



**Part Two**  
**The Loose Cannon**

**A Les Norton Novel**  
**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 Eighty-Nine

Les says, "Judge, I know from Miriam that you play Pennant Golf for Royal Sydney. I've got something of golf interest going down shortly at Hamilton. I've a Gulfstream booked for a direct flight to there. Perhaps you and your good wife would like to come along with Miriam and I to this. It will be a comfortable trip, "he continues, "brekky and lunch en flight. You will need warm gear for the on-the-ground gallery walk around the golf course."

"Goody, goody," Mrs Judge says, "I'll be able to wear my grey, dark grey Loden; piped with black, forest green – the one I bought in Vienna and which I've never worn."

Robinson Pere says, "Let's have a heads up on the golf, Les."

"Hmm...well, the idea came from Giles Barclay, the Hedge Fund guru. He's established in his personal right, or more likely in an untouchable Cook Islands Trust, a big property called 'Isingay', near Casterton. His flock are classed by a very tapped-in Kelpie breeder and sheep classer; one Finbar Dickenson. In the course of this and that, he discovered Finn is a world class nine hole player – won't play 18. Between Giles, myself, his workmate and spokesperson, Lisa, and my mate, Warren of the technicolour advertising ideas, we've made this arrangement. We found sponsorship of half a million tax paid for him to play the Oz Open Champion of two years running, as a separate nine hole match between the morning round at Hamilton of the Sheepman's Cup and the afternoon round. No handicaps apply (Finn hasn't got a handicap anyway) and its pure match play. Two bankers as scorers, the umpire is President of Golf Australia. I've yet to see Finn hit a golf ball, but he sure comes recommended, hence the visit to look."

Les doesn't tell them, but he's scraped off \$20,000 from Angelo's gun-safe on the Tamar and backed Finn with the sports bookmakers. He's got no less than 100 to 1 against Finn winning. Les is well kitted up in his Timberland boots, Yorkshire cords, polo jumper over a North Face down jacket, last worn on a ski trip to the slopes around the Matterhorn. He tops his outfit with an English Tweed hat, fits his bogus hearing aid, left over from Ballarat Gold South's AGM.

"What ho, folks!" he says and hands each a full silver flask. "We're good to go and Mrs Rob, that Loden of yours is devastatingly smart."

Warren is on hand with a stretch limo to run them to the Golf Club. He takes them straight to tee side. Lisa is there waiting to be interviewed by the Channel 9 talking head. The cameraman is mounting his camera on a tripod; the Oz Champion decked out like a Christmas tree as is his young caddie is walking down to the tee.

Finbar pulls up close in his old FJ Holden ute, gets out and lets out his black kelpie bitch, Sheena. Sheena is a bit unusual for a kelpie, just black, no other marking. She has won three truck loading musters for Finn. He's knocked back \$10,500 for her. He well knows is he sells her the new owner will breed her to death, so he has had her spayed and she is his constant companion. She can get grungy at times and he has her in a red muzzle today.

Lisa, tall, lantern jawed and married to an older Kiwi shearer, is sucking on a VB tinnie as she talks to the interviewer. Finn gets his clubs out of the ute. He hasn't got many clubs and they are in a cracked old leather bag. Lisa ends her interview, hands Finn a VB tinnie and is good to go. The black kelpie knows her place and lies down behind the action.

## Chapter Ninety

The news chopper comes over. Finn declines to shake the champion's hand, calls heads when the penny goes up and having won the toss, tees up his ball. Finn's different in his dress; pressed Pilgrim jeans, tan old golf spikes, Casterton Kelpie Muster wind cheater and floppy old cricket hat. He settles, he lays into the ball, really lays into it and produces the sound of cracking eggs. The ball goes and goes and lobs near the pin. The chopper swoops down to catch the start and the near 500 watchers of the gallery.

At this point with the champion the next man up, two things happen. Down the fairway, a chap on a motorbike fires three flares into the air and zooming in on the action, a big drone flies just over the tee. It's the opposition TV trying to get in on the action. Warren blows a blast on a hunting horn he is carrying and points. A man leans on a Prius car roof and fires two shotgun shots. The drone falls instantly to the ground, the shooter puts another two shells into the camera it's carrying and cuts off to get rid of his gun. The cops rush around, but there's so many spectators, they have no chance.

Kerrist, the judge, says to Les, "Shotgun range, I've always thought, was about the length of a cricket pitch, but that was an astonishing high shot."

"Mossberg 12 gauge," Les says. "Normal shotty, but with bolt action like a rifle and a choke, hand operated, that extends the range. They've sort of been and gone on the Oz scene, but somebody smart has kept his."

This has all created quite a buzz. The champion, perhaps a bit upset by Finn's cracking first drive, says,

"This is bloody theatre – not golf. I don't play this sort of game."

He doesn't want to hit his ball. Finn gives him a casual look.

"Well, let's toss to see who wins this hole and we can walk down to the second tee and get going."

"Okay," the champion says and favoured by the toss, he walks towards the second tee.

But it's the only hole he wins. Finn takes the remaining 8 holes, signs off on the card the bank manager puts in front of him, tosses his clubs in the ute tray, whistles up Sheena and is gone.

Lisa, besieged by media, cracks another tinnie and after a good suck, goes into the Clubhouse. Warren is ready with the stretch limo.

"Mission accomplished," he says, "no point in wasting time."

And they are off to the plane. They dine well on the flight and are back in Sydney without any drama, not that late.

"What a day, Les," the Judge says. "The transport must have cost you a mint. May I chip in?"

"Well, Judge," Les says, "the trip was free. Anyway, the sports betting people have paid for it, so although we have had the pleasure of your company, you owe me zilch."

## Chapter Ninety-One

Miriam is quickly on Les's wheel after the jaunt to Hamilton for a get-together. Tiny alarm bells start to ring in Les's squirrely mind. He tells her he has business in Queensland and will be away for a while. She immediately offers to come with him.

'Gawd,' Les thinks, 'this backing and forthing may not auger well for her job continuity at the ATO, him being in their bad books.'

He doesn't, in fact, owe them any money, but he's pretty dilatory in lodging the company returns. He's a bit one-offish on this. He long-hands the company results, deducts a huge interest bill from his dodgy arrangements with the Zingli Bank in Basle and walks into one of those tax returns while you wait firms that blossom at tax time and they get the returns up to lodgement stage. He then sits on the prepared return until it suits him to lodge it. It drives the tax office mad, but he's always paid ahead on his quarterly BAS, so, despite their chagrin, they really haven't anything on him and they know from past experience that if they lodge legal proceedings on him, he'll get old Dick from Bowral – Dickie QC and Bar – many bars, to make them look like total idiots by chasing a man that doesn't really owe them any dosh.

He flies to Coolangatta. He doesn't realise its school holidays and by the time he gets to the head of the Avis line for a car, all they have left is a Festiva. Now Les is not in any way fat, he's a big chap. The prospect of levering himself into and out of a Ford Festiva which, in his view, are made out of beer bottle tops, is to say the least, unappealing. He knows there's quite a good Volvo Station Wagon garaged at Tun's Broadbeach apartment, but he also expects that it hasn't been used for so long the battery will be well and truly flat. He catches a bus into Surfers, gets off at Cavill St Mall and walks up a bit on the north side to get to the high-rise. The battery is, of course, flat, but a call box call brings the Auto Association trouble-shooter along and in no time a new battery is installed; everything checked over and the vehicle is ready to use.

It's a misty drizzling Saturday and nothing like how one imagines the Gold Coast. Les drives over to Jupiter's Casino, has a flutter on the pokies and after a look at the tired faces playing the pokies, quite joylessly drives back to Broadbeach. He gets into his budgie snugglers and goes down to the bleak and swirling beach for a salt dip. The surf squad eye him off.

"Better note, mate," the man in charge says.

"Fuck off," Les says. "I'm just into total immersion today. I'm not heading out to breast any big ones."

They let him go and he lollops around in the breakers for a while and goes back to his high-rise.

## **Chapter Ninety-Two**

He chucks himself into the hot pool, the outdoor spa and heads finally into the sauna. The jacuzzi is packed with runty little Japanese tourists, who totally ignore Les, with the exception of one very small Japanese.

"Shove over, Hirohito," Les says, "so I can park my butt."

The Jap says, "We're here on a package tour. We need a few Ozzie swear words to take home."

Les grins, gives them a short, sharp lesson, but warns them that excessive use of what he has set out may well land them in the holding pen at Surfers Police Station. But he's had enough Jap speak, yadda, yadda, so wraps himself in his high-

rise supplied towelling robe and goes over to the juice bar next door to the proper small bar and orders and downs three or four Vodka cocktails.

“Fuck the Japs,” Les ejaculates.

The chap on the next stool says, “I think that was a quote from someone very famous.”

“Yeah, yeah,” says Les, “General Douglas McArthur.”

“In what context did he use it?” the chap asks.

“Ah...Bataan 1942.”

Back up in the unit, Les takes a dry cleaning wire coat hanger and taps his way around a big area of vinyl tiles. He soon tracks down a hollow sounding one and thus knows there's a floor safe under it, but no key surfaces.

Next morning, he drives himself into Brisbane, fronts up for 10am Mass at the sandstone Cathedral of St Stephens. He seats himself just in front of the choir area. The organist is first class, but there are only three girls, somewhat reedy voiced, providing the vocal bit. They get to that marvellous hymn that goes ‘Oh breathe on me oh breath of god’. The girls haven't a hope of doing it justice. Les stands and opens up his deep baritone voice. The organist is so gobsmacked, she runs through the verses twice. Mass ends. Les steps up to the choir. The girls receive him well.

“Where did you last sing like that?” they ask.

“Ely Cathedral,” Les says. “We were on ‘Hymns of Praise’.”

The girls get quite excited.

Les says, “I'm here on my lonesome and my next move is to catch a City Catamaran up to Bulimba and take the cross river boat to brunch at Eves. Why don't you all join me? I'll send you home by cab.”

They jump at the idea and pile into Les's Volvo, which he leaves at the Queen St Ferry Terminal.

“Anyone here with a mobile phone?” Les asks.

“Yes,” the organist says.

“Ah..,” Les says, “ring Eves on this number and let me talk to them.....Five for brunch, we'll catch the tail end of it.”

“No room, squire,” the man says.

“How many of you seat the punters?” Les asks.

“Well...three,” the man says.

“Well then, \$100 to you and fifty of each of the other two. No pissing around. Put five chairs out front on the lawn and serve us coffee and cognac. We'll give you ten minutes to fit us in.”

And they do. It's a great light-hearted brunch at the end of which the girls are disappointed when he says he has to go to get a flight to Melbourne. He takes some phone numbers and gives them all a complimentary voucher for another visit to the famous Eves. It's an expensive outing, but Les thinks ‘its only drug money’. By dark, he gets off a flight at Tullamarine.

### **Chapter Ninety-Three**

While he's had what could be termed a ‘damascene proportion’ (ie Like Saul on the road to Damascus) while he was sipping his brandy and coffee awaiting to be seated at the wonderful riverside restaurant of Eves, he is not immediately rushing to put it to the test. He has finally interpreted Tun's cryptic note that, ‘time is the essence’ as a direction to him to look in the clock.

But first he wants to check with Gareth Seeley, how things are going at the old bank building in Hawthorn. It's in a commercially unfashionable part of that suburb and the Melbourne and Ballarat Bank sold off these premises and moved closer in to a shopfront operation.

Security Shredding Pty Ltd, which underneath some layers is Tun's business and property, runs secure van pickups around Melbourne's commercial area, taking away confidential papers for speedy shredding. An armed guard escorts the workers in and another armed man, the driver, stays always with the van. The operation is, in fact, expensive, but the image it projects is a very secure one and the clients pay readily for the service. Back at base, the firm has some top of the range shredding equipment and finds a ready market for the shreds. The whole operation is well camera'd up and access to the building area is again, highly secure. Seeley, a retired bank manager, runs the whole enterprise well and it readily makes money. It's not in any way a cash business and due to this, all earnings are on the books.

"Any problems, Gareth?" Les asks.

With the real (disguised) owner of this show just not around, Les expects some glitches to occur. However, it seems like the Glenferrie Road Fruit and Vegie Market to run itself, as it were. Gareth says that they are paying their BAS on the day its due and that surplus funds are held in reserve to keep the running gear up to date and to pay off the building loan.

"In short, Les," he says, "what are you here for?"

"It's possible," Les says, "I may have to access the old bank vault. I need to do this discreetly with no cameras running or any witnesses on hand."

"What do you think is in the old vault?" Gareth asks. "I've never seen Tun open it, but I'm quite aware that he has been into it, but not at all recently."

"I've really no idea," Les says, "but as the boys have not touched base now for 13 weeks or so, I'm the odd job and tidy up man, per se. It's desirable I know what, if anything, I may need to tizzy up somewhere down the track."

"All understood," Gareth says. "Just let me know when you want in and I'll securitise and sanitise your entry and egress."

"Great," says Les. He pulls out his silver flask. "Fancy a single malt before I move on?"

In nano seconds, Gareth hauls out shooter glasses. "Pour away my pseudo boss," he says.

## Chapter Ninety-Four

Les has a key to Tun's apartment which overlooks the markets square. He goes up and has a look at the Grandfather clock. It's a very fine looking one, beautiful brass face and pendulum. But it's a kitsch one, quartz movement. He knows its history. Tun bought it for \$80 at a Benalla clearing sale; cheap because the case had been gnawed by rats. It was only wood veneer chipboard, but Tun had read of a cabinet maker in Camperdown who had bought the tree trunks of an avenue of elms that had reached their use-by date. The cabinet maker milled these into manageable size planks and is making and selling Grandfather clocks. Tun took his clock up to him in a panel van and the cabinet maker made an elm wood casing exactly matching the old one and the local jeweller moved the running gear into the case. The old one had grace and charm, but no quality. The rehoused effort is first class and it now stands in a noticeable spot in Tun's lounge area.

Les already has removed some money from within this clock case, but the pedestal part below the pendulum doesn't seem to have any openings. Les marks off the back of the pedestal into tiny squares and exerts a bit of pressure on each square. By trial and error, he finds that a square left of top centre, if pressed at the same time as the next square along at the bottoms, causes the back of the pedestal to spring open. He thinks it's quite a clever bit of secret drawer type of work.

Lying in the aperture, wrapped in bubble wrap, are 2 keys; very large. They probably open the vault door he thinks. But he also thinks there are more than likely (Les is vault savvy) two more keys to open the treasury section, the really secure bit where banks then stashed the real money.

Les is a bit unsure of his next move. He's probably made a mistake in talking to Gareth Seeley about his probable intentions. Les has detected a glint he doesn't like in Seeley's eyes. He's obviously a hard man underneath it all. Just at the moment, the vault is a lot or it's nothing, depending on what it contains. Les thinks it's a bit like Pandora's Box, best left unopened. In any case he hasn't yet found the keys to the inner sanctum where anything of real value must be.

## **Chapter Ninety-Five**

He heads off for the evening, rings Marti Cormoran, the manager of Mathias Models. Les, in recent times since he came back to Oz, gets big time invitations for himself and partner in Melbourne. This stems from his chairmanship of Ballarat Gold South, which, thanks to its great open cut gold mining interests in WA and from lease money from pastoral property owned in Victoria, makes him a man of standing in this conservative part of Australia.

Most of the girls Les rounds up are of the type that he tries to inveigle into one on one situations, in the oldest game in the world. He's always keen on this and so is Mr Wobbly, although the latter is well aware his entry isn't into the start of the game, but he soon demonstrates his willingness to participate when Les has the decks cleared, ready for action.

Due to all this, whenever Les has an invite that calls for him to squire along a top of the range girl, he rings Marti to borrow some window dressing and Marti provides him with some sensational looking dashers, dressed and turned out impeccably. Les has squired them out and about at various big do's and has never got to first base after the event with any of them. An amusing friend, top man of a big French bank who follows Les's example claims that with a Frenchified approach, he has got there. But, he says, it was just so disappointing. By the time Mathias Models have hand selected the girls with the look of the day, taught them how to walk the catwalk, taught them how to wear clothes, highlight the clothes horses they are, etc, etc, and turned them into smashing packages, no one has had the time to teach them sex. Thus, the desired end of the day or rather night, finishes in a fizzer (the man says).

Anyway, Les rings Marti.

"Looking for window dressing, Les?" she says.

She treats Les well. He's a very good payer and is usually able to get his and the model's picture in the papers. What Marti doesn't know, is that Les slips the social journo a \$100 note and a further \$100 if the photo(s) are in the social pages.

Works like a charm. But tonight he is just after a bit of company in this bleakly miserable winter town.

“No, Marti,” he says, “what about a bit of company? I’ll buy.”

“Les,” Marti says, “I’m between partners and I’m bored shitless. Where abouts, what dress?”

“Now,” he says, “dress a bit of glam, a bit of warm. I’ll send a Limo. The driver will know where to take you.”

She gets out of the Limo at Little Collins Street. Les walks over from the Melbourne Club and walks her into one of the many interesting Lane bars, endemic in Bleak City. It’s very French in theme.

“All French tonight,” Les says. “Bastille Day is approaching. French wine, French food and I’ve a pocket full of French letters if the occasion arises. Marti’s a card.

“Um...,” she says, “Les, you are looking real dapper. I won’t rule out what you suggest, but I won’t rule it in either. We’ll see how the evening shapes.”

And shape it does.

They have a couple of French (Napoleon) Brandy Crustas and then a bottle of French Birra and tuck into real French Champagne from the Champagne area of France. They order up a couple of Croque Monsieurs and finish on a flambé sweet. Over coffee and brandy chasers, they have a go at sorting out the world. Les is philosophical.

“There’s nothing wrong with Oz that a pocketful of sudden deaths wouldn’t fix,” he says.

“Could you spare a couple that I can use on my ex-husbands?” Marti asks.

“You’re not into husbands anymore?” Les queries.

“Um...,” she says, “They’re a very acquired taste and shit they sure get monotonous. Where are you camped, Les?”

“Um... the Melbourne Club. It’s a bit monastic, but it’s cheap.”

“Cheap,” she says, “would be the least of your worries, Les.”

“Yes, but you should never waste money.”

“Indeed, but what we, or you, have spent in this pocket-size bar tonight would keep a West African village for a week.

They cab over to her penthouse in St Kilda Road, which Les thinks she bought from Robert Holmes a Court’s estate. Marti’s family includes Toby Mathias, the richest man in Victoria, so she can tap into big dollars when the need arises. Les’s possible great wealth has come to him from the Grey Trade and he’s quite well aware that Toby Mathias’ huge portfolio of lent out interest earning property investment has all come from a smart operator, who has his hands on a significant portion of the Afghan poppy trade. They arrive via the private elevator to her unit. She digs out heavy towels and fluffy dressing gowns.

“Join me in the shower, Leslie. I’m still frozen from getting from the bar to a car. Let’s warm up and get into a bit of horizontal jogging.”

Les and Mr Wobbly know they are onto a good thing and get into action; repeat action at that, but as the French clock in Marti’s apartment goes into chime mode, another lightning bolt hits Les. He knows that Tun has clearly left a message for him that time is the essence. He’s only checked out the Grandfather clock. He knows of several ornate small clocks in Tun’s digs.

