

## The Tuesday Club



It's Monday morning, 9.30ish. Felicity Browning is just out of the shower, toweling herself off. The knock on the door sounds positive and she wraps her dressing gown sketchily around her and opens the door. It's her builder, Tom Herrick; she gets along well with him on her new house build.

"Oh..Tom..come in." She turns and he steps through the door, leaves it ajar and places his hands on her hips and oh so gently pushes her down on her knees; on to all fours and even more gently, spreads her knees apart. *'What the hell is going on,'* she thinks, but then the penny drops. She's helped out in her younger days in the stallion shed on the farm and immediately realizes what he intends. She hasn't said a word; stays on all fours as he shucks her dressing gown over her buttocks and holds her steady with one hand as he readies himself. Barely seconds later, he arrives and the first errant thought that chases through her stirred up mind is, *'This is delicious.'* To add to her enjoyment of this out of the blue encounter, she realizes her husband hasn't been near her in any way for over seven weeks. She is ready indeed for this miracle happening.

When he is spent, he gets her up, looks her in the eyes and walks her backward into the bedroom and on to the unmade bed. She objects just a bit, she's blushing madly. "Not face to face," she says. He laughs, drapes her dressing gown over her head and spreads her nicely. Seconds later his long rough tongue is probing into her and she's away again like a Roman candle. They lay panting on the bed.

"Felicity," he says, "that was like my very first Christmas."

She's come to terms to having being intimate with the first other man in her 32 years of life.

"Tom," she says, "I'm having fun too!"

He turns serious. "I rushed you, is it a safe time?"

"Just," she says, "but, I'm sure it's okay."

"I'm on a timeline, Felicity," he says, "and I'm just a bit late to meet some subbies. I'll be back at the same time tomorrow with a box of the doings."

"Tom," she says, "I'm a practicing Catholic, we've only used the rhythm method in our 15 years of married life."

"I don't suppose you committed adultery either," he laughs, "so we might as well play it safe."

"Fine," she says.

They kick along for near a month, every day gets better than the first. They are both in good hard shape and thrive on their strenuous regimen, but on the day of the handover of the key to her new house in Forrest Street, she also shuts the door on their startling affair.

Felicity enjoys her homemaking activities in their narrow fronted, but classy new home. Brendon is an interior architect; works for the UWA as a senior lecturer and through his partnered commercial firm, takes on contracts in the Eastern States. He's not home an awful lot and although he takes an interest in her, it's all a bit perfunctory. Felicity suspects he may have something going with his older woman partner. She (the partner) is very handsome.

Until Tom came along, Felicity hasn't been consciously aware of other men taking a bit more than a passing interest in her, but with one memorable and most pleasant affair under her belt, she seems to catch the eye of the odd good-looking man. She concludes there are plenty of grapes around for the picking, if she wants to go picking. In the next year, she coasts along quite circumspectly, but is easily tempted one afternoon when she is over at the Art Gallery. She is looking at a picture in an international exhibition, it's a Monet called the 'Advocates' and depicts a trio of French lawyers.

"It's very good." Her thoughts are exactly echoed by a young man who joins her to look at this picture. He knows a bit about art and they strike an instant rapport. A bit later he says, "Having found you, I'd hate to lose you. What about a walk over to the city and a drink?"

She dimples and agrees and they walk over to Murray Street and adjourn upstairs to Sasella's Tavern. She's not tizzy about drinks and they sink a couple of frosted tankards of draught beer.

"Another?" he asks.

"No," she says, "that will do me."

"What about adjourning around to Kings Hotel – upstairs?" he suggests.

"Where upstairs?" she asks.

"Just give me a moment," he says and walks to the door with his mobile in his hand. He comes back – "Room 555," he says, "fifth floor, room 55."

"Hmm," she says, "I didn't expect this, but.....perhaps we will have another."

And they do. She's made up her mind, looks at her watch.

"Okay," she says, "room 555 at this time tomorrow." She touches his cheek and quietly goes.

Felicity doesn't run a car. They live so close that she thinks it's an unnecessary expense, catches buses in the main, walks to the shops at Karalee or down to Mends St. Thus she gets off the bus a stop or two short of Kings next day and settles herself down with a walk to the pub. Its late winter, she is wearing long boots, a long woolen skirt, a jumper with nothing whatsoever under and a leather jacket. He's left the door ajar and is sitting up in bed with a stubbie. He grins.

"You know," he says, "I never doubted you would turn up." She sheds her clothes. He chuckles. "Leave your boots on, puss," he says.

