

CASTLE, mine

Copyright Paul Audcent 2013

I wrote this because I hear of so many grandparents that loose the connection with their grandchildren due to separation, divorce and vindictive single parents. Alas it has become a crying shame and grandparents have been left out of the discussion mainly by the courts. But they do have rights! Oh and I do love visiting castles! So I chose an elderly, grumpy grandfather to be the voice of this tale, so apologies to all grandpa's!

Chapter 1 A time to reflect

'Bloody Hell, she's come, but not with the little one!' I peered over the windowsill my arm on the bedside table that Maisie stands my meals on. The dam thing moved and I fell in a heap and a thump. There came a wild stamping up the steps and a violent entrance as Tom my valet rushed to my side. He crouched and picked me up like the useless bag of bones I had become. I was then gently steered back into my bed, the pillows punched and my eiderdown replaced.

"Tom, I saw Robroy's mother coming across the lawn again."

"Indeed your Grace?"

"Yes indeed Tom, as clear as I see you, now off you go and find out what she wants now."

"Begging your pardon Sir but thats Finlay's job, him being your Butler."

"Bugger Findley he's in the pocket of you know who, now get on with it." You know who is my dratted sister Sofia, or rather half sister, the one Father had when he intertwined himself around his third wife after two unsuccessful marriages. Well at least she gave him a quieter time, always popping off to town whenever she could and leaving him to his stamps and three unruly sons. Eventually he discovered her in cohorts with his jockey so he sacked them both and took it all out of we boys. Hell we were just in our teens as I remember. Now look at us, me, at the top of a tower spiteful as ever, Eustace as useless as ever in the South of France growing lemons by all accounts, and Gidsgone so called because he always got away with it in spite of being the cause of some mischievous. Real name was Gideon, now in the outback of OZ farming sheep and doing little else so I hear. Yes I hear a lot sat up hear it comes up though the heating pipes, they tittle tattle all the time, both the relatives and the staff. So there are my siblings all three of them hands dipping into the family funds like woodpeckers around a bucket on money. The worst of them all is Dulcie my wife, first and only one alas, but she gave me two children, both I dread. Oh yes, I had a name, Heir. Apparently my arrival was a shock to my dear Papa, not being due for some weeks I spoilt his hunt by arriving as he was climbing up on his horse. "Oh the blasted heir

has arrived" Thus I became Heir and thankfully not blasted. He was supposed to have checked me over once and congratulated my mother when he called me 'Bit thin and wretched, old horse'. Well I might have been, but she definitely was not, and as I have related, she gave him two more thin and wretched.

Ah yes when Dulcie and I got spliced I did have a name and it was Heir Lockston Armitage but after father died it was shortened to 'Your Grace', even by Dulcie though I suspect she called me other names behind my back, even though I allowed her three pairs of new shoes a year!

Now Sofia likes all the tittle tattle and pumps all the staff for tit bits of info especially on me, but shes not even in line so she's just plain nosy!

Now what did that poor wretched woman want, Tom's not come back, he is my fourth valet so looks like I'm due a filth pretty soon unless he hurry's up. Think I'll wander over to my pipes, well struggle at least but what I get from them is rich and juicy! Got two sets to listen too, on either side of the room, bloody nuisance but at least I get some exercise. You've Right staff kitchen/dining, Left Dulcie study and drawing room et all.

Its about Nick, my eldest, seems he has forgotten to pay his monthly dibs thats maintenance to you, for the care of my grandson little grand-heir. Yes he has a proper name, she put her foot down and called him Nicholas Robin or was it Robert, I call him Robroy to myself. Nice little lad, don't see too much of him alas, she keeps him well away. They broke up a month after he was born, I guess Nick did not like the competition, though she was all over the little lad like a vacuum cleaner. Bonny blond hair and a sweet face, must have taken after G'pa. Last time she bought him up here he said 'thank you Grace' very nicely so I said 'I would prefer Grand-papa' and she said 'Nicholas Robin cannot pronounce that, its too long a word your Grace, Grace is much easier'. Well I admit I was stumped for a minute then I said 'well he won't learn long words will he if you don't teach him.' And that foolish woman said its up to the schools to do the teaching.' I couldn't stop myself 'You blithering idiot of a woman....' But before I could finish she dashed out of the room with a scream.

