

Hammer and Tong

As the date for departure approached, Nigel Mumford felt decidedly ambivalent about receiving his gong from the Queen. He had allowed for a simple ceremony at Hong Kong's Government House, requiring no more than a lounge suit. But his wife, Mavis, had set her heart upon the pomp and circumstance of the Buckingham Palace Throne Room.

It was all very well for Mavis. She had her excuse for an expensive dress and an elegant hat. But for him it meant the horrors of a morning suit. Such attire struck him as absurd, particularly on someone as short and as generous around the waist as himself. Appearing before one's sovereign was intimidating enough, without being trussed up like a penguin in an outlandish outfit hired at vast expense. He wished he could get out of it.

As a Crown servant, Mumford was adept at getting out of sticky situations. A vexatious file could be consigned to limbo for weeks, if not months, by simply requesting more information on some marginal point or by inscribing a "Bring Up" note for some much later date. A public uproar or some ill-conceived criticism in the press could be defused by referring the issue to an *ad hoc* committee. He was a master of such devices. But the social ambitions of a wife were an entirely different kettle of fish.

If there were a Platonic ideal for civil servants, Mumford would be it. He had just the right combination of diffidence, shrewdness, languor, *amour propre* and narrowness of vision to thrive in that great growth industry. His notions of the fitness of things, informed by patriotic history and an insular upbringing, suited a calling where precedents and regulations covered virtually every contingency. Imagination and originality were in any case not his strong suits. It would never cross his mind to wonder, for example, why some miserable hole or a pile of rocks should be defended just because forebears had once planted a Union Jack there. He saw his job as maintaining what had been passed down and not in reasoning why.

It was fortuitous that Fate should have decreed for him a career in Hong Kong, that last jewel of an empire upon which the sun had all but set. Fortuitous, too, that geopolitical considerations prevented untimely disturbance of that colonial carbuncle on the underbelly of China. The powers concerned, caught up in the fervid atmosphere of the Cold War, had more entertaining squabbles elsewhere. So, in spite of diplomatic posturings, a tenuous co-existence was in place, worked through subtle winks and nods, secret signals and unspoken understandings.

In such an atmosphere, it was easy for less perceptive heirs to empire to entertain the illusion that Palmerston's gunboats, suitably up-dated with nuclear

devices, still guaranteed their privileged lives. So they sipped their aperitifs and lorded it over their houseboys, convinced that all was well with themselves if not with the rest of the world. It was an attitude shared by Mumford, though he occasionally experienced a twinge of guilt. Hence he regarded his work as both a mission and a sort of expiation.

Otherwise, Mumford had no quarrel with expatriate existence. Its luxuries and perks were undreamt of back in the wilder reaches of the Tyne from whence he came. Its toll amounted to little more than an increased rotundity, a less robust head of hair, a more avuncular air and the occasional lapse into absent-mindedness.

He retained a clear and impressive brow, however, one befitting a representative of a metropolitan power. Salt-and-pepper hair inched away from it with considerable dignity. His hazel eyes remained friendly. Unaltered, too, was that lugubrious cast of the mouth caused by a long, drooping upper lip and a retracted lower one. He cut such a staid establishment figure that only bowler hat and furled umbrella were needed to render him indistinguishable from members of certain tribes previously infesting parts of London.

Had he not been on the point of retirement, Mumford might not have spent the best part of an hour ruminating over sartorial concerns. But aberrant behaviour was common among those about to cash in their chips. So daydreams were forgivable. Mumford's drifted from Buckingham Palace to his retirement cottage, from his inflation-proof final salary pension to the problem of allocating his leisure between his garden, constituency work for the local Tory Party and the daily tussle with the crossword in the *Times*.

An office attendant bringing a cup of coffee jolted him back to the present. It reminded him of the need to clear the office, as his successor would arrive the following week. The heaps of files, reports and documents littering his desk testified to the waiting chore. The disposal of the files was easy. They were for the most part inactive, accumulated only to beef up his "In" trays, to impute an air of industry. They could be returned to various registries for signing off against his name.

