



The Late Marriage

Anne Winter-Willowby is driving her white Mercedes coupe just out of Chalfont Studley on her way to her Knightsbridge office when, for the second time in the past fortnight, she spies Professor Calder Tolliver standing disconsolately on the road verge, looking introspectively at his British racing green Porche Boxster. She instinctively pulls sharp up onto the verge and walks back.

“Professor.” she says, “where is your reliable old Bentley?”

He half grins, it’s a bit of a rueful grin.

“Back at the house,” he says. “I always know I should take it, but I keep getting seduced by this bit of green frippery. I bought this in Jersey – I love it – but its unrequited love. The fucking thing continues to stick me up, especially when I have a lunch date. It’s been over to the Porche people, but does not get fixed and I get little sympathy out of the beggars.”

“Ah,” says Anne, “but you didn’t buy it from them.”

“But they’re Porche agents,” he says.

“Well,” says Anne, “if there’s no sale profit to motivate them, it’s not surprising that they are leaving you to dangle.”

“Hmmm,” he says, “perhaps you teach economics.”

“Not at all,” she replies. “I’m just telling you what the car trade thinks of people who buy out of the country.”

“Yes,” he says, “indeed – I have once again got the AA coming – ten minutes they said.”

“Ah, Professor,” she says, “You need a good woman to sort you out.”

“I had one,” he says, “for twenty short years. I miss her dearly.”

“Yes,” Anne says. “I’m told the Royal Ballet does too.”

“You seem to know a bit about me,” Tolliver says.

“Well, I attend all of your poetry readings including that marvellous one at Stoke Poges Churchyard last month.”

“It drew a huge crowd,” Tolliver says.

“Indeed,” counters Anne, “and unfortunately you had to use a lapel mike. I prefer your wonderful voice au natural.”

“Kind lady,” he says.

“To business,” says Anne. She walks around the car, comes back. “This green beast has sustained a hit at some time. I think you are only suffering from an electrical glitch and I expect I can have it ironed out for you.”

“How?” asks Tolliver.

“Leave it to me,” she says, “and lets have a latte out of my thermos flask while we wait on the AA.”

They are just finishing the latte and a shortbread biscuit when the Break Back truck rolls along. She gives the driver a card.

“Take this box of tricks here,” she says. “By the time you arrive it will be expected.”

She gives another card to Calder Tolliver. “Just ring Eduardo on this number say, about 4pm and I expect your problem will be approaching a solution. Now...where are you expected, I can drop you off.”

“Bracks Club,” he says, “in St James.”

Mid-afternoon next day, the receptionist comes into Anne's beautiful American Cherry wood-lined office. "An impressive older gentleman to see you," she says. Anne goes out. Tolliver is standing at the reception desk. He's impeccably dressed; dark suit, striped shirt, plain tie. He's got a bigish bunch of roses on his arm and is carrying a bottle of Crystal Champagne.

"Perhaps the sun is over the yard arm," he says, "and these need to go in water."

An hour later, with the Crystal all gone, he says, "I now have the Dutch courage up enough to ask you to an important event at Cambridge."

"Tell me," Anne says.

"Umm...a while back I published a book. The fight over Fenland; It's about the Luftwaffe hanging around the bomber fields near Lincoln and trying to whack the planes as they took off. I got the story from a surviving bomber pilot. The University have asked me to accept an Honorary Degree in Literature from them. I would be delighted to have you along for company and I promise to use the Bentley."

Anne laughs. "Yes, but only if you demonstrate faith in me by driving the Boxster."

A few weeks later when they are dining in a pleasant bistro at Maidenhead Thicket, Calder, rather surprisingly, says, "Anne, I've been a much married man, sort of. You've never married. I'm very house trained and very rich. Can I suggest we make a match?"

Anne laughs a tinkly laugh. "Calder," she says. "I'm certainly unmarried, but I'm certainly experienced too. What the hell; let's give it the old school try."



So they do. They mix and match houses, including Anne's warehouse apartment in Gibraltar and have both an interesting and compatible time. Two timely or perhaps untimely events now roll along. Tolliver thinks it's time he gave up his Tenure as Professor of English Literature (Emeritus that is) at Oxford and Anne gets a sharemarket approach for a friendly takeover from the biggest firm of her trade in all of England.

"What do you think, Anne?" Tolliver says.

"Umm...if you think we can continue to get along as well in a non-working situation as we do in our working situation – and only – let's do it."

By Christmas they have honoured their social obligations and they're out of a daily occupation. They are now both sitting back on a heap of the readies and in Calder's case, a good pension. "Let's go and have a look at the Antipodes," Calder says and they go out to Queensland Gold Coast. They stay at Broadbeach. The beach is nothing much and in any case, the high rise shades the afternoon sand. They go down to Jupiter's. It's raining a bit and the crowd there can best be described as lacklustre. They go up to the North Coast where they discover the much talked about sunshine and the never talked about humidity.

They visit Sydney and Melbourne and then are impressed with Adelaide. *'Possibly, they think, but we'll look at Perth next.'* Perth hits the spot. It's pretty and it's not so crowded and Calder enjoys a hit of golf at Sea View in Cottesloe and Anne meets some very compatible swimmers at North Cottesloe nearby. They bum around and buy a unit off South Terrace on the South Perth/Como boundary. It's a two-storey beauty and by crossing South Terrace at the right time of the day, they can walk the Royal Perth Golf Course right down to the Windsor Pub and its

marvellous drinks/meals annex. They juggle things around a bit and Calder containers his beloved Porche out, buys a decent yacht that they pen at the South of Perth Yacht Club. They settle in to enjoy life and through University contacts, make it on to the Reserve List of the A List, that get invited to every cat and dog show around the city. The climate suits them; Calder plays acceptable golf and they are soon dug into an enviable lifestyle.

