

## The Curate

by  
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It's a beautiful sunny windless morning, a water colour perfect English day out on Sunninghill Golf Course. Jerry Raball and his dad, Sid, are putting out on the last green. Jerry's just finished his economics degree at the London School of Economics. Sid's a city accountant with his own practise at the foot of Ludgate Hill. They've played 18 holes in perfect conditions, but they both think it's time for a spell and a coffee, or in Sid's case, a neat single malt whiskey. They clump into the Club House. Jerry feels a fatherly talk may be in the wind. They sit and sip their tippie.

"What next, Jerry? Sid asks. "Do you want to join the practise or do you want to take up your offer to join Price Waterhouse in Sydney and play shield cricket for New South Wales, perhaps."

Jerry sips his coffee. He's a very laid back young man with a lot going for him. In particular, early on in his studies, he assimilated the first law of physics - for every action; there is an immediate and opposing reaction. Thus he is very considered in his actions, surprising in a way, as young men are usually pretty brash. Jerry has had a stellar career at the LSE and knows as much as any University Professor about Economics. He has also, and most importantly, studied the cause and effect of economic cycles, that is to say, shortage of supply inevitably leads to higher prices and vice versa. Jerry says,

"This may surprise you. In fact I have an offer to go to Cambridge to complete a Theology MA Course. It won't cost you much, as the Old Church of England puts up most of the costs. You know the rules, they pay up cheerfully for the acquiring of learning and at a maximum of seven years after graduation you must take up Holy Orders in the Church. If you've got your MA, the odds are you get a better living." Sid is a bit gobsmacked.

"I never thought you religious," he says.

"And I'm not," Jerry rebuts, "but can you show me another occupation, that given a bit of fast footwork and juggling of time, gives you something useful to do and you only have to work one day a week."

"But its penury," Sid says. "A good church living is still small beer to what you could earn if you join and eventually take over my practise." Jerry laughs,

"You always say accountancy management really boils down to the fact that much of what you make goes to fund employees super and holiday pay and so on. You've said to me time and time again, that it's not worth the candle." Sid polishes off his Glenlivet and calls the steward for another.

"But I've done all right," he says. Jerry turns serious.

"Well, yes. We live in a fine Tudor house in stockbroker belt, Surrey; you drive a Bentley, a newish one at that; but Mum earns very respectable money as the Burrough Council in - house lawyer and my Jewish grandmother financed you into ownership of the practise. Well, bless you, Mum and old Miriam's heart," Sid says.

"You're spot on. It seems to me," Sid says, "that unless a churchman marries a bit of money, he's into a miserable, short of money life, and his wife lives in penurious circumstances; not to mention, being looked at with pity by the upper and even middle class church goers."

“Well,” Jerry says, “I have an economics degree and I’ve learnt a bit getting it, so I can get a crust now out in the big wide world. But I also know where money is concerned, there is never enough. Never, never. Once you set out on that course and down the track after pursuing the mighty pound hard, you eventually run out of time to do what you would like to have done while you’re fit and able to fully enjoy it. Study comes very easily to me; I have a lump of seed capital coming from Grandma to experiment a bit in the market. In essence, I hope to become proficient in making a bit of money, enough to have a decent stash by the time I put on a dog collar. However, I may crash early and have to revise my plans, but I hope not.” Sid laughs,

“Well, you’re a deep thinker and you seem to have an innate ability to do what you want in life so far without putting anybody’s nose out of joint. Another drink? What about a half of Champagne to toast your future?”

“Why not?” Jerry says.

Jerry goes off to Malta to have a stay with his Grandmother, Miriam. She’s a traditional Jew, but not to look at, she’s fair. Her late husband met her in Jerusalem at the time of the Mandate and they lived here and there on Army posts belonging to Great Britain. He was shot in the Crater District in Aden, never recovered. Miriam comes from a seriously rich Jewish family and has a great deal of money in her own right, mainly by inheritance, but she understands finance and manages her money very well. Rather surprisingly, she plays the American Futures Market instead of the conventional Stock Market. The family sort of expected that she would return to her roots in retirement and live in Israel.

“No way,” she says, “my happiest married days were when we were stationed on Malta. It’ll do me.”

Israel is doing well thanks to the Yanks, but its struggle street so far as peace and plenty is concerned. Jerry enjoys his visit. He sits shiva and says Kaddish with his dear Gran and they talk business hard. Jerry at least brushes up on his Yiddish. His Jewish Gran will allow him to speak nothing else. The upshot of it all is that Jerry flies home to start at Cambridge with the promise of a bank draft to follow, to give him seed capital to try out his economics ideas.

Cambridge is not the most inspiring part of the country scenically and the winters are bitter, but Jerry lives in at his college and leads an extremely busy life. The qualities of the nation’s later leaders are supposed to be instilled at Cambridge. It’s a cerebral and intellectual environment. Jerry studies hard and plays cricket for Surrey County in the summer, also social cricket at his home village of Chalfont Studley. Winter is swat time and also investment time for him, as he’s not so taken in time as in summer. He burns the midnight oil and also takes a great interest in Liturgical Music, of which there is plenty on offer. The high point of his musical career arises when he gets the gig to conduct an Oxford Orchestra and Choral army at the all England Universities Musical Contest at the Albert Hall. It’s an accidental gig, as his good friend at Merton College falls off his motor bike returning from a visit to Jerry’s college. He hits a bit of black ice and ends up in Guy’s Hospital to recover. He strongly nominates Jerry to replace him. Jerry plays the oboe with the group, the only outsider, and he gets along famously with them all.

Thus, this afternoon, after a close and amusing conversation in the dressing rooms at the venerable Royal Albert Hall, Jerry, resplendent in his tail coat, takes the podium to conduct the Merton College Orchestra and the combined choral groups of Merton, Jesus and New College. He taps his baton near the mike, turns it off and says in a carrying voice,

“Now let’s wake these beggars up.”

Sir Cecil Hardyman Wilson is emceeding today. He is the front runner to replace the famous long standing and now retiring Conductor of the Proms. Many think him too dour for the role, so he has a lot riding on the success or otherwise of his efforts today. He has already announced that Jerry and his mob will start off with Sibelius's Finlandia, a dream of a thing to present, but Jerry and his musicians have other ideas.

"Don't know that, Sir Cecil, we'll try another."

They absolutely zing into the Wedding March from Lohengrin and with the shortest of stops, belt out the rousing Soldier's Chorus from Faust. The orchestra is really a top hole one and the male component of the choir runs along like the Red Army Chorus; the girls soften it down a bit. Jerry raises his hand as the crowd start to applaud and onto the stage, in full Coldstream Guard Fig, comes a bugler, who instantly blares out the single note of the 'Still' used in both the Army and Navy when instant cessation of work and sound is needed.