About six, they shower, dress and adjourn to the small discreet bar adjacent to Reception. He pulls out a pen and a business card to take her number. She's had a fun time, but shakes her head over what he's asked for.

"A month's time, same room, same time. Just be here," she says.

He raises his right arm. "Woo hoo," he says.

About once a month Felicity and Brendon have Sunday lunch with her Great Aunt. She lives in Dalkeith and her estranged husband has come out from England to join her. "Strictly platonic now," she says, "he is and has always been a terror, but I keep him now at arm's length." They are down for next Sunday at the Palm Court Restaurant in the Hotel Como at the top of South Terrace. Brendon is away on a lucrative job in Melbourne for the ANZ Bank, but she has let the appointment stand. Thus on Sunday she comes into the restaurant, Uncle Ron is there, tucked into a dark wood booth at the end of the room. He is mid seventies, six foot something and is a very fine looking man.

“Ha, Flip,” he says, “we are just a twosome today, Auntie Letitia is on a visit to her sick niece, the favoured one, but as you’re my most favoured one, I came anyway. I’ve got to know your taste and the meal is ordered for you.”

“What are we having, Ron?” she asks.

“Ah...Lobster Ravioli and Rack of Lamb.”

“Sounds good,” she says, “and what next?”

He levers himself out of the booth. “There’s no drinks service in here,” he says, “I’ll get drinks from the cocktail bar.” He comes back with six shooter glasses. “This is Aqua Vite,” he says, “the Swedish palate cleaner. You just toss it off.” And they do. “Now,” he continues, “Grand Marnier with a spritzer.” They toss these off. “And a rounder prior to our wine - Calvados,” he says, “older than I am.”

The cocktail waiter from next door comes in next with a very cold looking bottle of classic dry white. He decants, Ron sips and nods.

“It’s very good,” he says, “pour up.”

This done, they savour this beautiful, absolutely non-sweet wine. They have nearly finished the bottle when the food arrives. Ron stands up, motions Felicity around to his side of the table and tucks her in the end of the booth. They are well screened by the palms. She is starting to experience a deep, deep tingle and a slight buzz in her ears; she doesn’t resist in any way as he unbuttons her long skirt, slides his hand up her lower tummy and catches the edge of her pantyhose. Without being asked, she reflexively sucks in her tummy to admit his hand.

“Ah good, good,” he says, “You’re fully waxed.” She finds her tongue.

“Christ,” she says, “let’s go somewhere.” She wiggles a bit, pulls her pantyhose down.

“Oh, I’ll just keep your motor running a bit, we shouldn’t waste good grub.”

They gobble their meal. He goes off to pay. The minute he is out of sight a big man in a beautiful suit stands up and puts his head close to her. In a low voice, he urgently asks, “Are you going on with him?”

“God, yes,” she says.

The chap says, “He’s spiked your drinks.”

“Who?” she asks.

“The old yin,” he says. “Here, put this in your bag.” He hands over a beautiful silver hip flask with a fox mask on the front of it.

“Listen up,” he says, “the first spike is to get you to play, the second turns you into a no holds plaything. Duck any drink he offers you – drink only from this. It’s just Cognac. Quick, quick. Give me your phone number.”

Felicity is cute. There is no way in this world, she is going to give out her phone number when she’s doing this sort of thing and she’s ready if asked. She scribbles it on the serviette.

“Any Monday, only at four pm sharp,” she says.

He looks at it. “Funny number,” he says.



“Funny business,” she says. Actually it’s the number of a public phone on the corner below her house. He ducks away in a flash. Ron comes back.

“Taxi outside,” he says, “I need a little lead time. We’ll drop you off and a nice chap called Byron will pick you up in 45 minutes and bring you around.”

“But,” she says. He puts a long finger on her full lips.

“No butts,” he says and they go for the taxi.

Felicity is steaming like a kettle, so cools off at home with a quick shower. She gets into black stockingettes, an ankle bracelet, court shoes and a string of pearls and wearing nothing else, puts on a long black coat. The doorbell rings and she comes out quick. A nice looking mildly Middle Eastern looking man opens the rear door of a white Lexus car. After a quick up and down look, he shuts the door smartly and opens the passenger side front door of the car. She hesitates.

“Easier to talk,” he says.

Felicity rejoins with, “my immediate needs are for transport not conversation. I’m suffering this minute from the hots and the happies.”

The driver takes the hint and in no time, unloads her in the driveway of a well kept house in Nardina Crescent, Dalkeith.

“Going on past experience,” he says, “I’ll be back here to pick you up in ninety minutes.” And he does. She is gobsmacked. She has had the most exhilarating time of her life with old Ron; she’s stopped only a couple of times to have a swig from the hip flask – much to Ron’s disgust.

