

## MY WEIRD STORIES 2.

### A SHOCKING DIVORCE.

Copyright P. Audcent 2014

This happened to a colleague of mine years ago so I have adapted it slightly, well alright I have added a great deal, but the outcome was the same!

Thomas Newell was a very good accountant, he was an only son and an orphan. His parents had left him their house and a little money to finish off his exam finals. He was a very generous man always willing to help people, like his neighbours with their tax returns, but he had always been inordinately shy. Because he was a brilliant mathematician he found a job soon after without any real effort on his part. One of his neighbours put his name forward with a business he worked for and he was snapped up.

He had, since his parents had died, been rather lonely and felt embarrassed to speak about general matters. During his work hours facts and figures from the company accounts absorbed his time and he was quite able to speak on the accounting side of the business but he would hide in his shell if another subject was broached to him. He would just flush and stutter a 'thank you' or 'do you think that' and hide away into his little world.

He thought he would get a dog or a cat at home but he never actually got the urge to visit the cattery or the dogs home. He mentioned this one day to Sally Newell his cousin and she said she would go with him to the dogs home and they both would look for a suitable companion for him.

They drove to the dogs home and found exactly what they were looking for, a small Scotty terrier. It was so quick and both were delighted with the small bitch, and she took a shine to Thomas immediately. As he cuddled her in his arms the lady attendant took his details and his money. She told them that a house and garden visit was the associations rule before any dog or bitch could be handed over, so Thomas made arrangements for the lady to visit, and he handed over the little terrier to be put back into the kennel.

On their way home he turned to his cousin to thank her for coming with him.

"I shall call her Lady."

"Do you want me to come over to your home when that Miss Brumer calls to see if its suitable?"

"No I shall be alright but I do have that lovely garden that Dad put in years ago and I think there should be no problem."

So a week latter Miss Brumer came to visit with her check list.

"My" she said, "what a lovely house and the garden is just perfect, you could have had any of our larger dogs, now you will have to train your little Scotty not to dig into those lovely plant and bushes."

“Train?” Thomas stammered.

“Yes all dogs need training especially terriers otherwise they would be off on their own, I see your fences are very low.”

“Yes, Dad liked people to see over and enjoy the colour of the plants.”

“Your dad and mum are still alive?”

“Alas no that's why I wanted a little company.”

“But that lady who came with you was not your wife or girlfriend?”

“No she is my cousin, I live alone.”

“Well I could train your terrier if you wanted.”

“I could pay you.”

“I'm sure you could but you seem such a nice man, and yes I am approving your ownership of this little bitch, have you thought of a name?”

“Oh yes” Thomas brightened up at the thought, “Its Lady.”

“Well I will bring Lady to you tomorrow and each Saturday I will come and help train her, if that's fine with you?”

Thomas nodded his thanks and showed her out.

Next Saturday Miss Brumer arrived with Lady in a special carry cage and when she was released she immediately hurtled over to Thomas who picked her up and gently patted her. Miss Brumer then indicated that they should go into the garden as let her do her business and explore her new surroundings.

Now Thomas may have been born shy but he admired Miss Brumer and her obvious talent and knowledge of animals, and indeed his little Lady, nose twitching and running here and there eventually did her business and returned to Thomas who was sitting on the bench next to Miss Brumer. And there they sat for over an hour talking quietly with Lady curled up close to Thomas's feet. There was no training of the bitch but several glasses of wine later, Thomas asked Miss Brumer out for a date.

Three months later they were married in a local church and three months after that Mrs Newell nee Brumer went to her solicitor and put in for a divorce.

“We are incompatible” she said to Thomas.

“But but b..” stammered Thomas, “We were so happy especially in are little paradise.”

“The one your parents made, well I am demanding half of everything including Lady!”

“Lady is mine and so is the house and garden.”

“Well take your pick, which do you want!” and with that his new wife packed her

bags and left to stay with her old boy friend.

“Will we get the half?” said her boy friend in his flat.

“Well yes its the law here, but I don't want that Scotty bitch, I'll let Thomas keep her, after all you cannot divide an animal, and then you and I can go away as we planned. I suppose the money will make it worth while, the very thought of having his thin hands all over me. Come to think of it, you are a real cad Angus, so don't you forget this, it may have been your plan but my body, so its my money.”

Well with the one hundred thousand, the funds left over, did actually buy Thomas a tiny ground floor apartment and it did come with a small back yard, he and Lady were very happy together but whether his little Scotty was worth loosing his parents home and garden to a conniving pair of fraudsters was a mute point.

XXX

Prologue: Well I confess I had the same problem as Shelly, and I went right through early school until I reached the grand old age of ten when my teacher found my problem! Who said teachers don't only teach!

Sister Mary Magellan joined the teaching order when she was seventeen. She was Irish and from a large tribe of siblings. She was the youngest and as was common in most Irish families their mother liked to have at least one son train as a priest, and if possible, a daughter to join a nunnery. This of course saved the parents the cost of helping them in later life and gave them pride in their children's achievements.

Well Sister Mary had hoped to eventually marry, in fact she had already found the right boy but she submitted to her her parents request and instead joined the order as a novice. Her elder brother did likewise and went of to a seminary.

Some years later found Sister Mary installed at a church school where she became a form teacher for the ten and eleven year olds. It was a co-educational school and highly regarded in the township. Though the many years Sister Mary watched over her charges she would give her best in sorting out a myriad of problems, yet her natural flair was in actually teaching and always she was fair and tolerant to both girls and boys. She remembered what Ursula the eldest sibling told her when she started teaching.

Ursula told Mary, you will have a new set of children every year and with your constant love and instruction they will remember you for the rest of their lives. You borrow them from their parents Monday to Friday and you have them under your wing longer than anyone at that most important stage of their lives They will be a constant source of worry, surprise and pleasure so you are the most fortunate in our family.

In her second year as a teacher and on the first day of term, she had a new class and having taken their names down for the class role she noticed a little girl called Shelly Prouse. In fact Sister Mary had to take a second look before continuing with role taking. As the class progressed she found herself spending more of her attention on Shelly than the others. When school was finished she found herself walking to the window overlooking the road outside and checking that each child crossed safely, particularly Shelly Prouse. Sister Mary was careful not to be overly attendant on Shelly in class but one day she wrote some numerals on the board and asked various children to read and multiply them.

"Shelly Prouse" Sister Mary called out, "What is this multiplied by this," She pointed to the figures on the board.

Shelly stood up from the rear of the class room and leaned forward, she stuttered and soon her cheeks were red with tears gently sliding down.

"Well maybe you cannot see clearly dear, so wipe your tears and come closer to the front. Michael Leary will change places with you for a moment."

So Shelly made her way to Michael's now empty seat and she once more glanced up

to the board, and hesitated.

“That's fine Shelly I think I will give you a note to take home to your parents, just stay at Michaels desk please until the end of the lesson.”

“May I then return to my seat later,” said a worried Shelly.

“Yes of course, its certainly not your fault, we always seem to have one or two children who have eye problems every year, and as a precaution I've asked your parents to have your eyes tested.” Sister Mary took off her own glasses, “As all of you children can see I need glasses, without them its just an empty classroom, none of you exist!” They all roared with laughter.

And so Shelly returned to class with her new glasses and sat in her old seat and her education proceeded at a fast pace for that year and for many years after.

Sister Mary read in the newspaper years later that a Miss Shelly Prouse had accomplished her Degree in medicine and was to be placed as a Registrar in the local hospital. Sister Mary wondered what particular branch of medicine she has chosen. It was many years later when Sister Mary contracted that awful disease of cancer. She was subsequently sent by her Order to the hospital for treatment, it was here she met her old pupil.

“I shall have to operate Sister Mary, but thanks to you I will see what I am doing.”

“But dear Shelly you don't have your glasses on your nose any more!”

“Well Sister I have. They are small and they fit securely onto my eyes under the lids. They are called contact lenses, and nowadays you can even get a lazer operation to alter your own lens. I suppose you keep a check on all your new pupils but I am surprised you seem to have been the only teacher to recognise an eye problem.”

“Perhaps but we do have hearing problems to watch for as well Shelly.”

“Well they would be more difficult as some children refuse to hear!”

“Oh do tell me, in your class which ones were they.” exclaimed Sister Mary.

“Oh I think you already know and for what its worth most of us truly believed you had another set of eyes in the back of your head, now lets get you wheeled in for a scan, and for once I can tell my old teacher to stay quite!”

Authors note: Just a forethought about the title, A slice of time. Because each teacher only has that one year to connect with his or her pupils. Well yes I expect a 'passage of time' might have been more realistic, well what do you think!



Its strange how stories seem to create themselves without too much thought by the author, this is one where I had the title but nothing else, so I just kept on tapping it out on the keyboard!

In every ones life a special person drops in and makes an immediate impression, this happened to Daisy Westbury. She was kayaking one sunny day along the river Avon, she had her bathing suit on and a safety blown up floatation device around her middle, so she felt very safe as she enjoyed the river bank and all its vegetation. The willows dipping their fronds into the water fascinated her, so she paddled closed to one very old willow that had little birds climbing up an down the yellow branches.

What puzzled Daisy as she gently manoeuvred across the river towards that great willow was that all the tiny birds were a bright blue and green colour. She had seen documentaries with such fauna but always from distant shores, sadly she had left her mobile phone in the car, she would had definitely taken a photograph if she had it with her. Suddenly she felt something hit her knee inside the Kayak, so she felt under under her leg and produced her own mobile phone. Suddenly a small voice entered her ear apologising for frightening her. So she drifted closed to willow fronds that, like a curtain, hid the trunk of the tree. She used her paddle when she met the river bank and swept the fronds aside, here sitting against the trunk was a small child, a girl she thought, but it could have been either.

“Why are you here so close to the water, where are your parents?” A startled Daisy called to the child.

“I love the river. Please take my photograph, with my lovely birds.”

Daisy grabbed her mobile and turned it on, or rather tried to but she had forgotten to charge it up.

“I would love too but there are two problems, the first is it needs charging and the second one is I cannot print out a picture for you.”

“No that's fine I don't need the picture for myself, and if you wait a minute your phone will charge up.”

“Why are you here anyway, you aren't at school, are you playing hookey are some such?”

“What is Hookey? I live here.”

“By the river?”

“Yes by my lovely old willow, the tree protects me and I can go out and help other souls just like you, now your telephone should be ready now.”

Daisy felt the child was so certain, she tried the start button once more and her mobile leapt into life.

“Do you want a smiley photo or just a ordinary plain one?”

“As I am please.”

Daisy selected the camera and focusing she took the picture. She checked to see if she had captured the little birds as well and indeed they were all there and in focus. Gracious , Daisy thought they must have all stopped climbing all at once just for this photo. She looked up and they were still moving about the child's body.

“They are my friends, you know we get a lot of sad people along the pathway behind so I send out one of my little birds to make them feel better. Of course they cannot see them but that does not affect the outcome. People feel so much better and go away much happier.”

“Well that's a kind thought, you must be a very special person to think like that.”

Daisy looked up after shutting down her mobile, but the child had gone.

She leaned over to the river bank and finding a small branch she snapped in half and drove both pieces in to bank so she could find this tree again, then she paddled back to the boat house and pulled the kayak from the water.

“Did you go far?” asked the owner of the boat shed.

“Just down to that big old willow.” said Daisy.

“Funny you know, you have a big smile on your face. But when you arrived and paid me the hire money for my kayak you were very drawn looking and if you don't mind me saying you were kind of tetchy.”

“Do you know this child?” Daisy bought out her mobile and switched it on then showed the photograph she had taken to the boat man. He looked at it carefully.

“Can't be here, those are foreign birds.”

“No, the child?”

