

## CASTLE MINE 2.

1.A birthday – not mine alas. Copy-write P. Audcent 2015

Well here I am planted into my enormous bed with blankets and eiderdown under my armpits listening to the noise from below so clearly I don't need to cross over to my pipes, everything is as clear as a bell, well if you like a full orchestra with drums and trumpets in the ascendant! So I'm completely left out as usual, me the provider of a roof to all those dependants, so what has changed. My fault since I did invite the whole dam lot to come and live here, well yes my two boys are very useful about the place after all they do is look after the land and the rental of the estate housing. Then my two useless brothers Gideon came back from OZ bearing two kids and a wife and a lot of debt from his farm closure. Then brother Eustace, the lemon lad, married an Italian sort, dark hair and bloodless lips, but a figure to die for, except she bought a little lad called Fig, short for Figaro I expect. About three years old at a guess, thank goodness he left the father behind, heard she was not married but the fellow tried his hand at selling his mistress to lemon lad. The grapevine had it that the lemon grove was a straight swap for the black haired beauty! Then there is Sofia seems to have brightened up considerably with all these young ones calling her Aunt, so she holds sway over all the youth, well nearly all because my Robroy still holds out, is politeness personified but avoids any further combat with her.

Speaking of Robroy its his seventh birthday being celebrated downstairs and that child has quite forgotten his ailing Grandpa and his crop of measles no doubt caught from that little Italian urchin two weeks ago. Measles at my age, I had them when I was nine, ages ago, yet I dam well got caught again so nobody is allowed up here. Well Tom is different he seems to be impervious to any decease and I think I can hear him plodding up those stone steps which will be the death of us all eventually.

“Your Grace, a piece of Master Nicks birthday cake and a napkin to catch the crumbs.”

'Thank you Tom and how thoughtful, I presume my wife asked you to come up.'

“Actually it was young Master Nick himself, I suppose he felt a bit sorry for his old Grand-papa stuck up here all by himself.”

'No doubt Tom, and thank Master Nick, and would you know by any chance what the Doctor has told my dear wife about my condition.?’

“I heard him in the hall saying you should be now clear of the illness you having already had the decease before, I believe you were about nine your Grace.”

'Indeed I was and that ruffian, if he had checked my history properly, would not have me staying up here forlornly, I might add, I should sack him for being a fool!’

“Alas he's the only one we have in the village your Grace.”

I shoed Tom away with my hand and commenced eating a very crumbling cake with most of it going onto the napkin, and I was just about to climb out of bed and brush the crumbs out of the window when in dashed Robroy and a bellowing group of young children all jumping about and frightening the sparrows on my window ledge.

How on earth did those sparrows know they were getting the crumbs? That's one of

the many mysteries which I will have to work out later.

'Quite' said I rather loudly.

So young Master Nick jumped onto my bedside chair complete with cushion that now made him somewhat taller than me.

'Do you really need that cushion Robroy now you have grown above snail height?'

"Yes Grand papa, I like being taller than you, its makes me feel.."

'Superior!'

"No taller somehow, much taller than I am on my own legs, from here I can see the dust on your bed frame and over there on your marble washing table, and up there on your old clothes cabinet, if I stretch really hard I can see a discarded shirt, which I guess you threw up there in your haste to get to bed."

'Oh really, listen Robroy will you ask those children over there not to damage my foot soldiers on the mantel, they are there for display purposes only, not playing.'

"For showing off you mean Grand papa," then to everyone in the room he yelled

"Stop please" very loudly. The little Italian boy Fig burst into tears and all looked directly at me, then cascaded back down the stone staircase. Robroy did not move his small frame but he had that smug self satisfied look on his face, really a picture of total command, so where on the earth did he get that from?

## 2. An unexpected fire.

Well it happened shortly after Robroy's birthday bash. I was at last released from my own bedroom and began to take a short walk around the castle when I smelt the smoke. On turning the corner of the back turret I found Gideon's children baking sausages over a fire they had constructed close to the stone wall. Alas that part of the house was covered in Ivy some fool had planted years ago. Yes you've guessed it, the flame caught a frond and was climbing rapidly up the stems with those children entirely engrossed in their sausages on sticks, which themselves had just caught alight. Then they noticed me and turned to look upwards at the flames moving rapidly towards their own accommodation.

'Run up and warn your mother. Quickly boys ask her to pour water down from that window above.'

"But Uncle that's our bedroom!"

'So run now and call Tom to get the fire brigade!'

"But our sausages are almost cooked." This from Brigan the youngest so I clipped his ear, meanwhile his more alert sister had dashed away to warn her mother and Tom. I could here her yelling at the top of her voice. I looked around hoping to find water, a bucket anything but all there were was two worthless boys with sausage sticks waving in the air and tears starting to run down their little cheeks. They had stood as if turned to stone until Robroy came running round the corner with a flailing water hose grasped in his hands which he immediately directed upwards towards the gathering flames.

'Above the leaves Robroy spray above.' I called but just then a huge waterfall of

water drenched us both as Gideon's wife had a bucket of soapy water and threw it out of the window.

"I guess she had been washing up." Said Robroy as he peeled a small leaf of lettuce off his forehead.

"Don't like greens." That from his cousin Jarvis, the one a previous lighter of forks in trees.

