

That'd Be Right

By William McInnes

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There wasn't much of a yard to mow. It was your basic green-carpeted, southeast Queensland suburban lawn. Bland and bare. Chook wire ran along three sides but there was no fence at the front. There weren't many clumps of growth that could hide toads. Not much to really do to it, but for three years I mowed the lawn for a little bit of cash and, on occasion, some warm orange cordial courtesy of Mrs Glazier.

Mrs Glazier was an immense woman who wore vast dark dresses and had a moustache. She spoke with a soft, sibilant English accent. Her eyesight was bad and the images on her colour television were all tinged with a lurid algae green. Certainly Rick McCosker looked green. In fact he looked like he came from Mars as we watched old footage of him walking out to bat in the 1977 Centenary Test. Him and his broken jaw. And his baggy green cap covering the great egg of his bandages.

'Oh, he was brave, wasn't he?' whispered Mrs Glazier.

McCosker's jaw had been broken in the first innings and now he had come out to bat in the second. His captain, the gentlemanly Greg Chappell, had tried to stop him but McCosker would have none of it.

My family and I had watched the test a few months earlier, and when McCosker came out to bat my father had clapped his hands.

'Now that, that bloke there, that's a *man*.'

'Colin, do you have to yell with your mouth full?' said my mother.

'Sorry, but it's more than that poor sod can do! Well done you.' He pointed a finger at the television.

I looked at McCosker, eyes downcast, his awkward country gait emphasised by the ungainly cricket pads and tight trousers. He didn't showboat. His reaction to the crowd singing 'Oh Rick McCosker' to the tune of 'Waltzing Matilda' was to gently raise his bat and continue waddling to the crease.

He may not have been the best player, or the flashiest, but he was certainly the bravest.

'Showboating' was the term that my father gave to acts of lairising or showing off. Of letting people know that what you had done was good and important. Of carrying on like a pork chop.

We'd already seen a bit of showboating at the Centenary Test with the wonderful fast bowler Dennis Lillee and his performances for the umpires. He may have been brave, bowling with his bad back and bruised feet, but he was still a showboater.

In fact the showboating began when the former English and Australian cricket captains had assembled side by

side at the start of the test.

And if anyone needed any evidence that cricket was a game of the suburbs then there it was in the faces of the Australian captains. None of them would have been out of place walking down the streets of our neighbourhood. All bluff blokes, even the white-haired Richie Benaud. Perhaps Richie may have had a wine down at the bowls club instead of beer at the RSL, but he would still have fitted snugly into our life. In fact, any of them could have walked up our drive to hire something from my father's hire service. It would most likely have been party equipment because a few did look white collar – especially the Victorians like Lindsay Hassett and Bill Johnston, although Bill Lawry had a tradesman's look about him that my father approved of.

Don Bradman, my father thought, would be the sort of fellow to hire a sander for a little bit of home renovation and then return it in better condition than it had been when he borrowed it.

'A mysterious bugger, The Don,' he said.

But Ian Chappell had blotted his copybook.

'Oh Christ, will you look at him!' moaned my mother.

'Oh son... that's not up to speed... oh dear,' said my father, for he liked Ian Chappell. He shook his head. 'Why is the silly bastard wearing a safari suit?'

It was a question worth asking.

'Maybe he's in the Labor party,' I offered.

That made some sense to my father and he considered it for a moment, then he shook his head.

'No, no-no-no-no. Christ. A green safari suit.'

Even my father had stopped wearing these creations.

'Oh Ian, you look like you work at the pawnbrokers.' The pawnbrokers was a hock shop cum real estate office in Deception Bay that was run by a group of shifty-looking men who wore aviator glasses, had moustaches that seemed to be glued on and all drove Sunbirds – cars that made the Cortina, universally loathed as the poor man's Torana, look good.

That is what Ian Chappell looked like.

'A green safari suit,' said my father again.

'And sunglasses,' added my mother.

My father nodded sadly. 'And sunglasses.' He sighed.

'Why'd you have to go and showboat, Ian? He looks like a goose.'

The safari suit did look a little lurid. In fact, it looked like he was dressed to be on Mrs Glazier's television.

But he wasn't. Rick McCosker was still waddling away until he abruptly gave way to an image of Kerry Packer, the 39-year-old owner of the television station.

A voiceover told us that cricket had gone from the glory of the Centenary Test to the controversy of Kerry Packer in a few short months.

Not to mention a hiding by the English in the Ashes.

