
CLOUD FIVE

A COLLECTION OF FIVE SHORTER STORIES INVOLVING DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS. THE READER SHOULD FIND AN AFFINITY WITH ONE CHARACTER AT LEAST.

- CIRCLE OF GOLD** **A shipwreck and porcelain make for an interesting combination on a day out.**
- BIG PINE** **A move to a new house and a new life suddenly turns out very unusual for someone.**
- TALL GRASS** **A mystery involving a body and rare books and told from four different viewpoints.**
- RUSONELLI** **A couple on their honeymoon find a place that they never expected, and the effect it had on them.**
- THE CHARIOT** **An insurance investigator is given a challenge that leads him into areas he never dreamed.**

By Jimmy Brook

CIRCLE OF GOLD

by

JIMMY BROOK

CIRCLE OF GOLD

Looking back on the whole business, I wondered what had happened in the great scheme of things, to use me of all people as a catalyst. If I had decided not to go to that gallery on that day but chose another day with a different agenda, it may never have happened. But life is a bit like that, isn't it. What if? I smile to myself when I reflect on the matter and sometimes feel the urge to talk to someone, but being a person who looks deeply at all the connections and probabilities of most actions, have decided that it is best left alone, to fade back to whence it came. Since you may never have reason to venture that way, and maybe it would be a loss to society if no recollection was available, you may care to refill your glass and ponder on that day with me.

When was it now? It must have been nearly five years ago. A cold winter I remember, but brilliant days all through the sleeping months. It was a brilliant day on this occasion as I remember, for that stirred me to shake off the warm rooms and crowded byways and take myself out of the city. If you know me, I still need a logical motivation to do something, and today was no exception. Don't laugh when I say it was prints. It would have to be something to do with them, I suppose. I'm a collector of prints. All different sorts, but with a bent for old style and historical motif. The study is lined with framed prints, many done before 1940, when technical processing changed dramatically with the advent of war. Horses and landscapes and sailing ships being my favourites.

About five hours south of the city, I had read about an exhibition of oils and water colours and prints that was being staged in a small tea house or refreshment rooms in an equally small town, but the mention in the current month's art journal, that it would include some old and previously not seen

works, caught my interest. An early start for the sky was clear and a chance to see how my car would cope on the open road. Even if the trip was a waste of time, it would be a break in routine. A nice one at that.

Not quite five hours, even with a coffee break. Frankly I was rather disappointed. The prints had some interest but nothing caught my eye. One was even hanging on my study wall. Oils have a singular identity. There is only one and only one person or gallery has it. On the other hand, prints exist in the plural. Hence the search for the special ones that in them selves become almost singular due to what ever factor makes them special. Still the ham salad was filling and it seemed a pity to waste such a beautiful day. A sign coming into town indicated a

maritime museum of sorts, and thinking these often contained etchings and prints of once proud sailing ships, headed down the side road and shortly found a reasonable building overlooking the sea. There were a few cars and a bus outside and after paying my entrance fee, wandered around looking at all the trappings of ships of yesteryear. Actually some good prints but only for display. When a group forced me to move to a lone display case, I took an interest in the brass bell and then the printed history of this vessel that had come to grief somewhere nearby, about 1905. The 'Nesbit' was a passenger and cargo schooner that founded in a wild storm one night, on a small shoal just off the beach. Two of the crew and one passenger drowned, but the rest made it through the surging swell and breakers, onto the beach. The area was remote but as the captain had managed to fire some distress rockets at the moment of impact, it was hoped a local property owner may have seen them and come looking. Indeed that was the case. Balfour Lockey was looking through his bedroom window at the storm when he saw the lights in the sky, if only momentarily, but as he was about five miles from the coast by rough dray track, woke his eldest son, Daniel, and told him to be ready at first light to hitch the horses to the dray and they would go and have a look.

In the meantime, a line had been rigged to the bow of the ship which was still out of the water and some supplies and cargo had been floated on to the beach. When the Lockeyes had finally arrived further down the beach and saw the wreck, they quickly drove up to the survivors and did what they could before going for help. Finally the people were transported to town and beyond and more wild weather that night saw the demise of the Nesbit. The salvaged cargo had been piled in a heap and two days later, Balfour Lockey had instructed his son to take a friend and fetch it, for transporting to the railway, some 20 miles away, from where it would be carried to the city for

collection by the shipping company. There was not much more, other than some information on the ship, but there was a paragraph concerning a crate of china cups and plates that the ship was carrying. Especially crafted and fired in England for a property owner out here, it was unique in that the shape was not round but more with five sides. This included the cups as well. Inlaid with pink irises and a thin border of 18ct. gold on each piece, it was worth a fortune. The survivors had remarked that they had no hot tea to drink whilst they waited on the beach, but did have the stylish crockery to use, for the crate was one of the salvaged items.

I thought this an interesting comment and mused on the hardships of travel, even as late at that period. Then after looking around some more exhibits, called it a day and started to head home. One hundred metres down the main street was a bakery and a fresh custard tart came to mind. By the way, I have a large one in the fridge, so remind me to get it out when i have finished. Where was I? Yes, custard tart. Coming out of the shop, there was a newspaper office directly opposite. Just a shop front really. The little story below the ship's bell had got me interested and I decided on the spur of the moment to pop over and ask if they had copies going back to 1905. Maybe, I thought, there could be a little more to satisfy me. as it turned out, the paper had only been here some 20 years or so, but the receptionist did suggest I try the library behind the main street. Should I forget it? No. May as well finish it out. Custard tart now well taken care of, it was into the repository of written knowledge. Like a quest really. Yes there were old newspapers out the back, passed on when the old 'Register' had closed it's doors.

The good thing about small places away from bureaucracy is that they are just that. Away. Soon I was seated at a dusty table and opening up parcels for 1905. It took some 10 minutes to find the story, luckily in March of that year. In a way it did not add a lot, but there were a couple of items that took my fancy. Two of the survivors said how they grabbed a crate that came out of the side of the hull as they jumped into the surf and it helped bore them to safety. They noted it said on the sides: "Fragile. Fine crockery for Dengales Estates." another item described how a Master Daniel Lockey and Peter Styles, local residents assisted the shipping company by collecting all of the salvaged items and transporting it to the railway. The comment about no hot tea and loads of china to drink it out of, was also there. And nothing much else. I had come to an ending of sorts, and now it was time to head for home.

If I had gone home directly, or stopped at any other place other than the one I stopped at, my little story would never have started. As it was, about an hour into my trip, I saw an antique store in this town and on the window, was a sign that said old prints. Wheeling the car over, I ventured inside and actually bought one. Maybe more out of wanting to make the trip worthwhile. Who knows. It was whilst waiting for my change, that I casually glanced around and my eye caught some pottery and china in a cabinet, and specifically the single cup and saucer. It seemed familiar and as I wandered over, I remembered the item about the Nesbit's cargo. This cup and saucer was a similar design. Pentagonal in shape with pink irises and a thin gold band. Could there be more than one set ever made? I asked the owner of the store how he came by it, but on opening a large register, advised me that the transaction was private at the request of the seller. You know, there was something about this lonely little cup and saucer that caught my fancy, and not doing well on the print front, I suddenly had the feeling that it needed a new home. The price was a bit over the top, but soon it was wrapped in tissue and brown paper and residing in my hands.

Ever had those on the spot impulses that usually get you into trouble? I don't normally do these things but something presented itself and I moved without thought of the consequence. Not me usually. My personality was one to think ahead of all the possibilities but here, I just acted. What happened was at that moment another customer from at the back of the shop yelled a question or something and the owner headed in his direction, as I had half turned to leave. The register was open on the counter and I just acted. A swift look to see only his back and a slight turn of the book to focus on the entry where his finger had been. Just a name and a phone number and a description. Then I was out of there, heart racing. The thought that there would be others and one could make a set of four, perhaps. More likely that curiosity to find out if this was part of another story that nearly came to grief on a stormy sea.. A swift walk, clutching my parcels, to calm my normally placid self then to a phone box where the local directory gave me the address. I drove around and knocked on the cottage door. A middle aged woman answered and I just went for it, sort of directly. I had seen the china cup set and did she know where I could get more like it? That pause where somebody sums you up. I smiled.

And she just told me. No, there was only the one cup and saucer set. It was in the house when she bought it many years ago and frankly, she needed some money. Who had owned the house before hand? Wasn't sure but, it

used to belong to some old woman. As I thanked her and turned to go, she yelled out to me, "Think her name was Hetty Byles or Styles." Then it was the long drive home. Was it coincidence that I had come across the name Styles earlier. It was a common name. Still is. It was quite dark when I pulled into my garage and I was very tired.

Like I said before, this thing had got under my skin and somehow it just couldn't be dropped there. A few days later there was need to go to the State Library to research a catalogue on Austrian and German prints, as I had seen something in a local gallery that looked good but was a bit pricey. I found what I wanted and decided that there were too many copies around to pay the asking price. Then that nagging thought about the china from the 'Nesbit', came to mind and in the city was the ideal opportunity to talk to Raymond Kirkwood, a collector and connoisseur of pottery and china and all sorts of small and exquisite things. Only by reputation had I heard of him, but it gave me something to focus on.

His store was up on the second level of the heritage style arcade that had been renovated to recreate the ambient atmosphere of yesteryear, and it reeked of delicate things. I asked him about the design and there was an assured but distant interest that a number of sets with the pentagonal design had been fired over the last one hundred years, but were now rare. A cup and saucer would indeed be a find, but without the plate their value diminished. Old catalogues and a printed treatise on fine china were laid on the counter and it transpired that the pink irises were a pattern of Jon Doyle and Son, of Leeds, but only some six sets were made. Gold inlay or bands were not part of this craftsman's product, but it appeared he was commissioned in 1903 to produce a batch of thirty six sets for the Earl of Wessex's wife, with a circle of thin gold. She took ill on the birth of her child and the Earl cancelled the order, but as they had already been fired, John Doyle finalised their product and managed to sell it to a wealthy Australian grazier. Sadly, reflected Mr.Kirkwood, the catalogue went on to say that the ship carrying the case of china, founded off the Australian coast and it was lost. I was informed that my recently acquired cup and saucer was probably mass produced 'in Asia' and worth even less.