'How about a severe beating, not with a leaf of lettuce but a piece of thick bamboo, I am sure I can find a piece.'

"Oh Dad never beats us, if we are bad we have to write ten lines." This from Brigam looking dolefully up at me.

Then he started to eat his sausage whilst Robroy continued to damp down the smouldering ivy. So I took his stick turned both lads around and then gave a great swipe across their backsides. Just then Gideon rushed round the corner and grasped the stick with a half eaten sausage from me.

"We never hit our boys Heir, never. Never" Gideon face full of crimson so I thumped him right on his mottled nose.

'Well Gid you'll need to find yourself another place to live, these boys of yours are only too aware of the danger of fires in the open after all they come from Australia, the land of brushfires.' I was angry and Gid knew it. That was until his wife decided to throw another bucket of water out of the window so we all got drenched again. This debacle was saved by the arrival of the brigade and larger hose pipes were unloaded.

Gideon's boys got in the way and where unceremoniously pushed away, well a great shove would be more accurate followed by streams of tears, Gideon reacted by blasting the Firies and getting a mouthful of rushing hose water until eventually it was redirected and doused out the final flicker of flame nearing the window sill over which Ruth, Gid's wife leaned menacing as she had watched her useless boys pushed away by the Firies. So the brigade chief turned the hose on her just to show what she thought of the shambles she had come across. Ruth and Gideon had moved from the stables to the rear Castle turret as Ruth had felt the need to stay in the safety of the main house. But I presumed the stable was cold in winter so she swapped with Sofia. So now Sofia was back where she started close to the Shires but with Jasmine my niece and her two actually alongside the stable. I can tell you I was dubious to allow this but for fire hungry boys would be surrounded by stone walls rather than brick and wood, so I said nothing.

'Thank you Mrs Drew for your prompt action and thank your lads, I'll ask Tom to have a word with Mine Host down at the pub. Beer all around.'

"That's kind your Grace, but mine would be a sweet sherry please" She looked up to Gid's bedraggled wife.

"She needs to give those kids a right belting, where are they from?"

Gideon heard Mrs Drew and drawing the boys close marched them around the corner and the safety of the front door. Just then Mini arrived back with towels for Robroy and myself.

'Thank you Mini, I wonder Mrs Drew if you could give Mini a ride in your Red beast

of a fire engine as a reward for her act.'

"Indeed your Grace when Tom rang he told us she was the only one who moved to ring us. Those boys were useless." And she looked straight at Robroy and his sodden cloths with the garden hose still clasped in his hands."

'Well my grandson did try with his hose when Mini yelled to him.' said I looking at my grandson somewhat hurt by the Brigades Chief stare.

"Right" she said "both of you into the engine and off we go down to the lodge and Mini you can work the horn and Nick you the bell."

So off they drove leaving me with two wet towels and a problem with what to do with Gideon and family. Time for a family conference no doubt.

### 3. A conference.

Finlay our butler called me down from my lofty perch as my wife Dulcie had organised the dining room into a conference centre. Tom came up to help me down those dam stone steps onto the second floor dining room. All the major players were already seated except Robroy who was playing with his cousins over at his other Grandparents Cafe, or rather my Cafe, the one they managed for the Estate. I expect lashings of free ice cream and cakes were the order there resulting no doubt in a sharp fall in our cafe's profits!

Dulcie spoke first introducing us all to this family conference in the dining room. I interjected.

'Why on earth do we have it in here and not the more comfortable lounge room with its easy chairs.'

"Because your Grace would fall asleep in your favourite laid back chair and nobody would hear though your sudden snoring!" Dulcie

"Just like a horse I'm told dear brother." That from sister Sofia.

'Well in that case I'm going for a walk, I fancy ice cream on this warm summers day, you can all conference and let me know when you all have decided, whatever you have decided upon, but I'll tell you one thing or maybe two, that vine at the rear, the one that caught fire, has got to be bought down and the mortar repaired, its well know that Ivy can damage a buildings fabric.'

"Well Father why on earth have you not already done that or rather ordered it to be done." My son Nicolas acting the great leader.

'As a matter of fact I instructed our old Factor to arrange for it to be done whilst you were chasing around that blond Bimbo in the South of France. So naturally it quite forgot my memory, to tell Roberts to arrange for the removal, and as you are all quite aware Roberts was one to be told twice before any reaction entered his skull or in fact any of his ears.' With that I stomped out raring for the company of my young folk and a multicoloured ice cream.

As luck would have it Robroy and Mini had yet to reach the Cafe and were wheeling a wheelbarrow full of weeds from the central flower bed.

“Just going to to ditch this into the compost heap, where are you off to Grand-papa?” Piped the little voice.

'Where you and my great niece are headed.'

“We'll give you a lift if you can lie down on the weeds, so please balance yourself.”

Well I did as I was told, well ordered would be a better word, and off we rolled to the compost heap where I was allowed to get off with Mini's help, then gently pushed back into the barrow when empty. Then carefully balanced as I was, both children took a handle and I was wheeled ceremoniously over to the Cafe and a welcome ice cream, and anyway blast the profits.

Once we had all finished our cones Mrs Evans came by to ask for payment.

“Well your Grace we cannot expect the Estate to pay can we but we will divide the cost between ourselves and yourself if that suits.”

