still, Zarana wasn't like the paper cutout birds in the book. And, after two appalling crime scenes in one day, he doubted whether he'd be able to raise the enthusiasm for "rampaging rumpy-pumpy."

"I'll get by," said Zarana. "I'm gettin' too old and tired for strippin'. It's murder on the [plates](#)."

Fred thought she might be about twenty-four.

Richard slid out of the darkness and took a stool next to them, squeezing Zarana's hand in greeting. Fred, for once, was sensitive—Zarana liked Richard, but fancied Fred. One in the eye for Robert Jasperson, Mighty Shaftsmen.

"Here's a funny thing," said Richard. "Where do you think Lord Leaves of Leng hangs his hat?"

"Some Georgian pile with half Hampshire around it?" ventured Fred.

"And a dinky pied-à-terre in Knightsbridge," added Zarana, "handy for Harrod's so his wife can shop her little heart out?"

Richard smiled in triumph.

"That's what I thought, but—no—Algernon Arbuthnot Leaves resides right here, in Soho. It's a Georgian, all right. A town house in Golden Square, about five minutes away from this fleshpot. You notice he didn't have his rally outside his own front door and tick off the neighbours. Konstantin Schluderpacheru is one of those, two doors down. According to [Screen International](#), John Bull Films have a more or less permanent party going on there. Top folk from showbiz getting zonked, dollies draped around the furniture, hospitality free-flowing, cutthroat deals signed in blood in the bathrooms."

Fred noticed Zarana shuddered. He remembered what she'd said about "trade shows."

"Gates lived on three floors above the Hot-Lite, in Dean Street. DI Booth had a split-level mews flat off D'Arblay Street for which he didn't pay rent. Fred's old classmate Harry Boddey makes do with five spacious rooms and a rooftop garden in Ramillies Street. Soho is the place to live, it seems."

"I share with two other girls in Falconburg Court, off Soho Square," said Zarana, unashamed. "Handy for the clubs."

"Undoubtedly. But it's His Lordship who stands out, as it were."

"That explains why he's so worked up about smut," said Fred. "What with him being local. Probably worried about his wife getting a shock every time she pops out for a [pinta](#). The place fills up with blokes out looking for ... well, you know. A decent woman isn't safe."

"I doubt Lady Celia does her own popping, Frederick. Folk like the Leaves have people to do that for them."

Fred felt a full-bore glare aimed at him. Zarana was furious. He hadn't thought through that "decent woman" remark and had dug a hole it would take a lot of fancy footwork to get out of.

"No woman is safe," he amended, which actually didn't make things better.

Those model's hands made knuckly fists.

"You know what I mean," he said, exasperated, fending her off. "You must get as much unwanted [aggro](#) out there as anyone."

Zarana cooled and decided to let him off with a vicious pinch.

"Fair point. When I walk home, if I can't get a bouncer to see me to my door, I wrap up in an old coat that makes me look like someone's grandmother. Even then, idiots give me stick. They see you naked and think they know about you."

"Besides, there's something weird about Leaves's wife," said Fred. "Did you see her face? She might be against filth and fun, but she's charged up about *something*."

"Yeah, I know," admitted Zarana. "Among his other earners, Gates puts out—used to put out—a spankin' mag. You know, 'It's six of the best 'pon your quiverin' buttocks, Fiona!' Lady Leaves looks like a *Strict* model. One of the thrashers."

Fred liked the idea of Lord Leaves flicking through a porn mag before writing his next morality song and seeing wifey's bright little eyes staring up from a [fladge](#) lay-out. Under her wimple and robe, Lady Celia could easily be wearing black leather and straps. He tried to stop thinking of that. It was all Lesley Behan's fault, for warping his mind.

"I've looked over some of Lord Leaves's recent speeches," said Richard. "He continually harps on the theme of himself as the last moral man in Soho, surrounded by a rising tide of obscenity, crying halt! to the advance of corruption. He sounds like someone who wants something *back*. This whole square mile."

9: Private Files

Boddey was in handcuffs, being eased firmly toward the door and a waiting Black Mariah. About time too, thought Fred.

"What are you doing him for, sir?" he asked DI Macendale.

"Tampering with evidence, for a start."

"Freddo, it weren't me," pleaded Busy.

"Files upstairs have been filleted," said Macendale. "We've got enough to hang Booth and a whole lot more, but choice items have been spirited away ..."

Richard was interested. "What, specifically, is missing?"

Macendale looked glum. "Hard to say. But gaps are obvious."

"Constable Boddey," said Richard, "have you any ideas what ought to be there but isn't?"

"I didn't touch it!"

"I didn't say you did," said Richard. "I asked you if you knew what *it* was."

"Will it help me?" Busy asked, tiny spark of cunning twitching the corners of his mouth. It was the ghost of his smirk.

"It will help *us*," said Richard, gesturing to keep Busy's attention.

Macendale shook his head. He wanted to get home to his cocoa and be up early tomorrow to swoop on high-ranking bent coppers. He would already have Busy down as grass-in-training and ready to cut a deal to get the higher-ups named. The people who'd let Booth get away with it all these years.

Busy swallowed. He had got more tear-streaked throughout the day.

"I'd have to look."

"Under no circumstances . . .," began Macendale.

Richard unfolded a document and presented it to the inspector. Macendale's lips moved and his eyes swivelled from side to side as he read. Richard kindly pointed out official seals and signatures.