## Chapter Ninety-Six

Next morning, he's at Tun's, rectifying his oversight. The first clock is English Victorian; gilt and embellished with wheat sheaves, doves, pitch forks. It is really in exquisite taste and gilded heavily. The mechanical action is still in good working order. The wind-up key is tucked into the frame. He picks up the clock. A heavy key, perhaps eight inches long, is duct taped into the hollow base. He quietly removes this, winds the clock and puts it back.

The second gilt clock is, despite its marvellous enamel Roman numeral face, perhaps Tectonic. He knows its history. Tun bought it at the Salamanca Markets in Hobart. It was just a shell inside. He fitted it with a quartz movement. It's now a striker, very, very mellow and subdued. Needless to say, the last key, or what he thinks is the last key, is taped on an angle (to fit it in) below the quartz movement.

'Um...,' Les thinks. 'I now perhaps and most likely have the keys to the kingdom.'

He walks along to Federation Square, buys a cup of cappuccino and a couple of donuts and has a bit of a sit. Last night's little adventure has taken the flip out of him (and Mr Wobbly), although it is said men think of sex every sixteen minutes, Mr Wobbly is lying very doggo. He decides to let sleeping dogs lie for the moment. He walks over to a bank he does business with and stashes the keys, then to another bank to stash the key to the box he's just put the main keys in. Just on dark, his shuttle flight drops him in Sydney.

## Chapter Ninety-Seven

Les has an idea of sorts buzzing around his big head. On his way up to Ballarat Gold South's Pitt Street office, he calls in at a small shopfront advertising, 'Resumes While You Wait'. A good-looking thirtyish brunette is the only one in, busy on a laptop.

"Help you, Squire?" she pleasantly asks.

"Umm...I want something written."

"Perhaps a ransom note?" she says, looking him up and down.

Les chuckles. "If you're prepared to be my hostage for a while, that's quite an idea."

"It depends," she says, "where you plan to keep me during the ransom negotiation. Going on today's weather, I would have to insist that it would have to be a beachfront; one that catches the early morning sun and has a sauna and room service."

"I can do all that," Les says. "And you'd find me a lovely fun-loving jailer, but that's fantasy land. I want a film script put together."

"Okay," she says. "Where's the hard copy?"

"None," says Les. "Crank up that box and I'll dictate."

Twenty minutes later, it was out, given a cover and ring-bound.

"You've a fertile mind," she says, "and a rich turn of phrase. What you've dictated to me will work, its effing brilliant."

Les gives her two hundred dollar notes.

"What about taking a two hour lunch Friday, I'll pick you up."

"Dress?" she asks.

"Pretend you're dining with the Prime Minister and dress to suit."

"Bang on," she says. "You are dinkum?"

“Dinkum is as dinkum does,” says Les.

“I look forward to Friday.”

“You want a name?” Les asks.

“God no,” the girl says, “You’re the famous, or is it infamous, Les Norton, head bouncer at the Kelly Club. You once threw, down the steps, a chap that I unwisely went out with.”

“Are you sure?” Les asks. “I would surely have remembered you berating me if I had done that.”

She laughs. “Frankly, I welcomed the chance to get rid of that bastard. I would have kissed you if you weren’t so busy chopping him up.”

They parted amicably.

## Chapter Ninety-Eight

Friday, just before noon, a chauffeur driven Lexus car pulls up outside ‘Resumes While You Wait’.

“I’m your driver for you lunch meeting, Ma’am. Mr Norton has particularly asked me that you bring along three completed resumes. I have a document case here to put them in.”

They get into the car; the driver has opened the wooden cocktail cabinet in the rear seat.

“There’s a vodka cocktail in that shaker there, Ma’am,” he says. “Mr Norton thought you might like a drink as we go.”

“Where are we going, young man,” she asks.

“Ah...it’s a boardroom lunch at a well-known advertising agency.”

“Mmm....,” she says, “sandwiches and orange juice?”

The driver laughs. “Mr Norton’s idea of a light lunch is more Beluga caviar on Fortnum and Mason biscuits, French champagne and that’s just for starters.”

“Good, good,” she says.

He parks in the undercroft, escorts her up to the boardroom. Les and Les’s advertising friend, Warren, are waiting. At the end of the boardroom is a cardboard cut-out of a four-poster bed, obviously a prop for a commercial.

Les says, “Well, the bed’s ready, love. Should you be wearing crotchless knickers, we can all be up and doing within three minutes.”

The girls not slow. “I was promised lunch.”

Les points to the other end of the boardroom table. “Well there it is.”

It’s a can of camp pie, one tomato and a stale-looking bread roll. They all burst into laughter.

“Business first,” Warren says.

He takes out a couple of the Resumes (While You Wait Resumes), slips them into a green print on white cover. The cover depicts a rabbit eating a carrot. The speech balloon says, ‘This is a bit pithy’; a smaller rabbit’s speech balloon shows him saying, ‘Of course it is, I just pithed on it’. Under the humour is a block headline reading, ‘This resume contains the pith and moment needed to make the right recruitment decision.’

Warren says, “Our humour is always the best seller. We ran this past a focus group this morning and this is the one they all recalled. It’ll work. We’ll run it on TV, print and radio for 14 days and watch the results.”

“My god,” she says, “I’m battling to pay the rent; I can’t afford this.”

“It’s all paid for,” Les says. “Warren has worked for nothing, it’s an interesting exercise, besides, I’m sure we’ll think outside the square in terms of a repayment strategy.”

Business is now over and they tuck into prawns, Beef Wellington and finish on tiny apple pies and cream. After coffee and Irish cream chasers, they part company.

## Chapter Ninety-Nine

Two weeks later, Les is going to the Gold Mining Co office, looks in to see what is happening at the resume place. Nine typists are feeding stuff into laptops; printers are chattering out finished work; about a dozen people are sitting waiting. He grins at the harassed boss, leaves a sheaf of red roses on the reception counter and heads off.

Les opens the Ballarat South Gold office door with difficulty. There’s a mountain of mail that has come through the slot. The phone is buzzing and the answering machine is saying monotonously, ‘Our office is unattended for the moment, so we cannot take your call.’ Les starts shovelling the unopened mail into a chunky commercial shredder. Any serious mail that he receives comes addressed to him at a Newsagents box at McMahons Point. Anything else he sees as unwanted mail. He hasn’t any phone connected anywhere else and the non-picking up of the office phone is a fairly good way of discouraging this type of contact.

A few days later, Les and Warren are on the Great Western Highway near Marangaroo. They are having a captain cook, first at a long disused granite quarry and then at an abandoned brick-works, south of the road.

Les says, “A sniper with a Barrett sniper’s rifle is retained to pot the Iraqi Minister for Agriculture, when the Department of Agriculture people are taking him up for a look at the Orange Field Days. The car is ID’d from a motorbike running in front of it. The sniper is sprung by the farmer who owns the land adjacent to the quarry. The sniper and his spotter immobilise the farmer, take out the Iraqi easily enough in two shots, but there is more cover on him than they think and the villains eventually hole up in the brickyards and this develops into a sort of Mel Gibson bit of action, embracing motor bikes, four wheel drives, a trench mortar and so on and so forth. The cast is drawn from the Sydney Street Theatre mob, who are darned good and with a deal of help from a good explosives man and a bit more creative writing and using the cameramen we use for TV commercials at the advertising agency, I expect we will knock up something good enough to take to the Cannes Film Festival.”

“Umm...,” says Warren, “is the plot thick enough?”

“It’s up with Mad Max,” Les says. “Locations will carry this film idea. We have Tun’s Broadbeach apartment, the houseboat at Echuca, the winery at Mudgee and we can use the old Tudor House at Horsham, etc. These are all owned locations, plus public ones at Bondi, where we can showcase Caitlin’s very excellent bare superstructure on a sunny morning. Just cast a wide net on casting – if you will pardon the dreadful pun. It may be best to sectionise the film, settle on just a piece, film it, edit it and move on to the next one; pay cash up front where we have to hire expert help and so on.”

Warren says, “I’ve shot successful commercials for film and TV on lesser scripts and you’re right, we have heaps of talent that will cost us virtually nothing.”

Les is doing a bit more thinking. “We can easily film a segment at the boys’ Cambridge Cottage, Ely Cathedral.”

“What would shooting there bring in?” Warren asks.

“Dunno,” says Les, “but I’m sure we will collectively think of something.”  
And of course they do.

“We’ll do the sniping scene first,” Warren says. “The field days are coming up; perhaps we can lose the shooters in some reality filming there. Do you have a Barrett sniper’s rifle?”

“No sweat,” says Les. “A friend of mine, towards the end of his last tour in Afghanistan, brought home a Barrett and a Dragunov. He tucked them into a damaged SUV that was shipped back to the base workshop in Brisbane for a refit. Rest assured we have the right ridged didge gear.”

Warren cogitates.

“There are quite a few financing avenues for film with large Oz content,” he says. “Putting the submissions together to garner the dosh is tricky, but I know someone well experienced in doing just that. But we will need a deal of up-front money to get the show going.”

“I’m good for that,” Les says. “Or, more correctly, Ballarat Gold South is; no worries at all. We invest in different fields, so it will call for no great comment or investigation.”

## **Chapter One Hundred**

This all takes a deal of time and time is ticking away. Les realises that 26 weeks have slipped by since Malaysian Airlines 370 disappeared from the radar screens. He’s in an odd position. All of the money he spent three years getting into gold stocks in Europe and elsewhere is in his name and his name only. Here in Oz, he has a large property portfolio, all bought one way or another by Grey Trade money in the name of Ballarat Gold South, of which Les is the king shareholder with the other five old biddies holding minimum numbers of shares.

If Angelo and Tun, the real owners of all the huge assets set out, don’t turn up, Les is one of the very richest men going. If, on the other hand, they do resurface, then he is morally obliged to hand over the dosh and would return to being a very poor man. He really has no idea of how this situation will pan out and if the missing men stay missing, who or what will turn up waving wills or promised property rights and demanding that the missing men get declared dead, so that their heirs and assigns (if any) get their legacies (if there are any).

But old Leslie is quite unflappable at heart.

“It is what it is,” he says.

And propositions the Resume girl to have four days at Norfolk Island with him. He collects some of what she owes him for successfully launching her Resume business and he collects this in a way and manner that gladdens his heart and leaves the lady panting a bit.

“Geez, Norton,” she says as they board the flight back to Sydney, “You have worked hard at keeping me busy.”

“Ah...love,” Les says, “Busy people are happy people.”

## **Chapter One hundred and One**

Les continues to be a hard man to contact. Some time back, Angelo has given him a copy of Michael Connelly's book, 'The Closers'. This intriguing book spells out over a period of some seventeen years of literally getting away with murder. The culprit is sprung through a traceable cell phone call, a call traced by pen registers which the LAPD put on a phone. It's a graphic illustration of how unsafe any form of phone connection can be.

Les only uses public phones and his usual modis operandi entails having the person he wants to call back, ringing again from a public phone. It's all a pain in the rear end Les thinks, but Tun and Angelo have schooled him well. Any real time business communication, mostly from Hiram at the Timber Bank come in addressed to James Cassidy at the McMahon's Point Newsagency box. Anything else, he shreds unread; the better known you are in the Sydney scene, the more people write to you, Les has found. The one point of contact that people can get to Les (sort of) is at the Kelly Club....but Price doesn't want his phone clogged. They refer such callers to another phone belonging to the club. Les usually plays back these and deletes them. Few, hardly any, does he respond to. The downside to all this is that more and more callers knock on his door at the Bondi flats. This, again, doesn't suit Les. He buys a very discreet unit with great harbour views and private access and lives there a bit out of sight from time to time to lessen the knocks on his proper door at Bondi.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Two**

The film project gets underway. They aim at one section filmed and edited every six weeks. Production runs along smoothly. Twenty-four weeks into the project, they shut down for six weeks to give everyone a bit of a break. Reporters cluster around Les in Sydney streets to get a bit of a read on progress. Les plays hardball, particularly with the print journos who have been chasing an in-depth report on the, so far unnamed, film.

Towards the end of the break, Les is down at the Porthole bar at McMahon's Point. Edgar, the barman, tells Les that he (Les) is being given a write-up in the weekend press. Thus, he is not unduly surprised to see his photo, wearing his ersatz hearing aid and a good suit, leap out at him from the newsagent type street sign. It's a supplement of course and is headed 'Les Norton – Pirate or Philanthropist?' He buys a Sunday paper, goes back to his hideaway harbour view unit, gets a can of Oettinger beer and sits on his terrace to read the piece.

It's more a photographic effort taken from many newspaper shots of Les here and there around the traps. However, what prose or captions that appear are pretty direct. The first graphic shows Les as a 13 year old, well-grown choir boy at Indooroopilly. It's before his voice broke.

'Gawd,' Les thinks, 'at least there isn't a follow on shot of what he got up to after the service. Where he fumbled the 14 year old girl choir leader out of her very first pair of panty-hose, behind the organ console.'

The next shot is of Les in the boxing ring at Brisbane University, knocking down the heavyweight champion of the University boxing team. Here again, he is pleased there is no follow up shot of the bookies paying off Les for his long odds win (it was, of course, a fixed fight) and Les got a lot of money, cash in hand.

There's a graphic shot of Les putting his body in front of a gunshot when someone tried to take out the Premier of New South Wales at the entry to the Kelly

Club. While Les goes down, it's of little moment, as he's wearing a very good set of Kevlar bulletproof body armour.

Next along, is a hardhat picture of Les at the opening of his famous open-cut gold mine in WA. The caption to this shot suggests that Les's company, Ballarat Gold South, used insider information to ramp up a majority holding in this, then, new venture, which has paid off big time ever since. This is true enough, although Les always says his information came from a bar girl at the Woolloomooloo Pub.

There is a shot of Les receiving the Order of the Seal (which he wears at top class social events in Oz). He got this for funding at his bankers importuning a soup kitchen in Helsinki and another being capped with his Oxbridge degree at Cambridge. Thank the lord, there's no shots of Les bribing a smart Asian girl to write his literature thesis and even more importantly, of the brilliant young scholar who sat the actual examination for him, resulting in a first. Les reflects that he was more than dead lucky that he was in the first intake of on-line students that benefitted from the loose start-up rules of that time.

There is a fine shot of Les with his horse that was the Melbourne Cup favourite that ran a narrow second in the Cup. The bookies, of course, paid him handsomely to run a slanter. Les actually owns a Melbourne Cup, from the year that West Australian Paddy Connelly won the Cup with Blue Spec in 1905. The bookies chipped in to sweeten the deal with Les to lose the race by donating him this cup in a very, very private presentation.

Les skips over the reams of social pictures that follow in the feature; it says a lot for the due caution he, Tun and Angelo displayed in their meet-ups, that no picture of Tun and Angelo appears and none of them as a group. It pays high tribute to the approach the partners in crime took for so long.

The most damaging photo is one of Les exiting a motor hotel in Melbourne with the wife of Senator McInerney close to hand. Even more obvious is that, under her clinging fine wool top, the lady is clearly not wearing a bra (she is rather full-bodied). This picture has the possibility of causing Les a deal of trouble, but fortuitously, he is carrying a rolled up set of plans, which he later claims effectively, was the garden designer's drawing for the re-planting of the Walled Garden at Tudor Hill Farm at Horsham. The Senator's wife is the Chair of the Western Districts Garden Club and this gets her off the hook for her presence there.

"We were just discussing the new plan," Les calmly says a bit further down the track.

With the film screening rolling along and with Les getting an approach to stand for a seat in Federal Parliament, it might be appropriate now to call a halt to this long tale and contemplate the title of Les Norton's next adventures.

Perhaps it could be a) is Les ready for Politics?

or

b) is Politics ready for Les?

## Chapter One Hundred and Three

Les is doing doorman duty at the Kelly Club this October evening. Quite a few people are coming in the club door. Les is having no problems with those requesting entrance and is just coasting jocularly along, but at the same time, keeping a weather eye for trouble-makers. A very well suited middle-height fellow button-holes him.

"Mr Norton," he says, "the Premier of our sovereign state of New South Wales has sent me along to sound you out with an invitation to lunch Thursday coming at 12.30pm."

"Whereaway?" asks Les.

"Aubrey's," he says, "in Parramatta."

Thus, Thursday at 12.30pm sees Les, wearing a well cut business suit, white shirt and Club tie, trundling into Aubrey's fine dining spot. It's housed in a former townhouse. The sandstock bricks have been blasted back to original condition; they've avoided the resonance of hardwood floors and carpeted it with a fine muted grey wool wall to wall covering. The tables are all English walnut; small silver centrepieces have red roses in them. The tableware is Georgian silver and the tablecloths, heavy damask. It's beautifully set off with restrained, but very old Hunting prints on the wall. The Premier is already seated; has a silver tankard of beer in front of him.

"Watcher, Tommy," says Les, "how about standing up?"

The Premier does so and Les runs his wire detecting wand over him.

"Don't you trust me, Les?" the Premier asks.

"I do, I do," says Les, "but I've learned from quite a deal of experience to mistrust modern technology. In short, I don't want anything we might (or might not) discuss today coming back to bite me in the ass in time to come."

"Talking of asses," the Premier says, "at Easter past this year, the dean at the cathedral told us of Jesus entering Jerusalem on his ass, which is I think, something many users of the NSW transport system seldom achieve in these crowded days."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Four**

The Premier is on his own, as is Les, but Les is aware that Pasquale Manglavite, Tommy's bodyguard, is sitting at a table just inside the entry and this chap is no doubt well rodded up in case of trouble. The waiter brings Les a silver tankard of beer and another for the Premier.

"Well," Tommy Strange says, "To open the batting, I have to say Les that I like you and have always done so."

"Umm," says Les, "Tommy, are you going to suggest today that we get married?"

"Gawd," the Premier says, "You're a hard bastard to toss."

They sip their beer and move onto melt-in-the-mouth Barramundi fillets.

"I'm planning a snap election," the Premier says. "The opportunity is plainly looming; there will never be a better one."

"Yair," says Les, "the opposition are sure giving the impression of stumbling around in the dark....so why not!"

"The fucking war chest is empty," the Premier says, "that's why not, hence this lunch."

"Why Parramatta?" Les asks.

“Um...” says Tommy. “There’s a very Oz type art exhibition being held in Old Government House in 8 days’ time. You must have seen the ads on TV.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Five**

Les has. “Who’s paying for the coverage?” he asks.

“It’s the arty farty mob burning through their overly large government provided funds. I plan to cut that posturing posse of wannabees of art off at the pass shortly. They’re a bunch of puffed up shits on a sunny day. The in-fighting among themselves is rather unbelievable.”

“Moving on...,” Les says as their barramundi plates are removed and replaced by an equally mouth-watering Beef Wellington.

“Oh...,” the Premier says, “Do you want to stay with the beer?”

“Yairs,” says Les. “I don’t want to get on the ‘woobla’ and start making rash promises to you.”

“Good,” says Tommy. “Now....my suggestion is that you fund up and donate to us, the ruling party, television spots to the value of one million dollars.”

“And in return....?” Les asks.

“We can shoe-horn you into State Parliament, give you a Ministry to run and ancillary benefits.”

“What Ministry?”

“Oh, the Arts and Culture one.”

“And the ancillary benefits?”