More wine? Anyway my curiosity was now aroused, as you can guess. Whatever the catalogue may have said, there was the local newspaper of the day, talking about floating to safety on a crate of tea cups. And was the name Styles just a passing coincidence?

My little adventure, so to speak, would have finished there for there was nothing I could see, that one may pursue. Maybe history or distressed survivors had it wrong. After all there could have been more than one crate of crockery on board. But still there was this cup and saucer that now resided in my kitchen cupboard, that had a story I would probably never know. However life had a turn for me, in the form of Emily. Now you have met Emily and like me, know what she's like. Almost married her. I see from your smile you either look surprised or knew it would be obvious in the course of events. Difficult decision, but she was so organised and so in charge, that I felt like being a pet dog. Sorry, that was a bit cruel to say, but we would have clashed. As a friend, however, she is wonderful.

Angie on the other hand was the opposite. Too disorganised for me but I would have loved that. No planning, just do it. Maybe I should be realistic. Wandering around some foreign place has a certain amount of romanticism but for me, I would be planning ahead. No, that may not have worked. Still I should have given it a go.

Where is she? Last I heard she was riding elephants in Chang Mai and then thinking of cycling across Mongolia. Emily? Oh yes, I got side tracked a bit. She came to visit me about six months back. Breezed in and organised dinner and we looked at old furniture. That's what she's into. Then she wanted me to go to Portadale to look at a Bosswell that was advertised. Oh, some sort of small cabinet thing for hallways. I could drive as she didn't feel up to it, or something. I agreed and realised I hadn't been there in four or five years since being down that way and obtaining the cup and saucer a little further down the coast. That made me think over the whole incident and again of the set which was still in my cupboard but almost forgotten. On the day, she was over early and even had a picnic basket on my back seat, just delightful, she said, to stop along the way and have tea, and a custard tart which came from my refrigerator. We did indeed stop somewhere or other and have tea, from the small flask she had. And do you know, she had packed two of my cups and saucers, one the elusive pentagonal shaped, she must have grabbed from the cupboard.

We found the house she wanted and after a good deal of indecisiveness on the small cupboard, and some haggling, it was finally in my car's back seat and we drove off. I should have realised she fell in love with it at first sight, but was being shrewd as ever not to show it.

We must have only gone some two hundred yards or so, when I caught this sign on a street corner pole and without thinking, had braked suddenly and turned. I ignored her look as she quickly checked the purchase. Another of those impulse things of mine, I suppose. The sign had simply been a direction notice to Nesbit Tea Rooms. It was the name that obviously had caused my quick reaction. Emily had been told of my little story some time back and again yesterday, so when I said that a look at something Nesbit would do no harm, she just smiled and nodded her head.

It was a house set on some nice lawn on a double block. Not that old, and I felt disappointed for I hoped somehow it would be pioneering or colonial or something. Instead it was what you would call Federation style, maybe 1930s. There were no other cars but we went in. The owner said she was really closing but if we wanted have a look at the furniture and paintings in the front living room which was open to the public, she could rattle up a pot and serve us on the wide front verandah where several small tables were dappled by light coming through a wonderful wisteria vine. Nothing had caught Emily's eye in the way of furniture, I could tell, but a large glass china cabinet, caught mine. For inside were various dolls and figurines and china sets and a lovely pentagonal china set with pink irises and a circle of gold on each piece. Thirty five cups and saucers to be exact and thirty six side plates!

I looked for Emily but she had more interest in the table and chairs by the look of it, that stood outside in the hallway. Then the rattle of crockery and our tea was laid on the front verandah. The owner stayed a minute to chat, apologising that there was no cake left, and that she had been here for some twenty years or so. I asked who had previously owned the property and she said a young couple who had inherited it but preferred to travel and see the world. They were the last of the family line, whose grandfather had built the place. Of course I asked who had built it. My interest about the name of the place and the crockery was starting to rise. I suppose there was no big shock when a name I had come across down this way, came up. Daniel Lockey. Probably a little more surprise when Emily suddenly announced that there was some cake left in our picnic basket and she would get it. The owner had heard of the ship called the 'Nesbit' from a customer, but wasn't aware of the connection, if indeed there was one, to Lockey. Then she left to go inside as Emily returned with the basket.

Now I knew, and Emily must have known that there was no cake left, for she didn't open it, but just drank her tea. I asked her had she seen the china cabinet and with just a hint of a smile, told me nothing much got past her. When we had finished there was a look of knowing on her face and a simple statement. "Your decision." Now I knew about the reason to get the cake.

There isn't much more to tell about this whole business. It was an impulse that started it, and I suppose an impulse that would finish it. No, not quite true for Emily had taken the lead. I would have, truly. We left and gave a wave to the owner who was at the front door. There was no talk about crockery on the way home but we were both feeling good inside, I'm sure.

Ah, how come that cup and saucer came to be separated? I thought you might ask. Well one would never know for sure but I would venture that the son, Daniel Lockey, probably was a little put out that he had to go out to the coast and load up the cargo and then drive it all the way in to the railway. Wouldn't imagine he was getting paid for it either. So he probably decided to recompense himself. After all, who would know what was saved and what was lost. Maybe the case of crockery was the first to hand and looked valuable. But there was his offsider, young Peter Styles, to keep quiet. So I would think he opened the case and took out a cup and saucer from the straw, when they were hiding the booty. A woman would have taken a side plate as well, but not a man. Don't look at me like that. The cup and saucer would have gone to his mum eventually and part of the furniture left in the old house when Hetty Styles died. And that is that.

And now for some more wine and that custard tart.

Jimmy Brook

BIG PINE

By Jimmy Brook

When we stretch life's long thread, eventually it can no longer support us, and we are faced with choices. Even our destiny is not finite.

BIG PINE

He sat on the headland, high up, gazing out at the white caps on the water whipped up by the south easterly breeze. Two lone sea birds battled against the wind then disappeared below the rocks. He pulled the jacket closer around him.

Bernard had come to sit up here most days. It gave him an hour or so away from the house. Time moved slowly and it was now just over four months since Melony had gone yet it seemed only like yesterday. Often he wondered if he would ever accept it. They ran the small dairy farm together. Long hours and limited return but it was something for both of them to work at. When they moved to the farming community of Meroo, more years ago than he cared to remember, it was a daunting challenge, but he grew up with dairy cows and he intended to follow in his father's footsteps.

They called it an inoperable 'something' tumour, and before they knew it, she was gone. Still difficult to face, he lost interest in the dairy business and sold out a few months later. Their daughter tried hard to get him to live with her and the grand children in Newcastle but big cities weren't for him. He had always lived on the south coast and the thought of being far away from Mel, who now rested just outside Meroo, made moving north impossible.

One of his close mates, Terry, had offered him the use of a holiday house at Bendalong on the coast, and after a few weeks he decided he would stay. A newish brick residence on a large bushy block came up for sale, and whilst walking on the beach one day, it came into his mind. It had appeal. He drove past. Yes it got better as he looked at it. By the time the outside was checked out he already had ideas in his mind of one or two changes, but most importantly the big rock at the back would be the centre piece of a small memorial garden. There would be roses of all types. Mel loved roses.

When he did get to see inside he knew this was it. His offer was immediately accepted and then it was only the waiting. Finally

the agent gave him the keys and he felt a change inside him, a new venture was about to be embarked on. His daughter insisted she come down and give it the woman's touch. "Mum's not around now and you are hopeless.

Probably buy curtains with black and white cows on them." Then she added in a quieter tone that while he and she would never forget, it was time to look to the years ahead.

The time with the two grand children was precious. Walks along the beach and around the small sheltered harbour, picking up all sorts of things that young ones find interesting. Even his daughter came fishing one day and the children were fascinated with the large rocks and trees when they had a picnic up at nearby Boyd Lookout. The housewarming party was a bright event. Terry did honours at the Maori style feast in the back yard. When it was all over and everyone had gone their way, it became very quiet. Bernard expected this and became enthused in making his new acquisition more comfortable. Nor was his social life neglected. Once a week he drove to Nowra and tried to improve his lawn bowls expertise.

It was in his effort to make the memorial rockery take shape, that something happened that was to change his life. Despite his best intentions, he could not shake his wife's passing. More time was spent just sitting, either gazing out to sea or by the fledgling rock garden. It was on one of these reflection days out the back, that he decided more rocks were needed to complement it. His place was near the edge of the small town and bordered bushland. It had never been looked at by him, probably as there was no interest in doing this. His life had always been cows and pastures and of late the beach. So it was more of necessity than interest that he decided to take a stroll. If he found what he wanted, he would ask the estate agent who owned it and then approach them.

The ground was uneven and the tea tree scrub and small banksia bushes so close that he has having difficulty in finding a way. Just when he decided to give it a miss and try other areas, he heard the sound of a bell, the sort tied around animal's necks and the

chopping of wood. Then he was on a small path so like a magnet drawing him, he soon found it opening out into a large clearing. There was indeed a milking cow tethered on a long rope and a small timber stack, but no sign of any one. The dominating feature was of course the timber house, not new but in good condition. As he moved around the side towards the back door, a woman came out carrying a basket. Bernard gave a yell more to reassure her than anything else. She turned and stood there. Then a man appeared from around the side of the house.

"Can I help you mate," he said in a loud and firm voice.

Bernard smiled and gave a half wave. "Sorry to come in this way, but I live across next door," pointing his arm behind him.

"Bernard Mewett. Bought the Porter's house recently."

Neither said anything but maybe it was Bernard's smiling face or the openness about him, for the man came over and shook his hand.

"Don't get many visitors, especially out of the bush. Ted Wilson. Didn't know we had neighbours that close. These days houses are going up quicker than you can blink. You working the place?"

"Hardly," replied Bernard, "only a small block. Had 300 Friesians up at Meroo but lost my wife earlier this year and couldn't bring myself to stay. Bendalong is a nice sort of place and I tinker with gem stones and fish a little."

