



**TOP OF THE WAZAR**

**BY LLOYD NELSON**

**A Les Norton Sequel  
With apologies to the late Robert G Barrett**

## Introduction

Robert G Barrett – Bondi butcher and later resident of Terrigal, has provided many Australians and also overseas readers with his entertaining escapist books featuring that true blue Aussie character, LES NORTON.

Les cruises through life applying common sense to complex situations and a tad of measured aggression when needed and deserved. He's good with women and is a clean-living type with a penchant for buying good brand names in what he wears. Sadly, Robert G Barrett is no longer around. That doesn't have to mean that his famous Les Norton character created by RG has to disappear with RG.

In a spirited attempt to keep Les alive and up and doing, Lloyd Nelson has penned a sequel with legs, of Les's latest escapades. Nelson is not bad on sequels. His last one is Richard Marston's Journey – a continuation of Rolf Boldrewood's famous story, 'Robbery Under Arms', that could have been written by Boldrewood, himself. Read it on [lloydnelson.net](http://lloydnelson.net) short stories.

Dear reader, we need your support to keep Les Norton alive.

Pictured:

Lloyd Nelson on the day he published his first book in the late '70's



## Chapter One

For a late spring day in Sydney Town, the afternoon is a tad sharpish. Les Norton is on a different mission today. He is taking a package out to a lawyer at Rooty Hill.

“Personal delivery, Les you clumsy beggar,” Price says. “Don’t put it in anyone else’s hand, whatever you do.”

“Bang on,” Les says.

So here he is today, really smartly dressed. His shoes are London Oxfords, good for kicking in, dark green trousers, white shirt, Manly tie and a good navy wool blazer over it all. The big red-headed Queenslander looks spruce indeed. He gets on the train at Circular Quay; he’s just ferried over from lunch with a sheila he has his eye on at McMahons Point, he’s set to meet up with again.

The train is fairly full and he sits next to a smallish Italian-looking man. Big Les looks him over. He looks a bit Sicilian to Les; face like a twisted sandshoe, quite well dressed.

“Palermo,” he says to the runtish chap.

“Close, but no cigar,” the man fires back.

Les chuckles, opens his Sydney Morning Herald and starts to scan it. He hardly gets the broadsheet open when there’s a hell of a bubble occurring in the gap between the front seats. Les is sitting in the next row past the train door clearway.

Four big West Africans are having a set-to with the Train Guard. It’s not too clear what the bubble is about, but one of the Africans stiff-arms the guard while another pushes him over and a third, wearing what looks like steel capped boots, sinks the slipper in.

Les isn’t going to stand by and see a four to one comp going down in front of him. He drops his Herald, digs the Italian in the ribs.

“Here,” he says, “grab that bloke’s dreadlocks while I sort out the rest.”

The Sicilian doesn’t say a word, he pulls out a leather plaited sap from his coat and holding the chap, whacks him hard on the temple, then, showing great presence of mind, smashes the CCTV camera just above the door. He has to jump up to do this; it’s quite an athletic effort. Les smashes the best target on the nose, spreads it all over his marks face, blood gushes. He stamps on the foot of the next man, really stamps and as the bloke doubles down, head-butts him really hard. That’s two out and two active ones to go. The next one, he has a bit of a yellow look about him, pulls out a whippy knife. Les grabs the knife man’s arm and dislocates his shoulder. They divest him of the knife from the now useless arm and Les turns now to take out the fourth chap, but the Sicilian has landed a terrible sharp kick to the chap’s genitals and the bloke clutches his groin, giving Les a clear shot at him. He breaks the chaps jaw and gives him another huge pent-up swing that takes out teeth.

## Chapter Two

The train brakes sharply for the next stop. Les is on a roll; by the time the doors open, Les is half-way through bundling two of the chaps out and the Sicilian is dragging a big man out by one leg. They barely get time to fling the last one out as the doors start to close.

Les dusts himself off. "What a mob of rotten cunts," Les says.

The Italian man is now busy clearing the train guard's airway and putting the comatose man in the recovery position. The big Queenslander yells down the carriage, "Any medical man on board? If so, where are you?"

A decently dressed man with a crew cut moves up to join them.

"Paramedic ex Vietnam," he says.

"Work your magic," Les says.

He whacks the Italian on the shoulder.

"You little bottler ding," he says. "You saved the day."

The ding is quick. "We're on the camera," he says. "Let's jump out at the next stop and catch the train after. We might get away with it."

## Chapter Three

While they wait, Les puts out his hand. "Les Norton," he says. "I live at Bondi."

The Italian grins a sardonic grin. "Angelo Abruzzi," he says, "from deepest Carlton."

"What are you doing here, Angelo?" Les asks. "You seem to be a long way out of your territory if, as you say, you're out of Bleak City."

"Just business, pizeness," Angelo says. "God, this town seems to be turning to shit lately."

"Och, aye," Les says. "Mind you, the Moran gang war in Melbourne is stirring the pot down here."

"Aw," says Angelo. "Those idiots have bigger egos than balls. They're interfering with us normal business people going about our business."

They get out at Rooty Hill.

"I'm off to see a lawyer,"

"Lawyers, pawyers..." Angelo says. "Don't use them, they're wordy bastards and very, very greedy. And...if things get dinkum, there's trials, appeals, re-trials and so on. And who benefits? Only the lawyers pawyers who will manufacture reams of gobbledey gook, until the offender runs out of dosh and then he's on his own."

"Yer know," the Italian continues, "I just love Shakespeare. In Act Two of Henry the Sixth, Part Two, he has the King saying, 'First thing we do is kill all the lawyers.' What an admirable sentiment and really, it's in line with the French Revolution, when the out of hand Paris mob lopped the heads off the young lawyers from the Jacobin Club."

"Senza dubbio – Centro e Vero," says Les with a grin and claps his hands.

"Ah..." Angelo says, "you understand a bit of ding-speak it seems. How did you come by that?"

Les looks a bit embarrassed, "In actual fact," he says, "I was trying to get into the pants of an Oz girl whom I met travelling in South Africa. She was off to the English speaking University at Perugia. So I did two semesters there."

"Did it work?" the man asks.

"Ah...", Les says, "It was Mafeking night every night for quite a while. But getting back to lawyers....so Angelo, what do you use in lieu?"

Angelo smiles a wicked little crooked smile. "Generally, a man comes around towards real dark with a Lupara."

"A bloody what?!" Les ejaculates.

"A shotgun, heavy shot, two barrels if necessary."

"And how do you keep it quiet?" Les asks. "For instance most of Melbourne knows who's been shooting who among the Moran family, even if the cops don't."

"Omerta," Angelo says, "no one talks. If they do, someone with a shotgun calls on them. And...there's always the professional assassins, very good at what they do, very efficient, very deadly. Before World War Two, old Benny Mussolini took a dead set on the friends of the friends..."

"Hold hard, Angelo," Les says. "Surely you're talking about the bloody Mafia."

"Mafia, Dafia – don't use that word – there's no such thing."

Les says, "Haven't you read Mario Puso? You mean to tell me the mob he was blowing the whistle on were girl guides and boy scouts?"

Angelo laughs. "Actually, Mario didn't spell it out as it was shown in the TV series. That was Francis Ford Coppola beefing up a thin tale, but..., he says, "getting back to what I was saying; the Friends of the Friends commissioned the Palermo assassins to pot old Benny, but they didn't have to in the finish. Mussolini took the hint and backed off."

"That's very bloody interesting, me old Ding china plate," Les says. "We've had a very entertaining afternoon. Let me get this delivery out of the way and we'll have a drink and work out how best to get back to the steak and kidney CBD."

"Okay," Angelo says. "I'll sit on that bench there, while you do your odd jobbing."

The bar of the Sail and Anchor is quite busy; lots of Lebanese and similar and the old dyed-in-the-wool old Aussies sitting on bar stools and sinking their halves. As they sip, Les says, "If we want to get back to town without attracting the unwanted attention of the bizz and buzz, we had better find alternative transport that won't cost us the arm and leg of a taxi fare."

After a couple of noggins, they walk over to a nearby Servo, where people are filling up cars. Les looks over these, settles surprisingly on a young girl filling a Camry.

"Love," he disarmingly says, "my old mate and I are trying to bum a lift into the CBD. If you could shoe-horn us into your car, I'll pay for the fill."

The girl is as quick as a flash. "I suppose," she says. "You blokes are too well-dressed to be axe murderers. I was going to put twenty dollars' worth in, but if your offer is dinkum, I'll fill the tank and spare jerry can that I've got in the boot."

## Chapter Four

Les is pleased to see how readily Angelo hauls out his wallet to contribute his share of the petrol. The girl is a competent driver and they chat away amicably as they go. She drops them off in Martin Place and gives Les a card.

"Ring me sometime," she says, "you look a good sort to me."

He looks at the card. "Caitlin," he says, "I wouldn't be bragging when I say many have told me that."

"What does your wife say?" Caitlin asks.

"Wash your sweet little mouth out, Caitlin," he replies, "wives are strictly for the lame-brains in this world."

"Oh...", she says, "I'd like to extend that argument some time."

"Caitlin," he says, "I'd welcome the opportunity, but not for a few days, as I have a bit of business going down."

She chuckles. "I won't hold my breath," she says, "but I'll expect to hear from you."

"Geez," Angelo says, "you, my friend, have a sure feel for women."

"Not always, Angelo," he says. "I draw a few rough ones too from time to time, but that one's a real dinky-di sweetie. What about you Angelo - Sicilian wife and lots of mouthy tin lids?"

"No," says Angelo, "I'm all business. If I want a woman, and let's face it, we can't live without them, but can't live with them, I produce a decent little wad of happy baccy and in no time at all, my chosen ones are ready to stand on their pointy little heads if I do so ask them."

"Well, Angelo mate," he says, "we've had a great day. If you're destitute for something to do, come around to the Kelly Club. I'll be outside watching the door, but I'll get you in without charge and I'll get Alison, the duty hostess tonight, to get you sorted and happily parked near the action."

Perhaps just a little to Les's surprise, Angelo turned up very nicely dressed in a Milan sourced suit, and Milan suits are very good indeed.

"Can't stay past 11pm, Les," he says, "got a late flight back to Bleak City."

He has a box under his arm. "I'll have your Alison put this on the club safe if she will," he says.

"Geez mate, I just hope it's not ticking."

"Not at all," Angelo says, "but it may get you ticking when you have a need."

## Chapter Five

When he checks the box a day or two later, he finds a pack of half coronas, a thick package of happy baccy and a big bag of the white stuff. Les never goes beyond a few toques of the best Nimbin product usually, but he knows, of course, who he knows who likes a few lines of the white stuff. But he's cautious too. He takes the white stuff around to a secured facility in Blakehurst and locks it away for the moment.

It's a beautiful summer morning at Bondi. Les is there with Billy Dunne and a couple of Billy's ex-army mates. They've surfed, swam, paddled out a bit on the skis and finished up with a jog along the water's edge. They are all young, big fit men and draw some good glances from the topless girls sunning themselves a few feet from the edge.

The plan is when the army mates go, is to have a steak lunch washed down with mineral water and coffee. But just after the army men go, Les is a bit astonished when visitors arrive, not together. It's Angelo, brown as a berry, wearing only a very small pair of budgie snugglers, Greta Garbo sunnies and a trilby hat.

"Jesus Christ on the mountain, Angelo," Les says. "What a pleasant surprise. How'd you find me?"

"Easy peasy, I phoned you and your flat-mate Warren said I'd find you on the water's edge within spitting distance of the North Bondi 'Risshole'. So here I am."

## Chapter Six

Angelo has arrived carrying two bags; one a purple tote bag and the other a Coles cold bag. This coupled with Angelo's little swim napkin and his tangerine trilby hat and Greta Garbo glasses has drawn comment.

One jobbo yells, "You little poof. Are you canvassing for business?"

Angelo casts an eye over this noisy chap. "You're just a fold of blubber," he says, "You'll never get a starter." But it is just good-natured chaff.

"Hi Les, Hi Angelo," floats through the air; its Caitlin tip-toeing through the sand. She's sort of wearing an eenie weenie swim suit.

"Gawd," says Les, "I've only got two friends and both are here this morning."

Angelo shucks out some salami, cheese and Peroni iced beers.

Caitlin says, "Well Les, as I made my way over, despite being in the near vicinity of drop dead bimbos, most with their tits hanging out, I could see you were surrounded by men. You're not gay are you?"

She sips her Peroni. "Good stuff," she says.

"Ah," says Angelo, "Berlusconi drinks nothing else in the beer line."

Caitlin strips off her top. She's not built like the girls on the water edge, but what she has on display really attracts Les and Angelo's gaze.

## Chapter Seven

But things happen quickly. Five Lebanese young men come walking along the water's edge. They take in the topless bimbos and following an emerging pattern at Bondi, kick sand at the topless girls.

"Bitches, whores," one says, "You are an offence in the eyes of the prophet."

He kicks sand in Caitlin's face. Angelo is out of the blocks in seconds. After a quick dig in his tote bag, he springs the biggest set of brass knuckle-dusters Les has ever seen. He delivers a vicious chop at the Lebanese man's jaw, decks him flat and in a Jackie Chan move, kicks the next one in the groin. Les, perhaps slower to move, but rather unstoppable when he gets momentum, snatches up a close by beach umbrella, closes the top and using the stout wooden shaft, is doing daisy cutters of tremendous momentum on the remaining four or rather three, as one, the smallest is running for his life up the beach. Les crunches his lot in no uncertain fashion. One bloke appears to have a broken elbow, another, a smashed kneecap.

Les growls, "Pity you didn't bring your prophet. I could have shoved this umbrella stick up his arse, pointy end first."

The bloke running has put out a call like a Muezzin calling his flock to prayer. Les can see another group of Lebanese running up the water's edge toward them. Angelo, who is as quick as, says, "Ah, we need a diversion." He dips into his bag and produces a bell-mouth flare gun. He looks at the sun, lifts his finger to test the wind and fires an upward shot into the air. A huge burst of saffron smoke emerges as the flare hits a chap in the middle of the advancing bunch. His mates stop and throw him in the sea.

A double cabber truck comes racing over the sand to where the flare has landed and is burning brightly. The coppers jump out, one of the Lebanese levers their fuel tank open and sets a wick. In no time the truck turns into an inferno. This is old rope to ex-Beirut people. All this is creating different zones of action on Bondi Beach. Angelo dives into his bag, brings out a small notebook and a decent flick-knife.

"That little cunt will angle back across the beach," he says. "Let's see if we can edge him off."

The Lebanese is doing exactly what Angelo predicts and the closing angle favours the pursuit. Angelo starts to swing a steel boule ball on a lash, around his head as he runs. This entangles with the running man and they have him. Les arrives along and kicks the chap in the head. Angelo gets at him with the flick-knife, lops a bit off one earlobe, boy does it bleed! Angelo slits the chap's bathers, Les takes a slash at this chaps crown jewels.

"Names," he says, "Names or you will have no tackle to mix it with your promised black eyed virgin in Paradise."

A couple more kicks from Les and a dislocation of his elbow produces the name. Les stamps on the elbow, the dark chap screams. Angelo, who for a little guy, has shown amazing abilities to assess a bad scene and to take palliative action, says, "Let's make for the change rooms."

## Chapter Eight

The morning moves on. They get changed into shorts and tee-shirts and go to lunch. The 'Risshole's pretty crowded today, but they gather up enough chairs to get a table together.

"What's this do you are perhaps inviting me to?" Les asks Caitlin.

"Ah...it's at McMahons Point Thursday evening. Meet me at the Porthole at 7.45 sharp. It's a short walk from there and we must be there at 8pm sharp."

"It's an off night at the club. Onyer, Caitlin," he says. "What's the dress code?"

"A good button at the neck business shirt," she says, "white of course, and it must have a top pocket."

"What for?" Les asks.

"All will be revealed Thursday night, Les," she says, "and now I must away. I've promised my parents to be home for afternoon tea. It's a family get together."

She goes and they watch her walk away with deep interest.

"She sure is a drawcard despite the slightness of her stature," Angelo says. "It's near impossible to imagine her as a fat middle-aged matron, but that's the way most of them go."

Les says, "Well, Angelo, now we've stopped perving on Caitlin, what's brought you here to Bondi?"

“I could say necessity. With the Moran thing in full flight, there’s too many bodies floating in Port Phillip Bay for swimming.”

## Chapter Nine

“Come fishing,” Angelo says. “Ten days away. Meet up at Port Macquarie Tuesday. Bring your passport; we’re going close by international. You will need decent shorts and long socks and a business short-sleeved shirt. It’s a fun cum business trip with some decent fishing and drinking. In and out of Port Macquarie.”

“You’re on,” Les says. “Is this a confidential trip?”

“No, not at all, but I like to keep out of the limelight. Just don’t tell anyone and I mean anyone who you are going with and please, no satellite phones.”

Les drives up to Port Macquarie in his Berlina. As instructed, he arrives at the Port and dumps his gear aboard the ‘Sandgroper’, quite a decent looking craft, purposeful looking. Great big Evinrude twin outboard motors, several pram dinghies strapped up tight to the side.

They go out well into the Coral Sea and put out a dead anchor to keep the boat heading up into slight swell and get into fishing. About 4pm, a float plane skims over them and drops a streamered container. They drop a pram dinghy into the water and scull over to pick up the floating item. It’s just a biggish esky fitted with floats. Angelo tucks it into the cabin and they pull in the dead anchor and set course for Port Moresby.

When they make port, the humidity is so bad; they have difficulty making out the shore. Angelo is scanning the jetty with a small tech glass.

“It’s all fine, Lewis,” Angelo tells the skipper, “Take her in.”

Worded up, Les has on his shorts, long socks and a short-sleeve shirt. Angelo has brought up the plane dropped box, hands Les a carpetbag, its heavy.

“Les,” he says, “We’ve done this run just so many times, but you never know. I’ve brought you along; you’re so big that you make quite a respectable deterrent. Now look in the bag, I know you know about these things and again, they are only a deterrent.”

Les opens the wooden handles of the bag. There’s a Beretta Trap gun, 12 gauge in there. It’s been well cut down. The gun’s open.

“Just close the breach and fire at will,” Angelo says with a grin.

## Chapter Ten

A tall chap dressed like them hops down into the boat. Angelo hands him the passports of those going ashore. He puts an Australian \$100 note inside each, grabs one end of the box and says, “Let’s go.”

One of the crew goes to buy return supplies from the markets on the other side of the wharf. The tall man, introduced as Hiram Bellamy from the Port Moresby Timber Bank, leads them to the guard shack. Hiram hands over the passports; the bloke in charge just stamps them and hands them back to Hiram. They get into Hiram’s car, a very well kept Lexus and they go up into town.

Angelo unlocks the box, spills the contents on the floor of the Managers office. Its layer upon layer of close packed and banded one hundred dollar Australian notes. Two clerks count it carefully. Hiram goes over to the computer terminal and sends

off a wire transfer. They sit down to double espressos and some savoury croissants. Bellamy looks at Les. Angelo grunts, "He's safe or he'd better be."

"Hmm," says Bellamy, "the main bank in Helsinki has too much money in it. Also, Cyprus is a bit overloaded. Best move soon."

Angelo says, "Yes we have plans to. Now....here's the satellite pass times for your next scheduled drop. If there's any change we will be in touch."

They are back in Port Macquarie in no great time. They unload the frozen fish they've caught and Angelo gives Les a freezer box with some choice fillets in it.

Angelo says, "I came down from Coolangatta in a hire car and it's been returned. If I may, I'll ride back to Sydney with you."

"No probs, mate," Les says.

## Chapter Eleven

Angelo doesn't have much to say until they get down to near Gosford. Les asks no questions. Angelo finally opens up a bit.

"Les, old pal," he says, "we've had a pleasant trip, we haven't done anything illegal in Australian waters and thanks to the corruption that is endemic in New Guinea, and in particular, Port Moresby, we've had no problems that end either. The fishing charters are of a long running nature. Customs sometimes turn out boat over going and coming, but that's their job anyway and there's nothing for them to find. We get away with the shotguns as being necessary for sea snakes or sharks."

"How in heavens name...," Les asks, "do you get the satellite schedules?"

Angelo laughs. "I guess every intelligence man dreams of retiring to the Caribbean. We're making it possible for some key men to do just that. Of course, we don't put up the full amount. A lot of people club in to when the eye in the sky will pass over, so all we have to do is chip in a bit. Hiram, at the Timber Bank organises this for us."

As they get closer to Sydney, Angelo hands a heavy envelope to Les.

"Bit of cash in there," he says, "you did a good job."

"But nothing happened," Les expostulates.

"Exactly," says Angelo. "That's what I wanted."

Back at the flat, Warren is out. Les opens the envelope. There's seven thousand dollars inside, all in one hundred dollar notes. There's a note inside written in a crabbed hand. It reads, 'money is handy stuff, but don't bank it anywhere other than safe deposit box or under a discreet stone.'

Having missed out on Caitlin's cocktail party, Les has to square himself off. He phones Caitlin, "Love, I've been fishing."

"Hmm," she says, "you're a heartless bastard. Instead of bringing along a big upstanding handsome fellow, I finished up a spare wheel."

"So you missed out completely," Les says.

"Not at all, not at all," Caitlin says, "but there's another one Thursday. Are you good for that?"

"Caitlin love," he says, "wild horses wouldn't keep me away."

"In that case," she says, "now that I know the drill, I'll meet you in town Tuesday and we'll shirt shop for you."

After a quick light lunch she has him in Pardoe's at the Centre Point Tower looking at Turnbull and Asser shirts. She's very picky.

“It’s got to be white white.” she says. “Long sleeves, button down collar and it must be a really good fit. This one with the black buttons is a stunner.”

‘Keerrist,’ thinks Les, when, after a bit of searching, he finds the price tag, but he goes along with it. Thanks to good old Angelo, he’s not short of the chocolate freddies. She hands him a note; typed up.

## Chapter Twelve

‘Essentials’ she has typed. Good shower, close shave, wash your hair and use conditioner, shirt over buttoned fully, normal shoes, roomy cotton trousers – tans only.

They meet up at the Porthole.

“Don’t worry about a drink, Les,” she says. “The booze flows very well at these shows, or at least the one I went to. Cover charge for the men is a one hundred dollar note, just the one big note; no makeup of change.”

As she’s spitting this out, Les is looking her over. She’s wearing a duplicate albeit much, much smaller of his Turnbull and Asser shirt, a beautiful gold medallion on a chain and gold slip-on sandals with a touch of heel. They walk up a few blocks to a good-looking apartment block. A big chap in a dinner suit is checking out anyone going to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor. Les knows him.

“Benny,” he says.

“Bloody hell,” Benny says. “How’d you get a guernsey for this one, Les? This isn’t the Cross, this is upmarket and I mean upmarket only.”

Caitlin flashes the invite. “That’s enough from you, my good man, if you want to keep this job.”

Benny’s face falls. “Of course I do and I do what I’m told.”

“And what’s that, Benny?” Les asks.

“Ah...look, but don’t ever touch.”

They laugh their way into the lift and get out at 11. The entrance hall is very dimly lit; another big man checks the invite and lets them in the door. The lighting, although expensive looking, is very subtle indeed; the room is not big and there’s about a dozen boys and girls in it. Les recognizes the hostess; she’s a bit of a power-house on the Sydney scene, but he’s never met her. Their timing is pretty right.

She strikes a gong. “Game on,” she says. “Drinks are now up.”

There are two drinks waiters; again, Les has seen them at shows around town. All of the men match Les’s dress and all of the women match Caitlin’s. The drink waiters are dressed the same. The drinks flow swiftly and smoothly; the waiters are also serving shooters, either separately or tipped into the drinks they are serving. Exactly thirty minutes of ‘down the hatching’ later, the hostess dings her gong again.