Kerry Packer, with a wide fleshy face and watchful eyes, looked at the journalist off-screen like some great predator, half-smiled and said softly, 'I'm just interested in good quality cricket.'

I watched Kerry Packer while Mrs Glazier poured me an orange cordial to celebrate my agreeing to mow her carpet of lawn occasionally.

Mrs Glazier could hardly see, as evidenced by the thick dark glasses she wore. She filled the glass with water from the hot tap and I drank the first in a long line of warm orange cordials.

I said thanks, for it seemed impolite to point out that the drink was anything but cool and refreshing.

Kerry Packer looked out from the television with unflappable coolness and seemed to mock me with his steady gaze.

Mrs Glazier's poor eyesight was also evidenced the next day as my father flapped his hand up and down at her from the cabin of his truck while intermittently giving the thumbs-up sign.

'She's a lovely woman but, by Christ, she looks like she's wearing welding goggles,' he muttered as he gave me a lift to school.

'Do you think she saw me? Blind as a bat.'

'Mum says she puts sugar in her sweet potato mash.'

'You what?'

'Mrs Glazier puts sugar in her sweet potato mash. She gave Mum a recipe for it.'

'I'm talking about her eyesight for Christ's sake – not what she puts in her mashed potatoes,' my father fumed.

'Sweet potato,' I added.

My father kept driving but took both hands off the steering wheel and pointed at me with both his forefingers, as if he were an Australian Rules goal umpire signalling a goal. As he did this, he cupped the steering wheel in his knees and proceeded to drive.

'Now look you, don't go shirking off and doing a half-arsed effort because she can't see through those beer bottles she's wearing. Make a go of it... do a good job and maybe there'll be other lawns you could do. Who knows where it'll stop?'

I wondered what my father meant. Did he think I could become a professional lawn mower man? Was that my future path? I thought of people who mowed lawns. They usually worked at the council or were grumpy school janitors. I didn't really see myself there.

And then there was my father. He would occasionally mow lawns, with incendiary results.

My father believed that there were some people who were too lazy to do their own lawns.

‘Don’t ask me why but there are sods out there who’ll pay you money to push a mower around for twenty minutes. They want a specialist service.’

For a while my father would add this to his entrepreneurial basket, turning up at people’s backyards for ‘twenty minutes of specialist service’ with his squadron of mower machines.

‘I’ll just whip out and do a lawn, back in a tick,’ my father would cheerfully say, and anyone within earshot would roll their eyes, for the twenty minutes would deepen into an hour and a half, and on some occasions a whole afternoon.

It was because of the squadron of mowers. These contraptions were cannibalised from bits and pieces of different mowers, found objects and things that were probably never mowers in the first place.

The squadron ranged from something George Jetson might use on a Saturday night for a bit of fun, to an appliance Dr Frankenstein knocked up in his garden shed in his spare time, to things resembling the odd machines used to prepare France for the Allied invasion in World War II – great threshing machines that would explode landmines in wallowing clouds of smoke.

The squadron consisted of two types of mowers: rotary-started mowers and chord-pull mowers.

On the rotary mower a little handle at the top would be turned and slapped down and the machine would leap into life. Well, that was the theory. My father would hunch, squatting over the mower with his great body quivering, as he wound and wound the little handle.

A little sigh of mechanical intent would be released by the mower and then it would shudder into silence.

The ‘Fartin’ Bastard’ it became known as. But, without a doubt, the top-shelf moment was when my father would start the chorded Victor Rover. A string would be pulled to crank the motor and then lever controls would be manipulated to govern the speed of the mower.

My father would heave and yank and pull with all his might and then attack the lever like some bad actor in an old film, as if he were fighting the controls of a spacecraft.

And, like a bad actor, he would speak to the machine.

‘Oh come on you swine of a thing...’

Try and reason with it.

‘Come on Victor old mate, there’s a lad, come on. Come ON. Come ON!’

He’d yank at the string.

‘Start, you bastard, start... workAHHHHH!’

Another yank and he’d look like he was a hammer thrower in the Olympics.

He would yell so much at the machines that some of his customers thought he was talking to another person, this Victor fellow, and would peer out through their windows to see who the man providing their specialist service was yelling at.

I thought about all this as we drove to school but I didn't say anything. Then I nodded in the way teenagers nod when they aren't listening. A blank-eyed bob of the head.

Without a great deal of thought I asked, 'Would Kerry Packer mow lawns?'

