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The Golden Pig

The Penny Brothers

Published by Lightning Press

Extract

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Part One

Hymie Goldman was a detective of no fixed abode, hairstyle, or opinions; they all came and went like the north wind. Unlike his name, he wasn't Jewish; the closest he'd ever come to Judaism was walking past a synagogue in Golders Green. His real name was Artie Shaw, after the once famous but now deceased jazz clarinettist. As dead musicians weren't noted for their investigative skills, and he was frequently skating on the thin ice of bankruptcy, he'd begun changing his name in a futile attempt to attract new clients and repel old creditors. It had worked in reverse and he was now on his third identity. At least it gave him the chance to advertise himself as "under new management" from time to time.

His last incarnation, as Jackson Pollock, man of mystery, had been selected by sticking a pin in an encyclopaedia of modern art he'd picked up at a car-boot sale. He should have foreseen its cockney rhyming-slang potential, but he frequently missed the blatantly obvious. The irony of choosing the name of a dead artist over that of a dead musician was entirely lost on him.

He had never felt like a *real* detective; probably because he'd trained as an electrician. After his father died under the wheels of a bus, caught taking photographs of an unfaithful husband, in the nightclub Flagrante Delicto, he found himself running the family firm. He had tried to sell it, of course, but nobody wanted it.

B Shaw, Private Investigators: it was corny but catchy; much like the old man himself. He'd re-branded it "JP Confidential; no case too large or small" in the Pollock era, and invested blood, sweat and tears, not to mention his last penny in a

sensational new website. He'd hoped it would bring in a tsunami of new business, but he was still waiting on the beach. His father, who'd had a saying for every occasion, had always told him, "Life's a beach, and then you die." He had studiously avoided the seaside ever since.

Everything about Goldman was a twenty-five carat fake: in his thirty-eight years on the planet he had pretended to be so many things to so many people that he scarcely knew who he was any longer. His flat had been repossessed so many times that he kept a suitcase by the front door. Having recently been evicted, he now lived in his office, contrary to the terms of the lease. Most of his meagre belongings had to be hidden from the bailiffs when he wasn't actually using them, and even the clothes he stood up in bore the hallmark of the charity shop; a cut that didn't flatter and a style that was last fashionable in 1986.

Work had been thin on the ground of late, which suited his temperament, if not his desire to eat regularly. On the morning of 4th July he awoke, slumped across his desk, after another fitful night's sleep in the swivel chair.

Bleary-eyed, he surveyed his kingdom at 792A Finchley Road with the haunted look of one waking from a dream of paradise, to find he had taken the wrong turn at the last roundabout and ended up in hell. Even in his dreams he should have known better than to buy a satnav from Dodgy Dave down the King's Head.

He stood up, stretched and farted. It helped him to limber up. He even made a valiant attempt to touch his toes, but he had been a stranger to exercise for so long that his body rejected the challenge: his toes remained distant and unattainable, while he descended into a fit of giddiness that caused him to head-butt a passing wall.

"Ouch!"

Returning to the vertical, he peered through the blinds to make sure he was alone before lifting the loose floorboard beneath his desk with an old screwdriver. He retrieved his laptop, logged on and checked his inbox. On quiet days he spent hours fiddling with his laptop. However, since *Reader's*

Digest had developed a way of tracking him in hyperspace and he didn't need any more free business cards, he hurriedly logged off again. He completed his ablutions in his usual peremptory fashion and breakfasted on the remains of a packet of cornflakes and some long-life milk, which was nearing retirement.

Downstairs the Black Kat café was just opening up, and on the mean streets of Finchley anarchy and chaos were pitching their stall for the day.

An insistent burst of wood-splintering knocking sliced through the fug in his brain.

"There's no one here but the cleaners," he croaked, trying to sound like an old crone.

He had just covered his laptop with an old copy of the *Sun* when the door flew open to reveal Janis, a world-weary seventeen-year-old he had recruited after that unfortunate incident involving, in no particular order, surveillance, beauty queens in Notting Hill, and his arrest for kerb-crawling. It had all been a ridiculous joke by some Jamaican taxi driver of doubtful paternity, but the police had been highly suspicious of him for months afterwards.

In retrospect, he could see how it might help an investigator following women around for a living to be female, so he hired Janis.

He liked to refer to Janis as his apprentice, as though he had some higher level of knowledge to impart, and she was a dedicated student of the craft of investigation. In truth, he was still learning the job himself and she was employed on a government training scheme, if you could call poverty wages and brain-death work training.