“We are now...,” she says, “moving into the more subtle part of the evening. Men into that room there, girls, the one on the other side. Put a tag on your discards.”

“What’s that all about?” Les asks Caitlin.

“Just shuck off your shoes and socks and tans,” she says. “Put a written tag on yours for ID when reclaiming them later.”

Les does as he’s told and they all come out again to mix and mingle wearing just their shirts, but buttoned up and in the case of the men, certainly riding up. The

lights now get dimmer and the drinks service faster. After 15 minutes, the hostess dings the bell.

"Turn around now," she says, "and unbutton your shirts except for your collar button."

## Chapter Thirteen

"Geez, Caitlin," Les says, "is this a turn on?" Which, of course it is.

An older man closes on Caitlin and Les. With the shirts unbuttoned, Les's Mr Wobbly loses his collywobbles and springs up like a steel bar. The girls now take out condoms from their top pockets and start to cap the many Mr Non-wobblies in the room.

"Preston," the girl says to the older man, "I'm with Les tonight, but perhaps later will be fine. Go and grab yourself a new first. If you need a reference, send them over to me."

Les is getting a bit glassy-eyed with what is dimly on show. A very young girl comes over to Caitlin.

"That old chap, Preston, has put up his hand for me. God, he's old enough to be my Dad."

Caitlin laughs. "He's the ideal one to start with," she says. "Les stood me up last time and it was him or no one. Boy, did he produce a smooth act; he rang my bell and some other bells that I didn't know I had. Grab him quick, he's worth having."

The hostess rings another bell – the gong she is using. "A toast," she says, "to fun." They all skol it down. "Now...form two circles," she says. "men clockwise, girls anti-clockwise and find your partner for the fun."

Les beats a couple of other blokes off Caitlin, takes her arm and goes looking for privacy. There's not much left.

"The laundry," Caitlin says, "and bring that pouffe."

"Geez," says Les, "I didn't know there'd be any poofs here. If there are, they're in for a big disappointment."

"You stupid lug," Caitlin says. "The thing on the floor...the bean bag."

She helps Les drag it through the door, shuts the door and on her hands and knees kneeling, buries her beautiful face in the vinyl. Mr Wobbly, by this time, is absolutely screaming to go.

"This way?" Les asks.

"Yep," she says. "You're such a big man that this will avoid me being squashed."

Les goes for broke. Mr Wobbly cuts to the chase and shows amazing stamina before he vomits big time. Les is staggering around using his teeth to open the next cellophane pack when Preston muscles in the door.

"Excuse me, excuse me," he says, "I don't want to waste that position."

Les is not ungenerous and Mr Wobbly is deserving of a spell.

"Okay," he says, "go for it."

He watches the action. The older chap is very, very expert and Caitlin acts accordingly.

## Chapter Fourteen

The cocktail party comes to a firm end with the hostess ringing the sort of bell used at country schools and football matches. Les and Caitlin pick up their gear, get redressed and part amicably with their host. They walk back down to the Port Hole Bar.

“Gawd, Les,” she says, “I’m beat at the knees.”

“Yeah, but it was mint fun,” Les says.

“I have to say,” Caitlin says, “that that old beggar is a class act, a real insidious, overwhelming class act.”

“I wasn’t up to scratch?” Les asks.

“Oh yes, Les, but old Preston knows how to set the scene and build one up to a crescendo similar to Tchaikovsky’s masterpiece – the 1812 Overture. It’s all about ringing bells.”

Caitlin is looking as though she has been pulled through a hedge backward. Reflecting the stress of the evening, she’s a bit dishevelled.

Les says, “Me old china plate, let’s have a cold Millers Draught.”

The waiter brings them one; she skols it down.

“Jam and Jerusalem, Les,” she says. “That was as good as an orgasm, and I should know. I’ve had a few tonight and the taste of that after the mouthwash served up at the cocktail party, is rather divine.”

Les laughs and beckons the drinks waiter over. “Bring us a couple more orgasms, mate,” he says.

## Chapter Fifteen

The big Queenslander is a bit wrung out after the McMahon Point shenanigans and has no need of female company for the moment. So he thinks when he wakes up, it would be best to mend a few fences at the Kelly Club, where he’s been away more often than he’s been there lately.

There’s a note from Warren in the kitchen warning Les he’s wanted on a TV commercial job at Jenolan next day. He does a bit of this from time to time and his mates give him shit when the ads; about 95% pf which end up on the cutting room floor, he thinks, come out. But he’s a good Aussie talent and the public seem to like him. Whatever is being put out on print ads and film doesn’t usually bring much in the way of feedback comment, but Les’s style, or perhaps the outlandish way they depict him, has people saying to him in the streets of Sydney on odd occasions, ‘I think I know you.’ Les’s stock reply to this is; ‘Well hardly, I just arrived from Darwin this morning, first visit.’

He decides to organise a bit more backup for when he can’t make his Kelly Club shift and rings an old mate; Linus, an ex-military policeman, one of the dreaded Red Caps. They meet for brekky at the Starlight smorgasbord at the Hilton. They front first at the salad bar. Les loads his plate with everything he can find and another with fruit. He gets a big glass of tomato juice bedded over crushed ice and tips a deal of Worcester sauce into it. He then munches his way through a big bowl of Bircher Muesli. While all this is going down well, he orders an omelette with tomato and capsicum with small slivers of avocado. They finish on a pot of extra grouse herb tea.

## Chapter Sixteen

Linus has mellowed a bit since he left the army and Les words him up on the best way to do the fill-in work at the Kelly Club.

"Its easy work mate," Les says, "but remember, unlike what you used to do, in this job the customer is always right unless they're wrong. The punters like to hear a bit of ruckus; it adds colour to their evening. Price has a bit player who comes in, makes an arsehole of himself and gets not so forcibly ejected. We can't put a bit of sheep raddle on his back to tell you that he's not kosher, so when they tell you what's coming up, make sure you lamp him well and don't throw the wrong bloke out. By the way," he continues, "all of the work at the Kelly Club goes to the tune of Johnny Cash. You'll find it puts quite a decent lump of chocolate freddies in your sky rocket – so don't, I repeat, don't stuff up."

With this stand-in arranged, Les goes around to the Goldstein and Fitch Advertising Agency and winkles out Warren.

"Just go to Caves House at Jenolan by 10am," Warren says. "We've got a fair bit of stuff going up. We've got a bit of similar talent coming up and I don't want to mix them in with the hard-bitten bastards on the camera crew. What about ringing Delilah Stone on this number and pick her up as you go."

"Onyer Warren," Les says, "and will I have to wear a blonde stringy wig again at this fucking show?"

Warren chuckles. "Yours is not to reason why old fruit," he says. "Just roll with the punches."

Delilah turns out to be down to earth and delightful. They have a very amicable trip, both coming and going. The commercial is a mish-mash of Australian Bushranger and bikini girls, of which Delilah is the lead. Apart from all the confusion and stuff-ups involved in any commercial shoot, they have a deal of fun and this comes through clearly in the finished result, which wins a prize at the annual commercial film awards later that year.

## Chapter Seventeen

Les, in his Ben Hall gear, bush hat, false beard and six shooter in his belt, winkles out Delilah for lunch. It's a vegetarian salad bar with a bit of tofu tossed in for substance; uninspiring, but quite filling.

"Geez Delilah," he says, "what would you give for a plate of bacon and eggs right now with toast and jam and washed down by a big frothy cappuccino?"

"Toss in a couple of neat cognacs and I'd be ready for a shag in the sun," she laughingly replies.

A little light flashes on in Les's uncomplicated, but savvy mind.

"Could Delilah, I interest you, subject to a little notice, in a very, very upmarket cocktail party?"

She doesn't really reply to that until he is dropping her off outside Goldfinch and Fitch's.

"I've had a fun day. Les, thanks to your droll humour," she says. "What does one wear to this cocktail party?"

“Ah,” Les says, “Ring us when you have enough time for lunch in town, say...three hours and I’ll take you around to the shop that sells what you will indeed need.”

“Bang on, Les,” she says; blows him a kiss and departs.

## Chapter Eighteen

Les gets involved in a bit of a dust-up. A tall man with a wispy little beard gets upset with the wait staff. He throws a glass of wine over a young wait person and says, “You’re a fucking wanker.”

A distress call comes out to Les, who is taking it easy out front of the Kelly Club at the Cross and busy chatting up a good-looking young South Australian girl.

“Les...Les... Les,” the runner says. “You’re badly wanted.”

“Don’t go away,” he says to the croweater, “I won’t be long.”

He takes in the tall bearded one shouting abuse at the staff, grabs his coat collar and frog marches him out the club door and throws him into the street. He kicks him in the backside and says, “I have a message for you from the Management. It’s short and simple.” He bellows, “FUCK OFF!”

Les is not to know this chap is a professor of English from a Gold Coast University in Sydney on a speaking engagement. Some weeks later he is served by a nervous process server to appear in court charged with bodily harm and offensive language. Les turns up in court without a lawyer. He’s a bit skint at the time and thinks the charge is ludicrous anyway, as he was just doing the job he’s paid to do.

The judge makes light of the assault charge when Les call the waiter to tell his tale and then moves to the bad language bit. The judge is a bit of a liberal and after a very spirited attempt by the Law Professor’s Queen’s Counsel to nail Les on the bad language bit, the judge settles himself in like an old chook making a nest and enunciates;

“The words ‘fuck off’ as the lynchpin of the case against the defendant involving perhaps severe penalties, is a non-sequitar. Fuck has become so common in daily usage in a multitude of cases that it seems hardly likely that my learned friend, a QC no less, is doing other in a way and in effect is rowing upstream without a paddle to make this charge stick.”

“Objection, Your Honour,” the QC shouts.

“Sit down, Sir,” the judge says. “I’m going to adjourn this case.”

Les now pipes up, “In that case, Your Honour, bearing in mind your erudite comment and that you are about to adjourn the court, I’m sure you won’t mind at all if I fuck off.”

The court subsides into raucous laughter and the stringer from the Herald runs a picture of Les, immaculately dressed, leaving the court. Les is not stupid, mouths to the journo, ‘fuck off’, and strides down the steps. A court expert, expert that is, in lip reading and much hired by the football commentators to interpret what is being said at games, tells the reporter what Les said and this too adds to headline in the Herald.

## Chapter Nineteen

Price gives Les a serve next day.

“You could have said the Kelly Club is the best place in town.”

Les mouths the same comment and pours a solid scotch out of Price’s office decanter.

Les, resplendent in a roomy dinner suit, is picking and choosing who gets in the door of the Kelly Club. It’s a bit of a gala night; Solly Brandis, literary critic at the Courier Mail has a birthday and has brought along to the club a big table of Sydney-siders, well known ones at that. He jollies Les a bit as he gets in the door.

“Gawd, Les,” he says, “we write solemn prose to higher the education of our Scotch and Bleeders, never get any praise or indeed feedback. You get hauled into the Sydney Courthouse for throwing one of our most illustrious members into the street and advising, nay telling, him to ‘fuck off’ and then create a literary cause celebre in so doing, then appear in the headlines and lead stories of press and television.”

## Chapter Twenty

Solly’s mob have been liquid lunching at the Potts Point Hilton today and are a bit raucous; Les shirtfronts one of the slurry ones.

“I’ll let you in fella,” Les says, “but the bar staff will serve you water only.”

“Onyer,” says Solly, who has had a few himself. “Very wise crowd control indeed,” he continues.

Les gives a belly laugh. He has to keep alert. He drafts three young Lebanese men out of the line. He knows they are not here to drink and he’s not going to give them a chance to cause trouble among the real drinkers.

“Out,” he says, “and don’t come back.”

They bridle at this a bit.

“You cunt, Norton,” one of them says. “How can you ban us,” they say, “if you’re prepared to let that sleaze and his doxy in?”

They point at the pair Les has passed as good to go in. It’s really a fair question, but Les is not into fairness. The Lebanese are not to know of course, that the pair they point to, often are quite good bit players in a Sydney street players group hired by Price tonight to stage a full on, but somewhat humorous domestic later in the evening to provide the punters with a colourful incident that will enliven their night out and give them something to talk about later when recounting their club visit. Les gives the Lebanese a thousand yard stare, makes pushing movements with his hands.

“Yours not to reason why, old cock,” he says. “Now I’ve spent enough of my valuable time on you. Get chalking or I’ll make you beggars airborne down the steps.”

## Chapter Twenty-one

There's always possible danger in culling door crowds and lately there have been a number of drive by shootings at the clubs. Tonight, Les has a reliable chap with a shotgun loaded with rock salt staked out on the flat roof of the building opposite just in case. Anyone catching muzzle flashes from a 12 gauge shotty isn't likely to query what is in the gun firing at them before splitting for cover.

Drive-by shootings were, at this time, the height of the Sydney drug supply turf wars – quite bad for business. Nobody got killed so far, but several crowd controllers were shot. Luckily the drive-by people never got into shotguns; always a rifle. A customer got knocked down by a rifle shot outside of Elkins. Price has taken some measures such as fitting his bouncers with Kevlar bulletproof vests; his have Kevlar to the elbows and he stands the racket of having roomy dinner suits made to accommodate all this without detracting from movement. But the customers start staying away, which is of course, the lever the drug dealers want.

Price asks Les for his views.

"Jesus mate," Les says, "it's no fun being the Aunt Sally out front and giving first aid to customers who come for a good night out and finish up bleeding on the footpath."

"I understand that, Les," he says, "but plainly, unless the shooter is a shithouse shot, the gun fire is indiscriminate rather than targeted."

"Umm," Les says, "but the next upgrade of this nasty little war may be targeted to set an example."

"So what do we do?" Price asks. Les thinks this may indeed be a rhetorical question only, but he puts his bib in.

## Chapter Twenty-two

"Given about four weeks lead time, I can stop it dead," Les says. "It will cost some cash up front, no results guaranteed, but what I have in mind is sure-fire really."

"Tell me about it," Price says.

"No," says Les, "No doubt you've heard about the king who told all his secrets down a well and died in bed at 107. Look upon me in this case as royalty. But, money has to be spent and those that stand to benefit big time again, should contribute to the dosh to fund this sure-fire idea."

A few days later, when Les is just back from a run on the beach, followed by a bit of surf-boarding, Linus comes around to Chez Norton.

'Price wants you,' he says, "wearing a good suit. There's an action meeting being held at the Killing Pen in Elkins over a sandwich lunch."

Les rides over to the meet up with Price.

"Les," he says, "sit against the wall just behind me and look menacing. I'm going to float your idea. How much dosh do you need?"

"Thirty thousand," Les says. "No less."

There are ten well-suited people at the meet. The famous hostess of this bar, Eleanor, where for many years they charge a flat rate at their happy hour of \$20 per drink and have made Elkins 'a must be seen at' bar, drawing the cream of Sydney society from the judiciary, real estate, the odd politician, movers and shakers from

around town and visiting firemen, is present. The owner of Elkins is as smart as a whip and some of the better known drinkers are drinking on comp. The cash pay-off man outs the drinkies money in their pocket. They are more or less the Judas sheep common in abattoirs to get newcomers and regulars slurping the \$20 a pop booze.

### **Chapter Twenty-three**

Les has been here in the past using Price's money for intelligence gathering. It's quite astonishing who comes in; financial writers, media shock jocks, the best known footballers and racing owners and trainers and so on.

Les looks the assembly over. There are no Rhode Scholars among this aging lot, he thinks. Most of them must have fallen off the lucky tree and again, mostly through owning the real estate to house their clubs. When it's all said and done, it's the women that come to these bars who are the unpaid drawcards for the men, and they flock in.

Les gazes reflectively at this, perhaps, Sydney version of the Mafia. They are all well-dressed; all have holiday homes at Terrigal, Surfer's Paradise or Bowral; all drive Mercedes, two Rolls Royces. They look soft, but they all have active brains and like all businessmen of this type, are smart enough to recruit smart lazy men to keep their little empires running. The only really dangerous one among them is Italian. His club is on the outer fringes of the Cross, so he has to work harder to make a dollar.

### **Chapter Twenty-four**

Les gets called to explain his possible solution.

"I used to be in the finance world," Les says.

"Ah," one fellow interjects, "You're the man who told the judge you were fucking off from his court."

"True enough," Les says, "but now button your lip." Les continues, "Supposing you have a drug supply or supplier in your clubs, this is all about the drive-by backers wanting a share of the action. To bring this about, they're starting to dint your cash flow. The partners of punters are now saying to their bread-winners – stay away, it's too dangerous, think of your wife and kids (and the occasional boyfriend and the credit cards which stem from the bread-winners income really). This is about to get worse. I can put a stopper on this."

"How?" one fellow yells. "We're not going to put money blindly into something we know nothing about."

Les pauses. "Let me restate," he says. "Your cash flows are affected now and when the drive-bys get just a bit smarter, they will start to really shoot punters, not just at them. It can be stopped and your input, between you, has to be \$30,000; barely enough, but probably enough."

"To do what?" the same man yells.

Les eyeballs him. "The best prepared and least successful military action in history," he says, "was the Battle of the Somme. All because somebody in Government wanted to know the plan and foolishly told his wife. The least surprised army in the world was the Krauts; they knew it was coming and when, as did most attendees at top dinner parties in London at the time. For that reason," he continues,

“stump up your dough to Mr Price and leave it to us. Now, I’m not one of you; I’m an employee of one of you and having told you I have the solution to your problem. I’m out of here.”

## Chapter Twenty-five

That night after they close the club, Price tells Les that they’ve gone along with the idea.

“Words,” Les says, “Here I am, on my Pat Malone, with a failsafe idea and no lump of dosh in sight. Those fat cats wouldn’t know an alligator until it bit them on the arse.”

“We’re not all fat cats,” Price says.

“Oh,” says Les, “so the holiday home at Terrigal, the flat in Knightsbridge, London and the office block in Basle are the accoutrements of a poor man?”

“How’d you know about them, you cunt,” Price says.

Les says, “I quote local knowledge only. For all I know, that’s only the tip of a bloody big iceberg.”

“Besides,” says Price, “that Italian bloke at the Protea Club isn’t rich.”

“No,” says Les, “but he’s connected. You blokes would do well to get someone on the inside there; he’ll move on you sooner or later.”

## Chapter Twenty-six

The dosh comes through and Les gets rolling. He knows perfectly well that someone at the big meet will spill the beans to someone else, although it’s not in their interests to do so. But, as Les tells himself, even Jesus Christ couldn’t put a dozen men together without getting one bad apple, so he is only being quite realistic in his assumption.

He takes a good bush engineer, who normally spends his time fixing up dry cleaning and bakery machines and keeping them running. They go down to Bankstown and locate the Reserve that Ashton’s Circus is set up on. Les winkles out the boss.

“I’m approaching with benefits,” he tells the man handing him a bottle of Black Label Johnnie Walker. “I want to have a look at the device you have been firing the Human Cannonball out of to delight the crowds over the years...and no...,” he continues, “I’m not setting up in opposition. We just want to see what makes it work.”

“Who are you going to fire out of it?” the Ringmaster asks.

“Well,” Les says, “perhaps Joe Hockey.”

“Gawd,” the man says, “He’ll never fit in it, despite the appealing nature of what you have in mind. Come this way.”

It seems simple enough and the circus lends him the plans for an hour or so to enable Les to make a copy at the printers.

“It’s simple enough in principle, but what size do you want it?” the engineer says.

“Big enough to fire a basketball,” Les says.

He gives the man a couple of green notes to get him started.

“Test firing in two weeks,” Les says.

“Umm, perhaps,” the techie says, “but quite likely.”

## Chapter Twenty-seven

Les is in fact, setting up a plausible diversion; he now gets onto his main plan. He drives his Berlina down to a mechanics workshop just off Parramatta Road, winkles out Felspar, a very bright mechanical worker. Felspar invented the catching arm that Buffalo hunters used to pull beasts out of a herd in the dry season on the Marrakai out from Darwin. This was, of course, before the geniuses in the NT came up with the idea of shooting them from choppers.

Les spells out his idea. "I want a super-fast sprint type car. It has to be a solid one. It will need a ram bar on the front and it has to have a steel plate fitted over the windscreen with a slit device like in tanks...um...and a rear ram bar too."

Felspar says, "I have quite a good old Monaro; they're solid beasts that could handle that."

"Licensed?" Les asks.

"Well, not yet."

"Don't want it licensed," Les says, "but a personal plate reading 'GOTCHA' would be good if you can dolly one up."

Felspar laughs. "I know a man in the plate works," he says, "no probs."

"I'd like it a bit sinister looking," Les says. "matt black, perhaps."

"Umm," Felspar says, "windscreen, push-bars, plates – take only a few days. We'll start souping up the engine tonight."

"I don't want it particularly loud," Les says. "But it must be fast, look menacing and so on. It's a Johnny Cash deal and there's upfront start-up money if you like. Good tyres are a must."

Seventeen days later, Les is looking at what he ordered. It runs like a German watch, the ram bars would be okay on an army tank and the whole thing does indeed look sinister.

"Who's going to drive this power wagon?" Felspar asks.

"Umm," Les says, "I'd like Jack Brabham Junior, but won't, of course, get him. You'll do nicely."

## Chapter Twenty-eight

"I fully expect," Les says, "that this monster properly handled will only have the one outing and that outing is totally successful. I am able to put \$12,000 extra hoot and hollers in your sky rocket. We'll give you a good Kevlar flak jacket. You'll want a flame-proof suit."

"What's the target?" Felspar reasonably asks. "The Commonwealth Bank cash transfer tin can?"

"No," says Les. "Our target won't be anything out of the ordinary. The last time out, they used a Holden Cruze. The wheelman will be ordinary. They'll have shooters of course, but the odds are you can probably rear end them and then come back to knock the sides in."

"With them in or out of it?" Felspar reasonably asks.

"Either," Les says. "Just one outing, properly handled, will fill my principal's needs. But it wouldn't do to have the slip and slops find it in your carport."

“Oh,” says Felspar, “I can burn it if you like, but I have a deep burrow near the CBD that may suffice.”

Les knows that Felspar’s main income comes from a chop shop he runs, but he doesn’t have a clue where it is.

Next, Les has a very interesting lunch with his bikie boss mate up at the Hawkesbury. They strike a deal. The bikies get busy and steal or otherwise acquire some good enduro type bikes and some good quality non-bikie leathers and other gear.

“No flashness,” he says. “Black as the night and very discreet.”

The most difficult part of Les’s plan is getting the skinny on the next drive-by, but the bikies give this to him. He’s amazed.

“How did you get that, Eddie?” Les asks.

The big bikie chuckles. “Without violence at all, at all,” he says. “And if the information I have just given you is spot on, the crime Godfather, who we think hails from the Bekaa Valley way back, will get his wife and younger child back.”

“How’s she faring?” Les asks.

Eddie laughs. “She’s having a holiday,” he says. “We’ve tossed out her Burka, given her a bit of Milan sourced wear and taught her how to play poker. She doesn’t seem too worried about Allah, but I expect she was press-ganged into wifedom and motherhood to that ugly little coloured bastard.” He pauses. “I think it was Whitlam who let these beggars in. We thought about taking him out in return for the troubles he’s brought to our once safe little country by opening the borders, but we left it too late. We thought about Keating; everyone would be pleased to shoot him, but it wasn’t in his timeframe in power, so we let it go – reluctantly.”