The project studies, white papers, green papers and other documents were but the detritus of forgotten exigencies. They too could be disposed of. Gazette announcements of his appointments and promotions, circulars on pension adjustments and notifications of retirement benefits, however, had to be retained. They were the markers of his rise from the lowly rank of Education Officer to his present position as Director of Government Training.

Flipping through the bumf gave Mumford a comforting sense of accomplishment. He had had a good innings. During his twenty-six years in Hong

Kong he had overseen many changes. It was now time to pass the torch. So thinking, he began tearing up papers he no longer wanted before consigning them to the wastepaper basket.

He worked steadily, interrupting his task only to sip his coffee. As he disinterred more material from his desk, a tiny scrap escaped his grasp and fluttered onto the floor. He picked it up. Written upon it in his own steady hand was a date of some fourteen years ago and the words "Tong's Personnel file passed by hand to D.F.S."

The words arrested him. Then, as the shades of memory drifted back, they conjured up the stern, penetrating eyes and bushy eyebrows of Augustus Hammer, the redoubtable Deputy Financial Secretary of the time. That image was followed by the earnest features of Tong, the village lad from heaven knew where, who pursued Hammer's bidding with exemplary zeal. As those half-forgotten memories closed in, he waved an arm involuntarily, as if to drive them away. But it was no use.

Why should long buried events re-surface now to mar the final days of his career? Everything he had done had been in line of duty, for the good of the service. Perhaps there had been some economies with the truth, some minor bending of the rules, even some creative employment of public funds. But everything had been done according to instructions. Well, perhaps getting ten thousand pounds for Aunt Beryl stretched things a bit. But on the whole he had nothing to be ashamed of. Or had he?

He felt a certain queasiness as recollections of his involvement with Hammer and Tong returned. Though his career had flourished as a result, that association had not been without disasters, particularly for poor Aunt Beryl, now dearly departed.

The fateful chain of events had started shortly after his secondment from the Education Department into a supernumerary post in the Government Secretariat, to serve as the Secretary to a Working Group on "localisation".

Localisation became a fashionable word after the winds of change limped into Hong Kong. It was adopted as a battle cry by those seeking to break the monopoly expatriate officers held over top positions. But, as every right-minded person knew, those called to high office had first to be trained. British responsibility demanded nothing less. Power could not be handed over to people unready for it. Hence the formation of the Working Group to examine the implications of localisation.

Mumford had no idea why he had been picked. He certainly did not volunteer. Apart from being a junior functionary in the education establishment, he had no qualification or experience for the task. Neither had he any familiarity with

the requirements of high office. Indeed, up to that point, he had never so much as set foot inside the spite-laden corridors of the Government Secretariat.

Once seconded, however, he found two clerks and a typist assigned to him. He did not know what to do with them. He did not even know what to do with himself. When he solicited the views of more senior members of the Working Group, they made clear his responsibility for framing training proposals for localisation. He was, after all, supposed to be in the pedagogical business.

He was at a complete loss. He saw his career mired in some sort of bureaucratic Siberia. He canvassed the opinions of colleagues, but they had enough problems of their own. He consulted textbooks on management and public administration. But they seemed long on platitudes and short on substance. Moreover, they contained not a whisper about localisation. In desperation he stooped to the standard means of escape -- the engagement of overseas consultants. But he had no allocated funds and when he asked for funds a missive came back from the Deputy Financial Secretary, over the signature of Tong, dismissing the case as inadequately made out.

Shortly thereafter, he received a summons from the Deputy Financial Secretary himself. Hammer was a staunch adherent of the dictum that governments governed best when they governed least. Hammer thus gripped the public purse-strings more tightly than a devout monk his prayer beads and had no qualm over lashing out at all forms of extravagance. His instructions to his staff were simple. They were to be more parsimonious over public expenditure than over their own.

