

**Sir Sturgess Entrepreneur: Businessbear extraordinare meets a poor-but-humble poacher**

*Mistress Deirdre's art clip for the day: GoogleGoogle. Look at this, Bluey Bligmund: a three-thousand-year-old bear-print for sale in China. I think I see a likeness. NB research exactly when and whence bears arrived in China. I could buy an Ursus arctos paw for \$24.*

*Neurosis for the day: What if there's a terrorist aboard my plane and I die? Am I replaceable? I should have been more patient before Master Peter left home for his flight, because His last memories will be of me in Irascible Mode, and I'm not really like that, only when I'm pushed to the limit, which is something loved ones are good at, at least mine.*

Lucky Lepidoptera hovered our aircraft in the dead of night over some mountains in southeast China while I prepared to disembark. The bear rights people had provided precise coordinates of the village of a suspected poacher named Li, a poor-but-humble young man embodying the Confucian virtue of filial loyalty.

I was exactly where I was supposed to be, two-point-three miles away, so the villagers wouldn't hear anything. That was what happened when you worked with pros.

I did one last equipment check and covered my left foot with the invisible cloak made by my haberdasher in Bicheno.

Fluttera the air hostess flung over the door and I parachuted into adventure. My invisible cloak billowed like butterfly wings on my drop from the plane's belly.

Hopefully I'd soon be back aboard Monarch Air savouring raspberry chocolate and foot massages. My paws would need it.

Lucky L and I had arranged to meet back here in one week. Fallback was two weeks. After that I was on my own. The pilot couldn't risk an international incident.

Soon I was toddling down the road wrapped in my invisible cloak. My adrenalin high made short work of traversing two-point-three miles through dust and dark. I wondered if I'd been spotted and thought to be a UFO. No more Sir Sturgess Entrepreneur, fêted businessbear extraordinaire. I was just an invisible wildlife warrior determined to protect the body parts of my ursine cousins.

If this went well, I might consider the activists' offer to do a deep throat.

First things first.

These ruminations deposited me at the edge of a tiny settlement, what Thomas Hardy called 'a little one-eyed, blinking sort o' place.' I'd been briefed that Li's hovel was first on the left. I found it and peered inside.

A young man bent over an obviously ill woman on a pallet whom the old man next to her could no longer comfort. Li's father snored from the depths of his exhaustion. The parents were in Li's care now.

I recalled my own mother as I eavesdropped on Li's filial conversation. Mater dearest was a meek seamstress abused so badly by a drunken husband that one night she snapped and murdered him with a hammer in his sleep and rolled his body in a carpet, for which she went to prison for one year.

Tasmanian judges had their priorities straight.

At least, that was the official story of my birth. The seamstress and brute were simply conventional vehicles on the Believability Highway.

What really happened was this.

The Sturgess was conceived under a mating moon in the Pamirs and born in ignominy.

My roots were in the mountains, along a different road, not my brother Mikey Kerowack's Wild West but my own Wild East.

Wolves howled in the Pamirs the night my consciousness first coalesced. That may have accounted for my love of adventure. Perhaps my depths yearned for the Onion Mountains, those ninety thousand square kilometres that overlooked highlands on the Silk Route and connected China to the Middle East.

Thinking about what my family suffered when the Pamirs slid into warlordism and drug dependence made me shiver in China. I pulled my invisible cloak closer.

A hunter killed my father and fatally injured my mother before the fighters were re-integrated into society as farmers or small businessmen, thereby completing the conversion from Kalashnikovs to ploughshares. With her dying breath, loving mater threw my consciousness wildly into the ether. She was too weak to control its trajectory, so I ended up in Tasmania.

Events in the household of poor-but-humble poacher Li pierced my ruminations.

'Can't you get rid of that thing, Ma?' Li gestured at the loom for weaving clothes in the corner. 'What's that?'

For a moment I thought he saw me, then remembered my invisible cloak hand-sewn by my haberdasher in Bicheno with ten thousand sequins.

She shook her head with minimal movement, a twitch combining weariness and sadness. 'Not as long as your father works in the city,' she said, answering the first question.

'That should make life easier, Ma.'

'He's not paid very much and he gets cheated out of half of that.'

'You've got electricity' — he pointed at a flickering lone light bulb in the centre of the room — 'and now your own water tap.'

She snorted eloquently.

'But Ma, you never rest.'

'I know the clothes we wear are sound, son, and I'm resting now.'

'If you can call it 'rest' to be awake and pain-wracked at the hour of the wolf.'

'In the old days there'd have been daughters to look after me.' Her voice trailed off. *Why aren't you married?* remains unspoken.