Arnold Solderhein, a German student at Jesus and arguably the best baritone in Europe, hits the first note of the Eton boating song, as eight big men and one tiny man dressed in flannels, striped blazers and straw boaters carry a single long oar on their shoulders on stage. God, it's impressive. They roar through this most popular of college songs. It is, of course, the victorious Oxford University Boat Crew. The judging today, this being a fun and frolic musical day, is judged by the 'applause-o-meter'. This gadget is invented by the engineering faculty at London University and has a huge clock face recording the applause. The face reads far and away the highest of the day so far. Sir Cecil is over the moon; he clearly sees this act's success as his success too. He stands applauding and says,

"Well, Jerry, what other unscheduled surprises do you have for us?" Jerry and mob laugh, "We can do you a ninety second 1812 if you like, Sir Cecil," he says.

The day has hit its inarguable peak and later in the dressing room, where the whole group are scolling Champagne and making a huge row, two men come in the door together. The first is rather pompous Sir Cecil, who is grinning like a Cheshire cat – he's got it made he thinks on the back of Jerry's effort. One of the best crowd pleasing efforts he's ever heard and superbly presented to boot. The other is Charles Farson, popularly known in the City as Charley Farley. He's the captain of Jerry's social cricket team; Jerry plays for them every summer, always a twilight game. Charles is beautifully dressed in a grey flannel suit and Fedora hat. Unfortunately for Charley, he is the spitting image of television's famous character, Arthur Daley, and as such, no one trusts him in any way. He wears the polished dodgy look of Arthur Daley to the life.

"Jesus," Charley says as he shakes hands with Jerry, "did I have a helluva time finding you in this blasted rabbit warren. If Sir Cecil hadn't come along, I'd still be lost out there." (In this, his description is not wrong, as the nether and rear stage environs of the Albert Hall make a rabbit warren look simple.) He goes on,

"What a marvellous effort. What a crowd pleaser. My granddaughter, Emma, from Merton College, is in your choir. Sir Cecil tells me that you're a Monte for a gig at the final Night of the Proms.

Jerry is now well into his Cambridge course and taken a few steps to get a bit Church involved. He takes up the Curate's role at nearby Girton. The incumbent, the Reverend Brandon Powell is a dipsomaniac of the first water. It's a decent living, but no normal curate will work under this erratic clergyman. However, this latter trait gives Jerry a good learning curve as he stands in for the man when he's missing. Powell loves weddings, it's a bit of good dosh; and hates funerals, which tend to drag on a bit. The locals soon take to Jerry, he's such a pleasant and presentable young chap who does evensong well and occasionally Holy Communion with the special ministers doing

the wafer and wine bit. He's also good on Pastoral visits - travels for these in leathers on his old Norton Dominator motor bike. He carries pocketfuls of small oranges, mandarins; juicy and easy to peel. He puts three to a small paper bag and hands these out, often assisted by the girl organist from Girton Church. They become a breath of fresh air to the ones being visited and it goes down well. He's very impressive and perceptive at funerals and does these very well. We move on.

We are now at a twilight cricket match at Chalfont Studley. The ground is a brilliant green and the light very soft. Low treed banks surround the ground and there is always a bit of a crowd in the delightful small pavilion and at wooden tables outside the village pub, which abuts the ground – the high street ends at the ground. Charles Farson captains one side. It's very casual cricket, played by a wide spectrum of players; gentlemen and others, there's a lot of sporting goodwill evident. The world in Surrey as elsewhere has changed a lot and thus Charley's wicketkeeper is a woman vet. She's a damn good wicketkeeper. Jerry is the demon bowler for the Surrey County side, they have a big game tomorrow against Cambridgeshire.

"Wanna bowl, Jerry?" Charley asks. He always asks, and Jerry always declines. He's here to enjoy his cricket, not to burnish his killer instinct on this field. As the umpire has called over, they have a moment to chat.

"How's Cambridge going?" he asks Jerry.

"Easy, peasy. I'll be out at year end."

"And to do, what?" Charley asks.

"Hmmm, well, I can go to a multinational and perhaps play shield cricket for New South Wales if I'm good enough."

"Christ, Jerry," Charley says, "the only thing you are likely to bring back from Australia would be skin cancer and possibly a wife with a dreadful Oz accent. You know the type – Owyergoinmate, orright – and think sex is for having children."

"You've got a better offer?" Jerry laughs.

"Surely," says Charley, "come over to Swanns old yard near Canary Wharf and I'll lay it out for you."

Thus, Jerry gets off his Norton Saturday morning at Swanns old yard. He puts his leather jacket into a pannier and dons a roomy tweed sport jacket and clumps into the yard. Charley owns this place and has cleverly turned all the old stables into mews type flats for the Yuppie world. The old slipway provides a launching site for the many who own motor cruisers and keep them there. The admin block, which looks the same as it did a century ago, has been internally modified to provide very well-lit design studios. Charley comes out to greet him. He's dressed casually in cords and a marvellous Fair Isle sweater.

"Come in, come in," he says and they go upstairs to look at concept plans.

"I jagged this huge parcel of land in Spain," Charley says, "it centres on Huevla and runs towards the Portuguese border. The concept looks brilliant. If you can imagine English picture post card villages, complete with church, pub, village green and hall, village stores and mini markets forming the hub. Boulevards radiating out from there like spokes in a wheel, with San Francisco type cable cars running down alternate boulevards. Modern hi rise units looking onto the boulevard, then you have the idea in a nutshell. Traditional, easily accessed by tram car from ultra modern."

"The target market?" Jerry asks.

"Ah, well-heeled Poms wanting to live in a decent climate, but in a location that isn't tourist Spain."

"And the builders?"

“Ah, the Ruskies. They’re well stuck into it. Their gear and methods aren’t pretty, but they’re sure cheap.” Charley continues,

“This is a big, big project and I’ll be quite busy holding it all together as it progresses. What I’d like to do, is have you come on board on a two year contract to handle the marketing from whoa to go. I’ve budgeted one million a year for you, gross that is, before tax and I’ll build you in an overriding commission on the total sales.”

“I’m interested,” Jerry says, “but why me?”

“Well,” Charley replies, “you have the polished look and a Surrey accent. You’ll do us.”

“And us being?” Jerry asks.

“Just me and the Russians really, no middleman, no financiers.” The phone goes. While Charley is on the horn, Jerry wanders around the drafting room and takes in a beautiful design layout of a similar, but smaller development.

“What’s this?” he asks Charley.

“Oh, that’s the trial balloon on the Black Sea, where the Ruskies got up to speed on this sort of work. It’s completed and beautiful.” Charley says to Jerry,

“You’ve seen the graphics, why not take two days off next week and I’ll show you the progress site. A few days in Spain wouldn’t be too nasty just at this time of the year.”

“Fine,” says Jerry, “next week isn’t exciting here, when do we go?” Charley says,

“There’s an old, but good war time strip just north of Biggin Hill, the Yanks used to fly B26’s off it when they were razing Hitler-land in the last real big one. Just ride your bike over there Thursday morning by about half nine and away we go.”

Thus, Jerry lobs along on his Norton a bit earlier than that. Charley is there, beautifully dressed as usual. There’s a grey Lear jet ticking over on the runway near the old signal tower. Charley is smoking a huge cigar as he waits on Jerry.

