

# 1996 : A Metaphor

A Novel  
Douglas Lockhart

## SYNOPSIS

### 1996: A Metaphor:

This is a novel with an international theme set in Australia circa 1996 which develops into a tale of intrigue and deception at the political level. It is the story of John Hennessey, a novelist and ex-army intelligence officer who has had a manuscript stolen and published in the UK by one Gavin Dean, an Australian criminal of vicious temperament whose aim is the setting up a new identity for himself. Dean's scam is uncovered, it being thought he has used the book to import hard drugs, and this sets the novel's storyline in motion.

There is however much more to the situation than a stolen book: Hennessey is questioned by the police (Hobart drug squad), and subsequently interviewed by David Palfreyman, an urbane individual representing the *Office of Special Investigation* (OSI), a small, specialist unit set up to identify and prosecute war criminals living peacefully, but furtively, in Australia since 1945. As a skilled interviewer of German civilians wishing to work for the British army in Germany, National Service Captain John Hennessey finds himself drawn into a situation that quickly escalates and darkens.

When the novel begins, Hennessey's relationship to his partner is on the rocks, their subsequent separation and interaction counterbalancing the intricacies of the developing plot. And all the while Gavin Dean's shadowy presence flits in and out of the story, threatening Hennessey and revealing deep and troubling associations between the far-right, the criminal underworld and Australia's rapidly changing political climate. Friends of Hennessey's are caught up in the nightmare of moves and countermoves, the dramatic climax of the novel bringing into play a number of unusual characters with equally unusual aims and ambitions. Having taken up the challenge, Hennessey is confronted by a new type of political reasoning, and by the book's end has had to deal directly with those wishing to foist this new type of reasoning on the public mind via the ballet box: populism and madcap political pragmatism is in the air.

The novel also carries us into Australia's chequered political past, and into the nightmare that was Germany as a result of National Socialism's distorted vision. It is a window into the minds of those who would have us believe that certain individuals are less worthy than others. Catching a glimpse of Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century, we are made aware of how a subtle manipulation of symbols can confuse and disorientate the psyche of a whole nation.

This is, in every sense, a novel for today, it's time element a perfect vehicle for an examination of present-day political, philosophical and psychological points of view through the prism of the past. It is at once a thriller, a story of unrequited love and a reminder that a society, any society, can be systematically seduced away from its core values.

Douglas Lockhart  
June 14, 2017

"What is the difference, in morality, between the totally anarchic criminality of the artist, which is endemic in all creative minds, and the artistry of the criminal?"

John le Carre  
*A Perfect Spy*

". . . . In writing there are no musts."

John Fowles  
*Daniel Martin*

# Contents

## **PART ONE:**

- 1) A Little Turbulence Ahead
- 2) Interrogation
- 3) Crooks with a Philosophy
- 4) Limbo
- 5) Assignment
- 6) When Things are a-cookin'
- 7) Short-changed
- 8) Birds of a Feather
- 9) Mad as all Hell
- 10) Ubermensch
- 11) Descending into Nothingness
- 12) A Terrifying Moment

## **PART TWO:**

- 13) Recapitulation
- 14) A Veil of Silence
- 15) The Language of Rebirth
- 16) Betrayer and Betrayed
- 17) The Buried Nerve
- 18) Either Symbol or Parable
- 19) An Unspeakable Presence
- 20) Morality is for the Plebs
- 21) Double Act
- 22) Bitch
- 23) Sinister Benefaction

## **POSTSCRIPT**

## 1

## A Little Turbulence Ahead

The sound of rain beating steadily on the window panes of the study fitted perfectly with John Hennessey's mood. In a tone that suggested he ought to have known better, Laura Green said she was temperamentally unsuited to marriage, that marriage was a bubble, a membrane of imposed permissions. Not exactly a serious proposal on Hennessey's part, more a clutching at straws, but so sententiously received that he regretted having made it. Ten days later he was in London working with a new young editor on the manuscript of his latest novel, Tasmania's plummeting mid-summer temperature all but forgotten. But not Laura's look; he could not get that out of his mind.