“Goddalmighty,” she ejaculates and sits back in the Lexus seat.

“It went well?” the driver asks. She wakes out of her euphoria and gives both he and the car interior a hard look. The car has a pleasant waft of a high class fragrance about it and the driver is also a class act. Soft Italian shoes, fawn well creased trousers, a Canterbury football shirt over an obviously Italian wool jumper; only an Italian jumper out of Milan can drape like that.

“I’m Byron Gartrell,” he says. Shaking off or rather luxuriating in her relaxed feeling of wellbeing, she says,

“Pull the other one, there’s no Byron Gartrells in Beirut.”

“Gawd,” he says, “you’re quick, but it’s a tickety boo deed poll name.” He continues, “I do a lot of delivery work to many well heeled chaps – some like old Ron.”

“You’re a sort of upmarket pimp,” Felicity throws out.

“You could say that,” the man says. “Perth’s a different city today. It’s full of smart technicians and executives and a great many of them are on short term contracts. It’s all to do with the mining boom. They don’t bring out their wives and partners. They are not the sort of people to pick up a street walker or even to use an escort agency. They simply don’t have the time to dine and wine women. I fill their needs with what I call ‘The Tuesday Club’. I recruit and deliver wholesome willing ladies – very discreet willing ladies – to suitable executives. It works like this. Tuesday is two shifts. I pick up a lady at, say, 9.30am and deliver her back not later than noon. Afternoon shift is at 12.45 with the ladies back and comfortably home by school out time. Wednesday, I deliver less discerning ladies to the more demanding men. Thursday is much a repeat of Tuesday, but the ladies involved on that day are just a whisker below the crème de la crème of the Tuesday Club.”

“What’s in it for the girls?” Felicity asks.

“Umm,” he says, “to be quite honest, it’s an escape from ennui and boredom. Many of the Tuesday girls have FIFO husbands and while they can’t go out on the town and whoop it up when hubby’s away, through my club, they get to enjoy very uncomplicated sex and aside from all that, earn quite a deal of cash money.”

“How do you find the willing girls?” Felicity asks.

“It sounds improbable,” Gartrell says, “but I recruit the Tuesday Club ones myself, the rest by newspaper ads.”

“It certainly sounds improbable,” she says.

“Many true things are,” Gartrell says, “but funnily enough, I can generally tell at a glance who might be players. It doesn’t take all that long to put it together either. Bored housewives are indeed my stock in trade. I wouldn’t be anywhere without them, they are most plentiful in the early to mid thirties. Now,” he continues, “getting back to old Ron and looking at things with a clear eye, you are a prime, very prime Tuesday girl, but I’ve learnt the hard way that its best to deliver only Wednesday girls to him. Ron’s a sybarite and a finely honed voluptuary; good humoured indeed, but hard hearted. He’s absolutely fine and a gentleman on the surface and the first time’s just great...”

“Amen to that,” Felicity contributes.

“But the ones that go back for more, often get into my car near to completely shattered and never come back. It’s what he slips into their drinks.”

“How badly shattered?” Felicity asks.

“Oh absolutely,” he says, “and woozy on their feet. I don’t really know how best to put this to you – an obviously upmarket lady – but he feeds them something pretty strong to arrive at an....um....um....anally retentive situation, or to be jack blunt, when they get their senses back, they find they are very sore where they shouldn’t be in the course of nature. Believe me, “Byron continues, “its best never to go back. I only take him Wednesday girls now. These girls are ready for anything, as they are more used to dealing with the technicians of the Boom, not the executive type. One of them took offence at Ron’s mal administrations and beat him up. He still books regularly for Wednesday girls, but I talk to them hard about what to expect before I drop them off. Dalkeith, by the way, was only on today as his wife isn’t home. I usually take them to his East Fremantle office.”

They pull up outside her Forrest Street home. “Now,” he says, “you’re obviously an intelligent girl and given the parameters I’ve set out, I’d absolutely love to recruit you to my Tuesday Club.”

Felicity laughs. “Hmm,” she says, “I surely don’t feel now any need for that today, but drop in Tuesday morning; I’ll probably be a goer.”

He laughs. “Until Tuesday,” he says.

On Monday, just before 4pm, she walks down to the phone box below. It rings at 4pm on the dot. She picks up. “You rang, Sir?” There is a deep chuckle on the other end. “I’m in a heavy meeting,” he says, “but I’m all yours.”

“Say, a drink at the America’s Cup bar at the Windsor,” she says, “at 5.15?”

“Fine,” he says, “I look forward to it.”

