



Judge Dimity Drummond

The white Commonwealth of Australia car has come to a stop in the car park of Strathplane Cemetery, up country South Australia. There are a few cars in the carpark although it's a Friday afternoon. Judge Dimity Drummond, Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia has been working on her papers in the run up from Adelaide. She has some important pending rulings to hand down on Tuesday in Canberra. But she's done with her work for now and turns her attention to the purpose of her journey. Her bodyguard and her driver get out of the car. Driver Len springs the boot of the Mercedes. There's a big sheaf of red President Lincoln

roses there; the scent emanating from the sun warmed boot is really a bit overpowering.

"Your Honour," the bodyguard says, "if you will hold hard here for the moment, I'll attend to my duties."

He goes up the cemetery path to the Catholic section. He's a big strong, watchful man; good at his job. The role of Chief Justice of the nation's highest court is not without controversy; you never know who is carrying a grudge. The Commonwealth Police make sure the Chief Justice's tail is well covered. The judge gets out; she's a very slim and very stylish woman. She's wearing a beautifully cut fawn suit. Len, the driver, diffidently says,

"I have a small latte here in a vacuum flask Your Honour. You've been very busy with your papers coming up. Perhaps a coffee while the Sargent is attending to his duties?"

"That's very thoughtful of you, Len," she says. She sips the excellent coffee while casting her eye over the life learned landscape. "You know, in my extreme youth here, old Doctor Moule used to ride his big bay hunter up to funerals and then jump him over handy logs in that bush block on the way home. The unofficial squire of Strathplane used to send his man down to leave the paddock gates open on funeral days."

"The eccentricities of rural life, Ma'am,"

"Indeed," she replies.

The bodyguard comes back down the path. "It's the O'Halloran family from the Kingshorn Estate," he says. "They buried their adult son on Tuesday. This is just a final visit as they run their interstate visitors back to Adelaide Airport."

Judge Dimity looks at her watch and then at Len. "Len," she says, "can you break off a spray of roses from this big lot?" Len whips out a Swiss Army knife and attends to this. They then stand respectfully as she scoops up the two lots and crosses the bitumen road to the cemetery. The guard follows, back a bit.

She drops the main bunch on a big bluestone triple slab, and carrying the small spray, walks up to the O'Halloran group. She is all class and style. They are subdued, but naturally flattered; she is a famous figure. Current rumour has it that she will be the next Governor General when she steps down from the Bench soon. She places the roses on the fresh mound of earth, kneels and opening her missal, says a decade of the Rosary. The group kneel with her.

"A great honour, Dame Dimity," the head O'Halloran says.

"It is and always is just Dimity, Kevin," she says. "My deepest sympathy and I'm afraid you must excuse me."

She walks back to her parents' grave and that of her famous footballing brother; the best ruckman ever to play for Glenelg. She says two decades of the Rosary and gently spreads the roses. Several other people drift up the path while she is kneeling; the bodyguard gently, but firmly motions for them to stop until she is finished. The local press photographer, camera in hand, rushes up. He talks urgently to the bodyguard who swiftly pats him down.

"I think it's okay," he says. She agrees to a photo. It's an absolute beauty and the Joe Blow snapper sells it to the National Press and TV.

She finishes in the cemetery and Len runs the Mercedes up to pick her up as more people arrive. Throwing off her seriousness, she tells Len; "I was born here and spent my early married life here."

Len grins. "Well, you seem to have shaken it off, Your Honour. As I hear it, you have spent much of your life in mega cities."

"Indeed," she says, "but I expect that I will be back here for ever in the end. In the meantime, Len, drop me at the Emporium. I want to touch base there. Then I'll walk up to the convent."

"I can allow you up to an hour, Your Honour," he says, "then we must be on the road in time to catch the Governors dinner. As you also know, the Prime Minister is anxious to see you about Tuesday's High Court rulings."

She goes into the Emporium and winks out her old friend and bridesmaid, Sandy. Sandy was a busty and tongue-tied teenager in their youth, much given to wearing deep boat neck dresses. The boys overlooked her lack of small talk, being too busy overlooking her deep and well displayed bust. She looks now to need a good curry comb and brush-up, worse still, she's got quite garrulous.

"Watcha doing here, Dim?" she says. "What...yer going to visit the convent? I s'pose yer know it's a Backpacker's now?" she cackles. "That little mongrel priest has never been back since you and your brother belted him and old Ma Glaskin up. The proper story never got out; not bad, eh, for a tiny town."