"Uh, carry on, Mr. Jeperson," said Macendale, fuming.

Richard took back the precious document and slipped it into an inside pocket.

"Let's take Constable Boddey upstairs," he said.

Busy shrank with terror. Macendale at least got enjoyment from that, and manhandled his prisoner up to Booth's office.

A door that looked like a broom cupboard led to a tiny space lined with metal filing cabinets. Locks were smashed. Richard took an interest in the damage, which could have been done with a sledgehammer. He scraped dried scum from a shiny dent in the dull metal and showed it to Fred.

Only two people at a time could get in the room, and they found it cramped if any drawers were pulled out. Richard withdrew and let Macendale supervise Busy as he went through the files. The inspector kept a close eye on the miscreant—as if expecting him to grab and swallow something incriminating. At that, Fred wouldn't have put it past him.

Richard took Fred aside.

"Our Mr. Sludge has subtler habits than we thought," he said. "Smash-kill-grind-crunch is one thing, but filching evidence from locked cabinets in a hidden room suggests a lighter touch. That's where our summoner comes in."

"Still think it's Leaves?"

Richard considered. "Booth's files would interest a moral crusader. In addition to protesting against the

mere existence of licentiousness, I assume Lord Leaves agitates against folk who profit from immorality, encouraging their prosecution on criminal grounds. I imagine that's why Booth was first on the to-kill list—it should have been his job to pursue Gates and the like for what I assume were many, many infractions of the letter of the law."

"Campaigners have tried private prosecutions," admitted Fred. "Stooges fronting the sex shops or porn cinemas get slapped with huge fines, which are paid promptly in big bundles of cash. Confiscated stock is replaced by closing time, and some new face is behind the counter the next day. Burly Gates rarely even gets mentioned in court."

Macendale brought Busy out of the file room.

"So?" asked Richard.

"He's shamming," said Macendale.

"I'm *not*," whined Busy. "Honest. All that's missing is old stuff. Records from the '60s. Memorabilia."

"Memorabilia?" asked Richard, intrigued.

"Publicity eight-by-tens, brochures, mags. Too tame for today's market, but nostalgia is booming. Private collectors pay high prices for vintage smut. Anything with Pony-Tail is worth a packet."

Fred and Richard exchanged a look. Pony-Tail, again. Was Grek still trying to rescue his tasselled princess?

"Booth had it salted away. Came with the place. Called it his school fee fund. He had kids."

"That's all that's gone?" asked Richard.

Busy wriggled, which was what a shrug looked like with handcuffs.

"There's something else," said Richard.

Busy couldn't look away from Richard's eyes.

"It's other ... investments," admitted Busy. "Eight millimetre films of tarts who've got new lives and want to keep old ones forgotten. Explicit photos of girls, and some lads as well, with prominent people—film and TV stars, business magnates, politicians, *policemen*, judges, pop singers. You can imagine the kinkiness, and how eager they are to keep it hush-hush. Some were paying off like rigged slot machines."

"Blackmail," said Richard.

Busy wriggled again. "That's it. That's all of it."

Fred remembered Zarana had mentioned Booth was milking a former stripper to keep her stag films out of the Sunday papers. Evidently, it was a cottage industry. That bulked out the suspect list, though—with the goods flown—it'd be hard to add actual names.

"It's no surprise Booth and Gates were in the blackmail racket," said Fred.



"Not Gates," said Busy, surprised. "The other one, Schluderpacheru."

## 10: The Party Scene

Golden Square, London W1. Handy for Wardour Street, where all the film companies—major and (very) minor—keep offices. A semisecluded haven of dignified mansions off Brewer Street, the (even) sleazier continuation of Old Compton Street.

A hop south was the Windmill Theatre, where nude girls had been appearing nightly since the War. The Windmill boasted "we never closed," despite air raids and police sweeps, working within the law of the day by presenting bare lovelies in posed tableaux. Vice squad officers kept reserved seats, allegedly prepared to haul the curtain down if a gooseflesh girl so much as blinked. Fred assumed the predecessors of Boot Boy Booth just enjoyed the ogling opportunities and the thick envelopes of ten-bob notes mysteriously slipped into their programmes. The Windmill was now a dad's idea of naughty—patriotic songs and patter comedians, and mere glimpses of skin. It was rendered outmoded by flickering X-certificate fare on offer in Piccadilly Circus at the Moulin and Eros sex cinemas (the latter opposite the statue of Eros), let alone the clubs, "reviews," and in-all-but-name brothels clustered at the lower end of Berwick Street. Plus *Oh, Calcutta!*, settled in for a long run at the Royalty Theatre: a Windmill show with sarky sketches and nudes that moved, suitable for trendy poseur and carriage trade alike.

Konstantin Schluderpacheru's town house might as well have sported a huge neon sign with "Bad Scene" written on it. The windows were open but curtained. Shifting, multicoloured lights gave the building a flashy, disco come-on look. Live music poured out, heavy on the bongos and the fuzz pedal. Glittery people came and went, in states of disrepair. A Eurovision Song Contest runner-up clung to the square's railings, bird-thin shoulders exposed by her backless dress, heaving liquid vomit into the bushes. A working-class novelist swigged from a pint mug of vodka and berated the pop princess. He blamed her for his inability to write anything worthwhile since moving from Liverpool to Hampstead and Ibiza.