“Yes, we’ve worked it through. We can give you a coal mining permit that will easily return you one million per annum for the first five years.”

“Whose seat?” Les asks.

“Hmm...Charley Abbott’s.”

“And what does he get in return?”

“Ah....the NSW Agent General’s spot in London, for whatever term the new government gets. He would expect to get six years out of the job, at which stage, he would have to retire anyway.”

“I don’t know much about the Arts,” Les says.

“You couldn’t know much less than the idiots involved in spending the Arts Department money anyway. But there’s a catch. We would expect you to halve the Arts and Culture budget, make up for it by encouraging local artists and getting more of it on line.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Six**

“But surely,” Les says, “if you hand me an under the lap coal mining bonanza, this would come out in time, like Eddie Obied and end result would be that I go to jail.”

“No,” says the Premier. “We are as one with the Labour Government in Queensland. The coal mine would be in the Gladstone area and we will trade this with a Hunter Valley Coal lease to them. It keeps it all at a decent remove and good money will be made by all, without risk.”

“Hmm,” says Les, “you have my deep interest at this stage.”

After an old world sweet of Spotted Dick, the Premier says, "Ok. Let's have a bit of cheese and a few red globe grapes and go up to do a reccy on the artwork at Old Government House."

And they do.

"The nub of this," the Premier says, "is to make you familiar with this show and you can cut your speechifying teeth and dip your toe in the water, Arts portfolio wise. Now..." he continues, "you can knock up your own speech or I'll get my helper, Dodgy Dan, to write you one."

The Premier looks at Les. "Questions?"

"Hmm...you may be opening a new page in the chapter of my miserable life. How do I ship the dosh in?"

"Ah...we have a tame eccentric millionaire, prone to grand gestures, who will donate the million you give him in cash to us. It's really no risk; it's been done before."

Les is thoughtful. "Well..." he says, "I know the ALP manifesto states no man is an island, but I also know that if bullshitting was an Olympic sport, the ALP would win every gold medal going."

"This deal is simply not that. Its real-life political life. Sydney, as the world knows, is the Tammany Hall of Australia and anything is possible in the wider political context. Mind you," he says, "if we don't get in, you could do your dough, but the sunburst of TV coverage that your money will give us is, I'm confident, a good win."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Seven**

"Now," he continues, "you are a clean-skin with no known party affiliations, so tomorrow I want you to attend with me, old Mick Farrow's funeral at Rookwood. Just being there will give you credentials when the time comes."

"And what next?"

"Hmm...say nothing, do nothing. Nominations close Friday. We'll just nominate you then for the seat and no one but us will know our sitting member won't be turning up to nominate. The seat of Lang will elect you with ALP endorsement by around a 70% majority on a two party preferred basis."

The withdrawal of Charley Abbott from the election doesn't create the storm that Les expects. It's apparent that Les has, on the surface, done well by being a capitalist. And the fact he is standing for a seat in a Labour government, sort of rejecting his class, surprisingly hardly draws a ripple on the NSW political pond. There is perhaps much more of public interest in what opposition bobs up against sitting Cabinet ministers. Les after all, in Lang, is standing for what is perceived as a back-benchers seat at most. The world is yet to learn that Les, if elected, will walk into a ministerial role, which puts a very different complexion on the election.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Eight**

Les hops in hard in the electorate; knocks on doors, does very well with the women in particular and not so bad with the men. He has a good bit going for him one way and another and with the men he has quite the common touch that appeals in what is really a working class seat. No real bumps bob up in his path. He totally

rejects requests for radio and TV interviews; just doorknocks away, stands rounds of drinks at the local pubs and clubs, talks a lot to shoppers and business people in the shopping centres, goes into sporting clubs, wears a Sydney Swans scarf at the Australian Rules footy games and also the local brand of football. It's just so easy for Les to do and goes over well.

The election rolls around. Les works hard all day and they have a hell of a party at the declaration of the polls, that sees Les elected on a two party preferred basis with 74.5% of the vote. He passes up on a victory speech; leaves that to the electoral principal and mixes very well with the big crowd of supporters, in what turns out to be a very liquid celebration.

## Chapter One Hundred and Nine

Les works at appearing quite cordial and affable, but plays at being dumb; something that he is not. His first priority after being elected is to put an ex-copper, now a private enquiry agent, on researching the background of members of the opposing party that may cause him trouble. He starts with the shadow front-bench and has Paul Kelly, the agent, work through the rest progressively. He well knows that whoever dominates question time in the bear pit of parliament dominates the house and if he is good enough, won't ever after be troubled much by the opposing party members, who have been worded up, to embarrass him when the opportunity occurs.

One, of what he thinks could be the troublesome brigade, fronts up with a fairly deep question designed to embarrass Les as Minister for Arts, Culture, Housing and Aboriginal Affairs. (No one else wanted the latter gig) It's a culture based question. Les has had a word with the Speaker, who comes from his side of the House.

"Listen Dell," he says, "I've spared you a maiden speech, but I want to pull the teeth on one of the very likely big troublemakers to our Government in this House. In short, old girl, I need, on this occasion, a bit of rope."

"I must be impartial, Leslie," she says.

"Umm," says Les, "I'm giving you the opportunity to not, and I repeat not, open Pandora's Box to a heap of continuing trouble."

"Point taken," she says, "but I may need some reason to let debate run on."

"Easy peasy," says Les. "I'll have a runner deliver a note to you when we've got to the stage of push or shove and I want you to hold the runner, read the note and then direct the runner to deliver it to Roger Perkins up in the back back-bench. Concentrate on looking at him to acknowledge it before concentrating back on the job. It will give me the excuse to bluster on a bit."

Les rises to answer the question on notice, but he doesn't answer it then or later. He stands up, beautifully dressed; white shirt, club tie, hand-crafted Bally shoes; shuffles the papers in his hand (he has quite a handful of these).

"Madam Speaker," he says, "this is a good question and indeed one that should be asked. However, members of this august house have to be totally genuine in the questions that they ask, and searching enquiries that I have made, would indicate that the member asking this question is not seeking enlightenment on this subject, but rather is looking to cause trouble and waste the valuable time of this house. From the depth and direction of his question, one could and perhaps should, suppose that this matter is dear to his heart. It touches on some fine points of our

arts heritage and would indicate that he has background on the subject and an intellect honed to bring these fine points to mind. But looking into the background of the questioner, what comes to light is, firstly, in his own seat the only cultural interests he is always seen at, is mud-wrestling; the protagonists being nubile young women wearing almost nothing and usually losing it in the contest. This is not supposition, I table in this house, graphic pictures of him, in the front row of course, in the mud tub arena at the Burlington Hotel. Now, continuing in the arts vein, is he a singer? Again, I table graphic pictures of him singing heartily to a stripper at a buck's night in his electorate. Now, as to further qualifications of the mind, I now table a good clear picture of him reading '50 Shades of Grey' in the back seat of his parliamentary car in a Kings Cross street. And now, I will really get to the heart of the matter...."

"But," intervenes the Speaker, "you haven't answered the question."

Les has done quite enough by the look of the Polly that put the question on notice.

"It is plain, Madam Speaker," says Les, "that this is a question never compiled by the questioner, who obviously has the intelligence of a Kentucky Fried Chicken heading to the slaughter. Therefore, I will take his question under advisement and render a written reply in, say....six or seven months time."

Les resumes his seat; the silence in the chamber is overpowering.

## Chapter One Hundred and Ten

Over drinks later, (in the Leader's private room) Tommy Strange says, "It will be a brave man who asks you the next question in the House, Les. How much dirt do you have on their side?"

"Truckloads," Les says. "But a follow-up is needed. Can you put down a Dorothy Dixier from our side asap? I'll give you the question later. It's about a matter in my portfolio that I've got a headlock on and it would be a good idea to publicise it."

"Will do," says the Premier. "Who do you want to ask the question?"

"Ah...Trudy Biggs," Les says. "She's such a smasher, no one will pay more attention to me after she stands up."

"Gawd," Tommy says. "She's quite a drop."

"A poison drop financially," says Les. "She came from a fortune and has sort of halved the fortunes of two blokes in succession, without a pre-nup agreement in sight. She's divorced both in succession and is yet to produce a child."

"She hasn't hassled me for a portfolio – yet," the Premier says.

"Hmm," Les says, "How much did she contribute to the war chest?"

"Two hundred and fifty dollars."

"That's chump change," says Les. "Has it occurred to you she may be learning as much as she can and may change parties at the next election? She's hardly a typical Labour type."

"What would you do with her?" he asks Les.

"Ah, slip a bit of strychnine in a dine-out meal of one of your ancient NSW senators – shunt her into the gap. It's all quiet on the western front at the moment, but she's a full on storm, perhaps brewing up."

"Hmm...," says Tommy.

## Chapter One Hundred and Eleven

“About questions to the front bench,” Tommy says, “don’t drop off to sleep. The mob on the other side are not dills, despite the constant bucketing we give them. They’ll dream up something to fire at you towards the end of the winter sessions.”

“By the way,” he continues, “I love that Hummer of yours and I love the way your driver muscles up to the media bunch and drops you nearly in the door. And I love the way you ignore their questions and talk about the footy or cricket. And I love the way you never appear on telly or the radio, but put out your own press release and photos which, in the total absence of face to face interviews, they have to use. Leslie, you are the only politician in Oz today that has the media rat-pack saying exactly what you want them to say. You’re a class act.”

“Well, Mr Premier,” says Les, “if you’re a total idiot at heart, it’s okay for them to think that. What isn’t necessary is to open your mouth and prove it.”

The rest of the session goes well for Les. He has a close chat with his Kauri helper, Target Jones.

“What about organising a serious looking, but fun riot in Redfern?” Les says. “We can base it on an unfounded rumour. When the cops are pushing you around, I’ll roll along in my red Hummer and we’ll kerbside mediate the matter away, and at the end of this, I’ll tell you the address of a warehouse full of free woobla.

## Chapter One Hundred and Twelve

But a true blue riot blows up in the back blocks with a very serious kerfuffle at Walgett, which has been simmering for a while. The NSW Police have been inclined to use a posting to Walgett as a punitive measure for cops who are not seeing things the Commissioner’s way.

Eustace Parnell, now seven years in Walgett, is the main cause of the continuing problem. He is intolerance personified. This is the quality that got him posted here in the first place from Gunnedah.

Les is perfectly well aware that there is no easy, and in all probability, no way at all, of solving the problem in Walgett. The best he can hope for is to ease tensions and to strike a blow with a bit of innovative housing there. By and large, all the Government can hope for, is non recurrence of situations exacerbating the Walgett syndrome and bringing the government into the spotlight of the media people who subscribe to the view that good news is just no news and who rush madly to trouble spots.

Les decides to take a few days out and fuels up his Hummer, which tends to do gallons to the mile rather than the other way around. He loads up his indigenous helper, Target Jones, and with his usual driver at the wheel, sets out to look at the situation first hand. But he takes the precaution of getting an all-embracing Letter of Authority from the Minister of Police.

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirteen

Building on his developing skills as a bit of a showman, Les wears his Timberland boots, tans, a Rodd & Gunn shirt and an old Mounted Police pith helmet. Once seen – ‘on the scene’ – as it were, never to be forgotten.

He spends his first afternoon there, in the Duke of Breton and has a few handles there with whoever rolls into the back bar, while his undercover Redfernite target scouts around to see what cooks and nearly gets himself arrested while doing so, by the cops who are on the job and a bit antsy.

Next morning after bacon and eggs on the verandah, he gets out and about on foot. He's determined that if the mountain won't come to Mahomed, he'll go looking in lieu. In this case, if he has any hope of ameliorating things in town, he thinks it has to be this way. In the afternoon, he has a wander around and starts a conversation with the real locals – the indigenous.

"Yer know," he tells one interested group. "When you buggers used to go out spearing cattle and nicking jumbucks for a barby, you brought an awful lot of trouble on your head. Nowadays you scalp up tickets to get tucker out of the store and if you have any money, you can buy a bit of woobla and you can live in what started out as good houses, which are far from it now, and you don't make much attempt to pay any rent and upkeep. If you won't work, won't hunt and won't move elsewhere, its time you told me your genuine troubles and I'll promise to look into the matter. There it is. Go away and have a big natter and come back to me here tomorrow to outline your grievances, real or imagined. I'm the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, so if I can't help you, no one can. But you have got to be straight with me."

## Chapter One Hundred and Fourteen

At this juncture the cops turn up. Eustace Parnell is accompanied by his nominal boss, who used to be a drug squad man in Sydney. Parnell says,

"If you're going to talk to this mob you might have first asked permission and enlisted our aid."

"Yairs," says the boss, "this is very poor form when we have to learn of your presence here from watching the TV news."

Les looks him up and down.

"What sort of a policeman are you?" Les reasonably asks, "if, in a flyspeck of a town like this, you are unaware, though I'm here on my second day in town and you profess to know nothing about it. To make such a statement, you must be thicker than the average brick."

A deathly silence prevails.

"Come on, come on," says Les, "haven't you a word to say for yourselves."

They buckle just a bit.

"We would like a private word," they say.

Les bristles. "You haven't, I hope, ended the sentence."

"What do you mean?" the boss copper says.

Les points at Parnell.

"Repeat what your boss said."

"Um..." Parnell says. "We would like a private word."

"Um..." says Les. "You are compounding a crime that shouldn't occur in a hierarchal service."

He points at the boss.

"Can you, by any stretch of your bone-headed imagination, add the missing word, and while you are trying to find it, stand at bloody attention."

He looks hard at the head copper. The penny finally drops.

"Sir," he says.

“Now we start to get somewhere,” he says. “Now bugger off and I can get on with my enquiries.”

He does just that for three more days. Finally the suspense gets too much for the coppers. They beg an audience.

“What will now happen?” they ask him.

Les gives them a hard look.

“Do either of you have wives?”

“Well...we did,” they say, “but neither could hack Walgett-style living.”

“Yet, you’ve hung in,” says Les. “Love of the job?”

“Shit no,” Parnell says. “What’s to love?”

“If that’s the case,” Les says, “you’re saying you are just avoiding unemployment.”

“Uh...yes,” they mutter.

“I’m underwhelmed,” says Les. “You can expect change, but that’s all I can tell you until I consult with my Ministerial colleagues.”

“You’re going to sack us,” the head copper says.

“Not at all,” Les replies. “You are both square pegs in round holes. There must be some hole you would fit.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifteen**

Back in Sydney, Les rounds up the Minister for Police.

“We can’t change the dynamics of aboriginality in the back blocks,” Les says. “It just can’t be done. However, we can change attitudes and that is what the yelling and dancing is all about. Put Parnell back on city traffic and find the boss-man something decent within closer distance to ‘steak and kidney’. Put Detective Lou Caccano from Waverley and his shit-faced lady sargeant, Brenda Tully, in charge in Walgett for six weeks. Give them decent allowances and consult with them as to who they suggest can take over from them. I haven’t promised anybody anything, other than to expect change.”

“But,” he continues, “its only attitude at fault and the new team can change things and I’m sure that given the opportunity, they will. Quite out of channels, I will quietly monitor, unofficially, how things settle down and I’m confident they will. I’ve got a little housing project on the drawing board in conjunction with the housing architect and I plan to run this at Walgett too. So I have every reason to stay in touch.”

The next big bubble dug up in NSW, has to do with parliamentary allowances, over-claiming and such-like; the Premier call in Les after hours.

“Bugger it, Les,” he says. “I put a leading accountant in charge of this department. A very, very successful accountant and these most elementary of administrative procedures seem to be having me back-footing every night on the media.”

“Well, Premier,” Les says. “If this is going to continue to be a dry argument, I’m about to fuck off.”

The Premier stands, opens his credenza and pulls out a bottle of single malt Glenlivet and gets out clean whisky glasses.

“My apologies, Les,” he says. “I tend to forget Siegfried Sasoon’s memorable old saw about the helpfulness of alcohol in human affairs.”

Les has had a good idea of what the Premier wants to talk about, opens his briefcase and pulls out a blue book.

“Let me see,” he says as he downs his scotch in one swallow and raps his glass on the Premier’s red cedar desktop for a refill.

“In short,” he says, “Investigator Kelly tells me this....”

“God, Christ on the mountain,” the Premier says. “You aren’t investigating our side as well?”

“Yairs, indeed,” Les says. “Do you want me to read out what he has recorded about you and yours?”

The Premier holds up his hands in surrender.

“What about my ministerial problem?”

Les runs his eye over a couple of pages.

“He’s good,” he says, “very good as a macro manager, pretty lost on micro management, which is really what you are getting the backlash on now.....and it will get worse.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Sixteen**

“I can’t dump him,” the Premier says.

“No need,” says Les. “We have a very efficient micro manager on the Back Bench going to waste.”

“Who?” he asks.

“Belinda Harvey.....nice old girl, as sharp as a razor; used to singlehandedly run the Goulburn Co-op. Hubby’s no idiot either; a retired Bank auditor and possibly the source of her skills.”

“How can we get her on board? Private Secretary?” Les says.

“How do I do that when he’s got that big titted twit of a girl already there?”

“Easy, peasy,” says Les. “Make her Private Secretary Social, which she’s very good at and make Belinda, Private Secretary Finance. I’ll square Belinda off and provided you slip her in on the qt and don’t announce the appointment for at least six weeks, down the track your present troubles will disappear.”

Les phones ahead, drops in at Belinda’s Western suburbs home after Mass Sunday. He brings along a small platter of marvellous hor d’oeuvres and a cold bottle of Hunter Valley dry white. The Harvey’s are a tad non-plussed at Les’s visit, but they settle down on a sunlit side deck and look quizzically at him.

“It’s the old saw, me china plates,” Les says. “Beware of Greeks (or anyone else) bearing gifts. My gift today is the first step on the ladder to a Ministry. My offer is an immediate one, not one three elections away. And it’s not so hard. I just want you to do what you did at the Goulburn Co-op.”

Belinda arrives in the Finance department early next Monday, letter of authorisation in hand, ex auditor husband in tow. Les expects a bit of dust to fly, so gives it all a wide berth for most of the current week. Friday is a non-sitting day for the house. He is down at his Harbourside local with a pint of new and old in front of him, when the Finance Minister comes in the door. Les leans back a bit, sort of expecting feathers to fly.....far from it. The minister grins and says,

“What a bloody brainwave, Les. Where did you get her?”

Les chuckles. “Don’t waste the opportunity,” he says. “Once you’ve sorted out your shit, get her delving into the opposition expense claims. If there’s anything there to find, rest assured she will find it.”

“Bang on,” says the Minister.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Seventeen**

Next morning Les gets in his old Berlina and takes a drive up to the Blue Mountains, spends the day bush-walking on the floor of the Jamieson Valley. It's easy walking, with the mountain grandeur of the high sandstone cliffs bordering the valley.

He has a good handle on his Ministerial duties, but he has hard yards to do to meet the many demands of his constituents. He has promised to get to them sooner or later and it's now later rather than sooner. But he gets it all together – more or less. He goes around to the Mitchell Library, digs out a book, which, a while back, was rather famous. It's called 'How to Win Friends and Influence People'. Eventually he finds the bit he wants as set out by Dale Carnegie years back. He picks up a heavy lead pencil and puts a standard form together.

The form asks: What is your problem?

