

# Julian's Double



a short story  
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Cover Art by Paul Bergman

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1

## A Serious Proposal

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By himself, with his hair dyed platinum, he did look a lot like Julian Assange. The two were less than a year apart in age, had identical builds and had very similar complexions. And, most importantly, they were both Aussies, so they sounded the same to most people. But if you were to encounter the two side-by-side, there were obvious differences. First of all, Gareth Cassidy was an innately cheerful man, his face always on the verge of breaking into a wide smile. Assange, on the other hand, invariably wore a bitter, defiant look. Other physical differences were even more obvious. Gareth Cassidy was an inch shorter than Julian and, unlike Julian, he had a pock mark just above his left eye, quite noticeable, a remnant of the chicken pox he'd suffered as a child. Gaz - as everyone called Gareth - also had very pronounced eye teeth; they jumped out at you when he smiled. Assange's teeth were uniformly straight and perfectly positioned. And if you were to hear them speak, one right after the other, the two sounded rather different. Even to a non-Australian, if you listened closely, you could pick up the differences in their intonation and in the slang they used. Nevertheless, casually standing on his own, with a worn leather bag over his shoulder, Gaz could pull it off pretty well. To almost anyone, the Sydney-born stand-up comedian could easily pass for the Townsville-born head of WikiLeaks.

Gaz had been discovered by Barry Pearl, Assange's affable lawyer and confidant. One summer night, Pearl, an American expat in his late fifties, was out with friends at a small London comedy club. Up to the microphone stepped Gaz Cassidy, who quickly cracked up the audience with his hilarious, antic impressions of Tony Abbott and other politicians. That's when the idea hit Pearl. While Assange was not part of his act that night, Cassidy would have obviously had no trouble at all impersonating him. But more than that, thought Pearl, maybe Cassidy could actually *stand-in* for Julian; pretend to *be* him.

After Cassidy had finished his act, Pearl told his friends he was going to ask the comedian to join them for a drink. Presenting his business card to the club's manager, Pearl arranged to speak to Cassidy backstage. 'Hi mate' he said, introducing himself to the Aussie comic and offering his card. 'We really enjoyed your act.'

Pearl had an American accent. He was well-dressed, well-spoken and evidently in earnest. Gaz looked at his card. A lawyer. How can any good come of this, he thought, instinctively suspicious of the man. 'Mr. Pearl, is it?' said Gaz to his unexpected visitor, giving him the once-over. 'You know what they say, ay? There's nothing worse than a visit from a lawyer. Except a second visit from the same lawyer.'

Pearl ignored the remark. 'Let me get to the point.' he said, in a flat, quiet voice. 'I'm not an entertainment agent or anything like that, but I do have a business proposal. How would you like to make some money, some *good* money?'

Gaz issued a half-hearted, abrupt laugh. He'd heard more than a few fabulous schemes in his day. Somehow they never seemed to make him any richer or any happier. He was tired and just wanted to go home. 'There's an old saying about money' said Gaz, managing a smile. 'Money comes in pairs. One person gives it to you. The second person takes it away.'

'I'm quite serious, Mr. Cassidy' said Pearl, calmly and directly. 'I'm talking about twenty-five grand. American. Two weeks of preparation and then two or three days of work - if things go well. Cash. All above board.'

Gaz, who had stood to meet his visitor, sat back down on a bare wooden chair, gesturing to Pearl to do the same. It was a cramped little dressing room, uncomfortably warm and dimly lit. Pearl remained standing.

'Are you sure you've got the right guy?' said Gaz, unimpressed. 'I do stand-up. That's it. What do you want me to do? Rob a bank?'

'Nothing of the sort. Please give me a chance to explain.'

'Okay, why not? Make it quick though. It's been a long day.'

'This has to be in complete confidence, Mr. Cassidy. Can we go somewhere private?'

'I don't like the sound of that, mate. Are you working for Putin or something? What's wrong with right here?'

Pearl thought for a moment and then stepped quietly out of the small dressing room. After taking a quick glance around, he returned, closing the door behind him and lowering his voice. 'This involves your countryman, Julian Assange. I work for him. But it's a very sensitive matter, if you know what I mean. It would be much more comfortable if we spoke somewhere else. Can we meet for a drink somewhere, maybe tomorrow sometime?'