I didn't know if my father had heard me.

'You've got to go easy on the mowers because if you fart around you'll bugger them up... Why would you put sugar in sweet potato?' He scratched his head and held the wheel again. After a while he said in an empty voice, 'No, son, Kerry Packer wouldn't mow lawns. Why would he when can buy a whole sport?'

Packer wanted to buy the broadcast rights to the test cricket because across the world televised sport was a magnet for advertising dollars. Packer had offered the Australian Cricket Board more than the ABC for the television rights, but the cricketing establishment decided that transmissions of the national game should stay with the national broadcaster. Instead of buying the broadcast rights, Packer then came up with the idea of buying the players and, therefore, the game.

So, during the time that I mowed Mrs Glazier's garden carpet, there were two cricketing competitions: the Packer-led circus and the establishment tests.

Packer said that taking over the game was easy because the Australian Cricket Board didn't pay the players a fraction of what they were worth.

He had a point. The board was starting to making a lot of money from the game and passing very little of it back to the players. And so the parsimonious nature of the board's financial offers, plus the conservatism of their administration, rendered them powerless against the deep pockets of Packer's media empire.

The players were, for all intents and purposes, amateurs in a sport that was making a profit, and with the promise of more money to be made, why wouldn't they want a larger piece of the pie?

Up until then the best that professional athletes seemed to get from television was what they received at the end of interviews on shows like *Sports Scene* and *Wide World of Sport*. After a panel discussion the smiling host Rod Gallegos would turn to the sporty type and say with a wink, 'You won't be leaving us empty-handed. You've got the Adidas sports bag, the Hutton's 'Don't Argue' Footy Franks, a tube of Dencorub, a jar of professional-strength Staminade Sports drink, a pair of VYI sunglasses, a dinner for two at the Top of the Town and a night at Dirty Dick's Medieval theatre Restaurant.'

This glowing assortment of treasure was shown on camera, and surely no man could feel less than a king with

such booty. But overnight, with the age of Packer, people could see that it would soon be possible to earn your living from sport.

It was about appreciating people's worth in the market of life and this is where Packer understood the time.

If the Olympic athletes could complain to Malcolm Fraser and demand more financial assistance then it seemed that cricket and other sports could embrace the idea of paying athletes.

There were some players who initially resisted the temptations of Packer's money, but it quickly became apparent what the upshot of all the upheaval would be.

The idea that one man could own a whole sport was what seemed to tarnish the game in my father's eyes.

It was fine for Dennis Lillie to pose, pump up his heroics and immerse himself in the role of demon fast bowler, but how could one man own the deeds of Rick McCosker?

'You can have all the money in the world but you can't own what that fella McCosker did,' my father said as he drove me to school. 'Cause he didn't do it for the money, he did it for us, son. Because he thought it was the right thing to do.'

Still, it didn't stop me from thinking it would be great if Kerry Packer asked me to join his circus. I remembered his great impassive green face from Mrs Glazier's telly. While my father banged on about Rick McCosker, I was suddenly shaking Kerry's hand and signing up for countless thousands of Hutton's Footy Franks and jars of Staminade. We posed for the press photographers and shared a celebratory warm orange cordial, me and Kerry – and Mrs Glazier. In fact the two had begun to morph into each other and were now constantly linked in my mind, the mention of one momentarily flinging up a mental image of the other.

My father must have decided that he had found a rich vein of metaphorical life-message gold with Rick McCosker for he was mining it for all it was worth.

He took his hands off the steering wheel and beeped the horn, not to warn other motorists but to announce a new thought. He drove with his knees and spoke with his hands.

'Listen, sunshine, when you think it's all about money, when you think you can do a half-arsed job on that poor half-blind, old cow's lawn, think about Rick McCosker. Think about what he would do...' My father smiled to himself, beeped the horn again and leapt into a rendition of 'Oh Rick McCosker'.

I nodded the adolescent bob of understanding, but it was all for show. I don't think I quite knew what Rick McCosker had to do with mowing Mrs Glazier's lawns but I did note that money, and the chasing and using of it, were in the air.

The Federal treasurer, Phillip Lynch, had produced a budget that, in his own words, was 'rubbery'. He was eventually sacked from Malcolm Fraser's cabinet because of a conflict of interests concerning laws he was passing and properties he was developing.