My grandson peered up to me with questioning eyes. 'Well thats women for you Robroy.'

“Yes grand-papa” And although he waved and followed his mother downstairs I shouted after him 'Ask for a mince pie Robroy.' But I felt warm inside, that little Robroy had come up trumps. Of course he could pronounce that word!

Ten minutes later a heavy clattering of boots forewarned me the arrival of a very flushed grandson clasping two mince pies tightly to his chest

which he deposited carefully on the side table.

'Just push that chair over here Robroy by the table will you, and grab that cushion so I can see you plainly.'

"Grand-papa my name is Nicholas not Robroy!"

'Oh but I already have a son called that!' said I.

"And you have a second one called Robin, well Uncle Robin."

'Well I never,' said I, 'and by the way, to make it easier since you are only four, you can call me Grandpa not the Papa.'

"I call my father Papa and Grand-papa would suit just as well."

'Well use both then, which ever pleases your inner being,' I replied somewhat tersely.

"They told me you could be testy" answered the four year old perched benignly on his plump cushion with an almost smug smile on his bright little face.

'Testy' said I, 'only with impudent larrikins like you my boy and don't you consider two pies being a touch greedy?'

"Well actually Grand-papa this crushed one is for you, cook said it would cheer you up as its got brandy in it."

'And is it the same as yours?'

"No she crushed it so I would notice the difference, to give you the right one."

'Very thoughtful I'm sure what a clever cook we have.' a brief pause.

"Well I asked her too in case I forgot!"

'You have two hands a right and a left, A right for Grandpa and a left for me, simple.' I retorted.

"I am only four and a quarter, I held them close not to drop them, but if you like I will have the crushed one and give you the nice one."

'Well thats really kind of you Nicholas but I better have the proper one if your Grand mama smells brandy on you, I or Cook will be for the high jump!' So we munched away my grandson and I until crumbs were dabbed with licked fingers and Grand mama's face appeared round the door frame.

"Is my little angle free to come and get ready for home?"

'No,' I said loudly, 'we haven't finished.'

"I have Grand-papa" , squeaked the voice by the table.

'Darn Dulcie, I was enjoying my grandsons company did you have to come up and ruin it!'

"Yes your Gracelessness, Nicks mother has a home to go too so don't be so grasping, The boy does have home, and school tomorrow."

Well the boy hopped off his high cushion and clasping the arm of the chair launched his small body onto me and gave me an enormous wet and crumbly kiss on my cheek, then quickly jumped down and out through the door followed by a doting granny leaving me somewhat flummoxed.

'Come back soon Nick, please,' I yelled in a shaky voice. Dam the crumbs I said as I swept them off the covers.

Chapter 2. A trip out, and an adventure.

I looked out the window then dressed, the sun was out and a late Spring beckoned. I had not seen Nickolas since the day of the pies and I thought a little drive in the fresh air would be quite the thing if it passed the local school. Nick was five today and I wanted to present him with a brand new scooter with extra large wheels to make the ride more comfortable. It had a brake set on the rear board for safety. I had sent Tom out to buy it a week ago and had him pack it in brown paper box after I had seen it to approve.

He came upstairs to guide me down and into the car with Dulcie fussing behind us both.

"Now where are two off to." she demanded.

'Out for fresh air and a walk if I can, now don't fuss Dulcie, Tom will drive carefully and we won't be visiting pubs.'

So off we drove with the package safely strapped on the rear to the school. But alas it was closed for mid term, so once again we went on to Nicks home, a pleasant little cottage on the edge of the estate. Tom alighted and walked up the path between rows of growing vegetables and knocked on the door. He knocked several times but there was no answer. A neighbor came to our rescue and poked her head through my window.

"Oh its yourself my Grace."

'Indeed it is Mrs. Grant I've come to see my Grandson.'

"Alas he and his Mother have left the village, about a month ago."

'Where have they gone? My manager said nothing.'

"I don't believe he was told, she just left in a taxi and Mr Grant helped her with their luggage, young Master Nick looked quite bewildered poor lamb as he was hustled into the back. I'm so sorry your Grace it was his birthday today I think."

'Indeed it is Mrs Grant and thank you for the information, I will tell my Manager to find a new tenant as soon as possible.' I nodded but she understood my distress, 'back to the castle now Tom please.'