What is the cause of the problem?

What are likely solutions to this problem?

What is the best solution to the problem?

He gets the questionnaire type-set and has copies run off. He next advertises on his Pitt St Electoral office that all day clinics will be run every Saturday. No appointments necessary. By arrangement with the Sydney University, every Saturday they have a number of Social Science students front up at the office and fill out the questionnaire, from go to whoa.

Les is not involved in the filling out of the forms, but he personally deals with the worst half dozen every week and sometimes comes back to deal with ones that are a bit intractable. In short, he has devised a clever way to focus the people complaining, on their complaints and to formulate some (but not all) solutions. It also provides excellent feedback to the party machine, particularly its Research Division. But he also has a social conscience and his questionnaires clearly show the difficulties of the older generation, who can easily become soft targets for those who want to rip them off, financially.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Eighteen**

Les fronts up at a meeting of the NSW Retired Police Officers.

“Gentlemen and Ladies,” he says, “I'm not the Police Minister, nor am I the Minister for the Aging. But let me tell you of what I'm finding out from my older constituents.”

He gives details of some of the current rip-offs.

“What I want is some help from experienced people who are all too familiar to what I'm outlining today. I don't want to interfere with your bowls or your gardening or whatever you have chosen to do post work. What I suspect is that too many of you are bored out of your brains, your very experienced brains and suffer from WU (wives underfoot). I want to put together a small movement to tap into your very wide skills in the field I'm talking about. In short, I can supply names. I want to and hope that we can, put together here today, a group of you to act as councillors to the victim group. It's a pilot scheme which I hope that can be extended to the wider

community in time. I can't promise money, but I can offer you the opportunity to tap into skills that are lying fallow."

"What do you want us to do?" Tom Collins, the meeting chair says.

"Umm...six groups of two for starters, to look into problems and to formulate strategy. You blokes aren't old, but all of us get to that stage. How glad would you be if some sleaze is putting pressure on us, mainly to rip us off for cash for no service of value, if we can ring a number and have some very smart experienced people run the sleazes off and provide details of what is going on to current gendarmes still at work? The law doesn't allow me to allocate shotguns and 007 licenses – mores the bloody pity – so we can't be vigilantes on the action side, but we can be a very strong deterrent force. All I need after I have left this room and left you to sort it out, is the names of six squads of two with the phone number of the head man of each squad. Now I'll be at the pub around the corner in an hour's time and win, lose or draw, I'll buy you all a pint or three."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Nineteen**

Sunday morning, Les is walking back to his abode from a bit of minor shopping at the Bondi Deli, when he gets a toot from the driver of a grey Audi coupe. It pulls up. It's the very memorable Trudy Biggs; fellow Member of Parliament, but a back-bencher. She points back at the deli Les has just left.

'Owabout a cawfee,' she mouths.

Les, never one to ignore a good-looking member of the fairer sex, nods, turns on his heel. Over a cappuccino she gives him a very momentary hard look. Les thinks it's a bit like looking at the business end of a side by side double barrel shotgun, but it's a fleeting look which with startling quickness, turns into quite a suggestive look.

"Yer know," she says, "we work at the same coalface, though admittedly you are much higher up the seam, but we have never got together."

"Do you mean in the biblical sense, Trudy?" Les grinningly asks.

"No," she says, "not at all. I'm not for sale; I'm not looking for bidders."

"Hmm," says Les, "why'd you flag me down? I could be down trying to pick up a sheila on the beach."

"I'm talking serious governance," she says. "I've been lying fallow in Parliament. I should have had offers by now to do something for NSW, but I can't get an offer. And now, I hear you have elevated that fat oaf frump from Goulburn to a very meaningful spot."

"Ah...," Les says. "I'm making use of her very capable capabilities in a role that's very needed in the house."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty**

Les says, "Trudy, you are a very good-looking woman; you dress well. The only thing I hear against you is that you're a world expert on financially gutting your husbands of the day, prior to tossing them overboard. But..." he continues, "I'm not a husband. I have no ambitions at all to be a husband, so if you drop that into your mind and set it in very firmly, you have other capabilities that I could well use in the

Arts section of my portfolio. Just take that on board and we can talk about it fairly soon.”

One of the very first things Les did as a State Government Minister, after he briefed Kelly, the investigator to dig dirt on fellow members on both sides of the house, was to put a lock on Arts and Culture spending. He did it promptly and on the day. Thus, Arts spending is really on hold. Les well knows that the Head of the Department, Atticus Sylvester, is on the take. His past minister gave him free rein to set up visiting exhibitions in the Gallery and on the Stage.

Atticus worked this to the full as Kelly’s run down on him clearly illustrates. He simply has too many assets for an honest man. But Les knows that he can’t frighten the horses, as it were, but he also knows he has given the Premier a firm commitment to halve the Arts Culture and Literature budget.

Several of the big ticket literature items have been due for funding - in art and literature prizes of a long standing nature. Les easily avoids this expenditure by doing a one man Solomon-like judgement and deeming this year’s entries as not up to scratch. That is to say, he awards no prizes.

After a lunch of ham rolls and a can of Miller’s, Les has a bit of a mental review of what he has on the go. The block house type houses he has put together with the architects in the housing part of his portfolio are coming along well. No house is indestructible, but Les’s concept house, of which a block of these are now well under construction at Walgett and a section of Bathurst, are pretty close to this.

He closely analysed the cost of the standard houses the department has been used to building, shows they are individually relatively cheap to put up, but outrageously dear to renovate after their tenants have given them a work over. Better to pay more for the build, Les thinks, and to pay a helluva lot less to keep them intact. He’s optimistic on the outcome of this scheme.

He’s also happy with the progress of upping the numbers of social housing. While he can’t help thinking that he is, in the main, building a huge rabbit warren in parts of Sydney, he has no other choice. Immigrants in particular, be they legal or not, home in on Sydney like homing pigeons returning to their hutch. Les has his department building away seven days a week to lessen the backlog. It’s a very sensitive area for his Government.

While Les clearly has a lot on his plate, it doesn’t worry him. He is moving his portfolio areas along at a very brisk clip. But he clearly has to come to grips with the arts, culture and literature to cope with the Premier’s budget cuts (which the public are literally unaware of).

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-One**

Les gets called into the Premier’s office at the end of the session.

“Umm Les,” Tommy Strange says. “Charlie Perkins has asked for a spot of leave from the Police & Associated Services portfolio; something to do with his wife’s huge money inheritance in Chicago. He needs to check out some matters of disquiet to them, in relationship to what the executors are doing with her Dad’s huge estate. Now, as you must know, the Police Commissioner is the original tough nut who doesn’t take much notice of Charlie being his nominal boss. In fact, Dave Elliott is so intransigent to deal with, *appo pos* the present government, which no doubt relates to his very long tenure of the Commissioner’s job, that I would like to add to your

many duties (which by the way you seem to have well under control), the job of Acting Police Minister.”

Les grins. “Yer know, Mr Premier,” he says, “I have a little project going in my electorate involving retired coppers looking into sleazes doing dirt on the golden oldies. Allen Caporn, the retired Assistant Commissioner, is giving me very well prepared chapter and verse, but Elliott sees this initiative as infringing on his patch and won’t take any action. I would simply love to be that bastard’s boss for a while, but it will bring a bit of flak on your head.”

The Premier laughs. “Les,” he says, “I love the way you totally disregard the media rat pack and put out your own press releases and absolutely won’t go on air to defend your stance. I can safely expect that there will be flak, but very well contained flak, so go to it. Just ream that miserable cunt well and truly out. Rest assured you have my full backing.”

The announcement that Les now has the Police Minister role for the moment doesn’t cause too much stir in the public arena, but there is a bit of disgruntlement in Cabinet where there is a school of thought that Les is getting too much power in his hands and of course, he is. But he waters this down by asking for and getting Trudy Biggs as his Private Parliamentary Secretary (Arts) for the period that Charlie Perkins is away.

Les calls her in. She is very stoked, offers to come round for drinkies; Les short-arms her.

“Put out a bit of blurb, love,” he says, “but make no commitments until you and I have talked it through. And watch old Atticus, the Arts head of department.”

“Does he bear watching?” she ingenuously asks.

“Well,” Les says, “put it this way, Atticus is of the type that would and could piss on your shapely stockinged leg - and then tell you it’s raining.”

She grins. “Warning received and understood. What are you planning police-wise?” she asks.

“Oh....a police barbeque.”

“...to barbeque what?”

“Wait and see,” Les says, “but I’ve lit the heat beads.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-Two**

Les may indeed have lit the barbie in his mind, but he now has extreme difficulty getting hold of the Police Commissioner. He is told that the Commissioner, first up, is at a combined meeting of his interstate compatriots and won’t be back for ten days. His Assistant Commissioner, Albert Sealey, advises Les that pressure of police work means that he can’t fit Les in for a meeting for a further 21 days after he gets back.

Les has a chuckle and smartly regroups. “Get hold of Lou Caccano for me,” he says. “Tell him to ring me at this number from a call box.”

The girl says, “We didn’t know you had a mobile.”

“Sheer necessity,” Les says. “Smoke signals have got too slow.”

Actually, Les now has a carton of card phones, not so easily traced, used in the main just once when he’s into heavy stuff. Lou lobs along at the Geoffrey Droun Bar and Grill, which Les has nominated as a meeting point. Lou grins at Les.

“The changing fortunes of fate, Les,” he says. “I’m now a Senior Detective Inspector and bugger me, bugger me indeed, you are the present Minister for Police

and other things. The current view of you by Sydneysiders is that you are a roughie with a tendency to violence, and against all expectations, you seem to be getting the State Government's agenda."

Les chuckles. "The big unanswered question, Lou," Les says, "is....what are we going to have for lunch?"

"You're the boss," Lou says. "Order away, boss," he says, a glint of humour showing in his grey eyes.

"Actually....I have ordered."

"Hmm....what if I don't like it?"

"Then I'll have the bloody chef put it through the blender and tip it in your ear." Les says.

They order up pints of old and new.

"So what Minister are we doing?" Lou asks.

Les takes a very deep pull of his pint. "I was reading up on the history of the late, lamented John Fitzgerald Kennedy this week," he says. "The first thing to catch my attention was his saying, 'always ask for peoples' advice – but never, never take it'."

"And the other?" Lou asks.

"He made a speech commemorating the centenary since the Rebels fired on the Union at Fort Sumpter in Charleston Harbour. In this he said, in part, 'the first shots in the conflagration that turned the world, as our American Forebears knew it, upside down were fired just here over a hundred years ago. I'm firing the last shots in my campaign for the Presidency from this Historical National Monument. Come with me on the journey; let us start a new conflagration that will overturn the world as we know it, for the better. Let our children and our children's children say this was a volley deserving of the powder that propelled it'."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-Three**

Lou is chuffed. "Fucking brilliant," he says, "but before you say another word, why are we dining here in this restaurant? And do you know this is a sort of private preserve for the Police Commissioner and his bagman, Albert Sealey? It's off limits for my level of policing."

"I do know," Les says, "and I do know your bagman is to meet Charlie Iseppi, the drug dealer, here a little later in the day."

"Hmm....," Lou says. "I hope you appreciate you are poking a tiger in the eye with a sharp stick."

Les chuckles. "It's likely he may be a toothless tiger by Monday morning," he says.

Their Barramundi with lemon sauce arrives and they tuck in. And give up conversation in favour of good nosh. A melt-in-the-mouth Beef Wellington follows the fish. They put a bit of time into this delectable offering and sit back a bit until the Geoffrey Droun favourite, Spotted Dick, arrives. In the interests of a clear head, they stay with the beer.

"Well Lou....," Les says, "are you with me on a Kennedy-type journey?"

"Well Les....," he says, "if Sealey spots me here, I may be posted west of Walgett Monday afternoon and my wife, who likes to live walking distance from a Westlake Shopping Centre, certainly won't be coming with me."

"Talking of the devil," Les says, "here comes the bastard right now."

Sealey comes in the door, immediately lamps Lou sitting at the table with Les. He's a middle height man; his most noticeable feature is his near black pupiled eyes. 'An arrogant bastard,' Les thinks. He ignores Les; although he is the Acting Minister for Police and nominally at least, his overall boss. He gives Lou Caccano a very hard direct look, wades in.

"It's never a good idea to mix work and politics," he says. "My office 9am sharp, Monday." He moves on.

Lou looks apprehensively at Les as Sealey goes. Les has a belly laugh.

"Don't fash yourself, Lou," he says. "I'm about to make you a better offer that will leave Sealey a toothless tiger."

He slides over three letters.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-Four**

Letter one is signed by Les as Minister and counter-signed by the Premier. It advises the Commissioner of Police that generational change has been decided on and that he is now on GARDENING LEAVE until his contract expires in 11 months' time.

Letter two advises his bagman, Sealey, that he is being redeployed forthwith on secondment for two years to London's Metro Police.

Letter three appoints Lou Caccano Police Commissioner for a three year period and contains a safety net clause that says, in effect, should he not be reappointed at the end of such term, he can have his old job back.

Lou is pretty droll. "Jesus, Les," he says. "This is 'Alice in Wonderland' stuff. Is it all legal and where is the forty page addendum telling me what I have to do?"

Les chuckles. "We have gone through it step by step with the Attorney General. It's watertight. There's no addendum; just report to work Monday as the big, big boss and boss away."

"Reprisals?" asks Lou.

"No.....softly, softly."

"How will you handle it, press-wise?" Lou asks.

"Easy, peasy.....we'll just tell them that time management problems with the old Commissioner have predicated the change and add nothing to that."

"Less said, sooner mended, eh?" Lou says.

"Bang on, me old china plate," Les says. "Now....perhaps a coffee and a big snifter of brandy to end the day."

They down their coffees and snifters.

"Time I was moving on, Lou," Les says. "But, whichever way you look at it, as George Cole of 'Minder' fame once famously said, 'the world is now your lobster, my son'."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-five**

Les now shrugs off the solution of the problems he was having with the cops and calls in Trudy Biggs.

"Trudy, love," he says, "I want you to get your shapely derriere into action and get on a plane."

"Where to?" she asks.

“Samoa first. Get that trio often on SBS. Line them up to do ‘The Pearl Fishers’ at the Opera House; Limey land next. See if you can get ‘Hymns of Praise’ over to do a multi cathedral stint at the C of E Cathedral here in Sinny, St Andrews in Brisbane and St Patricks in Bleak City. Here are the hymns I want sung. It’s an eight day stint; one day to set up, one day to film and onto the next one. Then over to Septic Tank land. I want Ken Burns to come over to do a four part series on the American Civil War. Tee up the Sydney Symphony to play the famous and amazing theme music, to hit up the National Gallery in Washington to run a swap, 30 day exhibition of paintings of the famous Civil War Generals. It’s time,” he continues, “for bread and circus’s to take the voters’ minds off the mistakes my Cabinet colleagues are making.”

The changes to the cops hardly raises a ripple in the media, but the opposition table a question in the house, asking Les, whether Les as Acting Minister, is not doing a bit of vendetta against the NSW Police for charging him six times, in recent years, of GBH. A full house rocks up to hear his rebuttal. But Les, as usual, is on top of his brief.

“Madam Speaker,” he says, “there is no vendetta about these charges; all of which I was honourably acquitted of. (Thanks to his smart Bowral QC, Les thinks) Actually, I was doing the public a good service, as I expect if truth be told, they were all Liberal Party card carrying members and as such, neither use nor ornament. However, I am contemplating a question to you mob soon, just to find out how your Shadow Member of Police wiggled out of a recent DUI charge in the Goulburn Court.”

Deathly silence prevails in the house for just a while.

“Round two to you, Les,” the Premier tells him later. “What other miracles can you produce for us?”

“It would suit me, Premier,” he says, “if you would officially open our new indestructible, we hope, batch of rammed earth houses in Walgett. Beautiful they are not, but they’re built like monolithic shit-houses and they will be a low cost feature of the landscape out there for quite a while.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-six**

Caccano comes back to Les on Police matters.

“I could,” he says, “get a cast iron case into the courts over corruption by the Commissioner and his blasted bagman. I have the goods on them.”

“Nah,” says Les. “Lou, we can’t prosecute, as the Kelly Club until the recent changes, have been paying the grafters every week to turn a blind eye to the warehouses where Price stores his hijacked beer. Best to let sleeping dogs lie. How’s things otherwise?” he asks.

“Berloody brilliant,” Lou says. “I haven’t had to put on a uniform since you promoted me. Old shitface Brenda, (his sargeant) keeps the time-wasters away and the clothes-horse goes to all the Police funerals, Police send-offs, passing out parades, press club luncheons, etc, etc and so on, spouts out well-rounded clichés, commits me to nothing and leaves me free to beaver into things. By the way, his bagman is being well and truly kept busy in London’s Met. I have specifically told them to give him the bad ones that come up and to be fair and equitable to our willing helpers there. I’ve got their exchange out working in Wilcannia for the summer. Also, as you advised, I’m all stocked up on Pardoe suits, Turnbull and

Asser shirts, very subtle ties and Bally shoes. The only trouble is that when I go out for a haircut, they look at my weeds and triple the charge.”

“On yer, Lou,” Les says. “Keep up the good work and keep those special assistants working hard for you.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-Seven**

Lou runs a considering eye over Les.

“Sort of in passing, Les don’t go to sleep after such a course of action impacting the NSW coppers. You’ve touched deeply on people’s income, illegal money of course, but household income ipso facto. Bear in mind that assassination of a Federal Minister at Cabramatta a while back. Nothing and nobody is sacrosanct these days in good old NSW; the initial home of the ‘Rum Corp Cop’, who, without much trouble, got rid of Governor Bligh in the early days.”

“Yes,” Les says, “and they dumped John Howard too, but they didn’t shoot him.”

“All the same, Les,” Lou says, “the Commissioner, through his bagman Sealey, got first bite of the pie and a lot of small slices went to the sergeants that actioned Sealey’s order and they in turn, handed out slices to keep quiet any ranker with a conscience who showed signs of objecting to the graft that was obviously going on. All in all, a lot of graft money percolated through the ranks and cutting off, or at least the slowdown, of this has meant that a lot of toes have been trodden on.”

“I have,” he continues, “a fairly recent recruit to the force ex the Australian Army in Iraq. He was well up in the squad policing the Green Zone in Baghdad. I haven’t yet found the ideal slot for him. I would love to allocate him to you as your driver while you have the Police Portfolio. I’d be easier in my mind if you would go along with this.”

“I fight my own battles, Lou,” he says.

“Yes....and quite successfully,” Lou replies. “But now you’re outnumbered. Best indulge me in this, oh so important, precautionary measure; at least until you have settled down Sealey half a world away. Even then he could pull strings.”

Les nods.

Thus Alby Jordan enters into Les’s daily little circus act.

Jordan is hard-headed, carries a little Uzi under his jacket, mirrors under Les’s car in case of explosives and is ultra-alert to what is happening, or not happening, in their immediate surrounds. And he is quick and pleasant under it all.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-Eight**

When his assistant, Trudy Biggs, reports back, Les then sends her first to talk to the Singapore Government; he has decided to include a ‘Hymns of Praise’ effort to St Andrews there – if the money is right. It is, as it turns out, very right.