Meanwhile Malcolm Fraser, that bastion of all things establishment, remained manifestly silent on Packer's cricket takeover. This had more to do with not making a fuss over something that was likely to put out of joint the nose of a man who owned a vast media conglomerate, including the most successful television network in the country, than taking a stand on what was good and proper for Australian sport culture. It was an election year after all.

Fraser won the election so comfortably that it was one of the few election nights our television wasn't tuned to the tally room from go to woe.

It wasn't that late into the evening when we sat and watched Fraser's victory announcement. He bore on in his metronomic monotone that he wanted to govern for all Australians, no matter what they did or where they were from. He wanted to govern using the things that unite all Australians. He wanted to lead by uniting all Australians. How that was going to happen, and what the things were that were going to unite us, wasn't made clear because Fraser wasn't interested in expounding on them. He looked like he was just going through the motions. He took no questions and disappeared off into the Southern Cross Hotel.

The 1977 election was the last Whitlam would face as leader and he was crushed again, suffocating under an avalanche of votes supporting the Liberals. Their campaign had promised people handfuls of cash back in huge tax cuts, which miraculously never seemed to eventuate after the election.

The carrot was dangled and all the donkeys in the land continued to chase it.

For the first time, perhaps, men who didn't actually play the sports they were associated with were becoming the most famous faces within areas of sporting endeavour.

Kerry Packer in cricket. Alan Bond, a self-made millionaire from Perth, was single-handedly, it seemed, attempting to wrest yachting's most famous trophy, the America's Cup, from the clutches of the Newport Yacht Club of Rhode Island, New York. Geoffrey Edelstein, who ran a series of medical clinics in Sydney, had bought the South Melbourne AFL football team, which became the Sydney Swans. He was as likely to have ever played football as I was to start the Fartin' Bastard mower first time to do Mrs Glazier's lawn.

Yet none of these fellows were ever expected to think about what Rick McCosker would have done before they went about their days.

I'm sure that Rick would have carried his swollen jaw with dignity and honesty as he pushed the Fartin' Bastard over Mrs Glazier's grass, but then he would probably have been able to start the bloody thing, using his country commonsense to make some sort of order from the monster that my father had created.

I wound and snapped and wound and snapped, but the handle wouldn't do what it was supposed to do. I wound and snapped and my father's voice, though he himself was unseen, carried across the yards. 'Go on so, a

bit more Rick McCosker.'

I pictured myself swathed in bandages and had another go, and wound and snapped fruitlessly again. I was lucky to even get a fart out of it. After constant and largely inept attempts to engage the rotary I happened on the idea that, like some of my family's dodgy vehicles, perhaps the Fartin' Bastard could be jump-started.

For the next twenty or so minutes I ran up and down the length of Mrs Glazier's yard wrestling with the Fartin' Bastard, trying to coax some breath into its engine.

Then I tried the front yard, thinking that a slope would aid my efforts.

Nothing happened and I collapsed upon the seat in the little concrete patio, where the wet-weather clothesline was strung loosely with some very old wooden pegs.

Mrs Glazier came lumbering up and in her hand was a glass of orange cordial.

'Oh you have done a good job. Thank you so very much.' And in her other hand was a ten-dollar note.

'Oh yes, very neat, you're a good worker.'

I looked at her yard and saw no difference, save for a collection of desperate, swerving lines made by the mower and my feet where I had screamed across the grass.

I could have told her I hadn't done the job. I should have told her I hadn't done the job. What, I asked myself, would Rick McCosker do?

Or should I make the most of this opportunity?

I took the ten-dollar note and told myself that at least I had never mentioned that the cordial was warm.

It started a nasty habit of claiming money from Mrs Glazier that I never really earned. There were some days, when I had the more reliable Victor Rover, that I actually did cut the grass. And on the days when I was after a bit of money I would make sure I chatted to Mrs Glazier. She may have been a bit perplexed by my behaviour, but it made me feel better.

She had a record she liked to play. It was a collection of songs by various singers, but the one she liked best was a song by a man called Bobby Rydell. There was a photo of him on the front of the record and, true to Mrs Glazier's form with the television, it seemed to be covered in a coloured glaze. An orange wash draped Bobby's face. Perhaps it was his tan. He had enormous hair, a huge flat-top cut. So big you could lay a family-sized pizza on it, and his big teeth were as white as liquid paper. The song he sang was 'Forget Him'.

What would Rick McCosker do?

Bobby sang in his best breathy leagues club vibrato to 'Forget Him'. So I went with Bobby.