"And the walk sir?"

'But I sat back my hand tightly on the parcel that Tom had unstrapped from the back. 'Bugger the walk, home now please.' I left the parcel on the back seat. More in hope than anything else.

Good Lord these steps are getting steeper all the time, Tom came back

from garaging the car and helped me up the last few. Dulcie came out and saw Tom with the box unopened. I shook my head and told her the sad news. She took it badly.

'Well' I said as we crossed into the entrance hall, 'you get what you deserve old fruit.'

“And what do you mean by that!” came the cool reply.

'Dulcie, you spoilt those two brats of ours all the time, giving them this, giving them that, whenever they asked, which was often by the way. I cannot remember a time when they actually offered to help. Look at them Nicks off with a mistress, and Robin, well goodness knows where he's gone.'

“He's traveling at the moment, you can be so unkind to your own children. He is in Australia, he's been to see Gideon and has rented a flat in Sydney. “

'Nonsense our two boys take after their uncles!' A quick calculating look at my lady wife stopped any further discussion and I trod those blasted stone steps back up to my bedroom.

'Tom ' I shouted 'leave the scooter in the garage until I can find him please.' I continued up very depressed and not a little angry, a trip spoilt.

Chapter 3. A time to wait a time to search.

Well the best thing to do, my dear wife said, was to contact my ever absent son and ask him gently where the hell was my grandson. But my dearest said to ask nicely.

'Tom get me Master Nick on the phone please.' Tom bidden left abruptly for the phone downstairs. My dear Dulcie had not furnished my abode with one of those natty mobile ones so beloved of the younger generation. I think she felt I would spend the family fortune, meager as it was, on horse racing, a pursuit I am not afflicted by one little bit, so no communication equipment whatsoever, except my lungs and a stick to bang with!

Ten minutes passed and Tom has arrived all puffy and out of breath, his permanently sad face even sadder.

"Alas your Grace your son cannot be found, on holiday I believe."

'So you telephoned his address?' A weedy little flat near Knightsbridge.

"No your Grace her ladyship told me."

'My wife told you did she, well I want you to ring Nick now please and if Her Grace intervenes you have my permission to ignore her and ask her to pop up here for chat, now off you go and please do what you have been

told.' Exit a troubled Tom and I lay back and took a hearty swig from my pumpkin broth, recently delivered by the housemaid whose name I've forgotten. Well she has been with us two years or so.

Back came, Tom now completely exhausted and tells me Master Nick is away on holiday in Crete with a stunning blond. Some people have all the luck. So I asked Tom to contact Nick in his hotel if he can find it and to get hold of Lonson our local Beak and have him visit me as soon as possible.

"Shall I say it is urgent your Grace?"

'Just tell him to pop in at his convenience, thank you Tom.'

Well Lonson arrived a few days later obviously not keen to visit the castle with me in it. I once had the occasion of upbraiding him when one of my dedicated gardeners caught him with pockets full of pears when he was just ten. Williams Bon Cretion I think they were or some such. Anyhow he was brought to my study and given a sound telling off which, as I remember, included a threat to a severe beating if caught again. But Lonson was made of sterner stuff and both apples and pears continued to disappear over the years and mainly at night, no wonder the boy eventually found the law to his liking eventually fetching up as our local magistrate.

'Well do you have any apples in your pockets?' I asked directly as he was ushered into tower bedroom.

"Indeed not your Grace, you have a long memory and if I might add a somewhat spiteful way of welcome. Now how can I help?"

So I told him how my grandson had vanished, and how I needed his advice on how to proceed in finding him.

"Well I would suggest you use a detective, to track him down."

'Well I did think of using our local constabulary and that you might set things in motion.'

"Cannot help there, its not really a missing person if the lad has been whisked off with his mother, and actually its your son who could make a request begging your pardon."

'Beg all you like Lonson, but that idiot son of mine appears to be infatuated with a blond bimbo and appears to have little interest in his own child. That naturally annoys me greatly.'

"I'm sure it does your Grace so a detective appears to be the only solution, I do by chance have a name if you are interested. Healy, ex inspector friend of mine retired of course and in need of something extra in his retirement. Has all the contacts one needs for the job. I will ask him to call."

