

*No.11*

*Think Pig!*

By Deborah Hitchen

Floyd was not pleased. His dream of creating the country's first Carnival Theme Park, an idea that he had been nursing for months was now balancing on a claw edge. His clerk, Ernest Lovell, had phoned in sick so he was having to endure employing a temp and, to make matters worse, his top left fang was aching – a sure sign of snow. He hated snow; he hated the way it clogged his fur and turned the edges of his tail into icicles. One half of him was excited that his dream was about to be realised, while the other was so looking forward to this project being over for then he would be able to set off on his long-awaited holiday to visit his new villa in Florida. Warmth, that was what he needed.

“So what is your name?” he asked the figure waiting patiently before him. His stand-in clerk licked his nervous teeth and took a deep breath before responding.

“Adolfo, sir.”

Floyd turned the name over in his mind and tasted it on his tongue. Adolfo. It sounded foreign. Floyd was uncomfortable with anything out of the ordinary. However, the fact that the clerk was foreign explained why he looked so odd; he was small, almost stunted, and gave off a strange smell that reminded Floyd that he had missed breakfast. Floyd stretched himself up to his full height, his huge paws splayed on the desk before him.

“Run me through it again,” he growled. “Why can’t we set a date for the construction work to begin?”

“Well, sir,” Adolfo gulped, resisting the urge to take a step back. “It seems that there are three cottages on the site that are still occupied.”

“I can’t believe it!” Floyd snapped. “I thought that they had all been taken care of. Lovell told me that all the residents of Porksville had been bought off.”

Adolfo cleared his throat.

“I believe that Mr Lovell has been under a lot of strain recently. Maybe he thought he had dealt with them all, but these three seem have slipped through the net.”

Mr Wolf slammed his paw on the desk, almost upsetting his cup of coffee.

“This just confirms what I always believe: if you want a job doing you have to do it yourself. Get me the files,” he barked.

Adolfo handed over the three files and stood dutifully by while his boss read through them. Mr Everhard Hogg, a student at the local

university, Mrs Averil Porcini, an elderly Italian widow, and Sergeant Irwin Bacon, a retired army officer.

“Go and get my car,” Floyd ordered, handing the files back to his clerk. “Let’s get this business over with. You can come with me to make notes and then type up the contracts as soon as we get back.”

He was right; soft white flakes were beginning to float down from pink-tinged clouds, which did nothing to improve his mood. He hammered at the green door of the first cottage and stood impatiently, rocking on his hind legs, waiting for it to be answered. When the door opened a young pig stood before him attired in a long kaftan-style tunic, his round, friendly face framed by a fountain of straw-coloured hair and a pair of John Lennon sunglasses perched on his snout.

“Hey, man,” he drawled, holding up his hoof. “Peace be with you.”

“Grr...” Mr Wolf cleared his throat and remembered the reason for the visit. “Is it possible to come in? We have some business to discuss with you.”

“No problem. Please, enter my humble domain.” Young Mr Hogg stepped back and gestured them inside. “Sit down, make yourselves at home. Would you like a mushroom?”

“No, thanks,” Mr Wolf replied, looking at his clerk with raised eyebrows while inside his heart leapt with glee. This should be easy. He then went on to explain that Mr Hogg, or Evie as he liked to be called, would have to vacate the premises as soon as possible.

“Why didn’t you say? I’m real sorry I was not available when you called last, I must have been on a celestial plain. Money? No, I don’t need money; as long as I have somewhere to lay my head, I’m happy. Thanks for calling.”

Floyd couldn’t believe his luck; that was easy! And it had stopped snowing. Things were definitely starting to look up. He rubbed his paws together in readiness for the next resident.

“Who is it?” a high pitched voice called, after he had tapped a tuneful rhythm on the red wooden door.

“My name is Floyd Wolf from a local development company. I have some urgent business that I need to discuss with you.”

“No,” the voice squealed. “You can’t come in. *Va via.*”

Floyd arranged his features into a practised smile and took a deep breath. “I’ve come to make you an offer you can’t refuse!”

“Really!” called a surprised voice. The sound of locks being pulled back could be heard and the door creaked open to reveal a pair of big brown eyes, fringed with dark lashes, shining out from a friendly face. “You sound just like my late husband, God rest his soul. Come in, come in. I’ll show you a photograph of him.”