Mumford's loose upper lip therefore quivered with trepidation as he entered the sanctum of that fearful guardian of public funds. After Tong's missive, he anticipated the worst. But Hammer merely fixed his steely eyes upon him and asked: "Are you contemplating training in social graces?"

"Social graces, Sir?" Mumford replied, his voice pitched half an octave higher than was natural. "We haven't got around to that, Sir. It's a matter of priorities. We haven't been given our own head of expenditure."

Hammer emitted a grunt. "That will come in due course. Don't forget social graces, Mumford. They confer cachet upon a man, make him more confident in his outlook. Our Chinese colleagues need help in mastering social conventions."

"I thought the Chinese had well-understood social conventions, Sir, some dating back to the Book of Rites."

"I don't mean *their* conventions, Mumford. I mean *ours*. Do you know my assistant, Tong?"

Mumford, still worrying over Tong's rebuff, opted for prudence. It seemed better not to admit knowledge of a person whose notoriety was already legendary. He had often heard Tong cursed behind his back at bars and clubs where

senior officers congregated. In the beginning he could not divine why a wide-eyed and unsophisticated lad like Tong should generate so much antipathy.

According to personnel records, Tong was the son of a vegetable farmer from a remote part of the colony. Through dint of effort he secured a university scholarship. Subsequently he gained a first-class degree in economics. That, in turn, earned him an appointment to the elite Administrative Service. His first posting had been under Hammer and he displayed immediately those qualities of dedication and thoroughness which made him the most dreaded member of Hammer's team.

Tong had been a perfect disciple. Being a complete outsider, he was impervious to the influence of old school ties, clubby fellowships or secret Masonic understandings. He did his duties strictly by the book and his approach soon sent shock waves throughout the service. No sum was too small to escape scrutiny, no research too arduous to uncover a flaw. Before long the mere mention of his name sounded like the clap of doom.

Most departments had some lamentable tale to tell. Maurice Kingfisher of Urban Services sought early retirement because Tong not only eliminated junkets to Buenos Aires and Tahiti from his conference proposals but also asked to see reports on previous conferences Kingfisher had attended. Needless to say, Kingfisher had overlooked the need to write them.

Hargrave-Pemberton of Defence fared even worse. Tong unearthed evidence of official funds being used to entertain other Crown servants, something specifically barred by regulations. When Tong suggested restitution, Hargrave-Pemberton was heard uttering oaths of such originality they would have done credit to the very best public schools.

Against such a background Mumford ventured a circumspect reply to Hammer's question. "I don't think I have met him, Sir," he said.

"It doesn't matter. You will," Hammer said, as if promising a treat. "He's an excellent fellow. Has potential to go a long way, but needs nurturing. Trouble with local universities is that they can turn out chaps who know all about monetary aggregates, deflators and econometric models but not how to pass the port."

Hammer then proceeded to detail an incident at Government House the previous evening. The Governor had given one of his black-tie dinners and, in keeping with tradition, had included some of the younger Administrative Officers as guests. Tong had been one of them. But to general shock and amazement, Tong had turned up in a brown checkered suit, an ultramarine waistcoat of Chinese brocade and the kind of black tie meant for funerals.

To make matters worse, when the ladies retired after the meal to allow the gentlemen their Havanas, Tong had risen also to follow them out of the room.

Some wives speculated whether the astonishing young man intended entering the powder room with them. Others thought it might be quite amusing if he did.

In the inevitable *post mortem*, Tong explained he had never been to a formal Western dinner. Therefore he had taken the black tie specified in the invitation as any sort of black tie. If the colour of a tie had to be spelt out, it stood to reason "R.S.V.P." had to be an elaboration about dress, possibly meaning "Require Suit, Vest Particularly." Accordingly, he wore his best suit. But he did not have a vest and the only one he could borrow was, regrettably, not in a matching colour.