'No need just give him the scenario and let him get on with it, and any traveling needed I am to be told, agree to expenses and all that.'

"Right" Lonson rose from his chair.

'Just one thing Lonson how on earth did you manage to keep plucking my apples and pears without being seen?'

"Ah your Grace and his fruit, you remember old Habard, slightly deaf, always forgot to latch the walled garden gates, eager for the pub no doubt, so I crept in without a care and did very well selling at our local market. I admit I owe you for paying my way in tuition fees. "

'Well I never, I never guessed, but now I can see you were well on your way to a predatory profession. Goodbye and do your best please.'

"That's the first please I have heard you say your Grace, so I will endeavor to get Healy for you, and by the way those figs in the out house I kept for my mum."

With that parting shot he was up and away, and some hope filled my aching joints and a small smile creased my face, he was certainly an impertinent lawyer!

Chapter 4 A break though of sorts.

Well Lonson's man came and went. A small scruffy type not used to climbing slippery stone steps and advanced slowly into my room. Hesitant to sit I noticed, until I yelled 'for goodness sake sit here close to me I am not going to yell across this room' he nodded and crablike skirted the room until he reached the chair then sat in with an audible sigh.

"Lonson filled me in with your requirement your Grace, I require 200 on the spot and another 200 to cover expense like."

'Like what?' said I

"to cover fares."

'Expecting to go far eh?'

"In case, just in case, hotels train, you know."

'No I don't but that's hardly enough for a decent stay, I will right you a chitty for a thousand which you will give to her ladyship, and mark you, I require a full account of each expense. Agreed?'

The little man nodded and departed, chitty clutched in his hand. I noticed the limp and shouted 'A war wound?' but he turned and waved.

"I fell off the bike coming up your drive."

Maisie came up with coffee and a tea cake.

"S'pose your Grace needs something to read?"

'No'

"Can't be looking out the widow all the time, he can't come, he's a prisoner no doubt."

'Who Maisie are you talking about?'

"Your little one to be sure, heard Madam had gone funny and locked him up Sir.'

'I'm not a Knight Maisie, now where did you hear that?'

"Pub last Thursday were in the snug."

'Quite, I expect you hear all sorts of rumors in there and no doubt a number of lies, so where did that piece of information come from?'

"Were Teddy Greenlake, heard it from his cousin in Warwick, grand lady and small boy took rooms close by."

'Now Maisie a Mr. Healy is currently staying at the pub, I want you to go and find him and tell him what you told me, now pass me my wallet in the coat over there please.'

Maisie rose to bring my coat to my bed and I took a note out.

'And whilst you are there have a pint on me, now off you go and better tell cook I sent you off.'

"She'll not be pleased."

'Then tell her I sent you on a private mission, that should cover you.'

I thought for a while how the downstairs servants had their own little community with various levels of authority and command. Here I was at the top of the tree, yet a slave to my own bed, with a window to the world on the outside but hearing and seeing nothing on the inside, well yes I do have my pipes, so there and then I decided to venture out into my own little community and peer and pry into every bodies affairs. After all I was the paymaster in spite of what her Grace thought. So I gently slid across the bed collected my trousers from the rack, picked up my coat and in my slippers I descended the staircase carefully. Instead of heading for the saloon I found the back staircase I used as a child and made my way softly to the innumerable rooms downstairs. I had a brief look as Maisie closed the outside door on her way to perform her errand. There was sharp shout from cook then all was still. So I arrived in cooks domain and I opened the heavy door to see all and sundry sipping tea with a large walnut cake already sliced on the bare table.

'Oh, I'll a slice of that if I may Cook.'

A very surprised cook rose to her feet followed by the rest of the bunch, half of whom were completely unknown to me. I was certainly at a loss as to who they might be but I presumed some were from the estate and others may have been hangers on. So much for my wifes housekeeping. Since we lost Maisie's mother who was the original housekeeper the Duchess had suggested she carry out the task, alas another failure.

Cook handed me a slice on and I left them to it.

'By the way Cook I did ask Maisie to do an errand for me, I hope you did not mind as I know your staff are all so....' the last word was left hanging as I closed the kitchen door.