Floyd and Adolfo followed her into a bright kitchen painted sunshine yellow and full of the scents of garlic and warm tomatoes.

Signora Porcini showed them photographs of her family, gave them plateful’s of pasta, told them stories of her childhood, of her life in Napoli. She laughed, she cried and, to Floyd’s horror, she sang to them.

“That’s all very interesting,” Floyd cut in when he got a chance. “But I need to discuss some business with you. I’m afraid that I need your house.”

“My house!” Signora Porcini shrieked, clasping her hands to her ample bosom. “*Mia casa!* No, no, it is all I have. It is, how you say, connected with my late husband, God rest his soul.”

“Would you not like to go and live with your family?” Floyd asked, turning on his charming smile. “I can arrange it for you, if you’d like.”

“You would do this for me? I can go to my family? In Italia?”

“Yes, in Italia...I mean Italy... Naples.where your family lives. Listen, I have a villa there.” He crossed his claws under the table. “It can be yours. I’ll pay for your flight and give you money to start a new life.”

“Oh *grazie, grazie*,” the old lady cried. “You are so kind.”

“She was a bit of a bore,” Floyd said when they eventually managed to escape. He turned to Adolfo. “Right, when you get back to the office and type up the contract, don’t mention the villa, just the money and a one-way ticket to Italy, the cheapest fare, of course.”

“Of course, Mr Wolf,” Adolfo replied, dutifully writing down the instructions.

“OK! Two down, one to go!”

The door of the last cottage opened the instant that Floyd had knocked on it and a smart, well built pig stood to attention before him.

“Mr Bacon?” Floyd enquired.

“Sergeant Bacon, sir!” he barked, with a salute.

“Er, at ease,” Floyd muttered, nervously. “May we come in to discuss some business with you?”

“Certainly, sir,” he said, jumping to one side and allowing them to pass. The cottage was very sparsely furnished, just a camp-bed in a corner and two folding chairs. Floyd sat in one and gestured for Sergeant Bacon to sit in the other. Adolfo hovered nervously by the door.

Bacon listened in silence as Floyd put his proposition before him. “And I can offer you £100,000 as compensation,” he finished, feeling most benevolent. As he had got away so easily with the other residents, he felt he could afford to be a little more generous.

“I’m afraid I can’t accept that, sir,” Bacon replied, shaking his head firmly.

“How about £200,000?”

“I’ll tell you what, sir. So that I don’t waste any more of your time, why don’t we go the whole hog and call it a round half million?”

“£500,000? Well...” Mr Wolf licked his lips.

“Do we have a deal?” Sergeant Bacon asked, putting out his hoof. Floyd looked at it in distaste, merely touched it with his claw and stood up. “Yes, we have a deal.”

Once outside, Floyd turned to Adolfo.

“When you type up the contract,” he instructed. “Make sure that you knock a zero off that figure, I’m sure he won’t notice.”

“Yes, Mr Wolf.”

“Greedy pig,” Floyd muttered. But at least he had accomplished his purpose. He now had a clear road and he could start work as soon as the signatures on the contracts were dry.

Adolfo typed up the contracts as soon as he got back to the office and then took them personally for the documents to be signed.

“Any problems?” Floyd asked when he had returned.

“None at all,” Adolfo told him, putting the files back on his desk. “In fact, they were so happy that they allowed me to take a photograph of them. I thought it would look good in the local paper.”

The next morning, Floyd Wolf was happy. His plans were now coming together, his teeth weren't hurting him and Lovell was back at work. Wolf updated him on the project and explained how clever he had been.

Lovell stood before Mr Wolf's desk, the photo in his claws, his whole body shaking.

"Mr Wolf!" he stuttered. "This is impossible. This is the Porcius family, famous scam artists with connections to the Mafia!"

"What! Rubbish! Get me the contracts; let me see what they have signed."

The Porcius family were very happy with their awards. Everhard, although he had said that he didn't want any money, had not refused the bonds, or the pearls, he had received. Averil got her villa in Naples - Florida; it had been so good of Mr Wolf to give her the deeds to his holiday home. As for Irwin, rather than having a zero deducted, he'd had one added - five million pounds was definitely an offer he couldn't refuse.

"Trust my little Adolfo," Signora Porcius cooed over her son after he had removed his wolf costume. "He always was the clever one. He always thinks pig!"

*The End*