As for leaving the room with the ladies, Tong explained he had merely followed the instructions by the Aide-de-camp. He had been asked to "take good care" of a visiting dignitary from the British Council, a matron of staggering proportions by the name of Mrs. Willoughby. Apart from making conversation, he was to escort her to dinner. Therefore, when that awesome representative of British culture steamed out of the room like a battlewagon, he felt duty-bound to follow like a good escorting frigate.

"It's miscommunication, Mumford, sad misunderstandings across cultural divides," Hammer continued. "I feel responsible, as Tong is one of my own. We need to bring him socially up to snuff. Do you think a year at Oxford or Cambridge might do it? Lodging with a respectable British family perhaps? Maybe even an attachment at the Treasury afterwards. These are, of course, just random thoughts. But you might develop them into something useful, possibly even seminal. What do you think?"

Mumford's heart leapt at the suggestions. They seemed the answer to his prayers. "Your ideas are marvellous, Sir. I had been thinking along similar lines. I have contacts at Oxford. I'll get to work right away."

"Good! When things are organised, I'll deal sympathetically with any request for funds. If the arrangements look good, I'll even nominate Tong as a guinea pig."

Thus it was that Mumford's involvement with Hammer and Tong began.

Once pointed in the right direction, Mumford saw the various elements of his salvation taking shape. The support of as powerful a personage as the Deputy Financial Secretary guaranteed a fair wind for anything he might propose. The prospect of a respite from the inquisitions of Tong was bound to find favour throughout the administration.

And so it turned out. Once the possibility of shunting Tong out of the way became known, the green light for an Oxford course, attachments in Whitehall and everything else came with a speed hitherto unheard of. Mumford was despatched to England to finalise details.

At Oxford, Mumford took the opportunity to call on his father's youngest sister. Apart from an occasional letter and the obligatory card at Christmas, he had had no contact with Aunt Beryl for almost 20 years. He remembered her as a petite lady of great refinement, touched by an endearing streak of eccentricity. In a rush of patriotism during the blitz, for example, she had married a regular army captain she barely knew for the sake of "giving him something to fight for".

It was uncertain whether the marriage stimulated the good captain's ardour for battle or merely his instinct for self-preservation. In the event, he survived the war with hardly a scratch, only to be struck down soon afterwards by a disease associated with drink.

Until his visit, Mumford had no idea of the circumstances in which his aunt lived. He knew she owned an old two-storey house at Oxford and, judging from the expansive way she had described her rounds of concerts, tea parties, charitable works and donations to parish fetes, he had assumed she led a comfortable and rewarding life. But reality was rather different.

His aunt, in another of her vagaries, had apparently promoted her husband posthumously to colonel and conferred upon him a Military Cross. Such misrepresentations might have passed harmlessly enough except that she then tried to live in a style appropriate to a widow of a colonel and a war hero. Her modest pension could not sustain such a charade. In the end she had to accept students as paying guests, under the guise of making her contribution to higher education. When students left during breaks or when they were tardy with the rent, she had to skimp on food or forego small personal luxuries.

It occurred to Mumford that lodging a Hong Kong official or two with Aunt Beryl, as suggested by Hammer, would place her finances on a more stable footing. Besides, she would be just the person to school the likes of Tong in social graces. She was a stickler for form and would fuss over such esoteric matters as whether the milk or the tea ought to be poured first when serving tea. Of course, his blood connections with her had to be kept secret to avoid embarrassment.

It took several months for Mumford to finalise arrangements to enrol Tong at Oxford for the Michaelmas term and to lodge him with Aunt Beryl. Soon afterwards Mumford had the pleasure of finding the supernumerary post he occupied made part of the permanent establishment and upgraded to Senior Training Officer to boot. In due course he was promoted substantively. His upward climb had begun.

Suddenly, three weeks before Christmas, he received another summons from Hammer. On this occasion he was entirely free of foreboding. Indeed, his recent promotion and the approach of the festive season had put him in a cheerful mood. But when he entered the office, he saw that Hammer's face was black as thunder.

"What is the meaning of this, Mumford?" Hammer demanded, waving a piece of paper.

