

The Sniper

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Foreword
By James McArthur-Street

Herald News

Lloyd observes his scenery

Name: Lloyd Nelson
Town: Katanning
Family: My graceful and musically gifted wife, Stephanie.
Occupation: Semi-retired, but also a writer, visit www.lloydnelson.net for a sample.

First childhood memory: walking over to the shearing shed one sunny winter morning on my parents' farm
As a child I wanted to: read interesting books.
My parents always told me: if you can't pay a bill, front up to your creditor, tell them when you will pay them, and stick to what you promise.
In five words I am: observing the scene around me.
If I could change one thing: continue observing the scene around me until the next visit of Halley's Comet.
My worst trait: I don't suffer fools.
My best trait: seeing things through – if you like doing things stick to it until your nose bleeds.
I wish I was better at: trap shooting.

local legends

featuring Lloyd Nelson

When I want to relax: I get a glass of red and a good book.
I love Sundays because: I get to sing in St Patrick's Choir, go clay target shooting, watch the local footy or go for a burn on my motorbike.
Greatest achievement: staying married.
Before I kick the bucket I: would like to see much better national governance but I'm not optimistic about this.
Five people I would invite for dinner: my wife, Stephanie, son Christopher, Brien Taylor, Anne Flugge and Bob Katter. And if one doesn't turn up, Frank Bonini.
My last meal would be: beef Wellington accompanied by half a bottle of Jim Witham's Wadjekanup dry red.



Lloyd Nelson. Picture: Brendan Leicester

This newspaper article illustrates both the serious and quirky side of this writer. His writing reflects both of these traits strongly. His aim is to write interesting fiction and this he does as well as any other writer that I have read in contemporary Australia recently ----- Happy reading

Darling Point 2011

ONE

THE SNIPER

The Sniper by Lloyd Nelson



ONE

Second Lieutenant Francis Colless is talking to his extended platoon. They're about to essay a trench raid near Thiepval. There's a wind blowing, it's pretty dark and the smell of the front line trench is quite foul, it could hardly be anything else. Colless is hoping this will be the last of these ludicrous affairs. They've worked out who is the man behind these relatively new-fangled raids; a hyperactive staff officer, the Hon Charles Beauchamp by name. He is no longer in the war. A volunteer on leave in London drops a delayed action stick grenade in the pocket of Beauchamp's British warm overcoat in the Strand the previous weekend. We know it's happened, but the British censors have kept it quiet. Our man has also dropped in a hand printed telegram form in the mail to the War Office. They have been warned that any advocate of trench raids that can be identified will suffer the same fate.

Our aim tonight is to enter the German front line, create alarm and despondency and to bring back any prisoners we can grab and any interesting ordnance we can carry. Francis is a full time sniper and a very good one, but draws trench raid duty as he's always in or near no-man's land and knows where the gaps are. So he should, as he telescope observes the terrain from false dawn to dark every day picking out targets to shoot.

The corporal is doling out a shot of rum to each of the party. They carry light ladders to get into, and hopefully out of the German trenches. Francis takes along a trio of Lewis gunners to cover the retreat. He's already taken them quietly to their positions.

"Don't fire unless you have to," he says, "and don't move a muscle for an hour after that, and then crawl back quietly to the line."

Francis' trench raiders travel light, no coats, jumpers, bomb bag and each man carries a razor sharp hatchet. The rest can be left to your imagination.

“Aim for their necks,” he tells them, “and growl like a dog as you dispatch them.”

Tentative trench raids in this man’s war are always disastrous. Francis’ trench raids are always successful, but it’s lunacy to do these. The War Office, after they evaluate Beauchamp’s demise, halts them for a while. Two weeks down the track, another staff officer espouses the cause. Our friendly and constant Headquarters source passes this back and the new disciple is dispatched by hatchet on a paved road near Amiens. This sounds homicidal and is, but the loss of one life to preserve many is better on balance.

TWO

Not so long ago Francis Colless was a pleasant and easy going bank clerk at Bruce Rock in Western Australia. He knows in his own heart that the iron the war has put in his soul may never recede. Let’s rewind things a little.

Francis was about eleven years old when he came over to the West with his father and younger brother from Gawler in South Australia. His mother dies in child birth with a late baby three years earlier; his Dad can’t quite get over the shock. He is a quite proficient store accountant by trade and an offer to take over this job at Bruce Rock in the WA Wheatbelt evidently appealed to him and provides perhaps a fresh start after the bitter memories of losing Mum at Gawler.

Anyway they ship over to Albany and after getting the car off, drive to Bruce Rock. The co-op people make every effort to settle them into the company house and the town. Dad goes off to work, the brothers go off to the state school and they settle into an even pattern and have no troubles. It isn’t an exciting life, but between them all they cope fine. Dad is not a drinker, oh he’ll have a drink or two on a social occasion, but usually heads home as he knocks off and both kids on their part get tea on the go and attend to their own laundry and such like. It’s a hot and dry climate but quite bearable and sometimes on weekends Dad drives them up to Merredin to see the brighter lights of this bigger railway centre. They also get to Kalgoorlie; then as now almost an inland city. On a few holidays they get to the coast at Esperance for canoeing, fishing and swimming. Dad’s a good chap and the family functions well.

THREE

It should perhaps be explained at this point, that Francis is the possessor of a rare talent, quite natural, not learned at all. He is a wonderful sketcher and portrait artist, in crayon on crayon block paper. Not only is his work superb, it’s extra fast; five to eight minutes sees him out of a wonderfully perceptive and true to life portrait, his talent runs to shading out the background to run into the natural colour of the crayon paper he uses. It’s a stilted age he lives in and most painter’s use oils or water colours. Francis’ wonderful portraits are thus under-judged due to him using a different and unusual medium. In any case he keeps this talent dark and only runs it out when the circumstances suit him. Merrilies Blyth, the arts teacher, is awed by the talent he displays. Late in last term Merrilies calls Francis back as he’s about to leave for the day.

“A word Francis,” she says, “about expanding your art repertoire.”

She precedes him into the art room, the last room in the corridor. It has big windows to allow light and the old pepper trees screen the glass; it’s a quite pretty and sylvan outlook. She perches on the edge of her desk, Francis stands up straight

in front of her.

“Francis, there’s absolutely nothing, nothing, that I or anyone can teach you about pastel crayon drawing. It’s a superb gift you are perfectly well aware that you have been blessed with. However with your demonstrated ability it would be a crime on my part if I don’t direct your abilities a bit further into water colouring and oils. That’s if you are prepared to put the time in over the next few days, about an hour at a time would do it, it’s not a big commitment for a lot of possible gain.”

Francis nods in agreement. She picks up an oil paint brush and holds it near her cheek and goes to pass it to him. Francis reaches not for the brush, but to cup her cheek in his big hand. He moulds her cheek, doesn’t touch her in any other way, she nestles into his hand and her whispered yes comes over as softly as the last dying puff of the evening sea breeze as it expires. He quietly removes her twin set, gently feels her breasts, ever so softly tugs her nipples out, she stands up, unzips her skirt. They are lost in one another. It is as if it was always destined to be and they fit physically and perfectly into one another.

Totally spent they get up off the art room floor, she goes to speak but Francis puts his long finger on her lips, seats her back on the desk and within seconds is crayon sketching her as she perches on the desk, a picture, if the finished sketch is any guide, of a totally relaxed and fulfilled woman. She goes to look at the sketch, he makes chopping motions with his hand, picks up her bra and gently fits it on her. She dresses twin set etc., gold medallion necklace. Frances gestures her back to the desk, gently perches her on the edge and absolutely slashes off a sketch of her, head and shoulders dressed, on the reverse side of the lovely nude sketch. He diffidently shows her both sketches, she is totally overcome and bursts into tears.

He finally now speaks in a soft tone. “Frame the dressed side,” he says, “when the appropriate time comes just reverse the framing.”

She dries her tears. Francis is diffident, but all his life when the chips are really down he acts with great decisiveness. He strokes her cheek.

“Until tomorrow,” he says.

She nods soft agreement, they go their separate ways.

FOUR

Francis finishes up well at school, obtains his Junior Education Certificate and joins the local branch of the State Bank. He plays a bit of unexceptional football and rides quite well as an amateur jockey at the local race round. He’s too tall for a jockey really, being a deal over six feet in height, but he’s light and supple and seems to get the best out of his mounts and is quite in demand by owners.

He’s not much of a drinker and is not in the business of wiping himself out on booze, unlike many of his ex-school mates. In fact in those days you had to be 21 to be served in the pub, but once you turned 19, old Jack Dooley, who runs the State Owned Hotel, will allow you an occasional drink if you don’t cause trouble. The cops turn a blind eye if things stay quiet. Francis only ever drinks ponies (very small glasses) of beer and still does. He maintains it’s safer and a lot cheaper,

thus he becomes universally known in Bruce Rock as Pony to all and sundry.

Life is of course an ever evolving matter and at this stage Francis by and large is reserved in speech and very diffident in manner. He's more a stand back observer than a loud mouthed rusher in (there's plenty around).

However he surprises himself at times. He's riding a magnificent chestnut gelding at a race meeting at Narambeen and has this great striding horse galloping along evenly on the rails. He talks to his horses as he rides them, and uses the same successful technique later with his women, it settles everything down and creates an immediate bond.

A young vertically challenged farmer's son is riding a bay horse hard on his outside. He's seen this fellow around, but doesn't really know him; he comes from a moneyed family and is a college boy at Guildford Grammar School. He is pushing his horse a bit (far too early as there's a way to go) and when he gets up a bit better than level pegging, he reverses the whip he's carrying, a brutal wooden shafted thing with a big leather flap, Boans in Perth sell them. There's no suppleness in it and he cracks the chestnut Francis is riding a dreadful crack across the nose. Francis is totally astounded and his horse pulls back sharply and drops back, this being of course the offender's intention. Francis gathers the big chestnut in; he's been galloping very much within himself and has plenty of pace. He brings him up quickly on the outside of the other chap who is now glued to the rails and when nearly level, reaches his long arm down to the other's stirrup and heaves him out of the saddle, over the rails; actually he bounces off the top rail and into the inner drainage ditch. The ditch has been re-ploughed for the round and the dirt is gravelly, but relatively soft. He amazes himself with his cool action, wonders if he's killed the rider and surprises himself again by realising that he doesn't care a toss if he has. Francis wins and weighs in and there's no repercussions. He doesn't expect any as they were galloping well in front of the pack who were busy running their own race. Nothing much else happens for several weeks.

Often on a Sunday their Dad, who plays on a six handicap, takes the boys out for a round of informal golf. He's teaching them the game very well. They're playing the rougher back nine holes where the farmer who owns the land has sown a crop of Ballidu oats right up to the fairway edge. It's late spring and it's like playing down a canyon. If you hit one into the crop it's a lost cause. There's a roadway on the top side, or a track rather, where the green keeper travels to rake over the sand greens.

Along this comes a newish black Ford car with three people in it. One is the jock Francis threw over the fence. They've probably just let him out of hospital. He has two college mates with him and he's seeking blood. They hop out to monster Francis. Again he surprises himself. He tosses Dad's beloved new wood, given to him by the Gawler Golf Club as a send-off present (he was the club champion), and says, "Quick Dad! Find it in the crop before you lose it." Dad rushes to get it back.

Francis doesn't want him to witness what he now expects to happen and he suspects Dad understands this. He drags out his three wood from his bag, a Slazenger forerunner of their popular little slammer, rushes stiff armed at the Jock who goes over like a nine pin and has only one arm to break his fall (he's wearing a sling).

He cracks the belligerent big bloke hard on the knee and reversing the club welts him equally hard on the head, then adds a double handed punch to put him out of the picture. Francis now hunts for the third chap, who wisely runs off madly across country towards the club house, about a mile away. They're all pretty drunk, hence the attack. Francis lets down all the tyres and tosses the top of the coil into the crop.

The family are aghast, but Francis says, "Just act normal and finish the round," and they do. It's an unofficial day and they get back and load the car.

Dad chuckles. "Well done," he says, "but the police may turn up."

Francis ventures that they won't. The participants have too much sorting out of stories to cover them, and so it proves.

FIVE

About this time the war comes along in Europe. The Great War, the war to end all wars, or to quote the Poms, the war to make England the land fit for heroes. By and large and in retrospect, no one really knows what this war will do to the world and what a squalid murderous and miserable business it is to prove. To the young blokes of Bruce Rock, it is a wonderful chance to see the Elephant, an escape from dull old farm and work world, to the adventure of a life time. By and large Francis is a realist and doesn't get over excited about the War. He is however a keen observer of the scene, thus he continues his daily round while his contemporaries commence to disappear from Bruce Rock.

They enlist in Merredin, either in the 10th Light Horse, this is a small establishment and is often at this stage of the war closed to applicants or perhaps to put it better, admits limited numbers, or the alternative, the all absorbing Infantry, mostly 11th Battalion; either way, they seemed to be attending a send-off dance in the town hall, or at the shearing sheds at their farms and then they are gone. 13 weeks basic training at Blackboy Hill at Greenmount and quite soon after that they are on a troop ship. An amazing number within 10 to 12 months from enlistment are off this mortal coil. In other words as dead as doornails, either at Gallipoli, which is a lost cause from day one, or in France where the shell fire is so intense that many young Australians are exploded without trace. In the bitter trench warfare in Northern France and Belgium there are 10,000 such. Just read the names of the graveless men on the Villers-Bretonneux War Memorial and that's just the Australians I'm talking about, God alone knows how many others went west.

SIX

Francis is laying his plans to join up in a quiet way, but there is, to him now that Merrilies has gone off to her new school at Bridgetown, a very compelling reason not to rush off. He's enjoying sex three weeks out of every four every day without fail with the bank's hoity toity beautiful office girl; the daughter of a very well established farmer from the Belka Valley area. She boards in town, works at the bank every day. She is exclusive, totally sought after by the best heeled and most eligible young men

in the district who, by the way, are vanishing by the day to the war.

But she is Francis' in office hours. She is totally and charmingly wanton. It comes about this way. He and the hoity toity one, Anthea, are calling over and checking the postings in the bank ledgers, they finally get to the last section of the second ledger, the M to Z one. She stops, shoots a sideways glance, or rather look at Francis, gulps, gulps again and finally asks, "Ever had a girl fully Francis?"

Francis is perceptive, he toys with his steel nibbed bank pen. The silence extends, finally he makes up his mind,

"Hmmm," he says, "since you ask, I've had three and a woman....." he trails off.

"And?" Anthea eagerly asks.

"Women are better," Francis says.

"Why?"

"Well they've run some races; they know what it's all about."

"And the girls?" she asks.

"Very keen," he says, "inclined to panic as you make your way with the action, they start to worry about holding the baby, literally, as it were."

"But there's ways round that," she says.

"Sure," he says, "but one is not always prepared. You don't quite know when opportunities will occur and indeed where."

Anthea looks reflectively at him, hesitates, then goes on, "Well.... if you are prepared to teach me," she says, "here's an opportunity knocking, now or at least on Tuesday afternoon when the accountant teller will, as usual, go to the pub and the manager will be away on a time gap at the Narambeen receiving office."

"Why me?" Francis queries. "You're always knee deep in the rich and famous and most eligible?"

"Well, it's like this. I keep having these warm feelings that tell me it's time to have a man, but if you're a girl in a small town you just cannot, cannot play with the boys. Once the word gets out, you're dirt and you can't then hope to make a good marriage locally and locally is where I live."

"Tuesday is fine," Francis says. He touches her for the first time, she jumps up.

"Or now," he says.

"Ulp.... Tuesday is fine."

SEVEN

We are calling the ledgers (again) when the accountant teller locks the safe and heads off to the pub. He's a potential alcoholic and later drinks himself to death in a bottle license on the Midland line.

As the lock snibs and Arthur's out, Anthea stands like a statue.

"What now?" she says.

"Well, climb out of your bra and knickers and put your blouse and skirt back on minimally buttoned," Francis says. "Arthur sometimes comes back."

He does and Anthea scrunches over the ledger desk so that Arthur doesn't see her magnificent bosom floating interestingly free.

The fates conspire against our plans, the manager rings from Narambeen; he wants three large account passbooks updated before we leave, as our clients need them to take to a land board hearing in Perth early next morning. Arthur comes back again to get a parcel he's forgotten to take. The machinery dealer comes in with a late banking of some cheques he wants fast cleared. Head office ring with queries re returns and it goes on and on.

"Bugger it," Anthea says, "I badly wanted you to use me, not necessarily schmooze me and time is running out. What are we to do Francis?"

"I'm getting desperate too, hmmm," he says, "just drop on all fours and pretend you're a filly."

She does, they give it a very good try, he picks up the pace.

Then, "Whoa boy," Anthea cries, "whoa boy!"

"Are you alright?"

"Absolutely, just let me anchor my arms against the ledger desk, otherwise you'll shunt me out of sight."

Joined, they scrabble along the floor a bit to allow her to do this.

"Jeez," she says, "it's different to what I thought and that's my virginity out of the way at least."

"What will you tell your future husband?" Francis asks.

"Oh piffle," she says, "I don't plan on marrying anyone real clever."

Francis gives her a good all over feel and says, "Let's get back to work. I'll organise something for Thursday if you're not sore from today."

Thus stimulated, they dash into the work.

Thursday comes along; it's just a working day.

"What have you organised?" the hoity toity one asks, touching his arm.

Francis draws a little mud map showing her a deep bridged culvert near the show grounds.

"Just walk along a few minutes after proper dark and I'll be there, its leaf filled and soft."

She nods. "It's arranged, what do I wear?" she asks.

"Something that's quick to get into and out of," Francis says, "and tennis shoes for quiet."

She arrives very quietly. He's there with a pillow and a new wool pack for a mattress. It goes like a dream, they both yawn their heads off all day at the bank.

"You dog," she says to him, "you make a real beast of yourself."

"Hmmm, same time, same place tonight?"

"Yes please, please, please," she says.

She adds to what she brings, the little things that make everything easier, but she's also cute.

"Best another venue," she says. "What's wrong with the loose boxes at the show ground, there's a gap in the fence near the loading ramp."

They settle on that, it's a good all weather venue and boy do they use it and no-one, no-one at all ever disturbs them. Just to be safe, Francis constructs an escape hatch in the rear wall in case they ever get sprung.

They're having a better sex life than almost anyone in town and the girl slows down her going out, to rest up a bit for their very strenuous programme, which runs for months. She finally gets back into the social swim and almost immediately gets a very suitable proposal of marriage.

EIGHT

The groom to be is Brendon Johns, only son of Julian Johns, who is quite a good farmer about eight miles out. He's pretty solid. Brendon is a handsome young fellow and a reasonable size; plays football, has been to Guildford Grammar School and in general, like many in the farm world, thinks he's the very best. He's already enlisted in the 11th Battalion and their wedding actually takes place on his embarkation leave.

"You're mad," Francis tells the girl, "there's no reason to tie yourself up now".

"Oh... but there is," she says, "there is, there is....." she lets it trail off.

"You're not?" he says.

"I am," she says.

"How long?"

"Five weeks,"

"I'm so sorry," Francis says.

"Whatever for?" Anthea ripostes, "it's been the very best time of my life."

"But?"

"No buts, it'll all be fine."

"Besides, I just know that you'll be gone too in days."

"How so?" Francis asks.

"I just know, it's not in you to avoid the issue."

Taking her hand, he says, "Well..... I've enlisted in Northam. I'm off Saturday to Greenmount."

"What about your send off?"

"Oh, I'm sketching the bank crew tomorrow. Please come."

"Of course," she replies. She pauses. "The Johns are off to a funeral Friday afternoon, I'll give you a private send off at my new home."

Francis duly sketches the bank crew; gives each a copy and they place one copy in the banking chamber. It's a great bit of portraiture and Francis brings in a long mirror and puts himself in the frame with the rest of them. It's his first self-portrait, but he also purloins from the bank security vault a beautiful little wooden handled .22 auto pistol, complete with a web small of the back holster. It's a spare gun for cash carrying officers.

It's been tucked away unused for years, until Francis found it in an audit check and since then has quietly spirited it away for weekend practice. This handy little gun will go to war with Francis. He leaves a receipt for it on the dusty audit file and says he will return it after the war.

He arrives at Brendon's house and bed for his send off. He's cautious, places a sketch block on his light portable easel, slashes off some lines, tells Anthea to have her going away outfit handy to jump into and takes her to bed.

It's a soft and nostalgic parting, hastened by the sound of a car.

"Bugger me," Anthea says, "They must have raced home from the cemetery".

She skips underwear, jumps into her frock and shoes and by the time the Johns' pull up, Francis has a great picture very well advanced, he has of course started it earlier against any eventuality.

Julian Johns comes in.

“Hi Francis,” he says, “Your car tracks pre date that early afternoon shower. You’ve been here a while.”

Francis is totally unfazed, he is deep. “Hmmm.... yes.... well we’ve been work mates for a long time and the way this war is going we may never meet again, so I’ve put a bit of time into the portrait.”

“But you sketched her yesterday at the bank,” John says.

“Hmm, but not like this.”

He looks and is a bit gobsmacked, “It’s really beautiful.”

“Stay a minute, I’m nearly finished and I have a bottle of good brandy in the car. Let’s toast the future, God knows what it holds.”

He does and they do. His suspicions seem dissipated. He makes his goodbyes, give Anthea a kiss on the cheek and is out of there. Dad takes him into Merredin and he catches the train to Midland just a bit later.

NINE

Francis adapts quite easily to life under canvas. He has the sort of look about him, even at this early age that discourages the N.C.O.’s from hazing him. Perhaps they detect a slightly dangerous air about him, who knows, but they leave him alone to get on learning soldiering. He finds it only common sense, but he takes to rifle shooting Lee Enfield .303’s and soon becomes known as Bullseye Man.

“You’ve done this before,” the Instructor says.

“Only on rabbits, sir,” he says, “.22 only and single shot.”

“Well,” the man says, “you’re a sniper born.”

After a few weeks of this the instructor says, “Come into Midland Junction with me. There’s a telescopic sight in the gun shop there that is definitely you.”

They go and Francis buys this. The instructor talks closely to the gun shop man; he’s been to the Boer War and knows sniping. They make up a couple of quick release attachments so that this sight can easily be moved to another rifle and sighted in without hassle. Francis is equally as effective with open sights as with the magnified sight, but he can see that it is another bow to his arrow and quickly gets used to the way they have set it up. He can open sight, or if the target or light is becoming tricky it’s only a second’s work to get the scope into use.

After seven weeks training the N.C.O. says,

“You’re doing well, boy. I think we can reward you with a bit longer leave pass over Easter. Go into Perth and live it up”.

Francis doesn’t know anyone in Perth and has had so much sex in recent months he opts instead on a run up the Midland railway from Midland to Walkaway near Geraldton. He thumbs a lift with the guard and enjoys the trip. He sketches the train crew outside the Walkaway pub. They’re great subjects, faces like twisted sandshoes and missing teeth. He gives them a copy, they love him for it and his own copy gets a showing in the Archibald Prize after he goes overseas.

In later years Francis writes, but doesn’t publish his memoirs. This latter reads: I draw a veil over troop shipping to Egypt, doing the tourist bit with the pyramids and in Cairo. The young blokes go after the Cairo women like mad and by crikey, they look the goods hanging over the brothel verandahs, but it’s VD town and a very great many end up with having the fact they caught the clap indelibly marked

on their Great War Services records, along with the fact that one shilling a day out of their six shillings earnings is deducted for the period when they are unfit for duty.

There is a burning need for snipers on Gallipoli and there he is soon sent. The dun colours of the peninsula don't cause him any problems. He's done a lot of rabbit shooting around Bruce Rock with .22 rifles and is used to looking for targets in much the same coloured landscape as now. There is however one big difference, the rabbits he's now hunting shoot back and their eye is in.

Snipers on both sides are dangerous to troops and tend to concentrate on one another. Monash Gully, overlooked by Russell's Top, is ultra dangerous and General Pope cleverly imports steel plates with loop holes to improve their chances and safety. These are good innovations and improve their success rates. Boy, do the steel plates get bullet pitted by the opposition.

The Turks have a bit going for them. Liman Von Sanders is doing the strategic soldiering for them and Ataturk is motivating his men. It's a formidable combination. The ANZACS aren't going too well and General Hamilton seems to be running the show from his ship.

TEN

On a clear morning he joins a sniping party going up the slopes. Their party is mixed and includes the Clermont sniper, Wily Sing. In US Sheriff terms, Wily has 273 notches on his gun stock, he's been there a while. With him is Spider Keppel, a railway ganger in civil life and a dreadful little man. He scopes for Sing and carries a shotgun against sudden rushes. Spider has a party trick. At a point where the Johnnie's trenches are close every Friday Spider blows a blast on a hunting horn, God knows where he got this and lobs over tins of jam. The Turks are in the know and toss back pipe shag. It's rank, but burns well and they kindly share a bit with Francis, but Spider's not without heart. Francis see him once at a burial party blow a short blast on his horn and then recite the 23rd Psalm word perfect.

As they go, they pass a very big lumbering man surrounded and flanked by Red Tabbers. Francis instantly recognise him from press photos, but is interested to know if his mates know him. As they pass, there are salutes flashed everywhere at



LORD KITCHENER (LEFT) INSPECTING ANZAC FROM RUSSELL'S TOP
Beside him is General Birdwood.

them. In accordance with established Australian tradition, they ignore these, they are only Poms. They may have been a bit cavalier, as Birdwood, Quarter Master General of the Indian Army and GOC of Oz troops is with him. He shoots them a reproving hard look.

"Who's that?" Francis asks and has a quiet chuckle at the quick reply from Spider.

"Oh, that's some old fart called Kitchener, seems to have done a bit of soldiering in his time."

So much for the most famous soldier in the world at this time. Kitchener has left his mark on history, rude boorish and unloved. He skids Lord Curzon from GG India, invents in South Africa the first concentration camp, shells the Mahdis tomb at Khartoum, runs the Pommy War Office badly and worst of all, lets Haig become autonomous on the Western Front.

The cost in lives is incalculable and because their inarticulate old King thinks the sun shines out of Haig's nether regions, he is untouchable.

Lloyd George starves him of reinforcements in the end and the Germans near as damn it break through. It's a near run thing. Anyway, Herbert Horatio Kitchener is here to advise on Gallipoli and is on his way to Russel's Top to view the scene. Ten minutes there and, "evacuate," he says and they do, but not immediately.

Francis isn't mad about Birdwood either. In his view, he's prosecuting the Pom's lost cause with too much vigour. Francis gets told to do his portrait on Gallipoli, but things now start moving so fast that he ducks the duty, although he has to be careful too, as Birdwood's arm is long.

Francis chuckles when he reflects that only week's back, his aim in life was sex and more sex with the hoity toity office girl and now he's being judgemental on two of the most influential soldiers on the side of the Allies.

In later years during WWII Francis gets to visit Lord Kitchener's memorial on Mull. It commemorates the Field Marshall's loss at sea. There's some graffiti on this, it reads, 'Unloved by the Aussies and some of the Scotties'.

They continue up that morning, but don't come down at night. They're laying for the second best sniper on the peninsula. They shot the best one, whom they called Abdul, two days ago. This is his sidekick, almost as good; they call him the Bul Bul Emir.

Well after dark, they move like ghosts to a patch of rock and scrub, dangerously close to his shooting ground. The rock and scrub is somewhere you wouldn't expect a sniper to be, but they have studied this so much they think the slight shift in the ground will give adequate cover. They have browned their faces and hands, put a tiny tripod under Francis' rifle and laid a bit of scrub along the barrel. They are ready and lay very doggo well before there's daylight. They suspect to see Bul Bul move in, but if it's him he's closer than they expect. Francis makes a mental note that perhaps, like them, he's moved closer overnight. They lay immobile, almost totally.

About 11am something occurs behind them. Francis can see in his rear vision mirror which he has attached near the scope, (it's tiny) what looks like a couple of Red Tabbers trying to attract their attention. All this is likely to do is distract us and what they're doing is absolutely, possibly fatal. They're in sniper territory. Francis knows exactly what is going on, they want Kitchener sketched and these young sprogs, who have no appreciation of the dangers of war, are obliging their officers to get Francis and bring him back. It's as sure as shooting and shooting surely happens.

There is the yowl of a rifle bullet and then another and the two sprogs join the list of those killed on Gallipoli, but there's an upside, Bul Bul has shown himself and a mini second later Francis shoots him between the eyes. Another sniper further away tries for the, but they've got what they wanted and just lie and lie and lie. When it's deep dark, stiff as boards, they quietly crawl along the ground and reach relative safety.

Francis is in two minds, sorry that two young chaps have died because no one stopped their lunacy and glad that he got Bul Bul. It's just war he's afraid. He sketches Kitchener next morning. The original is in the Imperial War Museum.

Kitchener looks at the portrait and just grunts at Francis.

ELEVEN

A few days later Francis goes up the slopes, perhaps a bit higher than is safe, if anything is safe in the sniper's spectrum, and has a small sighting slit between brush mounded dirt. He can see well, but has limited travel for his rifle. Unusually, a German officer comes into his range. He can't get a head shot at him, 'kill them anyway you can', his masters tell him, so he gut shoot him. He flops around in the dirt, poor devil; helpers tentatively come out to drag him in, they have a fair idea of where Francis is. They look appealingly in his direction.

"For Christ sakes, let's get out now, Francis," his observer says. "They'll make a charge on this spot if we don't."

However, it's like rabbit shooting, if you gut shoot a rabbit you always find and finish him off. Francis gestures for the observer to go smartly and he does, this draws them off him and they move towards the officer. He's quite senior, as it's his aide who is attempting the rescue. War is War. Francis finishes off the officer and shoots the two helpers; doesn't feel real good about it. He doesn't beat a retreat, they know he's deadly serious, so he pile up a few bombs and awaits their visit. Nothing happens and at dark he set off back to camp.

Francis' observer says, "That was brave."

He really doesn't want to talk about it. They hear later who the casualty is, he's important, if careless of his own safety. Francis guesses his firing position up so high surprised him.

The German officers are strong on early morning telescoping of the scene, but they over-reach themselves. Francis and other snipers creep up the slopes in the dark and shoot five in one morning just as its full light. It is a feat similar to that of the Confederate snipers to Union officers at Little Round Top at Gettysburg. Whatever, it gains Francis a Military Medal and the team get back unharmed. They look into the chances of potting Von Sanders and Kemal on their morning inspections. It's quite feasible but they could never, never expect to get away alive.

The evacuation comes up. It's very skilfully done and much has been said about the Turks being fooled and not attacking during the event. They just didn't know. The same as the British General Staff never knew when the Krauts withdrew to the Hindenburg line. It's rubbish to say that an attack at this crucial stage would have been devastating. Unless you were there you could never hope to understand the labyrinth of trenches, or the very well-armed vigilance of the departing troops. The Turks' Commanders may have commanded if they knew, but the experience of their soldiers had been so bitter that if any forward move had been made it would have been a case of hasten slowly, slowly.

Francis and his fellow snipers get lent to the British, whose snipers are neither plentiful nor very good, to help with their withdrawal. The Oz snipers stay well forward and ping any Turk they can and are just about the last off. The stuff the Poms leave behind is absolutely unbelievable.

Between Suvla and Ari Burnu they abandon five small steamers, 60 good boats, narrow gauge railways, acres of barbed wire, piles of artillery and infantry ammunition, rows of wagon and gun limbers, small arms, hand grenades, machine gun barrels, enough flour and tinned food to feed an army. The entire tentage of an

army is left standing and in serried rows. Over 200 horses that couldn't be loaded, are shot dead on the beach.

While there is a lot of pressured movement, the snipers, though very vigilant, are not under pressure. Francis gets out his easel and sketches the head horse handler. He captures the look of loss in this poor beggar's eyes just so well. The Poms thank the snipers and drop them off on Lemnos and they ship back to Alexandra. Francis, now a Lieutenant, and his soldiers are called on to do little. After their knife edge existence on Gallipoli this makes a nice change. They swim, tour, train, etc. and practise cover shooting early and late for some weeks.

TWELVE

The troop ship 'Berrima' takes them to Marseilles where the Aussie troops drink red wine at 10 in the morning and start to turn the town over; not a real good idea as the French are tough. Francis intercedes with some gendarmes who are improperly getting involved in what is military police business and, through a French speaker, suggests they turn a blind eye as these chaps have just survived the Turks. They get stropky and won't listen to him and finish up forlornly wandering the quayside minus their trousers and with their ironmongery thrown off the edge of the dock, while the 11th Battalion blokes are arguing over who is to keep the Kepis and truncheons.

They hear rumours about a huge push on the Somme and also hear rumours that President Wilson is close to brokering a peace without victory. They also hear the Poms are rejecting Wilson's very sensible ideas out of hand and they see the hand of old Haig in all this. Francis can't see that the war is possibly sustainable and that it should be over shortly. How wrong can you be? Just the same, they don't get called into the Somme show for now and have a nice time looking through the old French towns and a lovely time in Paris. He gets called in at the tail end of the Somme, where the campaign peters out. They've gained an area about 10 miles by 12 miles, the French are so occupied with the war of attrition at Verdun they can't help that much and the British Army carry the can without much success.

Francis also does a deal of drawing of the main people running the war in France and manages to defer an order to report to British Army Headquarters with paper and crayons. He cops a bad shrapnel cut in the forehead and gets shipped out to London for some extra medical attention. Francis draws a lovely nurse, a blonde little Pom, who is giving out the right signals and they get to spend Easter down in Cornwall. It's quite a while since Francis left Australia and he hasn't had a woman since. It's bloody heaven.

Francis, while in London, takes some drawings with him in a cardboard roll and goes into the depths of Bloomsbury looking for a sculptor he knows he wants. He's seen his work in galleries around London; sale on consignment pieces and bought pieces. He's very good. Eventually he catches up with the sculptor; he's a she, a tallish willowy girl with big hands, as befits a sculptress. He takes her down to the local for a drink and a pub meal and explains what he wants. Thus he's in and out of her workroom and after three days, her bed, while she designs and builds the

most life-like head and shoulder effigy you ever saw.

What he wants is something realistic to draw sniper fire, in order of course, to help locate the sniper. It's got to be built in such a way that it can be fitted to a fixed point such as a periscope bevel slide. There are plenty of these well-made gadgets in every frontline trench. The idea is: if your effigy gets drilled it's all pointless unless you can get a visual or a compass bearing on where the shot comes from.



92. A LIGHT HORSEMAN SNIPING OVER THE PARAPET

The front is all a muddy grey, lumps and bumps, shell craters, barbed wire, plenty of cover and easy to blend in. Francis once spent two days and two nights lying in no-man's land, never dreaming that he was between a German and our front line; such is the nature of no-man's land. His quarry, he mentioned in passing, that at the time he had decided to move a second or so before Francis. He picked him up right away and ambushed him with the razor sharp hatchet he always carries when front lining. His career came to a very sharp end, if you will pardon the dreadful pun, and Francis gets back stealthily carrying his well-used rifle, from which they learn a bit and use themselves to snipe Germans with.

The sculptor comes up with the goods. She has a sense of humour and after a very torrid night, she says to Francis, "God, this is harder work than sculpting."

"Yes, but it's more fun," Francis says.

Having made this marvellous head and shoulders they now saw up the moulds into smaller pieces, remake these in metal and practise turning out heads. These will only ever take one shot, especially if the shooter is using dum dum bullets, so it's necessary to quickly recast replacements. The handiest and most available material for this is plaster of Paris (from the field hospitals). They get it down to a fine art; cast the heads, stick the bits together with a malleable glue and touch up the face with verdigrease paint and with a balaclava and steel helmet they look so real.

A chippy in Bloomsbury puts the whole lot in a pine case with sections for the mould parts and like Ruth, for the rest of the war, where Francis went the case came too. A deal of iron is starting to enter Francis's psyche. At his final medical the Pommy MO is a bit rude. He asks Francis if he is ready to return to the front line. Francis points out he's a sniper and he's still getting a bit of blurred vision from the head wound and suggests it will sort itself out given a bit more time off. The MO takes his papers and goes behind the screen. The medical board is operating in an old parish hall. His fellow board member says he'll leave him off the duty roster a bit longer - a sniper with vision problems can't be a sniper.

"Oh, beggar him," the senior man says. "Haig's staff says the best Australian soldier is a dead one. The bastards won't even salute British Officers and what's more, they're exempt from British Military Law. Back he goes and to hell with him and all Aussies. He can go the first charge at Arras."

Francis is a bit appalled that the impending attack at Arras is being bruited around at a medical board hearing. Thus Francis's papers are stamped 'fit for duty' and he quietly, but thoughtfully leaves the hearing.

THIRTEEN

Francis is inwardly fuming; he's a direct action man. He makes his preparations and dresses in a long black overcoat purchased from a salvage store and a beanie cap and skulks near the parish hall. Finally the MO comes out on his way to the officer's club.

"Gotcha, you swine," Francis says to himself and sets out for a cold wait in sight of the club. The MO finally emerges. Francis adds a balaclava to his persona, walks up to the MO in a halting way and puts a .22 shot into his shoulder. He pushes him down on the pavement and gives him an almighty kick in his vulnerable area.

"Who are you?" he painfully gasps.

Francis gives him another well aimed kick as he lies, but says nothing. He can't speak; it will only identify him as Australian. He leaves him lie, he's wounded painfully, but not fatally and may now be able to appreciate the active side of war.

Francis farewells his nurse in a hotel near Cavendish Square and goes back to camp in France - a hop step from Amiens. Amiens is more or less the hub of the war and becomes more so as the war progresses. It's a communication centre and integral to the defence of Paris and the retention of the channel ports. It's more or less the fulcrum to the Allies war effort.

Francis arrives back at the Australian camp just on dark and before he has sorted out his gear and moved to settle in, an army truck with two military police on the back pulls up and brutally dumps an injured soldier from truck height to the gravel road. Francis knows the victim, he's been outrageously beaten and his jaw is obviously broken. He's a Bruce Rock boy, good family, nice quiet young chap. Gay of course (they were called queens then).

"There's plenty more of that where this comes from." says the head MP waving his club.

In one of the quickest reflex actions of his busy life, Francis swings up onto the truck tray as they drive off in the now darkness. Putting on the cockney Francis says, "Wotcher cock, what'o this tiddler do?"

"Nuffink," says this low life, "we hate all Aussies and if they're queens it's even better."

Still cutting the cockney Francis says, "But you'll get into trouble over this."

"Nah," he says, "self-defence."

These military rozzers are big men and the victim would barely go ten stone in all his army clobber. An icy rage consumes Francis; he puts his bank .22 pistol in the big rozzers' ears and pulls the trigger.

"What's that, what's that?" says the other big fellow.

Francis drills a neat hole in his forehead. The truck is still trundling along steadily without check, so he drops off in the dark from the tail gate and quietly walks back to where he started. He's had the Poms, it's bad that the red caps have got away with such brutality for so long and usually on slightly built men who are there for King and Country. There's absolutely no call for them to be beaten up by their

own side.

Francis now follows his compatriots up to the Battle of Arras. He settles into the front to snipe and go over the top in this lunatic business. In a tiny lull he gets detailed to lead a trench raid. The Captain giving the orders says,

“We want to know who is in the enemy trenches?”

Francis replies, “With respect Sir, I know who is in the trenches.”

“Well who?” he asks.

“About a million fucking Germans,” Francis flings back, “and they’re even antsy in daylight. Look for yourself.”

The Captain stands on the fire step and does so. He is immediately sniped through the head. Thus the trench raid falls by the way side and the troops gain another day of life. Because the army calls him up from time to time for sketching jobs, usually of Generals, but sometimes of trench lines for tactical purposes, Francis sees a lot of the front and also the army headquarters; often well behind the lines, but in Birdwood’s case, relatively close. How they sleep with so many heavy guns going off eight or nine miles away is a mystery.

The sketching Francis does of officers (VIP Officers) is both easy and quick to him. He does head and shoulders and fades the background. Crayon lends itself to sombre subjects and this suits dark army dress so well. The staff officers with their red tabs and hat bands come up in starkly beautiful contrast. He can, of course, sketch anything, but apart from Birdwood wanting to be depicted seated on his Irish charger ‘Sherman’, he mainly does quick head and shoulder portraits.

General White’s favourite sketcher is sniped by a machine gunner, it’s all a mystery, this chap has been told to be careful and any front line man can point out where the machine guns are. Anyway, Francis is told to present himself at Sausage Valley; a bit to the rear of where Haig, with Australia’s help, is manufacturing military history, regardless of expense at the unfortunate French village of Pozieres. It’s the biggest and worst battle of this or any war. He travels the last three miles on a supply wagon and is gobsmacked when they come over the lip of the wide shallow valley running up to the famous Casualty Corner/Contalmaison cross roads.

“Stop!” he cries, and gathering up his mixed gear, jumps off the wagon.

It’s mid-morning and he is surveying the busiest thoroughfare in this wide world and it stays this way for all of August and September. The supply lines remain constant through the Pozieres stoush and moves then to an even worse one at Mouquet Farm Rivers. Everything necessary to feed the biggest conflict ever seen is going up the road and the detritus of everything being used is coming back. The confusion and carnage is unbelievable, but under it all is a sense of purpose, or perhaps it’s just the manifestation of the idiotic policy of the high command, which they have labelled attrition.

Francis quickly pulls the cover off his sniping rifle a bit. So far as he can see, he’s the only man in the war that carries a rifle in a canvas cover. He treats it as he would an oboe and keeps it away from dust and mud as much as possible when he’s carrying it between jobs. It’s his tool of trade and is all the better for care and attention. He mounts the bayonet on the rifle and sticks this into the hard ground (it’s high summer) and backs his fold up easel onto it. He doesn’t want to waste time, but he also wants to encapsulate this depiction of war wholesale. He tamps his briar, lights up and has a puff and then away he goes.

Fourteen minutes later he has the essence of the thing on dual papers and is easing into detail when a staff officer walks up to him.

“What are you doing soldier?” this tall officer asks.

He’s a Pom so Francis could tell him to get on his bike, but of course, for every action there is an immediate and opposing reaction and he doesn’t want to waste time causing trouble.

“I’m drawing the war, Sir,” he says.

“Yes,” he says, “and very well too. May I have a copy?”

“No,” Francis replies, “but why don’t you have a smoke and stand against that damaged gun over there and I’ll sketch you with that as background.”

“Done,” he says and does.

“By the way,” he asks, “where is Pozieres?”

“Not far,” he says, “a half mile over the crossroads at most. Mind you, I don’t think there’s anything left of the village now and although I’m as curious as the next chap, I have no intention of going up for a look.”

This chap takes Francis to White’s dug out and tells White that the quality of his work is such that he would ask that, immediately he has finished what White wants done, that he should be returned to where his unit is.

FOURTEEN

Francis doesn’t know whether White wants him to sketch or snipe, but it’s a bit of both. Thus he gets an up close and personal look at Pozieres and cops minor shrapnel wounds. This marvellous invention of Henry Shrapnel at Woolwich is much in use in this maelstrom and when Francis rejoins the conscious world next day, he can’t see too well, is bandaged like nobody’s business and everything he owns except his bank pistol strapped to the small of his back is gone, but not forever. They pack him off to hospital in London and his missing gear turns up before he is back at his unit. The sketching tube is empty however, so he now has no copy of the Sausage Valley scene and the war has moved on, just a bit, to Mouquet Farm. In later years, the pastel turns up in the Imperial War Museum, which of course ignores the fact that any soldiers other than British ever fought in this war. Thus his marvellous scope of the frantic war scene is there, but is not attributed.

Another Easter is in the offing, his third for the war, as the army gives their best shots to what is sometimes called ‘The Battle of the Outpost Villages’. The Krauts have rather contemptuously drawn their fighting formations back to the Hindenburg Line, which for the moment they have designated a rest area. It’s well prepared, but not a shot has been fired from it yet.

Their support trenches and soldiers are now their front line ones as they leisurely prepare to withdraw, blowing up everything blowable as they go. The village of Noreuil is our current objective, one village only has been taken in the outpost line, but it does mean with one gone, the others must go eventually.

Personally, Francis is all for leaving things as is, but the unluckiest general ever, Sir Hubert Gough, having now just heard of the Hindenburg line, is keen to have a diversionary slap at it. What in heaven’s name Gough expects to achieve against this mighty line with his badly staffed and understrength army is anybody’s guess. The immediate effect is that he can’t even get to the line until we’ve cleared out the outpost villages. This is no easy task as the Germans prefer to fire all of

their artillery and infantry ammunition at us in preference to manhandling it back through to the Hindenburg line. Boy are the beggars alert!

Francis is in a mine crater with a pinned down group of badly needed machine gunners. He's whistled up the Australian 4th Light Mortar Company. Some are lads from Wagin, south of Bruce Rock and he's hugging the wall of the crater, splattered with mud, using a periscope on a bevel runner to try to locate the sniper who has head shot three good men in the crater as they try to set up and get firing. Francis is concentrating on where he thinks he is in the hope something will give him away and let him sight in on him. There's a bit of a mud slide as an officer slips down the far wall of the crater. At least he realises later it's an officer, but it's also drawn the attention of the sniper and a bullet zwoicks into the mud, inches from the newcomer.

"Whoever you are," Francis says in a sharp tone, "get your fucking head fucking down before you lose it. Also you're drawing fire."

The officer says, "You can't say that to me soldier, I'm a Captain." Francis says, "I don't give a toss if you're the Prime Minister. This is a very tricky job and the last thing we want is tourists."

Then the penny drops, it is Captain Brendon Johns, who is married to his child's mother.

"Oh, hi Brendon," he says.

"Francis," he say, "it's Captain."

"Not here, Brendon," he replies. "This very dangerous mine crater will become much more so when the boot and scoot boys (the Light Mortarmen) let one fly, it's just not the place to stand on rank."

They are in fact dangerously exposed here. The woods are stiff with batteries from both sides and they're too far out in front. He cautiously lets the mortarmen have a good look through the periscope and then decide the game's not worth the candle. They sit absolutely still until real dark, and with the cries of a patrol coming in, beat a retreat. They haul Francis over the coals, but he's scoped out a better plan for dawn and says, "Let's not waste time on the past mission impossible, let's hit 'em hard at first light."

Brendon proves handy. Francis draws the sniper's position and Brendon and a runner take the drawing (charcoal on grey paper) over to a battery a few hundred yards away. The sketch he takes with him, now in the Imperial War Museum, is the last recorded impression of the Noreuil church tower, which is blown to nothing at first light. It's been the main sniper post. All they are doing, at great expense, is pushing the Germans to do what they were going to do anyway - retire to their new strong line. The line, by the way, is well engineered and well-built and is never breached until seventeen months later when the German's lose heart.

FIFTEEN

Francis is shuttled back into drawing General Officers and does an excellent portrait of Sir Henry Wilson, the mover and shaker in getting Foch put in supreme command. Wilson, to some extent, is the meat in the sandwich between Haig and Prime Minister Lloyd George (Wilson comes to a sticky end after the war when Irish Sinn Feiner's knock on the door of his Eaton Square house and shoot him dead.

Wilson has just got back from an Investiture at the Palace and dies with his sword in his hand, the only British Field Marshall ever to do so). Wilson however is okay and invites Francis to Eaton Square to have a drink and a cigar and to inspect the hung work.

Shortly after, he's back in Amiens furthering his plans to commandeer a very dark painting in the Amiens town hall, which Francis is sure is an unattributed Leonardo. Leonardo once famously said that everyone fades, but art doesn't. Anyway, it's a great painting and since discovering it Francis has been calling on all his skills taught to him by his art teacher in Bruce Rock to do a replica of this alleged Leonardo. He gets it pretty right and smokes the finished product by burning tins of black and brown nugget and running the painting over the flames. It's a very fair copy which he parks in a safe place, pending an opportunity to switch it with the original.

The army now catch up with him and he gets sent to army headquarters at Montreuil, or more correctly Montreuil-Sous-Bois, an eastern suburb of Paris. The general staff are housed in a beautiful old chateau adjacent to good riding country, well back from the front indeed. The area is thick with peach orchards and Red Tabbers. Francis sketches over seventy portraits of the great and famous 'brown nosers'.

In later years, he comes across these portraits in various places in England and on occasion, in France, of the many French he drew. He's at a dinner party at the home of a rich and famous Frenchman. Its sixty years since Francis drew his father and there the portrait is, in beautiful mint and mellow looking order. Drink in hand, Francis stands before this portrait; it's a beauty and brings out both the man and his French uniform.

"What a marvellous portrait," a French Minister comments.

Francis, who doesn't push himself, considers the comment and thinks what the hell.

"Yes," he says, "I drew it sixty years ago at the very lowest point of the war. I drew it in an estaminet, a stone's throw from Verdun."

And he had too.

It causes quite a stir at the dinner party and he later dashes off (next day actually) a companion portrait of the son, complete with his 'Legion of Honour'. He does this again with crayon; you would be battling to tell there's a sixty year gap between the two.

SIXTEEN

While he's at Montreuil, Francis scopes out a project put to him by the Dalgety group. It's an idea that has been around for quite a while, i.e. to snipe General Haig, heir to the famous Haig & Haig whisky company. Francis drinks Haig dimple whisky and surveys the scheme. (It's interesting to think that Haig's booze makes Joseph Kennedy's fortune a few years down the track when prohibition is repealed in the USA and Kennedy has the sole agency.)

Nothing would be simpler than to shoot Haig in this non war area and it's really quite a good idea. Haig is not imaginative enough to win the war, or to lessen the appalling loss of life. But there's a down side too, as too many people have been talking about the idea and many are in high places. You can get away with almost anything in the Allied Army, provided, very much provided, you don't have

accomplices. Direct action on your own is untraceable in the main. It's quite practicable to bump off old Haig, but there are too many tongues to wag.

Francis quotes from his memoirs:

"Just the same, he's watched a bit. His groom, who rides well back, carries a Winchester Hard Hitter rifle and while I'm studying Haig's movements closely in my spare time and not, I think, in any obvious way, a tall chap comes up alongside me one morning when I'm smoking a cheroot and getting my sketching gear organised.

He says, "You seem to be taking an interest in the old chap."

"Why not?" I say, as I take a pull on my cigar. "He's a National Treasure, surely."

"Hmmm," he says, "not everyone thinks so." and moves off.

However, he is entirely shootable in Francis' view, but there may be no point in it. Lloyd George is already starving him of reinforcements, but headquarters are still running on an autonomous basis aided and abetted by our inarticulate old King, and there are plenty of other much decorated thickskates around to continue Haig's discredited and dumb policies. Francis sketches and sketches, but defers doing Haig on the grounds that he needs a much bigger sheet of crayon paper to do justice to his subject mounted on his charger. Haig accepts this and Francis returns to Amiens.

The Dalgety group come around for a conference which takes place on the steps of the huge cathedral, which the Germans have been dropping the odd long range shell on from a railway mounted gun, well back. The Dalgety group is so named due to their unofficial leader Major Peters coming from near Dalgety on the Snowy river where the Federal Parliament, as near as dammit, nearly got built. They are deep thinkers and have changed the course of the war marginally, mainly by removing permanently from the scene, some original thinkers at headquarters who are dreaming up schemes that are costing the lives of a lot of good men. Major Peters is the brains behind the hatcheting of the trench raid enthusiasts. He has a cousin high up at Montreuil and thus has an inside source on the C in C's thinking.

"What do you think, Francis?" he asks.

"Quite feasible," Francis says, "but you haven't thought it through."

"How so?" he asks.

"Well, Haig's out."

"Hurrah, who's in?"

"You could get Allenby."

This slows them a bit.

Peters is bright, "You have an alternative, perhaps?"

"Absolutely!" Francis says, "but you are going to have to be very brave."

"Do tell," Peters says.

Francis runs through his idea. It revolves around dispatching Haig, putting a gas shell into headquarters, burying the whole staff after the gas raid in the peach orchard, issuing a summons under Haig's name to General Plumer, the very best General in this man's war to come to Headquarters, drafting him to C in C under direction, putting up a few daylight flares at the front and white flagging a team into no-man's land to negotiate a cease fire and hold back.

It's quite a practical concept, though a huge one. It all hinges on the plotters keeping the phone lines open to issue orders of the day and getting the support of around 100 Light Horsemen on dismounted action in France, to buy into the backup side. The Dalgety group are a bit stunned by this idea; it's a lot for them to chew on. Francis leans to putting a proposition to the most senior German that they can entice into no-man's land for a conference, that the allied army pull back to Paris while the Krauts pull back behind the Rhine. An agreement in principal to a non-aggression pact between the Brits and the Krauts for five years would be the hinge of the matter.

This raises the question, 'What about the French?'

Francis is prescient. "Take out Foch and Pau," he says. Petain is a defeatist anyway and he's sure Nivelle would step in to fill the gap.

"But how can this be organised?" Peters asks.

"Phone calls after the event," says Francis.

They fall silent to digest this 'oh so big' idea. Francis, for his part, pulls on his pipe and considers that on Gallipoli, only weeks after his focus was entirely on making love to hoity toity bank girl, he was being judgemental on Kitchener, the best known soldier in the world and his active subordinate, Birdwood. He's now stepping up to the plate with an idea that has the potential to change the face of the War to end all Wars, and to decimate the managers of the biggest enterprise being conducted in the world today. The Dalgety group comes back to him with a query, 'What about Lloyd George?'

Francis has an answer to this. He has designed the very first car bomb in the world; actually it's a florist van loaded to the gunnels with high explosive shells.

"Just ignite that outside 10 Downing Street," he says, "and hope against hope that Churchill is visiting at the time. You don't have to kill them, just throw the beggars totally off balance while you're preparing the main game plan."

Six weeks pass. Six weeks of much planning and interfacing with the players that can make this grand concept (or mad idea) work.

Francis now gets called back to the front and picks up another medal for some excellent work. He is sniping by day at the front and while he remains in line, he doesn't do sentry duty or management of the sentry duty at night, he has to have a



90. MARKS OF TURKISH BULLETS ON A LOOP-HOLE PLATE

bit of kip, of course. However, he has a bit of a feeling towards the end of a long overcast day and borrows four Lewis guns from a detail going back. He talks with the nearest officer senior to him and sets up an enfilade fire situation in two bombing saps. He thinks the Krauts may be coming over. This done, he smokes a pipe and then, covering himself with his great coat, catches a bit of sleep.

He dreams that he's back in Montreuil. It's do or die day and the latter may be what happens. Haig is impeccably turned out and sitting on a black horse. Francis is sketching both at a spot that gives enough slope to show the headquarters chateau in the far back ground. Haig's minder, riding a chestnut horse and carrying his Winchester rifle, is over a bit and out of the picture. It's mid-afternoon. They need the cover of night to tidy up from the impending action.

Around 3 pm, there's the muted crack of a rifle. Haig slumps from the saddle, he falls then, foot still in the stirrup and the mettlesome black bolts dragging Haig by one foot. In an incredible feat of marksmanship, the minder head shoots the horse which crashes to the ground. He swings his gun on to Francis,

"You're in on this," he says "otherwise you'd have taken cover."

'Where's the sniper?' Francis thinks and then realises he's probably blocking the second shot. He raises his hands with only his crayons in them and says, "What's going on?" and takes a step forward.

It's evident enough; there's another whistling shot and the minder is now history.

Concurrently with this an army convoy of trucks pulls into the gravel drive. Peters alights and directs troops into carrying a heavy gas cylinder into the main entry hall.

"What the devil is all this?" the Captain of the Guard asks.

Peters produces an order of the day signed by Haig and authorising him to deliver to the chateau a cylinder of harmless gas in order to demonstrate to the C in C the latest delayed action gas dispenser for use in the line.

"Okay," the Captain of the Guard says, "where do you want to put it?"

"At the foot of the stairway," Peters says.

They dump the load. Peters runs out a long cord through the front door, smartly pulls on the cord and sets off a German stick grenade, which smashes the casing and the gas pours out. Light Horsemen have been piling out of the trucks. They all carry German Mauser pistols; they're assault weapons really and way ahead of anything the allies have. They shoot down every man exiting the chateau, but the gas effect is so swift few make it to the outside. Peters' staff work is amazing, a number of trucks come into the chateau grounds and disgorge a big group of French pioneers, officered by a British Captain; they're gobsmacked - where did he come from?

An Aussie artilleryman and assistants are marking out a huge sized pit in the peach orchard and the French pioneers get into digging this with spades; it's easy digging. They complete this in two hours and are trucked out. The Light Horsemen, using the First War version of body bags, now without demur, start cleaning out the charnel house of the chateau and another squad are formed to fill the pit. It's all go; Peters takes a Doctor around to check for survivors and administers a coup de grace just once. We ask no questions. The filling in completed, Peters stands back and Spider Keppel (who else) steps up. A blast on his hunting horn stills the soldiers. He intones the 23rd Psalm as good as Francis has ever heard.

A squad under Francis' direction now head up to where Haig's life ends and they hop in and pit bury Haig, his resolute marksman and the horse in an hour of intensive work. Peters has cut off the phone reticulation to the chateau while he and his cousin are issuing orders of the day under Haig's imprint and are fielding calls easily and well. The cousin has recruited some key helpers for this and the orders going out bring the army commanders in the gates by around 11 pm. They are bagged up and detained in the guard barracks. They are told that a secret weapon mishap has left the army without direction and that Captain Peters has adjudged it better to fill the gap for the immediate moment. They are fed well and looked after, but no great discussion is allowed.

The London end now comes into play and they fire Francis' world first effort, in the way of a car bomb, outside No. 10 Downing Street when the War Cabinet of

five is meeting. It's pretty impactful and the War Cabinet, without exception, finishes up in damaged condition at Guys Hospital. This is knife edge stuff, but Peters has it firmly in his hand.

"Francis," he says, "I plan to use either Hubert Gough or General Plumer (Colonel Blimp himself) to legitimise our gangster actions, but I daren't leave the scene. You will have to handle the Krauts."

Thus Francis is at the front at 10 am next morning, followed by a truckload of POW's that were picked up en route under Haig's spurious, but unchallenged, order of the day.

Its day two of make or break. They go over the top after firing off magnesium flares, preceded by 100 German POW's marching behind their country's flag and followed by Francis, several orderly officers and a small carrying party with a sideless tent, camp stools and table.



They all carry big white flags on bamboo poles (God knows where these came from). They have a bugler in front bravely blasting out the single note of the still. Not a shot is fired. They halt in the middle of no-man's land, bodies lie around from last night's failed assault. There are shell holes, barbed wire and all the dreadful bits and pieces of this man's War.

The lads put up the tent; they distribute Woodbines and matches to the Kraut prisoners and await events. A tall Oberlieutnant comes out with a couple of orderlies. He marches up close, looks Francis in the eye and doesn't say a word.

"Non spoken der Deutsch," Francis says, "we have to have an English speaker."

"No problem old chap," this dapper fellow says, "is Cambridge English okay?"

"Cambridge," Francis says, "what the fuck were you doing at Cambridge?"

"Doing Divinity," this chap says, "hope to go back and finish when this little debacle is over."

"God help me," Francis says, gesturing to the bodies and the stink and squalor of no-man's land. "You surely can't believe in God after all this."

"The writing on our belt buckles says 'God is with Us', though I don't know that he actually approved the wording."

They both laugh, which is a good start.

"I don't suppose," he says, "that you've come to debate the existence of God with about 5,000 of my country having us in their sights and their fingers on the double buttons of their machine guns."

"Not at all," Francis says. "Take a seat and I'll explain how we both can get into the history books."

Peters has given Francis a fairly simple heads of agreement that can possibly settle the issue of the War here and now, although years of minor matters will of course have to be settled.

The Kraut says, "I'm an Oberlieutnant and you appear to be a second lieutenant. It seems unlikely that you and I will settle the problems of our troubled worlds, but by all means, fire away."

SEVENTEEN

Francis runs through Peters' memorandum. Brit headquarters and staff have been the victims of a secret weapon demo that went wrong. It's all hush hush at the moment, but the dissidents, including himself, think there's a window of opportunity to end the War in principle this afternoon, if he is persuasive enough.

"Tell me the basis," he says.

"Well it's this," Francis says. "If you agree, we will eventually fire a flare, red and that's the end of the shooting on this, the Brit front. We think the French will follow, we will try to nobble Nivelle for this, and he's got nothing to lose."

"What about Foch?" the Kraut asks.

"Il Morte we plan," Francis says.

"And then....," says the Kraut.

"Well, steady return of prisoners, national anthem to be played at 11 am Saturday. We all head back, us to Paris, you to the Rhine, a 10 year non-aggression pact, no reparations at all."

"And what else?" the Kraut asks.

Francis says, "Well, we won't want you poking around our, at present, front line or vice versa. Just a standstill with an anchor guard watching the ordnance would do it until we haul it away - eastwards for you, westwards for us."

"You know," the oberlieutnant says, "the old quartermaster (General Ludendorff) is pretty pessimistic about our little war. I think he would buy it if you can get someone of substance to sign for your side."

"Agreed," Francis says, "but we will have to do all our negotiating right here to keep things in perspective and to keep the bureaucrats away. The odd star shell or two would keep things sharp."

The Kraut stands up. "I'll report back immediately. Where will we find you later?"

"Right here," Francis says.

"Hmm.... it's a bit comfortless," the German says.

"Oh it's fine," Francis says, "we will use that shell crater over there as a latrine and I'm sure the boys can manhandle up a catering cart and pull it to here, so that we can at least run to sandwiches and a cup of tea."

The Kraut party and the now released POW's march off to their front line. A couple of larks are singing in no-man's land and there is a distant drone of a plane. The guns are eerily silent. In re-reading his memoirs many years later, Francis reviews where he has written the unlikely change to end the biggest war ever. His interesting dreaming comes to a sharp end, he is nudged by the Corporal.

"Bit of noise out there," he's told.

Francis is now awake and alert and he and the other Lewis gunner get their portable machine guns ready to go and within seconds are giving heavy enfilade fire at a fair few Germans who have come over on a trench raid. They're more likely to come over in huge batches, but tonight it's a tentative trench raid and none of the raiders go back. He is accoladed and rewarded with a medal for being so alert and prepared for this ill-fated attack.

EIGHTEEN

From shooting Haig to the present blitzkrieg in no-man's land is really only fantasy, though a good story in itself. In actual fact, Peters, in making arrangements with the Light Horsemen, who he finds manning up the front line when he wants to talk to them, gets killed by a German shell when his driver unwisely uses his headlights at a crossing behind the front line. It's a Black Forrest regiment handling the German guns this night and probably some old poacher has been standing there with the gun lanyard in his hand, knowing that sooner or later a timid driver will use his headlights briefly at the cross roads his Krupp gun is zeroed in on.

A great idea thus dies still born and Francis is called up to the front line further south to train the genesis of the long-gaitered American snipers who are arriving in big numbers daily in France. The Americans, showing the contrariness that typified Black Jack Pershings slow moves to get involved in the war are not yet ready for Francis. Francis, being a sniper, is always in the front line and looks with interest at the prisoners that get brought in from the German line when some action or other cuts these men off from their army. He can't speak German, but gains a smattering of this over the long periods of the war when he's front lining. In a bit of intense fighting, Francis is a bit surprised at the numbers of prisoners being bagged up and goes over for a look see at this new phenomenon.

"What's with this lot?" he asks the interpreter (a South Australian from the German settled area around Hahndorf in the Adelaide hills).

"Don't know Francis," this chap says, "it's odd, something's going on, there's too many of the beggars."

Francis eases into the group. He isn't a German speaker, but he understands body language.

"Come along and interpret," he says and walks into the cage. He's got a fair few packets of Woodbines, the international currency, in his pockets and distributes these as he goes. He asks, in the vernacular through the interpreter as he goes, loose questions such as, how's it going, did you dine with the Quartermaster (General Ludendorff) last evening and so on. He gets a good reception until he strikes a truculent Wurtemburger who says loosely, "Up yours you Aussie bastard, we will tell you nothing."

Francis decides to bring this little effort to a head. "You Kraut bastard," he says, "you've given up without a real fight. I intend to put you in a cage with a sign in German saying 'useful collaborator' for when your mates come over."

The German pulls out a short bayonet from under his tunic and makes a savage lunge at Francis.

"Die you Englander!" he says.

Francis is not apparently armed; he holds only Woodbines in his hand, but he is also dead alert and hauls out his razor sharp trench raid hatchet from under his coat and ends the life of this truculent German with a savage and mortal hatchet chop to his neck. There are only the two allied officers in the cage and the rest of the Germans get very antsy. Francis sees an opportunity as the German lies at his feet with his life blood gushing out.

"Jesus, Francis," the interpreter says, "this is bloody dangerous."

Francis pulls out and blows a silver whistle and rifle carrying troops rush up to the cage perimeter. Francis turns to the interpreter.

“Translate quickly,” he says, “don’t show any hesitation.”

Then to the riflemen, “Shoot any bastard that moves.”

Then swiftly back to the interpreter, “Translate quick!”

The Germans get the message. Francis now says,

“I want information and if I don’t get it every third man will get the hatchet.”

He waves the weapon, red with the blood of the Wurtemburger. In an intense question and answer session lasting only minutes, he gets the broad basis of the German push that appears to be coming. He has the main points before a Captain comes rushing up to the cage wanting to know what is going on. With the dead man laying there and the Germans looking very, very apprehensive, it’s a fair question from the officer. Francis waves his hands, passes out a good quantity of Woodbines and he and the interpreter leave the cage alive.

“It’s a long story, sir,” he says to the officer, “and I think we need to share it with Military Intelligence.”

Francis has more than a passing interest in this, perhaps, German push. Military Intelligence hasn’t called it, but Francis thinks the lessening effect of the U Boat war must inevitably lead to a do or die effort by the Krauts in France. Should this happen, the golden opportunity will be there for him to spirit the Leonardo oil painting out of the Amiens town hall. As a war artist of sorts, Francis carts around a deal of sketching in cylinders. One such of these contains the fair copy he has made, complete with a matching frame. This latter he picks up earlier in a Paris frame shop. The top of the painting is attached, the rest rolled up and the ingenious structure device will pull out the sides of the painting to make it like the original. He is awaiting his Amiens opportunity, which he thinks would be when the Krauts get rolling and the inevitable chaos and terror starts prevailing at Amiens, which is only a hop step away from the German forces. This event is a little bit further away than he expects.

Francis’ fame as a depicter of the managers of the war in France continues to grow and he is called up to the 4th Army Headquarters at Querrieux. This is Birdwood’s domain; its back about eight miles from the front and the man wants to be depicted seated on his fine Irish charger ‘Sherman’. Francis does a wonderful job on the man, part completes the horse and begs off, making the excuse that he wants different material to do the horse justice. He has no intention of ever finishing this work and never does. Birdwood chased him up for the completed job, but the German push later gave Birdwood a lot to think about and he doesn’t pursue the matter, although in later years his biographer does, rather intently. Francis has a down on Birdwood, because he is well informed by Major Peters’ cousin at Headquarters of the strength and consistency that Birdwood is applying on Pearce, the Oz War Minister, to bring in the application of the British Army Act to the Australians.

