

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds

A Political Thriller

Chapter 1

Archie Johansson was the MP for the lower socio-economic farming district of Fractured Ridge in the State of Catherinia. This was a dry-land farming area which had once been a major exporter of wheat and wool. However, over the years, overseas prices for these commodities had dropped enormously. Together with the current drought like conditions, this meant that the farmers and the townspeople who relied on their trade were 'doing it tough', as his constituents kept reminding him, obviously expecting that he could immediately arrange a large government handout for them.

Although the depressed state of his local economy meant that Archie's political influence counted for little with his fellow parliamentarians, he didn't mind flying under the radar, in fact, it gave him a certain anonymity which allowed him to unearth details about other Members of Parliament which perhaps they would rather keep hidden.

His electorate neighbour, Colin 'Colly' Fredericks, the Member for Glowing Plains, and a fellow member of the Farmers and Graziers Party, (FGP), had managed to manipulate the votes cast in his favour at the last election by promising large grants to as many local community organisations as he could manage. As these were unlikely to eventuate, his possibility of gaining re-election was not large, but that didn't stop him making the most of his time as a parliamentarian. It certainly made him popular throughout his electorate; particularly with a certain section of his lady electors, from whom he managed to gain considerable very personal favours.

Archie, on the other hand, couldn't see how anyone had the time or inclination to step outside what he regarded as being a good local representative, even if all it meant was listening to his constituent's complaints and passing these on to persons of influence.

At Party Room meetings he sat at the back and held his tongue. Others could big-note themselves, and more often than not felt a lash from the tongue of the Premier in the process. But Archie just voted as he saw fit for the uncontroversial decisions, and made do with the outcome if he was compelled to vote the party line against his

better judgement. Even if he had to explain unpopular decisions to his constituents, he was at peace with his conscience, and to him, that was how he should behave.

Archie was beginning to see however that there was a widening rift between certain members of the leadership team. The Treasurer was obviously not singing from the same hymn sheet as the Premier, as Archie found out one day in the Strangers Bar, while he was having a quiet coffee while waiting for a deputation from one of his local CWAs to arrive.

The Treasurer, Wilberforce Lucy, better known as 'Billy the Bully' suddenly appeared at Archie's side and mumbled something Archie could not interpret. When he lifted an eyebrow at Willy, the repeated words sounded more like, 'how'd you like to get a portfolio?' Archie was stunned. He didn't have the experience to take on a leadership role. He just wanted to keep on keeping on in the background and not making any waves.

'All you have to do is vote for me in the upcoming leadership spill. I need your vote, and in return I can guarantee you a Ministerial position, probably Natural Resources.'

Archie shook his head, and stared at Willy. But Colly had just taken one of the free chairs at the table, so he wasn't free to follow up the unexpected offer. 'What spill?' he thought. There was obviously more happening in this rabbit warren of intrigue than he knew about.

(Don Gemmell)

Chapter 2

Archie could feel hard eyes boring into his back as he wandered out to wait under the awning of the Strangers Bar for his CWA deputation. He loosened his tie, feeling strangled by what he felt was the atmosphere of treachery inside. Then he remembered that he couldn't look slovenly to his constituents. Archie could hear his grandmother telling him that, "Appearance was everything". Somehow he doubted that.

Standing in the warm autumn sunshine, he tried to process what had just occurred. Archie could understand the reasons for the growing dissatisfaction with the Premier. The Premier was experienced, granted, but had become set in his ways. He refused to listen to advice about major issues, insisting that his decision was not to be questioned. Unfortunately the Premier was a manager, rather than a leader. The tide of popularity was turning against him within the party and amongst his constituents and there was a very good chance of their losing the next election.

But was Billy the Bully a worthy replacement? Billy had proved himself untrustworthy in the past, participating in coups as long as he was promoted, working himself up the ranks by backstabbing those who stood in his way. He'd been promised the portfolio of Treasurer by the current Premier if he'd supported him. Now Billy was plotting to overthrow him and become the next Premier.