London had been Hennessey's stamping ground since the age of fifteen, when, for their boy's sake, his parents had decided it was time to leave Belfast and start a new life. 1951. His parents' version of love strained to breaking point, their marriage across the divide a bone of contention among friends as well as enemies. A new life and confirmation over the next eight years that their boy had a promising future, that if he curbed his tongue there was no knowing where he might end up. An honours degree in classics under his belt at twenty-one and on into the army to do his two-year stint. His mother chagrined by the sight of her son in a 'British' uniform, his father equally put out when, later, the glories of academia were swapped for the uncertainties of the artistic life. Write? Fiction? His father had been incredulous. He might as well have chosen the priesthood, he said wryly, a few weeks before his death.

The on-street window of the cafe Hennessey was in visibly buckled when the bomb went off: the IRA's brief ceasefire with the Provos was over; the men with lava in their veins had spurned the British Government's attempt at negotiation. Another false dawn. British soldiers back on the Falls Road with Wessex gunships clattering overhead. Eyes-in-the-back-of-your-head stuff. No insignia. Visual parity between officers and men to fool the snipers. The classic one up, one down formation as they moved through the streets. But the centre of the cyclone elsewhere. An IRA hit list with the Queen and other members of the Royal Family marked for assassination. A security scramble. Soldiers in bulletproof vests toting SA80 machine guns patrolling Buckingham Palace. Armed police forming what the papers described as a 'Ring of Steel' around royal buildings. Fifty or more terrorists armed with semtex operating in cells on the British mainland - a nightmare for Britain's Intelligence chiefs.

Hennessey's own negotiations had faltered more than once. The place of an editor he knew and respected had been taken by someone who wielded a Biro like a knife - another kind of surgery going on elsewhere. Time enough left over in which to catch a show, walk the Embankment or drink far too

much red wine in the company of friends. Still on edge, however, as he headed for Heathrow and that leap around the Earth's curvature. A glance back, and a wave, as he disappeared into the international terminal and left a jittery Britain.

On his return to Tasmania he found that Laura had taken off for Sydney only hours before - to speak at a conference. A great opportunity to strut her stuff, the note said, in her scrawly handwriting. The gods laughing as they moved the first piece in a game of chess bereft of rules. She returned to Hobart the following day, on a morning flight, the sun struggling to penetrate a canopy of thick cloud. Waiting behind glass he watched her plane touch down, then walked round to the passenger entry as she descended and crossed the tarmac.

"It's twenty-five degrees in Sydney!"

They hugged and separated and she remarked immediately on the breakdown of the ceasefire and what was happening in London. It had turned into a lottery, she said, as they headed for the carousel. One minute you were minding your own business, the next you were dead and in bits. Just like that. She snapped her fingers. What an irony if it had been him passing in that moment.

"That's why I rang."

A passionate lady, Laura Greene - in the sense of opinions strongly held. A forty-eight-year-old lecturer in literature with a fiery temperament. Five-eight in her heels with short, dark hair. Slightly overweight, but attractive. A beautiful summer's evening in London when they first met, in a Knightsbridge pub. Laura the talker introduced by friends; a visitor from the antipodes to whom he had been instantly attracted.

"So how did it go with the book?"

He made a wry face, said that a fair compromise had been reached on its length. The conference? Nothing terribly new, she said. She had given a paper on the horror fiction of H P Lovecraft, answered a few questions, listened to two other lectures and skedaddled to have dinner with Emma and Michael.

"You didn't have to rush back because of me."

She smiled at the slight undertow of his words.

As they drove towards Hobart he spoke again of his fear that Ireland was headed for a civil war. That was why the Brits would not pull out. They were afraid the IRA and the Anglo-Irish militants would go for each other's throats. A pause. He could remember his mother's family arguing the toss over who was properly Irish and who was not. His parents had almost separated after one of those bouts.

"I really can't imagine what it must have been like."

"You don't know the half."

A silence as they crossed the Tasman Bridge and headed into the city of Hobart. Then Laura saying that Alix was a lovely little girl, and that Michael doted on her.

"She's a bright kid."