“No child there just the birds on the willow leaves, but they can't be. Look no blurring, I reckon you stuck these on yourself, do you remember those girls fooled their parents with photo's of fairies and elves in the twenties. I reckon you just gone and did the same.”

Daisy smiled and shook her head, then she remembered the sticks she had stuck in the ground, but she thought now she would not come back, looking up at the boat owner who seemed a little angry.

“I had a lovely day, thank you very much.” and then to herself 'I wonder if it was a boy or girl.' Then in her head came 'What difference would it make.'





## BICYCLE

Copywrite, P. Audcent 2014

Have you ever read those 'Oh I wish' type stories when you were young? Well here's one for the wrong two wheeler type!

One day Jonathan was cycling to work, it was in the city and he found it quicker than waiting for a bus, besides which he could come and go as he pleased plus the fact that the city elders had created special cycle ways. So Jonathan with his smart helmet on his head and his yellow plastic coat was as safe as houses, biking along the narrow strips of tarmac set aside for cyclists like himself.

But alas these narrow strips were also used by motorcycles illegally, they were especially used by these roaring monsters at traffic lights, enabling the motor cycle to roar ahead in advance of normal road users when the lights changed to green.

Jonathan had reached the second light before his work place and just as he applied his brakes, a 500cc motor bike brushed past him and claimed the front place before the traffic light.

"Oh I wish he did not do that." said Jonathan loudly, but the motor bike rider hadn't a helmet on and he heard him, so before he knew it a great mound of a bearded fellow looked over him.

"Was that you who said that about me you little Cretan?"

"This is a cycle way for bicycles not motor cycles." Jonathan replied, not at all put out by the big bully standing next to him, who incidently was just about to grab him and pull him off his cycle.

Just then the lights changed so the oaf rushed back to his motor bike and clambered aboard only to turn round and shaking his fist before stamping on his start lever. Well it started but it didn't move so he slipped it into gear and still it vibrated to be sure, but move it did not. Jonathan peddled past the oaf and carried on, once over the intersection he stopped and looked back only to see the motorcycle was being swallowed up by the roadway, which by the way had reached the cylinder block and was encroaching even further.

When he arrived at work he told someone what he had seen but they made no answer just pointed to the morning newspaper, there was an official notice from the city roads department. It simply said 'In light of the complaints from normal cyclists the department have placed overnight a special formulation of tarmac at city traffic lights, any vehicle over two hundred pounds will sink, so cyclists are asked to check both their own weight and that of their bicycle before coming into our city.' Jonathan grinned to himself but was admonished by his work colleague

"What?" he said, "you drive a car!"

"Yes" said the other, "and I've got two wheels stuck by a kerb a mile away! Now they tell us."

"A kerb, next door to a cycle way, you as well!"

The telephone rang, Jonathan picked it up, after a while he said 'Yes he's here, how

much!" Then turning to his colleague, "its for you, City Hall, there's a fine and recovery charge, get a bicycle next time!"

XXX

Gladys lost her husband three years back and, as she had a large house to take care of, she thought long and hard as to what to do. Her friend Susan recommended selling up and buying a small apartment. Her other friend Clarice suggested renting out a part of the large house, so she invited both her friends for dinner one day to discuss the potential of either suggestion. Well after two hours of debate they all decided that Gladys could rent out a part. The main reason was Gladys husband Edward had spent both time and a fortune on planting out the garden and Gladys still wanted something close to her that retained something of Edward. She often loved to sit in the double swing seat that they both enjoyed, and on a sunny day she still sat there clasping a cup of drink as she watched the birds dipping and diving into the concrete bird bath Edward had made.

So once decided, she put a notice in the newspaper for a companion to rent a portion of her home, three rooms in all and preferably someone who enjoyed gardening and preference to be female. She had a box number for replies as she did not want a hoard of people arriving at her front gate. It was a weekly newspaper so she had to wait some time before they rang and asked her to collect her box mail. She did the following day by catching the local bus into town. She found four letters to answer so she hurried home, eager to open them.

The first letter was from someone called Sharon, it had been on the bottom of the pile and therefore Gladys had thought it probably was the first placed in the box and therefore the earliest. Sharon turned out to be a single mother with a little boy baby five months old, but with an odd skin complaint. It was this fact that Sharon had unfortunately not found a place to stay as she was currently living with her parents. At the end of her letter she asked what was the rent and would Gladys mind about the baby? Gladys put it aside and opened the second letter.

It was from a Gregory Richard Gordon, in the back of her mind somewhere she recognised that name. But she wanted a lady not a gentleman, so she was just about to return it to the pile. However since he had written she felt obliged to read on. Mr Gordon was a young executive and was willing to pay any rental as he wanted to live close to the work place which in fact was two blocks away from her home. He said he was quite, home loving man without any faults. That 'any faults' rang a bell and she searched through her pile of old newspapers, found nothing so went on the internet and typed in Mr. Gordons full name. Ah yes, he was accused of manslaughter of an elderly lady two years ago and it was two blocks away, the block that held the Courts of Justice.

No, she said that is what I will reply.

She picked up the last two and strangely she recognised the writing from both so she carefully slit then open to find a letter from Susan and another from Clarice. She sighed, they both loved her husband's garden and she knew Susan had a certain feeling for Edward although she was Gladys friend. And Clarice could be such a

pushy person and frankly a bore, even a day with her could be fraught with resentment. So she wrote to these last three explaining why she would choose an unmarried woman with a young baby to stay with her. Of course she was extra careful to thank her own two friends and in doing so in such a way to thank them for their wonderful consideration.

To Sharon she set out a reasonable monthly rent and suggested, that if she would like to do some cleaning and general housework, she could reduce the rent considerably. Then she gave her address and asked Sharon to call to see if the three rooms would be suitable.

Now there are three ways I could end this story so its for you the reader to choose one, I will say now two are awful and horrible as they have just this moment leapt into my mind. Ah, you thought I was going to leave a lovely gentle paragraph about the little baby boy growing up in a household with his mum, with love and support for Sharon and himself giving Gladys, who by the way was childless herself (sorry I did not mention that before) was given affection and care for the rest of her mortal life. Well you may like to have that so don't read on because it gets worse!

Sharon turned out to be Mr Gordon's sister so she did away with Gladys and installed her feckless brother into the house, Gladys pension fund was purloined by forgery and a will was also forged, whilst the garden was dug in one spot to accommodate the body of poor Gladys.

The second ending happened like this, Sharon's little baby had an shocking decease which poor Gladys caught and died soon after. Sharon had to move as the house was sold and she died of a broken heart. Well that one brings up a host of questions, like why didn't her parents catch the disease, or Sharon, or the hospital. So lets leave it at two only to choose, one good one bad.

By the way Edwards garden still looked beautiful, but the roses really did bloom extraordinary well each summer!

XXX

Nancy Graham was a middle aged widow who had a son who was married to Jenny at the ripe old age of eighteen. That was six years ago but life came to a screaming halt when the boy, one Jeff Graham was found full of barbiturates had crashed into a tree near his home. This of course gave Jenny a sad end to her already rickety marriage, and to her mother in law sadness with unprecedented gossip about her son, well known for his rowdy and drunken behaviour. So he was buried with a tear from his indulgent mother and a little relief from Jenny.

And so it came to pass that Jenny unable to continue with the mortgage moved in with her mother in law. Nancy in the meantime had started proceedings against the government for the pothole in the road that her wayward son had supposedly hit. Nancy was spurred on by the frequent advertisements of legal claim companies who charged the claimants nothing in costs but received fifty percent of the payout. It was shown that the pothole itself served no purpose in the accident it being a kilometre down from the crash site. But a stomach full of liquor and drugs were the eventual cause.

When after two years Adam Henry came to rent the house next door, both women took a fancy to this tall strong blond with blue eyes. Jenny was initially very shy, having been somewhat affected by her previous marriage, but Adam seemed such a quite inoffensive man and he was gorgeous looking to boot. One would have expected Nancy to encourage her daughter in law in her gentle approach to this hunk but not a bit of it, Nancy herself was also attracted to this new neighbour, after all she was still young at heart and looking in the mirror one day she decided to buy several of the products for anti wrinkles and skin care to improve the canvass so to speak. She even got to sitting and displaying her elegant legs on the front porch bench just about the time Adam was due from work and walk past her home.

Well eventually she called him over one afternoon and they sat together with a beer discussing the ways of the world with Nancy ever so carefully bringing out Adams past and present pursuits. No, he was not engaged or married, he only rented the house next door until he had saved a deposit to buy his own home, and on and on he went until Jenny also arrived home from work. By that time Adam had quite dried up in spite of drinking three of Nancy's beers. So he shook both their hands and left hurriedly. Of course this caused eruptions to follow from Nancy. 'Could Jenny not see how well Adam was getting on with her, why couldn't she notice and stay away for awhile.' And from Jenny 'He's not interested in you Nancy with your face all covered in that gross greeny brown coloured skin enhancer.' Well the effect on Nancy was to slap Jenny across the face and then run indoors to wash the stuff off which she had forgotten to do in her eagerness to get outside onto the porch.

Well Adam had already understood the effect he was having on these two neighbours and being a thoughtful person realised this could cause friction between them. So he

packed his bags ready to leave and visited the local estate agent. He had over the past two years saved enough to place a part payment on a small apartment they were just completing down in the town, so he moved in a month later having avoided both women those previous weeks, by arriving home later at night and skulking past Nancy's house or later staying with friends. He never saw his old neighbours again.

xxx

Reg Johnson was short man and his best friend Desmond could only be described as a lot taller. Both had been at school and one day Desmond had come to the aid of the much shorter Reg who was being bullied about his stature. From then on Reg became Desmond's true friend and Desmond enjoyed having Reg to follow him around. It was hero worship and Desmond was particularly pleased at being his hero. Reg was also clever, you had to be when you were that short to keep out of trouble, so the two of them lived very close lives with Reg doing all of Desmond's homework and Desmond being on constant guard duty to rescue his friend. They grew up together and even saved and bought an apartment when in their early twenties, their parents were so used to having both children visit them that it became the norm. In short they were adopted by each others family.

Of course it took a lovely auburn haired girl to eventually split them apart and she did this small feat by appearing one evening without an escort at a local dance hall that the boys would frequently go too. Her name was Tammy and every boy in that hall that night dreamed impressionable dreams about her, not least the two close friends. Tammy was not tall, slightly higher than Reg to be sure, but she had high heels on so flat footed she, Reg felt, was exactly his size. Now Desmond, having been around Reg all this time, was sure she was the perfect girl for him. Both boys as well as many of the single male population in that hall that night had a dance with her. But only Reg and Desmond danced twice with her and both asked her out for a date. And she yes to them both but on different days.

When the boys eventually got home they naturally wanted to skite about their date and after an abrupt silence they both agreed to let Tammy decide whom she would choose for a second date should she wish. So Desmond was the first date and he came home with lipstick on his cheek and an empty wallet. When questioned by Reg he told of all the places he had taken her, some indeed were ones Reg had decided to take her too. As the boys often talked over things, Reg was not best pleased and began to lay out a plan in his mind to discredit his friend.

So the next evening he took Tammy to many of the places Desmond had taken her and when Tammy had suddenly said 'Do you two always do the same things?' Reg replied 'that he had told Desmond where he was going to take Tammy on their date and obviously Desmond, not the brightest of individuals, had used Reg's plans for his own purpose'. Well Tammy was quite taken aback but said nothing and when Reg took her back to the bus stop, which she had asked, he asked for a second date. She said Desmond had asked her for one as well and she needed time to think, but would he leave his mobile number with her.

She now had two mobile numbers but she chose not to ring either. They never saw her again.