Why had Billy approached him? Did Billy see him as a sycophant with an eye out for his own future? Or did he see him as an unnecessary obstacle if he supported the Premier? Archie had no delusions of grandeur - he was a young, hardworking politician in an unimportant seat and had a reputation for honesty and incorruptibility. He felt a little insulted that Billy the Bully may have thought he could be bought. He kept a low profile, but watched others carefully and had a bit of dirt on a few of them by now, "Colly" for one. "Each to his own, but to thine own self be true", his mum used to say. Pope said "A little learning is a dangerous thing", but he preferred the misquote "A little knowledge is a powerful thing."

His deputation arrived and Archie spent the next couple of hours deep in discussion. It wasn't until he closed the door of his modest hotel room that his thoughts returned to the day's dilemma. He decided to sleep on the problem and review the situation in the morning.

The answer was no clearer the next morning as he made his way to his Parliamentary office. He had barely time to remove his jacket when the door was flung open and Billy, accompanied by Colin Fredericks, strode in. "You didn't answer me yesterday, Archie. I asked you how you'd like to get a portfolio? So...what's your answer?"

(Helen Goleby)

Chapter 3

Archie froze; this was way too fast for him to give an answer, he felt trapped and uncomfortable. As was his nature, he liked to fly under the radar; he would be well and truly visible if he agreed to become part of a leadership spill. Archie was aware that the tide was turning against the Premier, but he had grave doubts about Billy the Bully taking on the role, particularly with the manipulating Colly, Archie's sleazy electoral neighbour firmly at his side. Colly had probably been promised a top Ministerial portfolio.

"Well come on say something Archie, this is a big chance for you" blustered Billy.

Colly chipped in adding that it would be a wonderful chance for Archie's electorate to have their member as a Minister. "You will have the power to organize any number of government handouts for the poor struggling buggers out in Fractured Ridge".

Archie's conscience was torn, he was loyal by nature and did not want to be part of a leadership spill; on the other hand if he could really help his electorate it would make such a difference to their lives. He wavered for just a couple of minutes and then said, with some trepidation, "I will do it, count me in".

"Good man, good man, you won't be sorry", Billy replied, "let's go and drink on it, somewhere away from here, we don't want people sensing something is up".

The three of them left the Parliamentary building by a side door; Billy's driver was waiting patiently, he had presumably been given a pre-arranged instruction. Archie glanced over his shoulder as he slipped into the back of the car, he was not good at intrigue and didn't like this one little bit. Conversely Billy and Colly were in high spirits. The driver delivered them to the door of the Hunters' Club, men only and very elitist. This was a new experience for Archie and he was glad that he had dressed up today, in readiness for his CWA deputation.

Billy ordered drinks all round proffering thanks and congratulations to the other two. Archie thought the congratulations were a bit premature, after all as far as he knew the leadership spill was very embryonic. "Well that's it fellows, done and dusted. We tell the Premier tonight".

Colly didn't look a bit surprised, but Archie was speechless, he had not been given the impression that this was so immediate, doubts set in.

"Why the long face Archie, this is a great opportunity, choose your portfolio," blustered Billy.

Archie gathered himself together sufficiently to ask how long this plan had been in the pipeline, who else was involved, and why had they only just told him. He sensed something wasn't quite right.

"Well to be honest, the Premier has got wind of the fact that he is about to be stabbed in the back. He thinks you are leading the charge Archie".

"What the hell, how on earth would he think that?" Archie asked with a sinking feeling in his gut?

"Who knows," Billy said, "but I let him believe it because I knew he wouldn't take the threat seriously if it was you challenging the leadership."

"Yes," Colly agreed. "I let him believe it was you too. Won't he get a nasty shock when he finds out that the contender is actually someone with half a chance of success?"

"You bastards," Archie spluttered, he spun out of his chair and out of the club. He was seething. In fact, he could not remember being so angry for a very long time.