The woman hadn't come over, but was hanging out the washing on a long wire rope stretched between two trees.

"Must be off," said Ted, "some things to do in town." With a wave he turned and was off. Then the sound of a vehicle starting up. From the other side of the house there appeared an old Dodge truck, a toot on the horn and it bumped it's way up the track and disappeared into the scrub. Bernard was amused. His father used to drive one, way, way back. About a 1950's model. He turned as he heard a sound next to him.

"Gloria's the name." She stood there and looked him in the eye. A sort of proud look. There was a firmness about her, not so much

in stature but more in personality. He knew she was a survivor, no matter what the situation. She would be the type to dust off and start again.

"Bernard. Bernard Mewett. I live next door. Sorry about coming through the bush but I was looking about. Didn't know there was a property here."

"Been here a while. Suppose since we was married. My family was in dairying out at Cambewarra. Ted's a contractor. Likes it here."

"And you?" Bernard bit his tongue for speaking so open but once said, was said.

"One day when we get enough together, he's promised me a nice place closer to town." There was an slight pause. "Fancy a cuppa?"

"If it's no trouble." She pointed to a bench at the back door, then went inside. Bernard had a quick glimpse through the door as he sat down. Quite old fashioned he thought. He sat down and found the seat also had a view of the coast to the south. Then he thought of her. Tucked away. Although Bendalong was close to Nowra and Milton, without a car she would have to rely on other people.

She came out with a tray containing the tea makings. The cups were a nice Royal Windsor. This was an opportunity to use them perhaps. Maybe a need. They chattered about the dairy business and life in general, but Bernard found her a little vague when it came to the world in general. He thought of how much she was like the women who lived on outback stations and who's word was law but would be like children if they went to Sydney, bewildered and amazed.

Suddenly she went inside and returned with a small metal tea caddy. Opening the lid she unwrapped some grease proof paper and opened a gold locket. It contained a small photograph of a woman.

The eyes were the same as Gloria's. "My mother," she said. "Would you help me to place it near that small pine tree. Ted said it's silly but I would feel comfortable with it there."

He nodded and grabbing a spade he saw, walked across to the young bunya pine. He dug a hole about a metre out from the base and she carefully placed the tin and covered back the earth. There were tears in her eyes.

"I must go," but before he could say more, a toot caught their attention and they turned to see a black Holden sedan approaching through the trees towards the house.

"My sister, Josie. Say hello before you go."

They walked to the car and he was introduced. As sisters the similarity was apparent, particularly the eyes, but in personality they were like chalk and cheese. He had summed up Gloria, but got a shock with her sister. Very outgoing and flamboyant.

"Nice of you to drop in. Gloria needs to meet more people. Not my cup of tea out here. My daughter is at high school and Nowra suits us."

"Nice looking car," said Bernard, eyeing the FJ.

"It'll do. Need something reliable to get around, and it hasn't let me down in years.

Bernard stuck out his hand. "Must be off."

"Need a lift?"

"No. I'll go back through the bush to my place." With a wave he left and soon the tea tree and banksias swallowed him up.

As he sat eating lunch, his thoughts went back to the morning. Certainly different people to the holiday makers and retired people he had met out here. There was a necessity for some milk

so Bernard drove down to the shop. He had partaken of all the exercise he wanted to. Besides his knee was giving him curry again.

On the spur of the moment he decided to drop in on the agent, when he saw the door of the small shop open.

"Well," said the middle aged fellow who was stacking signs, "not selling so soon?"

Bernard smiled. "No. Was more curious about who owned the large property next door to me, to the west."

"Some investment company in Sydney from memory. Probably waiting for rezoning."

A frown appeared on Bernard's face. "There's a couple living in the house, um...Ted and his wife Gloria."

Now it was the agent's turn to frown. "Next to you? No house there, unless you count some old foundations." There was a pause. "I'm off to collect a sign up the road. Jump in and I'll show you."

Bernard didn't speak as they drove towards the highway and took the first track past his house. Very overgrown and once he had to move a small log. Then came the opening. It was as he saw it only a couple of hours back. The same view, only no house just some brick foundations. The concrete where he had drunk tea was there, only covered with debris. He shook his head. He started to think this was the start of something connected with Mel's death. The tree. He turned swiftly and looked where Gloria and he had been. It was there, however some forty feet tall.

"You've mixed up some one else's place." The agent smiled and started up the car. "Happens to me a lot, especially in my business."

Bernard smiled weakly and they drove back to the road. "Thanks for the trip. I can walk back," and gave a half wave as the car

disappeared at speed around a bend. Almost immediately a car pulled up and a middle aged woman stuck her head out the window.

"Far to Bendalong? Want a lift?"

"No. Yes. I mean...."

"Whatever it is, you'd better get in. I don't want to read about you in the paper tomorrow. Local?"

He nodded. "Well sort of." Before he realised it he was in the back. A young man in his early twenties was on the other side.

"My son," said the woman, "we took an on site van in Bendalong by mail. Thought we'd never get here. You are confusing, if I may say so."

"Actually I'm Bernard Mewett. Just moved here. Live not far down the road."

"Debbie. And that big lump next to you is Carson. We're having a short break from work. Used to have relatives out here."

"Stop here," said Bernard, "my house. Thanks for the lift." He got out of the car.

The woman wound down the window. "Who should I ask to find out where my aunty and uncle lived?"

"Probably the estate agent, although depends how long ago. What was their name?". He had one hand resting on the roof of the car.

"Wilson. Ted and Gloria."

Bernard froze. Then he knew what was in his mind that he couldn't quite grasp. The eyes.

"You OK? Look a bit pale."

He recovered himself a little. "Fine. We can be there in three

minutes," and before she could reply, he was around the other side and opening the door . "Turn around and go back to where you picked me up."

She looked at her son who shrugged his shoulders. "You are an enigma," she said as they turned and went back up the road.

"Down here," said Bernard, and then they were there. He half expected the house to appear, but saw only the foundations, just the same as a few minutes back.

"Nice view," said Debbie, "vaguely like I remember it. Came out with mum a couple of times. Think there are some photos somewhere of it and my aunty. She used to talk about her mother a lot."

"Was your mother's name Josie?," asked Bernard, his heart thumping.

She turned and looked at him. "How did you know?"

"Just know. You look like her, I mean you probably do." Time to say nothing more, flashed into his mind.

The son had wandered away and was pitching stones at an old drum.

"I guess I do," she said. "I wonder if she ever got her looks from her mum. Never saw my grandmother or any photos." She was gazing at the distant ocean.

Bernard was galvanised into action. "This may be a day you will remember. Come over to the big pine tree," and not checking to see if she had followed him, bounded across and looked for a stout stick. When she arrived, with Carson in tow, he had started to dig. Just where would be the exact spot, he did not know, but taking a guess, he started. Fate seemed to guide his hand, and he brought out the tin, old and rusty. With trembling hands, he gave it to Carson.

"Want to open it?," and gave him the stick. The boy looked at his mother, who nodded, and then with a little effort, he broke the

rust seal and removed the lid. The tin was rusty also inside, but the grease proof paper was intact. She took the small parcel and unwound it's many layers. The locket appeared undamaged, and giving a quick glance at Bernard, she opened it.

Bernard never explained how he knew about it's whereabouts nor did she ask. No more rocks were added to Mel's memorial, only the flowers tendered when needed. He knew she was somehow involved and in a way, saying it was time to start a new life.

Jimmy Brook

TALL GRASS

By Jimmy Brook

If a man had as many eyes as his fingers, he would still see ten different variations to one action. The human mind is infinite in its perception.

There is nothing like a straight forward event or crime. How to tell the real one from other ones, which are also real, is a task to which a person has to apply oneself. Will the end be the correct one?

Chapter One – The Policeman

The sun shone with a bite on a tanned body that glistened with sun screen and perspiration. Andy tried to angle his head to take in more of his gorgeous female companion but felt some unseen force prevent him from doing it. Then a noise that quickly grew in crescendo. Familiar but not yet identified. Then everything seemed to go dark. That's when Andy woke up.

He shook his head to clear it and had only microseconds of memory of a beach and someone by his side, before it all faded and became too difficult to recall. Dreams were like that. The noise was still there, filling the bedroom with its raucous buzzing. He looked at the clock and slapped a hand down. There was instant quietness, but only for a second then gradually the sounds of day crept in to replace it. A bird twittering. Car noises. Another day had begun.

Andy shaved, soaked up warmth in a hot shower and dressed in his work suit. Yesterday's shirt caught his eye but he shook his head. The shirt was also yesterday's shirt, yesterday. Still one left in the robe. Coffee was good and something more substantial would be had on the way. Ben's Burgers did a mean breakfast of toast and eggs and other bits and pieces.

He was halfway into the eggs when his cell phone rang. He ignored it but finally when other customers were giving him strange looks, he took it out and pressed the required button. Couldn't he at least get into the office before starting? Eggs and coffee continued to go down together, as he listened. It was going to be one of those days. Not even starting at the sanctuary of work where a second cup of black coffee would keep him going. Straight out into the world. Maybe Len would be efficient until he became fully functional.

Andy paid the tab and drained his cup by the time he reached the door. Traffic was as bad as ever and he gave the freeway a miss. Boston was getting just too crowded and he often thought of moving. May be New Bedford with views of Nantucket. One day.

The house was large and set back on the street. Already two black and whites were positioned and three plain units. One was his colleague and the other was the county medical officer, Dr. Helvers. Andy had worked with him long enough to call him Ivers. In return, he got called Andyou. He couldn't remember how that came about, but it was years back. The officer at the door nodded a recognition and inside he headed to where the noise was.

“Morning boss. Should be safe to walk about. Forensics were here early. Out the back checking the windows and grounds.” Andy gave a half wave and realised the other car was theirs.

“What have we got Len?” In truth, he already had the outline. Sharp eyes and a probing mind, plus the earlier phone call, were enough.

