

"That bridge is merely ornamental. Requested by Hugo de Groot, a.k.a. Grotius. It makes him feel at home."

On top of the oak front door was written in marble letters: Bureau for Relative Affairs.

As an asterisk a silver star was attached, that shone like a professionally brushed set of teeth from a TV commercial. Spinoza knocked on the door and a voice called out cheerfully:

"Come in, come in!" Behind a colossal walnut desk sat a man wearing a shabby grey sweater. His mustache and springy hairdo, that looked like a collection of melted radio antennas, were also grey. He was smoking a pipe.

"Albert Einstein. But everybody calls me Al. Sit down!"

Jimmy dropped into a comfortable arm chair of tufted leather and looked around. "Chesterfield," said Einstein proudly, "I have basically everything Chesterfield. Chippendale too of course. And an odd lot of Philippe Starck (all the "Ghost Chairs") and some small Rietvelds. For the nursery. I like my furniture quirky." He glanced at the ceiling. He thought of his offspring with melancholy in his heart. "Of course they have left the parental home ages ago, but I left the chairs just where they were. For a man of science, I am rather sentimental. Relatively spoken." He seemed to reflect again. Then it dawned on him. "But first a snapshot!" He opened a drawer and pulled out an old model Hasselblatt. "German quality from before the war," he giggled. "Look at the birdie and stretch out your tongue as far as possible. That way they will know you were registered by me. Say Cheese!" That was quite a challenge with an outstretched tongue, but nevertheless Einstein shot the picture as soon as the carbide light flashed. "Crystal clear," he said pleased, as he hung the photograph (black and white) to dry on a

clothes line. Not long after a carrier pigeon flew in through the open window and turned on its wings with the picture in its beak. "Perfectly trained for vice versa flights by our good buddy Baruch Spinoza," said Al. "He's quite the Birdman." It will arrive at HQ in less than no time. Would be of excellent use at the Department of Motor Vehicles. But that's another story. Glass of wine?"

Jimmy Burn started to feel increasingly comfortable. When he took a sip, a warm sensation ran through his entire body. The room turned slightly pink. Not only did he taste the powerful Shiraz, he also clearly perceived the vineyards in Australia where the grapes grew on the vines and the whole harvesting-to-bottling process, yes and even the kangaroo that had modeled for the label of Yellow Tail, whose name was Joey.

"It feels as if it contains LSD," said Jimmy.

"It does," said Al amiably, "this variety is clean and purely biological. Rye ergot grows in abundance in the open field and along the roadside. We call it Purple Haze." Einstein changed the subject. "I heard you like music," he said. "I will show you something that will pleasantly blow your mind."

He got a violin from a cabinet and played a piece from Opus Two by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The music was lovely. Jimmy underwent it as a completely physical experience. It went straight through him.

"It's a rare Stradivarius," said the famous scientist. "Present from Max Planck for my 50th birthday. I'm putting it back now, for we have a lot more work to do."

At that moment a woman with black hair, black eyebrows and a black pair of glasses popped her head through the door. Her lipstick was fire engine red.