

The Perfume Buyer

One

Crawford Farrington is the principal of the White Feather Farming Company in Dalby, but spends much of his time in Brisbane where the farm owns and runs a busy feed and produce store, at Hendra, catering to the racing fraternity. It's late afternoon on a Friday and Crawford is heading up from the Queen Street Mall on his way to his bank. He's off to the Gabba tonight to see the Brisbane Lions play Collingwood. It's a very important late winter game. He is to meet Felicity Rendell, the garden and landscape designer, at City Hall in half an hour. As he walks, he sees a truly amazing sight – his farming neighbour and sometimes worker, wearing a beanie cap almost down to his eyes and carrying a white bag that shouts bank, is absolutely haring down Queen Street in the direction of the mall. He rushes past Crawford and spits out – 'slow the beggar down if you can' – as he goes. Crawford looks up the street. Not far behind, running very hard is a big man waving a handgun. He's perhaps trying to get a shot at his neighbour, but isn't yet close enough. Crawford automatically steps into his line of fire to stop this chap getting a shot off and when the man is nearly abreast of him, he braces his shoulder for a massive impact and jumps into the big man's shoulder and gun arm. He impacts enough to topple the chap off balance and he falls face down to the footpath, the pistol flies, hits the sidewalk and goes off twice. Again almost instinctively, (he's not long retired from the army and just back from soldiering in Fallajuh, so is used to this sort of

thing) he sharp kicks the down man in the ribs and then puts his Rivers boots into his neck to stop him getting up.

“Stay down,” he says, “You’re under citizen’s arrest.” The big chap is too stunned to attempt much anyway. He hits the pavement pretty hard.

Arriving on this scene is a Catholic priest in a red Soutane, obviously heading down to the sandstone Catholic Saint Stephens Cathedral for early vigil mass (the church hierarchy follow the footy too)

“Father,” says Crawford.

“Yes, my son,” the priest responds.

“Would you mind carefully picking up that gun by the butt end and handing it to me?”

“Certainly,” the priest says, “Perhaps if you’re going to shoot him, I should render the last rites first?”

Crawford recognises the priest. He was an army chaplain in Iraq a while back. The priest expertly drops the magazine out of the Glock pistol, clears the reloaded barrel and says, “Quite like old times Captain Farrington,” as he hands Crawford the gun. They laugh.

A police car comes absolutely screaming down Queen Street, half on the footpath and half on the road. Two uniformed police jump out hefting short barrel pump shotguns. They roar out “DROP THE GUN, PUT YOUR HANDS ON YOUR HEAD.”

“Gladly,” Crawford says, and does so. “But this beggar’s under citizen’s arrest. I expect you to handcuff him.”

“Waddy mean,” a mean looking copper yells, “He’s one of ours.”

“Indeed,” says Crawford, “Police Service standards in Queensland are slipping it seems.”

“Well, who did you think he was?” the Rozzer asks. Crawford says,

“He looked like a drug – crazed lunatic to me, running madly and waving a sinister looking pistol. I don’t mind you giving him a gun, but it doesn’t sound to be good policy to give him bullets too.”

“He was trying to arrest a bank robber,” the mean cop says.

“Bollocks,” says Crawford, “No bank robber passed me.”

“Oh,” the cop says, and they change tack. “Who are you?” he asks.

“I’m Crawford Farrington. Principal of the White Feather Farm Company, Member of the Order of Australia, Retired Army Captain, Justice of the Peace and Deputy Shire President of our Shire. Furthermore,” he says, “I’m off to meet a friend and go to the footy. Here’s my card, ring me if you want me.”

The coppers are unsure of their ground and let him go. He’s been very high-handed with them, but he sure doesn’t want them catching up with his invaluable worker. If an honourable little man like Teddy Maynard is robbing banks, it can surely be only in the interest of keeping his delightful Scots Back-Packer wife – sadly stricken with cancer – alive. Who is he to judge, Crawford thinks.

Two

He meets Felicity in due course. She is a sort of girlfriend. Her husband is high in the W.H.O and is out of the country three months in four. Crawford met her in a professional capacity when she came up to Dalby to landscape the White Feather Homestead gardens. He's sort of filled the gap ever since. They get along remarkably well. But, despite the interest of a very close game of footy, Crawford can sense that all is not well with Felicity Rendell. She is miles away from the here and now. Later, back at his unit in Teneriffe Village, he draws her out a bit.