Len beamed as he spelt out the facts. He liked to feel he was useful but he did stick to the facts. Andy employed his gut feeling as well. Not always appreciated in the modern day of doing it by the book or by the superintendent's orderly process. “His name is, or rather was, Walter Merrell, the owner. Found by a John Sturgiss at about 8.30 this morning. Came to play golf. Found the door open and went looking for his golfing partner. Found him as you see him. On the floor with his head cracked open.”

“Where is this Sturgiss?”

Len pointed over his shoulder. “In the kitchen with a patrolman.

The doctor entered and looked pleased to see his old friend. “Andyou. Nice day. Well not for this fellow obviously. Blow on the head. Only one but very heavy. Crushed the cortex obs.....anyway death was instant.”

Andy looked at the body and the step ladder lying on it's side nearby. The room was a library and shelves reached to near the ceiling. He noticed the ladder had small wheels.

“Any idea when death happened?”

Ivers pulled off his gloves and dropped them into his bag. Then smiled at his work companion. “Thermo suggests ten hours. Found at eight this morning

so that makes it about ten o'clock last evening." He put up his spare hand in a mock self defence attitude. "Sorry. That's your department."

"Accident or foul play?" Andy hoped the good doctor had a guiding tit bit to start the ball rolling.

Ivers smiled and did up his coat. "All work for you, my friend. I can't say either way. Only that whatever way it was, our book worm ended up not breathing. More after I get him back on the work bench." He smiled and left.

Work bench. Andy winced at the choice of words. 'No sensitivity for the dead' he thought. There was little to go on. Merrell may have leaned too far on his ladder and toppled off. That means maybe a book or two on the floor. There was one near the window. It was big and looked heavy. He bent down and looked carefully. No obvious blood. So what did he hit his head on?

"Sergeant Davies." Len knew that when he was called by his title, his boss was in thinking mode and needed answers to anything that passed through his mind.

"Boss."

"If this fella did the high dive, what did he hit his head on?"

Detective Andrew Dewhurst had already found two items to suit, but needed confirmation. Maybe a third but he doubted it.

Len Davies scratched his head. "Well I thought of that. Only thing could have been the floor. No furniture to speak of."

Andy shook his head. "So the floor fitting for the portable gas fire is out?"

The younger man coloured a little. "Hadn't thought of that. It seemed too far away. I'll see if forensics found blood." As he started to turn, his superior's voice stopped him in his tracks.

"There's a broken ceramic something under the desk. Add that as well. Anything from our golfer?"

“Still upset. Appears Merrell kept to himself and rarely went out. Some sort of retired academic. I’ll get a full statement tomorrow.”

At the police station, Andy read the preliminary medical and the forensic on site evaluation. No footprints in the garden. No windows or doors forced. He had found where ‘Seas and Lands’ by Sir Edwin Arnold had rested on the top shelf before it came to rest on the floor. It was a first edition and besides hard bindings to enclose a lengthy treaty, also boasted metal corners. But there was no blood. They had re-enacted the ladder falling from where it had lay and found two things. One was that upright, it was about three feet beyond where the book resided. This meant that Sturgiss could have reached for it with a long stretch and lost his balance. The ladder would have come down where it did and where the victim had ended up. The other thing was that there was no blood on the gas connection, but there was on the ceramic bust. Sizeable pieces were found in a couple of locations. It may just have been on the floor at the point of impact, causing death. The medical report found minute porcelain pieces from the statue in the wound.

Len Davies entered with two mugs of coffee and sat down, placing one in front of his boss. “What’s it look like?”

A big sigh came from the elder man as he picked up the mug and sniffed it. “It looks like we have a dead man.” Davies screwed up his nose at the droll comment. His boss continued. “As to what killed him, we know that it was a statue of Napoleon’s head. Probably. Did he fall off his perch and hit his head on Bonaparte? Probably. Did some one steal into his library and pick up the porcelain dictator and clobber him? Probably. My gut feeling is the latter.

“Why.”

“It’s all too neat. Ladder conveniently pushed over. Don’t like things that look like accidents. They invariably turn out to be the opposite. Some one got in and took our quiet librarian out.”

“Can you be sure?”

Andy scratched his head. “Nope. Can’t be sure of anything, but I have a feeling it was deliberate. Library man was the target and they succeeded.”

Chapter Two – The Librarian

Walter Merrell sat patiently in the traffic on Commonwealth Avenue. It was always this way in the late afternoon. Normally he liked to conclude his business by lunch and be home to the relative quiet and serenity of his house. While not shunning people, his years at the university library and the time he spent in post graduate work over in Cornell, had given him a division in life. A division of being with people and being without them. Lately it was leaning to the latter.

Still he played the odd game of golf and accepted invitations to dinners and lectures, but there was always his books to go home to. To think about when life with others got boring. Walter read endlessly and was an intellectual partner on many subjects including art, sculpture and surprisingly, finance. He inherited the last item from his father who had a consulting business in New York and became well known and respected. There was a place for Walter in that empire, but the classics seem to draw him. Finally he started to formalise his passion and enrolled in Columbus University in Ohio. From there it was ever upward.

The years spent in Ithaca rounded off his education and his respectability. His final academic career at Boston, particularly in the university library as it's head, earned him much respect. Still he yearned for something that the ordered society did not give. Walter would be striving ever upward, in his quiet and unassuming way, until the Angels came for him.

Finally the traffic moved and he selected another compact disc of Baroque to help him change lanes and move to more leafy streets, finally to reach the haven of his dwelling. The houses were separate two story dwellings of some substance and in existence for a long time. Brick to withstand the cold winters and still in good condition to support the builders craft, something that was not so true today in the large housing developments. Originally an area some 150 years back that was the refuge of thousands of Irish immigrants who escaped their homeland and the Potato famine to find a new world. It was not all milk and honey but when you have nothing, then anything is better.

The car was garaged and the supper laid out by his housekeeper eaten in the den whilst he listened to last year's Prom concert, again. Tonight he would start on something oriental to balance the completed reading of The Crusades that still left wondrous images of valour and dedication in his mind. First it was necessary to plan some details for the coming year. About ten o'clock he had a sherry and stood gazing at the shelves that stretched up to the 12 foot ceiling, deciding what would be appropriate to start. The front door bell rang and startled him to reality. He ignored it, for this hour was too late for visitors. It rang again and he sighed. Perhaps it was John, his golfing partner for tomorrow. No, he would ring. Not even that. John would just wait until tomorrow.

Annoyed yet mystified, he was torn between going up for the book that had flashed into his mind and answering the door. When it rang again he shrugged his shoulders and left the room. On the other side of the locked screen door stood a thin man in a suede jacket and greyish hair.

"Yes? Can I help you?" Walter peered through the gauze at the man's face. There was something that stirred his memory but that was all.

"I think so, Mr. Merrell. I have a book for you."

Walter peered again. The face nagged him but he still couldn't place it. "Who are you? It is pretty late. If it's from the library that's where it needs to go." He stepped back and made to shut the door.

The man held the book to the door. "I think you should look at it now. The name is Brinks. Harold Brinks." He paused a bit then continued. "Huntington College and Antiquities Repository. Two years ago. Remember Mr. Merrell."

It came to him where he had seen the face. "Oh yes. You left or something." Walter looked at the book but it meant nothing.

"We need to talk Mr. Merrell."

Walter looked again at the face and felt a need to help this man. Slowly he unlocked the security screen. He was never street wise, growing up in a sheltered world. But he was methodical and saw discussion as a quick and easy way to move on. Then he could think about oriental mind appreciation.

Already he knew what book to get down and he was anxious to start. “Of course. Into the library, straight ahead. That’s where books need to be discussed.”

Brinks smiled and walked ahead to stand with his back to one of the walls. Behind him were rows of books reaching far up towards the ceiling. The librarian stood behind his desk, unsure of what may unfold.

“Nice place Mr. Merrell.” His eyes surveyed the room. “I was sacked because of you. I tried my best at anything I did but apparently it was not good enough. On your word they gave me my marching orders.”

Walter was tense. Would this be a physical confrontation? He hoped not. The memory came back to him. Brinks was a repository assistant, or ‘wormer’ as they were called here. Brinks was hopeless at his job and had to go. “Not only me, er Harold. Three of us came to the same decision. Huntington was not for you. We were helping you find something more appropriate.” He now realised that this confrontation had to end but the book had him intrigued. “What is it I can do for you?”

“Money. Pure and simple. Life hasn’t been easy since then. Now I’m sure you will tell me to clear out but to cut a long story short, this book should be enough. For a long time I came back to Huntington at night. Just to drive past or sit and contemplate revenge. Then I let it go when I moved to New Jersey. Two months back I returned and do you know whose car I saw driving away from the rear of the repository late one night? Yours Mr. Merrell. After I saw a figure in black drop down on a rope and get into it. I remembered your Mercedes.”

Walter looked dumfounded. “Me! You must be on happy pills or something. I couldn’t climb the spiral staircase to the repository’s belltower without having a heart attack. On a rope? You certainly have the wrong person.”

Brinks narrowed his eyes. “I saw your car. Only you have a silver Merc with fancy black GT lines. You were the talk of the library.”

“Harold, you’ve been away too long. All senior staff have a similar car as part of the salary package. I took mine with me when I left. I believe those black lines were part of a deal Huntington had with the Mercedes dealer for the fleet.”

Merrell felt more at ease. He now hoped this confused man would just leave. Then he remembered the book. "What is the book?"

Brinks had forgotten it momentarily also. "This? I found it where the car was parked. As though it was dropped."

Walter moved around and held out his hand. The book was placed in it. He looked at the title and shook his head. "Not mine or my taste. Nor Huntington's from memory. 'Beyond the Acropolis' by Beaton was never considered to have depth or character necessary for such introspection. Most book academics would agree." Already Merrell's mind had drifted to a far better treatise and he remembered where it was in his collection. "Beaton was an opportunist. He would create ten facts and five theories from one unrelated item."

Brinks just shook his head. He said nothing.

"Look. You worked as a wormer. There is no comparison between Beaton and Professor Anderson-Peers. I Have two of the professor's works here. Read a page and you will agree." He moved slowly and pulled the big step ladder along the wall. Then he laboriously climbed the steps, one at a time until he was at the top. Brinks just stood with his back to the book case turning his head to look at him. Merrell pulled out a small volume and waved it at him. "Here it is."