## **Chapter Twenty-nine**

It’s a sweet deal on the night. The shooters use a stolen Lexus. They are shadowed on their way by expert motorbike riders and just before they get to their selected club, which tonight is not the Kelly Club, Felspar rams them in the cars backside with his railway iron rammer; frightens them to death and then, when he’s got the car hard up against a building, he comes back at speed to ram the side panels back and reversing front. They get a few wildly aimed shots off and the only real casualty is the driver, who, in the wash-up, loses a leg.

Drive-by club shootings now disappear from the scene. In the wash-up, no one in the syndicate asks for a list of expenses or money back. Despite the violence that Les performs has to get up to in his daily work, he’s quite a softie at heart. He donates the left-over dosh in a padded bag to the television station that has publicised the misfortunes of quite a decent family. All anonymous, of course.

## **Chapter Thirty**

Everything, of course, gets out. A few mornings later, at Chez Norton, a poultice of police, mostly Australian Federal Police and some locals, including Detective Caccano, turn up at his door bellowing, ‘Police and Security, open up, open up’. Les, luckily, is awake and having a coffee, he’d decided to give the Bondi beach a pounding this lovely morning.

“What do you bastards want?” Les reasonably asks, taking in the door rammer, sledge hammer man, shotguns and other equipment.

“We want you,” the head AFP man says. “We are reliably informed that you were the mastermind behind the serious injury to Australian citizens in a car ramming incident.”

“First of all,” Les says equably, “I would have preferred it if you’d rung and asked me for an appointment; secondly, the Australian Nationals you are talking about all used to live in the Bekaa Valley until the Israeli’s made it too hot for them and they came here and some mental deficient in the Immigration Service, allowed them to be naturalized. Last and not least,” he continues, “I commissioned a special purpose vehicle to stop the drive-bys, mainly because I seemed to be those bastards favourite target.”

Caccano plucks his sleeve, puts up his hand, moves Les over a bit and makes shushing noises to the Federal cops.

## **Chapter Thirty-one**

“Christ on the mountain, Les,” he says. “If you lead them to that Batman car used to ram the crooks with, the next swim at Bondi you take will be, even with good behaviour, probably ten years in the future.”

“Detective Caccano,” Les says, “it’s my duty as a good citizen to make a full disclosure to you conscientious keepers of the peace.”

Caccano shrugs his shoulders. “Les old mate,” he says, “you’re fucking barking mad.”

“Ah,” Les says, “it’s not as bad as it sounds.”

He takes them out in convoy to his mechanic friend’s house. The man opens up his single garage and parked inside, grille facing out, is an old Toyota Hi-Ace van.

“Is it good to go, Ted?” he asks.

“Yes, Les,” the man says. “Everything is as promised.”

“What the fuck is this?” the head AFP man asks, looking hard at the beat up old van with what appears to be an air conditioner or a storage locker well front on the roof.

“You couldn’t ram anything with this,” the man says.

“Never said it could,” Les replies, “but it’s off-putting just the same. Let’s demonstrate it.....if you will step well back down the driveway.”

## **Chapter Thirty-two**

“Away you go, Ted,” he says.

Ted puts his thumb up, starts the old diesel and engages a drive belt lever which fires a stinking mess out of the mini cannonball launcher. It showers the coppers from head to foot. They run around like headless chooks.

“What in Christ is this?” the head cop asks, when he gets his spectacles clear.

“Wet pig shit,” Les says. “Unfortunately, someone unknown got to the drive-by shooters before we had the chance.”

Caccano bursts into fits of uncontrollable laughter. “Les, Les, Les,” he says. “This is just fucking too much.”

Les breathes on his fingernails. “I do my best,” he says.

Teddy, primed by Les, is well prepared for this little event. He's got the most concealed CCTV camera you could ever find, or in this case, not find. The lead TV news story starting at 6pm runs and the Sydney Morning Herald's headline reads, 'AFP really in the sh-----t.' Les is interviewed on 2UE next morning.

He says, "I'm not a vindictive man, I just wanted to embarrass the shooters before some good citizen got shot."

"...and who thought up the idea? Who else was involved?"

"Well," Les says, "I got the idea from the dry cleaner at Lane Cove. He told me at the club one night, that something that fired a deterrent at traffic offenders is needed. The idea thus, was not mine, but thanks to my mate, Teddy, of candid camera fame, I got it to work."

"What about the mysterious black sinister ram car?"

Les looks Jonesy in the eye.

"What black car?" he asks as he takes the headphones off.

### Chapter Thirty-three

A crabbed hand-written note appears in Les's mail – 'Ring me on the number under, but only from a call box.'

Les is off for a swim at Balgowlah today. It's a beautiful little horseshoe beach; a bit north and famous for the late and great Winifred Atwell, of the twangy piano, having lived there. He's got his board on top of the Berlina and catches a few good ones. He showers, puts on Billabong long shorts and a white Tee shirt reading, 'Be Alert – Oz Needs Lerts.' He pulls up at a small bar down the road a bit and calls Angelo from the box outside. With the use of mobiles, it's a bit harder to find a call box nowadays. There doesn't seem to be a lot of rhyme or reason which boxes are taken out; probably, Les thinks, the ones which are being vandalised the most.

Angelo comes on. "Hi Les, I'm coming up to Sinny. What about lunch?"

Les chuckles. "Ang, old china plate," he says. "Have I got a lunch spot for you. What flight are you on?"

"817 into town the day after tomorrow."

"Fine," Les says. "Now, about the Carlton wars..."

"Not on the phone, Les," Angelo says in a gravelly tone of voice, reminiscent of the Godfather. "Tell you about it at lunch."

Les does a deal with the helicopter people who drop off passengers from Melbourne flights here and there. After stops at four roof heliports, they drop Angelo and Les out at a small stop near Rose Bay. Within minutes they are on the float-plane service to the Hawkesbury. They get out onto a small jetty on the north side of the Hawkesbury; Les is carrying a small esky.

"What's this, what's this?" Angelo asks.

"Ah, Angelo," he says. "You remember giving me a cold box with some of our Coral Sea catch when we got back to Port Moresby?"

"Indeed, indeed," Angelo says. "What's that got to do with the price of fish?"

"The Chef here," Les says, as they walk up the steep incline to the ground hugging restaurant, "can make even poor fish taste like something special. I expect what he'll do with this good fish today, will be at least memorable."

### Chapter Thirty-four

They sip a couple of Millers Draught. Angelo laughs his head off when Les retells Caitlin's nickname for them.

"As good as an orgasm," Les says.

Angelo is in good form. "I can just remember those," he says, "perhaps I've been too busy concentrating on business."

While they're tucking into a bubbling small dish of really garlicky prawns, Les says, "Speaking of business, I'm coinciding having the pleasure of your company here today with just a tiny bit of business, which, if I'm not mistaken, I can hear coming."

The river restaurant is a famous one; Paul Keating is often seen here dining with friends. It seems he has a house nearby which, like the restaurant, can only be accessed by water or at least nearly so. A big bearded man on an enduro bike has come down a walking path from the rugged top. It's quite a feat of biking, Les thinks. The big chap clumps into the restaurant. He's obviously well known here. The barman rushes up with a tankard of half and half with two chasers on a tray.

"Here, Eddie," he says, "Will you be lunching?"

"No, Tom," the man says. This is just a quick in and out."

The big bikie, who looks like John Laws in his prime, only more solid, throws off the tankard of half and half, throws down the two shooters and yells at Tom.

"What does one have to do to get a drink around here?"

He belches and for the first time, looks at Les and Angelo.

"Well," he says, "Fuck me with a polo stick. What's a Bleak City big gun doing here with the Kelly Club's penny ante bagman?"

"Watch it, Eddie," Les says, "or else I may go looking for that polo stick."

Angelo grins. "Just slumming it, Eddie; sure you won't join us for lunch?"

"Nope," Eddie says. "I'm just here to pick up some petty cash from Les and I'll give some of that to a few of my boys who need to go down to Manly for a spot of lunch. I may not always treat my helpers humanely, but I do have the grace to be punctual."

Les, taking the hint, hands over a heavy waxed envelope to the bikie. Eddie gets up, opens the envelope and hands Tom a few notes.

"I'll cover the drinks," he says. "Another time," he says to them, walks out to his enduro bike and they hear it roar as Eddie tackles the not insignificant climb track.

## Chapter Thirty-five

They finish their garlic prawns. Angelo calls the waiter.

"While we're waiting for the fish," he says, "I'd like a few slices of Parma Ham on a bit of cantaloupe."

"Join you," says Les.

"What does Eddie do for you?" Angelo asks.

"Um," Les says, "his boys hi-jack the occasional truckload of beer for us."

"Surely the Kelly Club don't sell hi-jacked beer!" Angelo says.

"Not at all; Price wholesales it to the Kings Cross bars and he's got small bars at Katoomba and Bathurst that sell nothing else."

"Smart," Angelo says. "The Sydney cops are so dumb; they'd never think to look outside the City."

The fish arrives; it's quite extraordinary. Angelo has a few mouthfuls.

"Am I in heaven, Les?" he asks.

Les chuckles. "Angelo," he says, "where I expect you will end up, you'll be able to grill fish like this on the sidewalks."

"Now Les," he says, "you are touching on the big question of human mortality. Let me quote you what a Bleak City bookie told me only last week. He said 'I don't care when I die, but it's essential to know where I'll die'."

"Whatever for?" Les asks

"Well...the bookies answer to that was, 'well I'd never go near the bloody place'."

"Talking of Bleak City," Les says, "the Moran casualties continue to mount. As I've said before, everyone or most everyone in Melbourne knows who is shooting who, even if the cops don't. The last two to go down are a mystery to everyone."

Angelo gets serious. "Well...it's like this; if you're getting rid of a rabbit burrow, its best to kill all the residents otherwise the beggars will re-breed and continue the cycle. There will be, I expect, a couple more going west this week."

"Hmm, Ang," Les says, "Where do you fit into the dirty big greasy cog wheel of Melbourne?"

"Let's look at the sweets," Angelo says. "I fancy a slice of sticky date pudding and cream. It's like the pudding my Sicilian mother never made."

## Chapter Thirty-six

The sticky date pudding chased down with Cherry Brandy matches up the magnificent fish course beautifully.

"What do I do," Angelo says. "I have a partner whom you are yet to meet. He makes things.."

"And you sell them," Les interjects.

"No," says Angelo, "I distribute them and collect the money. You've seen what we do with the money. Eddie there, is one of our distributors; he wholesales to bike gangs as far west as Fremantle. He's a very sound man and his distribution network is both wide and very efficient."

"But you obviously have other distributors," Les says.

Angelo looks him in the eye, a very steely glance.

"What I'm about to touch on lightly Les," he says, "must stay with you. Should it not, one of our willing to help people will be along with a modern day version of a Lupara. I think you understand quite clearly what I'm saying."

Les isn't slow. "Angelo," he says, "I think you have just issued me with a loaded threat."

"Not at all...not at all. It's not in any way a threat, it is just a dead set - with the emphasis on dead - promise. Now...we can finish our pleasant meet up and you can walk safely away, that I promise - or you can hear more."

Les has never shirked a challenge in his rambunctious life and he's faced some fair old challenges in his time. They call for a couple of glasses of Calvados, a pleasant tipple, older than both of them.

"It's okay," Angelo says, "Eddie's paying for this and a couple of long patenellas."

Les decides to pass on the cheroots and pulls from the pocket of the beautiful Aquascutum jacket, a tamped briar pipe, big bowled, short stemmed. He often

carries this, filled and ready to light, but rarely lights it. He smoked it at his father's funeral while he was cogitating a bit of devastation to fall on his rellies, who neglected his Dad in his last weeks and never communicated to Les, his paters decline in health. Les finished up the sole executor of his Dad's will and he was thus able to inflict a bit of pain on those expecting a vast or kind dividend.

## **Chapter Thirty-seven**

He last puffed his briar outside St Mary's Cathedral, after a mass that he escorted a high court judge's only daughter to. She had the grace to compliment Les.

"Les, darling," she told him, "I've learnt more, lots more in the three weeks since we first met, than I ever learnt at Uni and that, I emphasise, is saying something."

But Les, though apparently ingenuous, is as sharp as a tack. On this occasion he wears an English suit that wouldn't have been out of place at a royal investiture. The judge, whom he meets for the first time, appraises Les with a steely blue intentness. For the life of him, he can't find a visual flaw.

Les smokes his pipe out. "Okay Angelo," he says, "I'm game. Tell me your tall tale."

Angelo digs into his inside coat pocket and hands Les a handful of foil wrapped pills.

"They're Ecstasy tablets – they bear the crown imprimatur of the most widely accepted happy pills in the wide brown land of Australia."

And, as Les later finds, in Thailand and places associated.

"I'm impressed," Les says. "I'm more than impressed. In fact, I'm bloody gob-smacked. You don't sell these little devils, they sell themselves."

"Well...it's mint stuff," Angelo says. "The Wermacht, or more correctly, the Waffen SS had the Reich drug makers develop these. They were issued, for example, at the Battle of the Bulge and Otto Skorzeny's mob took these before they got old Benny Mussolini off the mountain where they were holding him. We're using the same formula and also have German supervision on the current production. But that's enough of business," he continues, "Let me say that from enquiries made, you were very successful with St George Building Society for some years and you only got out when that idiot Keating, as Federal Treasurer, set out to hijack the huge funds in the building societies and promised his backers that he would return that money one way and another, to the Banks, and did."

## **Chapter Thirty-eight**

"It was a lot of fun for a long time," Les says. "I certainly enjoyed the expense account and being on the financial cocktail circuit, but it got plain towards the end that Keating was dinkum, so I took a golden handshake and paid for a new Barina and my flat. It wasn't all bad news and I've has a lot of fun since."

“Fair enough,” Angelo says. “We will have a proposition that we think will catch your interest within a few weeks. Let’s get back to Sinny and see what we can scare up until my plane is due to go out.”

The float plane picks them up and they go around to the Kelly Club for a while and jolly the girls along. Les runs him out to the airport and when they arrive, he gives Les a parting gift.

“These are crown brand mark two,” he says, “quite safe; not even on the market yet. Try them out at your next cocktail party, it sure will get the girls there rocking.”

It’s all a bit much to take in, Les thinks, so he relaxes a bit and avoids stress and for that matter, work, until Saturday, when he’ll be back on shift at Price’s club. But he’s in and out of the gym, keeping very fit and watches his diet as he goes. In between Lucullan feasts, Les is relatively abstemious and often runs through two thirds of his day with a toast and All-bran breakfast, black tea and a ham sandwich lunch. Tea is another matter, but he thinks that less is more in the earlier part of the day.

Another shirt cocktail party arrives along. Les, along with Delilah, (it’s her stage and commercial name really) who is wearing a crisp white buttoned down shirt and tans, lobs along at the Porthole and meet up with Caitlin there.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph,” Caitlin says, “I didn’t know you were bringing someone else, Les.”

“Caitlin, old mate,” he says, “I know who you prefer and this will give you a clear run at old Preston tonight.”

“Grouse,” she says, “but if that ballerina type girl he seconded with at the last show turns up, I may be on the outer.”

“No worries,” Les says. “If that happens, I’m sure we can manage a ménage à trois, that is, if Delilah doesn’t mind.”

## Chapter Thirty-nine

Les takes along a pocket full of Crown Mark two tablets, gets the girl distributing safers into the top pockets of the party goers, to put two in each girls shirt pocket. A bit later down the track, Angelo asks Les how it all went down. Les laughs a deep rumbling belly laugh.

“Yer know that television series in which that Shakespearean actor, Richard Roxburgh, played the lead as Cleaver Green, the dodgy lawyer?”

“Yes,” says Angelo, “it just confirmed my long held beliefs about lawyers.”

“Well,” says Les, “that show started with the introduction being a Catherine Wheel with Rake written on the blades and the Catherine Wheel appeared to be set in a dark railway tunnel. Anyway, it spun faster and faster and faster until it all melted down. That’s exactly how it went. The not so young Sydney socialite queen running the show finished up pregnant, god knows how, and the highlight of the evening was the pair of drink waiters having it off behind the low antique bar and stepping out from time to time to serve up a drink and then instantly getting back on the job. Gawd, it was a hoot.”

The following week, Les has a moderate little lunch with Linus at the Rissolle. They are downing really magnificent prawns in crusty new bread rolls and drinking a

biting little Yarra Valley White. Les gets the lowdown on how Linus is going on his fill-in nights.

“Just as well you told me to wear good strong shoes, Les,” he says. “It was sound advice. I’ve been knocking the proverbial out of the troublemakers without even skinning my knuckles.”

“Good....good,” says Les, “but bear in mind, that among the bumlbers you’re giving a lesson to, there comes along from time to time, a professional rough-houser. Make sure you carry that sap I gave you. You don’t need that sort of gear often, but when you do, you really do.”

A crabbed hand-written note appears in Les’s letter box. Ring this number, it reads. Les does. The Godfather type voice says in a low growl, “Goulburn War Memorial, 11am next Thursday.”

## Chapter Forty

When Les arrives at the site, Angelo is sitting on a flat stone, with a flask and plastic lunch-box evident.

“Have a shot or two of Sambuca Les,” he says, “and try my chilli sausage sandwiches.”

Les is a bit sharp set, so he does.

“Interesting tucker, Angelo,” he says. “Anyone you want me to breathe on and incinerate?”

“Dig a bit deeper in the esky in the boot,” he says. “I’ve got a couple of cold Crown Lagers there that will quell the dragons.”

They suck on their Crownies. Angelo waves his towards the huge War Memorial.

“Interesting,” he says, “You never hear about it.”

Les knows a bit about this landmark. His Grandad was at Gallipoli and was here for the opening.

“Built by a professional bridge builder – reluctantly,” he says. “They killed a Dray horse trying to cart foundation stones up; had to build sledges to finally get them here.”

“Well, it suits the commanding site,” Angelo says.

“The memorial is over 20 metres high, 8 metres square,” Les says, “2500 names on it somewhere – opened by the Governor of New South Wales in 1925.”

“Hmm,” Angelo says, “I once deciphered a classic war memorial near Corinth. It marked a war held there in the paddock in 223 – had just 11 names on it.”

“You didn’t put much in your letter,” Les says.

Angelo looks hard. “Not so long back,” he says, “Tonino (Tun) and I were partners in a tomato growing block in Griffith. We’ve prospered, mainly by watching the amazing results achieved by the Trimbolis.”

“Yeah,” says Les, “with the Griffith Police on their payroll. I remember a skit on ‘In Melbourne Tonight’, with Graham Kennedy shrieking out to his runner, ‘*call the police*’, then flagging down the runner seconds later, with that famous ad lib, ‘NOT the Griffith Police’.”

Angelo chuckles. “It was a dream start in making huge money - taking Hugh Mackay out at the beginning of the end. It was never necessary, much easier to have burnt down his furniture store. That would have taken his focus off the honest ganja dealers for a while. But,” he continues, “if you want to succeed in the grey

trade, the basic prerequisite to survival is not to put anything in writing, never use email, never use a mobile or fixed line, never to be seen with your key men together at special meets and so on. Just common sense.”

“So,” Les says, “you never use computers?”

“No and a yes,” he says, “We use social media to let key people know we want to talk with them.”

“Where...how?” Les asks.

“Go to facebook, google up the Bloody Mary site. It’s so obvious and so innocuous that it’s a safe way to post a call in messages. Most of the police and CCC people these days sit on their fat bums behind a desk looking for covert intelligence on computers. People these days are prolix and the investigators, through hacking skills, can get into what you may be doing. Computers are wonderfully helpful and convenient, but not if you’re in my type of business. Do you know the Russian Military are using manual typewriters again, instead of computers? That, I think, carries my point.”

## Chapter Forty-one

“I’ve been giving your overloaded bank account in Helsinki a deal of thought. Why Finland; it’s not the usual safe haven for dark dosh. Political correctness and pressure from the American banks has created a deal of information getting out of the Caymans and Swiss land,” Angelo says. We’re in Finland because old Hiram, at the Timber Bank says it’s the last discreet banking left in the wide world. Finland kow-tows to the Russians and most of the very successful and booming Russian Mafia use Helsinki. They well know in the banking world, that letting out information on their clients will bring on just the one certainty – a Makarov pistol shot in the head, either in daylight or the dark. However, we do use other banks; the Cyprus ones are very efficient and effective. We have avoided scrutiny of any serious nature so far by using only cash; cash in and lately so far as Helsinki is concerned, not enough cash out. We’re fine everywhere else.”

Angelo continues, “We want to bring you in on the money side. You don’t need to know any more about our production or our distribution of product. You’ve seen us carting money up to Port Moresby. Hiram has some sort of magical financial butter churn there that, for 5% of the take, can get money into Helsinki in untraceable form. But we need now quite soon to cash hike it into something else. We can’t use my name or Tun’s, due to the proceeds of crime confiscation laws. Mind you, we don’t think of what we are doing as a crime, it’s more of a much needed and appreciated social need. It’s not ice or crack cocaine, it’s just all pills and boy oh boy do the western world girls love them. What I’m getting around to,” he says, “is to recruit you to pick up the dosh from Helsinki and get it in cash form again into gold purchases. There’s a heap of gold exchange facilities around. Further down the track, we may be able to figure out a way to get it earning interest and better still, get the main lode or a decent part of it, back and useable in Oz where we live.”

“Why me?” Les asks.

Angelo gets out another stubbie and they light up long patenellas.

“You’re a clean skin,” he says. “We have no objection in the gold purchases being just in your name. We have made you aware of the risks, should you dud us and you’re a big strong open-faced and honest looking man. You’d fight off any

attackers, we're sure. You can use yourself. Also, you have a bit of a financial background."

Les goes to his car and comes back with a copy of the Financial Review.

"Here," he says, placing a finger on the market quotes.

"What am I looking at?" Angelo asks.

"Ballarat South Gold," Les says. "One cent per share."

"That's about right," Angelo says. "The environmental protection mob has stopped them mining their best prospect."

"Why not lodge a buy order at just that price with a discreet broker. Show interest, but not much interest. I don't mind buying for you in my own name, but down the track, if you can pick up the bulk of the shares and transfer the gold holdings to Ballarat South, all you have to do to cash up when you want, is to attach the gold certificate showing quality and weight to the company shares and advertise for a buyer; 24 hours would see you down and dusted."

"I take your point," Angelo says. "I'll need to consult with Tun, but you still have to find a broker and preferably an honest one."

"I'll need start-up buying cash with quick draw facilities if the bid goes well. Further again down the track to get your money invested in OZ, we or you, can use the gold as security to borrow in...say...Swiss land to buy up good farming land."

"I'm only a tomato farmer," Angelo says.

"You won't have to farm it, Ang. With modern farming gear, most farmers will pay over the odds to have bigger acreage to farm, even leased acreage and that is where we would come in. After all, it would only be an Australian company buying Australian farming land."

## Chapter Forty-two

"Let's climb up to the viewing platform for a good look along the Goulburn Valley," Angelo suggests, and they do. It's well worth the climb. When they come down, Angelo goes again to his car boot and pulls out a Gladstone bag stuffed with big notes.

"I picked this up in Albury today," he says. "There's enough there to start your share buy. I'll give you a while to start that hare running and by then, make sure you can get away for a while and I'll give you the outlines of the next step."

Les rings his stockbroker, Atticus, at Pickel Partners. When he's finally put through, he says, "Listen up, Boofhead – think of a good coffee place near you and set a time and I'll hop in my jam jar and meet you."

"What for?" Atticus reasonably asks.

"Ah...we need to rabbit and pork," Les says.

Atticus gets Les into quite a decent share portfolio after he bought his Berlina and flat from his redundancy from St George Building Society. His payout was much better than he deserved, mainly due to the General Manager being very generous and appreciative of some very willing women Les introduced this dry old stick to on Fun Friday evening.