'I suppose it will have to, but I did expect for once in our lives we might get a freebie, I think its called.'

“Alas Master Robin who looks at our accounts might object.”

'My younger son objecting. No Mrs Evans Master Robin will not object just bring me the till receipt if you please.'

So I wrote in a firm hand, this is to be paid by his Graces Estate and NO argument and I signed it Dad Grace.

Then we, the young ones and I all travelled back home, some to the stables and some to the Castle, and me to my dining room to face the inquisition of the problem Ivy.

'Well' said I 'Have you formulated a plan of action?'

“Well we thought you beating the boys a bit over the top.” My brother Gideon.

'Well Gideon your boys are frankly a menace and our home could have been a pile of ash and dust because of them, so how does that make you and your foolish wife feel?'

“She is not foolish, she just loves her boys to bits.”

'Yes I see, a they cannot do wrong sort of woman. But what have you decided on the ivy and mortar?'

“Well its your place Father so you decide.” Nicolas ever the leader.

'Thank you and of course you are quite right, so you will organise the gardeners tomorrow to take it all down and put it on the compost heap, after which we will get the builders in to inspect the mortar.' Then I spied two decanters of sherry and port on the table. 'Bit early to drink my Liquor isn't it? And yes I am sorry I whacked the hide off your darling boys Gideon but they must remember to be more careful with this old house, and I have not forgotten that tree we rescued from a burn out. Apparently I am forgiven by those lads, through the double helpings of ice cream we all enjoyed. Which by the way I charged to the Estate, so Robin please take note of the message I left on the Bill. Now I am tired after a wonderful day with my young family so I bid you all a good afternoon.' I filled a glass with some port and left them in stony silence.

## Chapter 4 Was it a mouse or a small mite?

I had taken a well earned nap after lunch partly to get away from the ferocious argument going around the dining table, and it concerned the two shires we had bought recently. At the time I was chasing a grape tomato around my plate and had just located the tomato against the slice of ham and was ready to stab so my attention was not on the whys and wherefores of the four young protagonists debating whose turn it was to brush then ride these lovely great horses. I banged the table with my fork and the grape tomato leapt across the table and hit Dulcie on the chin. She was mortified and before she could throw it back I left for my room via the stone staircase. I reached the top then shouted down that we had a perfectly good coach unused for umpteen years and why the debate.

As I was saying, I lay on my left side on the bed blissfully asleep when I heard a noise, a slight scraping it was under the bed. A rat or mouse I turned over in alarm only to find a bottom encased in shorts and woollen socks withdrawing my bottle of pear drops. Its tiny hands then pulled the bottle to its chest and opened the lid which then fell with a clatter as its black hair and violet eyes looked up suddenly obviously warned by the creaking mattress.

'Ah its you young Tommy. And my pear drops, caught you red handed you little thief.'

"Oh cousin Uncle Heir I just wanted one, the yellow one, Nick told me you had two and I didn't think you'd mind, after all you have a whole jar full."

'Yes indeed young Tommy but if you look carefully I only have those two yellow ones and I am very partial to that colour.'

"Well Nick said he liked the red ones the best, they tasted like raspberry cordial but I said I preferred the yellows ones they reminded me of buttercups.' Before he could say any more I lifted my jar from his clutching hands and picked out a yellow one.

'Now listen my fine lad taking ones pear drops without asking is a capital offence.'

I watched his eyes follow the sweet right into my mouth and he gave a kind of a sad gasp.

"What's a capital offence Uncle?"

'Nicking something that does not belong to you. Has not Cousin Jasmine taught you anything?' I scrabbled into the jar again and found the last yellow pear drop which I deftly pulled out and inspected whilst surreptitiously watching his eyes. They were a beautiful shade of violet, and he did have a wonderful mop of black hair, in all a nice little fellow.

'Well if I hear you say a please may I have a sweet, I might give you this one or perhaps a green one as I don't like those.'

"Please Uncle I am so sorry to have grabbed your jar please may I have a pear drop, a yellow one if possible."

I thought a minute as he crouched below me.

'Well since its the very last one and my mouth is quite dry it seems a pity to waste this one on a useless thieving little boy.' I overdid it, he started to snuffle so I handed him

his prize. And a look of sheer pleasure crossed his face, so I picked a green one out and put it gently into my mouth.

“I thought Uncle Heir you did not like green ones?” Tom said while sucking away. 'Ah but they turn yellow after a few sucks Tom.' I eased out the yellow I had been holding in my cheek and tongued the green one in its place. The face on that boy was a sight to behold as he marvelled at the change. I went back into the jar and bought a red one and a green one out.

'The red ones for Nick and you tell him to stop telling everybody where I hide my sweets, and the green ones for you, if it does not turn yellow you will have to learn not to steal, so remember this is my home so please treat it with respect.'

He left somewhat chastened but he did slid my jar just under the bed where I could still reach it.

It was after breakfast that Jasmine popped up in front of me with a worried expression on her face.

“Cousin Heir”, she started formally, “ I am worried about my Tom he seems disconnected somehow. He told me he had snitched your sweets and you forgave him but he is still not his old self. I had to buy more pear drops yesterday, not the yellow ones he likes but any other colour. That's a mystery to me.”

I thought a bit then realised what it might be.

