

The Investment Adviser

By Lloyd Nelson

Chapter One

The sign on the window of the 2nd floor Grenfell Street Widows Fund Building reads 'John Spykker: Investment Advisor and Financial Consultant'. John gets most of his business from small financial advertising, nearly classified lineage stuff; word of mouth and of course, continued repeat business. There's a heap of money floating around Adelaide looking for a home every working day of the week. A good Saturday and Sunday advert can keep the phones going for two or three days. John has a great phone answerer. She, like John, is a descendant of one of the many Krauts that flocked into South Australia in the early days. Julie has just the sort of voice that a film caster would recruit for a film on finance. She's a pleasant 40 year old widow and she surely helps his business to run and prosper.

In investment advising these days when people won't take any responsibility for anything, (just look at Howard's government) you have to protect people a bit from themselves. The lure of high interest rates seems to supplant common sense. Most, however see reason and John steers them into the safest and best earning stuff on the market. Much of it into fixed interest fixed term real estate lending, conveyanced by the clients own lawyers and so on. He keeps them away from the high fee, low return stuff of mutual funds, managed investments and his advice is very sound. As investments mature or more investment money becomes available, they come back and back, and the best business, like as in all business, is repeat business.

Chapter Two

Reg Spykker gets in touch. Reg is a tea planter near Darjeeling and has a summer house in old Darjeeling itself. John has never been there, but he's in regular communication with Reg as he looks after his farming affairs on the York Peninsular. Reg inherits a good sized wheat and sheep property from his Dad during the time he was serving in the Army Engineers, both in Australia and Vietnam. His plan was to take over the property as soon as his army time was up, but somewhere along the track, he meets and marries a very attractive Indian woman. Mia was doing her PhD at Adelaide University. Instead of taking her back to his farm, she takes him back to her farm; an old established tea garden, or plantation, which she likewise inherited.

John looks after Reg's farm and his own adjoining thousand acre block. He tosses his farm in John's lap when in Vietnam. John takes advice and after a deal of thought, sells the sheep. Too much



looking after is needed and he hasn't the time. They put a share farmer in, living in the Manager's house, growing wheat and oats, and after harvest when the stubbles are available, they rent agistment out to stock owners from the Northern Pastoral Country.

They also bale up a lot of oaten and wheat big roll bales, which are either sold to the agisters if needed, or held over until next season if not wanted. Reg's farm has a very good farm homestead on it; stone, brick quoins and bow



fronted. Big pepper trees, of which there are so many on old farms in South Australia, and a good sweep of reticulated green lawn at the front and sides – not so usual in South Australia. The place is totally secure. Reg, through the army workshops, has fitted soft looking wrought iron grilles on windows and doors. They don't look at all fortressy, but they're

Tungsten steel and deeply routed into the old stonework and quoins. Reg has made free of the Commonwealth Defence Department stores when he was boss cocky in Adelaide. There are isotope pads under the perimeter around the house that touch off a ship's foghorn type alarm when someone comes around on the pad, and at night, flashing lights. He has a wonderful water source available across the paddock and has reticulated around the house, using pressure pumps and no solenoids. A clever device activated by water bleeding from the pump, switches lines by means of a simple lever valve. There's just grass around the house, no shrubs or roses and the house has, what is called in England, a 'haha'. That is, a ditch with a fence in the bottom surrounding the house. There's a TEA Ferguson tractor, the one with a petrol vanguard engine, with a 4ft slasher mower attached to keep the grass up to scratch. It's all very simple and very well engineered.

Reg, by the way, is very bright. In 'Nam he takes up a modern version of the old Pederick (WA) rabbit warren fumigator and he gives the tunnel dwellers stick with this. He first injects heavy cyanide gas into the tunnels and when he's given this a burst, a light gas that shows where the exits are. So they go and blow in the exits and move to the next set of tunnels. They put the fear of god into the 'gooks' and kill unknown numbers. Reg explains it all.

"Well, it always worked on the rabbits on the farm." he says.

John goes up to the farm once a month to monitor things. The share farmer lives in quite a good corrugated iron house, built about 1918. These days, it is fitted with power and evaporative air conditioning and painted modern colours that are right up with the trends. John's wife, Julie, who's a whining bitch of the first water, has never come up once. She says she's lost if she can't see the spires of St Peter's. Their marriage, sticky for a long time, is now unstuck and John's busy paying her out and getting rid of her. They're selling the red brick, post war house they jointly own near the Oval.