In short, he wants the right to shoot Australians for military misdemeanours. The Canadians and New Zealanders foolishly agree to this and at this point in time, quite a few of them have faced the firing squad. However the legacy of Breaker Morant lives on and the Australians won’t agree to this, but he keeps pushing just the same. In fairness to Birdwood, who is Indian Army actually, he is under great pressure from Haig, Glasgow, Rawlinson, Holmes, Gough and Uncle Tim Copley and all from among the Pommy Generals. Collectively these chaps have the distinct power to raise him up or pull him down.

The ascendancy of Monash as Australian Commander eventually put paid to Birdwood, who moves onto the under resourced 5th Army. Collectively, Francis and some of the old Dalgety group decide early on that if Birdwood gets his way they will put him down (six feet down) within seven days of the Act being put into force. They have courageously dispatched a written telegram (form) acquainting him of this, for what it's worth.

Francis finishes at the chateau by knocking off a wonderful sketch of the quartermaster, who has been most hospitable to him during his stay. He portrays him at his fine desk in the graceful room that is his office and he backgrounds the sketch with the panelling, small paned windows and chintz curtains, which complement the room and the sketch.

As he works, there is a clatter of Craxwell field boots and a small party of officers arrive on the scene. They have ridden their horses over from Heilly and having stabled them in the chateau stables, have now arrived to borrow the quartermaster's car (he has two) to take them into Amiens for lunch. A tall whimsical and perhaps old (for a Lieutenant) officer gazes intently at Francis' near finished work.

"God that's amazingly good," he says.

It turns out to be an officer that, at this stage, is little known, but who becomes famous several decades later when he publishes his 'Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man' and then 'Memoirs of an Infantry Officer'. Thus Siegfried Sassoon introduces to a very interested world, his famous character George Sherston.

They are a bit on the run time-wise and learning Francis is heading in the same direction, Sassoon says,

"What about joining us and we'll take you to lunch in exchange for a good look at what you have in that huge tube there."

Francis thus dines in a green shuttered private room at the famous Godbert restaurant. They dine on langoustines, roast duckling and several bottles of excellent champagne. They slum it with sweets, old world treacle tarts topped with heaps of whipped cream. The restaurant brings in another table and Francis spreads his work out to a discerning, but appreciative audience.

"God, that's a great one of Birdwood," they say, "why haven't you finished it? The others are all totally complete."

Francis dissembles and suggests a quick walk around to the cathedral, probably the largest ecclesiastical building in France. They look at the shell holes in the roof, nothing dramatic as they have been inflicted at long, long range by a railway mounted gun.

Sassoon says to Francis, "God, I wish you could portrait me on 'Old Cockbird' (his famous hunter)."

"No probs," says Francis, "if we all survive what we are presently involved in on a daily basis I will do that as soon as we all get back to England."

Sassoon gives Francis his London addresses and phone numbers against this contingency and they all go their separate ways.

NINETEEN

Francis now gets seriously into training the American's Expeditionary Force on the ins and outs of being a sniper. The senior Yanks want them trained en situ due to their rapidly approaching entry into the War. He does this in Flanders, where the

mud precludes trenches, and abutments are used in lieu. The Germans, of course, use concrete pill boxes in this situation. The British intelligence profess little knowledge of pill boxes, but the Chicago Tribune prints a five page colour supplement on the German ones and thus they get informed fully, quite quickly. The serious work is done near Chateau Wood, a tricky area, ideal for sniping.

The Americans are very proactive and stick their heads up like turkey gobblers, with dire results from the German snipers who can't believe their luck. Seven Yanks went west the first afternoon out. However, they are good shots and quite intelligent; they learnt quickly.

Francis is generally of the opinion that there is a place in France for the



91. A NOTABLE SNIPER

periscope rifle, where the shooter shoots without making himself a target. His bosses don't agree with him. He lobbies the Yanks in the hope he can fire them up to get the Browning Company improving the Gallipoli Periscope Rifle. The Yanks have a great belief in manpower in quantity achieving results and don't pick up on the idea. This characteristic carries over later to the Normandy Landing, when this later generation of soldiers reject the British offer

of flail tanks to hit the beaches with. They pay a terrible price in loss of life due to their crassness.

The American Lieutenant in charge of the sniping contingent is an amusing chap. Joey Lamont is connected in Chicago. His Irish Boston Dad, a contemporary and friend of the later famous Joe Kennedy, does high level legal work and lobbying for the Gambini crime family in Chicago and meets and marries the youngest daughter of this Italian Mob. Joey carries the Irishness of his father with a mix of his Sicilian Mother. It's quite a combination and Joey takes to sniping, and supervising sniping like Cape Barron geese to water. They have a lot of fun and drill a whole heap of Germans together.

Francis notes the increasing number of hits from the team and also quickly realises they are shooting more Germans, mainly because there are more Germans packing into the front line area. His golden opportunity, for which he laid plans is, he thinks, about to arrive. Thus when Ludendorff makes his major attack on the Allied lines, March 21st 1918, launched to achieve a result before the Yanks get more long-gaitered troops on the ground, Francis is already out of the line and staked out near Amiens. The Germans get to within about seven miles of Amiens and the town empties out, with good reason.

About 2 am on a misty morning, he makes his move and like a wraith traverses the main and very empty streets carrying a long previously fabricated pry bar. Entry is through a back door at the town hall. The pry bar secures the forced door from inside and he has ample time to lift the alleged Leonardo from the gallery wall, to spring-load the copy and carefully put it in place. It's a perfect match if he can get out of Amiens alive. Nothing is moving as he exits the town hall. He now puts the pry bar in place and bolts it as a security bar across the forced door and with a big wrench he is carrying bolts this ever so firmly in place. There's not a soul anywhere and he cuts across to the chapter house at the cathedral and pokes the rolled up painting in its split frame into a hidey hole long selected for the purpose.

Mission accomplished, he goes into the main cathedral for a bit of a kip before returning to the front line, that is, if there is any front line left. Colonel Bruckmuller's artillery plan is brilliant and havoc reigns supreme.

Francis comes across a great many of his acquaintances, many even from Gallipoli. These older non-idealistic Australians have a built-in instinct when there's a bad one coming up. They parade and arrive at the front line and ever so silently and unobtrusively disappear to the rear. They come back later when things quieten down, or the military police catch up with them. These chaps infuriate the Poms who are running the allied war and they would dearly love to be able to shoot them for desertion. Francis however, thinks it's not Australia's war and the actions of these old sweats are a better pointer to the outcome of a push than anything else around. They have a little campfire going on the marble floor of the nave and are boiling up billy tea and cooking up a bit of damper in the coals. Francis laughs at their strong survival instinct and joins them. It must be a bad one, as they have no plans to return to the front and rather think the way the Germans are going gang busters that the front may be well on its way to come to them.

Francis camps there for the day and then fades in the dark in the general direction of Villers-Bretonneux about seven miles on. He joins the fighting streams and acquits himself well. Ludendorff changes battle plans mid-stream and throws away his golden opportunity. He's shot his bolt, but there's a great deal more fighting to come still.

Francis now gets shipped up to chateau Thierry of war fame. The Yanks, who under Pershing's direction have been pretty slow in getting up and going, now try doing their own thing and do so at Belleau Wood, a pretty wooded hillside five miles north west of the chateau. At least it was a pretty wooded hillside area. It's grown back now to near its former glory. The French designated it a Memorial Battleground post war for the 8,000 Americans that ended their day in the sun there in June 1918. It's really a French thank you to the Americans for taking the heat off them at that time. It's not a good battle for snipers; it's far too rushed and volatile.

Sadly Joey Lamont gets a bit overconfident and having dispatched two German snipers in quick order, surveys the scene for his next target. A phlegmatic German ends his life and career. Francis has only just that day completed a beautiful sketch of Joey holding his specially built Remington rifle and standing in a trench. It's very striking and catches the mercurial temperament and ebullient style of the man. Later in Paris, Francis posts this off in a roll to his parents, explaining the background and expressing his sympathy at their loss. They write back later; their letter chases Francis all over the front, where the powers that be want sniping done. It reminds Francis of the line from Banjo Patterson's famous poem (The Travelling Post Office) 'My letter chases Conroy's sheep, along the Castlereagh'. Anyway, they want Francis to attend a memorial service for Joey in Chicago Catholic Cathedral after the war. All Francis has to do is present himself at Coutts Bank and they'll make and pay for all the arrangements. Francis writes back. He accepts, conditional on being on deck when the war ends. He is sort of feeling that he has pushed his luck a fair way in this seemingly never ending outdoor inferno.

While the German army has blinked it's really the privations in Germany that are pulling them down. There is still though, plenty of fight left in them and they are as ever, very good soldiers. Haig and Foch are keeping as much pressure on them

as they can. After the fighting at Montbrehain, behind the Hindenburg Line, the Australians are withdrawn from battle and go back to rest and regroup. It's really the end of their war, except for the artillery, who accompanies the British and American troops. Francis, through his work with the Americans, stays in the action and almost goes out the hard way when a very good Kraut sniper takes the top off his left ear.

TWENTY

Back in the line, with a stitched up and plastered ear, Francis goes to a deal of trouble fitting a plaster of Paris head onto a bevelled trench slide. They place an irresistible magnet on the head of the bust, ie, an officer's cap. Francis sets this all up in the dark and moves up the trench to a bombing sap and sets up a periscope rifle. It's the one he used on occasion at Gallipoli and did well with it there. Once properly sighted in they are very effective and he discreetly starts to inch up the bust target. The German they are laying for is a tad eager; he's a good shot and has had a deal of shooting luck of late. He waits a bit longer and then puts a bullet through the plaster head; almost simultaneously Francis ever so softly squeezes the trigger of his .303 and drills this man, taking off the top of his head. As things turn out, it's not his last shot of this man's war, but it's his last notch on his rifle butt, metaphorically speaking.

The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month is close to hand. The front lines are standing easy, but vigilant. The soldiers see the hand of Winston Churchill, the Minister for Munitions in the selection of this time, to close the war down, old Haig has no imagination. Francis has a bit of a down on a very competent machine-gun post that has been causing them angst. He sights his periscope rifle again in a handy bombing sap and sights in on the nest. He hopes to have these devils in the history books, as the last German casualties of the war. At two and a half minutes before 11 am, they bustle and start firing, skimming the British trench top. Francis is sighting easy, but also has a pocket watch hanging on a bayonet just in front of him in the sap. With one eye on this and the other on his target, he is confident he will pink the shooter the minute they stop firing. They don't; it's the longest sustained single machine-gun burst of the war and it only stops at 11 am. Francis is pissed, he has lost his anticipated moment. The machine-gun trio confidently stand up in their pit and stiffly bow to the British lines.

"Ah heck," says Francis, "that was a class act. Let's give the beggars a clap."

And they do. The only thing missing from the final curtain is Spider Keppel and his hunting horn. No doubt wherever Spider is in the rear lines, he will be skilfully playing, 'Gone to Earth' with great facility. The Poms keep Francis busy sketching this one and that one, until December 21st, on which date he sets off on leave via Amiens, where he picks up and tubes his Leonardo lying untouched in the chapter house hidey hole.

The next day or rather the day after, he is spruced up and in London and has a go at taking his sculptress to tea at the Ritz. This is, of course, a great London tradition (and still is 90 plus years on). The Ritz is loosely designed on the lines of a French country house, most pleasant.

"Tea for two," Francis says to the waiter. The war's over, but this is still red tab and politician's country.

"Can't be done, sir," the waiter says.

"Why not?" Francis says, "There's plenty of tables."

"Well..... sir," the waiter temporises.

Francis looks down at him from his great height and looks him in the eye the same way he looks at impending sniping targets. The waiter reads the implied threat.

"Well..... sir," he says, "it's not life or death, it's only tea at the Ritz," and takes them in the direction of the very best table in the room. The head waiter crosses their path, it's his bailiwick. Francis gives him the same look; the head waiter takes in the look, the damaged ear, the puckered scar on the forehead and hastily reverses his stance.

"Enjoy, sir and madam," he says.

"Did you put the hex on him Francis?" the sculptress says.

"Not at all," says Francis, "I was only clearing my throat to ask him if the cucumber sandwiches are good today."

After this little outing, Francis meets his blonde nurse at Euston and they train north from London on their first post-war Christmas eve. They train to Kendal for a six day break. They walk and talk and do just about everything in the snowed-in land of the lakes.

Midway through their very active little holiday, they get a day where hints of sunshine enliven the snow covered landscape. They ferry up the lake from Bowness where they are staying, to Waterhead. Francis carries his sketching gear in a flat flax folder and does a marvellous little sketch that impresses even himself, of the blonde nurse with Grassmere church tower in the background. The sketch picks up the reflected sunshine off the snow covered road on which Francis is standing in the middle of, sketching (it's only a narrow snow covered black top, no traffic due to the snow drifts). As he is intently concentrating on the sketch, a tall man in a beautifully cut military coat comes along with a handsome 35ish woman on his arm. They are both, like Francis and his girl, suitably attired for the snow conditions. They stand behind Francis and watch him working.

The woman says, "Hugh dear, that's absolutely beautiful."

He eyes Francis as he finishes the sketch.

"Would you portrait my lady in the same spot?" he diffidently asks. "I'd pay."

Francis gives him a steely look. "I'm not a commercial artist, Sir."

Francis then recognises the man; it's the tall staff officer who observed him observing Haig at Montreuil, when the idea of shooting Haig was around. He's also, at the same time, lamped Francis and goes to speak. Francis shushes him, puts up his hand.

"Sure," Francis says, "stand there and I'll do you both."

The girl is gobsmacked, very pleased.

"Please, please, please Hugh," she says.

"Umm, awkward," he says, "awkward....." he trails off.

Francis gets the picture. "Oh, we'll do you separately," he says.

Ten minutes sees her portrait out, she has a marvellous face, all planes and angles. He moves the officer up a bit and only backgrounds the portrait with a bit of the church stone and blurs the real background. He runs the portrait past their delighted

and joint gaze, rolls them up and places both in a spare tube. Francis hands this to the officer.

“Happy New Year, sir and madam,” he says. The subjects walk away arm in arm, carrying the cardboard tube, in the direction of Chapel Stile.

“Gosh, that was nice of you,” the nurse says.

Francis looks at the retreating figures walking out of his life and wonders what the future holds from them.

TWENTY ONE

Their ‘oh so pleasant’ sojourn in Lakeland comes to an end when the blonde nurse is due back at the hospital. They train to London and with the girl back at work, Francis looks up his sculptress friend and they go down to Brighton for ten days. It’s a bleak time in England, but the weather isn’t bad on the South coast and they have a pleasant and entertaining time there, which comes to an end in the middle of one afternoon.

They are enjoying a Devonshire tea on the Promenade, when along comes a King’s Messenger accompanied by several local Bobbies, who have been enlisted to help track Francis down. The War Office wants Francis, complete with sketching gear, at Versailles for the peace conference, which kicks off on the 18th, seven days away. They have got a bit panicky at his absence. The war’s over, liberty hall is perhaps back and Francis has been trading on this to unofficially extend his leave. Anyway the War Office, having found him, is not keen to lose track of him again in view of how the peace conference is coming up fast. The King’s messenger has a car and driver, so after hastily packing and checking out of their small private hotel, it’s on to London and an appointment next morning to sort out his duties.

Francis is very cordially received at the War Office, almost suspiciously so. They settle his duties in Paris, make army accommodation available at Vincennes and agree to his little deal that he takes the sculptress along to do some sculpting work at the conference. It’s all settled amicably and the Australian army liaison officer now joins them and acquaints Francis with the news that he’s been promoted upwards, a captaincy no less. Francis is very surprised, he expects no promotions. His independent role in the war as a sniper and sometimes war artist has given him exceptional freedom of movement and this has upset the rigid minds of officialdom quite a bit. Also, Birdwood is getting a bit querulous about the non-arrival of his equestrian portrait.

“I’m surprised,” Francis says.

“Well yes, but one way and another you’ve contributed greatly to our war effort,” the major says. “Apart from retail sniping, you did a good job in training the Yanks for wholesale sniping. Also you have drawn beautifully, the great and famous.”

“I doubt,” Francis says, “if my drawing efforts will have contributed to this surprising elevation of rank.”

“And you’d be dead right,” the Major says. “You can thank the Yanks really, they insisted on it.”

“Well, that’s all good news,” Francis says. “There’s got to be a catch in this.” The major laughs, “Well they want you to portrait Blamey.”

He’s from Wagga Wagga in NSW and is Chief of Staff to General Monash.

Francis doesn’t like him and has ducked several requests to do this sketching

earlier.

The major grins, "You can't get out of it this time." He is aware of the earlier play.

"Hmmm," says Francis, "if I have to. I suppose I have to, but I don't think he will be happy with his picture."

In situations where jobs such as this are foisted on him, Francis has been known to draw his subjects in such a way that they are too true to life and seldom get hung.

TWENTY TWO

Francis catches the channel ferry with the sculptress. In his later memoirs he says:

'If ever you are in the Smithsonian Institute and look hard, you will find a very fine crayon drawing of General Pershing, at one with an accompanying very fine bronze bust of him (again). Both emanate from a fourteen minute sitting he gave the pair on the garden terrace at Versailles at high summer in 1919. The hall of mirrors is just above where they sketch him. Everybody at Versailles is quite busy. They are burying the late war and solidly laying the foundations for the next one. Blind Freddy can see it, but not the punitive decision makers.'

The army want him to do a portrait of General Pershing; he thus talks to his Aide, captain Carstairs. Nice chap, old South.

"Hard to fit in," he says.

"Hmmm," Francis says, "cozen him out and sit him there on the steps for ten minutes at the end of this session," (it's a military session).



"Black Jack" Pershing (left), commander of the US Expeditionary Force in Europe in the First World War.

"Okay," he says and does.

Pershing (Black Jack) is a wonderful subject and Francis runs a two sketch easel for him; one for him, one for the army, the sculptor also sketches away madly back and front, head only of course.

They finish in fourteen minutes from go to whoa. Pershing's delighted with the finished product.

"Well done soldier," he says. He hesitates and then hesitates a bit more. Francis wonders what's coming; he's a no hesitation man.

"Haig doesn't like you," he says, "something about assassinating Military Police."

This makes Francis jump I can tell you, they've had a sniff of his trail.

"Oh, General," he says, "I was asked to snipe him once."

"Why didn't you?" Pershing asks.

"Oh, I thought we might finish up with Allenby in his place."

Perhaps to put Allenby of Jerusalem, later Baron Megiddo in perspective, he is the character that C.S. Forrester built his extraordinary novel 'The General'

around, it's a bit hard to find these days, but do read it.

Back to Pershing. He roars with laughter at Francis' comment.

"Oh, what a thought, soldier, what a pity I didn't discover you while the war was on."

"My loss entirely, General," he says.

He becomes serious. "Anything I can do for you?" he asks.

Francis muses. "Honorary rank in your 41st Rifle Brigade would satisfy my soul General."

Pershing pulls his chin. "What rank?" he barks.

"Whatever," Francis replies. He's now finished with him.

"It will be done," he says. He points to his Aide, who is standing by to receive the portrait, which Francis has been putting into a cardboard tube. "See to it, Carstairs," and in the fullness of time they do.

As Pershing, something of a magnet to men, moves off, Old Rawly comes bumbling along. Rawly is Henry Seymour Rawlinson, the 1st Baron Rawlinson, a huge loser at the Battle of the Somme and a huge winner with five hundred tanks at the remarkable Battle of Amiens two years later. He's the luckiest General there ever was. He stops, looks at Francis and says,

"You've never drawn me, Soldier."

There are a lot of possible replies to this, but why should Francis prick his balloon.

"Sit on the garden box there, General," he says, pointing to one of the many that dot the terrace. "I'll be with you momentarily."

So he does and Francis does.

He's reasonably polite and takes his sketch away. It's a beauty by the way and is now in the Imperial War Museum; just take a tube to the Elephant and Castle stop. It's worth real money today. In later life, Francis names a racehorse, Rawlinson, and wins both the Perth Cup hurdles and the Metropolitan Handicap with him. The luck must have rubbed off. Rawly later becomes C in C in India and dies there about six years later after an operation. When Francis sketched him on the sun-drenched terrace of Versailles in May 1919, he looked good for another fifty years.

TWENTY THREE

There is talk of Francis drawing Woodrow Wilson. Poor old Woodrow, he should have stayed back in Fortress America in his ivory tower. Although his 14 point peace plan is the catalyst that got the German's on the armistice path, he is no match for the territorial old Europeans. He gets done like a dinner and then hammered by his own mob when he goes home in June.

Francis has the opportunity to draw Foch and Pau. He has doubts about their soldiering, but they are without a shadow of a doubt the very best of subjects; hoary, portly, shrewd as Gardies and up to the game. He is delighted to draw them, and together. One thing Francis has learned about the leading soldiers is that they are egocentric and don't want anyone, anyone at all, sharing their picture. Francis once does a sketch of Haig in evening candlelight and draws a monstrous shadow in the background. He calls it Haig and his ego. He never circulates this and in very later life he sells the original to a history minded Japanese industrialist for telephone

numbers. The Brit army want a lot more work out of Francis, but he has a commitment in the USA coming up.

He concentrates on providing the needed provenance for the huge heap of both war and Versailles portraits that he has executed. He puts a standard form on the back of each copy, naming the subject, the date pictured, where it was done, who was present. He gets to his portrait of William Morris (Billy) Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia; star of the bitter conscription rallies and the Referenda. He's a rat faced little Welshman who has an astonishingly long career in the Australian Parliament. Instead of provenancing this very excellent portrait, Francis burns it. The Government makes enquiries as to its whereabouts in later years. Francis has learned from the French, he just gives an expressive shrug.

TWENTY FOUR

Francis now catches the boat train to Southampton. The Lamonts' bankers, Coutts Bank, have made all the arrangements and have given him a bank draft for expenses that will be incurred, but also advise him that a pursers account on board has been opened to cover drinks or any other items needed en route, also that the purser will handle all tips to staff and so on. It's all very thoughtful and at no cost whatsoever to Francis. The strength, or rather the financial strength, of the Lamonts' shows up on the Liner. He's at the Captain's table no less and strikes up a fun relationship first night out with Patsy Staniforth-Smith, stepdaughter of the Governor General of Canada.

The weather on the crossing is doggy and while they dine and dance of an evening, deck activities are difficult due to the squalls and rain, so bridge becomes the choice of the day. Francis is a well taught bridge player. His father and Father Patrick from the Catholic Church in Bruce Rock, co-opt the boys on many Saturday nights to make up a bridge four. They enjoy it, they're good mates with both Dad and the priest so it's the least they can do. Francis and Patsy become inseparable and he holds his end up well. Still in uniform, he has no tricky dress decisions to make.

In no time at all they berth at the boat area of lower Manhattan and as the gangways are run out Francis is very pleased to see Captain Carstairs holding up a big sign reading Sniper Captain FHG Colless and another smooth looking party holding something similar, reading Captain Colless. For her part Patsy is thrilled to see her Mum and Stepdad present on the dock, well attended by their flunkies and an escort from the New York Police Department.

There is quite a bit of mixing and confusion between all the parties, but the upshot is, the Lamont emissaries tell Francis he is booked into the Waldorf and their instructions are to take him there, settle him in and take him sight-seeing or whatever he wishes. Francis is a bit stunned; he imagines he would have found himself a cheap room in the Bronx. In an aside, Carstairs tells Francis that the Lamonts have the clout to direct the Illinois electoral vote to the Grand Old Party or the Democrats, as they wish.

"Don't let it go to your head Francis, these fellows have nothing but serious clout."

While he is sorting this all out, Patsy brings along her Mum and Stepdad to meet Francis. They click and immediately invite him to dine with them Saturday

evening while they entertain the rich and famous at the Waldorf. They are trebly impressed to hear that that is where he is staying anyway. Francis, Carstairs and the Lamont chaps now adjourn to the Waldorf and settle down to a drink in club chairs with a view of the east river through the picture windows of the suite. Saturday night rolls around along with the Governor General's dinner party. Among the VIP's, surprisingly, is Winston Churchill, who is in America negotiating book contracts. Churchill writes for his living and the USA is a prime consumer of what he writes and the funder of what he is writing, so he's in New York a lot. At the port, brandy and cigars stage of the evening, Churchill growls at Francis, "I suppose you blame me for Gallipoli?"

Francis takes a pull on his cigar and replies, "Not at all, good idea, bad stuff up on the landing site. I think," he continues, "your naval men have a lot to answer for. A bit more gutsy action on their part would have got them through and once through, the landing would never have been necessary."

"Hmmm," says Churchill, "the Navy you say."

(Churchill of course ran the Navy.)

Francis digs a little bit deeper. "They were pretty inanimate at Jutland too." For once, Churchill doesn't fight on and the conversation lapses.

Churchill thinks again and ripostes, "But you're only a rifleman."

"Yes," says Francis, "but a keen observer of the scene too."

Patsy is disappointed not to be able to see more of Francis and her Stepdad invites him to visit them as a houseguest at Government House in Canada. Francis can hardly refuse and says yes immediately and does make the visit some weeks later. It's a great success and an eye opener. Francis, many years later, becomes the acting American Consul in Western Australia and a lot of what he learns on this visit proves very helpful.

TWENTY FIVE

Francis now finds himself in Chicago at Joey's memorial service. It's bigger than Ben Hur. He reads the second lesson from St Paul's letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 6) solemnly and well and then, lightening up says,

"Those of us who knew the soldier we are remembering and honouring today, know that St Paul's letter to St Timothy might also be fitted in here. In Timothy 23, St Paul said 'Drink not only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and other ailments'."

Then again getting serious, Francis produces the package that he has carried to the Lectern and says,

"I have here the army rifle that the very first American snipers, starting with Joey Lamont, were trained on in France in the Front Line near Chateau Wood. It's as much a part of US history as the weapons from Bloody Angle in the Civil War are. If General Pershing's Aide will come forward, I would like to present it to him, to hopefully get to the Smithsonian Museum".

Carstairs, who is taking post on Pershing as usual springs up to comply, but Pershing, who is in the front row, growls at him and calls him back. He comes

up himself. There is no greater honour going today in this great republic. Pershing stands up straight and sotto voce asks,

“Does Haig know that you’re giving away British Army Ordinance?”

“Oh, not at all, Sir,” Francis says.

Black Jack takes the mike.

“This young soldier,” he says, “who we sometimes referred to as Michelangelo with a machine-gun, (he gestures at Francis’ portrait of Joey on the steps of the altar) taught our men how to take enemy life, but also how best to preserve theirs. In recognition of this work the Army appointed him Major (Honorary) in the 41st U.S. Rifle Brigade on the 1st June this year. We salute him and wish him well.”

He salutes, Francis salutes and they go down into the body of the Cathedral.

TWENTY SIX

The Chicago Tribune, the New York Times and eventually the English Times shower honour and fame on Francis. It’s a dashed queer reward for a young man who has painted the deserving and undeserving of this world, shot Turks one day and Germans the next (and a couple of British Military Police) and who has chopped into German troops with a hatchet on trench raids.

In later years, he is asked in a TV interview if he harbours any regrets. He replies, “Well, I was once asked to snipe General Haig,.....” and let it trail off.

“What was Haig like?” the anchorman asks.

Francis ponders. “He had the clearest gaze; it was as though he was looking into the middle distance at some vision not apparent to the rest of us.”

“Did other Aussies think that?” he asks.

“Oh not at all,” he replies. “Most of my mates always maintained that the lights were on, but no-one was at home.”

The day or so after the service Francis meets Joey’s extended family. He goes with them to Benediction on Sunday evening and accepts an invitation to lunch with Lamont Pere on Monday. They have a chat and Lamont asks Francis what he can do for him while he is there. Francis is in the heartland of the Mid West and tells Lamont that he would like to talk to grain farmers and get a picture on the latest farm equipment. He also explains that he has an old Master to sell, but he’s a stranger in a strange land. After an excellent lunch at a German restaurant (soft shell crab, German beer, etc) Lamont gets things going. The upshot of all this is that the Hearst Foundation art buyer is in Chicago next afternoon.

They use the Lamont boardroom in the famous Wrigley building to fine tooth comb the painting; they agree on its authenticity and make an unbelievable offer to Francis. They can buy it legally, some USA statute of the spoils of war. He sells, then under arrangements made by Lamont, does the rounds of the farms and buys and pays for three tractors, plus spares. Two Caterpillars and a Cletrac; farmers vouch for all three as being the very best gear available and demonstrate theirs on the midsummer farmland. Francis is impressed and they make forwarding arrangements to Western Australia.

Lamont advises him of the huge windfall and Francis, now a wealthy man, stashes a big heap of gold in a security box and also buys stocks recommended by the Lamonts. They have looked after him very well and they remain friends forever.

Francis returns to the Waldorf and is having a pleasant drink in his suite, when there's a sharp rap on the door and Pershing's Aide, Carstairs, makes his appearance. Francis welcomes him, pours him a drink and they settle into club chairs. He tells Francis that Pershing has sent him. They are going, via a courtesy call at the White House, to Philadelphia where Black Jack is to deliver an address to the famous and well-connected Pickwick Club in this city. This Club it seems is pure Dickens and they have in years past, erected the only statue in the world to Dickens. He is depicted with his famous character, 'Little Nell'.

"You must come, Francis," Carstairs says. "Few people in this life get such an invitation."

The White House visit is short and informal. President Woodrow Wilson is only just back from his disappointing Peace Conference and is already under attack from Congress. However he stands them a drink in the Oval Office and then they are on their way to Philadelphia.

TWENTY SEVEN

Philly, the seaport town, is the fourth largest population centre in the US of A at that time. It's so steeped in the history of this great republic that it's too daunting to start to mention the highlights. Suffice to say, that late afternoon Francis' party is seated in the front row of a performance by Sol Demetrious, arguably the finest organist in the world, playing a virtuoso performance on the biggest pipe organ in the world.

He's well into the programme when the Pershing party arrives (this is known and expected) and he has saved his best pieces to last. The front pew is now filled with the rich and famous of the sovereign state of Pennsylvania. Sol is up to the game and he sure rattles the ancient rafters of the hall. For the finale to out finale all finales, he stands up and bows to General Pershing. When the clapping subsides he leads subtly and then enormously, strongly into the very best version ever anywhere of 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. It sure brings the house down. The world stands, hand on heart as he finishes on the 'Star Spangled Banner'.

The press pick up on the party, Francis to the fore, at this performance and the Philadelphia Examiner, the New York Times and all the matched services run these pictures around the world. The caption reads 'The Bruce Rock Boy mixes it with the great and famous of the great republic at Philadelphia'. There is no doubt about Pershing at this time; he is the magnet of all times in drawing press and people's attention.

They now gather for dinner in the quaint and Dickens style era clubrooms of the Dickens Club Rooms. Georgian windows and architecture, more English than England. They, the members, are dressed in keeping. They present the visiting party with cased Dickens' pipes and a leather roll of shag tobacco; they all eventually have a puff. Francis has his still nearly a lifetime later.

They address Pershing as today's guest of honour and why not, thanks to the

late arriving patriotism of the Americans and the power of the popular press, he's the very best known in America. Black Jack stands up straight, he's totally imposing, and he speaks very well in reply. He does Francis the very great honour of calling on him to say a few words. Francis stands up, looks around this famous assembly, he's not expecting this, although he's starting to find out in all dealings with this famous General, it's wise to expect the unexpected. He has a pull at his pipe, considers, you could have heard a penny drop, the audience, experienced as they are, are in the palm of his hand.

Francis says, "Just weeks back, we were crouching in trenches on the Western Front. Shooting and being shot at. We hardly expected to survive the next rush, indeed the statistics that we would ever do so were not on our side."

"However," he continues, "providence, or the good Lord (whom we hoped was on our side) put us on the same category of that of Doctor Manet in Dickens' famous, totally famous and deservedly so, 'Tale of Two Cities'. We have been recalled to life, truly recalled to life. What we make of this life, a life we never truly expected to have, is up to each and every one of us to use to the best possible purposes and really for the good of our fellow man."

It goes down well. Francis sits down to sustained applause, standing applause at that and no less than the club members and the General accord him a standing ovation. Francis sits bemused, he relights his pipe with the Club provided tapers, sits there in his Australian army uniform, medal ribbons on the jacket. He feels at home, it's part of a timeless period. Later, they take time out to look at the only statue of Charles Dickens in this wide world. It portrays the famous writer, a keen devotee of the USA with his famous character, Little Nell. It caps a magic evening. But Francis also expects to sing for his supper. As the members disperse and mix around the fine old club rooms, Francis unlimbers his sketching easel, he sits Angus Rodean, the President of the Pickwick Club and Black Jack together by the old world fire mantelpiece and seats Carstairs just a bit back.

In a twelve minute burst, he runs off three really good pastel portraits, holding up his hand, he holds them in place while he does his own copy. One he hands to Rodean. It hangs today in the Pickwick Club and would command a huge price on the open market. Black Jack's copy and that of Carstairs, he puts in cardboard tubes for them to carry away. Black Jack already has the one that Francis did of him at Versailles; Carstairs is very, very chuffed with his. Later, when a deal of time has gone by, he returns the compliment in another form.

TWENTY EIGHT

The following morning Pershing, Carstairs and Francis board the Senator fast train back to New York, where Pershing has commitments later in the day. Black Jack has his own personal Pullman car, a perk of the job. They settle back in comfort and watch the verdant greenness of Pennsylvania flash by.

"You know Francis," Pershing says, "I'd be interested to hear your overview of the late war. I've been a bit high up one end of it whilst you've been in it from the jump at the coal face."

"Not entirely, General," Francis says, "I didn't rush into joining up. The reason being, I was far too preoccupied with making music with a beautiful co-worker,

but the time came.”

“That’s all to your common sense and credit,” Pershing says, “let’s face it, love and sex make our funny old world go round. However, I want your views. Spit it out man.”

Carstairs pours him a snifter of very good brandy.

“Come on Francis,” he says. They light cigars, sip their brandy.

“Well General,” Francis says, “here’s the two dollar trip. Gallipoli was a lost cause from day one, but due and due only to landing where we did. It was inexcusable and Hamilton should have been shot. The war in France was similarly a lost cause from the day that army movement absolutely stopped and we burrowed like rabbits into the ground. The equation of fighting a Peninsula type Wellington war could never work; it was flesh and blood up against barbed wire and machine guns. But the Brits would never acknowledge this. But what can you expect from Generals who, at huge cost and work, maintained, God help us, hordes of cavalry regiments in France. How double thick could anyone be, especially these managers of the war?”

“Hmmm,” Pershing says, “and your Generals?”

“Well,” Francis says, “Plumer is the best by country miles. It would never have gone on the way it did if he had been boss cocky.”

“And a good Lieutenant?”

“Oh, the old artillery man, Horne,” Francis says. “He is smart too.”

“The French?” he asks.

“Brave but erratic,” Francis says. “Their best contribution was their .75mm field gun, it’s a beauty.”

“And of the Germans?” Pershing asks.

“Oh....” Francis says, “They could never have packed it in if the old Quartermaster (Ludendorff) hadn’t gone to water.”

“And of the future?” Pershing asks.

“Not good,” Francis says, showing considerable foresight. “The Huns will be back and the French will never fight with any commitment again.”

“Your mob were amazing,” Pershing says, “shock troops, the very best”.

“That’s so,” Francis says, “but not everyone’s heart was in the melee. Plenty of the older chaps evaporated just before every big push and turned up later. They were the realists of the show and to some extent, reliable barometers of what was about to happen. I certainly took notice of what they did even if Monash and his sidekick Blamey didn’t.”

“Top them up Carstairs and find some more cigars,” Pershing says. “What direction should we take in our arms development, Francis?” he asks.

“Oh..... that’s easy,” Francis says, “the Air Force is now your eyes and ears, the Krauts, not being slow learners, will be bang on into better tanks within months. You need something with the power of a French .75mm that can be fired and most importantly be carried by one man and something pressure activated that can blow tracks off tanks. You need short barrelled quick firing assault rifles patterned on the German Luger and Mauser. You need better means of dispensing disabling gases; surely Mustard gas has proved that. Submarines will always be handy to have.”

“What about ships?” Pershing asks.

“Well General,” Francis says, “so long as I can find a ship to get me home, I

hope, trust and pray that I never see one of them again.”

Having resolved the future of future ordinance, they relax and talk of lighter things until they roll into Grand Central.

Pershing says, “I don’t know if or when our paths will cross again, but you talk very good sense and I’ve listened. Before you boat out tomorrow, as you’re an Honorary Major, I’ll see that Carstairs here fits you out with a new AEF uniform and a surprise or two.”

Next day near sailing time, Carstairs lobs along with a flat boxed parcel.

“That’s your uniform Francis,” he says. “You’re entitled to it and here’s the surprise - it’s an army pay book.” Pershing has put Francis on half Major’s pay and he continues to draw this until he turns seventy.

In parting, Carstairs says, “You seem convinced the Germans will come again and if you’re right in the long term I’m sure we’ll meet again.” And they do in Baltimore 22 years later.

TWENTY NINE

Francis is standing on Constitution Hill and sketching a mounted man in Green Park. The subject is Captain George Sherston/Siegfried Sassoon, as you will. The horse is an eye filling very light bay. It’s a beauty and really too small for Sherston’s height. It’s beautifully saddled and bridled with the simplest of good looking gear, small park saddle and light bridle. Sherston is sitting whimsically at ease on the horse.

Francis is well along with this effort, the colour of the horse is absolutely true to life. A young police constable comes along.



Breaker Morant: Example saved Australians from execution in World War I.

“This looks a bit irregular to me, Sirs,” he says.

“Horses are Hyde Park, not Green Park.”

“True, true,” says Francis, “but there’s a good reason. Anyway, Captain Sherston (Military Medal) is a war hero, best leave it alone.”

The young copper rolls his eyes.

“Tell you what,” Francis says, “why not just stand there by the railing and I’ll sketch you in.”

The copper looks at the painting.

“If I can look as good as the horse Sir,” he says and takes position.

The finished result now hangs in the National Gallery. The inclusion of the copper took it out of the ordinary and the plaque on the frame reads ‘Captain

George Sherston MM and PC Carswell in Green Park August 12th 1919’. But it’s not all painting. Sassoon lounging on the horse stiffens up and snaps a salute. Francis stops his intense work for just a minute and lamps three Military Officers in full dress uniform walking along the roadway. The first is Rawlinson, he stops.

“Well Captain,” he says, “you surely have been mixing with the rich and famous in the Colonies.”

He is of course referring to the extensive pictorial coverage Francis has been afforded at the Chicago Memorial Service, visiting the White House hall in Philadelphia.

“General,” he says, “I was there solely for a serious purpose.”

Birdwood now has a say. “You’ve had a lucky war, Captain.”

“In what way, Sir?” Francis asks.

His mean faced adjutant, the famous, or infamous, Major Greenway replies for him, he chops in. “You’re still alive, which is more than we can say about Captain Smyth-Parsons.” (The headquarters chap chopped on the paved road in the midst of the trench raid objection.)

Francis waits. Still as still, all snipers are good at waiting. Greenway goes on, “We always thought you had something to do with that event.” he says.

Francis deliberates. He crosses the Rubicon.

“You know, Greenway,” he says, “I’m well aware that your General here signed off on letters written by you to our Minister of War, seeking the right to shoot Australians wholesale and I know you would have done that if you could have. The question of the loss of one life, however promising, of one soldier to save that of many and him a Pommy at that, is really small beer.”

“That’s insulting,” Greenway says, “You’re still in uniform. I could have you for that.”

Francis chuckles. “But you can’t shoot me,” he says.

The two Generals start to shuffle a bit; the turn of the exchange has now gotten bitter. Francis becomes serious again.

“Greenway,” he says. “We do not wish you well. If you take any steps to impinge on my liberty, someone, somewhere, will put a sniper’s bullet between your oh so close together eyes.”

Francis snaps to attention, snaps a salute to the two Generals, ignores Greenway and in the best tradition of the USA, from which he has just returned, says, “Have a nice day Generals.”

He reads later they were on their way to a dinner honouring the Duke of Wellington’s birthday at Apsley House next to the entrance to Hyde Park; it’s just along a bit.

Sassoon has been within earshot of all this, he grins, resumes his easy seat on the horse and says, “Captain Francis, do remind me never to upset you.”

The painting finished, Sassoon heads back to the Hyde Park stables. Francis follows along and Sassoon produces a delightful little picnic basket and iced champagne, with which they sit on a park bench and relax and enjoy.

THIRTY

The troop ships are still running and do so for yet another year. Francis returns to Fremantle on the same ship that took him over. The adjutant of 11th Battalion meets him on the wharf and carrying his kit bag, periscope and rifle, loads him into an army car right on the wharf. They go into Perth and Francis gets stood lunch at the Weld Club. He’s quite at home there; he has been in similar often in his latter days in London. The OC arrives to join them with the famous Tommy Todd, head of the 10th Light Horse. They lunch delightfully at a table set up looking onto the bowling green.

Francis has his gear with him and offers, and they accept to be sketched on the spot. He sets up his easel in seconds and waves the adjutant into the picture a whisker back, the adjutant defers a bit, but Francis says, “the war’s over, let’s be a bit democratic.”

Francis double easels and repeats this sketch, but moves them around a bit for the second effort. He's lightning fast at this sort of work and in no time, he has handed them each their copy. They are all very chuffed at this and sit back to admire themselves and to sip very excellent brandy and puff also very excellent, cigars.

"What of the future, Francis?" they ask. "Do you want to stay in the army? We would be glad to have you stay."

"God no," Francis says. "I've had my fill of war and fighting. I want to put it all behind me (he little knows there is a lot more fighting he will see twenty years on). I have to report in to the Bank up the street a bit when we finish lunch and perhaps bank work and a bit of sharecropping may take up my time."

"Hmmm," the adjutant says, "well, we certainly wish you well. Is there anything, anything at all we can do for you?"

Francis takes a cogitative pull on his cigar. "I want to borrow a field gun."

"You want to borrow fucking what?" the Light Horseman ejaculates.

Francis grins. "Nothing serious, but yet serious," he says. "I want to put a few ghosts of war to rest at Bruce Rock and I'd like to do that in about three weeks." He explains; they nod immediate agreement.

Francis now arranges for the Adjutant to cloak his gear at the railway station and to organise a ticket and they agree to meet at 5 pm there, for a send-off drink at the Station bar. Thus unencumbered, Francis walks up to the bank where his arrival, to put it mildly, creates a huge stir. His real fame has preceded him. In no time he is being tendered tea and biscuits with the trio who run the bank, in the fine old boardroom. Francis tenders his pistol, bank property, they refuse to accept.



"It's yours," they say. "We would be honoured for you to keep it. We will transfer the license within days."

"Now," they continue, "what's next? We want you back as soon as you're ready."

"Doing what?" Francis asks.

The Chairman says, "I fear you will find office work a bit dull after what you have been through. What about fieldwork? The bank has a huge expansion programme planned in land development, particularly in the Eastern

Wheatbelt. The pressure to resettle returned men is something the Politicians cannot avoid and there's plenty of Commonwealth money coming our way to lend out and manage. Also we can threaten the bad payers with sending you out."

Thus, over afternoon tea, Francis settles his future. He will take up a senior posting as bank Inspector; with a month off of paid leave for seeding and a month unpaid leave for harvest.

THIRTY ONE

On the 21st day of October 1919, Francis gets off the train at Bruce Rock and walks home. By the time Dad gets home from work he has an excellent small roast of beef and four veg (picked up in Merredin when changing trains) on the go. There's only Dad and Francis now. The younger brother goes west at the second battle of Gaza.

"Who shall we invite around?" Dad rhetorically asks.

"No one," Francis says, "just let's have a nice evening."

And they do and drink the only toast from a bottle of red to their lost son and brother. They both have a little cry.

Francis visits the old bank next morning and catches up with the news. He finds, to his surprise that Brendon doesn't make it home. (He gets done in around Poelcapelle when the Krauts push hard) He waits a few days. The girl hears and comes around looking for him. He has a little portrait to give her of Brendon in the shell crater at Noreuil. She takes it, hugs Francis hard and bursts into tears. She settles down, whispers in Francis' ear. "Where can we go?"

In desperation they walk over in the twilight to their old trysting place in the show grounds loose box, throw a horse rug on the stable floor and become one again. Later, replete, they lie there.

"Marriage?" she breathes.

"Of course," Francis says. "I'm effecting a bit of closure for Brendon and the rest of the boys on November 11th. We can marry the following weekend if Father Patrick agrees."

It's a done deal, but Francis has no idea of the troubles to come. He goes out to the Johns' farm. His love has lived there in the house she and Brendon set up, but only lived there days before he shipped out. Johns Senior continued to live in the main house after his wife died and he has taken his main meal at the Brendon house every day since. He's in the farm workshop when Francis gangles his long frame in.

"Well hello, Francis," he says. He stops, looks at Francis. "You went away a very affable though reserved young man, you're still young, but you have a very different look now."

John really has paraphrased. Patsy Adam-Smith's famous words in her book, 'The Anzacs', where she says, 'so you're back again old chap I see, but you don't seem the same as you used to be'.

"Oh it's just an off-shoot of my recent occupation, Mr Johns," Francis says. "But I've come to talk to you of other matters. Brendon's widow and I have arranged to marry."

He explodes. "You rotten bastard," he says, "It's your child isn't it? He's the image of you."

He's about sixty. He's still a big strong man in the prime of life. He picks up a three foot long piece of 4x2 jarrah and swings viciously at Francis' head. If it had connected, Francis would be very much history. Francis ducks and Johns is off balance. Almost reflexively, Francis grabs up a pitchfork standing handy and drives the prongs through and out of his upper shoulder, pulls it back out violently and reversing his grip, gives Johns two or three hits on both sides of the head with the springy handle. Johns goes down and bleeds profusely. He's stunned and hurt. Francis cuts away the shirt using an army knife and pads the wound on both sides. It's nothing like a gunshot wound, of which he's dressed an appalling number in the Front Line and being a sniper, he has always been in the Front Line.

THIRTY TWO

By the time they arrive at the Bruce Rock Hospital, Johns is back in the now world. Francis is very irritated at all this totally unnecessary drama. He quietly says to Johns, "I don't blame you for taking a swing at me, but you've had your swing."

He puts on his military bark as he walks around to the passenger side of the touring car. He takes Johns by the upper left forearm and says, "Right soldier, step out and walk on." Johns does and they go up the steps into the hospital. A nurse materializes.

"What's this?" she says.

"Get the doctor!" Francis says.

"Well he's on a procedure and....."

Francis continues his frightening military bark. "Get him now girlie," he says, "this man's bleeding." She flees down the corridor and smartly brings back the doctor. He's in a white coat and is clearly annoyed at being interrupted.

"What's all this?" he says, "what's all this?"

"You're repeating yourself," Francis says. "This man's bleeding, get yourself into gear and fix him."

"What's the injury?" the doctor asks.

"A shiny pitchfork has been driven through his shoulder," he is told.

"What's the circumstance?" the doctor asks. He looks sharply at Francis' great height, his stern mien and Francis barks,

"This man needs immediate attention, not a public enquiry. Now are you going to get your ass into gear or must I run him through to Merredin?"

The doctor subsides and they hustle Johns into the theatre.

The doctor says, "There's no need for you to stay."

"Doctor," Francis says, "I'm underwhelmed at your lack of action. You have a chance yet to redeem yourself. I'll watch now what you do closely."

He stays until they have done what is necessary and being satisfied, Francis drives around to his father's house. He cogitates the uncertainties of civilian life as he kicks up the Metters stove to boil the billy. He is addicted after army life to billy tea and drinks nothing else. He tosses a handful of tea into the boiling billy and then taps the side of it with a fork to let the tea settle. Just as he does so, there's a rattle of boots on the front veranda and a stentorian voice calls out, "Come out here you soldier bastard."

With the billy in one hand Francis steps out, there are two cops, one very young and one thirty fiveish on the veranda.

"I remember you," Francis says. "You were here before I went away. How did you escape the war?"

"None of your business," the big copper says. "You, you soldier bastard, are a trouble maker."

"Oh... how so?" Francis asks.

"Well, you bastard," he says, "before the war you threw the son of our main Justice of the Peace over the rails at the Naremben Races and then thumped him while he was injured."

"Oh that's hearsay only," Francis says.

“Well now you’ve done it,” he says. “There’s no place in my town for you. You damaged a leading citizen you thug, you can’t do that. I run this town, I won’t have it and you have to go.”

Francis is still standing there, steaming billy in hand listening to this excitable prat. “Well you’ve been quick I must say.”

“Well the doctor rang us,” he says. “We went straight to the hospital.”

“Oh,” Francis says, “and what does Mr Johns have to say.”

“Well,” the cop says, “he says it’s probably all his fault and he doesn’t want charges laid.”

Francis is now getting bored with this conversation and shows it.

“If that is the case,” he says, “what are you doing on my Dad’s front veranda delaying me having my cup of tea?”

The big cop gestures to his young helper. “Charlie and I have decided to teach you a lesson. A lesson all trouble makers should be taught in my town.”

Francis looks hard at constable Charlie. He’s a stripling and as green as. “I doubt,” he says, “if Charlie would know if his back side was on fire.”

This sets the big cop off. “Hold him Charlie while I belt him.”

Charlie grabs Francis’ arm, the arm not holding the billy. Francis does two things in the blink of an eye. He throws the red hot billy of tea in the big cop’s face, stamps on the young copper’s foot with his steel shod army boot, grabs the truncheon off the young cop and crashes it into the big cop’s truncheon hand when he reverses and comes in swinging. Francis gives a terrific pent up swing into the copper’s truncheon hand and bones break. He then turns and head butts the young one, probably breaks his jaw. The old cop is nursing his badly damaged hand; the young cop is holding his jaw.

“Just sit on the veranda there,” Francis says, “while I attend to the paperwork. Don’t you dare do a runner or I’ll have you.”

They sit. Francis recovers a field book and writes a statement of what has occurred starting with the cops arrival. He walks to the back veranda, comes back with the kindling hatchet (he’s had a lot of experience with hatchets in the trenches).

“Get in the car,” he says, “and sit quiet and I’ll get you some medical attention in Merredin. I don’t think your local doctor would appreciate more custom from me.”

They get in, Francis drives. He unloads the damaged men at Merredin Hospital and drives around to the Police Station. He walks in; only the Sergeant in charge is there (perhaps luckily). He gives the chief cop his statement, tells him where his damaged staff are and points out that his address is on the statement. The chief cop takes in Francis’ grim aspect and scarred countenance. He’s old and practical.

“Well,” he says to Francis, “there’s been a War, good help is hard to get. Perhaps,” he continues, “there’s an urgent vacancy in Wiluna or Marble Bar.”

Francis sees the big cop again in the streets of Perth in later years. He’s now a Sergeant, his hand is all crooked. He nods to him; he nearly stops, thinks better of it and walks on. Francis calls. He stops reluctantly and turns.

“I’m surprised,” he says, “that they kept you on, let alone promoted you.”

“Ah well,” he says, “All they really said to me was that I picked on the wrong man.” He waggles his crooked hand. “I have a constant reminder here.”

“All right,” Francis says. “Past is past.”

“It could have been worse,” the copper says. “They tell me that you greatly enjoyed shooting people in the War,” he hesitates, “on both sides.”

Francis’ fame has spread it seems. They part company, but nod amicably to one another when their paths cross on the city streets.

THIRTY THREE

Francis gets on with laying his ghosts. November 10th sees him digging a deep hole and putting in a strainer post at almost the exact spot the War Memorial is built in the 20’s with Federal money. He limewashes the post white and goes away. At 6 am next morning Archdale Wilson clatters down the street in his farm wagon with eight Clydesdale horses doing the pulling and a hack loosely tied to the back of the wagon. He skilfully turns the wagon behind the strainer post and parallel with the street and tosses a ramp of new seasons sheaf hay in platform fashion around the post. He unhooks the team from the wagon. Francis mounts his hack and takes four horses and Archdale does the same and they jog along in the pleasant early morning out to Jura Rail siding, about six miles out towards Merredin.

There’s a sprinkling of ex-gunners from the war assembled there and they’ve got the army field piece untied and ready to remove from the railwagon to the ramp. Archdale takes up just one horse with a single swing and chains and with a bit of juggling gets the gun, limber and ordnance boxes off the train. He now hooks up the whole eight horses, they don’t of course need that many, but they want to make a show and with men on the wheels and brakes they ease the gun onto the siding flat yard. Gunners now mount the big horses who are a bit leery as they probably haven’t been ridden before, but Archdale has brought them a fair way this morning so they’re not disposed to be difficult. The army bugler and ordnance man now mounts the limber and they set off for town at a jog trot, the iron wheels of the heavy gun arousing vivid memories in all of the old soldiers by its rumbling.

They clatter into the streets of Bruce Rock; the roads board have barricaded a section off for the gun. Archdale drags it to where it is scheduled to go and unhooks his team and drives them off on a long rein to the showgrounds, where he has already dropped sheaf hay to feed up the Clydesdales for a couple of hours. The gunners swarm all over the gun, drop its trail from the limber, chock the wheels and position the blank charges ready for the head gunner. There’s a big crowd here to watch and take part and they’ve got ten minutes until 11 am to get ready.

Four of them, all soldiers in uniform, together with Catholic Father O’Reilly, who is also an ex army Chaplain, climb up the short ladder to the wagon bed. There’s a huge heap of cut roses, which have come up on the train from Kalamunda, stacked back from the wagon. They don’t say a word, there’s no need, the crowd are silently expectant. Just before 11 am the bugler plays one sharp note, the Still, then Last Post. Francis holds the silence to three minutes and the bugler plays Reveille. In rotation they call the name, rank and place of death of Bruce Rock’s thirty six fallen. As each name is called a member of the family or, in some cases, a stand in from the Roads Board steps forward and lays a rose on Archdale’s sheaf hay platform surrounding the white post. As they stand back, the name reader salutes and the gunners fire a blank shot.

It's very moving and impressive. Mr Johns, arm still in a sling, together with Anthea, lay Brendon's wreath. He looks Francis in the eye and snaps a salute. Francis clicks his heels and reciprocates. Dad, straight and dry eyed, lays his brother's rose. They run through the thirty six names of Bruce Rock's fallen.

Francis looks at Aub Walsh, he's out of hospital just for today. He's the most popular man there ever was in Bruce Rock and he's a gas victim, mustard gas at Gommecourt. Won't have a chair or a wheelchair, but old Jack Dooley from the pub is a gentleman and has carried over a bar stool, a shot glass and a flask of Brandy to keep Aub going. Francis acknowledges Aub's presence; the assembled crowd give him a rousing round of applause. The gunner, on the ball and worded up, fires a double shotted salute. God, do the crowd jump.

THIRTY FOUR

The ghost's laid, life in Bruce Rock returns to normal, or as near as can be, bearing in mind Francis and Anthea are to marry on the weekend.

Dad asks, "Who's in the wedding party? Who's your best man?"

"You of course."

Dad says, "I'm old, that's ridiculous."

Francis continues to grin. "I've mixed with thousands," he says, "over the war. You're the very best man I've ever met on God's brown (the green of winter being gone from Bruce Rock) earth. You'll do nicely."

"Hmm," says Dad, "that's quite a compliment. Thank you and yes I will do it. Will you live here?" he asks.

Francis says, "Well, that's something I'll try and wrap up today."

After lunch he goes out to the Johns' farm. Julian is again at the sheds. Francis pulls up, takes a bottle of scotch (single malt), a couple of heavy shot glasses and his pipe and shag into the sheep shed. Johns' arm is still sling bound. He looks quizzically, but not antagonistically at Francis. Francis pulls a bale or two of hay from the stack handy and tosses them on the ground. In parade ground voice he fires, "Sit down Corporal, we shall have a drink."

Johns promptly does.

"It's like this," says Francis. "We want you at Saturday's wedding and we hope to preserve due form and have you give away the bride. We, or I, also think the smartest thing for all of us is for Anthea and I and Aaron (my son) to just go on living here. It's best all round, you need help and company and family interest. Aaron looks upon you as Grandpop. I've got three tractors on the water. I know stuff all about growing wheat. I've leased the cropping for three years on Gannaways' place next door (Gannaways only son goes west in France). You're a good farmer, let's live and pull together on this place and grow a bit of wheat."

Johns goes to speak, Francis raises his hand.

"You can think about it for a day," he says, "but only a day."

Johns grins. "I don't need to," he says, "it's all fine with me. Tell us about your tractors."

Francis laughs. "Well, they're brand spanking new and there's three of them," he says.

This marks the start of a most amicable farming arrangement. Johns is surprised that Francis is going back to the Bank.

“Why not just farm?” he says.

Francis gives a serious reply to this. In essence, he says, although the war has not damaged him psychologically, he has seen too much of the very worst of what man can do to man. It’s tended to make him sort of grim and taciturn and the isolation of farming life full time will, he thinks, hasten this trait. Better, he thinks, to stay in a people orientated business with a bit of introspective wheat farming on the side. Johns looks at him.

“You’re a forbidding bastard,” he says, “and I can understand exactly what you’re saying.”

They marry and move in, Francis feels he has returned to life on the first Sunday when he unlimbers his sketching gear, puts some feed in a long wooden feeder at Johns’ horse yards and ties up with leather couplings a bay, grey and chestnut draught horses. As they knowingly munch and look at him, Francis dashes off a magnificent sketch, even to the knowing glints in their eyes. Julian Johns comes along.

“What in the world are you doing Francis?” he says.

Francis laughs. “I just felt like perhaps immortalizing these three,” he says, “particularly old Tommy (the chestnut).”

He succeeds in part. The painting today is in the Adelaide State Gallery, it’s an eye catcher. Old Tommy is long gone, but he looks the same hanging in the Gallery.

THIRTY FIVE

Francis and Julian admire the arrived tractors and give them a run on the summer ground and pick out what they will pull behind them come the opening rains. They decide to break up the heavy ground with shearer ploughs and seed using wide direct seed drills. These are going out of fashion as a seeding implement but as Johns says, “They’re bloody light to pull and although crops seeded with a seed drill



are a bit slower to get going, they finish up equally as well as a combine crop.”

Francis decides to break up with the Caterpillars and do all the seeding with the Cletrac. The season opens well and they get the crops in on the Bruce Rock farms and Francis then takes the Cletrac down to Belka Valley and seeds the ground that Anthea’s Dad has worked up and back with horse teams. That done with no problems, Francis gets back to

bank inspecting.

The years from 1920 until the crash of ‘29 are years of great growth and expansion of farming in the Wheatbelt and particularly the Eastern Wheatbelt. Francis is out early and late, often six days a week, measuring up and approving clearing loan payments. Financing wire netting loans to combat the rabbit plague, checking on new houses and sheds going up and so on. There’s a lot happening especially with the easy finance from the Agricultural Bank to get low equity farmers on the land.

It's a busy and buzzy time and Anthea cheerfully produces another son and a daughter before calling it quits. Johns is always down for a very early breakfast before Francis drives off in his bank car and again for a late dinner as Francis is always home late. Life and the crops are good and Francis, through common sense and practical farming, knows what he is doing and rises in the bank hierarchy. Hardly any big decisions on rural financing get passed without his inputs, visits to head office and general say so.

THIRTY SIX

He keeps up his horse interests and along with Aaron, in the pony ranks, shows his upstanding hack in hacking and hunting events at Eastern Shows and on occasion at the Perth Royal Show. At the end of 1928 Francis receives and studies his annual exchange of Christmas cards and letters with the Lamont's in Chicago. The Lamont's, always cashed up, are now seriously rich through efficiently running a huge beer brewery in South America and distributing the end product offshore on the West Coast to a never ending stream of purchasers, catering to the prohibition thirst of the Yank Nation.

Lamont is no man's fool. He has just got back from Germany and is of the opinion that the German War reparations will bring the Teutonic economy down and the rest of Europe will follow. He is also not so confident of the wheat market, which the Lamont's, as commodity and futures traders, are heavily into. His advice to Francis, succinctly put, is that Francis should quit his booming American stocks before June at the latest. If it crashes, he tells Francis, you'll be able to buy them back at cents in the dollar. Francis really can't see these clouds on the horizon and confers with Father Patrick, who back and forths to the Vatican on financial issues relating to the Church. Patrick was a successful CPA before he took up his vocation, so he can and does contribute to church economics. He acquaints Francis with what the Vatican is halfway through doing, i.e. converting American stocks and bonds to gold with a view to being out of the market by September. Francis still has his Old Master gold stashed in safe deposits in Chicago and now moves smartly to convert the rest into gold. The brokers demur, they say the market still has plenty of growth in it and things are serene. Frances cables, *'do it and today'*. They do.

Towards the end of the English summer Francis and family go to London where the War Office has been clamouring Francis for some matching sketching for the Imperial War Museum. It's a nice little break and they all enjoy it, especially Aaron, now fifteen and bright, enquiring and whimsical with it. They have a great time and stay with people Francis met during the war, here and there.

THIRTY SEVEN

On October 25th 1929, Francis picks up his copy of The Times and instantly realises that the world they know has fallen over. The cataclysmic depression has arrived and rather than starting in Europe, as the Lamont's have predicted, it's started in the USA. The headlines shout 'Worst Stock Market Crash Ever', 'Wheat Smashed', 'Chicago Pit in Turmoil'.

Francis is back in Bruce Rock just as the crops are ready for harvesting. It proves a glum job as the lucky ones got one third of their expected wheat price, some much less. The bank themselves are caught in this event that has made much of their securities worthless or worth not much. The low equity farmers by December, with no available crop income and with their bank credit non-existent, start walking off in droves. They can hardly do anything else. Their wheat income is applied against their bank loans, the bank has a stock and station charge against their stock and plant, their credit is cut off, there is simply no money for food. It's a lost cause and they vote with their feet.

Francis now has the problems of abandoned stock, particularly working teams of horses just abandoned on these farms. They are all under the bill of sale to the bank, but they are also in need of care and attention. He settles on various abandoned farms as depots and commandeers from his bank branches everyone who can ride a horse. They use hacks found here and there with saddles and bridles on the farms and round up these teams and run them to the depot farms where there is good water. He rounds up another lot of bank staff who can't ride horses and they go around with commandeered wagons and horse teams loading up sheaf hay from stacks on the abandoned farms. This is pre depression cut and there's plenty of it. This is carted and restacked on the depot farms. Head office kicks up about Francis nobbling their staff, the bank returns are not coming in and the three old tyrants who run the bank come up for a look see.



They find Francis on a place just south of Bruce Rock where he has on that day 137 working horses held there. They're being well fed despite the harsh summer conditions and Francis, horseman that he is, is tipping molasses into the water troughs. It's good for the horses. The oligarchy from the bank pull up, they have, unfortunately, with them the State Member of Parliament for the

area; an ineffectually and totally useless bad farmer. This chap is full of bounce.

"What, may I ask," he rhetorically says, "are you doing today, Mr Bank Inspector?"

Francis, along with all the chaps he has dragged out of the bank's branches, has been working like a demon to stabilize things. He grabs the polly and tosses him into the water trough amongst the black molasses he has just tipped in. When the Polly emerges spluttering, Francis pulls out and tamps his pipe and lights the shag up.

"Well, Mr Politician," he says, "I'm putting a gloss on the bank's assets. What have you done for our members today?"

The oligarchy from the Bank burst out laughing.

"Jesus Francis," the Chairman says, "that's a bit rough."

Francis laughs. "You know Chairman, you've no idea of the stresses we've had here in recent weeks and how hard these guys have worked in the bank's interests. You can't deny us just a tad of fun."

The polly threatens legal action.

"Come on, William," the Chairman says, "you must be mistaken, we saw nothing."

Things don't improve in the Wheatbelt. Men from the machinery firms now comb the farms by arrangement with the banks and repossess train loads of initially, harvesting gear, the big ticket items and then come back to comb the farms for the better tillage gear, combines and such like. These are loaded onto railway trucks and sent mainly to HV McKay and Co at Maylands. McKay's are a very conscientious firm. They put each harvester over the concave rollers, which simulate field conditions without dragging the equipment around a paddock, replace any part that needs it and repaint the harvesters. Not that repainting is such a big job as there is a fair bit of galvanized metal on the popular AL type harvesters repossessed. These go into store and are fed back into markets as conditions slowly improve.

THIRTY EIGHT

Farming remains totally stagnant. Francis' area of responsibility being probably far worse than elsewhere, because so many are relatively new farmers on new to newish cleared land. The paradox is that the wheat crop of 1930 is far and away the best ever and is never again equalled in size for 30 years.

The grain dealers overpay on the crash year crop and those that stay on the land have to repay the excess back by direct deduction over their next three crops. The banks foreclose on land left, right and centre. However quite a few farmers who lose their farm negotiate cropping and grazing leases and continue to farm and live on the properties, but it's hard going, as without security they can't raise a bob in credit. Most are in debt to the local stores and the debt adjustment act is passed to try and alleviate this.

It's bad news for everyone despite what action Government takes. The Federal Government, badly advised by Bank of England men who come out from London, continues to honour their borrowings when common sense dictates that they should have simply defaulted. By keeping the loans up, the population suffers extreme privation.

"Buggar all Politicians," Francis says as he goes about his daily work of dispossessing farmers from their land.

The more established farmers keep going of course and the odd new machine or car makes its appearance now and then. Self sufficiency is of course the order of the day and the farms produce much of what is needed to maintain life. Kids that would normally have been sent away to Perth Colleges now stay in the State school system or go on to High School.

THIRTY NINE

Francis is cashed up and very, very selectively buys land adjoining Johns' property and buys Gannaways' when age takes them off the land. He also picks up some more farming land adjoining the Belka property of Anthea's parents.

"What do we do Francis?" they ask him.

"Just hold on," he says. "You're a mile better off than most; it's a question of marking time until the spectrum changes."

Germany starts its cataclysmic climb to super power status in Europe. Francis joins the Militia and starts training a new generation of men, mostly at the Northam Army Range. He has a strong feeling of de ja vu, the rifles minus the dangerous magazine cutouts are Great War leftovers. They start to resuscitate the cavalry, which brings a mirthless grin to Francis' dour countenance. He has some pull with the Military and gets training going again at Northam on the use of trench mortars and Lewis guns. It's the most advanced training programme running in the army camps.

Some mechanisation also has come in and training is done with armoured cars and light tanks at Lancelin. The Lamonts keep him posted on the state of play in the USA, hard hit with the depression. This consumer orientated country has a very hard time in the depression, unlike England which has never experienced the highs that America has, so it's not so noticeable in England, but pretty dreadful in Australia. Despite all this Francis and his family live well in Bruck Rock. Most of his work is administered at Merredin branch and he takes an interest in Merredin life. The tough conditions mean that people make their own fun, thus Francis gets involved in a local production of H.M.S. Pinafore and brings the house down with his marvellous interpretation in the role of Dick Deadeye. His son Aaron is now away at Aquinas College on the start of an academic career.

FORTY

Francis farms wheat on the farms. His American tractors are still performing well and he has upgraded his tillage machines and gone into headers in lieu of harvesters. His farming is uncomplicated to a degree, as he hasn't the time or inclination to run sheep. They need constant tending and it's much simpler to just grow grain. Once finished you overhaul the cropping gear ready for next year and thus he has unencumbered time to get ready for next year and he also has unencumbered time to get on with the responsibilities of his bank work.



The balloon in Europe eventually goes up. He's 43 now and the army offer him a commission. He is immediately man-powered to grow wheat for the war efforts; which is fair enough; he's a big wheat grower, cropping on seven big farms.