Atticus is a bit surprised at Les's request. He thinks for a moment and says,

"Les, if it is your oddball wish and desire to buy all the available stock up in the biggest blanc elephant in Victoria, so be it. At today's prices, you could buy the lot for about \$8,000.00. I can get cracking today, but you will have to top up your buying account."

Les pulls out a medium sized envelope.

“Just get your ass into gear,” he says. “How many shareholders are there out there?”

Atticus sucks his teeth.

“I expect probably about 800 to 900 investors bought shares. The promoters, who must be crying into their beer as they speak, kept a lot and financed their drilling gear using their shares as security.”

Les spills his double espresso.

“If that is the case, find out what the miners owe the finance company and we’ll work from there.”

By the end of the week, they’ve waved a medium bit of cash under certain noses and a deal is struck. The finance company call in the loan; the stock broker rings around and the end result is some fine shots in the Age, of a repossession company (owned by the Red Dog bikies) repossessing the mining gear. The press pictures bring the shares down and a very big rush of sellers come out of the woodwork. Les’s name, as the share buyer, comes out of course, but he goes up to Broadbeach to a high level unit owned by Tonino and keeps nit. The broker puts out a bit of diversionary stuff that Les and some partner are looking at a new mine at Tennant Creek.

### Chapter Forty-three

Just three weeks later, Les is sitting in First Class on a Qantas flight to London. He’s kitted up with a couple of dodgy fake passports for use if needed and papers that show him to be now the Managing Director of the gold mine, company, etc.

Angelo has counselled him a bit. “No contact with us or between us, no electronic shit, no letters. Move the dosh at no more than half a million at a time. If the carry goes wrong, we can’t cavil at losing half a million, though of course, we’d prefer not to. But we go along with your idea of converting cash into gold, but we wouldn’t want more than 50% left with them. When time permits, put it into safety boxes under your own name.”

Les laughs. “And if I disappear with the loot?”

“Ah,” Angelo says, “we would quickly come looking for you with one of Friedrich’s products.”

“Friedrich?” queries Les.

Angelo gives an evil grin. “One of Friedrich Makarov’s excellent products,” he says.

He thinks the best way to dull the pain of such a long trip is to apply a bit of anaesthetic via the surprisingly good champagne the very attentive air hostess is plying him with.

“How long will you be in England?” she asks.

“Oh,” says Les, “a friend has left me a car in London, somewhere near the Battersea Power House, whatever that is, and I’m going to have a little holiday in a village quite near Ely Cathedral.”

“Oh, that’s Cambridge. I went to Uni at Cambridge,” she says, “know the area well. What’s the village?”

“Burnt Fen,” says Les. “How’d you like to show me the way out to the area?”

“Hmm,” she says. “If you don’t mind swinging past my flat to get some gear, that’d be fine. Oh...and my name ‘s Fiona.”

Thus, Les’s introduction to the Old Dart is intellectually very interesting and physically demanding. By the time her six days off run out, Les has a handle on off-licenses, food shopping, how to negotiate the famous English roundabouts. He’s found the carvery pubs and his cottage larder is well stocked. The girl is a gifted nester if ever there was one.

“Do you want me back,” she asks Les, when he drops her off at Heathrow.

“Has the Pope got a balcony?”

“Are the Kennedy’s gun shy?” she flings back at him.

Les comes at her in his excellent bass voice. “Will ye no come back again?”

“Sure love,” he continues, “I’ll pick you up when you get back.”

## **Chapter Forty-four**

It’s getting dark early in London and starting to rain a bit. Les is on his own this afternoon; his girl is visiting some Sloane Ranger friends that she’s overdue to call on. Les has slung his hook and has been walking around the vicinity of Buckingham Palace.

He’s chuffing along like a steam train puffing on his short stem big bowl briar pipe. He stops short of Marble Arch. There’s a fruit stall open. He goes under the awning and picks up a few huge, almost purple Cyprus figs and some magnificent grapes that must have been grown in a vineyard overlooking the Med, he thinks.

Les has got a bit of ding speak and he chats for a few moments with the Italian stall holder. The rain picks up.

Les says, “I think I can get to the tube down the subterranean passages, can’t I, from Marble Arch?”

The ding looks at the four lanes of busy traffic rushing past them. It’s hectic.

“Best not,” he says. “It’s safer to cross the road.”

Les laughs, looks at the traffic and shakes his head.

“There’s a lot of low-lifes in the alleys,” he continues. “They start dossing down for the night around this time. It’s relatively warm, well lit and certainly dry.”

“Um,” Les says, “A bit bloody wet out there, cobber,” he says. “I might take a punt and try to get home fairly dry.”

Les has been studying the phenomenon of the underground passages. They are really pedestrian subways that run beneath Marble Arch. They are really from Oxford Street to Edgware Road, from the tube station to Hyde Park. It’s quite a maze of long intersecting corridors with around fourteen entry and exit points. They are a bit on the eerie side, although they are quite well lit and the walls are tiled. As you go down the entry stairs, the frenetic traffic noises subside. There’s quite a bit of air movement in the tunnels and the sounds of pedestrian footsteps are quite noticeable. You can almost deduce who they come from by the noise of these; firm and strong, hurrying, hesitant or foot dragging. The tunnels aren’t huge – mostly eight foot wide and high – real tunnels as it were.

It’s coming on dark when Les comes down and although he is striding purposefully along in his Timberland boots, he’s getting passed by the denizens who doss down overnight here out of the elements and in a warmer environment. Many are carrying sleeping bags or their sleeping quarters, fridge boxes, ungainly, but able to be folded under their armpits to carry. He starts to pass sleepers settled in for the

night in quarters of several fridge boxes joined together. It seems the inhabitants fold them up during the day and stash them away, returning at night to reassemble them in the tunnels. Les is looking in wonder at these underground sleeping quarters. One is really big; one flat-pack on the other to form a double story abode. 'Bloody hell', Les thinks – 'what a way'.

Then he reflects that it's got to be a whole lot warmer and dryer than a bench in the park or a sleeping bag in a drafty doorway. And probably down here they may have a system where one looks after the other. They get the boxes from behind the big electrical stores and there are numerous places around London where you can get new or newer sleeping bags and toiletries for free. With this are plenty of soup kitchens and free supplies of food for the street dwellers.

There's a bit of a break in the run of cellar dwellers quarters and Les rounds a corner in the unending tunnel and runs into a posse. Four men block the eight foot wide tunnel. Three are equidistant, one, with very darty eyes is just a bit forward on the left.

"What ho," says Les. "You'd best get out of the fucking way fellas or you'll get run over."

Les hasn't halted in his stride – he has to maintain momentum before the wolf pack attack him. But he's acting as fast as he's thinking. Les is not unprepared. In the belt of his jeans under his big horse blanket quality Harris Tweed sports coat, he has a light ballpeen hammer. He whips this out, judges the hood on the left to be the knifeman and smashes his collarbone with a short travel blow; the man doubles up, Les knees him under the chin as he comes down and right handed, bashes the next bloke in the face. The head kicker wearing steel-cap boots gets bashed hard on the knee and this just leaves the last one, who stands his ground despite the mayhem of his mates writhing on the tunnel floor. Les grabs the chap's anorak and crashes him into the wall several times and then starts using his boot to give the man the mother and father of a thorough kicking.

"You're nothing but a totally fucked up bunch of losers," Les tells those who are able to listen, pulls out his box of tapers for his pipe and sets fire to the sleazes housing.

As the boxes fire up, Les hears the tapping of footsteps behind, spins around with his hammer. It's a gaunt-faced long-haired girl.

"Jesus Christ on the mountain," Les says, "What on God's green earth are you doing down here in sleaze land?"

The girl drops the Pizza boxes she's carrying, dashes to one of the damaged ones.

"Donny, Donny," she cries, "What has this thug done to you?"

Les realises she's with this bunch of losers, sees his pyrotechnics are going well as the flames burn into the cardboard. The smoke is blowing down the tunnel and Les quickly realises that the London Fire Brigade and the Metro Police will be here all too soon, so puts his little hammer back in his belt, helps himself to a slice of meat lover's Pizza from the spilled boxes and jogs away towards the Hyde Park exit.

Just a little later, he meets up with his light of love as pre-arranged at a nice little Italian restaurant, just along from the Royal Albert Hall.

"How was your afternoon, love?" she says.

Les is bland. "Oh...nothing eventful," he says. "I got up to Grosvenor Place to look at Jagger's Royal Artillery Memorial. The bronze figures on it are really something. How were the girls?"

“Oh....ah....” she says. “They castigated me for letting such an eligible man as you, out on the loose in licentious old London.”

Actually, Les got hit on by a very good-looking street walker not far from the Restaurant.

“Want a girl, Mate?” she asked Les.

“Ever the smooth dilettante, Les fires back, - “Oh...not on an empty stomach.”

## **Chapter Forty-five**

He catches the channel train to Paris the next day and flies with Scandinavian Air Lines to Stockholm. He rents a serviced apartment and for some months, moves half a million lots at a time to the Stockholm Gold Exchange. The Gold Exchange's pleased to accept his money and after the paper formalities are worked through, he leaves with a certificate of verification that they are holding gold purchased at today's value, in trust for him. He now hunts for very secure vault security and rents a couple of boxes to hide his gold certificates in.

## **Chapter Forty-six**

Air Hostess Fiona, is starting to figure in Les's life now. He's not unhappy at this, she's a full on fun girl. She is a pleasant diversion on weekends, after his busy Monday to Friday tasks. He has taken the pressure off in Helsinki. It seems that any balances over three million Euros has to be included in Government reports; hence the pressure to reduce the balance, from old Hiram at the Timber Bank. While Les appears to have open slather on the Helsinki money, Hiram, under Angelo's direction, has placed strictures on what the Bank will tell him. As Angelo said early in the piece, 'it's about your need to know. You need to know balances, but not the full source.'

In a way, this suits Les. Back in Sydney his life centred on being social, being on time at the Kelly Club, wearing decent casual clothes and so on. His life now sort of consists of sorting out travel arrangements and lumping around big lumps of money without anyone at all watching his back. It's making Les edgy; with only Fiona wholeheartedly providing a weekend diversion.

But he also gets a bit of a jolt when he recognises a face, several times, on the Stockholm Ferry. He's travelling solo and it would take a strong man to attempt to hijack his carry. But it tells him two things; his pattern of movement may have brought him unwelcome attention and he should be armed.

## **Chapter Forty-seven**

He goes into a boating place in Deptford; buys a small compact flare gun. A canvas worker soon runs him up a simple shoulder holster for this. The bit of bulk it gives him in the right quarter, he thinks will be a bit of a put off for anyone lamping him closely.

For three weeks running, Les moves money from Amsterdam and Brussels into cash to Swiss land. He eventually takes the bull by the horns and has no trouble establishing himself as a buyer on the Basle Gold Exchange. He doesn't at this

stage, move any of it into separate safe security facilities, but he does rent a bank box to lodge the Gold certificates in. If anyone rolls him, he will be carrying no evidence of the stash.

Easter now intervenes. Fiona comes up to the cottage to visit. Neither she, nor Les are Catholic, but she has a degree with a major in Liturgical Music and as St Rosalie's in the Marsh has a rather excellent pipe organ, they often go and attend mass there to hear it in action.

Good Friday, they go down to attend the Adoration of the Cross ceremony. The priest prostrates himself on the church floor near the cross; it's an eye-catching part of a simple ceremony. Fiona breathes into Les's ear.

"This is serious shit, mate."

"I know, I know," Les breathes back, "but we're only here for the organ and there's none of that today."

After the service Fiona says, "My flatmates back in London are all in Cornwall for the weekend. London always empties out at Easter. Let's go back and have a mosey around."

"Bang on, me old China," Les says.

## Chapter Forty-eight

They go up to St Paul's between services. Les takes in the multitude of memorials, plaques and other inscribed marble slabs cluttering the walls.

"Tell me this edifice's main claim to fame," Les says.

"Ah...it's the recognised symbol of Great Britain's resistance to Hitler. It's the only British Cathedral designed by the one person and completed in his life-time; Wren of course. Wellington, Nelson and Wren are buried here."

"Who was responsible for the dreadful mosaics?" Les asks.

"Ah...Queen Victoria."

This catches Les's attention. The social media postings in which he keeps Angelo informed by a quite effective code; always carries a picture of dour old Queen Victoria on it. Les, whose views on architecture borders on the austere, says,

"I think her taste must have been mainly in her mouth."

Fiona laughs. "She was no intellectual. Gilbert and Sullivan was about her musical level. And talking of those chaps, may I take you down the embankment to my favourite memorial?"

And they do. Just a little later in glorious sunshine, they read the inscription. This reads about WS Gilbert. 'His foe was folly and his weapon wit.' They take in the famous abbey next.

"Holds 2,000 normally," Fiona says, "and 8,200 packed in like sardines for a coronation."

"I'd like to have a look at the statues of Eros," Les remarks.

So they walk up to Piccadilly Circus.

"Umm," she says. "It's made out of aluminium, the first non-monolithic monument in London town and sculpted by another Gilbert – AR Gilbert."

They end up at a Saturday matinee of Agatha Christie's famous 'Mousetrap'.

## Chapter Forty-nine

They track back across the Haymarket to get to Fiona's Fiat Punto. They turn the street corner and immediately spot a chap hunched over trying to pick the door lock. Les doesn't falter in his stride.

"Keep walking – don't look at him. Make like we are just pedestrian going past."

And they do, but a pace from where the chap is working on the door-lock with a bunch of skeleton keys. Les in two, ups, puts his huge well-Oxforded shoes into the rear of the crook. It's as good and as strong a kick up the karsi that anyone could see. He decks the man, puts a foot on the back of his neck.

"Now fella," he says, "take off your shoes....and your socks."

He hauls the bloke back on his feet, turns him around and boots him in the rear again.

"Run you bastard, run," Les says, with another great kick to speed him on his way. The miscreant running, of course, in bare feet now has an advantage over big Les in normal footwear, but Les can indeed run. He once ran in a Stawell gift spoof event for runners over twelve and a half stone and won it. As they hit the next street corner in this funny little part of the Haymarket, they almost run slap bang into a London Bobby. He stands back and has a look at this rather unusual spectacle; a barefooted man running like blazes and pursued by a very big man aiming kicks at the front runners derriere; the chaps gaining ground, so Les gives it away and turns back to the copper.

"Who are you, Sir?" he asks.

"Les Norton, President of the Flat Earth Society, here in London to promote the, bring back the birch concept."

## Chapter Fifty

The copper laughs. "Have you ever thought about running for parliament, Sir," he says, "plenty would vote for your platform."

"Ah...yes," says Les, "in a country that regularly fields candidates for the Raving Loony Party, I expect it would be fertile ground to work."

"And the bloke you were chasing?"

"Just a tea leaf," he says, "trying to knock off my girlfriend's Punto; here's his skeleton keys."

"Well Les," Fiona says, "it's nice to be called your girlfriend. Most of my bitchy girlfriends would fight me for the honour."

Les chuckles, "You told me your flat is Easter empty. I feel like my old self after that fracas. What say we mosey around to your sublet?" And they do.

Mr Wobbly enthusiastically endorses this idea and is up and running as they go up the partridge and pears to the flat. Although after a sustained and busy burst, he vomits away, full on.

"I need a drink," Fiona says, "Mr Wobbly is showing signs of re-grouping."

Les finds a brandy decanter and they take alternate swigs out of this until Wobbly stops wobbling and away they go. They subside after this for a while. Fiona takes another belt out of the decanter and says, "Leslie, love, if ever you desire to take a wife, my hand is up."

“Aw,” Les says, “Fiona, my dear little ding and foxy, if you can produce a ridgedidge certificate that certain apparatus of yours has had its tubes well and truly tied...”

“Les,” she shrieks. “Every girl wants her own family.”

Les grins. “As Shakespeare, who should have said it – bearing in mind, he had a shotgun marriage to an older woman – and therein lies the tragedy.”

## Chapter Fifty-one

Les comes back to the cottage late on a Friday. He’s now into moving big lumps of Euros from Luxemburg into Switzerland; not into banks, just into security boxes. It’s a whole lot easier than he expected. He finds on his table a post-it note reading – ‘at the Pub’. He picks up his loaded stick. It’s a bit of knurled oak that he had a gunsmith at Lincoln bore out and pour melted lead into. As an extra precaution, he puts his small flare pistol in the big pocket of the coat he is wearing.

A biggish chap, Italian looking, is sitting chatting to Joe, the publican. A pint of ale, half drunk, is in front of him.

“No car,” Les says.

“I walked from your cottage,” the man says. “Our mutual friend, Angelo, drew me a mud-map.”

He pulls it out of his pocket. Its tickety boo, pencil drawn with notes in Angelo’s crabbed hand on it.

The man says, “Have a pint and I’ll tell you what I’m doing here.”

Les is very suspicious of this chap, but is prepared to listen. They go over into the pub snug.

“Main message,” he says, “The jug in Nicosia needs emptying a bit; end of message.”

“You came specially to tell me that?” Les says.

“Not at all, not at all,” the well-dressed man says. “I’m here to do a job for Angelo and Tun. They suggested I use your Volvo to avoid a paper trail.”

“What else can you tell me, my unknown friend?” Les asks.

“Ah...someone fire-bombed the Kelly Club, not particularly efficiently. Linus caught him leaving and using methods not best talked about, found out who gave him the job. That done, Linus, under instruction, burnt down the job-givers holiday house at Terrigal.”

“Ah,” Les says, “that belongs to the chap who owns Elkins.”

“Spot on,” the man says, “but there wasn’t anyone in it, so he was just conveying a message. They used a Bleak City contractor on Kelly’s. If they’d used a local man, Price wouldn’t have got out of it so lightly. They also had been lucky enough to sell the drilling gear that had to be bought early in the deal. Everything is going well in Sinny, but there’s been a bubble in Melbourne, where somebody smart blew up the house and everyone in it, of the Lebanese Godfather. Angelo is less than pleased about that, but it doesn’t seem to have affected the distributing chain so far. Now,” he continues, “if you don’t mind me using your station wagon, let’s go and get it.”

## Chapter Fifty-two

Back at the cottage the man produces a package from under Les's cottage hedge.

"Need a Phillips screwdriver," he says.

Les finds one and the man gets on with changing the number plates.

"I got them out of the back row of a car sale in Brixton," he says, "plus a spare set from a car ferry park in Ipswich."

He gives the car a rev and is off.

Les picks the car up in Cambridge a couple of nights later. He scans the paper. There is no way to tell, but the use of Atlanta spaghetti to incinerate a Porsche Boxter in the car park of a carvery pub. It took a few cars parked nearby with it and, of course, the driver of the Boxster.

'Might be,' Les thinks. Something similar happened in Bleak City at the height of the gang wars. Les is fairly numerate and a bit suspicious with it. He noted the speedo reading on the Volvo before giving his visitor the keys. He does a little sum, takes out a North of England road map. The blown up car certainly fits comfortably into the distance up to where the Porche went up in flames.

'Hmm,' thinks Les, 'the boys must be distributing in the UK. Somebody has crossed the line and paid the price.'

Les thinks it's time he heeded Angelo's message and heads for Cyprus first via Geneva. He catches the Geneva Milan express, gets off at Brig to have a little look at the famous Matterhorn, up valley from there and then a day or two later, he arrives at the Milan Train Station, a huge Travertine marble affair of cathedral proportions. Benny Mussolini gave it to Milan in exchange for the political support the Milanese mistakenly gave him in his climb to power. Milan is the world capital for men's suits and he shops around to stock up on a few new ones. It's all on expenses anyway.

## Chapter Fifty-three

He catches the Euro Star train to Florence and stops over for a good look around this famous centre of art and culture. He walks through the main centre and finishes up sitting on a bridge abutment of the famous Ponte Vecchio. After a decent chunk of pizza and a couple of Peroni stubbies, he heads back to the Cathedral square to have a look at the famous bronze Baptistery doors. He is standing there taking these in, when an American tour party lead by a nasally-voiced American Tour Guide lobs along and lines up.

She shakes her sun brolly and says, "These doors were described by the venerated Michelangelo as fit to be the gates of paradise."

A Cockney chap with a wispy beard sitting on a stone bench says, "Miss, these aren't the originals."

"Thank you, my learned friend," she says. "What you say is indeed true. The originals are in the Accademia Museum just opposite the Uffizi. This is understandable," she continues, "The civic fathers in a more enlightened age, could hardly be expected to leave these works of art out to be desecrated by vandals and other street scum."

She directs a piercing look at the Cockney. She starts again.

“As I said, Michelangelo stated as soon as he saw them, these gates are fit to be the gates of.....”

Les is not greatly impressed by the bronze doors. ‘Definitely an acquired taste,’ this Bondi boy thinks.

“Um,” he says in a carrying voice, “Miss, perhaps old Mick was on the grappa that day. The Cockney chap ad libs, or perhaps rumours about his eyesight going were true.”

The septic tank guide realises she’s been bested.

“Moving on,” she says and the tour moves over to the Cathedral steps. Les says to the Cockney looking at the cathedral, “It’s pretty spectacular outside.”

The Cockney laughs, “And a bloody dark mausoleum inside.”

## Chapter Fifty-four

Les has seen as much as he wants of Florence, but after he does the Uffizi, he makes a few enquiries and tracks down a sculptor who has been making, it seems, a very good living doing marble knock-offs of the famous David. He goes out to his workshop. There’s a marvellous array of different size statues of the said David. Les walks along the display and says,

“This is what I want, but I hear you do some with David with a good erection, rather than the traditional flaccid.”

“No probs,” the stone man says. “It’s just a question of how erect you want him.”

“Ah,” says Les, “like a steel rod.”

Les settles the quote, paying cash in Euros.

“Crate up the finished job,” he says, “and I’ll arrange transport details.”

Les has a belly laugh as he walks away. He’s always fancied having a classic courtyard garden and this order will make an incredible talking point at mixed parties, he thinks.

The Euro Star dumps him at the train station and he scores a room just over the road at a pub. It’s full of Americans and they’re a bit on the rude side. Next morning he is breakfasting quite well on cereals and fruit from the food bar. He goes back for bacon and scramblers and an American student has sort of blocked his access to his small corner table.

“Excuse me, Miss,” Les says.

She ignores him. He steps on the bag as he goes and there is a satisfying crunch of something breaking. Breakfast over, he flags down a taxi; there’s always heaps of those at the train station forecourt.

“To old Grimly,” he says, “the Colosseum.”

The taxi driver detours a bit here and there, quite unnecessarily. They pull up outside this famous Roman Empire relic.

“Sixty euros,” he says.

Les sits, thinks of the current exchange rate, realises the man is charging him a bit under ninety dollars Australian for a very short and should be straight trip. He reaches over and grabs the driver by the back of the neck and squeezes.

“No speaka Anglais,” the driver spits out.

Les just increases the pressure. The driver suddenly finds his English.

“How about fifteen euros, Squire,” he says.

Les grips him a bit harder.

“Umm.....ten euros,” the man gasps.

Les pays him and starts to get out, stops and says,

“What about getting out?.....Just for a minute.”

“No fear and what for?”

“I rather think,” Les says, “that a very good kick up the karzi might cure you of ripping off well-meaning tourists.”

## Chapter Fifty-five

Fiona now draws a shift based on New York with the airline. Les thinks it's best to have a bit of routine in his life and he continues to go down from the cottage to St Rosalie's in the Marsh and now sings in the choir. Something he once did in the Indooroopilly Church. The organist on the old pipes, Annette Jesperson, soon thinks the sun shines out of calm old Les.

“Your bass voice,” she says, “has brought depth to a shallow lot. Your fame is spreading. Marie St Clair-Clark is coming to hear you next week.”

