



Lloyd Nelson

The Churchman

Up There Cazaly

and other jolts of escapist reading

Foreword

by

James MacArthur-Street

This is the fourth time I've written the introduction to a book by this writer. The previous ones being, 'The Darker Side of The Rainbow', an e-book which you can easily find on www.lloydnelson.net ; his last printed book, 'Richard Marston's Journey' and lately, 'The Sniper'.

The writer's intention is to write interesting fiction – and by golly, he's done it again with 'The Churchman'.

May I suggest you pick a comfortable chair; put your feet up and dip into this page turner of a book.

Darling Point 2012

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THE CHURCHMAN

BY LLOYD NELSON

ONE

I've just finished Uni and am now on holidays. My Father, Uncle and brothers are flat out harvesting a big wheat crop on the family property 'Downside', west of Bathurst. They're driving the ageing Gleaner combine harvesters very hard indeed and I'm flat out carting wheat from the very full field bins to the wheat bins in town in a longish semi trailer, a Dodge six ton truck converted to pull a semi. I'm not alone. Eleisha, a farm girl from Kansas has come out to the farm, as she is not flying home to the U.S. of A. for a break. She wants to see a bit of Oz over the summer.

I get the last load in for the day and coming home, very late afternoon, suggest to the girl we have a swim in the first roadside dam on Downside. She readily agrees and we strip off to the buff. She is a knock out in the nude. Milky skin, beautiful figure, big boobs on a frame, very exotic. I look at her lustfully and she looks at me.

"My Bernard" she says, "you big boy, but as we enter the brown of the dam, muddy vaginas are not but you may knock on my window tea when we are all showered and cossied up if you like?"



slim

are a waters the go, after

At tea Dad asks me what I plan to do next. We haven't had a chance to talk as I started driving the truck half an hour after we arrived. I startle them a bit when I tell them that my trust account permitting (we all have trust accounts) I'm off to Oxford to read Theology for a time and after that I plan to take holy orders of a minimal type, but also will take an active part in the family finance companies which trade in Bathurst as Bathurst Finance and in Balmain as Granite Finance.

Downside Homestead
Circa 1910



It's a very successful business owned by Dad and his brother Aubrey, but run by

Uncle Aubrey. The latter is a bachelor farmer who is getting on. Aubrey is with us tonight. I've graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce Degree and by and large after kicking the idea around a bit, they think it's a good idea. I didn't expect any objections. My family are staunch Anglicans and pillars of the Church, though not fooled by it. They can see as well as I that it's running down.

Also it resolves the long-term future of the finance companies. Uncle Aubrey is enjoying the challenge of growing the two companies, but he likes farming too. As he says, he can't go running the rabbit to Balmain where good growth is taking place forever.

Bathurst Finance and Granite Finance are both run on a day to day basis by ex Bank Manager's recruited in Bathurst. The Bathurst firm raises money from the

public and lends mainly to Doctors, Specialists and private hospitals, with a deal of farm machinery and stock and station finance chucked in. The Balmain based firm does run of the mill financing, raising its money from wholesalers of finance and lending big percentages on margin to share traders.

TWO

Lending on margin gives Granite Finance a very big insight in what is taking place on the share market. Dad and Aubrey are circumspect in their plunges, but ruthless in taking advantage of early knowledge. The traders ramping up finance to buy shares tell us what they are buying, we have to know this as we take loose security on the shares.

Stockbrokers west of us i.e. Adelaide and Perth in particular, trade longer than the east coast market. Thus it is not unusual to be lending to a trader mid afternoon and lodging buying orders with discreet brokers half an hour later. If we were stockbrokers we would clearly be inside traders, but as this is a private firm that tells nobody anything, then or later we are not restricted. But we must be very, very discreet. To say the money rolls in the doors in good periods is understating the case.

I'm a bit of a queer cuss at heart and though I can see the distinct possibilities of the finance companies, I would also like to blur the edges a bit by being involved in hard nosed finance and soft edged Church work. I more or less think that no one will ever quite work out what I'm up to. I certainly won't be stereotyped if I can help it. Keep it confused is my motto and hopefully become rich in the process.

THREE

My four years in Pommyland go like a flash. I do Theology at All Souls, spend a year at Coverley's Merchant Bank, learn to speak and read old Aramaic and interpret scrolls in this language, act as a sometimes Curate near Guildford, mainly to get in the form and so on. During this time I get around England, a place just so chockfull of interest and history and for a period each summer I attend the College Archaeological Dig in southern Iraq.

I live for a time with a Physiotherapist and later with a Professor of Archaeology, who has a beautiful house in Canterbury, hard by the old Cathedral there.

My last dig in Iraq ends in tragedy and bloodshed. The Professor and two girl students, with their A.K. 47 toting body guard, leave the dig early in this (then) quiet corner of Iraq to return to camp. We follow along later and spring an Iraqi patrol, 19 soldiers, who have just finished raping and murdering our friends. It's too late to help the girls, but we stand the patrol at gunpoint. The girls have been spread staked with rope and deep pegs on their backs. The guard, likewise, has been pegged and castrated.

Through the interpreter I tell the patrol to drop their trousers, they cavil a bit and I shoot one full in the stomach. He moans piteously and the others hastily comply. All but two have blood on them. We almost let these two go, but it's not safe to. I swing my Stirling automatic weapon right along the line and shoot the whole lot. Then in a spirit of frenzy and revenge and rage, take one of their laser guns and fry off their testicles. God its like a charnel house.

The C.I.A. guys, who in those days financed and joined every Brit expedition in order to suss out what Saddam is doing, lob along and are horrified. They whistle up a C.I.A. helicopter within 25 minutes and we load into this big machine the bodies of the girls wrapped in black plastic, plus the star pieces of the dig and abandon the rest of what we have there.

We cremate the girls in Kuwait City and weeks later attend a memorial service for them in London.

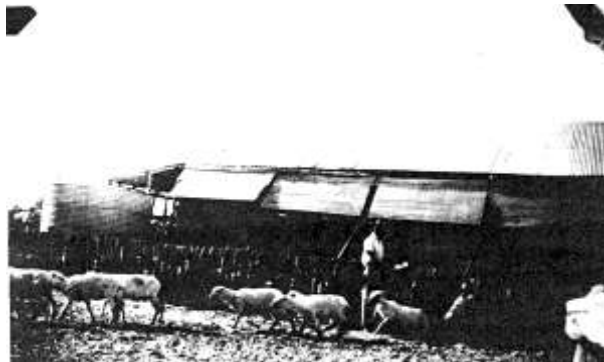
The C.I.A. provide me with a concealed weapon, plastic, which has a built in silencer and fires eagle's claw plastic screw bullets. You can go through the airport screens packing one of these things. They also give me a supply of nerve gas, stuff that can knock people out without harm for around four hours. They advise me that the Iraqis would later, rather than sooner, be on my track and suggest I get out of London to the more open and safer spaces of Australia A.S.A.P.

FOUR

The dig was my last official engagement in the northern hemisphere. Thus I find myself back on Downside driving a chaser bin for harvest. Dad and my brothers have pensioned off the old Gleaners and have invested in a state of the art John Deere combine harvester, two chaser bins and a road train to move the wheat.

It's all very impressive fast moving and we have a harvest period and a good Xmas.

Uncle Aubrey is with us Xmas and tells me that the sooner for me to get closely involved in the control and direction of the finance companies, both of which are growing like mushrooms.



and great family

for better

During my time in the U.K. and particularly when working in the Merchant Bank, I have written up a new and innovative marketing plan for the companies and over a few days we analyse this and decide what and when the best points can be taken up within the firms.

I have been deeply into computers and bought a programme to automate the share-buying programme, which is based on what our margin buyers are buying.

FIVE

I next move into the empty flat over the Balmain office, it has been junked up with records storage, so we've had these computerised and shred the left overs. It's quite a good flat and shares the second floor with a well-appointed boardroom. Under floor parking is accessed from the front street, down a ramp under the building, which like everything else in Balmain, is narrow frontaged.

The front office is accessed from the street alongside the roller garage door. The office opens out at the rear to a Tuscan style walled garden courtyard, much

used by the staff at lunchtime on good days and for Xmas barbies and later by myself for weekend entertaining.

To get to the flat you go through the main floor and up a flight of stairs and then around the corner from the boardroom entry. It is quite secure, has wood block floors and minimalist type furniture. I add nothing to this other than my clothes.

The beauty of the whole set up, apart from free rent, is that while I'm home of an evening I'm right on the job in checking what is happening at the Finance Co, which I never visit in working hours. My ploy is to run the show, but not to be seen to do so.

The draw back is that it's a fixed point from which I start my day or end it. The security cameras are first class and I can observe the street before leaving, but not when returning. With the Iraqis in mind, I make an arrangement with a security firm to scope the area when I'm returning after dark. They work full time in Balmain so its something they can easily do and they just give me a flick on a mobile phone to say alls clear.

Some months later they warn me there is a possible stake out running and that it will come to a head. The evening they spot two watchers. as against one. we get together a street or two back. These chaps are very alert but I warn them what we are about to do is a bit like catching cobras.

"No worries mate" they say, so we all tog up in overcoats and hats this winter evening and make like a trio of drunks and nail the watchers.

I give them each a squirt of nerve gas and we load these in the back of the Tojo small farm truck that I've swiped from the farm and we quietly place these inert forms in the Ambassador's driveway, device them up with a bit of fishing line attached to a huge firework placed in a street bin and drive away.

The bodyguards eventually come out to see what is going on and unwittingly set off the fireworks. It's the most colourful show ever seen in this quiet and exclusive harbourside street.

I wait with my two helpers outside the Mosque the next morning and hands held wide, approach the Ambassador. He is highly nervous and shrinking, his bodyguards stand alertly near.

I say to him, in old Aramaic, that I hold him personally responsible for last night's stake out and that his own life is on the line if anything further eventuates. He bows and I stand aside to let him enter the Mosque.

He and his family return to Baghdad within days and before his replacement arrives to reinforce the message I put a solid core R.P.G. through his former front door. Later I ring the new man and in old Aramaic again tell him that is a reminder message and that the main message will remain on hold. Thanks to George Bush the whole matter disappears in time.

Not unexpectedly, the Commonwealth Police appear on my doorstep. I talk to them in the boardroom, but am scant on details. I suggest that it would be best if I talk to A.S.I.O.

A.S.I.O. come around. I am more open with them and hand them the assorted hardware, including the modern pistols with Carswell silencers, taken from the watchers. They are enigmatic about things and offer and do take over the evening security for nearly six months.

I concentrate now on getting a good grip on the finance companies and without lessening the authority of the two ex Bank Managers, who are performing like trained seals, hire a couple of bright marketing graduates, both B Comms, arm them with lending authority and send them out and about to get the money out and earning.

Thanks to computerisation we can do this without adding to our grunt force. They work hard, discern users of finance and target these.

For my part I put my focus on our wholesale source of funds that we lend out and get some nice chunks of money in. Actually Granite Finance is becoming very big business and in terms of office space per dollar, not many around Sydney can shake us. The profit margin in share trading sits in a special account and, to my surprise, I find that after tax there is around \$23 million in the Balmain account and half as much in the Bathurst account. This represents about \$35 million of funds on which the Firm has no demand or need of, so the operation is nicely cushioned against down turns.

This now all seems under good management and control and my chances of being assassinated on the street has lessened quite a bit.

I now peddle along to the Bishop of Bathurst and put in place the taking of Holy Orders. I'm arguably the best-educated Anglican in New South Wales, outside of the present clergy and I'm prepared to work without stipend.

Understandably they can't get me ordained quick enough, allowing my Oxford degree and English Curate experience as acceptable quick start qualifications. I take over four of the plains Parishes with seven Churches situated within these. I concentrate on these Parish's and preach at one Church per rote every week.

Doing also a day's pastoral work in the area of each Church every Saturday, house, hospital, aged care home and so on. I work entirely from Balmain as my base, drive only a Tojo ute I've swiped from the farm, it looks a bit rough but I put a Caterpillar diesel motor in it and know it will go forever and adds to my one off, but practical image.

Also being diesel I can continually fuel it from the Downside fuel tanks. As part of my smoke screen and to blend in with the semi red necks of the plains, I generally fit in a clay target shoot, skeet for preference.

On Sunday afternoon, there's always a shoot on somewhere in my area. I shoot with an interesting gun bought in Oxford. It has one stock, but two interchangeable barrels for trap or skeet. I shoot B Grade and a bit worse than I have to. I want to blend in with my flock as a non-threatening person.

There is the usual sector of poor and underprivileged in the plains towns where my Churches are, plus a huge segment of really wealthy landowners. That is not to say they are cash rich, but they are very asset rich. They are also a bit on the mean side Church wise.

I focus on tidying up the Churches, it's something very tangible and obvious. I add nothing new, what I aim at is involving the moneyed segment in coming back to Church (use it or lose it I say) and in working bees to reinstate them to good condition. I move around in the style of Lenin who famously said, 'take action and see what happens.'

There is heaps of useful gear within radius of every Church, trucks, front-end loaders, paint sprayers. We set a 28 week period to restore the Churches and without hardly paying a tradesman, get stonework tuck pointed, barge boards replaced, roof repainted. I thank the good Lord for the new high lift front-end loaders.

As each is finished we gather up plaques from the War etc and memorial plaques from local people and plaque up the interiors, we stone up memorial walls giving each Church's pedigree and we have the biggest and best known Anglicans in the country and even the world, we score a retired Archbishop of Canterbury to help with the visit honours, we get the Prime Minister along. It's draw card stuff and into all this we get volunteer landscape gardening, of long lasting native and deciduous trees and shrubs, in and going.

SEVEN

We also, through widely read magazines like Country Style, offer our Churches for Christening's and Wedding's and thus in the green inland season get our Churches into the social pages of the Yuppies.

Being in Sydney and in finance I am able to coerce T.V. personalities and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra into doing profile T.V. features on the rebirth of these very fine old Churches. It breathes life into the Church. Wisely I keep our Church functions on a strict seven week rotation, I don't want to brown anyone off with a sun burst effort. I just want to get the Churches looking good and ticking along.

I'm there for the long haul and now they're back up and running I can easily maintain the momentum if I keep my attention forward. I do nothing in Bathurst, I don't want to step on the Bishop's toes.

A lot of firms, not necessarily represented in the olden, golden city of Bathurst, draw good income from the produce of the plains. I go bald headed after We set up Xmas funds for the poor and privileged of the area. We are not greedy, are not unrealistic and soon we have borrowed factory units, full of goodies being packed for Xmas and perhaps, more importantly, a good blanket and warm clothes appeal going for the bitter Bathurst winters. We get also into food vouchers and even school scholarships for the poor.

Firms not involved in plains produce trading see a publicity possibility and dig deep. In all honesty I'm making a mark on a big area in terms of acres, but small in terms of population.

However we can't kill the Golden Goose on the matter of oversupply so I divert the quite big surplus' quite anonymously into inner city problem Parishes and don't say anything about this. We keep the focus on the western plains and the day before Xmas eve have a 5 p.m. 'Thank You' function and service in St James, Greenways famous Sydney Church. We just do a Benediction Service, round up the Governor General and every T.V. face we can get. The Service is not quite Church, Church but with the Governor General and the pick of the T.V. stars and the donors, always the donors, it turns out a hell of a show and gets plenty of T.V. coverage.

This also fills the social pages, which isn't a bad promo effort, it being Xmas Season and even the Archbishop himself wants a speaking spot. He owns St James so we gladly give him this, but write a short presentation for him to articulate. He's

St. James
SYDNEY
(Greenway)



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trying to work me out, but he follows his script too. The publicity is so good how could he not.

This whole effort is both worthwhile and very successful, but of course I'm only working seven Church Parishes, small numbers and I have a Sydney base to work the big firms over. It's just common sense, which I think isn't all that common.

My Church career zooms along. The Archbishop has great ideas of a Sydney Parish or Cathedral spot for me. I tell him I am of the western plains and have hardly scratched the surface of my Ministry there. He counters that my efforts are only benefiting only a small number of people.

I counter, well yes, but they're my people. This is total horseradish of course, people are people all over and no one owns anybody. It's just that it suits me to do what I'm doing without taking on the burden and unsolvable problems of a troubled city Ministry. I have, as you know, other fish to fry among all this.

EIGHT

In preaching in my Churches, which is every Sunday in one of my seven Churches and on occasion in Bathurst and mid week in Sydney, I take what I call the St Paul line, i.e. do right by your fellow creatures, spread the daily burden, I've yet to preach a sermon on God in the abstract and I never will, I'm not entirely sure I believe in God, but as Mahatma Ghandi once famously said about Christianity "It's an interesting idea".

However, you can run on for years preaching from the Bible and never (and I never) preach the same sermon twice. I rather like the mental gymnastics of covering differing theological subjects and I keep my sermons as short as. This is not to say that I rush off when I finish. I always stay as long as is compatible to getting to that afternoon's clay target shoot and I put this time into people and their problems.

The Archbishop, of course, wants me in Sydney for my alleged financial expertise and why not, our Church, like every Church in the dry brown land of Oz is suffering from Church attendance fall off and thus financial fall off.

I fob him off by telling him that I'm just sort of making an appearance in the family finance businesses to oblige my parents who stump up for my stipend (or so I tell him). I'm actually drawing \$3,000 per week, tax paid, which is a drop in the bucket to the Finance Corporation and I spend very, very little of this on anything.

Everything runs along smoothly for a while and I get an official letter, from the Church in Australia, inviting me to be their representative at the forthcoming London conference. Fully aware that if I'm attending this the swarthy ones in London will get to know and that may return me to serious target status so I decline, pleading work to do in my parishes. The Church is not pleased and accepts this reluctantly. No Parish Priest has ever declined such an offer prior.

My Merchant Bank friends in London get in touch. Their Swiss colleagues want to buy into a bank in Australia on a sort of unofficial basis and they want us as participants.



Broadly the discussion centres on whether, through the old established share buying operation in Granite Finance, we can set up a deal to acquire about 15% of Eastpac Bank. We can buy up just under 5% in any one name without sounding

alarm bells and having the drawbridge pulled up.

After hours of close discussions we agree to do the buying, so long as the funds to do so comes in over the counter in Bank Drafts or similar. We agree we can have the dividends in the period in which we hold the shares and that, subject to no ructions or other interference from the regulatory bodies, we will after five years transfer the shares to whomever they nominate.

The Swiss mob, to whom we now talk direct, in company with the London Merchant Bankers, want only a gentleman's agreement on this huge deal.

They don't, particularly don't, want any writing that can be publicly accessed. They also insist on a close, very close overhaul of our computer security.

In the final wrap up we discard computers and set up a room full of Burroughs's ledger machines for the transactions. We use some temporary runners from the University Student's Guild to cart our orders around to the brokers in each state capital. It's discreet and it works.

This deal all smells to high heaven. It's got to be the dirtiest money in the world, being made respectable per Granite Finance. However the huge dividends, plus the status of without any fanfare of owning just under 15% of Eastpac, is just too much for us to walk away from. Also, having disclosed their hand to us, it's not really safe to walk away.

The Swiss warn us clearly that the owners of the money being put up will certainly make their own arrangements should we try to stiff them.

We accept this as fair enough and it is so away we go. We achieve our purchase mission without any enquiries of any nature being levelled at us.

We stash the shares and make tax arrangements so that we can cover any tax on dividends. However these being franked shares, tax doesn't really arise.

NINE

Another year, or three, zips past and I do much the same things, keeping an eagle eye on the finance companies. The old Manager's are very busy and give mild indications that they want to retire, but they change their mind when I ramp up their Super and give them double holidays. I use the bigger holidays to train up several new ex Bank recruits so that I have a management resource pool, readily to hand when and if needed.

I take on a part Chaplaincy at Sydney University and am honoured with membership of their Finance Committee and I hone my skills by concentrating on the Government Uni financing programme, an area in which I have a deal to offer. I also target undergraduates who will, when their earning skills get up after they graduate, will be valuable customers of our finance firms.

At present, nearing the end of their learning, many are cash strapped and this has bad effect on their outlook. I arrange small weekly drawing accounts in their final two years for the quality ones. It's usually walking around money they are bereft of.

In the counselling area I help by steering some into the Church, with a view to developing more Ministers and I also tap the Catholic Church funds to steer some towards priesthood. I also do some lecturing in the



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the
B.A.

area on Archaeology, mainly Roman and Middle Eastern areas that I am versed in.

I also meet and decline to marry, a marvellously attractive Professor of Psychology. It's her idea not mine.

"Oh well" she says, "let's just settle for sex" and we do.

She's a very liberated woman from the U.S. of A. We smoke a bit of pot and once in a while on weekends snort a bit of cocaine to move our sex partnership along.

I take her out to Bathurst on a Church Service run and we overnight at Downside.

"Christ Bernard" she says "you must be out of your mind driving around this dust bowl (it's late summer) preaching at backwoods rednecks."

I tell her "perhaps we should marry and become Missionaries and go to New Guinea?"

"You're off your trolley you mad bastard" she screeches.

It is, however, a good fun relationship and she is a very interesting, sexy and erudite person to take along to the odd social function that I must attend. She tells me one evening that she is going to stop taking the pill and when she's pregnant to me will return to Chicago, with or without me. I excuse myself for a while and walk down to the nearest overnight chemist for condoms and never give her a chance.

With the Churches in good shape and getting more used for services, christenings, weddings and so forth, I now ramp up extra activities for my Church group or rather group of Churches.

Through my University contacts and having access to the brick shearer's quarters at Downside, I involve Uni music people in late winter and spring recitals in the Churches.

We generally finish up with a barbie or finger food dinner in one of the Church halls, overnight them at the farm quarters, which are comfortable and well equipped and, after a good breakfast next morning, despatch them back to Sydney, while I go on to the Church that is on my schedule for that day.

The University Conservatorium of Music get keen on buying a batch lot of Paul Bailey violins circa about 1892. I suppose they are the colonial edition of a Stradivarius or Stainer. They bring about \$13,000 each on the open market but, with Granite Finance happily being the donor, we buy the last four on the market for \$50,000 all up (and if you will pardon the pun) give these to the Uni Music Department without strings.

By way of recognition of this generous gift the University conduct a recital in Bathurst Cathedral to thank my parents and Uncle Aubrey for their generosity. They make short speeches in reply and are clearly delighted when the Cathedral Choir with Uni Soloists runs off a hacked up version of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'For he's an Englishman' substituting 'for they are Bathurst people'. It's a huge success and the Sydney Morning Herald and the weekend press do it brown.

This all brings a few problems on my head when the Archbishop calls me in.

TEN

I plead other engagements and put him off for nearly a month by which time he gets quite shirty. I eventually have to front. His secretary starts to shorthand our discussion and it very quickly becomes confrontational.

I stand up, flex my shoulders, "let's rewind bit my Lord" I say. I point to the Secretary (quite the Church) and say "you, Out!"

He bristles, "I certainly don't have to go" he

Now I'm riled, I grab him by the scruff of the neck and seat of the pants and throw him into the door, there's a loud crash and he gets up dazed.

"You big swine" he says.

I open the door, point at the gap and he scuttles (there is no other word to describe it) out. Archbishop is now standing behind his palatial desk and looking very disconcerted.

"Sit down" I say and he does. I get a straight pipe, which is already filled and tamped and put up a smokescreen. "Well my Lord, what indeed is the problem?"

I draw it out of him, bit by bit. He tells me he views the extension of my power base within the Church and the University and financial world, with concern and wants to know if I'm after his job.

"Not at present" I shoot back.

"Well you must then be aiming at the Bishopric of Bathurst and you certainly can't have that as the Bishop's irreplaceable."

"Come off it Archbishop" I say (my Lording him is out now forever). "The honorary dear old Bishop is an old fart (actually he's the same age as the Archbishop, as I well know) who couldn't run a party in a pie shop (regrettably true I'm afraid)."

"Well Reverend Doctor Bernard Cowley, I could have your job for that" he says.

"Well Archbishop" I reply, "bearing in mind that I know where the bodies are buried, such action could result in creating an implacable enemy, who could incessantly shoot at the soft underbelly of the Church of England, from the Sanctity of the all powerful and much listened to Roman Catholic Church."

"You ungrateful bastard" he says, "you'd actually defect?"

"Oh yes" I say, "I've certainly had the offer (and I have). But I say my Ministry concept is that of equity for my fellow man. Jack Kennedy once said 'he that expects fairness and equity in this life is clearly suffering from a serious delusion'. I don't subscribe to that famous viewpoint but in my heart I know it's right. I just try to lighten people's loads and I have no interest in seeking promotion, although I would consider any reasonable opportunity, so long as it doesn't impinge on what I want to do."

"For your part Bishop Harbottle" I say, "I suggest you look upon me as a committed worker for my fellow man and not as a burr in your saddlecloth."

I fear the allusion is lost on my hardnosed Bishop, but he gets the message just the same and we make to part. I expect this power mad Churchman will be back so at least I've had adequate warning.

"Good day to you Reverend Doctor" as we part without any handshake.

He walks me to the door where we brush past the banished one, still standing there, shorthand pad in hand.

He reopens the discussion with the thrust, "I don't even know if you believe in God."



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says. neck

The desk

“Lord Bishop Harbottle” I say, “none of us have tattooed on our foreheads, ‘I’m a believer’. Perhaps you are querying the Theological content of my sermons?”

“Never” he says, “I monitor their content and they are everything I could expect and more, although decidedly different.”

“Lord Bishop” I say, “I have an Honours Degree in Theology and I believe I know my stuff. Do you believe in God?”

He’s grins and attempts to lighten the discussion as well he might. He’s headed into unwinnable territory as he has a very minimal University Degree at best.

“Most days” he says.

I toughen up the discussion again and tell him if I ever see his brown nosing secretary short handing my sermons again I will unmask him to the congregation before throwing him neck and crop out of whichever of seven Churches I’m preaching in.

“O.K.” Harbottle says and we part company finally.

The knuckleheads at Eastpac Bank start getting their Annual General Meeting format together and the penny finally drops. They ring Dad and Uncle Aubrey, who tell them I hold proxy voting for the shares and they should talk to me. They try to but I give them the run around saying, via the secretary that fields my calls at Granite Finance, that I’m too busy on Church matters.

They make enquiries at the Church office as to where I’m preaching that weekend and thus, well forewarned, I line up an amusing character actor, one Luca, who does some odd jobbing for me.

To cut a long story short, when the Eastpac Board turn up en mass at Saint



John’s in the Wilderness the very next stinking hot Sunday morning to hear the service and to bail me up after, Luca, a huge man who looks like the pub bouncer he sometimes is, dressed impeccably in a dark well cut suit with a fake bulky hand gun in him arm pit, intercepts them.

He draws the whole bunch, including the drivers and the odd secretary to one side and one at a time runs a hand held metal detector over them and checks their I.D. closely. One doesn’t have any with him and he is told firmly to sit quietly in the car and not to attempt to enter the Church. He spends the long morning baking in the un air-conditioned long car.

Luca states he’s in charge of security and that their very attendance in a country environment warrants a checking of their bona fides. Somewhat shaken they enter the Church, where the usher shows them into a selected front pew. I tell the largish congregation truthfully that we have the full Eastpac Board here this summer morning. I laud their annual substantial donation to the western plains Xmas appeal and express the hope that at morning tea, after the service, that my congregation will make themselves known to the Board and personally thank them for their consistent and generous help.

ELEVEN

After Church I shake them off and leave them to the locals who crowd around them and stuff tea and cake into them on a very generous scale. I quietly mizzle off to a christening in Bathurst and then to a late lunch at Downside, where my rellies

listen to my tale and laugh their country heads off. Particularly so when I tell them that I have preached on the text of Christ cleansing the Temple of the moneychangers.

On Monday I have my secretary, or rather the secretary I use, ring and invite them to morning tea in the boardroom at Granite Finance on Wednesday. I pick Wednesday as I have to take a funeral at Rookwood at 11.30 a.m. so thus can keep the meeting very short.

They arrive as usual en masse. I really don't know what this mob is up to, but they obviously don't trust the Chairman to negotiate out of their hearing.

Luca and a fellow bouncer, impeccably suited and barbered and wearing fake Mannlicher pistols under their arm pits, nod the ones they recognise from Sunday up the stairs and hold back several of those that they haven't seen before and run their detectors over them.

One rings positive, he's wearing a wire. They hold him and ring the police. The bank secretary borrows a phone and rings the bank lawyers.

At this point my boss, the Archbishop Harbottle, arrives on the scene.

"My Lord Bishop" I say, "what an unexpected honour. What in the world are you doing here?"

He garrumphs, "well I'm the bank's spiritual advisor, as well as being a shareholder on the Church's behalf."

"Oh" I say, "it's unusual to see a shareholder being privy to this type of meeting. How often do you spiritually advise them?"

"Well this is actually the first time" he mistakenly says.

The cops now arrive, its illegal to tape a business meeting scrumptiously, he admits the Chairman told him to. The bank's lawyers arrive to fend off the cops, the press (we've tipped them off, but given them little detail) arrive. It's a scene of utter confusion with so many different groups and individuals trying to do what they have to do in a space thats two thirds too small to cope with them.

All we need now to immortalise this farcical meeting is for the ghost of William Schwenke Gilbert to arrive and write another 'Trial by Jury' type epic.

I'm due at the funeral soon, so with no more available time I fade from the scene, leaving this unruly mob clogging up the tiny boardroom.

Immediately following Rookwood I play real hard to get and drive out and take up a short term booking at the Church Retreat House near Jenolan. This fine house, which still has its servant's quarters from the good old Church days, provides exactly what it says it will i.e. to provide a quick retreat from the world by stressed Clergymen.

Luca comes out a bit later to continue the farce and he fends off the phone calls and various visitors that lob along, except Dad and Uncle Aubrey and we have a most pleasant time sitting on the shady veranda in steamer chairs and drinking single malt whisky and smoking our pipes, while I update my rellies on the state of play.

