

---

## **CLOUD FIVE**

---

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

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

**By Jimmy Brook**

---

**CIRCLE OF GOLD**

---

by

JIMMY BROOK

## CIRCLE OF GOLD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

And now for some more wine and that custard tart.

Jimmy Brook

## 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