Chapter Three

John's a quiet living sort of fellow; plays the oboe in the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, goes to his office five days a week and sings in St Peter's Choir when he can fit it in. The marriage problems stem from the fact that Julie is childless and blames him. This won't stick, as he fathered a child when still at school with a 15 year old girlfriend. In the ignorance of youth, the girl adopted it out instantly. He makes the very serious mistake of telling Julie this when he gets totally exasperated one Saturday. She goes up like a roman candle and never comes down. She goes home to mum, who is also a whingeing bitch. Anyway, the opportunity was too good to miss, so he shuts the marriage down that weekend, probably the smartest thing he's ever done.

Personally, he's not that mad on wives and family; sex yes and it's a bad scene when one tries to dominate and blame the other. He's a quiet chap and he voted with his feet before she changed her changeable mind. She's a school teacher by the way, and is now working back at her profession. They've split what they owned and signed it off, all legal and proper, which, in the light of events, proved very wise.

Reg wants to talk to John. There's plenty of money in the farm account due to the sale of stock and a long run of good seasons. He pays the rates and taxes and does his personal income and pays the tax there, so everything's quite current. His farm is increasing in value every year and in all, if he has to beat a retreat from India, he's in very good shape. John decides he'd like to visit India and take a break in England, so he flies to Delhi, works his way across country by a small commuter plane and eventually arrives at the end of the stinking hot plains.

Chapter Four

He gets up to Darjeeling by the narrow gauge (two feet wide) railway track, which the Poms built in 1881 to take them and their extensive households up to the Hill Station for the hot weather period. It's an eight hour and very interesting trip. Darjeeling derives its name from the Tibetan 'Dorje Ling', which translates to 'place of thunderbolts'. The town sits idyllically on the top and western side of an 8,000 feet high spiny ridge, which juts at right angles to the mighty Himalayas. It was always a favoured rest and relaxation place for the Colonial service people and by 1857, long before the railway,



there were over 10,000 people there. Talk about picturesque, its mind blowing. It's built on terraced landings that are joined by flights of stairs and almost vertically stepped lanes. Easy to go down, damn hard to climb up. Along the top terrace, is the wall where the Poms would promenade after dinner. The mall begins and ends at the town square, Chowrasta.

The buildings reflect that they were erected when Queen Victoria was Queen Empress of India. Along a bit is the Oberoi Mount Everest Hotel, the Windermere, New Elgin and so on. High teas at the venerable and traditional venues take you back for an unforgettable look at the past. Reg and Mia have a tall wooden bungalow with grounds treed by the ubiquitous Deodars and huge Rhododendrons, and it's a huge step back in time, but with all mod cons. They have serious house staff, as befits a big tea planter and they live



like kings. John parks his gear and they sit on the verandah sipping iced silver tankards of beer and look at Everest and Kanchenjunga. It's the sort of place you would expect God to live in.

They dine on spicy curries and about a million side dishes; each better than the other and in the last light of day, instead of promenading in the mall, they

relax with snifters of brandy and long cigars and look at the roof of the world. Reg and Mia take John down to their hillside tea plantation. There are nearby tea gardens employing mobs of people and producing about 11 million kilos of premium priced tea every year; it's the most sought after tea in the world and brings top money. Reg tells him that they're doing very nicely and that the whole industry stems from the mid 1800's, when Dr Campbell planted tea seeds in the compound of his bungalow.

There is another rail link out of Darjeeling to the southern plains, but as yet he hasn't seen it. They dine in some nights and on others they dine in the middle layer of the terraced town; Chinese, Tibetan, Continental and Indian of course. They like the starchy momos. Other nights they go down to its vibrant lower terraced levels and mix it with various cultures and nationalities. It's incredible Burka's of Eastern Nepal rub shoulders with yellow-robed Tibetan Lamas; jewellery laden women with black pigtailed and striped aprons barter with Sikimese or Lepchas, Dukpas of Bhutis or Bhutan. It's all fascinating and near indescribable.



They also take the swaying cable car ride of 5kms over the tea plantation to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. Much of Hillary's and Sherpa Norgay's Everest climbing gear is in the museum at the institute. They don't talk business, just revel in the sharp mountain air, enjoy the food and sights and John sleeps like a top and thinks about how ordinary Adelaide looks by comparison with the fabulous, exotic and steeped in history settlement of Darjeeling. Its one of many hill stations set up by the Poms and the government of East Bengal operates here for many, many hot seasons. After 10 days of good fun and good drinking and eating, Reg and John sit down for a business session.

Chapter Five

Reg tells John that his will sets out that in the event of his demise, the York Peninsular farm comes to John, conditional on Mia getting one third of the income for her lifetime, should she need it. He can't see that she will, as the tea plantation carries no debt and the government have shown no sign of meddling in the industry. John asks Reg whether he is feeling stirrings of mortality, but he says not. It's more about something else he says.