Also, the promise for front row pews going back in order to State governments, starting with his own Cabinet and going on to the Queensland, Victoria, and with a last minute huge commitment from the South Australian government to include St Peters in the mix, means that Les can stage this ecclesiastic extravaganza at next to no cost to the New South Wales art budget; a fact much appreciated by the Premier.

The 'Pearl Fishers' effort at the Opera House will bring in a big lump of money, also from the BBC and Fox Media. 'Money for jam,' Les thinks and full honour to him. 'It's not a bad effort for a night club bouncer,' Les rightly thinks.

## Chapter One Hundred and Twenty-Nine

Hiram Bellamy, from the Port Moresby Timber Bank, is in Sydney on one of his clandestine money laundering expeditions. He turns up in Les's office without an appointment. Les runs his new, super wire-detection wand over him and they go off to look at pictures at the Art Gallery.

"Les," Hiram says, "the meth lab money from Angelo and Tun's venture partners is growing exponentially in Cyprus, Helsinki and the Bank of China. You just have to ladle a big chunk out, preferably on your past choice, into gold ASAP. Too much money sitting will inevitably attract attention sooner or later. Most banks leak like a sieve, information wise."

"I hear what you say," Les says. "What about that safety net idea you had a while back to establish an export/import bank in Timor. You thought at the time you floated the idea it may be a fall-back if New Guinea gets tricky."

"Well, Les," he says, "corruption is absolutely prospering in Papua, but your idea is sound. I'll do some homework on the present situation of course, but do go and shift some of the dosh I'm talking about."

"Will do," says Les and does.

He rings Trudy from London.

"I'm considering a 'Last Night at the Proms', love," he says. "Catch a Singapore Airlines flight to Milan Saturday and I'll meet you at Malpensa on Monday morning."

She does and he does.

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirty

When she comes out the entry gate, he is there looking very relaxed in tans, a beautiful black Polo shirt with a Burberry collar and pocket flash and tan suede moccasins.

"I've done what you said and travelled light. I haven't a lot to wear."

Les chuckles. "This is Milan; fashionable gear capital of the world," he says. "Let's catch the shuttle into Milan where I have somewhere to stay for us and go shopping."

"Where are we heading, boss?" she says.

"The Verona Arena, 2pm out of here tomorrow. They're doing the hepped up version of 'Aida'; the one with the heroine arriving on a lawn mowing tractor and where the crocodiles have electronic flashing jaws, etc and so."

They lob along at the Verona Colosseum beautifully dressed.

"I've never heard of this colossal structure, Les," she says. "I thought the Colosseum was strictly Rome only."

"Not at all," says Les. "The Romans built a few of these at military crossroads of note. Unlike Rome's, this one has never been out of use – seats about 10,000, all marble bleachers. Buffalo Bill held his European farewell wind-up here and the Three Tenors made it modern famous. Prince Charles is the star guest tonight."

“Is Camilla with him?” she asks.

“Doubt it,” he says, “or if so, she’ll be down inspecting the stable block of yore.”

Aida turns out to be a stunner this wonderful balmy European summer evening.

“We need, Trudy,” Les says, “to get this over to Oz, but there’s so many people involved that it will be very bloody costly. However, if you can harden your heart even more to starve short funds in the arty farty budget, it may be possible.”

Trudy laughs. “Just so long as they sing as loudly in ‘steak and kidney’ as here.”

“Woffor?”

“Well...the anguish from the arts mob, who you are bleeding for spending money, is making a dreadful noise.”

“Hmm,” Les says, “it’s like they say about the American Jews.....there’s not that many of them overall, but they make a powerful lot of noise.”

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-One

Next morning, Les says, “Moving on, moving on.”

“Where?” Trudy asks.

“London.....we have tickets to the final ‘Night of the Proms’. Bryn Terfel is down to rattle the nails in the Royal Albert Hall roof.”

As any ‘Last Night of the Proms’ goes, goers will readily agree, it’s one hell of a show. They are staying at the old Strand Palace Hotel in central London. Over a full English breakfast next day, Trudy says,

“What’s the go today, Leslie?”

“Ah....a car will be outside for us in 45 minutes. We’re off to the Cotswolds.”

They end up at Bourton on the Water, a magic village where the tiny river, ‘Windrush’, runs down the main street under low bridges beside trees and lawn. The roads are lined by mellow Cotswold stone houses. It’s a very picturesque scene indeed.

They leave the car and driver and walk along a bit to a beautiful cottage. Les knocks on the glossy door. A pleasant woman appears.

“You must be Mr Norton,” she says.

“Call me Les, love,” he says and he takes her hand in his big ones.

They enjoy a tea and scones morning tea.

“To business,” Les says.

She takes a cloth off an item on the walnut sideboard. It’s a bronze bust, which is of the famous Nehru. It’s an Epstein. The work was commissioned by Lady Mountbatten, when her husband Lord Louis, a close friend and confidante of Edward the 8<sup>th</sup> – briefly King of England, was the India Viceroy.

“Edwina commissioned and paid Epstein for this little beauty,” the lady says. “I was one of her ladies-in-waiting when old Louis was making a big, big stuff-up in partitioning India (or as we used to call it, the ‘Ninja’). She was sweet on old Nehru, though the bust didn’t do his patrician features justice. She paid the bill, gave me the Epstein bust and had a portrait done of him instead. I took it along to Fiona, on the Antiques Roadshow at Chatsworth House. They valued it at £30,000, but later, when I did the rounds of the antique dealers, I never got an offer as high as that.”

Les laughs. “£30,000 is fine with me,” he says to her.

She writes Les a receipt, counts her way through the big heap of pound notes Les pulls out of his Harris Tweed jacket and the deal is done.

"You may have a bump getting it out of Limey-land," Trudy tells him.

"No," says Les. "I've talked with the Oz ambassador. They will send it out to me in the Diplomatic bag next Tuesday."

Les has now been away from Australia for a while, moving grey money out of banks in Helsinki and Cyprus into Vatican Bonds in Italy and to bullion exchanges in Geneva. He has also for the first time ever, brought a heap of Euros into London for the same purposes. But it's time to get back to the building up of matters in his NSW Ministry.

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Two

They catch a Singapore Air Lines flight and do a two day stopover in Singapore. Accommodation is a bit tight and the best the airline can do at short notice is put them up at the Ibis there. It's comfortable, but not flash.

They have a walk around tropical Singapore and stock up on some interesting presents to take home to friends and associates. But the evening prior to the day they are down to fly out, takes a different turn. When they get back to the Ibis, Trudy tells Les she will be down shortly with a present to Les for the interesting time he has surely given her.

She knocks on his room door wearing an entrancing little Grecian pleated night-rail under a Chenille hotel robe. Les is gobsmacked.

"Trudy," he says, "is this a good idea?"

She dimples. "It's a smashing idea, a wonderful end to a great time."

Mr Wobbly stands up like a Life-Guard. He evidently thinks it's a great idea too, and shows great resilience in what turns out to be a major effort.

After such a tumultuous start, they both settle down and apply themselves thoroughly to what they are doing. While what they are doing is far from peaceful, they are a very well matched pair, prepared to put time and effort in again. After a little while, are erotically at peace, perfectly at peace with one another.

Next day is fly home day. They have a drink in the Singapore Airlines Guest Lounge prior to boarding.

"You know, Les," she says, "last night was grouse."

"Did you say gross?" Les says.

"Not at all...grouse, brown grouse in fact; fast, furious, like the flight of a brown grouse, but we both kept flying and flying. Yer know, apart from three or to be more exact three and a half tumbles in my Uni days, you're my first full-On one night stand. I've only ever had sex in later life with my two husbands; neither of which was consistently memorable."

Les is intrigued. "How can you possibly have a half tumble, Trudy?" he asks.

"Ah...a premature ejaculator, promised much, splattered me much with the doings outside of entry. Boy was it frustrating!"

"Um," says Les, "we could join the mile high club after the plane hits cruising altitude?"

"I'm game if you like," she says, "but let's face it, with your size and to a degree, mine, we may be able to cram ourselves in the dunny to the stage we get the door shut, but the only space left would barely allow us a cuddle."

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Three

Back in Sydney, Les has much to catch up with on his ministerial desk and many people clamouring for an interview. Les is often asked and never minds making decisions on tricky matters, but he well knows that for every push in one direction, the law of physics says there's an immediate and opposite reaction. Thus he is circumspect in making his decisions.

In the Police Portfolio, he is putting one day a week into visiting cop shops. These are quite informal, but very much appreciated. He gives every copper one of his constituency trouble-shooting forms.

"You work in a hierarchical system," he says. "You are the foot-soldiers of an under resourced army. It's never easy and often downright dangerous. I expect your Sargeant Management can and do make necessary decisions to handle difficult situations, but I don't expect you to be unfairly treated or repressed in your work. Politeness, after all, costs nothing. If that is happening to you, just fill out one of these forms and post 'em to me. If you have a case, it will be looked into and action of some sort taken. There will be no comebacks."

Les knows of course, after all he is as shrewd as a Gardie, that what he is suggesting is micro management, which he can't really afford to get involved in. However, he also well knows that if he busts just one sargeant and puts him on gardening leave, or fits him in some spot where he has no one under him, the word would flare through police ranks like a Californian canyon wildfire and that will achieve his objective without much further grunt work. And of course, consultation with Commissioner Lou Caccano has given him the names of police stations to target where what he is chasing down is reputed to be entrenched.

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Four

Les arrives at his ministerial office this sunny morning.

"Who've I got today, Karen?" he asks his secretary.

"Um...the Premier first up, then Mrs Biggs."

"Doesn't sound too bad," Les says. "I missed breakfast. What about organising a cappuccino and some raisin bread? I'll move into the conference room for the first two on the list and for other people seeking an audience, tell them I'm packing a shitty today and suggest they try again on Friday after the house rises."

Thus, when Tommy Strange arrives along, Les is sipping his frothy coffee, munching on toasted raisin bread and listening on ABC FM to Hadyn's symphony. 'The Clock Minuetto', being played by the Irish Symphony Orchestra. Tommy isn't dumb.

"Ah," he says, "you are starting the day with a bit of Irish, Leslie."

Les pushes over a Starbucks cappuccino, a slice of raisin toast and a bottle of Jameson's to Tommy.

"Get that into you, old Cobber," he says, "and tell me what's on your, perhaps overloaded mind."

"Yes indeed," says the Premier. "It's one of those days with calls to make and soundings to take. What's with all the piercing screams I'm getting from the Fuzz?"

"Surely," Les says, "you don't listen to those cunts."

"Well, not really, but a couple of your dislodges live in my electorate."

“Again,” says Les, “with your cast iron majority, I repeat the question; why listen to them?”

“Well, they come to my clinics and grump and grizzle, so I have to give them some sort of an answer.”

“Well, Boss, I’ve stiffed 18 of the old sergeants, kept them harmlessly employed in dead end jobs until their expiry date and have let 18 young or at least younger bloods into the chain of command. The only things that those given the big shift understood about the chain of command, was that they used it to beat quite good staff around the head with. But best you just tell them that I, as Acting Commissioner of Police, have set my mind on generational change.”

“Fair enough, Les,” he says. “What’s our re-election chances?”

“Pretty shithouse,” Les says. “By and large, between you and me and the garden post, we’ve done more than a fair job of running NSW, but in all honesty, I think in the nature of long term government, we are now around our use by date and will be out on our asses come November.”

“I have some regrets on how I’ve handled things,” Tommy says.

Les laughs. “Tommy, if regrets in this game were dollars, we’d both be Bill Gates by now. But also reflect on that you are a hard man coasting along in a soft job. You can’t complain and if your concealed Queensland coal interest isn’t putting a lot of dosh into your Swiss accounts, then I’ve overestimated you.”

“It’s just,” Tommy says, “that when you are out of office, you’re nothing. It’s no fun being in opposition. Will you walk away Les?”

Les chuckles. “Firstly, I’m going to sign up Lou’s term as Police Commissioner for an unheard of and unprecedented ten years.”

“Will you put that through Parliament?”

“Never,” says Les. “I’ll do it through the regulation avenue. That cuts out a shitstorm.”

“Fine with me,” Tommy says. “That’s all I’ve got today.”

“Before you go, mate,” Les says, “I’ve learnt a lot in Parliament here, or more correctly, outside of the day to day shot and shell. Let’s see if we can persuade one of the old dinosaurs to resign from the Senate and shoehorn me into that.”

“Yer know,” Tommy ruminates, “it could be done and in fact it’s quite easy, but what do you suggest we offer them as a sure fire inducement?”

Les tells him.

“Jesus, Mary and the Sainted Joseph,” says the Premier. “Why don’t we both keep our noses in the trough and both move on?”

“No reason at all,” says Les, “but best you get the wheels moving. Your best bet, Tommy, is to move to the High Court Bench. People who you’ve helped get there in past years would be obliged to back you and the Labour hold on the Federal area would, in my view, give you a box ride in.”

Trudy is in next. She looks smart and very well, puts a plain sheet of lilac coloured paper on his desk.

“What ho, love,” Les says, “what about locking the door and we can give this very solid old table a bit of a work on?”

She grins. “Les, for chrissake read what I just put on that same table.”

He turns it face-up. It’s a copy of his Clinic questionnaire, printed on lilac paper. It reads....

Question - ‘What’s the problem?’

Answer – ‘I’m pregnant.’

Les is not put out. He gives a huge belly laugh.

“Come on, Trudy love,” he says, “popular wisdom in Sydney is that the only interest you have in what a man’s pants contains, is the size of his wallet. What, indeed if this statement here is true, could possibly be in it for you?”

“Move on,” she says.

He looks at the next question – ‘What is the cause of the problem?’

She’s filled this in baldly – ‘YOU’ it reads in block letters.

“Um...” says Les, “are you sure?”

She looks daggers. “DNA will easily back up my statement,” she says.

‘What are likely solutions to the problem?’

She has filled in, in one long sentence – ‘Marriage to the culprit, go to a gnome in Gnomeland’, and under the heading – ‘What is the best solution to the problem?’, she has filled in, in her neat hand – ‘Let the pregnancy runs its course and play the rest by ear.’

“It’s not a new problem to you, Les. I understand that you pay maintenance to a girl in Nimbin.”

Les looks at her consideringly. “Not proven,” he says. “As they say in Senate hearings, I have no recollection of the occasion.”

“But you pay them maintenance.”

“Not really. I send the IGA store there, \$600 per month, indexed, so that she and the child don’t starve. But it’s only a bit of fun. Its chump change to me and when I’ve had enough, I’ll call for DNA.”

“So it’s not your child?”

“Well.....I was on the Nimbin ganja that weekend, so anything is possible, but I can and do remember every girl I’ve been in the sack with and I don’t recall this one at all, at all. But...” Les continues, “Is it wise to continue this pregnancy at your great age?”

“I’m just 38,” she says. “It’s not that uncommon these days. Besides, motherhood is an adventure I’ve never had and I’m ready for it.”

“Well...on your head,” he says, “and good luck for your courage.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Five**

By mutual consent, they go along as parliamentary colleagues in their work. When Trudy is four months on the journey, she and Les have to attend a Sunday afternoon function at the NSW Art Gallery. This is being held in what they have named ‘The Surprise Gallery’ and which has drawn many visitors since the day it opened.

Today’s star attraction is a series of crayon portraits of interesting people, all drawn in Martin Place by an artist known as ‘Ten Minute Ted’. Some of the subjects are just picked out of the crowd, but quite a few, the majority in fact, have been pre-arranged as subjects by Trudy. As mentioned, they are all crayon depicted on dark crayon paper. Ted is a whiz in doing portraits of his subject and fading the colours into the paper background. They are very well done. Today, there’s also a section for ‘Patrons Treasure’, to which Les has brought his Epstein bust of Nehru.

The Premier is doing the honours today, the last day of the exhibition. Trudy introduces him and moves over next to Les, who is the real brains behind the offering. But she is looking quite white.

“Les,” she murmurs, “I can’t finish this; can you get me out of here?”

Les catches his driver’s eye.

“Take her back to McMahons Point,” says Les, “and then come back in the Hummer for me. This show won’t go all that much longer.”

But it does. It’s after dark when they set off in the Hummer with Alby Jordon driving, to get back to McMahons Point.

“She’s okay, Les,” Alby says. “I would have taken her to Sydney General emergency if she wasn’t. I settled her down in your unit and she seemed to have recovered from whatever it was by the time I left.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Six**

They are heading along the access narrow street to the 8 storey block of apartments when Alby ejaculates, “Look out.”

A black Mercedes is standing, engine running, near the unit entry. A chap carrying a pump shotgun has apparently lamped them and is trying to get a shell into the barrel as he attempts to get out of the Merc. Alby throws a right across the street and jams the man in the door, which he pushes in using the Hummer bull-bar. It’s a bit of an impact, the man’s shotgun flies up in the air from the impact and goes off.

Les barks, “You’ve probably killed him!”

Alby, calm as, says, “Like the Secret Service men said when Diana met her Waterloo in the tunnel – better dead than Mrs Fayed. Look out, Les, here’s the rest of the posse.”

Three men burst out of the entry door, two with sawn-off shotguns. Quick as a flash, Alby has his boxy Uzi out, single taps each man, they go down. Alby runs over to the fallen men, pulls away their shotties.

“Get after the third bloke, Les,” he cries.

Les needs no urging. He sprints in the entry. The third man is obviously in the ascending lift. Les keys the small personal lift that is his access to his 8<sup>th</sup> floor apartment. Muffled screams are coming out the unit door, loosely ajar. Les drops his bronze bust of Nehru and charges in the door. But he’s too impetuous. The third man is cute. He, as it turns out, is behind the entry door.

The most impactful thing that Les has ever experienced now envelops him in nano-seconds as the door slams after the disappearing hood. It’s not one, but two stun grenades, albeit a non-lethal military weapon designed to knock down and immobilize the occupants of a room to clear the way for a shooter to have the upper hand. The real impact radius is about five feet from the point of impact. It’s not something that anyone would wish to share a room with.

Alby is on the job in the stairwell/lift shafts. He comes up in the big lift. As he gets out, he realises the small personal lift is on the way down. This gadget holds four occupants, steel framed, glass infill, no top, as it’s electrically powered.

Alby takes a quick look down the shaft. A shotgun blast wafts past him. Quick as a flash, Alby pelts the Epstein bust down the shaft at the shooter. Bullseye! The man falls to the lift floor. Alby is down to truss him up in short time. The bloke is head damaged from the impact. He snaps a pair of handcuffs, wrist to ankle, leaves him comatose and goes back up to where Les is staggering around the unit holding his head from the stun effect.

“Quick, Les,” he says. “Grab the other end.”

They lift the bedspread off the bed and carry Trudy down to street level. Alby reverses the Hummer out of the impacted Mercedes and they split for the hospital emergency. They cut in front of ramping ambulances to get Trudy in the ER door.

They pop her on a gurney. Alby pulls out a tiny gas horn and sets it off. As he says later, "It was designed to get immediate attention to Trudy."

As she is whisked away on the run by emergency team, Alby says to Les, "I'm back to McMahons Point to shed a bit of light on what we've done there. Back (I hope) when it's sorted."

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Seven

After the sort out and securing of the unit, Alby returns to the ER. Les is drinking canteen coffee with a look of intense disgust on his face.