The company, scotch and mountain scenery are all top hole and we have a lot of laughs. Luca enters into the fun and puts his Rottweiler onto a group of financial press paparazzi, who abandon their cameras and run for their life. Luca is a sport and he removes all film and puts the cameras safely aside to return them later.

Dad and Aubrey are as shrewd as gardies. They are both farmers who blandly and convincingly profess to know nothing about anything and between them both and between farming seasons have had the gumption to make their mark and fortune in both farming and finance. They race a few horses in Sydney and no

trainer or bookie has ever bested them. Under their agricultural cloak they are as sharp as tacks.

We put together a bit of a game plan, as I hide out here and read a few John Grisham novels that I've been saving up for such a break. The Bank is bound to contact them so they concoct a dumb story to suit the occasion and set off back to Sydney. Our Merchant Banking friends turn up at Granite Finance, asking for a conference at short notice. I have them come out to Jenolan, bringing a lunch hamper and some vintage wines, as the food at the retreat house is a tad rank.

They turn up with the hamper and iced bottles of wine and we set ourselves up around a table in the gardens for a pleasant lunch. They finally get down to business at the stage, when we are lighting up our pipes and sipping some marvellous old Calvados and hand me a thick envelope, which contains the proxy votes for another 18% of Eastpac. This now places me in full control of the Bank, sort of. Boy am I gob smacked.

I ask them what they want and they tell me. It's quite a clever ploy. They want me to create mayhem with the Board, followed by a furore in the press and deep uncertainty on a big scale with the shareholders. They've sold Eastpac shares short and want a big share dip to gain from this. They cannot actually lose in the long run as they have so many shares already they can cover the shortfall easily. They want to make a huge dollar in so doing. It's not illegal, but its better not to put the deal in writing or to discuss the matter in the wrong spot.



The plan involves a fair bit of running around and preferably no phone calls. I use Luca and the Merchant Bankers to do all the running, as it's unwise for me to emerge from seclusion yet. In fact, it's essential that I don't.

Luca and Co gather up quite a gallimaufry of data, a deal of it privileged, on what the Board of Eastpac has in mind. I hang in at the retreat, do a deal of early morning bushwalking and wait on events. Our associates bring in a good banker, fired out of Eastpac about a year earlier. He has a good insight into what is going on and has all this and more at his fingertips.

"Spill it out" we tell him "and we'll sign you back in when we've gained control."

He's an invaluable source to us as we concoct an operating plan of sorts.

TWELVE

I go incommunicado and reject all Bank requests for a meeting, telling them that the untrustworthy nature of the Granite Finance boardroom meeting, doesn't give me any confidence in meeting them. We now release snippets of information here and there that the Eastpac Board are in danger of a complete spill and that their imported nominees for Management will not be ratified at the A.G.M. We talk of a drastic drop in the share price and possible amalgamation of the Bank.

This is, in part, pure waffle but the financial writers take to this dross like chickens to wheat. After a while the press now looks for the niggers in the wood pile and alight on Uncle Aubrey, Dad and myself.

They can't get to me in the retreat house, where I'm relaxed and reading Grisham novels. Dad and Aubrey are all worded up and ready to appear. They pass on live T.V. interviews, but cheerfully make themselves available for photo opportunities out at Downside. The project all the values of a vanishing rural Australia and bemoan that Eastpac, once the guiding financial source in the development of farms on the western plains, is now a creature of the city and making a lot of mistakes in their ruthless pursuit of the bottom line. They haven't, of course, made that many mistakes, but the press are now in full cry.

The amusing part of all this is that professing and espousing rural values and pictured in the cabs of their huge machines, Uncle and Dad are proven city operators and sole owners of Granite and Bathurst Finance, successful companies by any standard. The press totally overlook these factors.

The destabilising campaigns, now growing its own momentum and the usual financial rat bags start buying into the argument. The share price goes south and keeps going. The Merchant Bankers and Institutional Investors now start chewing their fingernails, as the whole thing now looks like a media soufflé that could collapse overnight.

Our Merchant Bankers can't make up their minds when to start buying the devalued shares. I put a further rocket up the Board's tails by issuing from the retreat, a very considered but short statement of my growing concern at the present state of Eastpac and that I will cut my retreat short (short, I've been out there nearly a month now despite protestations by my Bishop who wants me out, but under the very rules of the Church can't get at me).

I wring my hands in the press statement that such a venerable institution finds itself in a corner with no way out in sight. The shares go further south and further south again as the institutions, who have always regarded Eastpac as Blue Chip, quit like rats leaving a sinking ship.

The Board issues statements that their ship is totally buoyant, but we quickly leak damaging information, obtained by their defector, to counter this and our Merchant Bank friends do a bit of share fire selling in London, which puts the icing on our plans.

We really don't think we can stage this charade much longer so we now are ready to buy and buy we all do. Our Merchant Banking friends, who set all this up, cover their short selling and make a king's ransom in the process simply by putting out a one day only buy order to the institutions who grasp at the offer, like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

As the acceptances roll in at the end of the one day offer, quite late I issue an invitation to Caves House at Jenolan for the following day for lunch.

They arrive and we all sit down ready for our meal, I chair a round table conference before they bring in starters. I tell them that we have half an hour to settle the fate of Eastpac. No phone calls in or out and I table my big heap of proxies.

They quickly realise that they are goners and ask what I will settle for. I tell them that we can settle the whole thing here and now by gentleman's agreement, or we can have a pitched battle at the A.G.M.

THIRTEEN

It's a surprisingly short meeting, but in any case our wish list is short anyway.

We out the overseas management birds of passage (there's a loop hole in their contract that gives us a cheap out) and appoint three commissioners to run the Bank, one staff, one money, one public affairs, for the first years I will Chair the commission. Time ticks along.

Six weeks later I tap the gavel at the head of Eastpac Board's table. I call on the Archbishop of Sydney, as our spiritual adviser, to offer a short prayer to launch this new era. He's as sour as a quince and looks it, but he also speaks well.

I thank him, observe he is a busy man and must have things to do and dismiss him from the boardroom.

We run through the formalities, I look at the first item of real business on the Agenda.

"Gentlemen, let us start. The first item is the provision of very cheap housing finance for disadvantaged residents in Bathurst."

"Well damn it all, gold found near Bathurst started the forty year bull run that took our country from being a loose collection of sheep runs to the cusp of Nationhood."

"We owe the area this much at least, although I have some small pricklings of conscience in that this Bank, which we have been jerking around without mercy, was around long before gold was discovered...."

THE POLITICIAN

BY

Lloyd Nelson

ONE

It's a bit before 8 on this fine spring morning and I'm taking in the magnificent view of the Grampians as I walk from my homestead towards the shearing shed. I'm going down to let the rams out for the day. The walk is slightly downhill and easy. I'll drive back from the sheds in one of my small farm trucks when I come back for coffee. My ASIO man is walking along a bit over from me. He's carrying a short Winchester Hard Hitter rifle at the ready. It's a waste of money (the Taxpayers) in my view but his bosses claim to have uncovered a plot against me and are keeping a close eye on things. I've been out of the Prime Ministership now for over three years and I can't think who would want to shoot a figure now out of the picture.

The workers are rolling up and after I let the rams out I join them to pass the time of day. They are all business, letting the sheep dogs out of their runs, tossing bales of hay onto the trucks and about to go about their daily run around the sheep. There's no yard work today on the Clear lake flock but I can see my neighbour pushing a mob of sheep up the race way from her farm to my shed so guess the mulesing contractor will be along shortly. It's quite surprising the activity on a sheep and grain property, someone always coming and going. We ship quite a few cast for age sheep, shipping wethers and fat lambs into the regional saleyards every fortnight, but today is an off sale week so although there's heaps of activity there's



SHEARING BOARD AND WOOL SHED

no great pressure. None of my workers live on the property. One is a retired farmer from town, another, a widow and the last, a hard bitten 18 year old girl from a nearby farm. They are very good with sheep and each has a mob or three to look after and they come together when a working team is required for whatever we are doing. There's 38,000 sheep on Clear Lake, the same as 10

years ago. Wool is rubbing along at the bottom at the moment though the bad old days of the stock pile are behind us. I'm not optimistic that wool will ever come back so we are turning off more and more fat lambs from the ewes we used to breed only fine wool sheep from. Sheep meat is selling very well as is the baby beef we turn off from our Murray Grey Herd. Much of the wool cheque seems to go on getting the sheep shorn, about \$5 a head it seems to average and our ram sales, though good fun, don't do much more than break even.

We have another 20,000 sheep up on Robin Hill, a fine property I bought a year or three back from the Fogarty's. Everyone seemed to want to buy this property but the childless owners weren't keen to sell. I cracked them by taking up a bottle of Scotch and spending an afternoon drinking this with old Pat.

“You're getting too old for this Pat. What say I buy you out and lease you back the house and say a thousand acres on a lifetime interest? You needn't shear the sheep, I'll supply you with a thousand ewes each year off shears and lend you my meat rams and when the fat lambs are ready sell the lot including the ewes and pay me market rates for the ewes and I'll replace them next year?”

Fogarty agreed and we have never had a cross word about the arrangement. I hope he hangs in for some years to come as I enjoy my odd visit to Robin Hill Homestead.

I should explain that I'm a bachelor of lifelong standing. As Sir Humphrey Appleby famously said 'some of my best friends are women', but I have never married one. There are two types of bachelors in the bush. One is the man who no woman wants or who, as so often in farming families, lived with their parents for their life time and then it's far too late. The other is the natural bachelor and I'm in that category. I just don't want a woman in my ear full time. I crave and need quiet times to think and write and plan.

The last thing I ever expected to be was a farmer. I'm a lawyer by trade and farming was both incidental and accidental. I was brought up on this property, attended the local school and went off to Geelong Grammar. I always thought this to be an over puffed school but I rubbed along OK there, never missed a game that Collingwood played in Melbourne and went on to Sydney University to tackle their famous arts/law degree in due course. I had a row house in walking distance of the Uni and I guess really started to live there. I shacked up with an American girl doing the same degree and we had a wonderful life of sport, study and sex for the four years I was there. After graduation I went back to Melbourne and clerked for a year in the firm my father used in Little Collins Street. Much of standard, law is very much grunt work, so my general aim to be a barrister and let other lesser lawyers do the real paper work.

TWO

The law firm shoved most of their pro bono work onto me (work without charge, paying their rites of passage in this privileged profession). I nearly brought the firm down in my first real case picked up in the cells of the law courts. I take on a mobster charged with GBH with possible upgrade to murder. He's from a famous crime family, is a recognised long standing foot soldier and is utterly and inexorably out on a limb defence wise. He tells me in Italian Australian that the deceased and he worked for the same mobster and mistakenly did a bit of free lancing on the side. They (the crime family) have the gun used in the matter with his prints on it.

“How so?” I ask, he shows me a dreadful burn on his forearm, “blow torch,” he says, “I had to wrap my hand around the gun or they would have moved to more sensitive parts.”

“Why haven't they got the gun?” I ask (the cops, that is).

Tony says they have promised to give it to a detective in due course and that he looks like spending the rest of his life locked up. However, he says there is a possible solution if he can get to talk to Jean Paul, a Lebanese who can be found at the Red Lion pub in Carlton through the head barman. I bring in Jean Paul, who is quite literate and a fine looking young hood and he, dressed in a very good suit and trimming, accompanies me to the gaol and acts as my note taker for the interview. They speak Italian. I ask him what it's all about when we leave and tells me, “Mr Advocate it is far better for you not to know.”

War breaks out on the streets of Carlton and a good segment of the mob come to violent ends. They counter attack and quite a few Lebanese turn up dead. No-one can quite catch up with what is going on. My phone goes late evening. It's Jean Paul. He needs a hideout right away from his usual haunts for a few days and an overnight car ride to Albury. I stash him at the family holiday home at Portsea with a supply of canned beer and food and a few days later drop him in Albury, where he is immediately loaded into a car and whisked away in the general direction of Sydney. It seems the mobsters set the whole thing up to flush out the Lebanese who are making (or were) inroads into their trade. The lawyers want to know all about it but I brush them off saying that anyone I discuss it with seems to get killed. They laugh and let the matter drop.

THREE

Having not covered myself in glory on my first major case the firm offer me a posting to London where an associated firm specialising in shipping law needs a junior council. I spend the next years progressing through the ranks and fighting cases in diverse spots around the world. Six months in Oslo, six months in Baltimore, 5 months in Rio de Janeiro and so on. I never travel back to London when I'm on these long appointments and see an awful lot of the world by travelling from whatever city I'm lawyering in to nearby countries.

Eventually I get out of this slow moving but very lucrative section of the law and do a lot of work in the London office for a merchant banking firm. Some of this entails back and forthing to Switzerland to talk to the gnomes of Zurich. I take over completed work to them and bring back viva voce instructions on what they want done next. Nothing in writing other than cryptic notes. I notice on these trips that I seem to have an ever recurring shadow and discuss this with the Gnomes at the Weirkree Bank. They run me down to the basement and we go through their security cameras. Once we find him on the security camera the programme is set up to seek repeat pictures and put a date to them and print out hard copy. It's quite amazing and I had no idea that this type of computerisation had advanced so far. I was even more amazed to see well known Australian political faces recurring on the same programme. I pick up on four of the very best known ones who are always in the Oz papers and get printouts on when they were there and photos. Boy have they been regulars. The security man is obliging and I take away the hard copy. They pick up my shadow; or rather their security contractors do, lock him in a cellar with canned food and water, a bucket and a roll of toilet paper for 30 days. By which time he tells them everything but his grandmother's birth date. They conclude there is nothing too serious in it and tell me that they have let him go with a warning. Certainly I never saw him again and I wonder at times whether anyone else has.

FOUR

I get back on the shipping roller coaster and have eight months in Boston and then return to London and merchant banking work for the next two years. During this stable period when I was always in London and took a moat flat at the famous Barbican, I once go to a concert in the building at which Sir George Solti conducted the LPO and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa sang Puccini. A very memorable performance

and only a 100 yards walk from my flat. I never shackled up with a woman in this period but I had two that overnighted from time to time. The first is a physiotherapist and massage expert, what an experience. I met her in a London pub and we got along famously in all ways. She is undemanding unlike the second stringer who is the MD of an international advertising agency; great fun but very feisty and up herself. She was always trying to move in and left more and more of her clothes at the flat. Every so often I would dump the surplus in a Good Sammy Bin. I flinched when I did this as it was all top of the range designer stuff but she earned so much money I don't think she ever noticed as she kept on leaving more. She pressured me heavily on marriage but I parried her with the riposte "But I hardly know you." "You rotten bastard," she says "you know me inside and out, and very often."

Things were quite testy when I get a call to go to Boston again and then Montreal. Months later I am finished with these two demanding cases and in Montreal buy quite a good looking Honda motor bike of a type we have at Clear Lake, buy some Wal Mart leathers and armed only with a starting pistol and a flick knife set out to see a bit of America. The route followed takes in the plains and the Rockies, Yellowstone National Park and Mesa Verde. It's all quite fascinating. I motel wherever I am, put some plastic on the floor and bring my bike in with me. I eventually get to roar around Yosemite National park and then go into San Francisco, selling my bike and leathers to a friendly bike dealer and buying some clothes, go into the city where I have good friends at the Wells Fargo bank on the corner of Samson and Sutter. A young hood tries to mug me in broad daylight in the street. I whip out my starter pistol which is loaded with double blanks, put it in his ear and pull the trigger. I've never seen a rabbit run as fast.

My mates are good fun and they take me out through the High Sierras to play the tables at Lake Tahoe for a day or two. We also have a good look around the famous state capital, Sacramento. I go around to the Australian consulate to see what has been happening in Oz and read in a five week old copy of the Age an account of both my parents and my older farming brother Rob being killed in an horrific road smash near Yass. The paper said they were returning from a sheep field day at Hay. It's all over red rover for my family.

I ring dad's lawyers next day and they tell me they have attended to matters. Cremations had been carried out and the ashes held until I get back. They are paying the farm workers, but as the senior partner said,

"Gerry, we know fuck all about sheep. We have of course been out to the farm, which by the way belong's lock stock and barrel to you, to pay the workers and summat is going on. The manager's changed the entire staff so he obviously is getting rid of potential witnesses." My old boss is as sharp as a tack, so I take close note of this.

"Thanks and I'm home soon," I say and sign off.

I arrange for the Barbican agent to clean out my flat, put my gear and Rover car in a container and send it on paying by credit card. I laugh much later when my gear



and the advertising girls all arrive at the farm.

I whistle into Melbourne from San Francisco wearing the same clothes purchased there. I call on my old legal firm for a big hi and a close chat, call at the big stock firm Elders, buy some used work clothes at the Good Samaritans so that I don't look too new chummy, even get a battered stockman's hat and boots and catch the afternoon train to Hamilton. I toss my gear and a sleeping bag into one of the many vacant rooms at the shearers quarters and let the manager know I'm here. He offers tea but I decline and light the stove at the quarters for hot water and to grill a steak.

Next morning we are about to count the sheep beginning now. Much confusion reigns and people and sheep dogs are dispatched hither and thither. While the stockies are counting I'm going through the stock register, stock tax register and stock movement book. By 4 pm we have a final figure, short by 4123 of what should be there. I look at the manager and give him an out.

"You must have a mob agisted somewhere," I say.

"Oh Lord, yes, he says," as quick as a flash, "There's a mob at Ebsarys (adjoining farmers at the back) on agistment."

"Go get 'em," I say.

He does and we finish the count just on dark. I now have all my sheep and now know I've got a dishonest manager and nest of vipers on my boundary. I give the stockies a good handful of money to buy tea and drinkies in town and after another cook up crash for the night.

In the course of the next day I clean out all the staff, mostly newcomers and the manager and pay them up. I've got my sheep back so I pay the manager three months extra pay to get him relocated elsewhere. He doesn't ask for a reference.

I will gloss over the next few weeks during which I seek a lot of advice, hire three local workers, arrive at suitable size mobs for each to handle and divide duties. I also go up to the wheat farm in the Wimmera which dad and my brother crop about a quarter of every winter. The farming gear is all there and looks in good order so I strike a deal with a neighbour to keep any eye on this not lived on property.

FIVE

Clear Lake is run as a sheep property in the main with some course grain cropping and hay cutting for the dry. There's a section of irrigated Lucerne around part of the Lake and Lucerne hay is regularly cut and baled here. I've no machinery or tractor skills so I call on another neighbour who I'm told is a whiz on this sort of thing. I strike a deal with him to do the tractor work on Clear Lake offer him a share crop deal on the Wimmera property which is called Killing Fields. During the time we are back and forthing and setting up a deal I spend time chatting with his rather beautiful wife. They have no kids and she laments the lack of a decent house on their farm. She shows me the site she likes on a granite outcropped hill. She's a strong type so I suggest she build her own.

"Tell me," She says.



"Well," I say, "Let the local blasting expert (there's bound to be one) blow that big stone outcrop to bits and use the stone to build a stone house." I had been looking at one such being built in Connecticut only recently and thought it looked simple enough.

"There's the problem of water," She says.

I look down the gulch to a huge dam that dad had sunk himself with an Allis Chalmers bulldozer, still on the property. Because of its huge size and great height water is run to troughs in a number of paddocks but only a smidgeon is being used.

"Well," I say, "hook a poly pipe onto the mill down there and put a tank up here."

From such small beginnings a beautiful stone house is now well towards completion. We all do a bit on it from time to time but the housewife, wearing heavy leather gloves, has put most of the stone facing in place. I'm still at the quarters, which I use as an excuse not to entertain visitors and generally refuse all offers of hospitality on the grounds that I cannot yet return it. A willowy girl calls, she's married to a local farmer, no kids, is looking for a bit of work for pin money so I recruit her to maintain my cellar and larder and cook me a roast tea four days a week. I tell her to cook up a storm and leave it in the oven for when I come in. She's gone always by the time I get in from the paddock. One evening she's still there when I come into the quarters.

"Well, this is a surprise," I say.

"La sir, do you want the menu?"

"Fire away," I say.

"Well, there's smoked salmon, curried soup, roast pork medallions and for desserts there's me and if you're still hungry I shall also be the after dinner mints." She leers at me, "what will you start with?"

"Dessert," I say.

"O.K. then," she drops her long skirt under which she is wearing nothing, sashays her magnificent bottom, flashes her long, long legs and says "follow me." We pass my usual room and go into one much further up. She has wrestled a double bed in, has a video running on the Karma Sutra, incense burning and in a flash we're into it. All quite mind boggling.

"What's brought this on?" I ask.

"Pure lust sir," she says, "pure lust."

She becomes part of my life, but only when her hubby is away for sure and certain.

SIX

I go back and forth to Melbourne from time to time sorting matters out with the lawyers and so on. I also attend the meetings of the city branch of the Pastoralists and Graziers, which is held in the Melbourne Club committee room. I do this to avoid local involvement as much as possible. Get back into Clay Target shooting at the Melbourne Gun Club at Lilydale and contemplate keeping a horse at the Hunt Club for the winter season. Dad always raced a few horses and bred a few and there is a good small mob of horses at Clear Lake. I'm a bit interested in steeple chasing, having followed the National Hunt events in the English winter. Victoria has a lot of hurdle events. A very good girl jump jockey has recently been rubbed out by the stewards on flimsy sounding grounds and I winkle her out and offer her a job for her suspension period sorting out the neddies at Clear Lake and seeing if there is racing potential in them. She is very interested but is a bit worried about leaving her mum whom she lives with. "Bring her too," I say and in no time they are settled into one of the vacant workers cottages at Clear Lake. We have the stable cleaned out and are picking our way through the mob with the help of a local horse breaker. He gets them going and she works on them from that point. This is all going in the right direction when I have a call from the jump stewards warning me not to employ a

suspended rider. This intrigues me no end. It seems to me they are not only able to stop her riding income but they now want to stop her alternative income. I make a time with this burke and go to the racing office and delve very deeply into this matter. I am so incensed at this ham fisted crowd that turn up at the next inquisition of a jockey, offer him my services pro bono and commence to turn over this mares nest, calling a press conference as I do so.

No one has really seriously challenged this mob before but I'm a lawyer and a practised barrister and there are loop holes everywhere. For some months I appear for any rider that I think is being leant on free of charge and I like to think that I brought back a sense of enlightenment to this serious industry so far as the all powerful stewards go. One case we took to the Supreme Court and we shot the stewards to bits and got a heavy order for costs. Things changed for the better after that. The racing president bailed me up one day and asked what I wanted.

"Fairness and equity," I say, "and a bit more common sense from you chaps when you're appointing stewards."

The upshot of all this horse activity was that we settled on having four horses in work full time with two others in light work and the girl jockey rode these in country and metro races. We flat raced the best one and jump raced the rest and made money out of it. Of the other horses we got most to polo pony standards and I played a lot of polo over ensuing summers.

I've played a fair bit of polo so am no beginner at this sport. I cut a green sapling and bolt it to the tray of my Tojo and run four horses abreast down to the polo field, much of the distance is actually through the farm so by the time I'm on the public road they are calm and settled and trot along well. I don't have a strapper and am having a busy time between chukkas in getting the next horse up. A very tall pleasant girl in long boots and a floral frock comes over and says "want a hand mate?" I accept and she has the next one ready well in advance of it being needed. She's a high school teacher, skilled with horses. She straps for me all summer. Appearing at matches and heading off home when I have the team assembled to trot home after the game. Towards the middle of a game a farmer's wife takes a hard fall and hurts her back. There's no medical help of course and I step forward. I give her a slug of brandy from a flask, gently ease her over a bag of chaff commandeered for the purpose, get her shirt up and breeches down a bit and work on her back where she plainly has a popped disc. Calling on my extensive learning from my Physio live-in and using a bottle of olive oil and a hair dryer which runs from a cigarette plug in a Ute I get the disc back and we get her on her feet. Several weeks later she turns up at the quarters one evening when her hubby is at a Masons do.

"Gerry," she says, "I cannot get the feel of your touch out of my excited mind so I'm her to exorcise the problem."

I thoroughly massage her and she goes away content and I lie there totally relaxed. I assume she told her husband as he fronts up blood in his eye. I shirt front him to see he keeps his distance and summoning all my court skills counsel him using the arguments that few marriages last these days. She possibly has satisfied her curiosity and he may never have further trouble with her. In any case what is the



alternative? Surprisingly he sees the logic of the argument, he buckles, she is still with him and we are all amicable friends at the polo.

The other episode at the Polo ground is not so amicable. I help the next door widow Ferguson a bit with her flock management problems and she runs her mob up a raceway from her boundary to my shearing shed and we do her sheep work, like mulesing, drenching shearing, crutching, on the tail end of doing our own. Referring to this young Hopgood from a grazing family comes along with two of his solidly built mates, all the worse for many tinnies and says to me in passing,

“Ah, Mr Connolly, still trading sex for sheep work with the widow Ferguson?”

I take exception to this crude remark (mind you it's an appealing idea) and suggest he apologise or get a belting. I say to my polo friends each side of me on the log (where we were drinking tinnies).

“Watch the one on either side while I reason with this blighter.”

The blighter bellows defiance and swings at me. It's a one punch fight and I drag him over to the horse trough and dunk him in and out a few times. For good measure I let the tyres down on their Ute, they're too drunk to drive anyway. I can't say that my polo days are dull.

SEVEN

At the end of the polo season, for convenience sake we stable the hurdle team at Bacchus Marsh at a place my Dad has for years past used as a racing base for Melbourne events. I'm going down one Sunday morning to see the team work out and at a long abandoned siding on the Bacchus Marsh road I see a big eyed girl sitting in a stationary car and a hundred yards or so behind her in the old siding stand three cars belonging to and surrounded by local natives (original Australians) I drop the pace of and run in alongside the three cars. I know many of these chaps by sight as you do in small country towns and say to one

“Yo, Felix, what's with the girl?”

“Christ,” he says, “she's panic stricken and we can't get near her to help without her having hysterics.”

“You might have told the cops,” I say.

“Bugger, no,” he says, “we've drunk so much woobla we'd still be locked up if we'd gone within cooe of the Fuzz.”

“Fair enough Felix, have a good one I say and mosey down to the girl. She winds her window down and says

“I'm desperate to go to the loo really desperate.”

I dig a roll of toilet paper out of the Ute and tell her to jump out and go behind the old raised rail platform. She comes back much happier. I unload her gear, run through to the farm, lend her another vehicle and send her off to her new school about 60 miles away. I undertake to take her new car to the local dealer and to get it warranty fixed.

“Ring me towards the end of the week,” I tell her and she sets off.

I take the car into Hamilton on the farm car trailer and she turns up next Saturday morning at the farm late morning to swap vehicles. She's very young, very slim and very pleasant. I barbeque up a bit of lunch and we read the weekend papers.

“Why not stop over?” I suggest “and come to the Country Club dinner dance?”

“Love to,” she says, “but I've only got what I'm wearing with me.

“Oh,” I say. “Have I got some clothes for you?” and take her down to the machinery shed to the yet to be unloaded container full of my London gear which is

sitting on the concrete ramp. I unlock it and hunt around til I find the hanging clothes, swathed in heavy plastic. There's a raft of top designer frocks belonging to my London girlfriend there. She is gob smacked, stunned and delighted in the one breath. We take a selection up to the house for her to try and later run into town to buy her some dancing sandals. It seems my old girl friend had bigger feet. We have a great and pleasant evening and she comes back to the farm and I put her in the double bedded room but don't try to come on to her. We have a pleasant breakfast and she sets out for home.

"May I come again?" she says.

"Sure," I say.

"Well then, until Friday evening."

Friday proves the start of a pleasant relationship of a weekend nature.

"I could move in," she says.

"No," I say, "I need a playmate, not a wife."

EIGHT

My old law firm gets in touch. They have a case of distinct possibilities that they want me to senior counsel for. I read the brief. It's a lawyers dream and worth a mint to all concerned. I take it on eventually on the basis that the client, a huge corporate desperado, pays legal costs as he goes and if he gets off Scot free and no appeal is lodged the success fee to the firm is one million dollars. The publicity from this court contest was enormous. I ran the whole thing but only appeared two days a week for the real action. I was able to set up blind alleys and more blind alleys for junior counsel, well coached by me, to run the case down, which he did with great drive and direction. We got the corporate one off after 14 months of court work. It was never difficult, just long running. He paid up like a lamb and I took a marvellous home unit in his St. Kilda road development in lieu of money. I have it still and stay there when in Melbourne.

About this time I have the London Merchant Bankers do a run down on the wool outlook, not particularly encouraging as and when the price support scheme collapses, as collapse it must due to the size of the stock pile and also the secondary stock pile held on farms. I take steps to guard against this by increasing fat lamb production; reducing breeding more merino's by not mating the merino ewes and selling down the wether numbers and so on. The Bankers tell me there are no worries on the grain side so I acquire privately the farm adjoining ours in the Wimmera and step up wheat production. I'm conservative, so we chop with big combines, use minimum spraying and harvest the results with dads original New Holland self propelled header, plus another good second hand one acquired at a clearing sale of the same model. This all works fine and I continue at law running three cases at the one time. Here again the instructing lawyers, mostly my old firm, do all the grunt work and I work the court rooms. It's quite rewarding, keeps my hand in. I turn up at the local court on the odd Tuesday and tackle any case where the miscreants are not represented. I keep out of the way of the Aboriginal legal service and in the main help the out of the loop Australian. The cops don't like me much as I never concede a case without a determined and knowing effort. This is of course all without charge work. I sure make some eyes light up with hope and some cops eyes darken.