“Run your bike into that open hangar and lock it onto one of the steel supports.”

Jerry runs his bike in alongside Charley’s BMW and pulls out some high tensile chain from one of his panniers and a huge lock and does just that.

“Rouse, rouse,” Charley says and a white jacketed dark chap ushers them in and seats them in this small air plane.

“Its not the latest magic carpet,” Charley says, “but its typical of the owner, understated efficiency.” They have been seated to the back. Up front is a huge stone-faced man and another counterpart of the white jacketed one. Both are sharpfaced, alert as all hell and right up front is a dark visaged small man, who is studying papers. The minute they are seated and strapped in, the chap, without looking back or acknowledging their arrival in any way, waves his hand – for all the world like a wagon boss on the Cimarron Trail indicating ‘move em out’; the jet instantly powers down the strip using not all that much of the length and lift off. They are wheels up within seconds. The white jacketed one who, though wearing his white stewards jacket with a huge bulge under the arm pit, is obviously an alert bodyguard more than anything else, comes along and dispenses excellent coffee and small hot scones with jam and cream.

“No questions,” Charley says, “just enjoy the ride. Our hosts are off to Turkey, but will graciously drop us off in Spain and pick us up to get back here.”

In no time it seems they touch down on a totally deserted strip near Malaga. They grab their gear and get off quick. Charley thanks the steward and hands him a beautifully cased Cuban cigar.

“Thanks, Charley,” he says, “see you Friday. Stand clear quick.” They do so smartly and the plane powers off and climbs rapidly into the blue.

A dark blue Ford Taurus car appears from nowhere and the driver opens the boot for their gear and then the doors for them. Three hours later, they arrive at Huelva on site and looking out on the bay of Cadiz in a southwest direction.

"Its out of the ruck," Charley says, "very agricultural." Jerry is no realtor, but enough construction work is under way for him to see the very distinct possibilities. When they've cased the project, the driver takes them across the border. Just as the sun is setting, they are about to sit down in a Lisbon taverna when the sunset gun is fired. A nice, dramatic end to a most interesting day.

Late morning next day, they are wheels up out of Malaga and a bit later pitch in on the old Bomber strip in Lincolnshire. A stretch limo takes away Skender and his increased party. Charley and Jerry walk into the hangar to pick up their transport. Charley unlocks his BMW and Jerry unpadlocks his Norton.

"Charley," he says, "we've left the UK, visited a foreign country, but we've seen no officials, no customs people." Charley chuckles,

"The people we travelled with Jerry, take no cognizance of what you're talking about. Money, it seems, irons out all the detail, but its fair to say the last time I dined at Mikhail's place in Gloucestershire, the Home Secretary was there, among others."

"What's he do," Jerry asks.

"Oh, he finances things, makes things and similar. The rest you can observe for yourself. It's good advice not to look hard at or into, Mikhail Skender. It makes him nervous.

## Chapter Two

Immediately after completing his degree at the university, Jerry gets down to things at Swanns Yard. He has done a unit of marketing and he has marvellous graphics to work with, so he proceeds in a very organised way to structure up the marketing arm. During the course of this, people and Charley come and go like yoyo's on the construction project. Jerry is closeted with the money man, Emmanuel 'Manny' Sondheim, a Swiss Jew at one stage and he casts a jagged jest at Manny. Manny is gobsmacked. "You're a Yid," he says, "I'd never have guessed."

They take a break towards evening and go around to the Canary Wharf pub for a drink or two. After a while, Manny, who obviously has been wrestling with some problem, gets two more pints and says,

"Let's sit at that table over there." He continues, "It seems there are two Yids in this deal and it's a fair chance one of them will end up in Wormwood Scrubs and it won't be me." Jerry is gobsmacked.

"I thought Charley is on the level," he says. Manny says,

"Charley's fine. He's also prosperous, but the forces of darkness are putting up the dosh."

"Should I cut and run?" Jerry asks.

"No, you'll make a mint," Manny replies. He digs out of his pocket a small rubber stamp, tiny writing. "Put this in your briefcase," he says. "Sometime, somewhere, you may be asked to sign some papers in connection with this project. Place this stamp alongside of your signature and you'll stay free. It's a well thought out disclaimer and you're going to need it. End of story, no more to say."

Jerry realises of course, that Manny has taken quite a risk to give such a warning and he never re-raises the conversation with him. What Manny has said, niggles away in his mind like a worm in an apple, but he gets on with the job apace. And he does it very well.

Jerry, with inputs from Manny and the best advice he can glean here and there around the city of London, spends the rest of the winter getting the promotional and selling side in place. With no cricket to distract him and the free lend of a moat flat at the Barbican, he is really on the job. The selling launch coincides with the summer. The cool ocean breezes at the project are the best times to sell space in the Huelva development and sell he and a commission based team do. Some sort of outstanding deal has been done with the Spanish Land Department and as the money comes in and construction proceeds apace, titles are readily issued to the buyers. Although the sales are of course, off the plan, sales are backed up by the huge amount of work the Russians are carrying out. The series of coast sited English village centres grow quickly and they are absolutely beautiful, also with the big sources of water; piped across the border from the Guadiana River along a 40 mile pipeline, sees green lawns, gardens and herbaceous borders spring up and complement the village look. The Russians work like demons, great bears of men, big rough trucks and excavators. There are concrete pads and footings everywhere and rising steel columns.

To say Jerry is busy is putting it mildly, but he finds time for cricket at Chalfont Studley. He has to abandon county cricket, but is still able to fit in a bit of social times on Friday nights and weekends in the city watering holes and singles bars. One fairly constant girlfriend whom he takes fairly lightly, turns out to be a Duke's daughter. Although to look at here, she seems just like one of the many in the racy city mob, despite her blue blood background. She constantly asks him out to weekends at the Ducal seat, but he doesn't play, although once he runs up for a few hours on his Norton and meets the parents.

Charley, likewise, has been very busy liaising with the Russians and Jerry hasn't seen that much of him over this frenetic period. Late summer they lunch together at Canary Wharf. He tells Jerry that they have interest from a buyer or two to take over the project for huge, huge money. He wants Jerry to put a complete package together and to confer with the buyer in Panama. The assets of the project include a mountain of cash sitting in the Bank from the buying spree, the completed villages and the just only started masses and masses of high rise construction. Charley gives Jerry all the details and Skender's Lear jet is called up to send Jerry to Panama. The buyer is pretty keen and they sign a Letter of Intent. Jerry ensures his disclaimer stamp goes alongside where he signs. The proposed buyers make absolutely no comment on this. He's hardly back, when Charley has the jet refuelled and Jerry goes off in quick succession to Hong Kong and finally Lichtenstein, where he is wined and dines at the Royal Families Bank. So far as Jerry can see, he's put together three letters of intent for the same deal and he assumes Charley and Co will collect on the one he wants, or perhaps he may institute a bidding war, as all the potential buyers are as keen as mustard.