"No wonder Lord Leaves hates these people," said Richard.

Two doors down, His Lordship's house was dark and shut up tight. At ten thirty in the evening, all good moral crusaders should be tucked into their twin beds, eyes screwed shut, ears plugged against the seepage of party noise. Or else peering with night-vision scopes at the comings and goings two doors away, keeping careful note of the names and faces.

Schluderpacheru might be the King of Blackmail, but Fred had no doubt that the Festival would use the same tactics. Lord Leaves needed a flock of politicians and newspaper people in his pocket. No one made a better, more vocal supporter of decency than a dignitary with something to hide.

As expected, Schluderpacheru's front door was guarded like a *führerbunker*. With the soaring death rate among the host's known associates, extra muscle was packed in. Skin-headed ex-boxers in tuxedos stood by. Fred spotted a couple of off-duty plods stationed about the square, moonlighting to cover their [hire-purchase](#) payments.

"Come on, lads," said Zarana, linking arms with Fred and Richard, and steering them toward the door. "Teeth and smiles."

There were flashbulb photographers in wait.

After Richard had theorised that it would be difficult to secure an entrée into the Schluderpacheru house, Zarana pointed out that it was one of the many places in London to which entrance was impossible unless you were, or were with, a stunningly beautiful girl. She then dug out her standing invitation, initialled K.S. in green ink. When not working her Queen of the Nile routine, Zarana did a high-society act as "Contessa de Undressa." With different makeup and costume, she looked like a different person. In full Contessa drag, she wore a floor-length red silk evening dress secured by four tiny-but-sturdy clasps, an upswept blond wig (complete with tiara), and a boxful of impressive paste jewels. Thanks to spike heels and the towering wig, she was a foot taller. She looked down her patrician nose like someone who would snub the Royal Family as middle-class German parvenus. If she kept her mahf shut, the illusion was perfect.

To Richard, this was a stroke of luck. He had no qualms about letting an ["s.b.g."](#) join the fun. A semi-official amateur himself, he would take help from whoever offered, assuming they were capable of taking care of themselves. Even with multiple deaths and supernatural maniacs in the case, Richard saw it as a bit of a lark that would be jollier with a pretty face along. Fred was less cavalier: from their earlier chat, he knew Zarana would put herself in an uncomfortable position by taking up the green-initialled invitation. She assured him that Schluderpacheru's guests could hardly be a bigger shower than the Skindy's clientele, and, besides, she could rely on him to protect her. That was a joke, but he took it seriously. She covered doubt well—she was a skilled performer, after all—but Fred picked it up. Again, it struck Fred funny that where Zarana was concerned, he was more in tune with the vibes than the supposed "sensitive."

Zarana presented the invitation to a squat, thick man who wore sunglasses after dark, and turned on a full-wattage smile.

"This is Happenin' Herbert, the pop artist," she said, indicating Richard, who flashed the peace sign. "And this is the famous Fred, who you must have read about in the Sunday supplements."

The goon [clocked](#) the "K.S.," returned the gilt-edged card to Zarana, and stood aside. The door opened.

The mirror-lined reception hall multiplied their images to infinity. Fred wore a white dinner jacket appropriated from the Skinderella's costume store (what act was it part of?) and now saw it didn't really go with his jeans and Docs. He tried to be the sort of Fred who made sure he got written up as fashionable, then wore something else equally stupid when people copied him.

One of the mirrors had a telltale grey-veil tint. There would be two-way glass all over the house, especially in the upstairs bedrooms, and cine cameras grinding away, adding to the Blackmail King's investment portfolio. Fred resolved not to use the toilet while he was here.

Zarana made a kiss-mouth at the mirror.

They proceeded into a large, half-sunken room full of chattery people and flashing lights. On a stage, a combo performed "She's Not There," trying not to mind that nobody was paying attention. In the centre of the ballroom was a bath of light—a swimming pool the size of a family plot, with a lighting array inset into the walls. A very drunk, very white girl wearing only a bikini bottom sat on the edge, splashing with her little legs, making waves that broke against the chest of a fully dressed white-haired man who floated with a dreamy smile stuck on his face, puffing happily on a pipe of tobacco and hash, the wings of his Ganex raincoat spread out like lily pads.

"That's . . .," began Fred.

"Yes," said Richard.

"And with him is . . ."

"Yes, her. She's in all the *Sexploits* films, and *Stow It, Sandra*. Not much of an actress, but she does this trick with her mouth and two golf balls that turns strong men to custard. I worked with her once. She's a [right cow](#)."

"Blimey," said Fred. "You wouldn't have thought it. I'd have expected him to be with Lord Leaves's crowd, protesting. He couldn't exactly show up at his party conference with her on his arm and expect to get reelected."

"Don't be so sure, Freddy," said Zarana.

"I'd say something about 'strange bedfellows,'" said Richard, "but I suspect that the beds here have seen a lot stranger."

A small, round man in a skin-tight moiré kaftan approached Zarana, pupils contracted to pinpricks, sweating profusely. He stuck out his tongue, which had a half-dissolved pill balanced on its end, and reached for Zarana with chubby, wriggly hands. Fred slapped him away and wagged a finger. He looked as if he was about to cry, then latched onto a passing black girl with a silver wig and matching lipstick and paddled along in her wake.