I have a practise of heading away from the farm some Sundays, catching Mass at a church en route (I know the mass time tables of a heap of churches) and after

mass going on to the most handily situated Clay Target Club (there are heaps of them in Eastern Australia) to shoot where they are shooting skeet that day. Wherever I am at mass, being a long time member of the Church Choir at Brompton Oratory in London, I invariably join the choir, most churches are light on and are glad of an extra voice. One church, central to where I'm often going is a smallish one



near Ararat. I'm often there in the off Polo season. The organist is a pleasant lass. Not quite young, with beautiful brown eyes. One Sunday she appears shattered and has difficulty in playing the organ. It's none of my business but I stay a while and learn that in the one week her aged parents and her dad's very aged stockman have all been hospitalised and look like being there for some time. I pass on the skeet shoot and take her for coffee at my Ute. I always carry

a flask of coffee and a ham roll or two, so I unlimber a couple of folding chairs and we sit there in a sharp wind and I gather the facts.

I tell her that I'm a lawyer and trained to ask hard questions, so I ask them. I then join her for a run out to her farm to see what is pressing in the stock line. Quite a bit is. I take my Clear Lake team over on Tuesday and we tidy things up, get a Hamilton lad, looking for work over to the property for a few weeks to work on what I direct him to. He's still there. From this start I remain involved with the Granite Hill property for some years. The sick ones all pass on over the next year, they are all extremely old. The girl, sole owner now of a huge grazing property is against selling, so I integrate her operation with my own and the sheep classers, mulesing contractors, shearing contractor and so on that do the Clear Lake work automatically move on to the same work at Granite Hill. It works out fine.



Due to her close attention to her ageing parents life has sort of passed her by. I get my swishy house help friend to take her to Melbourne for a few days and get her into the real world of good hair do's clothes etc. We jointly teach her to dance; she rides a horse well anyway. We get her playing polo cross. She suggests I may be looking for a wife and that what she owns would be mine if I was interested. I gently let her down, but over a period of a year rearrange her life. I have a good lawyer friend in London. He has nothing much, lives right up to his income but is a sound legal man. I go to London on another matter and suggest that legal practise in Australia and marriage to a not quite young heiress would make his old age much easier.

"Gerry," he says after another whisky, "you're on."

He comes out, we establish a legal practise in Ararat as equal partners and he meets and later marries the heiress. I do the pre nuptial agreement tightly in the heiresses favour and so it goes. They now have five children and are as happy as sand boys. He runs the law practise well and the farm well and really is now a person of standing and money. I never saw a better result from such an unlikely

start.

NINE

About this time the Ram Breeders took an overseas corporation to court over a hotly disputed semen shots deal. There was a principle of considerable financial interest to the ram Industry and the matter finished up in the International Courts of Justice at The Hague. I lead for the wool growers at no fee to them unless we won the case, in which instance I can claim costs.

It was no more difficult than the shipping cases I'd argued all over the world in times past and I finished up with a huge fee and a shit load of publicity.

The National Party then approached me to serve the balance of the senate term which had occurred with the sudden death of their only Victorian Senator. They pointed out that as a large wheat and sheep farmer and a successful barrister I was well qualified to fill this slot and so I did.

I can tell you that from a busy lawyer farmer to member of Federal Parliament is a quantum leap but a manageable one. I jogged along for a while gathering facts from Switzerland and deferring having to say a word until the late afternoon occasion arose for me to make my maiden speech. There was hardly anyone in the house (they're a pretty shallow mob in the Senate I can tell you). I had done my home work and planned my getaway, this being the last speaking day before the late summer recess. I stood up and started.

"Mr Speaker," I said, "coming from a rural base and making my living in the main from the rural area you could expect that I will now, in accustomed style, present many of the difficulties facing my constituents and seek redress. Today I'm not going to do any of that. I speak on the wider issue of Parliamentary morality. In this context why are senior members of the Labour Government patronising Swiss banks in a clandestine looking manner?"

I table security pictures of Government members with their faces blanked out expertly and leave a few spares around for the press gallery to "find".

"I do not wish to take up too much of the time of this house on this matter today, Mr. Speaker. I ask that I be given time to expand on this nefarious matter on the day Parliament resumes."

The press gallery (there's only a handful in attendance) are practically wetting their pants at this turn of events. I sit down, then rise smartly after gathering up my papers and cut out of the Chamber, skid down the stairs and head to the car park where, by arrangement, Mayflower Florists, contractors to the government have a van idling. I jump in the back, the driver leans flower boxes over me and we're away. He drops me at a shopping mall in Queanbeyan where I have a car stashed and minutes later I'm on the road to Portland. Early next morning I swap my car for a hired 4 wheel drive, toss my camping gear into this and drive onto the Devonport car ferry and I'm out of the mainland.

The trip over is uneventful and I spend the next few weeks fly fishing in the Tasmanian Highlands and smoking my catch. After 3 weeks I spruce up and go to the old town of Bothwell for a skeet shoot. I ring a small paper in the area and tell them that they have an exclusive photo opportunity and to bring a good photographer.

The local paper leaks what it knows to the national media as I expected and I get surrounded as I unload my guns and gear at the Bothwell Clay Target Club car park. I tell them quite plainly that I cannot of course discuss anything with them due to the

laws of libel but they are welcome to take photos and they do.

By the second days shooting the big guns from the Labor Party arrive, hopefully to talk. It's not the chaps really involved, it's their minders. Broadly they ask me what I have in mind. I suggest they await the opening of parliament after the recess when all will be revealed. 'No can do' they say, 'this all must be cut and dried before the house reconvenes.'

"O.K., I say, "pilogue parliament for as long as you can, call a reps and half senate election for as late as you can, make sure these chaps don't stand (I hand him a short list) and the matter is over."

"Honest Injun?" they ask.

"Scout's honour" I reply.

That's what happens and I tip my hand to no-one, despite pressure to do so. I suppose it's the big advantage of being a bachelor, nothing leaks.

I take my place in the new parliament, wave my hand when the speaker asks me if I want to say anything and move to the front bench as treasurer. We are now kings of the political scene and I enact to the joint party room a court sitting in judgement on a huge fundamental change to our economic scene. In short I go all out for a flat 3% tax. I act as counsel for the case and the opponents of the scheme appoint their own barrister. The empanelled jury of 25 vote unanimously to try the scheme and away we go.

By the end of my term the party is in the best position ever and is set for 3 or 4 terms in office without doing anything further. I finish my term on an amusing note when they appoint me Prime Minister (acting) while the proper Prime Minister is in London.

I leave the house a popular man (unusual for a lawyer) and sell my memoirs for \$3 million.

What you are reading in this short story is the cheap but true version.



Achtung – Panzer

The Theatre-out crowd is swirling along Broadway this sharp winter New York night. They are packing into bars and restaurants here and there. There is actually a bit of a queue spilling onto the street outside Fratti's. It's a small, but upmarket brasserie, half a street off Broadway.

A fairly impressive small party bypass the lineup and make their way up to the front. They are greeted by Alfred Rosen, the Jewish proprietor, and escorted to a small rear table. Some of those already seated recognise one of the tall men and they give him a little hand clap. He's the star of the one man show, 'Goodbye Mr Chips', James Hilton's mini masterpiece currently running at the Hippodrome. There is big vogue in America at the moment for all things British, especially back to the past English shows. It's perhaps due to the closeness developed between the Great Republic and Postage Stamp size Britain during the recently ended war; or it may be that there are a heap of newly minted Anglophiles back from this same war.

Rosen reads them exactly – it's a sharp night – and he pours generous shots of schnapps into Muscat size glasses on their table. We can now meet the immediate players at the table. Erich von Hollenzen, tall and austere, is a leading Berlin actor. He shared duties on the stage of the Ernst Theatre, near the Adlon Hotel from 1934 to 1939 as first, the understudy to Joachim Voight, then later, as Voight gets roped in by the Nazis to help them here and there and as the demands on his time by this and his war goods manufacturing company gets stronger, as the alternate lead.

It's an interesting play, written by Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wills Wilde about 1890, but never produced anywhere until 1934, when a German chap picked up the script in a Dublin old wares shop. It's an instant success. Joachim thought it would be from the day he read the script; its technically produced counterpart of London's famous and ever running, 'The Mouse Trap'. There's only six characters in this play and the lead plays three roles. A very good young actress, a niece of the famous, later Tank General Heinz Guderian, plays the ingénue Prudence. She grows from a teenager to a stunning young woman in the time she plays this play. A couple of old hands play the odds and sods, while Joachim Voight and later Erich plays both twin brothers who provide the prurient itch part and also that of the Anglican curate who provides the moral restraint overtones.

The Germans, as is their want at that time, ignore Wilde's copyright and pay no royalties, something old Somerset Maugham used to complain about at this same time, so it's a big money spinner and totally a must see. The play catches the imagination of many people and as it lends itself to excerpt playing, Joachim or Erich perform for Goering at Karinhall and for Hitler at his mountain eyrie as well as country houses throughout Germany.

The other two at the table are similarly striking men. At six feet four inches, Wilhelm and Guenther von Prinz are identical twins, impossible originally to tell

apart; not so difficult these days. An American Mustang pilot brewed up Guenther's Tiger Tank in the rush to the coast in heavy cloud conditions in the Battle of the Bulge. He survived okay and has been in the USA for the past three months undergoing some fairly successful plastic surgery. The remaining player, Wilhelm is wearing the uniform of a US Tank Corp Colonel.

They relax with their drinks and their Californian omelets arrive, shepherded by the Jewish owner, just ensuring that everything is to their satisfaction.

"It's a funny old world," Willy observes.

"Ah," says Erich, "if the Jewish owner turned up with his omelets in old Berlin, I'd be phoning for the Einsatzgruppen to come and get him."

Gunner laughs, "Were you that anti-Jewish, Erich?"

"Oh, not a bit," Erich says, "but you must admit it was very fashionable to be so back in Hitlerland. Mind you, anti-semitism was certainly an effective means to an end for old Adolf – I don't know if he would have carried it on in the long run, but Himmler, horrible old Heinrich, was up and running by that time. Everything goes around, but what the fuck, Willy, are you doing in Yank Tankers weeds?"

"Ah....I'm employed here to help build and then test the Mark III version of our Tiger Tank. The Yanks picked up the blueprints for this when they overran the Ruhr at war end are so impressed, they decided to keep the Tank Factory at the Ford Motor Company going a bit longer to see how advanced it is."

"Our tanks are not and have never been the sort of tank the US would adopt," Gunner says. "They build muscle tanks, highly overpowered, while ours are powered with marvelously engineered small diesels, economic on fuel and just the best tank ever built."

"You know," Wilhelm says, "while we are talking tanks, the action you took to warn us on the day of Hitler's tank review at Potsdam was just so brave of you."

Erich interjects, "and of Marlene."

"Indeed," Wilhelm says. "It's only due to you two that all of us are here today, sitting at our ease in this prosperous country, waiting on our strawberries and cream and our brandies."

The aforementioned now arrive, along with the Jew riding shotgun on his Latin waiters. He well knows who they are of course; he gets from his waiter's tray some beautiful demitasses and tips into these Cherry Brandy, older than any of the recipients. They are not Thugs. "Thank you, thank you," they chorus. When the Jew goes, Erich picks up his tiny cup.

"A toast," he says and stands, "an inevitable toast....to absent comrades."

Absent indeed, there must be millions of them that went west in the late war.

The action of Erich's at the Tank Review is worth expanding on. It's complex and indeed had a bearing on the war, or the continuation of the war after the military tide turned.

Joachim Voight expected his Principals would close down Prudence and the Prurient, when Hitler's war was up and running. However, they received without notice, a visit from Reinhardt Heydrich; tall, blond, the Gestapo personified, just so formidable in his Death's Head uniform and closely flanked by two Schmeisser toting bodyguards.

"Keep it running," he says. "Always leave two boxes empty for Army and Political use."



And they do. If Heydrich wants institutional theatre running as a sign of

normalcy to soldiers home on leave, who are they to argue? Such is the power of the Gestapo. Marlene Guderian sees quite a bit of her Uncle Heinz and the Prinz twins – rising stars of Guderian's Panzer Armee. Old Heinz is the inventor of Blitzkrieg. His star never shone despite his very advanced tank use theories until the early thirties, when Hitler single-handedly recognised his talents and thrust him through the ranks of the burgeoning Wehrmacht. Guderian espoused the cause of strong armoured thrusts on narrow fronts aiming at irresistible break-throughs followed by rapid expansion. He surely got it right and after the devastating victories of Poland and France, got command of one of Bock's four armoured groups in Russia. The tour de force he then engineered got them to within 200 miles of Moscow with little left in front of them. At this point Hitler repeated his mistake of halting his armour at the canal at Dunkirk, stopping the advance on Moscow. Rumour surges through the Tank ranks. He's going to ginger up the lagging southerly push by transferring Panzer Armee Guderian down south.

Heinz confers with his leading commanders and he and the twins climb into a corrugated iron sided Fokker and head down to Berlin to try and stop this dangerous brainwave. He leaves the twins in Berlin and staff cars down to Berchtesgaden. He is well received by Hitler, but is out-talked or out-ranted by the Fuehrer. It's probably out-talked, as they part amicably, but Hitler hasn't altered his plan one whit. In fairness it's only due to Hitler's intuition that Guderian has risen just so high. Win, lose or draw, his place in Germany's rich military history is assured. Inevitably the only thing he can do, having registered his protest, is to buckle.

Back in Berlin, he brings the Prinz brothers up to speed at a small dinner party at his grand house in Potsdam. Marlene, his niece, organizes this and in the interests of privacy, the servants are cleared out of the house for the night as is security. Running drinks and prior prepared dishes out, Marlene gets the drift of the Generals' frustrating visit to the top of Hitler's world. After the main course, Guderian sips his chilled Hock.

"You know," he says, "if we arm our new designated Tiger tanks with the new shells specially designed for winter use in Russia tomorrow, we can easily remake this war. It's simply aim and fire. It would only need our three tanks to do it."

"How so?" asks Willie.

"Bloody hell!" says Gunnar.

Heinz says, "Old Adolf is a political genius. He's got to be the best ever at pushing the boundaries."

"Who in hell would think the victors of the last war would sit on their hands while we re-armed?" Marlene says, "especially when smart old Churchill has been telegraphing our exact punches in the British Commons and being ignored totally by those whose job it is to listen and look after the country's best interests."

"Indeed, but he's cranked them up now and America looks like coming in."

"He made a marvelous peroration two years back," Gunnar says, but to deaf ears.

"What he said was about us - will we defeat them – of course we shall, but how much greater the toil for every days delay."

"It sounded to me like whistling in the dark," Willie says.

"Surely," Heinz rejoins. "We were sure of things at that stage. Now of course, we are defeating ourselves. The very size of Russia and the severity of Jack Frost will put paid to us. If Hitler had stuck to politics and left the general staff to do the



fighting, he would have been home and hosed. He knows jack shit about running huge armies really.”

“Okay,” says Willie, “we’re game. Run us through your just hatched plan.”

“Simple, really,” says Heinz, “boom....boom....boom... and all on the reviewing stand disintegrate. Then, hmmm, 25 Tiger tanks to shell the Gestapo headquarters; same again to blast the Communications Centre and Radio Berlin, the rest in reserve. We can orchestrate their movements on the inter-tank radio. We simply cannot put anything in writing, but once we have pressed the buttons on our tank guns, we, of necessity, will get right onto Rundsted and Rommell to front the needed change of Government. It will be easy to turn the whole thing into an army coup de main.”

Marlene Guderian is thus well aware of the plans of the plotters to blow to kingdom come the true managers of the Third Reich on the reviewing stand at the Garrison Church Square at Potsdam. She goes in early next morning to the Ernst Theatre, where they are reviewing their worse for wear players’ wardrobe. Rene Collinson looks after the wardrobe and the full cast is there to fight for whatever improvements they want in their garb. They are slurping ersatz coffee and scoffing pastries when Deiter Obst comes in.

He’s a very unobtrusive man, a former medical student who has travelled far in Gestapo service. The top dogs in Hitler’s Germany have to have efficient help and if total loyalty seems lacking, or the suspicion thereof, they are not slow in having the offender shot or shipped out to the Eastern Front. This chap is, however, both deep and smart and at war’s end, when many of his compatriots are no longer around, he just goes from better job to even better job within the management structure of the victorious side. Evidently, he deems this a morning to give a bit away against future favours. He knows this mob, although not military types, are indeed well connected.

“Ah, Joachim,” he says, “the powers that be want you to take the Tank review at Potsdam this afternoon at 2pm.” He passes over the uniform he is carrying.

“Much as before,” he continues, “the cap has a slightly higher brim. I’ll be back to pick you up at 1pm. You certainly do Hitler well.”

This is information that should properly be conveyed to Joachim in private. Marlene sees immediately the ramifications. Hitler just won’t be at the review and there are a million reasons to consider why this is so. The immediate concern is though, the Prinz brothers and Uncle Heinz, who may be facing a useless disaster – or a firing squad. Marlene sees that her chances of getting to the Prinz boys or Guderian, who will be knee-deep in sorting out 100 Tiger tanks, will not be good. She calls Erich to one side and tells him of what’s going on. Erich has a look around outside the theatre and sees the goons on the stage door.

“I doubt, Marlene,” he says, “whether we have a prayer of getting out until Joachim is picked up, but we can make a plan to move the instant they do.”

Thus they are organized and the minute the Gestapo pick up Joachim, and the goon squad depart, Marlene, wearing an army transport driver’s uniform, has a Volkswagen scout car at the door. Erich, beautifully done up in full general’s uniform, complete with monocle, a crutch and what appears to be one short leg, clambers in behind. He looks like Captain General Christian Remarque to the life. (Remarque jumped with his paras on Crete, busting his leg, but still running the show)

With some hard driving, they get around the push and go to drive onto the Garrison Church Square, where 100 Tiger tanks stand, motors idling, or to be exact, 99, one has seemingly stalled. The Captain of the inevitable ring of black-coated

Waffen SS, that are always near when Hitler is scheduled to appear, puts up his hand. Marlene splutters the Volkswagen up real close. He salutes General Remarque.

“With respect, Sir, I can’t let you in. The Fuehrer.....” he tails off.

Erich, playing the greatest part ever of his life, lamps the Captain through his steel monocle. He pulls on his long cigar and looks disdainfully at the SS man.

“Are you discharging your duty to the Third Reich selflessly and well, Captain?” he asks in quite a reasonable tone.

“Jahwol, mon General!” he replies, “indutibly and always.”

“Would you not hesitate to play a larger part for Fuehrer and Reich?”

“Absolutely, mon Herr General. I stand ready to do what the Fatherland requires.”

Erich blows a magnificent pungent smoke ring.

“You are aware, Captain,” he says, “that I am on the committee deciding Wermacht and upper companies deployment?”

“Jahwol, Herr General.”

“Stand at attention, Dumkopf,” Erich barks. “If, Captain,” he continues, gesturing to a wine cooler on the seat beside him, “you see it as your duty to prevent me going along to Panzer numbers 1, 2 and 3 to drink a toast with the inventor of Blitzkreig and to my godsons, who are his aides, you can take it as read, that in 10 days time, you will be on the Russian Front living day by day; that is for the short time you may live; in conditions even colder than the ice in my wine cooler.”

He grasps a handful of crushed ice from the cooler.

“Put out your hand,” he says and drops the ice into the man’s palm.

The Captain goes deathly pale. He has a good soft job in Berlin; his wife is here and he has a good thing going with a lively and lovely girl from the National Theatre. Realism dawns. He pulls back the rope.

“My apologies, Herr General,” he says. “I have been a little overly conscientious. Please proceed.”

‘Phew,’ Marlene thinks and smartly runs the scout car down to the lead tank of the Parade. Guderian and his two Lieutenants are standing in their tank hatches. They hastily come down the tank side.

“Jesus, Erich,” Guderian says, “what the hell are you doing? This isn’t playing patty-cake you know!”

Erich clammers down from the scout car.

“Open the drinks, Marlene,” he says, “look convivial, kiss the boys.”

“Hitler won’t be here,” Erich says, “the actor’s standing in for him.”

“Then we may be dead men,” Guderian says.

“Perhaps not,” Erich says, “but if we are, it will be for the greater good.”

“Buggar the greater good!” Wilhelm says. “Let’s skol the champers and then you’d better get out quick. Cut across the back of the review. If you’re late for the Matinee, it will be curtains for all of us.”



Erich runs his eye over his supper companions at Fratti’s as they sip their cherry brandy.

“Let’s drink to yesterday,” he says. “All that activity was, in the long run, entirely futile, but boy, it was exciting at the time.”

They stand up, to the amazement of the nearby diners, and drink. Erich has the last word. “It was good to stand tall,” he says; but the boys have yet another.

“We travelled far and saw much,” Willie says.

Gunnar grins an unmatched grin – “and shot many,” he says as he lamps the Jew returning to their table – “but not all it seems!”

Ringling the Changes

Alan Field is in his mans shed on his 10 acre hobby farm, out a bit from Wagga Wagga, or more correctly, it's at Alfred Town and on a big creek. He's not long given up work and is quite enjoying living to his own timetable. One of the big hardware chains made an offer too good to refuse – so he took it. He's busy cleaning a shotgun. He does a bit of clay target shooting and likes to keep his guns well cleaned and oiled. A white double-cab ute pulls up and his wife's brother-in-law, Fergus, gets out.

"Oi, Alan," he says, "I've bought a discount case of whisky from my bottle shop friend, a round dozen at \$15 a bottle. What about we have a shot or two?"

Fergus has not so long back gained a big redundancy payment from the Fire and Emergency people in New South Wales and has acquired a similar property about three miles over. He's not yet settled to doing nothing. He pulls up a stool and takes the top off this suspect whisky; suspect, that is, in quality. Alan thinks that at \$15 a bottle, it's probably worse than the Japanese Suntori Whisky which he always suspects is made from recycled car tyres, but it's not at all bad and they sit back to sip and sort out the troubles of the world. I guess, in actual fact, both of these men are too young to be retired at all – there's a lot of life and energy and real life force left in them.

"Fuck this retirement," Fergus says. "Amelie says that now that we're retired, she's retired from sex too. It's all off in our house: can't get her up to the barrier at all, at all. How's Ethnee by comparison?" he asks. Alan sips and considers.

"She's like she's always been," he says, "lively as a cat in bed."

"Hmm," says Fergus, "lucky you. I always thought you had a real goer in her." Amelie says the chemistry has gone from our union. You know, the kids are long gone and we, like you, are thrown into one another's company 24/7. Plenty of opportunity and I'm as fit as a mallee bull according to Dr Leaver in town."

Alan laughs. "You know," he says, "it's the old story – you marry a body and live with a mind. That said, I may be able to get things up and going for you. Let's see if we can sink two thirds of this bottle while I work it out."

The late autumn sun is coming in the big sliding door of the shed and they sit in this and sip appreciatively. The bottle is going down and Alan gets up and starts rummaging around. He rummages a bit further then stands up a big wooden slatted ladder and climbs up to the top of a shed column and brings down a package.

"Here's the go," he says. "Get this video on the run after you've had a wine or two. Just leave it running with the dubbed fake sound down and suck away at a bit of grass; here's a plastic bank bag full of it; and see if you can inveigle her to have a separate smoke or even a puff of yours and it'll be Mafeking night over at your joint. Watch the peripheral stuff; take the phone off the hook and shut your cyclone gate. If she takes the bait, you'll need some privacy."

"What's it all do?" Fergus asks.

"Hmm," says Alan, "I suppose it's best if you have a bit of a preview."

He puts the tape in an old VCR player and moves it on a bit and Fergus sits stupefied at the action being shown. It's not at all gross, but boy, is it interesting.

"Jeez," he says, "what a honey," and a little later, "shit, he's a real big boy."

Alan gets some cigarette papers and rolls up a decent size toque. He hands it to Fergus with a box of tapers.

“Have a bit of a puff,” he says, “it sure makes life look a whole lot better, but best not to drive home. I’ll just have a suck on my pipe and thus, I can run you home and we can get your ute back tomorrow.”

Fergus gets his joint going very well and pulls hard on it until it’s finished. He gets up, tucks the video tape in a pocket of his old army pants, slips the grass into a hip pocket and says, “Mate, I’m ready to rock and roll.”

“Let’s hope Amelie is of the same mind,” Alan says.

“Um,” says Fergus, “I can sometimes carry the day with a bit of well applied ‘Force Majeure’.”

Alan hears nothing further from Fergus for four days. He’s busy cleaning the plugs on his old Ferguson tractor when in pulls the ute. Fergus gets out carrying three bottles of his cut-price whisky.

“I’m like the Indians,” he says, “in reverse. I’m here to trade firewater for some more of that amazing donkey fodder you gave me.”

“Worked, eh?” Alan says.

“Jeez,” Fergus says. “It was a bit bloody iffy getting her going, but once I got the video rolling without the fake sound, I had her in. I had her glued to the set and absently puffing the grass, when she got up, took off all her clothes and we didn’t even bother about the baked tea we had on the go. I think she will ring you, but in the meantime, what about a bit more?”

Alan laughs and hauls out his ladder.

“Where the hell do you source this?” Fergus laughs.

“Well,” he says, “this is stuff grown by the young for the young. It’s hard for an older man who is immediately suspected of being with the police to get hold of it. The bloke, who comes over to shear my tiny lot of fat lambs, put me onto the source. They sell it in Woolworth’s car park on Thursday nights in at Wagga Wagga, or at least they take your money there and I do my collect an hour later out at the Clay Target shooting ground entry. No one has chased me up and I don’t want the fuzz scouting me out as a regular buyer, so I buy a fair heap at the one time and pay them \$50 over the odds. I think my source is a well considered and sound one. I’d love to know where they grow it as I think it’s locally produced, but I’m not about to make any enquiries.”

Alan comes down the ladder and to seal the swap, they open up one of the good looking bottles of whisky.

“This is mint stuff,” Alan says. “If you poured it out of a Johnny Walker bottle, not a black, but perhaps a red label, I couldn’t gainsay the difference.”

They sip away a bit and light up a couple of small toques.

“I might as well give Ethnee a nice surprise after dinner, although, truth be told, she doesn’t need any sort of kick. She’s never knocked me back ever in our married life.”

“Lucky, lucky you,” says Fergus. “Until we got onto this stuff, it was more miss than hit for me.”

“Well, you must have rounded her up twice,” Alan says. “You’ve got two kids and I’ve none.”

“We’ve often wondered about that,” Fergus says. “Did you have fertility testing to find out who was the non-provider?”

“No,” Alan says, “Ethnee and I married indecently young and she always said she never wanted children. This is my type of girl I said to myself at the time and made an appointment in Sydney and had the big snip. I come from a dysfunctional family and my Mum married three times; never, I’m pleased to say, to anyone poor. I

was the youngest, so saw firsthand, the trials and tribulations of how my older half siblings pushed the boundaries of marriages, partnerships, one night stands, afternoon matinees and so on. I became firmly convinced before I went to college at Kings School, that kids weren't worth the candle and Ethnee's never changed her mind. Never; she's never ever commented on not having children, but Christ, has she been family bombed. Even the old priest has pressed her at confession."

"Hmm," says Fergus. "We married very good Catholic sisters and might I say, I have never trusted that old goat of a priest. I'm sure something about him will hit the big fan one of these fine days."

Ethnee and Amelie are indeed sisters. They're a year apart and could almost be taken for twins. They are both very fine looking women. They're slim, but big busted. It's a very, very exotic combination. They stand up very well indeed. They are not at all blatant women and in their dancing days, were indeed a bit overlooked by the young blokes who leant more towards the voluptuous ones, often quite short. Alan, at the time, thought the sisters were both quite outstanding and wouldn't deteriorate into fat, overblown little housewives. In fact, the first time he saw Ethnee in shorts at an open garden day, he took in the good length of thigh between her knees and hips and thought what a breeder she would make. Her kids would never be anything but tall. Certainly Fergus's kids, both away at college in England, are very tall and good looking types, whereas Ethnee is without issue for the reasons set out earlier. The boys sip away at their Scotch and pull on their slim (this time) toques.

Alan says, "If Amelie came up to the bail easily, I've got something else you can try. If you think a bit of marijuana sparks things up, this stuff starts bush fires. But having said that, don't spring it on her cold. Get her on the weed first, and then before you get onto her, con her into a snort of this. It's highly illegal, easy to use and in relation to what we are talking about, it brings Christmas on early."

He moved the ladder down to the corner shed column and climbs up it. He pulls out on a very long thin wire and keeps pulling. A yellow tobacco tin marked in red on the lid and carrying the name 'Erinmore Flake Tobacco' materializes. He takes down from the wall an old hanging mirror which, despite the dusty nature of the farm shed, is quite shiny and polished. From the tin, he spreads out a short line of white powder. Fergus looks round eyes at this.

"Jesus," he says. "This is something I've read about. Half of commercial Australia; especially the highly social ones seems to use it."

"Yairs," says Alan. "Its cocaine, in fact it's worse than that; its crack cocaine. Let's try a tiny snort. The feeling of wellbeing it gives you is akin to an early morning swim at Bondi."

"Where and when do you use it?" Fergus asks.

"Sparingly," says Alan, "it's highly addictive. I only use it if I'm planning to lay a woman other than Ethnee. Ethnee is well aware of the grass; she is, I think, totally unaware of the coke bit."

"Who, for Christ's sake, have you rounded up lately?" Fergus asks.

Alan laughs. "A gentleman should never discuss these matters," he says, "and he should never name names, but I guess I can tell you this: You remember that weekend when you took the girls down to visit their mother?"

"Indeed," says Fergus. "You cried off due to stocktaking or something."

Alan laughs a deep belly laugh. "Actually, I was taking stock of the lady Bank Manager from Eastpac in Wagga."

"I know her," Fergus says. "Sexy and chubby and not all that young."