The other man had lost interest. His reason and demand seemed to be fading. He just stood there and looked straight ahead. Walter realised there was no interest and put the book back into its place. Then glancing along the shelf, he saw Arnold's 'Seas and Lands' and realised that this was what he had planned to read. All focus of the current situation receded and he instinctively leant to the side to grab it whilst up here.

The ladder moved on its little wheels like a pendulum as his weight was extended to reach the volume. It was just too far for a physical reach and next moment he felt himself coming off the ladder into thin air. He tried to grab the top of the book shelf but his fingers slipped and Walter felt himself falling.

Chapter Three – The Visitor

It was a warm day for this time of the year and Harold Brinks turned up the air conditioning on his old Studebaker 170. It made little difference. The machine had reached a time in it's life when it just wanted to be put out to pasture. He swore at it but predictably, it made no difference. Harold, not Harry. It was always Harold even as a child. Harold had moved back to Massachusetts some months back, partly to find work in a place where he had spent some time and so felt comfortable. But also to find some solace in being near the place where he once worked but thanks to others who thought he was stealing their jobs, no longer. It took him a long time to accept that he had been sacked. Sacked! Harold Brinks should have been able to leave with dignity but they didn't let him. Maybe he could make up for it. Funny if they got sacked because of him!

The apartment reeked of age and despair. And last night's dinner. The woman on the floor below stood at her door in a gown. She had seen him come from her window. He knew what she wanted was not to fix her cupboard door but to fill her lonely life. He had filled too many lonely lives, and wives for that matter. One reason he moved about. Now he needed something to kick start his life or he would end up like his uncle Oswald. A no hoper and a slob. However last week's aimless wandering might just have paid off. He reminisced on his driving slowly around and past his former employment premises, Huntington Repository. It was late at night and very quiet but the sight of a silver Mercedes parked a block away caused him to pull over and speculate. It had black stripes like that twerp Merrell who had got him kicked out. In fact he was sure it had to be his for he had never seen any other around when he worked here.

Thirty minutes later and two Chesterfields to keep him company, he was startled to see movement above the car on the building next to where it was parked. A swinging rope caught his eye then a figure in black, rappelling down to the pavement. The rope somehow fell and it and the man got into the car and drove away. It had to be Merrell. It was his car. Harold got out and walked to the spot. 'Why here?' he thought. Then he realised that the roof would lead to the roof of the Repository and he suddenly caught on. He had stumbled onto a robbery of sorts.

In the gutter an object caught his eye and he stooped to pick it up. A book. And a classic by the looks. It had to have come from Huntington and this seemed to confirm that it was Merrell. "I never took him to be the athletic type but the world is full of surprises." He said this aloud but there was no one to hear his spoken thoughts. By the time Harold had arrived home, he had already formulated an idea. An idea that could earn him lots of money and bring his dream of ousting Merrell, to reality.

It didn't take long to locate where Walter Merrell lived. Telephone directories make it so easy. There is no privacy any longer. You are always to be found, to be spied upon. The first night it was the semi's of the baseball league and he gave away any thought of going out to confront Merrell. Winchester was batting tonight and that could not be missed. There was some money riding on it as well.

But after a couple of bourbons the next night, he drove past the house slowly at around 9.30. There were lights on and parking a couple of houses away, walked slowly to the front door. His heart was racing but the thought of what could be achieved was foremost on his mind. He would be polite. Respectful. And he would make this man pay.

A car drove past but he didn't glance up. 'Just keep walking to the door' he said to himself. It was one of those conservative places. Neat lawns and primroses and a chimney or two. He rang the bell and waited. Then again. Not a sound so he pushed the button again. He could hear the chime inside. He tried again. Then a noise and the door opened. Walter Merrell was there in a light jacket peering at him and asking the obvious. Harold proffered the book.

Obviously he had not recognised him and took him for some student or whatever trying to return an item. When he went to close the door, Harold got straight to the point. He held the book up against the security gauze. "I think you should see it now." Then he gave his name and when they had last met. When he got a recognition he pressed the point about talking. Brinks could feel the indecision in the other's mind and the uncertainty in the book he held. Then the door was unlocked and he was in.

The library looked like a miniature of Huntington. Books line the walls and stretched to the ceiling. A step ladder was necessary to get to the higher

shelves. It put an ache in Harold's heart to be around such knowledge. He should be still around it except for this man. So he just said what he felt. The expected defence of his action came. 'Three people' was taken in and he raised his eyebrows. Maybe the other two didn't like him also, but he always believed it was just Merrell. These were words to cover an action. Then the direct question of why was he there. Harold was a direct man so he gave a direct reply. "Money. Pure and simple." He went on to give a brief account of his difficult life since then and his chance meeting of Merrell's car and the owner coming down a rope. Brinks knew he had him and could see a little blackmail coming easily.

Walter vigorously denied the statement that he was the person in black or the owner of that car, providing a story of many similar cars now belonging to Huntington staff. For once there was now a small doubt in Harold's mind. 'Was he telling the truth or just denying it was him?' This was something he needed to think out. Suddenly a small shiver went through him. The thought that he was wrong came up with bright flashing lights.

He heard Merrell go on about Beaton and someone else but he was only half listening. When the librarian went up the book ladder and waved a book shouting "here it is", he was still half listening. His gaze was more ahead to the far wall when he became aware of a stifled shout and turned slightly to see movement. Harold took microseconds to register the fact that the ladder on which Merrell was balancing was toppling sideways and he saw the librarian momentarily hang, then fall. In that same instant he knew the ladder would miss him and a small smile started to form on his lips.

Chapter Four – The Friend

“Wonderful turnout George. I’d say the support tonight more than seals it.”

“I hope so,” replied George. “There’s a lot riding on this campaign. Not only the reputation of some prominent people but a considerable lot of money.”

John grabbed two whiskeys from a passing waiter and offered one to his companion. “Here’s to success.” They both raised the drinks in a traditional salute than sipped for a few seconds. The noise of the gathering seemed to make a perfect background to the beverage.

George smiled the look of a cat who has dined on an unfortunate canary. “Well still a couple of loose ends and a check book to be prised from it’s owners pocket. See you later.” Then he was disappearing into the crowd, heading towards his mark with a straight aim. John just smiled to himself and moved to the front door. ‘Enough for tonight,’ he thought, ‘it has been far too busy a day and tomorrow he had golf with Walter Merrell. The outcome of that could not so easily be predicted. John felt himself a better tactician and all round golfer, but the wily old Walter had more than once surprised him. Loser bought the drinks at the club house and over the year, it was fairly even.

John Sturgiss lived two streets from Walter, in the next neighbourhood but a slightly better class of street. Well this was Walter’s opinion, not that John really cared. He got on well with his golfing partner and as long as he could live his life and obtain his comforts, it didn’t matter. Close to bed time he made a chocolate drink and was just about to head upstairs, when the door bell rang. He looked at his watch and saw eleven o’clock. “Who could that be?” he muttered aloud. The small video security camera he had on the front porch, hidden, gave him a picture of a familiar face on the monitor and he frowned. He shut the cabinet and went to the front door.

“Walter. Surprised to see you at this hour.” He could see that his friend looked upset. “Come in. I was just having a hot milk. I’ll make you one.”

Walter walked into the sitting room and went straight to the whiskey decanter. His golfing partner decided that another hot milk would be not needed. “Well sit down and drink up. Then tell me, Walter, what brings you here when we should both be conserving our energy for 18 holes tomorrow.”

Walter didn't look too perturbed but he was a little red in the face. “A problem I'm afraid. There's a dead body on my library floor.”

John looked a bit surprised but not overly disturbed. “That's a bit inconvenient. Do you know who?”

“Oh yes. Brinks. Harold Brinks. Used to work at the Repository. A bit useless. We had to let him go in the end. Made so many mistakes. Came around tonight to complain about his treatment. Then to blackmail me.”

Now Sturgiss did look surprised. “Blackmail! Why?”

Walter poured a small nip and offered the bottle to his friend, but Sturgiss shook his head. “Well John, he saw me shimmying down the rope when I was leaving Huntington a couple of months back.”

“That was the two Degas and that obscure Monet?”

“Yes. Recognised the car. Not me, I was in black. Unfortunately I dropped a book as I was getting into the car.”

Sturgiss was listening intently. “That's unfortunate. But if he didn't see your face, how would he know it was you? You didn't have your name in the book I hope. Come to think of it, we weren't taking books that night.”

The mantel clock gave it's chime for eleven fifteen. “No, it didn't come from them. I had to sit for so long in that cramped locker, I took along a book to pass the hours. Beaton.”

“Not Beyond the Acropolis? I thought that was beneath your intellect. No wonder you dropped it.”

Walter looked pained. “I was hoping to find something to salvage in it for my efforts. Anyway forget that. My name isn't in the front. But I do emboss it in the rear on all my books. Unless you know, it isn't obvious, but

eventually he would have found it. Anyway I told him it wasn't mine or from the Repository. I think he believed me, not that that is relevant now.”
“Awkward. So you killed him?”

“Not really. It just happened. He sort of ended up dead.”

Sturgiss looked confused. “This is not a putt. It's a bunker shot Walter. Get on with it.”

“Not much to tell. I went up the ladder to the top shelf to get Anderson-Peers and prove to this Brinks that Beaton was superficial. He wasn't interested. Just looked into space. Then I saw ‘Seas and Lands’ a bit over and reached for it.”

“What has Sir Edwin Arnold got to do with the other two?”

Merrell sneezed. “Sorry,” and pulled out a silk handkerchief to wipe his face. “Nothing at all. I was going to read it.”

“Walter my friend. The body?”

“Well I overbalanced and the ladder fell and I was left hanging on the top shelf. Then I fell.”

“So the ladder caught our daydreaming blackmailer on the head and ended his days?”

“Oh no. It fell short. It was Napoleon that did it.”