"Oh," Dimity says, "our smart local lawyer handled that all well."

"Hmmm," says Sandy, "some of the locals say you had a fling with Brien Frimantle. Didja?"

Dimity laughs a throaty laugh. "The locals never did let the truth get in the way of a good story. Beaut to see you, Sandy and now I'm walking."

En route to the old convent, she pushes against the front door of the stylish old Pub, once the social hub of the district, or rather the Catholic part of it. Its only open three days a week now. It's still there, solid and stolid, but the major players that buzzed are long gone from life or the district. She walks over the railway line, laments the abandoned railway station and on up to the convent.

"How's it going, love?" an irreverent young backpacker calls from the balcony.

'God,' she thinks, '57 years ago, the nuns would have ganged up on this young sprog and thrown him over.'

"Come up for a tinnie, you look the berries, there's no age barriers here."

The big guard following her steps up to the fence raises an admonishing finger. The backpacker instantly recognising stern authority pulls his head in. Judge Dimity steps into the road a bit to the point where she can take in the Convent, the Church and the Presbytery. The once Sunday twice packed church now has a visiting third world priest once a month; the Shire rents the priests house for staff housing.

Her car is now close to hand and the big guard, superbly suited, is standing there. It's all a bit classier and larger than life and so upmarket that passing drivers slow to look. A somewhat battered old Fairlane car pulls up alongside her. It's Helen, her first husband's second wife and his lover long before that.

"Jesus Dimity, you look the berries. I hear you are to be our next Governor General. May we expect an invitation to Yarralumla?"

Dimity grins engagingly. "Only to the servants Christmas do," she says as she shafts Helen.

"You were always an upmarket bitch," the woman says. "Brad tells me that you had an out of this world figure, but you were useless in bed."

"Hmmm," says Dimity. "I really only had exclusive rights to him for three weeks when we married, hardly time to get into harmony. Then you romped back into the equation in a big way."

"Hah," says Helen, "I was never out of it. I came to Hahndorf the first Sunday of your honeymoon when you were at Mass. You would have had Buckley's of getting anything out of him that day – I sucked the beggar dry in the hour we had."

"Hmmm," says Dimity. "I saw your car tucked away behind the German Deli. In my ignorance, I supposed you had to come up on Print Shop business. I was somewhat startled when he never mentioned anything."

"Brad always said that it wasn't possible to bed you without you consulting the chart you had pasted inside the wardrobe door. He said that you were big on negatives."

"True, true," says Dimity, "but I had to as Brad well knew; we were actively practising the Catholic rhythm method of birth control. The Catholic teaching of the time set out forcefully that the seed be not wasted. The only way around that was the rhythm method and Brad didn't want children at that stage."

"And you?" Helen asks. "You've never had any as far as I know."

"Indeed," Dimity says and lets it pass.

"Jeez," Helen continues, "Brad and I had a great time at the Clear Lake Duck Shoot that year. We got stuck into the Pinot Noir and made a big night of it. You didn't know and you were out at a dumb and dull old Christmas Tree dance at Gravel Hill. Old Brad couldn't get out of the van at dawn to shoot. I ran him ragged."

'Hmmm,' Dimity thinks. 'The Gravel Hill Christmas Tree dance was far from being a dull one – it was far and away the most memorable ever; her very first orgasm and more than one.' She supposes she owes Helen a lot really.

"Brad always thought you were so quiet in bed that you were on with someone else in Strathplane."

Dimity doesn't react to this; Helen is shooting her mouth off well enough without any needling from her.

"It was all your loss," Helen says. "You didn't know how to work him. He was a real good romp then – not now though."

"You've quite a few children," Dimity says, "and you built a nice house on that 10 acre rural block Brad and I jointly owned."

"Hmmm...seven of them. I've got fat ('and hard-faced with it,' Dimity thinks). Brad's a boozier and that's made him a loser. Desktop Publishing and computers mean that the old Print Shop is fooked."

"Ah," says Dimity, "Blind Freddy could have seen that coming, but not Brad. He's so steeped in small towns and small thinking, he couldn't change horses. Besides, the booze had him by then."

"How did you realize I was on with Brad?"

“Partly the resistance you showed to me even visiting the Print Shop, but I never knew for total sure, but one day after we made love in the afternoon and he dropped off, I sniffed him thoroughly and identified your usual scent on his actual skin. But it was Brant Addison who put your real pot on the day you went off to Clear Lake to duck shoot with him.”

“But why would Brant tell you that?”

