

## The Observant Man

by

Lloyd Nelson

The writer pictured below in his garden in retired life in Narrogin, was indeed on the Finance Cocktail Circuit in Perth during his time as a Senior Executive of a Building Society. He based this story on seeing, now and then at major functions, alert well dressed men, probably doing the job description set out in this story.

The homeless man, moving with surprising vigour, was observed by him in Terrace Drive not so long back. He put the two together to make up this story.



Matthew Robinson has been farming at Goomalling with his Dad and brothers. They are wheat and sheep farmers in heavy country about 11 miles out of town. A machinery mishap has damaged Matt's right knee and he has been living at the family unit, near waterfront or rather oceanfront at North Cottesloe. He is undergoing physio treatment and swimming a lot to get his mobility back on track. But he's not wasting his time and is doing the last year of a previously started Tax Accounting Degree at Curtin.

He's getting along well with this and in the course of his course, has met up with a big chap doing the same course. They have the odd beer together at a nearby small bar. This chap, it turns out, is a copper, but not a walloper. He dresses very well, has a very pleasant style about him and towards the end of the final year, has a serious chat to Matt over a couple of pints.

He tells Matt that he is recruiting a new group of semi detectives; men who are very presentable, have a good appearance, dress well and have people skills.

“We look into things, Matt,” he says. “We carry a weapon, have a very good clothes allowance, do some undercover protection work. We won’t be hunting criminals per se, but we will be observing what goes on with a view of hunting the managers of crims; that is to say, the people behind organised crime. In short, you could call us general purposes people with a very wide brief. We are also on call a bit by the CCC; people who, while they are bits of bunglers at heart, certainly or eventually, get on the wheel of people who deserve it.”

Matt gives the offer serious thought. He’s not ready yet to go back to the farm. He wants to keep up his physio and swimming at North Cottesloe. Also, he’s in the University Choir; something he would like to continue with a bit. In short, he is enjoying quite a few interests in the City that will all disappear on him if he returns to the bush. He puts it to his Dad and brothers that he will stop drawing on the farm for sustenance and contribute his share to pay for a good working man to take his place on the farm pro tem.

Thus, Matt becomes a copper of sorts and takes to it like a duck to water. Much of his duties include joining the Cocktail Circuit at various venues around town. And so he becomes a bit of an A-list member at these constant do’s. It gives a very good picture of who is who around the City and gets him on nodding terms with a lot of regular attendees. Matt passes himself off as an accountant; he can hardly say he’s a Police Department member.

One of his recurring jobs is keeping an eye out at semi diplomatic shows. Thus he comes to meet Lucy Chan, always at Chinese Charge’ affairs. To be quite truthful, Lucy seeks him out in a pleasant sort of a way. At a biggish function of the Commonwealth Bank, Lucy invites him around for a coffee on his next rostered day off. They agree a day and a time. She lives in Terrace Drive in a rather splendidly sited apartment building looking across parkland to the River.

“Err, Matt,” she finishes diffidently, “we don’t have any house staff, but a contract cleaner comes in every morning. It may be discreet to not come to my entry door, which will be unlocked until they quit the premises, usually ten past ten daily, regular as clockwork. They come in a marked van, so just let them get clear before coming in.”

Thus, just at 10am, a few days later, Matt arrives in his private car, parks in Terrace Drive on the parkland reserve. The cleaning van is still there, so Matt scrunches down in the seat a bit and scans his newspaper. He is distracted by movement along the park verge. He lamps a roughly dressed homeless man searching a rubbish bin thoroughly before moving on to the next one. Nothing unusual in this of course, except that the man dressed very rough and older, is moving with the sure step and quickness of movement of an athlete. He is also alert and spots Matt sitting quietly, changes his pace and gait immediately. An errant thought runs through Matts mind – this is, that this man may not be what he appears to be. He dismisses this from his mind ass the cleaning company van pulls out of the driveway. He gets out smartly and goes up the apartment steps.

The promise of the meeting eventuates and Matt and Lucy soon get into things. He leaves a bit before noon and she comes with him for an impromptu visit to Matt's Cottesloe abode. They lunch and swim later, leaving the water when a late sea breeze blows in. Matt reflects that city life does sometimes present opportunities of a stirring nature now and then.

Two weeks later Matt, nicely dressed, is on duty in Forrest Place where the Prime Minister of the day, a sharpish lady one, is giving an address from the steps of the old Post Office. Matt is back a bit, closely observing the scene and is startled to see the homeless man moving purposefully towards the front of the crowd. He immediately trails the man, pushes several bystanders aside to get on the chap's heels, kicks the homeless man's legs from under him and is on him like a tiger. The fallen man fights back with manic strength. Matt kneels on his chest, pulls open the old military greatcoat the man is wearing and puts both hands down on a sawn off under and over shotgun, which is held by a leather strap around the vagrant's neck.

A few weeks later Matt, by command, is present at a small get together, where he is presented with a Police Gallantry medal by the Deputy Prime Minister, flown over from Canberra to do the honours. He is asked what made him aware of the risk to the PM. His reply is succinct and sharp, but not quite truthful – "Instinct," he says.

He can hardly say that he was skulking in a car on his day off, awaiting a clandestine meeting with a married woman, can he?