'I'm doing my best.' Li had that look on his face that Master Peter and Mistress Deirdre sometimes got, of wounds and words ratcheted from deep places. 'You'll be able to have that operation, Ma. I'm heading back into the hills.' I spotted in Li's expression some of the self-loathing Mikey Kerowack expressed in his darker moments. The conscientious son knew only one way to obtain funds for his mother's medical treatment, short of vicious robbery.

'All I need is bear gall, son.'

'That's not what the doctor said.'

'He doesn't know everything,' she moaned. 'Give and take. Those farms give us medicine and take the population pressures off our bears.'

'Concentration camps, that's all they are, Ma.'

'Bring me back the paws, son. You know how much your father likes to eat them.'

I examined my paws. God knew where they'd been. God may not have but I knew, and I certainly wouldn't eat anything that had been *there*.

Li had resisted for a long time, but his mother's accelerated nocturnal thrashings tipped the balance. If she died, his father would follow as fast as his gnarled knees allowed. That was where his lifetime of love had disgorged him. And Li would be alone in the world.

The dutiful son felt trapped. He had to hunt the wild bear. After extensive research, Li found a humane bear farm, which he visited to assure himself of his quarry's good treatment. He explained about his aged parents and filial duty, and

how he hoped to get married one day before his parents died, but girls were in short supply in his village and he didn't get away much, especially since his mother's illness. He felt disloyal blurting out his problems, which paled into insignificance next to those of the farm's inmates.

I pulled away from the window to allow Li and his mother some privacy.

NB Self: reread chapter on parking the conscience.

Later, in the blue light of day, Li trudged on twisting tracks, scrambled over boulders and skirted streams. He traversed open ledges and peered into rock crevices for dens, treading respectfully at the edges of the nature reserve upon which we encroached. Every now and then he examined a tree for bear signs such as claw marks and broken branches. He must have seen the bark stripped from a valuable timber tree because he examined the far distance with eyes flashing determination and regret.

I followed valiantly, counting the days until my paw massage.

For an instant I observed us from the outside, from an existential distance. Through the silent woods, deeper into the forest, the invisible bear padded after the isolated hunter stalking the elusive beast: the Asiatic black bear (*Ursus selenarctos tibetanus*), called the moon bear because of a yellow crescent on his chest.

Were they my ancestors and relatives?

We paused to rest. The young man's reveries speared me into sorrow that I had to expose him. Li was as much a victim of circumstance as his prey. He'd welcome exposure, be relieved to be caught. Why o why must we force the innocent to be predatory?

I shed a tear for myself and shot a silent thank-you to my haberdasher.

My invisible cloak was working.

Filial Li couldn't see me sitting next to him, but that had a downside. How I yearned for a cup of tea, that solution to the problems of the British Empire. Here I

was in the land of *Camellia sinensis* and nary a drop to drink! Nor did the hunter smell me, as I was a bear of fastidious habits.

My invisible cloak was really working! The haberdasher in Bicheno had worked for eight days and nights creating this sartorial masterpiece, painstakingly sewing on every one of ten thousand sequins.

Li the poor village boy needed to visit my tailor. Those sandals had to go. At least he had a blanket, although it reeked of horses and the little bits of straw caught in its loose weave. That homespun material did not keep the weather out and the warmth in.

I snuggled deeper into the sequins. Life was good!

Li whipped it out and had a pee, right there in the mountains of China on our illegal bear-poaching expedition.

This reminded me of something painful.

My unredescended male equipment.

On and on we trudged. The sun sank and night fell. Li shivered in his homespun blanket. I appreciated every single one of the ten thousand sequins hand-sewn onto my invisible cloak.

The watery moonlight unspooled a different side of Li's character, whose incessant murmurings punctuated the darkness. Nights were cold at 2,300 metres.

Li huddled, knees to chin, arms encircling his legs, a completely closed circuit. He didn't realise he was mumbling audibly, that his apologies to the bear spirit were overheard.

I delegated my own spirit guide, Swami Sturgiedananda, to have a quiet word with his ursine counterparts and give Li some peace.

I drifted off as Li explained to the bear spirit how one of his ancestors slew a bear that stalked his village's livestock during hard times. This traumatic event had passed into his family's mythology.

Why didn't Li stop talking about food? It was making me hungry. Mistress had promised me two desserts for my birthday party after I get home.