“Who is this mystery woman?” Les asks.

“Bred in the purple,” she says. “Daddy is Vice-Chancellor of St Cecilia's College in Cambridge. They're landed people – Yorkshire, I think.”

Marie, of the landed gentry turns up next Sunday driving a bright yellow Audi Coupe. After the service, she bails up Les. He takes her in. A good face, very long legs; she stands close inspection, but he is a bit amazed to realise her pupils are just a bit pin-pointy. Whatever she was on last night is lingering.

“Mr Les,” she says. “My dad is a big noise at Ely Cathedral and has asked me for help.”

“Woffor?” says Les.

“Well.....we have a Hymns of Praise coming up in Ely. One of the star turns is a male duet, to be sung in the Crypt and shown into the cathedral by video screen. We have two musical fellows, both as queer as a three pound note. They are doing the male duet from Bizet's Pearl Fishers – ‘In the Depths of the Holy Temple’. One is a tenor and the other, a counter-tenor and they're very, very good. But we need a baritone to give the effort depth in the low range.”

Les laughs. “Every baritone, or aspiring baritone, knows this one,” he says. “In fact I was press-ganged into doing it six weeks after my voice broke.”

“Will you help us?” the girl appealingly says.

Les has nothing planned apart from walking over to the pub for a roast lunch, so he hops in her car and half an hour later, is adding very impressive depth to the famous number in the darkest and deepest of church crypts. It's no sweat to Les. It's being taped and Marie comes out with a copy and suggests to Les that he could come to lunch at home.

“Nah,” says Les.

“I won't take no,” Marie says, appealingly again. “Besides, if you come, it will save me being bored shitless.”

The girl's home is a Manorial Jacobean house in the Cathedral Close and the meal served up is first class. The upper crusts are cordial and ask him what he does.

“Umm,” Les says. “I'm the Managing Director of a penny ante mining company and I'm having an extended spell here, having a look at this part of the world.”

## Chapter Fifty-six

From this, Marie invites him to a shooting party at their Yorkshire home. They drive up in her Audi. It's most pleasant, being summer, August 12<sup>th</sup> to be exact – the opening of the shooting season. His hosts have quite a decent party and Les meets this one and that one and is keenly looked over by the women.

"Don't worry, Les," Marie tells him. "I'm in the room next door to you. Turn left out your door and there I'll be first door to the left."

In the after dinner entertainment, Les, suitably black-tied, sings 'Old Man River' and 'The Holy City'. He's not bad and gets a great hand, after which he plays a bit of poker. Les is a dab hand at poker and comes out of the game 78 pounds to the good.

He's bought a pair of ribbed pyjamas for the occasion; they're frogged like a French uniform and lack only epaulettes. Les trundles into Marie's room. She hops out from the cover, stands at attention, not a thing on and salutes.

"Grrr..." goes Les and they are away into a strenuous evening. Les is bumming around the bedroom looking for his pyjama bottoms next day when a pert looking maid comes in with a toast and tea tray. She looks Les up and down.

"My," she says. "You are a big boy."

She drops off the tray and goes.

"Geez," says Les. "I thought housemaids would be demure and with downcast eyes."

Marie bursts out laughing.

"Les," she says, "No one can afford full time servants these days. We hire in from the village on these occasions. That maid is the local vet's wife, she helps out at the clinic and is used to seeing big bumbling beasts."

"Awwrr," says Les.

Les gets settled in the shooting line. They're having a crack at Brown Grouse today. He has two Labradors and a loader at his shooting stand. Les has done a lot of duck shooting in his time, also geese in the Northern Territory. He knocks down every third one of the driven birds and lets the rest go by firing well clear of them.

"You are a conservationist, Sir," the loader says.

"Ah..." says Les. "I believe your best fox hunters subscribe to the view that it's best to leave some for tomorrow."

The Hymns of Praise event turns up at Ely Cathedral. Les doesn't want the world to lamp him singing in an event that is broadcast by the BBC worldwide service. But he owes Marie one, as a fill in for his relocated love, Fiona. He turns up in a big white alb wearing a very good blond wig and Ronnie Corbett spectacles. It's a real wow, but he understandably declines Marie's invitation to lunch.

## Chapter Fifty-seven

A car comes down his entry road, nineish one evening. There's still a lot of light about in this summer light rich country. It's the organist, Annette Jespersen. She gets out of the car. Les has only seen her in church drab dress at St Rosalie's.

She's got on a denim frock, slits deep up the skirt and a very décolleté neckline. She's obviously had a few drinks – another surprise. She's carrying a couple of bottles of wine. Les looks her over carefully.

"To what do I owe this honour, Anne?" he asks.

"Well Les," she says, "I've been doing a slow burn about that bit of aristocratic fluff who is giving you the run around when the gorgeous Fiona isn't to hand. I feel deprived."

"Oh..." says Les, to stem the flow. "Aren't you being looked after well by your famous merchant banker husband?"

"Shit, Les," she says. "I have to mix raggedy goat weed in with his muesli to get a jump out of him, but you're just diverting me. I've come over to fuck your eyeballs out and I won't take a no."

She is a bit of a turn on, both in her dress and very firm in her approach. He drags up a steamer chair under the shade-cloth terrace sail.

"Sit tight for a minute, love," he says and goes over to the old windmill that, in days gone, used to pump water out of the fens. He comes back with a Ziploc bag full of green stuff.

"Let's have a belt of happy baccy," he says. "This usually lights a few fires and keeps those fires burning."

Annette must be 42 if she's a day and Les has always been tangled with young girls. This dealer and wheeler is red-hot and very energetic with it. She's in no state to drive home, but is up early.

"One for the road, dear Leslie," she says, "then I'll shower and get home for brekky."

'Life's full of surprises lately,' Les thinks.

## Chapter Fifty-eight

Les gets back on the Cyprus run. He takes cash over to Brindisi on the ferry, invests this again in Vatican Bonds in the gold mine company's name. The Vatican Bonds are bearer bonds, so he can keep his name quite dark on this ploy. He gets the Cyprus Bank down to half a million and then resumes the Helsinki run. He is pulled up short when he finds the balance is in line with the Cyprus one, after taking out the half million for Stockholm. Much later, he finds out quite surprisingly, his principals are now stashing money in Panama – but that's for later. Les thinks they've pushed their luck without incident a very long way in Helsinki and Cyprus and has a few weeks twiddling his thumbs.

At St Rosalie's a couple of months later Les is singing in the choir and fielding lascivious looks from the organist. Once or twice he's had it off with her behind the organ console after the service ends and she surely is flashing him liberty hall looks today. But today, Les is unthinkingly taking off the stance of Rodin's famous bronze statue of 'The Thinker'. He's leaning forward in his choir pew, elbow on one knee, chin in hand.

The priest is quoting Ecclesiastes; he's articulating,

For everything there is a season,

A time to be born,

And a time to die.

'Hmm,' thinks Les – 'and a time to go fucking home'.

Late afternoon a car comes down Les's cottage entry. It's Annette Jespersen.

“Well, shoot,” says Les to himself. “This may take the edge off tonight’s dine out in Cambridge.”

“Your real farewell party, Les,” she says, “is next week. Only two guests, you and me, but I have an urge for a romp and was in the vicinity.”

She gets out of her car. She’s wearing a very sexy suit, a sheer blouse under, with a sheepdog black bra showing through.

‘Bugger the evening,’ Les thinks. ‘I’ll make do with here and now.’

## Chapter Fifty-nine

He flies Singapore Airlines, has a stopover and gets a lump in his throat to see Pittwater and the Opera House come into view. He taxis around to Chez Norton. His door key still works and an hour later, he’s on the beach with a six-pack of Heineken. Warren is delighted to see him.

“Manna from heaven, Les,” he says. “We need you at Bathurst tomorrow for a beer TV commercial outside their classical courthouse. Here’s the script and Delilah will be there.”

“How’s Caitlen travelling?” Les asks.

“No joy for you there,” Warren says. “She married old Preston and is on her second set of twins. But Delilah is still good to go.”

He meets up with her at Bathurst.

“Geez Les,” she says. “A few wines at lunch and I may yet get my shag in the sun.”

Angelo is not around, but Price is delighted to see him, as is Linus.

## Chapter Sixty

Angelo gets in touch.

“Come over to Launceston,” he says. “Come and have a look at my cottage, vineyard and yacht on the Tamar.”

Angelo’s acquisition is indeed very impressive. You came off the road, down through the sloping vineyard and the house sits on a sandstone foundation overlooking his boat mooring.

“What happened to the risk of confiscation?” Les asks.

“No probs,” Angelo says. “We bought this by Ballarat Gold South, using the power of attorney that you gave your stock broker friend. We’ve turned the gold mining company into a property company.”

“How are you financing this?” Les reasonably asks.

“Easy, peasy,” says the little Italian. “Old Hiram has come up with a scheme whereby he uses our cash at the Timber Bank as loans back to us at a rate of interest that allows us to negative gear the loans tax wise. We’ve bought a big property at Horsham.”

“You’re now farming?” Les asks.

“Never,” says Angelo, “I only know how to grow tomatoes. We’re leasing out the broad acres to proper farmers. Come along now and look at my tomato patch.”

Les shakes his head. “And all that dosh in the gold exchanges?”

Angelo looks at him shrewdly. “That is just to ensure that Tun, me and you will never have to work again. By the way, we’ve bought your block of flats in Bondi.”

Back in Bondi, he goes around to the block of flats that the mining company now owns. He works out that he should take over the main ground floor flat, put in a spiral staircase to the flat above and mousehole from that flat to the next adjoining one and he will have heaps of living space with rather splendid beach views. He can keep his old ten gear bike in the bottom flat and bike anywhere he wants to go in the immediate area. But Les thinks there's always a but in his affairs, the space at the back of the flats is too narrow for him to develop a courtyard garden to install his very erect statue of David in.

A couple of old thirties houses abut his property line. An Italian owns these; lives in one and he has a 'To Let' sign on the other. The houses are modest, early fifties War Service ones, brick boxes really. They once had great views over the back, but the developer that built Les's block of flats did away with that. A real estate agent tells Les the Ding owner won't sell the houses. Les doesn't want to show his hand. Unwanted attention isn't desirable.

He confers with Linus, entices him to lease the empty house for twelve months, with six months rent up front. The Ding jumps at the deal. Once the papers are all signed, Les tells Linus he deserves a break.

"I'll do your shift at the Kelly Club, free of, old chap. You'll still get paid, take a six week break. I can give you a key to a high-rise at Surfers, there's a car in the underground parking and so on."

In short, Les is making free with Tun's unit that he hung out in when he bought the mining company and hid out there to avoid the press. Les goes around to Redfern. He winks out his old friend, Target, a big sloppy original Australian.

"Here's the go, Target," he says. "Here's the key to a house at Bondi. The double garage is stocked up with full strength stubbies and 90 casks of wine."

Target gives Les a shrewd look.

"What do we have to do, Les?" the chap asks.

"Just party on for a few weeks. The booze is free and without charge. I just want you to make plenty of noise and have a good time."

Target isn't any dill, despite his indolent look.

"Ah Les, Les, Les," he says. "The last time you gave me a gift horse out at Clontarf, the bloody thing bit me in the arse with very sharp teeth."

Les hangs his head a bit.

"Well," he says, "We all make mistakes."

"Don't worry Les," Target says. "With a garage full of stubbies and 90 odd cardboard casks, I don't see my constituency voting against it. In fact, I'm sure they'll vote it the only show in town, until they drink the stock dry."

Les says, "It's essential that all transport not be in cars. The fuzz will be out setting rabbit traps to get you once things get going. I'll liaise with you to give an out of work bus driver some work on a Redfern-Bondi shuttle service."

"Fine," says Target.

The booze comes with the compliments of Eddy the Bikie, or nearly, he is charging Les \$5 per carton for this hi-jacked booze, and \$1.50 per wine cask. Les gets a garden design man in and tells him to draw up what he wants.

"But the block's got a house on it."

Les grins. "I'm about to work on that," he says.

The Italian landlord whose home has been made unliveable by the Redfern Boys running nightly corroborees takes umbrage not so much later. He's not without connections. They come onto Les at Chez Norton, about the time Les goes to bed. Nut he hears them coming. He still has the noiseless strobe alarm he used on the

Stockholm ferry, which was designed to tell him if a hit squad was assembling outside his cabin. It works like a charm.

By the time they get busy breaking in his door (a solid one), Les has an aluminium baseball bat in one hand and a bit of hardwood tile batten in the other. He pokes the tile batten into the first man's stomach and belts the next man on the head. It's pretty thronged by now on his portico entry. He gives the next man a bums rush push off the balcony and sets himself to give the main man, who seems to want to lead from the rear, gyp.

Les really gets down to it with this chap belting him around the ears, head-butts him and finishes him off with a rabbit killer. He now gives them all a spray from the capsicum spray that hangs in an onion bag behind his door. He looks over the lot; they are all out of it. He picks out the wheel-man, stamps on his elbow, then goes down to the street and using his flick-knife, slashes all the tyres. Warren arrives home at the tail end of this little riot.

"Give us a hand, you big poofter," says Les.

"What are you going to do?"

Les grins a not so pleasant grin.

"We're going to stack them in their car and take the handbrake off. Despite the flat tyres, it will move the evidence from here."

And it does. Thus he gets the evidence well away from Chez Norton and the police don't knock on his door.

## Chapter Sixty-one

Les has a look through his old wardrobe at Chez Norton. While he's been in the northern climes, he's bought and worn very upmarket English sports coats, whipcord trousers, beautiful Edinburgh Mills jumpers, quality corduroys and Milan sources suits, not to mention his sturdy Oxford shoes; the best kicking shoes in the world.

But over there, his front persona was to walk into ferries and trains very impressively dressed, carrying his loaded stick, almost a cudgel and with him, a very small wheeled overnight case, by which means he's transported some millions of Euros; half a million at a time here, there and everywhere, without a query. Only once has he been accosted by a bank security man. It was a short, but sharp encounter.

"You're carrying a weapon, Sir," the man says in German.

"No," says Les, "I'm carrying a flare gun. I travel a lot by ferry and I have no intention, if through some nautical mishap, I find myself treading water in the Baltic, of relying on anyone else telling the rescue people where I am. I shall fire my own attention getter."

He moves carefully, his coat open to back his words. The man looks closely.

"It's what you say, Sir. Do continue on and have a very nice day."

Les has paid excess baggage to get his Northern finery home, but here at Bondi none of his shorts fit. He's put a bit of pudding on in living an active, but luxury filled life overseas. Les tries on a few pairs of his old shorts. He grunts in disgust and walks up a bit to a Target store. In the men's, he finds a big fixed plastic model in summer gear of red tee shirt and grey shorts with cuffs and little medallions on the legs.

"Can you find me the size I want in what's on this model?"

A long haired girl simpers at him.

"Certainly, Sir," she says....and does.

It looks so good on him; Les buys six pairs of the outfit.

Angelo says, "It's time you met Tun."

He whistles up a taxi; they get out at a market entrance in Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn. A small between banks entry gives way to a big covered space. Tun, it seems, has for many years run a very full-on fruit and flower stall. A minder, a very big Macedonian man, keeps the hoons in line. Les is big, but this chap, Chiro, is bigger, carries a short steel club hanging on his belt.

Chiro waves them into the screened office set into the brick building forming the square. Tun turns out to be an about 37 year old, dressed in very good fitting, perhaps Pilgrim jeans, sports shoes and a Hawthorn football shirt/jumper over. He greets Les with warmth.

"You're a big yin," he says, "and you did big good for us in Europe."

"It was interesting," Les says, "and I lived well at your expense."

"Just working expenses," Tun says. "You didn't hit us up for anything over the top.

One of the girls serving at the stall looks in.

"Big rush on grapes, Tun," she says.

He hops up, picks up two flat, open cases of white grapes and hefts them out. In bending to pick up the cases, Les spots that he's wearing probably a flat pistol in the small of his back. Angelo tells him later that Tun is entitled to do this. He is a partner in a security firm and as such is entitled to carry.

"You're not in that firm, Angelo?" Les asks.

"Never," says Angelo. "I much prefer to be sitting in the bar of the Italian Club in Carlton drinking Vin Rouge instead of clumping around somewhat dangerous shopping centres at night."

Angelo tells him that he and Tun have a security shredding business housed in a former bank down the street a bit.

"We got involved in this a bit for business information," he says, "and also the strongroom is handy as a trans-shipment point at times."

Les is looking curiously at the medium size safe in the office. It has a letter sized slot in the front of it. Angelo sees him looking.

"It's in daily use," Angelo says, "but its bait in a sort of a way. If the fuzz ever come in with a search warrant, then we know they're on to us."

Over a period of time, Les gets just a bit of background out of Angelo.

"Tun got his start, he is told, by growing Lucerne hay for the horse feed stores; grew it at Mildura, put in selected bales a big lump of happy baccy and split the feed store people in. Everybody got a real heap of money out of it and still do," Angelo says.

"And the pills?"

"Uh...Tun converted package drycleaning on-site machines so that they looked the same to look at, but each was a meth lab. He put them in the bigger laundry/drycleaning concern and worked them on production after hours. Plenty of diverting smells in those places. Never got rumbled, as not only did production go gang busters, but the laundry owners could launder much of the nett through the books."

"And now?"

“All production is offshore in places where corruption is rife; and a bit in Tasmania. We’ve got a whisky distillery over there that produces a beaut peaty drop and in off-times, a lot of pills.”

“And the Thailand/Filipino outlets?”

“Ah...Tun, who is a single man and very non-complicated with it, got into a chogey sheila with semi Tong connections. He’s franchised the pills side up there and amazingly we’ve got paid on every deal.”

“Where does that dosh go,” Les asks.

“Bank of Japan, Bank of South Korea, just a bit into the Cook Islands.”

“But you’ve got out?” Les asks.

“Yes and no,” Angelo says. “Let’s just say we’re not in the firing lines; the front line, that is. Broadly, the Lebanese and the bikies are making and running it now in Oz. It’s not so hard to bribe the boys in blue here and there. Enough of business! Let’s go down to Port and watch Hawthorn and Collingwood cross swords. Tun has a box there, not a luxury box; it’s just a non-attention getting one.”

It’s not Sydney type football, but they have a nice time watching the blood and thunder of AFL.

‘Shit,’ he thinks, ‘must be stuff all to do in Bleak City on a weekend if this number of Melbournites is packed here like sardines.’

## Chapter Sixty-two

Back at Bondi, he dines with Warren at the Risshole.

“You look the berries, Les old mate,” Warren says, “but if you don’t mind me saying so, you look a bit of a white suet pudding in your swim trunks.”

“And so would you, you asshole,” Les says. “I spent most of my time away dodging showers, particularly in the land of the To and Froms.”

They knock off some Millers Draft and then open a bottle of pink champagne to celebrate Les’s return. Delilah lobs along at the coffee stage.

“Well, Les,” she says. “It’s a bit peopled up for a daylight dig and dag. Why not come up to my unit for a custard tart afternoon tea and get on with a bit of tarting?”

“Right on,” says Leslie.

They are walking up to her flat; Warren has to go back to the advertising agency. A plain looking Holden that shrieks ‘cop’ pulls up.

“Hey, Les,” the driver says. “I’ve a good mind to arrest you for walking with intent or otherwise leading a young girl to slaughter, or at least astray.”

It’s Detective Caccano; an old, but friendly, sometimes adversary of Les’s. He’s got a rather fat and aggressive looking partner with him. Caccano was, of course, present when Les’s pig manure firing cannon was demonstrated, years back.

“Fair suck of the old sausage,” Les says. “You seem to be having all the luck.”

The detective’s partner rolls down her window a bit and shoots Les a venomous look.

“I’ll get you, you big bastard,” she says and winds the window back up.

Caccano rolls his eyes and shoots a ‘welcome back’ at Les as he starts to drive off. Les puts up his hand and makes winding motions. Both cops wind their windows down a bit.

"It's just come back to me." Les says. "Four years ago, at the Waverley Police Station, they told me you fell off the top of the 'ugly tree' and hit every branch on the way down. God, you've got fat too."

"It's the junk food on patrol," she says. "I remember you now too. You were being booked at Waverley for nearly killing those four Lebanese men. I remember also that, at the time you said 'if assholes could fly, Waverley Police Station would be an airport.' I'll get you for sure, you miserable cunt."

"Well..." Les says. "Have a nice evening at the airport."

She grabs her nightstick and makes a very good effort to get out of the car, but Caccano is too quick for her and drops his foot.

"Phew," says Delilah, "you sure know how to sweet talk a woman."

"That's no woman," says Les, "it's a gorilla posing as a woman."

### **Chapter Sixty-three**

Angelo, smartly dressed and looking quite relaxed, comes around to Chez Norton for a natter. He brings with him a couple of dark bottles bearing a discreet label reading, 'Tamar Vineyard'. They uncork. It's a Beaujolais style wine and quite good and Les, who has drunk a deal of this in Europe, tells Angelo just that.

He asks, "Why Beaujolais?"

"It's like this," Angelo says. "I'm not getting any younger."

"No..." says Les, "but do you know anybody going the other way?"

Angelo continues. "I want a wine that's ready to drink every season. Not that Grange Hermitage shit that takes half your lifetime to mature."

### **Chapter Sixty-four**

Les is standing on the steps of Sydney's Town Hall. The Italian from the Protea Club has asked for a meet. Les is too involved with the Kelly Club to get the same with any other club, so in the interest of not starting any rabbit rumours running by meeting in a more confidential spot, he has chosen, unwisely, the Town Hall spot. Unwisely that is, in that he didn't know there's some other function of note actually here today.

The Governor General of Australia has nodded to him on the way up. Les is hard to miss; he's wearing a magnificent Milan red jumper, wrinkle free tans, striped Italian shirt (an Aldo Bugatti, no less) and fawn suede country shoes bought in Thirsk. He's been quietly smoking his big-bowl, short-stem cherry wood pipe. Next, along comes an old friend, Tommy Strange, the Premier of the day, accompanied by an even older friend, Pasquale Mangalavite, once a bouncer at Elkins. They both stop and shake hands.

The Premier says, "I see your mine in Western Australia is going well."

And it is. Les and Co have bought into what looked a dud, but which from inside info, they knew would become an earner. Never trust the geologists Les said at the time.

"Yes," says Les. "Tommy, you have proved again that anyone can be Premier of NSW." and to Pasquale, "Where's your shotgun?"

Pas is here in a bodyguard capacity.

“I’ve got a sawn-off 12 gauge under.” he says, “and following your lead, it’s loaded with pig shit.”

Tommy leans close to Les.

“A good donation to the funds may prove helpful in the long run. I hear you are looking at coal in the Hunter Valley.”

## Chapter Sixty-five

The Protea man is now waiting on the steps.

“I’ll fix it,” Les says and motions them on.

The Italian says, “I’m not here to try and recruit you, Les, but I’m finding the going tough. I’d pay for good ideas.”

‘Umm...’ Les thinks. After a little while, he says, “You really need a wood duck to come along and buy you out.”

“Figures aren’t good enough,” the man says.

‘Oh,’ Les thinks. ‘I know a way out for this chap. Angelo is in touch, really in touch with the grey trade. It should be easy enough to launder some ganja cash through the club. The efficient growers like to make it in one place and launder it in another.’

“I will send a man to see you,” he says. “That will sort things out, but build the cash flow steadily.”

He’s done with this conversation and turns to go, only to be met full on by a beautiful, really beautiful woman heading up to him. She gives Les a smacking kiss.

“Les, you wombat, its years since I’ve seen you. Do you still have wombat habits?”

