

Jude the Obscure

The big Kenworth truck and trailer loaded with containers is easing down the highway coming into the Griffith Truck Stop, just out of town. The driver pulls up near a convenient truck pump. The big broad shouldered chap, who's hitchhiked a ride with him right from Mildura, jumps down from the high cab. He's carrying a cricket bag and little else.



"I'm grateful," he says to the driver. "I'll hold a table inside. Come on in for a bit of lunch when you've filled up."

"Sure," says the driver.

We can now take a bit of a look at the hitchhiker. He's perhaps late twenties, a fit man in the prime of health. He's clean shaven, good haircut and is wearing pressed jeans, a cotton long sleeve light jumper with a denim collar and is carrying a lightish leather jacket. There's nothing rough or tough about him. He looks a bit like a casually dressed tourist really. The driver catches up with him.

"I've ordered steak and eggs," the hitchhiker says, "it'll be along in just a few minutes."

"Very kind," says the driver, "and not necessary, I was glad of the company." They put away their meal and a coffee or two and part company.

Jude Adamson now walks around to the local government offices and goes in to the counter. The bird behind it is a bit harassed. She takes in the good looking man standing awaiting her attention.

"Sorry," she says, "bloody computers. I agree with John Elliott at times."

"Oh," the man says. "Is he a computer expert?"

"Not really," she says, "he reckons computers are for idiots."

"Not always," the chap says. "What's wrong with yours?"

"Oh, it's on the blink and the man who can handle this temperamental damn thing is on a clay target shooting jag at the Nationals in Wagga Wagga. Bloody hopeless."

"Hmm," the big chap says, "that's my line of work. Let's have a Captain Hook at it." The girl steps back a bit, but she's a goer.

"Okay," she says and they lift the flap to let him in.

"Need my bag," he says. "I've got a good fault finder in it."

He's pretty smart or perhaps lucky as he spots the problem and rectifies it in minutes.

"Oh," she says, "I'm so grateful. Can I buy you a drink after work?"

"Sure," he says, "but I came in looking for a job; preferably a non-computer job."

"Like what?" she asks.

"Oh, something on the work gang or out at the refuse centre or whatever."

She taps the computer, makes a phone call and says, "You're on. On trial, that is. The recycling plant is short-handed and the foreman will be here in ten minutes to show you the ropes if you're still interested."

"And the drink?" he asks.

"Oh, 5.30 at the Pride of Mildenhall. My brother-in-law owns and runs it. I live there."

"And hubby?" he asks.

"Fly in, fly out. In the Timor Sea – currently out."

“Oh,”

“And a name?” she says.

“Jude Adamson.”

“Unusual,” she says. “Short for what?”

“Oh, just Jude, my grandfather was a Hashemite Jew. I scored his name; he never made it back from Hitler’s clutches.”

They have a pleasant drink in an intimate cocktail bar. The pub’s flat out.

“I’d better help,” she says. This seeming paragon says, “I’d like to help too. I bar worked my way through University.”

So they hop up and hop in. It works very well. As things ease off, the brother-in-law comes in.

“Geez thanks,” he says. “Too many sickies being taken by the staff. Now,” he continues, “I hear you start work at the refuse centre tomorrow. How can I help you?”

“Ah, a room would be nice,” Jude says, “and if you continue to be short-handed, I’m pleased to help; no cash out, just knock it off the rent.”

“Done,” the man says, “what else?”

“Where’s the Honda dealer? Need some light transport, that is, if there is somewhere here I can store it.”

“Don’t waste money,” the man says. “There’s a licensed road trail out back that I only use every other Sunday. I’ll get you organised with it, at say, 7 tomorrow morning.”

Thus by 8am, Jude in working jeans and a big flannel shirt is on the recycling line. There’s a black haired girl – lots of studs and earrings – next to him showing him the ropes. She’s a good looker.

“What are you doing here?” he asks.

“Oh, Tom Cruise, I could ask you the same. But it’s not bad here. They pay on the dot and you can take the odd sickie and it’s not like dealing with the picky, picky public.”

“Okay,” he says. “What about a drink after work at the Pride of Mildenhall?”

“Hmm,” she says, “back or front bar?”

“The club bar,” he says.

“Oh, you are upmarket.”

“Hmm,” says Jude, “and I’m the barman there too, a bit.”

She laughs, “Well, we’re all off at 4pm, so I can gussy up for our meet.”