Charley indicates that for a three week period, he is shutting down the whole operation so that they can all, and particularly the construction workers, take a well deserved break from this all consuming project. Jerry has been kept paid up to date on his salary and his speculations on the Chicago futures market over the past year see him very cashed up. He converts a fair deal of this into gold, stashed in Chicago and tells his broker there to punt on whatever Grandmother Miriam is punting on, as try as Jerry might, he can't better her unerring selections. However, just to be safe, he siphons off a fair deal of his profits to date and rolls the rest back into the market.

"Keep at it until I tell you different." he tells the broker. Charley says,  
"What about a bit of fishing in Wyoming. Great fishing, even Ernest Hemingway said it couldn't be beaten."

Thus, per medium of Skender's Lear, they arrive at and greatly enjoy catching brown trout in inconspicuous streams that run off briskly from the towering Rockies. A small house staff at their rented lodge keep the food and drinks up to them. Towards the end of their stay after a breakfast of grilled trout and waffles and Maple syrup, Charlie unlimbers a box of Cuban thigh rolled cigars and though it's far too early in the day, he pours them both snifters of Napoleon Brandy. They sit looking out onto the rugged slopes of Mount Blandford through the huge plate glass windows.

"Time to talk," Charley says, "we can only talk about you. The very last thing I want, is to see you shut up in a cell at the Scrubs under some cooked up conspiracy charges. If you know nothing, you can tell nothing, so don't ask. You can only imperil your liberty in the long run." He opens his briefcase. "First up," he says, "this is the access code to a numbered account in the Zingli Bank in Swiss land. Engrave it in your memory and then burn it. There's a balance of three point five million English pounds in the account. It's your commission as promised. Now, here's a fake passport, useable in an emergency, it's Irish, in the name of Terry Pearce. Here's a Russian seaman card, containerships only. Present this at any Georgia Line ship or office and you can container yourself away into the night. It's a slow magic carpet to world anywhere." He digs out more papers. "Here is a Bearer Bond Share Certificate that gives you ownership of a Swiss company – Heaver AG; and the address of the Swiss accountant that is au fait with the company. He does the statutory returns when due. Heaver AG owns a small property in Western Victoria. Good sheep country, although I suspect it's too small to be totally viable, but it may be a good Buzzards Gulch type of hideout for a while. Now," Charley continues, "there's a Georgia Line ship out of San Francisco in two days time. I suggest you take it and jump ship in Melbourne. It's best all round if you get lost for a while. You're the most uncommitted man I know of. You've no wife and kids and you turn up for non fixed things when you want. We'll reassure your parents and Manny Sondheim will get some air tickets to them, so that you can meet up in Oz for Christmas next year. He'll put a personal ad in the Melbourne Age on Melbourne Cup day that will clue you in. Now, no phones calls or letters, everything will be tapped or otherwise looked at most likely. Ah, here's the jeep to take me to the plane. One last word, Jerry," he says, "if you can refrain from making contact or spilling what you know to the fuzz for 19 months, then another seven point five million will be added to your numbered account, on this day, 19 months hence."

"But, but, but," Jerry says.

"No butts, Jerry," Charley says, "the very last person you want on your wheel is our friend Skender. In 19 months, the Panamanian Statute of Limitation runs out and you can come home. It's your choice – alive and rich or dead and bones.

### Chapter Three

Thirteen weeks later, a group of bearded seamen come down the gangway of the container ship 'Georgia Countess'. It's ANZAC day and some very smart, forward planning has been done by someone. The whole group are wearing Collingwood scarves; it's the big game day against the 'Dons'. The Wharf guards say,

"Oh, you'll never get into the ground."

They produce ticketyboo passes for the Southern Stand and the security guards burst into laughter and let them through. They enjoy the game, give the Victorian beers a nudge and are one short on returning to the ship. Jerry sleeps in his seamans gear in Flagstaff Gardens overnight and on Tuesday morning finds a Salvation Army shop. He's got a poultice of money in a body belt. He buys a big-wheeled case and some tidy

gear, quite a lot of it, then heads off to Flinders Street Railway Station to transform himself from being an obvious sea farer to something else. A unisex hairdresser trims his hair and beard into a hippie style and he changes into some hippie type jeans, jacket and headband; all from the Salvos. He bins everything else except his pea jacket.

He trains to Geelong, walks out about 6kms to Fynesford, puts on his Collingwood scarf and within minutes, is climbing up into the cab of a huge Kenworth hay truck. His obliging driver takes him well west, to just short of Casterton and a farm Tojo drops him at the farm. It's just along a bit from an imposing entrance reading Wreford Park Stud. He unloads his large case at the entrance of Brudenall; so named after the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Cardigan, who famously led the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava.

John Ibbs, the caretaker, is there with his wife, Molly. They caretake the place, visit twice a week from their home north of the Hamilton Highway. They give Jerry a cook's tour of the property. The sheds are lockup and very functional. The house, in an almond grove, is stone with brick quoins. It's actually in sound order, but the windows are sheeted over and the doors seem to have rotted. There is also a deal of old, but well kept farming gear.

"Anything I can get to town on, on a back track?" asks Jerry, who, of course, can't produce a driver's licence.

"Ah," replies Ibbs, "there's a good two-stroke farm Honda. Just cut across the paddocks to the railway embankment and you can ride into town crossing over one public road only."

Jerry passes himself off as Jerome (pronounced Jeremy) Ball. He has burnt the Irish passport and left his original in a lockbox in San Francisco. In a pinch, his seaman's card might get him through, at least until they deport him. Jerry settles into the shearers' quarters, which has water, power and quite good facilities.

"Who, actually, are you?" asks Ibbs.

"Gap year student; back-packing here and there," says Jerry, "I plan to stay here a while and tidy the place up."

Molly Ibbs was an architect in her early life and they map out a renovation plan for the cottage and within days, do a raid on the extensive salvage yard in Hamilton. Thus, Jerry puts a sign on the gate – Private Property, No Entry – and with valuable help from Molly and Ibbs, soon has a big spruce up going on the cottage. It's surprisingly sound and one summer's morning he is right up on the ridge, tech screwing down some loose capping, when a car pulls up and a big heavy fellow climbs the fence and walks over towards the cottage. This is Jerry's first contact with the locals and he sure doesn't want this, so he tells the burly visitor to 'rack off', but in fast Yiddish. The chap gives up after a while; "Bloody wogs," he says as he walks off.

A day or two later, Molly is over sticking her way around the cottage. She has a bad hip and relies heavily on a walking stick. She says,

"Jerry lets glass in the end of the verandah from the lounge window to the first window on the west side. It will give you a marvellous winter room. Tile fires are a dime a dozen second hand. One in the solar room and one in the lounge area will winter proof this place and you need it as its sharp here."

"Okay," he says, "I think we'll glass panel doors where they've rotted out and Georgian windows."

"Yeah, yeah," she says, "and flagstone over the bricks on the verandahs. But the garden?" she continues, "you know the wrought iron fences from around the old war memorial that are sitting in the salvage yard? They moved them out when the memorial

was relocated to the swimming pool. They're short, but we can weld steel extensions to raise them and dry stone wall the gap a la Edna Wallings."