The Yanks also put in a sharp bid to keep him on the job as they are losing so many men to the war. Francis then works on the bank rationalisation scheme, closing branches here and there and centralising work at others again to release young men for the services. Everything gets rationed, but due to the nature of what he's doing, he gets petrol for his car and power kero and diesel for his tractors.

Aaron, now at Cambridge, immediately joins the British Royal Air Force and goes into pilot training. This causes Anthea and Francis a deal of worry as the RAF will certainly be at the cutting edge of the island's defence when the Blitzkrieg part of the war is over and Hitler can concentrate on defeating England. Aaron goes out of the war comparatively early when the wimpy Wellington Bomber he is flying is shot down near Doorn. The Dutch underground, which specialises in getting pilots back to England, gets him to Paris easily enough, but he gets caught up in a house to house sweep by the SS and finishes in a Prisoner of War camp in Northern Germany. At least he is alive and the Red Cross are watching the camps closely.

FORTY ONE

Francis takes an international call at Merredin branch mid to late afternoon one Friday after Pearl Harbour has changed the face of the war. It's Carstairs, now a General. He is sociable, but direct. The US Army is calling Francis up, both to sketch and consult. It's all Pershing's idea. Actually Pershing isn't all that well and is currently in Walter Reed Army Hospital, but due to the involvement of the Americans in this escalating and now worldwide conflict, there is a lot of broad brush planning going along in Washington. Francis is an Honorary Major in the Yank army, he's also drawn half pay from them since 1919. He certainly is not bound to respond legally, but he certainly thinks he has a moral responsibility.

"How do I get there?" Francis asks, "and where do I come to?"

"All fixed," Carstairs says, "there's a place on Sunday's Catalina out of Crawley Bay reserved for you. Don't ask anybody's permission, the red tape could be longer than the war. Wear your uniform and travel light apart from your sketching gear."

At bank closing time Francis has marshalled his thoughts and programme. He doesn't know how long they will want him. He expects weeks, doesn't imagine it will be much longer, so he drags up a typewriter and puts his instructions to the bank in relation to where he's going, and for them, the work in progress. The crops are growing on the farms and the tractors ready for next season so he runs out instructions for Julian Johns, (Julian is 80 odd now, but still farming along with a bit of help) a letter to Anthea setting out what's happened and telling her what money is where and how she accesses it for her needs and then catches the 10 pm Kalgoorlie to Perth train.

He overnights at Steve's Nedlands Park Hotel and next morning early, Steve himself drives him around to Matilda Bay where the Catalinas are moored. He's on board by the appointed time and at 6.30 am they're lifting off from the still river.

In no time, but an interesting time at that, Francis is walking around the streets of Cape Town, then the Azores and they pitch in at the Naval Base at Norfolk, Virginia a day or three later. Carstairs, a big time General now with a General's

entourage, is standing on the ramp as Francis gets out of the plane. He's put on a deal of weight, but is still the same man despite his rise in the army. After big hellos, he calls forward a crop headed young Lieutenant.

"This Major," he says, "is your aide; he will now take station on you. He's Tom Dooley the Third."

Tom's yet another Southerner, with intelligent eyes and a southern drawl. He salutes and stands back.

"The day's young, Francis," Carstairs says. "We'll plane up to Washington and put you into decent quarters."

This happens quite quickly and mid afternoon they get driven to Walter Reed Hospital and visit with General Pershing. Black Jack's not all that well, but he's bright. The next few days go by at a gallop. Tom Dooley is top notch and within a week Francis has on crayon paper excellent portraits of George C Marshall, Patton, Eisenhower and even Admiral King. King's quite a subject; a thorn in everyone's side and as sour as a quince. Francis also sketches a heap of others whose fame may or may not last the war. He misses on Halsey, who true to style, is already at sea. Francis has just finished provenancing the works he has done, the same as he did in the Great War. He's just lit an excellent Cuban cigar and is relaxing when Tom Dooley escorts General Carstairs in.

"Hi Francis," he says, "great portraits. Gibraltar tomorrow Francis," he continues, "We'll play it by ear after you've been there a few days."

And so it goes, Tom Dooley comes along and smoothes all paths and after a few most interesting days in Gibraltar, an American submarine picks them up and days later they are ashore in Alexandria. It's a very interesting time to be in Egypt. There are two schools of thought prevailing. One is that Rommel will roll into town next week and move his headquarters into Shepherds Hotel or alternatively, (and this is the less favoured view) the new hopeful, General Bernard Law Montgomery, will crank up his new and very plentiful supply of tanks and other military ordnance and turn the tide of the Eastern Mediterranean War.

Francis doesn't get a chance to sketch anybody or anything before he is in the door of a huge planning operation to be run under Montgomery's direction out in the desert.

FORTY TWO

Carstairs has asked him for a quick appreciation of what he thinks of Montgomery and his plans. He puts it this way.

"A lot depends on this limey General. We've sunk zillions of dollars into his military hardware, but we don't know a lot about him. The erratic old character running the limey side (Churchill) says he's okay, but there's a bit of strong conviction missing from what he says or the way he says it."

Colonel (later Brigadier) Arnold Potts, a Kojonup, farmer is in Cairo, this has been kept very quiet. He is going out to the desert planning conference with Montgomery and his staff, so Tom Dooley organises Francis to have the use of Potts' car and driver to find their way out. It's a marquee in the desert and it seems to Francis to be a bit on the dangerous side. If any of the Luftwaffe stumbles across it, it's a sure target. However no one else seems worried, so they go.

They arrive at the marquee. There's not a vestige of shade out of it, so the transport drivers are allowed to sit in a corner of the tent where they quietly play cards. They've seen it all before. They are sternly told by Monty that what they will be hearing is top, top secret and that if anyone talks out of turn they will end up in the desert. Montgomery has two planning groups at work and the General Staff are thus putting forward both the Allied and German viewpoints to Monty. He lets them go for a while and then calls on both groups to be ready to summarise as soon as they've all had a cup of tea.

The red faced engineers said everything has come out except firewood. Montgomery very testily tells them that they are engineers and there is surely something they could chop up. They searched and did. They chopped up the new wooden body of a good sized truck that John Collard from Wagin in WA had driven out. Following tea and the planning précis, Montgomery took over using maps and a long marker and set out the basics of the Battle of El Alamein.

This latter is a mountain range running from the Med to nearly the Qattara Depression where tanks couldn't go. It stops just short of the Depression and Montgomery runs through his plan. He details his existing mine fields, lists his field guns, most of them brand new, not WWI types and with rubber tyres fitted. He details his machine gun posts and finally dug in, hull down, tanks, of which he has two very well equipped divisions.

"This," Monty says, "is my anvil. We must not yield. When Rommel has committed his armour to battle, we will take our armoured divisions along the Qattara Track. They will be my hammer and smash him against the anvil."

Monty is not all that impressive; thin faced, ascetic, the best that can be said of this presentation is that he didn't stumble. A stir develops in the marquee, signal types rush in and out. Rommel seems to have struck already at Alam Halfa. Monty is very concerned.

"They must be stopped," he says.

The General Staff tend to the view that it's, at most, an armed probe or a reconnaissance in strength. Monty and Potts are for off, but not before John Collard is given a note to allow a new body to be put on his truck back in Cairo.

Our driver, a young Wagin farmer, takes us towards the Front, not so far away. It's a bit difficult to get to. The German artillery are firing salvos behind the Allied Lines. Potts, for the first known time, moves into the front seat of the Mercury army car and studies the pattern of the salvos. He thinks they're predictable and gives the order to drive on fast as soon as the left hand salvo is fired towards the position aimed for. They nearly make it until a very near miss sees the driver crashing the car into rocks. They proceed on foot and when they arrive at their destination, they find the outpost troops have given ground and their gun pits out front have been taken over by the Germans.

Potts organises a counter attack. They all go up with fixed bayonets and storm the gun pits, where the axis troops are working like crazy to turn our guns around, so that they can be used to fire on us. The pits are taken and the now prisoners provide the needed labour to turn the gun back. They jib at first; Francis tells the prisoners to strip to their underpants and then pushes them over the pit and tells them to run for their lives. It's necessary, as the troops have not a moment to spare to contain prisoners. They are then involved in a maelstrom; four days and nights and the axis come over. Intelligent gunners, deep in the minefield, keep dropping shells on the advancing troops and wreak total carnage.

FORTY THREE

Monty has expressed the view on the way out to this mess, that Rommel's attack will be from the south below the Alam Halfa Ridge and he's right. Monty's extra strong on the Ridge. He's had two months to get ready for this; the carpers say Monty is only following Auchinleck's old plan. The general idea is that German armour getting through will be targeted by the RAF and field gun fire, both from the artillery and dug in hull down tanks, most new and the very latest, immobile and deliberately so. Monty doesn't want his armour pursuing the Germans; he needs everything available for his next offensive. Things get pretty hectic, Rommel smells a rat.

"Where's the armour?" he asks.

He suspects, and rightly so, that he is being lured into a trap. Code breakers read his enigma dispatch to Berlin advising that he is breaking off the action. He sees the setup is potentially a death trap for his armour and most battle hardened men. Be this as it may, it's beyond their purview. They're stuck and for the two days Monty is with them, the 8th Army is minus its Commander. He gets out and goes back. Potts stays.

It's totally horrific, the wounded can't be evacuated. Surveys are taken at dusk; the possibles are dragged after dark to near the German lines. Rommel says a wounded soldier is a wounded soldier and must be treated. The worst cases are given a mercy shot by the officers, the ground is as hard as hell, the heat is totally intense and screwworm flies attack the blood of the wounded. A tank looms up, they whack him with their modern field gun - it's a 25 pounder. It doesn't stop them.

"Pull out the wads, double the charge," Potts says.

"Bloody dangerous, Colonel," says the gunner.

"Just do it," says Potts.

He does, they blow a track off, the tank stops. The gunner says,

"We'll keep firing," and men in flames run away from the tank.

Men observing them in other positions deeper back and into a minefield, go back for a break, Francis' group are too pinned to move. The others come back from their break and survey the scene. They know they can't get back and tell them later that they are amazed that they were still holding the position. Francis scopes the front and rear scene.

"Whoever that gunner is back in the minefield, dropping shells just over our heads to stop the rushes, deserves and will get a dirty big medal," and in the fullness of time he does.

Alam Halfa is the very first battle that stops the Krauts. It's a terrible battle, the combination of high explosive shells on such terribly hard ground is absolutely dreadful.

FORTY FOUR

Montgomery brought to this theatre of the war total self confidence. He may indeed have used Auchinleck's plan at Alam Halfa, but it sure worked and took away the fluid war that Rommel excelled in. He also has some other confidence building ideas, such as moving Headquarters to alongside the sea.

All power of course corrupts and Monty becomes a considerable pain in the rear end for the remainder of the war, but a very successful one.

Carstairs wants a précis of what is happening in the desert war. He trusts no communication methods, so Francis long hands and pictures what is happening and Tom Dooley catches a transport plane back to report to his boss, along the lines that there has been an amazing turn around and to keep the ordnance up to Monty who seems quite capable of doing the job. Dooley returns within days looking a bit travel fatigued with instructions to Francis for them both to make their way to Gibraltar where he will see them soon. So they do and enjoy a pleasant time in a beautiful villa looking onto the harbour and the Med.

The world is scheduled to arrive at Gibraltar. It's all about Operation Torch, then to be the biggest amphibious operation in the world so far. In the interim, the Germans bomb Malta incessantly; they give the island pure hell.

El Alamein erupts on November 2nd, the Germans are stuck with Hitler's non withdrawal orders, but Rommel rejects these and they get out along the main coast road and leave the Italians to bite the bullet. November 5th sees Torch stage into the Mediterranean. Francis and Tom Dooley view this fantastic spectacle from way up on the Rock. Torch gets ashore in North Africa and the church bells ring in London to mark the feat of arms. However it is no victory, the Dough Boys are as green as the bunch at Chateau Thierry more than 24 years earlier.

Things move a bit, Francis gets to sketch Churchill, Alexander, Roosevelt, Eisenhower and Harry Hopkins at Marrakech. They have very comfortable digs at a grand hotel near Casablanca, where they talk for nine days straight and decide on many things. They opt for unconditional surrender from the axis and thus invite a fight to the finish.

Churchill, on the day he sees Roosevelt off, paints the only oil he completes during the war; quite a good, though heavy picture, which now hangs in the town house of Sir John Foalesworth-Uxton in London. Companion oils on the walls include one by Hitler and another by Prince Charles; they would now all be priceless artefacts.

By this time 8th Army is well past Tripoli and Rommel is now busy knocking the Dough Boys around in Tunisia, at Kasserine. He throws the Yanks back thirty miles and takes over half of their tanks and transport. However the Brits weigh into matters and they eventually see Rommel off – just.

Carstairs sends Francis and Dooley to Tunisia for a reccy and Tom Dooley takes Francis' report back. Monty has generously weighed in with the hard hitters from 8th Army and Francis is able to reassure Carstairs that it is now only a matter of time. It ends soon, as does the last successful campaign in which the Poms play the leading role, but it's pretty dreadful for all that. It's as bad as any battle scene that Francis has viewed and he's viewed many indeed. Troops are now being sent to England. Things are now very complex for the Allies and priorities have now to be seriously set. July 9th 1943 sees the Allies invade Sicily and sees also the appalling loss of paratrooper's lives in this experimental airborne operation.

FORTY FIVE

Francis sees little of the Sicily campaign, but is ashore early after General Mark Clark lands at Salerno. Hitler, preoccupied with the Russians, now moves slowly to the defence of Italy. The American and British forces do it tough at Salerno; they've got air superiority, but the German counter attacks are fiercely fierce. The Allies eventually string a front line across Italy, but everything is slow and difficult, costly and muddy. The German Commander, Kesselring, knows his stuff. The Allies go ashore at Anzio and Nettuno, but Kesselring keep them well contained. The front remains static for months and Carstairs shunts Francis and Dooley up for a look see.

It's totally dreadful, the German .88mm are as good a gun as the French .75mm of the First War, the .88's can take the head off a tank commander at a 3 mile range and often do. Francis' report back to Carstairs tells him not to expect much from this shocking and dogged campaign for some time. He is sent to Rome next and told to sit back there now that the Germans have abandoned central Italy, until further notice.

Long distance bombers come to the aid of Allied troops in Italy, it sure helps a bit. The Allied bombing efforts on Germany now go up a notch or two and particularly in the summer of 1943 in Berlin. This is quite heavy stuff. Carstairs wants Francis where he is pending the invasion of Southern France, the main forces for this gather at Naples, they go ashore east of the mouth of the Rhone River. Carstairs wants some portraits of those doing the grunt fighting in Italy, so Tom Dooley and Francis find themselves in Army working uniforms up at Anzio. He's seen death, disease, mud and blood in many, many war scenes, Anzio is as vivid as any and the Kraut paratroopers are as good a soldier as he has ever seen.

Right at the Front Line area, he's sketching a Para taken prisoner by bad luck (or perhaps for him good luck in view of the fierceness of the fighting). This chap speaks English a bit so they sit him on a campstool and sketch his strong face and his uniform of Para smock. It's coming along well when a fierce counter attack develops and the line gives here and there. Francis is used to shouts, confusion and sudden changes in close proximity from his time in the Great War trenches. He resolutely tells his subject to sit still and the portrait is coming along rapidly and beautifully when two non-captured Para's (German Para's) burst over the mounds in front of them. The sitter reverts to type and joins the newcomers in an attempt to wipe them out. Tom downs two of them with his pistol, including the subject, and the third man shoots him badly in the upper arm. This just gives Francis the barest time to get out his Bruce Rock Bank .22 pistol and he puts one through the shooter's eye. He tears the dog tags off the paratrooper's bodies. The three are down and out of it. Tom's hit quite bad, but Francis manages a tourniquet with draw strings cut from one of the German's smocks and gets him out of the area. The paramedics staunch the bleeding, but look askance at Tom's arm, "not good," they say "but you'll live." Francis doesn't see Tom again for years although they keep in touch.

The Germans have their 19th Army standing by to repel boarders, but the overlord soldiers are going strong so the 19th Army now withdraws to protect itself and the invasion becomes a fizzer. The war in Europe proceeds to its inevitable and Wagnerian end, but Carstairs occupies Francis with the War in the Pacific. He even gets to Brisbane in the McArthur days, but not home to WA He's at the

surrender on the Missouri of Tokyo Bay; quite a day and gets off a portrait of General McArthur and also, a bit perhaps against their will, a wonderful sketch of the Jap Military signing off on the war.

Sir Thomas Blamey, in full fig, is there signing for the Australian Army, his Aide gently nudges Francis for a portrait of Blamey. Francis is no fan of Blamey either in this war or the previous one and he thus dissembles and gives it all a miss. The party is now well and truly over and Francis thankfully gets off his commercial flight at Guildford airport.

FORTY SIX

Anthea and the kids, along with Julian Johns, are all down from Bruce Rock to meet him after his long period away, but the Bank is also there. They want him back in harness, post haste. They are re-establishing their operation. They have truck loads of Commonwealth money ready to go in re-establishing soldier settlers and have been busy buying up all the big estates and chopping these up into smaller farms with standard houses, shed and general infrastructure. The bank is, of course, State owned, but the scheme is Commonwealth financed, but again State controlled and administered.

Francis applies himself to getting his farms organised for next seeding and then, living back on the Johns' farm, spends time in the city at Head Office and in the field in the WA agricultural regions, getting the War Service farmers up and running. He's as busy as, but settles back easily enough. Aaron, when he finishes his delayed last year at Cambridge, comes home with his degree to go wheat farming. Commodity prices for wheat and wool gradually escalate (as predicted by the Chicago Lamonts) and the country districts enjoy a great run of prosperity. Francis sticks with wheat growing at Bruce Rock, but Aaron diversifies successfully into wool growing at the Belka end of their farming enterprise.

1945 soon rolls around to 1966. Francis slacks off a bit from 1960 on. He retires from the Bank in 1966 at age 70. He's had a great run, but he thinks it's time to go.

In fact, he knew it was time to go when at a bank in-house conference, a young sprog, on the way up, puts forward a proposition that the bank, in assessing assets of borrowing clients should place a money value on the working capacity and personal equation of the farming borrower. Francis does a slow boil. He takes a puff of his straight stemmed pipe (no silly anti smoking laws in those days) and stands up, you could have heard a penny drop.

"Mr Chairman," he says. "Was there ever a man, born of a woman, who could hope to evaluate the worth of a person in pounds, shilling and bloody pence?!"

The Chairman of the bank, a gentle fellow, and the Secretary, a hard man and Francis run this rural based bank in reality, although they also do other things. They have a scotch later in the Board Room.

"Perhaps, old boy," he says, "we are all getting old."

"Well Roy," the Secretary says, "do you know anyone going the other way?"

Francis has acquired a very good house in Jutland Parade and spends time between there and the farms. He also fills in as the Acting American Consult, at which he proves very successful. He understands the Yanks.

FORTY SEVEN

During one of these periodical stints Francis gets a call to the cipher room to take a coded call. It's Carstairs, now a General Emeritus. They use him mostly on intelligence, he tells Francis. Then he goes on.

"Francis, we want you in Saigon City next month to sketch Westmoreland and Lyndon Johnson (Francis sees now why this is a heavily coded call)."

He laughs. "Well, General," Francis says, "what's one bar, more or less? but I usually only sketch Generals."

"Oh," he says, "you sketched anyone I asked you to when Operation Torch was glowing."

Francis cogitates. "Fair enough," he says. "When and where?"

"Alice Springs would be best," Carstairs says. "Pine Gap hard copy Intel goes out through there by Lear jet. We'll send you a warrant and fine detail."

Thus three weeks later Francis is taking coffee with brandy chasers in the Saigon Embassy of later fame (or infamy). They've cut it fine. After coffee Francis sets up his pastels and double easel and waits for the subjects to arrive on the scene. They do. Johnson looks absolutely dreadful. This old toad peaked his career as Senate Majority Leader and now between the visceral U.S. Opposition to the Vietnam War and the hash the CIA are making of things in S.E. Asia, Francis doubts if Lyndon gets much sleep. Not to look at him anyway.

The caravan moves on and Francis flies to Tokyo and ships home on an iron ore carrier from there. It's a very pleasant and undemanding journey.

Back in Dalkeith, Francis gets a report on how the new Caterpillar equipment is performing on the farms. He opens his mail one morning and finds a letter from Tom Dooley. One armed Tom now runs his father's publishing Empire. Its Quiller Media & Publishing, a bit in TV productions and internationally known for publishing best sellers here and there. Tom is working on a retrospective project of his own and it is in connection with this he is visiting Perth, where he wants to catch up with Francis. Francis cables back to Tom, 'Come and stay with us, you are very welcome'.

This happens within six weeks or so and on a fine November morning Francis takes French leave from the farms where the headers are going and sits with Tom on the front terrace of his Riverview home. It's a sparkly day and Tom, much more substantial now but with the Southern tones of his voice the same, outlines the project he is well advanced with. He's doing a collected colour plate book of all Francis' crayon sketches. It's not likely the owners of these works will part with them, so Tom has been here and there taking good camera shots, which he has now brought to Francis for a redraw.

This, of course is no burden to Francis to do and he is able to add other places he may find more portraits, including the Lamont Collection in Chicago and the father and son portraits in the Grand Apartment on the Avenue Phillippe Auguste. Tom now presses Francis on the ones he missed to date.

"Well,....." Francis says, "there's a duo of the younger Windruss, killed on Gallipoli and of the burial party there, in particular Spider Keppel playing 'Gone to Earth' on an English hunting horn at this hurried burial on the dun slopes."

Francis savours his brandy and continues, "There's three more of interest. Here's one." and pulls out a marvellous one of Tom himself, clutching his badly

damaged arm near Anzio. Tom is amazed, he didn't know it existed. Francis rummages more in his study and pulls out the incomplete portrait of Birdwood seated on his Irish charger Sherman.

"It's beautiful," Tom breathes. "Why ever did you not finish it?"

"Ah....." Francis says, "I was never mad about Birdwood. Just depict as it is, my principles won't allow me to finish it."

"And the third one?" he asks.

"Well, it's a nude of my art teacher in Bruce Rock in 1913. She's 93 now, lives down in Nedlands a bit, in Boronia Avenue. Perhaps we will take over a drink after lunch and see if she will come to the party."

They do and she does. She's as bright as and Tom, with her okay, photographs both sides of this double surfaced portrait and also photographs her with the both sides.

The house Merrilies lives in, in Boronia Avenue belongs to Francis, who has long ago deeded her life tenancy. Additionally, he has the lawn mowed and has a nearby bottle shop top up her drinks cabinet regularly. He owes her much; it was her tuition and rare luck that caused him to recognise and replicate the Leonardo in Amiens town hall. This stolen work of art made his fortune and he still has half of the ingot gold stored safely in Chicago.

Tom says, "I'm going to run a retrospective of the Colless collection in the University Undercroft gallery next year. Would you speak at it on this picture?"

Merrilies gives out a cackle of laughter. "I wouldn't miss it for the world," she says.

On a late August Sunday afternoon of the following year the exhibition is opened to a full house of viewers by the USA Ambassador, over from Canberra especially. Carstairs is there and a great many of the owners of the originals, including a rep of the British Imperial War Museum and the Australian National Gallery. Francis has been asked by Tom Dooley to nominate four owners, other than Merrilies Blyth, to speak.

"That's easy," says Francis. "The Adelaide State Gallery, they own the picture of old Tommy at the feed trough. Anthea, depicted (sans underwear) in her going away outfit at Bruce Rock. The Winduss', the picture of their son and the burial party - they are very, very old but will cope."

"And.....?" Tom asks.

"Oh, that'll do it," Francis says. "Enough is enough."

FORTY EIGHT

The gallery opening is a huge success. Francis has left Merrilies til last and she takes centre stage under a floodlight, and they look at the marvellous twin set and gold medallion portrait of her in 1913. She speaks authoritively and well on the portrait's merits and then says, "Well it's time for the flip side."

Two attendants reverse the nude crayon. It's absolutely marvellous still and it takes the breath of the staid audience away. Merrilies cackles. She holds up the ankle bracelet depicted on the portrait.

"It's the only thing he allowed me to wear," she says. "Look at the scarred and dour old bastard now. He's at least had the grace to grin."

And Francis is grinning and the crowd are clapping.

“And by God,” Merrilies continues, “you should have seen him at age 16 with no clothes on.”

The whole crowd dissolves into raucous laughter; ceremonies are over.

The newspapers and particularly the cartoonists have a field day next day. A bottle of cognac is delivered to Francis’ Jutland Parade home. There’s a card with it. It’s from the bank and staff. ‘We never thought you had it in you, you dry old stick’, it reads.

FORTY NINE

The Winduss family, who spoke so movingly at the opening, get in touch with Francis through Aaron a few weeks later.

“Can you come and see us?” they ask.

Francis does. It’s a pleasant visit, they want to retire and the farm can be bought by Colless Farming if they want.

“Gentlemen’s agreement Francis,” they say. “And you’re a great gentleman - whatever you think is fair.”

They settle the deal. It’s Francis’ ninth farm purchase, but not his last. He writes in a cooling off period, in case they change their mind, but they don’t. At the farewell stage, they are standing on the north side of the 1920’s corrugated iron homestead under the big pepper trees, so common around old homesteads in the Eastern Wheatbelt. A tiny waft of summer wind bears to Francis the pungent smell of the pepper berries, like a similar breeze did so many years ago in the art room at Bruce Rock School, but pepper trees there, mercifully, screened the art room windows. Francis’ mind drifts back down the years.

“We seem to have lost you Francis,” Mr Windruss says.

Francis pulls out his straight stemmed briar pipe and covers his confusion by filling and tamping it. He lights it up.

“Yes,” he says, “I’ve been well away.”

It’s too personal a story to tell.

HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE

‘The Sniper’ is presented as fiction and the reader will be wise to take it as such. However the central figure is a composite of two Wheatbelt soldiers, one of whom was a very good pencil sketcher. His work was lost to the world in a Wheatbelt house fire. In his young days the writer was surrounded by ex-soldiers. (9 uncles and his father were in the War, the latter in the famous cavalry charge at Beersheba). By osmosis alone, the writer absorbed a wide range of War stories and his writing reflects that. History has never admitted the presence of Lieutenant-Colonel Arnold Potts in the run up to Alam Halfa. However his driver there is still around and confirms Potts’ presence. Perhaps 8th Army was reluctant to detract in any way from Montgomery’s shine.

TWO

***JUSTICE
DELAYED***

Justice Delayed

Mary Hardisty is standing casually in the main street of Parkes. She is talking to the wife of the manager of the Commonwealth Bank. This is in the days when the banker and his family lived behind the street-front bank. Mary's life is a bit different in that her husband's bank, the State Bank of New South Wales is a late-comer to the banking world and she in fact has a separate residence in a high part of Parkes, but it's not an upmarket house, in that its of weatherboard dado with asbestos sheeting over the upper exterior, but it's not a bad house by the Parkes standards of the day.

She is really lurking with intent and the conversation with the other banker's wife is purely by chance. She is lurking casually to catch up with her husband's ledger keeper, Simon Grantham who, she happens to know, will be along within minutes to handle the daily exchanges between banks. Junior staff gather daily here to swap each other's cheques. On Fridays, they issue drafts to handle the imbalances. Her husband's clerk/typist usually attends to this, but she also happens to know that this girl has a rostered day off today and that Simon will be standing in. Simon comes scooting along the street, black exchange bag in his hand. She excuses herself and flags him down.

"Good morning, Mrs Hardisty," he says, "pardon my rudeness, but I'm just a tad late for exchanges."

"Oh Simon," she says, "This will not delay you long. Herbert tells me that you are a bridge player and I've cleared it with him for you to squire me out to a bridge dinner at Underwoods on Saturday night. A - I need a competent partner; B - I can't drive; C - Herbert will of necessity be at a Masonic Lodge Induction night – stag of course."

"That'd be right," Simon thinks. His boss is big into a lot of community things: Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, Agricultural Society; anything at all up front that may advance his banking career. She's put this young banker well and truly on the spot, but he's not tied up this Saturday. The love of his life has just returned to Parkes to live and to work in the main office of Kintail and Goyder, the big local universal providers' store. She's churchy and he knows they have an internal do this Saturday, for which he hasn't got a guernsey. 'In for a penny,' he thinks.'

"Surely," he says, "What time, where?"

"Seven for seven thirty at their farm," she says. "Can you bike up about 10 to 7?"

"Fine," he says and Saturday he does.

A friend has picked up Herbert for the Lodge do and his grey Morris Oxford car is gleaming in the driveway and Mary is looking the berries in a somewhat décolleté frock and ready to go. It's a pleasant evening at the farm; they are all well taught Bridge players, so there's no boobies in the group to exasperate the good players. About



9.30 Mary develops a sharp migraine and cries off. She's in a deal of pain, but waves away pills.

"I'll be stuck with this tonight," she says, "but on past experiences, I'll be fine for church tomorrow." Needless to say, her hubby is a sidesman at the Anglican church and secretary to the Vestry. "Would you mind if I ruin your evening, Simon and ask you to zap me home?"

As they dust out the drive, Simon says,

"Well, that's bad luck Mrs Hardisty; we were having a nice evening. You sure can play bridge." She laughs a full throaty laugh.

"Simon," she says, "it's quite different to what you think. I'm as fit as a fiddle and your luck of the evening is just about to start."

He shoots a quick look at her along the bench seat of the Morris Oxford. She's quite close; it's not that big a car.

"There's a little gravel reserve up about half a mile, just pull into that and put the lights down to park."

It's a deeply dug out pit and out of sight of the road. She gets out and opens the boot, pulls out a heavy rug and a pillow.

"Out of your daks," she says, "and I'll show you some real fun." And she surely does. Later, back on the road, she says, "Gosh, you are a bit of a surprise packet. I expected a fumbler. How did you get your skills?"

"Easy, peasy," says Simon. "I always patronise the wall flowers at the dances and take one home if I can. They're easy pickings by comparison with the popular girls."

"Hmmm," she says, "and how did I stack up?"

"Stack up!" Simon says, "You're all woman – not a nervous girl."

"Do you go back to the wall flowers for repeats on other occasions?"

"Only at dances," Simon says, "and yes, they always seem happy to go around again, but I don't want to get too involved; it closes off too many promising doors."

"Well, Simon," she says, "my door is always open on Masonic Lodge nights. That's his long stay event of the month. God knows what they get up to in that gloomy building. Now....Thursday week, 8.15 on the dot. We'll use the spare room and this rug. A flatter surface gives better purchase."

And so it goes. Simon can't believe his luck; he's just 19 and she's 28. The husband, the bank manager is mid 40's. This becomes a long running show. Once a month is not near enough for either, and they structure up some in-between meets, but of a very, very discreet nature. She cleans the bank for pin money and if she can stage this for when hubby is at something else, she lets Simon in the back door. They surely have a busy, busy time.

Some months down the track, Simon is talking to the shunter's in the railway yard. One of them is a part-time builder and is giving Simon a hand extending the stabling for his polo ponies. Simon is at the railways to pick up banking from the Station Master's office. They get pay envelopes – cash in these days and Harry, the Station Master, has a scheme going that a deal of this goes into Simon's bank to the men's accounts. Railway men are notoriously improvident and Harry is quite unofficially ensuring that living money is banked the morning they get it, leaving an adequate amount to see them through Friday night at the pubs, most of which the workers make for at shift end. The wives are indeed are very grateful at Harry's guidance, the publican not so.

Anyway, Simon is discussing aspects of the stable job and they are looking across the yard to the early morning deserted street when the main office girl, a good looker who Simon has taken home from dances, but not recently, steps into

the door recess and gets the keys into the lock. As she does so, the Town Clerk comes up behind her and looking both ways carefully, first steps into the recessed door and one-handedly fondles her right buttock as she is opening the door. She surely doesn't object and slips him a sexy grin over her shoulder.

"Jesus," says the railway man, "this has been going on for a while, perhaps I should toot the steam whistle."

"Better not," says Simon, "unless you want the shire healthy around inspecting your chook pens and dog licenses and the traffic inspector putting your vehicle over the pits."

"Christ no," the man says, "It's about the last thing I need."

Simon contemplates. "He's playing with fire," he says, "he's only got that job through his father-in-laws influence and if his starchy wife got word of any hanky panky with the office girl, the manure will soon hit the fan. In any case, all he has to do is just be half competent at what he does and in the fullness of time, when Old Barney falls off the perch; he will be married to the richest girl in the district." (Old Barney has a huge and efficiently run farming property out a bit).

"Yeah," says the engine driver, "it beggars belief and it doesn't look like a one off thing."

At the height of summer, Simon comes across some further evidence. It's a stinking hot night, but with a deal of moonlight and he decides to ride up to the big



railway dam and have a swim. He puts a bridle on old Tinkerbelle, a big rangy mare with a beautiful temperament and rides her bareback through the rifle range, shortcutting to the dam. As he rides up the sandy road that leads onto the range proper, he spots two cars near the open fronted clubhouse shed. One is the council car and the other, a small Japanese one; the council's office girl's car. He can make out two people on a rug in the space in front of the shed. They are making a bit of noise and Simon doesn't stop, he just keeps old Tinkerbelle

walking. He expects that they are not aware of his presence due to the sandy nature of this patch of ground.

'Hmm,' he thinks, 'in the office, outdoors – there's a brisk little affair going on here.'

Six weeks later, he rides his bike down to work and as he is leaning it against a buttress, the police sergeant, a big piggy-eyed man wearing uniform trousers and boots, shirt and tie and a brown sports coat, gets out of his English car and walks over.

"Simon Grantham," he states. Simon is diffident indeed and respectful of his elders always, but he bridles at this.

"Who the fuck else would I be, sergeant?" he says. The cop is not put out.

"Simon Grantham," he says, "I require you to accompany me to the police station to help us with our enquiries." Simon's interest is piqued.

"I'll bike around," he says, "after I've told the bank manager why I'm not at work."

"He's been told," the sergeant says, "now walk over and get into my car and don't you try a runner."

"Why not?" Simon says cheekily. "With the pudding you're carrying, you'd never catch me." The copper pulls a big black pistol out of his belt.

"I'd stop you alright," he says.

"Ulp," says Simon and goes over to get in the car.

At the station he is taken into an interview room of this archaic building. He is told to sit down and the sergeant takes the chair behind the desk.

"Would you care to tell me where you were between 8pm and midnight last night?" he asks.

This is a Friday morning and for the hours the copper sets out, he was busy sparking Mary Hardisty on the well used rug on their spare room floor. In fact the very memory of it creates a huge yawn.

"None of your business," Simon says.

"Ah, but it is," he copper says, "constable....."

The second officer at the station, a probationary constable, comes in. He's a tall chap, herring gutted and a real mongrel to boot. It's only a matter of time before the locals entice him out of town a bit and rough him up. He's certainly been busy making a lot of young blokes and some older ones around town think this way. He's carrying an evidence bag, places it on the desk and steps behind Simon. Simon's only a youngster, but he is also pretty tough under it all, as the polo playing fraternity well know.

"I haven't got eyes in the back of my head, fellow," he says to the constable, "why don't you stand where I can at least see you?"

The constable reluctantly does, but only just. The sergeant tips the evidence bag contents onto the desk top. There's only a short cotton rope with a gold snap clip each end.

"Is this your property?" he says. Simon looks at it.

"I would think so," he says. "I've got four of these about this length and two the same, but much longer."

"What do you use them for?" the big copper asks.

"Well...I take four ponies down to the polo ground every Sunday afternoon during the season. I couple them together with four of these (gesturing to what is on the desk) and the longer ones hook the end horses up to a sapling that I bolt to the flatbed. It's a simple and easy way to move a lot of neddies at the one time. I don't have a helper groom, of course."

"Why the gold clips?"

"Yes, they are unusual," Simon says. "A good friend gave them to me."

"Who was it?" the copper asks.

"Again," Simon says, "It's absolutely none of your business."

"Let's make sure this is yours."

"Okay, we can drive up to Dad's place and check at the stables."

They do so.

"You don't lock your gear away?" the copper asks.

"The saddles, yes; I hang them on hooks in the mesh cage. They're quite expensive by my standards, but the lesser gear; head collars and couplings, no."

Sure enough, one of the couplings is missing.

"Last seen?" they ask.

"Oh...I hung them there Sunday night. I'm sometimes late home and feed up in the dark. I certainly didn't know that one was gone and wouldn't probably have noticed that until next Sunday at polo round up time."

They return to the station.

"A missing coupling is hardly a major matter," Simon says. "If you're finished with me, I'll get back to the bank."

"Not on," says the copper, "unless you can have someone vouch for your whereabouts between 8pm and midnight last night."

"No," says Simon. "It would have unthinkable consequences to do so."

"Hmm," says the copper, "the consequences to you could be even more unthinkable. Now," he continues, "you will understand that I report to a higher authority and in that vein I intend to hold you here until that very higher authority arrive on the scene to continue our enquiries."

"Not on," says Simon, "you've told me nothing. I want old Dadda Thaxton, our family lawyer, around. You must allow me the use of your phone."

The cops leave the room, but come back within the quarter hour.

"You can use the phone on the desk," they say. Simon immediately rings old Dadda Thaxton's legal secretary. Molly Carew says, "He's in Court, Simon. Where are you? I'll send a runner around to the Court House to alert him."

"Please do," says Simon, "the matter is becoming serious – whatever it is." Dadda arrives within the hour. He hears him pull up in his 1927 Chevy 4 Tourer. He consults with the cops and they usher him in.

"Umm...Simon," he says, "this is big time for a small town and you can't blame the coppers. Someone strangled Vivian Maroney, a pregnant Vivian Maroney, with what appears to be your coupling rope at the rifle range last night about 10 o'clock. They got an anonymous call at 5am this morning from someone claiming to have seen you leaving the scene."

"Rubbish," says Simon, "I was in town."

"Where?" Dadda asks.

"I can't tell you that, there would be ramifications."

"Umm..." says Dadda. "They're going to hold you until the boys from CID at Bathurst arrive. They have agreed not to interview you without me being present, so I'll go home for a bit of lunch and then come back."

Dadda goes, the Bathurst boys arrive: this pair of plain clothes men are a tad gung ho.

"We've near got you pinned on a murder rap," they bluster. Simon grins.

"Well, buggar me." He says, "The Keystone Cops in person. Where's my lawyer?"

The big bloke whacks him hard on the side of the head; Simon jumps up, grabs the hardwood chair and has one down on the floor and the other on the run, when the constable comes in sporting a black service pistol. Simon's made his point. Dadda arrives. They question their suspect intensively with Dadda interjecting quite effectively. Finally they toss it in and Simon gets back to work about 3pm. Herbert Hardisty is not impressed. His staff is small and he's been two short for most of the day.

"What in Christ is going on, Mr Grantham?"

Simon tells him. Hardisty holds his head in his hands for a bit.

"Don't worry, Sir," Simon says, "I had nothing whatsoever to do with the matter. Hopefully they will now have to chase up the real killer."

Wild conjecture sweeps the town and quite unknown to Simon, one of the wallflower girls from the Saturday night dances that he takes home once in a while, timidly comes around to the cop shop. She volunteers that on the night of the murder, she saw Simon prop his bike up at the side lane opposite her home, where

there is a big bushy hedge and walk up the street. She also, out of curiosity, kept an eye out on his return and thus can confirm he came back about 11.30pm to retrieve his bike and ride away into the darkness. The cops have him in again and he confirms the information they have received in confidence, but doesn't tell them of where he was. (Mary Hardisty's house, seven houses further up). He eventually hears and thanks the source for coming forward. The girl clasps his forearm.

"Simon, you wouldn't harm a fly intentionally," she says, "You are a lovely gentle fellow. Are you going to Saturday's dance?"

With the cloud hanging over him, Simon has been keeping out of the limelight, but he goes Saturday night and walks her home. The cops, of course, are right on the case and on Monday next, they have the girl in to grill her on the off chance she is making up an alibi for Simon. Things go a bit quiet, and for Simon a fair bit sour when the love of his life, a girl he has been associated with since fourth grade at Parkes High School, tells him that until the dark matter is cleared up they should stay clear of one another. This is heavy stuff and quite devastating to Simon; they have only recently come to an understanding that they are quite serious about one another. But there's even worse to come.

The cops arrive at the bank one Wednesday morning when they are all busy balancing the ledgers and take Simon away. They take him back up to his horse stables and spreading a sheet on the tack room floor, ask him to tip out the contents



of his tack box onto this. He upends the Gladstone bag, a leftover from his school days and they pick over the sheet and produce a gold ring with a pearl inset in it. Simon recognises it immediately and says so. It's a ring, the only ring that anyone had seen the murder victim wear. It's discreet and in very good taste, but it is, or was hers. The cops admit they knew it went missing and under pressure admit that someone told them to look for it where they found it. The upshot of all this,

is that Simon finds himself under arrest for wilful murder and is tossed into the Parkes cells.

Dadda Thaxton says, "Simon, I'm getting old and in this matter, well out of my depth. I've arranged with your Dad to bring in a criminal lawyer who has seen this side of the business much more than I. I'm more a wills, trusts, real property conveyancing and so on, type of lawyer."

"Fair enough," says Simon. "What about bail?"

"Not so easy," says Dadda, "but we can work through that when Thomas O'Reilly comes to Parkes."

And they do. It's pretty intense, but the evidence in this matter is purely circumstantial and stemming from anonymous calls. There's enough doubt to point to someone unknown trying to fit Simon with the crime and the magistrate (also from Bathurst) isn't so mad about the cops' case and lets Simon out.

Two miserable months go by during which his light of love keeps incommunicado and his alibi girl a bit more clinging and his trysts with Mary Hardisty more physical than ever.

"Simon," she says, "if things turn really against you, I'll alibi you of course, but let's let it get down the track a bit. If I rush in now and they later turn up the real murderer it will have all been for nothing."

So he gets arraigned in the Bathurst Court and the case falls to pieces when Thomas O'Reilly subpoenas Mary Hardisty and she provides the needed alibi to get Simon right off the hook. It is, of course, a huge sensation both in Parkes and in the Sydney Morning Herald. The bank removes both parties from the scene. Herbert gets posted to Goulburn and Mary goes with him; Simon is transferred to Martin Place.

"It's like this," the staff officer says, "There's nothing against you other than a magnificent scandal. A junior officer having a full on affair with the wife of his bank manager marked for promotion makes you something indeed of a freak. You are well connected and well spoken of and I don't know whether you know this or not, but Packer Senior is a mad keen Polo player and a huge client of this banking institution, apart from wielding impressive media clout. He's been in to bat for you, so it's now more than a bit political. It seems, if you continue to play good polo, you are as safe as houses, but of course, as with any freak, we will keep you under observation. Now, what do you want us to do with you?"

Simon chuckles. Having seen the bills that came in from the legal eagles, there is only one way to go.

"What about a law school scholarship and a part-time job and a commitment to enter the Bank's Legal Department when I qualify?"

"It could be done," the man says.

A decade passes and at the stage where Simon considers he has paid his debt to his employers, he turns up off the train at Parkes and walks around to Dadda Thaxton's home. He has a bottle of single malt Glenlivet in his attaché case. Dadda's glad to see him; even gladder when Simon produces two shot glasses and does a pour.

"Nice to see you, Simon," he says. "I suppose you want the practice."

Simon chuckles. "Not while you're still around, Dadda," he says. "Just pretend I'm your articled clerk and we'll split what we can make."

"And my paralegal?" he asks.

"Ah, business as usual."

"This is all a bit providential," Dadda says. "There's a bundle of work stacked up at my chambers and its getting beyond me."

"It's not so providential, Dadda," he says. "My long standing deal with Molly Carew was to call me when she needed me, but not before."

"Good old Mary," says Dadda. "I can't climb the stairs anymore."

Simon next goes around to the old chambers, dark as all get out and very Charles Dickensish.

"You'll take over Dadda's old office, kit and caboodle?" Mary asks.

"Not while Dadda's around. Let's hop in and paint the well-windowed store room, furniture and all and take it from there. Just one coat of heavy beige base and a new Georgian door at entry point, beige again."

She laughs. "You'll be wanting me to toss out Dadda's enamel coffee mugs next."

"Now Mary," he says, "is your shorthand still good to go? If so, grab your pad." He dictates a short letter and an affidavit.

"God in Heaven," she says, "Parkes has slumbered since you were acquitted. Are you sure you want to open this awful can of worms?"

The affidavit sets out the sighting of alleged intimacy in the recessed doorway and the sighting of the two cars at the Rifle Range near to 11 years back. The short

note to the Town Clerk is notice with these attachments that Simon will be around to effect a citizen's arrest the next day at 3pm.

At 2pm the next day, Molly comes into his new office and says,

"The police from Bathurst to see you, Mr Grantham."

"Um...show them in," says Simon.

The local Sergeant comes in accompanied by the Bathurst Superintendent in full fig uniform.

"There's been a suicide," the huge Superintendent says, "caused by you it seems."

"Spare me the details, me old policeman china plate," he says. "What you are here about, I expect, is a man that could bear his guilty conscience no longer."

Continuing to stir the pot, Simon goes around to the huge providers, where the love of his life, childless, married to a commonly known wife beater, still works. She is astonished. "What on earth are you doing here, Simon?" she asks.

Simon puts his hand on her tall shoulder.

"I'm here to propose to a married woman and to take her away from all this."

She holds his stare. Her eyes, as always, are big, open and blue.

"I accept," she says.

THREE

MAYHEM

NEAR

MAYANUP

Mayhem Near Mayanup

Brad Wintle and his Army Engineers team have just finished their third stint in Afghanistan. They are back in Western Australia on leave – and having quite a relaxing time. Things in the desert of Afghanistan haven't been at all easy and the attrition rate – mainly from roadside bombs, which are becoming quite sophisticated – has been quite high.

Brad has been down at his sister's place, west of Kojonup. She is married to another of his army group; three small kids. Her hubby's a much decorated war hero, another Afghan victim. He's not the big strong man he was. He gets around with a limp, but is coping with running their farm (inherited from his Dad) quite well, but he's not fit enough to do the off farm contracting work that he used to, to bring in a lot of outside money. Brad goes down to the gate with his sister to pick up the mail and bread from the mailbox.

"Things, Brad," she says, "are a bit disquieting here on the farm. There's a fair chance we may lose it to the bank and I really don't know how Tom would get on without the challenge and therapy of running this place."

It's a mixed farm down a gravel road a bit, towards a big microwave transmitting tower. It's heavily timbered country, but fine for cropping oats and canola and running sheep and cattle. While they are picking up the mail, a white armour guard car rolls quietly past on the Blackwood main road.

"Gosh," she says, "I wish I could knock that beggar off. That would ease our financial problems."

Brad looks around – bush and stillness.

"Middle of nowhere, Sis," he says, "wouldn't be much in that sardine can."

"You'd be surprised," she says. "Tommy's sister works in a bank in town. Says this run carries the Boddington Gold Mine cash pays every Thursday. They generally cart around one and a quarter million."

"Um," Brad says, "what's Tommy up to?"

"He's putting up new cattle yards. He's up the road a bit chainsawing down long saplings for the job."

They go up for a chat. Brad's got a quick brain; spends a deal of time with Military Intelligence setting up entrapments to bag up the Taliban baddies. Back at the house, he has an intense look at the fire map on the office wall and asks a few questions.

"What's the jackenory on the bank difficulties, Sis?" he says.

"Tommy's late," she says, "Dad borrowed against this place while Tom was soldiering to subdivide the big chunk of land he owned in town. Subdivided it into 15 acre hobby farms; did a great job with roads, water, power, great fencing; cost a mint and he got it on the market the week of the property crash; hasn't sold one. The worry killed him, I reckon."

By next Monday, Brad and his mates, complete with a big esky of German tinnies, are having a swim and relax at North Cottesloe, before the sea breeze comes in. The beach patrol pulls up and a big chap gets out.

"Not on, fellas," he says, "best close up the esky."

The boys get up en masse.

"A word.....," Brad says. "We're on leave from a place with more sand than you see here. A word further....piss off....," Brad says it pleasantly and the beach patrolman, after a close look at them, says,

"Yes, well.....okay."

With the man gone, Brad says to his group, "I'm planning a working bee to get our old mate Tommy out of trouble – volunteers needed. It's not all that tricky a job, but it has consequences if we screw up."

"Tell us the plan," his 2IC says.

By and large, the soldiers have had a good time in the Northbridge nightclubs and catching up on their sex life. They are getting a bit skint and a bit bored - "Didn't know that booze and sex could prove so expensive," one remarks.

Anyway, they are all ears.

"I plan to knock off an armoured cash van," Brad says. "It's a lot easier than what we've been doing in Karajan Province. We'll need some ordnance however, of a non-army type and a deal of army ordnance too. We can get the latter from Swanbourne Barracks and the military stores at Karrakatta. For the rest, we'll do a reccy tomorrow at sparrow fart."

They steal a newish Toyota van first, and a not so good one. They take the ID device out of the new one, fit it to the old one, run the latter out to a limestone quarry and really torch it. Then they load up their army stuff into the remaining van. Next night, they break into a Main Roads Depot in Welshpool and load what they want onto a tandem trailer – also hijacked – and team this up with another hijacked vehicle; a Toyota Land Cruiser taken from a used car yard, and after a few other purchases, set off after dark for Kojonup.

Next morning at 10.57 sharp, the Armour Guard vehicle passes the turn-off to the Mayanup Phone Tower Road. As soon as they are around the next bend the conspirators run across 'ROAD DETOUR' signs. They do a call to the group nearest to Kojonup, who do the same. Traffic both ends now is on detour to the next parallel roads; dusty gravel ones. The detour signs on these roads have been in place for half an hour prior. The money van pulls up short when a farm tractor towing on a jinker a heap of 20 foot long saplings crosses their path. The driver doesn't look their way; he's looking down the road in the direction of Kojonup. The money van pulls up to let him get his load over the road. There is a loud explosion and a stainless steel spear crashes through the side of it. A blast of compressed air blows in CIA developed nerve gas – it's a sort of bang, whoosh effect.

Brad waits three minutes by his watch and starts up a pump to reverse out through the spear, the air from the van. Helpers with steel cutting gear have the complete side cut out in minutes. For safety sake they have put a communications dampener on the top of the van to cut out all alarms. It's all standard type stuff used every day in the Afghan war. Gloved helpers now get stuck into unloading the van and transferring the load to their van. They get everything cleaned out and leave the three guards sleeping peacefully where they fell. Tommy is long gone from the scene down to his new cattle yards deep into the property.

The conspirators fit big magnetic advertising signs to their van, advertising a Margaret River Winery – they lifted these from a supplies van at last Friday's wine show at the Broadway Fair. They drive past and through Boyup Brook and out on the Donnybrook road, where the entrance road to the Clay Target Club has a furniture removal truck parked along it a bit and run the van up a long steel truck ramp. They buzz along a bit; the boys all in the back enjoying a tinnie or two. They turn off a back road towards Wilga, to a very secluded spot where they have a deep pit dug and a bobcat parked in concealment nearby. They drive the van into the pit and bobcat away to fill it in and level it off. They spread bags of gum leaves over the disturbed earth and grab their stash of motorbikes (all legally owned) and split in

various directions. Brad gets right through to Bunbury in the furniture van, parks it in a road train assembly area, runs his motorbike down the ramp and is away.

The news choppers are up near Mayanup by late afternoon and every road progressively starts to get blocked off. The guards come around within three hours – none the worse for wear and confusion reigns supreme.

“Never saw any van,” Tommy says and indeed, the van driver confirms that Tommy was concentrating on looking up the Blackwood road as he eased his tricky load over. Tommy’s no slouch, they can’t shake him.

On the North Cottesloe beach two days later, Brad doles out a decent lump of cash to each of the participants to keep them floating for another and last week of their leave. The outer movements of all this frenetic activity sees Tommy sell off cattle to keep the Bank dampened down. The boys on their next break dig up their treasure trove and then rebury the van using a bobcat on a trailer to do the digging. They ship the lot intact to Port Moresby on a fishing charter and in the fullness of time, the Timber Bank, through channels, pays out the bank debt on Tommy’s sub-division and to replace the cattle he had to sacrifice.

The boys are having a few tinnies on a small hill in Karajan Province. Brad raises his glass – “Here’s to you blokes and old Tommy,” he says. “Let’s do the next ones for ourselves, personally.”

Aaron, probably the smartest one in the conspiratorial group, says, “Yer know....I’ve been studying how the Septic Tanks cart around their Afghan helpers gold payroll in a Bradley armoured car – the real beat-up one.....”

The mob instantly chorus, “So have we, so have we.”

FOUR

***COOL
RUNNING***

Cool Running

(The Streaker in Wagin)

Police constable John George is on patrol in Narrogin – along the main street, Federal, a bit. It's an easy duty, he passes a few joking remarks with a famous local, Baymiss Ugle, an indigenous chap who tends to get on the sherbet a bit and stir things up. Baymiss is on his bike today and he's got a .22 rifle tied to the handle bars.

"Off to rob the stage coach," Johnny laughingly comments.

"Not at all, Constable George," Baymiss says. "I'm off to exercise my legal rights and pot a couple of ducks that I know of on a dam."

"Good luck," John says.

He gets up to Durrell's bakery and there's quite a crowd morning tea-ing inside. The junior constable comes along from Fortune Street.

"The sergeant wants you, Johnny," he says. "Something out of town, I think." Johnny makes his way back down Federal Street, turns at Egerton and walks up to the station.

"Ah, John," sergeant Kevin says, "A change of scenery."

"Fair go, sergeant," John says, "the Railways Football need me here at the moment."

"Oh, it's only for a day or two," the sergeant says. "Catch the diesel rail car down to Wagin this afternoon and report there to sergeant Bill. You've been booked into Moran's hotel, so it will make for a pleasant change. Wear civvies though, this is undercover duty."

"And to do what?" Johnny asks.

"Take your sandshoes," the sergeant says. "The boys are trying to catch a streaker and as sergeant Treloar insists that his young constable runs in regulation boots, they can't catch the beggar. You're the fastest man on the footy field here and you can wear civvies. I expect you will soon apprehend this athletic perpetrator."



Late afternoon off the rail car sees John round at the old stone police station being put in the picture on the streaker. Constable Pat Wilkinson is there with, until recently senior constable Treloar, now a sergeant. Treloar comes from a farming scene in Robinson Road, Woodanilling and what he doesn't know about duck swamps isn't worth knowing.

"Hmm," he says. "We've no idea of who this beggar is. The railway shunters, who have watched us chasing him around the streets at night, say that if they find out, they'll blackmail him into running in the Stawell Gift and they'll put their shirts on him. The beggar can run and because of this ability, he gets away on us and jumps into his street gear and melts into the local scene. Now, constable," he continues, "you are our secret weapon; very secret, so, as far as we are concerned, you can lay off and read Westerns in your room at Moran's during the day, so that you can be fresh on hand in your running gear at 9 sharp. He runs after that time on irregular nights. He always comes down from the direction of the Methodist church, past the baker's and the variations in his runs, which have made it hard to catch him, occur at Bank Street. He often turns there, disappears down Blythe and that's the end of the sighting. He often also continues right around the block, past the front of the town

hall, ignores the alleyway, rounds the corner at Mac's store and disappears down the laneway next to Jack Holland's Billiard Saloon."

Something must or perhaps got out as the streaker has a lay week and constable John, dressed not to look like a rozzar, just drifts around town a bit. He gets noticed and is offered a couple of jobs and a girl in the Co-op, the big local store, gives him the real glad eye.

If the night's a fizzer, he walks around town, has the odd beer (on expenses) in any of the three pubs and notices with interest that at the same time every evening, the Railway shunting engine; a big steam one, a Mountain Class, stops sort of midway between the Federal and Palace Hotels and the young shunters and often one or two from the Night Stationmaster's Office, come down to take their crib on the footplate. He notices also, that a small but regular crowd seem to gather at the side wall of the Federal. The big engine blocks their view a bit, but some of them seem to be carrying field glasses.

It's all as curious as curious that in this freezing August night weather all this purposeless activity is occurring. He remarks on this to sergeant Bill and constable Pat next evening when they convene fruitlessly to lay in wait for the streaker.

"Ah, constable, you look at them looking, but it seems you missed what they were gathered to look at."

"Hmmm," says the copper. "I looked for what they were looking for, but I didn't see anything out of the ordinary."

The sergeant laughs. "Oh, perhaps she took a lead from the missing streaker and had a lay night too."

"Who might the 'she' be?" he asks. Constable Pat provides the info.

"Well.... she's known locally as Bellsie and she is filling in for the office girl at one of the stock firms, who's on holidays. She's a smashing looker; olive skin, pageboy haircut."

John checks her out surreptitiously the next few days. The description doesn't quite do her justice. She is a class act in a period when the local girls dressed a bit tizzily and often permed their hair. She is a natural looker – tailored non-fussy dresses, straight falling hair, brown eyes. She reflects the sophisticated grooming of a city girl, and she has the charm, poise and warmth to go with it.



The cause of all the night time assembly is that she has the first room facing the railway line, upstairs in the Palace Hotel and of an evening, usually about the same time, she peels off ready for bed and walks around the room; lights on, blinds pulled right back and in dishabille or really non – non dishabille, hangs her clothes of the day finished and selects her tomorrow wardrobe. She takes her time doing this and is probably totally aware that she is running the only show in this dull old town of a

night.

A fireman, a bright one with an eye for the girls is the first to discover the show and word spreads, so that from the next evening on they prevail upon the engine driver, a droll character known as Muscles, to park the train in the best vantage spot and to provide an incomparable viewing platform for them to legally have their crib there.

The Stationmaster, a gentlemanly and churchgoing man becomes aware of a change in routine and in dressing gown and slippers, makes a difficult walk along the ballasted permanent way to see what is going on. In the way of the old English station set-ups, the Stationmasters house fronts the railway line a short distance from the station proper, and just across the road from the Palace Hotel.

[Quite recently it was sold off to a private owner. En route to a wake at the Palace Hotel, the writer speaks to the owner. "Nice solid old house, what's it like to live in?" "Pros and cons," says the new owner. "When the Rubbety shuts, my drinking mates tend to walk over to have a tinkle in my front garden and then bang on the door to bum a tinny to get them home – otherwise, fine, fine." There's a new For Sale sign on it now – noticed at another wake. Perhaps the visitors were a bit constant.]



He mounts the footplate and Muscles, the driver, known to be fond of a cold ale on a hot evening, says, "Well, Harry....the boys have asked me to park here for their crib time and Old Roy (the boss of the Loco) can't find anything in the regulations to prevent me doing this, so here we are. You can join us for the show or you can order us to move on; in which case, the young blokes will, I think, vote for industrial action or perhaps best of all, you can do a Nelson."

"A Nelson?" Harry asks.

Muscles chuckles. "Ships, I see no ships."

"Oh," Harry says. "You're very literate for an Engine Driver."

Muscles laughs. "Old Chifley was a Bathurst Engine Driver," he says, "and no one before or since has run the country better."

Harry says, "Fair enough. Have a good evening."

He returns home the way he came, stumbling along on the bluemetal.

Next afternoon, the shunters on afternoon shift, who miss nothing, see sergeant Bill and constable Pat walking along Tavistock Street. They are pacing distances and every 100 yards, they put a chalk stripe on the brickwork and a Roman numeral above it. Town clerk, Jim Brown, who also misses nothing, comes out to query them.

"What ho, Bill?" he says. "What are you doing desecrating brickwork on buildings that I am solely responsible for?"

"I'm on duty and this is police business, Mr Brown,"

"But Bill..." Brown starts to say.

Displaying the notorious reserve of the police force, Bill says, "It's sergeant, thank you and I would be pleased if you will now refrain from interfering with Police business and stop drawing attention to what we are about. Policing is serious work!"

The two extraordinary shows running in Wagin in the dark of a winter's night can't be expected to go on forever; in fact the stock firm girl's outstanding show is known to be ending this Thursday evening as the (missing) girl on holiday is due back Monday morning. Thus Bellsie's last night in Wagin is a Thursday as she has organised a lift back to Perth and her Nedlands home, after work Friday.

Sergeant Bill, a bit frustrated at their so far unsuccessful stakeouts, tells John and Pat that he reckons the stalker is, he suspects, among Bellsie's regular watchers in the stalls and that as she is ending up, the stalker may take the opportunity for a valedictory performance too; which, he admits, would make this the latest streak yet, but he's got this feeling.

Bellsie goes out with a flourish. When she has protracted this Thursday as long as possible and reasonable, she walks up to the window, nightdress over her arm, gives a curtain call bow and starts to draw the curtains. The engine driver leans on the train whistle. They're a tad overdue to get back shunting on the western edge of the railway yard. The girl's a true trooper. She reopens the curtains; she's got her nightie on, but she gets a bit of a fright too, when she realizes that two men on the balcony, schooners in hand, have seemingly been in the front stalls of her risqué show.

"Awwrrr," says the disappointed crowd and a final train whistle is blown.

Minutes later, constable John is peeled down to shorts, long sleeved footy jumper and sand shoes and is running on the spot halfway up the paved alleyway between the court house and the town hall. He's positioned to go either way; if the stalker turns down Bank Street, he is unlikely to get in front of him and it will thus be a stern chase which, going on the stalker's running ability, may prove fruitless. If, on the other hand, he goes around the council offices corner to head past the entry of the town hall, he will be able to take him head on. A much better prospect.

He hears the shrill whistle carried by Constable Pat go. This indicates that sergeant Bill's hunch is a good one and the target is moving east down Tavistock Street. He steps up his running on the spot, ready for immediate take-off and seconds later, he hears the blast of a police thunderer whistle, which Treloar is carrying. Thus he now knows the stalker is doing the full block, so he gets into gear and bursts out of the mouth of the alley and charges towards the stalker, who is running very fast indeed. He's wearing nothing but a bathmat, folded with a slit for visibility. Johnny now sees why the watching shunters have never been able to identify the runner. The young copper runs flat tack at the stalker. This chap is going so fast, he can't take evading action soon enough. They crash head on and sprawl on the pavement just north of the town hall entrance.

Johnny is the first back on his feet, but not by much, so he gives the runner a vicious rabbit killer to stop him getting up further. By this time, constable Pat and sergeant Bill are on the scene and the shunters give them a sustained victory hoot on the train whistle. Looking in their direction, sergeant Bill yells,

"We got the beggar, we got him."

John Ellsdon, a wonderfully smart carpenter builder and trotting owner trainer, works on the railways at night to give him time to train his neddies in the morning. John's very quick and on the mark.

"If you'd been a bit quicker, sarge," he yells, "you would have caught the girl he was chasing."



Bill is taken aback. He looks at Johnny, who thrusts the stunned and naked stalker into Bill's arms and hares off in the direction of the Tudhoe Street/Tudor Street corner. He realizes he's been conned when he turns the corner; absolutely no one is in sight. It's a very cold night. Back at the crime scene, John Ellsdon turns contrite; he doesn't want sergeant Bill on his wheel.

"Sorry, sergeant," he says. "Only joking!"

Sergeant Treloar is magnanimous in victory and calls back, "That's okay, John, don't worry about it. We got him down from Narrogin for his running ability, not his brains."

Constable George's work is now finished at Wagin, but while walking around Wagin in mufti and pretending he's on holiday, he's made a few unsuspecting friends; one of whom he is to take to the dance at St Georges Hall on Saturday night. He's a very presentable young man and the girl he has picked up with, although a

tad reserved, has sparked him up a bit. He catches the 2am train back to Narrogin and by arrangement with Jack Moran, retains his room until Sunday.

Saturday afternoon late, he rides his motorbike down from Narrogin and suitably spruced up, he meets his girl at the dance. It's a great dance, good music, savory supper and a few beers out the road a bit with the local lads. You can't legally drink within a quarter mile of a public hall at this time.

After supper, Johnny jogs around to the Hotel and does a bit of organising. The maid's put a couple of hot water bottles in his bed; he puts it on Jack to drop up a bottle of vodka and some cold orange juice to his room and prevails on him to turn off the stairway lights and the big outside streetlamp for five minutes at 12.15am



sharp. Jack, an amusing and gregarious chap has seen it all in his life of helping run the pub and living there as well.

"Well, John," he says, "bit unusual, but not out of the question. Woffor?"

"I hope to smuggle my date for the night up to my room for a cuddle," he says, "It's bloody bitter out."

"Who's the girl?" Jack asks. "If you want my assistance, I think I can fairly ask that."

Constable John leans over and says very confidentially, "And I'm only assuming that I will round her up, but she's certainly flying the right signals to date. It's Avril Anstruther."

Jack is stunned. "Jam and Jerusalem. If you pull this off and it gets out, all the denizens from her church will be around to beat you to death with their hymn books."

"Oh," John says. "She's a honey. I'll take my chances."

Johnny returns to the hall. He gets in the door, catches the girl's eye, but gets distracted when a young stock firm chap, whom he had met earlier, comes dazedly in the door. His tie is at the back of his neck and his coat to match is back to front.

"You've been in a bit of strife, Ralph?" he asks.

"Oh, not at all," Ralph says and then realizes how he must look. He laughs and starts to get his clothing together. "It's a big strong local," he says. "When he's on the laughing juice, he tends to pick on the blow-ins, never the locals."

"Ah," says Johnny. "Where does he operate from?"

"Oh...the Geraldton Wax bushes on the west side of the Hall; the track to the dunnies."

Johnny sucks his teeth. "Come on Ralph, if you're game. Just retrace your route and I'll bag the beggar from behind."

"I'm game," says Ralph and giving time for John to duck around the Hall and get in position, he sets off.

The local is well sherbeted and John, without much trouble, and with the advantage of surprise, soon dumps the chap to the ground. He debags him and hands the trousers to Ralph and they leave the miscreant wondering what the heck had hit him. They toss the trousers over the alcove entry to the Hall and get back to dancing. John puts his proposition to the girl when they are having the medley; she immediately accepts and he explains the time frame and they step out for the Pub. The minute Jack douses the light, he sprints her upstairs and is soon pouring her a stiff drink.

"Never been in a pub before," she says. "Can't touch the drink if it's alcoholic; it'll get picked up on my breath."

"No way," says John. "Vodka is odourless and it's only mildly alcoholic," he continues; telling a very big porky.

"In that case," the girl says, "top that glass up and splash a bit of orange in and I'll try it." She tosses it down like water. "Mmm," she says, "fill up another." She tosses that down in one swift movement. Her eyes start to lose their focus. "Yer know," she says, "Mum's against the drink and this is absolutely my first time in a pub. Gosh...it's very warm and snug, isn't it?"

"The bed's warm too," Johnny says. "The maid put a couple of hot water bottles in earlier."

She's now on a roll. "In that case, turn your back for just a jiff."

When he turns, her gear is scattered on the floor and she's sitting up in bed with a lop-sided grin on her face.

"Come on," she says. "The last one in is a muffin."

She has given John that she should be home by 2am otherwise her Mum may go nuclear. At 1.45am John has walked her down to the common ablutions block and walked her into a cold shower. He has trouble getting something to cover her as she walks along.

'God,' John thinks, 'no wonder the Russians won the war – or their part of it – if this is the effect that Vodka has on the unsuspecting.'