There's not a bump in the road for their near five years in Perth, until the night they walk down the golf course and enjoy a thick steak and salad at Ogden's. It's a tad towards dark as they set out along the golf course. They've been over to the pub, America's Cup Bar, for an after dinner brandy and in Calder's case, a cigar; so they set off home as the light is failing. Between the Clubhouse and South Terrace, two hoods accost them. They walk up close.

"Just your wallet, Dadda," they say to Calder. Calder shoots them a hard look. "This could be injurious to your health, chaps." he says. "Best you walk on smartly."

"Huh," the bigger of the two says and pulls out a leather plaited sap. "We warned you, Dadda. We'll have your wallet anyway, so jump to it."

Calder has a stoutish stick in his hand; red wood, brass ferruled. He gives this a twist; it's a full length sword stick acquired at the Portobello Markets, years back. It's a long blade and Tolliver has fenced for Britain in the Olympics some time back. He swishes the stick.

"Shall I lop off your left ear or your right ear?" he says, swishing the blade back and forth in a very menacing way.

The hoods are seriously intimidated. They turn on their heels and walk away quickly.

"Phew," says Anne as they sit down to a good snifter of Cognac. "That was a tad nasty."

"Oh, I don't know," says Calder, "we got rid of them easily enough without lopping off an ear or two."

But the incident stays firmly in Anne's mind. A bit further down the track, she says, "Why don't we look at moving to the near country; keep this place for overnighing after a show?"

Calder pulls down his Australian Touring Atlas and they look for possibilities.



They settle on York as their first choice; it's only 100kms from the city, less from the big shopping centre in Midland and you can park at Midland and catch the electric train into Perth and dodge the heavier traffic. It all takes a while, but six months later, their two-storey English cottage is near to completion. They haven't made any move to furnish this up, when an earth shattering event touches them.

Calder is killed in an unprovoked attack when he was putting their rubbish bin out, nineish one Thursday night. His head is savagely beaten in with half of a star picket. Anne is a very pragmatic person, but this catastrophe puts a deep dent in her pleasant life. The entire Senate of the University of WA turn up en masse at St Georges Cathedral. The Governor, himself, walks over the road to attend. It's all a signal honour to a very erudite man.



Anne gets on with finishing and furnishing her York cottage; she commutes in her own small car and lets the Boxster sit in the garage. She now baits the trap;

works away intensively on the Boxster. She also has a grille door installed about two thirds of the way down the unit stairway. She is very conversant with reloading shotgun shells, which, due to her very good hand skills, has been a big help to Calder with his Skeet Shooting hobby at Whiteman Park. He was academic by inclination, not at all a handy man.

She now gives the Boxster a wash and polish in the garage and leaves the door raised and a low wattage globe on. She sits up late – and very prepared, until 11pm each evening, before closing the auto door and locking up. Thursday night she hears her front door being forced and takes up a spot on the stairwell. While it was only the longest of longshots, she immediately recognises two of the three home invaders.

“There you are, you old bitch,” the leader says. “We want the Boxster keys and your cash and credit cards.”

Anne is sitting calmly up near the top of the stairs. “Don’t do this to me,” she says, “and stay down there. The Boxster keys are on the piano, behind that Doulton vase.”

The chief hood grabs the car keys. “Fair enough, Bitch,” he says. “Now throw down the cash and credit cards.”

She doesn’t blink; pulls the small Angora car rug off what she has concealed on the stair edge and produces a very good looking Under and Over skeet gun. She swings it up, takes it off safety. “I’ll count to five,” she says, “you would be fooking wise to be out of my sight by then.”

The hood springs up the stairs and tries to force the grille. As calm as calm, she shoots him in the chest through the grille. There’s no blood, she has only loaded the shells with sunflower seeds. But there is a pretty impactful impact at such short range. The other two pick him up off the floor and get out the front door. She hears the Boxster motor rumble up and there’s a scream of tyres as they do a doughnut in the unit drive and gun the sleek car out onto South Terrace. They’re out and rolling, so Anne puts the shotgun down and walks out onto South Terrace, through the neighbours who have gathered in front of her unit. She says to the neighbours, “It’s all over, no panic,” as she goes. She looks intently up the hill and takes in the light and sound show now occurring there.

The Cops come around smartly after she reports her car stolen and back again in a couple of hours as they match up the blown to smithereens car with her one reported lost. The next day at the Police Compound, the forensics man says,

“This is a professional hit. They’ve or whoever has very expertly booby-trapped this beautiful car. They’ve used black powder magnesium tape and a bit of jelly. It’s what is known in the USA as Atlanta Spaghetti and was used in that city to take out the FBI squad tracking the stolen cars cartel; never heard of it in Australia. In essence, it snuffs the car occupants, but doesn’t do much harm to those outside of the car, other than near frighten them to death.”

Nothing further bobs along to alter Anne’s new life and about a month later, she is fitting out Calder’s York upstairs study just the way they planned it. She hangs a very fine charcoal drawing of Calder which was done by a kerbside artist in Portobello Road. It’s very well done. She looks into the marvellous depiction of Calder’s gaze.

“Hello Calder, old son,” she says. “I’m surely missing you.”

She then hangs a frame and impressive certificate which reads;

‘This certificate issued by the Surrey Board of Trade confirms that the Licensed Technical Expert and Managing Director of Chalfont Studley’s

Automotive Electrical Group is Anne Myfawny Winter-Willowby.’

She grins and says to herself, “It’s perhaps best that the Fuzz never sighted this.”