*I wrote this story hunched over a Mainframe computer waiting for the electronics to finish their processing in 1989. It was to be about a gentle giant running his piggery, more than a prediction of the fall of the Soviet Union. The fact that a new Russian Federation was born in December 1991, was pure coincidence. This started as a short story but got longer and longer thus I divided it into chapters, well it was a long night at work and I had to keep awake for the processing and various switches to press!*

**The Monastery.**

Copyright P Audcent 1989

## **CHAPTER ONE. Beginnings.**

The mist swirled as the wind picked up, bringing intermittent showers and numbing cold. Beneath the sandstone headland the sea swell surged rhythmically, echoing deeply within the hollowed out cliffs. Dawn was coming and the old mother sow was dying. Stefan clasped her head closer to his chest and prayed that old age be banished from that moment on so that life on earth could be truly eternal. Alas the old sow sensing his grief, grunted once then lay still as the life force left her. He covered her head with his overcoat and blessed her with his hand, then fell exhausted into a deep untroubled sleep wedged between her enormous body and the doorway he had hauled her through.

The wind increased and the mist dispersed. He awoke to the roar of an oncoming thunderstorm, so levering himself up and out of the doorway he trudged wearily across the yard and commenced digging her grave where he buried her alongside a host of chickens, geese and lambs. Then he shouldered his spade and with his great arms outstretched, herded the other animals along toward the farmhouse. Brushing his large hands over their heads and necks he comforted each one, and they, feeling his touch, entered the old house and settled down to await a change in the weather.

Thus for five years this had been the life of the St. Owen Abbey pig-man, a daily ritual of feeding, grooming, caring and loving his animals. For reasons best known to themselves the abbey fathers had decreed that their famous breeding stock of pigs and sheep be kept well away from the walls of their enchanted enclave lest the smell drive the friars to distraction. Volunteers were always sought on an annual basis, but strangely none were forthcoming. It was left to Stefan, after all he was so good with the pigs, and pretty useless at anything else. The abbey tutors discovered long ago he had this disagreeable habit of debating every new rule that the fathers, in their combined wisdom, decided to implement. It was useless to explain to Stefan the reason for these rules and procedures and why they were necessary, particularly as they generally encompassed the improvement in comfort and convenience for the staff. One such covered a new regulation that no food or sustenance was to be given away in times of famine, as the brothers would need extra food to sustain their heavier duties in providing spiritual relief to the populace. Stefan took some offence at this even though nobody could ever remember when the last famine had occurred.

Brother Stefan by no means languished in the piggery, for in truth he probably found

the company more to his liking. Occasionally he would herd the season's progeny up to the small roadside yard for collection by the local market people. The pigs were sold to farmers to improve their stock, and knowing they would be safe and cared for, he would shout and wave goodbye as they were trundled off to the farms or sales yards. Then he would wash as best he could, and walk across the fields up to the abbey where he would visit the chapel for an hour before heading off to the abbot's office for fresh instructions. Scrub as he might he was never quite able to get a tang of piggy smell off his cloths so nobody followed him into chapel, and, if they were there already, some polite excuse followed by a hurried exit was often the case

It was a new trainee recently arrived, who unwittingly entered the portals of the chapel precisely at the same time Stefan arrived, and as Stefan was senior, the novice was thoughtful enough to kneel some distance behind him. Though engrossed in prayer, a movement suddenly attracted the younger man, and looking quickly up he saw Stefan rise majestically in a kneeling position to hover over the altar rail. The poor novice was astounded and after a while managed to get enough courage to gain a better vantage point. Indeed Stefan was floating unaided with his head sunk deeply on his broad chest, his huge beard wagging up and down as he chatted away.

Of course the novice's report would not have been believed had he not been the abbot's nephew.

'Father Abbot, Uncle, the brother who looks after the pigs was flying in the chapel' The youth was nervously shaking either in wonder or trepidation.

The abbot ordered his nephew to obedient silence, dismissed him and then pondered on the possibilities of such an event. As caution was the better choice, he asked Stefan to remain at the abbey and the unfortunate nephew was despatched to care for the pigs and other animals. A watch was set by three of the abbey brothers to follow Stefan into the chapel, and report any strange occurrences. A week passed with no unusual happenings, the old Abbot breathed a sigh of relief and prepared to write a sharp letter to his sister about her son. As pen reached paper one of the brothers opened the Abbot's door and beckoned him to follow quickly. They arrived to see Stefan bent in prayer, hover over the sacristy rail and land gently in front of the altar. They heard his final prayer 'I miss my friends the animals, give the Abbot a little push please'

Events from herein moved rapidly and the Bishop's secretary was informed forthwith. The young priest with a clutch of very respectable doctorates ran post haste to his Lordship's gazebo where lunch was being served. The Bishop waved his secretary to the opposite chair and commenced to fill his plate up while the event of that morning was recounted to him. Being no fool the Bishop proffered a number of theories that could explain the occurrence, but the priest assured him that Father Abbott himself had witnessed the event and urgent attention to the matter was needed. His Lordship thought for a few minutes and he then bade the priest to drive down to the Abbey to investigate the matter.

"Always knew that doctorate would come in useful, now off you go, take my car, keep an open mind and, for heavens sake, not a word to anyone. Tell Father Abbot that proof is what we need, suggest a Polaroid photo or two - you don't suppose they have a video camera there?"

The secretary shook his head and scurried off through the rhododendrons toward the garages, leaving his Lordship somewhat bemused at the stir such an event would have had in those comfortable cloisters of Saint Owen

## **CHAPTER TWO Offerings**

It was early evening when the secretary was ushered into the abbot's study, and the abbot himself poured two glasses of sherry as he showed his guest a large sofa to sit on.

"Frightful business really"

"I would have thought the opposite, Father Abbot, a miracle indeed!"

"Exactly the wrong time too, really its too much", sighed the old man.

"But just what we need to instil a little faith into our brethren surely?"

"We'll be the laughing stock of the Pigs and Sheep Breeders Federation no doubt, look we have contracts to fulfil, our sheep stock is highly regarded, we have a shipment due in less than two months to Saudi." He paused somewhat out of breath.

"Saudi Arabia?" exclaimed the young priest

"Middle East you know, a market recently opened up at great expense, the Arabs have plenty of cash, not promissory notes mark you, but hard cash."

"That's a bit pecuniary Father Abbot?"

"Nonsense, it's called business, but I hardly expect those who live in ivory towers to understand. Now what did his Lordship have to say on the matter?"

"Well he didn't say much at all except to be sure to get a photo. He did seem amused by the incident"

The Abbot lifted his hands to his forehead.

"Did it again, our brother Stefan, just an hour ago, we didn't have anything but a video camera handy at the time so we used that. Father Dunster hid behind the second confessional and fortunately the light was sufficient to capture the event." The Abbot reached for the decanter and poured a fresh supply of amber liquid into their glasses.

"Wonderful, wonderful" the young priest clasped his hands in joy "May I speak to the brother if that isn't too much bother?"

The Abbott sighed, then rose and pressed a small electric button on his desk.

"Brother James will take you to his cell, I mean that literally, we've locked him up for safety reasons"

The secretary spent an hour or so with Stefan and discovered many things about farmyard animals in general piglets in particular, and sheep that gave birth to twins, but nothing about bodily elevation. Stefan said in all humility that he had never met one of those magicians and had no intention of allowing more than one foot off the ground at a time. The young priest persisted in his questioning but got no further. He returned to the abbot, collected the video tape, promising to return it when he and the

Bishop had seen the evidence, then drove back to the palace in a high state of excitement.

The Bishop was settled in the television room and was engrossed in a documentary on bee keeping, a subject close to his heart as he loved to potter in the garden where he had two hives to satisfy a sweet tooth.

"My Lord, I have a video no less, of the event!"

"Do sit down Father please, this is very interesting," his Lordship jabbed a finger to an empty chair.

"Yes, isn't it, a fantastic piece of luck the abbey having a video camera."

"Very modern and progressive I'm sure", said his Lordship, "Now kindly keep quite."

"Please may...we must see the event at once." The secretary rose up and headed for the video machine.

The Bishop shrugged his shoulders, he loved honey, and they were demonstrating a new smoke canister, he made a mental note to send away for one.

"Very well if you insist," then he sat back as the secretary loaded the cassette and started it up.

Though somewhat shaky and dark there was no mistaking Stefan and his heavy beard flapping away at his chest in his pew. Suddenly he rose to a height of two metres, floated for several minutes then returned slowly down to the pew. The Bishop rubbed his eyes and called for a second showing, then a third. Deep in thought he rose and bidding his secretary goodnight, went to bed dreaming of beeswax and honey.

The Archbishop was a grisly birdlike man with wisps of fine white hair protruding from behind the ears and a set of cool blue eyes that made many a Bishop somewhat uneasy. The cardinal's cap had eluded him thus far, for his manner was both cold and remote and those who count in the Curia noted these things. He was, nevertheless, a true man of the cloth, had a genuine affection for mankind in general, particularly the underdog. When informed of the phenomenon at St. Owen he ordered that Stefan be allowed to return to normal duties, further no special protective or security measures were to hinder the brothers work. He advised the Bishop to keep an eye on the Abbey and consult directly with Rome.

Brother Stefan was returned without ceremony to his lonely farmhouse and the Abbot's nephew returned to the safety of the Abbey. Rome was duly informed by a formal request from the Bishop to investigate the event. Ultimately the request became buried under a pile of other miracle reporting. The wheels of bureaucracy turn very slowly in any society, particularly in the case of the Vatican with its rusty bearings. So the Abbot was taken by surprise when eight months after the event had occurred, a highly regarded servant of the Curia turned up on his doorstep to request an interview with both the witnesses and Stefan.

"I'll have Brother Stefan brought immediately", said the Abbot

"No, please, I'd like to see him on his home turf so to speak", replied the Monsignor,

"But first the Bishop informs me you have both witnesses and a video tape, so please allow me to interview them and then look at the tape."

Monsignor stayed at the abbey for three days interviewing the monks closely associated with the event. He visibly choked when the Abbot's nephew, in a state of high euphoria, exaggerated the height of Stefan's flight.

"But Brother you reported a mere two metres nine months ago, now you say Stefan rose up to twelve metres, which am I to believe?"

"Fourteen it was sir."

"Truly remarkable since the ceiling in the chapel is only seven!"

The nephew blushed and said mathematics was never his best school subject.

"Nor estimation or truth it would seem", came the droll reply.

On the fourth day Monsignor drove down to the farm by himself. As luck would have it Stefan was in one of the outbuildings tending a sheep with a broken leg.

Monsignor introduced himself and sat down on a bale of Lucerne to watch the brother tackle the job at hand.

"You'll splint it I suppose rather than put the animal down?" he asked.

"No, its a clean break and will heal quickly", said Stefan.

"Really!" exclaimed an amused Monsignor, "But how long is quickly?"

Stefan looked up, then without replying set the leg and wrapped a bandage firmly around the limb.

"Off you go now and be more careful of that rocky outcrop. You aren't a mountain goat, though you may act like one sometimes." He raised the sheep up and gently ushered the creature through the door.

"That's cruel Brother Stefan, Gods creatures deserve better treatment."

"I'm sorry Monsignor but I don't follow you. "

"The leg you foolish man may be set, but that bandage will work loose soon and the animal will suffer a greater pain. Call it back at once please."

"Come then we will call the sheep back, you are right that bandage could be harmful after all", Stefan raised his voice and the sheep trotted back to them. He lay the animal on its side and unrolled the bandage.

"Now off you go your leg will have greater freedom to move and you won't go tripping on the bandage." The sheep leapt to its feet and bounded away like a rabbit in spring.

"Remarkable", said Monsignor quietly, then in a louder voice, "Of course the leg could only have been sprained or maybe just a graze"

"Maybe," replied the Brother "But the cause and answer is not important. The sheep is whole again, that's all that is important to her."

Monsignor returned to the abbey two days later, wished the Abbot a happy day then went on to the Bishops residence to give him an interim report.