'A change in colour is what we need after my Tom has taken the children to school I will take a trip, now don't worry Jasmine, when he told what he had done you weren't really cross with him were you?'

“Well I gave his hand a smack as I was not pleased, I told him we were guests of yours and what he did was terrible.”

I called Tom my valet to drive me to the village centre after he took the children to school, but he said I could get in the front and the children could squash together in the back and share the belts, two to a belt, he would drop them off outside the gate house and they could walk the rest. Indeed that's what happened and soon I was in Miss Scrim's lolly shop.

'Morning Miss Scrim I wonder can you help me please. Do you remember those lollies we had years ago called gob-stoppers?'

“Indeed I do your Grace I think I may have some old stock here, they stopped becoming popular when people were frightened over reports of sticking in children's throats.”

'Yes well I was looking for a particular sweet that changed colour just the once.'

“And what colour would that be?”

'A yellow colour.'

“Ah let me see.” She ran her finger over the large glass jars holding most of her boiled sweet stock until finally it stopped and she turned. “ Do you remember those yellow sweets with sherbet in them, well I have those in white sherbet or yellow with a pinky red outer cover.”

'Guaranteed?'

“Oh yes do try one.” She opened the jar and fetched one out, so I sucked and sucked.

“Whilst you are sucking is there anything else I can help you with?”

'Ah I just spotted those humbugs, they will make a nice change from pear drops and are all the same colour so it won't get me into trouble again!'

So Miss Scrim weighed a small bag of humbugs and as she finished I fished in my mouth and bought out the yellow sherbet

'Perfect Miss Scrim I'll take four of those sherbet ones please.' I paid her from my leather purse then left to go back to the car.

When we returned home I sought out Jasmine and asked her to send young Tom into the study when he returned from school.

Well the day really dragged waiting for the children to return. I thought of asking my Tom to pick them up from school but Dulcie thought it a bad idea as it could be confused with showing off and the children would be teased. I disagreed but finally agreed to bide my time so I went down to the stables to the horses and spent a happy hour or two with them until the voices of the children's return beckoned me back to the castle. They came in a rush past me obviously to visit their pets but stopped when I called a halt. I looked at each one but Tommy was not amongst them.

'I'm looking for young Tom.' I said.

Robroy tapped me on the arm,

“Cousin Jasmine called him to go into your study, and Grand-papa you are not there, you are here so maybe you best be on your way.”

I nodded, well what else could I do, I checked in my pocket and the small bag was there so I turned and trundled off to those horrendous steps and my study.

Tommy was there sitting propped up on a cushion so he could see over my massive desk.

'Ah Tom just the lad I have bought these special coloured lolly from Miss Scrim for you to try, that's if you want to of course.' I handed one over and Tommy took it carefully. 'It won't explode Miss Scrim assured me.' So he popped it into his mouth. After a few minutes his small face twitched and I suspected the sherbet had broken though.

'Now Tommy put your fingers in your mouth and bring out the sweet.'

I was covered in yellow sherbet and Tommy's spit but when he looked his face opened up in a wide grin and a shout of absolute joy rent the air, then he stood and hurled his little frame right across the desk into my arms. Jasmine came across to help him still unaware of what had occurred. I bought the small bag out and gave it to him.

'For after dinner Tommy now the other children have gone to the horses so off you go.' Jasmine gave me a quite look which I took to mean homework time!

'And tell the others they have that dreaded task of homework if you have been given any!' So he leapt off the desk gave his mother a quick hug and burst out of the study to almost bowl Finlay over.



## 5. The Home Farm.

The children came back from school and all dived down to their pet horses and found them missing from the stables so shrill shouts rent the air which awakened me from my afternoon nap! Soon came the thudding of tiny feet up that long staircase and a belligerent Robroy stood fairly in front of me surrounded by the others.

'Its polite to knock first, there is a piece of wood in that doorway.'

“But you always leave it open during the day Grand-papa, either to listen to what goes on downstairs or welcome any busy body for a chat.” Robroy with arms folded and a scolding look on his bright little face, “And by the by what have you done with our Lord and Lady may I ask,”

'You can ask all you like grandson, we sold them this morning as they were costing a fortune and idling about or can I say kicking their heels.' The look of horror on those young faces was unbelievable except for my grandson who stood his ground arms folded.

“Wrong Grand-papa you maybe old, really old, but you are not a mean old!”

'Thanks a lot Robroy, I would hazard a guess and say my sons have got them working on ploughing the lower field.'

“But we have a tractor for that, a big shiny one that Dad and I drive when I'm allowed.”

'Well what have we got in the lower field that we have to be careful about, mark you the field where Grand-mama likes to pick her mushrooms, and what do heavy tractors do to the soil?'

“Crunch it down hard I 'suppose” came the sullen reply.

'Well I want you all to listen carefully.'

“If it takes too long can we have a humbug please.” From Mini.

'How do you know I have humbugs?'

“Miss Scrimms told us when we went into buy some lollies after school.” That from Jasmine's Jess as she surreptitious looked under my bed.

'Well maybe later when you have done some thinking, after homework I want you to get together and write out ideas for giving the horses more work. I have a few of my own but first you think up ideas. Off you go and not down to the lower field you can do your work and feed the horses on their return.'