John Sturgiss wondered how this seemingly vague person could at the same time, be so agile and cunning and execute the seemingly impossible plans that he did. “Bunker shot Walter.”

“That heavy bust from my auntie's estate. I had it on the top to prop up some books but it was too close to the edge. When I grabbed the book case, the vibration must have shaken it loose. Don't think he even saw it coming. I think it's time to call a halt to our operations. There's a few million a piece in the Brussels' account and now is not the time to have police sniffing around.”

“I agree. Coffee whilst I think.” It was a statement, rather than a question. Walter nodded and sat back. A few minutes later, Sturgiss returned with a tray and two mugs. “A bold plan but seems workable. You up to moving to Europe in the next couple of days?”

Walter stopped sipping, with his mug stationery in mid air. “Go on.”

“Walk back home, unseen, and pack a bag. Money. Anything quick and light. Take this fellow’s wallet and leave your own on the desk, open and empty. Make sure he has no keys or other identification.”

Walter raised a finger. “What about a car? I just thought of that.”

“Probably. Look out in the street and see if a key fits. You should be good at that. I suggest driving it to Bradley Park and leaving it. It’s pretty dark and given it’s reputation, no one would be interested. You can walk back. You still have your nephew’s passport?”

Walter nodded. Alfred was his sister’s step son, who lived with his mother half the time and his girl friend the other. He wasn’t too bright and Walter had accidentally acquired the passport in some belongings sent to him when his sister died. He kept it.

“Good. Leave the room as it is. I think that would be best, but try and wipe as many fingerprints of yours off things. No good having a body that is supposed to be you but someone else’s prints around the house. I know it will only be temporary and the police probably will work it out. But you never know. Anyway, you will be far away and with a new identity, spending those millions.”

Walter cocked his head and shrugged. “Why not. It buys us time. What will you do? I mean Brinks will be identified.”

“By me, tomorrow morning, when I arrive to pick you up for golf. As Walter Merrell of course. Down the track I can say I was confused and upset and assumed it was you. Your house and all. Then probably I will head for distant shores.”

Walter stood up. “Time to go I suppose. I’ll be back in an hour or so. Leave the back door open and I’ll come down the service lane behind.”

“Walter.”

“Yes?”

“No books to read on the plane. Can’t have you dropping any more.”

Jimmy Brook

RUSONELLI

When we push ahead and there stands the Emerald City,
It may not be obvious. We have to see it with our hearts first.

The last carriage of the train rattled past them, and left the young couple standing on the little platform amidst smoke and cinders and a receding noise of exhaled steam and clanking iron rods. There weren't many on the train and those that had got off at the same time were fast disappearing through the waiting room. The man, dressed in slacks and a shirt and tie, was carrying a jacket on his arm. He picked up the two suitcases, old and battered, and smiling at his youthful companion, followed the diminishing throng.

"Where are we exactly, Roger?", she enquired as they emerged into the street outside. Her white hat was lifted up by a slight breeze but she deftly caught it.

"Berry. This is the nearest station to the monastery, or whatever it is." He looked around for a vehicle or bus, but already the only bus, a relic of the 1920s was moving out. "In all our involvement with the last couple of days, I forgot to check on

how we should get there."

"Who cares," she said. "Let's find a rustic little cottage and have our honeymoon there. As long as I have you." She put her arm around his waist and rested her head on the top of his shoulder.

"Mr. Waters?" A firm voice came from behind them and turning around, they faced an older person in working clothes. He doffed his hat to the young lady. Roger acknowledged him.

"Would have been earlier, but business held me up and a load of pigs on the road. With petrol rationing still on we can only afford one trip to town a week, so we try to make the best of it." He smiled, displaying nicotine stained teeth, then hoisted the baggage on his shoulder and headed to an ancient utility truck.

The ride took them across the railway line and meandered through open countryside, dotted with patches of trees and red farms. Everywhere the sight and sound of cows. It was a warm day and not a cloud was to be seen in the sky, just a dome of light blue. In the cabin, the closeness harboured an odour of country and tobacco and man.

"How far to the monastery. That is the right name?"

"I suppose it is. We just call it Rusonelli. Oh, you can see the tower now," and the driver pointed somewhere out the front.

"I can see it," said Helena, "it looks wonderful. So, how would you call it, monastic."

Roger, her husband, smiled. She was so much a romantic, so vivacious. He was glad they were together. This was going to be the perfect honeymoon.

The first impression certainly was captivating. Nestled in the green fold of a hill, it stood out, a row of irregular shapes of darkness with a splash of colour. Not foreboding, not even dominating, but it was there. A hint of red and yellow around the base

accentuated the look and then it was gone from sight as the car swept into a grove of willow trees on the creek bank. Then they were climbing and the young couple's first glimpse of the river. It looked like a huge wide band of silver joining the ends of the earth. Then this was in turn gone as they abruptly turned into a pair of large wrought iron gates and wound up a long road towards the monastery.

As they approached the impressive stone building, grape vines passed by. Most seemed to be high in weeds and in neglect, as were the fruit trees. Then they were there. The front door opened and an elderly man in white shirt and floppy brown slacks, topped by a large straw hat, seem to float over the uneven path and down to the vehicle.

"Welcome to Rusonelli. You must be Mr. and Mrs. Waters. I hope Clance was on time. He tries to do too much on his trips to town."

"This is lovely Mr., I mean Father," Helena blushed a little, then waved away some flies.

"Any name, whatever it is, as long as it comes with well meaning, will do. However most people call me Father, and since the church hasn't abandoned me, it's probably suits the occasion. Father Vicaro. Tea. Yes, you must be thirsty after your long trip from Sydney."

As Clance disappeared inside with the suitcases, Father Vicaro headed for the side of the building and a large veranda. Roger and Helena followed, hand in hand. The area was cool and ferns hanging down from baskets added to the pleasant atmosphere. However if the couple were expecting anything, they weren't expecting the view.

"Oh Roger. Look. It's magic." She tightened her grip on his hand. Even Roger was taken back. He had experienced the sights and sounds of beautiful country before. Usually with others like himself with more urgent duties at hand than time to reflect at length. With his wife it took on a new meaning. They sat in

wicker chairs and surveyed the view.

From the elevated position of the monastery, the land ran down for about half a mile to the Shoalhaven River, a large broad band of silver lined with green trees. From their vantage point the guests could see two vessels both with their funnels issuing smoke and both heading down stream towards the ocean. Several birds flew overhead and some were landing in the abandoned fruit trees below the terrace. The country gave a hint of colour to break up the greens, often in the form of some building or roadway. White smoke curled up from a mound a long way off but no flames could be discerned. The shrill sound of a steam whistle reached their ears, muted to denote distance.

"Help yourself to the scones," offered Father Vicaro. "Brother Philipe made them especially. He does all our cooking."

"The whistle?", asked Roger.

"Dare say your train has arrived at it's destination. The river gives us a highway in some instances and becomes a barrier in others."

They sat for several minutes drinking tea and taking in the view. Father Vicaro took out a pipe and a pouch.

"Do you mind? I like a smoke in the middle of the day. I'll move to the end of the veranda." He stood up.

"It's OK," replied Roger, "we both have an occasional puff ourselves. a legacy of my service days."

"I thought priests weren't supposed to have vices?" There was a twinkle in Helena's eyes as she spoke.

Vicaro smiled. "We are all imperfect."

Roger coughed. "Anyway darling, smoking isn't a vice, just a...bad habit."

They talked, and the relaxed atmosphere gave each a time to study the other, even the newly married couple gaining insights of their partner. Roger was fascinated by this older man. He seemed so worldly and at ease. The face was well tanned and with his strong hands showed many years in the outdoors, unusual for one with a cleric's occupation. He obviously relished in meeting people and putting them at ease.

The room offered to the couple was plain but the bed was soft and the view from the little balcony just as magnificent. Time seemed to have stood still that afternoon. When the gong rang, they came down nervously for dinner.

Besides Father Vicaro, another monk was seated, and a woman. Roger and Helena were introduced and Brother Philipe came in with the meal. A kick from Helena caught Roger just in time from eating as the others waited for the blessing to be made.

The lady was Bunny Torrens, an actress on a sabbatical from the hectic stage. The monk was a Brother Paul, some sort of novice. The meal was fairly simple yet ample and Helena had never tasted such a delicious sauce that covered the tender meat. Bunny was true to her profession and without being overbearing, held the conversation with tales of the stage and her past liaisons.

Roger was getting on fine with Brother Paul, who was sitting next to him. He wasn't like the young people that he knew or associated with, all one way or all the other. Paul was educated and knew endless information on politics and the great writers. At the same time, he knew more about rugby and cricket than Roger did, and how to rig a beach fishing line.

During all this, Father Vicaro kept the meal going, but also was using the occasion to observe his guests. Bunny had been there for two days and he felt she was very sincere. He liked the Waters. So many young people today often thought only of themselves, but here he found a couple so refreshing and open. Willing to take on the world.

It was during the chatting after the meal that the hand of fate, or more appropriately the hand of God, came into play.

"We think you are so lucky here." It was Helena who made the remark, looking at Father Vicaro.

"Thank you Mrs. Waters. However nothing is permanent. You know the Order is closing down and Rusonelli is to be sold?"

Her face looked as though frozen by the cold. "Oh no. Why?"

"Money my dear," interjected Bunny.

"Not just money," replied Father Vicaro. "True we are not self sufficient and the Diocese can no longer support us. But also as you see there is no longer any religious progression here. Hence only my two friends remain."

Roger put down his glass of wine. "That seems silly. I mean you have the land and that. Just doesn't seem right."

"The way of the Lord." The priest finished his glass. "I've served my time with the Church in an active way. After here I intend to stay on in the district."

"Doing what?" Helena asked, rather abruptly and caught Roger's scowl.

"Naturally helping in the community and some writing. We'll see."

Bunny stood up. "I'm going outside for a cigarette, if you people don't mind. Talking about retiring, gives me some thinking to do. About time I quit the stage." She smiled and headed for the veranda.

"Can't the Order get going again?" persisted Helena.