"Crawford," she says, "I'm a small business person, running without an overdraft and getting plenty of work. However, I'm doing and have nearly finished two big jobs for Sammy Gianetti – the Fortitude Valley car king. One's at his grand house in Ascot, the other at his ground hugger at Noosa. I've had to buy in a heap of articles to secure them. Can't get a penny out of him, my bank card is now maxed out and I'm about to hit the wall."

"Oh, Felicity," Crawford says, "let's go to your office tomorrow for an up to date printout of what he owes you and I'll go around and reason with him on Monday."

They do this and on Monday at about 10am, Crawford, beautifully dressed in a smart suit, enters Sammy's car sales showroom. There's a bit of activity going on. Young well-dressed professionals with stethoscopes hanging out of coat pockets, along with their accountants in tow are sussing out luxury cars, here and there.

Crawford, avoiding sales contact, walks back to Sam Gianetti's office area. Hand signals the stunning looking office girl to stay in her seat and opens the door to the inner sanctum. Sammy and his huge offsider are drinking brimmers of Scotch whisky, single malt at that to look at the bottle, and are smoking 'Toad of Toad Hall' type cigars. They are recovering from a hard weekend. Sammy shoots up.

"You can't come in here," he says, "throw him out Andy. This guys trouble, throw him out."

Andy jumps up. He looks sloppy and has a big beer gut. With the speed of light, Crawford produces what looks like a small can of gun oil and absent-mindedly squirts CIA developed nerve gas into his nostrils. This marvelous product is instant, quick and easy and doesn't leave a hangover when the victim wakes up, three hours hence. Andy crashes to the carpeted floor. Crawford turns him over and gestures to 'Slippery' Sam to throw his chair cushion over. He puts this under Andy's head, loosens his tie and belt.

"Leave him be," he says, "he will be awake, fit and well by about 1.30pm. Won't remember a thing. Now sit down. To business," he continues, " Here's the bill from Felicity Rendell. Cash will be fine, but she will also accept a bank cheque. I'll be back at 3pm to pick it up. I'll expect it to be at the desk out front."

"The hell you say," Sammy says,"or what?"

Crawford gives him a gimlet look. There's a beautiful framed picture of Sammy's two houses hanging along the office wall. Crawford pulls out another Iraqi souvenir. Its another CIA gadget and looks like a butane cigarette lighter.

However, it's a mini flame-thrower, gas powered and a frightening thing.

Crawford walks over to the painting and sparks the lighter, incinerates the picture and sets fire to the wall - quite an intensive fire. Lighter burning in hand and now absolutely scorching the feature ceiling of Birds Eye Maple, Crawford says,

“See you at 3pm,” and walks out.

He returns at 3pm, carrying an odd looking package. The receptionist can't give him the money soon enough.

“Felicity will post a receipt,” he says and casually walks out, tearing brown paper from the parcel. It's just a ploy and it works. If there's a reception committee out the door, they don't wait around and he exits the building easily and safely.

Three

Teddy Maynard turns up at Crawford's door later in the week. Crawford has a top floor unit in the huge converted wool store known as Teneriffe Village, a hop-step from the Brisbane River. It's one of the very early conversions. You could play badminton in any of the public hallways. It's the only block with steel balconies appended and his one looks over to the huge Polish church in Bowen Hills. They go down to the Ice Bar to have a drink and a steak tea.

Teddy tells Crawford he scored \$187,000 from last Friday's effort. He thanks Crawford for his timely intervention and suggests Crawford may like to help him with his next bank job, in a different part of the city.

“Hold hard, Teddy,” Crawford says, “Last time, I was an unwitting accessory after the crime, but you are now suggesting that I become an accessory to the actual heist and that is a horse of a very different colour.”

“Well, yes,” Teddy says, “but I’d risk anything to string out a longer life for my beloved. (Crawford didn’t think people spoke like this anymore) After all, it’s only ordnance help I need and you used to make your living handling this sort of stuff.”

This is of course quite true. Crawford has a reputation. He’s not long back from Iraq, where he served in the Engineers. He gets the drop there on a mob of Shiite clerics, who are doing the Western cause untold harm. They depart this world and the Army (the Australian Army) wanted to court-martial Crawford. The Yanks however, want to give him a congressional Medal of Honour for his decisive and effective action. His luck holds, he hears of where there is a succession planning meeting scheduled and drops a mortar shell, a real big one, there on them. There’s now none of the real smarties left to plan anything and Fallajuh becomes a quiet town overnight.