“Grand-papa I think we ought to change their names I am sure they preferred their old ones before we bought them.” The rest nodded in unison with Robroy leader of the pack.

'What were they called then?'

“Rob and Tinkle”

'What does your fathers call them when they are with them?'

“Rob and Tinkle and and Come on now or click click gee-up!”

'Well I'm not sure about the click click gee-up but Rob and Tinkle sound find to me, but if I remember you lot chose the new names! Now out you go and yes you can have a humbug and I shall let Tommy to distribute one each.' By the time Tommy had finished dolling out my precious humbugs I had seven left!

After dinner that night we all sat around the table and the children were asked their views on how to make the horses more useful to the estate. Their main work in the past had been to give those children rides and Mini came up with the suggestion of roping them in for visitor days when with the large cart or the open coach we could take visitors from the castle over to the Cafe and vice versa, for a small charge of course. Then followed a stream of other ideas from many quarters including my sons, for instance to carry building equipment or hay.

At this point it needs me to explain why we had a home farm at all. In the past the castle had a lot of land attached to it so our predecessors commenced selling parts in order to raise revenue for repairs and maintenance. Sadly this had the effect of diminishing the size of the land and the reduction of profit from it. So my dear old Grandfather turned the whole property into a Trust with him as the main trustee and thus instead of selling pockets of land, portions were leased to able farmers and close relations and the main bit remained our Home Farm. Thus we had a mass of different agriculture and our own Home Farm to provide we, the Castle inhabitants, money from sale of stock and wheat. Robin my son repaired and extended the vegetable garden, planted fruit trees which we intended to pick and make jams and preserves, both to sell, or eat in the Cafe. In all we had six thousand acres in the home farm and ten thousand total for the estate, then we had five acres of house and gardens and the lake, so the balance was leased. Fortunately the land had always been carefully cared for in the past and was productive. Yes I have forgotten the various properties the estate owned in and around the village and much of these was rented out, including Miss Scrim's lolly shop so beloved by us all.

As I am rummaging through my brain, I think it was time we did what Duke William did after he landed, he had written up all the assets in this new country he had just invaded. So I will ask my boys to list out all we have, then have Edith to type it out. This should include repairs to all buildings and if possible the timing or schedule of any repairs or rebuilding. Lastly I must admit the opening of the castle to the public has helped enormously to the estate upkeep and we have introduced and enhanced a few special rooms for the public to sit and enjoy and chat. We fortunately have several out houses both here and on the Home Farm which we can develop so my boys will be busy and maybe one of them will live at the farm! Edith and Dulcie laid out the private parts of the house so our lounge/sitting room, family kitchen and staff quarters were private plus the three turrets where we had our bedrooms and the guest turret currently with Jasmine and family in, was made open to the public to see the extent of the gardens and lake. This invariably set the visitors hot footing it downstairs to view the garden and lake more closely. We had to buy a number of video camera's set up in the ceilings so these visitors could be occasionally watched as once we had a valuable bronze stolen from under our eyes and it was only when the perpetrator dropped it from under his coat by the entrance steps that the discovery was made by Finlay. It made a chip in the stone stair edge and I was not best pleased. He tried to sue for damages to his foot, his argument was we shouldn't leave expensive items out where they could be nicked. Naturally Lanson the local Magistrate took a different view and fined him!

## 6. The Italian connection.

It was Sunday, early afternoon as it happens, and I was just sitting up in my bed ready for lunch. Being a 'Visitor Sunday' it was visitor day for our paying public, I could just glance out of my left hand windows and saw the car park was filling up quite nicely and that I suspect it will keep the whole family busy. Well I suspected wrongly because Maise our housekeeper bought up my tray of salad, followed by Jasmines two children.

"Its ham today your Grace, Mrs Underbridge managed to get a goodly portion of smoked ham from the butcher and she thought it might make a nice change for you from your normal smoked salmon."

'Thanks Maise just on the table by the side here, and what do you two want?' Maise left the room and left Tommy and Jess standing at the foot of my bed looking very sheepish.

"Uncle Heir" began Tom.

'I am not your uncle dear cousin Tom, we are cousins only.' I cut him short rather sharply.

"Mother told us to call you that as the other children call you Uncle, except Nick of course." Jess this time standing up for her little brother.

I looked at them both more closely, Tom with black hair and a light bronze face with violet eyes, A sweet child with a wide open visage twisting his little fingers in front of him, perhaps out of nervousness. Jess taller and similar but a proud bearing.

'Does not mean I love you less, but cousins it is.'

"I prefer to call you Uncle, we always have, even in the old days, after all we have Grand mama who is a great aunt to you." He meant Aunt Vi, my Fathers sister and both strong in temperament and physically aggressive. Aunt Vi played golf and beat any man willing to take her on. Not much was said about her husband and once I asked Jasmine but she clammed up. I later discovered he decided to leave Aunt Vi rapidly after Jasmine was born, similar to my eldest and Edith, but Nick senior came back eventually. Ultimately Jasmine met a young Italian in Rome and quickly married, I can remember Aunt Vi was not well pleased with her daughter, then the said Italian disappeared four years later in a snow slide and by my reckoning of Aunt Vi it went up a huge measure. Anyone who could arrange an avalanche by just shouting had to be pretty fantastic especially from eight hundred miles away!