“Yes,” says Alan, “but if you’re going to romp a bit. You can’t beat an older one. They have won a few races and know how to pace themselves. In fact, those aren’t my words, they are actual words written by old Somerset Maugham in his best seller, ‘The Razor’s Edge’.

“Hmm,” says Fergus, “You always were a literate bastard. I only read ‘Penthouse’.”

“Oh, there’s better around.” Alan says.

He goes over to the big old hold-all dresser on the far wall and brings back a very tidy glossy magazine bearing the title of ‘Black on White and Vice Versa’. The contents are very tasteful and not at all gross; shots of opposite coloured people having it off. A huge negro basketball player and a blonde, short, society type girl is the page three effort.

“Can I take this home?” Fergus asks.

“You’re welcome to,” says Alan, “but it would be a bit much to get her to try white lightning and read all this at once. Just try her on a small quantity of this. I’ll put a bit in a bank bag and you should use a clean, well shined mirror. I’ve got an old crisp two dollar note here you can use to do the snorting. The quantity I’m giving you won’t do much harm to anyone, but it will sure as shooting produce a very interesting result.”

“I would have thought you would have gone for one of the sexy young tellers in the bank,” Fergus says. Alan pulls on his toque and chuckles.

“I’ve always wanted to try a fatty,” he says, “and the effort was as sure as hell worthwhile.”

Ethnee arrives quietly at the shed and takes in the two chaps puffing away. Alan offers her one. She considers.

“Hmm,” she says, “just a very thin one and then we will jointly drive Fergus home. Better roll a big one for him, Alan, so that he gets home in the right mood. I’d better ring Amelie in case she wants to slip into something suitable – like a chastity belt.”

They have a further puff and Ethnee hops into their big Mercedes station wagon.

“Come along too, Alan,” she says. “I can’t drive and have Fergus groping me as I go.”

They run over to Fergus’s and drop him at the gate, which he carefully shuts behind him. As the couple drive along in the now dark, Alan says,

“Well, I’ve been showing Fergus that black and white book. He may keep Amelie a bit busy.”

“Hmm,” she says, “I don’t know about Fergus. Amelie tells me he’s fond of rough sex, whatever that is, but she won’t expand further on it.”

“Pull up at the standpipe, Ethnee,” he says, “and jump out of your shorts.”

“Okay,” she compliantly says and heads into the standpipe parking spot.

He drops the lid of the glove box to anchor one heel and she drapes her left leg over the back of the seat.

“Gawd, Alan,” she says. “We’ve been married for years. This is quite ridiculous.”

Alan centres himself quickly. “But it’s fun,” he says.

She gasps, recovers and says, “I do agree. You know, I thought I’d lost interest in sex, but this bloody stuff we are smoking has totally reawakened it and I seem to have some other ideas popping into my head, which I will tell you about at a

more suitable time. Now, push...push. I'm terribly intrigued at Amelie's reference to rough sex, but haven't been able to get more details out of her."

Alan laughs. "I expect whatever it is that Fergus serves up to her would well and truly be on the go by now or else he's sulking in the kitchen corner."

He doesn't mention the white stuff he's been tutoring Fergus on, but he's keen to hear the result in due course.

Amelie is the next one to pull up outside his men's shed. She gets out, comes in; she's wearing fitting long legged shorts, sling-back sandals and a very revealing deep-necked blouse. She's just a bit bigger than Ethnee, he realises, but she is similarly a class act. She steps up close, pushes her admirable chest out a bit and puts a hand to his cheek.

"Alan," she says, "The three of us, Ethnee, myself and Fergus have a project in mind that will involve the four of us. Ethnee doesn't quite know how to put it to you, so, in the interests of bringing an interesting project to a head, I'm here to talk to you about it." She rubs his arm, takes his hand and places it on her breast.

"And," she continues, "like any sales pitch, you have to approach with benefits."

She guides his hand inside her shirt; she's not wearing a bra, just little exotic pasties. "In your case, I'm the benefit,"

Alan grins. "Do we start now?" he asks.

She withdraws his hand quickly. "Oh no," she says. "We have to dress up the goods a bit before that."

Four bottles of whisky later, change-over day arrives. It arrives without being announced in advance, but it's very likely the change-over has been very much on the minds of the four people involved. Mid morning, Alan gets the call and walks up from the shed to the cottage.

"Here, mate," Ethnee says, handing him a tall, slim pressure pack. "Just give me an all over light spray of this scented stuff."

It's very light or rather fine and has a trace of a golden sheen in it. It's wonderfully scented with a very ethereal fragrance. She stands on a six inch high pine stool to allow this, wearing nothing but a gold ankle bracelet. Alan has a good scrutiny of her when he's finished. She has had a full-on wax, looking like a slightly golden and very statuesque statue. She, at least to a man, is a totally mind blowing exotic sight. Alan is enormously excited.

"Shall I massage it in, love?" he asks.

"Geroff!" she says. "The gussied-up goods you are staring so fixedly at are all, for an as yet undetermined period, the exclusive preserve of my brother-in-law. Now hand me my dressing gown. I'm taking my car and Amelie and I are meeting at the standpipe to get into our Christmas wrapping. Stand back....." She makes shooing noises. "I'm off."

She drives away promptly wearing only her dressing gown and carrying nothing. Alan has a shower and hops into a nice Pardoe red knit sweat shirt, chinos and polished loafers. His timing is good, as Amelie rolls in the gate. She hops out of the car, puts her hands on her head and leans back.

"Holy moly!" says Alan.

Amelie is wearing high heel gold sandals, ankle chain and a white tee shirt with sunflower patches over the breasts. She chuckles.

"Now Alan," she says. "I'm very ready to rock and roll..... I have been for days... but a pleasure delayed....perhaps you may pick my flowers. They are only

glued on and we'll have a tiny walk around your green garden." She flaps the sunflower patches at him. "Pick away," she says.

He pulls both off at once revealing shapely breasts pushing through the holes cut in the tee shirt.

"God," he says, "can I take a photo, Venus arising and all that?"

"Why not!" she says.

He goes into the cottage to get the camera and by the time he gets back, she has activated a drawstring taped inside the bottom of the tee shirt.

"This," she says, "may enhance your photo."

"Woof, woof," Alan says (who topped his college in English). He takes the photo.

She sits on the garden bench, crosses her shapely legs and says, "A small coffee, Alan, and we can then embark on a pre-lunch romp."

Some exciting days later, Alan is down at the shed cutting up apples to put on the tank stand for the possums evening meal, when Amelie walks down. She's wearing her tee shirt today and wearing it so well. It says that she is immediately available if and when he wants. On 'no go' days she wears heavier stuff.

"Best go over and check on Ethnee," she says. "It's been two weeks and Fergus has just gone to town. It's a good chance to see if she is okay. She sounds a bit slurry on the phone."

Alan jumps into his station wagon and is off. Fergus has a very impressive country mansion as opposed to Alan's neat Georgian cottage. It's a beauty, but a bit overblown Alan thinks. Fergus bought it walk in, walk out while Alan and Ethnee spent two and a half years from scratch building theirs. Ethnee answers his ring. She's wearing nothing but a loopy grin. It's obvious she's had a few snorts of the white stuff. He sees, with some alarm, she has a bruised cheek. She grins and angles herself, displaying a bug bruise on one buttock.

Alan says, "What, in Christ, has old Fergie done to you, love?"

She grins a wider grin. "He's been teaching me new tricks," she says, "wonderful new tricks."

"In that case," says Alan, "what's with the bruises?" But he's relaxing a bit more as he can see that they are not new ones; they are fading.

"Hmm," she says, "he says you have to be cruel to be kind and to teach an older mare that instant compliance to his requests is required, a bit of smartening up is needed. Oh, Alan, have I new tricks to show you. He's absolutely amazing."

"Well," Alan says, responding to this graceful and totally nude girl who is grinning archly at him and wiggling her breasts as they talk. "Let's get to it."

"Oh no," she says throwing up her hands. "My education is continuing and he's gone into town to get something necessary for the lesson. You'd better go."

"So it's going well?"

"Going well – that's the least of it." She gets serious. "Alan," she says, "I love you madly and I've enjoyed our life in all its aspects, including bed, immensely, but to be staringly honest, making love with you has been as soporific as going down the Yarra in a two-man canoe."

"And Fergus?"

"Fucking hell," she says, "It's akin to going over Niagara Falls in a barrel."

Fergus, we should say at this stage, is quite a man. He's like a younger version of Rex Hunt, light beard and all. If you were casting for a film on Ernest Hemingway you couldn't pass up on him. He's just so unassumingly impressive that

Alan thinks, if you looked up the Oxford Dictionary under 'impressive', you wouldn't be surprised to see Fergus's picture there.

"Well," he says in what is perhaps a rather lame rejoinder, "Amelie isn't complaining."

"Of course not," she says. "she tells me she's thoroughly enjoying a dip in the calm pool at the bottom of the waterfall, instead of riotously going down the bloody thing."

Alan heads off home thinking deeply. Amelie laughs her head off.

"I'm off to a Catholic Women's League meeting, Alan," she says, "but put the stove on warm, about evening and turn the bed down and I'll be back to demonstrate a couple of Fergus's rather rude, but exciting ideas. Perhaps I can school you up so that you can use them on that sexy bank manager next time around."

"God in heaven, how did you know about her?" And she tells him.

"She rang," she says, "Ethnee doesn't come home for two months. She's very happy in her work. Now...I'm due for a bit of a spell, you've worked me hard of late. I think I'll visit Mum for a few days. I'll put fresh linen on the three-quarter bed in the spare bedroom and you should invite that plump old pouter pigeon out for Easter."

Darcy arrives along on Good Friday eve and Alan soon has her watching very rude, but not nasty videos, smoking fat joints, snorting lines of cocaine and getting into things like a performing flea.

"Jesus Alan," she says, "I've been married twice, got bored out of my brain, was much under-utilised and my transfer to this blasted boring old town miles from anywhere, nearly pushed me over the edge. I come here, you walk in and ask my advice on how best to take travel money to Phuket and lo and behold, next thing, I'm having it off with you in the bank storeroom on Saturday afternoons. I'm more than joyed, in fact totally overjoyed at finding out things I never thought existed, except in tall tale story books."

Alan adds a very stiff brandy with frozen gin ice blocks to the refreshments. She tosses down half a glass in one go.

"Darcy, my sweet recreational friend," he says, "you have seen absolutely nothing, let me tell you what my wife says about her new partner and what they get up to."

She gulps, tosses down the rest of the drink and raps her glass on the side table for a refill. He tells her, her eyes glaze.

"Bloody hell," she says, "get him over, get him over." Alan has a belly laugh.

"I'll give him a ring," he says and picks up his mobile. Fergus picks up the call.

"Waddya want?" he says, "I'm pleurably busy with your wife."

"Fergus, old buddy," Alan says, "I've got a plump chicken here cooking along slowly, on baste. She's not only cooking, but she's coking and my lucky friend, she's asking for you."

"Just a moment," he says. "Seeing as you've interrupted me, I'll consult."

There's nearly five minutes buzz of bed talk.

"Hmm," he says, "I don't know that I want to share Ethnee."

"Bloody hell, Fergus!" Alan says. "She's my legally wedded wife."

"Maybe so," Fergus says, "but that's quite immaterial to what we're talking about, but she's quite willing it seems. We'll effect a transfer at the standpipe."

He turns to Darcy and says, "You're on kid. Have another line to keep your motor running." Darcy snorts away in bed from the mirror.

"I'm good to go," she says. "What an Easter. What do I wear?"

"Just a sec," Alan says and digs in the side chest of drawers and pulls out the first day tee shirt. "It might be a tight fit," he says getting a pair of scissors to enlarge the peep holes. She pulls it over her head and he pins the flower patches on. She looks like a very sexy sausage bursting out of its skin.

They effect the change and Ethnee sniffs hard when she comes in the house.

"Bloody hell, Alan," she says, "what's that scent she's wearing? You can surely smell that as far away as Wagga."

Alan opens Ethnee's dressing gown and gives her a spray from the pressure pack scent. She laughs. "Oh, it's good to be home, even if briefly."

"You're going back?" he asks.

"Oh surely....the amazing journey I'm on has some interesting twists and bumps on the track we're travelling, or so that amazing character, Fergus, says. Anyway, he's got me hooked and I'd hate to miss out on anything even newer."

"Come on," Alan says, "just give a demo of what you've learnt so far."

"No," she says, "I'm buggared; you're very welcome, but for my part, I intend to emulate that famous Prime Minister's wife who said she lay on her back and thought of England. But....," she continues seemingly relenting, "let's have a shower together first."

"Rah, rah," says Alan.

They adjourn to the bathroom and run a steaming shower. Alan is soaping Ethnee down with a curved cake of scented soap, when the penny drops.

"My god, oh my god," he says, "You're wearing a baby bump."

Ethnee laughs a tinkly laugh. "Well, Alan," she says, "I expect Amelie is now stuck with a 'ménage a trios' for a while, so I'm quit of old Fergus. I'm home to stay and we can now, after all these years, settle down to playing happy families."

'Gawd, it indeed takes two to tango,' Alan thinks.

THE WHITE FEATHER

by
Lloyd Nelson

ONE

In the first world war, the great war to end all wars, it was common practice for women busybodies to give a white feather to any fit looking man who hadn't gone to the war. They didn't ask why you hadn't gone they simply presented you with a white feather. This really used to get up my nose and being very young I didn't handle it well, these were senior and well respected matrons doing the feathering. One chap, a bit older and smarter than me didn't go to war, though three of his four brothers did. One of the brothers was known as Cordite Bill, as anyone who has read Forsyth's 'Day of the Jackal' knows, if you chew enough cordite (which you can easily get out of .303 bullets), you turn sickly grey and pasty quite quickly and sometimes this got you out of the army. I once, when we had had more than a few beers at the local district club, asked this chap why he hadn't gone. He told me he was heading into politics and he eventually got there. He said the only place he was likely to be wounded was in the buttocks as he ran away from the shooting and this would be very detrimental to his planned later political career - so much for the morals of our legislators.

My reasons for not going were quite clear. I'm an independent chap and there was no way the army mind, God help us, was going to put me in a uniform, in a tent, and throw me on the shores of some God forsaken country, to pursue the political aims of the Poms. I had read politics at Brisbane University enough to understand the situation. The British Empire, I think, is largely a myth power-wise and I can't see this Island Nation standing up to the volcanic might of the Kaiser once the Krauts really got going. In the event, I was wrong, but no one could have expected England to be so prodigious in money and men to keep it in the conflict.

TWO

At this time Dad and I are running our two farms at Dalby and busy growing wheat. We are working three ten-horse teams of horses, one each and have a working man driving the third team. The season is shaping well, the seeding season that is, nice lots of rain at the time we need it. Dad and Mum go into Dalby each Friday shopping and half the town asks when I'm joining up. I just tell them to say, "Well he hasn't mentioned anything about it, we don't know his plans".



They do actually. I've no intention of becoming a member of His Majesty's armed forces. It curtails my social life a bit, as so many have enlisted and I'm about the only man of military age that hasn't done so. The young sproggs at the Saturday dances are all raring to join up and it's just becoming a matter of age. They

tend to get a few beers in and rib me a bit. I just tell them I'm waiting for a suitable vacancy for Commander General to come up. They're well aware I've been through O.T.C. training at Uni, but haven't taken up my offer.

The girls don't seem to mind, but many have been sort of spoken for and they are waiting until their favoured one returns from the war. They have no idea of the years to come and that it isn't all beer and skittles and they had absolutely no idea then, as none of us did, that many of the young and even not so young chaps will only reappear in this district as names on the War Memorial.

Of course many of the girls are realists, they are aware of the here and now, not something way away in the future, so I do pretty well. One girl I was a bit keen on is the only daughter of a big farmer, his only son now in Gallipoli; he's battling a bit to get his crop in as his son has been the wheat farmer in recent years. I take his handsome daughter out a bit, but don't accept invitations to meals at the farm. He's sort of on the verge of saying something he'll regret, but hasn't so far. He's really struggling with getting the crop in, he isn't sure of me, I come from good family and I'm one of the few educated (Uni educated) men in the district. He's well aware I'm not a fool, as he was at a meeting where I tore into the Roads Board President for condoning a sub-standard Roads Board Secretary. I told him firmly, that either he must bite the bullet to resolve our road problems or he must stand down as our elected leader. God, it was a buzzy meeting and after which I had to flatten the chairman's son; he thought I was too young to push matters up hard to our elders and betters. I told him that in my considered opinion his old man couldn't organise sex in a brothel. This, as I well knew, was enough to cloud his judgement and overreach himself. One big thump and it was all over and this young sprog was senseless on the ground. His mates got a bit stropky and I, icy calm, said,

"Righto chaps; I'll fight the rest of you one at a time. Who's next?"

There's no takers. The Chairman resigns and people watch their words around me. They know I bite if stirred enough.

THREE

Anyway when we've got the last acre, in I say to Dad, "Take no notice of what we're doing and I may be back quite soon," and our working man and I turn our teams and big wide seed drills out the gate and go down to my girlfriends dad's place and pull up to his seed and super wagon. He splutters, he sure as shooting doesn't want to be beholden to me, but he's never going to get his crop in.

I say to Mr Halliston, "We're a figment of your imagination, just look the other way and keep the seed and super up," and he does.

Over the next four days with three machines going and younger workers on the job, we finish the last paddock about 4 p.m. He starts to say,

"I don't know how....," I stop him, no words are necessary.

"We owe it to your son to get the crop in."

My girlfriend loves me.

"God," she says, "you don't waste time talking do you? You just get on with things."

I unbutton her blouse (she's not wearing a bra) and say, "Hmm." We're having really marvellous sex. This girl is good at it and is full of giving and spreading and pushing and bucking. I can't believe my good luck.

"Don't get pregnant my love," I tell her, "I may be off soon."

“God, you’re joining up?” she says.

“Not at all,” I say, “but I may leave the country for a while.”

FOUR

Actually, I’m working on an idea. It’s obviously going to be a war decided by machine guns; the Krauts have the best ones and their followers at Gallipoli are proving just how good their ordnance is in this line. I’ve studied mechanical engineering and have a fund of ideas of how to deal out death faster and more accurately. To get this idea in action, I really need to go to America. They will inevitably get involved in the war, later rather than sooner, and have the breathing space and money to have the best possible weapons on hand when they do go in. My research work has centred around adding a heat dispersing component into the steel the barrels are made from to reduce heat and I have some (I think) innovative ideas on cooling machine guns. Overheating is the biggest bar to machine guns, though the Germans seem to have found a remedy.

After shearing, I get the harvesters out and give them a real birthday and put them back in the shed and make my farewells. I go down to Brisbane where I pick up a deck hands job on a freighter going to the west coast of the U.S.A. It’s carrying inert cargo so there’s not too much to do and in no time it seems we stand under the famous Golden Gate Bridge and tie up within sight of the Presidio in San Francisco Harbour. It’s a great humidity free, Mediterranean type climate and I start to see why this coast is growing madly, population wise.

FIVE

I thumb my way via the truck routes to Massachusetts and talk to the men at Harrington and Richardson’s, who have exported shotguns to Australia for yonks. They point me in the direction of a patent lawyer and after long consultations with him, I take my ideas to Browning who are doing serious research into machine guns. They are quick and adaptable and adopt my ideas; set a patent pending payment on each gun produced and I’m on my way. It’s not as easy as all that, but it was a lot more results orientated than I expected. They are sending a team from Browning, together with war procurements officers, to France for a look see and invite me to go along. They give me a temporary, or the army do, officers rank pay and uniform for the purposes of the visit. We ship over on a Navy Destroyer. The Atlantic has a calm spot and in no time we’re off at Liverpool. We train down to London in grey lowering weather and are put up at a good hotel in the Strand. London is the hub of the war universe at this time and there are uniforms absolutely everywhere, with the number wearing the red tabs of staff officers being extra numerous.

We overnight to Calais on a small steamer and a staff car is there waiting to take us to breakfast and then in the general direction of the fighting. The Poms, of course can’t do enough for us. Our main escort is a Captain Harewood-Fife; old Scots and baronial - very laid back. We breakfast, a full English breakfast, at an estaminet, back in a bit from the harbour. I enjoy this and end on a coffee and a snifter of brandy; it’s a bit parky. Then we roll, puffing on our cigars as we go.

We more or less catch the 3rd battle of Arras, during which at great cost, the Canadian’s captured Vimy Ridge. The French, under General Nivelle, took a bad pasting on the Aisne and in the Champagne District; so much so, that the army

mutinied and Nivelle went and Petain came in to replace him. The loss of life had been just too great and no doubt all this contributed to Petain's World War Two defeatist attitude.

In June, Haig attempts a breakthrough of the German right wing of their armies, fails and then took the Krauts head on at Ypres from July to November. We saw all of this. He lost 400,000 men and achieved zilch. The tank battle, involving 400 tanks at Cambrai, was hailed a great achievement, but the old Germans rallied quickly and won back what they had lost.

We just couldn't get over the amount of carnage and the persistence of the Poms. Haig is fighting a Peninsula type war, ignoring the invention of machine guns and barbed wire. Of course he is really unassailable. King George V thought the sun shone out of Haig's nether regions and he is so strongly entrenched that Lloyd George can't get rid of him; thus the British army took unbelievable casualties, while Haig goes horse-riding every afternoon, spent hours and hours writing up his journals and never once visited the front. To add to all this, every back village and gulley was full of cavalry horses, the very best ever target for machine guns - totally useless to the war effort. Thus we went up to the front in company of large numbers of fit soldiers and things got worse with every step; rivers of wounded rolled back down the road, field batteries are chucking iron at the Germans and they are throwing it back with interest.

SIX

We were also still there in 1918, when the Germans gave their best shot to forcing the issue in France, in advance of the U.S.A. getting big numbers of troops into this war theatre. They damn near got there. It is expected that the Americans will be quite ready by the spring of 1918, so Ludendorff kicks off on April 21st south of Arras. In no time, they push the Poms back 40 miles before French reserves, in the main, stops the westward push. The Germans had shot their bolt. The collapse of Haig's front saw Foch come in a C in C. There were better and worse soldiers than Haig of course, but his flint-hearted approach to the butchery his army is subjected to, have typecast him.

In looking back at the quite long period in which I was involved as an ordnance observer for the Yanks, it is just totally unbelievable that the killing continued for so long. It just seemed unresolvable madness that the war couldn't be wrapped up; but for Ludendorff losing faith, it could have gone on for years. I got back to the U.S.A. via the Navy and then back to Australia the same way I came, as a deckhand on a freighter. We tie up at the wharves at Teneriffe in the Brisbane River late in 1919. Workers were arriving at the huge brick wool stores that dot this section of the river and I couldn't hear a gun going off anywhere.

Later that day I'm back at the far. They've done well and everything looks good and quite prosperous. The grain looks marvellous. I have a bundle of



Browning royalty money in my pocket and we quickly buy two more wheat properties, near enough to adjoining our present holdings; farms that should have gone to soldiers who didn't come back.

SEVEN

Old John Moses Browning, with a bit of auto suggestion on my part, strikes me a gun metal medal and the United States Consul liaises with me for a suitable presentation night. We opt for the Dalby Town Hall. The bush is a quiet place, not offering a lot of diversion and I know that a big crowd will muster. The evening approaches; I do a bit of preparation that involves a few sacrifices by Mum's white leghorn chooks.

The Town Hall is packed. The Premier of Queensland is there, the U.S. Ambassador comes up from Canberra. The choir sings, speeches are made, presentations are made and it's my turn to reply. I ramble around a bit and finally, going for the throat, I call up the most prominent woman in the district, who in 1915 and 16 gave me 27 white feathers in the streets of Dalby. I tell the crowd that I have a deserved presentation to make to her and call her to front stage on the platform. I unveil a big board with 27 white tail feathers glued to it and I tell her it's now her turn.

In full spotlight glare, she asks me, "To do what?"

"Perhaps old girl, you could drop your panties please, face tonight's crowd in reverse order and I'll call for volunteers to tickle your old derriere with this fine collection of feathers."

Christ, do the crowd love taking the mickey out of this old Trot. They laugh and laugh and laugh. The meeting is entirely kaput, so we adjourn to the pub for the biggest and best night there ever was in Dalby. She never recovers from the insult and moves off to Brisbane within the month. I send over her board of white feathers to her new address by carrier.

I'm walking down the main street of Dalby to the Post Office two days later, (it took me that time to speed my visitors on their way). The farmer with the handsome daughter, (and she's with him) pulls up in their Buick car and hail me effusively. I haven't set eyes on her since I got back.

"Great show the other night, Simon," the farmer says, "and so well orchestrated. By the way, the crop you and young Spargo put in was my best ever."

"Well," I say, "it should be; with young Spargo and me there, there was plenty of bull shit on the ground."

He laughs, lightly punches my shoulder and goes into the Post Office, leaving me to talk with his beautiful daughter. Well, she's not beautiful in a Dolly bird style; she's just very, very handsome.

"Did you know Simon, you fathered triplets with me when you went away?" she asks.

I'm gob smacked. "I didn't!" I say. She dimples.

"No, you didn't," she says, "but I'm free tonight if you want to make a start on the project."

"Done," I say.

"By the way," she says, "I come with a good farm."

Her brother goes west at Gallipoli. I start to play hard to get.

"I'm not short of farms," I say.

But she's also a good thinker, "You know, if you buy Hannaker's, which is going cheap, you'll then have six farms all adjoining."

We wrap the whole deal up amicably and pleasurably in very short time and if you're ever on the Dalby North Road and see a big entry gate of mellow paddock stone with a classic sign reading 'The White Feather Farm Company', you now know the background.



HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE

The writer came to Browning just at the right time and his pending patents made a major contribution to Brownings .30 Heavy Machine Gun, recoil operated and water cooled. It was trialled by the U.S. Army in May 1917 and immediately adopted as their Army's machine gun.

He is modest in his description of himself as an observer. His comprehensive assessments of the military tactical approach of the British and French submitted to the Browning Company in late 1917 can be found in the Library of the U.S. Congress.

This report was instrumental in the formulation of General Pershing's Policy of keeping the American divisions together and not being thrown in as Haig wanted piecemeal into Allied weak spots.

This paper is headed, 'A Survey Undertaken for the Browning Co' by Captain (Honorary) Farrington. U.S. Army Corp. It is catalogued as Paper A 376/ 701/ a.

The Man Next Door



Mary Meningetti has been shopping at Woolworths in Northam late this Friday morning and has just returned to her home in a pleasant street, just off Gordon Street, the long street that runs at right angles to the town's main drag, Fitzgerald, from the post office corner.

She gathers up her shopping bags and lets herself in the back door of her house; it's elevated a bit as the land drops away. She has barely put her full bags on

the benches and is getting her wallet out of her bag, when the fly-screen door bashes back. Two indigenous youths push in; they're a bit rough looking and she realizes that they are a bit tough looking with it. They don't say a word, but snatch at her bag. She remembers seeing these chaps in the arcade outside Woollies.

"You beggars," she says, "you followed me home."

"Bang on," the taller one says and tugs at her bag.

Mary is a resolute type and she isn't going to give up easily. She lets out a piercing scream. It shakes up the robbers and they wrestle with her harder to get her bag – she screams again. Almost instantaneously, the door crashes again and in comes a big strong man wearing nothing but sneakers and jeans. He takes in the scene, grabs one of the intruders by the forearm and loops his elbow around the others neck and bashes their heads together. They fall to the kitchen floor and the newcomer grunts as he kicks them and they grunt as they get kicked. They try to get up; the man snatches a skillet from the stove and forehands one and backhands the other. The blows are long swinging ones.

"Stay down you bastards," he says and to Mary, "How about ringing the fuzz."

The miscreants now realize they are on to a severe hiding to nothing and lay still clutching their heads.

"You don't know how lucky you are," he says. "If only I was wearing my steel-cappers."

The cops arrive. He hands over the pair.

"I'll be in to give you a statement," he says – but he's not done yet.

"Look me in the eye," he says to the two chaps. "If ever, whenever I see you beggars in the street again – day or night – watch out for yourselves."

But they obviously get bailed. Next morning, but two, he is running in the park near the river; they try to gang up on him. It's a sharp morning and the runner is wearing an army greatcoat, as he often does. '*There is safety in numbers*', the dark chaps think, and they run to head him off. He pretends not to see them until they are nearly up to him. He stops, turns and pulls out of his coat pockets two king browns of beer. They stop sharply, but he's onto them like a tiger. When he's finished, he leaves them senseless on the ground and tosses the broken bottles into the river.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

After the cops cart away the would-be robbers, the big chap says,

"I'm Michael Hennessey,"

"And I'm Mary Meningetti," she says. "How did you get here so quickly?"

"Hmmm," he says, "I was up on the pergola pruning the creeper when you yelled. I just dropped down into your yard. It's a hell of a way to meet a neighbour."

"A coffee?" she asks.

"Sure," he replies, "just give me time to get decent first."

He goes home to get a shirt. Mary has not been into entertaining strange men to coffee, but she realizes she has a very appealing one on her hands. He's a big handsome chap. *'He should be in films,' she thinks.*

Mary is rising forty-two. She married a small, wiry Goomalling farmer twenty-one years back, had triplets with him. After he went out in an horrific Header accident, she kept the farms together while her two boys went to College. They are now back, and despite their youth, are farming very well. One boy, and his even younger live-in, farm the Goomalling property and the other boy runs the Wyalkatchem farm and her daughter is at medical school.

Mary bought her house in Northam to give her boys room to move, but she still keeps an eagle eye on the farming finances. She hasn't signed herself out of the farms yet, but her life is sedate. She plays the pipe organ at St John's and is secretary of the quilters group. She is really quite attractive, but leads a quiet life.

Hennessey is her next door neighbour. He's leasing a big well – furnished house from the Bolton's, who have moved into a retirement home at the top edge of town. She hears him, but it's the first time they have met face to face.