It’s just a meeting to return the generous lend of his flask.

Tuesday – the day of her offered initiation into the mysteries of the Tuesday Club – she hops into the Lexus. Byron grins good naturedly at her.

“You’re quite gutsy under your charming exterior,” he says. “I bet myself a ton to nothing you would front up today. May I say, you look stunning.” She is wearing a camel hair shortish overcoat over black net stockings, a nice scarf and a bit of bling. “You’re nothing short of a knockout,” he says.

“What have you got to tell me, Byron?” she says.

“Well, first up, you’re expected and I’ve spoken well of you to your host to be. You have absolutely nothing to fear, but...” He hands her a very shiny silver cell phone. “If you don’t want to proceed after the meet and greet, just hit speed dial and I’ll be there to walk you out....and there will certainly be no recriminations.”

“Okay,” she says.

He drops her at the door of a Mount Street block. He gives her a slip of paper with the entry code and says, "Go up to the Penthouse, Elliott is the name on the door."

While she naturally has reservations on what she is walking into, she does just that and is quite astonished that the chap who answers the door is black and incredibly tall. He ushers her into his luxurious pad.

"Erskine Elliott," he says and extends his hand. She shakes it. He's not so black as a light copper colour. "I'm here for a while," he says as he gestures at the well furnished room. "I'm from Dallas. I have an incredibly beautiful wife and three kids. We live in some comfort in the Trescue Hills Country Club area. Just at the moment, I'm here kick-starting the Guardian Gold development, north of Mount Magnet."

Felicity realizes she is quite at home with this very attractive man. "I know," she says, "you've been on TV a bit of late, in the business segments."

"Hmm, just glitz," he says, "You know the old story, a little bit of it goes a long way. May I help you out of your coat?"

"Certainement," she says as she unbuttons it. He slides it off her shoulders and realizes she is wearing only black knee high stockingettes underneath.

"My god," he says, "my god.....bearing in mind the underlying purpose of us meeting like this, I may now be unable to get out of my trousers."

Felicity is quite enjoying herself. "Not to worry," she says, "I'll help. I may have a pair of scissors in my bag if needed."

"Ulp," he says.

A frenetic activity period now develops, at the end of which they both subside, panting hard. The man (and what a man) gets up and goes out of the room, returns with a decanter and glasses. After a while he says,

"What chance of negotiating an exclusive rights deal with you?"

She sips her drink. "You would need to talk to the organiser about that," she says. "It may not be possible, but speaking only for myself, Tuesday's regular would not be a problem."

"Okay," he says. He takes her hand. "Felicity," he says, "I wouldn't have missed that for the world." They put down their glasses.

Things roll along and settle into a pattern that suits all parties for nearly five weeks. Driving back to South Perth, Byron puts an idea to the girl.

"I know that you are satisfied with the Tuesday round," he says, "and you've knocked me back flat on Thursdays...."

"Indeed Byron," she says. "There's only so much pounding a girl can take."

"This is more of a counseling job," he says.

"Ah, yes," she says, "soft spoken start, frenetic finish."

Byron laughs. "Well...you put my deal in a nutshell. Will you do it?"

"Tell me about it," she says.

Thus several Thursdays later, she gets off the bus, goes into the foyer of Kings Hotel/Car park and softly knocks on the door of room 555 (fifth floor room 55). It's opened by a man in shirt sleeves and tie. Quite a nice looking man, late fifties; although he is a reticent looking man, he doesn't backfoot.

"I'm Colin Dreyer."

"Yes," she says, "I know, 65 St Georges Terrace."

"Your husband is a client of ours."

"Yes," says Felicity. "Again...I know, I know."

“Rather than express my surprise,” he says, “I might as well tell you that Byron Gartrell has filled me in. He tells me you are new to this.”

Felicity laughs a tinkley laugh. “Not as new as I was, Mr Dreyer,” she says. “Why don’t you tap your Mini bar for a drink for us both and we can relax and get to know one another, at least in the social rather than the biblical sense.”

He does as she asks. They sit in two club chairs with the bed being the unmentioned elephant in the room.

“Tell me your story,” Felicity says. “Byron has told me that a little counseling may be desirable.”

“Hmm,” he says. “I married the boss’s daughter; (he grins) perhaps I shouldn’t aughter.”

“But...you’re still married,” Felicity says, “I’ve seen you in the Social pages with your wife and you are the head of a well thought of family firm.”

“Indeed,” he says, “but in reality, I’ve never had any fun, or what my warped mind tells me should be fun.”

“Have you been to marriage counseling?” she asks.

“Never. My wife would kill me if I suggested any such thing.”