In no time, Jude is dug into Griffith and meets a lot of people. Jackie, his co-worker, is not averse to snorting a bit of cocaine or puffing huge joints and soon organises him with her supplier. While the world thinks that after Aussie Bob Trimboli’s era that drugs are under control, in this area nothing is further from the truth. Thus he is hitting on the lower user end of the market via Jackie. And more importantly, he is not asking any questions of anybody about the drug scene. Most of, or much of what he wants to know seems to be voluntarily passed to him via Jackie and her connections.

A dark southern Italian type of chap flags him down leaving the refuse facility. He’s progressed to foreman quite quickly, which is easy enough; he is a man of considerable intelligence and has soon risen to the surface of the very ordinary little pool he is swimming in, but he’s an amiable fellow too and stops to talk to this intent chap, whom Jude thinks should be pulling in fish nets in the Mediterranean somewhere, by the look of him.

“Ah,” the fellow says, “you are in the local club scene and the locals think you are okay.”

“Hmm,” says Jude, “well, that’s nice to know. Now, I’m dying for a shower so that I can get off to the bar, so how can I help you?”

The chap says, “You are well placed to distribute a bit of the white stuff. It pays well, if you are discreet.”

Jude is way ahead of this fellow. They obviously think he’s an undercover cop and they are trying to tempt him out and perhaps later, get a clean shot at him. If he was undercover, he would jump at this offer – but he’s playing a much longer game.

“Thanks, but no thanks,” he says. The chap’s face darkens.

“But you’re a user,” he says.

“Only a recreational user,” Jude says. “Dealing is just not my scene.”

The chap oversteps the mark. “What the hell are you doing in Griffith?” he asks.

“Well I only stopped to look around and when I’m ready, I’ll disappear overnight. Just at the moment, I’m earning money. I’m well looked after and I enjoy bar work. What do you do?” he asks.

“What I’m told,” says the dark one.

The latter then reports back to base. He’s talking to two Italian Australians in a tomato packing shed.

“He’s convincing, but not I think, kosher,” the chap says. “If we can find out where he’s worked in the past, we can perhaps get the real skinny on him.”

The two men, behind the scenes types, look at one another.

“We’ve been through his room and effects several times,” he says.

“Absolutely nothing there to give a clue; can’t even find his passport, but we’ve found a shotgun license, can’t find the gun.”

“In the pub safe, I expect,” the dark one says, “perhaps he’s a clay target man, there are plenty around here. Australian headquarters of the sport is just down the road at Wagga Wagga as you well know.”

They decide to word up Jackie to see if they can find out a bit about his past to dig into. Jackie’s a bit of a one off. To be a very good-looking girl and work on refuse sorting out perhaps clearly indicates this. She is not averse to trading a bit of sex with the boss man at the Tomato shed in return to the material for her, not so severe drug habit. The boss man’s wife is an import, pure Sicilian, but lean and good-looking too. She is intent on progress and the material things of life and trades off good sex for things she wants her husband to provide. Thus for something with a lot less pressure, Jackie is an answer to an over-sexed Italian prayer. It’s just good fun and at the end of the day, a bag or two of the doings from their vast stocks (much of it these days from Mildura) sees her off with both parties happy with the exchange.



Jackie now invites Jude out on his evening off for a swim and other delights, perhaps in the Murrumbidgee, which at this time is well watered up. They go to a nice spot at Hill Bend and alternate pure passion with a skinny dip in between. They are about to go again and are lying there without benefit of any clothing when two men walk into the moonlight. They’ve either been there for some time or they’ve walked in. Jude is as alert as a rattlesnake and so he should be; before he came to Australia on extended leave he was undercover in Israel for the British. He’s seen it all and despite laying there on the bank of the Murrumbidgee without any clothes on, he is prepared just the same. He puts his hand on the small steel pry-bar under the rug.

“Keep clear,” he says. They keep coming – don’t say a word, but their intent is clear. It’s over in seconds once he regains his feet and uses the extension to his arm (the pry-bar) to effect. He breaks an arm or two and a kneecap and throws the damaged and immobilized men straight into the river. He runs Jackie back to her place on the motorbike.

Over coffee, she says, “Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Jude! That was quick and brutal. Do you think they can swim?”

Jude laughs, “Well if they can’t, they would, I expect, have learned quick.”

“Did you know them?” she asks.

“No, not them, but I know the type. I lived in South London for quite a while. It’s full of these sorts of denizens.”

