

## News From Home 7

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A dense fog covers the Trellises, our bijou suburban paradise. It is midnight, and nothing stirs, so, with a mind that this is getting to be a habit, I give Georgio a knock, and we silently slip through the *Calycanthus Occidentalis*, around the *Galvezia Speciosa*, and into the manicured glades of *Azaleas* various. It is hard to see more than six feet in front, so we proceed with great caution, fearful of another nocturnal encounter – but as we inch closer to the concrete shrine, we find ourselves happily alone, and we get on with our nefarious task. Now I don't want you to think, dear reader, that I haven't been wrestling with guilt since our last attempt to remove the objectionable Thing from the premises – Hashimoto, regardless of his undoubted crimes of trespass and subterfuge, clearly had a spiritual use for our garden and our unwitting facilities therein – however, I wish to regain control of my own petty kingdom, and will not be dictated to by mere contractors. Before I have given too much thought as to who gets the heavy end and who goes backwards through the blackberries, Georgio has already loaded the top into the pickup, and has come back for the base. I make a show of helping, and clearing the path, and within three minutes the whole thing is loaded and strapped down, and we're off! As we roll down the hill towards the beach, adrenalin pumping, the fog grows thicker still, and we finally crawl at about 5 miles per hour onto the bridge over the run-off channel. Weather conditions could not be more perfect – if the Police passed ten feet away they wouldn't see us. I grab an end of the base to help Georgio

heave it over the parapet, but he gives a kind of snarl, and like a true man of iron, lifts it and holds it, elbows and knees locked, high above his head, before sending it crashing down, with a mighty splash, into the briny. The top follows swiftly, and our work is done.

Next morning I decide to break the news myself, fearing that I might start twitching, Anthony Perkins-style, if things drag on too long, and I duly raise the alarm. I am taken aback by the subdued nature of the response, until I learn that darker news has already been carried – old Mrs. Wasserman across the street has just been discovered floating face down in her swimming pool, gin glass still miraculously gripped in her stiff fingers, her original 50s cocktail dress spreading over the gently undulating surface like a huge, polka-dot water-lily. Our ‘robbery’ has taken a back seat, and nobody has mentioned going to the fuzz....A silent prayer of thanks and flowers in memoriam to Mrs.

W...Honourable No.3 Son knows I'm up to something, though, dash it – he can't quite figure out how it all fits together, but he knows I know, and I have had to resort to bribery, in the not insubstantial form of FIFA 2003, to keep him gagged.

I call on Georgio in the guest house, to congratulate him on a job well done, but I find him extremely miserable. It seems Martina has got herself a boyfriend. I am about to ask Georgio why, if he has to turn sideways to walk through doors, doesn't he go round and give this usurper a good wallop? But he pre-empts my question by telling me that the love interest is the current Mr. Poland, and may prove more than a match in a trial of strength...it would be nice to get the guest house back in time for our nephew's wedding – which reminds me, I must order the Chinese lanterns from The Bamboo Hut ('Where the Topic is Tropical')...

Played Mavis some of my Gracie Fields classics – tried to give her a good range, from the stirring soprano acrobatics of “Sally” to the side-splitting comedy of “Heaven Will Protect An Honest Girl” – her reaction was somewhat muted – “It's a load of bloody old rubbish, is that”, I think were her words. She asked if I had anything by the Stone Roses. I was just digging out a gem from 10CC, when she said she had to meet a friend for a drink, and disappeared out the front door. Funny, because she likes George

Formby...by the by, last night when I came home, she seemed a bit flushed and ruffled – still buttoning her blouse when she answered the door – but no sign of a partner in sin. Perhaps she got over-excited watching David Hasslehoff on the box...

I thought I wouldn't be, but I'm rather glad to see Akbar and the boys back – they're stripping and priming Mr. Alphonso's house, and I can't wait to see how that colour looks. No doubt I shall have to say something to my old friend, give a little gentle advice...meanwhile, Mr. A has been showing me the fine art of the boleadoras – you know, those balls on ropes the gauchos use to trip up cows and other poor defenceless creatures. Mr. A is still pretty hot from his restricted wheelchair position, and bests me every time. The secret is in the speed – not too fast, not too slow, just three times around the head before throwing around the legs of – in our case – a plywood silhouette of a Rhea, the South American flightless bird, which I ran up on the bandsaw for our recreational pleasure. "Hah! You throw like schoolgirl! You throw like seamstress!", says Mr. A, in that special way he has of giving encouragement. I move the target back another 10 feet, and that soon shuts him up, and we repair inside for a cup of mate and a hand of Bezique. Mr. A says Mrs. Wasserman was a fine figure of a woman back in the fifties – big busty blonde in the Mamie Van Doren mould – her husband was an executive at Fox, who fell out with the Mafia at some point, hence no big house in Palm Springs, and when the husband died, in very unsuspecting circumstances (from a septic finger) she scraped by okay on her SAG pension plan. But Mr. A swore that she was teetotal, and a model of Christian rectitude, which doesn't fit the picture at all. As one of the older residents of the area, he should know, shouldn't he?