Dimity laughs, “I’d just come out of the shower to get ready for the Christmas dance. He knocked on the door, told me the tales and offered to console me. He insistently wanted to console me and I felt indeed for him, with his wife crippled from that car smash he couldn’t possibly have been getting his male needs attended to at home.”

“And you buckled?” Helen asks.

“Not immediately,” Dimity replied, “but by God, I was tempted.”

The back-packers have obviously sunk a few tinnies and are back at the window of the balcony.

“Come on up,” the chief yeller calls, “you can both come up. You’re old girls, but you sure look as though you know what it’s all about.”

Helen laughs. “I’m tempted,” she says. “I don’t get any at home.”

Dimity chuckles, “I expect Helen, your long term average is still quite high.”

“Well,” she replies, “with two men on the go for most of my married life, that figures.”

“I suggested to Brant that he knock on your door when your new (to you) husband was at the Club.”

“Well, I’m astonished,” Helen says, “that cool diffident exclusive old you was that thoughtful....and thanks indeed.”

The driver now walks over to where they have been locked into raking up the past. “Time to go, Your Honour,” Len says. “I need safe driving time, but we are now losing it.”

“See you, Helen,” Dimity says as she hops into the Mercedes.

“Arghh, and you too,” Helen says and gives Dimity the finger as she drives away.

On the road back to Adelaide with the later afternoon sun coming into the car, Dimity ponders on all of the other things she would have liked to touch base on in the District, had time permitted. A visit to her lawyer and old lover now in a nursing home here, a look at this year’s drop of thoroughbreds at her inherited property, ‘Hooten Hall’ and a look at progress of the rambling stone house that a mason, who she has brought out from Italy, is slowly building for her on the property. *‘What a crowded life I lead,’ she thinks.* And it seems destined to get even busier if she takes up the Prime Minister’s offer of Yarralumla.

Another thought of a retrospective nature crowds her mind - the Thursday evening when Reverend Mother tells her after Benediction that she has been nominated to head up next year’s Del Credere Society. They’ve jumped a class to select her and she is immediately if quietly alarmed. She is a well grown and very handsome girl, albeit only fourteen, but has detected the priest’s eye on her.

“What’s it all about, Reverend Mother?” she asks.

“I don’t know a lot,” she is told, “it’s a programme the priest has been running here for some years. It’s a sworn to secrecy group, buy the intent is to prepare young girls for marriage and the later life.”

Dimity has deep held suspicions if this, oh so, secret society. She has seen the girls come and go to the Presbytery on Friday evenings. Some come back and exchange dark secret looks with others of the girls. A blonde girl comes back a gibbering wreck. Two girls blatantly, and lesbian, come back very self-satisfied and immediately hop into bed together. No one hassles them. Mary Staley comes into her dormitory that evening late.

"You and I are IT," she says, "for tomorrow evening. I don't think you have anything to fear and I'm inured to it all, but be warned...once he sees you in the buff, he may want to make a start on you instead of waiting for next year."

"Umm," says the young Dimity, "spare me the physical details, but do draw me a mud map of where this all happens and the approximate times." And she does.

Dimity is up early next day and taking the key to the day kids school room and makes like she is about to do early homework and assignments. In actual fact, she round hands what she thinks is going to happen that evening, envelopes this and goes down to the lane behind the convent. She catches Freddie Shaylor as he comes along, gives him the letter and tears a pound note in half.

"Freddie," she says, "if you can put this under the lawyer's office door as you pass, I'll give you the other half of this on the way home, so long as you enquire on your return trip whether he actually got it."

"Day-oh," Freddie says and bikes off. He's reliable.

The girls walk over to the Priests House after dark. They are in full fig school uniform. The housekeeper, Mrs Glaskin, leads them into the priests study – he's down for Friday night drinks at the District Club. She makes an unbuttoning gesture at Mary, who immediately starts to disrobe and hang her uniform on a hatstand. Dimity quietly cases the dimly lit room and slips through the heavy velvet curtain – she wants to unbolt the French doors, but is sharply called back by Mrs Gaskin. She is carrying a long black cane and slashes Dimity on the legs.

"Sit down and be quiet," she says. Mary slips into a white short one button tunic with the De Credere slogan embossed on it – it's indecently short. The grandfather clock in the hall strikes the quarter hour and the priest arrives. He just puts his head in the door.

"All ready, Mrs Glaskin?" he asks. "Indeed, Father," she says, "as always."