Father Vicaro smiled. "No I'm afraid. It is officially transferred to Sydney. Absorbed actually." Outside an owl

hooted.

They joined Bunny on the veranda and mostly sat, taking in the night and the chirping of crickets. The stars, unhindered by city smoke, were bright and hung like jewels, ready for touching. Below, the shaded outline of the river could just be seen. A boat was making it's way upstream, visible only by the few lights on board.

Next morning, Roger, Helena and Bunny went for a stroll and talked a lot. Father Vicaro was writing in his small study, when the trio asked could they interrupt and have a deep and meaningful chat.

An hour later, a bottle of wine Vicaro had been saving for something special, was broached and they, including the monks and Chance, drunk to the future. If there was to be one.

Three months later came that wonderful day. There were flags and people came from Berry and all the surrounding area just to have a look at the latest innovation to their district. There was even a band on the lawn in front playing and no one complained about the wonderful food.

The Chateau Rusonelli was born that day. Three months ago it was a concept. Today a reality. Locals always liked Vincenzo Vicaro and no doubt would still call him Father, although he had now retired from ecclesiastical duties and was now managing the hotel together with his partner, Roger Waters. They liked the lovely Helena on the main desk and to whom no request was too much trouble. All guessed that the chef came from Europe, but Philippe would make the Hotel Australia back in the city, envious. The hotel even had a resident singer and compare, Bunny Torrens, all the way from the stages of the world.

That night Chauffeur Chance joined the staff for a toast. They drank to the venture, and to Brother Paul in his decision to still seek religious enlightenment. They also toasted the Archbishop who had reluctantly at first, but finally agreed to rent Rusonelli to the partners, rather than sell.

Roger and Helena walked arm in arm in the garden that evening.
their new life together was also a new life for others, and for
the stately Chateau Rusonelli.

Jimmy Brook

THE CHARIOT

By Jimmy Brook

A display of a large rare artefact in a museum leads to an interesting hypothesis and perhaps to rethink what we believe.

THE CHARIOT

This is the strangest incident I have come across for a few years, and I have come across a few odd ones in my time. Part of my job I guess. I'm a claims investigator with an insurance company so we get to investigate all sorts of claims that seem out of the ordinary or a bit suspicious. When I look back, I'm still not sure if this series of events were logical or beyond our knowledge. It didn't matter in the long run as no one would have believed it as other than a natural series of events.

In my younger days I was a very keen student of ancient history and languages. Particularly old ones. So when you looked at some Egyptian hieroglyphics, you probably saw a few animated characters that meant something or other but I saw the written history of that event just like reading a book. That probably helped in this case.

A quiet week as no one was stealing much or found to go fishing when they were supposed to be in traction at a clinic, until our biggest museum in the city, and a client, called us for help. The Science and History Museum is an institution that is prestigious and conservative, so it never made it to the media that a small artefact (two actually) had suddenly disappeared from an exhibit and they had gone into panic mode. Mostly out of embarrassment as the item that it was part of was on loan from an even more prestigious museum in Europe. No one knew how many days it had been missing and CCTV footage (can we use that term in our metric world?) could not help as the camera angle was elsewhere. I suppose you want to know what it is. It was the left and right hand grips on the sides of an ancient war chariot. All of a foot long and in well polished timber with some inscriptions. Now I ask, who would want to take these? In fact we tentatively suggested they were never there in the first place, but should have known such an institution would not make this mistake. Still there were a few ruffled feathers .

The police came and said missing handles off an old chariot would be hard to justify in terms in resources, but being such a museum and it wasn't theirs to lose anyway, they would keep a look out. That's how we came to be

involved. Actually my employers were similarly minded but on looking at the premiums they paid us, gave me the job. I like it for it had two important ingredients. One was the challenge, even though I thought some kid had nicked them for his billy cart. The other was the chariot itself. It was really ancient and that stimulated my interest no end. Only two ever from this civilisation had been found in a recognisable state being buried completely by cave ins and so preserved. Earth tremors do have a good side. I just realised you do not know what civilisation or where it came from. Sorry about that. It was Hittite and had been dated at around 3,000 years old! Other civilisation used chariots but they were a little later. We know the great Egyptian kingdoms had them around the same time and a few have been recovered from tombs. In fact at the great battle of Kadesh in 1290 BC between these two superpowers, it would have been like modern tank warfare in head to head clashes. But a Hittite machine was a rare find.

Whilst I'm on my soapbox just a few odds and ends about these people that I remember from my uni days. The capital was Hattuša built somewhere in the middle of the Anatolian highlands, in central Turkey. It was the area where the civilisation of the Hittites flourished and inevitably disintegrated. There were many earlier societies before them though. The Hittites came from the north around 2000BC and settled here to grow and expand their territory through the Middle East to Syria and with their sights on Egypt. The civilisation was feudal with strict controls on its inhabitants and colonies. Historians feel they were the first to work with iron. Their language was definitely an Indo European base using those wedge shaped Cuneiform characters and words exist today in our European counterparts.

Now back to the present. This chariot was unearthed near the base of the Taurus Mountains to the south and had marks that suggested it was used by King Hattusilis III. Thus it was special and took a lot of negotiating to get to be on display here. So how does one start? I had an assistant, Julia, and she followed me around hoping to learn the ropes. What I didn't tell her was that it never was the same each time and you winged it. The first thing was to inspect the scene. Nothing stood out there. The CCTV cameras had been adjusted for better coverage and the general museum security seemed appropriate. Looking like no handles to me in the first place but I plodded on.

We sat for an eternity in the security office and viewed the footage from the day it was set up, complete with a life size plaster horse I might add.

Apologies to the Museum, for the handles were just discernible until sometime on the fourth day when there were lots of children and some adults milling around. Two kids did climb on to the roped off exhibit and a couple of adults moved in. One appeared to be the teacher but the other didn't have much interaction with them, more like a close look at the exhibit. You couldn't really see him, just a quick indistinct facial glimpse captured as he left. That most likely was the theft but who was he? When Julia mentioned they had tapes for everywhere in the Museum, it dawned on me that we might catch a glimpse at the front door or outside. With the time frame we now had, we got a better glimpse of his face as he left and the bonus was in the underground car park where his clothes gave him away to us as he got into a car. With enlargement we now had a registration number. Oh the wonders of modern science.

That explains why my trusty assistant and I were knocking on the door of this modest suburban brick veneer, hoping the articles mentioned would be mounted over the mantelpiece or such. An elderly lady said that Arnold, for that was the alleged culprit's name, was not home but for us to come in and wait, as he should not be long. Eagle eyes failed to find the articles or even a mantelpiece but I did see something on a sideboard that took my interest. Sort of heart pounding interest for it was a smallish statue of some old deity that you would probably pick up in a market for a few dollars. I didn't draw attention to this fact but instead led questions into the character of Arnold. His mother, for that was who she was, said he was quiet and had a new girlfriend but no job at the moment. In fact he hadn't held any job down for long since he came back from overseas. He was not completely well yet but was getting there.

Julia asked the obvious and it was apparently some sort of breakdown after his trip to Turkey. He never wrote for two years nearly. Just sort of disappeared and it nearly finished his mum. The Embassy tried but no one had seen him. It was as if he just disappeared off the face of the earth. His brother even went to Turkey a few months later but all dead ends. Then one day Arnold was taken into a hospital in Ankara in a terrible mental and physical state. He was home a few weeks later when he could travel and his brother had paid the fare and his medical bills. She said he may tell us more as to what happened. It was all too distressing, to which I used the old eye signal to Julia to get her to do coffee. As Julia and the old lady disappeared into the kitchen, I moved quickly to the statue and knew this was no \$2 factory piece. I had seen photos and read about it when studying. It was

bronze and aged about the right texture for a couple of thousand years or more. This was of the god that was most revered by King Suppiluliumas and only one similar was known to exist in the British Museum. That one from memory was larger. On the coffee table was a note book and being one to investigate, I casually opened it and got a shock. The wedged shape characters leapt out at me. Several pages worth. What was a man keeping records of that needed to be written in Hittite? I knew about four characters at the most, enough to confirm it.

Then the coffee came and I made an excuse that I needed to get my mobile phone from the car. What I needed was my mini camera, useful tool of all sleuths. What I didn't need was for Arnold to now turn up. Luck was on my side for the lady remembered a fresh cake and as she headed for the kitchen I was already clicking away at the pages as fast as I could. I did about six or seven and was just taking the statue when she returned. As my back was to her she didn't seem to notice. Then the front door opened. All too close for comfort.

Arnold was average and as I remembered him from the security tapes. It was obvious from the introductions that he was withdrawn and still recovering from whatever had taken a toll of his mind and body. I just came out with it and said we were investigating a missing piece from the display and were asking anyone we could locate, if they could help. He hesitantly asked why we were asking him and I told him. He seemed to accept this and was silent for a while. He was thinking. I could see that. Would he open up was what I could not see.

Then with a shrug of his shoulders, he said he could not help and indicated our meeting was at an end. Reluctantly we left. It would have been nice to resolve all this for I had this funny feeling that what he would eventually tell me (I hope) would be unbelievable. We headed for the University for I had a golfing partner who worked there and just happened to be the head of archaeology. Well it's nice to have connections and we did study ancient things together a long time ago. It was an hour cooling our heels and wandering about hallowed halls before we could get in but he was pleased to see me and Julia whom he had not met before. I downloaded the photos onto his upmarket computer and watched his eyes grow bigger by the second.

“You have got to be kidding me,” he said. “That image appears to be the real thing from what I see, as you indicate. Where did he get it?” I shrugged my

shoulders for I didn't really know but I was formulating an answer in the back of my brain which definitely was not for public hearing. The hieroglyphs amazed him. I knew he could read a few different languages from the past and Hittite was one that he had some working knowledge of.

"This is Hittite of course. Don't know all the pictures and abstractions but it seems to be more modern. Not sure what that means. The feel and layout suggests one who lives in the 21st century, rather than thousands of years ago. Who today can write this stuff?"

"What does it say?"