"Business as bleedin' usual," she said.

"*Ou se trouve* mine host?" asked Richard.

She scanned the room. "Not here. There's a room upstairs, for his inner circle. Wood panels, ghastly pictures of satyrs and fat [bints](#), hundred-year-old brandy, private screenin' room. Popeye holds court there. Though most of his cronies are here. You can tell them because they look bloody worried."

Dotted throughout the senseless crowd were furrowed faces.

Richard hummed. "The oases of desperation do stand out somewhat. Or, at least, sobriety."

"Did you see that Vincent Price film about the fancy-dress ball?"

Fred knew what Zarana meant. "*Masque of the Red Death*?"

"This is that, isn't it? Rich people makin' animals of themselves tryin' to have a good time, with the plague outside, ravagin' the countryside."

"And the Red Death approaches the castle doors," said Richard.

"It's time Death knocked here like bleedin' Avon callin'," said Zarana.

"Let's slide upstairs and try to see [Prince Prospero](#)," said Richard.

Fred turned to Zarana to tell her to find a loitering spot in the crowd and wait for them.

"No fear, Freddy," she said. "You're not leavin' me behind. It's not safe here ..."

A couple of football players with enormous bouffant perms and muttonchops shaped like Roman helmet cheek-pieces caught sight of Zarana and began dribbling toward the goal area. They wore suits that flapped like flags.

"Point taken," said Fred.

11: Coming in at the End

Without Zarana, they would never have found the inner sanctum. Schluderpacheru's house was like a funfair maze: zigzag corridors that cheated perspective, flock wallpaper with an optical-illusion theme, floor-to-ceiling joke paintings of doors, set decoration left over from Gruesome Pictures, actual doors chameleoned into walls, burning bowls of heady incense. There were chalk marks on the floor, recently scrawled runes.

"Schluderpacheru has taken precautions," said Richard, toeing a symbol. "I suppose he learned in the old country."

Zarana led them round a corner, and they found themselves looking up at a nine-foot-tall man with a distinguished rising wave of grey hair and a superbly cut wide-lapelled suit. He was sleek, with shining, somehow wicked eyes, and wore a mediaeval armoured glove.

It was a lifelike portrait, painted directly onto a wood panel.

"That's Popeye," said Zarana. "Larger than life and twice as creepy."

One of his eyes was brown and lazy-lidded, the other green and staring.

Voices came from behind the picture, raised but indistinct, arguing in a language Fred didn't recognise.

"There's a trick to this," said Zarana, patting the portrait. She found studs on the metal glove, and twiddled them. "Boys and their bleedin' toys."

With a click and a whoosh, the painting split diagonally and disappeared into recesses.

Beyond was a room illuminated by a blazing fire in an open grate—in contravention of the [Clean Air Act](#), Fred noted—and burning oil lamps. Two men were outlined by flame light, both wearing symbol-marked dressing gowns, locked in struggle, argument turned physical. One was Schluderpacheru, undersized in person, hair awry. Half his face wrinkled with effort, but the left side was plastic surgery-smooth, with the fixed, glaring green eye. He had the upper hand, but Lord Leaves—for all his years—fought fiercely; his fingers sank deep into Schluderpacheru's windpipe, and incantations rattled in the back of his throat. In one corner shrank Lady Celia, holding a fold of habit over her face like an Arab wife, eyes startlingly bright and excited.

Swirling in the air before the fire were scraps of matter in the shape of a big man, struggling to cohere but tearing apart as much as it came together. Mr. Sludge—Grek Cohen—had an invitation to the party, but wasn't here yet.

Everyone froze to look at them. Even the phantasm.

"We seem to have come in at the end of the story," said Richard.

Schluderpacheru and Lord Leaves spared them barely a glance, then got back to their grappling. The artificial side of the host's face bulged. His eyeball popped, escaping its wet red socket. The egg-sized glass eye fell heavily, thumping Lord Leaves on the forehead. His Lordship, stunned, lost his grip, and Schluderpacheru—who presumably couldn't pull that trick twice—dropped him. The King of Blackmail passed a hand over his hair, prissily fixing its dove-grey wave in place, but didn't seem concerned about his empty eye socket.

"I know who you are, magician," Schluderpacheru told Richard. "And I don't need help. This war of witchery is about to end. To my satisfaction."

He took a metal triangle from a stand, holding it like a trowel. It gleamed, two sides sharpened to razor edges. Schluderpacheru dropped to one knee, raising the triangle high, then brought the killing point down heavily. Lord Leaves's breastbone snapped.

Lady Celia yelped, but her husband said nothing.

The wedge-knife was embedded in His Lordship's chest. He kicked, leaked a little, and was still.

"There," said Schluderpacheru. "That's done. No more Festival. No more other."

Smug and suave, he considered the man-shaped cloud.

"Go away, Grek," he said. "Your summoner's dead. You've no place here, no toehold in this world. You should have stayed where you were."

Matter swarmed thickly, lacing together. Embers from the fire were sucked up and clustered into a burning heart. Stuff came from somewhere, from all around, and knitted. Greyish liquid seeped out of the air, running into and around the big shape, slicking over. A big-browed face formed out of the darkness. It looked down on the one-eyed man.

For a moment, Schluderpacheru was puzzled. He glanced at Lord Leaves, to make sure he was dead, then—panic sparking in his remaining eye—around the room, fixing on each face in turn.