He returns wearing a white Alb, goes over to the desk where Mrs Glaskin pours him a whisky neat and liberally sprinkles something from a herb bottle onto the drink surface and stirs it in with a swizzle stick. The priest drinks it, has a refill and turns his coal black little eyes onto the girls. He gestures for Mary to take her tunic off and she complies, but he is also lamping Dimity; looks at Mrs Glaskin, who walks over to her and says, "Disrobe." Dimity undresses and isn't offered a cloak.

Just at this balancing point in the evening's progress, there is a cataclysmic crash and the French doors burst open and in comes Dimity's footballing brother carrying a sawn bit of a railway sleeper as though it is a matchstick in his hand. He throws it on the floor, steps over to the door and kicks a soft wood wedge under. Brien Frimantle, the lawyer, is already snapping away with his big Nikon square camera.

The priest throws up his hands in unspoken horror. Dimity's brother knocks him to the floor, goes to the French doors to retrieve a Gladstone bag and from this throws a pair of Burdizzos to the floor alongside the priest. He gives the priest a lick in the essentials and says, "I'm going to doctor you now, you miserable bastard. You'll never be a threat again, to any woman." "God help me," wails the priest.

“Wrong call,” Ashley says, “it’s the Angel Gabriel – the devil himself, you should be calling on. It’s his work you’ve been doing for god knows how many years.”

Mrs Glaskin tries for the broken French doors, but Mary, stark naked, trips her up, grabs the cane and roughly throws her across the lounge arms and takes to her with the black cane. It’s all like something out of Dantes Inferno.

“Back off, people,” Frimantle says, “we have all we need and if you use that gadget on him Ashley, we may all end in jail.”

Ashley relents, but takes a pressure can of Magenta disinfectant out of his bag and sprays down the priest and Mrs Glaskin, head to toe. Dimity steps over the prone figures to the priest’s desk and scoops up quietly the herb bottle on his desk.

“God, Dimity,” says Ashley, “you and Mary are huge eyefuls. You’re no longer pups. Where have you been hiding all this?”

Mary chuckles. “Ashley,” she says, “I’ll be out of this hole come Christmas. What about taking me to a dance?”

“God, Mary,” he says, “How could I stand it? Every time I lamped you, I’d be imagining you as you are now.” She chuckles a very sexy chuckle.

“No harm in that, Sir Galahad,” she says, “we’re all naked under our clothes.”

Walking back to the convent, Dimity says, “Mary, you seem to have played a long running part in all this. I can’t understand that.”

Mary says, “The start-up bit was hellish, but whatever that old devil was imbibing turns him into a very good lover. Believe me, I know, I’ve tried out the locals at home after dances. They’re without exception fumblers and two minute Tims. That old Yin could buy and sell them.”

Frimantle does Dimity’s bidding in this matter and 10 days later, Frimantle picks up Dimity outside the convent and they go to his office to meet with senior priests from Adelaide. Brien lays out depositions, all properly signed and attested and the damning photos. They take all of this in.

“What do you want?” the head man asks. Brien looks at Dimity.

“This is really a police matter,” he says, “but my client has requested this conference.” Dimity looks the picture of innocence in her neat school uniform.

“I think, Mr Church Emissary,” she says, “that is you post Father Lacey to Leigh Creek and leave him there and if you ensure that Mrs Glaskin is never employed by the church again and last, but not least, that you ‘discover’ that Mardie Wilson has won a scholarship to Sacred Heart College, and when you get her there, you will undertake to provide the best counselling and psychiatric treatment, then most of the bases would be covered.”

“Okay.....you’re pretty young to be bouncing the ball, young lady,” the churchman says.

She dimples. “If you would rather that I sell my story and pictures to the Murdoch Press, then you can walk out the door now.”

“God no!” says the Jesuit. “What do you want in writing?”

“Nothing,” says the girl. “This can be a school kid/gentleman’s agreement, but by St Cecilia you had better keep your end up.”

He grins. “I’ve dealt with sticky situations with priests in my time, but your common sense approach is a great rarity.”

Dimity ends the meeting. “Father,” she says, “Common sense is not common in our defective world.”

The second man, older, who until now has not said a word, says, "Your summation of the effects of Father Lacey's attention to the girls involved is very discerning. Have you thought of following clinical psychology as a career path?"

"My mother is ill with Motor Neurone Disease," Dimity says. "I will nurse her along and probably marry a farmer and stay in the district."

"A pity," the churchman says. "We could find University money if you change your mind. You could work it off on counselling work."