It turned out to be a letter from Tong. As Mumford studied it, his heart tightened with alarm. "I am grateful for the opportunity to attend Oxford," the letter said. "Since arriving, I have learned many things, but some are decidedly disturbing. For instance, I go often to the Ashmolean to look at the seals of Chinese emperors on display. Each time I see them, I am left wondering why they should be there, instead of back in China where they belong.

"I have also met in my residence a Swedish student of anthropology who knows much more about Chinese culture than I do. I had no idea, for example, that during the Han Dynasty it was customary to seal with jade the nine orifices of a corpse, including the anus and the sexual organ, to retard decomposition. Each day my ignorance of my own heritage is shown up in some way.

"Although Oxford will equip me well for government service, I fear it will also turn me into a yellow-faced Englishman. That is not what I wish to become. I want to remain a Chinese, but one who is much more aware of his own culture. I fear I cannot achieve that working for a colonial government. I therefore hereby tender my resignation. Enclosed is a cheque for a month's salary in lieu of notice."

Mumford was struggling for words as he came to the end of the letter. "He has obviously fallen into bad company," he eventually managed. "That Swede must be a subversive. Up there, they're all pinkies or worse. It sounds like standard Communist recruitment method. Look at what they achieved at Cambridge! We must obviously do something. We must alert Special Branch and MI-5."

"You will breathe no word of this to S. B. or anyone else," Hammer hissed, in a thin whisper. "Will it look good for the administration -- or for yourself, for that matter -- if we were to lose the first officer handpicked for a new training course? You had better head for England at once. Talk some sense into Tong. I want him back. I have cleared this with the Chief Secretary. I expect a full report on your return."

Mumford walked out of the office in a daze. The turn of events had been totally unexpected. The moment he got back to his own office he tried to telephone Aunt Beryl. But the inability to raise an answer only added to his worries.

Then an incoherent letter from Aunt Beryl arrived. In it she went on and on about her home being wrecked and flooded, about her Royal Doulton dinner set being smashed, about Tong running about naked with a girl before the vicar and his wife and about unspeakable humiliation and financial ruin. Most of it made little sense except that Tong seemed somehow implicated in the whole catalogue of disasters.

By the time Mumford got to Oxford, Aunt Beryl was in hospital with a nervous breakdown and Tong was nowhere to be found. Slowly and painfully he pieced together events from former tenants, the vicar and members of assorted emergency services.

Apparently, one of the fellow lodgers in the house had been a Swedish girl doing a post-graduate thesis on Chinese burial customs. She was blessed with Nordic good looks but happened also to be a feminist, committed to the cause of free love. She had approached Tong for help in deciphering some obscure Chinese texts. The combination of physical charm, knowledge of things Chinese and liberated sexual attitudes proved too much for Tong, who fell hopelessly under her spell. So it was inevitable that one thing should lead to another.

There was an upstairs bathroom designated for the use of lodgers, located right above the kitchen. It was equipped with one of those massive cast iron baths with great clawed feet. Over the years lodgers had splashed bath water so indiscriminately over the floorboards that, unnoticed by anyone, dry rot had set in.

One evening, while Aunt Beryl was entertaining the vicar, his wife and some other guests, Tong and his Swedish friend decided to bathe together. The floorboards had deteriorated to such an extent that the weight of the cast iron tub filled with water and the exertions of the couple in it proved too much. The floorboards gave way and bath tub, lovers, soapy water and all suddenly landed with a resounding explosion in the kitchen, smashing the kitchen table, the Royal Doulton crockery and a tureen of chicken soup intended for dinner.

Miraculously, no one suffered serious injury. Tong and the girl received no more than bruises. Aunt Beryl, who was turning the roast in the oven at the time, was shocked into a dead faint. As guests and lodgers rushed to the scene of the commotion, they found Tong and the girl trying to revive Aunt Beryl, completely indifferent to their state of undress.