The next day is a usual one for Jude; he has the plant running like a German Band and again much as usual, the office staff via Jennie are down seeking computer help. They run him into the office and while he’s working out the latest configuration to fix their computer problems, Carl Sanderson, the administration officer for the Local Authority says,

“Jude, you’ve become instrumental to our computer section, which is just about everything in administration. How about coming on board full time?”

“No,” says Jude, “but you obviously know where you can find me and as long as the rubbish contractor goes along with you borrowing me when you need to, everything’s fine.”

“Oh,” Carl says, “but I do worry. What if you disappear as mysteriously as you came?”

“Not in my plans.” Jude says. “Jennie here, has set me up with food, a bed and transport and we enjoy working the Club Bar – what more could I want? It sure beats London Town.”

“But,” says Carl, “why are you here?”

“Ah,” Jude says, “I was the computer nerd for a huge oil company in Iraq and London and it got to me in the finish. I had to get out to a bit of sunshine and a lot less pressure to stay sane.”

“Who did you work for?” Carl asks.

“Meneghini Oil in Leadenhall Street,” he replies.

A few days later, the two operators of the tomato plant have a natter.

“Well, our last idea wasn’t too good,” the junior man says. “We’ve lost our two best enforcers we’ve ever had for months and when they mend, they’ll hardly be useful for anything but packing tomatoes.”

“It’s rather amazing,” the boss man says. “Those beggars are good at their work.”

“Hmm and the mark was even better. You wouldn’t dream that such a pleasant looking mild man could be such a surprise packet and totally ruthless with it.”

“What concerns me more,” the boss says, “is how well he read the play; one warning and then....bang.....commando stuff.”

“Perhaps it is,” the lesser man says.

Jennie must have said something to someone or Carl has. Whichever, a few days later, a very astute computer hacker in Mildura is into the staff records of Meneghini Oil. Jude has never worked there, but there’s a tickety boo employment record there showing stress leave and so on which supports Jude’s story as related to the local authority. And so it should; he hacked into the record himself a while back in London on the big Kray computer at Century House.

The entry into Meneghini’s records is of course flagged and a coded email tells him this when he scouts things out on the Hotel computer a few days later. This



he thinks will prove a good enough red herring to draw the smart eggs from the vegetable producing mob off his trail.

On Sunday, both he and Jennie have a day off and she kindly invites him to her home on the outskirts of Griffith for lunch. She whacks up a beautiful roast and five veg and after they've washed and wiped, says, "What about a hand with a rose tidy up in the back garden?"

Actually, although she seems to live at the Pub, it's a very nice Tuscan type brick house with a brick walled garden giving great privacy to the back.

"When's your hubby here?" Jude asks, "He doesn't seem to have been back while I've been here."

"Ah," she says, "the bastard's on with a delightful little Chinese girl from the oil company's head office in Orchard Rd in Singapore. He spends his weeks off there."

"He must be mad," Jude says, "you're a delightful smasher – any man's dream." In this, he's not laying it on.

"Lend me your shirt, Tarzan," she says. He is stuck into turning over the rose beds; has stripped off his flannel shirt and is enjoying the play of the sun on his muscled chest. She is back in moments, wearing only the floppy shirt. She stands, poses, hitches up the shirt – nothing under.



"La... Sir," she says, "would you care to dance?"

"To quote you Aussies," he says, "too bloody right! Where?"

"Ah," she says, "have you any objection to making love in the sun?"

Jude has used the Century House facilities to get what he wants out to Australia for his mission and he now gets these up to Griffiths. Several weeks later, he is having a drug muddled conversation with Jackie. They're on a comfortable sleeping bag out at the refuse site. It's a Sunday and he's added an extra padlock to the main gate, just to protect their privacy for the moment. What Jude is snorting is non-cocaine cocaine. What he's feeding Jackie, in between feeling her up, is super grade Turkestan pure. It's as strong as and she's starting to babble. Jude doesn't really know if he's mining a rich seam or wasting his time. Er, not perhaps fully wasting his time, in view of what he's doing with her. He feeds another long line on the mirror and she snorts it up.

"What about next Sunday?" he says when he judges the time is about right.

"No," she slurs. "I'm the entertainment at the annual celebration."

"Of what?"

"The anniversary of when they sunk Hector McKenzie inside a water-logged old hollow tree," she says.

Jude lays out another line. "Can I watch?" he asks.

"Dangerous," she says. "They always have a watcher across the river with a .22 Hi Power Hornet."

"Do they carry?"

"No," she says. "Giuseppe does occasionally."

"And where's the picnic spot?" Jude asks.

She just spits it out. "The Ned Kelly carved tree, just there."