They wire into all this. Ibbs provides the skilled front end loader work, Molly, the expertise inputs and Jerry works like a slave on the navvy work. They reticulate the house grounds, integrate the old almond trees into the garden as focal points; spread sheep manure from under the gratings everywhere and mix and match Sir Walter grass right throughout. With heaps of water and a top spread of pig manure, the lawn takes off. They knock the whole project off in weeks of hard yakka and the farm house and surrounds starts to look like something out of House and Garden. They talk antique furniture, but eventually settle on some tasteful repro good, rich floor rugs and so on. It looks totally stunning in the end.

Jerry has, of course, been keeping his head down, really down, so far as local contact goes. Easter Thursday, the Ibbs have gone off to rellies in Adelaide and Jerry kicks up his Honda and takes an exploratory run into town along the railway embankment. He wheels the bike over the only road and finishes up pulling into the yard at the Hay plant, which is on the line, or rather a spur line. He leans the bike against the fence and drops into the office. A real cutie of a girl; chubby, very comely, says, "Well, hello." She is with her boss, Jock Morrison, who Jerry gets to know well as he goes along.

"Who are you?" Morrison asks, "want a job?" Jerry laughs,

"Not really. What sort of specialist are you after?"

"A mechanical computer expert," Morrison says. "The pellet plant is on the blink." Jerry has worked in his uncle's pellet plant in Wilshire on long vacations and oddly enough, knows a bit about the machines.

"Let's have a look," he says. They go out to the big workroom. The problem is simply a build-up of dust and grit in the card mechanism that sends messages to the machine.

"Ummm," says Jerry, "I need some detergent, a tooth brush and some vegetable oil." They scurry around and in no time, he has them away again. They are grateful.

He walks down town, gets a bit of sustenance and a six pack of German beer and carts it back to his bike pannier. The hay plant mob calls him in for an Easter drink.

"Any good at book work?" Morrison asks as they sit on hay bales and scoll Vic Bitter stubbies. "Should I computerise my accounts?"

"Are you working tomorrow?" Jerry asks, "I'll come in for a look if you like. Anyway," he gestures towards the chubby girl, "I thought Scooby Doo here, would do your books."

"No," says Morrison, "she makes the tea and otherwise brightens our lives." The girl is not slow, "What about coming down to the Pub with me," she says.

"It'll impress the hell out of my crowd if I bring along a big handsome hippy."

"Thanks, but no thanks," says Jerry, "there are no lights on my bike and I'm not licensed for the roads."

Next morning, Good Friday, Jerry buzzes back to the Hay plant along his pleasant railway embankment short cut. Morrison brews up a coffee and points to the paper chaos of his office.

"A computer?" he asks.

"Nah," says this Bachelor of Economics, "not for you."

He hunts the yard for an 8 foot pine plank. He sharpens up some 5 inch nails on a grindstone and knocks these into the plank and nails the lot to a long well-lit bench. He then goes along with a marker pen and labels each spike, ie Bills, Accounts Receivable, Pay Slips and so on down to the three last ones, reading Odds and Sods – 1 important,

2 less important and 3 dull looking. They ring Scooby Doo, who has been to church and arrives looking very glam.

"Here's the go," Morrison says, "Jerry will tell you the drill."

Monday, early, they attack the filing and by noon, have the problem sorted. Jerry says,

"I see the name of a franchised bookkeeper in a shop window near the seven eleven. What about getting her down to do broad sheets from this point on. I'd like to talk to her a bit first."

## Chapter Four

During these activities, Jerry, under Ibbs direction, gets on with a bit of cropping work at Brudenall. There's quite a good old Power Major tractor among the gear and they team this with a 20 run International Combine. They ignore modern chemical spray farming, putting in a deal of hay wheat and a fair bit of oats. Later in the season when the crops are at the stage of rippling in the south breeze, Jerry sits on his back verandah, pulling on his short briar pipe and looking across the wide water run at the end of his property to a huge granite rock. It is, he thinks, quite a fair sight. His tenure here at Brudenall is, as ever, very shaky. If he can keep out of official notice, he will end up quite a rich man. If he can pick up the extra seven point five million dollars, he will be able to buy up a bit more land and become a proper farmer, perhaps. And there's a bit to be said for such a plan. The climate leaves England for dead really, it's very, very liveable.

He continues to lie low and works around the farm. He goes in once a week for supplies on his Honda and enjoys the huge heap of books that Molly has sourced for him, from a closing up book dealer in Hamilton. The following Friday, he is in late to pick up his supplies. Scooby Doo is in the office.

"How about delaying your run home a bit tonight," she says.

"Well, I'll be here 'til about 6 having a drink with the toilers," Jerry says.

"Fine," she says, "don't go without me."

She is waiting by his Honda when he comes out, nicely dressed in tan trousers, short boots and a jumper and is carrying a small pack. Jerry asks,

"What's the go?"

"Oh, I'm going to cook you dinner, all my own work too."

"Hmm, Scooby," he says, "is this a good idea?"

"A good idea?" she says, "it's a bloody marvellous idea."

"I can't run you back in the dark," he says, "no lights, tricky track."

"Oh, Jerry," she says, "my parents are in Melbourne for the weekend. By dark Sunday night should be fine."

"Okay," he says, "hop on." And away they go.

At the cottage, she is all business and stakes her claim by getting this and that out of her pack, including a rather brief night rail, which she drapes on his bed.

"Just to give you the general idea," she laughs. He goes to nuzzle her.

"Down boy," she says, "I'm in cooking mode just for the moment." Boy, is she on the ball. Anti pasta is Feta cheese soaked in olive oil and herbs; to this she has added red wine to form the marinade for a couple of Porterhouse steaks, Greek salad with cherry tomatoes, microwaved small white rolls and so on. Dessert is stewed, new season apricots, which she chills for a while in the freezer and tops this off with whipped cream. Turkish coffee along with iced water follows. It's been quite a repast and they jointly wash the dishes.

“Now,” she says, “let’s have a bottle of chardonnay to let loose any inhibitions and go to bed.”

They have a riotous weekend. Toby drops her back at the Hay plant 15 minutes before dark on Sunday and scoots off back home. Scooby Doo blows him a kiss as he wheels the Honda around. Jerry is very circumspect in that he never rides across the only public road on his town path. He slips a webbing strap under the Honda and actually carries it across the road. He knows the cops lay for him near the Gun Club to catch him out, but he never gives them the opportunity, then or later.

The hay cutting season now rolls around. Jerry and Ibbs have around 800 acres of hay to mow, windrow and bale. Hay is never easy. Spring rain usually creates a wealth of problems for those putting up the hay and can have a huge effect on the quality and thus the selling price of the finished product. There is particularly good money in hay that can be put through the chaff cutter to make bags and bags of chaff. This is usually done by cutting hay into sheaves with the binder or self-binder, to be more correct. You then put the hay into stooks and when it has matured a bit, cart it into the cutter, which is a mobile set up. Jerry, however, from his uncle’s set up in Wiltshire, is very aware of the new balers, which bale up hay suitable to be run straight through the cutter thus obviating the very intensive work involved with self-binders.