'Well that's true and this is your home as much as mine so Tommy don't be so nervous, just settle in and be content!'

"No its not that Uncle, we have been asked by a members of the public that they want to meet a real live Duke, and that's you." Tom again rising up on his toes and delivering the request with a somewhat impassioned plea. "Plus our Headmistress is outside with a message." He gasped out now quite out of breath poor lad.

'I don't want to meet the public visitors, I don't like the public visitors traipsing over my home and land, that's why children I stay up here out the way. So at least I am not going to shout at them or throw plant pots at their stupid heads. I am being thoughtful don't you understand?'

Both nodded.

“But a lady said she knew you, or of you, same difference.” Jess again, all haughty. 'No its not Jess they are quite different. Well young Tommy with a surname I cannot pronounce, what do you think?'

“I would pop down and say alas my lunch is waiting and shake hands and go back up the staircase.” His hands I noticed quite settled now and his face aglow with pride, something I said but I couldn't think what. I jumped out of bed and yes I was fully dressed in my light summer suit, after all it was a gentle snooze after lunch I was after, so I followed the two children down those gross stone steps, past the second floor and down again into the hall where Finlay stood all erect and bowed as I swept past.

'Finlay you never bow on an ordinary day so why now in front of the public?'

“Very good your Grace.” was all he said then another blasted bow!

Though the open doors and down those dratted steps I went to be met by Miss Frobisher our headmistress. She bowed as well!

'Well Frob what do want?'" A titter from the nearby public and various exclamations from members of that same public who suddenly realised they had the Duke in their company and he seemed not at all well pleased.

“A calamity at school Heir.”

'What has Calamity Jane arrived at your school Frob?'

“Not a Jane with pistols firing but a decease with pustules on some of our children, so I've come to warn you to keep the children indoors for the time being, just in case.”

'I am absolutely sure all here have been duly vaccinated, right children?' I looked downwards to Tom and Jess. They nodded. Then I looked out to the gardens and lake where there were many many children at play. So I decided on instant action.

'Tom Jess off you go, please round up my family and send them to their bedrooms now.' I shoed them away and thanked the headmistress for coming all this way. I directed her to the staff kitchen to get some refreshment. Then half galloped back upstairs to enjoy my ham and salad in bed, to a chorus of 'What a rude man!' behind my back. Insufferable people and that prompt movement up those steps wrecked my right hip, bed for the day at least!

## 7. A chance try out a cart.

It was sometime before my poor hip recovered and Robroy came up to view the patient. He shoved the chair close to the bed and announced blithely he was going adventuring with Rob and Tinkle.

'Presumably you have asked your Father and Uncle Robin, boy wonder?'

“Of course Grand-papa I mentioned it at breakfast this morning.”

'Under your breath perhaps?'

“Well I did speak softly to be honest.”

'Well Robroy that's not what I call honest as I suspect neither of my children heard you, so pray where are you off to with my Shires?'

“If I told you that you would not let me go.”

'Well perhaps not Robroy, only a few days ago Miss Frobisher asked that all you

children be kept indoors because of the decease!

“Grand-papa I am bored out of my mind so I need to go out into the fresh air.”

'You have windows in your apartment?'

“Yes.”

'Then open them and fresh air will come in apace. Anyway where were you headed with my Shires?'

“Uncle Robin has finished the trailer and I was going to give it a try out around the lake road, just to see if it moved well.”

'Its meant to carry people on it so wouldn't you need a supply of visitors to give it a fair trial?'

“That's been arranged.”

'By whom?'

“Us.”

'Pray tell me more and don't leave out a thing!'

“Miss Frobisher has told Maise the alarm is over and the pustules were nettle rash so all are free to go outside.”

'Excuse me, surely Miss Frobisher would have told your Grand-mama or myself first of all!'

“Well she did tell Grand-mama and Maise overheard the conversation.”

'Fine that's cleared up, so who have you organised to go on the cart?'

“The whole school since they all had been shut up for days!”

'Then you will tell Uncle Robin in a clear voice what you have organised and seek his permission to overview the whole journey. And by the way you will tell whoever suggested this to ask permission first of all!'

“How do you know it was not me Grand-papa, after all it was a grand suggestion, thinking of others, I mean.”

I thought about that long and hard but I had no answer except my Robroy was not devious and certainly not given to whispering requests to his elders. He was the type to come right out with it. Anyhow I decided what a great idea it was to give Robins cart a christening and I'm sure the children would enjoy it.

'First you must see Uncle Robin, see that the paint is dry and the cart ready to ride on then contact Miss Frobisher to arrange for the children to come here. But first you and Uncle Robin will take the cart for a spin to see all is well and second I am going with you to check that you can drive the Shires correctly and gently.'

With that I shooed him out and got dressed in my oldest clothes just in case. The thought of riding in a horse drawn vehicle with Robroy in charge close to that lake filled me with some dread.

Well in short I got down those stairs unaided and through the sitting room window saw Robin and Nick senior placing the traces on the Shires and latching them to the cart. All my family of children were jumping in joy at the thought of riding in that colourful cart. Then a thought hit me, all my family of eager kids wiped out in a gigantic accident. So I stepped gently down the front stairs and called Robin over.

“Father are you coming as well?”