"You—" he blurted.

Grek Cohen was solid now, a colossal statue of sludge, boiling with ghost-life. He gave off a spent-match stink.

Huge hands clapped, catching Schluderpacheru's head. The top of his skull popped, and his one eye leaked blood as his face was ground to paste between rough, new-made palms.

Zarana shoved her face into Fred's jacket, again. Richard whistled. Cohen lifted Schluderpacheru—his arms and legs flopped limp, his shoes dangled inches above the carpet. Cohen tossed the corpse into the fireplace. The robe flared at once; then fire began to eat into the flesh. Foul cooking smell filled the room.

"That's the last of them," Richard addressed the colossus. "The three who betrayed you, Mr. Cohen. The three who did away with the girl you died for. And Lord Leaves, too. You have no master here. Your purpose is achieved. Yet you remain. Why, I wonder?"

Richard walked up to the golem and examined it as if he were thinking of buying. Grue dripped from its spade-sized hands. Fred held Zarana, and looked around the room.

Lady Celia was mad, poor love, tearing at her habits.

Richard made some experimental gestures. Cohen stood solid.

"Hmnm, interesting. By all rights, you should evaporate. This is a rum do."

Lady Celia's wimple came apart, leaving her pale face framed by an Alice band. Her unconfined hair poured out—impossible lengths of it, blinding white-blond, shining in firelight.

In a flash, Fred put it together. It was dizzying, sickening.

"Pony-Tail," he said.

Zarana dared to peep.

"So it bleedin' is," she exclaimed. "Wonders never cease!"

Richard also directed his attention to Lord Leaves's young widow.

Lady Celia stood up, shedding the remains of her habit as elegantly as she had ever undressed, slipping the band off her crown, shaking out her hair.

"Now I see what they were talking about," said Richard.

The woman was nude, Godiva-curtained by her hair. It seemed alive, like Medusa-tendrils. She gathered the mane in her hands and held it at the back of her neck, winding her band about it. She had her ponytail again.

She couldn't have been thirty yet; how young had she been when she was a striptease star? She hadn't been legal, for certain.

"Grek Cohen had no master, just a mistress."

Lady Celia nodded to Richard. She formed a sly smile.

Fred felt it again, the warmth this woman projected. An icy warmth to be sure, but persuasive. He saw the guile working on Richard too, on the thing that had been Grek Cohen. This was a woman a man wanted to shield—he would put himself between her and any horror, and think the prick of a blade-point in his spine was the first touch of a caress.

Pony-Tail stood over Lord Leaves.

"Good-bye, Daddy," she said. She had a finishing-school accent, clear and sharp as crystal. She raised her bare foot to his face, stroked his slack cheek with her toes, then deftly scraped his eyes shut. "You were always my first."

"Clouds of mystery part," said Richard.

Pony-Tail giggled, and looked fifteen again. "Have I been naughty?"

"Does *he* know what you did?" Fred asked.

She looked at him, teasing and quizzical. Fred indicated Cohen.

"Does he know it was you? Booth, Schluderpacheru, and Gates didn't kidnap you in 1963. I'll bet it was your idea. His original body is under a foundation stone somewhere, isn't it? Did you do it yourself, or just watch? Was he happy anyway, just that you smiled at him as the concrete poured in? What a mug! Ten years on, and he's still your pet, isn't he? This has all been cleaning house. Had they started blackmailing you—those idiots!—threatening to expose Lady Celia Leaves as the notorious Pony-Tail? That would be one for the *News of the World*. Scupper His Lordship's Festival of Morality once and for all. Or was it just money they wanted?"

She smiled, enigmatically.

"You know what they *really* wanted?" she said, tilting her head to one side. "More than money, more than business as usual, more than power? They wanted *me*. They wanted me *back*."

She did a few steps, hair alive around her shoulders.

"Pony-Tail ... returns," she said, presenting herself. "Pony-Tail ... rides again!"

Fred fancied Cohen was smiling, appreciating her act. He had never really been fooled, but her act was just so damned *good* that it was impossible not to play along. Fred guessed Lord Leaves had been the same, opening his big book of spells just for a wink and a smile and a peek.

"I suppose this is your final performance," said Richard.

"Maybe not. What with everything, I'm Queen of Soho. No one in the way. The Festival will follow my lead. Can you imagine what I can make them do? It'll be a twenty-four-hour riot. And I can buy or run everything else in sight. Maybe I will come back, do the shows and the films and the telly. Only this time, I'll do it for me, not *them*, not men, not you."

She laid her head against Cohen's pebbled side, a girl petting her horse.

"It's the dancing, isn't it?" asked Richard, fascinated.

"Very clever, Mr. Magician," she said. She bent over double from a full stand and touched her toes, then sprung back upright, hands on hips, perfectly balanced, perfectly supple. "Yes, it's the dancing. Daddy started me off. He brought me up to be an initiate of Erzuli, Baphomet, and Nyarlathotep. Ritual dance, steps along the paths of power. I had to go out into the world, break away from the Festival, find my own dance. Then I had to go back, for a while. It was part of the pattern. Now, I have new steps, new paths, new dances. I don't need any of them anymore."

She was always in motion, dancing to the rhythm of her heartbeat. She was a white flame, endlessly mesmerising, lovely but deadly.