The arrival of firemen, policemen, gasmen, ambulance attendants and members of other essential services created a completely chaotic scene. The building had to be evacuated pending structural investigations. Lodgers preparing for end-of-term tests were in an uproar and Aunt Beryl, who revived only to find herself soaked with bath water, was in such a state that neither the vicar's wife nor the women constables around the house could calm her. Only Tong and the Swedish girl seemed to take the calamity in their stride.

Unhappy tidings dogged Mumford throughout his brief stay at Oxford. Try as he might, Tong and his lover were nowhere to be found. They had disappeared during the confusion of the evacuation. Therefore any attempt to talk to Tong was out of the question. Then enquiries with the insurance company on Aunt Beryl's behalf revealed a condition in the policy forbidding paying guests. Since

Aunt Beryl had obviously violated that condition, her claim for repairs, estimated at fifteen thousand pounds, was rejected.

Mumford did not have the heart to break the news to his aunt, who kept asking about the insurance money. She was petrified of having nowhere to live when she left hospital. That, no doubt, aggravated her nervous condition. In order to reassure her, Mumford rashly undertook to have her home fully restored by the time she was discharged.

But it proved a promise he was in no position to honour. That preyed so much on his mind that by the time he got back to Hong Kong he felt completely wrung out. He had some modest savings, but by no means enough for the job, and Mavis would not hear of spending a red penny on Aunt Beryl's home. The only solution seemed to be an *ex gratia* payment out of public funds. After all, Tong was in a sense responsible for the debacle and he *was* at the time a Hong Kong Government official in good standing. But how could that be arranged without attracting unwelcomed attention?

In the meantime, other ramifications arising out of Tong's resignation crowded in. Every officer proceeding on overseas studies had to agree in writing to serve for three years after completion of studies. Otherwise, the entire outlay had to be reimbursed. But it remained open to argument whether an officer resigning part way through a course could be deemed to have completed the course.

The Attorney General was consulted and he dilated learnedly upon the meanings of the words "complete" and "course". But in the end his advice left Mumford no wiser as to what to do.

"If attendance at a three-term course were to be compared with the construction of a three-legged stool," the Attorney General had written, "would a stool with two legs missing still be considered a stool? That is the question."

Fortunately, the matter became academic because it proved impossible to locate Tong, either to talk to him or to secure reimbursement. But loose ends still had to be attended to, lest audit queries arose or questions came up in the Public Accounts Committee.

In the end Mumford decided to put the issue to Hammer. He set out the whole dismal story in a minute in Tong's Staff/Restricted file. He suggested writing off all expenditures associated with Tong's course and granting an *ex gratia* award of ten thousand pounds to Aunt Beryl. He handed the file personally to Hammer, in case the latter wanted more details.

He sat frozen with fear as he watched Hammer read through the minute. Eventually Hammer looked up and asked incredulously: "Are you mad, Mumford, writing a minute like this?"

"You said you wanted a full report, Sir," Mumford replied.

"But I did not say it had to be in writing. Have you learnt nothing from your time in the Secretariat? Only a fool would report in black and white on a matter as embarrassing as this. Could you not have reported orally? Then a minute of one sentence, to the effect we had spoken, would have sufficed. My reply could be just as succinct. A three-word minute -- 'Action as proposed.' -- would have been settled everything. Even the most suspicious Director of Audit would have a job making anything out of such an exchange. Instead you had to commit all the gory details to paper, for every bored secretary and nosy clerk in Registry to read and gossip about.

"Do you know what will happen if this gets out, if the press got hold of it? Government will become a laughing-stock. I can imagine the headlines. 'Sex In Bath Lands Hong Kong Official In Chicken Soup!' Moralists will be up in arms, those penny-a-dozen politicians will have a field day! The furore will discredit overseas training, call into question our collective judgement and undermine our very mandate to govern.

"And ten thousand for a landlady who has fiddled her insurance premium! That's rich! That will go down like a lead balloon in Finance Committee! Why can't she be left to stew in her own juice for not up-keeping her property?"