Number One:

### **Sturgess's Birthday Chocolate Pudding**

1 x 375g evaporated milk (chilled overnight)

2 rounded tablespoons cocoa (be generous)

½ cup sugar

2 heaped teaspoons gelatine

¼ cup boiling water

Dissolve gelatine in ¼ cup boiling water. Put sugar and cocoa into electric mixer and mix. Pour in milk and beat at high speed for 5 mins. Add dissolved gelatine and beat again in electric mixer for 5 mins, for a total of 10 mins. Pour into serving dish. Chill and serve with stewed or tinned fruit.

Number Two:

### **Green Frothy Fruit Whip**

Use a tin of crushed pineapple, a tin of chilly Bear Brand evaporated milk and a packet of Aeroplane jelly soaked in boiling water. At my direction, Mistress Deirdre added a lot of green food colouring and sprinkled desiccated coconut on top to make the letter S. She even put it in a bear mould!

However, that was in the future, at Home Sweet Home.

Back in China, the moon shone silver on the midnight-blue mountains. I'd been dreaming about a certain little ursine honeypot I knew back home. I craved a

rest from all this information overload that promised to blow the bile-farming racket sky high.

A scratching nearby snared my consciousness.

I saw a real little vixen hunching above me, tickling my nether regions. Why should a fox in a trenchcoat and beret be attracted to me?

Umm, don't stop, do it like this, more, more ...

Who are you?!

A fleeting look in those beady feminine eyes might be interpreted as treacherous, but after a certain point who cares?

Ooh baby you do that sooo good ... harder ... faster ... oh oh oh oh oh  
ahhhhhh ....

I drifted into dreamland without fully seeing my seductress.

I was thoroughly enjoying my visit to the land where nothing mattered, brief as it was, when I looked up at a human face nose-balling me, full of puzzlement.

That's right, it was Li. He lifted his chin towards the midnight-blue mountains and asked if this is how his prayers had been answered.

A sinking feeling overwhelmed me. All possible parts had shrivelled. I was supposed to be invisible. What happened?

My invisible cloak with ten thousand hand-sewn sequins had disappeared.  
And I hadn't even paid it off yet!

Treacherous little vixen, leaving me, Sir Sturgess Entrepreneur, exposed like this.

Did she know who I was?

The oldest trick in the book, and I fell for it! She was probably a Chinese spy.

Two horrific thoughts gripped me:

1. The state of my poor haberdasher when he learned I'd lost his work of art.
2. How to explain to the animal activists my stark-naked state upon surfacing from post-coital lassitude.

O the shame! I couldn't bear it!

You may wonder how that Jezebel found me if I was invisible. All I can say is I must have been giving off bearomones.

I thought quickly, which was not easy in such a state with a reluctant poacher looming over one, driven by filial desperation.

Never one to miss an opportunity, I offered the dutiful son a lucrative financial deal in return for the television, film, video and DVD and mystery tour rights to his quest. Perhaps I'd resuscitate scratch-n-sniff, as in those movies from my cubhood. Smell-o-rama ... sensurround ...

I cleared my throat and made a proposal in my most honeyed tones.

I just wish I'd been power dressed.

The furrow in Li's brow deepened as he listened. A grin rippled his face in the moonlight, exposing rotten teeth with several gaps.

No, said the dutiful poacher, he'd not accept my offer. His quest was over. He'd be content with what the gods had sent.

The glint in his eyes made me stagger to my feet. My back encountered numerous rocks in the ensuing melee. I may have been bruised and bleeding but I didn't feel a thing. We rolled and tussled through the silver night, but I was no match for the strong and solitary hunter. I was just a little purple-and-white bear who liked his creature comforts.

We puffed and grunted.

Mine were louder.

My grip on consciousness wavered. I was hovering over my newly completed circle of competence. The animal activists were circumambulating it restlessly. I was supposed to report back to them, but things hadn't gone as planned.

After all, I was just in it for the money. I had financially psychotic tendencies, but unlike my otherworldly spirit guide, Swami Sturgiedananda, I recognised the value of a dollar.

Wait, watch, pad and pounce.

2W2P.

That was my motto for success.

I tried to hold on but my paws flailed against the sides of the tunnel of consciousness. The forces of darkness won the skirmish.

I heaved my thought mail through cyberspace with my last sequin of strength. So must dear Mother have tossed my consciousness to Tasmania from the Pamirs with her dying breath.

Everything went black.

*Thought mail from Sir Sturgess Entrepreneur on the bear trail in China to Bluey Bligmund and Mikey Kerowack:*

*The problem is bigger than I thought. I need help. If only there were more of me ...*

*Send in the clones, all ten thousand of those minuscule cubs, each wearing an invisible cloak with ten thousand tiny hand-sewn sequins.*