“Fair enough,” says the girl. “Show me a couple that go to marriage counseling and I’ll show you a couple that don’t get along in bed.”

Dreyer grins ruefully. “I’m enjoying our talk,” he says, “you’re down to earth. No, the marriage bed has never contained much joy at all for me. She’s a reluctant prude and it seems to me she has only gingerly gone through the motions to produce a small family and after that she quit entirely. In fact,” he continues, “I have come to understand that that part of my life or the ability to take part in that part of life is ebbing away and it was through Byron Gartrell that this meeting came about.”

“What is your connection to Gartrell?” she asks.

“Business,” he says. “He’s an amazing businessman and a very fair one. He saw a niche in the market and filled it with the Tuesday Club. Later, he launched the Sunday Club.”

“Hmm,” she says. “He’s never mentioned the Sunday Club to me.”

“That’s understandable,” Dreyer says, “it’s unlikely you would ever be available on Sundays.” (*What the hell is the Sunday Club? she mentally asks herself*)

“Anyway,” he carries on, “he is a very successful share market man and is on his way to being a very rich one, despite the vagaries of the market. In short, he’s a risk taker, but not a reckless one.”

“Hmm,” says Felicity, “so you think that having created this opportunity, you may not be capable of maximizing it.”

“In a nutshell,” he says.

Felicity says, “I’m no expert, but fear of failure may in fact produce it. What is it Roosevelt said? ‘All we have to fear is fear itself’. It’s a memorable truism. As I said, I’m no expert, but I’ve personally experienced a deal of very high class fun with a man at least sixteen years older than you. But...to continue the research first into this matter. Just stand up and take your clothes off.”

“All of them?” he asks.

“Surely,” she replies and stands herself; unbuttons the beautiful tweed coat and drops it to the floor. She stands back and pirouettes as he gets out of his gear.

“Gawd,” he says, (he’s wearing only his glasses by now) “you are a stunner. I’ve never seen a naked slim girl before and your breasts stand out just so.”

He moves towards her, but she stops him at arms length, looks him up and down and says, “You’re fine. You’ll do well, but we have to talk it through further.”

Best hop back into your gear.” His disappointment shows. “Go on,” she says, “just do it.” When she’s dressed, she says, “What idea of fun do you have clearly in mind?”

“Ah,” he says. “Have you seen Pierce Brosnan in his role in the Tailor of Panama, where he seduces the Tailor’s wife by simply asking her, ‘has she ever been involved in wild loving?’”

“Um...” she says. “I haven’t, but by our next session, I will have if it will give me a pattern to what you want.”

A couple of Thursdays later, Byron Gartrell picks Felicity up in the Lexus.

“Where to today?” she asks.

“Ah, the old stock broker. I’ve passed on what you wanted me to and he’s raring to go. His wife is in England and he’s booked you solid on Thursday’s until she comes back.”

The venue is the stock broker’s house. A nice one with river views near Chidley Point. He pulls up at the gate, hands Felicity a small bank bag of white powder.

“As requested,” he says.

Felicity has consulted with her old step-uncle about all this and he’s given her the good oil. She presses the keypad and her client is just inside the entry wearing only a khaki’ish chenille dressing gown. He is pleased to see her. Within minutes they are in a grand bedroom with river views and Felicity is putting an old VCR of The Tailor in Panama in the previously requested old VCR player. By the time they have fast forwarded to the point where the man says, “Stop, stop right there,” its game on. Felicity says after a while,

“God, I’m impressed. When you get your breath back, let’s try the white stuff. I’ve never experienced it.”

“Nor have I,” he says, “but its well spoken of.”

They run a line of powder onto a mirror laid flat and both give it a snort. They finally surface, totally exhausted about 7pm. Its way past her usual time, but her hubby is away on a Geraldton job. Gartrell believes in giving the customer what they want and the only difference in the day is that he arranges to meet Felicity for a quick drink in South Perth a couple of days later.

They meet in the America’s Cup bar at the Windsor in South Perth. Gartrell produces a small inked stamp pad.

“I need you to put your left thumb into this,” he says, “and then we can transfer the print to this card. I’ve got a box for you at Bastion Safe Security, near the old Sub Station in West Perth. To access this, you just key in the date I first met up with you to take you around to the old yin’s place. That gets you into reception and your thumb print will get you into a security box.”

“Why all the cloak and dagger stuff, Byron?” Felicity asks.

“Hmm,” Gartrell replies, “I’ve lost several of my best girls – not through carelessness on my part, but due entirely to them leaving unexplained cash around that their husbands have stumbled on. Pretty devastating! Now I only put the cash in Bastion boxes and advise my girls to take out just the amount they need, make only cash purchases and if there’s any big surplus over, just cab up to Bastion and put it back in the box.”