"You know," he continues, "when I was running the Army workshops in the Engineers in Adelaide; we had another operation sharing space with us. It was the CIA and we were forever building army safe/strong boxes for them to ship over unrefined gold and genuine and funny dollar money on the supply ships to Vietnam. The funny money was printed by a specialist on several old multi-lith printing machines; all American dollars of course and they sourced the gold from mine owners in Kalgoorlie, paying off the mines in proper US currency. The gold is all in slipper form."

By this he meant, it was gold refined enough for forwarding to the Perth mint for proper processing into ingots. It's the usual way gold is sent to the mint from mines. It's as though molten gold has been poured into a woman slipper and allowed to set. You can see piles of it being refined at the mint on any visit. It carries, of course, no official stamps, but some mines do leave a mould imprint. It's a very negotiable way of doing business in hard-to-identify gold.

"Well," he said, "two mates and I duplicated one of their strongboxes, a big one; filled it with funny money of theirs and brass slippers from our foundry and rang the changes on the CIA. These strongboxes have lifting lugs on the top and the one we swiped; we took up to the farm and unloaded it in the workshop via the strong travel beam and block and tackle. What we didn't know, was that the bastards booby-trapped each safe with cyanide gas. The boys were working on getting it open and I went over to the house fridge to get a few bottles of beer. When I got back, the safe was open, the place stunk of bitter almonds and my mates were as dead as door nails on the workshop floor. Very sticky.....and also sad." He continues, "We were right at payola time. Of course, this left me the sole proprietor of a lot of dollars and a lot of dodgy gold. I put the whole lot in the pit; the boys one end, the strongbox the other. I backfilled it with sand and skimmed the top with concrete mixed on the spot, locked everything up tight and faded from the scene. Later, I parked my army surplus landrover in the workshop and moved the gear down to the new shed workshop. I incorporated the shed into the house security and as far as I know, everything is as was."

Reg says, "Broadly there were never any ructions about the loss of the real safe. I guess, in the crash in Vietnam, it was just another loose end, but it means, probably, no one is looking now for the safe and contents. There's about 6 million in it, by his reckoning. The bills are all used bills (that is, the genuine ones). This was necessary for what the CIA were doing with them, so they'd be quite safe to use in the right market. Gold, of course, can be DNA'd, sort of, as to approximate where it comes from. Perhaps if it's melted down, not all at once, just a mix of slippers melted down, old type coins stamped out. It could be done. The Turkish kri-shekel, non milled edge and half an ounce of gold, is still in common use in the Middle East and of course, India just loves anything that's gold. They are the original gold merchants.

The funny money also has value, but would perhaps need to be sold at a big discount for real money. Anyway,” he carries on, “have a think about it all. Perhaps I’ll meet up with you at Dubai on your way home, if you have any brainwaves. On the other hand, of course, it can just sit there in the inspection pit for another 20 years. It’s just food for thought at this stage.”

They make their farewells, and John goes to London to the tennis at Wimbledon, cricket at Lords and even gets down to Glyndebourne. He’s on his own, but meets some nice people at Glyndebourne and adds his hamper to theirs on the lawn, thus meeting the Right Honourable Patricia Flowers-Smythe, MP for Ealing. She’s not married and is well known in British politics. He just couldn’t have met a more interesting person. John squires her around to things she has invitations to and for which a partner would be handy. Thus he gets to a Royal Garden Party and a private party that inspects the Great Garden at Hidecote.

Chapter Six

The pleasant summer season in England ends, as all things do, sooner or later. John flies out to Dubai. God, what a mind-blowing place. He meets up with Reg, who has been sussing out this and that in the gold line in the Lebanon. Reg, in this then quiet period in this trouble spot, has been talking closely with gold men in Beirut and has got a clever set of moulds made that will hopefully, turn some of the gold stash into kri-shekels and thus turn dangerous slippers into easily traded gold coin.

Back at the farm, Reg has stashed a few of the gold slippers in his gun safe, not noticeably so. He has a spring activated device, which is really a false floor to hide the gold, just a bit. Following Reg’s engineering instructions, John cranks up a jeweller’s crucible, which runs on three phase power and melts gold bars to a creamy consistency and pours this into a set of moulds. He makes 24 to a batch and they come up very professional. The next stage involves leaving them in a chemical mix for a few days and the result is very good and aged looking. It’s not such a hard job at all, but Reg has done the setting up work and as mentioned, it’s just a matter of following the printed word and watching the crucible temperatures.