"Nothing yet," he says.

A harassed looking middle aged medico in green scrubs almost follows Alby in.

"She's okay," he says, "just....but she's miscarried twins. She will have a range of hills to climb to get back any degree of normalcy, but she'll live. And in Mr Spock terms, will, I think, in time, get well and prosper."

He spreads his fingers in a spock-like gesture.

After the man goes, Les says to Alby, "You know the sunset scene in 'Gone With the Wind' where Scarlett O'Hara says screechingly, 'As God is my witness, I'll never be hungry again'?"

"Yes, of course," says Alby.

"Well...." says Les, "to paraphrase the drama of that event, just so long as my fundamental orifice points to the ground, I'll get the bastard that organised this far-reaching event."

## Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Eight

Les Norton, the big red-headed Queenslander, currently the Acting Minister for Police in the NSW Labour Government, is sitting in a cane chair on the patio of his Bondi home.

He's tucking into a bowl of mixed fruit and Bircher muesli while his sometimes live-in house help, an Indooroopilly Uni student of stunning looks and amenable disposition – she is always ready to hop into Les's bed on quiet weekends – is cooking up scramblers and adding smoked salmon to them, inside.

A Lincoln town car pulls up on the street and the USA Embassy Cultural Attaché, beautifully suited in a Brooks Bros suit trots up the stairs.

"Les," he says.

"Joe-Bob," Les replies.

"Theo Lamont wants a meet up," he says.

Theo is the head of a famous, or is it infamous, Chicago crime family; a good friend of Les's. The thought rolls around Les's head about how does a crime boss have the pull on this side of the world to use the US Embassy staff as messenger boys.

"Umm," says Les. "P'raps the Holiday Inn in Dublin, 1<sup>st</sup> of next month."

"I'll pass it on," the fellow says. "Now I must run. I'm on my way to a breakfast meet at the Menzies."

Thus the 1<sup>st</sup> of next month sees Les closeted with Theo Lamont in a smoky Irish pub bar in Clondalkin – just out of Dublin. They down a few Guinness pints.

Theo, of course, is knee deep in minders, who don't blend in that well with the pub patrons.

"Now," he says, "to business. The Farmers and Manufacturers Bank we own in Missouri, hasn't worked out for us. Surely, surely it makes good, good money, but with the team of accountants the Homeland Security sleuths have, means we are bogged down with auditors just about every month. They say they are on the lookout for terrorist money, but in our book, they're only spies for the Inland Revenue. Not wanting the Inland Revenue to have us in their spotlight to the degree they seem to, I have to look for a better alternative."

"Well," says Les, "as you know, my employers, or as it is now just me acting on their missing behalf and bearing in mind that they may well turn up off the street one day, run a lot of money through the Timber Bank at Port Moresby. But despite the great work they do for us, we know that Hiram Bellemy is a one man band and we, or I, don't trust him enough to leave our money under his control for very long. In short, we use him as a clearing house for money going to Cyprus and Helsinki. Under new franchise arrangements, a lot of money is going on to Korea, China and the Bank of Japan. I'd like to get it somewhere where it can be lent back to Australian banks when they are out hunting loan money to keep their businesses running and which can, in time, mature in Australia, thus allowing it to be converted into real property."

"Such as...?" Theo asks.

"Well," Les says, "The Aussie banks are fixated on house type lending and hunt the world for more money at the right price to fund up their lending programme."

"Most bank busts," Theo says, "are related to property lending. I'm sure you know what happened right here in good old Paddy-land and for that matter, the sub-prime thing in the US of A."

"Of course," says Les, "but the Oz house lending programme has a fair way to run yet to meet the demand caused by people coming into the country and wanting housing."

"So why don't you lend them some Port Moresby money?"

"Can't be done," Les says, "Old Hiram is competition to the Oz banks. They will never, never help him. But I have an idea."

After a bit of back and forthing and the making of arrangements, we find Les deck-handing on a luxury, Jewish financier-owned yacht, the 'Sea Fire', which just at the moment is sailing from Darwin to Timor. Jack Levinson, the owner-skipper, remarks to Les on how quickly flat old Darwin and Oz generally, is disappearing over the stern rail. At first light next morning, Jack and Les at the yacht wheel area, see the tips of Timor's mountains come into view. They are drinking coffee out of mugs; black coffee topped up with generous shots of rum.

"A couple of points of interest, Les," Jack says. "You see that sharp peak at three o'clock?"

"Yep," says Les.

"That bugger was the sighter for Japanese planes returning to that very good strip they built at Bacau. Those little yellow buggers were as sharp as tacks," he says. "That's why they bombed the shit out of Darwin in 1942, but left the biggest target, the Hotel Darwin, untouched. The Jap military wanted it preserved as an Officers Mess. Now the other point," Jack continues, "let me quote Willy Somerset-Maugham's famous words where he said, 'I looked up and saw the outline of Tahiti and realised this was the place I had been looking for all my life.' This may not, of

course, apply to Timor, but those magnificent, if distant, peaks are very illustrative of what he said.”

And they are. It takes another three days running behind a stiff breeze to drop anchor in Dili, the capital of the reborn Timor. It has always been a famous landfall in this part of the world. But it’s also relatively informal to visit. Les gets ashore and books into a hotel without having to produce papers of any sort.

Next day, he gets an appointment with Peter Mua, the go to man on finance in Dili, simply by walking in the door of Peter’s office and asking to see him. Peter Mua is a mixture of a Timorese mother and a Portuguese army officer father, stemming from the days when this island was a Portuguese Colony, with a very big National Serviceman population. Les chats with Peter on the pub verandah.

“You haven’t done a Cook Islands deal here, Peter,” he says.

“No, Leslie,” the man says, “it took a deuce of a job to get rid of the fucking Indonesians. If we allow a mix of the Caymans and Cook Islands banking to develop here, Indonesia is so corrupt that dodgy money would come over the border in semi-trailer loads and thus starve the Indo street banks of deposits. They have told us very plainly that they would not allow it and we of course, have to listen. For our part, we do a lot of trade with them and that is very, very important to our economy.”

“Understood,” says Les. “But you have a golden opportunity to let a number of entrepot banks set up here. Set up by people that have the capacity to marshal up money and lend it to Australian banks. Look at Singapore. Due to its long standing entrepot trade, it’s top of the financial wazar. You can emulate that and get a lot out of banking license charges and perhaps strike a deal, whereby the entrepot banks here could lend an agreed percentage into small loans to Timorese nationals and administer those loans. All using money not raised in the region.”

“I could probably sell that,” Peter says. “I can see where you are coming from, but what’s in it for me?”

“A villa in Geneva could be arranged,” Les says.

“Um...,” Peter says thoughtfully. “Just leave it with me.”

He sits thinking and says, “How would you staff the banks?”

“No big deal,” Les says. “Computers would do all the mundane work and we’d house a manager who could run two or three banks up at Maubisse – out of the Malarial Zone.”

“Makes sense,” Peter says.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Thirty-Nine**

While Les has been up in Timor importuning Peter Mua into providing him with a banking conduit that will allow him to convert huge lumps of cash and gold into investments by way of loan into the big Oz banks, investments, that in time and after some years can be repaid within Australia and thus be converted into real property, other things are happening.

In Melbourne, the Crime and Corruption Commission are congratulating themselves on having shafted a Lady Lord Mayor who has been on an international gravy train. She’s not the only one of course, but they’ve certainly got her. The Commission keep their work and indeed existence, very dark. Today they are meeting in a Collins Street borrowed boardroom, which they have closely checked in case of electronic bugs.

They have 12 active cases under investigation, or now that they've got the Lady Lord Mayor to rights, eleven for the moment. Among the names on the list of eleven is that of Les Norton. This mob has been late to get on Les's wheel. It was only after Les returned from England and cranked up Ballarat South Gold into action, that his name has come up.

"Tell us about Norton," the chairman says. "His rise from club doorman to head of a booming concern must have a shitload of corruption in it somewhere."

He looks at Tommy Shorthouse, the commission man who they have got sussing out old Leslie.

"This," Shorthouse says, "is a most unusual situation. The man under surveillance is different. Usually my helpers can tap phones, follow people, hack into computers, bug their emails and so on. This bugger doesn't use any of these; it's quite unprecedented."

"But he must," the Chairman says. "He's a Minister in the NSW government."

"Well," Shorthouse says, "his staff handle these; there's little of a personal nature on the inflow. His personal return calls are made for him by his confidential assistant, and at that from different phone boxes. And for instance, we know he is just at this time, up in Timor talking to Government officials about who knows what and interestingly, there is no record of how he got there. Another obstacle is that Police Commissioner Caccano has allocated him a smart driver to ride shotgun. One Alby Jordon; he used to run the Green Zone security in Baghdad. He's the guy who importuned the Septics to bring over panel beaters on short term assignment, to angle grind off the back doors and the boot lids of anyone wanting to enter the Green Zone. The approaches to this, even today are piled deep with boot lids and rear doors from cars. This bugger is razor sharp and I think starts his day with an 'eagle's breakfast'."

"What the fuck is an 'eagle's breakfast'?" the Chairman asks.

"Ah...", says Shorthouse, "A quick shit followed by a sharp look around."

"And another thing," Tommy continues, "This chap is owed big time by the new Police Commissioner. The NSW Police have considerable investigative powers – powers that Norton can call on at a minutes notice."

"Umm...", says the Chairman. "Keep up the good work, Tommy, but softly, softly seems to be the way to go."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Forty**

Les hasn't been near his ministerial office for a while, but his secretary has sent around a daily summary in neat long-hand, acquainting him of any problems looming. There has been more enquiry for him, as the Premier, Tommy Strange is ensconced in Canberra for a time. The official story is that he's doing some work on a better carve up of the GST to New South Wales.

'This is pure blue sky,' Les thinks, as a very in source tells him that Tommy has been closeted with Robert English, the young Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. Tommy had more than a bit to do with Robert getting this plum appointment straight from a common law practise. Les thinks Tommy is working hard on a big reciprocal favour.

Also, Roald McCracken, the Government Chief Whip, has been in every sitting day trying to catch up with Les. Les barely gives this chap the time of day and he particularly doesn't want to talk to him before he catches up with the Premier.

A note from his secretary comes around with a reliable messenger that Les's office uses away from normal channels. Tommy is back and wants a meet and greet in the Sailing Bar at the Menzies. Les sets out to meet him just on dark. As he passes one of Sydney town's oldest watering holes, he comes across a big semi bikie-looking chap having a tinkle in the gutter in full view of the passing parade.

"Hey," Les says, "knock it off."

The bikie turns in Les's direction, opens his sheepskin vest and rattles a length of heavy chain strapped across his chest.

"Fuck off, big fellow," he says, "before I get offended."

Les grabs a firm hold on the chain; kangaroo hops the bikie along a bit and flings him onto the bonnet of an oldish car. As the bikie makes a violent effort to get on his feet, Les double hands him a rabbit killer and a half and it's all over red rover for the bikie. A passerby catches the occurrence on his mobile phone and emails it to the Sydney Morning Herald. Les is front page next day, bells and all. He doesn't normally talk to the press, but when they catch up with him, he simply says,

"I just happened to do a bit of a street clean up on this thug as there weren't any garbage men in sight."

Sydney town enjoys a good laugh and most of next day's email to Parliament House and the press, in essence, say 'Good onya Minister'.

## Chapter One Hundred and Forty-One

What with tying up the loose ends of his bank idea and trying to get Trudy Biggs back on her feet after the tragic miscarriage of her twins, Les has a great many matters to attend to, particularly as Trudy isn't around to put the arty farty mob in place. They're baying for blood, sensing a chink in the Arts/Literature portfolio. Seeing that Les, at the Premier's behest, has halved the arts budget, their ire is quite understandable. Les of course, isn't giving an inch on the drastic cuts. He goes into the meet with the Premier just a little late due to the bikie dust-up. Tommy isn't worried. He's sitting comfortably in a booth, pint in hand. Les takes one look at Tommy, who's grinning at him. Les looks around, no one in earshot.

"Well, Judge," he says, "when do you start judging?"

"November, Les," he says. "Robert English wants someone versed in constitutional law, so I've got the High Court guernsey. We'll organise your entry for the upcoming Senate vacancy in late October."

"McCracken's on my wheel," Les says, "no doubt you know what he wants."

Tommy laughs. "All Whips are on the make," he says. "He wants to embarrass you about Trudy's absence I expect and he wants some dirt on Ted Ellery."

"Hmm...", says Les, "that bastard is a true whip. He knows knowledge is power, but we can't tell him anything about Ellery if your plan is to make him the next parliamentary party leader; be it Premier or Leader of the Opposition."

"About Trudy," Les continues, "I've got her safely stashed sans any communication link."

"Fine," says Tommy. "What the hell do I do about this same sex marriage thing?"

Les laughs. "Just don't turn your back on them, Tommy. Look, it's not your problem, its Federal. But if you like, you can join me in marching at the head of the gay coppers at the upcoming Mardi Gras."

“What good will that do?” Tommy asks.

“None at all,” Les says, “but it’s always a plus to confuse the punters.”

“Yer know, Les,” he says, “you’re the one that should be taking my place; you’d whoop it in on the party vote.”

Les gives Tommy a hard look. “Mate, you are just now suggesting that I take a deckchair on the Titanic. No bloody thanks.”

“Well, it was worth a try,” Tommy says.

“Ah, Tommy, you should know better than that.”

“Well,” he says, “I don’t want to walk away from a train wreck and looking at next Tuesday’s question time, Ted Ellery may not survive what looks like being one.”

Thought jack blunt in one to one confrontations, Les is really truly introspective.

“Tommy,” he says, “I’ve taken care of that, but I will need Trudy Biggs here on Tuesday to help me out on the arts questions. She’s on top of her brief.”

“But where the fuck is she?” Tommy asks.

“Umm...she’ll be here with bells on Tuesday. I’ve had her stashed away to recuperate and also to delay the inquests on the dead man outside my McMahon Point unit, also to fob off deep questions about the chap in a deep coma due to having old Nehru’s bronze bust dropped on his head from a great height.”

“How can I help, Les?” the Premier asks.

“Ah...a loan of your business jet on Sunday to retrieve Trudy.”

“Fine,” he says.

## Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Two

Les has had Trudy recuperating after her stint in hospital and following. He’s judged her fine now to rejoin the shot and shell of NSW state politics.

Les has worded up Del, the Speaker, on what he has in mind and has her agreement, sort of. As the House gathers, Les stands in the gangway where the opposition pass through to enter the chamber. He’s wearing a truly magnificent muted Yorkshire tweed suit with tan Italian loafers and an MCC tie. He draws a lot of hellos and querying glances from the opposition. Mark McLeary, the one down to ask two questions, comes self-importantly along carrying a file of papers.

“A word,” Les says.

“I’ve hardly time,” McLeary says. “I’m down to ask questions.”

Les gives an evil grin. “Mark,” he says, “for every action there is said to be, under the law of physics, which is all about the unseen, an equal and opposite reaction. Now, if you are out to scotch Ted Ellery and put his ass in a sling, bear in mind a famous QC from Bowral has, last week, taken an attested deposition from a girl who you got into holts with, in the Cronulla sandhills a long time back.”

“Keerrist,” says McLeary, losing his composure fully. “She’s been paid off.”

“Yes,” says Les, “that only involved money. We have encouraged her now to go for blood – your blood.”

“This could finish me here,” McLeary says.

“Not really,” says Les. “Just drop the Ellery question, ie, don’t ask it and I’ll hose down the Cronulla bit and give you a bit of traction on the Arts question, which will give you good press...until I shoot you down, further down the track.”

The Liberal Whip materialises.

“Come on, Mark, you’re on.”

“But you want an answer now?” McLeary asks.

“Not at all,” says Les. “Just at the moment, career-wise, you are standing at the Gap. Whether you leap into it or walk away unscathed is entirely your decision, but do bear in mind that at question time, if the question doesn’t suit me, I take no prisoners.”

## Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Three

The Speaker doesn’t look all that happy as she opens proceedings, but Les is well aware that the Premier has told her to follow what Les wants done, or be prepared to lose the Speakership the next day. With his departure from Politics assured to the High Court, Tommy doesn’t mind flaunting his political power while he still has it.

Del welcomes Trudy Biggs back from sick leave, opens up question time. McLeary asks what Les’s (and Trudy’s) jaunt to Italy and England cost. Les tables the modest costings and gestures to Trudy. She is wearing black rimmed glasses and looks for all the world, as though she is about to review a book for the Barcoo Examiner.

“Ms Speaker,” she says, “the Honourable member has queried the costs of recent overseas travel by my Minister and myself. He is hunting costs, ignoring benefit. I draw the attention of this House to the presence in the Gallery, of the Choir of St Timothy’s in Limerick, here today to render an Irish blessing on this House.”

The opposition certainly doesn’t expect this. It’s the well-known version;

‘May the road rise to meet you, May the wind be always at your back.’

The lone fiddler pays a wonderful obbligation to this strikingly soft interpretation.

They get a standing ovation.

## Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Four

Les allows the session to dribble on – McLeary withdraws his Ellery question and when Les judges that the press deadline is about passed, he tips the wink to the Speaker and she allows a question without notice, to Belinda Harvey, Parliamentary Secretary – Finance. Her question is simple.

“What cost, Minister, of your trip will or has been charged to the Government?”

Les gets up. “Nothing whatsoever,” he says. “I paid the costs personally.”

She has a one word further question. “Why?”

Les says, “Due to prevailing circumstances, I have had to slash the Arts budget. The least I could do was to toe the same line and cover the necessary travel personally; which I am glad to have done in the interests of the common good of all New South Welsh people.”

Les knows this stunning answer (for a politician) will come out the next day in the media and shoot down McLeary’s question.

“A bit brutal, Les,” the Premier says when next their paths cross, “but just so bloody satisfying.”

After Les retrieved Trudy Biggs, Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts and Culture Ministry, from where he had her recuperating at his country homestead, Tudor Hill Farm, just a bit out from Horsham, Les has had her staying at his unit at

McMahons Point. Les has the top floor of this block with the use of the rooftop garden and also, as it's a luxury unit, there's a maid's flat on the seventh floor with access via a spiral staircase to the unit Les occupies, when he's not out at his Bondi quarters.

## Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Five

This particular morning, Trudy is sitting in the sun from the big windows, wearing a very big robe of Les's reading Mountbatten Hotel Kensington.

"Where or rather how did you get this, Leslie?" she says.

"Well...I stayed there in London one time; thought the bill a bit steep, so evened things up a bit by stuffing that robe into my travel bag."

Trudy has recovered well from her medical ordeal when she was in this apartment, when baddies essayed a hit on Les, who wasn't even there. Les is sitting on a Chesterfield lounge reading a long document.

"What's that?" she asks.

"It's a rundown on the likely matters to come up when they schedule an inquest of how two men were shot coming out of this block, how one man was killed when my driver took him out in the Hummer and also, a bit about the head honcho who is still in a coma due to having an Epstein bronze bust dropped on his head from the height of the lift well."

"Concerns?" she asks.

"Probably not, I've had our Solicitor General have a good look at it. He thinks we can get the Coroner to see things our, or my, way in the end."

"Fine," she says. "I feel well, what can we do today?"

Les grins. "Oyster entrees and a good steak out at Wisemans Ferry, I think."

## Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Six

Later, outside the pub there, she comments.

"No security today, Les?"

"Umm...well I'm wearing an ankle holster under my cords," he says, "and a stiletto down the back collar of my Yorkshire Mills jumper."

She chuckles. "I like your robust attitude to life, Leslie," she says. "How the hell have you avoided marriage? Every man of good standing it's said, is in need of a wife."

"Umm..," he says, "men should be careful of women; the witch lives near the surface in all of them."

"But sex?" she says.

He laughs. "Universally available if people think you are rich."

"And you are?" she asks.

"Lots of property," Les says, "but lots of borrowed money too."

Changing the subject, Les says, "The chap who got his head bashed by the bust of Nehru wasn't armed."

"But," she says, "He was carrying a gun."

"Not a gun, gun," Les says. "It was a Herf gun."

"What the fuck is a Herf gun?"

“Well...you just aim it at the computer, press the button and it fires a Hi-energy radio beam or rather, frequency, that disables the hard drive, stopping any Hi-Tech operators from resurrecting deleted files with recovery utility software.”

“I didn’t know you know that much about computers,” she says.

“Nor do I,” Les says. “I’m only repeating what was set out in this long memo. It’s all a bit amazing. Gawd, I’d like to have seen the crook’s face when he couldn’t find any computer, or phone, or mobile phone, or Facebook, or Twitter, or any other of the shitty things modern technology has foisted on us. I’m all for smoke signals; they’re much simpler.”

They knock off a bottle of white and then a very fine Hunter Valley red, over a lengthy meal.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Seven**

Les, who normally is as deep as a well, gets just a bit prolix with Trudy, who he greatly admires.

“I’m just not mentally tough enough for wives and babies, love,” he says.

“Have you ever been to the crippled children’s home? We give them scads of money, but in return, I have to front up twice a year to present cheques and look over the place and its occupants. They are young, have strong hearts and will live long. But the anguish of their situation to a parent is just something I could never take.”

She looks at Les. “You big old sook,” she says, “and everyone thinks you’re a hard man.”

“Oh...it’s just my general philosophy – kick their heads in before they kick yours.”

Trudy now gives Les one of her rare looks that remind Les of looking at the business end of a double barrel shotgun.

“Leslie...” she says. “What the bloody hell is going on with our government?”

“Not much,” says Les. “Just at the moment, Tommy thinks a steady run of masterful inactivity is called for.”

“Why?” she asks.

“Umm, it’s leaving no meat on the bone for the Liberal Opposition to chew on and that’s always good in an election year.”

But it’s also interesting to Les. Obviously nothing at all has got out about the pending defection of him and the Premier to parts elsewhere. If it was out, he knows Trudy would know – dumb she is not.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Eight**

Nothing much of note happens for quite a while. So much so, Les tells Trudy,

“Well, me old soulmate, it’s time we took a bit of time off. I’ve always wanted to visit Jordan, look at the famed city of Petra. Wanna come?”

“What do I bring?” she asks.

“Water wings,” Les says.

“Woffor?” Trudy asks.

“Umm...23 French tourists in one group all drowned in the chasm in Petra in a winter flash flood.”

“Oh...” she says. “Thus, if I don’t drown, I may well get shot.”

“Well....Jordan is safer than Kings Cross just at the moment,” Les says. “But I’ll take my minder along to run interference should that be needed.”

After they get back from Jordan, Les is at ‘Downpatrick’; the Casterton property that Ballarat Gold South has only recently acquired. He’s talking to a couple of hard cases that he has odd-jobbing in and around the magnificent garden. It’s competed with the old Frazer property, ‘Nareen’, for some years in the open garden displays in Spring.

“Yer know, Mr Norton,” one of the hard cases says, “youse woz lucky to get this place. It’s a beauty and it’s only due to Charlie Todd smoking his head off all his adult life and that his son was gay and wouldn’t leave Melbin and Jack the Dancer struck at Charlie’s lungs.”

“Ah...” says Les, “I had an uncle that shuffled off the mortal with something similar. During the war (WW2) tobacco was hard to get, so he pulverised white gum bark and smoked that, even after rations lifted. But it finished him in the end. They took him into hospital, opened him up and the surgeon reported to the family, he was full of it.”

“Wot, cancer?” one of the roughies asks.

“Not at all,” Les says. “WHITE ANTS.”

Les’s company borrowed back the purchase price of ‘Downpatrick’ from his proposed entrepot bank in Timor. In effect, borrowed back his own, or more correctly, Tun and Angelo’s dosh; charged himself interest on it and thus, gets a huge negative geared tax claim. This upcoming deal is as deep as a well and the ATO have no chance of digging into the detail.

The new property has 38,000 Merino ewes on it. Les plans to put Poll Dorset rams to the entire ewe flock on a one year rotation and next year, Horned Merino rams. The turnover of fat lamb sales one year and shipping wethers and ewe sales will bring in worthwhile money. He share-farms out oats and lupins and baled hay; thus has no machinery to worry about and he has a retired sheep classer living in the overseer’s house and running the sheep with helpers from town when needed.

There is heaps of water available. He has a pump about the size of a Mini Minor car pulling water out of the Wannon River into huge tanks that reticulate the garden. He has simplified this and casual help plant huge beds of petunias and long runs of sweet peas on bamboo tripods to give pizzazz to the Spring Open Garden.

The house is a huge red brick beauty; a great backdrop to a great garden. This Spring, Les has organised a Proms concert in the wool shed. The Tel Aviv Symphony are to play, featuring Sibelius’s Finlandia Hymn and the Governor of Victoria will be doing the honours.

Charlie Todd, who ran Downpatrick for so many years, was a bit of a classicist underneath it all. The farm is bisected by wide sheep race-ways with rolled pathways and English tree plantings. He has named each sheep lane after famous Roman roads; ie Watling Street, Fosse Way, Ermine Street and so on. Walking clubs run charity walks along these beautiful pathways in the Spring.

The departure of Tommy to the august High Court of Australia’s bench and that of Les to the freshly created Senate vacancy, causes quite a storm in the media, but the pundits say in the finish that they can be likened to rats leaving a sinking ship. But comparatively, it finishes up a bit of a storm in a teacup and Les fires broadsides through his personal press releases and avoids the many calls for interviews. He terms it natural attrition in his press releases and calls for the major media players to retire what he terms ‘Tired old Tarts’ from their journalistic teams.

This does happen just a bit and fairly quickly. Les, as usual, follows his usual policy to taking no prisoners, as his detractors find out yet again.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Forty-Nine**

He drives down to Canberra a few days before he's due to show up in the Senate at the first session after the Winter recess. He's leased a furnished apartment with all mod cons and space for a couple of vehicles. He settles in and walks the area and generally suss's things out. He unplugs the phones and internet connection; as far as Les is concerned, modern technology is not for him. He learned this thoroughly from Angelo Abruzzi during the time he was the bagman, or perhaps more correctly, the money moving man for the two men who were top of the Wazar in the grey trade.

His thoughts are often on the missing Angelo and Tonino, whose huge money stocks, much of it in gold coin and ingots, is stashed in Europe, Chicago and Italy; all in Les's name. The jury is still out on the long term results of the missing men, who seem to have been on Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 under assumed names, when they were en route to Beijing and then Moscow in pursuit of checking on their expanding income. If they don't turn up, Les looks like being one of the world's richest men; or if they do, he will go back to a modest stash and perhaps have to restart working as a doorman at the Kelly Club. In the interim, he keeps Tonino's fruit and flower market in Hawthorn going and Angelo's small winery on the Tamar out from Launceston. But he is also circumspect on what he spends. If he has to justify his stewardship of the mountain of money under his thumb at some future time, he has a clear conscience.

Much of what he has acquired of late, including the big Hamilton property, Downpatrick, and even his bronze bust of Nehru, an Epstein no less, has been acquired in the name of Ballarat Gold South. Les has all but 5 shares in this. The old girls in the Bondi Bridge Club won't part with their shares and have become rich women by doing so. What the world doesn't know, is that Les has effected a legal hold on their shares; he can buy them back if the old girls shuffle off this mortal coil, at twice the market value. It's the best he can do to safeguard the valuable freehold held by the mining company. In the meantime, the old girls and of course Les, have been enjoying the income from the very rewarding gold open cut mine in Western Australia. A dodgy geologist sold Les the intel that this mine assay results showed it would be a bonanza and Les and the boys (but in Les's name only) passed him a million dollars and got a lock on the shareholding, much to the annoyance of the entrepreneurs who set it up and didn't have a clue that a dodgy geologist would sell them down the river.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifty**

Les arrives unobtrusively at Parliament House, the media pack are at the door.

"Congratulations new Senator," they say. "What's the word?"

Les says, "G'day possums, condolences may perhaps be more appropriate. In the NSW parliament, I was perhaps a bit of a big noise, here just a new boy. Rest

assured I will do my best to keep you, the denizens of the media, totally misinformed.”

This takes the wind out of their sails and he gets in the door without further molestation. Despite the apparent splendour of the new Parliament House, built in Malcolm Frazer’s time, its short on office space. Les has taken over his predecessor’s office, sharing with Senator Clarrie Millar. When he trundles in, Clarrie, an affable fellow, says,

“Cameron Colbert wants to see you.”

“Okay,” Les says.

A little later a runner comes in.

“Where are you?” he asks. “The Chief Whip is waiting for you.”

Les chuckles. “Doesn’t the Chief Whip know where my office is?”

The chap blanches. “It doesn’t work that way, Colbert whistles, you go to him.”

Les laughs. “Tell your master, I’ll be here for the next half hour – but no more than that – if he wants me.”

Colbert doesn’t take long. He comes in Les’s office door with the fluid ease that accompanies power. Les has a good hard look at this chap. He’s a bit of a short-ass, balding, but beautifully suited.

“I need,” he says, “to fill you in on my requirements.”

“Oh,” says Les, “fancy a cigar?”

“No smoking in this building,” the man says.

“Oh, indeed,” Les says; sucks on an Italian cigar and lights it up with a taper.

“Brandy?” he asks, digging out a bottle.

“No drinking in sitting hours,” the man says.

“Oh,” says Les as he pours a snifter into a shot-glass. “And your requirements are?” Les asks.

“You’re to break the ice by seconding a condolence motion, which will originate in the Senate to mark the passing of Thomas James Ferguson, the very well-known and regarded Merino breeder from Yass.”

“Old Tommy is dead?” says Les. “Who shot him?”

“Waddaya mean?” the man says.

“Well...,” Les replies. “That old RIP has been standing over the Merino Breeders Association and the business people of Yass for near on 50 years. It’s past time somebody shot him.”

The man says, “That’s heretical and shows no respect to those deserving of it.”

“What other rubbish are you espousing today?” Les asks.

“Well...don’t go mixing with that awful mob who quite undeservingly, have the balance of power in your house. Our policy is to isolate and ignore them.”

Les says, “For a man so obviously brain dead, you seem to have risen high in the ranks of this institution. Now...” he continues; turns to Clarrie Millar, “Would you please open the door?”

“Woffor?” Clarrie asks.

“So that I can throw this asshole through it without damaging taxpayers’ property.”

The Chief Whip flees.

Millar says, “Parliament is a soft touch in the main and brings with it many member benefits. Having got in, most in fact all grovel to the Whip, you don’t see the PM much, but the Whip carrying out his orders, you do a lot.”

Les yawns. "To business," he says. "Have a cigar and a brandy."  
"Yes, please," the man says. "Working with you, Les, however short a term here you have, looks like being fun."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-One**

The President opens proceedings in the Senate, gives Les a very wordy welcome. 'Gawd,' thinks Les, 'I've got another Magnus McCormack on my hands.' He stands in acknowledgement of the welcome; you could hear a pin drop in the chamber, says, "Thank you," and smartly sits down again. Somewhat bemused, the President moves a condolence motion on the passing of Tommy Ferguson; again very wordy. He looks at Les to second it. Les looks at the ceiling. Evidently the Whip has told them that Les will be doing the seconding. A nasty silence ensues; finally one of the Independents stands up.

He says, "While I didn't know Mr Ferguson, I cannot allow this condolence motion to simply lapse, thus I second it."

This seems to put a bit of a taper to gunpowder as the PM himself turns up in Les's office.

"That," he says, "is close to unforgiveable for a new member."

Les gives the PM a droll look. He opens the blue book on his desk, turns a few pages.

"Um..." he says, "Let's start with your record at St Peters College."

The PM jumps, looks at Clarrie and says, "This is a private matter."

Clarrie picks up some papers prior to departing. Les raises his hand.

"Stay, Clarrie. I've researched or had researched every member of this Parliament. What I'm about to touch on is part of the public record, if and I mean if, you know where to look."

The PM says, "Look...I have another meeting."

"Fair enough," says Les. "Don't feel you have to hurry back."

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-Two**

In Senate proceedings, Les sees that whenever one of the Independents rises to speak, the Chamber empties on both sides. Counting heads, there's usually only the cross-bench members and the officials left listening. Les sits pat and if, at the end of the day, what he has heard sounds sensible, he tells the speakers just that.

On week three of the session, a tax measure is being debated. The Libs and Nationals are, of course, voting as a bloc against the Independents motion. Les stands up after the Speaker gives him the nod.

"Mr Speaker," he says, "the motion before us is the very first one of substance that I have heard in this house – this house of legislative review. We should support this motion."

The Speaker is of Labour persuasion and smartly adjourns the house briefly. Les's leader in the Senate walks over.

"You can't do this," he says.

"Um...it's the soundest bit of logic I've heard in this place since I arrived here. I think you need a rethink. Look at the Press gallery, they're obviously salivating about this."

“But I can’t support it,” the Leader says.

“Fine,” says Les, “then use your guillotine option to defer the vote. This is simply a motion the house should pass.”

## Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-three

Les gets along with the press pack quite well. They bomb him every morning when he turns up at Parliament House. He quickly turns their probing questions into matters such as, how well Collingwood is doing in the AFL.

“Collingwood,” they cry, “why would anyone follow the Magpies?”

“Well now,” Les says, “I’m sure Eddie McGuire will be Governor General one day. Eddie, I’m sure thinks it a good idea and there I will be, champagne flute in hand, pulling faces at you mob with your noses pressed against the glass, outside. Yarralumla, no more questions, unless....”

He looks the President of the Press gallery in the eye (and she has nice eyes – her only redeeming feature)

“...you will take a question in private.”

“Certainly,” she says and steps away a bit. “What do you want to know?”

Les grins. “What about dinner one night....say next Saturday night?”

She is a bit taken aback.

“Senator,” she says. “We all understand that you are gay and I’m certainly not. After all, you always march in the Sinny town Mardi Gras in front of the gay cops.”

“Means nothing; its just a token of appreciation of very good policing on their part. They are smart, perceptive and never hassle their girl partners and what’s more, if something of interest comes up in antique shops, they tell me first. I’ve added quite a bit to my collection due to them. However, if you’re not interested.”

“I am, I am,” she says, “what time and where?”

“Well it can be my place or yours.”

“Mine,” she says. “I like to do my own cooking, if you’re game, but it’s out a bit in sheep country.”

“Fine,” says Les. “If it’s a bit isolated, no one will hear your screams.”

“Well...” she says. “I’m not overburdened with males fighting for my favours. In fact I wouldn’t scream a bit.”

“You realise, Ethnee,” Les says, “this conversation will be on front pages here and there in the weekend press.”

“They wouldn’t dare,” she says. “If they do, the only assignments I give them will be in-depth interviews with the Dalai Lama.”

Les is down today to ask a Dorothy Dix question in the Senate. The Whip, never game enough now to come to Les’s office, has sent around a concise note on what he wants asked. Les is no fool and he is an assiduous reader of what is going on. He sends a runner over to the Member representing the Minister concerned, with a new question. It is a good one which allows the Minister mileage on a recent semi coup, but it also allows the Member asking the question to demonstrate quick thinking and makes a very press-worthy reply, which Les has worded the gallery to watch out for. So far as questions this week go, Les has set up a tour de force.

## Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-four

Once again the PM takes note and sends around his Chief of Staff, a pushy vinegar tongued girl, to point out that you have to ask the question given. The lady bowls in the door, takes a seat, places some papers on Les's desk. Les stands up, hands her back her papers and says,

"It's a busy life here and my policy is just this.....I talk only to the organ grinder."

This girl has never had anyone stand up to her before.

"You bastard," she fires at Les.

"No, love," he says. "I have in this office, my birth certificate as a counter to you – as I understand it, there hasn't been a marriage in your family for now over three generations."

Clarrie Millar, his office sharer, is practically choking with laughter.

"Geez Les, life was just so dull before you came in the door here. But she'll get you for it, wait and see."

"Perhaps," Les says. "She and the PM are unfortunately joined at the hip. The only consolation is that when they sink, it will be together."

He wags his finger at Clarrie. "But," he says, "if you repeat that, I'll deal you out of the single malts and cigars."

He pulls out his desk drawer to get out a dark bottle and a wooden box of stogies.

## Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-five

Saturday afternoon rolls around and Les gets out his Humvee; often referred to by the uninformed as a Land Yacht; it's quite massive, a soft fire engine red in colour with plenty of chrome; it's a bling effect. He follows the mud-map Ethnee made for him and when he is in the approximate area, he stops, has a look around.

The stone ruin cottage she is working on is near the top of a long slope. It's under the rim of the hill and is thus a bit wind protected, but it's a bleak slope studded with granite. Down a bit is her weekend accommodation. It's a container house, very neat. Probably, it will end up a guest wing or quarters when the cottage is finished.

He by-passes the new place and pulls up at the cottage. It looks as though it's been abandoned for a great many years. The wooden floors are long gone and so has the roof. But it's a high gabled, very commodious building and the old stone walls stand up straight and true, except one end where some philistine has knocked down an end room to source squared off stone.

"Well Leslie, I had hoped you had journeyed out with a view to seducing me," she says, "but you've caught me on the hop, in afternoon working mode and in very down-market duds."

Les chuckles. "The last one I seduced," he says, "finished up in hospital and after being surrounded by dead and wounded. Besides....sex isn't always a good idea. There's three stages of this in any relationship. The first is when early in the relationship, you have it off everywhere around the house, including the kitchen table, then things cool a bit and you have it just in bed and then things cool even more to the stage you start having hallway sex."

"Kerrist," she says, "what's hallway sex?"

“Um...,” says Les. “It’s when you are off to work and pass one another in the hallway and you look her in the eye and say ‘Fuck you’.”

“Let’s have a look at your project,” he continues. “You’d need to be physically strong to take on a stonework reno and a bit simple in the head to get involved in the first place.”

But he can see the possibilities. The cottage has great views down the hillside; there’s a dam that could be enlarged for house water. It’s really a fine bit of sheep country.

“How far advanced is tea?” Les asks.

“Umm...haven’t moved on it yet, but the menu’s in my head.”

“Chuck it in, love. Come back to Polly city and have the weekend at my unit. We can get in at Findlay’s; should be a nice meal.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-six**

Later, after returning to Canberra, she gives Les another try; comes out late evening wearing a long pink nightgown.

“Can I entice you, Les,” she says.

Mr Wobbly, who usually is full of running, shows little enthusiasm.