The Kelly tree was carved years ago by a hippie on grass. It's along the river bank of a very long stretch of water and is about two miles in from a car park.

"It was a long way to carry him," Jude says. "Hmm, but then again despite some deep searching, they've never found him either."

"Not that they would," says Jackie. "Giuseppe wrapped the hollow bit with chicken wire."

Jude has now got what he came to Australia for. Hector McKenzie is or was his first cousin who bullheadedly tried to drag the drug dealers out to the light of the law and paid a huge price for his honesty and convictions. They murdered him in town and brought his body away. Evidence of the crime was everywhere, but nothing has resulted. Jude, through his work, has dealt with low-lives around the world. He came out to try and get some closure for his dying Aunt. He now seems to have what he wants, but doesn't know if it's dead true. He's interrogated, really interrogated suspects many times. He plies Jackie with more Heroin; she really starts to babble now, but she relives the story she told him.



Jude makes a deal of forward preparation and Sunday sees him emerge from behind a huge river gum, just as the watcher has settled in and checked the gun and field of fire. Jude is on him like a tiger; breaks his neck. He pulls the dead man into approximate shooting position, places the gun in his hand then drops into the water and quietly breast strokes across. It's like his old SAS days.

He digs out his stash further along the river bank, gets himself organised and watches the party people arrive. There are only the top two from the Tomato plant and Giuseppe, the shooter and regretfully, Jackie. They've lugged a fair bit of stuff in from where they stashed their cars and set up folding chairs and eskies and use the sawn off tree stump in front of the Kelly tree for a picnic table.

They drink and dine and just at the stage they are about to move on Jackie, Jude steps out from behind yet another huge river gum. He's wearing a beautiful city suit and accessories and his hands are empty. The blokes pull up sharp at his appearance. They're not too fashed, they have or think they have a sniper across the river. If anything threatening happens, a shot should (but won't) ring out. The suit is to fit in with Jude's training text book – surprise and confuse them, then shoot them.

"What the eff are you doing out here on the river, dressed to the nines and who the eff are you anyway?"

Jude has had a few late night conversations with these chaps in the club bar at the Pride of Mildenhall. He's always stuck to his script. London School of Economics, head nerd of computers at Meneghini Oil, etc, in Oz to chill out for a while, etc. They always bring their over indulged and over jewelled wives, who, by their insatiable lust for things material, would seem to have come from a Sicilian orphanage. One even wears a bejewelled gold watch on each wrist.

Jude pauses a moment. "Well I always dress well for funerals," he says.

Alfredo bitterly says, "And the next one will be your own."

"Ah," Jude says, "don't count on it. In answer to your second question; I'm your worst ever nightmare." Jude gets up close, tosses a laminated picture of Hector McKenzie at their feet. "I suppose," he says, "you will now blame this on dear Old Aussie Bob, a man just so far ahead of his time."

"Never," says the boss, confident any second of a rifle shot. "It was all our idea. Bob was getting past it and planning to go to Ireland."

"Well, in that case.....," says Jude and reaches to his back. The suit coat is backless and a sawn-off pump action shotgun is hanging there. He brings it round, drops Giuseppe first, then the others. Jackie is stunned.

"I'll never talk, Jude," she says, "I'll never, never talk."

"There, there Jackie," he says. "You need a line."

And he lays a line out on the mirror the boys have lumped in. She snorts it up and has another, but what she's just taken into her system means she has taken her

last snort – ever. Moving quickly, Jude puts small blocks of Cemtex under each of the fallen, starts the timers and swims fully clothed across the river and back to his cargo shorts and trail bike.

By 10pm he is waiting in the Emirates hospitality lounge in Sydney. He thinks to himself and chuckles. The Crime Scene people will need someone from a jigsaw puzzle factory to make any sense of what he has left behind.

Monday morning, 10ish, a young chap from the local nursery comes into the Council office. He's carrying beautifully wrapped, a very nice rose bush ready for planting. Jennie looks at this delivery with surprise.

“For me?”

“Indeed,” the delivery man says.

“Is there a card with it?”

“Sort of,” says the man. “The chap who placed the order says the rose label should be adequate, but he wrote something on the bottom too.”

The label has been folded in an odd way. Under the planting instructions is a hand-written addendum saying, ‘travel instructions to follow’. The rose description unfolds next; it reads, ‘magnificent large blooms, rich yellow in colour with a strong seductive fragrance’. She keeps unfolding and gets to the name of the rose. It reads, ‘Jude the Obscure’.