"Come to tea tomorrow night," he says, "I'm cooking; it's quite dull to dine on your own."

"Tell me about it," says Mary, who recognizes a good offer when she sees it.

She fronts for tea at the appointed time, next evening. She has borrowed one of her daughter's frocks, short and décolleté and she looks the berries. He's more casually dressed; pressed jeans, light red jumper with a denim self-collar. He serves up pink champagne and some delightful anti-pasta, which she recognizes as a Woollies pre-packaged effort. Then with a minimum of fuss, he serves up small fillets of Dhufish and a Greek salad. They have now changed to a heavily wooded Chardonnay and he goes on to serve up small steaks and a sweet potato bake. They round off on chilled mango and ice-cream and move to coffee and Drambuie. They then sit back and chat. Mary is very relaxed and feeling full of herself. Her frock, though a tad immodest in the modern manner, shows her off well and Michael is such an impressive man. A revolutionary thought runs dartingly through her head – if he puts a hand on her, she knows she's gone. Her resistance seems to have evaporated, but he sees her to her door; gives her a peck on the cheek as they part.

"I'm away tomorrow, what about a coffee late morning the day after, say 10.45 on the dot."

Thus after hunting around to find something remotely matching to wear, she comes up with a long skirt and fawn cotton top with a good scooped neckline. She's getting a bit carried away mentally – *'if you've got good assets,' she thinks, (and she has) 'you shouldn't flaunt them, but you can certainly display them just a bit.'* Just as she comes out the door, her single son turns up in his farm Tojo; sheepdog on the back.

"Tommy," she says. "I'm delighted to see you, but I'm due for coffee next door and I can't be late, or at least I've been told not to be late."

Tommy looks at her in a funny way. "Who's next door," he asks. "And what's with the big car and the security detail and the sports car – a beauty by the way?"

Just as they move to the street gate to have a better look, a dark suited man raises his hand to stop them; he's obviously security. The driver is opening the car door and as he does so, the Federal Treasurer and Michael come out of the house and shake hands before the former gets into the long white Commonwealth car.

They drive off, leaving a beautiful Audi convertible, the only car left. Michael is wearing a marvelous, conservatively cut, grey flannel suit and a red silk tie – he looks like Worthington on a good day.

“Hi Mary,” he says, “come in.”

“Oh, Michael,” she says, “this is Tommy, one of my triplets. He’s dropped in for a coffee.”

Michael grins good-naturedly. “Come in, both of you. My PA, Deidre, is doing the coffee.”

Thus they meet this knock-out, sophisticated girl, who is sitting among the detritus of the meeting – pie charts and long print-outs scattered on and around.

“Gawd,” the young bloke says. “What a marvelous car.”

She grins at him; plucks a key from her bag, “Here,” she says, “Take it around the block while I filter a bit more coffee.” And he does.

After a pleasant coffeeing, Tommy reluctantly takes his leave. Michael looks at Mary. “Sweet Pea,” he says, “I have a few low-key lunches and things in Perth over the next few days. I could do with a bit of window-dressing company. De is off back in a minute, and she will source a few things in the way of good gear with you.”

She hesitates. “No cost to you, of course – as you know, I’m in finance and the only person paying for what I suggest, will eventually be some bloated plutocrat who benefits from the deals I do.”

Mary knows that Michael is the representative of a Swiss firm, Torrent AG, but she is yet to work out how this, too good to be true male, has ended up living, for the present, next door to her and jinking her out of the very conservative life she has been leading.

She surprises herself, “How do I get home?” she asks.

“Easy, peasy,” he says. “Deidre will drop you down to the Sheraton and I’ll get you from there at 6pm.”

The afternoon in Kings Street is an eye-opener for her. Deidre is right up there with fashion and amongst the purchases is a Ruth Taryvadis dream. Mary has excellent breasts, but is a bit dubious about whether she can keep this little and inordinately expensive number up. Deidre gives a throaty laugh,

“Not to worry,” she says. “Double-sided tape is almost compulsory if you are wearing one of Ruth’s dresses and it holds on like wallpaper.”

She moves Mary into Brunischetti to buy shoes to go with the good gear and at 4pm sharp, she walks her in the door of Frascattie, the big gun hairdresser.

“This is too much, Deidre,” Mary says.

Deidre laughs her throaty and merry laugh. “I think Michael is planning to take you to a few really upmarket shows,” she says. “Anyway, all he said to me was that you are a natural good-looker, but you need a good currycomb and brush-up, in horse terms, and he’s something of a horseman, and a few new filly rugs.”

They both laugh and go in.

They all meet up at 6pm. Over drinks in the piano bar where an afternoon tea dance is just winding up, Michael says,

“Just one outfit, Deidre, we’ll sort the rest out tomorrow or the day after.”

Just at this point, Australia’s richest man walks into the bar; spots Michael and comes over. He’s introduced to the girls. He’s totally impressively dressed; Armani suit, Gucci loafers and a heavy gold Rolex on his wrist. He’s looks as though he is enjoying his fortune – a fortune of recent origin.

“Michael,” he says, “it’s a pleasure to meet your friends. I’ll be in Northam on Friday for a coffee.” He moves on.

They head off to Northam; stop at Baker’s Hill Tavern for a drink. Mary has been wondering madly, but not daring to ask questions.

“God in heaven, Michael,” she bursts out in the Tavern. “What on earth do you do, that the rich and powerful are rolling up at your Northam – Northam of all bloody places – door.”

“It’s quite simple – nothing complex – I just marry up capital with those needing capital. I’m perhaps a bit of a one-off in that I don’t call on the potentates. My position is sufficiently strong enough that they come to me.”

“You’re smart,” she says.

“No, it’s just that I have the say-so on a lot of venture capital. There’s a world shortage of it at present, hence the Northam visitors. Come to mine for a coffee and then I’ll send you home for a little rest and to mentally review your day.”

As she gets up to go, he scrapes around on the floor for the box Deidre gave him.

“Mary,” he says, “I’m no masher. I spend most of my life on my ownsome and I’m enjoying your company. I’d never dream of inflicting myself on you, so here’s a little dress – open it up when you get home. If or when, or not at all, you feel like dancing the light fantastic here in my rented four-poster, just pop this little number on with the matching shoes and the necklace, that in the heat of action goes ‘ching ching’ and walk in – er...by the way, Deidre tells me that the line of this dress is so austere that its designed so that you shouldn’t wear anything under it.”

She is gobsmacked. He gives her a peck on the cheek and with the box under her arm and her head whirling, lets her out the front door. She makes a sandwich for tea; she hasn’t really eaten all day, and has a shower. In her dressing gown, she pours a stiff brandy and opens the box. The dress is both severe and outstanding, and in fossicking for the label, she finds that it’s a Milan job and has a price tag of 3,216 Euros.

Over the next two days, lit up like a candle, she tries on this dress, shoes and neck medallion, forty-three times; she keeps count. She is impressed, attracted, undecided, firm and undecided again and finally knocks on Michael’s door wearing the dress, shoes and medallion, with a somewhat uncertain look on her face. Michael answers it. He’s beautifully dressed in an Italian casual way. White duck trousers, loafers and a blue and white striped shirt. He grins a wide grin at her.

“Mary,” he says. “Welcome.....shall we dance first or have a drink?”

Mary’s voice is so thick, she can hardly get the words out; “We dance,” she says, “by god we dance.”

And they do. She’s never experienced anything like it, ever; she is totally entranced.

“Well you’ve only just made it in the very nick of time, Mary. Have you a valid passport handy?”

“Yes,” she says, “I went to Noumea last Christmas.”

“Okay,” he says, “If you are willing, we are off at 7am tomorrow.”

“To where?” she asks.

“Oh.....Borneo, Hong Kong and China – it’s just business.”

“My garden....my cat,” she says.

“Just write out your instructions,” he says. “Deidre will attend to matters.”

“Hmmm,” she says, “De seems to attend to many of your needs.”

Michael laughs, “Not all, or not now,” he says.

At 6.45am Michael puts his Volvo into a hangar at the airfield and pops their bags on a trolley. With a roar and a rattle, a compact Lear jet, light grey, reverse thrusts along the strip, making a terrific noise. The door drops down and a smartly dressed young Chinese woman ushers them to their seats. There's only the pilot, the girl and Michael and Mary. They dine that evening in a good hotel in Sarawak.

"Just relax a bit," he says. "I have business to attend to."

The world whizzes along a bit and the next night they are staying in a private apartment near the peak on Victoria Island. They have their drinks, along with a well suited Chinese man; a businessman to look at him, on the apartment deck. It's a fine clear evening and they sit, sip and appreciate. They take in one of the world's most busy and buzzy views – Hong Kong harbour with the Star Ferries dashing to and fro.

The conversation between Michael and the Chinese man is in rapid-fire Mandarin and Mary, instinctively, feels by the way the Chinese man is looking piercingly at her, that she may be the subject or at least part of the bones of the conversation. He takes his leave. Michael parts with him very affably. When he's gone, Michael says,

"Let's go over to the famous Peninsular and have Peking Duck and Champagne. It's one of life's great experiences."

"My god," says Mary, "since I met you, Michael, every fooking day is one of life's rare experiences, especially for a Goomalling farmer's widow...."

"Young widow," he interjects.

He's quite right and the Peking Duck is certainly a food experience par excellence. Towards the end of the meal, she asks,

"Michael... that Chink was talking about me. What was that all about?"

He laughs. "God," he says, "you're on the ball. He thought you were a bargaining chip, as it were, and he wanted to take you back to his hotel for the evening."

She shoots him a look. "Well, you might have told me. I might have gone."

He looks a bit stunned. "Would you?" he asks.

"Perhaps," she says. "You have rekindled my fires in that direction – fires that I thought had burned out."

Michael chuckles. "Fear not," he says. "If you have totally rejected the Chinaman – and I can't blame you – I have a French experience that you might take up. However," he continues, "in all seriousness, sometimes in delicate negotiations of the type I'm engaged in, the woman in the party is at times a bargaining chip, pure and simple. Men being men and interested in the one thing, it can often make or break the deal. My Chink friend didn't believe me when I said you were along with me – not on business."

"And tomorrow?" Mary asks.

"Umm.." says Michael, "we are flying into China to just a few miles from the Great Wall. My understanding from our visitor is, we will be wined and dined in the Forbidden City – a very rare honour – by the man who has the say on what iron ore comes in from where. It's the old city of Peking of course."

"You're pushing West Australian iron ore, I expect," she says.

"Indeed," says Michael. "It's complex, but if our tomorrow hosts push the boat out, a new junior miner will become a very senior miner and a fortune or three will result from this."

They land in a howling Northerly (Chinese houses have no north windows) and are taken by closed limousine into the city and after close scrutiny at the main gate by armed guards, go in. As the car pulls up, Michael says,

“Shit, that fellow to the left is the Premier of the People’s Republic; if he wants you Mary, it is best to oblige on the spot.” He takes in her look. “Only joking, mate,” he says.

The driver opens the limo doors and as they get out onto the paved terrace, two huge suited Chinese men and a lightly built Chinese woman front them.

“Honoured guests,” the woman says, “I am your interpreter for the day. The Honoured Premier is of course an English speaker, but as this is a business meeting, I expect that the common language will inevitably be Mandarin, but I will of course translate to you Ms Meningetti the pleasantries passed, but not the business. I might add that this is an important meeting and the guards here will check to ensure you are not wearing a listening device. Not, honoured people, that we are expecting it of you – it’s just the standing requirement of the security people. The Chinese nation,” she continues, “is maturing, but it is fair to say it is not ready for any wikileaks just yet.”

They go on to greet the small party. The Chinese Premier says,

“Welcome to you, Ms Meningetti. We are not sure of what part you are playing in this visit, but our man in Hong Kong, with whom you had drinks last evening, says you are fine and are along purely as a travelling companion. Is that the case?”

Mary plays it cool; drops a small curtsey and says, “Surely, Mr Premier,”

“In which case,” the Premier says, “we surely have to congratulate Mr Hennessy on his great good taste.” She blushes. “I might add,” he continues, “that while we are hardnosed – to use the American term – we have found and do so regard Michael Hennessy to be an honest broker. He has done good work for China. Now we had better go in, as time is always pressing I find.”

They enter a very European room with touches of English furniture and some fine Victorian water colours. They sit and take tea. The Premier looks directly at Michael and says in English, “I take it, Michael, that the Australian Government remain unbending on letting us in on the iron ore in any majority stake.”

“Yes,” says Hennessy, “I spoke with the Treasurer in Northam a few days back.”

Reverting to Mandarin, a very robust discussion now takes place; the iron ore import man takes a close part in these discussions. The interpreter throws the odd English phrase to Mary; if anything, she is more open than reticent, so she has a bit of a handle on proceedings – just a bit.

Next morning, they are out of the Forbidden City by 10am.

“Quite a heavyweight meeting, Michael,” she says. “How are you involved in such top level discussions?” He cogitates a bit.

“Hmmm.....just at the moment, the world’s in a financial pinch which was engineered entirely by the gnomes of Zurich and has created some strange new bedfellows. Capital has dried up. It’s as tight as I’ve seen it and for my part, as I speak for the biggest uncommitted funds pool in the world, the owners of which are in search of new opportunities, I’ve been closeted with the Chinks in recent weeks; that’s now been all wrapped up nicely and next week on behalf of the grey millions owners, I expect to be talking to people who matter in Russia, in a venue yet to be determined.”

“What about England and America?” she asks.

“Totally broke in reality,” Michael replies.

“And Australia’s not?”

“No,” says Michael, “Your past Prime Minister is a true internationalist. He’s smart enough to promote Chinese participation, but definitely not control. Oz is indeed in great financial shape, despite their mad proclivity to give generous, but admittedly humanitarian donations to other countries. I’m doing a bit between Australia and Israel at the moment – they are natural financial soulmates really, but there’s a lot of distrust of international Jewry in Australia. Anyone with half a brain in government should be able to see this.”

“Hmm,” she says, “I would be greatly interested to know the source of the money bloc you seem to represent here and there.”

Michael lightens up and laughs. “Believe me Sweetpea,” he says, “it’s definitely better not to know. Now,” he continues, “it’s nearly Christmas and you are the organist at Anglican old Northam, so I plan to take you to midnight service at Canterbury Cathedral. That is, if you are willing?”

“Are the Kennedy’s gun-shy?” she retorts.

They stay at the Mountbatten, a small and very discreet London Hotel. A car and driver take them down to the Christmas Eve service at Canterbury.

“There’s heaps better cathedrals in cathedral ridden England,” Michael says, “but of all our great church edifices – perhaps excepting Westminster Abbey, this is more intrinsically linked with English history. Thomas A Beckett died here for his beliefs; rather astounding when the present day church seems to favour gay priests.”

She is absolutely stunned when Michael is called to read the first lesson.

“How, in God’s name,” she asks, “did you pull that gig?”

Michael laughs, “Ah...I have invested Church funds wisely and well. Without me, they would probably be running on 15watt globes or candle light.

They spend between Christmas and New Year in interesting, but cold old London and catch the train to Paris on January 3rd.

“I promised you, Mary, a French experience – but it’s not compulsory.”

“Who’s the Frenchman?” she asks.

“Wait and see,” he says and taxis her around to the Avenue Montaigne. A very handsome, right age man lets them in the door of a huge 28 room apartment, furnished in the style of Versailles.

“In light of your visit,” the host says, “I have let Jacob have a few days off.”

She wakes next morning in their host’s bed. Pierre’s position, Michael has explained, is similar to Bob French’s in the High Court of Australia.

“Have no fear,” he says, “he’s probably the most famous bachelor in the Northern Hemisphere, perhaps the most sophisticated.

“Amen to that,” Mary says.

On the third day of her stay, she wakes late. Deidre comes in the door in a picture of understated elegance. She is carrying a flat box.

“What the hell?” Mary asks.

“Everything’s fine at Northam, Mary,” this paragon says. “Your boys were hunting you a bit, so I found out what they wanted. It seemed that the Lingvale’s farm on the Toodyay road, came up and they wanted to buy it. I arranged them a 3% loan over 25 years, 100% advance out of funds provided by Michael. I suspect they are starting to see plus factors in your new friends. No charge against your other assets, no charge at all. If their new venture falls over, they only stand to lose that, nothing else.”

“And Michael?” she asks.

“Umm, in Bogota.”

“And Pierre?” she asks.

“Ah...doing something at the High Court at The Hague. My orders are to transport you to Florence, where a famous painter with an unpronounceable name will do your portrait. I’m then to speed you home with a firm promise of tickets for you to meet up with Michael at Aspen at the start of the new snow season or just to be safe, six weeks into the season.”

Time ticks by. A charming aide from the French Embassy turns up on Mary’s doorstep in Northam.

“The Consul has told me to deliver your painting, Madam Meningetti,” he says, “and also the accoutrements that the painter retained to make sure of the colour.”

It had arrived several days back in the diplomatic bag. After a bit, she hangs the incredible portrait of her sitting in a chair in front of a picture window with the dome of the Florence Cathedral showing a bit in the background. She is pictured wearing ‘the dress’ that said ‘game on’. It’s a magnificent thing; slightly ethereal, very romantic, like her immediate past life has been.

Mary is walking along Wellington Street on her way to play at the morning service at St Johns. She is thinking of the magnificent portrait. *‘Jesus, Mary and Joseph,’ she mentally exclaims, ‘what a memento of the incredible man next door.’*

We can round this tale off – perhaps a bit disappointingly – by recording that she never hears from Michael again, but that of course, may not be entirely Michael’s fault. People who mix it a bit in Bogota with the Cartel, tend to disappear, it seems.





Slippen Farm

Brock Bishop and his business partner/live-in Phillipa Anderson are down at Etihad Stadium cheering on the Magpies. The Maggies are delivering the West Coast Eagles the mother and father of a belting. They're going down the tube by about 14 goals. Collingwood are now at the top of the ladder and its near certain the Eagles will achieve the wooden spoon. 'How the mighty have fallen', reflects Brock.

The Weagles, in money terms, are very well heeled, but the winds of fortune are not at John Worsfold's back and it seems likely that he will soon be back at his old trade as a Pharmacist. There are just too many cooks at West Coast and probably John will not be around in an official capacity to take part in a much needed rebuild of playing strength. On the other hand, doughty old Mick Malthouse is doing what he does best – he's playing finals football.

Underneath it all, Brock doesn't think that Mick gives a flying fig for the flag. He's content just to be right up there, left front and centre. It seems to reflect his same sort of game that he used to plat in days back for Fitzroy. Brock can feel for the Eagles. He's had a drubbing today too. They have just this week sold their Mining Staff Recruitment Firm for telephone numbers. Brock used to be a banker with Westpac; Phillipa, his line boss. She is a tall, good-looking girl and is the driving force in them both leaving the Bank, setting up their Mine Recruitment firm, and so catching the insatiable demand of the WA mining epiphany. They operate from leased premises in the same bank building as the Branch they used to work in and they have a retired bank manager running their Western Districts Branch at Hamilton. The sale of their thriving business came just out of the blue; the offer was over the top and thus too good to refuse.

Brock could hardly believe his eyes when the offer came in accompanied by a thumping non-refundable deposit, but subject of course, to due diligence. Brock knows that it will pass this with flying colours and lifting his head from his heavy workload, he allows himself the luxury of contemplating life without the daily grind of any jumping along business owner for a while. However, such thoughts of a lotus eating nature are rudely dispelled as Phillipa, the architect of their successful business, now tells him their plans, or her interpretation of their plans.

"Oh, Brock," she says, "we can now get on with life and get out of this shoe-horn of a flat (it's in St Kilda Rd) and buy a four bed roomer of a house in Canterbury (a very expensive area). You can go to full time tax work accounting with the firm you moonlighted for in our banking days and I can launch on our family; a decent sized family, four or five children."

Nothing could be remotely further from Brock's plans.

"Hmm, Phillipa," he says in a measured manner, "we've only seen, so far, working life. For God's sake, let's now or soon look at life in the slow lane before we even think about replicating life."

"And how do we do that?" she querulously asks.

"Well....lets rent a unit in....say...northern Italy, Lake Como or thereabouts and have a quiet look at and experience of the many diversions the old world has to offer."

“Frith and frippery and fuck you,” she explodes. “Lotus eating, squandering our hard earned dosh, frittering away capital. I want you at the launching and arrival of each of our family. I want a home and babies. I want a welcoming environment for my family to visit, babies for them to enjoy, I’ve neglected my family far too long.”

“Hmmm,” thinks Brock. He cogitates on two things. Firstly, the comments of a mate who had attended the arrival of his first child. They are downing handles of Crown Lager at the famous George the Fourth Lane Bar.

“God Almighty, Brock,” he says, “childbirth is something to witness, by and large, but I can take it or leave it. Look at the old rams on the farm. When the ewes are lambing, they’re well out of things behind a dam bank; wise old rams.”

The other thing that sticks in Brock’s mind is that Phillipa has never even asked about his family. Thus, when the business settlement details are being filled out, Brock carefully writes in that the sale proceeds are to go in equal amounts to their private accounts; not their joint business account. Brock has no inclination to the life she has stridently spelled out. He realizes he really has to depart the scene of their six year live-in arrangement. It would be nice to do this without too many battle scars.

In his monthly runs to Hamilton, to their office there, he has been having a quick look at bits of property. Melbourne is a pretty grinding place to live and it’s as boring as hell away from work; look at the vast crowds that go to the football - nothing better to do, Brock thinks. He finds a place at Dunkeld on the southern edge of the clear air and scenic backdrop of the Grampians. A lot of farm consolidation has taken place and he picks up the farmhouse and sheds and three hundred acres of farmland left over from a farm carve-up between neighbours. The farm sheds are trappy, although the unused shearers’ quarters are in good condition. The neglected farmhouse is pure art deco and roomy, not all that appealing, more functional, but what has caught his eye down below the main house is a magnificent iron-roofed brick cottage, built perhaps 45 years back as a Dower House for the main farm widow. It’s not been lived in for many years, but the bones of the cottage are very good.



Settlement on the sale of their firm goes through. Phillipa doesn’t make any comment on the equal split into their private accounts. She tells Brock that they have seven houses to look at next day and tonight she is going out on a celebratory dine out with her old banking girlfriends. She is no doubt about to lord it over them at how well she has done and to paint her own idea of the vision splendid she has, oh so firmly, fixed in mind. She has hardly gotten into the taxi, when he is tossing his clothes into a big, wheeled suitcase. He leaves a sheaf of half a dozen white roses, a kind note and a return ticket for one to Broadbeach, on the kitchen table.

The next month goes like a flash out at Dunkeld. A jobbing builder strengthens the sheds and pulls down the old chook and pig pens. Brock is flat tack with a front- end loader dumping all the build-up of farm and house rubbish and a very upmarket Kew firm come out to fit a recycled steel and glass conservatory, where it will catch the winter sun. He doesn’t expect to get much summer use out of it. He brick-floors it with matching brick from a knocked down storeroom. The house has an unused door at the blank end and this gives him easy access to his new and charming addition without incurring structural work, to the cottage.

He gets some people experienced in restoration work to knock the art deco house into good shape. In a little over a month, he has his small property in very appealing order and has swung a beautiful set of wooden gates at the drive entry. He's also restored the old name plaque, 'Slippen Farm'. He leases the house to Hamilton High School teachers, who go away caravanning in the holiday breaks.

It gives the farm more of a lived in and used look and discourages visiting vandals, who seem a bit endemic in rural Victoria these days.

He hasn't any stock other than his grey hack and a neighbour crops the paddocks. He paints the old shearing quarters, inside and out, with a good base paint and gives the use of this to the Victorian Society of Water Colour Artists Group, who like nothing better than painting the appealing landscape of the Grampians. He helps them a bit: makes sure they have plenty of wood for cooking and heating and for the hot water system. They come up in droves and sometimes singly or couples. 'Country Style' magazine descends on him. They want to do a feature article on Slippen Farm and his beautifully restored farm cottage and garden. "No," he says. He doesn't want to attract unwanted attention; particularly that of his late love, Phillipa.

Back on the tax work, the Hamilton Courier leaves his assignments on his doorstep and takes away the finished work. His reverse run has to go through Ballarat. Brock works on contract. He's very good at what he does. He can easily live on his tax work; he is debt free and his living costs are quite low. He goes to Melbourne quarterly to consult with the firm he contracts to. He takes the passenger train, the fast one. His spring visit is, in a word, eventful. He knows the Circuit Magistrate's wife by sight and he sees her get off the train at Spencer Street. She walks along the platform and Brock, back a bit, is looking at her in appreciation. She is both slim and very shapely; probably just over 40, he hazards, perhaps less.

Things now happen, she is set upon by three lightly built South East Asian types. They target her strap bag, her rings, the gold medallion she is wearing and incongruously, a gold ankle chain she is wearing. They upend her to get at this and this gives Brock, arriving quietly on this somewhat violent scene, a great chance. One of the yellow fellows in on his knees undoing the chain and Brock gives him the mother and father of a kick to his rear from his RM Williams chisel-toe boots. "Awrrkk," goes the bloke and in a flash, Brock gets an ankle lock on him and exerting main force, tumbles him over and over and onto the rail tracks. The others turn – Brock has regrouped and slams his steel-edged briefcase into the next chap's face. He goes over and Brock gives him a sharp and dangerous head kick. He's down and out. The third chap produces a whippy, long knife, but Brock is really on a roll and comes at him in the style of the ruckman he used to be, and barrels him over the platform edge, jumps down after him and kicks the chap senseless against the rail line. He throws him back up and pulling out some baling twine (which he has carried up to tie together a bundle of loose books, which he usually sources from the stationary station book barrowman), he trusses the two stunned chaps up like Xmas turkeys. The other one lies totally inert.

The cavalry – the Rail Security people arrive on the scene. By this time, Brock is turning his attention to Mrs Judge, lying on the platform. He takes off his Harris Tweed sports coat, pillows it under her head and tips his brandy flask to her lips.

"God," she says, "what is that?"

"Guaranteed to revive a dead horse," Brock says, "French Cognac."

The cavalry claim his attention. "You can't do that," they say, "it's against the law in Victoria."

Brock snorts. "I don't give a bugger," he says. "I've citizen arrested these low-lives, but if you care to cuff them, I want my string back. May I suggest a summary court-martial and shoot the bastards."

"What a good idea," the quasi coppers say and cuff the crooks!

"Now, Mrs Judge....., he says, feeding her another stiffish shot of brandy.

"Yes, Sir Galahad, what is your pleasure?"

Brock thinks his pleasure would be to pleasure this beautiful woman where she lies, but she's in pain. He massages her knee, which is skinned and blowing up. He's an old hand with footy injuries; gently massages it and gets things back in place.

"I don't think we need an ambulance, but if I can get you up comfortably, I'll taxi you over to the City Private Medical Centre."

"It's Cecily," she says. "It's a helluva way to meet up with a gentleman."

An hour later, she has got a strapped knee and a lend crutch from the clinic.

"Now," says Brock, "what's your revised schedule?"

"Ah...", she says, "back home on the 6pm flyer. In the meantime, I have to go to an antique shop, up near Young & Jacksons, to finalize a deal on a French Escritoire that I fancy for my big home in Hamilton."

Brock scribbles in his notebook, tears the page out and says,

"Well, I'll meet you here at 4pm. It's a nice old Brasserie at the Jam Factory in South Melbourne and I'll see you home from there."

They meet up at the Brasserie, enjoy a cocktail or three and a marvelous little meal of mud crabs, small steaks and salad, all over a bottle of Yarra Valley Red and finish on tiny apple pies and cream, coffee and cognacs. They just make it to the train. She's a bit shot by this time and snuggles up to him in the seat they share, falling asleep on his shoulder. The Judge is there to meet them, most appreciative of Brock's help.

"No problems," Brock says, "always a pleasure." As they part, he continues, "Mrs Judge, the Victorian Water Colour Association of Artists is due to descend on me at Slippen Farm in two weeks. I read in the local paper that you are an artist of note. Perhaps you would care to visit. You too, Judge, bring your golf sticks."

"Thanks," says the Judge. "Perhaps," says his wife.

She's out there in ten days. Like so many visiting painters, she's painting in the gravel pit just below the Slippen Farm gate. It's off the little-used entry road and is really a truly marvelous vantage point for those painting the blue, blue Grampians. Parcel Pete, who drops off and picks up work from Brock's cottage words him up.

"There's a beautiful Volvo and a very pretty painter in your gravel pit." Old Pete is as sharp as a tack, misses nothing and he's humorous with it. Brock hops on his quad bike and runs down to the pit.

"Hi Cecily," he says, "Care for a spot of lunch up at the house?" She showers him with a marvelous smile. "I've brought some eggs and some sliced truffle," she says, "it's for a truffle omelet after."

"After what?" Brock ingenuously asks. Her laugh is tinkley.



“After,” she says, “we have done to one another what both of us have been thinking about continuously, since you softly rubbed my knee.”

“I accept your fascinating offer,” Brock says, “now!”

“Let me get this wash on while the spring light holds,” she says.

“Ummm,” he says.

She gives him a direct look. “A pleasure delayed is a pleasure doubled,” she smilingly says. “Why don’t you put a pan on the stove on low and turn the bed down?”

It’s a happy result – both she and the omelet are very delicious. She has a shower, along with Brock, after their late lunch.

“Sir Shaftalot,” she says, “you are a pleasure. I’ll be out to mix with the painters on the weekend, but not, I regret, to do this. However, what about Thursday next in Melbourne? I’ll reserve a room at the John Batman Motor Lodge?”

“Yes please,” says Brock.

Things move along swimmingly and often for the next two years, or close on two years.