The Bishop had laid out lunch in the Gazebo on the back lawn and served Monsignor himself so they wouldn't be disturbed.

"Have you seen the video yet?" he inquired

"I am so pleased your Lordship did not serve lamb today." Monsignor smiled at his host.

"Well come on, what do you think?"

"Having not actually witnessed the event myself, I can only presume the evidence has a basis of truth therefore I would like to take Brother Stefan to Rome for further research I think the Brother is gifted but I am not prepared to say more."

"Out of the question " said his Lordship between mouthfuls, "The pigs would never allow it!"

"Pigs?"

"The farm animals. I think Stefan would be happiest where he is, in his own world not somebody else's, if you get the implication."

"You would veto his coming to Rome?"

"Yes, for his own protection and our salvation."

"The Archbishop would support you in this?"

"Most certainly, we both play a round of golf occasionally and I would refuse to allow him to win! " The Bishop leant back and grinned.

"Pity, a man of Stefan's ability and simplicity. We would have bought a breath of fresh air into the higher echelon of our Mother Church."

"You would have killed him with kindness or captivity, now eat your lunch

Monsignor, I do hope you write a slightly less enthusiastic account when you get home and leave our Brother Stefan in peace."

Monsignor nodded his assent then dutifully tucked into his food all the while calculating the chances of an unofficial kidnap. His Lordship smiled broadly at his guest and pointing his finger at Monsignor.

"Tony, off the record, no abduction or tricks of that sort or you'll not get a portion of cooks trifle, made with my own honey. Besides which, it would be the ducking stool for you." The Monsignor blushed, then roared with laughter.

"Maybe, maybe not, but I'd be a classic fool to tackle an old fox like you!"

They parted as friends that evening and Stefan remained secure in the world that he loved.

### **CHAPTER THREE. Troubles and turmoil**

Life returned to normal at the abbey and Stefan's visits to the chapel were rarer. His duties, plus the fact that the Abbot had converted a small metal shed as a chapel on the farm for Stefan to pray in. The shed was slightly lower than Stefan's ample frame. The Bishop himself came down to consecrate it and dubbed it in his mind 'the farmers retreat'. But he pronounced it loudly as 'The Chapel of St Francis.' The video remained dormant in the Abbots cupboard safe and sound.

Alas nothing ever stays still for very long, for the abbey had prospered, particularly as the Danes had purchased a swag of piglets at enormous cost to themselves. So the Abbey 癩 furniture was either repaired or replaced. Father Abbott, being first in line

had his study refurbished and the old furniture was auctioned off in the city. Needless to say both the cupboard and its contents went under the hammer to of all people, the local Mayor. He was a person who held political views slightly left of the far left, and the discovery and subsequent playing of the video together with the knowledge of from whence it came, set his mind in a whirl. Strange to say he did not suspect for one moment the video to be a fake. He had the prudence to realise that in spite of all his shortcomings the Abbey was an honestly run enterprise and not given to larking about. He smelt what one would call a heck of a story, or a heck of an inconvenience depending on which political foot you were standing on. As both his feet were a brilliant scarlet with hammer and sickle to boot, he forwarded the tape in a plain brown parcel to a friend who might perchance have a use for such an item.

Meanwhile, a Polish Pope had been elected a few years earlier, an austere man but also a patriot. The Iron curtain countries continued to be alarmed at the mantle of power bestowed upon one so strong in temperament and personality. They demanded some neutralisation of this man by the Soviets before he turned their world upside down. Moscow disagreed, it was too concerned with its own economical plight, but agreed to turn a blind eye to other attempts to discredit Rome, or worse, attacks on the person of the Pope. The Pope blooded by a bullet became less interested in diplomacy and more strident in his demands for freedom of his eastern flock. The satellite countries requested prompt action by Moscow to curtail the Papal onslaught, so a brief but highly productive meeting took place in a small dacha outside of Moscow. Present were officials from the KGB, GRU, and Kremlin security. The Service Chief of a department simply called 'the unit' was invited into the discussion. His department was not subversive, merely a collection and storage office of miscellaneous information patiently screened and filed away for future use.

A committee was formed by the politburo with each of the services represented by a senior person. Thus a second meeting took place at the same dacha. Four pieces of information were presented to the new committee. The video of Brother Stefan was certainly the most unusual, highly improbable, therefore the most likely piece of news the decadent west would accept. It had everything going for it, religious, human and animal interest, more importantly it had not cost a rouble.

In New York, some weeks later a dapper little man sold a copy of the video together with an overview of where it had been filmed, to the mighty American Broadcasting Company. They in turn decided to include it in a news segment after the briefest of checking the accuracy of the tape. They had a human-interest story and with Easter fast approaching a short piece on miracles in general and this event in particular would be an apt time to air the story. The public reaction was enormous and the demand for more information forced both the ABC and its competitors to reshow the video with discussion panels afterwards to give the pro's and con's. Even more strangely not one member of these panels was a Catholic let alone a practising Christian. But all expressed their divergent expert opinions with great authority. Even bell ringing, and table lifting managed to find their way into the discussions.

The public fed up with the normal daily round of crisis and negative news demanded more of the religious theme. The news hounds were released; the story floated from continent to continent but the Mother Church remained deeply apprehensive.

A spark can become a raging inferno by a little judicious fanning, and Moscow Central were experts where misinformation was concerned. The abbey soon became the focal point of the ferocious media pack fed by regular drops of misinformation originating from the East. The poor Abbott had the presence of mind to lock all doors and keep the telephone off the hook. Alas his nephew, having a penchant for opening his mouth when on a visit to his mother's local Inn, imbibed too much and poured out all he knew into the ears of a lady from "The Post".

The Bishop, meanwhile, had never foreseen the newspapers eagerness to get their hands on 'the miracle' monk, so he had Brother Stefan whisked away to the safety of the city with room and board at the Sisters Of Charity. There Stefan stayed in sanctuary whilst greater minds than his, plotted their next move.

The Vatican knew that the bubble was to be burst at some future time, but even the CIA couldn't fathom out when that time would be. Consequences would be traumatic. Euphoria was wild, those demanding more information further criticised the Church for not utilising Stefan as an advertisement for Christianity. Monsignor called the Bishop and they debated the issue at great length. Brother Stefan was to go to Rome for his own safety, Mother Superior was getting more alarmed at the chance of his breaking her crystal lights in her chapel, and she wanted him out. One chandelier had already been shattered. The Bishop asked he be sent to a non-Christian country to serve out his life in peace, however the Americans wanted him for research, the French needed a new saint and the South Americans wanted another idol, as the Peron's were now dead.

Monsignor flew over to Cornwall a few days later.

"My Lord, whichever way we jump those grandmasters of chess will have us in their palms. They intend to cut this appalling interest in one swipe and the Church will undoubtedly suffer for a decade or more".

"But Stefan really does have a gift, not only in levitation, as you well know. Why not admit it to the world?"

"Far too risky, the higher we rise the deeper we fall."

"I'm concerned with his healing abilities Monsignor. God gives his gifts to be used. We can't keep him incarcerated for ever, besides Mother Superior has just written me an ultimatum."

"Very well, let Stefan return to the farm, to be seen by those who wish, if the Soviets act we can deny the event and disclaim the video as a prank of the youngsters in the abbey. We can't win more souls at the expense of loosing them."



Moscow had been sure the Church would react differently and use the free publicity to its greatest advantage. The Vatican issued a brief statement requesting calm and common sense to prevail. Further, the video was badly shot by an amateur, however the Church would not refuse to allow the Brother to meet with the media if the public so demanded to set every bodies mind at ease.

Thus a week later Brother Stefan met with a group of correspondents and denied all knowledge of levitating during prayer.

"When I pray I am not aware of my physical being and certainly would be greatly shocked if I rose up even two centimetres. I don't think that to get close to God means you have to climb a mountain. Better to stay where we are, both feet on the ground and our minds in the air, rather than the other way round."

"Have you seen the video in question?" asked one reporter.

"No, I have no need of television or radio, my music and songs are in the countryside around me. "

"Wouldn't it surprise you to know the film shows you actually levitating?"

"Nothing surprises me in this world, or indeed in the next, we are all Gods children and no doubt eager to learn as we progress toward our Lords intentions".

"Can you heal?" asked the lady from 'The Post'.

The room became tense as Stefan scratched his beard and thought awhile.

"Yes, I am an instrument to heal", he said quietly. "We can all be used to heal, prayer is very powerful, its a gift we could all share."

"Perhaps, but you heal in particular".

"Enough, I know where you wish to lead me, but healing is a natural process within our own bodies, I do not heal as an individual, by prayer I ask God to help and sometimes he does, there lies the Lord's gift to us all."

"You speak in riddles Brother."

"Can you write the simple truth, or must you garnish your reporting to titillate the public pallet, so bending or destroying the original concept. So you will do with me. Strange that the simplicity of truth when written down looks so small and insignificant, you'll want to pad it here and there to make a repast into a banquet. I have no idea why I levitate if indeed I do, but I do know that the Lord can heal using whatever means is at hand. Be it a man, woman, child or tree, flower, shrub or the wind and rain. It doesn't matter which. What is important is the means to achieve the end and gives proof of Gods love for his Universe".

The Bishop arrived in the nick of time to save Stefan from fending off more questions about the Universe and its components, something he had neither interest nor knowledge. Whilst guiding him through the door his Lordship turned, thanked the media for their visit and suggested a small contribution to the building fund would be appreciated.

Though the interview had barely lasted eight minutes, Stefan was not wrong in his assessment of reporters, that a town of Babel was much in evidence as long and conflicting accounts hit the news-stands and the TV screens across the world.

People listened, debated and some disbelieved, many others did not.

Moscow was pleased, the reports had far exceeded their wildest dreams, all manner of admissions and fantasies had been dreamed up to serve a demented public thirst for miracles. The Committee met some weeks later to discuss their final tactics.

"Bring him down with a wallop or let him become yesterdays news," said KGB.

"No advantage to us unless we get maximum impact." said GRU.

"Kidnap him, and say he's come to the land of his choice." said the beefy lady from the Kremlin admiring Stefan's portrait in front of her.

"No advantage in that either, some would claim he'd come to convert us". GRU scratched his nose with a pencil "We'd get a martyr or a saint more like."

They surveyed the despatches from around the world and were about to break for food and vodka when the door opened.

"Our comrade executives are entirely pleased at the way things are progressing, they are concerned that this great opportunity will be lost unless we act now. They agree with the KGB, the time is ripe to bring down the curtain on this provocation from Rome". The General Secretary himself leaned against the door as they turned somewhat startled at his presence.

"Well, come on get on with the vote, then to the vodka."

In less than a minute they had voted for the downfall of Brother Stefan as soon as the publicity had peaked. The KGB were left to devise a plan whereby a false video would be produced showing clearly the outline of wires suspending Stefan in the air. A copy of the original was dispatched post haste to a secure film lab where cartoonists set up their boards and worked the night away.

In Rome the Vatican parried all questioning with discretion and charm. Secretly they were amazed at the enormous interest which the event had aroused, pleased too at the overwhelming support of apathetic parishioners who turned up in droves for Sunday Mass. By this time the media had discovered the whereabouts Of the Abbey farm and photographed every animal in sight 'A new Francis of Assisi' proclaimed one program,

'A shepherd guiding his flock of sheep' raved another though what the pigs thought about being collectively called sheep is anybody's guess.

Stefan returned to the farm and shooed away all the busybodies tramping over his paddocks. As fences had been broken he set about mending them, then off he went in hot pursuit calling those animals that had strayed into the hills that backed onto the farm. Of course the T V crews had a field day, and the sight of Stefan lumbering back to the farm with his horses, pigs, and a gaggle of errant geese following on behind gave viewers a real turn on.