It wasn't that I was the only one. Almost everybody knew that kickbacks galore were happening in the

Queensland state government under Joh Bjelke-Petersen. His minister for everything, Russ Hinze, was becoming a cult figure with his creative use of public monies. Even Phillip Lynch had returned to Federal cabinet after a safe enough time had elapsed since the election. He had been replaced as Treasurer by a young man who was fond of wearing waistcoats with suits. John Winston Howard.

My friends and I followed suit. We didn't start wearing waistcoats and sporting a comb-over as the Federal treasurer did; we started taking opportunities. On the day that Sir Robert Menzies died, surely a metaphor for the end of a certain type of propriety, my friend Peter landed a gift from the gods of opportunism. It was a little ray of sunshine for all of us.

Peter got a job at the Sunshine servo down in Clontarf, which was owned by Mick the Pom and Stan Stan the One-armed Man. They did little and left the staff to run the place.

There were three workers there, Peter and two oddities of humanity called Lobby and Kelvin. Kelvin would hold forth about how smoking could cure pimples – he smoked like a chimney but his face looked like a meat lover's special; about how afterburners on jet aircraft held spy cameras that checked up on what the council workers were up to; and that he, Kelvin, had devised the concept of inbuilt obsolescence and had sold it to the Reader's Digest Group.

In other words, he was barking.

He would bang on with so much incessant tripe that Peter would get us to come in and fill a shopping trolley, then walk out as Kelvin banged away. Eventually Kelvin would spot the orphaned, and by now empty, trolley and go and collect it. 'Bloody kids,' he would blurt before going on to the next piece of idiocy.

Nobody seemed to care, least of all Stan Stan the One-armed Man and Pommy Mick. They were too busy in the Fortitude Valley to ever look back in anger.

As we got older we all needed more money and yet, even when we got part-time jobs down at Coles, the idea of somehow making things work for you was paramount to the age. You did as little as possible, and it was easy to do that on the odd days I was required in the meat area.

A tall man with a limp and the appropriately named Jane Mutton did most of the work.

I managed to draw a wage without hardly turning up, so when a pale, hairy man called Eric, who had a habit of shedding long strands of dark hair, took my place one Saturday I could hardly complain.

And there was always Mrs Glazier's lawn.

Even though Mal Fraser was committing Australia to becoming a multicultural nation and began the first transmissions from the Special Broadcast Service, the world and the drought had begun to close in on Big Mal. The economy was very much like me and my group of friends. It wasn't really achieving very much at all. We arsed around and generally cruised through the days. At school in economics we would hear strange stirrings of

words like 'rationalism' and its relevance to efficiency, and that economics was no longer a social science but was in fact becoming a system based around models and statistics, not people.

Mrs Glazier became a set inflow of income to me. I provided a service to her. This occurred to me one day when she gave me a warm cordial and some money I hadn't earned from the lawn.

I did sit and chat though, and, in this way, I was following the suit of refining the service I was providing. But sometimes even in a perfect economic model something can creep in – a past, a voice, a fleeting memory. Life. I was ready to chat but instead Mrs Glazier held my hand for a long time. She didn't play Bobby Rydell, even though he looked at me with his liquid-paper-toothed finery from the shadows of a little sideboard.

I grew rather uncomfortable and wondered if she was all right. She tried to smile and then said softly, 'It's my wedding anniversary today.'

'Really,' I said.

She smiled and continued to hold my hand.

'He was a soldier. An American lad.'

I could see through her dark glasses that her eyes were closed.

I stood. She stood. She held my hand.

'He was so lovely. He had the kindest eyes.' She stopped and then let out a little sigh.

She let go of my hand and waddled into the kitchen. I could hear water pouring. She came back with a glass of orange cordial. It was warm. She had some money in her hand.

She gave it to me and said, 'It's awful to be alone. But that, I suppose, is the way some lives just pan out. He was lovely.'

She turned away and walked up the little steps to her house.

'You're a good worker all right,' she whispered.

I didn't drink the cordial and I didn't throw it away as I usually did. I walked to where some roses had finally started to grow, broke a stem off and plonked the rose in the glass of cordial.

At the door of Mrs Glazier's house I called out that I had something she might like. Bobby Rydell was singing. I said that I would leave the glass on the step. She'd see the rose then. I looked at the money and thought that perhaps I should leave that too.

But then any money was handy because things were afoot. We had a school trip to the Snowy Mountains and a bit of extra cash would come in handy because Hairy Eric had made his presence felt in the meat department. I promised myself that I would bring something back for Mrs Glazier.