"What did you say about the cleaners?" asked Janis, binning the last of the junk mail she'd retrieved from their letterbox.

"I said it's disgusting in here; just wait till I see those cleaners."

"I expect they'd be glad to see *you*. I can't remember the last time you paid them."

"Yes, well, I can't sit here all day discussing the decline

of the great British cleaner; why don't you pop out and get us two coffees?"

"The Black Kat?" she queried.

"Unfortunately that's all there is, Jan. Perhaps one day there will be coffee shops on every corner where the coffee is actually drinkable, but for now, needs must. Oh, and get a couple of slices of toast while you're at it."

He ushered her away with an imperious wave of his hand.

"Is there anything in petty cash?"

"Unless you count the pawn tickets, I fear not."

He sighed like a deflating beach ball. The only appointment in his diary was with Barnet County Bailiffs. They were dropping by to collect what was left of his office furniture. Where were his clients going to sit? The question was largely academic as they were increasingly an endangered species. It was all very well saying "it's not over until the fat lady sings" but now that that pneumatic young opera singer from Cardiff had moved in next door, he was beginning to feel like an extra from *Turandot*.

As the familiar strains of "Nessun dorma" drifted through his keyhole, the green, plastic, retro-styled telephone on his desk began to trill. It was probably the Indian call-centre again, or the double-glazing salesman with the stammer, or that drug-crazed loony who just yelled a string of random numbers down the phone at him, then rang off.

"Twenty-four, thirty-six, forty-two, don't be late!"

What could it mean? Was it the vital statistics of the girl in the "before" photo at the slimming club or just a series of menu items from the local Chinese takeaway? Special fried rice, sweet and sour pork balls or egg and chips in a black bean sauce perhaps? Ah well, that was the price you paid for advertising in *Catering World*. Still, it *was* cheaper than *Yellow Pages*.

Janis returned with a cup of the black sludge sold as coffee to the regulars of the Black Kat and a small bottle of still water. Her complexion had improved dramatically since she'd stopped drinking the coffee. Still, what choice did *he* have? Without caffeine he'd have to face the world as it really was:

scary. He couldn't even brew his own sludge now that the kettle too had finally succumbed to repossession.

"No toast, Jan?" He looked like a small child who had just been robbed of his bag of sweets.

"Their toaster's on the blink. It only does cremation."

"Unbelievable."

"I know. Mr Goldman, your phone's ringing."

Janis chivvied him, as ever, in her most apologetic tone. It wasn't his fault he was a complete halfwit; he was a man.

"Go and catch up with your filing," he snapped, peevishly.

His last resort was always to the absurd; since they hadn't had a client in weeks, there *was* no filing. Perhaps he meant her nails.

"It's all up to date," Janis said.

"Well, go and play with the paperclips."

She smiled her *patient* smile and retrieved the *Hendon and Finchley Times* from her designer shoulder bag. He lifted the phone to his ear as if he half expected it to bite.

"JP Confidential, no case too large…I'm sorry to have kept you, how may we help?"

"How *confidential* are you?"

"Oh great! Loonies!" he thought. He fought back the urge to drop the receiver, to scream obscenities into the mouthpiece, to ask "How long is a piece of string?" and settled for humility.

"They don't come any more confidential, madam," he said. "I personally guarantee to take all my clients' secrets to the grave."

"*Whose* grave?"

"Anyone you care to mention."

"Who are you? The owner?"

"Yes, Hymie Goldman."

"Are you Jewish?"

"Is the pope Catholic? Look, I'm a busy man; do you need a detective or a telephone chat line?"

"I may have a job for you. Meet me tonight and I'll tell you what I want you to do."

"Sure. As long as it's… ." He was going to say "legal" but

thought better of it. Surely rejecting a case for purely *legal* reasons was unethical.

"As long as it's what?" she queried.

"It will keep till we meet, lady. When and where did you have in mind?" he asked.

"Eleven sharp at Ritzy's nightclub. You know it, I presume? Let's say the Glitter Lounge…no, better make it outside." She didn't want to be seen with him and she hadn't even met him. He had always been a fast worker, he reflected ruefully.

"Certainly, but how will I know you?" he continued.

"Don't worry, I'll find you."

The line died.

Hymie was already fantasising about fat fees and how he was going to spend them, when the doorbell rang downstairs, shattering his reverie.