Crawford gets his medal, but a lesser one and the Australian Army make strong efforts to get him home quick. It’s all politics and the government are overly sensitive in this matter. Crawford’s success relates to the fact that he speaks fluent Arabic. He learnt this skill quite by accident. Back a bit he did a year or two at the English speaking University in Perugia and while there, lived with a beautiful, sharp-faced Moroccan girl. By means of pillow talk and an aptitude for languages, he became very proficient in speaking Arabic.

He puts this to good use and the Yanks draft him into intelligence gathering. Their interpreters are telling them porkies and Crawford is thus a godsend to them. On the qt. While he is doing this and that for the Yanks, he also uses some of their time and plentiful CIA money (talk money for potential information givers) on sussing out where the hugely valuable and quite beautiful artworks from the Baghdad museum now are.

It's statuary and wall plaques he is really interested in. Most think the artworks have disappeared into Syria, which is a bit of a catchall type country that is turning unrest in Iraq to its advantage. They surely have the experience to do this, after the years of turmoil that they have been closely tied in with, in Lebanon. Once the Paris of the East, Beirut is now something else again and home to the gangsters of Hezbollah. Crawford spreads a bit of this cash around and talks Arabic Argot to those who may know something. He finds in actual fact that enterprising locals have stashed much of what he wants in the sands of Iraq, in spots fitted into their GP's.

Without firing a shot, Crawford gets quite a bit of this out. One lot sell him short and attempt an ambush, but Crawford smells a rat; its too easy, peasy. Cyanide grenades take the posse out, out forever. They shoot the last man standing; he's the initial informant and load the bits and pieces into a well-covered army truck. Getting the stash home isn't all that difficult either.

The Engineers' stores come in supply ships ex-Brisbane and used-up gear goes back there on the return run for refurbishment, etc. The Engineers are a close-mouthed circle; thus Toby gets nearly a container load of priceless

artifacts back into Queensland. He has some of the lesser known items in the foyer of his Teneriffe Village unit, some at his parents house and the lot that he plans to sell back to the Iraqi's, when or if ever peace and prosperity return to this dysfunctional country; this latter lot, is stored still in the container out at Dalby, in a huge feed store.

Four

The next day, disguised just a little bit, there's video cameras turning here and there, Crawford walks the course, zeroing in on the bank branch Teddy has in mind robbing. The day after, he susses out the leading oncologist that Teddy's wife goes to. Its just straight intelligence work that Crawford is very good at. The day after that, at about 11.30am, Crawford walks off Queen Street Mall into the David Jones store, goes to the perfume and cosmetics counter where his intelligence gathering tells him the leading oncologist's wife works. He speaks with her at the counter, passes up the Chanel products and zeroes in on Estee Lauder products. Nearly half an hour later, he has settled on Private Collection perfume. He buys biggish bottles of this and spends about \$500. He hopes Felicity likes what he has bought. The oncologist's wife has quite enjoyed demonstrating and selling this big handsome and whimsical man a deal of product. It's a good sale. As she hands him his beautifully wrapped purchases, he says,

“What about a coffee and shortbread upstairs?”

She is flattered, but says, “Oh, I'm a married woman.”

“I know,” Crawford says, “It’s your husband I want to talk about.”

She’s intrigued. “Okay,” she says, “about 10 minutes time then.”

The next day, thus armed with information from the oncologists charming wife, he opens the door of Guy Haslett’s waiting room at Wesley Hospital, Toowong. Its ten minutes to the mans lunch hour. Crawford surveys the scene; a sick, sick world is sitting there awaiting their appointments.

Crawford walks over to reception, he says,

“Sally Ann (the wife) has suggested I give this to you to take to Mr Haslett, the oncologist without delay.”

He hands her a beautiful little wicker basket, a classic. The girl bridles.

“Its okay,” Crawford says, “There’s no bomb in it.” And lifts the lid a bit.

“Okay,” she says and laughs.

The basket contains a duty free cut glass bottle of Russian Vodka, some smoked salmon sandwiches and a note reading, ‘what about a shot of this and a munch of the smoked salmon and a three minute consultation on how Jennifer Maynard’s case is going. He’s a trooper, Crawford is soon called in. Haslett opens the vodka, pours a couple of good shots into the beautiful shot glasses from the basket. He then shakes hands and takes a slug.

“Need this,” he says, “The progress of a cancer can be slow and you get to know patients well. The last three in are now on morphine, they’re getting a bit final.”

“Why do you do it?” Crawford asks.

“Well, its medicine,” Haslett says, “Its typical medicine, very big money for very wearing work.” He brings up Teddy’s wife’s record on his screen as he downs the first chaser.