The two cricketing tribes had made up on Kerry Packer's terms and so he settled into his glory days of being

the great cricket revolutionary and unlocking opportunities for players. That meant, in many cases, players overstaying their welcome and trying to create little enclaves of power and influence through celebrity and notoriety. Namely showboating.

Rick McCosker came back to open in a test and then never played another. He'd gone off and played for Packer's cricket rebels but he ended up on the country circuit, his place taken in the Australian team by the South African born Kepler Wessels. Wessels scored runs. McCosker was the bloke who came out in the Centenary Test with a face swollen like watermelon. Nobody wanted to remember that now.

Least of all when we were heading for the snow. And to Canberra, the nation's capital. One of the bus drivers brought his son, Olaf, who looked and behaved like a prison warden out of a Stephen King novel.

On the way to Parliament House we visited a place that made lots of clogs where I bought something I thought Mrs Glazier would like. A bottle opener sticking out the toe of a little clog.

What clogs had to do with anything educational was a bit moot, but one of the teachers filled me in.

'Some Dutchy came over to work on the Hydro scheme and when he finished on that he thought he'd set up this place. It's educational.' I looked at the teacher and then around at the walls of clogs.

'You can learn a lot about Holland...' the teacher said. 'And clogs. Things are changing. And he does all right.

Taking the most of an opportunity that presents itself.'

We were supposed to meet our local member, a large jolly chemist called Big John. My parents never voted for him as he was a Liberal, but they liked him all the same for he was large and jolly. And, besides, the man he ran against was a man with a beard. A GI Joe type of beard.

As far as my father was concerned Big John's seat was safe – even though right up until the last week of the election campaign it looked like Bill Hayden might lead Labor to victory. But the last few days before the poll opened Mal Fraser's Liberal party created a handy myth that Labor would impose a new wealth tax on the sacred cow of Australian life, the family home.

It was, as my father and most commentators pointed out, complete and utter bullshit. But it was good politics. Maybe it didn't sway that many votes, maybe it did, and maybe it was just Malcolm Fraser taking advantage of an opportunity that presented itself. Either way, he squeezed back into power and said the same things he always seemed to say and then disappeared as was his wont into the rooms of the Windsor Hotel.

That was all a month away and for now all we wanted was Big John.

But Big John the jolly chemist couldn't meet with us for he had politician work to pursue. In his place was an immense tray of sandwiches. After a week on a bus we were slightly demented and to say that the tray was attacked was an understatement. A girl I was in love with went at it hardest. She ate like some mad raptor. Seeing

her at work on a rather angry-looking beef sandwich I remembered how her mother's arms would wobble whilst on tuck shop duty. I put this out of my head and stole furtive looks as she burped her way around the parliament on a guided tour.

To my distress Olaf the prison guard was being very solicitous and even gave her a tissue. I thought this was to wipe her face but as we walked across Kings Hall I saw that he was offering her a Big John sandwich.

At the end, as we stood by the doors of Parliament House, she staggered down the steps and upended herself and the contents of her stomach across the lawn. Democracy can be a heady thing.

I looked down at the Aboriginal tent embassy as the girl I loved hurled on the grass. A teacher told us why he thought Indigenous people felt they must protest. Most of us pretended to listen and then the teacher said he wished they didn't have to protest, but at least it was sort of good that they could. The War Memorial loomed in the distance.

That morning we had walked up and down the War Memorial's marbled floors and barely looked at the names etched into the walls. It dominated the horizon, yet the tent embassy was to me just as compelling. I didn't quite know why but both seemed to haunt me.

When we returned home I eventually got round to unpacking and I came across the clog with a bottle opener in the toe. I picked it up and wandered over to Mrs Glazier's house.

The lawn had been mowed.

I stood at the back door and looked at the step.

The glass of cordial was still there, as was the rose. Or what was left of it. Some petals were strewn either side.

A little spider web clung from the stem to the side of the step.

A horn beeped. I looked up to see my father waving.

'The old dear's gone to live up the coast with her son. Had a bit of a turn... Should be right but she won't be back here.'

For some stupid reason I said, 'Maybe it was the sugar in the sweet potato mash.'

My father didn't say anything. He just shook his head and went about his business.

I looked down at the clog bottle opener. It wasn't much of a present.

'What would Rick McCosker do?' I said to myself. Then I walked home to finish unpacking.