He hailed a nearby taxi, directing the driver to Parliament House. He ran up the steps and made for his office. Sitting down, he tried to calm himself. He was not going to let them sew him up like this, he was going to get revenge and the beginnings of a plan began to formulate

(Pat Matthews)

Chapter 4

One of the personal traits Archie was always proud of was remaining neutral and doing his best to not get caught up in any political in-fighting. With Billy and Colly's sudden strategic play, Archie knew his political career, and indeed, his reputation would be over if their leadership spill plans came to fruition. As Archie approached the Premier's ministerial office in George Street, his mind was in turmoil.

Archie entered through the main entrance to the Executive Building, walked past security to the main elevators. He absent mindedly loosened his tie and wiped sweat from his brow. It was a cool, winter day but Archie felt hot and was sweating profusely. His personal motto of staying hidden in parliament was about to crumble as he rode the elevator up to the seventeenth floor.

Archie suddenly found himself looking at the security guard stationed on the floor, a surprised look on both their faces at Archie's sudden departure from the elevator.

"You alright there sir? Can I help you?"

"I'm fine. My name is Archie Johansson, sitting member for Fractured Ridge. I need to see the Premier as a matter of urgency."

"Do you have an appointment?" Glancing down, the security guard looked at the banked computer LED screen and appeared puzzled, fully realizing that Archie definitely did not have an appointment.

Archie expected this question, "No, I don't have an appointment. However, I have to meet with him urgently. It is imperative that I do as it concerns a matter that is of utmost importance to his political career."

Lance, the security detail, hated it when politicians complicated statements by spouting gibberish unnecessarily. He understood though, politicians always liked to preen themselves with fancy words and he was not paid enough to ask too many questions.

"Please wait here Mr. Johansson. I'll go and see if the Premier wishes to speak with you."

"Of course. Thanks Lance. Please, call me Archie." noting the badge on the guard's uniform.

Lance looked up in surprise. He was not used to politeness and respect in the regulars that visited this floor, "I won't be a minute."

Archie nodded and stood waiting at the counter. Looking to his left, he could see the window had a beautiful view of the Brisbane River. He wanted to inspect it further but knew it would be not proper etiquette to walk closer to the Premier's door without clearance from the guard.

Perhaps not so surprisingly, in light of the leak that Archie was intending to head up the leadership spill, Lance came back within a minute, "The Premier will see you now Archie."

Archie swallowed and nodded his ascent, "Thank you Lance. Have a great day. Let's hope the Broncos can pull off a win against the Cowboys."

Lance nodded in agreement, "I love it when those teams go up against each other. Thurston will be hard to contain for the Broncos."

Archie nodded and walked with acted confidence to the Premier's office door. His mother and father always instilled that confidence in him as a child. Archie remembered one of his father's pieces of advice when he first started his political career, *Archie; always carry yourself as if you are already in the job you want to be in; not in the job you are currently in.*

Archie had always seen the Premier in parliament but had never had the privilege of seeing him in person. He found himself being actually surprised at how modest in appearance the executive offices were and how traditional the décor that furnished the Premier's office seemed to hail back to the late sixties or early seventies. Archie found himself looking longingly at the decanter sitting by the bay window overlooking the Brisbane River window, with the no doubt expensive single malt whiskey inside.

The Honourable Gordon Wilson, MP Premier for Queensland noted Archie's glance at the scotch, "Archie, thanks for coming. Please, help yourself to a drink."

Archie turned his attention back to the Premier, a bit embarrassed at his lack of decorum, "Thank you sir."

"Oh no need for sirs here Archie. Call me Gordon," replied the Premier.

Archie nodded, "Ok Gordon. Would you like one?" indicating to the decanter nearby.

A small smirk appeared on the Premier's face before he answered in affirmative, "Sounds good Archie."

Archie poured himself a neat double and grabbed ice out of the classic 60's style container. He then poured the Premier's drink, walked over, and handed it to him. The Premier nodded his thanks then indicated to a chair behind his oak desk,

“Now, Archie, what brings you here?” as he took the first sip of his drink, totally use to the pre-lunch routine.