As I left I realized I had not been in that kitchen since I was a small lad and how enormous it had been in those days when the staff lavished care attention and cakes on me, a very spoilt little chap. So cake in hand I climbed the stairs slowly and shuffled into the saloon spreading crumbs as I avidly ate the cake which was by far nicer than what was served to the gentry of this house. So I confronted Madam with the fact that the servants hall ate better than we did! She gave a little sniff, so I told her I wanted a proper housekeeper. She said it cost money so I said I will cut both my sons allowance in half so go ahead and start recruiting. Her only response was to start bawling about her beloved layabout sons. I picked the telephone up and rang our youngest in Australia.

"Dad do you what time it is over here" came a belligerent reply.

'Yes I said its late, now listen your Mother is coming over for a visit in a few weeks, make sure she is truly welcomed. And I am cutting yours and Nicks allowance you are both old enough to survive on your own.'

"How is my dearest brother, still chasing the ladies?"

'Correct, and I have had enough, goodbye.'

I just heard him say 'you will pay mothers fare please' before the phone hit the cradle!

Mother was snuffling into her handkerchief so I went down the hallway and opened up the two doors and proceeded down the steps to the bench where I stopped and sat and drank in the view. What marvelous sunny day it was and to think I had cooped myself up in that stuffy bedroom these past two years, and for what reason? Yes I had a wheezing cough and a bit shaky on my pins but as the sun warmed my face I felt at ease with myself, but I expect Maisie news has given me hope. Now to look for a new housekeeper, but why? Maisie would fit the bill, her mother had been superb. There, all is finalized and may I say, in just a brief hour. All it needs is a returned grandson and a respectable elder son to make my life complete.

I was dozing just a short nap waiting for afternoon tea, but instead in walked Molly Simpson, through my bedroom door, without knocking!

"Thought your Grace needed my services?" she said out loudly, she woke me up!

"Heard about the grandson, missing they said."

'Indeed Mrs Simpson' said I more in astonishment. How can you help may I ask?'

"I have this wonderful gift, I can see things.

'Yes its called eyes'

"No what I mean is in my mind, I can transport my mind in search of lost things or people, its a gift you see."

'You can tell me where my Nick is then?'

"Yes your grace for a fee."

'Ah theres the crunch of the matter, a fee. I thought people with gifts like you volunteer these gifts.'

"Well we do in cases of poverty but and old gentleman in a castle, a large one I might add is a different case."

'You suppose Madame I am rich because I live in apparent luxury, four turrets and a roof, all in need of constant repair, how much to open that mind of yours?'

"Forty pounds if you please sir."

'Who on earth sent you up here?'

"Cook."

'Then go downstairs and ask Cook for the money no doubt she has more than I do.' With that I threw my arm at the door, bloody woman coming up here unannounced, obviously she must have via the kitchen and Cook! She left with a snort and slammed my door which I always keep open so I can yell for assistance should I ever need too. So I rose quickly and softly crept down the back stairs and there in the kitchen was the Simpson woman with Cook, so I listened to them chatting.

"What a miser for forty quid I could have told his Nick was living in Beechly not a dozen miles from here."

"Too right, biggest tyrant in the house when 'is missus is away, always complaining so I spits on food before it gets sent up

Gracious thought I, so stealthily I climbed away up to the bedroom, dressed and called for the car.

Chapter 5. Back to school.

Tom brought the car around to the front as I cleared the steps in a flying leap, I wish! Instead I clambered down each one carefully until he reached me and guided me down the rest.

"Where to your Grace"

'Beechly school please Tom' said I quite out of breath, whoever built those dam steps to the front door obviously had a point to make. I think I will install an electric chair!

With me ruminating about step transport systems Tom drove me quickly to the school and let me outside the staff entrance. Well I presumed it to

be as it seemed well maintained compared with the dirty double doors in the middle, no doubt to let the hordes out quickly.

'Miss Frobisher if you please' said I to a rather stumpy receptionist. A receptionist in a minor village school, WHAT ARE THINGS COMING TOO!

"Miss Frobisher is busy she takes classes you know, and who do you think you are just walking in here without an appointment."

I thought for a moment but I was rather taken aback, bloody hell my father built this school just so his boys could go to it, Mother being absolutely dead against sending her beloved offspring too far away from her apron strings.

'I am the Duke, Madam, my father built this edifice.'

"Well it needs repainting, so tell him that when you see him please."