Felicity says, “I never did this for money in the first place.”

“I know....I know,” says Gartrell. “You are most unusual, but, believe me, you have a decent amount in your box and no one but you can access this. Money is handy stuff, don’t ever knock having it.”

Later in the week another business matter comes up. She is having a pleasant time with her stock broker and as his intentness eases off, he says,

“Felicity, your hubby’s quite a share trader. Do you take part in this or is it just his deal? Also, how does he finance his forays? Some have been a bit wild lately.”

“He trades on margin – our home provides the bank security for his margin loans.”

“Hmm,” he says. “Would you let me open a trading account for you? I get the good oil at times on what is hot and sharing what we do physically every Thursday, I’m more than happy to share financial possibilities.”

“How do I keep it dark?” she asks.

“Leave that to me,” the stock broker says. “I’ll start you with a \$10,000 gift and with this I’ll buy you somewhere around 22,000 Zircon-Baldwin shares. This is strictly on the QT. Say nothing to anyone; just watch what happens to these over the next 21 days.”

She does and it surely does. He quits at the peak and she now has \$37,250 in her trading account. This he puts into Reveille Resources with an even better result. He then does a series of smaller ones and when her account tops over \$125,000, she takes out \$25,000 in cash and pedals up by cab to the safe deposit place. She is astonished at the loose cash in the box, really astonished. She assesses it, doesn’t really count it. It’s a very attractive jumble of money to which she adds her new very neatly packaged lot.

This is a lot of food for thought. She puts it on the stock broker for a printout of her husband’s investments. He complies, but also reminds her that this is only what has gone through Dreyer and Dreyer.

“If that is the case,” he says, “what shows on the printout probably reflects the more conservative side of Brendon’s share holdings. By and large, this is quite a good portfolio and the companies involved are onward and upward, but,” he continues, “and there’s always a but, when I’ve warned him off companies that I have been asked by him to buy shares in, he accepts this advice so readily and goes off without rancor. It just makes me think that he also deals elsewhere with less cautious brokers.”

Felicity is entwined with Erskine Elliott in his Mount Street unit this Tuesday afternoon. He is giving it all he’s got – which is quite a bit – but he runs out of puff before she does and they lie quietly for a while.

“Flip,” he says, “you have no idea of how much I’ll miss you.”

She is startled. “Why?.....Are you leaving?”

“Well, yes,” he says. “As you know, I was only here until we got Guardian Gold up and running. You have no idea of how rich a grade we are making inroads into up there in the dust of Mount Magnet. Magnet indeed! The shares will be a magnet for investors worldwide when the last six months milling grades are announced and the geologist forecasts for the mining becomes public knowledge.”

“Perhaps I can buy some shares,” Felicity says as she gets up and dons a dressing gown.

“Are you into shares?” he asks in a surprised tone. Warning bells ring in Felicity’s brain. His surprise sounds not so really surprised. *‘Hmm,’ she immediately thinks, ‘I’m involved with Gartrell, a share trader of some moment – I’m involved with Colin Dreyer who, as far as she knows, is a reputable broker of shares – and now here’s Erskine Elliott showing surprise, but not enough surprise that she’s into shares.’*

“I do a bit of trading,” she says. “I have around \$200,000 tied up in the market.”

“Hmm,” says Elliott, “tailor-made, tailor-made. The problem is that my employers are planning a share split, which will return them everything they’ve spent

at Mount Magnet and leave them with a freehold earner that they will undoubtedly sell to an equity trader for absolutely huge cash money, but still leave them with a finger in the earning pie.”

“So what do we do?” she asks.

“Hmm,” he says, “hmm.” Her mind tells her that he’s got it all down pat, but for forms sake, he is going to make her drag out the probably highly illegal details.

“I can cut you in if you want,” he says. “There are a few challenges, in that if there was any hint of insider trading, I could finish up in the stockade, as it were, and never work in my field again. Also, there is not that many shares out there, but there will be a lot more after the share split. I plan to go in big through a Singapore broker just prior to the split. It’ll all be a near done deal by then and my principals won’t come hunting. Although I’m prepared to wait my time, it would be nice to get a creamy slice out prior to the assays coming out. Now you could cash up and put a buy order through your broker and I could add something to that in cash here.”

“How would I explain the cash appearing?” she asks.

“Um, I understand you are a woman of property. You could say that it was raised by private equity mortgage.”