"Your nine-thirty is here, Mr Goldman," announced Janis, efficiently.

"Who or what is a *nine-thirty*, Jan?" he responded with vague bemusement.

"Why, an appointment, of course."

"Are you sure? An *appointment*? But the bailiffs aren't due until later. Who's it with?"

"A lady called Sarah Chandar."

"Sorry, Jan, she means nothing to me. Have I ever met her?"

"She seemed to know you. She said she'd seen the website and was most impressed. She said she could help us grow the business, so I thought that as your diary was fairly free, you might as well listen to what she had to say."

He pondered. "Thank you, Janis, I know you mean well, but next time, please discuss it with me first. I may have had an important meeting planned."

"Yeah, right," she thought, and only said, "Yes, of course, Mr Goldman." She remained the consummate professional, even if she was working for a rank amateur.

Janis pressed a button on her switchboard, triggering the door release, and invited their visitor to join them.

"Hello, you must be Mr Goldman. I'm Sarah Chandar from Ceefer Capital. It's good of you to see me."

She was Indian, maybe thirty years old, pretty but forbiddingly professional and polished in her manner, like the younger daughter of a millionaire industrialist.

"Not at all, Sarah, I'm glad I could fit you into my busy schedule," lied the man from Finchley, as Janis hovered attentively at the door.

"Please, have a seat. Can I offer you a drink?" He was determined to maintain the illusion that this was a *real* business.

"Oh, just a still water, please."

Janis eyed her bottle of water with regret before twisting off the cap, pouring it into the office glass and proffering it to their guest.

"Thanks, Jan," he said, as she left his office.

"I expect you're wondering what I'm doing here, Mr Goldman?"

"Yes," he thought. "Not at all," he said. "It's always a pleasure to network with the wider business community. You never know, one day you may be coming to see me as a client. Am I right?"

"Exactly, Mr Goldman, you are clearly a shrewd businessman. I knew you would be."

"Thank you." She seemed harmless enough, but he couldn't help wondering what she wanted. Surely not money?

"Which is why I won't beat about the bush any longer."

"I'm afraid I make it a habit never to contribute to…"

"I'd like to buy a stake in your business."

"Ahem," said Hymie, choking in surprise.

Life never ceased to amaze him. Just when you thought it was all over; that there was nothing left to play for, the game of chance was at its most dangerous. Who would have thought it? People wanted to give him money. It was priceless. It was plainly ludicrous.

"What interests you in JP Confidential, Sarah?" he said at last, as though it were the most natural question in the world.

"Its potential, Mr Goldman."

"Oh yes, we have plenty of that," he said, smiling to himself. Potential was the flipside of what he generally called problems.

"I have examined your website in some detail, and have to say it is one of the best I have ever seen. Your case histories are almost too good to be true, you are looking to the future and you appear to have a strong brand. With a backer like Ceefer Capital you could turn "JP Confidential, no case too large or small" into a world-class business."

"How much of the business do you want then, ten per cent? Twenty?"

She smiled for the first time. It belied the earnestness in her face.

"All of it, of course, Mr Goldman. We would, naturally enough, incentivise you to stay on."

There was always a catch.

"And how much will you pay me for it, Sarah?"

He found it difficult to suppress his mounting excitement. Could it be real? Or was he being set up for some new TV reality show where she would either offer him millions, only to pull the rug out from under him and leave him looking like a credulous berk, or offer him the fifty pence it was really worth, to uproarious laughter from a studio audience?

"It depends on your trading performance, business plan and cash-flow projections, but perhaps as much as half a million."

He had begun to glaze over when the "m" word revived him with a start.

"Pounds sterling?" he asked deliriously.

Yet, even as his conscious mind was rapidly descending into euphoria, some nagging doubt at the back of it wouldn't quite let him be. Outside his flimsy office walls, the real world was clamouring to get in.

The heavy tread of size-twelve boots on the stairs heralded the arrival of two burly six-footers in ill-fitting suits. They pushed past Janis with her outraged protestations but hesitated on the threshold of his inner sanctum, unaccustomed

to seeing him in a business meeting. They glowered through the glass at him.

It was all the opportunity he needed.

"I was afraid of this, Sarah. Some business rivals have been showing a keen interest in JP Confidential of late and they must have got wind that other bidders of your calibre were making overtures. Rather than have you facing any unpleasantness, perhaps we can adjourn this meeting for the time being. I promise I won't do anything rash until I have had a chance to consider your offer. You have my office number, but here's my mobile number just in case." He handed her a card.