“Remission,” he says, “Longer than usual. What’s he trying?”

“Curara bush,” Crawford says, “The old Aboriginal method.”

“Hmmm,” Haslett says, “An old chestnut, more myth than fact I’m afraid. But in the same situation, if it was my wife, I’d be tempted to give it a fly.”

“Will it do any good?” Crawford asks.

“Well, it’ll do no harm. You know the procedure that most follow – chemo poisons the system to kill or halt the disease. Not pretty, but its accepted practice in this god-awful job.”

“What’s your prognosis?” Crawford asks.

“Grim, really,” Haslett replies, “Remission is remission, just that. When it flares up the secondaries will finish her. Look, if she has peace of mind and a partly active life today, she’s doing better than most.” He pours a third.

“Times nearly up,” he continues, “Lets try the smoked sandwich blotting paper.” And it’s just that - Turkish bread, thick slices of genuine Speyside salmon. “You travel first class my friend. I bet you buy your prawns off the jetty at Weipa too.”

“What about the man in Lausanne that seems to be hitting the spot with this type of cancer?” Crawford asks.

“Yet to be proven,” Haslett says, “Besides, what he’s using isn’t legal in this country – yet.”

“Teddy is thinking of taking his wife to Lausanne.” Crawford says.

“Jesus,” says Haslett, “You’re talking big money. Can he afford the racket?”

“Well, he hopes to be able to,” Crawford replies.

“Let me know how it turns out,” Haslett says.

Crawford gives him his card.

“Any home game,” he tells him, “You’re welcome to a seat in my Gabba box or if you’re not a footy fan, bring your wife up to Dalby for a run around farm world.”

“Fine,” he says, and later does both. He’s a very nice chap for a hard-assed medical man. The rapport has been two way and it lasts. Crawford drops into David Jones late morning next day to thank Sally Ann. She touches his hand. “Late brunch, perhaps,” she says, “it’s my half day.”

“Where?”

“Oh, you said you’re at Teneriffe. What about looking at the river at Eves?”

They walk down to the ferry, pick up and take a City Cat to Bulimba. She points out her home. They have an apartment down a bit from New Farm. At Bulimba, they take the cross ferry and walk along the walkway to Eves. They’re just in time to catch the brunch menu. They order eggs Benedict with smoked salmon and a couple of Lattes. Crawford orders a brandy with his coffee and Sally Ann orders a triple.

“A bit of Dutch courage,” she smilingly says, “I may perhaps need it.”

They adjourn to Crawford's spacious unit and later to the pool. He finds her a pair of shorts and a T-shirt for swim suit duty.

"You're the essential surprise packet," he says, "I never expected."

"Oh," she says, "No children; never will be. Guy is being totally worn down by his job. I've been largely lying fallow. I need rejuvenating and you're the most interesting man I've seen in this city."

"And.....?" he says.

"Well.....discreetly onwards," she replies, "Next Thursday, eh?"

Five

Crawford is busy cleaning out the free-form pool at his parents Lloyd Wrightish type cubist house in Teneriffe Drive. You get to it off Chermside. The algae has got away a bit. He's drained the pool and has the pressure unit running to remove all this. He's miles away, mentally running the list of ordnance needed to make Teddy's bank heist practical. His Blue Heelers; Trooper and Tenant, are lazing at terrace level. He's brought them in for inoculations. There's a vet just along a bit from Teneriffe Village. The vets at Toowoomba are either sick of the constant sterile clothing changes as they move from place to place, checking out equine flu and have taken holidays or else they have been seconded to Sydney, where there's an 'all hands to the pump' call up of vets. Both Dalby Shire and Hendra are red zone territories; in fact, at this time there are just under 1800 infected properties in South-East Queensland.

The dogs stiffen and the huge copper that Crawford flattened in Queen Street turns up. He's jack blunt.

"I think you should accompany me to the Police Station," he says, "I have questions for you."

God, thinks Crawford, you can take the man out of the Police Station, but you sure can't take the Police Station out of the man.

"What questions?" Crawford asks.

"Well," the big chap says, "I have an eye witness account that you exchanged words with the bank robber that you didn't see the other day."

Crawford laughs. "Firstly," he says, "You'd need help to take me in and secondly, I'd want my lawyer with me."

"What lawyer?" he asks.

"Hocus Pocus, of course." Crawford says. "He lives three houses away."