Further alarm bells ring in Felicity’s mind. This, oh so suave and pleasing, man must be aware that she owns a big property near Benalla in Victoria. She inherited this, but it has a life interest attached to her Auntie. She can mortgage it, but she can’t dispossess the life tenant, so she has just made sure the rates and taxes have been paid and the property maintained. It is quite likely she could raise equity capital on it as a smokescreen if someone came looking.

“How much do you want to put in?” she asks.

“Four hundred and fifty thousand dollars would ring true to a looker,” he says.

“Okay,” she says, “I can rake up another \$50,000 or so to add to my present holdings, so if this is lumped with yours in my name only, we’re up to \$700,000. What can we expect to make?”

“Times about ten or twelve,” Elliott says. “It would be best to go in barefooted.”

“Or bare-assed,” Felicity laconically fires back.

“Leave it until the death knock so that your investment plunge leaves them no time to change settled plans.”

Thus, five weeks later, Felicity walks into her Thursday lover’s office at Dreyer and Dreyer with a tote bag stuffed with the doings and lodges her already hand written buy order. After his initial reaction of incredulity Dreyer says,

“You know something?” She grins. “Like Martin Luther King”, she says, “I have a dream”.

“Dream, be buggered,” says Dreyer. “Look what happened to old Martin Luther.”

She turns thoughtful. “Oh, that was accidental I think. The original idea was to shoot him in the bum, but the guy they hired thought ‘what the hell!’”

“But...”he says. She runs her fingers over her lips.

“Don’t ask, Colin,” she says. “Just act.”

He does and he stands in the market with a one day only offer and gets all the shares budgeted on. In accordance with her instructions, they fray the edges of the deal a bit and don’t rush the completion of the shares once bought.

People connected with Guardian call on Dreyer. This is inspired, they say, do you have a sell order in your desk drawer? But Felicity is cute too. He tells them what she tells him to – i.e. that the buyer has bought on a hunch and on a rumour emanating from O’Connor’s Wine Bar quite recently. It’s a buy and hold order only

and that his client has gone trekking to the mountains via Katmandu and won't be back for weeks.

Thus reassured, Guardian goes ahead and announces the assay results. The shares go through the roof. Tempting and game-plannish as it is, she doesn't sell. If Elliott's right, there's the share split gravy to come.

Brendon is away for a while doing renovations on the interior of the Boulder Town Hall; she's very rich (on paper); Erskine's left the country; Colin Dreyer is a bit buried in share issues that bring in his bread and cheese and Felicity is not really interested in Byron's offer of a new and exciting Tuesday Club venture.

Gartrell rings and she meets him at a city bar. He is sporting a bruise on his cheek and is not his normal bright self.

"Flip," he says. "I met you through your old Satyr of a step-uncle and that was most rewarding to all concerned, but in the same vein, things have gone a trifle pear-shaped. The old beggar slipped a bit much dope into a Wednesday girl, or rather a Tuesday girl attracted to try Wednesday because she needed the money. She contacted the Fuzz and because of the drug side, the head fink of that squad came around on his own to old Ronald's and searched the place. He didn't find quite enough to bust him big time, but he used a telephone book to batter a recommendation of the best plump pigeon Ron could put a name to, to provide a spot of entertainment for a fellow slob coming over for a visit. You can guess whose name Ron gave him and that's why I'm here."

"He never!" she says.

"Oh, but he did," Byron says. "Now don't panic. There is every chance this copper may get wind of my operation and wind it up. That is, if I don't promptly head him off. Just at the moment, the idea is to use you as bait to bag this beggar and pop him in a secure spot that I know of, for 30 days, then let him out with a stern warning that if anymore is made of this matter, he won't be around long enough to enjoy his new found freedom."

"Can you do this, Byron?" she asks.

"Easy, peasy, Felicity," he replies. "I have access to some very determined and very experienced muscle."

Thus, five days later, by arrangement, she enters the foyer of Kings Hotel and heads towards the lift to go up to 555. The bad one – she has been shown his picture, taken quite unawares it seems – is sitting at one end of the cocktail bar looking out for her. He wants, of course, to get a trial run out of Felicity.

"Let's go up," he says.

"No," she comes back with, "a girl needs a little time to prepare."

He stands close, inserts his hand into the fold of her overcoat.

"Rubbish," he says, "I hear you travel au natural on these jaunts."

Just at this point, as they stand at the turn into the elevator, a big man, familiar by sight to Felicity from the Palm Court event, short arms the Drug Squad man; pushes him back. He looks at Felicity.

"Mrs Browning," he says, "is this man intimidating you?"

Parnell produces his warrant card.

"This is official police business," he says, "butt out!"

The big man turns his attention to the copper.