The Curia loved it as well, collecting plates filled to overflowing, other religious communities found nice things to say about 'them Romans' and Governments eager for the votes of Christians promised funds for schools, hospitals, and even to upgrade churches buildings. Offers poured in for Brother Stefan to take on lecture tours or

become an honorary vet.

The Moscow committee met on a Tuesday morning, it was early autumn and the cool winds from the North-east had begun to stir. They settled into canvas chairs sipping vodka to warm their bodies, their hearts were already afire.

"Now" said KGB

"Now" said GRU

"Yes we all agree, now we strike!" said the lady from the Kremlin.

The tainted video from Moscow Central 's lab was distributed immediately through several channels, a relief organisation in Africa, a military Government in South America, a trade union in Portugal, and an activist group in Australia. Each tape came with a concise list of instructions on how and when to release the tapes to the media. The Vatican learnt through its highly unofficial collecting agency of what was to occur and by what means, but how to stop it they had no idea.

"Diplomatic pressure" said one Cardinal.

"First Station to show the tape we'll sell its shares," said another.

"Its the Devils work we can't compete," wailed another.

"Lets go and see the Holy Father," said a fourth.

The Pope received them promptly and sat them down in front of him.

"Well my friends and brothers in Christ, have you come to some agreement?"

"Deny the whole episode, we don't have an alternative do we Holy Father," said one.

"Quite right. We are in the clear, a head or two may fall in the process but the Church will live on", said a second.

"I presume the head you mention may be Brother Stefan's or the Father Abbots?"

The Pope looked at them all sharply.

"Certainly, hopefully it won't go further than the Abbot's head, so to speak" replied the first Cardinal.

"Speak I will though", said the Pope, with a glint of steel in his eye, "You will not touch one hair of anybody's head or allow it to be done. We are all Gods children".

"But Holy Father Moscow are behind all this!" exclaimed another, "and if you will pardon the expression, they hold the trump cards."

"Perhaps in our eyes that may be so, but they hold neither the grace nor favour of Our Lord. You have little faith in miracles and even less in understanding the simplicity of Gods ways." The Pope rose and smiled at them all, "Think again of the truth of what you saw on the abbey film, can you be sure that Gods hand was not upon Brother Stefan?"

They shook their heads slowly.

"Then go now, you have important duties to perform, tell our people what I have said.

If you will, keep alert by all means, then play your hand of cards with charity and truth. When we study a fine painting to closely all we can see is the canvas weave covered by paint, however we must stand back to enjoy the artists work!" He left them with furrowed brows and a resignation to the worst that surely must come.

## **CHAPTER FOUR. The fall and what came after**

Moscow had predicted the crash would be both loud and long, a disaster for organised religions. The false videos created an enormous and terrible reaction from both media and the world at large. The results were devastating for all, Churches emptied overnight, governments reversed funding the projects, the press pillared the Church and a negative wind blew fiercely across the continents turning faith and hope into anguish and apathy. The media returned to its role of sporting commentaries and political drama, and a quite anger raged in many hearts at being cheated by a cruel hoax.

Time and tide wait for no man, and Brother Stefan found himself and his animals at the ugly end of verbal abuse and physical torment. One night the youths from the nearby city fell upon the farm, quickly and silently they fired the farm buildings and chased the animals, herding them toward the cliffs. Stefan arose in alarm when he heard the animals cries, and quickly dressing he rushed out following the din to the lower paddocks, he pushed aside one, then another as they tried to hinder him, but eventually he was caught and his flailing arms were pinned brutally behind his back. They held him tightly to watch his beloved companions forced off the cliff edge and certain death. Luckily the geese flew up and the horses bolted though the mob and back over the fences but the circling louts trapped the pigs and sheep ever closer to the sea below.

The Leader of the louts laughed shrilly at Stefan.

"Save them man of God save one save them all if you can!" the louts shrieked in unison.

"How may I save them?" asked the angry and bewildered monk.

"By magic or strings from the belfry whichever you choose," shouted the Leader, then turning away he called for the slaughter to begin. Stock whips cracked, voices boomed and madness was at hand.

The pigs had gathered their senses and finding the hiss and spray of the sea below somewhat wet and chilly they decided the fiery farm buildings were a warmer place to go to, so they moved. Perhaps spurred on by the sight of Stefan being manhandled they surged forward, roaring and trampling roughshod as they went. The sheep used to following anything that moved came on behind kicking and weaving between the great pink flanks of the pigs. Chaos reigned supreme as this heaving bellowing mass of bodies broke through the ring of youths, lifting, kicking, stomping ever onwards taking Stefan with them as they felled man and woman, boy and girl. Fearful of the flames of fire, they twisted back on their path carving once more through the fallen human bodies, thence onward they sped toward the Abbey, a roaring angry mass with Stefan spread-eagled on top of the two largest porkers. Finally they stopped, at of all places the Abbey vegetable patch. Somewhat mollified by the lushness around them they settled down for a solid nights feeding.

Stefan took the largest sow back with him to the farm and picking up two pails of water proceeded to revive those louts still lying about nursing their wounds. He found

some had broken arms, others had shin-bones and collarbones cracked by the force of the pigs trotters. Others just lay shattered by the onslaught but otherwise unhurt. The leader lay against a blackened fence with blood seeping out from his forehead.

"Hells bells", was all Stefan could get out of him. Laying the palms of his hands on each one, he recited a short prayer asking forgiveness for his anger and that of his animals. As the dawn broke and the sun slowly climbed above the sea, the young men and women sat around the monk and the great pink sow. He blessed them all in Gods name, dressing their wounds, resetting broken bones, finally he bade them farewell. They arose and without a word drifted off to the road back to the city jungle from whence they came. All bore the marks of battle, cuts and bruises by the score, but they tramped along heads held high and not a limp between them.

Unfortunately for the Curia, the battle against the adverse publicity did not meet with the same success. Instead of dying a natural death, the saga of the false videos became the basis of anti Vatican documentaries and articles. Things, day by day were getting worse, a new Italian Government was sworn in comprising in the main of extreme left elements. The very dome of St. Peters rang with the wailing and gnashing of teeth. The Holy Father blessed smaller crowds in the square, but otherwise seemed to be unaffected by the tumult around him.

The Bishop had been worried to. He drove down to talk to Father Abbot and they both went down to the farm. They found him mixing the corn and bran in a barn for the animals, with his paddle like hands sifting and churning this way and that. "Brother Stefan", said his Lordship hesitatingly, "Times are hard for us all and through no fault of yours, we have received several cancellations for the abbey's stock of pigs. In short, the market has dried up and people prefer to deal with other farming institutions and not our abbey. "

Stefan sat down and held his hands to his head.

"Also considerable damage was done to our market garden, so we have to buy our vegetables from outside," chimed in Father Abbot.

"Alas we must sell the stock here for we should feed Gods children at the abbey ahead of breeding Sows, both of us will pray for you on this sad day." The Bishop wiped his brow and patted Stefan's shoulder in consolation. The monk sat quite still, his eyes tightly shut and his arms clasped about his girth, and then suddenly he rose to his feet. The problem was he kept rising higher and higher, his feet just missing the Bishops nose. Both clerics knelt, more by shock than revelation, and stared up at the roof through which Stefan's head had just passed. He stayed up there suspended like a puppet on string for five minutes, then gently came down to earth.

"I cannot understand the silliness of folk," shaking his mop haired head from side to side, "Our pigs are the finest breed stock in the country, farmers will gain so much by using them, why do they judge so badly?"

"Its the way of the world", said his Lordship gravely, "We are but a flicker of Light compared to the Maker of our universe."

"True," said Stefan "But even the short flicker of a match can light the way

sometimes... Please be patient both of you, I plead not for the loss of my animals, for the farmers will tend them as well as I, no I plead for sanity."

The Clerics looked at one another and the Abbot, pointing his finger upward said, "I promise we'll not be rash, because I suspect there's more in that head of yours than you are telling, though what it is I cannot fathom."

The Bishop had fathomed it, "One match. Oh dear me one match a negative at the moment but a positive light to come, really the pieces on this chess board are merely pawns, yet there is still hope from little seeds great trees do grow. Come Father Abbott we are off to the city to catch us some lads and lasses."

"I want the town scoured for the hooligans who set fire to the Abbey farm, bring them to me not the police is that clear." The Bishop glared at his secretary; "All available hands to the pump, priests and parishioners even the youth clubs."

"Yes" the startled secretary muttered.

"And please get me Monsignor In Rome as soon as convenient we have a fight on our hands, I suspect the weapon we shall use will be beyond even Moscow's control.

We had left Monsignor somewhat out of the story, but Tony Carter was a man of great vision, boundless good humour and an ex Formula One racing driver to boot.

He received the bishop's call later that day in Rome and they devised a simple plan. Monsignor would let the truth surface from the Bishops own domain, and then he would gently fan the flames into a roaring fire wind that would singe the twisted minds of those within the Kremlin. It was not a plan of revenge or an act against the enemy, merely a campaign of truth.

The American ambassador hosted a party for all and sundry at the Embassy in Moscow, it was an early winter evening as guests arrived huddled in furs both real and imaginary to gorge themselves on Western food and wine. The General Secretary and a Politburo general had bought along the three committee members to celebrate their victory.

"Bad business that Stefan hoax," said the General Secretary to the Ambassador Coats when they were alone.

"Yes, we suspect your people may have had a part in the game."

"Nonsense Ambassador," his eyes twinkled.

"Why are you Soviets so afraid of a simple monk like Stefan?"

"You have a saying in the West which we also once used, God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. We cannot allow the stupidity of your religious folly to hold our people back, they were born serfs and died serfs in the old days, now at least they have equal opportunity. The Soviet is built using the best people we have, progress by using science and technology, not idolatry. Devotion is also a watch word with me, but not to an unknown power but to the State, we are at least honest about that."

"General Secretary, I congratulate you on your game of misinformation, but I suspect

your opponents King has not quite fallen though you may hold him in check, but the move is his."

"The King may have his move, the clock has started, but he will fall not by himself its true, but by the apathy of his followers. If he does exist, and there are a few in the USSR who believe this, then at least he will be hidden from our eyes. I care not for belief or disbelief, I care for the power to protect our socialistic principles imperfect they may be, but we have a more equal society than you give us credit for."

"Economic barriers separate your people as much as mine Secretary, there are rich and poor, protected and unprotected in both our Countries, yet the freedom of thought, word and deed is essential for our democracy and meaningless to yours. I bid you a good evening Sir, I believe the French Ambassador wishes to speak with you now." He then escorted the General Secretary to the French contingent's table where their Ambassador rose to meet them.

"We have been raped twice in two world wars like you French. We have lost good people to the Germanic war machine, the Americans will never quite understand our caution." The General Secretary jabbed his finger at the French ambassador, "We will protect ourselves from further attempts by brain and brawn, not prayer to a non-existent God who allows people like Hitler to exist."

"About those trade discussions on the computer equipment Secretary," the French ambassador replied deftly.

"Computers?"

"Yes, the talks have stalled again, your people insist on the latest technology, which incidentally we haven't released in our own country."

"Give it to us and we will pay a fair price. You cannot expect us to continue to buy old second hand Western goods. The wheat we sell to France is from the latest crop."

"Very well Secretary I will speak to the Foreign Affairs Dept. on that issue and report your comments."

The General Secretary grunted his approval and rose to leave "Are you a Christian by any chance Ambassador?"

"No, I am an atheist, Secretary."

"I think the King may live, we have been too clever," mused the Soviet Chief as he glanced over to his wooden faced KGB general across the room who was wrapped in conversation with the committee of three.

"I believe your Emperor was deposed, and disposed of," the Frenchman smiled, "so what King are you talking about. Is it you?"

"Why, me?"

"We have heard a rumour Secretary that a certain General is in line for your chair."