By 2.15am, he has the girl home to her front verandah; Mum comes out like an avenging fury. "Where have you been? What have you been doing.....and what's that on your breath?" John has had her munching strong peppermints as they walked. The girl rallies.

"Oh, Mum," she disarmingly says, "this is John George from Narrogin. He's a nice man and we've been having a nice talk and he's coming to church tomorrow. Oh....and we've been drinking peppermint cordial.....it's lovely."

This is the first John has heard of this, but as she's spent the evening galloping hard in his room, he can't resile at that. He just hopes she can remain perpendicular until she gets to her bed.

John has a fair tenor voice and fits in well with the practiced singers at this non-conformist church. He's Catholic raised and thinks, 'Gawd, this is a dull old show.' He blends in with the other singers. He enjoys the morning tea after church; meets a lot of the church goers and doesn't dream at this point in time, that he will be seeing the same faces at this same church at his wedding there 17 weeks later; his bride, chubby now, at his side.

We can fast forward things a bit and gloss over his early married life and the swift arrival of his twin daughters.

Three years later, his life is radically changed. He has a nice house in Doonan Road, Nedlands and is now a transport executive with CBH. His new mother-in-law doesn't want her only daughter married to a walloper and she heckled his new father-in-law, a man big in farming directorship, to find John a more acceptable job with a title. In actual fact, it's a very good job and he is often overseas with the Wheat sellers, helping expedite delivery arrangements for the shipments they sell.

The only constant in his life is Australian Rules football. He plays centre half-forward for Claremont and makes the State team in these pre AFL days. Grand Final day arrives. They are playing Swan Districts at Subiaco Oval and much is at stake. As the Swans centre half-back trots out, (a big tallish chap wearing a ponytail) he puts out his hand to shake hands, in these past gentlemanly days, and is astounded when his opponent kicks him sharply in the knee. He doubles up and the same chap gives him a devastating head butt. He is so stunned, that before he has time to

retaliate, the chap has hooked his leg around him and pushes very hard to the Subiaco Oval surface.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Johnny asks.

The big chap grins a mirthless grin. “Ebbs and flows, old man, let me help you up.”

He grabs John’s forearm, gets him nearly up and then drops him back on the surface. He now grabs John when he gets back up and gives him the mother and father of a shaking. The captain of Claremont jogs over.

“What,” he says, “in the name of goodness is going on?”

All that is going on is, of course, what we now call ‘Tagging’ and a team like Collingwood have made this an art form, but back in this period, it was unknown. The big chap grins. “Don’t move him,” he says. “Like Ruth, where he goes, I will go. Why don’t you get back to tossing the coin and keep your nose out of my business.”

“You’re a rude bastard,” the Captain says.

“Ah,” says the tall one, “you’ve seen nothing yet.”

Johnny is a bit muzzy and every time he leads to gather up long, raking drop kicks, (remember them?) the tall chap flies like the remarkable John Gerovich and marks way over him. If he sprints for a mark, the tall one is right on his wheel and kicks his boot over from behind.

Claremont realises that if they don’t do something, they will go down. Their spearhead, who has been instrumental in getting them into the Grand Final, is not doing well at all. They move him into the forward pocket and without a by-your-leave, the tall one moves with him. With the centre half-forward spot now rudderless, the mid-fielders shoot for the pocket, but never get past the tall one. They go down screaming and the tall one skims off the man of the match medal.

As the whistle goes, Johnny says to his nemesis, “What the hell have I ever done to you?”

“Ah.....” says the tall one. “Four years back in front of Wagin town hall, you quite unnecessarily, gave me the daddy of rabbit killers. I think that today, I’ve squared the ledger.”

“Ah....banking talk,” says Johnny. “Surely they sacked you for your streaking efforts.”

“Not at all,” says the tall one. “They said that as I knew all about the dangers of square pegs in round holes I’d better be a staff officer. I’m now that for the whole of our WA operation. Do have a lemonade in your wowser home tonight to get over what I’ve dished out to you today.”

Sadly this is true. His wife, after the big night at Moran’s, has sworn off the booze and he now lives, reluctantly, in an alcohol-free house.



The above picture is of Premier John Tonkin opening the Wagin Water Supply. 'Muscles' Hosking and his mountain class viewing platform can be seen in the background. (with thanks to Tom Naylor for supplying engine details)

FIVE

***ALL LEADERSHIP
ENDS IN TEARS***

All Leadership Ends in Tears

(With Apologies to Harold McMillan)

Teddy English is a freelance journalist. He's just placed three articles with a very supportive paper and one with the Australian, so he's had quite a good week. He's heading down past the storied Brisbane Customs House; sandstone, green copper roof, one of the best olde worlde buildings in this pleasant city. He's going down to the boardwalk café strip. The long established tradition of the business lunch is very much alive and well in Brisbane. The boardwalk cafes are very popular with those who can indulge themselves and write off Friday afternoons. They lunch themselves and then go on to afternoon drinks still at the same table until knock off time, when they then head off to their homes and families.



Just before he hits the steps to the riverside boardwalks, a nice tan BMW car pulls into a reserved parking spot (scarcer than hens teeth on Friday afternoons) and a bespectacled moon faced chap gets out, flash locking his car as he goes.

'Gawd,' thinks Teddy, 'that's the just deposed Prime Minister Rudd.'

This is too good to be true. He tags Rudd down to the boardwalk. It's a beautiful still afternoon, heaps of people up near the server

area. The river is enlivened by the comings and goings of the fast and sparky city Cats. Rudd lives up the river a bit, on from the Cats Bulimba wharf stop. Perhaps he's leaving his Beamer here to go home by city Cat and to return the same way and pick it up later. Who knows what appointments politicians, even deposed leaders, have. He has another look at this chap as he lines up at the bar to get what he wants.

'It's got to be Rudd,' Teddy thinks, although he's only seen him at distance before, but constantly on television. His target brings stobbies of beer and a capsule cigar over to a pub table near the river rail. He has another look at him; well polished tan shoes, well pressed RM Williams stockmen's trousers, a good mid-weight reefer jacket and a football club tie – Brisbane Lions at that.

Teddy often comes to this very spot of a Friday. He's a great believer in 'In Vino Veratis' or in other words, alcohol loosens tongues, but he's very circumspect in protecting sources and most Fridays he can get a story that may take up to three days to run down. Being a freelance, whenever he spends a dollar, he has to do some work to earn a replacement dollar, but he's good at his trade and is well, if circumspectly known. People who know him well and feed him whatever agenda their masters are pushing this week, wave him over for a beer, but, damn it all, he is right on the wheel of the biggest story of this or any week, ie a deposed Prime Minister relaxing. Who knows what he may glean from this fortuitous encounter, or hoped to be encounter.

The blonde round faced chap unscrews the cigar capsule, brings out a Swiss army knife and cuts off the tip. He pats his pockets and with the speed of light, Teddy

has a small box of tapers out and is on hand to light him up. He holds the taper and when the chap has it lit up and going, he turns to him.

"Thanks, mate," he says. "Have a stubbie. I'm expecting someone, but they're not here yet – be my guest."

"Cheers," they both say.

"A wearing week, sir," Teddy says.

"Jesus," says his new friend, "you can say that again and again. Years of building up power, dissipated overnight by that auburn-haired bitch." ('God,' thinks Teddy, 'she's a redhead, a bottle redhead. This bloke is being kind.')

"Just when," he continues, "I'd pulled off that very international event into Australia." ('Hmm, perhaps the World Footy Cup.' Teddy thinks. 'I thought we'd struck out.')

"And that short-assed little beggar, who nobody wanted on the committee." ('Umm,' Teddy thinks, 'the Federal Government is now a committee and the S.A.L.B is obviously Bill Shorten.')

"And as for that other ingrate whose kids have a pair of Welsh ponies, the chap with an Iraqi name." (Umm,' thinks Teddy, 'the well known Senator whose kids it seems, are into horses or small horses.')

"Yer know," he says, "next everything constructive will change forever." ('Oh, it's not that bad,' Teddy thinks, 'perhaps Julia will get rid of Peter Garret and some other non-performers.')

"It's just too damn much," the chap says, puffing on his big stogie. He finishes his stubby. "Your turn," he says. "You'd better get three; my company will be along soon."

And it is. As Teddy juggles three stubbies of XXXX, a good looking blonde woman turns up and joins them.

"Umm," says the chap, "Better meet Jindee. Jindee and I have been an off and on item now for 9 years." ('Gotten Himmel,' thinks Teddy, 'he's just introduced me to his long established paramour. Does Therese know about this?')

"Hi, Teddy," she says. "God, it's terrible what the club have done to my old laughing and drinking friend here. Do you think he may climb back?"

"Won't be easy," says Teddy. "The press, if not the country, seem to like change." They reflectively lower their drinks.

"Well, mate," she says to the Pollie, "I have to go to practice for work. Friday's a big night." Teddy is instantly all ears, he's like a pointer at a grouse shoot.

"What do you do?" he asks.

"Oh," says Jindee, "I'm a pole dancer."

"And a very good and sexy one at that," his Pollie friend adds. They finish their drinks. "We must zip," he says, "Nice to meet you; always nice to meet someone without an agenda."

'Without an agenda!' Teddy thinks. 'This story will be worth \$20,000 up front.' He's already planning a ski trip to Sweden. But they are ready to zip.

"You're a great loss to the country, sir," he says.

"Well, to my country district," the mark says.

"No," Teddy chimes back, "a great and irreparable loss to Australia."

"Well, hardly," Jindee says. "Come on, Andrew."

The penny drops.

"Sir," he says, "I took you to be Kevin Rudd."

"Oh, not at all," the Kevin look-alike says. "I'm a second cousin; people often mix us up."

"But the International event you pulled off?"

“Oh, that’s the Prince Phillip Games, to be held in Brisbane this next year.”

“And the auburn-haired woman?”

“Curse the witch,” he says, “that’s Melinda Powers, the new President.”

“Gawd,” says Teddy, “I thought you meant the new Prime Minister; and Shorten and Abib?” he asks.

“Don’t know them at all,” Andrew Rudd says. “It’s Stainsforth-Smith and Archie Tomiqe I’m talking of.”

Teddy is flabbergasted.

“Sir,” he says, “I thought you had been skidded this week as Prime Minister of Australia.”

“Worse than that,” Andrew says.

Teddy asks the obvious. “What is the organisation you’ve just been voted out as leader?”

“Well...,” says Andrew, “the Presidency of the Barcaldine Horse and Pony Club.....what else?”

Teddy sorrowfully puts away his notebook.

“What else indeed,” he says, mentally waving his ski trip goodbye.



SIX

***HIGH DRAMA IN
KATANNING AND
POINTS EAST***

High Drama in Katanning and Points East

A sequel to 'The Tank Gunner'

In shooting Benjy Kidman stone dead on the grassy knoll overlooking Vincenne's, Richard Hartigan is attempting to close off his old life as a hitman for whoever was employing him. In other words, Richard doesn't know who, or indeed if there is a guiding plotter behind Benjy. This decisive act stems from the Thuraya phone call he intercepted, in which it became appallingly apparent that they were going to cut him loose and leave him swinging after he carried out the assassination of the Dalai Lama. This amusing old fellow is about the last person Richard would want to shoot and he takes umbrage that they never identified the target to him.

Before blowing the scene, Richard pulls the leaf blanket that has hidden his getaway machine; a light Johnnie Pagsta American Chopper road/trail bike, from helicopter based eyes and pulls this over Benjy's body.

He then rides off in the direction of Geneva. Dark finds him tucked under a hedge in a farmer's field near Le Cruzot. He could be further on his way, but he doesn't want to draw any attention to himself, so has ridden along at a moderate pace. He's got a French stick, some chunks of ham and tomato and an unlabelled bottle of Claret and his light sleeping bag, so he's well set up. He sleeps well, but awakes smartly when he hears someone coming along the hedge line. Richard unzips his sleeping bag a bit and puts his hand on the chrome grip of his 9mm automatic pistol, but it's only an early farm worker.



"Alors," this fellow says as he stomps past.

"And to you," Richard replies. It's a bit deep for this time of day.

In Geneva, Richard land line phones his bankers and a little later eases his Pagsta down the ramp to the under croft car parking of the Zingli bank.

"I want to leave this securely here," he tells his account manager. "I've a blue poly tarp to cover it. I'll be back for it, but it might take a while."

He makes his business arrangements with Dieter, the banker.

"You will have to pay the caretaker and all the bills that relate to the Cotswold Cottage," he says. "Now it's important for me to know if the cottage attracts a watcher. Here is the name of the caretaker and I leave it to you to discreetly contact her and have her ring you,

only from a call box, to check this matter out. If it's being watched, put an ad in the London Times following this code. Any Monday will do. I will see it sooner or later, but I won't acknowledge."

From his security box, Richard leaves his documents and passport behind and pulls out replacement ID, plus some ancillary forgeries of this and that. He puts a body belt with \$50,000 American into it; hardly denting his stash, and leaves the way he came, via the car park ramp.

A month later, Richard gets off the road bus at the old Katanning station. A starchy, but well dressed woman gets out of a white Lexus car. The only others getting off the bus are indigenous Australians.



“Well,” she says, “if you are Richard Prentice, I’m here to provide transport to the farm.” She jerks her thumb eastward. “It’s a hop step that way.”

She has a 12 year old boy with her. “My youngest, Tommy,” she says. “The elder is away at college; Guildford Grammar, near Perth.”

Richard stows his long bag, unzips and fossicks a bit.

“Here’s something for you, young un,” he says and hands over a gameboy and one of the latest kites with a tiny stuka air horn. “I got this at Changi Airport,” he continues, “they seem different.”

The lad is very chuffed. “Gosh,” he says, “this will put me ahead of the pack at Nyabing school tomorrow.”

“Well, Boss Lady,” Richard says, “you seem to have a general provider’s co-op shop there. If I may, I’ll just grab a couple of items and perhaps we can have a coffee at the pub, there.”

“Fine,” she says, “I’ll get an outside table.”

He’s back quickly and just as he is about to sit down, a young indigenous youth scorches past the outside seating area, with the smallest police officer Richard has ever seen running behind him with a Tazer gun in his hand. Richard, with lightening speed, picks up a chair and tosses it in the coppers path. The cop trips and stumbles, but avoids a fall. He’s now out of the chase and turns vindictively on the chair thrower.

“You bastard!” he says, “You’ve interfered with a police officer in pursuit of his duty. I have a mind to arrest you for that.”

Richard grins a lazy grin. “Down boy,” he says. “I was only giving your quarry a sporting chance.”

“No excuse,” says the copper. “You will have to accompany me to the station.”

“As you will,” Richard says, “but I now am formally effecting a citizen’s arrest of you for attempting to Tazer a youth in a public place.”

“That will never fly,” the copper says, “never.”

“I think it will,” says Richard, “especially if I ring up...what is it?...the West Australian Inside Cover column.”

“What would that do to me?” the copper asks.

“Well.....,” replies Richard. “I’ve only been in Katanning twenty minutes and as unimpressive as it is, I think it would be Paris-like in comparison to where you might finish up in your big and dusty North-West, when your police Commissioner decides to unload some retribution on you for bringing the Police Service into unwanted notice. They’re touchy about Tazers.” The copper wilts. Richard continues, “May I ask, where is your partner? I notice the WA Police work in pairs.”

“Here he comes now,” the chap says. “He chased the other one out the back sliding door.”

“Ah,” says Richard, “the score seems to be.....the indigenous two, coppers zilch.” The cop shrugs and walks away.

“Gawd,” the Boss lady says, “that was very well done, but it seems you may be a bit of a loose cannon.”

“I think,” Richard says, “that I may have a snifter of brandy with my coffee to settle me down after all that drama. This is a nice place.”

And it is; the owners have renovated this old hotel beautifully and the outside a la carte area is bounded beautifully by huge tubs of red geraniums.

“As you are probably aware,” the Boss lady says, as they drive out the Nyabing road in the early April sunshine, “I’m a school teacher widow running my late husband’s biggish farm, in order to preserve my children’s birthright. I’ve recruited

you for seeding and the Labour Bureau tells me that you have had the right experience, but in Wiltshire.”

“I’m surprised you haven’t recruited locally,” Richard says.

“Awkward,” she says. “The locals don’t seem to see it my way; not at all.”

‘Hmmm,’ thinks Richard, ‘my way or the highway.’

“Well Boss Lady,” he says, “to sort of establish the ground rules, I’m very pleased to do what you want, but I will be less pleased if you dictate how I do it. Just give me the broad outlines and I’ll attend to the rest.”

The starchy lady gives him a hard look. They dust their way down the farm driveway and she drives him past the sheds and over to the empty shearers quarters.

“Now.....meals,” she says.

“I’ll attend to my own brekky and lunch,” Richard says, “but a main evening meal would be nice.”

He settles into the quite comfortable and clean quarters. The boss lady has the stove running, so he has plenty of hot water in the system; the fridge is running well, so he stashes away his purchases and takes a walk around the sheds. The boss lady whacks up a good pizza tea and Richard uncaps a decent bottle of red.

“Shall we say Grace?” he says. She is a bit taken aback.

“Are you Churchy?”

“Oh, not really,” says the man, “but I’m an Anglican. We believe what suits us, but I think saying Grace is good form and where the upcoming generation is concerned, - he nods towards Tommy – it’s sensible to observe due form.”

They settle on what needs to be done and where the sheep are, which are the feed silos and so on. Next day Richard is up early, microwaves oatmeal, toasts up toast and makes a ham roll for lunch. The others depart for school and getting what he needs from the quarters; he takes out a .22 rifle and bowls over four fat lambs. He uses the easy lift on the ute to lift and dress them. He lets them cool off and then quarters and packs the result. He then takes a Stihl chainsaw and cuts up blocks of firewood, or at least tile fire wood and carts them into the homestead wood shed. He works out a mix of oats and lupins and feeds the ewes from the feed trailer and late in the day, puts on a roast and vegetables in the quarter’s kitchen. The lady is quite chuffed and they dine at the quarters and watch the news on TV.

She chuckles. “I’m a bit amazed,” she says. “You just saved yourself from fish fingers, salad and tinned peaches.”

Saturday evening, she asks him if he wants to borrow one of the farm’s Tojo’s to go into Nyabing for a drink.

“Oh,” he says, “I’m quite drink safe. I’m happy to share a drink on the side terrace with you and Tommy.”

“Thank you for cleaning it all up,” she says. “It’s an amenity I had almost forgotten, and you’ve got the fountain running again. My husband was no speedball, but he attended to all that very well. It’s nice to have a man around the place again. By the way,” she asks, “what are you planning to plant in that seed bed you have carefully fertilized and dug up over and over?”

He laughs. “You must always plant your Sweet Peas by St Crispen’s Day back in the old dart, but here I’m told it’s Anzac Day. So they will be planted shortly.”

“Do you want to come to Church tomorrow?” she asks. “There’s a service at St Peter’s Badgebup, at that beautiful little church we passed.”

“Surely,” he replies, “just drop me in the Serf’s pew.”

“Pick you up at 9.30,” she says.

Richard fronts looking very presentable in pressed jeans, leather brogues, tie and woollen blazer. He peels off as they enter and sits in the back pew, but he makes a contribution to the hymn singing with his very fine tenor voice.

Tuesday, he asks the boss lady to bring home a carton of Vic Bitter stubbies.

"I need to find out a bit from an intelligent neighbour," he says. "Someone you are not unhappy for me to talk to. I need, of course, to approach with benefits."

Thus he meets Allen and Trudy and they fill him in on the finer details of cereal growing in the clay country of Nyabing/Kwobrup. Allen is a dry as dust, weedy little bloke and Trudy, a fine busted, good looker. She holds Richards hand a little longer than necessary. 'Hmmm,' Richard thinks.

"The seeding gear is good," Allen says. "Old Don was very, or moderately conservative, but quite smart too. He didn't want gear that was of an overpowering nature, but he wanted modern gear. Thus the boomspray is easy to operate, although the spread coverage is less than the common oversize ones around. The air-seeder is a smallish one and there's a good tractor; a small, but articulated Case."

"Well, that's the good news," Richard says. "What's the reverse side?"

"Hmmm," says Allen. "No real truck, but Sutherlands in Katanning contract the grain and they have a marvellous quick call-up roster. The header is rat-shit. It's an old Gleaner, getting older."

"First the crop," Richard says as they sink a few cold stubbies.

Richard services all the gear, checks the fuel supplies and so on. He's serviced plenty of tanks in his time, so all of this is no trouble to him. The rains come and Richard gets out with the boomspray and a few hours later is seeding what he has sprayed. It's a busy time, but the season favours them and he wraps it up as fast as can be expected, with the smaller gear. He goes a deal over the agreed program, by sowing another big paddock with 'Baroota Wonder', the old fashioned hay wheat.

"Why?" asks the Boss lady.

"I think I can improve your cash flow a bit," he says. "There's no slackening in hay demand they tell me."

The season moves on a pace; spraying, shearing, mulesing, lamb marking, getting the baling gear serviced and emptying the hay shed. While she is a senior and full-time school teacher, the Boss lady is well read on farming trends and current thinking. She takes him to a symposium on futures, hedging and other stuff, including grain contracts that have come along to make the life of a farmer much more complicated. This is being held in the Badgebup Hall. Quite a bit of concern is voiced over a wide variety of subjects and world experts seem to be there preaching things, often diametrically opposed. Richard takes it all in, after all, he has an economics degree, so he knows money and he has an MA degree, so he knows about communication. He also has had intelligence experience and he can tell what's good advice and what is not. Eventually they call for input from the listeners. Richard shrugs and gets up.

He says, "In short, today we, by you, have been given a heap of advice or theories, much of which is hogwash – for lack of a better word. To move forward, it is essential to know exactly where you stand today and I can see that many of you don't really know that. Lend me your writing block."

It's just butcher's paper held together on an easel; he picks up the marker pen.

"Here are the imperatives," he continues, "put your ears on, chaps. I assume you want to improve your business. That you need to make it more profitable. That you want to be in business tomorrow. But, first things first. Where do you stand today? Sit yourself down one Saturday or Sunday afternoon and devote three hours

or so to clear thinking on your business. Bring your family, partners and staff into this session and discuss and write down your decisions. The formula is simple;

1. Diagnosis – where are we now
2. Prognosis – where are we going
3. Objectives – where should we go
4. Strategy – how do we get there
5. Tactics – what activities should we use
6. Control – how do we ensure success
7. Budget – how much can we afford to spend
8. Plan – decide now what to do and when

You will find such a session to be an interesting and attention grabbing experience. More importantly, your business now has a blueprint for the future.”

He sits down. The meeting buzzes. A young chap gets up; he’s from a very big farming enterprise.

“You talk very good sense,” he says. “Who, indeed are you?”

Richard stands up. He surely doesn’t want this mob digging into his background. “I’m educated,” he says, “in economics and communication and I’ve versed in farming in Wiltshire.”

“What’s the difference between farming here to farming in Wiltshire?” the chap asks.

Richard laughs, “It rains in Wiltshire.” The mob laugh ruefully as the season is turning dry (again).

“If you’re that well qualified, what are you doing here?”

“Well,” Richard says, “I’m having a bit of a sabbatical and looking at dry land farming. It was my choice.”

“Well,” says the young chap, “we have to look at why we are here.”

Richard picks him up. “In the main, I’d say you are here because your Grandfather and in some cases, your great grandfathers came here in a spring cart and brought with them hard rations, gumption and an axe. You’ve lived through incredibly prosperous farming times that are now, perhaps, above your financial means and in the nature of farming today, you need to run hard and think clearly if you want to survive. On the inverse side of the coin, if that’s all too tough for you, your neighbours, even if they can’t afford to, will buy you out and for peanuts, you can buy a good house in Katanning and relax a bit and get a job if you can, or just blow your capital.”

“And for those of us staying on?” a tall farmer who, up until now, has said nothing.

“Well,” Richard says, “having done your review, you can then carefully return to diversified farming. Sheep and a small herd of lean beef cattle still have their place.”

“You think wool will come back?” the tall man asks.

“Well,” Richard fires back, “it is just supply and demand. Stock is walking off many farms, never to return. But, the immutable law of economics is that high prices equate to short supply. In short, sheep are worth having and worth shearing, but of course, nothing can handle the tough going better than the old Merinos and put to meat rams, you are building sure fire income.”

“But they have to be fed and watered too,” the tall man says.

“Produce all the hay you can, bale up early canola. Hay sells to a ready market, but keep good reserves on farm. You have an asset at the Kwobrup dam that can be called upon in dire emergency. Work out your plans for your business

and stick to them. You don't want your bank running your farm, or indeed the John Deere Company."

"What about the agronomist and the farm advisors?" someone asks.

"Oh, they have their place, but you don't want the chemical companies running your farm either and you sure as hell don't want all your eggs in the one basket."

"Any off-the-cuff wisdom?" another asks.

"Hmmm," Richard says, "why not create a job for a Uni graduate to do the books for ...say... 20 farms, monthly and to project cash flows. Set him up somewhere decent to work from ...say... an office in Katanning. Make the very best practical mechanic you know, an offer he can't refuse, to contract to service and keep your gear going. That big young chap with a hearing aid that my Boss lady had out last week, doing a bit or work on the header, would be absolutely ideal for the job. Mix a bit of folding money into the deal, perhaps. A good man pays too much tax anyway."

"Right....enough!" Richard continues, "I have pointed you in the direction you can profitably take. The rest is up to you. However, if the Boss lady – he grins at Annette – will lend me the farm ute, I will be glad, by appointment to attend your self appraisal meeting in ...say... your wool shed."

"And the cost?" from the tall one.

"Zilch," says Richard. "But get cracking. I won't be here forever."

On the way home, Annette drives along quietly. As they dust up the drive, she says, "May I invite you to dinner tonight? I hear there's a very good chef at the New Lodge Dining Room."

Richard says, "Tommy and I accept your invite."

"Oh," she says, "Tommy is on a sleep-over."

They pass up on the intimate dining and have a great meal at the end of the dimly lit bar.

"We need to talk business," Annette says, "before the rest of the scringy mob take up all your time. Let's make a start on my farm business. We can, if you like, discuss this in my four-poster tonight."

Annette is wearing quite a décolleté dress and in the dim bar light, she looks the veritable berries. She is certainly flying very positive signals.

"Hmmm, Annette," he says, "alluring as that suggestion is, its best all round to get the business out of the road first, but also," he continues, "a pleasure delayed is, I would think, a pleasure greatly increased."

"Bastard," she says. "You've got me horny. Also, I've never had a young man, ever. Old Don was pretty conservative."

"But it worked," Richard says.

"Oh, after a time," she says. "He took a while to get the hang of it, but he got there in the end."

"And not often enough, it seems," Richard says.

"Indeed," she says. "You're not gay, are you? Some of the manliest men I've ever met have been as queer as a three dollar note."

Richard laughs. "Let's go out on the verandah and have a Port and a Panatella and we'll schedule an early start on your planning. We may have to skip church."

He puts his best effort into the planning session and is amazed to find the farm is not only debt free, but has a quite decent cash reserve on term deposit.

"I've always earned good money teaching," she says. "Don killed our own meat, grew heaps of veggies, bought all the farm gear at clearing sales and sold baby beef for cash. He sure knew what he was doing. My salary bought the groceries

and apart from keeping itself, the only farm money spent on luxuries, was that spent at Woollies bottle shop. Now..., what are your conclusions?"

"Hmmm," says Richard. "You are leading a bit, with your suggestion over equipping the farm with new machinery. You are certainly right that there are good taxation incentives to buy new farm equipment, but nothing depreciates faster and there's an abundance of very functional gear cluttering up dealers yards and late summer going on farm sales we've heard about, there will be plenty of clearing sale bargains around."

"So, what do we buy?" Annette asks.

"Um....you've got a good unit in South Perth and know yourself how this has accrued. Best to negative gear another two units to lower your tax commitment and to buy in a heap of gold; sovereigns and ounce ingots and a good lot of Kruger rand. That's all stuff that will hugely accrue in lieu of farming gear that devalues madly, but," he continues, "I wasn't aware of your Pine and Bluegum holdings. Where are they?"

"On the Broomehill/Kojonup road," she replies. "Don said it was too far away to farm easily, so he leased out the land for the trees on a 20 year lease and he also leased the unused land to an adjoining farmer. It seems to be an income earner and the pines will pay off big time at the end. Let's go over for a run and I'll show you the block. I'll pack a sandwich."

It's a pretty bit of country – typical of the undulating Redgum land running towards Kojonup. They access the block through a reserve, pull up by a dam and have a ham sandwich and split a bottle of chilled Goundreys Chardonnay.

"I haven't a key to the plantation area," she says. Thus they climb the fence and walk two sides of about 80 acres of flourishing pines. It's a delightful afternoon and the views over the rolling countryside are first class.

"We might as well cut back through the trees," she says and they walk into the plantation. Its deathly quiet or rather hushed within, with a pungent smell of kangaroos, which live in these plantations in absolute security, coming out late afternoon to feed on the adjoining crops and pastures. They walk quietly along until she stops.

"It's like a cathedral," Annette says, "and here's our chance perhaps to make love in a cathedral."

"Okay," says Richard, "but it's a bit tussocky."

"Oh," she says, "I can lie on our jeans. Off, out of them, quick!"

They spread them on the ground and get down to cases. When they are back in their gear, she says, "You sure ground me into those tussocks, but it was really something. How has a virile chap like you managed of late? You've never been into Town."

Richard can hardly tell his Boss lady that on Masonic Lodge nights, Trudy ghosts in; in total darkness, into his sleeping quarters – she's like a wraith and if Richard tries to comment or start a conversation with her, she just draws her long fingers over his lips, peels off and gets down to it. 'There's always a reason for everything,' Richard thinks, but just at that moment the gods are smiling on him and one simply doesn't query sweet gifts from them.

"Oh, I've managed," Richard says. "One of my ancestors was a Monk in Rochester, I'm told."

They climb the gates and get back to the farm Tojo. Richard produces another bottle of Goundreys from his esky.

"A recovery drink," he suggests. She looks at Richard speculatively.

"Let's adjourn to my four-poster," she says. "You pushed me hard, but I think I'm getting my second wind." So they do.

Nearly a week later, a week in which she has kept him at arms distance, Annette comes down to the shed. She hasn't gone into school in Nyabing. Richard has the comb off the Gleaner. He is cozzying it up ready for another harvest in its long history.

"How's it looking?" she asks.

"Oh, it'll get the harvest off with a bit of this and that, but this must be its swan song year. We'll hunt the clearing sales come February," he replies. "But more to the point how are you?" She is indeed looking pale.

"Problems," she says. "Problems stemming from our day long fling, a fun fling."

"Gawd, Annette," he says, "you can't be pregnant?"

"No," she says, "but something got me in a big way." She lifts her long modern skirt. "Take a look, please - I'm in a bit of pain."

'As well she should be,' thinks Richard when he spots the problem. Two kangaroo ticks, large, shiny and blood engorged are tucked into the fold of her buttocks. Huge red streaks, verging into black run down her leg.

"Roo tick," he says. "Two of them; no wonder you're in pain. They've got their nasty little jaws well into you."

He pulls over a bag of oats, perches her on her undamaged buttock and gets on his mobile. He can't get an appointment with any doctor and the hospital casualty doctor is away in Narrogin on anesthetic duties. Richard goes over to the workbench, comes back with a gas-powered small blow torch and heats up a blade of his Swiss army knife. Allen has taught him the trick of removing ticks from the sheep dogs. The trick is to get the tick retracting through applying, in stages, a hot knife to their posterior and you have to be careful that in getting them out, that their jaws come too, otherwise you are in trouble.

He stands Annette up, takes off her skirt and knickers and then adding another bag or two of oats, has an improvised operating table. He gets to work and soon has the culprits extracted, but is surprised at the size and depth of the holes the ticks have inflicted on her. He bathes the area with Condy's Crystals, the old bush standby, puffs in Sulphathillimide powder from an ex-army first aid pack from the Header spares box, then tapes over this and gives Annette a morphine pain killer downed with water from the shed tank.

"To bed," he says, "you'll sleep for a while and wake up woozy, but that should get you over to tomorrow and the Doctor."

He walks her over to the homestead and she is soon out of things.

Richard goes on with the header repairs. He checks her that evening; she is sleeping soundly. Tommy comes over at daylight.

"Richard, you had better come. Mum's very unwell."

Richard hotfoots it over. She is out to it in a way, but is running a huge temperature. Richard realizes immediately they are in big trouble.

"Grab the car, Tommy," he says. "Fuel it up and bring it to the front door."

Richard has taught Tommy how to drive and he is quite competent. He soon has the car over and Richard carries out Annette and props her across the back seat of the Lexus. He guns the car up the drive.

"Ring Hospital emergency," he says. "Tell them it is absolutely essential to have a doctor there in a few minutes."

He really scorches into Katanning. At the hospital, he scoops up the comatose Annette from the back seat and carries her into the casualty ward.

“What happened,” the Doctor asks. Richard tells him.

“Treatment?” the Doctor asks. Richard tells him.

“Should have worked,” the medico says. “Now, I fear blood poisoning, toxemia, pathogenic bacteria, in short, septicemia; bad, bad news. The sulphur drug must have lost its kick.” He works his damnest on her, but she goes out very painfully in the small hours two days later.

“Sorry old buddy,” the doctor says. “We did our best. I will have to report this, but what you did should have saved the day.”

Three days later, Richard is well into the complexities of harvesting canola. He has pulled Tommy out of school as the wood and water joey. Tomorrow they have to go to Albany for the cremation service for Annette. A police car pulls into the paddock. The short cop, accompanied by his sergeant, gets out.

“We have to take a statement from you, cobber,” the cop says. Richard turns off the header.

“It’s already written,” he says. “Come over to the house and I’ll give it to you.”

“Not good enough,” says the young copper. “Any statement must conform to our requirements. We’ll redo it.”

Richard looks the young copper up and down. It’s a short trip.

“I’ve now met you twice,” he says, “and you’ve gone out of your way to prove yourself a complete asshole. I’ll give you the statement and you had better be on your way quick smart. I’ve had a few very rough days and my patience is nearly exhausted.”

The sergeant, who hasn’t said a word until now, says, “Just give it to us and we’ll go, but don’t leave the district.”

“Unlikely,” says Richard. “The priorities are funeral tomorrow and then back to the harvest.”

We can fast forward this convoluted tale to the Inquest, at which Richard stands up tall and firmly recounts events. The Doctor backs up what he tells the court and a verdict of death by misadventure gets him off the hook. However, it goes on record that Annette was pregnant at the time. Richard can do no more than shake his head at this statement. Richard elects to stay on at the farm. This will give the elder boy time to finish at Uni. They do a deal with the local lawyer to expedite the running of the farm, financing of the next crop and so on. The farming accounts have to carry three signatures; the lawyer’s, Richard’s and the elder boy’s. Two harvests later, Richard is able to extricate himself from the farm and lobs back in England.



His Cotswold cottage is still under surveillance and he pays a visit to a factory unit, Richmond side of Whitehall Steps. His old unit mates from Baghdad, now big time security consultants, are happy to help. They isolate who the head watcher is and bag him up. After 90 days locked in a dark, but very secure security cell and provided with the necessities of life, they call Richard, who comes in to interview him. The bloke has survived his incarceration quite well, but wants no more of it. He spills the beans. Richard has what he wants, but they can’t cut the chap loose. The security people take this in and say,

“Well, Richard, we can bump him off if you want, but it’s better to give him a television, let a tame prozzy in for a night and hold him until you’re done with the affair.”

Five weeks later, in the depths of a North American Fall, Richard is well concealed in an autumn-toned ghillie (leaf) suit. He's at Cobble Hill. This is an old (once) Vermont farm, now for many years the country retreat of the Lamont clan, who are inextricably deep in with the famous Gambini crime family in Chicago. It's well into the fall and there are huge heaps of autumn leaves piled up along the path down to the Beaver dam. One good wind and the rest will come off the trees. Richard has been on stake-out here for three evenings. With leaf time nearly over, he knows that this will be the Lamont's last visit until they come up in ski season to make use of the lifts and the ski runs.

Tucked up in a heap of leaves, he can hear walkers coming down the path. He has a boom mike or three concealed along the track. With his marvellous CIA glass, he can scope those approaching. The lead man he knows will be Casa Farelli; the longstanding family bodyguard. Casa is carrying, as usual, a short Remington Hard Hitter rifle and he's scanning the surrounds alertly. Richard is pleased to see that Casa has quartered his leaf pile, but hasn't spotted him. Lamont Senior (Liam) and his smart son, Theo, are walking together, back about 50 feet. Richard lets Casa get a bit past him and then head shoots him. Casa falls like a stone. This is old rope to Richard after his previous life as a sniper in Iraq and later as a professional hit-man for Benjy Kidman.



Richard softly calls to the startled men. "Sit on the log alongside the path. Just put your hands on your head."

Lamont Senior says, "Who are you? We can't see you."

"You're not supposed to," Richard says. "Now shut up for a moment."

He close tunes his boom mike. There's apparently only been the three men in the party.

"You've had my cottage on the Cotswolds staked out for the past few years. A costly exercise, I would think. Would you care to fill me in on the details?"

"Ah...", says the older man. "Now I've made you. You were working with Benjy Kidman here and there for years. You took exception to sniping the Dalai Lama, I think."

"Yes," says Richard, "and I kept your deposit. You have a long and vindictive memory to have run surveillance on my cottage for so long." Richard can almost see what the younger man is contemplating. "Don't even think about it, Theo. At least you're still alive – just at this point."

Lamont senior says in a considered way, "The chaps at the cottage were members of our London staff and they watched in rotation. Benjy and you were our best hit-men ever. Since he shuffled off this mortal coil and you disappeared, apparently off the face of the earth, that division of our business enterprise has been shut down. It has cost us. We have only been looking for you to get you back in the fold."

"I assume," Theo says, "you have Teddy Bartholomew incarcerated or buried somewhere in Limey land?"

"He's alive," the leaf pile replies, "at least at this time."

"We would like to get him back." Lamont senior says. "He's a good man, even if he was a bit careless."

Richard says, "You can put your hands on your knees now. If you feel under the log, you'll find a couple of cigars and some tapers; smoke if you want. Now," the

leaf pile continues, “supposing we have met up to discuss a business proposition. What do you have to offer me that might dissuade me from putting you both down?” Theo picks up the conversation. “We are sorry to have lost efficient old Benjy and sad to see Casa out of the picture – that is, unless he is just playing possum.”

The leaf pile chuckles. “He’s not,” he says.

“We can offer you a good employment contract...say... five million a year plus expenses to contract four hits a year,” Theo says.

“Yes and you’ll have a reception committee on stand-by, to at least shoot me when I turn up to confer,” Richard says.

“Not at all,” Theo says. “This is the age of anonymous communication. We will deliver a hit brief to anywhere in this wide world you name. We will supply all needed details, but the when, where and how of the hit is up to you, as in the past. Payment, of course, is electronically easy; any bank, any country, any currency.”

“All right,” says Richard. “I accept provisionally, your explanation. Your Teddy will be out and about next week. I will phone in a box number for the next hit instructions to be sent to. The account number is 12345678011 at the Zingli Bank in Basle. Half in advance plus ...say... \$50,000 upfront expense. Our business is concluded, but it can only conclude with a quantum leap of faith on your part. Feel to the back of the log. You will find what looks like a gun-oil pressure can. Now Liam, just give that a spray into Theo’s nostrils and ease him down as he falls. He’ll be awake, with no ill effects, in 3 hours.”

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph!” Liam says. “I can’t do this. It’s surely something fatal.”

“If I wanted fatal,” the leaf pile says, “I would Farella-ise you, if you get my drift. It’s the CIA nerve gas, Zanadin. Benjy and I used it on the Shiites in Baghdad quite a bit. Do it now!”

Theo shrugs his shoulders. “I think he’s kosher, Dad,” he says. “I’m game.” Liam puffs the gas and Theo stretches out gently on the leaf covered ground.

“Give him another tiny squirt, Liam,” the leaf pile says. “Good, good, now lay down flat on the leaves and puff yourself.”

“Goodnight sweet prince,” Liam says and does.

Its dark enough now to nullify any hidden sniper from the Gambini side, so Richard, holding a very short riot shotgun, clambers to his feet and re-squirts his victims. He now pulls a larger leaf blanket over the recumbent figures and carefully sprays skunk spray from an aerosol can over them to keep predators away. He walks away in his ghillie suit, carrying his boom mike guns and ancillary gear in a leaf bag. His well concealed trail bike provides the means to get down to the car park of the Red Lion Inn. He drops down a metal channel and pushes his bike into the back of a Chrysler van and is away.

We can draw a veil over the next 20 months, during which Richard, in his removalist role, removes 9 people from this mortal coil, netting \$11 million into his Swiss bank account.

The final act of this drama is an offer to remove a Russian. The Russian Mafia put up the money which, of course, is well in excess of the \$7 million plus expenses that Theo offers Richard. In being offered this job, Richard expects that, as it is the last one, it may be convenient to the Chicago crowd if he trips up doing it. Richard’s biggest plus is that he is a long distance sniper; plenty of leeway to get away. He smells a rat on this one; asks and gets full payment upfront.

For all of his work, he has used Russian made long range sniper rifles. These are light and accurate as hell. He gets a new one for each job whistled up by the

Lamonts through the diplomatic bag in the country he is working in. He usually breaks down and bins the gun he uses each time; carries nothing away, but the one he uses in Colombia is so outstanding, he carries it away. He whistles up a new one for the big Russian mission and such is his intuition, that after pulling it to bits and scrutinizing it, he immediately realizes that it's either defective, or its been sabotaged on purpose. Unusually, in his hit instruction, it sets out likely places in detail. St Petersburg seems the best option. Richard can read these beggars like a book. He pots the very high up Russian in Highgate cemetery, where the bigwig has gone to pay tribute to Karl Marx. The mark goes down and possibly the biggest smoke bomb in this troubled old world absolutely blacks out the scene.

A few months go past. Richard has a meet up with the Lawyer, Annette's oldest son and Tommy in the kerb-side dining area at the Royal Exchange hotel in Katanning. Richard says to the eldest,

"You seem to be making a go of the farm. You seem to handle what you can manage personally and get in contract help for the other. Well done! Just marry a country girl now and you will have the best life possible; a life where you only have to work hard 11 weeks of the year and for the rest, it's little more than daily exercise. Marry a city girl and she'll have you out of the farm and working every day in the city or suburbs."

"Now, Tommy," he continues, "I've bought Troughton farm at Kojonup. Knock over your law degree and you can combine a law practice in Kojonup or Albany with a bit of farming. I'll just hang in and attend to the balance."

"If you agree," he says, including them all, "we will hold a memorial service to Annette at St Peters in November. The Bishop will come over for it and rather than let those that attend, disperse, I'll hire the Agricultural Society's marquee and we'll do very good finger food and drinkies on the spot."

The bar girl brings out some champagne flutes and a bottle of Krystal Champagne. She fills their glasses. Richard stands up, holding his glass.

"To Annette," he says, "If only she could have been here today."

The short copper comes trudging along Austral Terrace and takes in Richard standing, glass in hand. Richard catches his eye.

"Oh, good luck in Bidyadanga," he says.

"Bastard," the copper says. "You're well tapped in. I only heard of the posting yesterday. News travels fast in Katanning it seems."

Richard lifts up his glass to near eye level and looks at the copper over it.

"Only the good news," he says.

SEVEN

QUEEN VICTORIA'S FIRST SUITOR

File One

As Charles Dickens said in the start of his famous 'Tale of Two Cities'; It was the best of times and the worst of times. In Kensington Palace, it is the best of times; Victoria's elevation to the throne of England is imminent. The timing is spot on; she is a month past 18 and has every chance of ruling in her own right instead of through a Regency. Her mother and her partner (though not Victoria's father) anticipate a takeover and to run the country through her daughter, the new queen to be. They are breakfasting.

"All our plans and hopes are about to fly," the Duchess of Kent says.

"Hmmm," says Sir John. He's glimpsed the steel in his step-daughter's psyche. Victoria and Baroness Lehzen are also breakfasting. They are alone.



"Louise," Victoria says. "I can feel freedom approaching, but I also feel bad that I haven't been able to visit the King for a long time."

"Ah, Vicky," says Louise. "It may have been thought too anticipatory; best stay in the background and come out punching when the time comes."

At the King's residence, it is the worst of times. William, watched over by Queen Adelaide is on his last legs. Breathing is difficult and he shuffles off this mortal coil just after 2am. At 5am, the Lord Chamberlain and the Archbishop of Canterbury raise the porter at Kensington Palace. There's a bit of a bubble, but Victoria's mother goes up to break the news and to tell her who is here to see her. Victoria quickly jumps out of bed, puts on a wrap and slippers and goes down to the sitting room. She is all gravity and aplomb and neatly gets rid of her visitors on a

Royal mission to convey her condolences to Queen Adelaide. The high and mighty pair are back on the road, without refreshment, within minutes.

Victoria tucks into her breakfast. She's a foodie and while she's scoffing, Baron Stockmar, a kind of a lookout for her Uncle Leopold in Belgium, comes in.

"Ah," he says. "You will need helpers."

"Indeed," says the teenager Queen. "And I will shortly have them. Lord Melbourne, in his letter, says he will be here at 9 this morning."

"Hmmm," Stockmar says. "You will need a secretary." She laughs.

"Not that bastard Conroy," she says.

"How about me?" Stockmar asks.

"I'll think about it. I have things to do," she replies. Stockmar retires defeated. So far, so good. Melbourne arrives. She greets him demurely.

"I intend to keep you," she says. "And this meeting is a pattern to follow. I will receive you and other Ministers entirely alone."

Melbourne is pleased to have got a wedge in with the new queen so quickly.

"Back at 11am," he says. "Your first Council meeting." She nods her head.

"Fine, fine."

Melbourne is back early to word her up and she does very well.

For the first time in her life, Victoria is able to get rid of those close around her and be alone, really alone for one hour. She calls in Louise at the end of the hour.

“Get your skates on, kid. Get my bed shifted out of Mum’s room and put it in the room next to yours, dear Louie.”

“God damn it,” the Duchess says to her partner. “This is the Baroness Lehzen’s work. The bitch. She was only a nurse until some idiot thought that Vicky should only be looked after by someone with a title. God damn it again. She’s only a pastor’s daughter.”

“A pastor’s daughter she may be, but she is and remains for quite a while, the young Queen’s confidante.”

File Two

Lord Melbourne and Queen Victoria become soul mates. She has him as her advisor and close friend. Melbourne, after failing to head his young and spectacular wife, Lady Caroline Lamb, in any direction other than what she chose, finds great satisfaction in steering gently in the right direction this, oh so young, Queen. She is eager to do the right thing it seems, though she is innocent of the big, bad world outside.

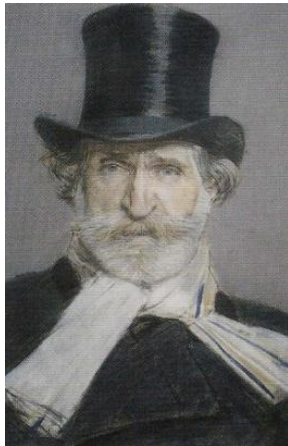
The Queen now has a go at getting rid of Sir John Conroy. He seems willing to go, but wants in exchange a Peerage, 3000 pounds a year, a seat on the Privy Council and the Grand Cross of the Bath.

“Good God,” says Melbourne. “It’s over the top. It’s bloody blackmail.”

He shelves the matter.

In the meantime, Uncle Leopold is working on getting one of the Saxe-Coburg brothers (Ernst or Albert) up as a husband for Victoria. Melbourne now moves to get her out of Kensington Palace and into Buckingham Palace. Queen Victoria agrees.

She parks her mother well away down the passages, puts Louise next door to her and knocks a new door in the wall between to give her quick access. Lord John Russell now appears at Court. He is the leader of the House of Commons. A bit of a bubble blows up – they want Victoria to review her troops in Hyde Park from a carriage, but she wants to ride a horse and they don’t want her to. The review is thus cancelled. She sticks to her guns and rides side-saddle at the later review at Windsor. She is very feisty. About this time, her path and that of Lord Palmerston cross. He’s the Foreign Secretary and a good one.



The Melbourne Government hits rough waters and Melbourne warns the Queen that there is a danger that Sir Robert Peel may be called on to form a new cabinet.

“To hell with Peel,” she says. “I’m happy with you.”

On this occasion the problem goes away. The Coronation rolls around. It’s a huge success. Victoria doesn’t know it, but she’s now at the very top of the tree and things start to go downhill.

File Three

The idea of courting the young Queen Victoria stems from a late evening discussion after a day on the grouse moors of Spinney Estate in Yorkshire. The day has been a social and sporting success and the shoot host, Lord Ilford and his son, the Honourable Robert Frost, together with Lord Melbourne and Robert’s close friend

from University, Bindon Flood, are all smoking cheroots and quaffing very fine French brandy at the fag end of a pleasant evening. The other shooters, mostly Yorkshire men, have long gone home.

“What’s the new Queen like?” Lord Ilford asks Melbourne. Melbourne, like his host, is a very rich man, Prime Minister of England and seems to relish his role as guide and mentor to the young queen.

“A bit of an uneducated hoyden at heart,” says witty and wise old Melbourne. “Doesn’t know much about anything really, but she is a quick study.”

“Ah, but she is a bit of a bright spark,” Bindon Flood says. “She laughs a lot, shows all her gums when doing so and she’s a damn fine dancer.”

Flood is a gregarious young man and moves in the social circles of the London based push, unlike his contemporary and sporting friend, Robert Frost. Melbourne chuckles in his brandy.

“Yes, indeed,” he says. “She enjoys life; loves her riding and her food. It’s quite a pity she has such a bad case of ‘ducks disease’ (the Queen is very short). She has very little height to hang weight on and as time goes by, she will I think finish up very square.” Flood interrupts again.

“She is surely not all that much to look at.”

“Ah,” says Melbourne. “Just so, but she is effused with the bloom of youth. She’s bossy, but most pleasant and underneath it all she has, I suspect, a fast growing sense of duty. She is no fool I tell you.”

“What are you going to do about finding her a husband?” Ilford asks.

“Hmmm,” Melbourne says. “At this stage, she is more interested in dancing partners than husbands, but her Uncle Leopold in Belgium is pushing the Saxe-Coburg cousins at her.”

“Gawd,” says Bindon. “What a poor and pusillanimous choice. Albert is as dull as ditchwater and Ernst is a real womaniser. They’re jointly and severally not worth a spit. What’s wrong with finding her an English husband?”

“Not favoured,” says Melbourne. “It’s hard to find an untainted one and the girl is totally surrounded by krauts, all of whom are understandably pushing krauts at her.”

Robert, who hasn’t contributed to the discussion so far, now does so.

“I’d give it a whirl if I can get near enough,” he says.

Melbourne turns his sharp, but world weary eyes onto Robert.

“How’s your German?” he asks.

“Not so bad,” Robert replies. “I spent six months on their artillery ranges, got quite conversant with it.”

“Well,” says Melbourne. “If you can socialise in German, you could be in with a chance. I can certainly get you in the door.”

Lord Ilford laughs a short snorting laugh.

“You may be a little tainted by ‘trade’, Robert, but if you pull this off, you will surely upgrade the social standing of the family.”

File Four

Lord Ilford and, by extension, his son Robert, are very seriously rich – coal and steel, cotton mills, cotton plantations in Georgia, tobacco holdings in North Carolina, tea producing highlands in India and sugar cane in Jamaica. In terms of business, Ilford is a true internationalist. He ties the whole lot together with a shipping line. His 60,000 acre estate in Yorkshire is only the very tip of his financial iceberg. On the surface, he is a man that keeps the social scene very much at arm’s length.

His tall wife, Lady Elizabeth, shares his distaste of the social push, although the outside world, well aware of how rich they are, pursues them. But there is a dark side to Lord Ilford's activities. He is the organising brain behind a number of syndicates that ship slaves from West Africa to the cotton fields of Southern America for huge profits. Even here he displays innate sharpness.

Most slavers buy in their stock wholesale in Western Africa and sell wholesale in Havana or Puerto Rico leaving the slave retailers to sort out, clean up and move the slaves to the markets. Ilford takes a different approach, at least with his own ships, but not with the syndicate ships. Over a period of time, he has a trained afro woman interpreter to talk to the new slaves, to tell them what is expected of them and to ameliorate the change from the bush of Africa to plantation life. As bad as this sounds, it is the most humane way to treat the newcomers and it lessens the violence; much of it brought on by ignorance by both sides.

Anyway, Ilford uses the Mississippi as his conduit and after breaking-in periods in compounds near New Orleans, they are taken upriver to selected markets. He thus completely cuts out the middlemen and his profits are enormous. Also and most importantly, he delivers the slaves in good and tractable condition, ready to be put to work. There is a huge demand for his product. While Britain abolished slavery in 1808, the shipping of slaves has not been policed, but negotiations with the USA on the Ashburton Treaty, to blockade the Slave Coast and search ships there, is progressing. Ilford, in total, is not averse in coining money. He has so many slaves on his plantations that his labour supply is self-perpetuating. On another front, his cannon foundry returns big profits by selling ship and field cannons to both the British Navy and to the Army, as well as doing a brisk export trade around the world.

He has familiarised Robert Frost with the outer and key elements of his trading empire, but has also left him plenty of free time to develop his interest in this and that. Robert, like his Dad, is a tall man. He is introspective and quite taciturn. Despite only touching on the fringes of London polite society, he is very well known through his steeple chasing hobby. He has won major chases in turf mad England and the racing world and its hangers-on well and truly understand he is not a man to trifle with.

File Five

Robert gets in the door at a Ball at Windsor Castle and gets to waltz with the Queen. Victoria is very circumspect about who she waltzes with. It's the most intimate form of dancing at this time, much closer than Gavottes or Quadrilles. Robert, thanks to Lady Elizabeth's tuition, can waltz. He is very well schooled as a dancer and Victoria and he are soon whizzing around to the strain of Strauss. She looks up from her tiny height, through her blue poppy eyes, inherited from the Georges, fully into Robert's introspective face, so far above her.

"Mr Frost," she says. "You have been my hero since I was fourteen."

Robert puts on a puzzled look and asks,

"How so, Your Majesty?"

"Ah," she replies. "I was a guest with my mother at Compton's Place, Castle Ashby; the year you won the Northampton Steeplechase on that magnificent black hunter of yours. You wore all black colours and cap and the crowd were calling you 'The Prince of Darkness' as you returned to scale."

"Gawd, Your Highness," Robert says. "That was back in 1833."

"Yes," she says. "I was just 14 and they told me you were just 25. I heard you went soldiering."

“Umm.....,” says Robert. “I was just learning about artillery really. Mostly in France and Germany.”

“Do you still have Captain Kidd?” she asks. “Why did you name him that?”

“After the black-hearted pirate,” he replies. “Yes, I still have him. He’s in the pink. I only hunt him now as he’s raising thirteen; still jumps like a stag, but he’s earned an easier life.”



“I follow your Grand National efforts,” she says.

Robert laughs.

“It’s not as easy as the Northampton. I’ve ridden it five times.”

“Yes,” she says. “And finished it twice. A narrow second last year – you seem to always crash at Beecher’s Brook.”

“Ah,” he says. “Your Majesty, it is easy enough to do.”

“I would love to see Captain Kidd again, he is fixed so firmly in my mind,” she says. “Perhaps, you can bring him over and join me on my morning ride.”

“Hmm, certainly, Your Highness. Next Saturday, perhaps?”

“Fine,” Victoria says. “Now it’s all settled and I look forward to it.”

Robert and his bodyguard, Tim Collins, bring over ‘Darkie’, officially Captain Kidd, to a Windsor Inn, Friday afternoon and stable him there. Thus they gather at the Windsor Castle stables on Saturday morning to ride in Windsor Great Park. Darkie looks absolutely marvellous in a light park saddle and bridle and red saddle cloth. Victoria rides her grey mare, Collywobble, side saddle. Stockmar and the Baroness have come down to the stables to see them off and to have a stickybeak.



Robert bows to them and in flawless German, says to Lehzen,

“I have something for you that I think will catch your interest.”

He produces a thickish small book; it’s about seven inches by four.

“It’s about your home town, Baroness,” he says.

“Beautifully illustrated; I found it in my library.”

Old Daisy equivocates; they don’t want non-German adventurers here.

“Oh,” she says. “I couldn’t accept it.” Robert grins an unmatched grin,

“Oh, it’s only a loan.” So she takes it.

Stockmar has been sedulously taking in Robert Frost. He’s a commanding man to look at and his huge black hunter looks a picture. Stockmar realises this youngish chap is formidable and very eligible.

File Six

They have a splendid ride around Great Park and the wooded environs on a bit. Victoria and the horses are as sparky as all get out and Robert notes, with mixed feelings, that she has taken quite a shine to him. A match is quite possible; he’s rich and he’s Church of England and there are no marks against him socially. Mind you, there is his actress friend and she’s a stunner; long-legged, fine faced, bosomy. She is spectacular and hard to fault and Robert has been sparking her for five years. She seems to have continuous engagements on the stage in very top class productions

of both classics and new plays. Robert is pragmatic and while he enjoys a deal of fun and frolic with this champion looking girl, he doesn't want her in his ear all the time. Thus being rich, he backs the newer plays that employ her and so far, is well in front financially on these ventures. He is not too sure that he wants to be constantly interfacing with a rotund little Victoria as a wife. Mind, there is a challenge to be able to direct the country in the right direction. Robert is pondering all this and at the same time striking conversational sparks off the Queen, when they pull their blown horses up in the stable yard.

A momentous happening now envelops Robert. Sir John Conroy is there, brandishing a horse whip.

"I'll have you, you young whipper snapper. You are an unsavoury type. We won't have you sniffing around the Queen."

Robert hasn't yet had a chance to say a word, when Conroy comes at him with his cutting whip. Tim Collins grabs his whip arm and flings him on his back on the cobbles. Conroy struggles up to a sitting position and pulls out a Pepperbox pistol from his coat pocket. Tim, ever vigilant, kicks it out of his hand; it goes off, but doesn't do any harm. Robert gathers matters in.

"Let the bastard up, Tim," he says. Conroy scrambles up from the dirt of the yard, clutching his pistol hand.

"Now fellow," Robert says. "This matter has become deadly serious. My friend will call on you later today to arrange a time and place to settle what is now a matter of honour. We can exchange no further words."

Tim grasps his arm and just short of frogmarches him to his small carriage.

"He's calling me out," Conroy says. "The whipper snapper. Perhaps I can apologise." Tim pushes him into the carriage.

"You can talk to his friend," he says.

Victoria is quite appalled.

"Dear Robert," she says. "This cannot be. He is venting his frustrations on you – a casual and charming visitor." Robert chuckles.

"I'm afraid, Your Royal Highness, this is now secret man's business. It will be best if I leave now. I can't compromise you."

He mounts Darkie, bows from the saddle, touches his hat to Daisy and Stockmar and clatters over the cobbles to the gate. Thus, two mornings later in the just on dawn gloom, the affair of honour is settled on Hampstead Heath. Sir John sustains a severe shoulder wound; he is lucky to escape with his life. The popular press, notably the Morning Post, pick up on this affair and cartoons in this irreverent paper show the unmistakable figure of tall Robert Frost standing, smoking pistol in hand with John Bull having a look at Conroy on the Heath. John Bull is shown saying 'A second shot appears in order Robert, but do try to aim better.' This is okay and it is going to do more good for Robert's standing as a Royal suitor – that is, if he wants to be – than harm.

File Seven

Robert and Bindon are lunching at Brack's Club and laugh about the cartoon. Robert thinks though there is more to come and he is surely right. The opposition papers cartoon the next day show Robert in slaver's rig, complete with lash, herding a black and naked Queen Victoria up the gangplank of the infamous slaver, 'The Mary Jane'. This latter is one of Lord Ilford's fast passage slavers that the British Navy quite illegally stopped and searched off the sea estuary outlet in Dahomey. Although conditions on the ship were good, the matter leaked to Parliament. This

cartoon is indeed very damaging, but it is small beer to the Morning Post the next day, which shows Robert leaving a French pox doctor's office with the doctor calling after him 'mind you, you may not now be able to father children'. Frost has been through the medical hoop like many of his contemporaries. He can't cavil at fact, but he takes exception to the slavery cartoon and toting a horsewhip, he goes around to White's and horsewhips the Editor. London Club land loudly object to this. Their bastions have been stormed.

This is unfortunately all too factual and puts paid to his quest. Mind you, he is perhaps more glad than sad. He is concerned that his family have worn bad publicity over the affair, but as they spurn polite London society, it is of no moment to Lord Ilford and the Lady Elizabeth. The true solid society they move in and value, that is of the productive and profitable Midlands, laugh and congratulate them anyway. England now hears that Albert is coming over to press his suit. Engagement announcements follow and Albert arrives on the scene, which he now sort of holds for the next twenty-one years.

Robert continues with his pleasant and relatively untroubled life and he and Lord Ilford look hard for a cash flow project to replace the slave trade, which from 1842 on becomes untenable when ships of war start their stop and search role. Continuing their international approach, they go into cattle in Queensland successfully. They become huge suppliers of salted, cask beef to the Navies of the world – the Royal Navy in particular. Robert is out in Australia for nearly three years on this project, but returns to England and business after that. He continues his interest in their cannon foundry in Birmingham. They make extremely good cannons, each bearing their incised trademark, which is the stylised figure of the famous Chalk-White Horse of Uffington. The foundry makes serious money, but it also is the



entre into interesting things and events. Thus, in a time when standard cannons were little more than cast metal tubes and in the case of field artillery mounted on simple carriages, bore loaded and fired by a small hole near the breech, Robert is regularly invited to huge army manoeuvres and he always goes. His guns are strong, but the real appeal is in the presentation. They leave the factory in shining and smart

condition, despite the engineers now starting after delivery, to paint them in matt finishes.

File Eight

He takes a keen interest in politics. He will have to, in time, take his seat in the House of Lords. Palace/Parliament gossip tells of severe clashes between Queen Victoria and her Prime and Foreign Ministers. Victoria believes that the enunciation of foreign policy is her job. She never resiles from that view, but her Prime and Foreign Ministers, in particular, Lord Palmerston, strongly believe in traditional practices and that the Queen's role is strictly advisory. Neither budes in their views and the sparks really fly. It certainly makes for interesting politics. Robert keeps away still, from the social life, but is finding it more convenient to spend a deal of his time in Eaton Square.

After attending the Russian Army manoeuvres, he is strongly of the opinion that war with Russia over Turkey is a foregone conclusion and he steps up Field Artillery production and reaps a harvest from the uncertainty. He is, at present, at the

Siege of Sebastopol. He takes out a team of technicians to keep the guns rolling and firing and when all this comes to an end, he is one of the very few civilians to be included in the presentation of a medal and thanks of Parliament. He chats a while with the Queen at the presentation at Buckingham Palace. He can't really say much as he is well aware that the Prince Consort, Prince Albert, who has waited some 17



years for this title, is perhaps, for the first time on top of things and isn't perhaps happy for him to be there. He bows to them both.

"A great honour, Your Majesties," he says in flawless German.

This perks Albert up.

"Perhaps we can meet again for a further chat," he says in German. He was never much of an English speaker – he got the vowels all wrong. "You seem to lead an interesting life."

But the invitation is a hollow one. He doesn't see them again until after the Indian Mutiny, when, along with others, he is back again for a decoration for the real work he put in, in India, as a civilian advisor. This time he does get to speak to her with Albert occupied with the Victoria Cross winners he is

surrounded with.

"Queen Vicky," Robert says in amusement. "What's with all the children?" Victoria is still of child bearing age at this time.

"Oh," she bristles. "Dear Albert says it is only natural and expected."

"Ah, Victoria," he cheekily says. "If you'd kept up your dancing and kept him out of bed longer, you may have slowed the pace."

"Oh, he's a marvellous husband," she says. "He is malleable and imaginative; a wonderful husband. He is my soul mate."

"Well," says Robert. "You were always pleasant and easy to please. He seems a dull old stick to me. You know I did dangle an alternative in front of you, at least early on."

"Oh, Robert," she says. "Don't think I didn't think about it, but Melbourne and Peel said that I had my duty to do; and they said you were carrying too much baggage."

This conversation is really attracting some attention and the Prince Consort looks concerned. Robert wraps it up,

"Perhaps, Vicky," he says. "We were both unlucky with Prime Ministers. I'm sure old Palmerston would have advised you to marry and be damned."

"Very likely," she replies. "He's no lover of Germans, I tell you." She concludes, "You've no idea of how I've followed your doings, both on the race course and socially. I see no sign of marriage or children." He laughs at her intensesness.

"You know," he says. "I think having children is surely a mug's game."

She wrinkles her nose.

"Spoilsport," she laughs.

They now have to part, but do so with great mutual goodwill. He never sees Albert again. Robert is over, involved in the American Civil War when Albert dies.

Lord Ilford, in consultation with Robert, takes a two-pronged approach to the upcoming civil war in the USA. Their land holdings in Georgia are huge and

successful and the cotton grown by them is shipped on their own ships to Liverpool and then onto their Lancashire mills. It's big, big business and they view with great concern the looming crisis. It can go two ways. Logically, with the Boston Tea Party aspects in mind the UK should side with the South, but long-sighted old Lord Palmerston is staying with neutrality. It's quite apparent that if the Poms stay out, the Union Navy will blockade the cotton shipping ports and strangle their cash flow with devastating effect after a few months, when cotton ceases to come into the English mills. They decide on several tactics.

Firstly, they set up cannon foundries in Richmond and Knoxville and start producing cannon in quantity. Secondly, Lord Ilford privately tracks down the best forger in England not in jail and sets up a banknote printing business in Luxembourg. They aim at replicating high quality US banknotes, running the result through cleverly designed machines to give them a used banknote effect. The general idea is to buy cotton with a mix of these and genuine notes and at the same time, to aim at debasing the currency. By this means, they get more than their fair share of available cotton out of the southern states by paying a bit over the odds for it. This, of course, has to be done in concert with the Confederates after the first shots are fired at Fort Sumpter. They thus have covered their tails and make big sums available to finance the purchase of war goods overseas for the South. This was only ever intended to be a short-term plunge, as the blockade stops war materials coming in and cotton out.

File Nine

Lord Ilford and Robert anticipate disastrous poverty among their mill workers and take steps to ameliorate this; at some cost to them in real money. They get geared up and when things go bad they have a steady supply of salt beef in casks and dried peas to serve as a staple food stock for their workers. With their huge cotton stocks, they run along avoiding the cotton famine until early 1863. Robert comes back to England at this stage. It would be dangerous in the long run to stay until the bitter end of the war. They have done all they can and certainly don't want to go down with the ship.

At war's end, Robert returns to Atlanta. They contribute to the Mill Owners Cotton Bank that they have set up to provide working finance for whoever can get the cotton plantations up and running again. The bank does well and the bright sparks sent out to get it going successfully introduce or reintroduce a different form of slavery for the ex-slaves. It is called share-cropping. The US Government follows the Bank's lead and tip in share capital after they get going. Robert has a close shave with the Ku Klux Klan, who mistakenly think he is disenfranchising the old plantation owners. He goes to the top and tracks down the wealthy Nathan Bedford Forrest, the founder of the Klan, to sort things out. They become friends and Forrest, who is also rich and an internationalist, joins them at Ascot on Derby Day. Robert laughs to himself when he thinks that on this occasion, the biggest counterfeiter of the modern times is enjoying a drink and a cheroot with the biggest terrorist in the world.