With a little bit of back and forth with the Swiss accountant at Heaver AG, he gets the very first chaff quality big roll baler imported into Australia. Ibbs is stunned by this, goes into Hamilton and tows this bright new machine back to Brudenall. The cost of the machine is a drop in the bucket of what money he has stashed in Switzerland, although the paperwork has been tricky. He buys it in Ibbs’ name to keep it simple and as they have to sell this idea to sceptical chaff cutting men, they bale about a third of the crop specifically for chaffing and square bale the rest for sale to Morrison. The round bales bale up with plastic wrapping and don’t pose any storage problems. As they have no shed space for the square bales, they sheet these with huge tarpaulins in the stack and ensure these are waterproof and tight by using the webbing straps carriers use to cart square bales on road trains. It’s expensive, but totally effective.

“Chaff cutters are pretty conservative,” Ibbs warns, “you seem to be preaching revolutionary change in their established methods.” Jerry says,

“What the hell. If we can’t convert them, the roly bales will always sell for feed next autumn.”

“Or,” Ibbs says, “you can stock up with sheep and feed them the hay, or agist sheep and achieve the same result.”

By the time they get all this done, Christmas is in sight. Jerry goes over to Adelaide and takes the Ghan up to Alice Springs and on to Darwin to meet up with his parents for the festive season. He, of course, hasn’t been in touch with them since he disappeared in the USA. He is circumspect in his approach and cases the Darwin pub where they are staying, before he is sure that they are not being observed. To be even surer, he has a hand written note delivered to them and they meet up a couple of days later for a picnic lunch at Berry Springs; a real bush oasis down near Adelaide River. They have a great reunion and then dine later at the Adelaide River Hotel. It’s been a very successful and pleasant get together, but Jerry doesn’t push his luck. He picks up a truck ride from there and vanishes into the night en route back to Brudenall.

When the working world get back to the job on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Jerry is watching a skilled forklift driver loading some of his round bales onto a Kenworth road train, when a police car quietly comes in through the open gate. The copper that emerges from the car is not young.

“My daughter from the hay plant has pointed me out here,” he says. “Bad news, I’m afraid.” Jerry has a mental fit of the shudders – I’m sprung, he thinks, but that isn’t the case. It seems Morrison has had a bad accident returning from a New Years Day visit to Melbourne and is in hospital there, in a coma.

“The working team,” the Sargeant cop says, “needs direction. My daughter says you’re the only one that can provide that, as you know the ins and outs of the place. I’ll run you in, that is, if you are prepared to go. The hay plant is intrinsic to the life of the town.”

“Sure,” says Jerry, “of course I’ll go. Come in and have a coffee while I’m collecting my thoughts.” The copper is impressed.

“Jesus, what a pad,” he says, as he sits sipping his coffee, “I’m impressed.” The thought darts through Jerry’s mind that, the law wouldn’t be too impressed if he knew just how much time his daughter has been spending in the bedroom of this pad. Jerry gets a suit bag and bags up some of his more discerning buys from the Salvation Army shop and is ready to go. The copper drops him at the plant.

“We’ll help you any way we can,” he says, “here’s my cell phone number.”

“This may not be easy,” Jerry says, perhaps you can do a check on Morrison’s state of health and let me know, say, within the hour, so that I can move on in possession of the facts.”

Jerry and Scooby walk through the plant. Plenty of product is rolling through, though the worried foreman tells him the Landlink agent who sources the hay supply, has already been in to say that, with Morrison out of the picture, it’s now cash only.

“He has to protect his sellers,” he says.

“Hmmm,” says Jerry, “Scooby, what about ringing that blonde girl who comes in to cut Jock’s hair. See if she can come this morning, then ring the hay plant Bank Manager and then his lawyer. Try to get them down late morning.”

The girl rocks in. Toby produces a ‘Time’ magazine.

“I want a haircut and beard trim, that will make me look like this chap,” he says, pointing to a photo. The girl concentrates and a bit later, she has transformed him from a hippie to a Madison Avenue type; sort of. Jerry unzips his suit bag and continues the transformation. He puts on beautiful brown Rivers shoes, grey flannel trousers, blue linen shirt, Collingwood tie and a smart double breasted blazer, complete with crested gold buttons; all from the Salvation Army second hand store. Then straps on a Rolex copy watch and he’s ready to deal, although he would be the first to admit that he’s doing this with a stacked deck.

He expects little from the banker. This chap is obstructive and says, rightly enough, that despite Morrison’s big credit bank balance, that they can do nothing without his instructions. ‘Strike one,’ thinks Jerry and he escorts the bank manager out the door. The lawyer lobs in; a nice looking, perhaps, 27 year old. She’s old Rawlings only child – Rawlings, that is, from Wreford Park opposite Brudenall. She works wages for the old solicitor, but the district expects that she will buy the practise when the incumbent is ready to retire.

“Where’d you spring from?” she asks Jerry, as she runs her eye over, up and down Jerry’s well turned and immaculate exterior.

“Ah...I’m your neighbour out at Brudenall,” he replies. She is gobsmacked.

“Gawd,” she says, “I know you’ve transformed that place, but Dad says you are a rude wog. In fact, I wouldn’t suggest you catch on fire near him, he certainly wouldn’t put you out.” Jerry laughs.

“He intruded, despite the locked gate and ‘rack off’ signs, when I was working up on the roof ridge. All I did was tell him to buzz off, but in Yiddish. It seemed to work.”

“Well,” she says, “he’s always lusted after that bit of land, never had a glimmering it was on the market, then you arrived. Ibbs and Dad are not friends and Ibbs shares nothing with us, although to be fair, he’s there instantly with his Tojo and a water tank and pump at the merest hint of a fire in the area.” Jerry, again laughs.

“Have a coffee,” he says. Scooby Doo brings this in on the trot. Decent little demitasse cups that Jerry has brought in. They relax a bit and then get down to business. Jerry produces the latest profit figures.

“It’s like this,” he says, “the hay plant is very financial and has excellent buyer contracts FOB Portland. It wouldn’t do to fall down on supply and there’s no problem there, as I have enough hay out at Brudenall to keep things going until we source new suppliers. I expect the staff would work without pay for...say...three weeks, until something can be done from payments due to the plant. Time, however, is the nub of the matter. If needed, I’ll tackle the buyers for faster payment, but I have some other ideas on this. Simply put, if I can get payments for delivery expedited, can your firm run these through your Trust account and once the bank cleared; can we do a deal for you to pay the workers and for running costs?” Ethnee Rawlings considers this.