"Alas there are many Kings and like many, you have also missed the point. Perhaps we are all disposable I would like to think not. Thank you Ambassador for the advice, give your President my personal regards, he was most hospitable to my nephew last summer." Pushing his chair away he shook hands, waved his thanks to the Americans, then left the Embassy to revellers and diplomats alike. His mind had now been made up.

## **CHAPTER FIVE. Endings and beginnings**

Some men and women are born great, some achieve greatness and some are great only after death. Some are given gifts of enormous potential some are bestowed gifts of seemingly insignificance. The General Secretary had the latter, acquiring by some means or other a nose for trouble. He mulled over the Frenchman's comments in the car then rang the American Embassy. He sacked the Committee of three for bad behaviour at the reception, they had happily got drunk and abusive. He instigated a complete review of the infamous video fraud and several film technicians winged their way into Siberia. Dissidents were released, Orthodox churches allowed to reopen.

Naturally the Politburo were furious, at least the factions that had always disliked him, so they opened their filling cabinets and dusted down old plans to get rid of him. They had made secret inquiries in the support they could muster from the armed services, Satellite States and Party Faithful. They set a day upon which they would all meet, to face him and force him to the party line or extract his resignation, the latter was the preferred option. They had in mind as his successor the grim grey KGB general or even a willing drunker politician, keen on expansion and preservation of the State as it was and his own pocket.

And so it came to pass that a genial golf playing Bishop saved the neck of the General Secretary of the USSR when the Bishop interviewed the scoundrels who had invaded the Abbey farm.

"Were you hurt in the skirmish?" the Bishop asked.

"Yes, few broken bones and what not." replied the Leader cautiously.

"And pray when did you take your hospital plaster casts off?"

"We never had any need to go to hospital."

"Fitted you up did he?"

"Yes"

"Go tell your story, its the least you can do, tell the truth alone, no fabrications just the facts unless you are cowards."

This rebuke annoyed many that were there.

"We will tell the truth, as you request, you don't need to insult us."

"Then go, you'll meet resistance at first, but they'll x-ray you and take pictures, by then you will have done enough."

The media had thankfully sunk into a state of torpor, when the news came of a noisy group of belligerent teenagers having a sit-in inside the local Television Station. The group was permitted to tell its story; haltingly they painted a rich and lively picture of the events surrounding the raid on the farm. The Mayor called on the police, who arrived soon after and carted the mob off to the cells to await the magistrate. The whole process of law churned slowly into gear. The media sniffed but laid low. Monsignor rang a racing columnist in London, a friendly editor there, slowly the



news took shape. Later an unknown source in Moscow reported the theft of specialist video equipment, an added rider to the message disputed the authenticity of the Stefan tapes. In America the fraudulent tapes were re-examined and bore marks that confirmed their irregularity. Stolen Soviet equipment was eventually discovered in a warehouse in a Muslim city.

The baying hounds of the networks leapt into action, the quickest turn around in the history of the recorded word came about and the day dawned bright in Moscow when the Politburo met. Not one head turned as the Secretary made his way slowly to his chair.

"Ah a perfect day" he said as he beamed around at his colleagues.

"I believe we need some younger blood in the inner sanctum, we've all worked hard and some of you need rest and retirement. I compliment you on your patience and fortitude over the last few months, a trying time for us all. What a shame General Greroff's plan did not succeed. He can't join us today but he has my sympathy. It's rather cold where he is."

"What do you propose General Secretary?" asked one of the Ministers sadly.

The Pope welcomed Monsignor, the Bishop, the Archbishop and Stefan to his private apartments.

"Please sit down and share a meal with me," he smiled to them to take their places at the table. The Pope looked up at them when they had finished.

"This is not a victory or defeat, nor did we conquer or vanquish others. We have no enemies' only people who mistrust our ideals and maybe we are as much to blame as they are. There is here in this small enclave, more political machinations and rivalries than in any Georgian village. Remember we are shepherds only, not the owner of our flocks we care for, please go in peace and pray for all regardless of state or creed."

The Pope ushered them from his presence blessing them individually until he came to Stefan.

"I believe a young nephew of Father Abbots helped set off this train of events Brother Stefan, another man's nephew from Moscow has arrived as ambassador to Rome, he seeks an audience with me shortly, please come with me to meet him."

What befell Father Abbots nephew is any bodies guess but Stefan served out his life on the farm with his animals as company and occasional 'events' in the privacy of the small chapel that had been built there. The French ambassador became a reborn Christian and the wise old Bishop played his game of golf as regularly as ever, with perhaps a little extra zip in his swing. Mother Superior was donated, a large chandelier from the Anglican Community to replace the broken one. Monsignor Tony Carter was to rise to the zenith of the church, his soul having been touched by the simple faith of a shepherd monk.

Some person on high smiled down on the small blue planet before moving their gaze across the vastness of space to another troublesome world many billions of light years away.

The weather had been predicted to be hot and people were asked to prepare their evacuation plans or to prepare their land and their houses if they were staying to fight any blaze that came their way. On the Thursday the temperature started to rise but fell early evening. The forecast was for a sustained increase rising to its maximum forty centigrade on the Sunday and that's when the Cleary boys decided on their plan to eradicate the Perols from the area. The Petrol's were a few hundred yards up the road and Stephen Cleary clapped his hands in glee for Richard his elder brother told him that fire races up a slope whereas on a downward slope it takes its time unless blasted by the wind. The two boys prepared their attack, whilst those neighbours around who planned their evacuation, set about packing and keeping their cases close by in case they had to quit and run. Cars were stocked with photo albums blankets and clothes and with those so important documents and jewellery, The Dermits packed all their computers tablets and various electronics. The Johnsons packed their flat screen TV and the computer back up hard drive together with the software discs, then the various game play hardware, both families had made a decision to drive away from the cul-de-sac neighbourhood and get to the nearest town should the police advise house holders to get out.

Fred Cummins was an old volunteer fire-fighter now into retirement and he set about clearing as much bush as he could from around the house. Years ago he had built a circular gravel driveway around his home and shed, no trees overlapped the area and he had installed wire grating right along the roof guttering. Fred kept his portable radio switched on the Saturday as he walked around his property surveying any possible problem points. He then went over to the Perols family home to see if they needed a hand with their preparation. The Perols had decided to stay, so they told Fred, and they were going to isolate the house as well as they could. Fred mentioned they had a green lawn two thirds around the property which they should mow and clean up the clippings. Dad Perols said the grass was green and would not burn but Fred stuck to his guns and went to fetch his ride on mower with a capture unit attached whilst his neighbours tackled other jobs around the home. The news that night was not good and there would be a complete fire ban on the Sunday and that meant no outside drilling or welding or BBQ's and absolutely no open fires at all. Whilst Fred was having his tea and listening to the news he decided his dog and cat had to sleep in the big utility van in the morning just in case he had to leave in a hurry. But next door the Cleary boys were making their plans for the coming day.

The Sunday dawned bright and warm, Mr and Mrs Cleary woke earlier than usual and during the night they had made the decision to drive out early to Mr Cleary's mother in the city. They packed a suitcase and called the boys up but there was no reply so they peered into the bedroom and both beds were empty. Mr Cleary looked outside in the back yard where normally they took Jake, their puppy, out for a play. There was no sign of the boys or Jake. They went inside and had a full breakfast by

themselves, they wondered where they were but Mrs Cleary packed their school bags with a change of clothes plus an X box they played and their two tablets. Mr Cleary called from the back door loudly this time. He need not have bother, the boys and Jake were snaking their way though the woodland below Fred's land.

Fred had been up early and had a cup of coffee on the bench beside him and his binoculars to his eyes. He wondered what they were up to on a day like today. Maybe just an early walk but they soon passed out of sight up towards the Perols horse rental property. There where no horses in the large padlock, they had been moved the previous week as the grass was now brown and dry. Something stirred within Freds mind, he remembered a grass fire up in the hills, similar conditions. He checked the wind conditions with his licked finger, once a Firie always a Firie. The breeze was freshening giving some relief to the locals and then he saw it, a tiny burst of flame, hardy any smoke, right at the bottom of the Perols paddock. Quick as a flash he reached his phone and rang the local brigade

"Its Fred Cummins, Perols place, a fire in the paddock I saw children down close to it I am going to get them out." The call was acknowledged Fred carried on putting his old fire overalls and hat on then as he walked down to woodland he heard the Brigade alarm blast across the fields. Always aware of the conditions he looked around constantly, the fire was raging and spreading and it was going upwards towards the Petols building, then he spotted two young faces coming out of the trees heading toward the Clearys, when the wind veered and bits of leaves and ash started to fly in the air and whirl about then dove down ahead of the boys.

"Stop there you boys go back to where the fire has already been you will safe there"

"It will be hot there we are going forward."

"No" yelled Fred, "Go back its already caught and so will you be, go back whilst you can."

Fred's mind racing, in the brigade it was always look after people and animals before anything else. The living before the dead was the maxim, so he headed across his land towards the boys now obviously frightened out of their minds until another wind gust blew more embers behind the lads, now cutting off any chance of escape, the only sound was the deafening roar of grass and trees catching alight and two boys trapped in an ever degreasing circle of fire. Fred jumped and stamped as he raced to the children, both now in terror of what they had done. He reached them and quickly looked around, one of the boys held a puppy in his arms. Then Fred decided to act. He took the puppy and laid it carefully on the ground just as he heard the Brigade engine in the distance. Catching the eldest by the arm and and leg he told them he was going to swing them over onto the burnt grass and then told them to run for home. He flung the eldest over the flames. 'Now catch you brother' he yelled and did the same to the lighter one. He again yelled for them to catch their dog and he picked up the puppy and like a weight thrower, balanced the pup in his hands and ejected the pup over the circle of flames. Having caught their puppy the Clearys raced for home where their anxious parents guided them quickly into the car and off they went just

missing the fire engine as it came round the bend heading for the fire ground.

They never did discover how that fire had started or who was to blame. Fred alas had not survived, the extra effort to swing the lads clear had caused a heart attack and he had fallen and been surrounded by the fire, he could not be easily seen to be rescued. Most of the grassland had suffered including the Clearys so there was no trail though the grass leading to the Cleary back door. The enquiry later laid the suspicion on Fred as they found him eventually, him with his fire overalls on. The common thought was he was out to prove himself as a capable Fireman and they were wrong to retire him. The Cleary boys of course said not a word. Luckily the Brigade chief checked Fred's car and found his pets. They were watered and fed, and eventually adopted by the Petrols.

XXX

Well the world is now full of TV's, Mobile phones, tablets and computers. Where will it all end? So you wanted a bit of horror for once?

Well I do have an alarm radio to wake me in the mornings but a friend of mine, one Robert Reynolds had a very queer story to tell me. It was like this, he is a little bit straight laced and does not like to be woken with a blast of ultra modern music. So I told him just to change the channel on his alarm radio.

“But there is nothing else on besides constant chatter about absolutely nothing important I think these radio commentators love the sound of there own voices. So I've decided to get me a new television for the bedroom.”

“Well you will find they just chatter just the same on TV at that time of the morning or they have continuous adverts selling pots and pans or healthy exercise routines and other stuff, I wouldn't bother if I was you and save your money”

“Well darn it at least I can see real live pictures as they speak and might even get a good weather forecast to boot!”

“You can get up and look out the window for weather and its the real thing not a prognostic.”

Well did Robert take any notice to what I said? No, his wife Gill thought the same but she had an ulterior motive I felt, as she wanted her husband to buy them one of those modern food processors instead. Well I was not getting involved with any internal bickering so left them a bottle of wine and went home to the flat and the cat.