Brock gets called up to fill in for his boss, who has broken a leg climbing in the Lamington National Park. They book him into a serviced apartment in St Kilda Road and about this time Cecily and her magistrate husband jet out for a seven week holiday in the UK. Brock is very much at a loose end. He goes into town to a Gustav Holtz concert – the famous Planets Suite. He’s on the stairway queue and starts up a conversation with a tall, pretty, blonde girl. Brock is a pleasant looking man, open countenanced, talks easily to people.

“You’re on your own,” he remarks.

“Christ,” she says, “I’m in a big class at Melbourne University, but I couldn’t get a starter for this concert. They’re all into Jazz House Rock, popping doubtful pills and skolling Vic Bitters over in the music quarter.”

“What about some champers at interval?” Brock says as the queue starts to move. “Where?” she asks.

He points the entry to Churchills Bar, which they sort of look at from the stairway. She gives him a quick and perceptive up and down look. “Fine,” she says.

She turns up and they chat and slurp.

“What about a nightcap, here, after?” Brock says.

“What do you have in mind?” she pleasantly asks.

“Oh, I thought we could go suppering and dancing at Annabel’s,” he says.

“They get going about that time.”

“Can I have another drink?” she says, “while I think about it.”

Brock grins. “I’m not an axe murderer,” he says, “though, funnily enough, I seem to think I know you.”

“No you don’t,” she says, “but your offer is attractive. I’ve been involved in a life of study of late. I don’t mind kicking over the traces just a trifle.”

“Well, in that case,” Brock says, “why don’t we split now and fill in an hour at the Crown Casino and go on to Annabel’s?”

Brock’s quite happy to swap the Planets Suite for a breathy, busty and beautiful blonde girl any day of the week. She looks him up and down again, seems to like what she sees.

“You seem to be a man of the world,” she says, “I’ve only been out with University dickheads lately. Okay, let’s move along.”

They become, in leisure time, quite inseparable. A few weeks later, as she is dressing in his service flat, she says diffidently, “What about meeting my parents

tonight? They've been travelling and only got back this afternoon. I met them at Tullarmarine. They are not all that decrepit. I thought that you might do to them the marvelous epiphany you gave me, that is, take them dancing with us at Annabel's."

Brock grins. "Surely," he says, "what time?"

"11.45," the girl says.

Brock and his girl, both beautifully dressed, sweep into the night club foyer at Annabel's near the appointed time. Waiting for them, and boy does this take the wind out of Brock's sails, is Cecily and her judge husband. They are equally taken aback.

"Jesus," says Herbert, "we go away for a little while and you hit on our only daughter."

"Daughter?" says Brock, "But the name?"

Cecily recovers and grins. "My first marriage," she says, "my only child."

They recover quickly and laugh their way into Annabel's. Brock is hardly in the door when he lamps his old partner, Phillipa, who is there, beautifully dressed, but looking as sour as a quince. She is dancing with a foppily dressed small man, a sort of William Shorten lookalike.

'Gawd,' thinks Brock, 'this is certainly a night with strong overtones of sweet and sour.'

As the gig finishes, Phillipa comes smartly over.

"Who are you?" she rudely asks the girl. "Are you with Brock?"

"Surely," the girl says. "What, may I ask, is it to you?"

"Watch him," the former live-in says, "he's a fink bastard at heart."

"Enough, Phillipa," Brock says. "Did you buy a house in Canterbury?"

"Yes," she says. "I'm the only tenant. You can come back and share it if you want."

"That can't happen," Brock says, "I've moved on. But what about the chap you're dancing with?"

"Nice, but totally gay," she says. "Good company for a night out, but that's all." She stalks off.

Brock's girl says, "Well, that's put a dampener on the night – you've never told me about her."

"Never needed to," Brock says, "but to be honest, we lived together for six years and made a deal of money in that time."

Things are turning just a trifle sour. Cecily resurrects the night.

"What about a dance, Brock?" she says. They swing into a corner. She hugs him close. "Have you bedded her yet?" Cecily asks.

"Umm..., Brock temporizes, he's on earthquake ground.

"And if so," Cecily goes on, "if so, do you realize you've been making whoopee with your potential mother-in-law?" She grins madly – the sweetness has returned to the evening.

"God, Brock," she says, "Have I missed you, you bastard!"

"Perhaps," Brock says, "we can now all settle down. I'm not at all averse to continue playing happy families."



Ibsen and All That

by
Lloyd Nelson

The scene that unfolds as this tale starts is being viewed, perhaps sardonically, by the Sargeant in Charge of the Tatura Police Station, Jim Whyte. He is standing on the steps of the station as his many visitors from the Victorian Police Service come back to the station after lunch at the pub. There are forensic men, detectives, his area boss and the overall Victorian boss. There are police cars everywhere and the central piece of the scene is a tilt tray police transporter with a blasted and burnt-out Holden car shell, plus bits and pieces strapped to the tray.

“Gawd”, Jim thinks. *“I came back here for peace and quiet and a rundown to my retirement, and here I am in the Police swamp, up to my ass in alligators.”*

Prior to lunch, the big boss has been quizzing Jim.

“This used to be a very quiet town, Sargeant”, he says. “Look at it now – in the past seven weeks murder and rape, very nasty, a man professionally sandbagged at the quarry, the magazine door pulled out complete with its frame by a front-end loader and chain, dynamite and detonators stolen, a local car turned into a speeding fireball, two men, not well regarded, incinerated in the car – burnt to a crisp. What the hell has been going on and what avenues of enquiry are you taking?”

Jim’s living back in Tatura in the twilight of his police career. He was stationed here in his early police days. He married the only child of the manager of the huge tomato sauce and canned tomatoes packing plant. She married beneath herself a bit, as her Dad, while managing the plant, had a decent shareholding in the same company and thus had clout. It was only Jim’s starring role with the local football club and later again in the ruck for Collingwood, that made him acceptable to his wife’s family.

He spent a deal of time on the Crime Squad in busy and crooked old Melbourne and only in recent years has he returned to the Uniform Branch to head up things in Shepparton, and now Tatura. His wife’s family left their very fine home, ‘Rathglen’, to their daughter and that is where they now reside in considerable comfort and splendour. It’s all been very easy policing until six weeks back. Now half of head office seems to have been up to assist. Assistance that Jim doesn’t want as he expects that given time and not too much interference, he will sort the matter out on his own and catch up with the culprits.

“It’s all linked,” Jim tells his big boss. “But only hard grunt work will get all the dots joined to provide the full picture.”

“Just run your dots past me,” the head man says. “So that I can follow up your theory.”

“Hmmm,” Jim says. “1. A locally born Nursing Sister is raped and murdered up by the old railway dam towards her home. 2. Five weeks later, an anonymous typed letter posted here in town directs us to two Shepparton-way men. 3. We round them up and put some pressure on. 4. They are given a cast iron alibi for the time of the crime by the most respected woman in town, who we would normally think wouldn’t touch them with a 40foot barge pole. 5. The quarry caretaker, who’s worked out there for years to look after the expensive equipment, is sandbagged one dark evening as he goes out to sus out a small explosion on the quarry site. 6. The very secure explosives store is completely dragged open by one of their own machines. 7. The two chaps interviewed in the rape/murder get fire-balled in their

car coming home from their usual Friday night drinkies at the Duke of Cromwell, where all the young and not so young people drink.”

“So you think you can make a link-up out of this mess?” Jim’s boss asks.

“Yes and no.” Jim says. “The matter is surprisingly deep, but we’re working on it. We will push on regardless.”

“Hmmm,” says the top copper. “Let’s hope it’s not pushing on rewardless.”

Having set the scene from the angle of the gendarmes, we can now take a quiet peek at what actually happens.

Matthew Clarke has been out fox shooting on his mate’s farm at Kyabram. They lamb early on this property, just after Easter. Thus they aim to cull the fox population in the lead-up to lambing. Its good practise and they know what they are about. For transport they use an old Austen A.40 utility with a good hand rail. One drives, one spotlights, one shoots and they alternate between using shotguns or rifles. The last thing you want rolling around the tray of a fast moving ute in rough ground is more than one gun. So one week they use a shotgun and run up hard on the spotlighted fox and blap him when they are right on his tail. The following week they approach their spotlighting more circumspectly and when they pick up the eyes of a fox in the light, they stop, may even give a blow on a rabbit decoy whistle to catch the ferals attention, and shoot him with a telescoped rifle.

Matt’s just arrived home from such a shoot and as he gets his .22 Hornet rifle carefully out of the boot of his Touring car, his eye is caught by a flash of white on the street over the school ground. He quickly recognizes that it’s Anne Bearsdon walking home in uniform from her shift at the hospital. It’s a warm summer’s night and unusually, no breeze has got up. Anne is a tallish, straight-limbed girl, about 30. She married and left Tatura years back, a bad marriage it seems. She is a qualified midwifery sister at the hospital – they are lucky to have her back.

As she turns the corner under the street light, he sees a car, seemingly tracking her. Matt whips up his rifle and looks through the oversize short scope to lamp the car. It’s a very dark Holden, Shepparton plates and there’s a dent in the boot lid. He looks at his watch; it’s 1.15am. Matt thinks no more about it. He leaves his bachelor home at 8am, after a bit of a kip and heads off to pick up the regular early morning flight to Melbourne from Shepparton. He’s off to Italy to do a bit of ski slope work with a mate who works for Arthur Anderson and Co in London. They get together once a year to do this. It’s the Dolomites around Cortina this year, Perisher Valley the next and so on. He’s away three weeks and has a week in Brisbane, coming home to visit his sister. Thus, until he gets back to his accountancy office in Tatura, he hasn’t heard a word about Anne Bearsdon’s brutal rape and murder.

Matt reads up on the local newspapers. Evidently, they caught her halfway between the corner light that Matt saw her pass under and her home. They took her and left her on a patch of scrubby wasteland that abuts an old and disused dam. The police make all the right noises and appeal for witnesses and all that, but they obviously have no suspects or clues as to who her killer is. Matt realises that he is in a position to give the cops a lead, but there’s a downside too. If he mentions the use of his gun-sight, they’ll most likely drop on him for having an unlicensed gun. You can’t get a license for a high powered Hornet rifle in the



southern states. Also, if he comes forward, he will immediately join their list of suspects and have to undergo a deal of police pain as a result.

Finally, he does nothing, but Friday night towards pub closing time, he parks his car in Shepparton near the Duke of Cromwell parking lot and watches who emerges onto the road from there. Sure enough, the Holden with the dent turns up. He's using his scope without the gun this time. Once he's sure it's the car, he catches up with them parked outside the popular snack bar on railway land across from the Town Hall. He parks, orders a toasted sandwich and a mug of coffee and quietly and unobtrusively observes the scene. There are two strongly built chaps with the Holden – tough looking. He carefully notes their number and after they leave, he goes back for more coffee and lightly asks a group of girls who the toughs have been chihiking.

“Who are those guys? I seem to know them from somewhere.”

“Ah,” they say. “Looking at the way you're dressed, you wouldn't know them. It's two of the four Ralston brothers. The others are even tougher.”

“Do they mix around?” he asks.

“Well,” one girl says. “They would if they could, but there are no takers. It's best not to upset them, but it's best to give them a wide berth too.”

Matt is now in a position to steer the cops in, very likely, the right direction, but doesn't yet. He goes back into Shepparton on several succeeding Friday nights and thus checks out that it is the same two brothers driving the same dented car each night. He now drops a very anonymous letter to the cops; uses an old Olympia typewriter from the store shed at work. The rumour, that Brad and Peter Ralston have been picked up by the Shepparton cops and closely interrogated by the ones up from Melbourne, circulates that their alibi, which stands up, is that they were being entertained by Cleo Phillips. The public don't believe this, although they are quite happy to spread the rumour a bit. Cleo Phillips is a very handsome, slim woman, married to a man much older than she, who is now in care with Motor Neurone Disease.

Matt drops round to see her. She invites him in and springs a coffee. They chat away a bit and Matt finally and perhaps reluctantly, gets around to what he has come to ask her – if she in fact is the alibi for the night of Anne Bearsdon's murder. She leans back on the stool. “Yes,” she says. “I am in fact.”

“Hmmm,” Matt says. “Did the cops lean on you?”

“Yes,” she replies. “And Matt, I'll tell you what I told them. It goes like this – there's a hunger one develops that is quite divorced from food and it's a hunger that, until assuaged, can cause one to throw away the moral constraints instilled over a lifetime of teaching and example. In short, if the opportunity to assuage crops up, you may even throw your hat over the windmill and enjoy the gallop; for it is surely a no holds barred gallop, not at all a canter. That's it in a nutshell, needs, my needs coinciding with the opportunity provided quite unexpectedly by the Ralston brothers.”

But she is not telling the real truth. Matt can see a tight white line showing on her unpainted lips. *'It's a stress line,'* he thinks, but he decides to push the boat out a bit.

“Perhaps you are hungry now?” he says.

She is shocked that he has come on to her, but she's game for all that.

“Er, no, um, no but may I keep it in mind?”

“Surely,” he says. “Thanks for the coffee.”

Matt is now certain that the Ralstons are the perpetrators and all that's saving their skin, is the word of one of the most respected women in town.

Three weeks later, on a warm summer afternoon, his phone goes. It's Cleo Phillips. She lives not far from him.

"Matt," she says. "I'm hungry. Why not walk quietly over. I'll be in the summer house."

Matt's a normal sort of chap; he's a bachelor and this offer is hard to knock back. He walks over in long shorts, T-shirt and boaties, across the main street and down the lane. The gate in the high fence is unlocked, with a block of wood holding it in. He pushes through, diffidently opens the door of the summer house. Cleo is there, barefoot in a lemon short, sleeveless frock.

"Hi Matt," she brightly says. "Have a drink. I've been getting fortified with a bit of Dutch courage. This is my third double," gesturing towards a bottle of single malt Glenlivet sitting on the top of the unlit potbelly stove; they skoll a couple more.

"Showtime," she says and turns her back to Matt. "Just undo the hook and eye at the top; I'm already unzipped."

Matt does that and the frock falls. She turns; she's a remarkably good-looking slim woman. She goes down on the eggshell plastic mattress spread out behind the tile fire.

"When you're ready," she says.

Matt can't recall a better afternoon. He stays the night, leaves at false dawn.

"You're the first in four years," she says. "Since my hubby fell over."

"What about the Ralstons?" he asks.

"Fairy tale," she says. "At least the cops believed me."

"Why?" he asks.

"They held a pillow over Mary's head (her only child). I had to buckle. How did you spring me?" she asks. Matt chuckles.

"I rang my old drama professor at Melbourne University, outlining what you told me at the time. It took him about a minute and a half to come back Ibsen. He said it's from Hedda Gabler, written in 1890. Human nature, of course, doesn't change. It's still as relevant as when old Hendrik penned it." Matt goes on.

"I then rounded up your college year book from Methodist Ladies College in Frankston. There you were in full dress-up; the star of the Ibsen festival."

"What next," she asks.

"Retribution, Cleo," he says. "Retribution in full."

Two Fridays hence, he has a lift-up jack under the diff of the Ralston's car in the Duke of Cromwell's ill lit car park. He's a bit vulnerable, but has a tyre iron close to hand; at least he thinks these chaps' movements are predictable. They will, he expects, prop up the bar counter until closing time. He duct tapes eight sticks of dynamite complete with detonator caps, wires and all, hooked to a cell phone under the petrol tank. Two hours later, he is sitting at the start of the longest straight on the Tatura road waiting on the Ralston's car. It speeds past. He waits until it's on the flat stretch and as there are no car lights coming from the other way; he dials a number on the cell phone. Seconds later, a huge pillar of flame appears down the road.

"Hmmm," Matt says to himself. "The books are finally balanced."

Misfortune in Fortune Street

(aka Nicholas Nelson)

Written by his biographer.

I'm the youngest of my family, but I'm generally regarded as the pick of the litter. As you can see from the photo (I'm

the one on the right) I'm both handsome and Intelligent looking. Not that I'm knocking my brothers, they're quite always share my birthday will again tomorrow, which

I'm expecting heaps of get much from the Nelson skin flints, however I may from Poppa and Nana I've just finished school at As usual I've been helping



their homework. I'm a very good student and the least I can do is help those who are struggling. Of course I charge for this, sometimes money sometimes barter. Today in my school bag I've got cash, a couple of Mars Bars and two bags of school yard marbles. I don't particularly want marbles but Lewis, my next up brother is a wheeler dealer and he will trade them for something more useful for me in exchange for his usual 10% cut. I will talk to my elder brother Marshall who is deep and smart before I enter into business arrangements with Lewis. I may be best to put the deal in writing; I will see what Marshall says.

School's now out so Lewis and I do our usual rounds of the novelty shop in the Old Observer Building. Strictly speaking we shouldn't be there as mum has forbidden it. However she is only a girl and we don't take much notice of her, our house is very male dominated and Dad says it's best to always listen to Mum's advice but best never to take it. I'm told this was a famous saying of the late and famous president John Kennedy of the United States. After we have done over the novelty shop I have to go to the Town Council office up the street a bit to pay a bill for Dad there. As I get near the Commonwealth Bank a beautifully polished up and presented Holden Kingswood pulls up. It's in lovely order and we later hear it was stolen from its garage in Nedlands for the crime I'm about to witness. Three chaps get out of the car, they're fit and tough looking, I don't think they are druggies, they look too clear eyed and sharp for that. They leave the motor running in the side alley and hefting shotguns and pistols they pull on ski masks and briskly enter the bank and shut the main door or rather disable the slider as they go in. They're all business so I have to do something.

I look around. Tommy Trinders Thrifty Towing Service Truck is standing in the street. It's festooned with heavy and light towing chains. I zip over, Tommy's on his arvo run to the bottle shop, just up a bit, he's a very handy man with a six pack my Dad says. I pull off a long length of light chain from the truck Dad says Tommy is noted for light chains of extraordinary strength and Dad usually knows what he's talking about on these matters as he's always towing this and that in his car trailer.

I'm only small so I slip under the Kingswood and loop one end of the chain around the back axle near the diff. I fix it firm with one of Tommy's many shackles from a box

on the truck tray. The chain isn't quite long enough and for what I have in mind I want them to have enough chain to get up pace. I add two more lengths and link them with more shackles and I then shackle the end around an S.E.C. pole.

I'm just finished and am pulling my traded in marbles out of my school bag when Tommy comes over Fortune Street carrying a block of Vic Bitter.

"What in the world are you doing Nick?" he says.

"No time to talk Mr. Tommy," I say, "but stand back a bit, the bank is being robbed and there'll be a whole lot of Tow Truck work here in about 3 minutes. He drops the block and starts towards the Bank.

"Don't even think about interfering Mr Trinder," I say. "They not only armed but they're obviously very dangerous, just stand back a bit."

He does so but not yet far enough, I gesture him back towards the church more.

"But what about you Nicholas?" he asks.

"I'm fine Mr. Trinder, I'm so small they won't notice me. We hear shots coming from the bank, the crash of a shotty and the zing of a pistol. I scrunch down near the door, it crashes open and the three rush out carrying bags of cash, I throw small handfuls of marbles in their path, they skid, run on the spot, trip and fall heavily. A mobile phone and a bag land at my feet. Another bag bursts open and hundred dollar bills fly everywhere. Tommy steps forward and as they get up they shoot him in the shoulder, luckily they use a stolen .22 target pistol on him, not the shotty. He falls in the square.

I grab the bag at my foot and with the speed of light shove it in a mesh rubbish bin and pull refuse over it. The hoods gun the vintage car, it has a marvellous motor in it. At peak rev's they let the clutch out and proceed at huge pace up Fortune Street, they come to the end of the chain, it's cataclysmic. The chain pulls the diff out of the car and also pulls the S.E.C. pole down, it's rotten it seems. The body of the car with the hoods in it continues its momentum and crashes through the plate glass of the bottle shop.

The hood jump out, they're all inside the wreckage of the bottle shop and to distract things they throw tinnies out into the street. The local alkies rush in and start looting grog. One indigenous one gets stuck into a bottle of brandy and as he gulps he dribbles it down the front of his old army greatcoat. Having drunk or spilled much of the bottle he starts on a bottle of stolen cognac. He then steals some cigarettes and makes the mistake of lighting a fag up. The match sets fire to his cognac stained coat.

I use the mobile phone to ring Police, Fire and Ambulance. The sparking S.E.C. pole sets fire to a car nearby, it goes up like a roman candle, talk about action. Fortune Street's never see anything like it.

What am I doing, I'm holding a towel from my school bag against the bleeding wound in Tommy's shoulder until the ambulance arrives and giving up all attempts to get through the holocaust which has now spread to several cars they run around and through the back of the square to get to Tommy. The alky's are giving the bottle shop hell, the one on fire tosses his coat onto a pile of cardboard cartons which burn like no-one's business, the heat cause bottles to explode, unfortunately some are boxes of brandy so within minutes the bottle shop is seriously afire. I know they're moving shop soon so I don't suppose the owners will be too fashed and they may have a huge insurance pay out to help them move. The robbers and money have disappeared completely. Later we find that they put a pistol in the ear of the girl in the shop and hostage her away in the Liquor store delivery van. They take her out to a side road near Hill Side meats and bind and blindfold her. They then proceed up

the road to where they have a beautiful beige Mercedes car stashed, they stole this in Dalkeith a day or two back and changed the plates, they then put on top of the range suits stolen from Parker & Co. in Trinity Arcade a few days earlier and impeccably dressed drive quietly to the city and disappear. During all the confusion I quietly leave the scene and walk home past the old dry cleaning shop and over the railway foot bridge. Mum asks me what is happening and in accordance with Dad's suggestion not to say too much to Mum I say,

"Oh, nothing much."

"Did you pay that council bill?" Mum asks. I reply quite honestly, "No, I started out to but got distracted."

"Oh, boy," she say, "it takes very little to distract you Nicholas, you have to concentrate more."

I think back on the little distraction and mentally list them:

A major bank robbery,

Shootings,

A man down with a shoulder wound,

The diff torn out of a valuable vintage car,

A man on fire,

A wrecked and by now probably burnt out bottle shop,

A shop looting by alkies,

An S.E.C. pole lying across Fortune Street and arcing out madly and setting fire to parked cars,

A girl taken as hostage, etc., etc.

By and large, it's a bigger show than Robert Duval's 'Apocalypse Now'. Certainly if was more colourful.

We have a nice tea enlivened by the news clips on the huge events in Fortune Street, Narrogin. The entire family is gobsmacked.

"Nicholas," Mum says, "why didn't you tell us of this huge event?"

"Well Mum," I say, "I didn't know where to start." Midnight comes and it's my birthday. I put a leash on our Jack Russell, Sammy, pick up a stick from Dad's shed and taking a torch that Poppy gave me I set out to get my present. I cautiously walk over the railway footbridge and dart up Fortune Street to the Church Square. The bank bag is still under the rubbish so I place it in a travel bag and trudge home, seeing no-one except the watchman sitting in his car outside the burnt out shop. I'm sleeping in the studio so I take Sammy in and put on a small light and start out to count the dosh. I get up to \$31,500 in \$100 notes and have the cash stacked up in heaps when there's a huge crash and the door flies off its hinges. Two huge body armoured SWAT team men holding huge sledge hammers look in and say,

"There he is," they stand back and 15 SWAT team men rush in carrying huge automatic weapons. The man in charge takes in the money and puts his huge gloved hand on my shoulder,

"Nicholas Nelson," he says in a frightening gravel voice,

"Its time....." His voice fades and is replaced by Mum's soft voice saying,

"It's time to get up. It's a school day and Happy



Birthday.”

I open my eyes, there's no money, but boy am I relieved that it's been a dream, or nightmare.

“Have you been dreaming, Nick?” Mum says.

“Believe me Mum,” I tell her, “I wouldn't wish that f**king dream on anyone!”

Death of a Taxi Driver

Caleb Anderson is playing Irish flute in a smoky bar/beer hall/pub lounge, set up down, down in deepest Carlton. There's a hell of a crowd in tonight and Caleb's fine flute work is accompanied by his girlfriend's effort on the piano, a distinguished old Monington & Weston Baby Grand, is being very well accepted by the drinkers.

His day job is that of a young Victorian Police Service Detective and he plays in bars around Melbourne in his spare time, mostly Saturday and quite recently, Sunday nights. Caleb's from Shepparton and gets called down to work in Melbourne at the height of the Moran gang warfare, where all the old hands are needed on deck to cope and they need some newy's to handle the unending grunt work. Caleb's taken to police work in snappy old Melbourne like a duck to water and is making good progress.

There is a slight interruption – two uniformed coppers come into the bar and talk hard to the bouncers. They gesture in Caleb's direction and he realizes with a sinking feeling, they are heading right for him. They pause;

“Are you Detective Constable Caleb Anderson?”

“Yes,” says Caleb, “what do you want?”

“You,” the copper says. “Do you know the Shepparton Taxi driver, Jerry Wells?”

“Surely,” says Caleb, “very well in fact.”

“In that case,” the lead copper says, “you're to come with me.”

“To where?” Caleb asks.

“Ah.....the City Morgue, you are needed there.”

“What in Christ for?” Caleb says, imagining all the terrible scenarios as one does on these occasions.

“I'm only the messenger,” says the copper, “don't shoot me. In the meantime, get your ass into gear, we're off and out, but we will bring you back after.”

“Keep tinkling, love,” Caleb says to the girl, “I'll be a little while.”

The whippy girl says, “What's up?”

“Don't know,” says Caleb, “but they tell me I won't be all night.”

Caleb's boss is at the Morgue door.

“Sorry about this, Cal,” he says, “but it's expedient to drag you in. And it will save a deal of time. I'm told the chap we are about to look at is personally known to you.”

Caleb is successful in that he gets on with things. They walk into the white lit morgue; he looks at what he has to look at – it's very horrific. The face of the man on the slab is shredded by shotgun shot. Caleb pulls down the sheet and finds what he is looking for; it's a horseshoe tattoo on the victims shoulder.

“The victim is,” he says, “or was, Jerry Wells, taxi driver of Shepparton and Fitzroy. Can I ask what happened?”

His boss says, “This chap, as you know, drives alternative weeks in Shepparton and Melbourne. He was called to the Parliament House car park this

evening, at 11.40pm to be exact. It seems someone was waiting there with a shotgun.”

“It doesn’t gel,” Caleb says. “This bloke is well regarded; he’s indigenous – just. He’s not into anything nasty, never has been; he was a big mild man, on the ball, no one with any sense trifles with Jerry; or did.”

“Hmm,” says the senior man, “perhaps the work in Melbourne subverted him, ready cash, perhaps drug money.”

“I don’t think,” Caleb says, “Jerry is or was never a greedy man, he was a big strong good natured local. This must be deeper.”

“Okay,” says the senior man, “the uniforms will run you back to the Pub. I apologise for interrupting your evening, but knowing you are quick and smart, it seemed the easiest way to get a quick ID. We can now move on.”

“Any witnesses?” Caleb asks.

“No,” says the man, “lots of shotgun pellets, probably self loaded stuff. No shells or anything like that, just the two shots. The site has been floodlit and forensics are busy there now. Best we can hope for is some giveaway cigarette butts.”

“Can I go up?” Caleb asks.

“Best not,” replies his boss. “Too many big flat feet up there now I would think. I’ll talk to you Monday at Russell Street. I have some stuff coming in that may be helpful.”

Thus, Monday morning, Cal is listening to the cab call centre phone tapes. The ring in call that lured Jerry to Spring Street; the voice is certainly disguised, but Caleb suspects immediately that the caller is Robert Jecks, a very tough feed-lotter with an irrigated small property north-east of Shepparton. He both feed-lots and grazes cattle. Caleb’s sixth sense prompts him to say nothing. Not in effect to tell anyone of his suspicions that Jecks is probably the one they want for this nasty crime. He certainly wants justice for Jerry, but he is also intrigued to know what the hell this shooting is all about.

He keeps schtum, but Wednesday is a rostered day off, so he drives his small car up to Shepparton and calls in at his old station. He’s well received and the locals don’t mind him having a sniff around. It’s not that long since he left the town and he certainly left on good terms with the near permanents, mostly not so young here.

The late Jerry’s taxi service has always operated on a phone ring-in basis. You ring into his base phone and the base phone says that Jerry will be there asap. He was a very phlegmatic man and he takes his pick-ups in the strict rotation in which they call in. Caleb walks around to Jerry’s base. It’s a steel framed shed, part brick fronted, very neat and tidy. It’s got a roller door and a hoist to allow the taxi to be serviced and washed on quiet days.

He springs the Yale lock with his credit card and has a listen in to the sequence of calls for Jerry’s services the night before he was shot to death off Spring Street. There’s no times on the calls, but he shorthands them into his spiral notebook. It’s all quite straightforward and he can use the recorded calls to confirm where Jerry did his pickups. There’s a longish gap between two Friday night calls. He tracks around to the all-night service station. Sure enough, Jerry had been there to refuel his gas cab.

Back at the Police Station, Cal suggests to the Sargeant that they immediately impound the cab call tape and starts to plot and fill in times on the Chamber of Commerce map. He works out probably routes Jerry would have taken in going about his business. He rings his boss back in ‘Bleak City’.

“Whatever lead to the crime, but not the actual happening is, I think, sourced here in Shepparton.”

“Highly unlikely,” his boss says. “You may be wasting time up there chasing Will o’ the Wisps. The real baddies live in Melbourne. Not everything that can be counted, counts – not everything that counts can be counted.”

“With respect, Sir,” Cal says, “the matter’s based here, but I need a day or more here to nail it properly.”

“Hmm,” says the boss man, “you’re leaving me shorthanded here and work is piling up.”

“What if I’m back Friday morning, early,” Cal asks.

“Okay,” the senior man replies.

The other Shepparton coppers start to look at Cal - he’s not local police anymore.

“Okay, Sherlock,” Sargeant Baynes says. “What are you up to?”