Archie looked down at his drink, and took a big gulp of the scotch, “There is something important we need to discuss Gordon. I couldn’t do this via the normal channels so I do apologise for showing up unannounced like this”

The Premier drained the rest of his drink, “No need. I must admit when Lance mentioned you were here I was quite surprised.”

The Premier then coughed a bit, and Archie noticed he had reddened in the face. He appeared to continue but suddenly rose, a look of confusion on his face. The Premier coughed again, quite hard, and Archie noticed for the first time it appeared The Premier was struggling to breathe. The Honorable Gordon Wilson suddenly grasped the desk, and Archie was suddenly a little concerned, “Are you alright sir?” forgetting The Premier’s first name in his apprehension.

The Premier looked at Archie, fear clearly written into his face. He coughed again and Archie stood up quickly when he noticed blood flecks spray across the oak desk, turning the white scribbler into a piece of abstract art. Archie looked at The Premier’s pallid face, realising the situation had taken a dangerous turn, “Gordon, I’ll get help sir.”

The Premier looked at Archie through bloodshot, bulging eyes and responded by toppling over his desk and onto the floor.

“Lance, I need help! The Premier’s in trouble!” Archie screamed as he ran for the door.

Lance’s speed at responding defied his middle age. He was in the office within a moment and quickly surveyed the scene. While feeling for The Premier’s pulse he was on the walkie talkie informing his division. Moments later emergency was called and Archie was amazed at how quickly the ambulance officers arrived. Archie found himself looking down at his drink and putting it down, suddenly all thoughts of enjoying a good scotch evaporated. The Premier had not moved the entire few minutes since collapsing. Tubes, wires and machines were inserted, probed and activated on the prostate form of The Premier.

Lance only stopped CPR when the ambulance officers arrived. Minutes went by before the ambulance officers suddenly halted their progress before whispering some words to Lance. The security guard looked up at Archie, suspicion clearly in his eyes, “Mr Johansson. I must ask that you come with me sir.”

Archie did not notice that Lance had already drawn his firearm and had flicked open some handcuffs with his left hand, “What is it? What’s happened?” Archie stammered out.

Lance looked at him, anger clearly forming on his face, “The Premier’s dead.”

Archie’s mouth dropped open. He hadn’t even realized three other security guards had already flanked him until they grabbed him roughly by the arms. He looked down at the now still blue face of the former Honourable Gordon Wilson, MP Premier of Queensland and thought, *Oh shit*.

(James Culverhouse)

Chapter 5

The security officers sat Archie down on one of the bentwood chairs in the office and told him not to move until the police arrived.

Archie did as he was told. He was in a daze, and in no condition to argue. Then, thinking about what had happened, he realised that he was the last person to see the Premier alive, so would automatically he'd be under suspicion.

Archie remained in a panic until a Senior Sergeant, and a couple of young Constables, arrived from Roma Street with the Police Surgeon. After taking a statement from Lance about Archie's movements and quizzing Archie himself about the reason for his appointment with the Premier, Archie was told that he was free to go, but to make himself available for any further police questioning in the future.

Archie was only too pleased to comply. He had advised the police that the reason for the visit was entirely in regard to matters of State, and that all he had done in the few minutes that he was in the office was pour two Glenfiddich's, of which he'd sipped one, and that the other had been offered to the Premier. At that stage, Archie said, the Premier had collapsed onto the blotting pad on his desk, and apparently expired, after coughing up some blood.

There was now considerable commotion in the corridor outside the Premier's office.

Archie could hear Billy Lucy, the Treasurer, loudly demanding to be admitted to the office, but being rebuffed by the Police. Then the voice of the Deputy Premier, Rosemary Rahilly, was heard querulously asking what was happening. She had a quiet word with the constable on the door, who after conferring with the Senior Sergeant, admitted her to the room. After a quick review of the scene, she turned to Archie, and suggested that he should return to his own office until a party meeting could be held later in the day. Archie was glad to escape the confused scene.

The Police Surgeon left with Archie, while the remainder of those who were left in the corridor stood to attention against the wall as the ambulance officers removed the late Premier's body.