It’s Annalise; the High Court judge’s daughter, whom he once escorted to a big do at St Mary’s Cathedral. The wombat habits she is referring to goes back with them (Les and Annalise) a long way. She, during their liaison, used to throw the hackneyed joke to him about being an animal; he eats, roots and leaves. Les chuckles at the thought.

“You married?” he says.

“Not anymore,” Annalise says.

“What went wrong with your parent’s number one choice, the lawyer?”

“Ah...” she says, “too kinky by half for my taste. I’m in the market for a rich mining man husband again. It makes no sense to give up after just one try.”

“Dinner at the Menzies tonight,” he says.

She laughs a tinkley laugh. “God, Les,” she says, “don’t tell me you’ve made it past the pie and chips menu washed down by a couple of tinnies.”

Like a tennis player at match point, he rallies.

“You’re looking hot, Annalise.”

“That’s a good start,” she says. “I need a bit of flattering.”

“Um,” he says. “I’m definitely not kinky either.”

“Come now,” she says, “how do I know you haven’t picked up new tricks since our last outing?”

It turns out to be a very splendid evening, but she puts a little burr under his saddle.

“You remember your old flame, Maxine, who I took you off?”

“Clearly,” Les says, “but it was only a pre-emptive strike. Her family wouldn’t wear me and sowed white ants in my path.”

“Hmm, she didn’t do so well in the matrimonial stakes. Married a wife basher; he’s been giving her a lot of stick, real violence.”

“But her family....”

“No go,” she says. “When they took steps to rectify the situation, he bluffed them thoroughly, threatened to take it out on the kids; threatened with graphic detail.”

Les was pretty keen on Maxine and this spot of grim news almost, but not quite, puts a dampener on the evening. He mentally shakes it off with a promise to himself to really look into the matter next days. Thus, the evening gets back on its early promising track.

## **Chapter Sixty-six**

He gets onto Angelo about lunch time.

“Not on the phone, Les,” the man says. “Do you fancy a dine out in Canberra; there’s an easy shuttle from here and where you are.”

An express envelope drops in Les’s mail box two days later. In it are Xeroxed copies straight out of the Police at Russell St. The violence reports are even worse than Les expects. A note in a crabbed hand says, ‘have a think about this. Best perhaps if you allow me to arrange some counselling this end’, and ‘burn all this today’.

About three weeks later, Les and Annalise are having pre-dinner drinks. They are drinking pink champagne with Anne tossing off the odd shooter for a chaser. She gives Les a very, very direct look.

“Maxine’s sparring partner has dropped out of sight.”

She leaves this statement on the table. Les doesn’t bite, but he knows the matter is sorted.

“No violence on your part I hope,” she says.

Les doesn’t bite again, but mentally he expects that the missing man may have been tasked with a long swim in Bass Strait.

## **Chapter Sixty-seven**

A few days later, he is back down at Angelo’s Tamar River home. Angelo resumes where he left off.

“Now Les,” he says, “let’s take another couple of bottles and a six pack and go out for a little sail on the ‘Marie Celeste’.”

“You know,” he continues, as they catch the North Easter and draw out into the river, “in the early days of Launceston, it was said that mud picked up onto the hulls of sailing ships, in the Tamar, could still be seen when they anchored in the pool of London. And.....talking of sticking to things; we’ll want you, after a spell at home, to be in Panama in a few months, to start converting an embarrassing amount of dollars there into gold - perhaps at the Chicago gold exchange.”

This pulls Les up short. He suspects that Tun and Angelo may have sold their pill operation. They seem more relaxed than before; perhaps why all this dosh is in Panama in the first place. It may indeed be Bogota Cartel money. It seems logical. Les ponders the idea.

‘Hmm,’ he thinks, ‘perhaps a deal of time where the Septic Tanks live may indeed be a bit of a hoot.’

He thinks back on Oscar Wilde's comments made on America when he (Oscar) lived and worked there for a time. 'Contrary to popular opinion, Wilde says, America was never discovered – it was really detected.'

Les is down solo on the beach in Bondi. He's dug himself a bit of a hole in the damp sand (the tide is going out). He's got a small square esky with him, full of Millers Draft. The beach is crowded; it's the usual panorama of how an Australian beach should look. He thinks back and shudders, of swimming in England; laying on the stony shingle. 'Things could be worse,' he thinks.

Annalise is looking very smart in a one piece white swim suit, almost a 1940 one, but perhaps not - its slashed at the hip, slashed to the navel. Perhaps it's a 50's style someone has attacked with a box cutter. Annalise has been fending Les off despite him advancing on her like a German Army patrol.

"Les, I've been thinking."

"A bad habit, Anna," he says, "better to feel your way."

"There's a nice little B & B in Katoomba," she says. "I've made a booking for us."

"Gawd, Annalise," he says, "what's brought this on? You've been playing hard to get."

"Well," she says, "I've just been thinking. You know, despite the plethora of aphrodisiacs that get shoved in your bib and brace incessantly, in the final wash up, 'the mind is still the most powerful sex organ'."

Les grunts delightedly. "Katoomba, here we come," he says.

## Chapter Sixty-eight

But Les's next trip to Seppo land comes up more quickly than he envisages. He gets called down to Angelo's Tamar Riverbank home after the AFL footy season wraps up. They are sitting in Angelo's sun-room looking out a big picture window to the river, where Angelo's sailing boat is moored at the jetty.

"It's like this, Les," Angelo says. "Tun has been taken up with an idea to legally like getting a huge tranche of money into Australia; money that you can buy something with, without having the AFP lobbing on your doorstep with a warrant to confiscate our hard earned, due to it being sourced from the proceeds of crime. Here's the outline of the plan which I want you to have a read of now and which I'll burn in the tile fire when you've read it."

It's an interesting idea and one of the very rare things Tun has actually put on paper. Angelo pours Les a Cascade into a silver tankard and Les starts reading. The broad outline is of a firm in Atlanta that can be bought. Barraclough Partners, it seems, is a long established Delaware Corporation which raises funds through bearer bonds and puts the money out on loan to banks, which on-lend the money, in the main, into housing and return it to Barraclough's at the end of the agreed term.

One Manny Gehlein, an Atlanta Jew, has run this single-handed for over three decades. But Manny is nobody's fool, neither is he any spring chicken. He took fright when the sub-prime organisers started lending money to any Americans with a pulse, who wanted to buy a house. He got out from under by calling in his loans through a clever clause in his loan contracts and buying back bonds, many of which were held by the Mob. Having avoided catastrophe, Manny has been lending out money in safer climates. He now does business in Germany, Canada and Australia.

Old Hiram, at the Timber Bank in Port Moresby, has suggested to Tun and Angelo that they could, before American Thanksgiving, buy out Manny's firm, keep it registered in Delaware, but keep the Oz loan repayments at term end in cash inside Australia. Hiram has warned Tun and Angelo that the Mob money invested can be paid out elsewhere, such as Finland – which would suit the Mob much better.

Les lights his pipe to ponder the content of his read. "Do you have to get involved with others, Angelo?" he asks. "You've got huge gold stocks in Europe safely tucked away and the only drawback, in view of your aversion to banks and other written words, is that you have to go overseas and bring home just an accountable (to Customs) amount of cash at any one time."

Angelo laughs. "Therein lies the problem," he says. "We've got too much cash stashed here and there in Oz without adding to it."

He waves his hands at the clouds of aromatic smoke coming out of Les's pipe. Les is both thinking hard and puffing hard.

## Chapter Sixty-nine

"Gawd, Les," Angelo says. "Let's go down to the vineyard and throw a few clays from the skeet traps I've set up there."

He reaches under the small Chintz covered sofa he is sitting on and pulls out a couple of shotguns from under the Chintz fringe. One is a pistol grip 12 bore Ithaca 37. It's a five shot and the quality of its make, shows up at a glance. The second gun is an English Holland & Holland skeet gun.

"Christ on the mountain," Les says. "You keep your guns under a sofa? What in god's name is in that top of the range gun cabinet in the laundry?"

Angelo laughs a dry laugh. "Come," he says standing up. "I'll give you a Captain Hook. It will illustrate what I've been saying."

He opens the very secure looking gun safe. Les is stunned. It's packed chocker with bank notes. He reaches in, pulls a few packets out; all Australian \$100 notes. Angelo pulls several packs from the other side; American dollars and Euro large notes. He opens the ammunition locker on top of the gun safe. It's full of bank plastic bags of gold coins, mostly the favoured one is Kruger Rand, but half of the available space is taken up with slippers of pure gold. This is a popular way of stacking up gold produced by small miners ready for the mint to appraise them.

"I go over to Kalgoorlie and other points west," he says, "to buy these in. All cash, no paper. Haven't been duded yet, but I do have the slippers core sampled by someone I can trust on a random check basis."

They go down through the vineyard and call in at the winery to pick up some no 9 shot. It's built out of mud brick, very French Provencal.

"I'm into Rosé at the present," Angelo says. "Most Rosés are traditional blends, but I seem to be getting results from using Pinot Noir with a splash of Grenache. You've got to pick right to get the colour most right," he says. "Tricky."

Angelo cranks up the skeet traps; doesn't miss a clay. Les shoots gun down with the Holland & Holland; doesn't miss too many.

"I'd love to give the Ithaca a run at the Melbourne Gun Club," Angelo says, "but I fear this type of gun – so American – could result in too many eyebrows being raised."

Les lamps the pair of clays just out of the trap; really concentrates, aims at the cross-over point and hits the pair with one well thought out shot. It's roughly the equivalent of a golf hole in one.

"Shot," says Angelo. "That'll do for today. Let's talk about the fine details over a glass of cold Rose and a few oysters."

"Onyer, Ang," says Les.

## Chapter Seventy

Thus, in late November, Les; beautifully dressed against the cold in English winter clobber from his Fenland days moving money around Europe, walks into the Atlanta park designated as the meet and greet place. It's on the site of the Civil War Battle of Peachtree Orchard and as a reminder of that conflict, a cannon marked by a plaque that says it was used at the famous battle, is the centrepiece of the park. A sharp-faced middle height man in a camel hair coat says, "Les Norton?"

"Spot on, me old China Plate," Les says.

"Okay," the chap says. He opens up a leather case, takes out something that looks like a wand.

"Stand easy," he says and runs this over Les. Apparently satisfied, he puts it back in the case.

"Umm..." Les says, "your technology may be out of date."

"Saves a pat down," he says.

"Maybe so," says Les, "but the new all plastic with plastic bullets wouldn't show up."

"Touché," the man says and pats him down expertly.

There's another chap standing under a dogwood tree and on a park bench is a wizened up little bloke with a stick. The wand owner walks Les over to the bench.

"Seems kosher, Mr Gehlein," he says.

Les puts out his huge hand. "Watcher, Cock," he says.

The little chap laughs. "Ah," he says, "You've spent time in Limey-land, I see."

"And you have bodyguards," Les rejoins. "Are they a constant?"

Manny Gehlein chuckles. "Only when I'm dealing with Australians," he says.

Les looks around. There's a woman on a park bench reading from a book to a, perhaps 12 year old, girl.

"Um..." Les says. "FBI perhaps?"

"Don't think so," Manny says. "My man here is ex Haganah and he's checked her out. She's reading Charles Dickens Tale of Two Cities, to her attentive audience. We think that's too deep even to be FBI. What do you have for me?"

"Um..." says Les, "Broadly, 60¢ in the dollar for your bonds - 70% in dollar bills, 10% in Euros and the rest in gold."

"Where's the gold?" Manny asks.

"Um..." Les says, "It's currently in Panama, but by deal settlement date it will be at the Chicago Gold Exchange."

Manny lights up a dark cigarillo, coughs as it first fires up.

"I'm stuffed with emphysema," he says, "time is running out."

"It's running out for all of us, Manny old cheese and plate," Les says.

"It's a helluva discount you're asking," he says. "But it would allow me immediate or near immediate dosh to settle on my kids and their kids in short order. But I think it's a start point to negotiate, perhaps."

“Nothing doing, Manny,” Les says. “My offer is the only one I am empowered to make, but, and there’s always a but, two people from Chicago will be along in the next few days to do a searching due diligence.”

“I have no qualms about that,” Manny says. “Gawd,” he says almost to himself, “it’s a bit parky.”

Les stands up, delves into his black English overcoat pockets and pulls out four shot-glasses and a squat bottle.

“Clyde Valley single malt,” Les says.

“Speyside?” the man asks.

“Nup,” says Les. “From Bothwell in Tasmania. One of my employers holds a major share in the distillery that makes it.”

Manny chuckles; calls his look-outs in and they skol their way through a bottle of really good malt.

“I hope..,” says Les, “there’s not a sniper out there in the bushes. He could take us out in two shots.”

“You’re quite a card, Les,” he says. “What about coming around and joining my thanksgiving lunch tomorrow?”

“Fine,” says Les, “I’ve nothing on. Where do I find you?”

Manny chuckles. “I never give out my address, but a starlight blue Limo will be outside your pub at 11.15am.”

## Chapter Seventy-one

Les doesn’t quite know what to expect from this unplanned home visit, decides to scrub up a bit. He puts on an English mid-grey business suit, crisp white shirt, Collingwood tie, beautiful hand-tooled brown brogues and puts away in the room safe, his Rolex oyster watch, wearing instead, a Readers Digest one, a PierCarlo d’Alessio, one that is nicely understated.

“If you’ve got it, you don’t have to flaunt it,” Les growls to himself.

He also puts a flat Makarov pistol in his pocket. He tops all of this off with yesterday’s black English overcoat, picks up another bottle of Bothwell booze and buys a very decent bunch of roses and a box of Belgian chocolates from the shops downstairs. He expects the bodyguards from yesterday will be there and buys three silver flasks, fills them with a small funnel from another bottle of the same single malt. While this sounds a bit over the top, Angelo gave him a Woolworths bag full of US dollars to bring with him, so he can, with a clear conscience, think, ‘hang the expense’.

Les starts his giveaway-athon with a silver flask to the coloured Limo driver. He doesn’t know what to expect about Manny’s living spot, but it turns out to be an apartment block in a big brownstone.

“Jewish ghetto quarter?” Les asks the Limo man.

“Yeah and no,” the man says. “Rich Jews, yes, run of the mill Jews, no.”

Les finds the look-outs manning the door, gives them gifts and checks in his Makarov.

“Nice weapon,” the man says.

To his surprise, only Manny and his wife greet him.

“Family?” Les asks.

"They're moderns," Mrs Gehlein says. "We love the boys and see them often, but their wives - all wives, no partners - are right little bitches on family occasions. But they do come around next day when the real point of the day has passed.

"Do you have children, Les?" Manny asks.

"No," says Les. "I've never married, but there is a girl at a place called Nimbin, who is raucously claiming that her daughter is our daughter."

"And is she?" Mrs Manny asks.

Les laughs. "Bella," he says, "on the weekend in question, I was smoking a product that has made Nimbin vicariously famous and as they say in American Senate hearings, 'I have no recall of the matter'."

"But...DNA?" Bella queries.

"Haven't gone down that road yet," Les says. "But I send a chunk of money to the supermarket there once a month to ensure they don't starve."

They tuck into the turkey and cranberry sauce and well baked veggies and are having a most pleasant and amicable time, when the black maid, who is keeping the food up to them, fields a phone call. She brings over another dish of roast sweet potato and says to Manny, "One you should take, Sir."

"What goyen would ring me at Thanksgiving lunch-time," he grumbles.

The maid is razor sharp. "Better to talk to them, Mr Gehlein, Sir," she says, "then have them call round."

Manny gets up and takes the call in another room. He returns rather subdued and thoughtful, but cheers up when the plum pudding arrives with its brandy sauce burning like a gas flare. They end up sitting with coffee and cognac on comfortable settees. Manny stands up.

"Something has come up, Les," he says. "We need to talk. Bella, my love, will you excuse us."

They go into a panelled and book-lined study. It's a fine room. Les runs his finger up the panelling.

"English linin fold," he says.

"Spot on," Manny says. "It came out of a Yorkshire house called 'Greystones' near Thirsk. It was up for demolition when they extended the big motorway there. Now Les, my phone call was to set up the due diligence inspection."

"Well, you would have expected that, Manny," Les says.

"Um...yes indeed, but I never expected money men from the Gambini crime family to be doing it. I need to know Les, just who you are running with."

"The Gambini's are all right," Les says. "Otherwise my principals wouldn't touch them with a 40 foot pole."

"Umm..." Manny says. "They are certainly very good businessmen. They have a firm culture. Simply put, if you dud them, then you are dead. You can always tell a Gambini wrap-up of a bad deal. A single shot to the back of the head with a hollow point .22 bullet."

"Well, Manny," Les says, "That's exactly what the Mossad use on their targets."

"Of course," Manny says. "Simple, but effective."

Les now has a few days to kill before meeting up with the Chicago people. There's a knock on his hotel door next day. Les takes the safety off his Makarov, holds it around his back just a bit and with the chain still on, opens the door. He knows there's only one man standing outside his door, but that's no guarantee there aren't others out of the door viewer sight.

"Nick Farella," he says. "I work for Theo Lamont in Chicago."

“Doing what, Nick?”

“Mainly watching Theo’s back, but today I’ve brought down the forensic accountants to look at Manny’s operation. The Gambini’s Gulfstream is out at the airport, so I’m here to offer you a free flight to O’Hare and we can give you a good look around the windy city, if you like, while you wait on the accountants findings.”

“Onyer, Nick,” Les says. “Sounds grouse to me.”

Nick gives Les a humorous look.

“You can bring that pistol with you. We don’t have to go through any security at the private airfield.”

“You’re quick,” Les says.

“Matter of...have to,” says Nick. “It’s the quick and the dead in Chicago. Always has been...always will be.”

In no time they are wheels up towards Chicago. Nick is pleasant company. He serves up, or rather their beautiful little Chinese stewardess does, a plate of antipasto and some Coors beers.

“What do you do, Les, in your normal life? That is, when you’re not over in strange lands talking turkey to strange members of the Jewish fraternity?”

“Um...” Les says. “I’m a doorman at a Sydney Town Club called ‘The Kelly Club’.”

“You work there?”

“Not entirely, I have a 49% share in the business, but it’s more fun being hands on, than shuffling paper.”

“Tell us a bit more about what you get up to.”

Les tells him about a recent dust up that he got involved in at a nightclub in Terrigal. He tells Nick about how his club experience got him into and out of what turned out to be a delightful melee. He also tells him of a recent dust up with the Lebanese, who have become very noticeable in Sydney. He tells him of having placed men with shotguns on the flat roof of a building opposite the Kelly Club and of what a good idea this was when things went belly up. He also tells Nick of a wonderful day at Flemington, during the last Melbourne Cup Spring Festival, when he was down there as a partner in a syndicate, whereby their horse ran second to a long shot.

“It was a cooked up deal,” Les says. “The ultimate winner belongs to a shearing contractor from Orange. This chap had a very difficult time keeping his horse dark. He had to win or show form enough to get a Cup start, but not too much form. The one jockey rode both race and track work on him so successfully, they got him out at 70 to 1. Our horse,” Les continues, “was the hot favourite, but we got a deal going with the bookies that brought us in, what used to be called a king’s ransom, not to win.”

“What about the honour and glory?” Nick asks.

“Hard to put in the bank,” Les says.

The flight attendant calls Nick to a phone at the forward cabin bulkhead. Nick has an animated conversation, comes back. He opens another Coors, produces some black cigarillos.

“Word from the top,” he says, “from Theo himself. He asked me if you are decent company and whether you have any woods-like clothes and footwear.”

“Yes, I have, Mate,” Les says. “Good enough to climb mountains in.”

“Thank Christ for that,” Nick says. “Anyway, given that you’re not going to bore the shit out of him, I’m to deliver the jet to Burlington and we’ll have a little visit

to Theo's old farm there. It's in the foothills of the mountains that sweep down to Lake Champlain; really Ethan Allen country."

A chap in a tan Pontiac meets them at Burlington. He gets a couple of Uzis, flat sinister looking little machine pistols out of the boot, puts one under his feet, gives one to Nick and Les.

"Expecting trouble, fellas?" Les asks.

The new man grins. "We always expect trouble," he says. "We're paid to anticipate it."

## Chapter Seventy-two

While Thanksgiving has been and gone and fall is just around the corner, there are still heaps of the last of the leaf colour to be sighted. It's well past full on, but the colour reaching up into the wooded heights is very eye-catching. They pull up at the Red Lion Inn. More men greet them and they go into a glassed in dining room and bar. It's set well into a mountain slope and the outlook is marvellous.

Thus Les meets Theo Lamont, relative of the Gambini's and head shेरang of the Gambini family business. Nick has told Les that Theo and his dad before him have shifted much of the family activities into legitimate business. He has glossed over the grey trade – but Angelo says they are big in it, despite the big drop of good imported stuff brought about by the intense activity of the drug enforcement arm of the Federal Government.

Les is a bit surprised at the extent of the Praetorian Guard surrounding, or in the near vicinity of, the big boss. After opening formalities and being seated across the table from Theo; a table with stunning fall views down the valley. Les opens the batting.

"You seem well protected, Mr Lamont," he says. Les would usually say 'owyergoin moite', but thinks it wise to show due deference to what is very obviously a man of influence.

"Call me Theo," the man says. "Protection now...this is the US of A, the land of the free, home of the brave, where the constitution allows anyone to carry arms. There's no gang wars in the windy city these days, but due to the efforts of the Drug Enforcement Agency, it's much harder to get good product in. We have sort of invented a way around this and the bit of a monopoly we have in this field has bred some very virulent jealousy; hence the need to cover our backs. We keep a sharp eye out on our home turf, but anyone wishing us ill would be more likely to have a crack at us when in holiday mode. So we man up when we're here or over in Montana, where I go trout fishing. Next time over, we will take you there is you want. Like Ernest Hemingway, we find it a congenial spot to relax. Now to food," he continues, "I recommend the boned quail entrée, soft shell crab mains, (we're not far from the home of this – Boston) and to honour another famous Aussie, Peach Melba for dessert. Drinks wise when we finish, a refreshing Red Stripe, we can perhaps try a Napa Valley Beaujolais, which only this week has been released."

Les laughs. "Mr Theo," he says, "that is just the dogs richard. I'd be pleased to follow you."

Nick Farella, who is with them, but at a watcher's table, cuts in.

"Mr Lamont," he says, "do let Les tell you the tale of the melee at the Terrigal Night Club. It's worth listening to."

So Les recounts the amusing tale and they get off to a very amicable lunch; after this they car up to Theo's old farm. 'Cobble Hill'. The old farmhouse is built of grey fieldstone, which litters Connecticut. It is generously proportioned and has a shingle roof. It's on a bit of a slope overlooking good flattish land. Alfalfa grows there very well and the deer congregate there to feed on the sweet grass of a night.

Les changes into jeans, Timberland boots and a parka. They take a walk around the environs. Over a bit, is a church and graveyard. The wooden grave boards are not readable and the old church, Les notices, has been buttressed up with big baulks of pine. Theo gestures to the uneven nature of the graveyard. There's tumps and hollows indicating where the old pine boxes have caved in below.

"Time and tide, Les," Theo says. "It's always a salutary lesson that time does run out."

"What's with the church repairs?" Les asks.

Theo says, "Well...we don't want to encourage strays or backpackers to camp in the church, but scenically it enhances the landscape. Thus we've pulled up most of the floor, but have secured the walls and shingled roof. It's all beautifully weathered."

And indeed it is. They return to the farmhouse for a coffee and cognac.

Theo says, "I'm off for a short nap and then I'll show you something you will never see in Oz land."