The London papers give wide coverage to Queen Victoria's seclusion in deep, or really, morbid mourning. They play up her daughter's wedding, which could have been easily mistaken for a funeral. She gives up on London altogether and some wits put big signs up there saying 'Premises to Let. Owner has no further use for this vacant palace', and so on. Old Lord Palmerston also hits the news in an amusing way when he comes out his front door one morning. He climbs the iron fence to the roadway and then climbs back. The police constable, who hasn't recognised him, comes over.

“Are you intoxicated, Sir?”

“Not at all,” says the Prime Minister. “I just wanted to see if my old legs would get me over the fence and back, and they have. There’s life in the old dog yet.”

Old Pam is as much loved for his ready wit as for his real ability in Government. The town mob call out to him for weeks, ‘Good on yer, Pam. There’s life in the old dog yet’. But he has little luck cajoling or forcing Victoria back into London life. However, he readily admits that Edward, the later King, and his Danish wife, Alex, are doing a wonderful job of keeping the Royal family in front of the public and being a womaniser himself, doesn’t mind Bertie’s goings on, but is a bit apprehensive of the future king’s mounting gambling debts.

File Ten

After two years of doom and gloom, a bit of life returns to Queen Victoria when her doctors, noting how much more cheerful and outgoing she is at Balmoral, pins this down to the company of big, strong, blue-eyed, curly bearded John Brown. The late Albert got on extra well with Brown, so he comes with Royal approval. He’s as rude as all get out and kowtows to no one, but the beggar’s capable. They bring him south, experimentally, and the Queen is delighted – the Prince of Wales and his wife are not. The Doctors note that sorrowful deep mourning is now transforming into less sorrowful habit. They notice also that mourning has little effect on her good appetite for food.

The Queen is now running through a few Prime Ministers. Lord John Russell and then Lord Derby age out of the picture and she dreads for a while that she will next cop William Ewart Gladstone, a stern old file who unwisely cavils at the cost of the Albert Memorial in Hyde Park. The other possible contender is clever old Disraeli, who earns the Queen’s undying support by saying that money to perpetuate the memory of such a man as Albert, was of piffling consequence. Old Dizzi had an interesting concept of Government too. Never deny, never contradict and sometimes forget. His approach to Royalty was succinct; lay it on with a trowel.

Things now run along smoothly for a while. The Queen travels to Europe on family matters and gets around her various homes, but not to Buckingham Palace. She also builds a highland cottage ornee on the Balmoral Estate, on a site recommended to her by ever present John Brown. She does this really to get away from the servants. It’s a bit of déjà vu really. She and Albert bought Balmoral when it was small end enjoyable, but dear old Albert rebuilt it with a dominant forty foot square tower in the style of a Hunting Lodge in his native Thuringia. Albert wasn’t a great sportsman. Rumour has it that he had his Gillies run deer into the cattle yards, where he shot them at point blank range. Another of his ideas was to dig trenches in the high country to get to deer shooting unobserved. The Gillies rolled around in the heather at this suggestion and the old German wisely dropped the idea. No one in his heyday loved him; no one had ever seen him smile.

Brown is now at the peak of his influence with the Queen. It’s amazing what she takes from this strong and arrogant man. She once tells him that his strong chin is the source of his strength.

“Rubbish, woman,” he says. “You’ve no chin at all, (true enough) but you run your domain with a rod of iron.”

True to this family trait, the Prince of Wales is pretty chinless, but his beard conceals this failing.

File Eleven

Old Teddy is getting pretty square and with the famous Lily Langtry, the Jersey Lily, an absolutely stunning beauty on his arm, he is at the very pinnacle of his womanising career. Old Teddy is not without heart. When Lily crashes with divorce, pregnancy and little money, Teddy, who has been abroad, finds her in her digs and a bit later, through his friend who owns the Prince of Wales Theatre, gets her on the stage. Her beauty carries her over her learning curve and she has real talent as an actress and racehorse owner. Teddy's regular attendance for her shows at the Prince of Wales, helps drag in the crowds at the start. After she moves to the USA, she becomes quite rich and prosperous.

The forces of darkness now intrude on our kindly English scene. Brown, with a load of pre and after dinner whiskey on board, is lured to the stables and savagely beaten to within an inch of his life. Lord Ilford and Robert get the news as they sit in their morning room in Eaton Square, looking at the day's dreadful cartoon in the new scandal sheet, 'The Tomahawk'. This mob is buying circulation through sensationalism and Brown and the Queen are their preferred targets. Ilford, under his well-dressed exterior, is as tough as all get out.

"Enough is enough," he says. "Get Pinkerton's around here."

These very efficient people report back with a watcher's outline of what happens and when at the printing plant. Thus Robert and Tim Collins torch the place two nights later. The Tomahawk moves to a borrowed plant; this likewise goes up in smoke the next night. The trade take the hint and the scandal sheet dies a quick death.

It's not so easy to get a handle on the thugs that have beaten up Brown. He is still in a bad way, despite the Queen sending round the Royal Doctors, or at least their nominees. Ilford, who has close connections with the dark side of life through his long running connection with slavery, conveys a savage message through a very frightening third party. This chap goes around to the Queen's doctor. He brushes past the receptionist.

"You are not giving Brown your all," he says. My instructions are to tell you that if Brown dies, you will follow within the week."

"But, but, but," the medical man splutters.

"No buts," says the formidable messenger. "If you leave this life early, you must understand that it is entirely your own fault."

"There are no certainties in this type of case," the doctor says.

"Ah," says the messenger. "If you plan to stick around longer, then you had better turn your uncertainties into certainties. End of message."

The feelers on the perpetrators don't shed much light, but Tim Collins, dark, handsome and self-effacing, has the conviction that Old Tum Tum (the Prince of Wales), much given to five meals a day with heavy snacks in between, is the culprit. We can perhaps at this point look closely at Collins. He was at Durham University, training for the Church, when his path crossed that of Lord Ilford, there presenting the Cotton Millers annual prizes. It was perhaps a case of one psychopath instantly recognising another. Tim's underlying intelligence and predilection for violence takes him far in the service of Lord Ilford. From keeping close tabs on the slave shipmasters, he is now bodyguarding Robert Frost. Somebody has a go at Frost at Cambridge. Collins attends to the retribution very efficiently. Wherever Robert is, Tim is just there in the background, armed and watchful; talk about cold and ruthless efficiency. Anyway he seems sure Teddy Wales is the culprit.

Old John Brown has restricted the Prince of Wales's access to the Queen in a very embarrassing way. Teddy has the motive they think. Tim has a plan to flush him

out. Old Teddy is having a good season on the Turf. This is near and dear to him. Tim concocts a scheme that applies to any plum events Teddy has a runner in. They can't get at the stable jockey, but in lieu, they spread 500 pounds in cash around the jockeys riding in the same field. The instructions are simple – keep Teddy's horse out of the money and the hoops do this efficiently and well. It completely beggars up Teddy's season. His high society riff raff friends give him stick. Robert is playing Baccarat at Whites when Teddy fronts him and says, "What do you want?" Robert picks up his chips, steps over a bit and replies,

"The names of the chaps that belted Brown and the organiser in particular."

Soft spoken old Teddy says, "I didn't do it."

"Ah," Robert says. "We have all heard that famous quote 'will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?'"

"Umm....., says Teddy and moves off.

They step up their jockey scam at the tail end of the season and Teddy's horses continue to finish well back in the field. This is not so hard for the hoops. Only one is really trying to win and he's not in the frame. The rest lap up their excellent cash payments and work hard at keeping this well-paying scam up and running.

At the Royal Yacht Club regatta at Cowes, the Prince of Wales catches Robert's eye. Robert leaves the bar and saunters over. It's a very unlikely place to exchange dark secrets, but old Teddy's pride has had enough and he sells a pushy acquaintance down the river.

"Davie Gartrell," he says and turns on his heel.

"Obliged," says Robert to his departing back. They now have a target.

Ilford, thanks to his everywhere contacts, buys in every outstanding note of Gartrell's. He pays 120 for every 100 pounds promissory note; buys the lot. A few days later, they call on Gartrell without an appointment. Good old Pinkertons have sent a runner around to say he is in and on his own. He views the tough trio on his doorstep.

"What do you want?" he truculently asks.

"Well....," Robert replies. "We can call in this handful of notes and call on Lord Summers to bail you out."

This is the very last thing Gartrell wants. Like many of his ilk, he is jeopardising his inheritance to keep up with his riff raff society friends that head up what could be called contemporary Victorian society.

"Or you can just tell us," Collins surprisingly says. "Just who and how much you paid that someone to beat up John Brown."

Gartrell goes white; he's really between a rock and a hard place. He buckles.

"How discreet can you be?" he asks.

"Very," Tim replies. Gartrell gives their names and the party leave.

Pinkertons find the targets and by the end of the week, fearful retribution is visited on them. Justice is done and to cap the matter off, Lord Ilford discounts Gartrell's notes to the Jewish money lenders and leaves them to do the dirty work.

File Twelve

Time continues to roll along. Our main players grow even richer and lead pleasant lives, although time and tide sadly sweeps Lord Ilford away. Robert takes his seat in the Lords. He still lives at Eaton Square with his light of love Caitlen Mercer.

She thinks she is getting in a rut with her roles in the West End Theatres and thinks she has to chill out for a while. This makes Robert sit up and take notice. They

get along just fine all round, but Robert doesn't want her getting underfoot and impinging on his free time. He whistles up Tim and they go round to talk to Richard Doyley Carte, who is bogged down building his Savoy Theatre. Robert suggests he will kick a deal of money in, in exchange to several top new roles for Caitlen. Doyley Carte is a bit pushed financially, so this is manna from heaven. Thus Caitlen lays them in the aisles in a few months' time as Madam Buttercup in 'HMS Pinafore' and as Katisha in the 'Mikado'. In the interests of keeping her busy and out of his hair he winkles out Oscar Wilde and puts a deal of production money into 'Lady Windermere's Fan'. On top of all this, a bit of donation money for the Swan Theatre Company at Stratford on Avon sees a Shakespearean season to follow. Caitlen does justice to all this and more over a period and Robert gets his money back plus interest.

The debacle of Majuba Hill now dominates the news. Robert gets a missive from Queen Victoria via a Queen's messenger – 'Come and see me', she says. Robert does. She rises when he is ushered into the room at Osborne; not a bad old



house by the way, sadly after the Queen's passing, it became a Naval College. She is old beyond her years, obese with it and on a stick. She shakes his hand; he stoops way down and gives her a peck on the cheek.

"Oh, Robert," she says. "Why do men get more handsome and distinguished as they age? We poor women turn into crows."

Robert reflects a bit. Actually, in her eternal black garb, the simile is quite apt.

"Ah, Vicky," he says. "Let's look at ourselves in our minds eye. While we have breath in our bodies, no one can take that picture away. Remember when we met at that Ball at Windsor? It's better to look back than forward."

"What would have happened," Vicky says. "If I hadn't let Melbourne and Peel dissuade me?"

"It's probably only a rhetorical question, but...", Robert says blandly. "I expect you would be childless – you'd certainly be childless."

"Yes," she says. "Albert's brother, Ernst, went through your medical hoop and he has no children. How we would have spent our lives."

"Hmm...", says Robert. "Summers at Spinney Estate, winters in the south of France."

"What an Elysian dream!" the old Queen says.

'Enough of the possible past,' Robert thinks. "You called me ma'am?" This tough old trot shifts gear into Queenly mode.

"Jam and Jerusalem, Robert! What is my idiot Government up to in South Africa?"

"Ah. They're divesting the Boers of their country."

"Is that a good idea? Well it's a surely profitable one, between the gold and the diamonds. But is it fair?"

"Not at all. It's blatantly immoral." Robert replies.

"Though you have South African interests," the Queen says.

"Oh, they'll continue on and pay off, either way."

"But our Army will steamroll these farmers in a fortnight."

Robert can't help it. He brings forth a raucous rumble of laughter. He is tapped in and still attends the Army manoeuvres. The Brit Army is all spit and polish. He knows from his experience in the Civil War in the States, that irregular troops, fighting

on their own turf and well kitted out with ordnance, will burn through the regular troops – at least for a while.

“What’s so funny?” Victoria asks. Robert turns serious.

“Well Vicky,” he says. “Your government in its wisdom is sending out General Redvers Buller as boss cocky of the Expeditionary force.”

“And.....,” she says.

“Oh, old Redvers couldn’t run a party in a pie shop. It’s going to drag on and on and on.”

“Is that such a bad thing?”

“Well,” Robert says. “They can’t lose really, and the longer it goes, the more experience it will provide the Military with for later wars. Victoria ponders.

“Well, it seems I will have to go along with it all.”

“Well, they’re on the water and providing old Redvers isn’t steering, I’m sure they’ll find Capetown.”

Victoria digs under the sofa cushions alongside her and produces a half full bottle of single malt whisky. She cracks an engaging smile.

“I drank the first half of this with dear old John Brown – I’m putting up a statue to him at Balmoral. I saved the other half for your visit.”

Robert unwinds his long legs from the dreadful little tub chair he is sitting in and gets a couple of whisky glasses off the sideboard. He joins her on the sofa. She pours two generous measures with a rock steady hand and with a sparkle in her eyes, she says,

“Dear Robert, lets drink to what might have been.”

They clink glasses.

“Amen to that, Your Majesty,” he says.

Footnote: *This account of Queen Victoria’s life, while essentially High Fiction, traces her long progress from a bubbly teenager Queen through to a very dour Queen Empress. But it is not entirely without foundation. The possibility of an English husband was always there – and she certainly could have gone down that path if she had really wanted too – and if she’d held her horses a bit longer. However, as this tale tells, Queen Victoria was always at heart the Complete Autocrat. She did her own thing and Prince Albert, having settled for the comfortable life, had no choice but to go along with her – very wisely so. Few women in history have combined the complexities of raising a large family with the management of a large empire. She did it all terribly well. The thrust of this story is that she could perhaps have done it more happily. It is one of history’s more interesting ‘might have been’s’.*

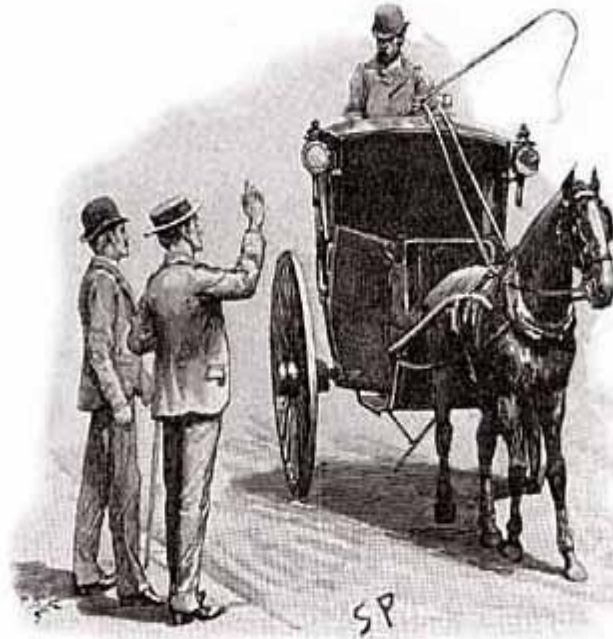
Further Footnote:

The Author has since written another story which parallels this one up to the stage where the Saxe-Coburg brothers visit England and Queen Victoria. In this version, Queen Victoria’s Other Suitor, she rejects the Germans and marries Robert Frost. Her life with an English husband and no children is devastatingly different to that of marriage to Albert. This story can be read on www.lloydnelson.net

EIGHT

**THE RESOLUTE
MAN**

The RESOLUTE MAN



by **LLOYD NELSON**

The early November London fog predicted is just rolling in when I get back to our lodgings at 221B Baker Street. I've been out since early morning doing medical house calls for my old friend, Tom Morton. We served together on the north-west frontier in the Afghan wars. Tom is yet to marry and having left it late, is now doing things properly. Just at the moment, he's out in deepest Gloucestershire meeting his intended's parents.

I've had enough for one busy morning and pouring myself a large whisky; I sit in my armchair beside the excellent fire on the side away from the Baker Street windows. Holmes is sitting quietly opposite me. He seems of late to have forgotten his trademark restlessness. He has indeed mellowed, at least for the moment. He's got a pouch of pipe shag on the side table and is smoking a handsome, big bowl, short stem, cherry wood pipe. It's one of a large boxed set of pipes presented to him in Dublin by Lord Colchester, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Holmes looks quizzically at me as I sip my whisky.

"You remember the day I got this, Watson?" he says.

"Indeed I do," I reply. "It was early summer in '92. I thought it to be a handsome present, along with that huge bank draft he gave you. I thought it rude of you to decline his lunch invitation at the time."

"Ah," says Holmes. "You were not to know that I had in my coat pocket free tickets for the 131st anniversary performance of old Handel's Messiah at the Point Theatre and that it had to be one or the other. There wasn't enough time for both."

"No, indeed and what a splendid show it was, even if we settled for smoked salmon sandwiches and champagne in lieu of one of Colchester's gourmet lunches. It was the high point of a very memorable year."

"What, indeed, did you chronicle for '92?" Holmes asks.

It's not a rhetorical question, so I reach up to the mantel shelf for my leather-bound running journal; the source of so many stories for the voracious Strand Magazine readers.

"Hmmm.....well..... 1892.....well, much that you undertook is well recorded here between these covers and a deal of it has provided entertainment for the readers of the Strand. Let's see, ah, the outstanding success of the recovery of the Considine papers, the Langdale Pikes murder mystery, the stormy and deep Williams divorce proceedings, the bank theft at Holborn, and of course, we will have to continue to sport the oak on even more interesting stories, such as the fascinating case of the Counterfeiting Curate, the Philandering Foreign Affairs Minister, the Ghost of Romney Marsh Smugglers, and so on."

"Ah.....rightly so," Holmes says. "They step on very sensitive toes; only the passage of time will allow you to throw such scintillating tidbits of cases out to readers of Strand Magazine."

He seems to be satisfied with my 1892 review. He gets out of his chair and obliquely steps up to the window.

"What did you observe in the street, Watson?" Holmes asks. "In the near street vicinity, that is."

Holmes, by example and scolding has instilled in me a sense of observation. Perhaps I've always had it; certainly it saved my life several times over when we were the targets of Afghan Jezails from the ledges where they were making great and effective play. Anyway, although I now live in a small area, housing over four million people and we are far from frontier country with its dips and hollows, I now observe things more carefully and arrive at conclusions; not always wrong; by speculation on this and that of what I see. I certainly have not got his powers of deductive thought, but I'm certainly taking in more as I go.

What I had observed in Baker Street, as I trundled along to our front door, was a closed carriage with blinds pulled down, along the street a bit. They had been there a while; the driver had thrown rugs over the horses backs and diagonally opposite the front door of 221B, a tall man in a good overcoat and a beaver hat was standing on the street, ostensibly reading a copy of the Times. I say, ostensibly reading, but with the cold and fog rolling in, it's not something to sensibly do. I sense that he is watchfully waiting on something or someone.

Without moving the curtains or showing himself, he has a good look through the small monocular spyglass that always stands on the sherry table near the window. While he is closely observing the man across the street, I detail what I have seen.

"And what are your observations, Watson?" he asks.

"Ah....they are waiting on events," I say. "For someone, or something, to arrive in our near vicinity."

"Very good, Watson," Holmes says. "Very good indeed. I don't think we are in any danger, but would you be so good as to get your Mauser pistol and arm it and place it in your lap under a newspaper?" I do this.

"What are we to expect, Holmes?" I ask.

"It's difficult to say. I don't know whether we are observing a, perhaps, assassination, or an attack on our good selves, or solid protection for our next visitor; who, if I'm not mistaken, is approaching now in a Hansom cab. That, in itself, is a disguised approach. If what is out there is quality protection, I would expect a coach, not a growler."

The said growler stops right opposite our door. The tall man in the beaver hat casts a searching gaze up and down the street and nods almost imperceptibly at it. In the coach down the street, a blind is raised and what appears to be an all clear wave, given. Two men get out of the Growler and walk briskly to our door.

“Ah,” says Holmes. “We are about to be visited by, arguably, the richest man in England; bodyguarded by, arguably, one of the most dangerous men in the same. Neither now are young, but only the dimmest fool in the Kingdom would be so bold as to underestimate them – either of them.”

Mrs Hudson, herself, brings the newcomers to our door.

“Holmes says we have never met, but I do, of course, know who you are. May I divest you of your coats?” Fine, they say and do.

I get up out of my chair. They look askance at the Mauser pistol in my hand.

“I’m about to put it away,” I say.

Holmes says, “May I introduce my old friend, Doctor Watson? Dr Watson, Mr Robert Frost and Mr Tim Collins.”

They are quite affable and shake hands. Holmes ventures,

“We didn’t know the reason for the build-up in Baker Street, but we could see it to be significant – hence the Mauser.” Tim Collins chuckles. “It’s always best to expect the worst, Mr Holmes,” he says.

They cheerfully accept a measure of single malt whiskey and sit back and sip appreciatively. Frost is a very tall man, quite handsome and well turned out.

He says, “Normally, when someone crosses our path, or looks like doing so, we deal with them directly. However, in this case, we have spoken to your brother, Mr Holmes, and Mycroft said we should come round and see you. So, here we are. Perhaps, Tim, you might explain a little.”

Collins again, is beautifully, but not foppishly turned out and half a head shorter than Robert Frost. The most noticeable feature about him is his near-black eyes; it certainly makes him look the formidable person he is reputed to be.

“We understand, Mr Holmes that the Prince of Wales – our next King to be – has retained you to look into why his big and expensive string of racehorses is running consistently out of the money.”

“Yes,” Holmes says. “It’s certainly killing the Prince’s pig. He says he has no idea of who is behind it.”

“Hmmm,” Frost says. “Old Teddy is even dumber than I thought. We asked him a while back for the name of the Thugs and the Thug Master who organised the severe beating-up of the Queen’s invaluable old retainer, Old John Brown.”

“Perhaps,” says Holmes. “In which case your request doesn’t seem to have stuck. What exactly is your underlying interest in this matter?”

“The Queen is a good sort,” Robert says. “She has done much for England. I try here and there to forward her personal interests, as we are old friends. She is regrettably and inevitably surrounded by ineffective politicians and sycophants, and she is a widow; albeit a very autocratic one to boot. Old John Brown is the only man around her to make things happen. He’s a rude old beggar, but he is not in it for himself. He’s there for the Queen and country and thus, I’m much interested to know the name of the chappie who has gone out of his way, to have Brown beaten near to death. And it gets worse,” he continues. “The Queen’s doctors, despite royal instructions, have been dilatory in his care. This I have now set them right on.”

Holmes chuckles, “I hear that someone sent a rather frightening messenger around to Sir Alfred Munson, promising that if old Brown dies, he will follow within the week. The Peelers are onto the case, but can’t find the messenger.”

"No more will they," Frost says. "But the message stands and is crystal clear. I might say that Brown's medical care has been dramatically stepped up – very wisely so. Anyway," Frost continues. "until Prince Teddy gives me the name that we are sure he knows, we will continue to keep his neddies out of the winners circle. We pay the hoops, of course, to bring this about. That is the reason we are in your rooms this evening. Once word runs around the race tracks, that the clever Sherlock Holmes and his sturdy confidante, Dr John Watson, are instituting enquiries, it can only delay us getting the name we want."

"Hmmm," says Holmes. "You leave me in a quandary. If I report back to Prince Teddy the plot in hand, and he belatedly springs the wanted name, something very brutal is bound to happen to someone."

Collins looks sharply at Holmes.

"Something drastic will indeed happen to the hirelings that did the beating, but retribution of a more subtle nature will be applied to the mastermind."

Robert Frost stands up.

"Perhaps the best all round result would be, Mr Holmes, for you to hasten slowly in your enquiries. We just need a bit more time for our plans to bear fruit. We don't share our plans with anyone as a rule. It is a mark of respect that we are here at all tonight."

After they have gone, Holmes says, "It says something for Tim Collins; bodyguard extraordinaire to Lord Ilford and his remarkable son, Robert Frost, for so many years, now has his own retinue of bodyguards. He surely has reached the peak of his profession."

While we are waiting for Mrs Hudson to produce our dinner, Holmes passes over today's copy of the Morning Post. He has put a pencil circle around an article that sets out a mystery surrounding the theft of a box of quarter ounce gold ingots from Fraynes, the gold merchants in Burlington Arcade. It's a high value robbery and seems inexplicable in that someone smart has substituted a replica box of brass ingots for the real thing. The article is a rehash of the original story and says Scotland Yard are pursuing enquiries, but that no arrests have been made.



Over dinner, which, as the fog has closed in and the only thing to be seen in Baker Street from our window is the merest fog bound glimmer from the nearest gas lit street lamp, we take out time. Holmes remarks that under the very heavy cover of this London fog, many criminal and highly illegal schemes will no doubt be underway.

The next morning, as I set out on my medical calls, Sherlock, well rugged up and carrying a stout cudgel, volunteers to accompany me.

"Ah, Holmes," I say. "You will find it deadly dull."

"Perhaps," Sherlock says. "I'd better come anyway.....a lone well-dressed gentleman is not all that safe in a pea souper."

He picks up an armful of papers from a street stall and reads them downstairs as I make my calls. It all takes longer, due to having to grope our way around and we sit down to a late cold lunch about two in the afternoon. A glass or three of a very good Spanish Claret sparks things up a bit and we are both fireside, drawing on our pipes, when the maid brings up our rodent-faced friend from Scotland Yard.

“What ho, Lestrade?” Holmes says. “Take a seat; help yourself to a glass of the excellent claret there on the table.”

“Thank you kindly,” Lestrade says. “It hasn’t been an easy day, with visibility nearly non-existent. It’s as damp as all get out in the street, but luckily not so cold.”

“You’re here about the Burlington Arcade bust, I expect,” Holmes says.

“Indeed,” says our visitor. “We’re going nowhere with this one so far.”

“Hah,” says Holmes. “Your horse has long bolted. You will need to be lucky.”

“But....but....it was only last week,” Lestrade says.

“Piffle!” says Holmes. “Surely you have connected the crime with that fracas in the Arcade.....what.....five weeks back.”

“Drunken seamen!” says Lestrade. “No connection.”

“Hmmm, and no arrest either, eh?”

“They sobered up quickly,” Lestrade says. “And decamped when the Peelers arrived; they disappeared smartly.”

“Yes and the gold disappeared at the same time,” Holmes says. “Someone very quick rang the changes when everyone in the Arcade was understandably distracted. The fake box was so perfect it was lucky the crime was discovered at all.”

“So, what’s your take on this, Mr Holmes?” Lestrade asks.

“I fear the trail is now too cold,” replies Holmes.

After Lestrade goes, I say to Sherlock, “You gave up easy on that one.”

“Not at all,” says Holmes. “This whole operation shrieks ‘inside job’. This doesn’t appear to have occurred to Lestrade yet, but it will.....given time. He may eventually get the culprit, but not the gold.”

We see Lestrade again after the pea souper mercifully lifts. We have been reading with interest of criminal activity in the annex to the East India Dock, where someone very efficient has cleaned out the entire stock, including bonded liquor, out of a store there. To add to the mystery, a night watchman, his coal brazier and even his watchman’s hut – a bit like a sentry box – has disappeared, along with the long cast iron chain that closed off the mews approach.

“This is a mystery and a half, Mr Holmes,” he says. “In sheer quantity, it’s the biggest heist I’ve ever seen. It’s a mid-size ship load of stuff.”

“And are you missing a ship, Lestrade?” Holmes asks.

“Not at all,” says Lestrade. “We seem actually to have one too many. It wasn’t until the brig, ‘Mary Jane’, was brought up river to load, that it was realised her load was long gone. The ship loaded in the dock in the fog on Sunday was thought to be the ‘Mary Jane’; certainly, her papers said so.”

“Hmmm, with three clear days and a night’s start, she’s out in international waters by now. Would her load sell well?”

“Yes. In any port,” replies Lestrade. “It’s all good consumables.”

“And the night watchman?”

“Ah,” says Lestrade. “We are dragging dockside for him; probably deep dumped, wrapped in the missing chain.”

“What do you know of him?” Holmes asks.

“Ah.....a Crimean veteran, one eye, damaged knee, but big and strong and very vigilant for all that. We have checked him out with the Army records.”

“And he’s drawing an Army pension?” Holmes asks.

“Ah,” says Lestrade. “Unclaimed for the past two years.”

“Then it’s another man,” Holmes says. “Let’s go down to the East India Dock annex and ask around, but first, I need to send a telegram or two.”

We lunch first at the Cat and Candle; an excellent lunch and by the time we arrive at the dock, a Hansom cab is waiting there. A tall young woman gets out and pays the cab driver.

“Not a nice area, Mr Holmes,” she says. “So I decided to stay in the cab until you arrived.”

“A wise decision, Amelie,” he says. “The world of dockland attracts some very off-beat characters.”

As we talk, Eric, our telegram delivery youth – often at Baker Street – comes along shepherding half a dozen of our familiar street Arabs. Holmes calls over a street barrow boy and within minutes, the lot are hoeing into bangers and mash, toad in the hole and other filling foods.

“You know what I want, Eric,” Holmes says. “Cast your hounds.”

The street Arabs fan out and start combing the area. Amelie now gets to work. She unfolds a collapsible book lectern and puts a sketch block on it. She is interesting to watch. With a long black grease pen she draws an eye patch; just that. As the street Arabs arrive and report, she fleshes out a head and part shoulders – picture of the missing watchman. She adds bits and pieces of the street Arabs continuing reports to arrive at her visual result. The whole thing progresses quickly and she soon has a good graphic of a strongly built man, bearded, wearing an East enders cap, a navy pea jacket and smoking a clay pipe. Eric and the street Arabs continue to bring back reports and people; people who were familiar with the night watchman by sight. They instantly recognise the chap of Amelie’s evolving drawing and the only common point of dispute is the eyes. ‘No’, they cry – she has depicted him with sad eyes. ‘No, no’ they say, ‘the eyes are all wrong’.

She now places a strip of paper over the eyes and draws and draws. Finally, the contributors are in agreement. ‘That’s him’, they cry, ‘that’s him to the life’. There is now total consensus on the image. I step up to have a good look at the result. In essence, it depicts a roughly dressed biggish man, with the light of keen intelligence in his eyes. Holmes is very relaxed.

“That’s your man, Lestrade,” he says. “Whatever he is in real life, he is no watchman by trade. However did he get the job?”

We put the question to the dock manager.

“Well,” he says. “The chap was a war veteran with one eye and a game leg. He is the type of man we employ for this ill paid work, but he seemed to me to be both physically strong and quite intelligent and worth having. I spoke with him often and it seemed to me that he had a very good grip on both the job and what was happening around him. He was very alert, very aware. He was obviously an army officer that war wounds had brought to a lower level in life.”

Travelling back to Baker Street, Holmes comments just a bit.

“Amelie,” he says. “Has an amazing ability to turn a word picture into a likeness. She does work for me and for the American Enquiry people, Pinkertons. Rather amazingly, Scotland Yard don’t use her abilities. The day will, I think, come when her abilities or the abilities of people like her will be part and parcel of major enquiries. She is also a professional portrait artist by the way, and I put commissions her way on a regular basis.”

Lestrade gets copies of Amelie’s sketch out into dockland and similar down market areas. Over a whiskey and soda, Holmes laughs at this.

“Watson, my dear Watson,” he says. “Our rodent-faced detective friend is the best, or near best of the Scotland Yarders, but he replaces imagination with intense activity. He turns over enough stones to get results; results that could just as easily be achieved by thinking, not acting.”

Holmes has been around to Amelie again since our East India dock interlude and she turns up late afternoon at our rooms carrying a sketch block. She lays out half a dozen sketches, all of the same basic chap, but dressed upmarket.

“Hmmm,” says Holmes. “Very, very good. Tell us your choice, Watson.”

“Well,” I say. “The Captain’s uniform I think, he just has that air of authority that fits; perhaps the Dutch Captain sketch more so.”

This latter depicts the subject in the distinctive uniform of the Dutch Merchant Marine, down to smoking a long stem, clay pipe. Holmes ponders.

“Why the Dutch one, Watson?” he asks.

“Well, we both heard the dock captain say that the watchman was fluent in Dutch.”

Amelie shares a sherry with us and takes her leave.

“No,” says Holmes. “There is more in this matter than meets the eye. I can’t help thinking that this was a very clever plot, most capably carried out by a very experienced Master Mariner. It seems to be a similar modus operandi, to the big clean out of the bonded store at Queensferry; all single malt whiskey, about a year back.”

“What’s the connection?” I ask.

“Well,” Holmes contemplatively says. “Difficult weather conditions prevailed in each case, both ships were very capably handled at night and neither seems to have been sighted since. It may indeed have been the same brig in each case; both ships were very capably handled, despite the conditions – a quick in and out job in each case. A capable and resolute man did both jobs. I expect. Also, and very significantly, only John Company (the Honourable British East India Company of Leadenhall Street) has been the victim. John Company can command the best and immediate help of Scotland Yard, but overall it’s just so rich that, at heart, nobody cares if they’ve been ripped off.”

The case of the missing night watchman falls into limbo for the present, as other less complicated cases arise. I see from my running journal too, that the Prince of Wales’ horses have returned, belatedly, to winning form. Old Teddy Tum Tum’s horses have been out of the money for just so long that it must have made a big difference both to his outlook and his expenses. Holmes, very studiously, reads all the newspapers looking for a connection with the chaps who belted John Brown so badly. These chaps are bound to be bad lots and the misfortunes that Robert Frost and Tim Collins will inevitably have visited on them doesn’t seem to have made the press.

Sherlock is suspicious of rumours around London that Davie Garside’s gambling credit has been withdrawn.

“Smoke, Watson,” he says. “No fire as yet. I think however, that Robert Frost will fill us in, in due course.”

“Is it true,” I ask. “That he was once in the running to marry Victoria when she was a teenager queen?”

“It was really a near run thing,” Holmes says. “Lord Melbourne wasn’t against it; in fact he helped Robert to get in the door early on. However, Frost’s father, Lord Ilford’s connections with the slaving industry was just too much for Robert Peel and

Lord Palmerston. Thus they encouraged stiff old Albert, one of life's dullards, to pursue and eventually land her."

"It seemed to work out," I say.

"Hmmm.....yes and no," Holmes retorts. "Her mad nephew, Crown Prince Willie, will bring the all encompassing German connection into question sooner or later."

"Do you think so?" I ask.

"Well," Holmes says. "The British Government has been trying to commission me to get the plans of the very splendid French 75 pounder field piece."

"And are you taking this on?"

"No," says Holmes. "The French are tough and very protective of their artillery break-through. I don't fancy being shot as a spy while old Gladstone assures the Nation that it has nothing to do with them. There's an easy way round the matter. We should just finance the French Army to step up the production of their iconic 75 pounders. If we get into holts with Germany, it can only be in company with France and so long as the guns are there in quantity, we'll get our share to use. It's access to, not ownership of, these great weapons that will help our cause so much."

Tim Collins comes around; he has a servant with him carrying a crate of single malt Scotch whiskey. "Mr Frost's compliments," he says.

"Will you join us for a glass of claret?" Holmes asks.

"Surely," this suave chap replies. He unbends a bit.

"Where are the thugs?" Holmes asks.

Tim grins. "They are now flensing hands on a two year whaling expedition to southern waters. The arrangement is to unload them in Patagonia on the way home."

"And Garside?" he asks.

"Ah...sadder and wiser and a bit sore and sorry, although it was in no way our intention, we have probably saved him from himself."

A deal of water now continues to run under the bridge and time and tide moves things on. The dear old Queen shuffles off this mortal coil and rascally Old Teddy becomes King, and not a bad king at that. He demonstrates a sure grip on foreign relations and so he should, as the rulers of the day are all his relations anyway.

Upon my marriage to a charming girl; a girl I met by the way during one of Sherlock's complex cases, I left our old rooms at 221B Baker Street and moved to a rather splendid Georgian villa off the Bayswater Road. Tom Morton joins me in the practise that I bought along with the house; my charming wife is well endowed with money through her inheritance. We live comfortably and well and with my dear wife being very musical, follow London's concert scene closely.

When I told Holmes of my intention to marry, in typical style he quoted Socrates at me. "By all means, my dear Watson, do marry. If you get a good wife, you will be happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher."

While I dropped in at our old rooms at least once a week, I could see that Holmes also had outgrown the old days and wasn't at all surprised when he confided in me that he had bought an apartment at the Albany. With the departure of Mrs Hudson, the old rooms had lost most of its amiable amenity. The Albany didn't, however, last long. He took up with Amelie, of sketching fame and settled into bee-keeping on the South Downs in Sussex.

His huge commissions, particularly in late years when he did so much Government work, had left him in a very comfortable financial position and he could well afford the partially retired life, although it was sure and certain that he would

keep his hand in, despite the remoteness of his domicile. But I hear from him again by telegram near a year later. It reads; 'Sproxtton Cottage, Sussex. My dear Watson, can you be at Harwich at noon Tuesday, (two days later) expect to bring the curtain down on the missing night watchman.'

I'm pretty busy in the practise at the time, but my dear wife says, "John, of course you must go. I'll get your portmanteau packed as soon as we have finished dinner."

Thus, we catch the overnight ferry to the Hook of Holland and the next afternoon, in steady drizzle, we mouse along the extraordinary waterfront in Amsterdam and stop at the imposing door of the Dutch East India Shipping Co.

"We are here to see Vice Commodore Kendrick," Holmes says.

The reception area is staffed by quite a few people, but the middle-aged receptionist is obviously the resident guardian of the gate.

"Nein," she says. "That is not possible without an appointment."

"Ah," says Holmes. "Just give him this....he will certainly see us."

He hands her a folded sheet bearing a wax hold-together seal; red wax. Holmes stands expectantly and so confidently, that she takes the papers and goes upstairs. It surely gets results. Two sharpish men return with the clerk.

"Just turn around," they say. "And lean against the wall," one says.

Holmes smiles his sardonic and enigmatic smile.

"Yes," he says. "We are armed and you may hold our revolvers while we are in the building. We carry them only for travellers' protection."

We unlimber our weapons under their ever so watchful eyes and they pat us down to see what else we are carrying. The two men escort us to the top floor and we wait for a moment in a glass walled reception area that looks directly down onto the North Sea Canal; surely one of the world's busiest waterways. The head man knocks and goes in to confer and is quickly back.

"Please go in, Sirs, my instructions are to wait here."

Vice Commodore Kendrick is Amelie's picture to the life. He is in fact, holding this picture on an angle in his left hand. I can clearly see Holmes's notation on the picture; it reads – The Night Watchman. He waves us to a seat.

"Do you have any idea, gentlemen," he says. "How easily I might arrange to wrap you in a bit of heavy chain and drop you in the North Sea, later this evening?"

"Very likely, Vice Commodore," Holmes easily replies. "But your record suggests you won't do that."

"By what are you judging my record?" he asks.

"Well, Lord Islington is still alive."

Kendrick laughs, "And a deal poorer."

He tinkles a small bell and a stunning looking girl, severely dressed, comes in. She looks questioningly at Kendrick.

"Perhaps a glass of Jong Genever may be acceptable to our visitors, and a few Batavian biscuits?"

We sit and sip our juniper berry liquor and munch some excellent and spicy flavoured biscuits. Kendrick opens the bidding.

"You're way out of the area of British Law here, Mr Holmes," he says. "I know you do a bit for Scotland Yard, so who are you representing today?"

"Ah," Holmes says. "It's quite true that I assist Scotland Yard now and then, but they come to me, I never go to them. In any case, their interest is in getting arrests. Mine is quite different; I'm always interested in seeing justice done and often, more often in fact, justice has nothing to do with English Common Law."

"I take your point," Kendrick says. "I think you know the story....or do you?" Holmes says, "I know that when you were the Doyen of the British East India Company ship masters you were their best ever earner and that you were unwisely cozened into playing cards for money when you were taking Lord Islington, Viceroy Designate, out to Bombay on your ship to start his term of office and that this dissolute character got to be the worse for drink and accused you of cheating."

"Yes," says Kendrick. "And I called him out, of course."

"Hmmm," says Holmes. "At which point he abjectly and wisely apologised to you in full and retracted his accusation."

"Yes," says Kendrick. "Fool that I was, I accepted his apology instead of shooting it out, and immediately he was ensconced in Government House in Bombay, he put maximum pressure on John Company to sack me. Which put the Honourable company in a cleft stick, as Islington could have damaged their lucrative monopoly."

"Well," Holmes says. "As I understand it, they took a different tack and moved you over to the Dutch East India Company."

"Yes," says Kendrick. "But at Islington's persistent urgings, they docked my bonus money."



"Which, by your raids on John Company's bonded stores at Queensferry and the East India Docks annex, you got back."

"Yes," the Vice Commodore says.

"What did you do with the dosh?" Holmes asks.

Kendrick says, "I set up and own the New Holland Co. We run export import and ships chandlery out of stores at Pymont in Sydney Town, Hobart, and of late, Melbourne. It's quite a big business and easy to run. I know of course, what the purchasing public are chasing in Europe and England and just send out ship loads of the same to my stores. I also have a big landed property near Canobolus or as they now call it, Orange. I ship my own wool direct to the English mills."

"Hmmm," says Holmes. "You show no sign of returning to your fine house at St John's Wood?"

"No," says Kendrick. "I am better insulated from British law here in Amsterdam."

"You seem to engineer one disaster a year for the now ex-Viceroy."

"Oh yes," says Kendrick. "I like to keep my hand in."

"Perhaps if these annual disasters could cease," Holmes says. "The night watchman (missing) would remain not found."

Kendrick pours us another shot of Jong Genever.

"Believe me, Mr Holmes and Dr Watson, it would be infinitely better all round if things stay schtum." We shake hands and take our leave.

The big young men escort us out to the dock.

As we part after our mixed, but interesting journey, Holmes says,

"Watson, old friend – we have faced some dreadful and dangerous opponents and enemies in the pursuit of justice here and there. You will graphically recall the fearsome Hound of the Baskervilles, the swamp adder in the Speckled Band and the

many fearsome human characters we've met and bested together, including the totally evil Moriarty. Only one has really frightened me."

"And who or what was that, Holmes?" I ask.

"Ah....the Vice Commodore; the perfect example of the very toughest possible opponent ever – 'The Resolute Man'."

Author's Footnote:

*This story is a tribute to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose immortal characters have been a source of interest and entertainment to generations of readers of English Literature.
He is one of the true giants of the pen.*

NINE

SHOT SIR!

Shot Sir!

The period around 1935 and the British General Election of December that year, has been variously described as the year the locusts have eaten. It can also be fairly described as the year the lunatic fringe prevailed.

Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin largely turned his back on his country's security, in the face of an obviously re-arming Germany. He said, "I give you my word there will be no great armaments." Actually, the Opposition, under the leadership of former army Major Clement Atlee, was even worse. He said at the general election or just prior, "We are not persuaded that the way to safety is by piling up armaments."

All of this in the same year that Hitler, as Supreme Leader of Germany, re-instated conscription, re-instated the Army Staff College and the furnaces in the Ruhr started working around the clock to build all that was necessary for war.



There was a groundswell, very much outside of the government to bring back Winston Churchill, the only realist and a very well informed realist at that, into power. Logically, as First Lord of the Admiralty – the Navy is strong – and this indeed may well have happened had not Stanley Baldwin's overwhelming win at the polls, lead him to quickly announce that there was no intention of including Winston on the Government Front Bench.

The British Press, largely pacifist and short-sighted, had a lot of fun devoting column inches to bucketing badly on Old Winston. Having briefly outlined the scene at this stage of this incredible year, we can now look at Winston's reaction to all this sledging he was being subjected to. He certainly was no stranger to vitriolic criticism, but despite all this, he was, as ever, a very hard man to put down.

Teddy Tingley knocks on the door of Winston's Ecclestone Square flat, just behind Victoria Station. The Batman/Butler answers the door.

"What ho, Teddy?" Winston growls, "I thought you and your yacht were in Morocco getting away from the cold."

Old Teddy is a thoughtful and rich bon-vivant. "Ah, Winston," he says, "I delayed going until I knew if you were rejoining the government benches. Now that's settled in the negative, I'm here to tell you the 'Lady Jane' is fuelled and alcohol'ed up and we thought you might join the party on a stag party to Iberia, now that's not happening. Just a short trip, it gets cold down there, but nothing like the old Dart. Bring your paints and rough wear British warm and you can muck up a few canvases and sniff the prevailing Spanish wind. As sure as God made little apples, there's a shooting war brewing there. The opportunity for Hitler and Mussolini to experiment a bit with their new military hardware is not something either of those evil bastards are likely to pass up on. Also, the trip won't cost you a penny and you can do a bit of writing to keep the cash rolling in."

Churchill writes for his living and he's writing pretty steadily at the moment. The crash of his investments on Wall Street in 1929 has gobbled up a lot of his hard earned and as a back bench member of Parliament, albeit a very influential and increasingly listened to one, being so heavily involved in the affairs of his country costs him. Thus late next afternoon, they are out of Portsmouth Harbour and heading for more slightly warmer climes.

A few days later, they are moored in the dockside pleasure craft area of Huelva. The anchorage is not all that protected, but Cadiz Harbour is not that far away if things turn rough. A British secret service agent is waiting on the dock. It's Ron Evans, who generally comes along to ride shotgun on old Winston, if the powers that be know he's going out of the country. Sir Robert Vansittart has personally briefed Evans to stay close in view of the unsettled nature of things in Spain. Vansittart is well aware of the astonishing numbers of political murders taking place in Hitler's Germany and while this hasn't spread outside of that country, you just never know.

"Come and enjoy a Mandarin or two, Ronnie," Churchill says, "I'm off when the car comes, to do a bit of daubing in the hills above us here."

While the appearance of such a competent bodyguard is a clear indication that at least one part of the British Government is taking an interest in Winston's whereabouts and well being, old Churchill thinks it is unlikely that the greater English public will care a fig as to where he is and what he's up to. However, international figures of note and notoriety are the exception.

In snow covered Berchtesgaden, Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of the Sovereign State of the Third Reich, is sitting just inside the huge window of his fine study. The sun is absolutely sparkling on the snow covered Obersalzberg. Certainly one of the finest mountain views in this tired old world. His badger-like secretary, Martin Bormann, is inevitably there; seated back a bit minuting the conversation in his crabbed shorthand. The minutes sometimes don't survive the meeting. Hitler occasionally directs 'burn that lot' and watches while it's done. Thus some of the most interesting decisions ever made in Germany become viva voce only.



The main other player present is Johannes von Trescow; perhaps best described as a broken down Junker. Certainly he is bred in the East Prussian purple of the old German Empire and certainly he is on the make in Hitler's new Third Reich. They are drinking coffee and hoeing into some heavy German pastries. Von Trescow has been in England sniffing the wind and has a heap of London papers with him.

"The pacifists seem to have a field day at the elections," Hitler says. Von Trescow laughs. "I'm sure. mein Fuehrer, if you put up a sign in the Rhineland saying, 'War is Coming', and a large sign at that, the dopes in power in France and England, not to mention Belgium, would choose not to see it." Hitler laughs his guttural laugh. "All they have to do is tape record the clash, clang and clatter of the Krupp works in the Ruhr and any halfwit of any country can see what is happening around the clock."

The secretary puts in a few of his rare words. "Churchill seems to be accurately telegraphing our punches," he says.

"You've got that right," says Hitler reflectively. "You know, the last time he tabled our aircraft production figures, about 7 weeks back, in the Commons, I had Goering update our figures. Do you know there was nothing between them? His sources on aircraft and other war production is invariably spot on."

"Ja," von Trescow says, "but the fact remains, they are keeping him out of power."

“Yes,” says Hitler, “that is certainly the case. It flies in the face of obvious fact that Baldwin is stonewalling him, especially as they worked together in Government, very well together in the past.”

Von Trescow says, “I discussed this with Ribbentrop at the Savoy last week. He remarked that as usual, all power corrupts and that Baldwin doesn’t want a hair-shirt making his final five years in Government uncomfortable.”

“Where, by the way, is Churchill?” Hitler asks. “He seems to have gone quiet.”

“Ah,” von Trescow says, “he’s gone painting at Huelva, I’m told. He’s working out from Teddy Tingley’s floating gin palace.”

“Half his luck,” Hitler says, “I’d love to get back to the palette, but I certainly don’t have the time just at present.” He cogitates. He continues, “Churchill’s antennae is very sensitive. He may well pick up the vibes of the Condor Squadron plans in Spain, especially as some air field work is proceeding. I don’t like the sound of it; I’d rather he wasn’t there.”

“Ah,” says Bormann. “Will no-one rid me of the troublesome priest?”

“Indeed,” replies Hitler. “Spain would, of course, be the ideal place to do it...”

“And,” says von Trescow, “I expect Reichfuehrer Himmler could put his hands on a competent sniper.”

“No,” says Hitler. “That is shallow thinking. We need someone like Baldur von Schirach; the clear-cut American look of youth. Thus we can hang the crime on Roosevelt forever.”

Hitler finishes his coffee, looks directly at the Secretary, “Burn your notes,” he says. “Get me that smart chappie that runs the German/Amerika Bund. Have him up here by this evening.”

He’s there by evening and after dinner Hitler talks to him alone in his impressive study with its Speer design. A design to overawe whatever mendicant is along begging favours from this, oh so, powerful master of all Germany.

“Yes,” the visitor says, “I have just the man, the son of an American Industrialist in Baltimore. He’s dropped out of Law School and he is here in Berlin looking to do something for the greater German good.”

“Okay,” says Hitler, “this is what I want done.....von Trescow is here at the moment and can go along and co-ordinate matters. It’s something that, of necessity, must be done outside normal channels, or certainly official channels. If any word of



this plan gets out, I will cauterize the leak in no uncertain fashion. A successful outcome will be very rewarding to those entrusted to carrying it out, except perhaps the shooter. It may be best to take him out while he’s feeling euphoric about his accurate shooting. If you leave me for a while, I will brief von Trescow.”

The expediting of an assassination is, of course, very old rope in Hitler’s gangster regime. Thus we can move to the hills above Huelva where Churchill is wearing a painters overall and an old British warm overcoat; very paint splattered.

He’s painting the irregular outcrop of stone known locally as ‘Goya’s Lookout’, with views in the background running to the sea at Huelva far below them. It’s going well, there’s no-one in sight. Churchill is enjoying his little bit of solitude. He has rumbled in the past, and quoting Helen Hayes – ‘solitude is very different to loneliness.’ The sun’s warm and his painting is reflecting the bright colours of his

subject. He has an opened bottle of malt whiskey handy and some scotch shortbread biscuits. A tall young man comes walking up the path. He's about six feet one, strong faced, dark, clean shaven.

"Good morning, Sir," he says. He's obviously American. "You're a painter!"

"Well, a dauber anyway," Churchill rejoins. "What part of the great Republic are you from?"

"Baltimore," he answers.

"Ah...", says Churchill, who knows his history. "Maryland, my Maryland. You chaps would dearly have loved to have joined the Confederates – indeed the Rebels may well have won the war if you had."

"Not practical, Sir," he replies. "We took them on when they brought troops through Baltimore, but we were too close to Washington really to pull it off."

"But...", says Churchill, "they were something of toothless tigers at the start."

"Yes," says the young man, "the show they put up at Baltimore in the riots lead to us over estimating them at that stage. I think we struck the only really aggressive troops they had at the time."

"Oh," says Churchill, "I don't think underneath they lacked aggression, but they surely lacked leadership."

"Yes," says the chap, "we certainly fooled ourselves as to the effectiveness of Lincoln's mob. I didn't realise who you were, Sir," the newcomer continues. "My apologies, I'm John Horst, on a walking tour."

"It's not the safest country to walk around at the moment," Churchill says.

"Indeed," says Horst, "but even I from Maryland have recognised you. Yet, you are apparently here on your Pat Malone. Where, indeed, is your security detail?"

Churchill reaches his hand under his coat flap, pulls out a black Webley revolver and says, "Oh....I'm not a bad shot."

Horst looks at the revolver. "That's pretty old ordnance," he says. "We're into automatics as weapons of personal choice now in the US of A."

"I'm told," Churchill says, "that they are prone to spray expended shell casings all over the shop. At least you can contain and carry away revolver casings."

"Have a scotch, young fellow," Churchill invites, pulling out a couple of clean whiskey shot glasses.

Horst says, "I regret to say, Mr Churchill, that I will have to pass on the pleasantries. I'm here on a mission."

He steps back a pace; pulls out a black automatic pistol and Evans, not in sight, but sighting through a Marquis bush, instantly blows the top off his head with a very short scoped rifle. As the assassin falls, Evans yells at Churchill,

"Look out, Sir, he'll have back-up!"

Churchill doesn't turn a hair; he lamped the back-up ten minutes earlier. He says to himself, "Just there, I think," and looses two revolver shots into the thorny Marquis bush over a bit. Von Trescow is there, pistol in hand, and as dead as a doornail. Evans looks back at old Churchill sitting calmly on his canvas stool.

"SHOT SIR!" he calls.

"Hrumph," grunts Churchill, "I think, Ron," he says, "that a tight operation like this would only have two men, but best we reload...." then he pauses. "On second thoughts, they're bound to be packing Lugers each. Let's wash the prints off our guns with some of the bottle of turps I have here, place these in their hands and we'll walk away with theirs. That is, assuming your little rifle is a clean skin. We'll take the scope away though."

Two hours later, they are back on board the 'Lady Jane', drinking rough red Spanish wine and scoffing smoked salmon sandwiches. Teddy comes down to the dock.

"How'd it go, Winston?" he asks.

"Well enough," replies Churchill, "but I fancy dinner in another country."

"What ho for Lisbon," Teddy says, "Quick now."

The sunset gun goes at Lisbon Harbour just as they sit down to an interesting Portuguese meal.

"Gotten Himmel," Hitler says, when the 'no news' finally sinks in.

Any violence in Spain at this time seems to touch off more violence. The Garda wisely decide to keep the whole mess schtum.

Churchill is practicing with his newly acquired Luger, in the wooded boundaries of Chartwell.

"It's not British made," he says as he blasts another melon on a tree stump.

"But, then again," he continues, "it's a fine weapon and very accurate. Would you care to run a zigzag course out in the open, Evans, carrying a melon on a long stick?"

Evans grins. "Not with you shooting, Sir," he says.

Historical Footnote

The 1935 election mentioned at the start of this story proved to be the only one held within the decade. This was due to the war and the appointment of the national government to fight it. Thus Churchill was excluded from Government in 1935, but by dint of huge ability, got there anyway. He was removed from this role in the election of 1945. He certainly lived in some tumultuous times. Bernard Law Montgomery said at the Albert Hall, just after the war, that Churchill (who was present) was simply the country's greatest living Englishman.

TEN

**SOUTH, DOWN
THE RIVER**

South, Down the River

Terry Faraday is a surveyor. He followed his Dad into this field, although now Dad is only part-time in this work, as he farms his property 'Kingsdown' now. It's Queensland floodplain and they produce a lot of Lucerne hay and run a baby beef operation.

Terry works for the big WA miners – fly in, fly out, two weeks on, one off. The week off isn't a paid one, but the working weeks are so well paid, he is a big earner. The camps are very comfortable, air conditioned and the catering first class. He has an unusual plus in that there is a lithe handsome girl doing the chain work on the team. They work the same shifts; she fly's out with him, sometimes to Perth, often to Bali and Phuket. Just at this time, she is in Perth looking for a home unit to buy. Terry's a fine looking young man, six feet and a bit in the old measurement, brown eyed sharp as a tack, cultivates an appealing indolent air.

Things are pear-shaped at Kingsdown. Half the state is inundated with the floods. There's a huge amount of water racing over their land on its way to the very distant Murray. They can't do much to improve their situation, but daily they check their major asset, the big circular irrigation gear, which so far is surviving well, though the river is still rising.

"Terry," his Dad says, "there's not much to be done here other than to watch the water rise. We got the cattle out in time and the river will dump as much dirt as it takes away. We'll get back in business, but not for months. Why don't you zap down to South Australia and get things organised on your great Aunt Mary's fruit block. When all this moisture gets down south, her old homestead will be right in the firing line. I flood-proofed the old joint thirty years back when I first qualified for dreadful old Uncle Rupert."

"How?" Terry asks.

"Well....the main house is so old it sits on stumps which are mortised into the floor joists. It's above the highest known flood level, but this one is different. Anyway, to stop the old house rising with the flood waters and simply floating downstream, I made up tee shaped mild steel brackets to hold the joists in place if the level topped earlier floods and to keep it en situ."

"And you want me to do what?" Terry asks.

"Ah, I want you to deliver my dear old sister-in-law from the life sentence that her family blithely visited on her when she stayed on the property and nursed old Rupert and my mother-in-law until the end, which took place on the block eventually. None of the other siblings ever helped her, including your mum. All they've done is visit for river holidays and even then, not in recent years when the river ran so low."

"How does she live?" Terry asks.

"Ah, she sublets the orange grove to an efficient local and runs a few beef breeders. There's no real money for other than eking out her living. The other's don't contribute, so I pay the insurances; it's a heritage property of course and it's well insured, as I've always had the feeling that a big flood will wash away much of the property. But I also made sure that Mary got the property transferred to her in fee simple to ward off the vultures. They must be doing well. They didn't raise any objection to me doing that."

"She's never tried to make a life for herself?" Terry asks.

"Well," old Dave says, "she was the youngest and was a late, late developer. There were plenty of young blokes around that appreciated her fine looks, but old Rupert smartly showed them the door. He was something of a frightening presence and of course, she has that dreadful speech impediment."

Mary is a stutterer of the first water. When Terry visits, this disappears entirely – it gives way to cut glass diction.

“It’s all psychosomatic,” Dave continues. “She was so bullied by old Rupert, that I think that’s what caused the impediment. It’s obviously a mental hang-up that disappears when someone she is 100% comfortable with, like yourself, visits.”

“Okay,” says Terry. “What do you want me to do?”

Later that day, he catches the Black Hawk magic carpet out of the flooded town and is on his way to Brisbane. He picks up his light road trail bike from their holiday home there and sets off south. Days later he arrives at Mary’s. There’s no flood here, but the river has benefited from the smaller floods north of Melbourne. Great Aunt Mary is delighted, truly delighted to see him.

“What a pleasure to see you, Terry,” she bubbles. “Now……I promise you your favourite Mexican omelette for tea with fresh Cyprus figs from the old tree down by the old cow shed. Now here’s the wine cellar key; go and raid my dear old Dad’s cellar.”

They have a pleasant meal on the front verandah of the house and enjoy a red older than Terry himself. Terry has a walk around the house. It’s built out of pit sawn Murray River gums, generations back. The room divisions are of stretched hessian plastered over. It’s still all quite sound, but cluttered up with heaps of Victorian and Edwardian age furniture of little grace and charm and the walls are festooned with similar memorabilia, including locks of hair in jet black frames. It’s pretty mournful and redolent of an Edwardian funeral parlour design. Terry goes back for a lesser bottle of red and they resume their sipping.

“What brings you here, Terry?” she asks. They are back on the wide verandah looking across the flood plain to the river and at the high cliffs on the southern side. Well, Great Aunt Mary,” he says, “I am entrusted with a Moses Mission. I’m here to show you the way to the Promised Land.”

“Do tell, young man,” she says - and he does.

“First,” he says, “do you see that long strip of dark stone in the high cliff over the river?”

“Surely,” she says.

“Well, according to Dad, who is no dill, he says that will be the flood peak when the Queensland water gets here.” She gasps. “Yes,” he continues, “and I’m here to ensure that such a level will have the desired effect on this dreadful old museum you have been forced to live in.”

Next day, with enthusiastic help from Mary, he is under the house with a hammer drill, removing the steel tee pieces from the underfloor and with a chainsaw, putting long cuts in crucial bearers. This done; he looks at Mary.

“Let’s pick out what you want to keep.”

She quarters the house and brings back only a silver fruit compote dish inscribed ‘Waikerie Show 1894, Section Winner – Fruit’.

“I’ll take this in to the bank tomorrow,” he says, “and get the stock firm out to value the baby beef and the breeders.”

With all of the arrangements in place, Terry gives Mary a pep talk and noting the floods in Queensland are getting worse, he flies back to the Port Hedland money source. To coin a dreadful pun, a lot of water flows under (and over) the bridge, before he gets back to see Great Aunt Mary again. She welcomes him in the door of her Georgian town house, facing the beach at Glenelg. She sits him down in the sunroom of her delightful and exquisitely furnished new abode. Every item on view has Georgian overtones and reflects grace of design and pride of ownership. Mary

herself reflects style too. She is wearing tans and a magnificent white blouse which shows off her slimness to perfection.

“Terry,” she says. “You won’t believe this, but I’ve been out in the Gulf all day fishing with my new boyfriend. I met him at a Probus Club meeting.”

Terry is well impressed. “Mary, do you stutter when you are with him?”

She laughs a tinkley laugh. “Terry, me old China,” she says. “I don’t stutter at all now.”

Terry laughs with her.

“You know?” she says. “My new dear one asked me today, how I came by all the luxury that my new life reflects – for a single girl – and I said truly to him, I owe all of this to my dear nephew, Terry, who came south to help me, and to the huge insurance money that came in when my old life went south – down the Murray, to be exact.”

TEN

**THE CHANCE
ENCOUNTER**

The Chance Encounter

Dawson Anderton is watching the Antique Roadshow with his wife. They are sitting in his study eating unsalted peanuts and drinking German Boutique beer. Tea is on the go; tonight they are having beef and Guinness pie, 5 veggies and a custard pudding. The show – from Powis Castle in Wales – rounds off and they move back into their family room. The tile fire is burning white-gum small logs; it's as warm as warm.

"Do you mind, love," he says, "if I nip down to the Club for one drink?"

"Whatever for?" she asks, "We've plenty more beer, tea is coming up and it's really quite bitter outside."

"Oh," he says, "it's quite a while since I touched base there; not since autumn."

"Okay," she says.

So he sheds his wool jerkin and puts on a heavier lined jacket that he last wore on a visit to Italy. He checks his wallet; he's not short of dosh, but in principle, he never carries much money. If you don't carry much, you don't spend much, he thinks. But he's got enough there for the Club.

He walks a few blocks down to the Hamilton Club. There's only three people there in the bar, so far; a retailer, a travel agent and the bar manager. He orders a Crown Lager, declines a glass or stubby holder. A very well presented couple come in. He doesn't know them. She's obviously younger than him, beautifully preserved though he is. The trio drinking together ignore the newcomers and continue their conversation about the recent climb by the Travel Agent to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. The newcomers take this in their stride and she's soon into the conversation. A couple more older members of the club arrive. The pushy lady produces a silver tray of goodies.



"Be careful of the pate," the patronising one says, "I've laced it heavily with Grand Marnier."

Dawson is over halfway through his Crownie and is not pleased with the addition to their discussion. He turns grungy; he came here to touch base with old friends, not to gain new ones. "Must be off," he says and heads out the door into the street darkness. He slips the unfinished stubbie into his sloped jacket pocket and heads down the street on the alternate route back to his home. About half way back to base, on an ill lit street carrying through traffic, if there is any, and darkened further by overhanging peppermint trees, three chaps, hooded,

perhaps indigenous, come towards him steadily.

It should be mentioned at this stage that Dawson is about to tick over 75 years of age. He may indeed be well past his biblical use by date, but he's strong and quick. He may be due to go downhill, but, by golly, it hasn't hit him yet. The leading hooded one gruffly says, as they approach,

"Well, old fella, we've decided to have your wallet. Get it out quick, please, we have places to go and people to meet."

Dawson doesn't check his stride. He grins; it's quite cold. He has his hands in his jacket pocket, one hand clutching the neck of his providential Crownie.

"Back off, fellas," he says, "this may be injurious to your health."

The lead hooded one chuckles. "Jeez, you're an optimistic old fart," he says as he swings an aluminium baseball bat from behind his back. "Jump to it, Dadda," he continues.

Dawson pulls his aforementioned Crownie out and absolutely belts the lead hood in the temple and as he stumbles down onto the pavement, backhands another shot onto the bridge of the next one's nose. The bottle shatters. He jumps in one bound up to the third smaller man and savagely glasses him under the chin, grabbing his pigtail to hold him still, with the nasty end just a bit more than nicking the victim's neck.

"Well, Sport," he says, "the tide has turned and it may yet take you out with it. Pull out your wallet." He pushes the glass harder into the man's vulnerable and stretched throat.

"Respect, Mon," the bloke says, "respect. Give me time to get my wallet out."

He tugs at his pocket and this and a small silenced automatic pistol both fall to the street top. Dawson started his working life in a bank and is quite conversant with automatic pistols. He pulls both items close with his boot, scoops them up and instantly works the pistol slide.

"It's possible I may miss you, you low life," he says, "best you run and zig zag as you go."

The hood hares off and Dawson ricochets three silenced shots after him. 'Zing' goes the bullets on the bitumen of the road. He pockets both the pistol and the wallet and gives both the downed men a dreadful kick in the ribs. They should both be easy to find later, as the only place they are likely to head to will be the Casualty Dept of Hamilton Hospital. He walks off home. He arrives nicely within the promised time frame and enjoys a glass of Rawsons Retreat with his tea.

"How did your short visit go?" his wife asks.

"Well enough," Dawson replies. "I had some very upmarket pate there."

After tea, he looks the purloined pistol over. It's a very streamlined American made, satin gripped one. The silencer is very small, but heavy. He turns the wallet out, give or take a bit, there's a bit there - \$23,000 in \$50's and \$100's.

'Jeez,' Dawson thinks, 'I've hit a professional drug dealer.'

He gets up and unlocks his gun cabinet. It has a highly illegal short-barreled automatic shotgun in amongst his legal guns. He puts number 9 shot in the gun and slips it under his bed, cocks it, but puts it on safety. Nothing of an unusual nature occurs around him.

He drives his 30 year old Benz to the Club when next he goes, the satin gripped pistol in his jacket pocket.

"You're becoming quite a Friday night regular again," the Travel Agent says.

"Yes," says Dawson, "even at this clubs exorbitant prices, I've been finding the drinks more affordable of late."

He only ever buys the one Crownie. He does a little sum on the back of a bar coaster. He has enough from his earlier encounter to finance him into another 3831 stubbies.

"Things are paying off?" the Travel Agent says.

"Well, walking home certainly seems to," Dawson rejoins.

ELEVEN

**THE
COMMODORE**

The Commodore

Back in the late seventies, a very well known Lesmurdie lady, who apart from her busy working career, was also the President of the Kalamunda Hospital Committee, asked me if I would launch her book for her when it was finished.

“Surely,” I say. “What’s it about?”

She shuffles among the papers on the top of her huge executive desk and hands me a roughish looking, or perhaps scrappy would be a better word, manuscript.

“Feel free to have a read,” she says.