'He died several years ago you abomi.....' just about to add the rest but Jane Frobisher stormed out of the corridor toward me.' Bloody Hell that was quick thank you Madam.'

Madam gave me an evil look and went back to her typewriter.

"Well Useless what do you want?" she yelled.

'Listen its Heir or your Grace, Janiepainie.'

"How dare you call me that Eustace, I am a headmistress now, someone might hear."

'Eustace is my brother you've got us mixed up, Useless was in a class lower than ours!'

We were at school together and kids always made up nicknames. Which reminded me the purpose of my visit.

'I take it my grandson is here Jane' said I somewhat more conciliatory.

"Indeed he is unless he has scampered when he heard you bellowing at me."

'Jane is he or is he not, I wish to see him for just a moment if you please.'

"Only parents can request that on school property."

'Actually its my property, the estate never gifted the school to the education department it remains under my control whereas you don't, you are the property of the tax payers, and I suppose I am one of those as well.'

"Well thank you for that Heir, your property is in urgent need of refurbishment so when can I expect a maintenance visit? Its really a relief to know the property is not Department owned as I have been onto them these past three years."

'Very well Jane I will have Habard my gardener come and take notes, he will arrange some tradesmen to do what is required, now may I see young Nick.'

"Yes in my office if you please." I followed her down to another corridor with the shrill sounds of times tables. She opened a door and beckoned

me to sit in chair then she went out.

Two minutes later the door reopened and in burst young Nick right into my arms as I rose unsteadily to my feet.

"Grand-papa I'm rescued at long last." he said breathlessly.

I held him close and set him on my lap as his enthusiasm had knocked me back in the chair.

'Now listen Nick, I want you to ask your mother to come and live with Grand-mama and I in the big house. We have four turrets as you know, one is mine one is Grand-mama's and one will be your mothers and you.'

"What is the fourth one for?"

'Guests and any relatives who may stay.'

"May I have some friends to stay as well Grand-papa?"

'I guess so as long as they are not too noisy. So I would like to ask your mother to come this Saturday and speak with me about the arrangements, my spies tell me your other Grandparents are feeling the pinch so to speak.'

"You have spies grand-papa, how exciting I expect they keep you well informed."

'Quite young Robroy, how else did I find you!'

"Is Miss Frobisher one of them?"

'No of course not.'

"I just asked if she kept you informed of my progress, at school work you understand."

'No she has not said a word at all, she has asked me to do is repair the school.'

"Well perhaps Grand-papa you could rip up that concrete paving and put grass down. As often we children fall and scrape our knees especially when we are scrapping."

I looked down at him this little scrapping boy in horror.

'Not fisticuffs!'

"No Grand-papa just wrestling," he gave me a baleful glare so I nodded agreement.

'Off you go back to class now my boy wonder.' I gave him a quick hug and off he shot back to his class mates. Jane peered around the door.

'The boy wants grass to replace the playground concrete Jane. Thanks for letting me see him.'

" I wondered why this term he had become much quieter. I think you need to have a talk to Nick the elder. You know his son has a lot in common with you, Your own Nick takes after the Duchess."

Not my Duchess but the Duchess. Jane really never liked Dulcie. Dulcie came from a different region and time. Refused to mix with my old friends, yes I had missed a lot following my fathers instructions.

I thanked Jane profusely and Tom drove me back. When we arrived at the

bottom of the blasted big stairs I asked him to run Habard down to the school tomorrow to see Miss Frobisher, and then get him to send the tradesmen up to me as I want an electric chair facility installed by the steps and a quote for the school repairs.

Then feeling satisfied with myself I lurched up those dam steps then the staircase to my bedroom. I rang down for Tom who came up to tuck me in.

'Is that frightful woman still with cook?

"The one who reads your mind and then spins out some knowledge, yes I believe they are enjoying a meringue together."

'Pop down Tom please and give her this.' I handed Tom some forty pounds. 'I think she deserves this. By the By Tom I have a feeling cook won't be with us much longer.'

Chapter 6. A confrontation.

"Lady Evesham your Grace." Finlay opened the study door wider and my daughter in law strode in.

'Morning Edith. No grandson?'

"This is not a pleasant visit your Grace, presumably you are not in the habit of sending a policeman with a brief message."