"What about him?" asked Fred.



Pony-Tail looked up at Cohen's caricature of a face, almost fondly.

"He's my masterpiece," she said. "How many other strippers really can dance to raise the dead?"

"You know a lot of dead people," Richard observed.

"I'm afraid I shall know some more, soon."

Zarana flashed anger at the woman.

"You ain't that special, you know."

"My friend would argue with you," said Pony-Tail, concentrating.

Cohen reacted to her change of mood, swelling into a more menacing aspect.

Richard muttered magics, which the dancing priestess dispelled with blown kisses.

"She's not your friend, Grekko," said Zarana. "She killed you, for a start."

"He knows, he doesn't care. None of them would care. Because it was *me*. Next to me, you're nothing, missy."

Zarana faced up to Pony-Tail.

Cohen's arm rose, ratcheting like a guillotine blade. Fred stepped forward to pull Zarana out of the way.

The girl eluded him and bore down on Lady Celia. The Queen of the Nile versus the Queen of Soho. Pony-Tail meets Contessa de Undressa. No holds barred. One fatal fall for the crown.

Zarana punched Pony-Tail in the stomach. Cohen roared.

Lady Celia doubled, hair tenting around her, then recovered in an instant and flicked out with contemptuous fingers. She twisted a clasp off Zarana's shoulder, and the dress came apart. Zarana held the scraps to her body, hobbled.

"I can't believe that rag is still kicking around. It was made for me."

Fred helped Zarana stay on her feet. He looked from the cockney Egyptian, awkward in the too-loose gown, to the white goddess, sinuous and unashamed in the firelight. Like everyone else, he dreamed of Pony-Tail; the difference was he knew she wasn't real.

"After this, I suppose the big fella's finished," said Fred. "All work done."

Pony-Tail cocked her head, considering.

"I might bring him out for special occasions. Summoning is an effort, but he's worth it, don't you think?"

"You hear that, Immanuel?" said Fred. "After this, you're going back in the attic."

Cohen was a statue, arm up.

"Good work, Frederick," said Richard. "Keep at it."

"You did all this to be with her, and she's shafted you. Again. Are you really as dim as they say? The cleverclogs. Burlly Gates, Boot Boy Booth, Popeye Schluderpacheru. They all *laughed* at you, Grek. Know what I mean? The big ape doolally over the princess. Like King Sodding Kong, they said. When they decided to dump you, she leaped at the chance to help. It was how she bought her way out, got back into His Lordship's house. Couldn't get into the Royal Enclosure with a lovesick gorilla mooning about, could she?"

"None of this matters," said Pony-Tail, bored. "Really."

"And now you've done for them all, and you *still* don't get the girl! Mate, you have been fitted up for a proper set of cap and bells. You must be the biggest mug punter in Soho."

The huge arm came down. The hand closed, on Pony-Tail's rope of hair.

"Ouch," she said, irritated.

Cohen held her by a leash.

Fred saw a glint of annoyance in her eye, an unattractive, petty expression. Then a sense of what was suddenly lost, a bulb of panic sprouting.

Thick arms hoisted Lady Celia Asquith-Leaves, the incomparable Pony-Tail, off the floor and hugged her to Cohen's chest, her struggling body shoved into the muck and mud of its trunk. Her arms and feet stuck out, flapping and kicking. Her face sank under the surface. Grey mass surged around the screaming O of her mouth, then filled it, staunching her noise.

"Finally," said Richard.

Now Grek Cohen had Pony-Tail, rather than the other way round, Richard's gestures and incantations had an effect. The colossus, growing insubstantial, rose like a hot-air balloon, bumping the ceiling. On its excuse for a face was a last smile.

"I think a withdrawal is in order," said Richard.

Fred and Zarana backed out of the inner sanctum. Richard followed, keeping up a stream of reverse conjurations.

"Where's his wand?" asked Zarana.

"It's in the fingers," said Richard.

"Magic."

The colossus shrank to the size of a floating man, Grek Cohen superimposed upon Pony-Tail, her limbs encased in his, her face shrieking soundlessly through his battered mask, her electric eyes staring madness through his dull, dead lamps.

The carpet pulled up and spiralled around the phantasm, spilling flaming oil and rolling Leaves away.

Cohen contracted to a dozen flaming points and whooshed into darkness.

The girl was gone with him, leaving only her hair. It drifted to the floor, strands crackling as they brushed flame. Swathes fell about like cast-off string.

The gorilla got the girl, which should count as a happy ending. Fred hoped never to see either again.

"The socially conscious thing would be to put out that fire," said Richard, "before the house burns down around the guests."

Zarana shifted a vase and disclosed a fire extinguisher.

"Just the ticket."

As she tossed the extinguisher to Richard, her dress finally fell off.

Fred couldn't look away. She noticed.

"That's better," she said. "I was worried. I thought that cow had you under her bloody spell, like she had all the other idiots."

After long, brazen seconds, she gathered up the gown and fastened it.

Weirdly, the little fiddle she did to reassemble her costume and cover herself struck Fred as sexier than Pony-Tail getting her kit off.

"There's no comparison, luv," said Fred.

Richard unloosed a surge of white foam at the flames.

12: Sexploits of a Psychic Investigator's Assistant

Near dawn, in the big bed in her tiny room in Falconburg Court, Fred finally drifted toward sleep.