Before she even knew what was happening, Ms Chandar found herself whisked out of her chair and politely but firmly shown the door. The last words she heard as she descended the staircase were Goldman's entreaties to his "business rivals" not to broadcast their latest offer to HM Revenue and Customs. She supposed he meant herself. He was clearly a tricky customer to do business with.

The bailiffs seemed to be enjoying the cabaret, but were reluctant to drop their guard, having been left in the lurch so often before. Goldman regularly claimed to have suffered a family bereavement or to be traumatised by a terminal illness, and they suspected that it was only a matter of time before he would claim insanity. Although it was increasingly uncertain whether he had anything worth lying about, old habits died hard. They marched into his newly vacated office and started eying up the contents of the room, with a view to a quick sale, Janis following at their heels like a terrier.

Having seen off his guest with his usual old-world charm, Hymie sauntered back to his office with little evident pleasure.

"I did ask them to wait, Mr Goldman."

"It's okay, Jan, it's only a social call; there's nothing left for them to take. So, what can I do for you two plug-uglies?"

They stood in the doorway like two gorillas on day release, knuckles dusting the lino.

"You know the procedure, Goldman; we hand you the warrant, you make a big song and dance about it, and then

we walk off into the sunset with whatever we can find. Usually zippo. Can't we just cut to the chase today? I have a lunch date," said the burlier bailiff, with the joined-up eyebrows.

"Say, maybe *you'd* like to buy a stake in the business too?" suggested Hymie, chirpily.

"He has me in stitches. Buy a stake in *your* business? Do we look like we've just escaped from the zoo?" asked the second bailiff.

"Well, now you come to mention it…"

"Button it, Goldman," they snapped, in unison.

"But seriously, gents, I do have *something* of value."

"On the level?" they enquired reluctantly, like dupes invited onstage by a magician.

"Certainly on the level," added Hymie, as his strategy miraculously dropped into place.

"But is it worth hard cash?" persisted Harry, the burlier one.

"Oh, bundles of it. You take my advice; put your shirt on Devil May Care in the 12.10 at Uttoxeter. It can't lose."

The other bailiff, Larry, reached into his coat pocket. Hymie was half expecting him to produce a banana, but he merely retrieved the usual paperwork and thrust it insistently on him with the practised ease of a man used to giving bad news. He would have made a good politician, thought Hymie.

"Seriously though, gents," he added, "if the horse doesn't win, I'll be a Dutchman's uncle." Those ruddy bailiffs had been taking away his stuff for years, it was about time they lost *their* shirts, he thought.

Larry, who evidently thought that *any* tip was worth backing, if only each way, retrieved a notebook from his other pocket and scrawled down the name of the horse in large infantile handwriting, while his colleague, Harry, simply looked on with disdain.

"It was a tip from inside the stable," said Hymie.

"Who from, the horse's mother?" responded Harry, sardonically.

"It was at twenty to one last night, surely that's worth giving my premises a miss for a few weeks? I know you gents seem

to have a problem believing me, but I was actually in negotiations to offload, ahem, to *sell* the business when you came barging in."

"Well, you're right there, mate," resumed Harry. "It's easy to tell when you're lying: your lips are moving."

"Nice one, Harry," added Larry, somewhat redundantly.

"Okay, *Mr* Goldman, go on, how much was the Indian princess offering for your business empire? Don't tell me…all the jewels of the orient…or, say, fifty pence?"

"Put it this way, enough to allow me to retire to the country."

"Which one? Bangladesh?"

"How much do you want, anyway?" asked Goldman, irritated. "A tenner? Twenty quid?"

"No, mate, try £5,000 in unpaid rent," said Larry.

"What, for *this* flea pit? Would *you* pay it, gents?"

"That's neither here nor there, is it, Goldman?" said Harry. "You see, *you* signed the lease, not us. It beats me how someone called Goldman can be such a worthless tick."

Hymie reached into his back pocket for a dog-eared chequebook.

"Will you take a cheque, lads?"

They smiled. "Not in a million years, mate. We've got enough meaningless paperwork as it is; we're part of the EU paper mountain scheme," observed Harry, regretfully.

"Fine. I'd like to say it's been a pleasure doing business with you, but I'd be lying. Help yourselves; you're welcome to anything you can find, but I'll tell you now, the only things not on hire purchase are the collection of stress-relief toys, the fake marble ashtray, and Janis."