'Yes and presumably you have life jackets ready for all who are going?'

“No”

'Then Robin you are driving Rob and Tinkle and if Robroy complains you can sit him right at the back with me!'

“He can sit with me and his father between us, and yes we will take all our youngsters first, then the school and Frob will have more room to cram everyone on.”

'Good luck with that Robin but knowing my lot they will not want to get off!'

“Well Father, Nick and I will rely on your vocal chords to order them off!”

I looked at him squarely then remembered most of my troupe were not too sure of my temper, though I believed Robroy and now cousin Tommy were more than capable of wheedling their way around me and twisting my arm in any dispute!

“I'll have Finlay place an armchair on the back so you will be comfortable.” A well padded chair was lifted onto the rear of the cart and Nick screwed it down then roped it to the bench in front. Robin then ushered all to climb aboard and young Tom immediately sat in the chair reserved for me, I had to smile as no matter how hard Jasmine asked him to move he stayed put.

'So Tom we will sit together shall we, so move over a bit so your old uncle can get in to sit.' With the help of my sons, a ladder, the chair rope and Dulcie calling out to be careful, I sat in exquisite comfort in the soft chair Finlay had brought. Robin and Nick senior had provided bench seats with strong backs and thankfully they appeared screwed securely to the cart floor. Tom noticed that I was checking the safety of the benches.

“They slot into those brackets so the cart can be used to carry hay and things.” said Tom earnestly.

'What a great idea that Tommy.'

“Yes I watched my uncles build it, I was quite fascinated, I would creep in after school to check on progress, every day.”

Welcome to the family Tommy, I said to myself and smiled.

## 8. School holidays start.

Well I had quite forgotten, all I knew was, it was coming up for summer as I lounged in my comfortable Parker chair in the sitting room. Except for my tower bedroom this was my most favourite room. It had two large bay windows some ancestor had carved out of the thick stone walls. This must have happened well after our Norman people had become truly Anglicised and the population had stopped throwing spears, arrows and bricks against our solid walls. Naturally my attention was diverted to the thick walls alongside each bay, then I realised there was not a sound to be had in any part of my home. I had got up early to get a biscuit and cup of coffee from cook down in that hell-hole called the kitchen, now normally a hive of activity. But only Maise was in residence so she smiled and cut me a piece of walnut cake and made me a real coffee from a newfangled machine my boys had bought a few months previous. As I climbed the back stairs up to the hallway with my cake plate and coffee cup clenched in my hand expecting a rush of children's shoes across the hallway and down to those blasted stone steps to the waiting vehicle to take them all to school.

But not a sound, it seemed only Maise and I were awake in this enormous house, not even Finlay was about, then feeling someone's eye on me I looked up and there was Dulcie perched over the banister looking directly at me.

"School holidays so I gave the staff a lie in."

'Apparently you forgot to tell Maise!'

"Humph". Was all she said, so she hadn't quite forgiven me for making Maise our housekeeper which as you can remember I took away from Dulcie. So I placed my cake and coffee on the hall table and went back to the kitchen to give Maise the day off in reparation of missing out of a morning in bed. But she said cook had told her and she quite happy to be up and about in case one of the children had quite forgotten school had finished for the summer. So I threaded my way back to my cooling coffee and cake and retired to the sitting room where I am now talking to you lot.

I found that I had polished off the cake and drank the coffee in one fell swallow, apparently this new machine the boys bought only used micro cups! So I waited in the dining room for breakfast. And I waited and waited a bit more until Dulcie appeared briefly at the doorway, but I caught her with my eye and she stepped in.

"You can wait all you like Heir but everybody is sound asleep and so should you, its very early for you to be up my dear anyhow."

'Don't you dear me Dulcie, I got up to enjoy the early morning for a change, and what do I find, or rather did not find? So I am going out to that gong Finlay bangs for dinner and wake the whole lot up.' I rose from my dining chair only to find Dulcie pushing me down, then Findlay walked in so I yelled to him to bang the b..dy gong several times and get cook up at once. But Maise rolled a breakfast cart into the room and distributed the various containers across the table cloth on the long birch bench we used for that purpose, it acted like the Credenza which we sold two years ago to pay for doing up the Cafe for the Evans. Normal practice is to self serve at breakfast and to collect what one liked on ones plate but as Maise left to bang the gong Dulcie fetched a large plate and loaded it with hot bacon and eggs and black pudding I was partial too and she placed it in front of me just as the children arrived in various shades of dress. They stopped rushing in as they spotted me and under Dulcie's guidance each selected a plate and helping themselves then sat quietly at the table and together we all ate our meal in perfect silence. There were no adults just Dulcie and I and it felt like the old days when it was just we four.

Eventually Maise arrived with a second batch of sausages, bacon and egg followed by my two boys. After lifting every dish cover my eldest remarked about the empty black pudding dish.

'How Nick did you think it was black pudding?'

"I smelt it father, and as most of the children do not have it on their plates I presume it has only gone one way, well two ways in fact." Looking directly at my Robroy as well as me sitting side by side.

'I'll ask Maise to ask cook to make more.'" I said to mollify my eldest son.