'Well I'm sorry it was the best method I could think of bar sending three of the estate staff to pull you out of the rented house which I presume is not mine.' I invited her to sit and waved Finlay away. He closed the door carefully as one might expect. But I spied a small crack in the door jam, a brief thought hit me that he was only making sure I was safe from my daughter in laws handbag, a hefty swing from her could knock me out, after all she came from good farming stock!

"So father in law what are we to discuss, an increase in my rent or what?"

'I don't believe I own a house in Beechly, anyhow there are two no three things I need to talk to you about and I am sorry that one concerns my eldest son so you might be offended.' She nodded.

'Are you both considering a divorce? After all neither you or Nick have lived together for quite some time, I know you have talked to my Dulcie but she refuses to tell me what you two are up to. I have packed her off to Gideon for the moment.'

"We are still married and I have refused his request for a separation, I'm

quite happy about his other ventures after all he's just a child, mentally that is, and he does have a son. " A long pause, "and I suppose I still have some feeling for him and not just because of little Nick. What does annoy me is that my boy has a closer affinity for his upstart of a grandfather than for his own father."

I ignored the upstart, I thought loving or caring was closer to the truth but then my own boys were certainly not perfect.

'I have reduced Nicks money by half. In fact both the boys have been cut back.'

"Why, thats cruel I know Nick had taken a mortgage on a flat in London and now I was expecting a call for us to join him eventually." She reached for her handkerchief and I do admit never really liking her, I thought she was just a trollop catching Nick and providing him with child. It takes two to tango thats true, but I saw in that instance that I had been wrong. Thinking of my grandson, she really had bought him up well.'

'Edith are you working at the moment?'

"Mothers always work, washing, food, sewing"

'Quite, so I expect my Nick sends you an allowance or some such for you both.'

"No"

'So do you mind asking how do you support yourselves

" We just manage, I've sold all the gifts Nick gave me, rather I've pawned them or sent them to auction, then of course my parents have helped me."

'Would you come and live here instead, you can have one of the free turrets.'

" I prefer where we are thank you besides if you really want to help you could give us one of those tied house on the estate, I'm sure you have some to spare."

'Up to ten years ago we found the estate was not bringing in what it used to and what extra taxes maintenance and all my factor has had to rent out every one and not being kept for the staff.'

"But surely"

'You've notice some of the notice boards around the place?'

"Yes and some of the rooms have been roped off."

'Indeed we are now a display castle for the general public on weekends only, thank God, but their money is most welcome. Your mother in law has volunteered herself to run a cafe, thats when she gets back but frankly I am perturbed at the very thought. '

"You have cook!"

'Ah her days are numbered, I don't like disloyalty in the ranks, but I was thinking of your parents they ran a cake shop years ago. After they sold their farm that is.'

"Have you been checking on them!"

'Well in looking for you and little Robroy I had a detective visit you old home town just in case you were there.'

"And?"

'You are not aware of their circumstances?'

"They wrote to say they had moved."

'Indeed Edith, to a small rented flat, they sold their home so that they could support you and our grandson. They have been supporting you for the past six months, I believe they also bought you a motor vehicle. All these things they have done for you and Robroy So I have written to them asking if they would help out running the cafe and they would be given an estate house once one becomes available.'

"They probably will say no, after all their son in law is not their favorite person."

'Nor mine.'

"Do you want me to convince them to come? I still believe Nick and I can have life together. You always thought I just grabbed him because of his position, in fact he never mentioned you or the duchess at all. The first thing I knew who you were was when we got married in this Mausoleum. But I'll do a deal with, you get Nick to return and we live here together and I will convince Mum and Dad to come." She said all this in a torrent of words so it took me a few minutes to comprehend the significance. But in this discussion I had been out maneuvered and I instantly saw some positive role for Edith.

'Fine with one further suggestion, I want a secretary I can trust, someone with brains and management skills, and thats you Edith. At the moment I've got my gardener going down to the school to look at the maintenance and organize trades people and quotes and what not. I believe you can handle that and maybe relieve our factor the job of estate houses, he really does have a lot on his plate with the Home Farm and the estate and the public weekends to organize.'

"Yes well I would prefer to handle the public open days and Nick could surely organize the estate houses. I truly believe he was bored here as you liked to control every aspect of the estate, so you never gave your sons any chance to apply there own initiatives. You even try to be a father to our Nicki and I think my husband, your son, resented that."