"You can prove that, I dare say?"

"I dare say," smirked Hymie. "Sadly, I have pressing business to attend to elsewhere. So, if you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'll leave you in the capable hands of my apprentice, Miss Turner."

He winked conspiratorially at Janis, grabbed his army-surplus trench coat from the stand in the corner of his office, and headed for the congested streets of North London.

"Don't forget, guys, Devil May Care in the 12.10 at Uttoxeter. If you hurry, you may just catch it."

"You'll catch it one of these days, Goldman!" called Harry, after Hymie's retreating back.

Part Two

It was midday by the time he arrived at the park. He'd had to walk, owing to the increasing unreliability of his car. Just after he acquired the car phone he'd spilt hot coffee into the CD player, while overtaking on a hairpin bend, and driven through a hedge. Fortunately, no one had been injured and he'd managed to borrow the money to spring his car from the local garage, but it had never been quite the same.

"Here ducks! Here ducky ducky! Here ducks!"

He threw a low-carb, high-fibre Atkins bagel into the centre of a small gang of ducks, rendering one or two unconscious. He often visited the park, finding it cheap, therapeutic and a good way of killing time between cases. By now he knew every blade of grass in the place.

Eventually he managed to find a bench that was both dry and free from obscene graffiti – no small task in London. He sat and gazed across the vast expanse of mud and dog turds that aspired to be a football pitch. The posts had been used for spare fuel last Bonfire Night and no one had played there since the Barnet Bulldogs were decimated by a drug-dealer's Dobermanns.

Hours passed as he paced the footpath, trying to come up with a foolproof plan for selling the business to Ceefer Capital. If only *one* of the cases he had made up on the website had been true, he'd be home and dry. As it was, he would probably have to *solve* an investigation before they would take him seriously. No one went around giving out half a million quid for a nice website, surely? He would also need to get some *accounts* from somewhere; whatever *they* were. What had she asked him for? Cash-flow forecasts? His cash

had been flowing out for years and he could hardly bring himself to read anything from the bank any longer. Clearly, he would have to be economical with the truth for a while longer.

Ritzy's was the kind of nightclub that used to stand on the corner of every main street in every decent-sized town in the 1970s; grotty and crying out for demolition on the outside, tacky and full of kitsch on the inside. The local council had left it standing to avoid having to erect slums or whatever social housing project their planning department was championing that month. Even slums cost money.

Hanging around outside in the pouring dark, he felt purple: marooned in the urban jungle; too scruffy, disillusioned and old either to fit in or care less. He pulled up the collar of his coat, unfolded the *Evening Standard*, which he had retrieved from the bin in the park, and settled down to wait. He turned to the horoscopes page and looked up his stars; 31st March, Aries: "Beware blonde bombshells bearing gifts, they are not all they seem. Sunny spells later." It must be that new astro-meteorologist.

He flipped through the remaining pages until he caught sight of something in the racing results. "Well, of all the…Devil May Care won by a head; those jammy b…ailiffs!"

Suddenly a taxi pulled up at the kerb and a vision of loveliness emerged, paid off the driver, and sashayed across the pavement towards him. To call her stunning would have been to cheapen the word; tall, blonde and drop-dead gorgeous with an hourglass figure and a smile that would stop a man dead in his tracks at a hundred paces. She didn't even have to begin to try to impress Goldman.

"You must be the detective," she said, her voice as smooth as velvet.

"Ye…ye…yes, Gymie Holdman," he yammered. He had never been a success with women, but like most men never gave up hope.

"Follow me."

To the ends of the earth, of course, but he was dreaming, surely? She led him around the corner to a parking lot,

opened up an immaculate black Porsche and they sped off into the encroaching night.

"I didn't catch your name," he said, fidgeting nervously with his seat belt.

"I didn't throw it at you, but it's Lucretia, or rather Lucy…Lucy Scarlatti."

A strange name, probably an alias, but by now he was already along for the ride.

Her manner was brusque and businesslike. Nothing more was said as they screeched through a myriad of back streets, finally arriving at journey's end, a newly refurbished warehouse conversion. Once inside she became more communicative.

"Take a seat. Would you like a drink?"

"I'd rather hear about the job first."

"So sit down."

He sat.

"It's a family matter really. It all began with the death of my father a month or so ago…"

"I'm sorry to hear… ." It seemed the only thing to say.