Hocus Pocus is of course Harry Percival, the famous and colourful Queensland barrister. The very fact he can afford to live in Teneriffe Drive, is proof of his success. Hocus is a good man to have on your side. If the police have you in, Hocus arrives in a flame pink range rover with a huge Pub bouncer type at the wheel and within seconds is shouting into the inevitable TV link-mans mike, police brutality, police conspiracy and so on. It's generally believed, he rings the TV station before he rings his driver. They know a good thing when they see it and always come post haste. Disregarding that, the big man says,

"I'll have you in." He pulls a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

Crawford motions the dogs and the Blue Heelers, latent menace personified, move in to monster the cop. He pulls a night stick from under his coat and Tenant, in one swoop, snaps it out of his hand. The copper reels back.

“I can shoot mad dogs, too.” he says and now pulls a huge Colt .45 Commander out of his waistband.

“Ha,” says Crawford and pulls the trigger on the pressure cleaner. The spray hits him mid-chest and pushes him sprawling into the Chinese Bamboo clump across the terrace. The big chap, yet again, loses his gun in the frantic proceedings as the dogs worry both of his arms. Crawford scrambles out of the pool and throws the gun out onto Teneriffe Drive.

“Get the hell out of here,” he says, “You’re only here off your own hook. No one sent you. It’s clear police victimization.”

The big cop quickly departs. He’s a sodden wreck. His coat sleeves are badly torn. Crawford has sussed him out. A smart, young, good looking Sergeant fills him in on this chap. Sometimes, on night work on a slow night, she and her driver call in at Eagle Farm and catch the end of the horses training. He has recently given her a hot, hot tip to back his Normanton galloper, ‘Channel Country’. The niddy comes in big, so she, although normally very circumspect in talking about work, gives him a good run down on this chap. This big chap was an Ipswich beat copper accidentally roped into the swoop on the valley, back in the Fitzgerald Commission time; they were short-handed. The big chap got a working girl, a former legal secretary who has fallen on hard times, to give a statement telling what every working girl and local businessman knew and had

known for a long time, about what's been going on there. However, he is the only one to get it all down on paper and properly attested. He is just smart enough to bypass his bosses and hand this in to Fitzgerald's top aide and smart enough to hide the girl out of Brisbane. Public pressure ensured he made Detective Grade. But what says it all, is years on, he is still only a Detective Constable. He's not really and can never be 'one of them'.

Teddy has chosen the major bank in McDonnell East, a sort of Brisbane equivalent of a refurbished David Jones. The old façade has been retained and it's full of legal offices and commercial concerns. It's not a bad choice, there's a fast getaway along Tank Street to North Quay, then to the endless opportunities offered by the Freeway to Surfer's and points South-East.

The bank heist proceeds the following Friday and the media scream – ORGANIZED CRIME, LARGE GANG, BIGGEST BANK BUST IN BRISBANE, A CITY BLOCK PARALYSED, etc.

Six

The outer movements of this large and confusing event see a laser gun hit on the street power source, the simultaneous ignition of a parcel in a shopping bag in the banking chamber and another in the front seat of a stolen BMW - car sun roof totally open, windows down. The smoke source, another ingenious CIA development, is about the size of a block of cement and in actual fact, has a dash of cement in it to cause implosion rather than explosion.

The smoke is quickly so thick that all movement ceases for the city block and a half. Surprisingly, although it is of pea soup quality, it's not at all acrid. The bank fire door is blasted to kingdom come by more conventional methods, ie a beehive size sticky bomb, and the sole orchestrator of all these doings enjoying total visibility by simply using night vision goggles, cleans out the holding safe of the big bank and gets away clear as clear.

Much of the stuff used, comes out of the Iraqi container out at the Dalby Farm. It's all stuff developed by the CIA to isolate mosques and take out the people they want under smoke cover. It's never been seen or heard of in Australia. Crawford laughs to think the taxpayers of the USA have unwittingly funded a huge bank break half a world away. In Iraq of course, huge smoke events are part of daily life and pass unnoticed, sort of. Brisbane is a different matter, but at the time, this is being written, they are none the wiser of where the ordnance comes from.

Seven

Twelve months pass. Things have settled down. Teddy and his wife are back on their farm. She is wan but well. The big cop has retired to Townsville. Felicity is contemplating divorcing her ever absent spouse and moving in with Crawford. Crawford is getting fonder and fonder of Haslett the Oncologist's beautiful wife, but wisely at a distance. (Except for very full-on Thursday matinees)

He opens a half bottle of champagne at his Teneriffe apartment, sits on the balcony, lights up a 'Toad of Toad Hall' cigar and toasts the world.

"Alls well that ends well," Crawford says to himself.