So I sit and do.

It’s a true story, it’s her story and it starts with her engagement to a Tanker Captain; really, he’s a bit more than a captain. He is the Commodore of the Japan-Borneo Tanker Fleet. He’s a huge Scotsman, accent and all and boy, is he down to earth. They are engaged for a while and she finds out, in a roundabout way that this is his seventh engagement, but a marriage had not occurred from any of them.

She has her own program to consider, of course and she eventually pressured him for a date.

“Oh, Spring would be fine,” he says. “I can take a spot of leave then. Bear in mind we have to set the building of a new house in train.”

She is ahead of him there. She has a nice block on about an acre on Lesmurdie Brook, one of the main feeder streams of Lesmurdie Falls.

“Here,” she says, “is rather a practical house that Collier Homes are putting out at quite a modest cost.”

“Hmmm,” he says, “a project home.”

“John,” she says, “getting involved with architecture is fine too, but bear in mind that the house you usually finally and belatedly get is what the architect has in his twisted mind – not necessarily the one you yourself really want.”

“Hmmm,” he says, “show me the blurb.” She gets up and retrieves a thick file, down to detail, such as floor plans, fittings, etc.

“Looks good,” he says. “Three bedrooms, surely you’re not one of those women who has babies, are you?” The penny drops. John is getting on now a bit and she’s not so young either. Obviously, he has shied off his earlier fiancées – probably scared off by them being of child bearing age. She perseveres.

“Oh, it’s not a third bedroom,” she says. “That one looks onto the creek and will be your office, of course.”

So things proceed. The builders build and the wedding takes place in the Church of Scotland in the Terrace. They honeymoon at Caves House and put a fair dint in the bar stocks of whisky, single malts of course. Finally, John announces he’s off to Japan by air, to pick up a huge new tanker in Yokahama.

“Why not give up work for a while and come along on a few trips? We’ll be going into the Emirate States to pick up loads and there is talk of an England run, to help their supply problems, so it’s not just Borneo/Japan and so on. It will be varied.”

“Fine,” she says. “Where, so I meet up with you?”

“Hmmm,” he says. “I’ll be in the Coral Sea, off Cooktown in 23 days. Fly to there and I’ll arrange for the pilot boat to run you out to the tanker. The Wardroom will want to welcome the Commodore’s new wife aboard and you can expect a full on cocktail party immediately on your arrival.”

“You’ll be anchored, I suppose.”

“No,” he says. “We will just put the ship on idle and hold position there until you are safely on board.”

“Fine,” she says. “I’ll bring my cases and what does one wear?”

Her new (and totally heartless) husband says, “Wear an outfit that is totally suited for a very, very cocktail party.” So she does.

When she arrives at the pilot boat pickup point, she is wearing very high heels, a grey silk shantung suit with a fashion of the day Hobble skirt, a deep veed blouse and heaps of jewellery and a smart little hat. She is good to go for a cocktail party anywhere. The pilot boat Captain mutters to himself, ‘Shit’, when he lamps her, but all arrangements are in place, so he doesn’t feel up to telling her what is in front of her and throttles the powerful boat out in the direction of the Coral Sea.

The tanker is 17 miles out; necessary to provide the depth such a big vessel needs, the sea’s a bit up and downy, but it could be worse. They run slap bang up against the tanker and the crew sound the huge fog horn to announce her arrival. Heads are evidently taking stock of the arrival. A net on the gantry is soon on the deck of the pilot boat and her bags are soon going upward to the ship main deck. The new bride is standing watching these go up and for the first time, appreciates the sheer rise of this ship wall; it’s like looking up Bluff Knoll at the organ pipes, she says later. She looks askance at the pilot boat Captain.

“How the hell do I get up there?” she asks.

Just at that point, down comes a rope ladder. It’s hard against the tankers side. The sides are thick manila rope; the rungs of this ships ladder are Island hardwood slats. She counts them later. There are 187 of them.

“You climb,” the pilot boat skipper says. “It’s not so daunting if you don’t, repeat don’t, look down.”

‘In for a penny,’ she thinks. Smart, long-handled handbag over her arm, she takes the first steps and continues on. As an afterthought, the pilot boat skipper says, “Count the steps as you go and have a breather after every 14 of them.”

And she does. She’s in no danger on the climb, but boy, is she puffing and panting. She is a solidly built woman, although shapely with it. She finally makes it to the deck – and then trips on the coaming and falls towards the steel plated deck, but the wardroom boys are on the ball. They catch her just short of hitting the deck. They put her back on her feet; one goes chasing after her handbag, which has gone flying, another tall officer straightens her hat and on cue, her husband steps up, takes in the vicious glare she is shooting at him, takes her hand and intones,

“Welcome aboard Peggy Morwin Winton Dunne.”

They proceed to the wardroom to a very upmarket well catered cocktail party. She finally settles in to enjoy it and at the conclusion, Commodore Winton Dunne goes up to take the con for Borneo and the chap who is second in command, takes her along to her magnificent State Room. This is so luxurious she stays with the ship and does seven journeys before returning to decorate and landscape her new house.

I finish reading the chapter.

“Peg,” I say, “this is just so interesting. It’s quite marvellous and it’ll sell. (time proves me right on this) What are you going to call the book?” I ask.

The manuscript as mentioned earlier looks a tad scrappy, but not so the cover. A picture of the huge Borneo/Japan Line Tanker; grey on a blue, blue sea fills the back and front of the cover. And the title, bold, bold black, reads.....

BASTARDS I’VE MET – AND ONE I SAILED WITH

TWELVE

**THE GAMBINI
GAMBIT**

The Gambini Gambit

Chapter One

The Gambini Clan are enjoying a bit of time out at the Lamont farm, 'Cobble Hill', up in Vermont. Its leaf time and the steep hills are aflame with the colour you only see in northern climes in the period approaching the fall. The Lamonts are hosting this get together. They are inextricably tied up with the Gambini crime family; Chicago-ites, all. Back a fair way, Lamont senior; an Irish Boston lawyer, made a match with the youngest daughter of this Italian mob. The resulting family carries both the Irishness of their Dad and the pure Sicilian traits of their mother to form a formidable combination. Theodore (or Theo as he is known) Lamont is celebrating his 18th birthday this week and questions of his future are up front in the rowdy discussions that family life entails.



They are all having a bit of a go at him, mainly due to the fact that he hasn't expressed an opinion at all at what he will aim for. There's no rush and neither is there any shortage of money. They were and still are mobsters in the main, though through Lamont Senior's direction, they are now dug into legitimate business in a big, big way. Chicago isn't New York, but they maintain a small army of foot soldiers to prosecute the clans business. They're into just about everything illegal and quite a bit that isn't. They were late into drugs, but demand pressures and huge profits sucked them in,

lock, stock. The demand for drugs is absolutely insatiable and there's plenty of it being produced throughout the world; getting it in is the ever growing problem as the Drug Enforcement Agency sharpen up their act and go off shore to Colombia to try and emasculate the famous and very efficient Cartel.

The clan have maintained very respectable offices in the old Wrigley Building, where Theo's Dad has practised law ever since he came to Chicago. However, the tactical centre is in a well-fortified factory down near the old Stockyards. Thus the strategy decided on in the Wrigley Building is passed along to the Stockyards Unit and this is where the squad commanders pass out assignments and orders to the foot soldiers.

The fall morning is a tad sharp, but very sunny and after a family breakfast in the huge old farm house kitchen, the majority of the visitors decide to go over to Sun Valley and ride the ski lifts. There's no snow on the steep slopes of course, but a ride to the top and a walk down a few stations to pick up the downward lift is quite fun and most settle for that, except for some of the women, who decide to do a run through the roadside antique places towards Lake Champlain.

The Gambini in charge of the foot soldiers allocates body guards and look-out men to each party. The crime family are on holidays and are thus less watchful than they would be in Chicago, which means the guards must be doubly aware of what is going on. Things have been running along smoothly for the family of late, but as in any extensive, illegal in the main, huge cash flow backed group, there is no room to take chances.

Theo joins his Dad for a walk around the farm and its environs. In saying that it is a farm, translates to having been a farm in the early days of Vermont. Early settlers cleared a lot of the woods, erected dry stone fences and attempted to make a living farming this, oh so, stony country. They are all long gone and these farms and the old farm houses now provide recreation and relaxation to mainly the city-bound and cashed up southerners. They walk over to the old churchyard. The clapboard church is derelict and the wooden grave boards are rotted away. There is the odd tump of a grave, but this churchyard is old; very old and as the old pine boxes have stove in, the tumps have sunk to suit and are more hollows now. Theo's Dad gestures to these as they walk.

"Time and tide," he remarks. "Don't waste the minutes, Theo. They don't come back. What do you have in mind doing next?" Theo's just out of college.

"Hmm," he says. "Engineering.....at Durham Uni in Limey land, I think."

"What sort of engineering?"

"Perhaps..... Marine," Theo says. "Of all of your legitimate enterprises, the salvage and shipping side is one that none of the family seem to have even a passing interest in."

(The Gambini's own a shipping and salvage operation down in Texas and operate mainly out of Calhoun)

"Hmmm," says his Dad. "We sublet a fair bit of our work, but it's not inactive. We've made \$87 million this year to date, keeping Zodiacs, Arms and other things up to our Somalian friends pirating ships and sharing big time in the ransom money."

"God, you've kept that quiet," Theo says.

Old Liam smiles his puckish Irish smile.

"I can't take any credit for the idea. Byron Gambini got it from someone in our drug distribution in London. He's had a few Somalis there as foot soldiers to knock the Jamaicans about a bit. They have been muscling in here and there. I'm thinking of shipping in a few Chechens for a spot of wholesale liquidations."

This startles Theo even more. He's not been aware that the Gambini's are in bed with the Chechens.

"Well, we have to be," Liam says. "Our US market is being restricted by the growth of technology in the hands of law enforcement. It's harder to fly or ship in narcotics. Congress fund (up) the law enforcers on a huge scale. Thus we have had to get into the UK and Europe. Of course, the growth of technology isn't a one way street. Do you know the only really profitable web sites on the Internet are those promoting sex in its many forms? Profits are enormously up and we no longer have to fund up-front strip clubs to get the punters in. All they have to do is Google up the menu for this, but there's a huge supply of the white stuff available through the southern Russians; it all comes through Turkey where it's processed. We tranship through Malta, although we don't leave it there long. England is easy to get product into; it's only a hop step to anywhere. In summer, we run something that faintly resembles the evacuation of Dunkirk, to yacht or pleasure-craft product in. Distribution is quite competitive, but Byron seems to have an efficient hold on this. Also, we launder a lot of dosh through the gaming clubs. In fact, I don't know where we would be without the UK market at the moment. We're putting a lot of the profit into Russia. Do you know we have three, four star Western type hotels from which you can see the Kremlin? Actually," he continues. "Since Communism fell over, Russia is a dream place to trade in. You can buy anything, anything at all. The local Mafia are now really in local government. They sort of run the profitable parts, without having to attend to the nitty gritty. We were lucky to get in there early; the Chechens are dynamite at protecting their turf."

“Just run me through the Somali operation,” Theo says. “How did you get into it?”

“Hmmm,” says Liam. “This Somali chap sold Byron the deal and I organised the hijacking of the very first ship; ours, but Panamanian registered of course. It’s packed, or was, to the gun whales with Zodiac outboards, GPS’s, guns, grenades, rocket launchers and satellite finders. The trick is to hijack between satellite passes.”

“How on earth do you get the timetables?” Theo asks.

“Easy, peasy,” replies Liam. “Every civil servant dreams of retiring to the Caribbean. We’re helping a very influential few achieve that dream.”

“So,” Theo asks. “How do you sum up things?”

“Everything’s fine,” says Liam. “Except, getting the good stuff into the States. Border security is so tough; the Citizens of the Republic are having to buy the rubbish that’s available, not the good stuff.”

“I can’t understand,” says Theo. “How the Somalian hijacking continues.”

“Ah,” says Liam. “No one’s heart is really in stamping it out. The ransoms are affecting quite a few countries that don’t love one another. The big trick is to keep the Russians out of it. So long as we make it profitable for them to stay out, we’ll stay in the business.”

“I gain the impression,” Theo says. “That our enforcers work as much on legitimate business as the old established rackets these days.”

“Well, the boundaries on things such as the bars and prostitution, Resort hotels, Loan sharking and international car theft are set and booming and the huge new consumer spending in Russia means we ship and sell every car we can steal and any muscling in is containable. Private or legitimate business is much harder and there is strong competition everywhere for our legal business arm. We find that, to tilt the playing field in our favour, it’s good business to use the under-utilised Vindicatores here and there. By and large,” Liam continues, “the Italians are good operators within their conventional and traditional fields and it’s still possible to bring in modern recruits from Sicily, where we run a training school, to Americanise them before we bring them over; but you, Theo, are different. You pass up on the consumer goods and the women and the high life that the Dings take to, like Maine geese to water. I have high hopes in the long run you will add your brains and abilities to the thinking and planning side of the operation as I have done. The Guineas, as I’ve said, are hard workers and big enjoyers of the fruits of their labours, but the beggars don’t think far enough ahead.”

They walk back to the house. Frank Gambini is there waiting to take them down to a country Inn for lunch. Vermont is chocker at the moment with leaf viewers, but the Gambinis own the Inn they are going to, so a table is no problem. They pull up their tan Pontiac in the car park of the Red Lion Inn. A well dressed fellow directs them in to a spot he has been holding. This chap is a Farella; pure Sicilian and as alert as a rattlesnake. They go in to lunch on a glassed in level, looking down on to the spectacular valley. Frank and Casa Farella melt into the background and two other foot soldiers take over the watching. Theo doesn’t know these chaps, but spots them. They are the ones nearby eating food that doesn’t require two hands. They are probably eating pasta or something of that nature that leaves their right, or gun hands, free.

That evening before tea, Theo marshalls the visitors for a quiet walk down to a nearby beaver dam to catch the twilight activity of the colony of beavers. The look-out beaver is well aware of their presence and warns the colony of this by a whack of its tail on the water. The whack is not an intense dive warning, it’s just to sort of say, ‘watch out’.

During tea, Tessa Gambini toasts Theo on his 18th birthday.

“Theo, old mate,” he says. “You don’t seem to take much interest in all that is on offer to the Gambini/Lamont clan. We despair of you amounting to anything within the family, but we do wish you well in the crack-brained idea you have divulged to your good old Dad. Perhaps you will have the luck of the Irish; if you intend to operate outside of the family, you will need it. Cheers.....”

He holds his champagne flute aloft. Theo stands in acknowledgement.

“Ah, Tessa,” he says. “I may surprise you yet.”

Chapter Two

There are some logistical challenges in getting settled into Durham University. The choice of bodyguard protection for the youngest son of one of the richest organisations in this wide world is one of them. The organisation has no intentions of being held to ransom if they can help it. Also, the strategy group want to involve Theo in tactics as well. They want him to liaise a bit with Mikhail Skender, the big wheel in the Turkish supply line for heroin and opium. Skender’s a southern Russian, who went to Afghanistan as a USSR National Service grunt. The Ruskiies, recognising his linguistic abilities and his intelligence, took him out of the line and into Military Intelligence. Skender could see at the outset that Afghanistan would never buckle to Russia and that the USA was running huge arms manufacturing efforts in Pakistan, to cause them great and continuing grief. As the numbers of body bags escalated going back into Russia, Skender applied his evident abilities into building firm and lasting connections with the poppy growers in Afghanistan.

He is so successful at this, that even today; no harvests of the poppy crop goes over the bridge into Soviet Turkestan and hence to the factories in Turkey, without his say so. He has the connections and the muscle to keep it this way. Byron Gambini takes him along the Thames embankment one delightful June evening to bring about the meet. They pause to look at Big Bertha; the famous boat mortar used at the siege of Riga, and now in permanent place down a bit from Tower Bridge. As they look at the beautifully preserved old gun, they become aware of a semi patrol coming up from the St Pauls end. It’s Skender and his bodyguard; the point man is huge and stone-faced. Alongside Skender is a tall, very well-suited man; his finance man, Gervaise and bringing up the rear are two Algerian bodyguards; alert as rattlesnakes. Byron makes the introductions. Skender, small and very well dressed in a no vent suit, acknowledges Theo.

“We’ve now met,” he says. “We do good business with your father, but not as good as we would like.”

Byron hands over a beautiful Hermes briefcase to the party.

“We can take another twenty tons into Malta,” he says.

“That’s a small enough order,” Skender says. “We are now sitting on a huge reserve for the USA. It seems it’s getting even harder to get it in, now that Mexico has been very closed off.”

“Hmmm,” says Byron. “There has to be an answer, but it hasn’t surfaced yet.” Theo, surprisingly, enters the conversation.

“We may be able to come up with an alternative freight arrangement. It’s being worked on.” Byron doesn’t take much notice of this.

“What, indeed, new can an 18 year old kid come up with, when battle hardened drug runners are bumping into the entry wall. The UK market is balancing things up a bit.” Skender nods.

“You are doing better than I expected,” he says. “And you seem to be keeping the Jamaicans in line.”

“Ah,” says Byron. “The Chechens are helping us there. The cops don’t seem to have rumbled this innovation as yet.”

The meeting’s over and they go their respective ways.

Theo remarks, “This seems a safe country; it’s rare to walk without bodyguards.”

“You can’t see them,” says Byron. “But they’re in line of sight with the very best snipers sights in the world; just off the USA Army manufacturing line at Remington’s. What’s your transport idea?” he continues.

Theo can be as deep as a well when he wants.

“It’s premature to talk about it,” Theo says. “But I’m optimistic.”

Byron says, “Well....you’ve met Skender. Your Dad thought this important and he’s right, as Skender is the best drug wholesaler in the world at the moment. He’s welded together the competition in the supply line without damaging their retail operations, and his product is good; very good indeed. He gives great value for money and it’s not his fault if his buyers overcut the end result. Now, your Dad wants me to show you the counterfeit money plant we have running in Luxembourg. It’s quite a good visit, we’ll chopper over Tuesday morning.”

Theo is impressed with this operation. It’s set out in the country; very private in overpopulated old Europe and it’s well thought out. They run their own power plant for electricity and it’s set in the tunnels of an old quarry. Printing the money is easy, peasy; they go the long way round and use old multi-lith printers – the very best for this type of work, though slow. The boss cocky of this plant is an amusing old Englishman; North Country. He tells Theo that any rabbit can print US dollars; the trick is in producing worn US dollars. In this regard, this chap has a very simple set-up involving the use of huge old laundry tumblers; steam heated. It’s quite simple and they toss in a variety of stuff to tumble with the money to produce a good used effect. Nothing is packed sequentially. They rubber-band big bundles of notes and pack them into a variety of cardboard cartons of uniform size, but bearing different brands and logos on the outside. They don’t let the money rusticate in the tunnels. It goes out on a regular basis, much of it to Russia and Turkey.

Russia, now it’s gone Mafia, is the very happiest hunting ground ever to a counterfeiter. They are so hungry for US dollars, that no one looks hard at what they are handling.

“What about Euros?” asks Theo. Old Tommy, the counterfeiter says,

“Well, while we’re printing US dollars, the currency of the nation the world loves to hate, no one seems to have any interest in bothering us, but Euros now, that *would* touch a nerve. I don’t know what you know about the French and German police and their SDECE, but I know enough not to print Euros. Mind you, if I wanted to print them, I’d move to Colombia. They would fall over themselves to help.”

Byron says, “We put a lot of this stuff into circulation through the gambling clubs in London and Monte Carlo. No one seems to ask questions and it’s a nice little earner. Mind you, I don’t know what it costs to print, but I expect it’s not much. However, we were lucky to pick up old Tommy when he stumbled out of Pentridge.” Tommy, who is standing with them, cackles.

“Ah,” he says. “It cuts both ways; here I am printing millions of US bank notes for people who don’t really need them and at the same time, making my own fortune after starting with a pocket with just £5 in it.”

“And how are you holding now, Tommy?” Byron asks.

“Ah, Mr Byron,” he says. “How does a vineyard and McMansion in Cape Province, Jaguar in the garage, top of the range Land Rover to run around the vines in, grab you? And that’s only the visible signs.”

Theo settles well into life at Durham. The design course he is taking catches his interest and he takes to it like Canada geese to water. The Gambini family keep up the ranks of the bodyguards to look after his protection. Theo is soon immersed in mechanical drawing, computer modelling and all of those things to do with marine construction work. He also experiments with ship associated gadgets made out of tin plate, which he trials in the big floatation tank at the Uni. Of course, as for any young man, it’s not all work and on Thursday evenings, the students get together for a bit of playtime. Theo picks up the occasional bird and takes her home for the evening, if he can. It’s just a tad awkward, in that there are always two watchers from the crime family checking what he’s doing and he has to sort of explain this to the girls he rounds up. ‘Ooh/Ah,’ they say. ‘You must be important, Theo.’ To which the minders say, ‘Oh, not at all. It’s just that he comes from an overprotective family, but just so long as you are not carrying any guns or knives, we’ll soon be out of your road, but of course, nearby.’

He gets involved on a Thursday evening in a very smooth and easy pick-up of a German student; blond, broad-faced, very attractive and wearing a smart suit with no blouse under. She surely looks the goods, but Arturio Gambini is a bit uneasy about this bird and as he trails them home, hits his cell phone to Casa Farelli, who is over from the States on other matters and who is at Durham to see how Theo is making out. Casa meets them at the door, takes their top coats to hang and takes their drink orders and in a short time, is setting these down on a magnificent drum table near the sofa they are sitting on.

“First things first,” Casa says. “I’m paid to ensure that Theo here is not at risk at any time. May I ask if you are carrying a weapon?”

“What is this?” the German lass says, in noticeably guttural English. If you shut your eyes, you imagine her saying, “Vot is diss?”

“Oh, it’s only precautions,” Casa says. “No need to be alarmed. Once I’m satisfied that you are sans weapons, then, as I’ve said, we disappear from the room.”

“Bugger you,” she says. “I’m out of here.”

Casa is a very good looking man; chiselled sharp features, but now he’s all business. He picks up a small pronged instrument and says,

“This is just a mini version of what you walk through at air ports. It doesn’t hurt a bit.”

She jumps up and tries for the door, but Casa grabs her by the ear, painfully. Theo sits quietly watching Casa at work. He runs the prong down her front, one handed and then her back. The gadget emits a piercing whistle. The girl reacts, pulling a steel stiletto out of the back collar of her suit. It’s very long, with a crossbar handle. She moves with the speed of a rattlesnake and very near gets Casa, but he’s as quick as a flash, even on a slow day. He jumps back and she spins on her heel and now takes a lunge at Theo’s left eye, but to do so, she has exposed herself and Casa karate chops her on the neck as she turns. As she falls, Casa flips her over and in an amazingly speedy bit of work, dislocates her knee and has her in excessive pain in seconds. Theo places a chair cushion over her head to cut down on the decibels. Arturio is now also on the scene.

It’s best perhaps to draw a veil over the unglamorous and painful methods she is subjected to, to make her talk. It’s just daily work to Casa and Arturio; work they are very competent at. The girl is obviously a cog in a bigger wheel and her story doesn’t gel with them. She says she is working for the Jamaicans; tough, very tough

drug dealers on the London scene. They work her knee back into place, slip her a hypo shot of Zactil and load her into a white van to take her to a safehouse. As she is vanned away, Casa grins at Theo.

"It might take 30 days to arrive at the true confessions stage," he says. "And she's bound to have back-up somewhere near. We will now spirit you away from here pro tem and have a watcher here on this pitch. She's a contractor," he continues. "And quick. If she hadn't changed her target, she may well have done for us both."

"How did you rumble her, Arturio?" Theo asks.

"Ah," he replies. "She came on to you so quickly and smoothly; too expertly altogether. Although to the eye, she looks so young; I could see in her eyes, she's not that young at all – definitely a contractor. It will certainly be interesting to find out who she is working for."

Chapter Three

By mid afternoon Friday, Theo, in tans and a smart Italian short-sleeved shirt and boaties and completely kitted, down to his small silenced Chinese pistol in the small of his back, is having a harbour-side drink in Malta. The Mediterranean sunshine bathes them in light, warmth and colour. Casa sips his drink and chuckles.

"Sure beats the shit out of bleak old Chicago," he says.

"What next, Casa?" Theo asks. Casa is similarly attired and between them, they comprise a pair of remarkably good looking young men. They are attracting the close attention of two Dutch girls at the next table.

"Let's try for these girls," Casa says.

"Oh, and you'll frisk them too?" Theo enquires.

"Hell no," Casa says. "They're wearing so little, they can't possibly be carrying."

Thus, four months later, they are still in Malta. Theo has taken up with Christina Boele van Hensbroek and Casa with her sister, Maria. It's a happy arrangement, albeit a taxing one, in that they have to whistle up another bodyguard, as Casa, for once, is preoccupied from his tasks. Byron Gambini comes down to Malta to visit and socialises a bit at their digs. The boys are living in fairly exclusive splendour at the Villa Guernica. This is on loan from a Gambini associate; Manuel Sayana, a very successful arms dealer. He's living on St Kitts at the moment and has been pleased to make the villa available.

"What's going on?" Byron asks. "You pair seem to have turned into lotus eaters. Theo, you should be back at Durham. Casa, you'll finish up going to the Dutch Reformed Church every Sunday if you're not careful." The boys laugh.

"No probs, Byron," Theo says. "I need to talk to Dad. Would he be interested in visiting us here? We wouldn't like to leave our love-ins unattended for too long."

Liam is not so amused, so Theo, with Casa riding shotgun, goes over to Dublin a few weeks later to have a heart to heart with Liam.

"It's dosh time," he tells Liam. "My plans are now ready to gel, but I need funds to put it all together."

"Give me the details," Liam says.

"No," says Theo. "I can give you the expected result, but I can't tell you the ways and means. This is a tight deal. There's none tighter and I don't want to jeopardise the work I've put into it."

"And the end result," Liam asks. "Will be?"

"Two hundred tons of heroin FOB Eastern seaboard," is the reply.

“Shit.....and the cost?”

“Hmm.....about ten ton,” Theo says.

“And the deal?”

“Skender will take payment for one hundred tons up front, the balance payable if we get it into the States trouble free.”

“How much money do you need?” Liam asks.

Chapter Four

Back in the covered docks, two huge dockyard punts, originally left behind by the Royal Navy, undergo a big, big makeover. The deck is peeled back and strong bulkheads are welded in, in accordance with some very precise plans. Some involved equipment arrives from Sweden and these pod-like structures are riveted to the skin of the punts. Technicians come down when this is completed and after



running private tests in the covered deep dock, they hook one of the punts up to the small strong tug, ‘The Snow Goose’, and tow it out into the Mediterranean for reality checks. They now have a huge steel punt, or floating dock structure, that can be submerged for up to twenty feet under water and brought back again quite efficiently, by means of a frog suited diver operating pressure valves.

It’s not so difficult to tow drugs around the Mediterranean, so Theo and Co tow the dockyard floating platform/punt over to the coast of Turkey to load up. They can’t floodlight the loading, so they work at dusk and dawn only, and finish up with three hundred tons of heroin, which is about equal to fifteen years supply, based on what they are currently getting into the US, and one hundred tons of opium product. It’s all loaded out of the creek mouth near Uгла, in the Gulf of Kos.

The inevitable Customs people turn up for the pay-off and hard on their heels is Dufall Skender; brother to the king drug pin, Mikhail Skender. They don’t give anything away, but he does say to Theo with a shake of his head,

“It’s a helluva lot of product to bring into the States in one go.”

Theo looks hard at Dufall in the fading evening light.

“Dufall,” he says. “This is a tight, tight deal. We are not expecting any leaks from our side, but do take on board, if a leak occurs and things go pear-shaped, the very best Chechen talent in the world will come hunting.”

“Hmmm,” says Dufall. “I do know the Gambinis are in bed with that mob. It must be a bit like sleeping with a tiger.”

They surface tow the punt into the covered dock in Malta and after water-proofing it, tow it underwater, and chain-slung under the other empty punt, which they are purportedly towing across the pond to the Gulf of Mexico.

Going on test and design, the underwater punt won’t get deeper than twenty feet below the surface of the Atlantic. The tow must be a slow one and to make the journey appear totally hedonistic and carefree, Theo and Casa bring along the Dutch twins to give this very serious drug run into what looks like a yachting party. As they near the North American mainland, where they can be overflown by the DEA or Coastguard, they rig striped awnings, put out sun lounges and deck chairs and on the merest hint of a plane showing up on their state of the art radar, the girls hop into

bikinis, drink champers from long stemmed wine glasses and make like a touring party.

The old 'Snow Goose' tug was once a bit player in getting arms into Ireland for the gun-runner, Manuel Sayana, who still owns it. The rear deck has been and still is fitted with a functioning .88mm gun. It's a leftover from the Second World War and was the best gun produced for that conflict. It had a standard crew of thirteen men and was equally very effective on troops, tanks and air craft; now of course, it's in a fixed position, so three men can work it easily. It's in beautiful condition and they hone their skills mid-Atlantic, shooting up empty and floating 44 gallon drums.

The Coastguard flag them down; Theo acknowledges their signal by firing a white flare straight up from the .88mm. The boarding party comes on board very, very cautiously; only to be greeted by the girls in string bikinis and offering up platters of hors'douvres. They all have a pleasant time and there are no repercussions. Thus, the Coastguard have intercepted, but not recognised, the biggest drug run in history going into territorial waters. They tow the doings into the covered company dock in Calhoun after dark. The boys crank up the .88mm gun just in case and move the 'Snow Goose' out into the centre of the covered area. They settle the loaded punt into the mud of the dock floor.

Then and only then, Theo rings his Dad and tells him to go to a phone box. They sort of code talk. Theo has taken the wind out of his Dad's sails, but Liam is quick off the mark and by midnight the following night, the punt is unloaded and the content trucked off to eighty separate locations. They then re-watertight the underwater punt, load it with sand and settle it out in the Gulf a bit. Their dock is raided by the DEA two days later, by which time the horse has bolted and no incriminating spillage of the doings can be found. They have pumped huge quantities of water on the outgoing tide to bring this about.

To make good their promise, Theo and Casa plus some bodyguards, fly out to Athens and consult with their hit men over there. Mikhail and Dufall Skender have gone to ground and don't ever re-surface in Europe. Much later a thought, not even a suspicion, circulates; they have come to a sticky end in safe old Australia, the thought suspects.

Chapter Five

Things have now gone full circle and Theo and his Dad are weekendng at Cobble Hill. They have walked down to see how the beavers are doing at the beaver dam. It's a beautiful June evening. The beavers, for all the world like big Labrador dogs, are moving quietly and effortlessly around the dam. There are tunnels here and there and mud slides where the beavers access the trees they are chewing down to stack away winter sustenance and to keep the dam in good repair.

"There you go," Liam says. "If you work like a beaver, you can get a good result. By jove, that run from Turkey has been a money spinner. We get the stuff for chips, as Mikhail Skender has never been along to collect his other half of the payment and the product is just so pure, we have cut out the rubbish head suppliers. Do you plan another run?"

"No need," Theo says. "You've got some years supply in hand and in any case, I have another direction in mind."

"You have my interest," Liam says. "Can you talk about this one?"

"Surely," says Theo. "I'm taking up options on iron ore mines in Western Australia. It's a sitter and it will carry us into the middle of the next century."

"What shall we jettison?" Liam asks.

"Nothing, really," Theo replies. "We should continue with our interests in Russia. What we are doing in that lawless world is akin to Chicago in Capone's day; anything goes and it's so profitable. Have you any idea of how much funny money we are putting into Red World at the moment?"

"Umm...." says Liam. "All I know is that the printing presses in Luxembourg have been updated and work around the clock. And you're buying art with the dosh. Is that a good idea?"

"Surely," Theo says. "We loan it to the world's biggest museum on a ten year loan. They protect it, insure it and promote it. All we have to do is reap the accruing value and do a sell off when it suits us, or if it suits us."

"And the car companies in Australia that you seem to have bought?"

"Ah," says Theo. "We have done that on Japanese dosh, on the understanding that we will run them into the ground."

"In exchange for what?" Liam asks.

"Ah.....open slather for our Argentine beef into Tokyo; no tariffs at all."

"And your personal plans?" Liam continues.

"Oh, I think I'll marry Isadore Bellos." Theo replies.

'Cripes,' thinks Liam. 'She's the most famous concert pianist in history.'

"Why her?" he asks. "Silly question that it is."

"Ah," says Theo. "If you're going to acquire a wife, it's best she has to spend a lot of time practising to further her career. You don't want her doing the shopping spree bit that broke old Aristotle Onassis or Sarah Ferguson decimating Prince Andrew's inheritance."

"God," Liam says. "The wedding cost would fund the National Debt."

"Not so," Theo says. "A quiet wedding in Kreta; fifty guests in total will be adequate. Isadora thinks that I'm only moderately comfortable moneywise."

"It's a funny old world," Liam says. "What about a quote to go out on?"

"I've got three," Theo says. "One on money, one on marriage and one on succession - when one is young we think that money is the most important thing in life. I expect when I'm old, I'll know it is. Now marriage; there is one fool at least in every married couple."

"And succession?" Liam says.

"Ah..... more profound," Theo replies. "Pygmies placed on the shoulders of giants see more than the giants themselves."

"Touché," says Liam. "Let's go down to the Red Lion for lunch."

"The last time we were here," Theo says. "You were directing time and tide saws at me." Liam chuckles.

"You've made the grade, kid," he says.

He waves his arm in the general direction of Casa, walking along alertly with a Remington short hard hitter rifle in his hand. Casa has changed his direction to suit theirs and is scanning the timberline with a short monocular.

"As ever," Liam says. "The price of continued success is eternal vigilance."

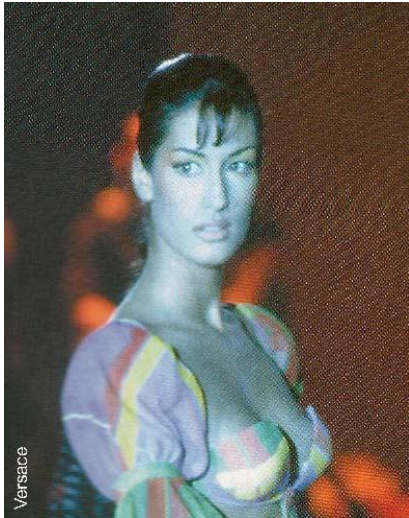
THIRTEEN

**THE HIGH
SCHOOL
PREFECT**

THE HIGH SCHOOL PREFECT

ONE

Siohhan Sullivan is a fourth year student at Gunnedah High School. She is the daughter of farmer/contractor Dan Sullivan. Dan farms, fairly badly, a property eighteen miles south of Gunnedah at Curlewis called Mount Latrobe. It's nice country, ten square miles of it with Mount Latrobe's spreading acres across it. It's all rocky scree slopes but it's all been axe cleared in the early days, good grazing on the hills and some decent but limited cropping land running down to the river valley.



The homestead is a real colonial relic, built out of paddock stone with a corrugated iron roof over the original shingles, which are still there. It's a ground hugger and has been built in sections and looks from the tangle of rocks around it down to and over the river in the distance, though it's hard to pick out the river but the line of Coolabahs along the river's edge shows where it is.

Siobhan is as bright as and barely keeps the farm in the possession of the family by her timely arrival home from school some six months back. The Hoyle's big American car is standing in the drive, her mother comes out to meet her. "Dad's selling the farm", she tearfully informs Siobhan.

Siobhan is a beautiful girl, she is a tad over six feet. Straight limbed and an utter eyeful in her high school jumper and long shorts. She reacts as she always does, very coolly, instinctively and with total self-control.

"The hell he is!" She sweeps into the lounge room, unctuous big Ted Hoyle is there, grinning all over his fat face and sitting near Dan who is laid up with a broken leg in a cast.

She ignores Hoyle and looks her Dad in the eye.

"What are you doing Dad" she says.

"Well Siobhan, I've just sold the farm to Mr Hoyle. It's for the best."

"What have you signed" she says?

He waves his hand at the papers lying on the side table.

"That" he says. "That's all it needs."

In one fell swoop Siobhan scoops up the paper, shoves it up her high school jumper and reaches down a double barrel shotgun off the end wall. She grabs a handful of shells from a packet on a timber shelf, breaks and loads the gun. She waves it at Hoyle who, completely stunned at the turn of events, is now standing.

"You" she says "out of here. Never return."



Putting on the look of a mystic, which she has practised, Siobhan says “If you come back I will pray to Saint Cecilia for bad things to happen to you. Now out.”

He demurs, she puts a shot gun blast into the stone wall behind him (he’s not to know the shells are only loaded with wheat to cut down on the shed’s rat population) he runs for his car and she puts the other barrel over the car as he hastily drives.

“God in heaven Siobhan” Dad says. “What’s that all about?”

“Dad” she says “you are a right old mucker but the day you sell out your son’s birthright I’ll shoot you myself. Now promise me on the sacred soul of St Patrick you will sign nothing else until I bring back some papers from Gunnedah tomorrow, raise your hand and swear.”

And Dad does.

This is the very first time Dad has sighted the steel in his six foot tall daughter’s psyche and boy is he impressed.

TWO

Next day, a school day, Siobhan sets off on her bike to catch the school bus to Gunnedah. She has to move quickly as she checks on their old neighbour Kitchener Thomas. Kitchener loses his wife and almost packs life in until the day Siobhan is cycling past a fair bit ahead of time, realises its days since she’s sighted Kitchener and finds him near dead from pneumonia.

She abandons school for the day, cycles in and cajoles the Doctor out. Kitchener won’t hear of hospital. The Doctor writes scripts and dictates treatment. Siobhan bounces Kitchener for cash, he’s so sick he gives her his Commonwealth Bank passbook and several signed withdrawal slips. Kitchener has \$204,430 on his account and hardly anything to eat in the house.



This girl is highly intelligent, softly hard and an activist. By the end of the day, or the day after, she has reorganised Kitchener’s life. She burns his working clothes and old fashioned long sleeved shirts and after that his grotty blankets and re-equips him, quite cheaply, from the Salvation Army shop in Gunnedah with decent used jeans, desert boots, jumpers and poly cotton easy care shirts and new pillows, electric blanket and doonas.

It’s touch and go for a day or two. Siobhan resumes school on Monday checking Kitchener out as she goes and returns to school. She has Meals on Wheels bring him his lunch, she microwaves him up porridge toast and croissants and honey en route to school and picks up from the Co-op something for his tea. Her brothers chop up timber blocks from the pile at the shed and they stoke up his tile fire of the morning and again the evening. Kitchener rallies and though pretty dependant on Siobhan and the boys, really comes good.

Hoyle, however, hasn’t given up on buying Mount Latrobe. The day after the blue Siobhan, with the help of the Vietnam Vets at the Bandstand in Gunnedah draws up and they all sign a transfer of the freehold of Mount Latrobe to Mum, Dad, Siobhan and the boys as tenants in common in equal shares. She and Dad haven’t the money to stamp the transfer and as the Commonwealth Bank has a mortgage for \$11,000 on the farm, it can’t be transferred until the mortgage is discharged anyway.

Siobhan sees all this clearly but the Vets say you have to start somewhere and this route, although long and painful, is as good and most likely as effective in the long run as any other.

Siobhan is tight with the Vietnam Vets. There are seven of them in Gunnedah. Five have disabilities, missing limbs etc, one in a wheelchair. Two are good walking around types who are Agent Orange affected and though tradesmen, panel beater, plumber, can't seem to work fully at their trade anymore. They all, of course, get Vet allowances and medical access but they also punish the booze a bit and too much of their subsistence money is diverted to this end.

In her first year at Gunnedah High Siobhan gets an oral history assignment to interview and record the history of six local ex soldiers. They are told to work through the R.S.L. who will point them to targets. Siobhan puts just one day into this interviewing unctuous and establishment old types, most of whom were in stores, mechanics, cooks etc., hardly ever saw a shot fired in anger but who act like Bold Horatius, the Captain of the Tiber Gate. These old farts are puffed up and wallow in being interviewed by good looking and bubbly high school girls.

Siobhan perceives early the uselessness of the project so peddles down to the River Bandstand where the Vietnam Vets, the Untouchables of modern warfare, congregate to smoke and drink mid morning in the summer.

Siobhan, looking a vision of delight, walks her long loping stride over to the Bandstand, she pulls up short and sits down across the Bandstand from them. She is on nodding terms with them, of course, and is a very affable girl. They take in her long legs, long shorts, magnificent bust under a high school summer jumper, high mop of Celtic dark hair up in a fuzz under a head band and so on, they are a bit gob smacked.

"How can we help" Jubal Smith says?

"Well fellows, I'm doing an oral history on returned soldiers" she says. "I'm jacked off with the old R.S.L. farts so I've come to you in the hope you are not young farts."

They laugh quite a bit and Jubal, who seems to be their spokesman says "but what's in it for us?"

Siobhan hands over a bottle of spring water, full. It's Potcheen, the white Irish whisky, home made from potatoes that the Irish have taken to every corner of the world.

"Try a bit of this on your Weet-Bix chaps" she says. "If that won't make you talk, nothing will. I'll be back same time tomorrow."

She walks away from them, they sit there bemused. Jubal takes the top off the bottle, sniffs and grins delightedly.

Over five mornings without interruption and another five mornings with the school, who have learned of her project and are against it, Siobhan tapes and at home types the fascinating and grim stories the Vets give her.

The R.S.L. are represented on the judging panel and work tooth and nail to scuttle her project, bald headedly so.

THREE

Siobhan takes out the prize on the oral side and sends the typed side to the Sydney Morning Herald. They ring, they will run the story as a weekend feature and do. They pay her \$3,000 for the story and ask for more. She photos the Vets at Dorothy McKellar's statue at Anzac Park. Siobhan has hardly a dollar to her name as Dad is still not working and their farm, not properly farmed, doesn't bring in a lot.

Despite this they do live well. They have cows and pigs and sheep and Mum is a seamstress, so they are well fed and clothed. Old Kitchener is regaining his grip on life and one morning, as Siobhan is buzzing around his kitchen micro waving Uncle Toby's Oats and slapping brown sugar and clotted cream (from the farm cows) onto his porridge, while Kitchener, neatly dressed, is sitting in the sun in the dining nook waiting for his brekkie, she says to him "Kitchener old chap, as you know there's not a lot of money in the kitty at Mount Latrobe and that bastard Hoyle, who I've fended off once will, I know, be back to try and get our farm. It's mortgaged to the Commonwealth Bank, he banks there too and is bound to pressure them now that Dad's behind with the interest payments."



Old Kitchener laughs. "It's not a problem Siobhan, I hear the mortgage is only about \$12,000."

"How the devil did you know that Kitchener" she asks?

He savours his porridge.

"Jesus Siobhan" he says "I'm feeble but not at all stupid." He has another spoonful.

"I'd hate to lose you and the boys" he says.

The boys at this moment are carting in armfuls of wood for the tile fire, they're a deal younger than the girl, they are good at making themselves useful. Old Defender, their blue heeler cattle dog, is at their heels, he always follows them down to Kitchener's and when they set off for school he takes himself home. He's a soundless dog, but gets his messages over by nudges and proximity and is as staunch as staunch.

FOUR

Kitchener says "Siobhan you have my bank book and withdrawal slips on the days you need it, every cent is accounted for, you've never taken a cent for yourself. Fill out a slip and pay the mortgage out and to hell with the bankers."

Siobhan is a bit overcome. She is, in fact, going in to the bank today with Dad's authority to talk to them and is absolutely expecting the worst.

She wipes a tear out of her eye.

"Kitchener" she says "I accept but I'll need a bit more than \$12,000 to discharge the mortgage, transfer the farm title and give you a proper mortgage."

"Oh that's fine Siobhan" he says "but best you move quickly. Hoyle has pull. He's been over blitzing me to let him share farm this place. He's not as rich though as he makes out and he's a chemical farmer. If I let him in you and the boys won't be able to use my big dam as your swimming hole, chemicals contaminate everything downhill of them."

We've swum in this beautiful tree ringed dam for years, we've also caught many yabbies there, it's a beautiful and very big dam.

“MMMn” Siobhan says “if I could I’d put a few trout fingerlings in that dam, it’s a sitter.”

“Oh” Kitchener says, “what the hell, order the fingerlings too.”

Her spirits back to normal, Siobhan puts some buttered croissants in front of Kitchener and they run for school.

FIVE

At lunch time Siobhan heads over for her bank appointment, the local branch has been rationalised and closed so she is dealing now with the Gunnedah Manager, a rather nasty type of bean counter. En route she touches base with the Veterans. She has gone halves with the Sydney Morning Herald payment but, in order that they don’t go on a bender, doles them out only \$10 each per day. The money is lasting well. She also springs them one bottle of Pootcheen on Fridays. They look upon her like Xmas. Jubal asks “where are you off too?”

Siobhan tells them and says she wants to borrow Tommy’s tape recorder, a class bit of work that she used a bit doing the oral histories. It’s also a radio receiver and Tommy hands it over. She knows how it works. She puts it in her backpack.

Siobhan arrives for her 12.30 p.m. appointment and is conducted to the manager’s office, he’s smallish and looks a bit sleazy. Siobhan has a game plan in her fertile mind. She asks the manager to withdraw his letter of mortgage foreclosure in the most appealing way.

“No way” the sleaze says “It’s my aim to kick your oh so shapely ass off Mount Latrobe. I can then pressure Sydney to transfer me back to Sydney and my wife and family.”

“Having obliged Ted Hoyle” she says.

“Oh yes, why not, he’s a very big customer of this bank.”

She sits silent for a while.

“There’s no way out of foreclosure” she asks?

“Not at all” he says. “You’re still at school and your Dad is earning nothing, no one at all will refinance you, you’re all a lost cause and have held onto that pretty piece of real estate much longer than I would have thought.”

“MMMn” Siobhan says “and Hoyle is implacable I take it.”

He grins “he’s never forgotten that shotgun shot you fired over his head, you’re goners sooner or later.”

“Come now” Siobhan says, “There must be some way I can get you to give us a twelve month stay of execution.”

She gives him a visual come on and breathes deeply, her magnificent bosom rises and falls.

“Well” he looks interested, “talking of asses you could use yours to work your way out of the problem, at least short term.”

“How short” she asks?

“Oh six months” he says.

“And for what” she asks?

“Good sex” he says. “I’ve been very deprived and you’re a zingy looker, in fact the best looking girl I’ve ever lamped.”

“Oh and who will judge the quality of the sex” she asks?

“Oh I shall be the only judge, over five nights, starting with tonight” he says.

“When and where do you have in mind?”

"My place in Grey Street" he says "but don't come before dark and you must be out before daylight. I have my reputation as a banker to consider and you're only white trash."

Siobhan is quite a good actress. She is, in fact, playing the part of Katisha in the school production of the Mikado at the moment, ready for their Christmas concert. She plays the ingénue.

"You know I'm totally inexperienced in these things and have no knowledge of men."

"Oh" he says, "I'll soon teach you, it's a natural thing and we would soon be fitting together like a glove."

"Tell me Mr Glove" Siobhan says. "Did you make love to your wife before marriage?"

"Good heavens no" he says "her rich old curmudgeon of a Mother made sure of that."

"So you were a virgin at marriage" Siobhan asks?

"Good God no, I seduced my sister in law to be years before. We made beautiful music together."

"And you never got her pregnant?"

"No" he says. "Condoms are the go, I have plenty at the house."

"Are you still with the sister in law" Siobhan asks? "These things once started."

"Oh yes of course" he says. "She married an awful chap with a huge chip on his shoulder. We go up to Terrigal and to Katoomba when my wife is visiting her terrible old Mum at Bowral."

"MMMN" Siobhan says, making sure her body language looks very encouraging and knowing that this is something the tape recorder can't pick up. "So you want me to sleep with you tonight and given a good performance to be judged solely by you, you might give us a six month reprieve on the Mortgage Foreclosure."

"Yes" he says "that's right."

"And this is sort of normal banking practise" she asks?

"No, of course not, but not every banker has the sacrificial lamb of a beautiful virgin, extra beautiful in fact, served up to him on a plate."

Siobhan thinks she has played the curious virgin long enough.

"You know" she says, "I've never in my life spent a night away from home."

"Well" the manager says, "I will make sure and certain that it will be a memorable one."

They both stand, he comes around the desk and puts a hand on each of the girl's breasts, she reaches up to fondle his ears.

"I think I'm on a real winner tonight" he splutteringly says as he feels away.

Siobhan moves a bit closer then grabs his ears in a vice grip, gives him her very best Hanoi head butt as taught to her at the panel shop by the Vets, he doubles up and she puts her limber, springy knee into his groin, he crashes to the floor making gurgling noises. She exits the room, locks the door to the banking chamber and carries away the key.

The Vets are keenly waiting at the Bandstand to hear the latest. She takes the tape recorder out of her small backpack and plays the tape. They listen with baited breath, laugh like old hens cackling.

"Geez Sib" Jubal says "played like Mrs Siddons. You sure have got the bastard dead to rights."

SIX

She abandons school for part of the day and they put their collective minds into a real good game plan, but the day is far from finished. Siobhan ducks over to the second hand shop and picks up a four pound small sledgehammer, which is about the best weight for her. She needs this to knock in short star pickets around the farm haystack. While she is doing this the Vets copy the tape, half a dozen copies to be safe and she stashes a spare or two in her school locker when she gets back to class.

“Where have you been Siobhan” Betty Green the science teacher asks?

“Sorry, Miss Green” Siobhan says. “I had perforce to go to the bank on Dad’s behalf, he’s laid up with a smashed leg.”

“OK” Betty says. She knows Siobhan as a dedicated and top student and accepts what she says without demur.

After leaving Kitchener’s she cycles along the old railway embankment, short cutting for home when Ted Hoyle’s Tojo farm ute pulls up alongside her quietly.

“Hi Bitch” Ted beamingly says. “We will have you and your mob out of Mount Latrobe by month end. My offer for the property has already been accepted, in principle, by the Bank.”

Siobhan sits on her bike and then dismounts. Calm as ice she says to big Ted, “get out of that ute and fight” she says.

“You mad bitch, I’ll just tail you home in my ute and perhaps bump you off your back wheel.”

Siobhan has calmly unlimbered the heavy four pound sledge out of her bum pack and Ted hastily puts up his window as she steps over with this dangerous thing in her hand. She walks to the front of the ute and smashes in the windscreen in two massive strong swinging blows. Hoyle hops out, he has a jack handle in his big hand. Siobhan unlimbers her flick knife, puts the 10” blade between her knuckles and as quick as a cobra slices about a quarter inch of earlobe off Hoyle, does it bleed.

Siobhan puts the 10” blade of the flick knife against Hoyle’s navel. “Don’t move Charlie” she says “or you’re dead mutton. Just stand still and listen. You have until next Wednesday noon for the bank to write to Dad cancelling foreclosure and to be delivered into our post office box here that day or the curse of Saint Cecilia will fall on you.” She injects the mystic’s look into her gaze, she’s practised this and it’s a very, very good act.

Nothing happens on this Wednesday but Siobhan has all her plans quite in hand.

SEVEN

The Vets, back a bit, aware of what is happening and proud of how she has become proficient at knife and dirty fighting, which they have taught her, have questioned her about Hoyle’s weak spots. They have settled on his prize Hereford bull Big Bart, who wins the championship each year at the Sydney Royal Show. They also ask about the understudy, a rather mean, leaner young bull called Little Bart.

They give Siobhan two small plastic bags, one smooth and one made of bubble wrap. Smooth is Bart, they say, bubble is for the mean one. Mix it with a bit of damp bran and slip it in the feeder, it will throw a scare of all scares into fucking Ted Hoyle.

Just as the moon sets Siobhan arrives at the bullpens at Hoyle’s. Defender is right at her side and scopes the area out, he comes back and nudges Siobhan, as

much to say the coast is clear. She has a way with animals and rubs Big Bart's nose and drops in the bait, which disappears as he munches. Smaller Bart is mistrustful, but circles around as she talks to him and eventually fronts up for his bait. She is talking softly to him when Defender nudges her leg. The door of the stone cottage, below the bullpens a bit, opens and footsteps sound. Siobhan pushes against the yards and stands statue still. The stockman who lives in the cottage is only out for a tinkle on the corrugated iron garden fence and soon goes back in.

She and Defender breath out and they cut for home across the paddocks, walking in the direction of the long pointer on the Southern Cross. It's quite a long night hike, seven miles as the crow flies.

Friday, when the bank opens, Siobhan walks in and asks for the accountant. She gives him a withdrawal slip made out by Kitchener and a covering letter saying the withdrawal and payment of the Sullivan mortgage account is what he wants and that he wants it effected before noon this day (Friday).

The accountant is a pleasant fellow. "Yes this shouldn't be a problem" he says "Siobhan."

She lams him. "It's Miss Sullivan" she says.

"Er, er er OK Miss er er Sullivan" he says. "Would you care to come into the Manager's office, he's er away."

"MMMn" she says "past experience here suggests it's better to do ones business in open view, where we are will do nicely."

He grins "we would indeed love to know what transpired in the office" he said.

Siobhan grins, she's a real charmer. "Oh I'm sure you'll hear, chapter and verse, in a little while" she says. "Don't count on the manager coming back."

He says "Er er er a bit awkward, I'm only the accountant but you have no idea of how high up the hierarchy have been phoning me and telling me to write you letters."

"What about" Siobhan asks?

"Well" he says "the letters I haven't yet had time to write says that the mortgage foreclosure can be forgotten about and have told me to negotiate a cash settlement with you."

He looks awkward, they are talking at the bank counter and people are coming and going and looking with curiosity at the accountant and Siobhan locked in close and intense discussion.

"MMMn" says Siobhan "how would head office even know about what you are talking about?"

The accountant is very young and Siobhan towers over him, she's also very pretty and he's non plussed.

"Well" he says "a manager with a broken nose and hardly able to walk after an interview with (and with deep respect) the daughter of a delinquent borrower, who is a fourth year high school student of very good reputation, had lead to an er.. er..er clean breast" he says, his eyes are on Siobhan's magnificent breasts and he connects and colours up.

Siobhan grins, "What's the offer?"

"Er..er..er \$40,000 to absolve the bank from any legal claim and to ensure that you make no further comment to the media."

Siobhan says "well comments made stand of course, but no new comments." Siobhan looks him in the eye. "That's probably OK" she says. "Put that in writing and I'll take some advice and be back in ten minutes or about."

She peddles down to Fiddlers, the coffee lounge at the entry to the shopping mall. She has parked the Vets there and purchased an endless coffee pot to hold them there. The owner is an erudite chap and goes along with her arrangement.

“Treat them well Andrew” she says. “They’re good people to treat well in a small community.”

“Bang on Sib” he says and does.

Jubal leads the discussion and Conrad, the ex para legal, provides the writing. She’s out the door in twelve minutes, paper in hand.

“OK Mr Accountant” she says “give me a typewriter.”

“Oh we’re all computers Miss Sullivan.”

“Bullshit” this lovely girl says. “I can see an old Olivetti right at the back there.”

EIGHT

The typing is pretty watertight and after phone calls and backing and forthing she signs the release and walks away with \$42,000 in the readies. She has written in some conditions i.e. she will take no legal action against the bank, she will make no further media comment or no fresh media comment (having spent the pre-school time with an interviewer and camera team from the Sydney Morning Herald and it’s TV channel associate) she has completed her media comment well prior to signing the new agreement precluding further media comment from noon on.

They have filmed her milking the cows, giving Kitchener his breakfast and have interviewed Kitchener saying she is the best thing since Carole Lombard he has ever seen and they have filmed her naturally and well up to the time she walks gracefully into the doors of the bank.

She has the grace to write into her release a condition that they give the accountant, due to his inherent decency, the opportunity to manage the branch for a period of six months. The girl has heart and it all happens.

She has the cash in her hand and is out the door before the station promo’s ramp up Tonight’s Exclusive. The bank runs to the Supreme Court for an injunction, but don’t have any luck as the paper and the channel have a faxed copy of the release, which, of course, only precludes fresh media comment.

The Accountant, to his credit says, “er er er Miss Sullivan, this will end Derek’s banking career.”

Siobhan grins at him. “Yes” she says, “good isn’t it.”

She’s got a huge fistful of bank money, has another \$40,000 coming from the media and is now free to get back to school and answer the headmaster’s runners, who have been coming over for the past hour saying the cops are at the high school to interview her.

She has an endless coffee with the Vets who are over the moon with her bank result and heads off back to school. To her relief only the senior sergeant of police is there. No detectives.

He says, “I’ve spent the whole morning waiting for you to be free and I have much to discuss with you.”

Siobhan brushes her dark Celtic hair back and says, “Sergeant if you are wise you won’t get involved or indeed damaged, career wise. Just go away and if you are still determined on getting in deep in something that doesn’t really concern you come back next Wednesday. I will have the media here to film the interview.”

“Come on Girlie” he says, “a damaged major citizen, a hysterical and hardly able to walk Bank Manager, a very sick grand champion bull, a very dead up and comer bull, it’s.... it’s.... its....”

Siobhan cuts in. "It's a nettle best not grasped sergeant. Unless, that is, you don't mind spending your sunset years in the police force quelling aboriginal riots in Bourke or perhaps Walgett."

"And how would you bring that about Siobhan" the sergeant asks?

She puts on her practised and very convincing look.

"Oh I would ask Saint Cecilia to visit bad things on you."

"Come off it" the sergeant says, "you're bonkers."

Siobhan grins. "Saint Cecilia is very effective" she says. "Do you really feel up to upsetting her?"

"No, no" the sergeant says, "she seems to have an amazing track record around Gunnedah."

Siobhan becomes very serious. "Sergeant, no one, no one at all is lodging complaints."

"Dead right" he says, "they mumble and stumble, but are not seeking Police help."

"Exactly" she says. "Now why in hell, in view of what you've seen glimpses of, do you want to get involved?"

"Touché" he says, "you're dead right and after wasting half a working day, I'm out of here."

He leaves the scene and Siobhan gets back to her tattered day in High School.

NINE

The proverbial hits the fan via Friday nights TV News and Current Affair and the weekend press are all Siobhan. She, for a brief period of a week, is the most famous face in Australia and again the following week when questions are asked in Parliament.

Various offers, of all types, are phoned or otherwise conveyed to her. The locals are gob smacked and look sideways at Siobhan. Kitchener sees himself on the TV and is very chuffed.

"God Sib" he says, "my declining life, I must say, has never been dull since you came in the front door enquiring about my health."

"Well it's all fine Kitchener and I can put your money back in your passbook as soon as I get a few cheques cleared."

"What are your plans, Siobhan" he asks?

She's very quick. "Perhaps" she says "we can do a two year share farm contract with you. The sheep have been non shorn for two years, your place hasn't been cropped and it's damn good land, wheats booming."

Kitchener laughs. "Go for it girl, write up a contract in case I drop off the perch and give it a go. I know you know about combines and there's plenty of seed and super in the top shed but you will need some tractor driving tuition. Simon Schleuter could do it."

Simon's a birth damaged child, he's disjointed, stammers and stutters and can never hope to live a normal life, but under his battered exterior lurks not only a normal, but a quite sharp brain.

Siobhan gives him a bit of power coaching from time to time and they take him out yabbie hunting at the big dam. Simon is a good friend.

The Schleuters are Lutherans, they are of old German farming stock and know what they're doing. They listen to what Siobhan has to say and tell her she

can't go wrong, it's very good wheat country and the sheep flock, although very neglected, are good and can be sorted out.

Siobhan and Simon thus spend all their spare time for weeks slapping sump oil and kerosene on rusted up bolts and super star turners that are set like concrete. New batteries go into the Caterpillar tractor and much oil is pumped down the cylinders to get the auxiliary and main motors ready to trial run.

Siobhan gets hold of quite a fair Gopher (electric powered people carrier) from the frail aged lodge who are upgrading their's and in no time has Kitchener trained up to use one of these and he is thus able to visit the sheds and tell them what to do.

Amongst this, Kiwi shearers come out on weekends and tuck into shearing sheep that have at least two years fleece on them. As the shearing is extended she also has several wool buyers out to price the product and also, reluctantly, a stock firm wool man. On the day the last bale comes off the wool press she proudly stencils the property name and the number on the last bale and is ready to deal.

TEN

It brings a heap of money, Siobhan absorbs the shearing costs from her share, sells the lot to Jack Rosher, the Jewish wool buyer and puts money into Kitchener's account and into her very deep cash hidey hole, no bank or bank manager's for her, not now, not ever.

Kitchener's farm is stocked with everything she needs to get a crop, including full overhead tanks of diesel. On one big day she and Simon adjudge the tractor ready to start and start up the auxiliary motor and then clutch in the main motor and the venerable Caterpillar chugs into smooth running. Kitchener grins, he's done countless hours on this beautiful old crawler.

"You can never better the yellow paint, not ever" Kitchener says.

The season fortuitously breaks the week before the May holidays and Siobhan and Simon are into it. They have to work as she plans on putting in 500 acres on Kitchener's and another 300 on Mount Latrobe.

Kitchener is quite agreeable to his gear being used on the Sullivan land as part of the overall project.

ELEVEN

In the wrap up, stamping the transfer of Mount Latrobe and stamping the share farm two year agreement with Kitchener, Siobhan takes along Conrad the Vet paralegal. They get it all together and the payment is made, papers stamped and so on.

She places all this in a black settlement clerk's document folder, found at the old wares shop and says to Conrad "what about a coffee before I get back to class?"

"Sure" he says and they leave the Court House door and run slap bang into Eustace Parnell, the visiting police detective. His car is running by the curb, door open.

"Get in Bitch" he says, "I have questions to ask at the station."

"Leave her alone" Conrad says.

"Shut up wreck" this gentle soul of a detective constable throws at him. "Get in, bloody get in" he says.

"No" says Siobhan. "Your reputation for violence on less than people precedes you. It's not safe for me to enter your car and I will not do so."

He says again, voice going up octaves from rage, "get in the bloody car." He pulls out a nightstick. By lucky chance Tom Trumble J.P. has just emerged from the court house.

"Enough Parnell" he says, "you can't have her."

Parnell flashes his card. "If you won't let me take her away for questioning I insist you deliver her to the police station.

Tommy says, "If the girl is agreeable I'll drive her around and sit outside for a while."

He drops her off at the cop shop.

"I think I'll read my paper until you come out Miss Sullivan. I've seen people front up before me in court a number of times with unexplained bruises and abrasions, all very unexplained."

She enters the police station, Betty Brown J.P., fiftyish who runs the counter looks apprehensively at Parnell who is standing, waiting, thunder on his brow.

"You took your time, bitch."

Betty bravely speaks up. "Constable I was here a few days ago when our Sergeant said no charges have been laid or even complaints really made about her, best leave it" she says, "just leave it."

Parnell says, "The sergeant is an old fart softie. I'll have the truth out of this person before he is back, into the interview room" he says.

"No thanks" Siobhan says and stands up straight and resistant to his demands.

Parnell is nowhere near Siobhan's height but he is strongly built. He grabs her shoulder and arm and runs her into the interview room and locks the door. He pushes her towards the corner of the room, picks up a Sydney M – Z Yellow Pages phone book and takes a dreadful swipe at her head, Siobhan ducks, his momentum carries him past her, in a reflex and immediate action she gets behind him, ducks down and grasps the back of his trouser cuffs and up ends him in the corner, crashing into the wall.

Many things happen, running feet sound outside, a chain saw burps, baraaap barap, into life.

Mr. Trumble yells out "don't, don't do that."

The Copper is getting up and unlimbering his nightstick from under his coat, he also dislodges his pistol as he does so and it goes off when it hits the floor.

"Where do they get them from?" Siobhan wonders "Who is absolutely so stupid to carry a pistol on full cock?."

Tearing sounds come from the door but Parnell is swinging. This girl is rapier quick, she, in one smooth movement, picks up the wooden chair standing near the interview desk and smashes it to bits on the copper, she is left with just a leg and she finishes him off with a belt on the head as the door, chain sawed from top to bottom, falls into the room, the Vets fall in the doorway followed by Mr Trumble and Betty.

"My God" says Betty, taking in the recumbent form of a battered and bleeding constable Parnell on the room floor and Jubal standing there with his chainsaw (it's got a metal cutting chain fitted for use in chopping cars at a panel shop).

"Rah, rah, rah Siobhan" they yell. "Well done."

Jubal gives the saw an ear splitting rev and cuts the interview desk in half. He turns and grins at Mr Trumble "you didn't see that Tom, didja?"

Tom, usually a stern figure, laughs, "well Jubal I must say this has been the most entertaining and action packed morning I've seen for some time."

"But what do we do now?"

Siobhan brings out a most delightful grin and chuckles. "Perhaps Betty you had better call the police" she says.

Arthur the ex Vet medic checks over Parnell, takes his pulse, makes sure his airways are clear.

"He'll be OK in a while" he says, "he doesn't know how lucky he is that he didn't need the kiss of life, otherwise he'd now be dead bones. He doesn't need an ambulance Betty" Arthur says. "When he comes around, which, with his thick head and the chair leg, may take a little while. We'll take him over to casualty at the regional hospital."

To add to all this confusion the Sergeant now turns up. He has been called to Regional Headquarters at Armidale to explain why so much has been happening and nothing is being complained about to the Police.

TWELVE

Siobhan takes over, "Sergeant we need a clear statement of what has taken place this morning and it should be done while all the witnesses and participants are here and it's fresh in their minds. Betty will you type as I dictate and so on?"

"Bang on, Miss Sullivan" Betty says getting all Police formal. They get it all down on paper.

"Any questions senior sergeant" Siobhan asks?

"Yes" he says. "What the hell happened to the desk?"

"Oh, don't worry about it sergeant" says Jubal, "we got a bit carried away. It was a sort of victory roll for Sib, but we will plate it with a bit of strong plywood after lunch."

Siobhan arrives back at Kitchener's after school and while she's popping a small roast and some sweet potatoes into the wall oven and string beans and pumpkin Kitchener says, "I'm about to have a small cognac, you look as though you need one."

Siobhan who never drinks says, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph Kitchener, I will join you as soon as these beans are cooking."

"You know Sib" he says, "I've never seen anyone work at the speed you do, it's quite amazing."

She laughs. She gets Kitchener's copy of the share farm agreement out and says "between getting these stamped and beating up a copper today and giving a talk on the Lakeland poets at school."

"Ah" Kitchener says, "Fair daffodils, we weep to see you rush away so soon."

"Come off it Kitchener" she says, "I'm talking Tennyson and you're talking Herrick."

He grins, his health is improving a lot. "Bottoms up" he says.

Siobhan sips her Martell Bleu cognac. "MMMN" she says, "It'd be good for cleaning up something one wants to solder."

He grins reflectively. "Well, Siobhan" he says, "with your great height, muscle tone and speed and with the current crop of cops getting smaller by the day I guess you won the fight."

She laughs, "well, yes but I was lucky, it could have gone hard against me." She pauses, "look here's a copy of the police statements, have a read."

Kitchener does, Arthur has attached digital photos of the prostrate cop and the collateral damage to the statement.

"They want me to sell it to the Sydney Morning Herald who are now at the stage that they say yes, we'll have it, before reading the copy."