Most of the toilers are in the station operations room.

“Umm...” says Cal, “Jerry, I think, saw something or someone where they shouldn’t have been or doing something out of the ordinary. That’s the root of the matter.”

“Rubbish,” says Baynes. “It’s strictly a Melbourne matter. It’s not local at all. God knows this is a quiet, quiet town, whereas Melbourne has half the crooks in Australia living down there.”

Cal persists. “Who’s been reported missing?” he asks the room.

“Amelia Wilson,” the desk copper says. “She lives in Andrews Road, her mum out at Tatura asked us to check.”

“And did you?” asks Cal.

“Surely,” the man says, “no one at home, her car wasn’t there.”

“Back to you,” the Sargeant says, “you have a fertile mind.”

“Okay,” says Cal, “whatever Jerry saw was most likely on his charted calls, most likely in a suburban street or lane, not in the main drag. Here are the streets we should door knock. It’s like old Lenin said, ‘Take action and see what happens’. Let’s see what we can flush out.”

“Starting when?” Baynes says.

“Now,” says Cal. “Let’s get into working groups and then door knock the likely streets until....say....10pm. It’s perhaps as late as we can go.”

Caleb is of course looking for something of a cross reference nature that bisects Jerry’s taxi routes. They get to work and quickly flush something or someone out. Someone torches Amelia Wilson’s weatherboard house. It burns like tinder and the arson squad are whistled up from ‘Bleak City’ and quickly work their way through the wreckage and discover the missing Amelia, or what is left of her, in the process. Time has now run for Cal. He has to be back in the city by next morning; he hasn’t any choice really.

“Any parting instructions, Cal?” the Sargeant says.

“Find the missing car,” Cal says. He sketches in a pencil segment on the map. “It’ll be somewhere in this area,” he says. He has mentally defined an area that would leave a car thief with three walking miles of the Jecks’ property.

Back in ‘Bleak City’, the Moran gang warfare escalates. All of the old hands are involved in the police backwash and the peripheral stuff, some of it quite major, lands on Caleb’s section. Thus, the Shepparton matter goes straight onto the backburner. His superior lands on Caleb heavily.

“We don’t want you wasting time on the supposed Shepparton matter,” he is told, “get stuck into the here and now down here, there’s heaps to do.”

And there really is, but he keeps on the case in his spare time. He walks around to the Crime and Corruption people to see about getting a tap on the feed-lotter’s phone to see if a match up can be made with the Melbourne Cab Centre call.

“It’s a bit hard to do this on an unofficial basis,” the man there tells Caleb. “Why not have someone make a dummy call to your suspect and tape him then. I can lend you the doings and once you have that, I can do a voice print analysis here.”

Caleb continues his walk and talks to the Accounts Manager for Shepparton around at Elders. He knows the suspect (in his eyes) uses this stock firm. Elders suck their teeth a bit, but finally make an account query phone call to Jecks’ property and thus, Caleb gets a tape recording to take back to the CCC. The results are a bit inconclusive.

“I think your gut feeling is quite right,” the man says, “but in making the cab call, as you expected, he has disguised his voice in two ways. The first is that he put something over the phone mouthpiece and I expect he had a marble or a big round gumball in his mouth. This beggar is no slouch, I can tell you. The upshot is, there is enough variation one way and another for your man to get away with this, in particular if they call a rebuttal voice print expert.”

“Fair enough,” says a disappointed Cal, and takes his leave.

He now rings Shepparton. They have had no luck in the sector search despite chartering a single engine plane to close fly the reserves and remnant bushland near town. The car they are looking for is a Forest Green small four wheel drive, perhaps a bit hard to spot, even from the air.

“And a foot search?” Caleb asks. No manpower for that, he is told. A bit later on, he rings again.

“Try the gravel extraction pits,” he says, and they do. They find the Subaru Forester in a blown in gravel cut, by using a metal detector. They pull it out and tilt tray it into the Police Station for forensic testing. But this doesn’t happen either. A heavily rugged up intruder burns it to bits in the yard with some form of heavy accelerant, just a night later.

Caleb continues to recognise the utterly ruthless nature of the chap he is mentally chasing. His thoughts now, are that Jecks ran across the dead girl in some bar and went home with her in her car. He suspects that quick old Jerry lamped him leaving the crime scene in the girl’s Forester. Obviously Jecks realizes he’s been lamped and acted to obviate this probability of a police report going in when word got out about the girl’s demise, and when Jerry had time from his frenetic taxi work to think about cause and effect.

Things are now at a dead end. Caleb suggests to Sargeant Baynes to just continue making enquiries about any sightings of the girl the night she was murdered.

“There’s a witness out there,” he says.

“Then why hasn’t that witness come forward?” the Sargeant reasonably asks.

“Hmm,” says Caleb. “It seems to me that whoever the witness or plural thereof, happen to be, they likewise had a good reason to keep the matter dark. They may have been somewhere or with someone that they collectively didn’t want getting out.”

The Shepparton police now get dinkum on their enquiries and 12 weeks later, a young man walks into the station and gives them the missing pieces.

“We are going to bring him in, Cal,” the Shepparton Sargeant says, “Do you want to be along?”

“Yes,” says Cal, “but this beggar is very, very dangerous. Don’t try to round him up at his farm, just put a watcher on his access road and bag him up when in town, but similarly, let’s be very careful.”

They bag him up a few days later at the monthly cattle sale and it doesn’t prove easy. Back in Melbourne, Cal’s chief says,

“This was a thoughtful and persistent investigation and it will add a deal of luster to your Police CV. We were doubtful Thomas’s, it seems. How may we make amends?”

“A day off would be nice,” Cal says.

Cal drives up to Shepparton, calls in at the local rose growers and comes out with a beautiful plastic bucket full of late pick roses – the best of the season. He takes them out to Jerry’s grave; roots the bucket into the crumbly earth, stands and sketches a salute.

“Ciao, Jerry,” he says, “We got the bastard!”



A Big Frog in a Royal Pond



Freddie the frog comes from a line of frogs known to English Botanists as the Frederick the Fourth Frog line. His genus lives in ponds surrounding Mad King Ludwig's spectacular castle in Bavaria. An English botanist, the Honourable Harry Lines, brought back a live collection of these and Queen Victoria's Parks and Gardens man, secured a breeding line from him. He placed these in the lake at Stively Manor in Yorkshire. Stively is part of Lord Ilford's Spinney Estate, which he hived off to give to his son, Robert (later Sir Robert) when he decided the time had come for Robert (his son and heir) to have a pad of his own. Robert Frost is married to Queen Victoria: Queen at present and later to be Queen Empress.

Sir Robert and Queen Victoria are often short-term visitors to Stively. They usually come in high summer, but they surprise him a bit by turning up here in deep winter. To say Yorkshire is sharp set in mid-winter is understating the case. The cattle and horses all are shedded for the winter and they generate quite a bit of heat and warmth in their surroundings, so Freddie, whose instinct for self preservation is as strong as a frog-royal or non royal, undertakes a dark of night migration from his summer house sun dial pond over to the part indoors and part outdoors stable pond, where he finds a nice warm spot to see the winter out and enjoying quite a good menu of insects who come to the pond for the same reason he has.

Freddie is now ten years old. He lived in the Dere Street Lake at Stively for near four years, but his increasing size made him an attractive menu item for the resident trout, so one dark night, he moves to the summer house pond. It's quite a decent size and the regular visitors to the summer house keep him well informed of what is going on at Stively Manor. The visitors are usually preceded by a bevy of servants directed firmly by the butler, Alfred Grant. Old Alf's a stern old file and he gives the girls curry when they are setting up all of the elaborate bits and pieces that are intrinsic to a Victorian era afternoon tea party.

Freddie drops into the pool to cool off when he wants to and when the tea house is buzzing with visitors, he hops into the shrubbery abutting the folly and pricks his ears. Perhaps the most interesting talk he enjoys is when Queen Victoria and Sir Robert Frost are afternoon teeing. They tuck into this and that; Queen Victoria's a real foodie and she's a handy person with a cream sponge and petit fours. She and Frost seem happily married and their union is not marred by the usually ubiquitous small children. Frost has a son with his paramour and Eaton Square live-in, Caitlen Mercer, the doyen of the London stage, but he has none with Queen Victoria. *'Curiouser and curiouser,' the frog thinks.* He knows full well the married couple cohabit – as it were.

After Victoria has scoffed everything in sight, she and Frost crack into the Brandy and dispatch the servants back to the Manor. Once they have sunk a full bottle, things get willing. Victoria is keen on a bit of fun and Robert Frost is more than happy to accommodate her. Sometimes the carrying on makes Freddie a bit embarrassed and he shuts his eyes, but not for long, as he likes to take in the real action. Sometimes it's all too stimulating and Freddie can hardly wait for dark to set

out to visit his lover, a delightful green lady frog who lives in the covered pool in the annex to the schoolroom.

The annex is well screened by big Aspidistras and the pool is heated from the steam boiler that creates a great growing climate for the exotic plants that are there in quantity. It's a very pleasant spot to swim around and make love in and not only Freddie and Veronica frog have discovered this. With bated breath, Veronica describes a Bacchanalian orgy that took place in the annex last evening when the starchy (but very shapely) Governess is disrobed and loved by Tim Collins, bodyguard to Sir Robert, who was safely in bed. Tim is late arriving of course, as he likes to sit up a bit, although Queen Victoria is an early-to-bedder – whom it is said calls out plaintively for Sir Robert to come and join her.

"Would you believe," Veronica tells Freddie, "Bindon Flood sneaks over just after dark and sparks the Governess and then makes off, giving the girl barely enough time to get herself together before Tim arrives."

"What a turn on," Freddie says as he advances lasciviously on Veronica.

"Yes indeed, Freddie," she says, "lets at it."

The Queen and Sir Robert are sitting in the summer house. They are not teeing. They have brandy balloons in their hands, and both are smoking long, thin Patenallea, product of Lord Ilford's Virginia Tobacco company. Victoria has developed quite a liking for these long thin cigars, but she is a bit distracted.

"Robert," she says, "I'm being asked to give my approval to a sharp note that Lord Palmerston has prepared in conjunction with Lord John Russell, to serve on the Americans. It's pretty blunt."

'Gawd,' thinks the frog, 'next we'll be at war with the Yanks.'

"Is it tickety-boo?" Robert asks.

"Oh yes," says the Queen. "He's written it from his country home, 'Broadlands', and his special cipher is on it. It's to distinguish urgent and important communications as against run of the mill stuff."

"Oh Vicky," says Robert, "It's a lovely sunny day, no wind at all. I've sent the flunkies off. Why don't you climb out of your bustle and we'll have some fun and think about this major decision?"

"Oh Robert," Victoria says dropping her frock to the folly floor, "yes to the fun; no to involving you. I have always said, and I mean it love, I'm happy to share my life with you as I do, but not the running of the country. That's my decision and only mine."

'Gawd,' thinks the frog, 'this sheila's a tough one. She's sort of saying what's yours is mine and what's mine is my own.'

Queen Victoria and Sir Robert start rolling around the folly floor and really getting into things. They're very distracted and don't notice Freddie as he leaves his cover and jumps up the folly steps to have a 'Captain Cook' at Lord Palmerston's cipher. *'Knowledge is power,' he thinks*, carefully taking in the cipher. The old frog is getting a tad tumescent at the goings on on the floor. Come dark, he is in the underlawn drainage pipe on his way to meet up with Veronica. For once it's business – not funny business – that is dominant with the frog's thinking. Veronica is a bit piqued. She's quite an intelligent frog and being party to the lessons the governess gives to the children of the servants and some of the offspring of the local gentry, she has learnt how to read and write and to assimilate English Literature and Poetry.

“Now Freddie,” she says, “I can see that I won’t get a romp out of you until we construct a message to the Queen.” She looks at the children’s clean slates lined up for the next day. She clutches a stick of chalk in her froggy appendages.

“Let’s draw the cipher,” she says, “we have to get that right to get any credibility into our message.” They spend quite a while on getting this spot on; this will perhaps get the message read.

“Now,” says Veronica, “what, Freddie, is the downside or possible disaster side of this inter nation communication?”

Freddie enumerates the possible cause and effect of England telling the US of A what to do. Veronica writes well. Her hand (or chalk) writing is a tad Frenchified, but she gets her message down on a series of slates. They nearly get sprung. The Governess/Teacher comes into the dimly lit room. She’s looking very striking in a striped skirt and a Cambric sheer-ish top. She sits on the chaise lounge and is starting to take in what the frogs have written on the slates. She gets up to closely study, when Georgio, the resident coachman comes in. He’s Rumanian, very strong faced, long haired and he and the Governess have been quite an item here on summer nights, (according to Veronica) but the governess is now a bit full of herself, having two new famous lovers in Tim Collins and Bindon Flood. Georgio, despite his native sex appeal, is really only a peasant at heart. She is now accustomed to suaver things. She pushes him away; he starts to tear her clothes off.

“Stop!” she says, “never, never again. Your time is past.”

Georgio, closely observed by the frogs, pulls out a long whippy knife and stabs the governess in the throat. She falls gurgling to the cobbled floor of the annex. She expires in a gurgling fashion, while the coachman disappears from the scene.

Freddie and Veronica return to the Queen’s communication and utilize near a dozen slates spelling out the ramifications and the bad possibilities of Old Palmerston’s communication. They finish and proof read their excellent work.

“Gawd, Veronica,” Freddie says, “you write marvelously.”

“Thank you, Freddie,” she says, “I’m thinking of writing a frog novel.”

“What will you call it?” he asks.

“Oh....,” she says, “perhaps, ‘Visits from Big Freddo’

“Umm....,” says Freddie, “now let’s tell the Fuzz who to look for.”

They find a clean slate near the fallen girl. They draw up old Lord Palmerston’s cipher and write under it, ‘The Coachman did it.’

Next day, it’s all action, but war with the USA is moved out of the picture. Late afternoon, Chief Inspector Jenkins from Peels Police is on the scene; special train from Victoria Station. After a deal of detective work, the Chief Inspector says,

“Bugger me, I don’t know how he does it, but old Palmerston is right again.”

At The River Mouth

by
Lloyd Nelson

Brady Graham is taking one of his very one-off Saturday morning walks. He has quite a menu of places to walk, but this one for some reason, is coming up quite regularly. He's at the mouth of Fowey Creek. It's a small river that debouches into the wash. There are lock gates across and safely behind these are some wooden hulled yachts, nicely moored in this safe little anchorage and seemingly only used at high summer. There's never any movement around them when he walks here, not on Saturday mornings anyway.

His subconscious and perhaps his reason for being here brings his attention to the woman who walks her chocolate Labrador Retriever along the river path. He's seen her here often, they've never spoken, but they have exchanged waves across the river at times. This time she is walking on his side of the creek. She comes right up to him; he realizes all at once she is an extremely handsome woman, she holds out her hand.



"Jenny," she says. They shake hands.

"Um...Brady," he says. She laughs a tinkley laugh.

"Well," she says, "I'm a backward person, backward in not coming forward."

"You mean diffident, I think," Brady says.

"Sort of," she says, "I've been at my cottage playing Glen Campbell's great little lyric – Dreams of an everyday housewife – casting off my pensiveness, I said to Kennedy (my dog), 'why don't I cook up a bit extra for lunch and invite back that nice man I see walking the other side of Fowey Creek?' So I did and here I am and will you come to lunch?"

Brady grins. "Surely," he says and takes her arm. "Perhaps your invitation may extend to a pre-lunch drink? It's a fair way back to Cawlseay where my car is."

Her cottage is up a bit, sitting on a high bank with views down to the mouth of the creek. She has a telescope on a tripod in the bay window.

"You might not always see me," she says, "but I usually see you."

She gestures at the telescope. It's a really beautiful Thomas Hardy type cottage; thatch, mellow stone walls, timber beams, hunting and shooting pictures, chintz. It's a mouth-waterer if you're into Chintzy cottages. She pours him a whisky and soda and brings out some excellent long cigars and they both have one, sit and companionably sip. Kennedy keeps an eye on Brady from his comfortable spot on the hearth mat. She serves him up a magnificent small meal and they sip Marsala with the sweet; a magnificent sweet.

"What the devil's this?" Brady asks, "it's beautiful."

"It's what's known as a Bee Sting. I get them from the Vietnamese Bakery in Cawsley. They can't be bettered as a dessert course I always think."

"So you entertain a deal?" Brady says.

"Oh, not at all," she says, "you're my first guest really."

They have another cigar and he is about to ask her something, when she puts her finger on his lip and says,

"Give me four minutes, Brady, and come in."

She's sitting up in bed, the sheet just skimming her magnificent breasts when he does. It all goes swimmingly and about 4pm, she serves him up a coffee and a cognac and walks down to the Cawsley path with him. She softly kisses him.

"Say...in a fortnight, Brady?" she asks.

"Surely," he replies and sets off on his longish walk back to his car.

Their fortnightly trysts settle into a pattern, although some Saturdays they go to bed before lunch; it all depends.

"Let's talk about things, Brady," she says, "that interest us. Not the hum drum of life that concerns us."

"Bang on," he says, lifting his champagne glass.

The following Saturday week, he turns up with a great little record which they play on her impressive Grundig. It's Davey Arthur and the Furies singing, just so well, 'Jenny, my darling, I love you, I love you with all my heart'.

"Oh Brady," she says, "that's just the sweetest thing I've had happen to me. Come to bed now – and I mean now."

They run through some very interesting old LP records, perhaps the best being those of pioneer recording stars, Dame Nellie Melba and Amelita Galla Cuerca. They continue to enjoy quite lovely and quite lively times. Several weeks later, Brady is telling Jenny that he took in Mallkai Stephens, singing 'Leider' in the West End.

"Yes," she says, "I was there. I saw you at the bar buying Bloody Marys."

"You didn't come over," he says.

"Hardly," says Jenny, "that auburn haired lady you were with looked to have quite a strong jaw."

"Indeed," says Brady, "that was Mary Montgomery, my office manager. We were up in town on business and took the opportunity to hear Mallkai. He was certainly worth the effort."

Brady hasn't made any real effort to find out all about Jenny, other than to ask



a real estate agent at Cawsley as to who owns the cottage on Fowey Creek.

"Bit out of my area, old chap," he says, "but I understand a big merchant bank owns it or did anyway. Do you want me to do a title search?"

"Oh no," says Brady, "it's such a charmer of a property and my interest is

only of a passing nature."

"It's worth a deal of money," the agent says, "it's the most exclusively sited cottage in the area."

A bit further down the track, Brady says to Jenny, "Interested in going on a cruise?"

"Only a very private one," she says, "it wouldn't do to run up against some people I know with such a good looking man as you dancing attendance on me."

"The cruise I have in mind is very exclusive; just you, me and a crew of three."

"You're on," she says, "where do we sail from and what do I bring?"

“Ah....we sail on September 1 and will be in Gibraltar that day. Our cruise ship is known as ‘Snow Goose’ and we’ll go on over to Malta first up.”

September 1 rolls around. It’s a good time of year; in fact it’s the same date that Hitler invaded Poland. Jenny is walking along the dock, tugging a big, wheeled suitcase and looking around for something substantial in the shipping line. She pulls up short when she spots the name ‘Snow Goose’ on a very workmanlike, but spick and span, ocean going tug. She steps onto the gangplank and a tall man in snow white ducks and epauletted shirt comes down to relieve her of her baggage.

“You must be Miss Jenny,” he says, “the big boss is up in the town proper, securing some little extras for the trip. May I show you to your stateroom?”

It’s a beautifully appointed smallish cabin. No expense seems to be spared on this workmanlike sea goer. She is seated on the rear deck in a steamer chair



under a striped awning when Brady is dropped off from a commercial vehicle and a young chap brings up some crates and packages onto the tug. They settle into a drink and long cigars as the crew cast off and head into the Mediterranean.

“How far’s Malta?” she asks as they enter the open sea.

“About 1500kms that way,” Brady replies, “it’ll take a day or two; there’s no rush.”

“What in the hell is that?”

Jenny asks pointing to the very workmanlike looking piece of artillery mounted on the afterdeck, along from where they are sitting.

“Ah...” Brady says, “the Snow Goose is by way of being a pocket battleship in miniature. That’s a German .88mm. The German’s developed it for WW2 and it’s equally outstanding on troops as it is on aircraft. It was put there for a reason initially and I’ve only ever seen it fire flares on festive type occasions.”

The weather holds beautiful and all too soon they are entering the Grand Harbour at Valetta. They run up into a closed dock and a car is waiting there to take them up to their digs. These are very splendid. Brady has borrowed the villa ‘Guernica’ from a friend for their stay. The exterior is sunwashed yellow limestone and the double doors opened for them by the maid, open onto a screen limestone wall on which some unknown ceramic artist has reproduced Pablo Ruiz Picasso’s seminal work of art, ‘Guernica’, depicting the Spanish Civil War. It’s quite mind-blowing and done just so well. They don’t exactly slum it at the villa, as there is an excellent staff including a chef that comes with the deal. The long gardens and pool at the rear of the villa are a delight.

“We might get to meet our neighbours,” Brady says, “Princess Anne and her hubby, Tiger Tim, are often next door.”

“Hmm,” says Jenny, “perhaps better not.”

In their 16 day break, they take the Snow Goose magic carpet to Crete and then Cyprus in a look around the eastern Mediterranean and in no time at all it seems, they disembark where they started in Gibraltar.

“Brady,” Jenny says, “that was just so splendid and I want to give you this.”

It’s a beautiful little gilt framed water colour of the cottage on Fowey Creek.

“A memento,” she says, “of many memorable meetings and I hope more to come.”

“Thank you, Jenny,” Brady says, “and I’ll see you there (he holds up the water colour) Saturday week morning.”

Nearly a month later, he gives her, at the cottage, an engraved gilt invitation to the All England Water Colour Exhibition in Mayfair.

“You must come,” he says, “I have something to show you. Just look as though you don’t know me.”

The exhibition is totally splendid and there, in pride of place, on a spotlighted easel, is Jenny’s sketch carrying a most commended good taste ribbon. He sidles over; the world is there this night.

“I didn’t bribe them,” he says, “you got there on merit. Until tomorrow.....” and moves quietly away.

The following morning she is not at the creek mouth, but Kennedy the Labrador meets him half way up to the cottage. Jenny is there; she’s all business and is wearing a beautifully cut business suit. The fragrances of cooking as usual, is just not there. On the knee-table is a plate of sandwiches and a carafe of orange juice and white wine. She’s all business.

“We have to talk, Brady,” she says, “and there is much to discuss.”

“Hmm,” says Brady, “you overawe me. What has changed?”

“You, my dear friend, are under attack,” Jenny says, “just have a shoftee at this file.”

She hands him a file marked ‘Marston Extruding and Plastics’.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but this, I think, is your private company.”

“My wife and I are the only shareholders,” Brady says. “It’s a profitable and unassailable set up. I can’t imagine anyone trying to wrest it from me. Though, come to think of it, my father-in-law, who put up the start-up capital, has 10% of the share holding. He’s now in a retirement village in Chalfont Studley and the firm pays his bills. I assume he’s on my side.”

“Hmm,” Jenny says, “how long is it since you checked on your wife.”

“Well,” Brady replies, “she lives in Bellagio in Italy. I haven’t seen her for the past five years, but I bought her the apartment there overlooking Lake Como and I keep her funded up. She signs anything I send her and I’ve had no complaints, but I haven’t checked her either. We parted company a long while back and it’s worked out for both of us. She hasn’t asked for and I haven’t offered a divorce.”

“It’s her toy boy, Brady,” she says. “He’s approached the Sturdee Merchant Bank to buy your wife’s shares in the Plastics Company and they’re quite interested. Hence the Confidential file you have in your hand.”

The file is a deep one. The Sturdee Bank has written to Sir James Cogshell suggesting that Marstons’ are a juicy target, but suggesting also that if Sir James just buys the voting rights of the shares this should suffice to oust Brady from the firm; ie by shareholders shares ordinary vote. They seem to have a very good handle on the profitability of the firm, perhaps inside information or perhaps a very good computer hacker. What the Bank don’t indicate is whether Brady’s wife is complicit in this plot or whether it’s just the smart toy boy setting up a possible deal. There’s a fair bit of deeper details, but that’s the essentials.

“Where’d you get this?” Brady asks. “And why? It’s deep stuff.”

“Well, Brady,” she says, “I’m married to Sir James. He’s a take-over merchant at heart and from the capital start I gave him and with a good information feed from the Sturdee Bank, which I have a share in, he’s now extraordinarily rich; but he’s

also pure fink at heart. He's my third husband; came after me for the dosh. He's also bi – something he never told me at the time. We live together, but not as husband and wife. What does your company do to be so profitable?"

"Extruded stuff, both plastic and fiberglass," he says. "The big yellow Caterpillar Headers you see pictured here and there are all paneled by us. 90% of shipped chemicals go out in containers we manufacture."

He doesn't tell her that nasty chemicals don't attract that much customs attention and that smart people use the all-in-one containers to ship a bit of white stuff around the world in the double skin and base struts of the chemical containers. His firm makes this possible, but at a great distance. It's unlikely the law will catch up with Marston Plastics. It's all well thought out.

"Well Jenny, you, I think are very much a realist. On my part, I have friends of the friends that could put the toy boy out of the picture permanently, on 48 hours notice, but in bringing this to my attention, I expect that you have some deep thoughts on this."

"I assume, Brady," she says, "the firm is worth keeping."

"Absolutely," says Brady. "I can live without it, but it brings me in the money that I invest in real property. I'd like to get another two years out of it to clear property loans entirely and after that it wouldn't matter."

"Well," she says, "the file you have in your hand is yours to keep. It's only a copy, but it is also a blueprint you could use in reverse to scare old Jimmy to death."

"Do tell," Brady says. She laughs.

"This isn't life or death it now seems," she says. "Let's discuss it in my four poster. I'll bring the sarnies with us." So they do.

Around five weeks down the track, Sir James' take-over vehicle, Garnsworthy Holdings, holds its annual meeting. It's held in Westminster Hall, where Old Winston laid in state some years back. There's quite a big mob there as the retirees of substance follow old Jimmy's firm very closely. His take-overs can be volatile and the market reaction often is rewarding to the punters on his shares. Brady turns up with a few helpers, including his blue-blood lawyer, Sir Bindon Keith-Charnes. He tables his proxies. The man in charge soon realizes he has something very serious on his hands. He temporises.

"Who are you, Sir?" he asks.

"Perhaps the majority voter here today," Brady replies.

The meeting opens and under Sir James Cogshill's chairmanship, runs through the nitty gritty. Sir James gives his address on the years activities and gets a good hand from the attendees. Before a vote of thanks can be moved, Keith-Charnes gets up.

"Point of order, Mr Chairman," he says. "Not all of us out here is in agreement with what you set out. We, in fact, are about to move a vote of no confidence in the moral aspect of your lengthy report."

"You can't do that," Sir James says, "you are out of order."

"Ah," Keith-Charnes says, "let's put it to the vote."

With the overwhelming weight of Lady Jenny's proxies, they beat down the objections. This all takes a deal of time. Brady stands up next and in good voice says, "This is going to be a very interesting, but time consuming business. I suggest



Sir James, you call a 30 minute adjournment and in anticipation of your agreement, I have arranged for tea and sandwiches to be served.”

Never, ever have any of Sir James’ meetings offered anything in the way of refreshment.

“I don’t know about that,” the squat and well tailored Sir James says.

“But we do,” says a big man in the front row, “and we’re going for it.”

Brady’s efficient catering arrangements are quite up to the mark and in no time the crowd is tucking into brimming cups of tea, cucumber sandwiches, sausage rolls and a few gross of scones. Frantic activity takes place at the afternoon tea-less Board table. Appetites assuaged, the crowd resume their seats. Brady has teed up the famous singer, of the famous voice, to present their case and he does this just so well. Mallkai Stephens now reads out a litany of those who have gone to the wall in Sir James Coghill’s take-over schemes; it’s a bit sad in spots.

The Board cringe at the top table. By this time the press are there in droves; cameras flash, closed circuit TV cameras switch on their illuminating arc lights and the sweat on the brows of the Board is evident. Up at the Board table, things are going from aggression to puzzlement.

“Where the hell is all this going?” Sir James asks of his company secretary. “This is my company, my meeting, but it’s proceeding under a different momentum on a different agenda. I’ve never said we were perfect, only that we’re very profitable.”

“Umm,” says the secretary, “have you spoken to Lady Jenny recently?”

“Oh, the usual grunt or two at breakfast. I told her this morning, it wasn’t necessary to attend today’s meeting. I don’t think she’s here, but her shares certainly are.”

“I can’t forecast where it’s going, either,” the secretary says, “but what’s come up so far, apart from killing your pig, isn’t really actionable – yet.”

Brady’s lawyer is back on his feet.

“Mr Chairman, this meeting has a lot more ground to cover and the hour is getting on. Perhaps an adjournment; my client here would vote for that.”

So the meeting collapses, apart from the humorous aside from the big man in the front row who stands up and says he would like to move a vote of thanks to be carried by acclamation to Brady, for providing a slap-up afternoon tea. The meeting is adjourned with rapturous applause.

Brady meets up with Lady Jenny at Whitehall steps. She again has her big wheeled case with her.

“Where to this time, Brady?” she asks. He gestures to the river.

“There’s the old Snow Goose idling out there and here’s their pinnacle to take us out to her.”

“Did you bring her from Malta?” Jenny asks.

“Not at all,” Brady says, “they’ve just finished an oil rig tow from Brindisi to off Aberdeen and it just fitted in.”

“So we are about to brave the Bay of Biscay?”

“Oh no, this is just our magic carpet to Calais. I’ve bought a unit in Bologna; thought we’d try it out.”

“Why Bologna?” she asks.