As far as he was concerned, Zarana was the real Queen of the Nile.

A warm, dry, intimate touch slid across his belly.

"Luv, I'm not sure I could manage again ..."

She pressed fingers to his face, and he realised he had spoken too soon. She planted a tongue-twisting kiss on him. He pulled her closer, as they negotiated the tangle of sheets.

The sliding touch across his stomach was still there.

Zarana broke the kiss and stroked his chest, fingertips moving toward the slithering touch.

"Freddy, meet Ramsbottom."

He was fully awake now, and—as Lesley Behan might have it—"raring for rumpy-pumpy." But there was a new player in the game.

"*Ramsbottom?*" he demanded.

"The other bloke in my life," said Zarana.

In the predawn light, Fred discovered he and Zarana were wound together in the coils of a contented snake.

"Love me, love my python," said Zarana.

"Fair enough," said Fred.

The End

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### Annotations

1. John Galsworthy (1867-1933). Author, of course, of *The Forsyte Saga*.
2. Doc Martens. Form of footwear favoured in the 1970s by skinheads and others who thought they were "hard."
3. Skiffle. Form of music popular (briefly) in the late 1950s, typified by the use of a washboard base and the mangling of nineteenth century folk songs. Stuart Sutcliffe once demeaningly referred to the Beatles as "John Lennon's skiffle group."
4. Carnabethan. Coinage by Ray Davies of The Kinks, in "Dedicated Follower of Fashion," conflating the "New Elizabethans"—as trendy Brits were labelled in around 1953, with the coronation of Elizabeth II—and Carnaby Street, from the 1960s on associated with fashionable clothing.
5. The *A to Z*. *The London A to Z*—indispensable book of street maps.
6. Fu Manchu. Droopy moustache, named for the oriental master villain—who was clean-shaven in Sax Rohmer's books.
7. Fuzz. Police.
8. Tart. Girl of easy virtue, prostitute.
9. *Thunderbirds* puppet. Gerry Anderson-produced children's TV show (1965-6), one of his run of puppet-populated science fiction adventures, enormously popular among successive generations of British children. Avoid the live-action movie directed by an American.
10. The filth. Police.

11. Black Mariahs. Police van, used for taking suspects into custody.
12. Susses. Suspects. Verb—to suss, to suspect or find out.
13. Grasses. Police informants.
14. Toerag. Person of inferior morals and status.
15. Hawkshaw. Synonym for detective, originating in a character in the nineteenth century melodrama *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*.
16. Crim. Criminal.
17. Nabbed. Arrested.
18. The proverbial dog that didn't bark in the night. Cf: "Silver Blaze," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
19. George Dixon. Introduced in the film *The Blue Lamp* (1950), Sergeant George Dixon, played by Jack Warner, was the archetypal friendly British bobby. Though shot dead by wideboy Dirk Bogarde in the film, the character was revived for the TV series *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955-1976)—which in UK TV terms holds the status of being equivalent to both *Dragnet* and *The Andy Griffith Show*, as police procedural and cosy vision of paternalistic law enforcement. The American urban legend of cops beating a suspect while whistling the theme to *The Andy Griffith Show* has a British equivalent involving the memorable *Dixon* theme. A memorable postmodern take on the character is the TV play *The Black and Blue Lamp*.
20. Giving Fred the shout. Keeping Fred abreast of the situation.
21. Glastonbury Tor. Site of alleged psychic importance in Somerset—a tower on top of an artificial hill.
22. Papa loa. Voodoo priest.
23. Teterodotoxin. Drug used to simulate death, essential in the recipe for enslaving folks as zombies.
24. Hendon College. The leading UK police academy.
25. A trimmer. Lazy, morally lax type.
26. Rozzer. Police.
27. Guv'nor. Governor, superior.
28. *Pouffe*. Effeminate or sexually ambiguous fellow, which in 197— meant almost everyone with longish hair and a wardrobe. Closer to the Regency term "dandy" than the homonym "poof," which is a demeaning term—Australian in origin—for gay man.
29. Plods. Policemen.
30. Time-warping Nazi demons. See: "The End of the Pier Show."
31. Spirits of ancient Egypt. See: "Egyptian Avenue."

32. Brain-bending seminars in Sussex. See: "You Don't Have to Be Mad."
33. Inflatable chair. Late 1960s-early '70s artefacts—very comfortable, but they were prone to leaks that had to be patched like bicycle tires.
34. Given Richard a bell. Called Richard on the telephone.
35. Lumme. Ancient cockney expletive—derived from "God loves me."
36. Goin' spare. In a state of desperation.
37. The blower. The telephone.
38. Cuppa. A cup of tea, universal British salve.
39. Ty-Phoo. A brand of tea.
40. Two pound. Expensive now, exorbitant then.
41. "I'm Backing Britain." A patriotic-but-trendy campaign ("Buy British") of the late 1960s—it revived the use of the Union Jack in design, but didn't exactly reverse the long-term decline of the UK manufacturing industry.
42. Jungle Jillian. Heroine of the serial *Perils of Jungle Jillian* (1938), played by Olympic swimmer Janey Wilde.
43. Glamour films. Silent, one-reel 8 mm short subjects sold mostly through mail order, essentially depicting striptease acts. The most prolific director of the genre was Harrison Marks, and his biggest star Pamela Green—who can be seen as the model in *Peeping Tom*.
44. The *News of the World*. Sunday tabloid, traditionally packed with crime and scandal stories.
45. On the game. The practice of prostitution.
46. Cove. Man, fellow, bloke, chap, guy.
47. Mince pies. Rhyming slang: mince pies = eyes.
48. Crombie jacket. The sort of jacket you'd wear in 197— if you didn't want to be labelled a *pouffe*.
49. Glossies. Also known as "eight-by-ten glossies," publicity photographs.
50. Bristols. Rhyming slang: breasts (from the football club, Bristol City).
51. Chancer. Spiv, wideboy, petty grifter, opportunistic crook.
52. Flash git. Showy bastard. "Git" is from "illegitimate."
53. With-it. Stylish, up to the minute, in the know.