A few weeks went by, as I had been on a trip overseas for my Company, so as soon as I was back I pressed my answer phone to see if there were messages. There were, and what's more mostly from Robert and a couple from Gill. Roberts started quite tamely and then day after day became quite erratic and demanding. Gills were more frightening and begged me over as soon as I had returned. My cat was still at the cattery so I left a message that I would pick her up next day. Then off I went to Roberts and Gills to see what what all the fuss was about.

I rang their bell and was immediately dragged in by an irate and frightened pair. Robert sat me down and Gill put a glass of wine in my hand.

“You'll need that.” she said

I looked at them both carefully and without a word of a lie they had both aged dramatically.

“Well I said I'm here what the devils going on, you both look absolutely washed out, you have been sleeping properly?”

“No “came the reply in unison.

“Its that's blasted TV Robert bought it has no proper channels its all so terrifying,

frightful, Paul its driving us out of our minds!”

“No pleasant weather forecaster?” said I with a glimmer of a smile.

But there was no smart reply just a stream of tears from Gill.

“Robert and I want you to look at the TV for us there are things I have to tell you, if we go to bed and watch a late night program its fine. So we set the same program on so in the morning it will come on again.”

I nodded.

“ Well it does not, some fearful program is on instead. You mentioned the devil and I am positively sure he or she or it was on that morning program a dozen times.”

“TV's have on off switches couldn't at least one of you get out of bed and switch the dame thing off.”

Robert joined the conversation, he really looked bad, he normally was a smart dresser but today he was weary and unkempt in scruffy clothes.

“Paul we got the shop people a week ago and they could not find anything wrong so they charged us for wasting their time. What we need is someone to separately ascertain what we are seeing.”

“Well you are both suffering some bad vibes so get your gear and you are staying with me tonight. I have to sign in to work tomorrow then pick up Fliss from the Cattery. Then you stay at my place for a second night and Fliss and I will stay at you place, I'll make sure she does not damage any of your special pieces of china, agreed?”

“Well yes,” Gill said “but you will be alone by yourself, we found those morning broadcasts really frightening .”

“Well I will have Fliss to keep me company Gill, I guess I will be alright but I will set up a camcorder just in case anything happens and I disappear in a cloud of smoke!”

So the next afternoon I picked my Fliss up and apologised to the Cattery people for the lateness of my return and asked how she had been whilst I was away.”

“Well of course she missed you most cats do miss their owners but she has been an absolute angel.”

So then with Roberts house key in my hand I headed for their home.

“Now listen Fliss no jumping up at that precious china of Gills you hear. “

I took a tin of cat food and emptied it into one of Gills saucers. I filled a bowl with water for her to drink, had a shower, set the TV alarm to wake me at 7.30 am and with the camcorder balanced on a bedside table then nestled down to sleep.

Yes the TV was suddenly on with the sun was shining through the windows and suddenly the screen was filled with a vision of the most horrible face I had ever seen then it began to laugh hysterically and a fiery finger came up and pointed at me, and the vision screamed an unearthly scream as Fliss jumped up upon the bed and spat and growled and spat again. The figure melted before our eyes and disappeared. Fliss came up to my shocked face and gently wiped her whiskers against my nose. I sneezed and then remember I had not switched the camcorder on!

“Thank you Fliss” I said as I gently lifted her off the bed.”I guess breakfast is in order for us both.”

I showered, dressed and drove back home with Fliss, Robert had gone to work and Gill was up making coffee.

“Well” she said “ Robert and I were frightened for you Paul, did you see what we were talking about?”

I nodded, “but I am sorry I forgot to turn the camcorder on so there is no evidence.”

“But you did see the awful spectre we talked about.”

“Well yes, just for a second or two, but Fliss chased it away. I turned the TV off reset the alarm five minutes and watched it when the alarm started again, a perfectly normal program came. My suggestion is get a cat if it happens again, but believe me the sight of that poor spectre after Fliss appeared on the scene with barred teeth and a terrible growling hissing noise made me think you've have seen the last of that particular program. Oh here's Roberts key and no breakages Gill, so I'll leave my little girl with you, she likes to sleep on that cushion over there, she has had an adventurous morning. I'll pop in tomorrow to see you at your place. Oh by the way, so get yourself a little female cat they are worth their weight in gold if you see what I mean.”

XXX

Intro: In 2010 Bruce Davis from Mudgee in NSW, Australia grew a Pleach, a cross between a peach and a red plum. I have grown one and it is the most delicious fruit I have ever tasted. Now this story is entirely different!

Grant Weld was a farmer in the deep south who grew oranges and lemons but he had a hobby of trying different fruits. He got them from the internet and sometimes they came illegally from overseas. Some took and some did not but he was fascinated by their actual growth. He had dragon fruit from Vietnam, bananas from the Bahamas and even some succulent native species from northern Australia. He grew them all inside a glass house he erected himself, and as his hobby increased so did the size of his glass house.

One day his son, who was as bad as him, called him over whilst he was hand watering the plants. Grant strode across and met his son's glance toward the back amongst the oldest plants he had been collecting. There was one that was shooting up over a circle of small dead juveniles. Grant studied the plant carefully and taking a shoot from its side he strode back into his home and picked up his plant reference guide. He studied the book from cover to cover, and then picked up another. His son soon joined him and together they perused every book and every web site.

'Do you remember what the seed was called when it arrived.'

'Of course its on the label, its supposed to be like those others that died two months ago. As you know I was hesitant in throwing them on the compost in case they grew again from the roots. Ah here they are in my book on New Guinea, I remember the leaf form when they initially grew, but look this is not at all like it. I expect someone dropped it in by mistake. I tell you what Joel, pop down and take a photo with your digital and we will send it off to them to identify it.'

Well the photo was sent off and a week later a reply came back with a series of '???' and a cannot help you. So the two of them sat down and discussed the problem, should they or shouldn't they destroy it.

'Not until we check with our own Institute first,' said Joel. So he sent the photo off to three plant and seed institutes and awaited their reply. None came back. In the meantime Grant moved the plant from the back into the middle of the glass house. That same evening he came to give the plants their nightly misting but the ones closest to the strange plant looked decidedly sick. By morning a circle of dead young plants surrounded the plant.

Grant was very angry some of his most looked forward to plants had snuffed it and he called Joel over from the paddock to help him decide.

'Move it into the laundry on the window shelf so it does not affect any of your prize plants.'

'Your Mother has her violets growing in granny's bowl, what if they were affected?'

'Well alright Dad I will put on my bedroom window shelf. I am as eager as you to see what flower and fruit develops.'

So they did and the following morning Grant had to pound on his son's door until he



eventually got up and staggered out.

'You look terrible, what on earth did you drink last night?' his mother demanded.

"Nothing..' Joel looked as his father, 'I reckon its that plant Dad.'

'Well I know you two hate throwing anything on the compost heap but put it in the laundry for the time being.' Joel's Mum returned to the stove to cook their breakfast.

Grant got up from the table and went into the bedroom and picked the plant up.

'We did not want to do that dear because of your violets, they are not the strongest of plants you know.'

'Just do as I say and make sure you close the door.'

Now which ever way you want this story to end you go ahead, but since its mine, here goes!

That same evening Grants wife popped into the laundry to give her violets a dash of water and she looked at the tall interloper, it was quite dead. She called Grant in and said ' Not the compost but the incinerator.' as she handed him his mysterious plant.

XXX

## THE SCAM.

Copyright P. Audcent 2014

I wrote this after I read an email warning of current scams on the internet.

The previous day had been pure luxury, warm with a cooling breeze, a swim before lunch and an afternoon nap to settle my stomach down. Then a longer swim in the channel like pool finished with a long back stroke then a shower and finally I dressed for dinner, and it was suburb. As I undressed and leapt into bed I thought this hotel was the best on this earth, the staff were efficient and friendly and everyone I met said the same. We will come again next year I heard a couple on the next table tell the waiter. He just smiled and nodded and filled their glasses with more white wine. Chardonnay I believe. I never saw them again, the couple I mean, presumably they had left before I got up the next day. But this time it was definitely heating up so I turned on the air conditioner. It didn't work, so quickly I slid on my swimmers and headed for the pool. Some others were standing on the edge looking down and stopped me from jumping in. The pool was as dry as a bone except for a small puddle right at the deep end. I look at one of the guests but he shook his head.

"No Air-Con?"

"No Air-con, so I came out here for a swim, to cool down. Do the staff know?"

"Can't find anyone to tell," he said "been out here for ten minutes then went inside, Marge my wife went down to the kitchens to see if she could see anyone, but not a soul."

Just then we were joined by another group who seemed quite lost and a little angry.

"Seen anyone around" yelled their obvious leader with an enormous stomach and a mouth to boot. Bossy I thought to myself. I took a second look and I felt I had seen him before.

"I've found the pool drain unlocked that's obviously where the water went, did you try your taps in your basins?" He looked at us all and I shook my head.

"Go inside and check your bathroom I don't think you will find they work." I beetled over to my room, unlocked the French doors and trooped into the bathroom. He was right nothing except a faint gurgling noise in the hidden pipes behind the wall. I switched on the TV. It did not work, nor did the electric lamp. There was no electricity. I went back outside and told my fellow guests. They looked dumbfounded.

"Its a new scam I believe." said a small bespectacled man striding before us.

"I beg your pardon!" We all said at once.

"I presume you all saw this special advertisement for a week on this idealistic island at a forty percent discount." Most of us nodded.

"And although you don't know this, only certain people who applied to stay were in fact chosen to stay, I would say looking at you all and the quality of current wear you

would be fairly wealthy!"

We all looked at one another closely and I thought I recognised two or three by pictures in the newspapers.

"Well naturally those of you who filled and kept a bottle of water in your fridge to mix with your drinks will quite possibly survive these two days until the end of your holiday. If you did not I can tell you the weather is predicted to get hotter with no rain forecast." The bespectacled man dressed in a light tan suit turned on his heel and turned towards the hotel reception, he turned again before opening the door." You are welcome to bring your credit cards or cheque books to Reception where a payment will be requested to reinstall those privileges you have been enjoying. If you had checked with the advertisement you would have found a small note at the bottom advising that the hotel was closed this week for maintenance. Oh yes the printing was very small, Oh and by the way we are the maintenance personnel! The owners had left this property to us alone for this week only. So if you don't want to die of thirst or heat stroke you would be wise to follow me."

The large leader man came forward.

"Well my friend what if some of us pay and others don't how do you propose to cut the hotel in half to facilitate both sides?"

"Well we won't, you must all co-operate or be prepared to stay as you are."

"But I believe there are more of us than there are of you".

"Well there is certainly a lot of you, and you will cook extremely fast in the heat."

It was then that my mind had been working on who this huge chap was. Then I got it and looked at the closed door and then at him.

"I believe Sir, this may have been in your line?" I saw him stare at me directly and then motioned his people back to their rooms, for what purpose I knew not.

"So you recognised me, so do you think Glasses did?"

I shook my head then added,

"But I expect for us all to pay up, last night's feast was worthy of twice what we paid."

"That's true my friend but I really don't hold with holiday stealing and then forcing people to pay a second instalment for something they had already paid for."

"Well we paid the owners of the hotel, not these thieving maintenance people."

"No," he stroked his chin thoughtfully "I don't believe I was paid, I booked under a false name, one I chose from a wealthy family."

"You suspected?"

“No, I always do when I travel it makes things so much easier.”

As I nodded my understanding I heard the noise of a large jet plane coming into land. Then the man's group came out of their rooms and they were dressed in dark blue suits. I suspected a lump hidden somewhere under the coats.

“You will all collect belongings and pack them and my people from the jet will bring water bottles and help you to board. I am sorry your holiday has been spoilt by these ruffians but you will be welcome to re book next week, but without a discount.” He turned and climbed the steps to the reception.