"Don't be, he was a terrible man. When he died there was nothing left…nothing but debts…and the statuette. You might almost call it a family heirloom; a golden statuette of a pig."

"Is it worth much?" asked Hymie.

"It's mainly of sentimental value."

"That much!" he thought.

"In his youth my father travelled the world with the merchant navy. I think he bought the figurine in the Far East; China or Japan."

"Where do I come in?"

Hymie was getting the distinct impression that this was yet another case for his "unsolvables" file. The file couldn't have been much thicker had he been investigating the *Mary Celeste*, the abominable snowman and life on Mars.

"Under the will he left me everything. My sister, Steffie, doesn't even get a mention."

"And your sister has the pig, right?"

"Yes, the bitch! She's always been jealous of my success in lingerie modelling, so she persuaded one of her lovers to steal it. Can you get it back for me?"

"Why not call in the police?" he asked.

"As I said, it's a family matter."

"It could get messy," he said. He didn't like the sound of it, but needed the money.

She sized him up and took the measure of him in a glance. "A hundred pounds a day, plus expenses?" she suggested.

"When do I start?" asked Hymie, resisting the urge to add "How about last Tuesday!"

Lucy left the room briefly, returning with a thousand pounds in used notes. "I'll expect a phone call every few days and a full progress report each week," she said. "Hopefully, you should have something concrete within the week."

"As long as it's not an overcoat," he thought.

She passed him a page from a notebook with a handwritten address scribbled on it and her business card.

"Those are her last known address and contact numbers. There's a photo of the pig attached. Call me."

"Certainly. Now, about that drink?"

"Maybe some other time. Find my pig, Mr Goldman."

It was a long walk back to 792A Finchley Road, but time flies when you've got a grand burning a hole in your pocket. His only regret was not having had the presence of mind to ask for a larger advance, but he had simply been struck dumb at the sight of so much hard cash. It would have been churlish or foolhardy to quibble with a woman so clearly used to getting her own way.

Back at the office everything had gone AWOL except the telephone and the hot-oil stress-relief lamp. How a lamp could relieve stress had never been adequately explained to him, but he'd always liked day-glo orange, and since he'd bought it with the proceeds of his first case he couldn't bring himself to part with it. The bailiffs had dismissed it as worthless junk, which it was.

He rang for a pizza; the biggest, with extra everything.

Only when his stomach was full could he think at all clearly.

Leaning against the windowsill he gazed out into the empty street below. "Benny's Unbeatable Bakery" flashed in neon lights from the opposite side of the Finchley Road. Benny had been baking the best pizzas in North London for longer than Hymie could remember, maybe a year even.

The phone rang from its new home on the floor of his office. It was partially illuminated by the garish orange glimmer of the lamp and cast a distorted shadow on the wall. He wondered who could be calling at this time of night. Some desperate, friendless character, that was for sure. He lifted the receiver.

"Hello, Mr Goldman, it's Sarah Chandar calling."

"Oh, yes, of course. How are you, Sarah? I was sorry you had to leave so suddenly."

"Fine, thanks…but you *asked* me to leave, don't you remember?"

"Yes, it was essential. I couldn't risk your safety with those two thugs on the loose."

"Who were they?"

"Just a couple of longstanding business rivals: hardened, cynical men operating beyond the outer fringes of the law; men who would stop at nothing to get my business. After you left, they tried to make me an offer I couldn't refuse."

"So, what happened?" she asked, in a breathless whisper.

"I declined, of course. After all, hadn't I just promised you first refusal?"

"Yes, but I thought you were just bluffing to drive the price up."

He fell silent, as though he had been mortally offended and could no longer find the strength to continue with the conversation. It worked a treat.

"I'm sorry, Mr Goldman. Can we meet to talk over my ideas for the business?"

"We can meet, but with a business *this* good, you can't afford to hang around. I'm not going to change anything until we've reached a deal on the price.

I believe you said JP Confidential was worth around a

million pounds and that's my price," bluffed Hymie, the tough negotiator.

"I said half a million," Sarah corrected him, "and even that depends on the satisfactory completion of due diligence."

She might just as well have been speaking Greek.

"You can do all the diligence you like, but the price is a million quid. Take it or leave it."

She left it.

"Sarah? Sarah? Let's not be hasty. How about nine-fifty?" He was talking to himself.

She'd be back, of course; businesses like JP Confidential didn't grow on trees.
