

SILVER SERVICE

In business circles, Harry Penderson, Chief Executive of GEI, was a highly respected Australian businessman in the world's stock market. A tall, powerful man he was noted for mingling with the society set; around Melbourne's night spots, he was often seen and photographed with celebrities and politicians.

From previous visits, Nick Papadopolous recognised Harry and the five suited men as they opened the glass doors of his St Kilda restaurant. One man appeared to be the Premier and he knew the others as captains of industry.

Well after midnight, there were still a few stragglers around – regular customers sipping coffee at the tables – but the night was over. *I've closed the tills – another lousy night. ..only just made rent again this month. I'm tired. Why should I put myself out for these bloody silvertails?*

'Sorry gentlemen we're closed' Nick said brusquely, turning his back on the newcomers.

In a quiet voice, Harry addressed Nick's back. 'Look, we've had a successful evening and I'd like to buy these guys some food and champagne to celebrate. I realise its late but I'll happily compensate you for the extra trouble.'

'Nope, were closed.'

Harry wasn't put off easily.

'Surely you could rustle up something? There must be some cold meats in the fridge. I don't care how much it costs...just something simple and some wine.'

Nick was not about to be moved. He turned and confronted the customer. In a loud voice he proclaimed 'You may be a big important man where you come from but, in this restaurant, I'm the boss. We are closed for the night.'

He marched off, disappearing through the kitchen door muttering, 'Bloody suits. Come in here throwing their weight around...'

Harry turned to the group of men, shrugged his shoulders and, looking downhearted, they filed out of the restaurant. Outside in the chilly night, Harry's chauffeur appeared surprised. He jumped out of the black limousine and stood at the kerb, ready to open the door. The tycoon shook his head.

‘No, we’re not going yet - this guy doesn’t want my money but there’s another restaurant over there. Let’s try there.’

He crossed the road with the men walking gloomily behind him. The lights of ‘The Green Onion’ were on but the place appeared still and empty. They moved gingerly into the bistro foyer and a young waiter approached. He greeted them in a lush Irish brogue.

‘Evening gentlemen.’

‘Are you still open? Could you provide us some simple food and wine?’

‘Well sir, actually we are closed but I’ll check with the chef. Please be seated.’

He ushered the men to seats in the foyer and disappeared – only to return a few moments later.

‘For sure, we’ll open the kitchen. You understand we can’t offer the full menu but we’ll do what we can. Come this way, gentlemen.’

Harry and his group followed the waiter into the empty restaurant and were seated at a table already prepared for the next day.

‘What about a drink whilst you decide what to order?’ The waiter proffered the wine list and cheerfully handed out menus.

Harry took charge and ordered bottles of champagne. Meals were ordered and glasses drained as the men toasted their successful take-over. When the food arrived, Harry ordered more wine and after the plates were cleared away, port and coffee followed. The table of men had been boisterous, laughing and talking loudly and appeared to have enjoyed their meal. When the bill arrived, Harry placed his platinum coloured American Express card on the silver tray.

The waiter looked worn out as he returned for a signature on the document. For the first time Harry looked at the bill as he raised his pen to sign.

‘Nine hundred and eighty dollars? Harry exclaimed with raised eyebrows.

‘Yes sir’ the waiter replied. ‘Actually you were drinking expensive wine sir.’

‘I’m not complaining.’

‘No sir, but it’s a large sum of money and I understand your surprise.’

Harry smiled and said, 'You don't know me, do you son?' as the waiter shook his head.

'Sorry Mr Penderson, I've only been in Australia for a month. I'm sure I would know you if I had been here longer.' The young Irishman looked beat and a worried expression.

'No worries son,' Harry replied laughing.' We won't chuck you out the country because you don't know me. Look, it's been an excellent meal. I'll sign this and give you a tip in a separate cheque. I'm sure you want to close up.'

The waiter nodded wearily and thanked Harry. Transaction approved, he returned the card and receipt and stood at the door to farewell the group. Harry was the last out and handed the young man a cheque.

'Split it between you and the kitchen staff.'

The waiter looked at the cheque and spluttered,' But sir, it's for ten thousand dollars!'

Harry nodded. 'I can afford it son...but before you cash it, I want you to promise to do something.'

'Of course...anything...'

'I want you to promise to go across the road to 'Silver Service Bistro' tomorrow. Tell Nick, the owner, personally that we came here after he refused to serve us. Tell him I gave you a tip and show him the cheque...promise?'

The waiter gulped and nodded. 'Of course, of course...I'll do that...thank you again Mr Penderson.'

Harry chuckled, waved and stepped out into the cold night air, starting to chuckle loudly. The chauffer could still hear his deep throaty laugh from the back of the limousine on the drive home.