Towards evening they walk on a downward path through the woods. As the path trends down, Les is aware of the glint of water to his left. They come down to a flat bit of gully floor and there find a broad lake, probably about 30 acres in extent. It's a beaver dam and in the still of evening, there are ripples paths across it where beavers are moving around, some of them towing small tree branches. They are, for all the world, like Labrador dogs in size. It's not a huge colony though Les can count 13 lodges. The look-out beaver whacks the water with his tail to warn the colony they have visitors, but it is not a dive whack. They're not particularly perturbed; it's just a watch-out signal.

The beaver dam has been placed at a point where the stream narrows. The dam is well built, but designed to allow a steady trickle of water through the dam wall. Pine and Larch woods, all soft woods if left in a still pool, develop methane gas. The cunning old beavers design their dam to prevent this.

Theo says, "In the day of beaver hats, these splendid and industrious little devils were very heavily trapped for their pelts, but nowadays, they're left alone to colonise many streams."

They watch for a while. It's a sylvan picture of industry. As they walk back up for supper at the farmhouse, Nick, carrying a Remington hard hitter rifle, leads the way at point. There is another guard behind them and a chap in the woods. It's classic patrol tactics. One of the group cooks up flapjacks for supper and Les and Theo light up their pipes and sit back.

"This deal you are looking at," Theo says, "has just the slightest smell about it, indeed, a fishy smell at that. Old Manny hasn't offered it to the locals; it's possible he sees you Aussies as a sucker opportunity."

"If," says Les, "this is a scam, how would it go down?"

"Time's running out for Manny," Theo says. "His operation, on the surface, is simple. He takes in cash for bearer bonds. Very much bearer bonds with numbers, but no name on them and they have an expiry date where you can cash them back with Manny. They don't promise interest, but in actual fact Manny pays this on them at maturity. He can't promise the interest rate upfront as it depends on what rate he

gets from the banks he lends it to – but it's always very kosher and rewarding. But his bonds are A1 at Lloyds as it were, and any moneylender will discount his notes if money is needed before the bond matures."

"So...where's the scam?" Les asks.

"Well, if there is a scam, old Manny could issue bonds with, say...a three year maturity, going forward discount them at lending sources, pocket the brass."

"In theory then," says Les, "Manny could sell us the business, sign over the Bank debts to the buyer and three years down the track, the owners of the bearer bonds would be knocking on the buyer's door demanding substantial cash."

"Spot on," Theo says. "The deal may be kosher indeed, but it just too fraught with risk. Why are you considering it?" he asks.

Les pulls on his pipe.

"We have, or my principals have, too much money overseas."

"Amen to that," Theo says. "Our overseas pot grows by the hour, so I guess you are looking for a simple way to get much of it available to you in your own dart without the Government taking it off you."

This conversation pricks the bearer bonds scheme and Les converts the Panama money into gold at the Gold Exchange in Chicago. Theo pays Les a signal compliment. He joins him at O'Hare for a breakfast at the Stirrup Bar before Les's flight is called.

"Think about getting your hands on a Bank," he says. "One you can actually control yourself. We are trial ballooning one in Missouri and don't mind letting you know how we get on. By the way, Les...I know you're big on gold mining and have such a company, but do you actually mine gold?"

"Yes," says Les, "but not in Victoria. A crooked geologist sold us test results on a proposed big open-cut one in the scrub in Western Australia. Thus we now have a controlling interest in a bonanza."

"Well done," says Theo as they shake hands and part.

## **Chapter Seventy-three**

Les doesn't hurry home. He goes to South Africa to have a captain cook at where he can buy gold and stash it there. But six weeks later, he gets off the South African flight at Mascot. Price and Billy are there to meet him.

"Didja have a good time, Les?" Billy asks.

Les growls, "Is the Pope Catholic?"

But Billy's quick. "I have a Methodist girlfriend at the moment. She is of the opinion that the jury is still out on that. Her argument is that Pope Leo the Tenth was appointed by the Medicis, due to his accounting skills – not on the quality of his theology."

"Umm...", says Les. "What's happening here in Sinny Town?"

And they tell him. Truth to tell, not much has happened in Sydney while Les has been away, but the Kelly Club hasn't flatlined. Some of his innovations gleaned from his long spell in Europe, have kicked in to give a decent boost to the takings. Satisfied with this, he decides to stay uninvolved for the moment and having adapted to the southern hemisphere summer, he goes home to follow a beach regime and to space out around Chez Norton some of his North American acquisitions which have arrived back in NSW.

He has a pair of Vanbrugh vases, fired from rich Colorado clay. Having walked the field at Gettysburg, he has developed an interest in repo artefacts of the Civil War. He adds two beautiful bronzes – one of Stonewall Jackson, the other of Union General John Sedgewick, who famously said (and they were his last words ever) of the Confederate sharpshooters, at the Battle of Spotsylvania, ‘Those bastards couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance.’ Les has also picked up some very fine subdued water-colours of this. They are subtly framed and he has put in plugs to hang them here and there.

He expects to see a cryptic post-it note from Tun, or more often Angelo, stuck to the brass face of his Grandfather clock; it’s their usual communication media – they all have copy keys of each other’s residences.

Les grunts with pleasure at his new treasures and goes down to Bondi on his mountain bike, wearing helmet, budgie smugglers and a big LL Bean t-shirt; towel around his neck. After a couple of hours catching some big ones and admiring the scantily attired girls on the beach, Les drops his bike gear down to the easy end and cycles back to his home. As he wheels his bike into its storage area, Les observes a rather beautiful looking girl awaiting his arrival. She has with her a wine cooler, six-pack and Pizza box.

“What about a drink in your back garden, big boy?” she says.

“Do I know you?” Les asks.

“Not at all,” she fires back, “but here’s your chance to.”

“Ok love,” chauvinistic old Les grunts.

He walks her to his back garden, sits her down and goes off to get changed. She’s a looker and has that look in her eyes. He puts on long tans, a button-down Turnbull and Asser shirt and some marvellous loafers bought in Como City at the foot of Lake Como; grabs his pipe and a slipper of tobacco and joins her in the garden. She looks around.

“This is marvellous,” she says.

And indeed it is. There’s a good sweep of green, green lawn, summer sweet peas of water-colour quality blooming in scooped dishes and the garden walls are espaliered with climbing roses; Delbards, David Austin’s and strong old English climbers. Set subtly among these on a bit of used brick paving is the statue of David, a very time-scarred David that Les bought in Florence some time back and shipped out.

“Ah...,” she says. “He looks marvellous and he’s not circumcised.”

“None of the classical ones ever are,” Les says.

“Hmm...,” she says. “Smart enough to give a girl a plain hint.”

“Oh,” Les says, “it’s just an interest arouser. I can show you the real follow-up in my bedroom.”

“Down boy,” she says.

“I don’t think you are here for that,” Les says. “Who are you and what are you up to?”

“Sally Redford, a Queenslander like you. I work for the Courier Mail and at present are doing a series on famous Banana State people.”

“I’m not famous,” Les says.

She pulls out a long stiff covered note book.

“Let’s see...you own almost every share in a publicly listed gold miner, which digs no gold in its correct state, Victoria, but is digging up bucket-loads from a huge open-cut in the scrub of WA. You got the shares dirt cheap. There were rumours of insider information, but they seem to have gone away. You worked for twelve years

for St George Building Society and at one time, did duty in the Dragon suit and you thumped somebody who upset you.”

Les laughs. “That was a raging poof who was trying to feel me up inside the suit. I had no option, but to run over the bastard.”

“Let’s see,” she says. “You do a lot of game fishing in the Coral Sea out from Port Macquarie.....”

‘Jesus,’ Les thinks, ‘I hope she doesn’t know about the Port Moresby money runs to the Timber Bank.’

“You’ve lived overseas,” she says. “Did most of your MA at Cambridge and finished it off here at Sydney University. Your horse, Splinter, second in the Melbourne Cup - did you run a slanter with him? I heard the Bookie’s ring were lighting Cuban thigh rolled cigars with twenty pound notes at Crown Casino that night.”

“Piffle,” says Les. “We never backed him. He was a slow horse.”

“Hmm,” she says, “but you took him to England and cleaned up big at Epsom. Now...” she continues, “you, a University student, were often sighted at money centres around the world. We hear you have been seen dining out Lakeside in Lucerne as the guest of the Zingli Bank. And you are known in the West end Clubs, including Whites; you are a member of Bracks Club, which usually has a very long waiting list. You’re often seen dining at the Melbourne Club.”

I can’t help it if I get invited here and there,” he says. “I tell good after dinner jokes and play cards jovially and quite well.”

And the girl says, “Although it took a while to ID you, you once appeared in a Hymns of Praise TV event from Ely Cathedral. And while in England, you kept close company and were at house parties with one of England’s noted debs.”

“Oh...” says Les. “She was a bit debbed out by the time I hooked up with her.”

“Now...” she says, “I get to the nub of the matter....you sail as a club doorman, but you’re as rich as Croesus.”

“Do you remember when Alan Bond was king of the world and made the cardinal mistake of trying to take over Tony Rowland’s Enro Company solely to skim Tony’s boat-mooring in Sicily off him?”

“Who doesn’t?” she says.

“Tony sank Bondy in a thrice by saying in the press, that Bond Corporation was technically insolvent. This was the bit that blew old Bondy up and left him languishing on a prison farm.”

“Ah yes,” she says. “And his prison warder got sprung driving Bondy to lunch in West Perth at O’Connor’s Wine Bar.”

Les laughs. “Say what you like about the old painter and alleged house-breaker, but he really had a lot of style.”

“But your point is...?” she says.

“Ah...behind every big Joe is invariably a heap of borrowed money. I owe so much to European bankers that the interest I pay on my multi-dud loans, leaves me with a minus profit figure on my totally genuine tax returns. I was fortunate enough at St Georges to put out some good investments in property around Sydney. Norm Gallagher’s green bans on terrace house demolition – god bless you Norm, wherever you are – left me with property of an ensured value to start raising overseas capital on.”

“Where,” she asks, “does the ownership of Tudor Hill Farm, Faint Hope Farm and that huge place, Robin Hill, fit into all this?”

Les chuckles. "Well, you can't ride a trail bike around Bondi safely. Thus I needed a hobby farm and Horsham is scenic and close and I could easily borrow to pay for it."

"But these are prime farming properties," she says, "and you don't farm them."

"No," says Les, "but Richard Goodfellow is making a good fist of doing that. Farming on that scale needs a fit farmer from a bush-rat family to make it work and work well."

The girl shuts her notebook.

"Goodenuff," she says. "May I take you out to dine?"

"Only," says Les, "if you drive and come up for a nightcap."

"Fine," she says. "I hear you have a home cluttered with mouth-watering goodies and I'd love to have a captain cook at these."

Both the girl and the Courier Mail article later prove to be kind. She is sitting in a beautiful little leather covered club chair in Les's lounge, wearing only Les's huge dressing gown.

"You're a pretty deep bastard, Leslie," she says, "and every half hour you seem to produce yet another hidden talent."

Les grins a Cheshire cat satisfied grin.

"No complaints from this side, Sally," he says. "If you will pardon a pun that I could have been shot for at Cambridge, are you up for a further sally back to the bedroom?"

She hops up with alacrity.

"One for the road, Leslie," she says, "and then I must get my new piece typed out. It's already indelibly inscribed into my feather-weight brain."

Les grins again. "It's not your brain I have in mind, Sally, let's get started, or restarted, Les," she says.

## Chapter Seventy-four

Having caught up on his sex life, Les catches a plane to Launceston, walks along from the airport coach stop to a place he knows, rents an oldie; a green Festiva for a few days, shoehorns himself into it and sets out for the Tamar River property. There's a white dual cabber down at the winery. It's Gordon, a near neighbour who works a bit with Angelo in the vineyard and the winery.

"What ho, Gordon," Les says. "When did you last set your mince pies on old Angelo?"

Gordon walks over to a calendar hanging on the mud batt wall.

"Nine weeks ago tomorrow," he says. "It's unusual."

"You must be owed a bit, Gordon," he says. "Do a sum in your head and I'll attempt to put matters on the square."

"Oh, he'll pay me."

"But not until you see him," Les says. "Best do the sum."

He pays him off and says, "Keep a fairly close eye on the place. If Angelo doesn't turn up, I'll see you are paid at least monthly. What are you working on?"

"Well..." the man says, "the bit of stock is easily looked after and I'm turning the bottle wine in the racks and spraying the vines."

"The yacht looks a bit forlorn," Les says. "Can you slip in and shed it in the boatshed?"

"Easy, peasy," says Gordon.

Les checks the house, checks the gun safe – still chocker with gold and bank notes. There's no message. Les is quite perplexed. The fact that the sailing boat has been left in the water, indicates that something is out of kilter. He decides to fly back to Melbourne asap. He tells Gordon to phone him and leave a message at the Kelly Club as needs must.

He taxis out to Glenferrie Road. The big pineapple – headed Macedonian chap is running things tightly. He confirms what Gordon has told Les. Tun similarly has been gone for the same period.

“Any problems?” Les asks.

“Not really...the daily cash take pays the wages and the next day's orders. Its running along profitably and easily, but the money in the safe letter box is dropping off a bit. I'm not entirely sure what that means totally, but all I can do is soldier on until Tun resurfaces.”

Les uses his key to access Tun's upstairs living quarters. It overlooks the Market area. He turns the modern Grandfather Quartz clock sideways a bit on the glazed tile floor. There's a heap of cash in the space under the pendulum and a folded up plane itinerary. The post-it note attached reads, 'This shows where we'll be. Don't know yet when we'll be back. Best wishes. PS Time is the essence.'

Les has a queer feeling in his gut over this. There's actually three itineraries. The first one shows Tun and Angelo's proper names – Sydney to Kuala Lumpur. The second shows a booking from there to Beijing in quite different names. The third in the different names shows a flight from Beijing to Heathrow. And that's it.

Les's gut does a flip flop. He is well aware that outside Australia, Angelo and Tun like to confuse things; use dodgy passports. He turns back to the second itinerary – reads the flight number.

Its Malaysian Air Lines Flight 370.

## Chapter Seventy-Five

Les Norton has been busy sorting out his new abode. He's moved from Chez Norton' his mate Warren is still living there, to the block of flats his ersatz mining company, Ballarat South Gold, sort of bought for him. As managing director and secretary to the company and guided by the Grey Trade duo he has worked for now for some years, none of this was much of a problem. He's knocked out walls, terrorised neighbours into selling him the houses behind the block of flats to enable him to put in a magnificent walled garden, landscaped almost to death by Felicity McKenzie, the famous TV gardener.

The show-piece in this garden is a three-quarter size statue of Michelangelo's David. Les commissioned this on a visit to Florence; but it's a David with a difference. It's an erect David, a huge conversation piece when he has a 'drinkies and savouries' evening in the back yard. It's more or less something of the conversation piece that Aristotle Onassis had in his yacht, 'Christina'.

The bar stools there were indeed conversation pieces, being made up out of whales foreskins. When he first read of this in the Mediterranean magazine – 'Interesting People', Les said to himself, 'Conversation piece – what the blazes do these people converse about?'

At one of Les's parties, a celebrity guest took off her knickers and hung them saucily on David's erection.

## Chapter Seventy-Six

Les is having a hunt through his extensive wardrobe of upmarket English clothes acquired over his three year stay in Cambridgeshire and brought home with him when he came back to Bondi.

“Hoady, hoady, hoady,” goes Les as he picks among his fine suits.

He’s looking for a grey flannel Anthony Squires one, mid grey at that. He finds it, picks out a Turnbull & Asser shirt, selects a soft blue wool RM Williams tie and pulls out of his shoe rack, a very nice pair of Bally tan shoes. It’s an outfit that could be worn at any level at any business meeting in the world of commerce, or for that matter, at any professional do. He wants to look his conservative best today, as it’s the Annual General Meeting of his mining company.

When Les and his associates acquired the company the shares were almost worthless on the Stock Exchange. The company was set up to deep mine gold on the Ballarat Football Oval – the idea being to donate a new fully fitted-out ground in exchange. They near as dammit got it through, but the Environmental Protection Authority spiked their guns, well and truly. The bottom fell out of the shares and Les, in his own right, using Grey Trade money supplied by Tonino and Angelo, scooped up almost all of the shares except a handful owned by some old biddies from the Bondi Bridge Club, who refused every offer.

As things turned out, they were smart cookies and their handful of shares looks like making them rich. A dodgy geologist leaked some confidential assays on a mine site being assessed south of Southern Cross in scrubland in Western Australia. The boys slipped him a million folding ones later. It was cheap, as the open cut pit is the best thing seen in WA Gold for many years.

Les acquired a big heap of shares before anyone realised that this mine was a bonanza and caught the promoters with their pants down. They couldn’t object to his takeover as they couldn’t stand the true results coming out. In short, Les blocked their scam, but left them with a lesser share of the company. Les has paid Company Tax on his profits, huge as they are, has lodged the money overseas and in a well-hidden ploy, has borrowed their own money back for investment in Australian property, paying themselves taxable interest on their alleged borrowings and building up the company assets here and there; all of which stands in the company name with Les as the only shareholder, other than the limited lot the old biddies own.

## Chapter Seventy-seven

The press have dug and dug and made much of how Les Norton, the big red-headed Queenslander, well known as the doorman at the Kelly Club in Sydney, now is a magnate of some note. Despite the digging, the investigative reporters are scratching gravel to find out much. Despite the assets the mining company hold, their head office is upstairs in a small one room office in Pitt Street. It’s not attended and in effect, is only an answering service. The clever chaps Les fronts for are Calabrian and as smart as whips.

They have schooled old Les well in their business association – put nothing in writing if possible they say, make your phone calls from different public phones, never use email, never use a computer, carry a splice (an electronic device that can detect anyone wired up) and use it on the bloke you are having a heart to heart with before you have an incriminating heart to heart, use a runner for messages and

change runners often and so on. Despite the apparent inconvenience, Les has adapted fully to his benefactors advice.

The Tax Office has long been after Les for not filing any of his mining company's returns; which he hasn't for three years while overseas moving Tun and Angelo's dosh around. But every quarter he has calculated what he owes the ATO and remitted what he estimates he owes. In fairness to the ATO, when the journos use FOI facilities to dig dirt on Les, they always admit having received regular payments from him. The ATO's chiefs are not idiots of course and can, if needed, be quite devious. Recently an ATO girl has been hassling Les over what is possibly minor stuff and during conversation number 3 with her (on a call box phone), Les jocularly says,

"Miriam, why all this communication when we could sort this out over dinner at a nice place any Thursday night?"

A long silence ensues. 'Gawd,' thinks Les, 'I've overstepped the mark, the tax police may be around shortly to arrest me.'

But the girl speaks – a very considering speak.

"Umm, Mr Norton," she says, "Thursday would be fine. Where, what time, what dress?"

Thursday arrives and he gets to meet and greet her. She is a very good-looking slim girl, thirty-twoish, he thinks. She's wearing a very eye-catching green frock that almost matches the colour of her eyes. It's a very sexy frock. He notices emeralds and diamonds on her hand, no wedding or engagement ring. He takes her coat, says 'Pardon me,' and runs his spic over her very gently. She is bemused.

She laughs. "Mr Norton, my masters haven't sent me, but no doubt they will expect some feedback."

"Why?" asks Les. "They're not paying for the meal."

They are dining at a tiny, but very upmarket lane bar in Little Collins Street, or rather just off Little Collins Street. They have prawns Nicoise and a biting little provincial white wine; quite superb. They follow this up with a mini roast, served half each with baked veggies, quite delicious and finish in plebeian style on treacle tart with lashings of cream. They don't talk business and have a very pleasant time, at the end of which Les says,

"Now it's home for a nightcap."

"Your place or mine?" she says.

"Mine," says Les and they walk out front to a waiting stretch Limo.

She is very impressed with Les's home and bits and pieces. She is particularly taken with some small but very fine object d'art sprinkled around the place, interspersed with austere furnishings of Scandinavian design. He feeds her coffee and follows up with four vodka cocktails and as predicted by the smart barman who provided the vodka cocktail recipe, he has her on her back like a beached turtle and embarking on quite a sensual journey in no time.

Les awakes to the smell of an omelette and coffee on the go.

"Gawd," he says, "Miriam, you're domesticated."

"Are you surprised?" she asks.

Les laughs a deep belly laugh. "After your wild animal performance of last evening, I'm amazed."

She laughs back. "Shit, it was pure fun," she says. "I simply love uncomplicated sex, but it's hard to find. What about next Thursday?"

'Gawd,' thinks Les. 'The good old ATO seem to be providing him with unmatched fun and frolic and perhaps, just perhaps a spy in their midst.'

After brekky he says, "In for a penny. Let's kick on for the day and I'll take you to a nice lunch."

"Hmmm," she says. "You may have eaten my lunch, but too bloody right. I'll call in sick, where's your phone?"

"There's a call box on the corner," Les says, mentally reminding himself to use a box further down into Bondi in case the ATO put a bug on the box he has just recommended.

## Chapter Seventy-eight

The day of Les's AGM rolls around and financial press plus the popular press turn up in droves to see if they can get in the door. Les anticipates this and in view of the number of legitimate shareholders with guaranteed access; himself and the five old biddies from the Bondi Bridge Club, he has advertised the meeting as being in the famous bar known as the Killing Pen at Elkins Night Club at the Cross. Just to confuse things a bit, Les turns up beautifully dressed, but wearing a very large hearing aid, which he bought from an Op Shop. Les's hearing is so acute, he can hear a single fart in a crowded movie theatre, but likes to keep the media both guessing and at bay.

He waits out front for the stretch limo he has sent to the Bondi Bridge Club for the girls and he squires them quite gracefully into the club door. In response to press pack questions, he cups his hearing aided ear and says,

"What's that, what's that? I can't hear you."

The pack come in like suckers and shout even louder. It makes great television that night and even on the financial pages of the Australian next day.

He gives each old girl a sheaf of long stemmed red roses as he hands them out of the Limo and into the crowd. The club bouncers are on hand; dinner suits, very upmarket and they head the pack upstairs for drinkies while Les has his meeting behind the well-guarded doors. He has to be brisk because, although the club owner has given him the run of the club, he wants the meeting out of the Elkins Bar early, as his usual crowd of celebrity drinkers will be clamouring for entrance soon. Elkins charges \$20 per drink and has done for years, whether the drink be beer, water or vodka cocktails and the business and professional world come here for drinkies in a big way.

Eleanor, the chatelaine of the Killing Pen, hosts the shareholders, mixes them whatever their drink of choice is and calls on Les. Old Leslie says,

"Geez, it's good to see you sheilas again and this will be a painless meeting. I'm not presenting anything written, but I'm pleased to say we have had a bonzer year. Eleanor will now be handing out to you, in gift wrapped form, a little bonus (there's \$10,000 in big notes for each of the old biddies) and as the mining company has bought a few top properties around Horsham with mint views of the Grampians, just tell Eleanor when you want to visit and a limo will take you up for your stay and bring you back. Accommodation is in the brick shearers' quarters on Tudor Hill farm and we will have a sous chef on hand to cook up a bit of tucker. Also, as we own a winery at Mudgee, there will be plenty of good booze on hand."

"Now," he continues, "here's your treat for the day."

A small combo comes in the door and play on stage with Valesquaz, the famous Spanish male stripper. Val really gets into it and the combo do the bump and grind music to a tee. The five old girls and Eleanor applaud Val's very erotic

finish and they all go downstairs to mix with the media frenzy. After the run of the mill AGM's held every day in Melbourne and Sydney, the press pens will run hot as they interview the shareholders.

"The first thing," Les says, "before you get involved in the media scrum is to tuck a few hundred dollar notes in your bras girls and Wilkinson Security will stand guard on your dividend packages and deliver these to you tomorrow and if any reporters mob you and ask about our meeting, just tell them your chairman has brought along Val here to demonstrate your company has nothing, absolutely nothing, to hide, despite the ATO saying we have."