And so it was I went down to London to see my son, living in a friends garage as they were foreclosing his mortgage, and we had it out we two. There was lots of shouting and cursing and eventually we made up. There was no blond bimbo and indeed he did miss his wifes organizational skills, amongst other things. So he came home two weeks later and Edith joined him in one of the spare turrets, newly decorated by them both. And cook was sacked and Dulcie came home and Robroy started to take both

his Grandfathers out for walks on the estate hunting for butterflies, rabbits and moles. Then to sit quietly and converse with nature and get away from the chattering women. Alas Robroy will soon learn otherwise and Jane tells me a little lost girl at school has taken his fancy. Dulcie and Edith are over the moon.

Chapter 7 And then again.

I suppose it would have been an ideal time to close this account but that was not the end of it. Yes Robroy and Grandpa Evans and I did go exploring, once I even managed to jump over a fence and was saved from injury by my two companions Dulcie was beside herself when Robroy opened his mouth and told all, I was banned from venturing outside the estate, but I've always thought other peoples property was more interesting than my own. So why did all the public visitors spend money to come and ogle at us on weekends? So my gardener Habard decided to retire. Nick told me he was keen to take over the management of the gardens.

"Well Father its true people want to see a real live Duke but these days they expect bigger gardens and plenty of herbaceous borders, after viewing the house they want to picnic in the grounds."

'They've got a cafe to go too with tables and chairs as well as your in-laws to serve them.'

"Well we need to extend the lawn close to the cafe for one thing, a rose garden close by and I believe a small circular lake for boating would not go amiss."

'Boats, they cost money and insurance to cover visitor injuries.'

"Well I will get onto it and we will have a family discussion. And I think we should involve my Uncles, after all this was their home as well!"

'Well heres something else to discuss, your brother is returning home so you will need to accommodate him somewhere, I was thinking the old stables as a possibility.'

"Fine I'll check them out."

'Just the roof and the walls etc. Nick Robin will want to do his own maintenance and decorating, give him something to do!'

With the garden under new management Robroy and his father started to spend time together planning drawing and building. One project included

a small tree house for young Nick and his friends, built by both his father and Uncle built the the timbers and roof and Edith did the inside decoration. Robin took over the estate houses to every-bodies relief, especially Nick who rather enjoyed the garden planning. Robin was a bachelor boy and Dulcie secretly hoped he would rent out one of the estate houses to a lovely lady!

One weekend, a Saturday it was, I was having a lie in with a cup of tea balanced on my bedspread. There was an enormous clattering up the the tower steps and sixteen children burst into my bedroom, its leader was the erstwhile grandson Robroy.

'What are you here for Nick?'

"Well Grand-papa the rope up to your staircase with the word PRIVATE was not there, so I thought great we can all go and see Grand papa's tower and say hello."

'Hello and goodbye.'

"No thats rude Grand-papa and I think you just might offer us one of those pear drops you keep hidden in that big jar under the bed."

'Excuse me why are half the school here, did you all pay to come in, did your mother know you bought the school up here!'

" Please go and I will negotiate with my Grand-papa" The children gradually sidled down the steps clattering and chatting all the time whilst Robroy stood his ground eying his grand-papa

"Well they've gone so that will be seventeen Pear drops please Grand-papa"

'I thought you were going to negotiate.'

"I have." came the answer quick as a flash, the boy is growing up I thought as I reached under the bed to grasp my jar, bur two smaller hands got there first.

'Get one of my clean handkerchiefs from the top drawer over there Robroy, sweets for other people must be kept clean!' So I counted eighteen pear drops in the handkerchief.

"That's one too many Grand-papa!"

"Well at least you can count, so thats for getting rid of the visitors so quickly, a fine leader you've become and the extra sweet is for you. Now off you go and look after your charges please.' I had visions of a stampede of children rioting throughout the house!

The new gardens Nick and my grandson had created were to be far better than I had expected. The lake was sumptuous and the lawns surrounding it became a hive of family picnicking and how the herbaceous borders ended close to Mr. and Mrs. Evans fine cafe. I warned Nick about the expense and maintaining the dam things every spring and summer, but as

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