“Ah, I’ve just read Grisham’s ‘The Joker’. He makes life in Bologna and the food thereof, sound well worth trying. Have you left word with Sir James of what we’re doing?” Brady asks.

“Sketchily,” she replies, “I told him not to be bothered with divorce rubbish and to keep the dividends flowing. For once in my life, or my married thrice life, I have that miserable, fat little bastard where I want him.”

The Non-Believers

Gray Cowley is working away on the 12th floor of a condemned high rise building in Falli Square in Baghdad. He's an army engineer and at present, is tasked with demolishing wrecked buildings to make way for reconstruction work to begin. This is his 87th job of this nature and he gets some satisfaction in looking down from his high vantage point at the magnificent temporary bridges over the Euphrates, that he supervised the construction of, when the armies occupied Baghdad initially.

Gray is working from floor to floor. He has the plans of this floor spread over a light card table and he is testing the walls and piers for density before he marks with red texta the angle and depth of the holes the working crew has to drill, ready for the fracture to be inserted and wired up. The density meter is something he dreamt up himself and it gives a very good indication of what he is dealing with, which in many cases, may be quite different to what the structural plans show. This particular building sustained a smart bomb in the basement area during the first air attacks and is basically unsafe. To avoid disturbing it further, all access is via a free-standing mechanical lift, just outside the windows.

Gray is cautious in what he's doing and he carries a bag of moth balls with him. Every so often, as he works, he tosses a handful of these in the middle of the floor to make sure they are still running the same way. It's a simple test to make sure that the building isn't shifting. For the same reason, when the air-compressed drilling starts, he only allows two men at a time on the floor. It's a necessary precaution to save lives if things go pear-shaped. With half an ear, he listens to the mechanical lift cranking up. It stops on his floor and a small man steps through the glassless window. It's Walter (Wally) Ling, Engineer in Chief and CEO of Dayton Constructions. Dayton operates internationally in civil engineering and it's arguably the most profitable firm of its nature in the world.

"Hi Gray," he says. "You're nearly finished with this shit here?"

"Umm...." Gray says, "well, it's the last Baghdad one, then a big one for the Poms in Hammersmith near the flyover and then home to help with seeding."

"You're dropping them very circumspectly, Gray," Wally says. "Seeing that they're surrounded with rubble, why bother?"

Gray laughs. "Well, it's wonderful practice for confined jobs," he says, "and after that debacle in Canberra, that you suffered, I thought you'd be all for a circumspect approach."

"True, true," says Wally. "The compensation for that error cost us dearly at the time. How do you do it really?"

Gray isn't about to give away any of his trade secrets. The reason he does so well in carefully imploding high rise buildings, is that in fitting the charges from the fracture companies' floor plans, his simple rule is to cut back their considered and recommended plans. He cuts the demolition charges back by exactly $7\frac{1}{3}\%$. He started this by gut feel and the gut feel has made him one of the most respected demolitions men in the world.

"When you're de-mobbed," Wally says, "we hope you will come on board for us. We have a good work load coming up back in OZ, but the international jobs are always there if you want a change."

"Actually," Gray says, "I'm missing the farm and Bondi beach, so if the bread is good enough, what you mention would suit me fine."

A deal of time goes past. Gray has a very pleasant sojourn doing the Hammersmith job in London and brings back with him to Australia, a bright little blonde girl he picked up dancing at Annabel's one Friday night. She has come out to enjoy a bit of sun and to take in Eastern Australia. Neither plan to make it permanent, but it's certainly fun for both.

They touch base at the farm. The Cowley family has very large farming holdings; 'Downside', a big wheat and sheep property on the Western Plains out from Bathurst a bit. Two of Gray's brothers are flat out doing the farming. His parents and Uncle Aubrey, who has another big holding next door, nowadays live in adjoining mansions in Middle Harbour, visiting the farm at autumn and spring. They amuse themselves racing a dozen race horses between them and they do this well.

Gray's next up brother is one of Australia's real mystery men. He is a Bishop now in the Church of England and he runs his responsibilities with the attention to details you could expect from the head Deacon of his Church or a Government Whip. He runs equally well the family finance arms, being Chairman of Eastpac Bank in which the Cowley family and some shady types from Switzerland have the controlling interest. Additionally, he is the Managing Director of Bathurst Finance and in Balmain, Granite Finance. The last two are huge businesses, but confound the other players in finance by operating from very small and modest premises.

In reality, quite differently from the other finance organisations who build huge CBD edifices, if they need more space, they simply decentralize to Industrial areas and extend their operations into factory units. Bernard has quite a feel for finance and is good at what he does. He's single still and runs all of his fiefdoms with a fist of steel. True to his church leanings, he has done a marvelous job in directing Eastpac spare money into social housing. This, an area neglected throughout Australia by all forms of Government, Bernard has developed and actioned plans that see Eastpac buying up tracts of land, well out, building exactly the same housing plans, but with a variety of facades and connecting these dormitory suburbs by light rail to the existing transport connections. It's a simple concept and as the bank only rent the properties and creates a tax loss to minimize their indecent commercial profits and with the land appreciating with the growth of the property market, they just cannot lose.

Anyway, the powers that be, certainly appreciate his efforts to get them off the social housing hook. They only, last New Year, awarded him the highest possible honour in the Order of Australia ranks. Considering that the very reverend Bishop Bernard Cowley if only there to feather his own nest and to further the family's interests, the new honour is received with much merriment by his extended family. Dad and Uncle Aubrey reward him further and Bernard now has a beautiful, beautiful villa at Antibe, but he's not mean and all the family take a turn of it in the northern summer. Uncle Aubrey cackles as he goes in to swim. *'The only sharks around the Med,'*



he says, 'are the Cowley's.'

Gray gets his hand in again at the farm at seeding time and marvels at how farming has changed. He plugs up and down the huge flat wheat paddocks, driving a John Deere tractor, pulling a sixty foot cut air-seeder; all guided by a GPS on the cab roof. You have to disconnect this of course to turn the tractor and seeder when they come to the end of the land being seeded. He is a handy addition to the

workforce as they run two of these seeding combinations while the other brother drives a huge, high-wheeled boomspray, knocking the weeds about five hours ahead of the seeding machines.

Gray's first job for Wally Ling's mob is to drop a tall building in Kings Cross, next door but one from the Sebel Town House Hotel. It's tricky in this congested area, but with the hard gained experience of Baghdad and Hammersmith, it's just a breeze to Gray. He's on the Penthouse floor late one Friday afternoon when Wally Ling arrives.

"Come on, Gray." he says, "toss it in for the day. I want to have a heart to heart with you."

Wally's chauffeur driven car is parked awkwardly on the street. Few Sydneyites would be game to try this, but old Wally has both, big money and political clout. He is an impatient man and when they were busy building things at Gove, he would never get off his private plane to get on a smaller plane to get over Arnhem Land, until his second plane was alongside with props turning. They drive down to his home. It's on a bit from industrial Botany Bay, on from Kurnell; great sea views. There's no one at the house.

"This is a private talk, Gray." Wally says. "Everything gets out in Sydney. Even if you fart too loudly someone gets to hear. What we're going to discuss is top secret."

"Wally," Gray says, "two men can certainly keep a secret."

"But only if one is dead," Wally says.

"Should I go and get my free issue H&K pistol?" Gray asks. Wally ignores him.

"What it's all about," Wally continues, "is Federal Parliament. Nothing's going the way we want it at present. On the socialist side, Gillard is top of the heap, but she's surely a flake."



"Why?" asks Gray. "For not believing in God?"

"No," replies Wally. "For saying it! It showed her up in her true light."

"Hmm.....I take it then, you believe in God," says Gray.

"Not at all," says Wally, "but I do believe in keeping my trap shut, when opening it is likely to just confirm how dumb I am,.....and boy, is that redhead dumb. And there's our man, Abbott the rabbit and what's best to do with him!"

"You could try a lobotomy," says Gray, "that is, if he's got a brain to lobotomise."

"Down boy," says Wally. "We need to back him up; the shadow front bench is devoid of talent. Turnbull should have been good, but when he wasn't putting his foot in his mouth, he was shooting himself in the same member."

"And this is all leading to...?" Gray asks.

"Oh, we want you in Federal Parliament," Wally replies. "We can shoehorn you into the Western Plains seat as a National, or alternatively, into Eden Monaro, the Bellwether seat, as a Liberal."

"To do what?" asks Gray.

"Umm, along with the other newbies, to quickly back up Tony and quickly get to the shadow front bench."

"As?" asks Gray.

“We need a Muslim speaker for what we have in mind,” Wally replies. “I just know you will have some hard-assed ideas on how to stop this unwanted torrent.”

From this casual talk and drink at Cronulla, things move apace and following the next election that Tony the rabbit doesn't lose by all that much, the newcomers are railroaded direct to front rank and quickly weld a cohesive new team. In a strong and concerted action, they get stuck into the 'Godless woman' and her cohorts, some of whom are old enough to know better and shouldn't have stood again this time, but did.

The strength of the new coalition and their relentless attacks on a government, perhaps grown complacent, exceeds expectation. Weeks into the new Government's term, a very orchestrated upheaval occurs when the Mining Industry, still smarting under their modified, but still irritating super tax, turn around to bite Gillard and Co. They have cooked their books a bit and now under the guise of force majeure, refuse to pay their tax. The Government move quickly on punitive and repressive laws to force them to pay up and a huge ruckus in the Senate provides the stymieing of the new legislation and the passing of a vote of 'no confidence' in the Government.

Strong industrial action ramped up by the Miners, creates a furor; a furor fuelled well by the media, who are looking for and finding drama. Perceiving that the Government will be in for a hard time and anticipating that the Senate co-conspirators will adhere to their plan to block supply, Gillard panics and prevails on the Governor General to call a double dissolution; something not seen since Gough Whitlam's days. Thus, the country is back at the polls, fourteen weeks after the latest election.

Tony comes up trumps and the Coalition, albeit with a lot of help from the Greens, whose number have advanced greatly by the Liberals preferring them and dropping out a few of the redneck Nationals (but not all) get cracking. Romping along, the new conservative Coalition action the scheme they have worked through for quite a while behind closed doors. They give the Miners what they want and spread the deal over the whole spectrum by introducing a 12% flat tax on everything after GST. The new ones have done their homework and know the new tax will work well. It will take a while to get a hold on how good this will go, but the model looks sweet.

Gray Cowley steps into the Immigration Ministry seamlessly. He has done his homework, as has the Minister for Finance (another newbie). A huge new camp for 'illegals', comes into being on the Roper River. They will no longer be flying so called 'asylum seekers' here and there by plane within the country. A secondary, but new camp also comes into being on the old Hermannsburg Mission site, out from Alice Springs. Gray has been intensely studying the Acts relating to his portfolio.

21 days from taking over, he has the Military units on site, just into Australian Territorial waters. They hit, by helicopter fitted with floats, every boat that crosses the line. Two streams flow from this; the passengers go into Tank Landing ships and are shuttled to the Roper River – it's quick and handy for this, and the Managers of the boats apprehended go to the Leandar Civil Prison in Darwin and from there, they are placed in forgotten detention at Hermannsburg. The only way to stop the torrent of illegals is to spirit away the people smugglers; not to acknowledge that they have them and dump them to rot at Hermannsburg.

Meanwhile, back at the Roper River, they draft the inmates into Sri Lankans or Afghanis and shuttle fly them back to their country of origin. The world media

focus on what Australia is doing, but find it hard to get a real handle on what is actually going on. Gray has found enough in the Immigration Act and more importantly, in the regulations surrounding this, to stick to his program and escalate the speed of return. With considerable subtlety, they spread the rumour in the creeks and river mouths of Indonesia that the Australian Government has handed over the control of the people smugglers they have caught, to Chinese hit-squad contractors. This, of course, can only work if they keep the people smugglers incommunicado. This is not so hard, as rotation squads of the SAS police the Hermansburg camp. The SAS shoot down a plane load of journalists that try to overfly the camp. That puts a stop to that.

Wally, the king-maker, invites Gray back down to Cronulla for a Friday afternoon drink.

“Jesus, Gray,” he says, “your fascist approach to stemming the illegals flow has surely worked. What have you been doing different?”

Gray laughs. “After we disembark them from their own boats, the Troops machine-gun their transport heavily above the waterline. I expect word has got back to the baddies and as no one has heard or seen neither hide nor hair of the boat managers, they now have belatedly realized the job isn’t worth the candle.”

Wally laughs. “Now,” he says, “to the future! Do you want to be Prime Minister?”

“Given certain circumstances,” Gray says.

“Such as...?”

“Ah....total censorship control of the media, abolishment of the Opposition parties, an act of Parliament stating that the head of the Australian Parliament has to believe in God.....that’ll do for starters.”

Wally laughs. “Among all that drivel,” he says, “you got one thing right you know. It was the statement that she didn’t believe in God that sunk that woman, you know. By the by, will you be marrying that smart little Pom you’ve been living with? A future Prime Minister should be married – at least a Conservative Prime Minister.”

“Can’t be done,” says Gray. “She’s a full blown atheist.”

Wally laughs again, lifts his glass and intones, “Here’s to non-believers.”

Author’s Footnote:

Any writer that centres on the politics of the day he writes, can expect his product to be very out of date when it appears. A week indeed, is a long time in politics, however, ‘The Non Believers’, penned within four hours of Julia Gillard’s comment that she didn’t believe in God, is entertaining and for that reason, has been left as written.

Up There Cazaly



John Brownrigg has never played AFL football – not that he hasn't been approached. He's coached a number of provincial footy teams in Victoria and he enjoys quite a deal of success in this. Country football is not so rule bound as in the big time and it allows scope for quiet decision making and a goodly dash of larrikin behaviour here and there. There is a lot of light and colour in what he's been doing.

Today he's coaching a new team that he formed himself to play charity matches. They call themselves 'The Spent Forces' and they're playing the proper Collingwood Football Club on quite a decent ad hoc ground at Bond-Bishop Stud property near Hamilton. It's the property's annual Ram Sale Day. A big batch of horned Merino Rams, traditional big framed Collingsville types are on offer. The pick of the offering are, of course, in pens in the main shearing shed, along with the Bar and refreshment area. Out of the shed and spaced between this and where the footy is being played, are the bulk sale rams; the lower price offering. These are held in pens of three, in portable pens out in the open.

Half of country Victoria is here today it seems, as well as the big TV station broadcast teams, the famous week-end footy commentators and the Glamour Promo Team girl from the TV backed Charity Foundation that will benefit financially from today's game. Even before a ball is bounced or a whistle blown, it's a helluva show, enhanced by the pre spring sunshine of the day that is quite splendid, taking into account that they are out in the changeable area influenced by the high country of the Grampians showing on the horizon.

What is behind this extraordinary action that will later tonight get television coverage in every state in Australia, is that Lary Aldridge, the all Australian star goal sneak for the Magpies, is the only son-in-law of Miles Bond-Bishop, the stud owner and crusty chairman of the big horse racing body. Old Miles, a first class curmudgeon, is in hospital in Switzerland after a walking accident in Zermatt. Thus Lary, whose day job when not at footy training, is the running of a couple of Bond-Bishop owned pubs in Melbourne and has by default been landed in conducting the annual Ram Sale.

Ram sales, or at least fine wool Ram Sales are not what they were in Inland Australia and the idea of running a big footy orientated sale is the brainchild of the coach of the Collingwood Football Club. He's retiring next month but one and his idea of taking his crack footy team to the bush in this off game week, has been rapturously embraced in football mad Victoria. Unbelievably and incredibly there are well over 20,000 people on this property today – Lary hopes indeed that there are a few ram buyers amongst them. The improvised siren has already sounded, but Johnny Brownrigg, a law unto himself at the best of times, is not about to let his team out of their improvised dressing rooms (the farm stables) just yet. They are dishing out cold stubbies of Victoria Bitter donated by the great Carlton and United unsleeping Promo team.

"Sink two stubbies each, lads," he says. "You can't get out until I've sighted the empties."

A band that often plays at the Melbourne Footy is at the ground edge. They've given Collingwood a good belt of their theme song, 'Goodbye Dolly Gray' and now turn to the Spent Forces theme, 'The Wentworth Song', much loved by hoons everywhere. The players are already joining their voices into the rousing chorus – 'never let a chance go by, go by, never let a chance go by'. Brownrigg has done a deal with Collingwood.

"Bugger the rules," he says, "I need 12 men on the interchange bench – I'm playing with true spent forces. I need balance."

They have agreed, thus Johnny has 30 players to use – and boy, are there some iconic faces amongst them. Some, of course, in quite spent shape. He has spread a wide net. When the second stubbies disappear, in no time at all, Brownrigg pulls a borrowed hunting horn out of his flash suit pocket; jumps on a Gopher and rowdily doubling the horn, leads his big mob out. The Collingwood players, used to hype and acclamation and first place in everything, are more than browned off, but the huge team of newcomers, many just so recognizable, get a heroes roar of welcome.

The umpire has the Deputy Premier of Victoria (he represents a rural seat) on hand to toss the coin, but the Clay Target Shooters of Victoria are into the act too. They run out a big green Johnnie Front End Loader onto the ground with a clay target thrower in the bucket and hand the cord and button to the Deputy Premier. The band play a trumpet fanfare, he presses the button and a clay flies up into the stratosphere and smashes to pieces on landing. It's all stage-managed and after the second one does the same; they put in a clay with a cement admixture; one side marked 'heads' and the other, 'tails' and give an extra screw to the thrower and the toss is then settled. They soon get into it.

Thanks to a generous deal by National Airways, John, the coach, has been able to fly from here to there within Australia to look for talent for the team and to bring them in for the game. He's made intelligent use of this windfall. For the first quarter, he rotates famous players of the past and immediate past between the ground and the bench. There's more problems getting the past famous off the ground than onto it, but at quarter time, the gun team is only two goals ahead of John's unruly mob.

John now rouses his secret weapons out of the change-rooms, where he has kept them hidden, but towards fully sober. They are half a dozen of the very best



non-contracted indigenous players in Australia; one, indeed, flown down from the Tiwi Islands. By half-time of this strictly 80 minute match, they are six goals ahead of the Magpies. John now mixes and matches and replaces players at an increasing rate. He strengthens his ruck and puts a loose goal sneak up in goals. He now brings in an innovative strategy that, kicks out of their goal area are channeled down the right side wing, then taken across the centre to the opposite side of the ground and then straight down that side to the 50 metre mark. This means his stars are one side of the ground going forward and the other side going goalwards. Boy does this work! The Collingwood team are 72 points behind at three quarter time and the goodwill aspects of the game are fast disappearing.

John holds up play at the big huddle, they chase away the commentators. They then burst out madly and after five minutes in which neither side scores; John hauls out his hunting horn and blows a long sustained burst and his entire bench run

onto the ground and really into the action. They all kick for the Collingwood goal until the scores are dead equal – this doesn't take long with 48 players all kicking the one way. Another blast see the Spent Forces all sit on the ground and ready volunteers run out wheelbarrows of Vic Bitter stubbies to them, all packed in ice. It's not a bad deal for the Carlton Promo Team to have every TV station in Australia that night show so many famous footballers sitting in bucolic splendor, scolling their product. It's a helluva fun thing and kids go mad getting autographs here and there.

There's a short ceremony while they present the least effective player on the ground with the 'Man of the Match' award and the Chairman of National Airlines with the No 1 jumper of the Spent Forces team.

The Ram men realize that they will soon be surrounded by drunks, so they kick off the sale. The rams indeed sell very well under spirited bidding, but not, of course at the price levels of heady days long past. Ever unpredictable, the good day is overtaken by a dark squall straight off the Grampians and it is soon obvious that not too many people will brave things for the outside pens; in any case, due to lack of shelter, the crowds are leaving in droves.

The stock firms and the Charity quickly confer with Lary, the boss. They need about \$40,000 for the lot outside to finish the sale well. A deal is struck. They hold them over and the head of the ABC, who is present, organizes a once ever only sale of these rams through their next Landline program and they shift the lot for a gross of \$68,000: a great and sporting result, everything taken into account. John Brownrigg is drinking a stubbie of Crown Lager and talking to a John Elliott look-alike when a tall chap, a stud breeder by his garb, comes quietly over and introduces himself.

"Athol Kennedy," he says. "I breed stud rams at Moora in Western Australia. Apart from the big dibs for the Charity and the big shake-up you gave the Magpies today, I can't help thinking that the lot of newbies you introduced into the game will have excellent prospects of an AFL career next season. How on earth did you source such a heap of good talent?"

Brownrigg laughs a deep belly laugh; he's a staid Bendigo CPA during his working days and a real footy larrikin when the game is on.

"The footy world is besotted with youth," he says. "There's heaps of potential stars, or at least, decent journeymen sprinkled around Australia and thanks to the generosity of National Airlines, I could hunt them out, free of much cost. I didn't pay any of the indigenous chaps – transported them of course, but they're smart enough to know that today was a very unusual opportunity to showcase their football skills."

Kennedy says, "You should be very proud of your efforts today. Can I coerce you to pay a visit to Western Australia soon?"

"Whatever for?" asks Brownrigg. "I'm not buying rams at present."

The man laughs. "I don't need to point out the West Coast Eagles situation."

"The Weagles!" says John. "Enough said. Have they won a game this season?"

"Barely," says the stud man, "and the net results are absolutely horrendous. Saint Harvey at Fremantle at the Dockers is a steady third on the ladder and we are certs to be the wooden spooners again."

"What exactly is your interest in all this?" Brownrigg asks.

"I'm on the Eagles Board," Athol replies, "not that I admit to it unless pressed and until today, along with the rest of the Board, we have not the faintest glimmering of a plan to turn the high flying Eagles of the distant past, around, but I believe you could do it and something indeed must be done. The Club is now losing real money and our good draft picks, which we are getting again now the new Eastern States

clubs have manned up, generally piss off at the end of their season one. I'd prefer not to tell you how few members we now have in relation to the Fremantle Dockers Army Corp."

"You've too many cooks at West Coast," John says. "You're sure at the top of the waser as far as the moral ground is concerned, but you need a bit of vice and immorality to run a successful footy club playing group. You know the old saying – 'all real football players have three legs'?"

"Oh Gawd," Athol says, "I believe the Claremont Football Club invented that old saw. But you will come and look?" he asks.

"Surely," replies Brownrigg. "I'll fly back with you and leave one of my helpers to sort out the messy details here."

They get a mixed reception back at Subiaco – the Committee look at John as though he has two heads. Despite the rollicking nature of his football career by dint of his accounting trade, finance and playing statistics are meat and drink to him. He is both sharp as a tack and very clear minded; skills he prefers to hide behind a pint of beer and a fat cigar now and then. John liaises with Kennedy, not the most influential Board member, but respected for all that.

"We're in this look-see together, Athol," he says. "We are dealing with some people with obvious quick-cement mind sets. This is not going to be easy. It may be hard, if not impossible to carry the day, despite the burning need."

He undertakes the most exacting due diligence of the footy club, delves deep, watches training closely and talks to playing and coaching staff. He taps the lot into his tiny laptop and decides to settle on getting a blueprint schematic accepted as Step 1; the rest to follow in 21 days. He takes away copies of every contract in force at the club, however minor. He turns up at the presentation wearing a very ambassadorial suit and in essence, without any palaver, speaks to this jury of West Coast Eagles Board, sitting stone-faced around the table.

"You are a cancer case, chaps," he says. "I don't need to remind you of what has gone before, we can cut and snip, apply chemotherapy and radiation, also counseling, but the patient will cark it in the end. I can give you a new and different body that will get up and get going for the next season, or you can just decide to attend the funeral; not just the funereal funeral, but your financial funeral also."

A bit of foot shuffling is evident in the listeners.

"If you are a bit brave," he continues, "it's possible to arrive at a team that will give you some results. Perhaps at best, it will keep your members sullen, but not openly rebellious. But, if you're big and full on brave, I can surely take you to the stars."

"How?" asks the Chairperson.

"Easy – peasy," says Brownrigg. And he tells them.

Three weeks later, Athol rings John in Melbourne.

"Game on," he says, "when can you start?"

"Now," John says, "the big stuff starts here of course."

"Of course," Athol says.

The Eagles, despite intense media interest, go into real dark lockdown. Brownrigg rings Athol at Moora. "Got them all signed!" he says. He's been recruiting very discreetly out of contract players, some good, some very good, all with probably limited shelf life. "Got training quarters at Mount Macedon," he continues, "we will use the Gisborne Oval for training. I've only recruited Melbournians, no relocating costs. The indigenous ones, of course, are intra state and they will live in-house."

“Just give me the Melbourne criteria again,” Athol asks.

“If I must,” John says. “Big football passion lives in Melbourne. You can’t have true passion without the impetus of thunderous crowds, and crowds are where the dosh, drive and direction is, or at least develops from. Also our bus will pick them up and deliver them back at the end of the day. Their home life remains in good shape without disruption.”

“Okay,” says Athol, “we accepted this some time back, but I was interested in the re-play and the date for the slaughter of the not so innocent, innocents.”

“Well, the legal opinions you already know,” John says, “and Broadbent, the Sydney QC, says we are good to go.”

John, in his due diligence, found the loophole in the contracts. It allows player sackings when the club hits bottom; no compensation, just the sack. And that is just what he dishes out, come Tuesday – both to players and staff alike. He cuts deep, retains just 8 players and a physio, but they give a resettlement cheque to those sacked also. The vitriol stemming from this action and the misguided attempts at legal compensation will, of course, run on for a very long time, but John has done his legal homework; he’s quite sure of his ground. There are three components to the new Eagles now in training, Monday to Thursday on their near rural Gisborne Ground. There are the very best, the survivors of the old team, there are the recruited Melbourne veterans, right in touch and right up there with the game and more than appreciative of their new contracts and renewed standing in the game and then, there are the back-country indigenous, the natural fast and whippy forwards and the grungy backline men. On day one, John says,

“We are running a football camp, not a Sunday school. You can get on the grog, but you can’t get blindly on the grog. Take it easy at the night spots after the game and take your group mentor with you. We don’t train Mondays or Fridays, but we expect a letdown and recovery run, hot pools and sauna every Sunday at 3pm after a Saturday game. Sunday is also strictly a Lite beer day.”

“Now,” he continues, “once in a while, we have to attend something formal as a playing team. You will be fitted out with good dark suits and accessories tomorrow. The jumper department will retain these, ready to wear when needed, so that when the occasion arises, you will look like gentlemen and players.”

“Now,” he goes on, “to performance enhancing drugs. God help you if you take them, but more to the point, God help you if you are caught taking them!”

Their home ground is still, of course, Subiaco, but in actual fact, they are fly in, fly out players. *‘You play better if you sleep in your own beds,’* John says. He flys them in in time for the game by private charter and flys them back after the game. The league has changed with the admission of the new Queensland and New South Wales Clubs, so about half their games are in WA and the other half on the Eastern States seaboard and Melbourne. Thus it works out quite equitably and having so many well known Melbourne veterans in the team, the loss of membership in WA is balanced up with new Melbourne members.

All this is straight organisation, something John Brownrigg is very good at and on day one of the new season they get a good draw and run out onto the MCG to a near full house. Everyone’s totally curious and they run out whatsmore, to the strong strains of ‘Yesterday’s Hero’. The crowd love it, there’s just so many recognizable faces there across the board. They have been tagged the oldies team, but that is more perception than reality. They have seven of the cream of last year’s Eagles,

the six indigenous are right age, but not youths and the balance and the bench are chocka with full experience.

'Meek and mild to start with fellas,' John has told them. 'Appear a bit cowardly if you want, it's just stage setting. Ten minutes in, turn nasty, but don't knock anyone useless. A melee after the quarter time bell would be very acceptable.'

And so it goes, they win their first-up game in the real big time in a walk against last year's runners-up for the flag. The indigenous chaps from Gooniwindi, Walgett and back of Bourke are street fighters born and can play a very grungy and intense game when they feel like it. The crowd is rapturous. *'War without the guilt,'* the announcer cries, *'footy like it used to be played.'* There are a few repercussions from the big wheels of football administration. John has no intention of ever talking to the press and has contracted on a regular basis for a chap from Actors Equity to speak for the club. The chap is a very excellent actor in Melbourne Theatre world and John can thus present things just as he wants, while totally disguising his real directions. In this case, when the actor fronts for instructions, John says,

"Them that should be selling fish and chips and not running football should be told that – but in a nice way."

"Roger D," the chap says delightedly.

And they go on to play finals football.

Athol, now Chair of the Eagles, fronts at the MCG on the big day and hands John a huge cheque and says, "Unbelievable, Johnny, what's for next year?"

Brownrigg laughs. "The match committee think you may be nearing your use by date, Athol," he says, "but I may be able to get you another season."

"Gawd, John," he says, "for once, we knew what we were doing."

"Sure, sure," says John, "but let's not tell the others."

At the flag celebratory dinner, at the Perth Convention Centre, (they've held one in Melbourne too) the Premier of Western Australia stands up to propose the toast. He points his glass at Brownrigg.

"On your feet, John," he says. He lifts his glass higher,

"Up There Cazaly! You got us out to fight."

It's perhaps not a bad result for a man who never played League football.

(refer Author's note – over page)

Author's Note: About Roy Cazaly – pictured.



This icon of Australian Rules Football played eleven outstanding seasons with St Kilda. At South Melbourne from 1921, he teamed with 'Skeeter' Fleiter and rover Mark Tandy to make up the terrible trio ruck combination. It was Fleiter's constant on-ball cry of 'Up there, Cazaly' that the crowd adopted wholeheartedly.

It entered into the Australian idiom and was used by Australian Infantrymen in North Africa – it's now part of the country's folklore.

He played his last game in Victoria, just short of age 60 – and kicked a goal. He is well remembered every Grand Final Day, when the crowd chants, 'Up there Cazaly!'

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AFTERWORD

by The Writer

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