I had seen this man's face on TV when he and associates had been moved out of Las Vegas some years before. When we boarded the jet I think we were all relieved to get out. What surprised was me how quickly the water and electricity had come on when I was packing my suitcase so I had a chance to have a quick shower, and I supposed the water noise helped dull the noise of shots being fired.

The large man came onto the jet to wish us a pleasant flight, he turned to me before he left.

“You were right about that evening meal, I'm keeping him on as head chef.”

xxx

SWANS. A true story (for once!).

Copyright Paul Audcent 2014

I stayed with my sister in a small village called Downton, south of Salisbury. It was soon after the Millennium and one day she told me about a new park that had been recently opened to celebrate the year 2000. So I walked there as it was just along the road and I found a number of seats regularly placed to rest on and one just by a concrete sundial set in the ground with a fisherman's seat close by the river.

I noticed two swans across the river Avon dipping their heads in the swift flowing river obviously combing the water weed for insects. I sat awhile and then continued my walk in an anti clock direction until I came to a spot with a view of the lower river, and here concentrated, where a flock of young swans some loosing their grey plumage and a few others with a full set of the bright white plumage. I stood awhile and saw the large male swan who had been up river gently float by. A couple of the younger swans had started to approach me and his appearance made them move back. He then approached me a few metres away but I held out my hands and said I don't have bread. He looked me over, I had heard swans could be dangerous, so I moved away and carried on with my walk.

A few days later I told my sister about the swans down in the park and she said 'Take some brown bread and see if they would feed', so with two slices in my pocket I walked down again and eventually sat on the fisherman's seat quietly. Well both the swans came across to me eventually and I threw from my seat several pieces of the bread. Then the female came ashore and sat down a metre from my bench so I gave her some bread on the ground in front of her, then gave the large male, still on the river bank, the rest. And so we all sat together, the female and I whilst the male went out to mid river and continued fishing in the flowing weeds. I was in no hurry to move so I sat there listening to the babble of the river whilst the lady swan tucked her

head under her wing. We stayed like that for an hour, then I said to my companion, 'I'm going home now so goodbye'. Well she awoke and paddled off to her mate and I left to carry on my walk. Well I did stop briefly at the lower spot to look at the young swans but who should come by but the big male. I worked out that he did not want me to encourage the youngsters to come closer, so I pulled out my pockets and showed him I had nothing to give them. So he turned from me and paddled back up the river.

Every so often I would return with brown crusts in my pocket and always I would sit on the same bench and both the swans the female in the lead would come across the river from their island home and sit with me whilst I fed them. But one day an elderly man came walking with his spaniel along the path that led to my bench seat. I called to him to be aware of the swans and the put his spaniel on the lease. Well he did not but kept on coming straight and shouting 'this be our path not for the likes of swans.' 'They will have a go at you, keep the dog away please,' said I. Then the spaniel spotting the sitting swans and went for the female sitting next to me, well that was its first mistake as the male swan gave sharp hiss and drove the spaniel away. I called the man 'just move away now they can break a man's leg.' He stood for a few seconds until madame sitting next to me rose and joined the male blocking the pathway. The man turned and retraced his steps and called his dog which had run back to the park gate.

The swans then returned to their original places and both looking me in the eye, I laughed and dug into my pocket and fed them the last of the crusts. Shortly another person came along the path, it was a lady with a sketch book under her arms.

"What did you say to that old man with the dog?"

"Why"

"He was muttering about some foreigner stopping him have a walk in his park."

"I told him to watch his dog going for the swans, he took no notice so the swans took to the spaniel."

"Oh well, can I pass your swans without getting chased?"

"Why yes just ask their permission, say can I pass please?"

"That big one looks really evil."

"Are you going down to sketch the young swans further down?"

"Yes."

"well I suggest you don't, why don't you sketch these two here instead."

"Well its your seat and obviously your swans."

"No I'm leaving now, so have a seat and be as gentle as you can when you open your pad."

So she did, she tried to sit between me and the female, but moved to the other side of

me and Ma, the lady swan relaxed. So I told them both I was leaving and this lady was going to sketch them. I rose and I noticed the male, Pa, returning to the water but Ma stayed quite.

On my anti clockwise walk I sat for awhile under a elderberry tree and then continued onto the gate. The lady artist I saw in the distance was coming back that way with her sketch book open. So I waited for her.

“Well I got her for ten minutes and then she padded back to the water, I went down where the young swans are and I see what you meant, he's very protective about his area.”

“At a guess I would say they are probably due to mate, and across the river is their nesting site.”

“I was amazed to see them so close to you and at ease. Do you live around here?”

“Well I think it was my sisters bread, it must be very special. No I live where I have noisy cockatoos after my apples and pears, good bye.”

My holiday was coming to an end and I was soon collected by my brother to go to Heathrow and home. But I shall always remember those two swans and the peaceful sunny days we had together in Downton at the rivers edge. Some years later I wrote a novel with them in mind!

XXX

There was an advertisement for an auction, mainly bric a brack but some jewelry and five pocket watches, and it was these that caught my eye. For a year or so I have been collecting the odd pocket watch. It amazed me how many people wanted to dispose of great grandpa's pride and joy. Sadly when the price of gold or silver reached great heights people would sell the case for scrap and sometimes keep the movements or sell them via the Internet. Of course without the case the movement became almost unusable! However the auction ones were complete, two of each gold and silver cases and one of gunmetal. The gold ones or rather they were rolled gold where a sandwich of copper is heat pressed between two thin sheets of gold. The silver ones were Sterling grade. Yes I was interested in either the rolled gold or silver as long as they worked of course so I checked my accounts and looking at the photo's and description. I calculated a price using my pocket watch books. These books I had at home, gave all the makes and serial numbers of all main watches over the last two hundred years and fortunately the book itemized the approximate value of these various watches, I guess to help insurance valuation. So I selected the two I would bid for.

Well the day came I drove down to the auction house with the details on a piece of paper with my expected maximum bid prices.

I went to a cash machine and drew out what I might pay for the two I had chosen to bid, then went into the auction house. I did not have to wait long as generally small valuable items were auctioned before the furniture. The first watch came up and was sold, it was a Waltham and as I already had one similar, I waited for the second lot which was one of the watches I was interested in. I bid for this one until it reached my maximum, the auctioneer waited a moment and on the spur of the moment I bid an extra ten percent. Someone quickly bid over me so I shook my head. The third watch came up and so I bid again and then again. It was a fine silver cased English pocket watch about eighteen fifty with a lovely enameled landscape on the reverse side. I bid as high as I could go, combining both valuations of the first I had lost and the book valuation of this one. Yes it was a chance I would get this but alas an elderly gentleman beat me too it, and I thought as I looked around, all the people here in the room must watch collectors. Well the fourth one was snaffled up at the same over the top price so I waited to see what would happen to the plain old gunmetal one. It started off very low the auctioneer said it had no name and no serial numbers, he said as the gun metal was dark in appearance he suspected it was a pocket watch used in the great war. Nobody bid so I thought as I had driven all this way, and not return with anything, I put my hand up, but alas another person also bid, so again I raised my hand and the hammer came down, it was mine! I went to the office to pay and received my invoice and returned to the counter to pick up my purchase. Truthfully I was not over joyed at the item as my main focus was to bid and buy the more beautiful watches that had gone for far more than I had been wiling to pay, but I pocketed the item and left to find my car.

When I arrived home I took the pocket watch and studied it for a moment, I hadn't even checked if it worked or not but in turning the case in my hand I spotted a long slide on the edge and close by a sort of pimple. Ah methought this might be a chiming watch so I turned it on its back and raised the rear cover only to find another cover which I levered carefully apart. The mechanism had two plates but no spiral coil and there were no screw holes to take one. Next I wound the main spring three or four turns and gave a gentle shake and the watch started ticking strongly. I shut the rear covers carefully and set the time, then left it on the table whilst I had my lunch. Whilst I ate I pondered what the slide on the watch was so I reopened the rear covers and checked the where abouts it was positioned only to discover one of the half pates covered any chance of investigation. The other plate covered the gear train and turning the thing over I checked the time against my wrist watch, they agreed to the second, well that was a relief. I re fitted the rear covers and tried to move the side slid, it would not move even though I pressed it in several directions. So I pressed the little pimple and tried up again and it moved with a faint click. The hands had now gone back to the time I originally set them an hour ago. Ah said I, its a watch for checking racing times!

Then a strange thing I felt hungry and I cast a quick look at my wrist watch and it too had changed. I switched on the radio and the one o'clock news filtered through, now all time pieces and radio agreed, what was more unnerving was I has just lost an hour, I pinched myself but no, I was not dreaming. So I lifted up the pocket watch it said five past one and pressed the pimple and slid the slid, the hands immediately changed back to one o'clock, the radio announced the one o'clock news and my wrist watch had altered back as well!

It was then and there that I first started the gambling. I know it was wrong of me but I couldn't resist making a fortune. At first I started on the horses, I found out which had won, slid the watch time back picked up the phone and bet on every winning horse. Naturally I won but I was also loosing part of the day though duplicating what had already proceeded. Well I got so clever at this that I went onto shares but I found to my horror that all the changing of the time had to be completed within the twelve hour limit. Well can you think of others I might have tried, for instance boxing matches and other sporting events gave me great returns, all those bets made within the twelve hour period. Alas eventually most local bookmakers have banned me as I'm too successful and the national ones have started to stop me as well, so now I have to consider other alternatives so suggestions would be welcome. Oh, the pocket watch is not for sale and burglary is not welcome at my place!

Authors note: Well it was a good story but of course this little watch would have had to have changed the whole world an obvious impossibility!



We children lived close to the top of a steep hill, during winter we used to get falls of snow that often lasted several days before turning into a grey slush. Well apart from throwing snowballs at one another and I being the second youngest with my sister still in a pram, I used to get covered in icy snowballs. I soon learnt to duck and dive but being a slow dyslectic child it took me a year to learn the ducking business. We eventually knocked up a small toboggan which we took down to the local park also on a hill. There were lots of kids and parents all sliding about, some on rubber tubes others on car tyres, and a few on proper toboggans. Also there was one group using a light weight wooden ladder. And it must have been greased as it flew down the hill. Our own conveyance had runners to narrow and short. Well the snow was powder fresh and it did not go far in fact it was a waste of time so we took it home feeling very dejected. Mother said we should wait for a frost to harden the surface and try again next day. But my brothers had been fascinated by the ladder with three people on it going so fast.

So next day my brothers decided a ladder toboggan might be the way so we hunted downstairs near the old kitchen that our father had turned into a work place, along by the passageway near the odds and sods room we called the Cave, in fact it was the place in the olden days they hung the meat. Eventually the boys picked one of the old ladders, heavy and solid even though it must have been centuries old! So we tried it outside and it did slide a bit but that was on the icy roadway. So we thought better of it and lifting it up on our shoulders we marched down the hill and then upwards to the park where many parents and their children were cavorting in the firmer snow.

Well we picked a really steep part and placing the ladder on the snow we all clambered on. Give it a shove Paul yelled my elder brothers, I was on the rear, so I pushed and pushed and we rolled forward an inch or two. A man came across and said 'that won't slide look its already on the grass below'. Yes it was, it had sunk right down and with the extra weight of three boys it had dug in as well. We never got to toboggan but we did get healthy exercise walking up hills and down dale, and I can vouch how heavy that ladder was, it was the one father used to lean against the tall pear tree to pick the fruit from, his Great Grandfather had planted all those years ago. And I bet it was even here when they originally bought the house and planted the trees.

Nowadays I reckon the lorry rubber tubes would be the very best to try. We did actually try a car one later with my children and except for getting a wet bottom due to snow piling up in the tyre hole, it worked rather well. But my grandchildren had the best idea they used their flat surf skinning boards and that worked a real treat. Well it just goes to show that the older you get your youngsters soon leap over your back and become even clever.

THE END