On Tuesday, having placed a batch of coins in a soft leather wash bag, brought back from India, John walks these around to the Rundle Street Mall, to a very ancient old coin dealer, who has been in Rundle Street as long as he can remember. He is quite laconic, but thoroughly checks the coins, which go 2 to 1.1 ozs of gold; the same as the kri-shekels should. He wants to gold assay one of the coins, which is fine with John as he can make more easily, so he lets the dealer pick one out and do his assay. This completed, the old chap gets quite enthusiastic and places the remaining 23 of the batch, with collectors within a week and asks for more. A good handful of money goes into John’s pocket and thus enthused, he runs off another batch.

Kri-shekels are not common in Australia and are a beautiful and antique looking coin – far more impressive than half sovereigns are. The



patrician head on the front of the coin is marvellous and catches attention. John misses a bit of time from his oboe playing and gets quite engrossed in his coin manufacturing activities, but he's also careful. He doesn't want to draw attention to himself, so he looks into ways to get a coin dealers license to legally spread his manufacturing efforts into a far wider market. This proves easier than he expects and he finds Singapore, both a pleasant place to visit and a good place to trade. He is not so interested in huge profits, trading kri-shekels for sovereigns. Thus it's gold out and gold back and no tax problems occur and he gets a big heap of sovereigns in his bank box. He can always trade the sovereigns at the mint, but he hasn't got to do that yet either. Whatever way you look at it, with the gold supply costing nothing in money, but bringing in heaps of money, he can't lose, provided he deals discreetly and on a wide front.

He soon gets a million and a quarter together, and will soon have to face up to inevitably opening up the inspection pit to get some more raw gold to work on. A grim thought indeed. But he sits pat for the moment and just trades what he has made and gets on with investment broking and advising. His ex-wife now comes looking for him. She has gone upmarket smart in appearance and dress and by golly, she may have been through the breast enhancement clinic. She sure looks the berries. Not that she wasn't good looking to start with, though the non child issue put some frown lines on her face; they seem gone now too. She suggests a weekend at Victor Harbour and they do, very successfully, but John arm-lengths her when she suggests moving back into his pleasant apartment, up a bit higher in the Grenfell Street block.

Chapter Seven

The Honourable Patricia Flowers-Smythe rings John (the Pommy MP he meets at Glyndebourne). "Why don't you fly over for Christmas?"

He does. They have the most fabulous Yuletide at her Cotswold home at Lower Slaughter. It's quite everything an English orientated reader can imagine Christmas to be. A beautiful, warm Chintzy cottage alongside a walk



path, just up from the village shop and duck pond. Holly bushes, carol singers, toffeed drinks, mulled ales – Christmas is quite unbelievable.

They attend morning service. John takes along his oboe and counterpoints with the choir and organ. The Honourable Patricia sings as a sort of guest singer with the choir. She has an eye-opening alto voice, a very good alto

voice and between the two of them, they make a worthwhile contribution to the service.

The Lower Slaughter crowd are very upmarket and John and the Honourable Patricia don't have to worry about cooking up a Christmas storm. The Honourable Patricia knows the world and thus they have pre-lunch drinks at the first port of call, soup at the next, mains at another and Christmas

pudding and brandy at yet another. It's a progressive Christmas dinner to beat all Christmas dinners. He doesn't think he can ever forget that Christmas; they've churched and lunched, beautifully dressed for the cold weather and finally romped naked in a centrally heated bedroom back at the cottage. "We're as pickled as parrots!" Honourable Patricia cries, as she lays out a line of cocaine to give their sex romp an extra zoom.

John fumbles around and places on the naked Patricia, a beautiful kri-shekel neck medallion on a matching chain, which he picked up in Dubai en route to Christmas. It looks and is, magnificent. Patricia admires herself in a long bevel mirror, flings herself on John and says,

"Let me square this off in one torrid session!"

After Christmas, the snow thaws a bit and slush sets in. Walking around the Cotswolds is not fun, so he takes her out to Malta for a few days. They have a pub apartment looking down the uncommon and commanding Grand Harbour. The weather is fabulous and in walking around Valletta, they come across the Princess Royal and 'Tiger' Tim doing the same. Anne's a



stiff old stick, who John has only seen standing at key points of the Edinburgh Festival. However, the Honourable Patricia knows the world, so they stop and have a pleasant chat, at which John thinks 'Tiger' Tim acquits himself well, despite his modest reputation.

After an enjoyable week, they fly to Rome airport and pick up a plane to London for the Honourable Patricia and a Sydney flight for John – the holiday's over. They promise to meet mid-year in Sydney, when Patricia will be returning from a mission to New Zealand. The Honourable Patricia has had a pretty good time. As they do their farewells, she says to John,

"Johnny, if you want to do anything of a longer term nature, I'm open to offers."

They part most cheerfully and well. A far cry from his wifely parting.