"Emma sends her love."

He did not reply; a nod sufficed.

"You okay?"

"I'm still jet-lagged."

"How was everyone?"

"The same."

He had thought of staying on in London for another week, but in the end had decided not to because of Laura.

They were back in their flat before she broke the bad news: Dean had published *A Daughter for Cain* under his own name, she said. He had used the D. H. Lawrence quote and changed the title to *The Second Strength*. She produced a slim paperback from her handbag and handed it to him. An effusive review in *The Australian* had alerted her to Dean's effrontery.

On the cover, a yellow rose suspended on a black background. On the back, a photograph of a bearded Gavin Dean in a striped shirt, sunglasses and flat cap, his hands held out towards a manual typewriter.

"What a cheek!"

"Wait till you read the blurb."

Beneath the photograph lay an outrageous collection of words likening Dean to a character out of a John Le Carre novel - nothing at all like the quiet writer he had now become. The biographical sketch told how he had left his beloved Sydney at the age of twenty and roamed Australia pursuing a variety of unusual professions, how he had often been at odds with society and the establishment, and how he had later extended his roaming to various parts of the world as a foreign correspondent and documentary film maker. He now worked in Los Angeles, in the film industry, and was busy writing a new novel that laid bare the shenanigans of the Catholic Church.

"Marks Books?" said Laura.

After eight rejections, Hennessey had placed *A Daughter for Cain* in a drawer, and closed it.

"The reviewer really liked it."

Hennessey leafed through the little paperback. "How can he hope to get away with this?"

"Dean's probably not his real name."

Hennessey laid the book face up on the dining room table to avoid looking at Dean's expression of triumph.

"You'll have to get yourself a lawyer."

"Lawyers are expensive."

"I'll help with that!"

They had bumped into Dean and his companion - an attractive brunette - while staying in some holiday units when they first arrived from London. In publishing, according to his card. Dean the publisher talking to Hennessey the writer. "I only publish sexy westerns." Laughter all round. Interested in what Hennessey was presently working on; he had some excellent contacts in the industry. The god of chance smiling on Hennessey in a twisted kind of way. A copy of the manuscript posted to Dean in Sydney with the hope that he might be able to drum up some interest in said book - the last communication with Dean in three years. No trace of the man at his business address in Bondi when Laura's friend Emma tried to check him out. The office that had once been a shop empty and deserted.

Tall, with wispy, sand-coloured hair, Mr Dean. In his late fifties, quietly spoken and well dressed. Amusing. His companion - Heather Barton - fluent when speaking of the London theatre scene. A nice couple. A business trip.

An immediate con, of sorts. And so neatly done; not the slightest suspicion that the pair were anything other than what they appeared to be.

Hennessey flew to Sydney the following morning and consulted the Copy Rights Council and the Art's Law Society. Everyone was suitably shocked. According to Andrew Balchin of Balchin & Partners, a court injunction would be served on the distributor when Hennessey's UK agent confirmed copyright. Checks would also be run on Dean and the English publisher. And all to be done at minimal cost through the Art's Law Society because Balchin and Partners had a social conscience and Hennessey's finances were not robust.

A bit of a shock when, not long after, he found three scruffy plainclothes detectives on the doorstep. Two men and a woman, the smaller of the men unshaven and mean looking, the other clean shaven and smiling, but with ever such a slight cast to his right eye. Her arms folded across a stained tee-shirt, the female had come across as the more sinister. Identification produced. A chat requested. All of them trekking down the hallway to the lounge with Hennessey up front. Amazed when told that he was dealing with the local drug squad in connection with his book. A detailed explanation given of his relationship to Gavin Dean that eventually made sense to them - but only after a deal of questioning and a couple of telephone calls. An accidental meeting the reason for his initial interaction with Dean. A fluke. One of those things. Two meetings with Dean and Heather Barton over a glass of wine before the scene was set for skullduggery. A tense few minutes before the calls were put through and they realised he was not the potential villain they had hoped he might be.