"She's an impoverished widow, Sir, trying to do us a service," Mumford replied. "Her husband was, I'm told, a war hero who died upholding the British way of life. If she were to kick up a fuss, the whole affair would get into the open. We would appear insensitive to the plight of a war widow."

"All right. Let's keep emotion out of this. I'll agree ten thousand, but this can't go to Finance Committee in the normal way. I'll approve writing off the course expenses, but you'll have to find the money for the widow from your training vote. This debacle has arisen out of training, hasn't it? If there's not enough, you'll have to work a virement or two."

"I hope, Sir, that will not affect the future of the Training Unit. We are committed to training for localisation. Political expectations have to be taken into account. More funds will be needed next year. More staff, too. It is only fair to expect understanding over my difficulties."

"Now you're learning too fast, Mumford. Don't get too smart too quickly. You're not out of the woods yet. Involving the Attorney General was a mistake. The Legal Department is notorious for leaks and lawyers never give opinions without hedging. But we can't do anything about that now. We must, however, do something about this unfortunate file. It cannot be left doing the rounds. I'll have it upgraded, barring unauthorised access. You would favour that, wouldn't you?"

Mumford sighed in recalling that long-ago interview and the tacit understandings reached. He wondered what Hammer eventually did with Tong's file. Did he upgrade it, as proposed, or did he simply destroy it? If the former, it should

be reposing quietly in either the Confidential or the Safe Care Registry. But it would be too rash to probe. If the latter, then the Personnel Registry must still have it recorded against his name! In that eventuality, the return of other inactive files might cause some over-zealous clerk to ask about the incriminating one signed out fourteen years ago!

If it could not be produced, the Government Security Officer would be alerted. An investigation would begin. A missing file, after all, represented a serious breach of security. He could visualise where an investigation might lead. His former secretary, now serving another master, might remember typing that damaging minute. Old papers would be disinterred. The payment to Aunt Beryl, their ties of kinship and the dubious write-offs and virements would all come tumbling out! It might lead to accusations of corruption, a disciplinary hearing, a reduction in pension. Even his gong might be whipped away!

Sweat formed upon Mumford's fevered brow. It was so unfair. Throughout his career he had performed his duties loyally and faithfully. Now, on the eve of retirement, ancient indiscretions were threatening to bring unthinkable shame.

As fears and apprehensions swirled around his mind, Mumford began dimly to perceive the cause of his predicament. Fourteen years ago, in his distress and confusion, he had deviated from the safe and charted paths established by generations of predecessors. By committing to record matters inimical to the interests of the administration he had violated a rule of survival. He had compounded that error by ignoring proper procedure for passing files. He should have passed Tong's file through his secretary to Hammer's secretary. In that way its movement would have been logged by both parties and cross-referred to the Personnel Registry. Omitting that procedure had robbed him of a defence. The scrap of paper he held was in fact his indictment.

Hammer would be of no help in the present situation. He had long since retired as Sir Augustus Hammer, the last Governor of a group of Pacific islands launched into micro-nationhood. It was unlikely he would risk his reputation to save someone else's skin.

The irony was that he had broken the rules not out of any sense of rebellion but through sheer carelessness. In his despair he saw for the first time what the life he had chosen for himself had amounted to. It had delivered none of the promises of grandeur, power and honour he had originally imagined. The best he could look forward to was a piece of coloured ribbon with a bit of metal attached to the end of it.

On a sudden, the ridiculousness of his situation struck him and he broke into a wry smile. His reputation as a senior Crown servant, his good name as the first

Director of Government Training, depended on nothing more substantial than the oversight of some faceless registry clerk!

His thoughts then drifted to Tong. If he had his life to live over again he would gladly change places with that unpolished young man. He might then have escaped becoming bureaucratic fodder. He might even have enjoyed a spicier life, causing havoc at Government House, striking fear into the hearts of bureaucrats high and low, and making love to a Swedish beauty in a flying bath tub.

Hammer and Tong has appeared in **Short Story International** in the United States.