“What you outline is most likely the best way to go,” she says. “To get a court order empowering you to run the financial affairs of the plant, will take a deal of time. I can’t see why, as Mr Morrison’s lawyers, we can’t do as you say, if you can expedite payments. However, it never pays to frighten the horses, and requests for expedited payment may do just that with the buyers.” Jerry says,

“If you are prepared to accept the money and pay out of that for running costs, and here the latter are easily provable from the P & L figures we have now in front of us, I should be able to discreetly get a faster payment system going. I’ll at least try.”

The lawyer takes her leave and Jerry sends a worker down the street for a carton of VB. At shift end, he gets the workers together, delaying the start of the next shift and tells them he’s only dressed up like a pox doctors clerk in the interest of the hay plant. He fills them in, tells them that meeting the orders on time is a must and that he will report further to them after a day in Melbourne. He thumbs a lift into Hamilton, then one with an overnight freight truck into Bleak City.

A visit next morning to the Salvo’s shop produces a very good Park Avenue pin stripe suit and a pair of black Florsheim, nicely worn in shoes. (Jerry has a little wonder on whose shoes he’s been wearing the last couple of days) He takes the suit around to a one hour dry cleaners and has this well pressed. He tucks his business papers into a Salvo shop document folder and goes out to Moorabin to talk to the garment manufacturers. There, he learns that the most used factoring company belongs to one, Manny Horowitz. He tracks Manny down and by 12.30pm, he is standing on the steps of the Melbourne Club in Collins Street, waiting for Manny to arrive, when a speeding car runs clear out of its lane, knocks over a pedestrian and smashes into a parked car that a woman is sitting in. The crumpled car starts to burn; Jerry acts like a triage nurse and marshals up the six or seven chaps waiting on the steps for their lunch engagements. Being tall and very well dressed, he had a commanding presence. He grabs two blokes by the arm,

“Out,” he says, “stop the traffic....run.” Surprisingly, they do and manfully, with upraised arms, stop both flows of traffic.

“You,” says Jerry, “run into that commercial building, break the glass, activate the alarm and bring back the fire axe. Quick now.....you,” he continues, pointing to a polished captain of commerce type. “Come with me, take off your tie.” He can see at a glance, the knocked over man is bleeding from an injured leg. A smallish, dark skinned man arrives among the carnage.

“Manny,” Jerry yells in Yiddish (it can only be Manny), “over here, quick.” He uses the club man’s tie as a tourniquet and his Swiss army knife to slit the victim’s trousers and thus gets pressure on the femoral artery. It’s obviously arterial bleeding. He pulls off his own tie, pads it and uses it as a pressure pad.

“Hold this, Manny,” he says and Manny does. The man arrives back with the axe. Jerry springs up, grabs it and bashes out the glass of the parked car.

“Get her out,” he says and grabs a few more bystanders. “Get the doors open or she’ll burn.” They tear the doors open with a bit of chopping. He then turns his attention to the rear car. It’s burning too brightly, but they get one chap out. The Fire and Rescue mob arrive and swing into things in a practised way. A medic takes over from Manny. He stands up, looks at Jerry and says in Yiddish,

“I’ve been to some lunches, but never one like this.”

Jerry laughs and fires back in Yiddish,

“Are we still lunching? I’ll need a tie.”

They vanish into the portals of the Melbourne Club, just escaping the press and TV, who obviously are the very last people he wants to see. The steward finds Jerry a tie and they proceed to lunch, resisting all entreaties from the media for them to come out for interviews. Privacy and decorum is a byword for the Melbourne Club, so they are able to ignore these calls.

“Do you know,” Manny says, “that this lunch meeting has been totally instrumental in saving two lives? Remarkable work indeed. We could do with you in the Israeli Reserve.”

Jerry outlines what he has in mind to Horowitz.

“Well,” the factoring man says, “load invoices plus delivery dockets will be all I need. We can set up the lawyers account on Internet banking and pay them at the end of each week. It will cost you 20% though.”

Whilst this is steep, Jerry knows that they can live with this, so they are in business, as it were. Thus the hay plant proceeds apace.

## Chapter Five

Morrison is yet to surface and Jerry and Ethnee Rawlings meet weekly to review progress and to see that the bills are paid. Having pulled things together, Jerry has stayed in non-hippy mode, wearing leather shoes, pressed jeans and often, a jacket and tie, or at least a jumper and tie. His administration of the business gets around and the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club come down and try to snare him. Jerry laughs them off saying, “I’m just a backpacker helping out in an emergency.” They look disbelievingly at him, but go away.

“Christ, Jerry,” says Scooby Doo, “why would you want to waste time with those dullards, when you know I’ll come out any night with you on pillion?”

“Ah,” says Jerry, “what good sense. How are you fixed tonight?”

Old Rawlings turns up at the hay plant; grunts into the office, avoids looking at Jerry and says, “I’ve some hay for sale. A shed full in fact.”

“Books fairly full,” Jerry says, “but if the price is right and subject to me checking the quality, I’ll take the lot at a certain price.”

They settle the details and after work, Jerry hacks up to Wreford Park on his Honda. He and Rawlings check out the moisture content with Jerry’s hand held meter. Ethnee arrives home from work in her grey Peugeot and pulls up to see what’s going on. She suggests a sundowner on the terrace and they do. Ethnee’s mother joins them. She’s a nice looking woman, but is a bit hard to understand, due to her hearing

problem. During their drink, Rawlings asks Ethnee, if she has been able to locate their Anglican Minister. It seems old Rawlings is high up in the local Anglican Church.

"Not a sign," she says, "the Reverend Teddy is on the scoot, I'm afraid."

"Humph," says Rawlings, "I guess I'll have to ring the Bishop."

"Wrong channel," Jerry diffidently says. "The problems of an alcoholic member of the clergy fall into the province of the Archdeacon. Show me a continuing problem of this nature and I'll show you an Archdeacon that is not up to his job. It's best to sort it out through that channel. Bringing it to the Bishop's attention may deprive you of a clergyman who still has some miles in him."

"You seem well informed," Rawlings says, "How so?"

"It's a long story," Jerry says, "suffice to say, a survey of incumbents made about 18 months back, showed that 39% of the clergy were using alcohol as a crutch; 13% quite heavily. Not many of the 13% were redeemable really."

"What do you attribute this to?" Rawlings asks.

"Well," Jerry replies, "life's a rough journey if you're poor. As Shakespeare says, 'we all end up in the bourne, from which no traveller returns.' The real job of the church soldiers is to hold out hope of a future and help people along through life. Voltaire said when he took on a prefectship in France, that although he was prepared to take on the affairs of his supporters in his hands, he has no intention of admitting these to his heart and lungs. Many clergy do, and drop into depression from what they see and experience, hence the resort to the booze. It's just life I'm afraid, and of course, in today's world of the internet and mixed messages and patterns of behaviour, it's all going down a bit. It's like the bank managers who once seemed to run the community; alternative finance methods have made them now largely irrelevant."

"Hmmm," says Rawlings, "you indeed have a point."

Come Wednesday, Ethnee calls at the hay plant.

"I had in mind, asking you to counsel the Rev Teddy," she says, "but wherever he currently is, we can't get a fix on him and we want him for Ted Roberts' funeral tomorrow."

