

## A Laborial Clown

John Biggs

Geoffrey loved talking. Talking was his job. People who couldn't talk their way into getting what they wanted, he thought, were piss-weak. Like writers, like all those arty-farty types, a bunch of poofers. But could he talk about who was or was not a poofter after one occasion in the not too distant past?

He was wandering Nutgrove Beach late at night. From the depth of the dunes, a high, sweet tenor voice ravished his ears. It was singing, softly, seductively, 'Send in the Clowns'.

'My favourite song,' breathed Geoffrey. He stumbled forward eagerly, desperately, to find the source of that wonderful sound. He did not yet know that it would be singer, not the song, that would stir his inner being so ecstatically.

Was it any surprise, after the long and *soulful* experience that ensued, that Geoffrey experienced difficulty in performing his marital duty? Yes, what had once been a source of immense pleasure to him—if not to Dulcie his forbearing wife—was first a duty, then an improbability. He tried all remedies. A bottle of shiraz initially helped him turn the corner from the street of duty to the avenue of pleasure, but that solution appeared to become the problem, as he lurched into the blind alley of improbability. His GP suggested that he forego his nightly bottle, and occasionally bottles, of good red wine. But alas, drunk, sober or in between, he remained afflicted with flaccidity.

Then – Inspiration! He remembered when in his workplace he had experienced That Certain Feeling at particular moments.

He instructed a naked Dulcie to sit propped up against a mountain of lace-trimmed pillows in their king-sized bed. In her hand she held a videocam. He, dressed in white shirt and his Tasmanian Club tie and nothing else, stood in front of the old-fashioned full-length mirror on the blackwood wardrobe. He admired the figure he saw there, with its proud tousel of grey hair atop the fleshy face, the full lips framing the front teeth that protruded royally with gleaming whiteness, while underneath his shirt lay the fine, solid paunch of a gentleman of taste.

He preened himself, turning this way and that, *positioning* his profile. When all was exactly as it should be, he bared his gleaming teeth, shouting: 'Now Mr. Speaker, *Now* Mr. Speaker, Am I Hearing This Correctly, Mr. Speaker? The Honourable Member, Mr. Speaker, The Honourable Member For Longreach, Mr. Speaker, Must Know That This Government, Mr. Speaker, That This Government Is Committed ...'

His own dishonourable member, by now huge and rampant, formed the front of his shirt into a circus tent.

'TO WORLD'S BEST PRACTICE, MR. SPEAKER, YES, MR. SPEAKER, TO *WORLD'S BEST PRACTICE!!*'

The tent floated gently downwards, revealing not only its massive supporting pillar, but the gruesome, grizzled mess that lay at its base.

He turned to his Best Beloved with a boyish, toothy leer. 'Get that on camera, Dulcie Luv?'

On the assurance that she had indeed captured this moment of supreme glory, he threw off his shirt, foreplay over. Whereupon, leaving his tie in place—he was after all a Member of the Tasmanian Club—he launched himself upon the hapless Dulcie.

Detumescence.

With a deep sigh that emanated from the very depths of his soul, he raised himself from the flattened—but mercifully spared—Dulcie. He dressed. He went to the garage, there to apply a desperate twist to the ignition key of his Commodore. He drove with increasing speed along Sandy Bay Road. The tyres squealed as he chucked a leftie into Nutgrove Avenue.

In a low, phlegmy baritone, he was growling: 'Send in the Clowns'.