Les has worded Valesquaz up and at the height of the boozy shenanigans, calls on Val, who obligingly opens up his long black cashmere overcoat (very briefly) to illustrate Les's point. As far as the press is concerned, Les's AGM is the only show in town and pictures of Val's show to end all shows, flood next day's press. Les has smuggled Miriam in, well disguised in blonde wig, trench coat and big shades to watch the fun.

"Gawd Norton," she says, "I've been twice married and well and truly around the block, but this is pure Barnum and Bailey stuff. What's the next big item on your amazing itinerary?"

"Umm," says Les, "If you're game, we're off to Mudgee to sample the first Beaujolais of the wine season."

She is a bit stunned.

"Mudgee?" she queries. "There's been five very violent murders up there this past week. They have foot patrols out to protect the public."

"Indeed," says Les. "We'll give the Beaujolais a belt and join them to help."

## **Chapter Seventy-nine**

They pack up the Berlina, down-filled sleeping bags, esky of drinks, a couple of stout cudgels.

"No glamour stuff, Puss," Les says. "A nice soft tracksuit and a warm overcoat and a beanie will do."

It's a fair little step to Mudgee; about 240 kilometres Les calculates via Penrith and Lithgow. They get there just after dark and pull up outside the winery that Les's mining company have a 49% interest in. Mudgee is drawing visitors in a big way in the winter, not so many in the 'ot and horrible' summer. Les has taken really a holding share in this and is rolling over in his mind if it's worth building a bit of cottage accommodation at the winery. The winery fronts a block of vines; they lap around the building.

The ambience of the winery is very winery-winery style. The eating area laps onto where the wine is made - big wooden barrels, racks and racks and racks of dark bottles. They're specialising in Beaujolais and through the use of facebook and similar, cheaply advertise what they are offering to an ever increasing flow of tourists, who have latched onto the first beaujo of the season and which is also drawing quite good late summer afternoon/evening Sydney visitors. Tonight's very cold and sharp. There's three of four separate stoned up fireplaces around the room and in the middle is a re-constituted blacksmith forge, complete with huge bellows to spark up the fire. Much of the grilling is done on the big steel hotplate over the flame. It's all a bit of all right Les thinks. There's also a birthday table in full swing.

## Chapter Eighty

The guest of honour, who has just hit eighty, is Stephanie Clarkson. She's hiding her age well; she's tall, limber and throws her leg over still, on stropo horses at three day events. She's a bit of an icon at the Gawler Three Day Classic – winning the big prize six times out of the ten appearances she's made there. Les has seen her in action at Gawler and it's her picture taken in younger days that graces the cover of this book. He goes over to say 'Gudday', and to give her a beautiful fox hunting scarf he picked up in Sydney for just this occasion, a while back. She and Les chat away just fine. He's not to know that two days hence, Stephanie will be on the front cover of the Sydney papers and the august Australian plus huge TV coverage of events that occur later this very night.

The crowd give Stephanie a raucous 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie' when she gets up to speak. She smartly taps on the nearest wine glass to quell the barrackers and tells the mob in a clear voice that this is a get together night, this ice-cold Mudgee night and warming drinks are all the go.

"But..." she says, "and there's always a but....our town is now the scene of one of the worst crime waves there has ever been in New South Wales."

She ends with exhorting the drinkers to 'be alert – Australia needs more lerts – but watch yourself tonight.'

## Chapter Eighty-one

Les and Miriam have been seated at the end of a long table. The Cockney chef, who has been with the winery now for two seasons, is known locally as 'Ulric the Orrible', but he's a dab hand at cheffing. He brings along for starters, some home-made crisped biscuits and a dip made out of field mushrooms fit to die for. Opposite Les and Miriam is a young, but not too young couple. He, like Les, is a strongly built redhead wearing a white jumper with 'Fuct' written across it.

"Bali?" queries Les.

"No," the man says. "The text is certainly Bali-like, but the product is that of a rising modern designer of menswear down at the Rocks."

"Yer know," Les says, "he would do business with 'Fuct by Vatican Two' – every oldish Catholic would buy one."

"What do you have against Vatican Two?" the girl asks.

"The sign of peace," Les says. "My dear old Irish mother – she was straight from County Antrim – always said that she went to Mass to talk to her God, not to shake hands with her bloody neighbours."

The girl laughs. "You remind me of Clarissa Dixon of Fat Ladies fame," she says. "When the sign of peace came up she would look the officiating priest in the eye and give him the finger."

"I've heard of that," Les says, "but I've also heard she left the Brompton Oratory two point two million pounds when she shuffled off the mortal."

Her partner says, "I favour my designer's idea of fronting the 'Fuct' slogan with 'Totally' and giving each member of the Federal Cabinet one."

The girl says, "You've commented on what Athol is wearing, but you haven't passed a comment on me."

The girl is just a bit towards being an overblown blonde; she will have to watch her diet, Les thinks, if she wants to round up a husband. He's noted her eyebrow ring and a matching tongue stud, but he's also observed what she's wearing.

"Shoes," he says, "French, but not Paris I think, nice jeans, very Black Pepperish, wool jumper, Lancashire or Edinburgh Mills, I'd say."

The jumper is indeed fine wooled and very deep cut, giving a good display of very shapely and lush breasts.

"God," she says, "You are a one, but you haven't described my underwear."

Les chuckles. "Slinky and sexy without a doubt," he says, "but I don't want to get into holts with your red-headed boyfriend here, so you don't have to stand up and prove me right or wrong."

"You are spot on with my shoes," she says. "They are French in a way; I bought them last month on a holiday visit to Mauritius. I had my first proposal too there."

"Who from?" asks Les.

"Ah...a tall copper skinned chap – spoke both English and French well. I thanked him for the proposal, but told him that I was about to decline it. I told him I didn't want to live in bloody Mauritius...nor do I, he said, I thought after we married, I'd escort you back to Ozzieland."

"What did you think of that?" Les asks.

"It sure took the shine off my first proposal," she laughs.

## Chapter Eighty-two

The meal is different and memorable. Ulric is well-schooled in putting together home-made sausages which he splits as he grills them, with a razor sharp metal spatula and serves them to us with a mix of baked veggies teamed with incredible sauces; his chilli and garlic ones are outstanding. He finishes the meal up with a spritzed up version of Spotted Dick. Les can't decide what the underlying flavour of the month is that is lifting this English dish to Epicurean levels. He suspects that Ulric has an illegal still making fine brandy out back.

"Where are you staying?" Les asks the couple.

"Umm, town's booked out," they say, "we've got sleeping bags and will have to camp in the back of the station wagon."

"Don't do that," says Les. "We're going out to join the foot patrols in town. The killer, whoever it may be, only murders people between one thirty and three am, never earlier or later on past records. Miriam and I are going to sleeping-bag here near the fire after that time. Feel free to join us and I'll get the doings off the chef to do a bacon and eggs brekky."

"How do you swing that?" the girl asks.

Miriam chuckles. "This multifaceted big beggar is part owner of this joint."

"Well...my Company is," Les says, "but I'm not the only one with shares."

The girl gives Les a hard look.

"I don't mix and match," she says.

Miriam laughs. "I don't get enough of this bloke," she says, "and I certainly don't want to share him now that I've discovered him."

Les says, "You two are pleasant and outgoing guys. If you care to leave me a contact number, I'll see you get an invite to one of Sydney's best kept secrets. It's at McMahons Point and it's a sort of shirt cocktail party."

“Grouse,” Athol says, “but I’m a FIFO on the Pilbara mines, so the dates have to fit.”

“Duly noted,” Les says and writes down the cell phone number.

### Chapter Eighty-three

The four of them drive up to the nearest vigilante fire in Mudjee. The Lions Club, painfully aware of the murders of five now of their older citizens, all widows living alone, work out from these fires to patrol the streets. They’ve fitted out the suspect group with small gas-powered air horns as a precaution. The victims have all been butchered in their homes by some maniac. All they know about him or her is that the killer is left-handed and very brutal.

The organiser at the fire gives them a little mud-map of the streets they should patrol.

“This,” he says, “is the Nob Hill area of Mudjee. These streets are peopled by silly old girls living in huge houses, totally alone. If we don’t catch this chap, we expect the Lions Village will be inundated by widows wanting more secure living.”

Les’s new friend plucks Les’s sleeve.

“What are we expected to do, Les?” he asks.

“Simple,” says Les. He roots in the boot of his old Berlina, pulls out two golfing woods and a couple of Maglite torches. He hands one of each to the enquirer.

“Well, Athol,” he says, “we’re only on deterrent duty until it’s past the killer’s usual killing time. However, if you see someone acting furtive and if they appear to have a broad blade in their hand, stand back the length of your club and lay the suspect on the ground; ask questions later. But, and I repeat, but, don’t let him get close to you.”

They are about to set off into the cold damp streets when a Prius car, almost silent, pulls up at the fire. Two people get out, one slim and limber and another big and lumbering. It’s Sydney Detective Lou Caccano and his patrol Constable.

“Hi Lou,” Les says. “Surely a Prius isn’t standard police issue?”

“What ho, Les,” he says. “We borrowed this one from the Drug Squad. They do a lot of undercover back lane work and a silent car is a prerequisite.”

“Hmm,” Les says, “and good morning to you Constable Pig-face.”

The lady copper spits out, “And fuck you, Norton. If I get the chance on this shift and I’m driving, I’ll run you over, you rotten cunt.”

“That’s a terrifying thought,” Les says. “If I’m on the ground, I’m sure you’d attempt to sexually assault me.”

“Assault you!.....I’d tear your pants off and Bobbitt you.”

“Too big a job even for you,” Les says, “and steady on, you look to be near foaming at the mouth. Of course, in your case, it’s the only sort of froth you are likely to taste in your mouth. By the way, you’re getting so fat that Lou may have to hire a trailer to cart you around.”

“It’s the junk food on patrol,” the big girl says, “and it’s not constable now, I’m a Sargeant.”

“Hmm,” says Les. “It’s probably the only way to have got you away from preying on the young coppers at Waverly.”

They start on their patrol.

“Gawd almighty, Les,” Miriam says. “That was pretty rude.”

“Never said I was nice, Miriam,” he says. “You know why God invented alcohol?”

“No, why?”

“It’s the only way in the wide world that people like Sargeant Fatso could ever have sex.”

“Actually, Les,” Miriam says, “I’ve been twice married, but you’re the nicest man I’ve ever met.”

“They must have been duds, eh?”

“Duds...the first one could get it up without notice at any time, but the bastard realised Dad is rich and after the honeymoon, he wouldn’t get out of bed and go to work.”

“How did you shake him off?” Les asks.

“Umm,” Miriam says, “Dad fixed it. He tasked a bikie from the Red Dogs to give him a real exit going over. Don’t break any bones, Dad told him, but make sure it’s a memorable belting. He also said to the bikie, that it wouldn’t be a bad idea to slip a couple of rubber rings on, like they use on male sheep to wither up their gonads, while they were at it.”

“And number two?” Les asks.

“Ah...” she said, “an accountant. Loved playing chess, didn’t play much in bed, he lasted just 14 months.”

“No kids?” asks Les.

“Nope, thanks to the good old pill. I just wish you had come along earlier.”

“No use,” Les says, “I’m into playmates, not wives.”

## Chapter Eighty-Four

Les and Miriam set off on the first street on their grid. Athol and the blonde girl go on the opposite side of the square. It’s all damp and a bit eerie. The first hiccup is when they are caught in the sudden glare of headlights from a big Tojo parked down an entry drive just a bit.

A stentorian voice says, “Stand where you are. Who are you?”

The voice, complete with a double barrel shotgun, comes into the light.

“Vigilante patrol,” says Les, “sent out by your local Lions Club Captain of the Watch, a local accountant.”

“Thought it was a bit early to go golfing,” the man says. “There’s no queue at the first tee this time of early morning.”

He is referring to the golf club Les is hefting.

“Just the same,” he says, “I need ID.”

Les complies.

The man says, “I know the parameters time wise, that our local Jack the Ripper is working to, so thought I’d sit in my ute for that period and see if anything a bit menacing comes along. I’m mindful of dear old June Doherty just up the street a bit.”

Les pulls out his long silver flask. “Care for a bracer?” he asks.

“Sure,” says the man, “I’m bloody frozen.”

They have a snort all round and he cuts the lights and they return to patrol. About half a mile further on, Les hears a bit of a scuff of shoes and they Maglite up a chap darkly dressed.

“Stand where you are,” Les growls, “don’t move a muscle. I’m armed.”

And he is; his old Deptford bought flare gun is in his deep pocket. The chap is petrified.

"Hands on your head," Les says and crooks the golf club on the man's neck. "You better explain yourself."

The man says, "My wife's away, but the locals have eagle eyes and prolix tongues, so I've perforce had to catfoot it up to my girlfriends place for a romp."

Les pats him down. "He's okay. Off home," he says, "we haven't seen you."

"A thousand thanks, Effendi," the chap says and ducks off.

They turn on the street leg back to the sentinel fire. The night is broken by a gas horn. It's a piercing call and Les acts with dispatch; fires a red and then a yellow flare in the direction of the horn and hotfoots it up a side street.

## Chapter Eighty-Five

By the time they get to where they think the call comes from, all hell breaks loose. Police cars and sundry other roar past them. A runner panting by says,

"It's, I think, all happening or happened at Stephanie's rural block."

He's dead right. By the time they get there, Lou Caccano's car, blue roof light flashing, is up close to the house. Two coppers block their path.

"This is a crime scene," one of them says, brandishing a short barrel pump shotgun.

"Foot patrol volunteers," Les says. "Better give us a heads up on what's happening. Is dear old Stephanie brown bread?"

The bigger copper says, "No, not at all, but the bloke that stalked her may well be."

"Well, that's okay," Les says. "Tell Detective Caccano and his grungy mate, that we're at the winery and will be serving coffee and bacon and eggs, if they see fit to call."

"I will, I will. I promise," the copper says.

By this time, Athol and the girl catch up, so they quit the large and fast growing roll up and head back to the Berlina. Les is up early, has a shower and cranks up the main grill. Detective Caccano turns up with the pig-ugly sargeant. Les grabs some mugs, tips newly brewed coffee into them and adds a decent slug of the winery brandy into the brew.

The police pair obviously have been up all night. They gratefully grab the mugs. The sargeant has a big gulp, looks Les in the eye.

"Yer know," she says, "Lou may be right. Deep down there may be a slight trace of decency in you, Norton."

"Wait 'til you get a taste of some bacon, eggs, hash browns and some jam and toast," Les says. "You'll probably nominate me for sainthood."

He gets on with cooking all this, along with a decent slab of breakfast steak. He doesn't press them on the night's events, but Lou volunteers a bit of intel.

"Steph was ready for the bastard," he says. "Beat the shit out of him with a claw hammer. He never laid a finger on her."

"Where's she now?"

"Ah....in the police logs. My masters told me to charge her with using undue violence on a suspect – a suspect – no more."

"Yeah.....with lock-picks in one hand and a broad blade in the other."

"True, true; she has a bail hearing here in the Mudgee Courthouse at 3pm. She'll have representation, we're told."

"This is bloody madness. How close did she get to brown breaching him?"

"Very," Lou says. "Two broken shoulders, hit on the head with the flat side of the hammer, both kneecaps broken and, God Almighty, you ought to see his ankles."

"Where's he now?"

"Cessnock Hospital so far. They'll medivac him to Sydney, or more correctly, did that at first light."

The police pair clean up their breakfast plates and move on. Les and Athol and the girls have a cleansing ale to start the day.

"What now?" they ask.

"Mass at Saint Augustine's here at 10am," Les says, "I'll have to hang in until the bail hearing in case they set a very high bail and she falls short. I can help in that regard."

"Saint Augustine's," the blonde girl says. "I had a look over St Augustine's or the ruins of it in the grounds of Canterbury Cathedral in pommy land last August."

"More correctly," Les says, "it's Christ Church Canterbury, the second Benedictine House in all Europe."

"That too," blondey says.

## Chapter Eighty-six

For a change of fare, they scalp a couple of bottles of beaujo from the winery and dine at a smart little Italian restaurant in the main drag. When they lob along to the bail hearing, there's a magnificent historic plated Austin A90 Atlantic Convertible parked outside.

"Good oh," Les says,

'Dicky Ironside QC (and bar, many bars),' Les thinks, 'is here.'

Dicky is on the ball. In his usual insouciant style, Dicky turns the formal bail hearing into a three ring circus, over the protests of the Chief Crown Prosecutor flown up from Sydney for the day.

"These proceedings are a travesty," Dicky says. "We should be giving the defendant an order of Australia, not arraigning her on unsustainable and trumped up charges of a totally trivial nature. Let her tell her story."

The judge is from Cessnock. The game being played out in this courtroom is a bit above him, but he rallies.

"If this case is to proceed, you are writing into the record, an impromptu recital of events that may be very, very prejudicial to your client, Mr Ironside."

Dickie fires back, "Once you have heard her story, your Honour, you'll be dismissing this miscarriage of justice out of hand."

"We'll see," says the judge.

It seems, from Stephanie's account of last evenings events, she locked her Labrador in the chaff house, put a set of fire tongs in the burning grate, rolled up a horse rug and put it in the bed to look as though a sleeping body is lying there. She then sits behind a leather fireside club chair, hammer in hand. The hammer is one she selected with care at the local hardware.

"Going carpentering, Steph?" the man relates to the court.

Stephanie, at the time, is looking hard at a chrome headed, rubber handled Crafright 560 gram claw hammer.

“Hmm....,” she says, “It’s more to deal with a very bent nail. My word, this has a very well balanced feel about it. I’ll take it.”

She doesn’t have long to wait behind the chair; there’s a tiny rattle at the front door. She twigs immediately that it’s the lock being skilfully picked. A bulky figure breathes into the main room; broad knife in hand, he heads into the bedroom and so far as she can tell by the sounds, starts madly stabbing the horse rug figure. He soon realises he’s been set up and zaps back into the main room, very dimly lit by the fire in the grate and Stephanie is there - red-hot glowing tongs in hand. She feints at his face and hammer blows his shoulder, cracks him on the side of the head with the flat of the hammer head, pushes the hammer and tongs into his face. He hits the deck and she now has a cleaner shot at his knees. She backhands one, forehands the other and taking her time and with the hammer upright, goes to work on his ankles.

“Let me see now,” she recounts, “That’s one broken bone for each of my friends, my dear friends and now here’s one for luck.”

At this stage, she decides to share the fun and picks up the air horn and alerts the town.

## Chapter Eighty-Seven

As soon as she sits down, Dickie moves to dismiss the case.

“Can’t be done,” the judge says. “This is only a bail hearing and my masters in the NSW Justice Department won’t be too pleased if I fast forward procedures.”

“Steady on, your Honour, your civil servant bosses can’t impugn your judicial independence.”

“No,” says the judge, “but I like living in Cessnock and wouldn’t want to be summarily transferred to the Bourke or Walgett circuits.”

He looks at the Court Steno.

“Strike that from the record,” he says and she does.

He looks at the journos present.

“If any hint of that indiscretion, which I have volunteered only so that you can understand my position, comes out in the press, I’ll arrest you by warrant for contempt of court.”

Les is keen to see Stephanie out and about and roots in the Berlina boot and digs out a thick wad of notes (all of which started its circulation life as drug money) and pays the bail on the spot. Dickie calls Les to one side.

“Goodonyer, Leslie,” he says.

“Well...it’s quite an honour to see such an eminent man come to Mudjee at short notice,” Les says. “What brought this about?”

“Ah, Les,” he says, “Stephanie was doing Arts at Sydney University when I was in my second year of law. Despite my spirited attempts, I never got into her pants, but I did get to have generous feels of her boobs. I’d come home after with my hands smelling like a fragrance display at Myers. Eventually I tackled her about this. She said, ‘I don’t let hardly any man fondle my tits, but those I do so, go away with very deep scented memories of the Special Collection Estee Lauder fragrance I spray on my knockers before I go out with them.’ In short, Les, I’d have been here today even if I had to hitch-hike to do so. By the way,” he continues, “what we’ve

had written into the court record today will see the case against her fade away forever by the weekend.”

He looks speculatively at Stephanie.

“She never married ever,” he says. “What a bloody waste.”

## Chapter Eighty-Eight

They get away from Mudgee by 6pm and run through without a stop to Rose Bay to Miriam’s parent’s house. Miriam is staying at home this week; some family do is coming up.

“Leslie,” she appealingly says, “come in and meet my parents. It won’t be half the fun reciting the weekend events without you there.”

“Bang on,” says Les, “walk me in.”

The parents are quite youngish. Les breaks the ice by saying to Mrs Robinson, “Why, you must have been hardly out of school when you had Miriam.”

She takes it well. “In retrospect, I was a bit too young,” she says, “unlike Miriam, who, at 32, has no husband or grandchildren for me to indulge.”

“Ah...these days,” Les says, “many girls proceed to have families sans any sign of a husband.”

Les meets Dad, a High Court Judge.

Robinson Pere says, “We have been quite enjoying seeing you in that insurance as headed, ‘Will your anchor hold in the storms of life’, and showing you riding out a huge wave in a houseboat.”

Les chuckles. “Actually, it’s a beaut houseboat; belongs to my company. We let it out on charter from Echuca Wharf, but my old friend, Warren, of advertising fame, had it tethered below the Barrenjack Dam when they opened the sluice gates. Old Warren has technicolour dreams and gets me involved.”

“Well,” he says, “I must say, you look fine in Admiral’s uniform and you kept your cool on screen, despite the turbulent nature of what was going on around you.”

Les chuckles again. “I was terrified,” he says. “It took five stiff whiskies to get me through that lunacy. But it was a nice change to playing Ben Hall in those dreadful beer commercials.”

Miriam’s dad continues, “I was intrigued to see you wearing a collar order at the Brownlows’.”

“Oh, I bought that at the jumble stall at the Glenferrie Markets. I didn’t want to squire Miriam along in her de collette splendour and have her the only one with an undecorated partner.”

Les is, of course, having them on. The order referred to is a minor, but good looking one that he got for funding a Helsinki charity. His bankers suggested and arranged it. Though, on what it cost him and with Finland being a prosperous country, Les suspects the food charity may be feeding the poor with Beluga caviar on Fortnum and Mason world class quality biscuits.

“We were also a bit gobsmacked to see you on the Brownlow red carpet chatting away like old friends, with Eddy McGuire.”

“Umm...well, I’m a Collingwood member of long standing and Eddy ‘Everywhere’, will I’m sure one day, be Governor General of Oz.”

“Are you serious, Les?” the man says.

“Yes, I’m sure Eddy would think it’s a very good idea...and it would be nice to be on the A list for functions at Yarralumla.”

Actually, the financial standing of Ballarat Gold South has brought Les into the financial spotlight. In his early Sydney days, he was a bit Pluto-ish – just a lump of ice in outer space – and quite content to be. However, his association with Angelo and Tonino has brought him into the full source of gravity and publicity.

The judge says, “Les, we never know whether the press are winding you up, or whether you are winding the press up. I don’t know whether it’s a good thing for Miriam to be seen socially with you.”

“It’s just my size, Judge. I haven’t got a police record.”

“Ah....not for the want of trying by the fuzz.”

“Indeed. I’ve duded them on six charges of GBH. Dicky Ironside makes mincemeat of them and they’re all stemming from incidents from my work at the Kelly Club.”

“You’re lucky to get Dickie every time.”

“Oh, it’s just that Bowral, Sydney and back is just a nice distance to give his A90 Atlantic convertible a run.”