54. Smithfield's. London's premier meat-market.
55. The firm. Organised crime.
56. Diamond. Outstanding.
57. St. Trinian's. Girls' school in cartoons by Ronald Searle, made famous by a run of British film comedies starring Alistair Sim.
58. My patch. Territory, fiefdom.
59. The full frighteners. A menacing stare.
60. Toodle-oo. Good-bye.
61. *Carry On Cleo* (1964). The one with Amanda Barrie as Cleopatra.
62. Donovan hat. Large floppy headgear, popularised by the singer Donovan but mostly worn by women.
63. Sta-presses. Smart jeans.
64. Sarnie. Sandwich.
65. Nosh. Food.
66. Herbert. Fellow.
67. Shane jacket. Hideously out of fashion after Jon Voigt threw his away at the end of *Midnight Cowboy*.
68. Demobbed. Demobilised, just out of the armed forces.
69. Knockin' shops. Brothels.
70. Cigarette cards. UK equivalent of bubble-gum cards.
71. Teddy boy. A late 1950s youth phenomenon—roughs and layabouts who liked rock 'n' roll music but dressed in modified Edwardian gear—frock coats, tight trousers, greasy quiffs.
72. Flick-knife. Switchblade.
73. Variety Club of Great Britain. Show business charity organisation that raises funds for underprivileged and handicapped children.
74. Quota quickies. Inexpensive British B-feature films, often with a faded American star, made to take advantage of a law that insisted a certain quota of films shown in British cinemas be British-made.
75. Diana Dors. Britain's biggest film star of the 1950s, famous for blonde-bombshell roles and probably more for her personality than any of her actual credits. The prison movie *Yield to the Night* (1956) was an unusually dramatic role for Dors, who was most often found in fluff like *An Alligator Named Daisy*

(1955) or London noirs like *Passport to Shame* (1958). In later life, and several dress sizes larger, she was a regular in 1970s horror and sex films—*Nothing But the Night* (1972), *Theatre of Blood* (1973), *Keep It Up Downstairs* (1976).

76. Shirley Anne Field. Star of *Beat Girl*, *The Damned*, and other British cult films, busy as late as *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

77. Lew Grade. British cinema and TV tycoon, scuppered his empire by making *Raise the Titanic*.

78. Royal Film Performance. An annual showbiz institution, whereby the Royal Family are shown a specially-selected-as-inoffensive film.

79. Tom. Prostitute.

80. Gilbert O'Sullivan. Mysteriously popular 1970s crooner. Wore bigger Donovan hats than Donovan.

81. Ponces. Men who live off the immoral earnings of women, pimps.

82. The Special Patrol Group. More familiarly "the SPG," controversial police unit of the 1970s - often accused of racism, excessive force, and the like.

83. Gob. Mouth.

84. Hot-pants. Short shorts.

85. The Bay City Rollers. 1970s boy band, very popular with the sisters of boys who hated them.

86. Mrs. Grundy. An unseen character in Thomas Morton's *Speed the Plow* (1798), who epitomises the prim, disapproving neighbour. "What will Mrs. Grundy say?" was a mocking catchphrase for decades, until Dame Grundy simply entered the language as a byword for priggishness.

87. Dr. Bowdler. In 1818, Thomas Bowdler edited an edition of Shakespeare in which all material he construed as offensive was omitted (e.g., the entire character of Doll Tearsheet from *Henry IV, Part II*); these cut texts were the default for fifty years. He lent his name to the verb "to bowdlerise," meaning to dilute by censorship.

88. Kia-Ora. Brand of alleged orange-derived juice, endemic to cinema refreshment stalls in the UK.

89. Plates. Rhyming slang: plates of meat = feet.

90. *Screen International*. UK film trade paper, along the lines of *Variety*.

91. Pinta. Pint of milk. A 1960s slogan ran "Drink a pinta milka day."

92. Aggro. Aggravation, often violent assault.

93. Fladge. Flagellation.

94. Hire purchase. Paying on the instalment plan—the pre-credit card version of "live now, pay later."

95. S.b.g. Stunningly beautiful girl.



96. Clocked. Took notice of.

97. A right cow. Not a very nice woman.

98. Bints. Young girls—from the Arabic, imported into English via servicemen posted overseas.

99. Prince Prospero. The character played by Vincent Price in Roger Corman's film of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death."

100. The Clean Air Act. The law, passed in 1956, that regulated coal-burning fires in London and put an end forever to the famous pea-soup fog. Whenever you see a London fog in an American film set after 1956, it's a mistake.

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