Siobhan is ambivalent about this, but in the end gives it to the bank courier on Monday morning and thus it gets to Sydney and the papers and TV cry police brutality and joy of joys Parnell finishes up stationed at Bourke.

“Poetic justice” Kitchener says, “he’ll be a big hit in Bourke, one bungled arrest and he’ll have yet another indigenous riot on his brawly, incapable hands.

THIRTEEN

They strike an excellent season and there’s a whole lot of wheat to go into the pool.

Siobhan does a deal with the Schleuter’s and they contract harvest and cart the whole crop once they’ve finished theirs. Siobhan is nervous and anxious about her crops, which are bumper, but overdue for harvest, but nothing untowards happens and they are harvested and carted under good conditions.

Dan is now back from his protracted and very expensive orthopaedic work in Sydney and is home and is getting around on yet another Gopher that Siobhan has acquired for him. She is hoping he will be moderately active and able to work within six months, as running the sheep is taking up more of her time than she has to spare.

On the surface she is the same to look at, she is pretty brown due to being out in the paddock, but still looks the very young person she is. She strikes the parish priest in town, he flags her down.

He’s an Indian recruited from a Madras Seminary for service in the Catholic Church in Australia, as so many are today. The Indians and other third worlder’s like the Filipino’s have come to replace the Irish who staffed the church throughout the Empire, at least for so long. The Irish Seminaries and Nunneries have now gone with the wind though the church hierarchy is still aged and very aged Irish in Australia.

“Oh Siobhan” this chap says, “I haven’t seen you at Mass lately, I hear much of your doings. Let’s get together to pray together and for you to absolve your problems at confession. I’m here to help.”

This chap is of the new church generation. They are neither liked nor trusted by their Irish orientated parishioners. The Bishop, a very dull old party, an ex school teacher with a late vocation, is glad of any help to keep the doors of the church open in his diocese and isn’t perhaps as critical as he could be in recruiting new priests and he gives them new cars and plenty of latitude in running their parishes.

‘Ours is a hot and dry place in the summer so I guess they fill a sort of a gap’, thinks Siobhan, ‘though they run around the countryside like commercial travellers, are arbitrary on mass times and are not in the business of giving pastoral care, not at all. Although looking so young and beautiful and dewy eyed Siobhan is sixteen going on thirty six and she has some strong feelings on the new type priests. She decides he is another male chauvinist and decides to give him a barrel. Just as she is about to launch, one of the senior church ladies of the parish comes simpering along.

“Oh a word Father” she says.

“Certainly” says the priest who has correctly interpreted the steely glint in Siobhan’s eye.

“Mrs Cooper” Siobhan says, “I’m just having a serious word with Father Azram about matters of the faith and soul, please continue on your way as if you have never seen us.”

“Well, I never” Mrs Cooper says.

“Don’t get upset Mrs Cooper” the girl says, “I’m about to put some matters of pith and moment to our peripatetic man of God while I have his ear. I’m sure you see him every day at Mass.”

“Well yes” says Mrs Cooper, “that is if a mass is on, many times now it’s a communion service given by the laity.”

“Hardly the laity” Father Azram says, “by the acolytes.”

“Ah yes” Mrs Cooper says, “The acolytes indeed, the flower pot men as the Bishop calls them.”

“On second thoughts Mrs Cooper” Siobhan says, “don’t go, stay and listen but please don’t interrupt until I’ve had my say. Azram” she says.

“Father Azram it is” he says, “I insist.”

Siobhan is very bright and quick. “Ah” she says, “the Bible states, call no man father, it’s a con you guys have got away with for too long.”

Azram sees he’s on a hiding to nothing, he wants away but he’s hard pressed to give a reason to run, his mobile phone goes, he pulls it out and engages in a rapid conversation. Siobhan, as quick as, tugs it out of his hands.

“Who is calling” she says? She is unimpressed with the answer, she tosses the phone into the fountain. “Azram” she says, “you well know that my Dad has been laid up with a broken leg at our farm. You have never called to offer pastoral care to him or as far as I know for anyone else. Most of us regularly and at personal expense fund up the church, you bring hordes of your rellies to the presbytery, you cast hard work on the willing but oh so stupid vestry helpers, while half the time you’re not even in the district, you’re pissing around Sydney or on the coast for very, very flimsy reasons.”

Siobhan draws herself up to her full height and towers over the Priest. “Give me your hand” she says, he very, very reluctantly does so, she squeezes it just short of breaking bones. “Here is what I want from you, four pastoral visits a day in Gunnedah, two visits a week in Curlewis, hospital visits at least weekly, no trips to Sydney at all for a month.”

“Is that all” Azram says.

“No” Siobhan says, “that’s only the start, it will be reviewed four weeks hence.”

The Priest says, “you’re only a schoolgirl, I don’t take orders from you and bugar you and you too Mrs Cooper” and he flounces off.

Mrs Cooper dissolves into fits of laughter. “Oh Siobhan, that was necessary and priceless.”

“It’s worse than that” Siobhan says, ‘he ignores his pastoral responsibility, but once he hears a bit about me he’s here, ears flapping, offering the sanctity and silence of the church in an effort to find out something, anything.”

This serious young lady, having exposed the banking and policing system to a very curious press and TV audience now sits down at a borrowed computer and writes a very perceptive article on the new breed of Priest and Azram in particular. She adds photos taken with a digital camera to this and the bank courier yet again drops it into the Sydney Morning Herald.

FOURTEEN

Thus she enters her fifth year of high school with a great deal of money tucked away, her Dad, coming good and under her direction, is now able to contribute to the care of the flock on Kitchener’s and the new flock on Mount Latrobe and she and Simon have the farming gear ready for the next break of season.

Several young chaps come courting, quite nice young chaps with background, along with the sleazes, who have an eye on her shapely person.

She treats them equably.

“Thanks chaps” she says, “nothing personal, but my life admits no time for what you have in mind. Come back in ten years.”

They laugh and go.

FIFTEEN

In late February, on a Sunday afternoon, she rides old Chauncey down to Kitchener’s dam for her usual regular swim on warm days. Defender isn’t around. He usually comes with her but the boys are way up the scree slopes of Mount Latrobe shooting a rabbit or two with their little Bayard single shot .22 and she can pick out the odd glimpses of them and Defender up the slope.

She ties Chauncey up to the fence and hangs a small net of hay for him to munch and tracks up to the dam through the surrounding bush. She detects an unusual smell as she walks along the well worn path. She sniffs again, probably not tobacco smoke, perhaps Marijuana, she thinks. She is suspicious that she is sometimes observed at this spot but has never smelt smoke before. Best not to falter, she thinks, best to get clear of the bush. Her suspicions are a bit more confirmed when she gets to the mouth of the dam, but the ducks, always there, are not today, they’ve obviously been spooked. Best, she thinks, to act normal, she makes some preparations, just in case and strips off her top. She always swims in her shorts, but bare topped.

She stands a moment, looking like a Goddess from a Grecian print. Three young men come walking along the water’s edge. She’s relieved at first, they are young men, not men, but not so relieved when she realises she’s never seen any of them before, she looks harder, one has the look of a Hoyle about him. She backs up a bit as they approach, they haven’t yet tried to get behind her.

“What do you want” she says?

“You” says the obvious leader, the Hoyle look alike. “You” he says, “we all want and we will have, you.”

Siobhan cautiously moves back a bit.

“Move on fellas” she says, “I don’t want to hurt you, move on I say, now.”

The leader says, “grab a forearm and boob each chaps and I’ll get her shorts off her.”

They move quickly on her. As quick as a lightning strike she pulls her veteran’s flick knife from the Celtic tangle of her hair and slipping it just through her right hand fingers, slashes open the face of the leader, ear to chin.

He’s stopped dead, “Aaargh, aaargh, aargh” he says and doubles over, blood pouring from the slash, which is not that deep, but sure bleeds.



The second man runs at her, she trips him and is on him like a tigress, sinking the flick knife deep into his shoulder and jiggling it a bit. It’s a severe wound, though not life threatening, the Vets have taught her well. She springs up, the third chap is cautious, but also coolly aggressive and has stepped up the bank a bit to pick up a solid stump, a bit like a mallee root with roots still attached, a dangerous club like thing. He gets between her and the second man, her knife is still in his shoulder.

“Gotcha” he leers and raises the club. A miracle occurs.

Defender, built like a doggy brick dunny, launches off the downhill run of the bank and rips a big chunk out of the assailant’s buttocks. He drops the club, Siobhan picks it up and belts it viciously across his kneecap. He is now down and in terrible pain and Defender needs only the word to go for the throat.

“Enough” she says and he immediately desists.

SIXTEEN

Siobhan looks at this trio of very damaged young men who are lying around non-compos, with Defender, all hackles up, just daring them to move a muscle. The sixteen year old turns out their short pockets to find their vehicle keys, sets off to find their transport and says to herself, “I guess I can now regard myself a grown up.”

She hasn’t a driver’s license, too young for that, so she loads up the wounded and the dazed and drives along past Kitchener’s to the main road from Curlewis to Willow Tree on the New England Highway. She expects other B & S Ball goers will be streaming along this, heading home and slewing the utility across the road she soon has a strike. She gives the keys to one of the three chaps in the front of the ute.

“These chaps are in a bad way” she says “and need to be dumped at a hospital soon. Muswellbrook would do. Just tell the hospital not the police. The hospital will, I think, fix them up, the police would lock them up. Don’t ask any more questions, just do it.”

The boys hop out for a look.

“They’re damaged” Siobhan says, “not dying, but if you get your asses in gear they will get needed attention quicker.”

“What about a phone number” one says?

“Get driving fellows” she says.

Nothing, nothing at all happens for five weeks. A private investigator from Sydney arrives at Mount Latrobe and presents his credentials, asks for Siobhan. Mrs Sullivan is the only one home, the chap’s a tad aggressive, she directs him to Gunnedah High School, but is cute enough to ring the Vets. She has Jubal’s mobile number. The Vets mosey across to the High School, the Sydney man arrives. The Vets envelop the car, they have a man-to-man with him. Tough though he is he blanches.

Tommy slips into the back seat behind the Investigator and slips a piano wire garrotte, wooden handled over this poor beggar’s neck and pulls it up tight. Tommy’s used to doing this on silent patrols in Vietnam.

“Talk to us” Tommy says.

The chap explains he’s doing an investigation into the dam incident for the parents of the young chaps involved.

Jubal enters the conversation. “We have no names” he says. “Give us the detail.” He writes this down in his notebook.

“In essence” Jubal says, “we keep an eye on this charming girl. We look askance at some sleazy private eye coming up here asking questions about her, either now or later. You could lose your head.”

Tommy gives a sharp pull on his fiendish weapon.

The Investigator says, “Well I thought this was a simple job.”

“Yes” says Tommy “and it’s now a very dangerous job, for you.”

They let him go, he thankfully and apologetically drives off, never to return. The parents ring for an appointment.

“Fine” says Siobhan, “I’ll talk to you after Mass in Curlewis Sunday.”

They roll up, get out of their cars, they are diffident and say “we need to know what happened, the boys go into fits if we mention the police. But we need to know.” Siobhan hands them three affidavits, which list the events of the day.

“This” she says, “is what is commonly referred to as a smoking gun. You may read it but not take it away. So far as I’m concerned it will never see the light of judicial day unless, unless I read or hear of your three being arraigned on sexual assault charges, in which case I will go public. The most charitable view you can carry away is that under the influence of left over alcohol they got carried away. In actual fact they are thugs that thought three men against one younger girl was fair odds. They were mistaken.”

“But this is only your side of it” the voluble one says.

“MMMn” Siobhan rebuts, “if you wish I’ll drop this into the Gunnedah police station tomorrow and you can argue your argument in open court.”

They buckle and leave and a note of apology, signed by all six present, arrives in the post. They’ve had just enough time to talk to their lawyers, Siobhan thinks.

Just the same she is careful for a time and carries a double barrel shotgun with her when going down to the dam for a swim and always has Defender close at heel. She carries the shotty in an old Light Horse leather rifle boot, attached to the saddle. Dad observes, “going duck shooting?”

“Perhaps” Siobhan says as she rides off.

FOURTEEN

**THE ART
BLACKMAILER**

The Art Blackmailer

ONE

I'm working away in Sketchleys Speedwell Dry Cleaners in Oxford just near the station.

I'm the manager and live in a very nice small flat over the store. The store itself is old English and very Oxford. It has small paned windows like Dickens Old Curiosity Shop. I try to keep the operation as profitable as possible as Sketchleys are great employers. I open the shop at 5.45 am to catch the early commuters going to the train station; they rush in with armfuls of clothes and pick them up in the evening when they return to Oxford. It's a good business and I know my customers



as I've been here for some years. I'm doing an art curators course at Oxford Polytechnic. I do this afternoons and am back in the shop to hand out work when the commuter tide turns in the evening. After about 9 am I take the work that I've been tagging, start running this through the dry to dry dry cleaning machines. Some preparation work is needed and if it's a difficult job I leave it until the spotter comes in. By 11 am I have a heap of work hung up and ready to press. I start the steam generator on

at 10.15 am and when the crew comes in at 11 am they're straight into pressing the day's work. It's easy work really, nothing industrial, just good business wear belonging to city types, it's hardly dirty, just wants freshening up and crisply pressed. We pack the finished work into plastic bags and add the docket and put the order alphabetically on the conveyor to bring up when the customer calls.

Tommy Girdlestone rushes in. Tom is a real regular, always bringing in suits, reefer jackets, flannels, ties, shirts and so on. He's in the art world, carries a big canvas art folder with handles. He has one now, "Michael," he says, "how about stashing this for me until I get back? I'm really on the run today and I mean really."

"Right on, Mr. Girdlestone." I say and I do

Tommy never comes back to the shop, not that evening as I expected, not ever. I read the London papers but there's no mention of Tommy running into any sort of trouble in the city. I'm aware he's missing but think not much more about it until two years later when I'm in the final weeks at the Polytechnic. We sell off, if we can, unclaimed clothes after two years and if we can't we put them in Good Sammy bins away from the area. Tommy's gear is now due for dumping. It's a hard one to sell to the recyclers as Tom is much the same build as Peter Ustinov in his prime. I pack the suit into a garbage bag and reflect that I miss Tommy. When he has some sort of art sale on (he's mixed up in a number of galleries) he gives me tickets for the opening night. I always go and I've met some interesting people there including my current girlfriend. She's both a train customer and an art student at an Oxford College. She lives in at the college and at my upstairs flat on weekends. She's very tall and I remember my intuitive remark when I first met her, I gave her an appreciative look, she is very tall, long boned and has a handsome long face. "What splendid children you will have," I said.

"How do you think that?" she asks and I tell her. Nothing else could have worked so well.

Later that evening back in my flat at Oxford I get to inspect the bone formation of long legs very closely. We click and click and click. A bit further down the track she has to go to a dinner party at her parents' home in Cheyne Walk and pleads with me to come,

"it would be so boring without you, Michael," she says, "besides, I don't trust you not to be down at the nearest singles bar telling some chick what a wonderful breeder she would make. What a line," she says,

"Unbelievable and effective, Rebecca." I say, "By the way are you pregnant yet?" She makes a face "You should be so lucky."

Saturday of the dinner party arrives, I work late, I work all Saturday's, it's a good business day. I pick off the rack an Armani dinner suit, a crisply starched shirt, a smart tie and rush up to the flat for a pair of socks and black shoes. Putting all of this in a suit bag I sprint for the train. A taxi drops me at Rebecca's place in good time and I ring the doorbell and the eyebrow lifting butler (hired in from actor's equity I judge) opens the door. I gently place a twenty pound note in his hand and say I need a bathroom and towel and a bit of privacy and I'll then come down to be ushered in.

"Righto Mac," he says, and pointing to the stairwell says "up, left and fourth door on the right." I set off passing some very upper class people coming down and laughingly say "I'm just a figment of your imagination, but I'll be down later."

The clothes off the client rack fit me superbly and I brush up and go in search of Rebecca who introduces me to the upper crusts I met on the way down. He's a bit po faced but she's more relaxed.

"And just what do you do young man?" he says.

"You can relax, Sir" I say. "I'm just a friend of Rebecca's."

"She's a fine girl and has many such."

"Don't look too hard at me; I'm not a suitor unless I win charities." (Beggar me; I sort of do a bit later, but even bigger)

"Oh," he says "Rebecca seems to think you might fit that category."

"No, Sir." I say, "Even a leading stock broker doesn't need an impecunious son-in-law." This clod persists however,

"But you're living with her."

"Not at all Sir," I say, "we're only a weekend item." I get to talk with him after dinner when he quite decently introduces me to a senior man at the National Gallery. I can hold my end up on art easily enough and I proffer and they accept some Winston Churchill type cigars which I puff with them on the terrace. It's a good night and Rebecca says, "Well Michael, they seem impressed for a change, what about staying the night?"

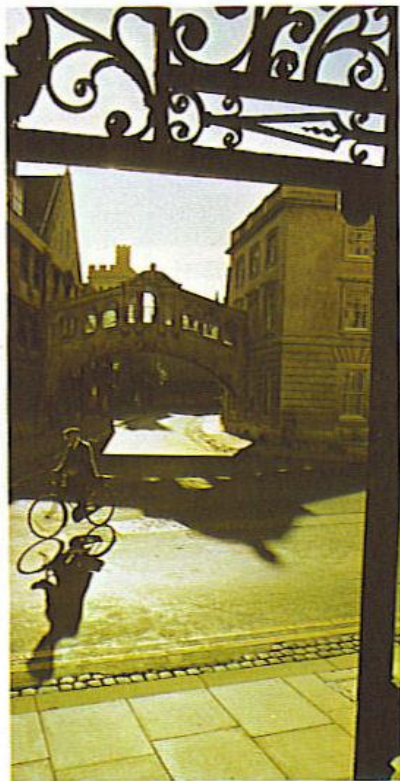
So I do. I still get a good reception at breakfast. I don't push my luck and leave early. I tuck my suit (or not my suit) bag under my arm and walk across to Westminster Cathedral for 10 am mass and then train home.

Somehow the image of Tommy Girdlestone comes into my mind and I recall the art folio bag he gave me to keep. Consumed now by curiosity to look at something that has sat in the dry cleaning shop for over two years I go home, pick up the folio and force the locks. It's not easy to pick them, so I have to heavy them.

There's 10 oil paintings in the folder and I'd have to be totally dumb not to realise these are part of the biggest art theft of modern times. An absolutely mind blowing exhibition of old masters had been scheduled to go on display under the tightest of security at Birmingham several summers back. The whole lot got hijacked. Some green mail took place; a total of 20 masterpieces had been recovered at huge cost. The top 10 are still missing, well, they were. I have them here in my flat. I

quietly put them back where they were to continue gathering dust and do some heavy thinking. I get on the net, get into newspaper reports of the original crime and stories on the recovered paintings. I go to Arties, the pawn brokers well known to many in Oxford. Artie's a real card. I hire from him a portable or nearly portable typewriter. It's a mechanical Studio 46 Olivetti. I take it home and after much thought I put on latex gloves and type a letter to the National Gallery.

Using gloves again I type up a big brown envelope to the same people. Taking then a pair of scissors from the shop I cut the Old Master, which is probably the least valuable of them all, right in half. It's a lovely painting, a grey sea scape enlivened by a bright red buoy. I know its history. The painter, Joseph Mallord William Turner hung this painting at the National Gallery and it was thought to be too dull in comparison



OFF TO WORK *A scout cycles down New College Lane on his way to work. 'Scout' is the traditional name for a college servant assigned to look after undergraduates*

with other more lively paintings. Turner came back and put a big blob of red paint in the foreground of his sea scape. The art world watched agog. On varnishing day, the last day when a painter can do anything to their painting he came back suitably equipped and ran the red blob into a marvellous reproduction of a bell buoy. The red touch against the grey gloom was so striking that J.M.W. carried the day. I winced as I scissored it into two but I felt sure the art experts would easily make it whole again and make it doubly famous in the process.

I added a note that simply said that I have the missing paintings and am aware of what was paid to get the return of the other 20 and I'm open to offers for the rest, which I will dispatch in advance of payment one at a time. I asked them to acknowledge receipt and quote what they would pay per item by adverts in the personal columns of the Times. They advertise back quickly that ten million pounds, one million at a time is fine; though they do this in a sort of a code I gave them. I write back to the gallery pitching for 12.5 million payable 1.25 Million a time equally, with the most valuable being returned last. They signal agreement within days. I now write again on Arties typewriter, saying this is fine and that I will now devise a suitable payment conduit which

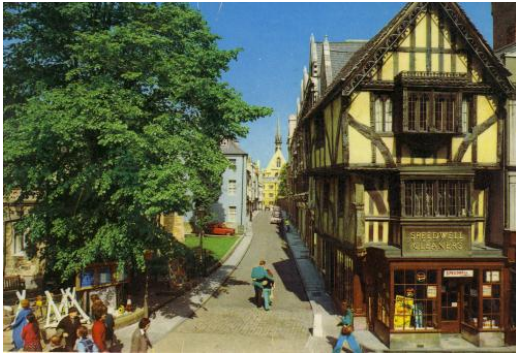
could take some months but that I will write them each month end to confirm that the arrangements are made.

Christmas, and final exams come and go. I Christmas tea with Rebecca and her family in Cheyne Walk. It's a very pleasant occasion and as I offer Rebecca's Dad another huge Churchill cigar, which he appreciatively accepts (they're the real Cuban McCoy and I get them from a fat cat in Oxford) I suggest that with Rebecca going off soon to join the National Gallery in Washington that I expect it will be the last time I darken his door.

"Oh, Michael, we have gotten along fine, call any time, Rebecca doesn't have to be here."

I take him up and tell him I will, one day, and perhaps sooner than he thinks. We attend to final matters in Oxford. Rebecca is capped by the University and I'm certificated by the Polytechnic. We both attend each other's passing out ceremony. I'm envious of her new job; I've been to the Washington Gallery, thanks to Freddy

Laker's cheap plane rides. They have college girls conducting Rembrandt Van Eyk tours in the summer. They have so many of his paintings. I've taken both tours. Rebecca flies out. I'm lonely, but I am also mentally busy as I have to come up with a safe way to get my twelve point five million pounds safely out of the country or rather collect it safely out of the country. The gallery uses my personal ads code; they're trying to draw me out of the shadows. I write them a sharp note, 'any more of this and I'll burn the lot and send them the ashes'. They code apologise and await my



next move, which they know will take some months. Professor Madelaine Kirby drops in Friday morning, I'm on my own in the dry cleaning shop, its early. Prof Madelaine lives in at All Souls, lectures at the university, at the Polytechnic and at London University. She's heavy art world metal, long legged, good chest, a strong, and in my view very sexy, lady. I love her husky drawl. She's also probably 40, I'm not sure.

"Well Michael," she husks at me, "what will you do without the gorgeous and rich Rebecca?"

I look her in the eye as I take her dry cleaning.

"Well, Madelaine," I say (we are not of course on 1st name terms but I have to make a start). "I'd like to start by inviting you to dinner."

"Where?" she says.

I thumb upstairs (my flat).

"And when?"

"Tonight, about 7.30 for 8," I reply.

"And what, might I ask, is the menu?"

"Well, prawn cocktails (I can get these quickly from Kentucky Fried Chicken), mains, chicken Gazbione (I've made this up but I can get from the speciality butcher, It's chicken breast wrapped in bacon and slabs of cheese and is easy to cook in a hot oven), Greek salad, Chardonnay and Turkish coffee."

"I'm not much of a drinker." Prof Mad says.

"Well Madelaine, I kind of share Siegfried Sassoon's view on the helpfulness of Alcohol in human affairs."

"Dress code and dessert?"

"Well, dress, come as you are, I have plenty of crash hot chenille dressing gown on hand," I gesture at the dozen or so of these for the Oxford Hilton hanging on the rack and as for the dessert, up to you." I say.

"Geez, Michael," she says. "You're a charming young sprog," I can see from her eyes that I have her full attention and interest.

"Well Prof," I say, "Faint Heart!"

She looks away and rolls this very unexpected offer around in her mind. She is nothing but decisive "OK Michael, you're on. However I will touch base when I get off the train this evening to make sure you're not just funning me".

"It's a firm offer, Madelaine," I say.

She drops in briskly about 6:45 off the London Train, I've customers and I serve them quickly and hand her dry cleaning and say "the chickens cooking, see you at the side door at 7:30."

"Bang on," she says and goes out the door.

She taps on the side street door on the dot. I let her in, I'm wearing only a luxurious chenille gown emblazoned 'Oxford Hilton'. I follow her upstairs; she's wearing a track suit, trainers but has a nice pair of slippers in a shopper.

"I took you at your word," she said, where's my gown?"

"In the bedroom." I say and usher her to the door. She comes out quite soon in gown a slippers I pour her a Chardonnay and put ice in with it. She says "I warned you, I'm not a great drinker."

I reply, "Madelaine there is nothing, nothing at all like alcohol to release long held inhibitions."

"Aw Hell," she says, "Top the glass up."

We then drift along through a very good meal. My roasted chicken is melt in the mouth stuff and we punish the Chard. Dessert is delicate stewed peaches that I have stewed myself, chilled and added whipped cream. We chat away a bit and very amicably finish the dessert and drink a demitasse of Turkish coffee complete with clearing glass of water. We tidy up the dishes together and then Madelaine says "well, show time" and heads for the bedroom

"I'll give you four minutes," I say. The flat and bedroom is rheostatted down to very, very dim light and I just take off my gown and walk in.

"Shit," Madeleine says, "you're bloody enormous!" I say nothing, I just gently spread her legs, very good legs too and we're quickly away.

It's a huge success. She tells me its 10 years since she last had a man.

"Good God," I say "what a waste."

"Mmm," she says, "but by Jiminy Golly, if you're disposed to continue I'm about to make up for those missing years."

"No probs," I say, and there aren't any, she's all woman, not a girl and I enjoy myself. About 3 a.m. she shakes me and says, let's have one for the road; you won't want me farting and groaning around the flat in the morning." God she's down to earth.

"Right on Mad, I'll walk you home to All Souls," and I do.

"When will I see you again?" she says.

"6 a.m. Sunday, at the college," I say.

We are both long runners, she every day, me Sundays only. By 6 a.m. I've jogged up High St. to All Souls, Madelaine comes out of the college gates and we run through the botanic garden to Magdalen Bridge, across the Cherwell and down St. Clements at the Plain. We now head due east, without the sun yet hitting us we run fast to get clear of the Oxford suburbs, we go through Headington, over the ring road steel bridge and past the old road, start to feel the upward sloped Shotover Hill onto Shotover plain, we step up the pace. Christ, she can run, we step it up again on the level plain and eventually ease off as we run downhill to Wheatley via the hamlet of Littleworth. We run back after a breather on the same route, pace down to the college and Maddy drops off for a minute to pick up a carry bag from beside the porters lodge. I do the same at the dry cleaners and we jog comfortably to the Oxford Hilton, low rise Oxford style but a very nice pub. I touch base with Mathoud who looks after the pools, saunas and spas and with whom I trade dry cleaning for access to his domain. He grins when he sees I have company and with a bob of his head, taps his turban.



We sauna, spa, hot pool and cold pool in that order and pulling on nice track suits go in to breakfast at the Buffets. Eggs Benedict and pink Champagne and Turkish coffee later.

Maddy says "What next Lothario?"

"Oh," I say, "let's train to London and do the Tate and be back for a late afternoon matinee."

"Fine," she says, "let's go," and we do.

All in all we have a lovely day and finish strong. Were in London next Sunday and I park Madelaine for a while so that I can morning tea with Rebecca's Dad. He's a sharp money man. I tell him I'm writing a short story on a blackmailer (actually I do write short stories and get them published in the Enquirer. They pay me well). I work through how the blackmailer can convincingly spell out how to get money in and out of banks safely and he tells me how it's done.

"The Swiss," he said, "set it all up and no questions about money in their banks ever get answered," and so on.

I rejoin Madelaine and we go to the National Gallery, quite a few of their best ever paintings are in the Oxford dry cleaning shop but I can't tell her that. Madelaine is a walking encyclopaedia on paintings and painters. I'm by comparison just intuitive. Let me lamp a painting and I'll know immediately if I see another painting by that artist. I have a photographic memory of painter's brush styles. We train back companionably to Oxford and dine pleasantly at an Italian restaurant.

Madeliane says "I have a proposition for you Michael."

"Christ no, Maddy" I say, "I can't possibly do it again today." She gives a belly laugh.

"No," she says. "Well you're qualified to curate a gallery and you should start on one. My sister is the chairperson of the Soames Gallery in Durham. It's not really a bad one at all. I can get you in there if you like; the chap there now is retiring. We can pass on the selection process or my assessment of the gallery stock, the money available to fund new purchase and so on. It's not a lost cause and it's an endowed gallery that works in with Durham University."

I move up taking the old masters from the dry cleaners with me and settle in. There's a fine spacious flat attached to the gallery, very secure and separate.

I've kept my pawn brokers friends typewriter for a bit, although of course I realise its damning evidence if things go pear shaped. I post off the other half of Turners seascape and tell them the numbered account in Panama to send the 1.25 million pounds to. They do this smartly; nothing comes out in the press. I type them a thank you after ensuring that the money arrives in Geneva after visiting Hong Kong briefly.

I have a few days leave to visit an art show in Paris and go to Geneva and convert some cash into gold and stash it in a security vault at another bank. I don't take any away. I'm able to keep myself on what my gallery pays me and I live rent free as I did at Oxford.

Madeleine often visits her farming sister in Yorkshire and I get together with her quite often. She comes up pregnant and is delighted.

"You know Michael." she says, I've been arting for a long time. I'm not short of the readies due to my interest in the big farm and I've tenure, long service and maternity leave available at Oxford. I'd love to have kids, but I don't need a full time husband either. I'll do my own thing. She does and twins Michael and Michelle turn up by Caesar and all's very well all round.

I send off my second painting. It goes, money comes, nothing in the paper again. So far, so good. The money goes to the same place and I again buy good stocks of gold and stash it away.

The first International exchange exhibition I organise is between the Tate Gallery and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it's the New York biggy and is also the biggest in the U.S. of A. It's been endowed and endowed. There's 2,300 paintings there plus a heap more at its offshoot the Cloisters at Fort Tryon Park, North West end of Manhattan. It took a while to put it all together and I think I was the very first exhibition organiser to talk the Trustees into letting us take a few from the Cloisters.



Among these is a Caravaggio. This chap was actually Michelangelo Merisio; he adopted Caravaggio from his Lombardy home town. Broadly Caravaggio, at least before he got into his huge religious work, painted ordinary people in ordinary surroundings but his mastery of light and shadow produced paintings of intense and melodramatic effect. They're bloody wonderful in fact. Among the Cloisters paintings I cozened out of the Metropolitan was "The Musicians". It's a great painting and they look like the Beatles of their day, strikingly so. I mention this only because it will re occur in this story.

We got 27 paintings out of them and staged a mirror image lot from the Tate and showed these in New York and later San Francisco, three weeks at each. I ran the American side and had a ball. The Tate itself ran their end. While the paintings were packed and ready to ship back to their homes an early offer I had made with the Melbourne and Canberra Galleries came together and we interchanged leading paintings of the Australian school with a mix of Tate and Metropolitan owned work, all taken from the exhibitions I'm talking about.

There was a huge crowd at the Melbourne opening night, it's a most interesting building with, I think, the largest stained glass ceiling in the world, if you can imagine such a thing it. It's near the Yarra River.

We opened it late on a benign February summer's evening to the multitudes. I get included in the speaking programme and as I talk, which I do naturally and easily as I've got used to this bit of art world kerfuffle, I look at a figure in the crowd with, I think, fairly well concealed amazement. He's cherubic and beautifully dressed and looks like Peter Ustinov. Shit, shit, it's got to be Tommy Girdlestone. I'm gob smacked, flabbergasted, it can't be, it can't be, it is. As we mingle later and sip surprisingly good champagne he quietly moves through the crowd, we shake hands.



"Tommy Girdlestone," I say. He puts his fingers to his lips, near he says "Tommy Tuddenham now."

"Tom, don't say it old boy."

"Where are you staying and are you on your own?"

"The Southern Cross and yes," I say.

"Oh," he says, "so am I, I'm working right now but let's say the buffet for breakfast at 7.30 a.m. tomorrow?"

"Fine," I say.

Over orange juice and cereal he tells me that he had to hire some heavies to pull off the National Gallery Heist.

“Not particularly costly,” he said, but he thought he'd blow town before word got out on what he got for the return of the goods and had the heavies on his tail for more. Over eggs Benedict he tells me he thought Australia was far enough and he runs a very successful gallery in Little Collins Street and has a lovely cottage at Bickleigh Vale in Melbourne's outer east. It was designed and built by the famous landscaper Edna Wallings and that he was lucky to get it. The cottages have been extended a bit but the landscaping, especially the stone walls, are vintage Wallings. Over some scramblers and bacon he tells me he cleared £22.5 million pounds from his 20 paintings and enquires what I got for mine, as he suspects I sold them back to the gallery.

“Actually at this stage I've banked ten million from them, as I have saved the two best for last and I've got them safely stashed together with the incriminating typewriter I use to contact them.”

“Well done old boy,” he says.

Over coffee and sweet croissants I tell Tom he is entitled to a bite from my stash. He gets a coffee refill and says “not at all old boy, what's yours is yours. However I do want something,” Tom says, “I want your Caravaggio.”

I splutter in my demitasse.

“You want fucking what? Shit Tom, it's worth zillions.”

“Of course, dear boy, why do you think I want it?”

“How?” I ask, “A huge smash and grab?”

“No, no, no,” says Tom, just a quiet substitution and a bit of greenmail down the track.

“Come up to my room.” says Tom after breakfast, it's a sunny suite overlooking Melbourne; the sun is beautiful on the terrace. He unzips one of his flax art folders with handles and there true to the life is The Musicians. I study it close, I really know brush marks and painting styles, you couldn't pick it from the real one.

“How?” I ask,

“Oh, a little diversion on packing day should do it, perhaps a good sized smoke bomb, don't worry it's all organised. We knew you would cooperate.”

Ten days later after spectacular pix and stories in the Age and the Australian we are sitting back on the still sunny terrace looking at the real thing.

“Piece of cake, dear boy,” Tommy says, smiling benignly at me. Tommy of course can afford to grin; he has sort of temporarily borrowed the Musicians and the sum he would get to greenmail it will make his many million pounds National Gallery Heist look like peanuts. Mind you, it wouldn't make my reputation look too good in the art world if it comes out that I've been running a showing that loses not perhaps the star piece, but a very good piece.

The paintings return to their home galleries, I return to London and Tommy takes his acquisition home to enjoy. Tom is confident that the Cloisters won't wake up for some time to the switch and to be quite honest, if they have, they're keeping nit about it. Tom sends me a card each Christmas in which he assures me that he's enjoying life and his pictures.

And why not? He grossed £22.5 million pounds, he has his own gallery and he always does well out of what he knows so well, art. If the proverbial doesn't hit the fan I'm sure he'll just go on enjoying the Musicians.

FOURTEEN

**THE JURY
AT GUNNEDAH**

The Jury at Gunnedah

Part I

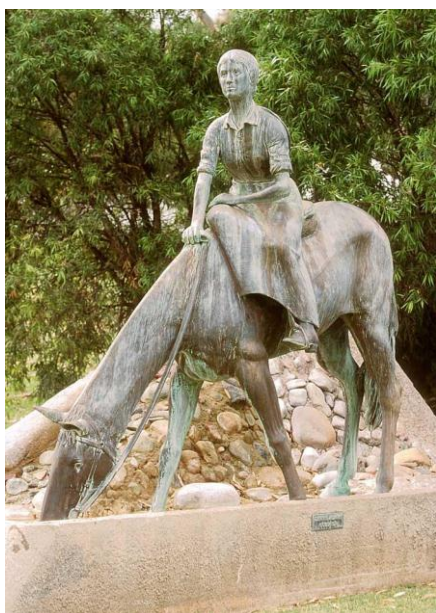
It's a very humid morning; the haze over the harbour is almost pure humidity as the Sea Princess mouses quietly into Port Moresby. Tom Scott is captaining this fishing charter boat and among the party of half a dozen sportsmen is Dennis (Dinnie) Faithful. This latter chap is the real reason for this visit. Faithful leans over the flying bridge,

"Slowly, slowly, Tom," he says. "I want to be able to see our mark before we touch the wharf." Tom is sharp eyed and knows what he is doing.

"Just arrived," he says, scanning the wharf, seeing the tall fellow in Port Moresby rig (shorts, long socks).

"Okay," says Dinnie. "Beam us in, Scotty."

The Mark is Hiram T Bellamy. He's from Minnesota and is the resident American running the Papua New Guinea Timber Bank. The timber bank, under



Hiram's promotional visits to Australia, does a lot of off-shore banking for those Aussies wanting to hide their dosh out of the country, but not too far away. Hiram meets and greets them on the wharf.

"Let's have your passports," he says and as he takes them, he puts a green Australian note inside each and they walk up to passport control. Hiram hands the handful over, the PNG chap in the kiosk briskly stamps each and just as briskly hands them back. There's no customs search. Hiram just hands a fat envelope to this separate mob and they walk through to his Jeep Wrangler.

Dinnie is toting an old fashioned Gladstone bag – there's 1.7 million Australian dollars in it. The biggish chaps, night club bouncers by trade and enforcers of this and that when needed, carry light cricket bags. Dinnie knows there's an AK47 assault rifle in one and a short-barrel pump action

shotgun in the other. They are not so long at the bank. Hiram's helpers count the dosh and then effect wire transfers which, in the end and after visiting Panama, will see the 1.7 less charges end up in a numbered account at the Zingli Bank in Basle.

This visit which was arranged in Saffy Waldron's legitimate nightclub in Kings Cross a while back, is the first of many cash runs to Port Moresby. It's a clean and uncomplicated cash deal without too many people involved or too many borders to cross. It's a Townsville – Port Moresby – Brisbane run with a bit of quite decent fishing as they go. There's many ways to skim off money to overseas banks, but this conduit has been recommended to Dinnie by Professor Dozey Mendez at Sydney University. Dozey has tenure there and got Dinnie his so successful part time job.

"It's like this," he tells Dinnie in the commerce faculty room. "You're my brightest student in this course; you're not poor and you're a good country boy. This is a good paying job and it's very good experience. Also, there's a good free flat that comes with it. It's above the nightclub in Kings Cross."

Dozey, who despite his nickname is as sharp as a tack, looks Dinnie in the eye.

“Do, however, go very carefully, Dinnie,” he says. “Where people who should have known better have got their fingers in Saffy Waldron’s till, he has been known to amputate these at the first joint with bolt cutters – without the benefit of anaesthesia. Just play it with a straight bat – a very straight bat.”

Dozey, it seems, gives good and continuing advice and staffing to the Kings Cross Baron, but is never seen in the Cross. Saffy has links to the mob scene in Fortitude Valley and has apartments at Broad Beach. To comp his helpers, he flies them to Coolangatta; installs them in one of his units and brilliant and no cost comforts arrive in to take his visitors rocks off. It’s smart and it works.

There’s three big cash flow nights at the Cross when a torrent of dosh comes into Saffy’s legal and illegal operations. Dinnie’s job is to be on hand by 9 pm when the first till clearances come in. He runs the doings through a cash sorter and rubber bands bundles of money, stacking it in the vault of the old bank building they operate from. Dinnie’s office cum counting room is the nerve centre of the operation and Harry Perkins, the minder and distributor of the cash, sits just inside the door with a sawn-off pump shotgun in his lap and a broadsheet Sydney Morning Herald over.

Harry’s a nice bloke and as things go along they surf together at Bondi early mornings. Harry, in his impetuous youth, has done jail time. He’s older and much wiser now, but carries the legacy of maximum security time in Long Bay by way of a nasty knife scar, ear to chin on his face. Harry’s very tough under his scarred exterior. Rumour has it that when the knife wielder got out of stir, Harry and helpers picked him up in a stolen van, threw him over the gap and left the van at the scene.

Anyway, back at the nightclub ‘Elkins’, Dinnie, when they have finished counting for the night, then makes up pay-off money into small brown envelopes. Saffy himself, provides the list, each envelope carries just a number. When this is done, they stash these in the strong room and Harry attends to the distribution the next day. It takes in a lot of people and places; one run in particular takes a bit longer. They train up to the Hawkesbury and at several riverside stations; pay off the Bikies that hijack much of the liquor they retail in the sleaze nightclubs down the strip a bit. He runs Elkins on the level, but runs his extortion through the other clubs and again at Fortitude Valley. The Brisbane police are so bent that Fortitude Valley is a dream to operate in.

In wicked old New South Wales police payoffs are a way of life also, but there are a few dead straight coppers that make their life difficult at times. Frank Naughton is one of these; Uniform Branch, very senior, well off; quite legally. He lives in a nice home in Clontarf. Naughton comes around to the Uni; wants to interview Dinnie and does. They are dying to get the goods on Saffy and offer to pay snout money for information. Dinnie, although young, is pretty bland. He is strongly built; looks like a young version of Oliver Stone.

“I’m only a clerk,” he says. “I do it for pocket money and somewhere to live. I don’t know anything that would be of use to you guys.”

Dinnie reports this to Saffy Waldron in due course. It’s just as well that he does as Saffy is quite aware the fuzz have been around to see Dinnie.

“This bastard is just about my only cop problem,” Saffy says. “I have the Minister and the Chief Commissioner on side, but Naughton is so straight and known for it that I can’t do anything effective to him. Even a hit is out of the question.”

Dinnie has an idea. He takes a bus out to Clontarf and cases Naughton’s home. It’s a very good house, one in from the corner. The corner house, he notes with interest, is for sale. While he’s only street sided the house, Naughton comes in next day; again to the University.

“You’ve been casing my house,” he says. “I have you on videotape. Can you give me a reason, here or at the station, as to why you were doing something as provocative as that. You know,” he continues, “If I want, I can get you smartly behind bars. Would not look good on your CV, you know.”

Dinnie, (with Dozey’s help) is taping all this; he may need it down the track. After Naughton goes, Dinnie runs it past Dozey, who has some good ideas.

Back at the flat, around 6pm, Dinnie sees from the precautions he takes, that someone has been in. He puts a chair under the doorknob and cases the place; easily done as he has only clothes and books here. A white package turns up, obviously a plant. He flushes it, post haste down the bathroom sink, scissors the package wrapping and burns it in the waste paper bin. He’s thus ready when the rozzers knock on his door with a search warrant and turn up nothing.

The next round in this vicious little war of attrition is that his car boot lid on his old Toyota gets jimmied. Again he finds a white package, dumps it in the nearest bin in the alley and sets off to pick up Harry en route to Bondi. A squad car stops him at the first set of lights and they turn his car over. ‘Enough is bloody enough,’ Dinnie thinks. He goes to find Saffy. Saffy likes the idea, thus a non-involved person buys the house for sale next to Naughton’s. It’s empty and they round up a shot-firer; a jail friend of Harry’s, and do a drill through the cap of the sandstone under Naughton’s from the new house cellar. The cellars are only about 8 feet apart, so it’s easy to do. They poke through about 2 pounds of cement and fuse it up, ready to fire. They then leave the back doors open in the house and word up some squatters in Redfern, who joyously move in. This of course kills the big coppers pig, but as the new owner is now away in Bali, living rent free at Saffy’s holiday home there, there’s nothing they can do about the squatters turning a good house in a select area into a third or fourth world rental. With the button under Naughton’s house ready to push, Dinnie discusses other things with Dozey.

Dozey is really Emmanuel Y Santose Mendez, Professor of Economics. He’s very savvy on money. Dinnie says he’s concerned at the huge amount of cash that Saffy is holding and thus the idea of the run to the Timber Bank in Port Moresby is born and actioned. Dozey has another bright idea.

“You know,” he says. “Sydney is a town where everyone lives beyond their means. There’s a fortune to be made lending out set amounts of cash on a monthly maximum, charging 25% interest. The famous faces (television stars, football stars, big punters, radio personalities) are all short of dosh mid-week. Lend on promissory notes only; shred the notes when they pay up, burn the shreadings and watch while this is done. Who the hell could ever track it down tax-wise?”

Thus another bright idea is embraced by Saffy and actioned by Dinnie. There’s a small and tasteful bar known as ‘Elanours’, but better known as the ‘Catching Pen’, that operates daily in Elkins from 4.30pm on. Elanour, a very glamorous and upmarket 37 year old, hostesses the bar and Paul, a suave and self effacing Englishman, always dressed in a dinner suit, is the barman. Every drink, irrespective of whether it’s water or Chivas Regal, costs \$20 per glass. There is no shortage of drinkers. It’s a mark of having arrived - to drink at Elanour’s, and the town’s high flyers, including many of the legal profession, drop in after work. There are, of course, a few high flying bell wethers among the drinkers, but Saffy sees what they spend is refunded by Harry on his dosh runs around the city.

Dinnie uses the Catching Pen as a suitable venue for his loan applicants to wait his call. Elanour looks after them and shuffles them upstairs in rotation. He interviews from 5pm until the first lot of cash comes in about 9pm. People from all walks of life come to see him. The famous faces are easy to suss out and he uses

Albert Gilbert, a very efficient private investigator and debt collector, to check out those he doesn't know. The system works and after the end of the first quarter, he hasn't accumulated any bad debts. Saffy comes in to look at the running sheets and is quite impressed.

"Just remember," he says. "If any legs have to be broken, we have plenty of help on hand to attend to it."

After a while, Dinnie realises that although he's only a Uni student, he is fast becoming the best known man at the Cross, or at least he's becoming the man all the fast spenders want to know there. Half or more of Saffy's empire hinges around the women in his employ. As he helps Harry pay them off, from hookers to hostesses, Dinnie gets to talk to and sometimes counsel the girls. Dinnie has no hidden agenda so they think he's Christmas and chat away to him. He gets quite a few of them on a savings track. They mostly earn very good money and being women, are not stupid about spending it. He soon has most of them on savings plans and the big earners on investment plans, often buying real property. And talking of real property, Saffy adds a bit of fuel to the fire he is building up under the straight copper, Frank Naughton, prior to cementing his nice Clontarf house.

"Take a bit of grog out to the Redfernites at the house, Dinnie," he says. "Encourage them to party; it'll get that copper bastard foaming at the mouth." Dinnie reflects that it must be hell to own a freehold and very good house at Clontarf and have a good number of Redfern denizens squatting next door.

"What beer will I take, Boss," he asks. "Some of the hijacked stuff?"

"God no." Replies Saffy. "Go to the warehouse at 4 Mile Street. There's a big lot of out of code stubbies there that have cost us jack shit."

Thus provided with fuel, the next door neighbours of Naughton's party and party. The coppers who don't really love their boss, who stamps on their extracurricular activities, play a bit difficult in winding the parties down. Naughton comes around in civvies to see Dinnie at Uni.

"I can move," he says.

"Ah," Dinnie says. "But you won't get much for your house and perhaps, like Ruth, whither thou goest they will go."

The big cop subsides. "How can we ameliorate this matter?" he says.

Dinnie says, "You obviously are blaming me. I'm the smallest cog in a big and sometimes nasty wheel."

"Perhaps," says the copper. "But the fraud squad tell me you are the man that calls the shots in the lending line. Watch out. We will bust you in the long run and hang you up to dry for loan sharking."

"Oh," says Dinnie. "I just help some good people along a bit here and there and I'm sure they're not complaining. In any case, if you're going to persevere in giving me stick, I don't see how this will make for easier and cleaner living in Clontarf."

"What's your game?" Naughton says.

Dinnie says, "I'm a nobody. I just want to get a living and finish my schooling and I'll then be back in Gunnedah on Dad's farm. I can clean up the Clontarf mess if you want, but you have to earn that right."

"How so?" says the big copper.

"Hmmm," says Dinnie. "Just leave me alone. Stop your mates trying to plant stuff on me. Back off on persecuting Saffy. He's an institution and a wise man would recognise that and leave him alone."

The penny sort of drops.

Naughton says, "I'm a straight arrow. I hate corruption. I've never done a deal in my life. Bugger it, I shouldn't have to."

"Do what you like," says Dinnie. "But the offer's there. I can take the colour out of your life – or from the immediate neighbourhood. Let's face it; you brought it all on yourself. It was hardly fair to land your heavyweight and long experience on me – a kid from the back blocks."

Naughton pulls on his chin.

"A kid you may be," he says. "But you are not lacking the grey matter. You have hit me in my one vulnerable spot. It's hell on me at home – the wife, the kids, the relations who once were pleased to call. It's hell....hell....hell."

"I'm not asking you to be bent," Dinnie says. "It's just a matter of reorganising priorities. I doubt if your Minister or Chief Commissioner are pushing this matter."

Naughton snorts. "Shit," he says. "In not so many words, they've advised me to do what you are advising me."

"Frank," Dinnie says. "We can settle this on a hand shake, but I expect you to honour your word, and frankly, I don't doubt that you will."

They shake hands. Saffy goes along with it and Dinnie, himself, negotiates the Redfern boys out and finds them somewhere else, but of course in a less salubrious neighbourhood and makes sure that a good supply of alcohol and a bit of cash lobs along on Friday nights for them.

Dinnie gets along well with Harry Perkins and being a top student at Uni he mixes around when he can and knows a big number of the undergraduates and the faculty. Somewhat amazingly some of the latter turn up in the Catching Pen at the Cross for a handful of readies from time to time. With Saffy's okay, he lets them off light on interest. One of the chaps he funds is a very popular plastic surgeon who only borrows to prop up the outrageous alimony he is paying three ex-wives. He's a bachelor at the moment and Dinnie, taking the long view, organises for Elanour to send this chap around some creature comforts on slow nights only (there are limits that Saffy won't go beyond).

He lugs Harry around to the medical faculty on guinea pig day where the visiting experts are looking for suitable cases to impress their students with. They have several good looks at Harry's scar and finally book him in for their normally hugely expensive plastic surgery expert. Dinnie has worded the surgeon up in advance, of course, and sent him around a couple of choice pigeons to build up a bit of good will. It turns out a mint, mint job and a bit later, when the dressings come off, Harry rejoins the normal looking world. In the wash-up, he tells Dinnie,

"Mate, I owe you a big one. File it away in your fertile brain – just call me when you need me."

Elanour, who is one of the loveliest and warmest females that Dinnie has ever come across, says to him,

"Dinnie, you're only a kid, but that was just so kind. We all love you and to show my appreciation, I'm taking you home tonight."

Dinnie says, "Elanour, it's not necessary. I'm not missing out on my oats." Elanour squeezes his arm and laughs her oh so husky laugh.

"Dinnie," she says. "Never in your wildest dreams could you imagine oats as sweet as I'm offering. I'll pick you up when we close the bar and you close the safe room."

Dinnie doesn't cut any corners, but a small niggle in his mind surfaces. He rings Saffy, who is around at Tattersall's, probably bribing jockeys for the Randwick meeting. (Saffy fields in the enclosure at Randwick) To his surprise, Saffy comes quickly to the phone.

"This had better be good, Dinnie," he says. "I'm sort of busy here."

"Boss," Dinnie says. "I'd like to be elsewhere, but there's just too much cash in the can. I'm nervous. Will you okay me to beef up tonight's security?"

"You've got a good nose for this shit, kid," he says. "Do what you think."

They have, of course, a lot of night safe bags on hand and Elanour, who has come up to see when he will be ready, helps he and Harry to stuff these and get a goon squad from the bouncers to run them around and return the keys. Harry goes with the drop-off run. Albert Gilbert responds to his call and comes along to supervise security. It's as well he does; Dinnie's brain niggles are spot on, as a fairly serious attempt is made on the safe that night, leaving two gunshot men behind. They ring Elanour during what turns out to be a very busy night for she and young Dinnie; a rich and rewarding night. She is as bland as all get out.

"Oh, he's probably over at Annabel's, picking up a bit of fluff," she says and they get back to what they are doing.

"Gawd, Dinnie," Elanour says next morning as she's serving him up scrambled eggs, bacon and coffee before he sets off for Uni. "You are the very definition of the virile. In fact, I'm of the opinion that if I go and look up the definition of virile in the dictionary, your picture will be there. Consider yourself to be spoken for on Friday nights."

Dinnie is interested. "And other nights?" he asks.

"Hmmm.....my daughter's home the other nights," she replies.

They run along like a German band, but along the track a bit she says to Dinnie, "I can't send you home to the farm with only qualifications that the farm girls are unlikely to let you use. That is, if they have heard of such doings. So I'm arranging for you to be taught ballroom dancing and next Saturday afternoon we'll go around to Pardoe's and get you some rags that are suitable to wear to bush dances, polo, picnic races and to B & S balls and similar bush functions. She is as good as her word and come December, Dinnie is out of Sydney and driving the tractor to finish the wheat harvest.

Their farm, 'Almond Grove', is on the outskirts of Gunnedah. It's wonderfully convenient to cart their grain into the bin, which they can see from the paddocks; not so good where the town dogs get amongst their sheep. Inevitably in these prosperous times in the bush, the town, which is short of land to expand into, will swallow Almond Grove. Dinnie's dad, old Tim, plans to retire here in his farm house and subdivide and sell off the farm land as a source of income. He can see that the golf club, the tennis club, a new primary school, state housing and on the higher land, upmarket houses, will all eventuate. A proposed meatworks is negotiating on the back land.

To make up for the loss of arable farm land, Tim has bought Smallpaige's farm. It's biggish and rough, but it's out a bit and nestles between Kitchener Thomas's old place and land owned by Ted Hoyle. Ted is land hungry and your footwork has to be fast to acquire any land that comes up. However, the Hoyles are hated for one reason or another and thus Tim got his land easily enough at a fair price. Also, Siobhan Sullivan has, for the same reasons, gotten a nice one thousand acre block adjoining Hoyles. Settlement on Smallpaige's is set down to just before Easter and Old Tom thinks they should not try to intrude there until the clearing sale is scheduled. Dinnie thus takes a temporary spot with Solly Stanley, the local accountant; does weekend work around Almond Grove and with his dad, lays their farming plans for after Easter.

For a diversion one Saturday night, he goes to a dance at Boggabri – out a bit. He's very well dressed in country clothes – sports coat, tie, trousers and good shoes.

Dinnie hasn't been home much while at Uni in Sydney, but he knows all the locals from his school days in Gunnedah. He's a bit of new/old blood and at the very first dance Sally Dawson comes on to him.

"I have to get in quick, Dinnie," she says. "Before one of these raunchy bitches snaps you up and puts a fence around you. What about taking me home tonight? I'll try to make it worth your while."

So he does and she does and it's only later the office girl at the accountants tells him that Sally has been sort of keeping company with a widowed copper for a while in town. About Wednesday, the same office girl tells Dinnie that the copper has belted Sally. Dinnie sucks his teeth a bit and after work, goes around to the Dawson's. He knocks and Mrs Dawson comes out. She's a bit reserved.

"I came hoping to see Sally," he says.

"Perhaps," says Mrs Dawson. "Perhaps.....I'll ask." She starts to go, stops and says, "I realise it wasn't your fault, Dinnie. We're a bit gobsmacked. Do come in, but take it easy, the girl is still a bit shell shocked."

Sally is in her dressing gown. Her face is carrying some nasty bruises.

"Hi Dinnie," she says. "I heard Mum. It's not your fault. You just gave me a convenient way of shaking that chap off, but I'm a bit worried he might come back and Dad's not well enough to throw him off the verandah." (Dad is getting over pleurisy and is still a bit weak)

"Well Sally," Dinnie says. "We had a nice night and when you mend up, perhaps we can go to a dance at Curlewis?"

"That is sporting of you, Dinnie," she says. "The mending may take a week or three and I'll still worry about those other witches."

Dinnie laughs. "I'll have a word with the copper," he says. "He can't be any tougher than his city mates."

She looks serious. "He's a head-case really," she says. "Lost his wife; I must look like she did. He seems to look upon me as a suitable replacement."

"Have you given him reason to think so?" Dinnie asks.

"Well.....after a few drinks, I did sound sympathetic," she says. "But then the penny dropped and I couldn't shake him off."

Dinnie drives around in his Holden ute to the cop shop. He pulls up in the yard. The young, perhaps not so young, cop comes out.

"Waddy want?" he says.

"A word," says Dinnie. "Listen up you mongrel. You can't belt a girl in this town and expect to stay here. You're on your way - one way or another. Most of your predecessors have finished up in Bourke or Walgett and that's where you will too."

"Bugger you," says the copper. "I'm inclined to belt you one."

Dinnie grins lazily. He picks up a couple of tomahawks, razor sharp, from the back of his ute.

"Pick your weapon and we'll settle this behind the showgrounds grand stand," he says.

The copper turns white. "Threatening a police officer," he says. "I can put you behind bars for this."

"Threatening, no - challenging, yes," says Dinnie. "Come on, let's get round there now."

"No," he says and scuttles into the cop shop and slams the door.

That ends the matter for the moment, but Dinnie exercises the same care that he exercised in Kings Cross to avoid threats and trouble.

Dinnie is at a dance the following Saturday night at Wherris Creek. It's a bit away from Gunnedah, but the old hall has a good floor and the band tonight is a

visiting one from Muswellbrook. The boys are having a few quiet King Browns around their utes. (This is in the days before cans and stubbies were invented) Dinnie contributes a bottle or so from his cool box and they chew the fat a bit.

“What’s behind no one dancing with Amity Parsons at Boggabri last Saturday?” he asks.

“Well,” says one of the young chaps. “You didn’t dance with her either.”

“Ah,” says Dinnie. “I fully intended to, but Sally Dawson was a bit demanding, so the opportunity passed.”

“Ah,” says another. “You got a nice little duck there, ripe for the plucking of. Constable Larry has had her bottled up for weeks, and of late she doesn’t seem to have been happy about it. He took her out to the Bog you know, and got called back to town. There was a big punch-up at the Duke of Westminster. He came back to get her after you took her homewards and boy, was he pissed off!”

“Well,” says Dinnie. “I wasn’t to know that, was I?”

“Be careful, Dinnie,” another young bloke says. “This is a different town now since they sent old Sergeant off to Armidale. Both the big new Sergeant and Constable Larry are bad, bad news. If they lock someone up, the Sergeant let’s Larry get his rocks off by belting the chap in the lock-up. Old/young Larry has a vicious streak and is good with his mitts and his nightstick – watch out!”

“Hmmm,” muses Dinnie. “He’s pretty light for a copper, small by Sydney Town standards.”

“Ah,” the same chap says. “But he’s very limber and he’ll belt the shit out of you given half the chance. Don’t say we haven’t warned you if we see you walking around town looking the worse for wear.”

Knowing the bruises and lacerations Sally Dawson is currently wearing, Dinnie takes this on board. The following Saturday they are back at Curlewis for a normal dance.

“Come on, chaps,” Dinnie says as they down a beer or three. “Be sure and give Amity Parsons a dance tonight.” There’s a bit of a loaded silence; the chap next to Dinnie gives his sleeve a pull. “A word,” he quietly says and they move over a bit.

“Firstly,” he says. “Don Hoyle has specifically asked us not to dance with her. As you know, the Hoyles have all the weight in the world around here and dispense a lot of contracting work out. Also, socially, they can put you beyond the pale if they want. Besides, Amity’s not much of a dancer and she’s not here tonight.”

Amity is like Dinnie, just back from school in the city. She’s not overly educated, but has reached the norm for country girls in that she has sat her Intermediate Certificate. Also, she damaged an ankle badly in school hockey and still a tad lame and thus she missed out on dancing lessons. She’s quite a big girl carrying a deal of puppy fat and because her parents had her very late in life, she hasn’t had much help on dress and being an only child, hasn’t had siblings to get her up to speed. Nevertheless, her parents own a very good farm and she would be a good catch financially – but the district it seems, lead by the Hoyles, is giving her little rope and a hard time.

Dinnie sips his King Brown and rolls this around his mind. He can easily pick up on what is going on. They are squeezing the girl out socially, with the thought she will probably quit the bush and return to Sydney. She is the apple of her parents’ eye. The odds are, they would sell out and move to the big smoke to provide her with a home there. Thus the Hoyles would be in the running to add ‘Spring Dale’ to their ever-expanding farming operation. ‘Bugger the Hoyles,’ thinks Dinnie. He jumps in his ute and runs out to Parsons farm. Their place touches on his new one and it’s not a bad idea to keep in with them.

As he pulls up in the driveway, the dogs come out barking, so by the time he's reached the top of the sweeping steps – it's not a bad old homestead by the way; spacious and verandahed, built about 1910 – Mr Parsons comes out to see who's calling.

"It's Dinnie Faithfull, Mr Parsons," he calls. Parsons is not young, but he's a decent chap.

"Ah, Dinnie," he says, shaking hands. "Our new neighbours, will you all live in Smallpaiges?"

"No," says Dinnie. "My parents will hang on in Almond Grove. The new joint is too far from town for Mum, but I'll move over about Easter."

"Good, good," says Parsons. "Perhaps we can talk about a bit of share-farming. I'm finding seed and super a bit heavy to lump these days."

"I'll be glad to talk business with you," Dinnie says. "But not tonight; I'm here to get Amity along to the Dance."

"Oh," says Parsons, his face falling a bit. "I offered to run her up to the Hall, but she burst into tears and took to her room. She was pretty broken up from the last dance; never got a dance."

Dinnie sucks his teeth. "That wasn't her fault," he says. "Someone, for their own long term purposes, had her sent to Coventry but we can get her out if she wants. See if you can winkle her out."

"Okay," says Parsons. "Come on in. Mary will be pleased to see you."

Thus Dinnie sits in their impressive lounge room and Amity comes out, back-footing a bit, but quite pleasant.

"Hi, Dinnie," she says. "Dad told me why you're here. I just couldn't go through it again tonight. I never got a dance last time and to be honest, I can only do the old time stuff. I can't modern waltz or quickstep."

Young Dinnie has quite a way with him really. He gets up and goes over to her. "Here Amity," he says. "Forget your parents are here and give me a hug." She's very startled, but comes into his arms quickly and gives him a big hug. They all burst out laughing.

"Okay," Dinnie says. "Ice broken; dancing lessons tomorrow; let's go over to the shed to check the floor – is there a light there?"

The shed has an excellent floor; many shearing sheds were used for barn dances in those days. They settle on dancing lessons after lunch next day.

"That's settled," says Dinnie. "Now, what about a few rubbers of Bridge?"

He well knows that the Parsons are Bridge players of note.

"But, you'll miss the dance," Amity says.

"No matter," Dinnie replies. "There's no one there hanging out to see me."

"What about Sally?" Amity says. "She surely monopolised you last week."

Dinnie turns serious. "There's a dark story there that I shouldn't tell you, but perhaps I will. It's not all sweetness and light out there in the big bad world."

They settle down to a very amicable bit of Bridge. Mr Parsons brings out a bottle of Johnny Walker and not to be outdone, Dinnie slips out to his ute for a bottle of Chivas Regal.

"Where'd you develop a taste for this good drop?" Parsons asks.

Dinnie tells them a little, just a little, of his interesting job at Elkins Night Club. It's a world they haven't glimpsed and they take quite an interest.

Next day, Dinnie turns up with a battered small piano strapped to the back of his Dad's flat top farm ute. With him is a school teacher from town. She plays piano at small dances around the district, not with big bands. Dinnie, with a bit of help from old Parsons, pushes it off onto the wool bale ramp and trundles it into the shed. He

pins up a sheet of butchers paper with dances listed on it. The first is the modern waltz.

“Play away, Mary,” he says. “Come on Amity, give us a hug and away we go.” It’s quite a bit of spirited motivation on Dinnie’s part and about 4pm, she is coming well to the party. Mary’s husband, also a school teacher, arrives.

“Here we go, Amity,” Dinnie says. “Here’s a new and exciting dancing partner. You’d better not hug him as Mary’s here.” In a piercing call, he says, “Gentlemen, take your partner for the foxtrot.”

The afternoon is an unqualified success. Mrs Parsons brings over afternoon tea to the shed and afterwards, the men push the piano onto the ute to return it.

“Where the hell did you get this old beauty?” Parsons asks.

Dinnie says, “Between you and me, I swiped it from the Repertory Club. They don’t use it in summer. Luckily the floor levels all round have been right.”

“What next, Dinnie?” Mrs Parsons asks. “Is she ready to go dancing?”

“Hell no,” says Dinnie. “This is only stage one. Let’s now organise a trip to Sydney smartly, to have the Uni Medical school suss out Amity’s dicky ankle. Then some real lessons at a dancing academy and some modern dancing dresses. Then and only then, we’ll be in business.”

They all go down the following Saturday in the Parsons huge Pontiac and run through the programme suggested by Dinnie. Amity’s ankle problem is muscular and they physio her up and suggest she have weekly follow-up work at Tamworth, where they know of someone good. Elanour organises the dancing practise, takes Amity along to good frock shops and provides the sophisticated (but not too sophisticated) inputs to put the girl on the right track.

“With respect, Amity,” Elanour says. “You’re carrying too much puppy fat, due only to you overeating to compensate with or for your difficulties and not being too active because of your ankle.” Elanour gives her handwritten diet charts. “Don’t get insulted,” she continues. “I’ve been helping Mr Waldron for years to keep his dancing girls in good shape.”

This has all been great fun and all involved have gotten a buzz out of it. Dinnie sets a launch date for the new and sophisticated Amity. It has to be a fortnight hence, as next Saturday the Parsons are due at a wedding in Armidale.

“Why not come with us, Dinnie?” the girl says. “We’ll shoe-horn you in.”

“Hmmm,” says Dinnie. “I have to help Dad Saturday. I’d love to come, but I think I shouldn’t put the old man out seeing as he’s financed my new..... or our new farm.”

Dinnie has just made the most cataclysmic mistake of his young life in declining to go to Armidale. It rankles him for many years to come. In fact it’s a life changing error of pith and moment.

Work over for the day, he spruces up and goes out to this week’s dance at Boggabri. Things happen quickly there. He finds a partner for the flirtation barn dance and in the flirtation bit, is hit upon by beautiful and raunchy Althea Hoyle; Teddy’s younger and very zingy daughter. She doesn’t muck around, dances close and says, “Keep me the medley, Dinnie.”

“Oh, you want a ride home?” Dinnie says.

“Shit no,” says Althea. “I’ve got the exclusive use of Dad’s Ford Galaxy tonight (a huge car), but we can take a run up to the reservoir for an hour or so.”

“Why not now?” Dinnie asks. It sounds too good an offer to wait for.

“Ha,” the girl says. “I like a keen one, but a pleasure delayed.....”

She dances on to the next partner. So after the medley, Dinnie loads her into his ute and they do the reservoir. It’s a warm night and they end their activity with a

skinny dip in the dam. Dinnie brings Althea back to her Galaxy and tails along behind her to ensure she gets back okay; they've had a bit to drink as they went, of course. She gives him a toot as he turns into his farm road and drives on.

Next morning is a hot feeling one and Dinnie is up early and down below the farm house about to start the pump at the dam to water the orchard, when he hears a car pull up on the road; heavy bootfalls. He steps onto the low platform that used to form a tree-house in their young days. It's set in a triple stem oak tree screening the house, thus he clearly sees the mean constable Larry and his huge sergeant arrive at the back door. They bang on it – nothing happens. Dinnie's parents are in Adelaide as guests of Don Bradman at the cricket. The big copper growls at the constable, "I'll try the front, bang him if he comes out." The sharp one stands there with a nightstick in his raised hand. They give up and go away.