Full of apologies for the communiqué they had received from Bondi that morning - about as daft a reading of a situation as their colleagues in Sydney could have come up with. The small detective tried to make amends by giving Hennessey a rundown on Gavin Dean's exploits: A police record that ran back to '56. Juicy items such as drug trafficking, assault, robbery with violence, prostitution and massage-parlour racketeering all part of his portfolio. Armed. Four aliases that they knew of. Had escaped from police custody twice. Fraud his specialty. Warrants out for his arrest in Victoria and New South Wales in connection with the importation of hard drugs.

"Gavin Dean is his real name?"

A nod from the man with the squint, who seemed to be in charge.

Stretched to the limit, it was admitted. A disease eating away at the big brown continent. Every major city in the world with the same problem. Massive amounts of money being made by people totally devoid of conscience. Kids at school running the gauntlet of dealers in addiction and death. An erupting boil on the hide of Australian society; a running sore for which, it seemed, there was no final, curative treatment.

"And your being Irish . . ."

The woman speaking, her glance conspiratorial.

The suspicion had been that something was going down when they heard about the book and Hennessey's connection with Dean. The name 'Hennessey' had set alarm bells ringing. Ireland was now one of the drug capitals of the world with Dublin leading the rest of the country in spent syringes and Mafia-type assassinations. An award-winning crime journalist



had been shot in the face and chest for trying to expose Dublin's leading criminals. Irish godfathers were vying with Europe's best.

Hennessey nodded, smiled his most understanding smile. "There's no mention of my book having been stolen in the report?"

An apologetic look from the pack leader. They were only interested in what the book may have been used for.

"Such as?"

"To bring hard drugs into the country."

"So why put his own name on it?"

The book picked up again, looked at back and front. The photograph was for real?

"He didn't have a beard when we met him, but it's him okay." Hennessey paused; then, because he could not think of anything else to say, he said, "He's added four lines to the end of the last chapter."

The lines in question dutifully glanced at, the book replaced on the little coffee table.

"Well, that just about wraps it up. For now. Hope we didn't give you too much of a fright, mate."

They were on their feet; it was as if someone had given a telepathic signal.

"If you want to contact us, use this number. Ask for Detective Sgt. Brownley. That's me."

A nod from Hennessey; then a question. "Do you really think he used the book as a cover to import drugs?"

Brownley shrugged and said that it was Dean's style to do something of the kind.

"But you're only guessing?"

"It's his style."

"You've met him?"

"Never had the honour."

"Do you want a copy of the book?"

". . . Not necessary."

"What do I do now?"

A blank stare from Brownley.

"About the book."

"Civil, I'd say." He glanced at the smaller man. "You'll have to get him into court."

"The book's a separate issue?"

"We're drug squad."

The house was empty of them minutes later. Hennessey stood near to the window and watched as they climbed into a big white Ford parked under a no-standing sign. A sad trio. Actors out of an episode of *Hill Street Blues* looking for a decent script. He turned back into the lounge, stood for a moment, then wandered through to the kitchen to make coffee.

In the morning paper Pat Buchanan's push for the White House and a suicide bombing in Israel merged with fifteen thousand men and women in Belfast asking for their ceasefire to be returned to them. A collage of horror. Men and women worldwide trying to fathom their existence. Frustration and hate and uncertainty and sheer bloody-mindedness scrunched together in neat columns of newsprint. He stared at the paper's heading: ULSTER'S

FALSE DAWN. Below, a photograph of a child playing next to a wall on which had been inscribed: EITHER BALLOT OR GUN - OUR DAY WILL COME. He closed his eyes, opened them again as the telephone rang. *BBC Panorama*? He listened amazed as someone rattled off a list of questions about Gavin Dean and drugs and cross-examined him on his answers. No, he had no idea where Dean was or how much of anything had been imported into Australia. Yes, a British publisher had been involved, and there were reviews from British newspapers. On and on his caller went, at breakneck speed as the pounds sterling mounted. Minutes later he was talking to someone at the *Sunday Times*. How had they found out, he wondered. A tip-off from someone in the local squad? More likely a mainland stringer, a listener and watcher with the Federal Police. There was money to be made if you understood the system.

End of Chapter 1.