But Maise had returned with new supplies including the missing item and slices of toast , butter and jam. What a treasure she really is and Dulcie gave me a smile of appreciation and thanked Maise for both of us. All the children clapped her in appreciation as well, and it was a very happy smiling Maise when she opened the

door and revealed a laughing cook with a tray of fruit including strawberries and cream in little glass bowls for us all. I then called Finlay and Valet Tom in and asked them all to sit and partake of this fine breakfast, but cook sped off to shortly return with more little bowls of fruit and more toast and home made jam. It was like a picnic as it was so lovely but what will it be like with everyone here for a few months. So I spoiled it all,

'Well where are you all going for your holidays?' Was all I asked. Sadly no one replied. Well except Tommy.

“Well Uncle we love it here so why go away when you love a place like this.”

I just got stuck into my strawberries and wiped my face, and Robroy's who had cream all over his chin.

'Did you use a spoon with that?' I asked looking at the small bowl.

“Yes Grand-papa I did, it was delicious,” turning to cook and Maise, 'thank you both for the nicest breakfast ever.”

Well I guess he will follow me eventually and he will make a perfect owner of this Castle.

## 9. An unwelcome visitor.

Well it always happens in the afternoon when I have just snoozed off, a galloping tribe of boots making its way up to my bedroom, a prompt bang on the door and in rushed Tommy and Jess who was waving a bright lime green paper whilst her brother held a bright green envelope in his grip. Then followed Jasmine and Dulcie both with wide bright eyes.

'Well done Jasmine you have won the lottery, only that could bring you all storming up to my rest period!'

“Now its excellent news Heir so don't be sarcastic,” This from Dulcie, Jasmine had remained silent. That could mean one of two things and both bad. A husband returns to the fold or her mother, my fathers sister was coming to stay. Uninvited.

“Your Aunt Vi has written she is coming home to stay and she wants her old room please.” Dulcie nearly out of breath.

'You children, can you remember your Grandma, its been so long I myself have profound difficulty, last seen was in Italy on the track of her adventurous daughter.'

“Now enough Heir please, the children are so excited, their Grandma is coming.”

Dulcie in protective mood, but it was my Fathers sister, my Aunt, known to we boys as.....I could not finish my thought as Sofia had entered the room and shouted out the dreaded word 'Tarzan' to all and sundry.

'Yes Sofia, she is your Aunt as well and looks like you may have to move out, as its her old room you are in!'

“We can share, or better still Jasmine can have her with her and the children. Its obvious she has come to see her grandchildren. So what better way.” Sofia getting up a temper and me desperate for a snooze.

“Don't bet on it she has barely seen them and I doubt she even has a photo of them!” Jasmine chimed in, but already accepting her mothers presence in her suite near the



stables. Meanwhile the two children entirely engrossed in this adult banter dropped the letter and envelope onto my lap. I picked them up and passed them to Jasmine but she indicated I should read the letter.

'What on earth made her choose these awful coloured paper?'

"I gave them to her for Christmas," said my cousin Jasmine forlornly. I burst out laughing then settled down to read, which took all of three seconds. {Am coming to stay, require my old bedroom, Mother}. More like a telegram or text as the children would say. No mention of me nor Jasmine or the children, in fact not one word of acknowledgement that we existed. All must be done with total obedience to Aunt Vi, her every desire and wish. Then I looked at the children still with a half hope in their eyes that Uncle Heir will not refuse this so looked forward guest.

'Jasmine you should write to your mother saying her generation has long gone and she being the last to survive should understand that there are new occupants in the castle, and yes she will be welcome to stay on those terms. But she will be asked to help like everybody else and we have no toiling servants as she had in her day, just members of the family and staff of the family. Can you arrange a bedroom for her over by your rooms and then ask my sons to acquire a bed for her. I presume there maybe a couple available at Home farm.' Jasmine nodded and the children whooped with joy young Tommy leapt from his corner of the bed and gave me a huge hug. It was then that I felt truly sorry for this little dark eyed imp, for he was yet to greet his long lost Granny. In fact although he had two granny's he had seen neither. Then I had a novel idea. It hit me as I lowered him gently to the floor.

'You and Jess can have one each Tommy.' And he reached under the bed for the sweet jar. Well my idea will have to wait until Aunt Vi arrived so I curled over and went back to my broken snooze.

Aunt Vi had just been picked up from the station and I was sitting at my desk in the library when she entered.

'Aunt Vi, welcome to my castle.' I said it with pronounced volume.

"Its used to be your fathers, my brothers and mine." she said shortly coming across to kiss me on my forehead.

'Where are your grandchildren I'm sure they went with Tom in the car to pick you up'

"Oh nuisance little children, jumping up and down and being very vexing and bothersome you would have been better to send my Jasmine to control them."

'Well we were not sure how much luggage you would bring so Jasmine felt it better you should see your darling grandchildren first, they being so very excited at your coming.'

"I have no idea what you are talking about, I don't like children, any type of child whether large or small. You know when I held Jess as a baby that one and last time she pees on me. On my best marigold dress, ungrateful child."

Well I had guessed right so my plan to change Aunt Vi view on grandchildren would have to be put into place and who better to help me but my ever helpful Robroy. So I'll think up the basis of a plan and get him to polish it up and put it into practice.

Actually Aunt Vi was quite sprightly so I would have to bring Jasmine and the children into the action. Basically it involved the good hearted Evans so Edith will

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