Obviously something dramatic is going on and it doesn't look as though it's anything to Dinnie's benefit. Dinnie ponders all this and after he's finished his chores, goes into the Cop Shop. His callers are both there. Dinnie, reverting to his King's Cross days, is carrying a brand new ten inch crescent in his back pocket, in case he needs a weapon. Harry at the Cross always says the fuzz can never ascribe evil intent to anyone carrying a crescent. It's not like a gun or a knife or a cosh, but it can be a life saver in certain circumstances.

"Good morning," Dinnie says. "I believe you were looking for me."

"Ah," says the big cop. "You are under arrest for the rape and bashing of Althea Hoyle. Her father, Mr Edward Hoyle, has laid the complaint."

Dinnie laughs. "Terrible Ted," he says. "What nonsense is he on about? Althea was in fine shape and form when we parted last night. Is she seriously hurt?"

"Ah," says the huge cop. "That's for me to know and you to find out. Cuff him constable and read him the caution. Take him into the back room – we don't want to provide talking points for the town passers-by."

Dinnie pulls the cuffs out of Larry's hand and throws them down the yard.

"I don't mind walking in. You've certainly got my curiosity aroused," he says and steps into the station. The big copper shuts the public door.

"Take him out back, Larry," he says. "He's all yours for ten minutes."

Dinnie's hardly in the door of the back room, when the copper has his nightstick out and is viciously swinging at him. Dinnie whips out his Dowidat crescent and smashes the cop's collarbone with it. Constable Larry's momentum is checked a bit and he crashes his head onto the corner of the laminex table and crashes to the floor of the room. In the flash of an eye, Dinnie wipes his prints off the crescent and drops it into an open japanned map case, standing amongst others in an open-topped drum container. He's clear of this when the sergeant arrives.

"What have you done?" he ejaculates.

"This bastard missed his swing," Dinnie says, off the cuff. "Hit his head as he went down I think."

They roll him over; it's quite a gash and bleeding. The big cop rings the ambulance. Larry gets carted away and Dinnie gets locked up. By lunch time, the copper has shown no signs of coming around and Dinnie is working on getting legal help.

At the first bounce this has to be Patrick, the local solicitor, who is currently attending to settlement on Smallpaige's for them. Patrick comes around within the hour. He's an unusual solicitor; he doesn't chase ambulances, he's actually a St John Volunteer. He has come via the hospital.

“Not good,” he tells Dinnie. “They’ve got Larry at Tamworth Hospital; flew him straight down. Bertie Thompson went down with him. They expect the worst, no less.”

“What chance of getting me out, Patrick?” Dinnie asks.

“Ah,” he replies. “Buckleys. They’re charging you with GBH with a possible upgrade. They’ll probably stash you in Tamworth Gaol next. Do you want to tell me the whole story?”

“Not at all,” says Dinnie. “I need you to play hardball on the mechanics of the charges, Patrick. I’ve got a friendly silk you can brief later, if it shapes that way.”

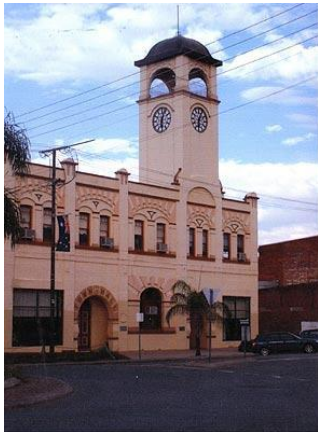
“Okay,” he says. He hesitates and slips a flask of French brandy out of his briefcase. Dinnie palms it. “Thanks mate,” he says.

Dinnie has been wildly hoping that the interview with Patrick would be in the back room, thus he may have been able to get his crescent wrench away from the scene. However, it’s really a crime scene now and his hope is a faint one.

Monday is a busy day at Gunnedah police station. Dinnie hauls himself up by his cell bars and notes the comings and goings. Patrick Baxter comes around to talk.

“You have friends, Dinnie,” he says. “Mr Parsons was in first thing this morning. He has volunteered bail and a surety if you get the offer. I told him it could be huge. ‘No matter,’ he said. ‘Just get him out if you can.’ They also want to come and see you, but the cops won’t budge yet.”

Another car can be heard pulling in and Dinnie levers himself up to see who this is and rather wishes he hadn’t. Frank Naughton, in uniform splendour all the way from Sydney, arrives along and stays and stays. Late afternoon, Patrick is back again.



“Bad news, Dinnie,” he says. “Constable Larry has fallen at the big fence. They’re going to arraign you in Gunnedah Court tomorrow – wilful murder.”

It’s probably an unsustainable ploy, Dinnie thinks, but it will certainly keep him out of circulation. But it doesn’t. Somebody somewhere pulls a very big string that very afternoon and he gets bailed for \$700,000; put up in equal parts by the Parsons, Dinnie’s Dad and a Sydney Solicitor – who does this on his ‘Pat Malone’. Without doubt, Saffy Waldron is carrying the can for the Sydney third. Patrick warns Dinnie that his liberty may be short lived.

“There’s an Affidavit around that may surface. I can’t talk about it as it was sworn in front of me, but I expect it to surface, so make the most of your free time,” he says.

So Dinnie does. He picks up Amity and takes her to the next Curlewis dance. Along the way, he pulls up, tips some orange juice into a paper cup and laces it with Smirnoff Vodka. She downs a couple of shots of this and asks for more. Dinnie laughs. “I can’t get you along to the Hall as drunk as a fiddler’s bitch,” he says. “This is just a fine line to lessen tensions and inhibition and to get you dancing.”

“My Dinnie,” Amity says. “You have a colourful turn of phrase and you serve spirited drinks. It’s not every day I get an alleged murderer and rapist to take me out. Did you rape her? Did you kill the constable?”

It’s the first heart to heart they’ve had.

“I certainly had consensual sex with her,” Dinnie says. “But the copper really killed himself.” (he doesn’t mention the bit of help he gave). There’s a bit of silence.

“What was she like?” she asks.

“Hmmm,” Dinnie says. “I have to admit.....it was like licking a chocolate coated double ice cream.”

“Hmmm,” she says. “What a turn on. Do you fancy a full on cuddle?”

“Of course,” he says. “But I think I’ll get you to the dance.”

“Only after another snort,” she says.

The nights a great success. Dinnie greases the orchestra palms a bit and the MC, who is a band member, runs not only a flirtation barn dance, but unusually, a flirtation quickstep. This is the best possible programme to get Amity into the swim with a lot of different partners and she’s quite a success. Dinnie has worded up her Dad to pick her up at the Hall at dance end.

“There’s no need,” old Parsons says. “We trust you. You can bring her home.”

“Ah, not a good idea,” Dinnie says. “We’re about launching the girl. I mustn’t spoil her chances by smothering her, besides I’m under a dark cloud.”

To Amity he says, “Someone is bound to ask to take you home. My advice at this early stage is just to dimple up and blush and say something like – Thank you young sir, dad’s calling to get me; perhaps another time? In short,” Dinnie continues. “If the chap appeals to you leave the door open.”

His liberty is short lived. In closed session, the police sergeant produces the affidavit from the late constable, swearing that Dinnie threatened him with a tomahawk on police premises. It doesn’t mention the fact that it was a challenge and that Dinnie knew full well the copper would duck it. Only the week before, the local paper had carried an article on Dinnie reaching the semi-finals for Olympic selection for the fencing discipline about a year back. A chap from La Trobe University headed Dinnie off in the final.

He gets a few visitors in the Gunnedah holding cells. The sergeant allows them to talk to Dinnie on site and with other original Australians in ear shot in the next cells.

“I need to talk privately,” Dinnie says.

“In that case,” the big copper says. “We’ll wrist and ankle chain you, thus you can talk in the yard.”

Dinnie hasn’t given anyone an account of what has happened. He recalls Harry’s advice – ‘don’t talk to cops, always have your lawyers present if they want to talk to you, say nothing until you absolutely have to, say very little when you do.’ He gives sergeant Bill a steely gaze.

“Just at the moment, you have me dead to rights, but I won’t always be locked up. As sure as God made little apples, you’ll be square in my sights somewhere, sometime.”

The big cop holds his gaze; buckles a bit. “Alright,” he says. “Given precautions that don’t leave me derelict in my duty, you can talk outside.” He gets a relief copper with a pump shotgun to stand guard duty.

Staunch old Harry comes up from Sydney. Richard Allen QC has been told by Saffy to defend him and he comes up for the plane ride. ‘Tricky Dickie’ is one of the leading lights of the Sydney Bar and is heavy legal metal. Dinnie, many times in the past, has lent out dosh to Dicky and once in a while, if it’s a slow night, he taxis around a couple of plump chickens to give Dicky a good time. Well, Dinnie always says, if these beauties are underemployed, they might as well be covering some of Saffy’s legal bills in advance.

Dickie is carrying a flat silver flask and he produces shot glasses and they down a few shooters. The shotgun guard sees this, but doesn’t flinch. He says,

“Lean forward as you talk, Dinnie, and turn your head. If Frank Naughton has been up here, they may have a boom mike tuned up. By the way,” he continues.

“Word is that if sergeant Bill gets you good gaol time, he’s been promised the head job in the Liquor Control section at headquarters.”

“Hmmm,” says Dinnie. “Well, this is the jackenory.”

Dickie listens closely and gives an opinion or two.

“Oh,” he says. “The Hoyle girl seems to have run into bad company after she left you. She went adventuring further and got into a nasty little party at Anzac Park. A couple of Vietnam Vets were in the area and they’ll get you off the hook there. About the copper,” he continues. “If you wiped that wrench as well as you said, you should get out of that too. I don’t think you have much to worry about, but watch yourself in Tamworth Gaol, as they plan to transfer you there until the trial comes up.”

They decide not to reattempt bail, so Dinnie sits it out without incident at Tamworth. They empanel a Gunnedah jury and there’s only one surprise in this. Dinnie has been close up and personal with a young school teacher in his high school days. She’s a surprise packet and disrobes Dinnie in the school darkroom during a photography session. She is very purposeful.

“You know, Dinnie,” she says. “You’re just like that chap in Somerset Maugham’s story, ‘Up at the Villa’. Like Rudy of the story, you have distinct sex appeal.”

Space is very limited in the darkroom, which is in one of the school towers. Thus they have to be very, very innovative to create the necessary room to move. It is pretty mindboggling and quite intense. When Dinnie went off to Sydney, Joan married a local farmer, but since he got back, she has left the door open for him on Masonic Lodge nights. They continue to run along like a house on fire; a very intensive house on fire.

Anyway, she’s on the jury; obviously word of their long liaison has never gotten out, they certainly took every step they could to keep it that way. Dinnie knows that whatever the result, he will be aware of those for him and those against him. That’s something to really think about. The trial gets under way. The QC is beautifully dressed and confident, but Dinnie’s world falls over in the prosecutions opening statement. They have brought up Amanda Stone, their top person in New South Wales, for this job.

They table exhibit one, the murder weapon. Dinnie expects this to be the shiny new and printless Dowidat crescent and mentally sneers at what he expects them to produce. However, it isn’t. It’s surely a ten inch crescent wrench, but it is an old, much used one that Dinnie recognises from the tool rack at the pump shed. It’s a wrench he and his dad use regularly in bleeding air out of the big Stalker pump that waters the orchard. He immediately realises that things have gone uphill and he also clearly sees why Frank Naughton spent so much time with the big sergeant. These beggars have well and truly stitched him up.

The Prosecution continues to outline their case and run through it by lunchtime. Dickie, Patrick and Dinnie huddle for the lunch period. The inspired evidence has thrown Dickie. He sucks his teeth.

“I think, Dinnie,” he says. “We won’t put you in the dock. It’s probably best to go with an unsworn statement and see what happens. If the finding is against you, we’ll file an appeal and allege police conspiracy. If I jump up and down now and they throw my argument out, it really knocks the stuffing out of a very good appeal situation. I really can’t let you in the box to be Aunt Sally to the allegations they will raise about the busted collarbone.”

It’s a complex situation, but they have to go with it. Thus they push on and the whole thing wraps up by 3pm next day and the jury retire. While the waiting is on,

one of the juror's sons comes over to talk to Dickie. It's the son of Arthur Harris, the hardware dealer. The essence of what he wants to know is, if Dinnie goes down will he see this as a normal course of law or will he carry a grudge into incarceration. This chap, of course, can't talk to Dinnie other than through council. Dinnie, advised by Dickie, sends back the message that his memory will be that of the elephant. The son, of course, is fearful for his dad's long term welfare and the question is a fair one. The answer is a tough one – there will plainly be no 'forgive and forget'.

They're out for two and a bit days; don't come back to the judge for any further clarification and finally decide. Dinnie gets seven years, but with parole after five. They hold him in Tamworth, before deciding where he will serve his time. Harry gets in to see him there.

"We're marking time until they decide the gaol," he says. "But we're not wasting time. We have ground scouts out."

The law decides on the maximum security bit at Long Bay and sets a date for the transfer. Harry comes back to counsel him.

"This is bad news, Dinnie," he says. "Because the senior copper has it in for you, the screws at Long Bay may be inclined to oblige him; at your personal and physical cost."

Part II

At the Long Bay Correctional Facility the warders push Dinnie into a two person cell. A very big shaven-skulled man is lying on the bottom bunk. Dinnie twigs him right away; it's Suave Sam, about whom he has been warned.

Before the warder has finished locking the door, big Sam, moving like the predator that he is, softly puts his hand on Dinnie's shoulder. 'It's now or never,' Dinnie thinks. He grabs the big bloke's upper arm and runs him head-on into the cell door; he pulls him back and starts bashing his head against the bars. Suave Sam is astonished and is already damaged by the repeated impact. He bellows like a bull. Dinnie now drags him back a fair way and really runs him head-on into the bars again. Sam sounds off with an anguished yodel that alerts the block. Dinnie chops him across the windpipe and lets out a piercing and blood-curdling yell. He's done enough he thinks so he can play act a bit now. He starts yelling and screaming and the warders come on the run. They open up and slash at Dinnie with their truncheons. He rides these hits on his arms, but ducks and dives a bit to keep up an explosive front. They drag Suave Sam, now bleeding and senseless, out of the cell and lock it.

A paramedic comes on the run and they get to resuscitating the big chap; he hasn't moved a muscle when they take him away on a gurney. He's a dead weight and the carriers curse at Dinnie.

"Jesus, Dude," the chap in the next cell says. "That was a good effort, just the right thing to do with that smooth pervert."

Things settle down in the cell tiers and Dinnie scabs the big chap's pillow and blankets and makes himself comfortable for what he hopes will be an undisturbed night.

We can now transfer our attention to Akbar Youab. This chap's a smart and larcenous Pakistani. He got into England among a big load of Belgian cabbages, walked Kensal Green Cemetery for a date that fits in, takes his name to a pre-advised address and emerges with a shonky passport and courier driver's license. He works in England for about a year and migrates, quite legally, to Australia. These

days, he lives with his wife, who he sent for, and two children in a narrow-fronted house in Bankstown. He drives for Courier National and runs from the city to Parramatta many times each day.

Tonight's his night out on the town. He's wearing white sharkskin trousers, smart Italian soft leather shoes and his shirt is a beige silk one, well open and he wears several gold chains and a big medallion. To settle any doubt, he's rouged his cheeks a bit and with a dash of lip gloss, there is no mistaking him for what he is. He's downing a Bloody Mary and looking over the talent in yet another of Saffy Waldron's many sleazy bars. This one is a gay one, of course.

A big chap, with a dreadful puckered scar on his face comes over; he's well-dressed in a conventional way.

"Ah, Akbar," he says. "You've left the lights on in your Courier National van."

"Never," says Akbar.

"Well, you have," he says. "Best go out and douse them or you'll be ringing the RAC to get you from outside Dismal Jimmy's. I'll walk out with you, just to show I'm dinkum." Akbar is quick, but in this case, not quick enough.

"How, pray, do you know me?" he asks.

"Ah," the chap says. "I work in Challenge Bank in Parramatta. You're always there in the undercroft loading and unloading."

Thus reassured, Akbar walks along to where he's parked his van. The lights are indeed on and the back doors are open. He instantly smells a rat, but doesn't get away. Three huge chaps, like bikies, wearing balaclavas grab him. One holds him and the other two pick up a long rough box and slide it into his van.

"Now, mate," they say. "Take this to 1118 Alma Drive in Grays Point. Back into the driveway, slide this straight onto their front verandah. Do it quickly and efficiently. Bear in mind the place has CCTV, so the plod will be along sooner or later. Just tell them exactly what happened – that you were fearful of harm and such and such and so forth. There's nothing dangerous or incendiary in the long box, it's all dead safe. Now, don't dud us as we have something under your van to ensure you go to Grays Point." One of them continues, "Here's \$500 to cover you and my advice would be to put it in your sock before you drive away. I wouldn't come back here tonight if I were you."

Akbar takes off on his errand. The bikies depart and the big chap goes on his way, stopping only at a pub toilet to remove the scar from his face with a small bottle of dry cleaning fluid.

At around 4am, Dinnie is sleeping peacefully, when keys rattle in the cell door. The inhabitants of the block, at least those awake, start cat calling the three warders on the scene. One of the warders goes out and smacks at hands extending through the bars, with his night stick. They now turn on Dinnie.

"Out," they say. "The Governor wants you."

They walk him carefully right through the prison to the head man's office; quite plush and executive-looking, by the way. The room is full of people – detectives, he thinks. They are suited up in cheap suits and have that hard look about them. The best dressed one says,

"What have you done with him?"

"What are you talking about?" Dinnie says.

"The Governor's son," the copper says. "He's been abducted." Dinnie laughs.

"You're not serious!" he says. "I've been under lock and key here since I arrived. Before that, I was in Gunnedah nick and I came here in a police van. The Governor now speaks; he's wearing a suit without a tie, is unshaven and his eyes are full of concern."

"I'll level with you, Faithful," he says. "My son was abducted after his rugby match late afternoon and a Catholic priest has been in touch, with a note left on his porch in unusual circumstances. Someone set off a flare to announce its arrival."

"What does the note say?" Dinnie curiously asks. He is of course, immediately aware that his old friends in Kings Cross are on the help trail.

"The message says, that if you are transferred to a prison farm today, my son will be left at the Archibald Fountain this evening." Dinnie chuckles.

"Well, I'm ready to go to a prison farm," he says. "Right now.....I didn't much appreciate being penned with the most noted sex offender in H Block and I expect you have someone worse to put in with me next. What happens if you don't transfer me?"

The Governor says, "Failing that, they say they will leave his ears on the priest's porch."

Dinnie looks the Governor in the eye. "It seems that there is much to be gained and little lost if you do what the note says. That is, if you have the power to effect the transfer."

"Of course I have," the Governor says. "But what will the press and the Police Commissioner say?"

"If I had a son in these circumstances," Dinnie says. "I would just quietly comply. Life isn't that long and I wouldn't want to torture myself every minute of every day for just standing on my dig and losing a son."

"Can you assure me, you had nothing to do with this?"

"Absolutely," Dinnie says. "Now can you assure me, that if I'm in the confines of a prison farm when you pick up your son from the Archibald Fountain this evening that you will sit a security man outside my door to discourage any of your alleged mates coming after me?"

"Wait outside," the smooth suited one says. The Governor adds,

"By God, my family and I are petrified. My son went off to his sport, doesn't come home and this evening, a National Courier driver – we'll have that bastard in shortly – drops a coffin-like box on my front verandah, then, without a by my leave, drives away."

"What was in the box?" Dinnie asks.

The Governor gulps, "Not what we thought it was when we saw it and eventually hacked the bloody thing open."

"Gawd," says Dinnie. "You were brave to do that; I would have called for help."

"Not with an hysterical wife standing alongside you," the Governor says. "Anyway the contents were, a back to school store window dummy dressed in everything he left home in, including his safety beacon – absolutely everything. Somewhat naturally we all went to water and here we are."

Dinnie is amazed that the governor is levelling with him. He clearly sees that while there may be a bit of back and forth, they will certainly buckle. While it's unusual for coppers, they have clearly grasped that time is of the essence in this matter. It takes about half an hour. The smooth suited cop comes out with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"It seems that when we check you into the farm, we have to paint a slogan on the Coathanger pylon, ocean side. We have a painter standing by. We are going to do this, but we would like some indication from you, the beneficiary of our action, of who is behind the action. It seems you have vengeful friends, very vengeful friends."

"What's the message?" Dinnie asks.

The copper says, "INFINITY."

It's a familiar message around Sydney Town, of course, everyone in Australia knows about this enigmatic slogan. While Dinnie has a fair idea of who's pulling the strings, all he says in response to the cop's query is,

"No idea, but let's get on with it."

By daylight, Dinnie is being checked into the Fourteen Mile Prison Farm, and true to their word, a security man from the prison contractors is seated outside his hut. He's hardly settled into his quite nice new quarters, when there's another huge stir. Frank Naughton comes in wearing a Drizabone coat over pyjamas and slippers.

"You bastard," he says. "You've blown my house up."

"Indeed, I haven't," Dinnie says. "Was anyone hurt?"

"Nooo..," Naughton replied. "Someone rang in using the IRA code; first time it's been used since the Hilton Hotel bomb blast, but we knew it was dinkum, so we cut and ran."

"Okay," says Dinnie. "That saves me moving the Redfern mob back in to compensate me for your rude visit here."

What Naughton is doing is just reflex action. He well knows that Dinnie will tell him nothing, it's just bluster and a substitute for action.

Dinnie says, "Frank, I know the reason I'm here at all is something to do with you and sergeant Bill up at Gunnedah. I'll tell you what I told the sergeant. Just at the moment, you've got me dead to rights. As sure as God made little apples, you'll be square in my sights – somewhere, sometime. Time is on my side, not yours."

"Ah," says Naughton. "You won't be out of here for a while and if I have anything to do with it, you'll be back in the Long Bay tiers by Saturday."

"Ha," says Dinnie. "In that case, you may not be around on Sunday."

Naughton jumps up and down. "That's a threat," he says. "That's a threat."

Dinnie grins a not so good natured grin.

"Ah, Frank," he says. "Don't ever confuse threats with promises."

On Tuesday morning, Dinnie is called into the Manager's office. He stands at attention while the Governor/Manager gives him a good up and down look.

"Belay that," he says. "Take a seat. Black coffee or white?"

The office girl brings this in. The chap offers a pick of a Panatella box and some tapers. They both light up, puff and sit back.

"Sir," says Dinnie. "I've had an unsettling time in the system. This is very nice of you." The man laughs.

"This is not a hard case camp," he says. "If you're here, you're not a hard case. However, from the pressures on me to get you back into Long Bay or Pentridge, you've touched a lot of nerves. If they get their way, I certainly don't want you thinking I was a party to it. I certainly don't want my daughters disappearing and have shop window models turn up in lieu. God, what an effective ploy!"

"Not my doing, Sir," Dinnie says.

"I didn't say it was. I know you to be a Gunnedah farmer's son and I know you lodged in Kings Cross while at uni. It's to your credit you have developed friends with very long arms, who have clearly indicated that they will continue to do combat for you. I can't determine the final outcome," he continues. "But I read a bit of history. It didn't do the Governor of the gaol any harm in the long run, to make Oscar Wilde's life a tad easier. It would be tempting and quite easy for your friends to spirit you out of here, but I advise against it. There are so many ups and downs in your conviction, that my gut feeling is that your sentence will be quashed on appeal. Mind you, it's a gut feeling, but I'm reliably told that your silk - and he's top of the Wazar - is bringing along Broadbent, QC Broadbent himself, as junior council. What judge could take on

that pair with confidence? It would be like playing golf against Tiger Woods and Greg Norman combined.” They chuckle and finish their cigars.

“Within reason,” the Governor says. “Sing out for what you want. You are entitled to conjugal, so if your girlfriends want to call.....”

On Thursday, the block warden chucks Dinnie a cake of decent soap and a fresh light weight track suit, with 14 Mile stencilled on it.

“Spruce up, mate.” he says. “You have a conjugal visitor at 2pm in Unit 14.”

‘Cripes,’ thinks Dinnie. ‘Who the hell is this? Perhaps Sally Wilson, perhaps Amity, perhaps Joan the juror, perhaps Elanour herself. One thing for sure, it won’t be the Hoyle girl. She seems to have left the country and the rape case has disappeared with her.’

At 2pm, he’s at the conjugal point and Joan the juror swings in. She’s wearing sling back heeled sandals, a pair of long tan shorts and a striped blouse. She looks a million dollars – all six foot one inch of her.

“Hi Dinnie,” she says. “I’ve got cake and grapes and the Sydney Morning Herald featuring you, in my bag, which your guardians have just cased and passed.”

“Jeez, Joan,” Dinnie says. “You have to sign in to get in here I’m told and if you’ve signed to get in here and have had to present ID, (“Yes, I have,” she says, “photographic ID.”) it will get back to sergeant Bill in Gunnedah, who will undoubtedly peddle out to your farm and husband.”

“No worries, Dinnie,” she says. “I have much to discuss with you and Kevin understands that the only way to get adequate time, is to pretend to conjugate. Why don’t you climb out of your gear and we’ll make a start. It’s a very long time between Masonic Lodge meetings.”

They’re having a breather, when there is a gentle knock on the door. Joan springs up, opens the door a crack and then wide. A hut warden comes in, eyes totally goggling at this 6ft nude girls waving him in. Dinnie pulls the thin blanket over his head. The man puts a tray, with two glasses and a bottle of champagne, on the coffee table. “Compliments of the warden,” he says; leers at Joan and departs.

“For Chrissake, Joan, why did you do that?” She laughs.

“Dinnie, you are a legend in things that matter. Why shouldn’t I add to your fame? Now,” she continues. “Let’s skol this champers before we get back to funny business and discuss jury business.” They clink glasses.

“Fire away,” he says.

“Well, Ted Hoyle swung the jury. I did my best to head them off and to extend the discussion in the hope of a better verdict. I used an unascrbed small book called, ‘How to Obfuscate, Distort and Change a Jury Deliberation’. Once I was on the panel, just to be safe, I got a copy of this from Toby Mathias, himself a lawyer and a Hamilton Land Finance man. He’s financed the last two blocks we’ve bought. His uncle is Auguste Mathias, Attorney General for Victoria, and I think he wrote this book anonymously. I argued with my peers every step of the way, but the votes taken on day one were no different to those taken on day two and a bit. The hanging group were John Harris, the hardware man, much patronised by the Hoyles; Allen Krogdahl, the seed cleaner, does all of Hoyles work; Arthur Reeves, the stock and station man, also deep in with the Hoyles; Mervyn McCloskey, who runs Gunnedah Dry Cleaners and Laundry and Tamworth Dry Cleaners, he’s the secretary of Rotary, Ted Hoyle is the President. Also Merrilyn Hoban, a right bitch, who runs the Meditational Retreat and Health Centre based on land at Ryder’s Gully owned by the Hoyles; and of course, your Jewish mate, Solly Stanley, who keeps the Hoyle books.”

In retrospect, it was just so obvious. Since the rape case seems to have disappeared and the copper murder charge is now up front and centre, Hoyle's close connection to this whole matter was sort of overlooked, sort of.

"Now, Dinnie," she says. "I have faith that Jesus and Mary will, I'm sure, get you out of this holiday home and back to work. In the meantime, I'm here to make up for my missing oats. Let's see you get cracking, time is sort of running out."

After Joan goes, the hut warden comes in and sends Dinnie back to his quarters. He lies on his bunk; all tensions dissipated and plans retribution on the ones that voted him into the prison system. Quite a few ideas pop up.

The Manager talks to him again the next day; says, technically he should be allocated a job, but for the moment, pending the expected appeal, he will make him assistant librarian and give him the run of this, and any problems to let him know. Dinnie thanks the man.

"If I get out of this mess, Governor," he says. "I hope you will visit the farm in mushroom picking season."

There's a gap of a few days, during which someone, somewhere, follows up the cementing of Naughton's house with a blast in Gunnedah that incinerates sergeant Bill's car. This is, of course, not going to achieve anything, but the managers of the retribution think it's not a bad idea to let this big mean copper know that things can swing either way at any time. The papers don't make much of this incident; somewhat to Dinnie's surprise.

Things now move into appeal mode in the Supreme Court. The A team of tricky Dicky QC and his co-legal eagle, Julius Broadbent QC, play tag with the Crown Law team. For reasons completely unknown, but much guessed at, the Police team is not a top drawer one. After much argument back and forth and screaming headlines in the Sydney Morning Herald about police conspiracy, the Court thankfully adjourns proceedings to consider their verdict. Before they go however, Dinnie's team put up a strong case to grant him bail, pending what will probably be a long wait for the outcome. It's immediately granted. The police effort to stop this happening is, at best, only half-hearted.

Dinnie, Harry and Saffy have a nice little lunch next day in complete privacy in the small Catching Pen bar. Elanour serves up a lobster lunch and champagne.

Dinnie says to Saffy, "It's early days yet, but I'm optimistic and I owe you a lot."

"You surely do," says Saffy. "I don't think there's any chance of you returning to the logs, thus I need another years work out of you. I'll pay you well and write off the case costs over that year."

"Doing what?" Dinnie asks.

"Structuring finance," Saffy replies. He looks hard at Harry. "When we finish lunch, Harry, I'm sure you have things to do."

They finish a very excellent meal on mulberry pie and whipped cream, washed down by a coffee and a calvados that is older than Dinnie. Harry takes his leave. He also dismisses Elanour and the barman for the afternoon and Tommy Fothersgill, one of the best of the bouncers, remains vigilantly in the bar lobby to keep intruders out. Saffy produces a long paper.

"First," he says. "I know you are anxious about seeding time at the farm. What exactly are your problems there?"

Dinnie outlines that they borrowed to buy Smallpaiges; that money will be rolling in soon from land sales of the back blocks of Almond Grove for a meatworks, but they have to clear up some brumby cleared country to get a cash crop in. Saffy enquires into their financing.

“Eastpac Bank,” Dinnie says. Saffy sucks his teeth.

“We’ll get a contractor in to push up the timber,” he says. “And a work gang to start burning and a share farmer to put the crop in. Can this be done?”

“Hmmm,” Dinnie says. “It’ll cost, as we budgeted our own work.”

“Oh,” says Saffy. “I’ll organise for Eastpac to change you to an evergreen, no interest loan to soften the purchase and the cleaning up.”

“You can do that?” Dinnie asks in some surprise.

“Oh,” says Saffy. “I can’t, but my very good friend, the Rev Bernard Cawley, who seems to have just taken over Eastpac Bank by means best not talked about, will see it all through. Your interest and repayments will stop in, say, seven days, by which time your cleanup and cropping money will become available. Now, does that sort you for the moment?”

“Christ, yes.” Dinnie says. “Now what do you want from me?”

“Well,” says Saffy. “The new and bloody tough drug laws in West Australia, where they lock up drug associated people and confiscate their assets, will be introduced here in the run up to the next election. The Premier thinks they will shoe-horn it through. Thus, I have to think ahead. You can’t be in nightclubs and not retail drugs. In any case, the money is so ludicrously immense; it’s quite indecent really. AND IT’S ALL IN CASH MONEY!”

Dinnie well knows from the increased and quite huge step up of money going into Saffy’s safe and over the sea to Port Moresby that it all has to be drugs.

“I’m reaching the sere and yellow stage, Dinnie,” he says. “I want to put a fence around my cash while I can. You are about the only person I’m prepared to trust on this, but to be honest, the flow chart is devised by Professor Dozey, who is very smart and larcenous at heart. I take his advice; it’s always brilliant, but I wouldn’t trust him with a penny of my dosh. Now, let’s get the preliminary work under way and have your passport ready as soon as the cops give it back to you, to set out for Swiss land.”

“To do what?” Dinnie asks.

“Just read this and then we’ll burn it,” Saffy says. “It’s in Dozey’s handwriting, by the way, so you’ll have to read hard to interpret his fly scrawl.”

Dinnie doesn’t even get back to Gunnedah. Harry organises a small plane run to bring his Dad down to Moss Vale for lunch and to spell out the new arrangements (subject that is, to Dinnie staying out of gaol). Old Tim is a bit gobsmacked, but Dinnie assures him he’ll be back full-time on Smallpaige’s, the seeding after this. They part amicably. Old Tim shakes his head.

“Gawd, Dinnie,” he says. “You’re swimming in a shark infested pool, but I’m sure you know what you’re doing.”

The High Court bench returns to present their findings. The media are there in droves. One says, ‘I’ve never seen so many people in such expensive suits’. Dinnie is amongst them in a very fine and splendid suit from Pardoes; it’s a beautiful Anthony Squires. It all takes just twelve minutes. They quash his conviction and direct the matter of police conspiracy be brought to the attention of the Corruption and Crime Commission for investigation and appropriate action.

Dinnie flies up to Port Moresby the next day and from there to Basle, Switzerland. It, at least and at last, gets him away from the media scrum. He spends the next four months in Europe; buys for Saffy a nice apartment on the Avenue Montaigne in Paris and makes very deep money arrangements that even Sherlock Holmes would never get a clear handle on. He knows Saffy has a cash mountain in Basle, but he doesn’t realise he’s only seen the foothills, not the main range. He

goes on to England and returns home via the USA. He chases and gets a bit of farming gear for Gunnedah that should put him in front of the local farming pack.

Back in Sydney, he doesn't even get home before he's up to his eyes in further steps in the liquidation of Saffy's empire. The sleaze bars they sell to the Lebanese; they get a huge amount of upfront money. Elkins, they syndicate privately around the traps and get even more. Saffy's real estate, Dinnie thinks, is safe enough and he just organises the purchase of a beautiful home on the hill overlooking Terrigal, again for Saffy. He then has second thoughts and at some expense, he transfers key real estate holdings into the names of Saffy's Luxembourg companies and the Terrigal house goes into a Channel Islands company. This all takes time, but he wraps it up and is free and clear of Sydney for Christmas, which he spends relaxing at the farm and driving a semi-trailer carting in wheat to the Bins.

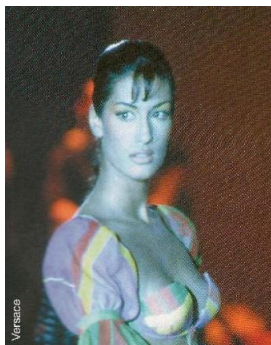
Things have changed at Gunnedah. Joan has produced a son; he's probably a prison conceived one, she tells Dinnie in a secret session at Dinnie's wool shed. Sally is overjoyed to see him and Amity gives him a huge hug. She is going very steady with Athol Timms, the son of a nearby farming family.

"We'll probably marry, Dinnie," she says. "Unless that is, you want to buy back in. I've held over on saying yes until I've seen you. It's all your doing that things have gone so well."

"Oh," says Dinnie. "You always had the potential; I just assisted into getting it into the open."

Amity continues, "Time is on my side. Don't decide anything now, just think about it. I'm yours if you want. You have never, like the others, despised me. I'm on my way to coming into my kingdom and I'm more than happy to share it with you."

The long break from Gunnedah has given time for Dinnie to think things through and he's now ready to make life an absolute misery for the six local business



people, who with intent and with a desire to please old Teddy Hoyle put him in gaol. He peddles over to Siobhan Sullivan's farm. Siobhan is star quality, over six feet tall, looks like a Versace model and has been so busy building up her farming interests and doing a part-time degree at Armidale University, that she has never been seen out socially with a man. As far as the district knows, she has a standard answer for those wanting to get up close and personal to her. It's 'Come back in 10 years fellas. I just have no time at the moment for what you have in mind'. They all seem to take it in good part, which illustrates how pleasant and well balanced this outstanding girl is. She's out

deadheading a stunning bed of Delberd roses.

"Hi, Dinnie," she says. "When can we expect the first shots of your civil war with fucking Ted Hoyle – bastard that he is?"

Dinnie knows the history of the Sullivan – Hoyle war a while back. She is the reason why old Ted looks a bit lopsided. In a fight on the railway embankment, she whipped a big chunk out of one earlobe with a flick knife. It gives old Teddy a sort of lopsided look.

"Well, Sib, you're about the only one around that went a round or two with Teddy and came out the winner."

"I do have a very good idea," she says. "Does your Dad still have that little roan scrub bull you caught with doped oats out on the water reserve?"

Dinnie laughs. "I expected him to have long gone to the butchers," he says. "But Dad says that little roany is only little because he was orphaned and feed

deprived as a calf. Damn me, he's right. He throws good calves, all of them roan. Strong genes, Dad says."

"Just the ticket," Siobhan says. "Here's an idea for you; but first we have to retrain the bull."

Dinnie floats the little bloke over to Siobhan's horse stalls and they train him to come to a silent whistle for food rewards. This little bull, due to his deprived calfhood, is a real guts and soon they can bring him up to them on the run, night or day, in any paddock they try, on response to a whistle; usually only connected with dog training. They run him with a head collar and he has, of course, a ring in his nose. He is simple to handle provided you watch his sharp and pointy little horns when he tosses his head. After a few days, they take him over to the 1000 acre block Siobhan owns adjoining Hoyles back paddock.

"He's got a big mob of absolutely beautiful stud Hereford heifers down here," Siobhan says. "They're coming into season each day. You can hear them yelling for it."

"Why hasn't he mated them?" Dinnie asks.

"Oh..., he's waiting on a new and very expensive stud bull from Roseworthy. God," she says. "It would gladden my cold little heart if we can mate a good few of them before the new bull arrives. Just imagine fat Teddy's jowly old face when he sees his top of the range heifers dropping roan scrub bull calves here and there."

Dinnie laughs. "Well, Sib, there's nothing like a scrub bull to service a heifer before she really knows what's going on."

Siobhan knows a fair bit about Teddy and his good bulls. At the height of her war with Hoyle, in her high school days, she walked over to his home yards, seven miles as the crow flies, poisoned his mean bull with dampened bran and made his prize winning one too sick to be taken to the Sydney Easter Show.

That night after dark, they lead the roan bull over a bit of deadfall fence and he trots smartly off in the direction of the heifers, sniffing the breeze.

"Well, Dinnie," Siobhan says. "There's a few beds up at Smiths old shearers' quarters and I've lit the drum heater. Let's go up and have a shower and see what develops."

"Gawd, Sib," he says. "What a suggestion!" He can feel her wide grin in the dark, but he says, "I've been doing a bit of singing and dancing in Sydney."

"Ah, yes," she says. "And here too; our Sally says you are the most exciting thing since sliced bread. We can't get an opinion out of that Hoyle girl who has disappeared from the landscape and we have resisted asking Amity who, we fear, is yet to hear what it's all about."

"Well.....," he says as they go into the old shearers' quarters showers in the dark. (there's no power at this isolated block) "Is this a first time?"

He can feel her silent laughter as he soaps her back.

"Mayhap, Dinnie," she says. "That we concentrate on the here and now and get on with things."

By about 4am, they are out in the paddocks, a bit groggily, but the roan bull comes up on the run to the silent whistle. They walk him over the deadfall and back to the farm sheds where they give him a good feed of oats and meadow hay.

"Hmmm," Dinnie says to Sib as they look at the roan in the dawn light. "He looks all shagged out; so am I."

"No way," the girl says. "I'll cook you up some eggs and bacon back at the house and we'll get a bit of kip and see what other surprises you can produce. Just at this stage, one-legged Johnny is leading the field of performers."

They let the roan bull in every night for ten nights and having pushed their luck a bit, Dinnie floats him back to Almond Grove.

"Best to remove the crim from the crime scene," Siobhan laughs.

Next afternoon, she blows into Almond Grove.

"Gawd, Dinnie," she says. "I'm the most contained person ever, but I'm bloody missing you already."

Dinnie brews up a cuppa.

"Who's next on your hit list?" she asks.

"Ah....Harris the Hardware man. Got any ideas?"

"Yes," she says. "Do you know a computer hacker?"

"The very best," Dinnie says. "What do you have in mind?"

She tells him. He chuckles.

"God, you're smart," he says. "Let's go to Sydney for five days."

"To do what?"

"Well....to hack into the hacker, to go dancing...."

"Can't dance," she says.

"And dine out...."

"Never dined out," she says. "Never been to Sydney."

"Ah, well," Dinnie says. "We'll go to Mass at St Mary's."

"You've won me," the girl says. "By the way, who waved the fairy godmother's wand over Amity Parsons and turned her from a teal duck into a swan?"

"You'll get to meet them," Dinnie says.

"What do I bring?" she asks.

"Nothing," he replies. "We'll stock you up down there."

Dinnie wants Siobhan to meet his friends, but only some of them. Good old Elanour gets Siobhan up to speed on dancing and takes her frock buying. Dinnie gives Elanour a big handful of cash.

"Just turn the Shroud of Turin into Versace," he says. "And bugger the expense."

Elanour says, "God, Dinnie, she's beautiful, beautiful, but what's she been doing with her hands?"

"Hmmm, farming I'm afraid," Dinnie says.

Sunday morning, they walk around to St Mary's for Mass and afterwards they walk up to the Archibald Fountain.

"Dinnie," she says. "What an uplifting experience. Thank you indeed."

They go round to Elanour's for a drink at Elkins and she tells them Saffy wants them to breakfast with him at Terrigal. So they do. They have a magnificent brekky. Saffy cocks a long look at Dinnie. Dinnie takes the hint.

"Sib," he says. "What about walking down the hill to the beach and have a coffee while you're away. The climb back is steep and Saffy's driver will pick you up outside Clouds in 90 minutes?"

She grins, "A great breakfast. I'll be there in 90 minutes."

Saffy's ideas are not complex; it's fine tuning he needs. Dinnie will have to go to Luxembourg and Basle to attend to it. It's to do with currency dealing that is escalating Saffy's fortune.

"Can I take the girl?" Dinnie asks.

"Oh God, yes," Saffy says. "Just put her on the bill, but travel economy class."

On their way back to Gunnedah, Siobhan says,

"You're very quiet, Dinnie. Not bad news, I hope."

“Not at all,” says Dinnie. “Saffy wants to give you and me an all expenses paid tour to Europe to do some things for him. Do you fancy going to benediction or mass at Notre Dame?”

“You’ve got me, you sneaky bastard,” she says. “But best you put the skids under the hardware man first.”

Dinnie has had close talks to the computer hacker in Sydney.

“How will you do it?” he asks.

This brilliant larrikin says, “Easy, peasy. I have access to the big, but not much now used Kray computer at Sydney University.”

“But how will you get it up and going?” Dinnie asks.

“Oh, I have the Vice Chancellors pass key; no sweat at all.”

“How the hell did you get that?”

“Ah...,” says the hacker. “I was on with granddaughter for quite a while. We used to make music in the computer strong area and play computer games. It’s not likely she’ll split on me.”

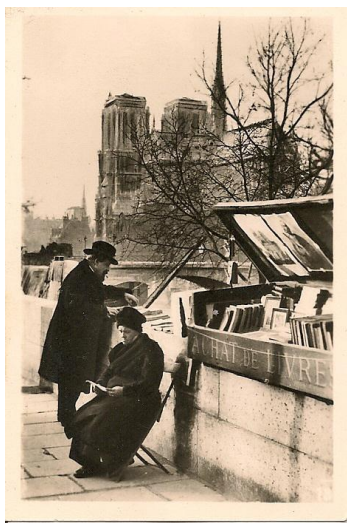
They talk about things a bit more and away they go.

The hacker reports back in due course that he’s been into files here and there and amongst action taken, he has listed the hardware man as a fast track priority for a full scale audit with the Australian Tax Office. He also has altered the steel order radically for the man’s best customer, the shed builder; has altered the manufacturers mix for a big order of Urea that will now kill anything it is spread on; sent out 118 orders extra for supplies; quadrupled his next paint order and to put the cream on his destructive cake, he has now transferred all of the money in the firm’s account to a Cayman Islands Bank, put it on fixed term deposit and changed the Bank’s records so that no notice of accrued interest will be sent to the hardware man for fourteen months. The hacker thinks that it’s possible that it all may be sorted out in the end, but that it’s highly improbable that this will be achieved in the short term.

In bed, over smoked salmon sandwiches and a biting little Hunter Valley wine, next Saturday, Siobhan laughs her throaty chuckle and asks,

“Who’s next? Who’s the lucky player?”

“Arthur Reeves,” Dinnie says. “That miserable bastard has had a box ride out of this district and that’s all about to change.”



After consultations with the hacker, they hack into the Farm World magazine that has six clearing sales advertised for Reeves. They just change the headings on each sale; same sale, different locations and dates, just enough to maddeningly confuse things. They play around with pending settlement statements on the real estate side and ship all of his trust funds offshore; not to steal them, just to hide them away for a while. They also launch a superannuation audit. Reeves is pretty smart and he may climb out of the mess they have created, but it will be a very stressful time for him. Old Tim looks after Siobhan’s farm, so thus they fly out to Paris.

They stay out at Galliani on the end of the Metro and train in and out to Paris proper. On their way to benediction at Notre Dame, they go down to the famous old booksellers stalls on the banks of the Seine and Siobhan buys a huge, huge tome of the English translation of Moliere’s omnibus of his work. It’s so heavy, Dinnie finds an English speaking taxi driver to

deliver it back to the hotel. Saffy's work is not so hard. They do an inspection of the 26 room apartment on the Avenue Montaigne and marvel at this.

"Why would he want something like this?" Siobhan asks.

"Oh," says Dinnie. "I think Mr Waldron is homophobic at heart. You could bump around an apartment this size for days without bumping into anybody."

"It's stupid," she says. "He'd be far better off in London."

"Well, if you like," he says. "We'll go over and see what's available and suggest he tries Pommy-land instead. He could at least order a pint of bitter there without any troubles."

The main purpose of Dinnie's visit is to throw a bit of a scare into the main currency dealer. Saffy has been building on his fortune on the Bourse on this and he just wants to make sure that the very successful returns that he has been getting are fair dinkum and that his dealer is not looking on him as a fat duck, to first feed and then pluck. Dinnie's gut feeling is to scale this down to diversify things a bit. All of which he does before they fly home via Athens. He supposes that it has all been worthwhile and after paying excess baggage at the Airport, he reports to Saffy and Siobhan tells him about a beautiful row house with a formal rear garden she has found for him in Knightsbridge. Saffy takes this all on board and later buys it.

Back in Gunnedah, they spot the 'Temporarily Closed' sign on the hardware shop. "I don't think I'll ask any local questions," Dinnie says.

Siobhan gets a bit lonely for Dinnie and drives over the rough, in between track to Smallpaige's. No-one's at the house, but she tracks down Dinnie up at the hay shed. He is standing there looking all innocent when she arrives.

"Come on, Dinnie," she says. "Come clean. What are you up to?"

"Look at this, Sib," he says. He pulls aside several small square bales of hay and brings out a very deadly looking crossbow. "The Yanks use these for shooting deer out of season. They sure pack a wallop. Now see this." He brings out of hiding, long steel bolts tipped with hard clear plastic heads; very mottled colours seem to be built into the plastic heads. He pours some solution into a container and dips the head of the first bolt into this; loads and fires the bolt right into a bale of new seasons hay.

"That's the performance for the day, Sweetpea," he says. "Come over for smoko tomorrow and I demonstrate results from the cause you've just seen fired."

"I don't need to rush off," Siobhan says. "Perhaps a roll in that hay back there could be fun."

At smoko the next day, Dinnie uses his bale shredder device, designed to roll out the bale a bit to make it easier for feeding sheep. The whole bale has multi colour dye through it. It looks revolting.

"What the hell is that?" Siobhan asks.

Dinnie says, "Well.....up to date, we've made history of the hardware man and the stock and station agent without getting off our butts. The computer juggler has done it all. We are under the distinct impression that he can't be run to earth and I hope he can't, because he and I could be done for conspiracy if he was."

"Ah, but you haven't stolen anything," Sib says. "You've just hidden away their dosh for fourteen months. It's all still in their name in a legitimate bank and they'll get it back, in time."

"True ...true," Dinnie says. "But that's in the past and my chemist friend at Penrith has come up with this idea. You just fire a bolt into new season's big square bales of hay and these buried away little bomb warheads dissolve in half an hour."

"And the result is?" she asks.

"Well...when these bales in the Hay Plant get to the compressing and pelletising stage, what comes out is not only a startling colour, quite foreign to what

the buyer wants, but it also has in its capillary action on juicy hay, a built-in stink component that will do no harm to a ruminant animal, but will also make it something that the same animal won't dream of eating. And the beauty of this idea is that you can lurk somewhere, sight unseen, where you can fire the bolts deep into big square bales discreetly and get well away before the results show up. Probably the easiest and safest way is a walk around a baled up paddock overnight, whacking the bales nearest to cover. I don't expect that it will bankrupt the Pellet man, but it will surely make his life a living hell for a while."

"That's pretty mild, Dinnie," she says. "After what you've done to the others."

"Ah, Sib," he says. "I sell a fair bit of hay to this plant and it's a district asset to the farmers. I want to vastly inconvenience this chap, not totally ruin him."

"Why the soft approach, Dinnie?" she asks.

"Well..." Dinnie says. "I hear he wasn't rabid about voting me guilty half as much as the others. By the way, I'm using the same type dye to take the Dry Cleaner to the cleaners; only it's a diametrically opposite colour."

"What are you going to do to him; burn him out?"

"No can do," says Dinnie. "The modern solvents they use these days are not in any way flammable. But I've got Elanour working on it."

A few days later a bulky parcel arrives at the Gunnedah Post Office for Dinnie. There are some decent clothes in it from a recycling shop at Double Bay. Dinnie unwraps these and with a small stitch remover, opens up some shoulder pads in the garments. Into the pads, he pours small packets of a powder dye – gentian blue. He then just superglues the stitched edges together. A few days later, another package arrives. It's an old Underwood typewriter. Dinnie types up a note that he attaches to a brown paper parcel of the Double Bay garments. He attaches the note and puts it carefully away in a big plastic garbage bag.

"Feel like a run to Tamworth," he asks Siobhan.

"Oh, you're offering to take me out to dinner?"

"No," says Dinnie. "You're to be the unobtrusive lookout while I don a big old coat, a hat and a stick and shuffle up to the dry cleaners after hours drop off chute and hopefully get away without too clear a picture on the Chamber of Commerce CCTV showing up.

They park well away from the camera area and Dinnie makes like he's an old crock and drops the poisoned parcel in the chute. He hates to think of the effect on the clothes being dry cleaned and on the cleaning fluid itself when the garments are processed and everything turns beautifully, permanently blue. It's not likely that he will hear about what happens for a while and he doesn't particularly want to. They drive home companionably. As they drive along, Siobhan says,

"About Joan the Juror...."

'Gawd,' Dinnie thinks. 'How the hell does she know anything about Joan?'

"The cops here know she visited you at the Fourteen Mile. Joan is a straight arrow and happily married."

(Dinnie thinks about Joan's comments that day. 'Dinnie, in the 9 years we've been romping, you have always, always made the earth move. I've never got a tremor or a vestige of a tremor out of hubby.' 'Ah, it's just the chemistry, Joan,' he said)

"She's your source, isn't she?" Siobhan continues.

"Why do you ask?"

"Well....," Sib says. "I don't expect you have anything going with her, unless you have a fetish for girls over six feet, but the cops may put two and two together

and work out that the heavy misfortunes happening to local people may connect with the verdict at your trial. In which case, they or the victims may come hunting.”

“You’re right of course,” he says. “That’s why I’ll leave the accountant until he thinks I’ve overlooked him. He’s not that hard to bring grief to, but your point is well taken. Perhaps I should hit one of the ones that voted to acquit, just to muddy the waters.”

“Why don’t you decimate the Pet Food Plant,” she says. “He was never against you. Dad says it will never work here in the long run. He says these sort of enterprises have to be slap-bang up against a big selling complex such as at Dubbo. You need a shrewd buyer to snap up all the old crackers when the bidding flags. Now would be a good time to do this as Eddie Gaunt has retired to Narromine and would probably be glad to have a commission to go to the sales to source pet food material on the hoof. It’s his old field and he’s very good at it.”

“Hmmm,” says Dinnie. “It sure would put the Hoyle hounds off the scent, as the pet food people are the straightest arrows around. We’d best ‘google’ their insurance cover to make sure we are not about to ruin them. I’ll call the hacker from the Tamworth phone in a day or so.”

“You wouldn’t want to be caught doing this, Dinnie,” she says. “Everyone on the jury would take out the loss of a local enterprise on you.”

“No worries, Sib,” Dinnie says. “Teddy, the safecracker at the Cross, is as deep as and he’d be glad to arrange the fireworks in exchange for a decent handful of the readies.”

He puts this on the back-burner just for the moment and they jointly do a think tank on what retaliation they can expect. In the meantime, they hear Frank Naughton has been stood down and also sergeant Bill, while the CCC look into them. Dinnie expects they will get off, but he also expects that their careers in the Now South Wales Police Service will go no further.

Ted Hoyle’s heifers start to drop in numbers and their new offspring are real little carbon copies of Dinnie’s roan bull. Dinnie has lent this little bloke to a grazier at Glen Innes, so the little culprit is safely out of gunshot range; at least from Ted Hoyle’s gun. Old Ted has lost the sale value of a year’s breeding. Dinnie never goes anywhere without a ten inch crescent on board and he avoids dark places at night. He’s safe on his farm, to a degree, as his cattle dogs are fine guard dogs. Dinnie is quite aware old Ted must be foaming at the mouth, but he never gets taken up or otherwise tackled. He expects that the only easy way for them to get at him will be a crop fire and this is just what happens on a bad day in late November.

Dinnie is out on the Case header, harvesting oats, when the fire starts. Plenty of helpers roll in in their small trucks and water tanks. Dinnie approximates where the fire started and he gets his old man to sit quietly on the tree line nearest the start point and to buzz him on the radio if anybody comes along to pick up something.

Sure enough, as the fire runs along, a farm Tojo comes mousing along and stops. Dinnie is on the job and there, just as the driver Teddy Hoyle comes walking out of the blackened crops, Dinnie jumps out with a pump shotgun.

“Hands in the air!” he yells. Hoyle shrugs. “What are you doing?”

Dinnie runs over and flattens the chap with the gun barrel. He then goes through his pockets and finds the magnifying device he expects. It’s the oldest trick in the book. It’s stinking hot in the burnt crop, but Dinnie keeps Hoyle on the ground until the cops arrive. There’s a fair bit of hubbub, but they caution Hoyle and take him away.

Patrick comes around. “Are you going to pursue this, Dinnie?” he asks. “It could sort of ruin old Teddy you know.”

"Yes, I do know," Dinnie says. He smiles a wolfish smile. "Good, isn't it?!"

"He's in a deal of trouble," Patrick says. "He's endorsed for a County Party Upper House seat."

"Ah," says Dinnie. "Firebugs....just what you want in the upper house."

"Hmmm," says Patrick. "So it's all go then! What QC can I expect to be helping the prosecution this time?"

"Only the very best," Dinnie says.

Dinnie's man appeals old Teddy's bail. Says he should be locked up before he lights more bad fires and that the man is unhinged and dangerous. Its froth and bubble, but it's not the sort of froth and bubble that you would want to swim in. Dinnie has a bit of a talk to Saffy. "What about Eastpac pulling old Teddy's credit?" he says. "As a big buyer of land, he's a bit extended."

"Cawley would certainly do it if I push him," he says. "But it's not a thing that can be done often, but if you wish....."

Dinnie sucks his teeth. "What about indicating that they might pull his credit? That would do just as well. I'm keen to kick the bastard while I've got him down."

Saffy laughs. "Wilco," he says. Thus Teddy has money troubles to add to his woes.

Siobhan is tied up on farming matters for three weeks. She is selling off fat lambs, selling store cattle and buying back merino ewes and poll Dorset rams. Dinnie is also in and out of the district. They eventually get together on a Friday night for a takeaway Chinese meal and a drop of Beaujolais.

"You've missed out on Solly Stanley," she says. "He's sold his accounting practise to Countrywide Accounting." Dinnie chuckles.

"Yes, I sold it to them. The proposition I put to old Solly after our hacker friend in New Zealand fine-tooth combed his books left him with little choice. It was a lucky 'get out of jail' card to Solly and a very quick profit to me. When he signed off on our deal, he looked as though he was sucking a salty plum, but he knew better than to cavil at the deal!"

"Hmmm," she says. "Well done. Spare me the detail though; I've had a tough week. I've been looking hard at what I was selling and buying and lumping around dangerous amounts of cash." (Siobhan is anti Bank; pays and is paid only in cash money) "Now," she continues. "What do you plan for the very last on your dark list, that sanctimonious bitch, Merrilyn Hoban?"

"Saturday night is the wrap up of their late spring meditation course," Dinnie says. "She's got about eighty people there; all smug Pacific Ocean dwellers, all up themselves, all women, all fat cats. Let's ride our horses through the bush to Ryder's Gully and 'ping pong' the bastards. If my scheme works, they'll never come back."

After full dark, Saturday, they ride their horses through Teddy Hoyle's bush block to Ryder's Gully. This is a very pretty and natural bit of country with huge trees. The Hobans run a very successful health spa here. They're into Colonic Irrigation and on arrival all are given an enema and fed a diet of quite interesting health food and walk the bush trails which, at this mild time of the year, are quite Sylvan. Hoban of the wispy beard and possessed of a fine ability on the flute and the Pan pipes is an ex hospital orderly – giving enemas is nothing to him.

At the point where Ryder's Gully runs over a huge sheet of flat rock, they have cleverly built a stone weir and have built slab timber seating on the rock sheet. To give this natural amphitheatre an intimate look, they have dug in pine poles just off the rock and strung ringlock sheep fencing on these. The barrier is about two metres high and absolutely smothered with rampant potato vine; an impenetrable screen effect. The accommodation is all straw-bale walled separate cottages.

Siobhan and Dinnie leave their horses well back as they don't want to frighten them and have them breaking loose. They climb up onto a big rock up the creek slope a bit. The audience, who have enjoyed a wind-up barby and plenty of alcohol to mix with their fruit juice, are sitting in groups. Near the weir, Hoban is doing an elegiac job of playing his pan pipes; it's soothing and calm; the audience is quiet and totally relaxed in fact. From their vantage point, the pair now load up the pine timber device they have carried in on horseback and start firing ping pong balls onto the sheet rock between the audience and the pipe man. All hell now indeed breaks devastatingly loose.

The ping pong balls are dosed up with flash powder, black powder, candle wax and magnesium tape. They go up and come down like a mortar shell. As they hit the rock, one after the other, the balls, weighted with just a bit of blue metal to give them flight stability, explode into deep thunderous booms and the near darkness becomes daylight, with arc light intensity. It's both devastating and paralysing on the senses. It's like the effect of stun grenades (or flashbangs as the SAS calls them). As Dinnie later says – it's like standing about half a metre outside the end of a railway tunnel at night when an Inter-City train explodes from it. Dinnie first saw these things demonstrated in an abandoned quarry near Gulgong. They have to be experienced to be believed.

The pair slope off from this cataclysmic scene and ride their horses out the way they came, shuffle them onto their double horse float and take a dark country track home. Back at the horse stalls, Dinnie feeds and unsaddles the horses while Siobhan whips up hot pancakes and bacon; they've had nothing since lunch.

"God in heaven, Dinnie," she says. "I understand now why you were so insistent in handling those things so gingerly. I had absolutely no idea of the shock and awe they would engender. I think you may safely say that meditational events at Ryder's Gully are now well and truly kaput."

"Yes, indeed," says Dinnie. "Good, isn't it?!"

Siobhan looks speculatively at Dinnie. "You've seem to have used excessive force in squaring the ledger. Couldn't you have achieved the same effect by going easier?"

Dinnie pushes his empty plate back and pours a good shot of Brandy into their coffees. "Sib," he says. "You've gotten something out of this activity."

"Ah yes," she says. "I've discovered a marvellous lover and I plan to keep him."

Dinnie grins. "Please take that as a given. I'm not going to let such a larcenous tart as you get away, Sweetpea."

"Gosh," she says. "I started out today to make sure that you aren't a homicidal maniac and here now I seem to be fielding a proposal, of sorts."

"It's genuine enough," Dinnie says. "I have Charlie Iseppi blasting rock at the moment to get the stone to build with."

"Will I have any say in this?" Siobhan asks.

"The furnishing and perhaps the landscaping of course, but the design will be mine. I know what I want and I don't want to compromise any of it."

"Dinnie," she says. "You must have a money tree."

"No.....just some world class financing that has nine years to run and a heap of cash that will come to me from Countrywide Accounting over a period."

She says, "The town doesn't know what to make of you. Have you noticed, in walking down the street, that people actually cross over to the other side?"

Dinnie laughs. "Only the Hoyle vassals," he says. "And they being the older group will die off in time."

“Well,” she says. “You come home ex uni after a period away when you were touched by your city environment and changed forever. You have one successful night out, you finish in gaol, you get out of gaol and since then you have had an effect in Gunnedah and environs that seem close to what old William Tecumseh Sherman had on Georgia. No one, no one at all in town will ever, I think, be brave enough to shirtfront you again. Did you have to exact the retribution you have?”

“Siobhan,” he says. “In getting into Long Bay I upset very senior police and they in concert worked to get their revenge. They dumped me in a small prison cell with the biggest sexual deviate in the tiers. Thanks to my friends who had served time there, I was ready for him. He’s brain damaged now and much less of a danger to newcomers to prison, but if I hadn’t pulled that off and bear in mind my victim was a very big strong man, the screws had teed me up to shower with the leading gang rapists in the Bay. They would have grabbed me in the showers next morning and the guards would have turned their backs.”

“But you would have had a plan in your amazingly fertile mind,” she says.

“Indeed. My King’s Cross friends are the main suppliers of drugs into Long Bay. They had arranged to get me a shank in a towel for next morning through their dealer links.”

“And……” she says.

“Well, the advice to me was that, shank in hand; and covered by the steam in the showers, I was to go bull-headed for the nearest man and to make sure I stabbed him in an upward motion under the ribcage. With the dead or dying man on the floor, the guards would have to turn around and that would have put a stop to their plans - at least for the moment. I was just four hours away from all of this, Siobhan. Just roll your mind around that.”

“But Dinnie, the people who put you in gaol, the people whose livelihoods, social standing and so on, that you have ruined, weren’t to know all this.”

Dinnie grins a wolfish grin. “If you put your personal self and financial interest to the front while you totally ruin a young life, you do indeed deserve everything that comes your way in the manner of retribution. I’m square with all these low-lives now. I think people in the long run will respect strength and recognise vindictiveness and keep their distance and that’s the way I would prefer it to go.”

“Fine,” says Siobhan. “Let’s go over to Smallpaige’s tomorrow and look at the house site.”

“Sure,” says Dinnie. “But while Charlie gets on with the building and sends us monthly pictures, it might be wise if we blow town for a while, before our victims’ gang up on us.”

“To go where?” she asks.

“Ah, Perugia, to the English speaking University; let’s do fine arts and arts history together and bum around Italy. Just think, we may even get your pianist hands back into softness again.”

“Hmmm,” says Siobhan. “I just know you have very good ideas of who will run our farms while we’re gone and I guess that there’s more to life than farming. Though before I met you, I never, ever would have thought so.”

“Yairs,” says Dinnie. “Let’s give the La Dolce Vita a bit of a belt.”

Author’s Footnote:

These days, our country’s population is absolutely city-centric. Any story that draws attention to the forgotten bush (even wildly fictitious ones such as this) can’t be all bad.

Siobhan Sullivan – the lesser but still important character in this story, stars in her own right in ‘The High School Prefect’ in this book. It’s all set in the Gunnedah /Curlewis area.

AFTERWORD

by The Writer

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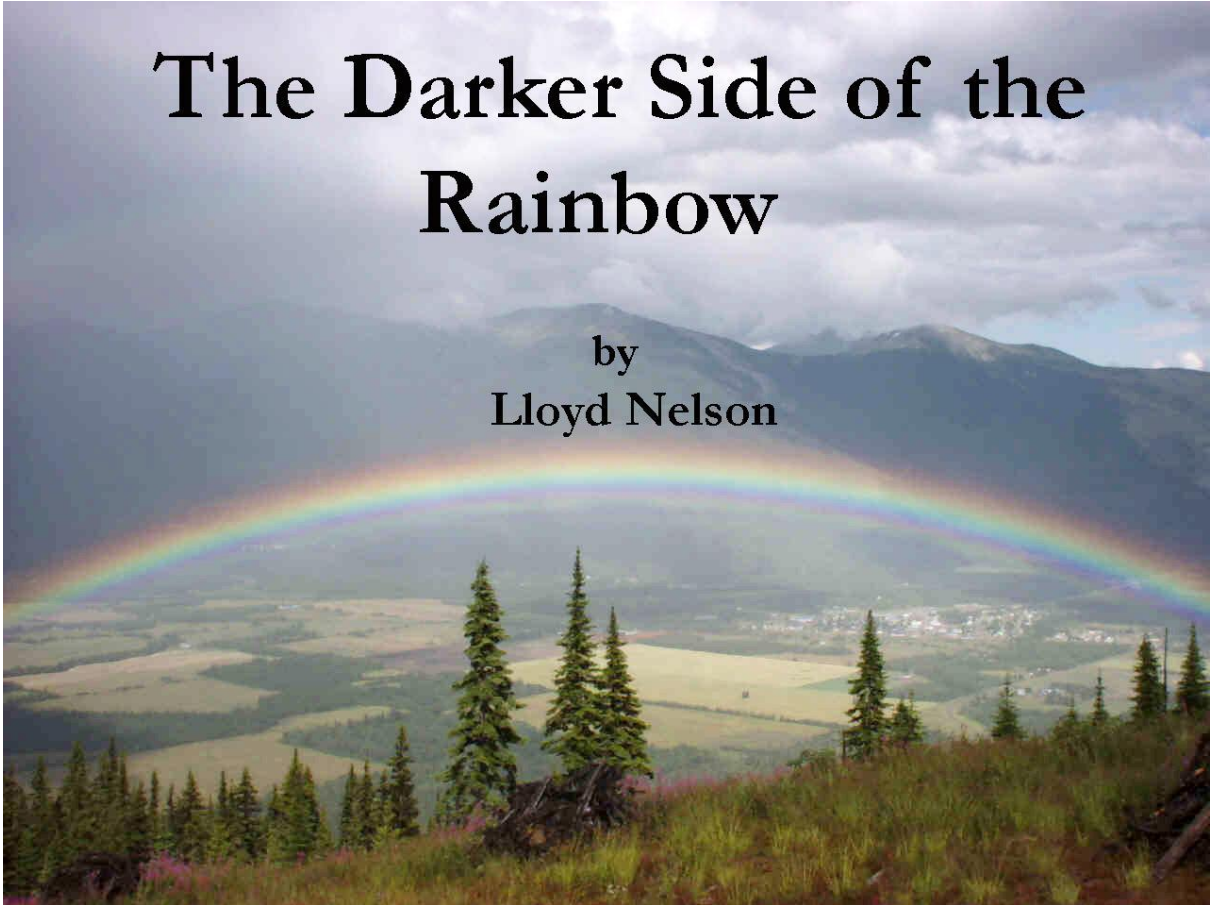
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