The Party meeting was called for 8pm. Archie was loath to go, but knew he had no option. He really did not want to face all his colleagues with their questions on the details of what had happened - he really just wanted to go home to the farm at Fractured Ridge. There were his prize Charbray cattle there, and he was sure they would need his attention. He'd recently purchased a Charbray stud bull from the Palen Creek Prison Farm at the recent Beaudesert Stud Sales, and was looking forward to seeing how he was settling down. Archie was quietly pleased with this

purchase, as the bull's sire was 'Palen Creek Diamond the third', which had won numerous awards at the Ekka.

Mrs Rahilly declined nomination as Premier, leaving the nomination process completely open. Billy Lucy, as Treasurer, felt that he was the only option available and had spent the afternoon phoning his acolytes to garner support. Unfortunately, the majority of the party had, over time, been the butt of his bullying tactics, which meant that his suitability as the leader of the State was called into question. Billy had also blotted his copy book by being implicated in a dodgy land deal with a developer, further hampering his suitability. This was currently before the courts which made his nomination totally inappropriate.

Colly Fredericks also nominated, with some support from a number of members who had only been in Parliament since the last election, and could therefore be relied upon to vote whichever way suited their best chances of re-election, or of perhaps of obtaining a portfolio. But those who had been in the Parliament for some time knew that Colly had some personal problems relating to a number of female constituents, and that the Party Director, with the backing of her State Council, would be arguing that Colly not stand at the next election so as to protect the integrity of the Farmers and Graziers Party.

Because the election of the leader, and therefore the position of Premier, was solely in the hands of the Parliamentarians, the Party Director was not present at the meeting. However, she had had a discussion with the Deputy Premier, who was advising those present that what they really needed was a 'safe pair of hands'. Someone who the community could believe in, and whom they could trust.

To Archie's complete surprise, he heard his own name mentioned, followed by loud calls of 'hear, hear'. This is ridiculous he thought. I've never held a portfolio and I'm pretty well unknown outside my own electorate. Gladys will not be pleased at suddenly finding herself the wife of the Premier, rather than her preferred position as a competent member of the local CWA. It certainly wasn't what she wanted in life. 'Never mind' thought Archie, 'I'll only stay until the next election. I think I can manage until then.'

He could hear Mrs Rahilly's voice breaking through the buzzing in his own head, using phrases like 'well liked', 'dependable' and 'acceptable to both the Party hierarchy and particularly the Public of our great State'.

Suddenly, Archie found himself being manhandled for the second time that day. This time however, he found himself being placed behind the lectern at the head of the room, and trying to find the words in his head which would be appropriate for an acceptance speech.

Over the next few weeks, Archie settled down to his new role. Having survived three election cycles, he believed he knew who were those he could trust both within the Parliamentary Party, and within the ranks of political advisors, so made appointments appropriately. Gladys came to accept her unanticipated role in life, even if she now had difficulty in finding time to maintain her usual routine of preparing her famous pumpkin scones.

Colly soon found himself on the front pages of the Courier Mail as reporters had a field day relaying all the salacious details of his divorce proceedings. He would resign at the next election as he could no longer command the community goodwill which would enable him to stand again.

Wilberforce Lucy, the past Treasurer of the great State of Catherinia, was found guilty of conduct unbecoming a Treasurer, in that he had used his considerable influence to rezone 40 hectares of National Park as Residential A, for which he'd received a considerable kick-back. As a convicted criminal, he was therefore ineligible to sit in Parliament, and so the inevitable by-election was called which expectedly the Farmer's and Grazier's won against little opposition. After 5 months at Wacol, the ex-Treasurer was transferred to the Palen Creek prison farm on the slopes of Mount Lindesay, south of Rathdowney, for the remainder of his three-year sentence. As Gladys said in her quiet way, 'Given that Palen Creek is known as the gaol in the sky, it seems quite appropriate that Lucy's in the Sky with Diamonds'.

(Don Gemmell)