“Well...” Les says, “You could pin up the hem of your gown and tuck it behind your ears, but I didn’t really invite you for fun and games. But I’m glad of a bit of company and perhaps you would come to Mass with me in the morning. I’m on Choir duty.”

Thus they have a pleasant and amicable weekend without any hanky-panky. That is, except for Sunday morning, when Les has something of a nightmare. He is woken by Ethnee, still wearing her pink night rail, waving tea and toasted Raisin bread under his nose.

‘Jeez,’ he thinks, ‘thank the good lord I was only dreaming that.’ He dreamt he was crossing Storey Bridge in Brisbane in his old Berlina, spied Ethnee in full bridal gear with veil and train, holding a huge bouquet and standing on the bridge guard-rail. He stops his car, leaves the door open, rushes across the traffic lanes to see what in God’s name she is up to.

In his dream, Ethnee, looking more than a bit unhinged says, “Leslie, you’ve got me pregnant. I know you’re not going to marry me, so I’m going to jump.” Les, in his dream replies, “Ethnee, I always thought you to be a good sport, so go for it.”

Then he wakes from his dream, looks questioningly at Ethnee standing there, tray in hand.

“You are about to ask me something, Leslie,” she says.

“God yes,” Les stumblingly says, “Ethnee, can you swim?”

“Of course,” she says, “I swam for my university college – 400 metres freestyle. Are you thinking of swimming with me in that bed of yours?”

“No, no, no,” he says, thinking quick. “I dreamt we were on a sinking Manly ferry.”

“That’s not a bad idea for the afternoon,” she says. “I know a nice pub bar over in Manly.”

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-seven**

The following Saturday afternoon, he lobs along at her build, in company with a low-loader carrying a mid-size bulldozer and an Italian looking chap driving a battered ute with a trailer with a cement-mixer in it. She is flabbergasted.

“Just relax, love,” he says. “Old Bruno here will build your missing wall. He’ll replace the stone piling ready for timber joists, while Teddy from Hamilton, will dig you a decent dam for the summer.”

“But,” she says, “my budget is a bit tight.”

Les laughs. “I’m the meanest man in Canberra,” he says, “but my gold mining company will cover this week of work out of petty cash, so don’t go looking a gift horse in the mouth.”

So she doesn’t.

“Les,” she says, “the Oz press thrive on dirt; we can’t leave ourselves in their firing line.”

Les laughs. “I don’t really tell my right hand what my left hand is doing usually, Ethnee,” he says. “But on completion of the project, have a little cheese and wine do on the verandah and we’ll have the heritage minister unveil a quarter inch thick brass plaque, naming you as the restorer of this bit of North Canberra history and acknowledging a contribution made by Ballarat South Gold; something they’ve done before down in Victoria.”

“Okay,” she says.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-eight**

Things are both chaotic and vindictive in Parliament at this time, with the government trying to bully or bulldoze the Independents in the Senate, to pass legislation they are keen to pass in the run up to the budget. The Independents, for their part, are working hard on amending several bills of particular interest to them. Les, as usual, is always in the Senate when the Independents are up; while everyone else, apart from officials, walk out on them. Things are really stalled and no one is giving way when Les knocks on the door of the room where the Independent group are in hurried session.

“Who are you, love?” he asks the girl who admits him.

“Um...I handle the door and take notes,” she says. “But you’re not a member; no, not at all.”

“Take a little break, love,” he says. “On second thoughts, can you round up the Greens, we need them.”

“Now...” he says, “Good morning wombats. Let’s imagine you collectively are....say....the corner party; i.e. you have the Government, such as it is, cornered on their legislative program.”

The Greens troop in.

Les says to them, “Take a seat. This is short and impromptu. We’ll loosely say you are the corner party of the moment. We’ll also say that Sally De Niro is in charge of the corner party order of business. Now look at this bit of paper I’m handing around. I suggest Sally confers with her official opposite number and tells them to fast track the three bills recorded and that you, the corner party, will not oppose them. This is called approaching with benefits. Now I suggest that you ask

them to support the wind farm amendment that you're focussing on, but don't make it a condition."

"They'll vote it down for sure," Sally says.

"They would be fools to do so," says Les, "but if they do, I can promise the Government a definite UCU."

About three members cry out, "What's a UCU?"

"In short," Les says, "it's an unforeseen cock up. Have faith, give it a try. Now I can say no more on this matter, other than to quote Rhett Butler in 'Gone with the Wind' – 'Quick, now it is life or death'."

He goes.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-nine**

Sally has talked well to the government chap setting the order of business. With the speed of light, that very afternoon, the three bills slide through. But the Government opt to oppose the Corner Party Amendment. The opposition, of course, supports it. A division is called. The Government is two short in the numbers; neither Les nor his shared office mate are in the Chamber. The Government have been hit with the promised UCU.

The press gallery rush to file copy. The House adjourns and Les and his mate walk back into the house and head for the bar. They have been out lunching and lunching well it seems, and got back too late for the vote. Colbert, the Government Whip, beards them in the bar.

"Where were you?" he growls.

"Colbert..." says Les, "if you are going to fast track legislation, the least you could do is tell us about it early."

"But you weren't there,"

"What!" says Les, "you went into my office?!" He throws half a pint of beer over the whip. "Don't ever do that again!"

Les has pre-warned Ethnee, but at very short notice; they didn't want leaks, but Les has a phone photo taker handy for when he hoses down Colbert and it makes the front pages of Friday's papers.

Les and Clarrie Millar meet up for steak at Findlay's next day. Clarrie has no intention of running again and is rich enough to not want an after parliament job. He has and is enjoying his day of fame. They blame it all on the Whip of course. The Government have never been sure of where they stand with Les and this only adds to his mystique.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Sixty**

The next party room meeting gets off to a somewhat leaden start. The Prime Minister says, "You weren't with us Senator Les, on the vote."

The Head Whip pipes up, "You're never with us. What are you doing here anyway? If you can't turn up for a very important vote, why come at all?"

Les, who usually lets the party room games flow over him, smartly stands up.

"Firstly Minister Prime," he says, "I removed the long running log jam in the Senate. The bills that went through last Thursday have brought a shaft of bright light into the overcast. You mistakenly thought that the minor parties in the Senate

blinked. It's a fair assumption, but an unfair action. It is as though you want all of your important legislation banked up at the dam forever and you are ignoring the thundering roar upstream of an approaching election, an election that all the polls say will take you and us down river."

"Turning to you, Colbert," Les continues, "you are neither use nor ornament in this parliament. Your continuing stance in regard to the Independents is intransigent, unyielding and totally bloody stupid. If you shove your head up your arse and leave it there, we can get the legislation flowing. But and there is always a but, keep out of the road of progress. If you interfere in forthcoming discussions with the Corner Party, I'll thump you. Don't take that as a threat, it's not, it's a firm promise."

Les continues, "You're out of any discussions, Colbert, but I want to meet with the Honourable Member handling the order of Government business at 4pm today in my office, in order to get this long delayed show on the road."

Things settle down, Les hands the corner party the order of priority from the governments long held up legislation and the corner party in return, table what they want passed or at least debated. Clarrie Millar is quite astonished.

"Gawd, Leslie," he says, "I expected a double dissolution no less today, but you seem to have both sides running down the right race."

Les laughs. "Just common sense, Clarrie," he says, "Something decidedly uncommon in this parliament, I've found."

With orderly progress restored, Les gets an invitation to dine with the Liberal Leader of the opposition.

Les is cautious, sends Clarrie around to settle details of the meet. Thus the alternate Prime Minister picks him up in his private car and Les tells him where to drive to. It's a private house commandeered for the meet. Les runs his electronic splice over the man and microwaves up some very good Chinese nosh to chew on while they meet.

"Les," the man says, "you're a rich man. You have no place in a working man's government. If, for the next election, you would come over to our side, either in the Representatives for a safe seat, or back to the Senate with a no one endorsement, we would start you in Cabinet in Arts and Culture, Police and Internal Security; a sort of Minister for the Interior role, as in Europe."

Les puts down his chopsticks, pours a liberal drop of Grand Hermitage into the Liberal Leader's glass.

"Perhaps..." he says. "Yer know, there's more people on my side of politics that I wouldn't allow in the door of the Kelly Club, than there is on yours."

"Hmm..." the Liberal says. "You're a smart fellow, but you are simply in the wrong camp."

"You suggest that's easily fixed," Les remarks.

"Indeed," the Liberal says.

"What could you do for my office sharing mate?" Les asks.

"What would suit you?" the Liberal asks.

"Umm... Ambassador to the US of A is perhaps a bit upmarket for him," Les says, "say....Ambassador to Greece."

"Easy, peasy," the man says.

## **Chapter One Hundred and Sixty-one**

Les has been to Mass at St Mary's. He's gone onto brunch at the Rubicon. He's tucking into Eggs Benedict and pink champagne when Joe-Bob from the US Embassy joins him.

"Ah...doing it hard again," Joe-Bob says.

"Yep," says Les, "I was never promised easy, but I must say all of this is going down well. What about joining me?"

"Yep," says Joe-Bob, "but let me give you this first." He hands Les a waxed unopened envelope.

"This came in the diplomatic bag from Timor," he says.

'Jesus, Mary and Joseph,' Les thinks.

Theo Lamont's crime family in Chicago seem to have the US Embassy providing secure postage facilities and a senior US diplomat is now also the postie.

"I hear," Joe-Bob says, "from an impeccable source, you may be changing sides and will be the new Minister for the Interior; a revamped ministry after an election that the Liberals and their mates are bound to win."

"Who's your source?" Les curiously asks.

"Umm...the CIA. These beggars know everything, at least everything that has to do with internal police security in the country of any ally. By the way, will you have to face an election before all this happens?"

"No," says Les. "I have years to run of my fill-in term. I can just change sides and have years to convince the other side that I'm good value. It's a better prospect overall than being still in parliament, but on the opposition side. I jumped State Parliament to avoid the same thing and it's turned out to be the right choice."

Later that day, he reads Peter Mua's letter. He's got his banking license. They won't consider letting the Farmers and Manufacturers Bank in, but have no objection to letting Les's bank act as agent for them. Les swaps Peter Mua a pleasant villa with the title obscured, Lake Geneva outlook, for his banking license, giving him a ten year clear run without interference in Timor.

Les pays a visit to the Canterbury home of the now retired Staff Officer of the Melbourne and Ballarat Bank, Tom Davis. He's an old acquaintance from the days Les was mixed up with the Building Society. Davis is a very good banker who was headed off from being General Manager of his bank and rusticated since in the Staff Officer position; very much a backwater for a man who successfully represented his bank in London for quite a time.

Les finds him on the verandah of his home. Tom is well dressed in tans and Royal Melbourne golf shirt. His moustache is neat and his hair cut modern. Retired, he may be, but he's keeping up to the mark.

"How goes it, Tom?" he says. Davis waves his Financial Review.

"God, this paper's gone to shit, Les," he says. "They seem to be puffing things they shouldn't."

"I'm here to offer you a really good job," Les says.

Davis drops his paper, sits up straight. "What about a Scotch?" he says. "McLellan single malt and perhaps a few cheese straws."

After a few sips of this marvellous tippie, he asks Les, "What job, whereabouts, what money, how long a term?"

Les tells him that he has registered the Maubisse Agricultural and Industrial Bank in Timor; runs him through the housing details for the manager – nice home in Fannie Bay, Darwin, three full days weekly to be spent in Timor and a nice deal for a good computer man if Tom can find one to do the grunt work.

“I know a real good man at the bank; he’d jump at the opportunity to be an international EDP specialist.”

“It’s a straight up deal,” Les says. Ballarat Gold South own the new bank, but it will use the Company’s money for start-up and will act as agent for several overseas banks as well. We will lend inter-bank in Oz, offering a better than rate and a better than lending term. You know who to talk to in that regard. Your job is to macro manage inter-bank lending and in doing so, make the system very simple, in fact so easy to use, the system will sell itself. Now the price or the inducement to Timor to get our license includes lending some chump change to the locals. It’s only a million and a half per year, but it gets down to micro-management and this would chew badly into your time. I suggest you appoint Peter Mua’s accountancy firm to handle this on an agency basis and that you pay him 10% of the rollback. This would work, but get a monthly statement from them showing the state of their loan book. It would also be a good idea to set him up with a simple computer to do the grunt work. I’m sure your EDP man could do this with his eyes shut. Now...a couple of other things. Lend inter-bank on promissory notes security, only to the big four plus your old bank; set them up to be transferable and see if you can do a deal with the Bank of England to hold these notes in escrow for a fee. That way, if the bloody Indonesians decide to re-invade, we don’t stand to lose much.”

Les knows the CCC will be all over his banking deal, like flies on a dung heap, but he also knows that if his lending to the big Oz banks gathers steam, people in the Banking Lobby will soon tell them (the CCC) to go away.

Tom Davis gets in touch with Les by one of their roundabout and very discreet channels. They meet up at a favourite breakfast, or more often brunch, spot of Les’s. Its Eve’s on the Brisbane River opposite the Bulimba Catamaran stop.

“Les,” he says, “the big banks are now back on their third tranches of inter-bank loans. We’ve made it so easy for them to do so and the security details with the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street (the venerable Bank of England) have proved very much to their liking also.”

“Ok Tom,” Les says, “Why are we meeting?”

“Well...” he says, “we have funded the Oz banks from Ballarat South Gold money and whenever I want more, the manufacturers Bank of Missouri wire it over the same day. But I’m also getting hammered to take more money from various sources. I’d like to do so, but our only income stream is what the Oz biggies pay us.”

“I suspect,” Les says, “that a very confidential and non-accessible holding pot is what they primarily want, especially now Swiss-land has had its deep discretion accessed here and there. Just take the money in interest free until you can find a home for it.”

“I have had offers or requests for inter-bank loans from America, South America and from Holland banks,” Tom says.

“Nyet,” Les says. “Lend to New Zealand banks by all means, but bugger the rest. They’re outside of our original job descriptions.”

“Some other minor nuisances have come up,” Les continues. “I’m getting invites to banking seminars and even to briefing meetings with the Reserve Bank. These latter bastards talk in Delphic riddles and what they have to say is even dryer than the potato chips they put out with their end of session beers.”

Tom says, “I can commiserate with that. I’m getting invitations too, from the banking world.”

“By all means,” Les says. “Just talk a bit and say nothing. Bear in mind that if we’re discreet enough, we will soon have a huge and rewarding asset to float internationally.”

“I must admit, Les,” he says, “that I’m a bit flabbergasted at how much money you are importing personally to the Bank.”

“Umm...” says Les, “my old Auntie Millie used to run a caphouse in Fortitude Valley, left it all to me.”

“Must have been a successful one,” Tom says.

“Well, it would make no sense to run an unsuccessful one,” Les says.

The Maubisse Industrial and Agricultural Bank is not constrained by banking laws as most elsewhere are. Thus even on a no interest bearing basis, the bank has to be appealing to many holders of dubiously sourced money. It is, in fact, a very deep hidey-hole for some very deep operators here and there.

“Tom,” Les says. “The secret of any business is speed. Just be sure that money you are just holding on a no interest basis is repatriated as speedily as it arrived, if the owners of the money want it back.”

## Chapter One Hundred and Sixty-two

Trudy comes around to Les’s Bondi pad on Christmas morning.

“Leslie,” she archly says, “the very last thing a girl wants in her Christmas stocking is a man, but for you I’d make an exception.”

Les is sitting there in a cane chair. He’s in summer dress, against a hot day coming up. Milan sourced suede moccasins, long walk socks, long shorts, a Rod & Gunn polo shirt. There’s a very intriguing watch on his wrist; a rolled gold Montreul, but in such good taste.

“Umm....Trude,” he says. “We’ve been there; in fact done that. Great fun at the time, but it’s left us both with some deep mental scars.”

“Surely Leslie,” she says, “at some stage of your rambunctious career, there must be a time when you want someone in your life. You must get lonely.”

“Dunno,” says Les. “Having someone in your life can perhaps be a rousing or souring experience. Besides I have someone; an alleged daughter at Nimbin.”

She gives him one of her looks that Les always thinks looks like the business end of a double barrel shotgun.

“You don’t even know if she’s yours, Les,” she says.

“Umm...” says Les. “I don’t plan on any DNA tests, but she’s booked into a leading Melbourne College for the year coming. I don’t plan on enriching her mother, who’s a noisy bitch on a good day. But...if what the Nimbin teachers tell me is correct, this girl will make it into Uni and all costs will be on me.”

Trudy sips her drink. “Does she have red hair, Les?” she asks.

Les gets up, goes into his study, brings back a colour photo; one obviously taken without the subject knowing. She holds the photo against Les’s head.

“Touché,” she says. “I’d sure like to know the progress of her academic career of course.....”

“.....of course, no doubt due to you being a nosy woman,” Les interjects.

“Surely,” she says, “but you’ll hear no further queries on her parentage from me; not at all, at all, at all.”

“That rounds the subject off,” says Les.

Les takes her over to Italy to Lake Como to have a few days at a balconied unit he has bought at Menaggio.

"Why here, Les?" she asks.

"Umm...Menaggio gets the morning sun and the evening or late afternoon mountain shade," he says.

It's a pleasant ferry ride over to Bellagio or down the lake to Varenna and if you're so inclined, Mass at the main church here with its marble splendour or benediction at its chapel; similarly splendid, barely 100 yards from the Church, is very soul rewarding.

## Chapter One Hundred and Sixty-three

Les has biked down to the beach this mild autumn morning and is now sipping away on a long neck of Crown Lager, on his sea-front looking patio as usual. A green Ford Taurus slides to a stop on the street. Les knows this car; it's a venerable aged Detective pool car that Police Commissioner Caccano uses in lieu of his official car when he is doing a quiet visit somewhere.

He high fives Les. "Yer remember the bloke at McMahons Point, that your man Friday knocked cold with a bronze bust of old Nehru?"

"Yup," says Les.

"Well..." Lou continues, "As you know, he came out of the coma just after Easter. He's now talking like a ventriloquist's doll, if you take my meaning."

"Yair," says Les, "and I bet it's all not intelligible."

"Nah," says Lou, "a bit slurry, of course, but he, in return for liberty and a bit of walking around money, would be happy to blow the whistle on that bastard, Sealey.....really blow the whistle; chapter and verse no less."

"Umm..." says Les. "Why don't you tell Sealey, after you depose the slurry one legally, that whenever or wherever he sets foot in New South Wales, you will arrest him and charge him with conspiracy with intent and take him into custody."

"Gawd," says Lou. "You're showing signs of mellowing."

"Umm..." Les says, "This morning after my early shower, I detected a bit of grey in my copper locks. In the old days, all I had to do was admit the right people to the Kelly Club; prospect for a suitable sheila for my next romp and make up my mind as to what cuisine I should select for my next nosh-up. It's not so simple anymore. Perhaps, I may be entering the autumn of my life."

Lou grins. "Ah..." he says, "Autumn, the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness?"

Les stands up, reaches into the esky for another long neck. He's a big devil, not a wrinkle on his face, coppery hair, well cut; in fact, he's a picture of a man in his complete prime.

"Fuck you, Lou," he says. "You've turned my words around. Perhaps, I'll end up writing a book – 'Life Begins at Eighty'."

Dear Reader, we'd better hang in, in case Les does. The best is yet to come.