"Well, I've done 18 funerals," Jerry says (and he has), "so I can stand in at the last moment if he's a no show." And he does.

As the wake, at the of pub that hasn't had any work (other than good coats of paint) done on it since 1918, is winding up, Ethnee says,

"Jerry that was just so well done. Why not come home to tea?"

"Hmmm," says Jerry, "I'd rather you came to tea at my cottage at Brudenall. I've never had a formal guest there yet. You know, you can be the first if you wish."

"Alright," she says, "how are you getting home?" Jerry laughs.

"On my trail bike," he says, "it's parked at the pellet plant. I'll push off now and if you can give me half an hour's start, I'll have things on the go." Jerry gives her the front gate key. "Let yourself in," he says.

When she arrives in her grey Peugeot, Jerry has the tile fire opened up, the back verandah hot plate heating and the soup and greens on the go. She is gobsmacked by the cottage and its furnishings.

"It's like something out of Country Style. Marvellous," she breathes. Jerry laughs, "All Molly's work. I only did the labouring."

They belt down several stiff drinks and she helps him set the table; white damask cloth and good English silver that has seen a bit of use. They light the candles and lay out fine old Georgian wine glasses. Jerry slips into things – hot beautiful soup (a tin of Campbells). He tosses the pepper steaks on the hot plate, sets out the salad and cooks the steaks to the turn. They move onto sweets – stewed peaches and whipped cream.

At the coffee stage, they leave the mess and move into the lounge by the fire. Jerry hands her a port and taps the finial on the sideboard. A concealed drawer pops out and Jerry takes out a pack of odd looking big cigarettes.

"Happy Baccy, if you're game."

"God," she says, "how does a total stranger to town source this? There's no drugs in town." Jerry bursts into laughter.

"There's heaps," he says, "if you look like a hippy."

"I've never tried this," Ethnee says, "what's the effect?"

"Hmmm," says Jerry, "it heightens the sensations and if you'll pardon the expression, it's a great randifier."

"I'd better join you."

"Yes," he says, "you'd better, or otherwise you have to run quick." She looks at him. "I'm not in the running mood," she says and leans forward for a light. The pot certainly greases the slippery slope Ethnee is now well and truly skating down.

Later, she says that, and "you are unbelievable, I'm as snug as a bug and I'm not moving until morning."

Jerry slips his hand under the blanket, slaps her bare rump and says,

"I expect some more movement, but let's have another drag first."

Jerry realises that with Ethnee soundly and exhaustedly asleep, he had better ring her parents to let them know she's okay. Old Rawlings answers,

"Yes?"

"Jerry across the road here."

"Who?"

"Your lesser neighbour."

"What do you want?"

"Hmmm, I thought I'd better let you know that Ethnee's fine. She's here at the cottage. Home late morning I expect." Deathly silence, then,

"Perhaps I'd best come and get her."

"Not a good idea," Jerry says, "she's fine, but you'd have to brave my Rottweiler, loose in the yard."

"You haven't got a Rottweiler," old Rawlings says.

"Perhaps not, but I think if you were to turn up right now, with the view of dragging her home, she well might savage you like a Rottweiler. In other words, she's quite contented and certainly not wanting to go home."

Jerry is amazed this chap isn't going off the deep end.

"A month ago," the father says, "I would have been down with a shotgun. However, I now know after what you have done for Morrison at the hay plant and after that marvellous effort at the funeral, that whatever you are in real life, you are no hippy. I would be very interested to know what you have been avoiding to hole up and transform Brudenall." Jerry laughs.

"If it's any consolation and I appreciate that it's probably not, I've been avoiding a very irate Duchess, who thinks I'm the father of her only daughter's child."

"And are you?" he asks.

"Not at all," Jerry replies, "but the unpalatable truth of who is, is unacceptable to her, so she's aimed at me as a more suitable alternative."

"What about DNA?" the stud breeder asks. Jerry ripostes,

"It's just not something a gentleman could ask a girl to undergo."

"Thanks for the call," Rawlings says, "Ethnee's mother is away in Melbourne at this time at a quilter's convention."

“Come down for breakfast,” Jerry says, “but not too early. Just toot at the gate and I’ll open up for you.”

“Okay,” he says, “be down at 9.”

Ethnee wakes up, yawns, throws her arms wide and says,

“It’s only Saturday, let’s go again and again, Jerry.”

“Okay,” says Jerry and away they go. A little along the track, he says,

“By the way, your Dad’s coming to breakfast.”

“My God,” she says, “my God, he’ll kill me.”

“Relax,” says Jerry, “he’s okay, but you might as well reinforce your emancipation.”

“How so?” she asks.

“Plenty of hot water,” Jerry replies, “good long shower, there’s my slippers (god knows how many sizes too big for her) and there’s a long, white chenille dressing gown hanging in the robe. Wear that for brekky. Should get your point across.”

She looks dubious, but Jerry goes in and turns on the shower.

“Get cracking, I’m off to clear the kitchen and open the locked gate if you can find the keys I gave you.”

By the time old Rawlings comes along in his gleaming Bentley, Jerry has Uncle Toby’s Oats microwaving, the percolator perking and the hot plate ready for small breakfast steaks. He also has toast in the toaster and Croissants ready to heat up and add honey. Rawlings is quite pleasant, shakes hands and says,

“It’s time really that Ethnee kicked over the traces. Any later and she may never have done it. She’s a bit of a late developer.”

Jerry grins and sits him down to coffee. Ethnee appears confidently in the manner described and they have a very pleasant brekky in the sun filled dining area.

Rawlings takes a long pull on his cigar.

“Why don’t you hang in here,” he says, “Ethnee’s left things a bit late, but not too late. She will inherit Wreford Park in time. You could perhaps combine with her and join the farms up.” Jerry chuckles.

“Ethnee may have her own view on that.”

“Oh, yes please,” she pipes up.

“Hmmm,” Jerry says, “I’m only a backpacker here. My hibernation phase has yet to run out, but run out it will and I have things to attend to at home.”

“And home being.....?” Rawlings asks.

“Let’s leave it at that for the moment,” Jerry replies.

But the moment comes up much quicker than Jerry expects. He is cranking things up at the hay plant only a day or two later, when Scooby Doo arrives at work well before she’s due. She’s flustered.

“Jerry,” she says, “get out quick. The Commonwealth Police plan to pick you up later this morning. I heard Dad on the phone during brekky. It’s clearly you they’re after. I wouldn’t be surprised if he intended me to hear. He thinks you’re the world on wheels.” He kisses Scooby.

“I owe you, kid,” he says. He walks out to his Honda and is out on the main road and gone within minutes.

While he has to lay low for several weeks, he achieves this and a Georgia Line container ship drops him in San Francisco, in sight of the Presidio and walking distance to where his British passport is stored. He never gets back to Oz. He and Manny Sondheim get together on many profitable, if not irreproachable financing deals out of Switzerland. Jerry becomes Archdeacon of Southwark Cathedral. He is dynamite on the clergy that lean on alcohol to see them through.