"Parnell," he says, "I know quite a deal about you. If this is police business, I'm Prime Minister. You know, if I looked up 'sleaze' in the Macquarie Dictionary, I'd find a picture of you under that heading."

Felicity is working to Gartrell's time schedule and what is happening now could wreck it. She touches the big man's hand.

"I'm here by appointment to meet Mr Parnell." She says. "I'm appreciative of your interest, but you are making things complicated for me."

"Get rid of him. I'll give you ten minutes, no more." Parnell says.

"Fine," she says. Then to the man, "come with me."

In the lift, she says, "You have stumbled on a well thought out ploy that is not to Parnell's advantage. You – like me – don't obviously wish him well. Please let the scenario play out and I'll explain things to you, but not now. Time is of the essence."

'I'll take station on you,' says the man.

She cards the door, dashes in and pulls back the covers on one of the beds, puts a softwood wedge in to keep the door open. She tugs at the big man's sleeve.

"Now we're going out the fire exit into the carpark, just stay with me and don't check."

She opens the fire door, drops a wood wedge into this also and they almost collide with a white van, rear doors part open, immediately outside the fire door. Two big dark men, Middle Eastern, decently suited, come straight in and head into 555 opposite. A third man watches them intently.

"Where does he fit in?" he asks.

"Just a good friend," she says, "and we're off."

They go down the exit ramp and two floors down, Felicity spots Gartrell's Lexus in a 'Disabled Bay'. "Hop in," she says and the three depart Kings car park.

"Byron," she says, "this man is a Good Samaritan, but he's also a man of the world. Can you assure him that no personal harm will come to Parnell?"

The big chap laughs. "You can garrote him if you like and I'll turn a very blind eye." They laugh.

Gartrell says, "We plan to stash him away for 30 days to teach him a lesson. We don't plan any other action. We just want to embarrass and frighten him to death."

They get down to the Victoria Avenue/Terrace Drive corner. That understood, Felicity says, "We'll drop you here and get out of the road. You know my Monday number. Please ring me, rather than the cops when the papers treat Parnell's disappearance as breaking news."

"I was only trying to help," the big man says. "I won't bother you, but I'll ring you." And he does.

"Care to tell a bit more about it?" he asks.

"Umm..." she says. "Parnell was on his way to wrap up an operation run by the chap who drove us out of Kings. It's a sort of girly delivery operation to men prominent in mining."

"And it seems, to my surprise," he says, "you are mixed up in the girly bit?"

"Just a bit," she says, "and less so now."

"Umm..." he says. "I'll just watch the papers and say nuffinck."

"Good," she says. "They are putting him somewhere out of the way for 30 days and, I'm told, will release him with a stern warning."

Surprisingly, nothing hits the papers. Felicity is dead scared that CCTV footage may enmesh her in what took place at Kings, but Gartrell says, "We spiked the cameras for 15 minutes. Cost us a bit, but that is why I was so insistent on timing. We only just made it."

A bit further down the track, she passes Eustace Parnell in King Street. He gives her a piercing look, but doesn't stop. *'Gawd,' she thinks, 'the dark ones have thrown a scare and a half into him.'*

Felicity, having got rid of all of her Guardian shares is sitting back on a huge heap of the readies. She hasn't heard a whisper from Erskine Elliott and rather than let such a capital sum lie fallow, she dumps the lot into Westpac franked shares, just to warehouse the dosh until Elliott sings out for his share. This also brings her to unwanted attention when the State Manager of the bank, who obviously studies his share register, invites her to a boardroom lunch. It's a fine room with great river views and the centerpiece is a beautiful Travertine marble table. The bought in meal is excellent and as it is, apart from her, a male occasion, they settle back to Port and long black cigars. She accepts one of these and enjoys the company. Felicity hasn't any real idea of what the underlying reason for the invitation is, but asks no questions. She expects that as and when they want, they will tell her, but it's obviously not going to be today.

These days, Felicity is a non-executive director of the huge bank she invested hers and Erskine's dosh in. Erskine has never surfaced; something to do with the big mining operation in the Congo that they assigned him to after Mount Magnet.

Felicity has cut her ties with Brendon, although retaining her interest in the new house in Forrest Street. She has bought out her Auntie's life interest in Hooton Hall and runs this fine property herself. *'It's all due to the Tuesday Club,' she thinks, as she looks at her fat bank balance statements.*

She looks around her paneled study. There's an eclectic mix of fine watercolours and small sculptures on unobtrusive display. The CEO of her huge bank has visited and paid her a compliment of some moment.

"This is just superb," he says, "Can I ask the name of your interior architect?"