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The East End Job

by Richard Rewell

There are a lot of things we don't want to know about the people we love. Take my Dad for instance.

In January 1949 my Dad sat at a table in the Rabbits pub in Manor Park, an area in London's East End scrutinising the pub's accounts. Dad sips from his pint and takes a drag on a cigarette, exhales and unconsciously contributes to the cosy fog that smothers the lounge bar. He never takes his eyes off the column of figures of the profit and loss account although he becomes instantly aware of someone standing over him. He looks up to see two young men looking down at him.

"We'll join you," said the smaller of the two men.

"Yeah," said his taller companion.

"As you wish" said Dad who speedily removed the figure strewn sheets of accounts from the view of the visitors while estimating the men's ages to be very early twenties.

"Nicely done mate," says the smaller man as he sat, "professional like."

"Very professional," echoes the taller man who remains standing.

"It's only fair," said Dad, "It's not mine to share with anyone other than the landlord."

"Well said. You're educated. Heard you want to be an accountant and you do bit of selling insurance isn't it?" said the smaller man.

"Well I just got engaged and need all the money can get. Just got demobbed. Good with figures so do the books for people. The insurance work, for Essex Insurance, is evening work, but the commission is good. It all helps."

"I like that," said the smaller man, "don't you?" he said turning to his companion.

"I do. Industrious."

"Look mate." said the smaller man, "we can offer you something a better." He paused "What's the word?"

"Substantial." said the taller man.

"That's it. Substantial." said the smaller man just before an old lady in the corner of the bar started to play the piano and sing "Underneath the Arches".

"Doris" shouted the taller man to the piano player who looked, stopped playing and nodded an apology. Silence and the other patrons glanced nervously towards my Dad and his visitors.

"Landlord" said the taller man. "A drink for Doris" and the gentle chatter and murmurings of the lounge bar resumed.

"Where was I?" said the smaller man. "Yes. Look forget Essex Insurance. You'll sell for us. We're a sort of partnership. And we're growing. Also, you can do our books for all our pubs in the East End, our clubs, our cabbie firms and our bookies. And we'll pay for your Accountancy evening classes."

"I don't know what to say?" said Dad "When can I start?"

"Tomorrow." said the smaller man.

"Sure."

The taller man eased closer to Dad and whispered "When you sell the insurances, we know you'll be professional and polite but if the client doesn't buy, call me immediately. Alright?"

"Certainly." replied Dad.

"Heard you took a bullet in the War. Italy wasn't it?" said the smaller man.

"I did. How did you..." Dad didn't finish the sentence.

"We know everything, Des" said the taller man handing Dad a diary "Your appointments."

"What company are they then?" asked my Mum that night in the flat she shared with Dad over a wool shop in Ilford High Road.

"I think strictly speaking they're a partnership" said Dad.

“Well who are the bloody partners then?”

“A Ronald and Reginald Kray.”