Towards the end of her mother's life, she meets up with Brad Johnston. He's 8 years older than her; formerly a stock firm man, he is on his way in life. He buys the local paper, sells the masthead to a bigger newspaper group, but retains the job printing aside. It's quite a good earner, but Brad sees it as only a stepping stone into state politics. He knows that as sure as shooting, Dimity and her brother will inherit the significant property known as 'Hooten Hall.' She may not have much money now, but she surely is an heiress of note. That's his angle. Her angle is that Ashley looks like marrying Mary Staley, which will make her a bit of a spare wheel at the farm. She can see that Brad is heading into being corpulent and she knows he is fond of a beer or three on a hot day, but he's her only suitor anyway, so she succumbs.

Having sketched out the scene to her big adventure, we can fast forward to the dance at Gravel Hill. Her sister-in-law and the farming husband are picking her up and have suggested she stay overnight, with Brad (and Helen) away at the duck shoot opening in Victoria. She shooed Brant Addison out there with her body jumping and saying don't, don't and is now dressing. She is wearing a very classy black wool frock, high neckline, which suits her classic tailored looks to perfection. She is unhappy with the line of the dress and decides to wear a thong under, which makes it look perfect. A string of single pearls, pearl earrings and a night rail in a small bag and she's good to go.

She's a pretty reticent girl, but has decided to have a good time tonight, so when the most attractive man in the hall arrives along in the Flirtation Barn Dance and asks her if he may have the next dance, she immediately assents. He's a tall chap, broad shouldered, slender waist, with the most modern haircut and truly wolfish grin. He turns up for the Modern Waltz.

"You're the really outstanding girl here tonight," he says. "May I perhaps escort you home?"

"Ah, kind sir," she says, "I'm a married woman." He hesitates.

"You look too young for that," he says untroubled. "Show me your husband."

"Oh, he's duck shooting in Victoria," (with his bloody paramour, she mentally ad libs). He looks at her speculatively and hugs her tight as they spin in the corners. He is surely a sophisticated and well suited man.

"There's a big white gum tree just past the toots. I'll meet you there after this dance ends; just a brief meeting."

"Umm," she says. After the dance, she says to her sister-in-law, "Lothario there wants a brief meeting with me behind that big white gum just past the toots. What about tooting with me so that it isn't noticed?"

Sister-in-law says, "What about Brad?"

She laughs a short snorting laugh and says, "He's taken Helen from the Print Shop to the duck shoot. I expect the pellets he's firing into a warm body won't be lead ones."

The girl chuckles. "Fair enough," she says. "We did wonder if you would ever wake up to what has been a long running show. We've always thought you to be delightfully naïve."

Just on the rim of light, she grasps sister-in-law's shoulder.

"What are you doing?"

"I'll just balance on you a bit as I take my thong off. If I'm going to give him a surprise, it should be an unexpected one."

The pushy one minutes later behind the trunk of the big gum says, "God, oh God; lets jump into my car and away."

"Love to," she says, "but it's just too noticeable – small town, overly active tongues."

"Umm," he says, "I think I know where you live."

"Come the back way from the lane," she says. "I'll leave the back door unsnibbed."

Sister-in-law says, "Do you know what you're doing?"

"Yes," says Dimity, "but just to be sure he isn't an axe murderer on tour, I'll ring you at 12.30 and we'll stay connected with the phone dangling. Just listen in for a while."

Brad comes back from his duck shoot very much the worse for wear and ready to sleep it off. She has little trouble keeping him at arm's length. Sunday morning she rides over to Brien Frimantle's rural property. His tough old wife is away as Dimity well knows. Brien's reading the Sunday papers on his front terrace.

"She's away," Brien says.

"I know," Dimity says. "Where's the shower?"

She goes carrying a Woollies bag and comes back wearing the most beautiful skimpy low neck, high hem dress and an odd looking necklace. She has a tray with a bottle of Scotch, glasses and what looks like a jar of herbs, with her.

"What on earth.....and Jesus you look the absolute berries. Have you anything under that little dress?"

"Only me," she says as she uses a swizzle stick to mix the herbs into his drink. "Just relax and sink this holy water. I have in mind giving you the time of your life to achieve what I want."

Brien's eyes are glazing over taking her in. "What on earth do you want?"

"I'm a late developer," she says, "but I want to show you how I've developed and I want to come to your office as an articulated clerk. I plan on being a legal eagle."

And she does. How she meets Athol Drummond, the international shipping lawyer is quite another story. He's no longer around, although Brien is and her brilliant law experience as a Barrister has brought her far and is yet to take her further. And she still has a third of a bottle of the priest's herbs left, should she need them.