"That's it. Some things about fixing the house. A job. No. A job he is seeking. Chariot? A girl called....looks like Phenos and another on the last page that looks like Melody. All unreal. Can I have a copy?"

I shook my head. "When we have finalised this matter I'm on, you can. At the moment this information is just too delicate. Promise."

We left. I was now fairly certain that what I had been anticipating would become a reality. The rules were about to go out the window. I dropped off Julia and headed back to see if I could have a heart to heart with our friend Arnold. He wasn't there when I arrived and I didn't know if to feel relieved or disappointed. Then he walked in the front gate as I had turned and he just stood looking at me. There then invited me in. We went through to back sunroom. It was small yet sort of spacious at the same time. He indicated a chair to me, sat opposite and straight away asked me what I knew of the Hittites because that was what this was all about. Then he stood up before I could answer and took a cloth covered item from the shelf behind him and opened it out on the small table. It was of course two polished timber handles, suitably inscribed.

Now I have a vivid imagination and a very accepting one. I wanted him to tell me but I would need to start him off. In my mind there could be one explanation which would be impossible and would never get into my report. Yet I would never shut myself off from any explanation. Society has locked us into defined paths and overlooked many others that are probably shaping our lives. So I bit the bullet. "I know where you have been Arnold. I have no doubt you were there. It's difficult for me to accept it but I see no other explanation." I could see the slight relaxing of his muscles and a sort of

relief in his eyes. “Start, if you like, when you went to Turkey two or three years back. By the way I got honours in Ancient History.” I hadn’t really, just an A.

We talked for an hour. I learnt more about the world at that early time than I did at school or university. He didn’t have time to make it up. It just seemed to flow. My head was spinning with information that men had been seeking for hundreds of years. I won’t bore you with pages of dialogue, just the basics. Arnold always had a fascination with old cultures. He lived and breathed his passion to the exclusion of other things in life that he should have enjoyed. The trip to Turkey was to be part of a wider journey taking in other parts of the near East including Syria and Jordan and then Iran. Not being able to get into Iraq was disappointing but maybe he could sneak in when the fighting was at a low. He never got past a week in Turkey. Somewhere on the outskirts of Ankara he was in an eating house off the tourist track when he was offered a chance to explore a dig that was off limits and was known to contain Hittite artefacts. The food kept coming and the wine flowed and suddenly he just saw flashing lights and felt he was in a whirlpool. Then as he was sick, he just blacked out. When he awoke, he was dressed in a white tunic and in a strange world. It was like a stage set with attendants and ancient surroundings. When he did get to look out the stone opening he was sick for he saw a world that had not existed for thousands of years. It took three days before he stopped vomiting and fainting from the fear. The people who were looking after him were sort of upper class with servants or slaves. He could not tell. The language was impossible but the clay tablets they inscribed it into were familiar. When he was taken to a temple and saw the gods looking down on those who stood there, he knew where he was. His mind went and it took weeks to have the will to start feeling his way around. He was taken everywhere and shown things he only guessed what they might be. Slowly he regained his will to live never sure if he would wake up in his own time again. Two years or a bit was his estimate of the time he was with that family and their society. He became almost as one with the culture and met many people at all strata’s but never the king. Very few met the king.

Why they accepted him was easy. The priests had foretold of a stranger who would come into their midst and bring prosperity and a respite from the need to take to war to save their destiny. The world of Arnold almost disappeared from his immediate mind. They couldn’t say Arnold so he got Anad. The priests also told of the journey that could be taken by the magical powers

contained in the king's chariot, particularly the talisman effect of touching the sacred hand rests. By placing your hands on these or the objects on to one's body, you would be able to see into the future and travel to the stars. But of course only the king could ride in his own chariot and thus experience these wonders. When it was learnt that the king was travelling with a vast retinue of a thousand bodyguards; servants and slaves to the neighbouring kingdom of Medes, he was taken to line the way on the great flagged entrance to the city where nobles and privileged ones would be near the power that kept the empire alive and so continue to serve him. Arnold and his family would be in the front row and be able to see the magical chariot and hopefully the sacred hand rests that guided the king always to victory.

Arnold said that it was the most mystical experience he had ever had. The shadow of that person had briefly fallen on him and he felt uplifted. He saw the hand as it rested on the polished handle and it seemed to glow with the colour of gold. That night he took more maize wine than he had become accustomed to and felt dizzy. When a lamp fell from the roof in front of him as he staggered outside, he felt outside himself and then in a shower of colours he just sunk to the earth. He staggered as he tried to get up but fell against the parapet hitting his head and passed out.

When he awoke he was feeling wretched, very sick and his skin was like nothing he had ever seen on himself before. What shocked him more was that he was in unfamiliar surroundings. An old stable or shed that looked and felt very unhealthy. Not that he cared much at that moment. Crawling outside he was in a back alley of some eastern city. There were people who avoided him and some motor vehicles and donkey carts who did the same. All of this passed into the recesses of his memory but he said that later when it got colder, a woman came out and yelled at him in some gibberish. Then she went away and shortly later returned with some one and a cart then he just lapsed into unconsciousness.

Arnold spent two weeks in a hospital or clinic. He knew that he was in Turkey and it was two years after he had first arrived. When he had entered the government clinic, he was clutching a small object wrapped in muslin. They left it with him perhaps to give him a clue as to where he had been. He knew where he had been but they just shook their heads when he tried to tell them, and gave him more pills. As for the statue, he knew about it and had seen it in the residence where he lived, but could not remember why he had it now. As his strength returned despite the meagre medicine and ghastly

food, he finally requested a visit from his country's consul and from there things happened as it seemed to him, slowly. Then home.

No one believed him but neither could anyone, including the Turkish police, offer an explanation of where he had been. There were no records and no trail. The doctors said amnesia. He could not handle it in the end and went into depression. Only now he was beginning to get himself together.

The handles? He saw the media display about the exhibit and felt drawn. When he saw the chariot, he knew it was the one he had stood so close to. The one that had that enormous power and he realised he did not have a life here. Arnold needed to return to that time in which he had been taken. There was some destiny or prophecy that needed to be fulfilled. The theft was difficult but many visits and the freak opportunity when the children climbed under the rope barrier and onto the chariot gave him that split second insight and he grabbed it. With a large screwdriver he had kept up his sleeve, he pried them off. They came easily and were not large. Each day it became harder to face what he had done and what he wanted to do. Holding the handles did not have any affect yet he couldn't tell others, not even his mother.

You may call it luck or it was just the right time, but when I came and sat down to talk, he could no longer hold it back. Now was a dilemma. I could think of no other credible explanation but definitely the world was not ready for someone who had been taken back in time. The floodgates would open up and I knew Arnold would not survive. Probably not me either. So I took a chance. Arnold looked pensive at my suggestion but finally agreed. I would take the handles and would tell the museum some kid had found them in bushes in the park opposite, and as I was asking questions in the area, gave them to me. To further help him, I would not mention anything in any report that involved Arnold or his time spent with the Hittites. Whatever report I put in to my company or the museum would be accepted. The suggestion to Arnold from me was that he had been privileged by the Universe to be chosen but it should remain with him. Society would not be kind if he wanted to talk about it.

As for the statue, he should keep it. It wasn't stolen. It was his tangible souvenir from Turkey, purchased, as I suggested to him, from a bazaar.

I rang my eminent professor and told him unfortunately it was a bit of mess but the photos of the writing and the statue had been accidentally erased. I

didn't feel any guilt for I then did just that. Erased them. The statue? Gone, along with the book. We had lost track of the owner. Read my official report.

Julia and I sat down to our favourite drink, caramel lattes. I had checked my e-mails and found the one I hoped would come and now it was time to relax. After a couple of slow mouthfuls she asked what was the real story. She had seen the statue and the photographs. Was Arnold involved? Did he steal the handles? I felt she was entitled to some explanation, so I did something that was unplanned. I told her the truth! For yesterday I thought long and hard about the incident and suddenly realised how I could prove what had happened. Sitting here looking at the froth and bubbles, I realised it was time to finalise this most interesting case. "Arnold had gone to Hattuša in the ancient land of the Hittites and he did spend two years or so with that family millenniums ago."

"But that is not possible? Or are there things scientists don't tell us?" Julia sat there with her coffee in mid air.

"You need to think outside the square," I told her. "I would be quite sure scientists don't tell us everything, but as to the former, it did happen but all in Arnold's mind." Then I went on to explain how. Arnold was a keen student of the ancients, so keen in fact that he was living and breathing it. Hence the trip to the Middle East. When he had that night of drinking and whatever, I believe he suffered a minor stroke or something that not good for the brain cells. Probably brought on by the drink. It caused amnesia on such a scale that when he did wake up his mind was telling him he was in Hittite land. I don't think he ever knew where he was in reality. Whatever he did from day to day, he saw it only in terms of the historical setting. And yes, her next question as I took a breath, was where was he for two years? For that I produced the e-mail I had been waiting on earlier.

"It is from a contact I have in our government who asked our embassy in Turkey to check on something and which turned out to be our answer. There are a few alternate societies or communes existing and whilst the police keep an eye on them for drug related offences, they rarely have trouble in that area. These are people who live a life of seeking and sharing mostly. Remember Turkey is not a fundamentalist state so lots of things are tolerated. In one such place there was a European that fits the description of Arnold, who just wandered in one day, apparently dropped off the back of a

truck on to the road. They took him in and he stayed for a couple of years. Out of his mind they said, but benign. Kept talking about ancient times. The police never seemed to know he was there on their visits and that was that. One day he wandered off and they assumed he was moving on.”

“Must have ended up somewhere in a town and his brain decided to kick in. Who knows? The rest is as we know it.”

Julia looked worried. “But did he steal the handles? Did he do anything wrong?”

“No” I replied, “he didn’t steal them and he didn’t do anything wrong. I would say the case is ready to be tucked away in the archives.” I wasn’t lying. I believe that in taking the handles, he was not stealing them in the accepted sense. He was doing something far more important. I didn’t add anything more to my answer.

We filed the papers and left the room. In my mind I still might have that doubt. Maybe he really did go to Hattuša. We will never know.

The End

Jimmy Brook