

**MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES
JOSEPH LIND AND SHELLEY SHIELDS**

**A
Crime
Novella**

WORKED

TO

IDEATH



peter c byrnes

**MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES JOSEPH LIND
AND SHELLEY SHIELDS
WORKED TO DEATH ©**

Peter C Byrnes

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The heat hit me in the face as I emerged from the air-conditioned interior of the Cop 4WD. Almost immediately my head and shoulders were affronted and assaulted by a huge cloud of flies. They manically whizzing about as though they felt I was topping their battlement and they had to do everything in their power to repel my advance!

I almost slumped back into the dim interior of the vehicle. Wanting to head back to the Airport to catch the next flight back out to Sydney.

This would be my first case without my junior partners, Shelley Shields and Dallas Courtney. The “powers to be” insistent on them now capable of flying it alone as a formidable Murder Squad Team.

Me?

There was as yet, no suitable candidate that I could take under my wing to mentor. To advise. To teach.

Would you believe it??!!

The hierarchy seeing me as the Officer most capable of passing on his knowledge on all things to do with the human condition and the particular ugliness of its more psychopathic elements.

Me???!!!

Who would believe it?

“Road-train!” Some-one yelled as a three trailer Road-train came rumbling towards our position on the side of the Highway.

Its very width seemed to fill the entire north bound lane. The noise and whine of its diesel engine deafening.

Its initial bow wave of air wanting to throw me off the side of the road....then the suction as the length of it sped past. Luckily I was on the lee side of the Cop vehicle....but maybe that wasn't the safest place to be as the 4WD vehicle rocked alarmingly from the air pressure of the speeding behemoth. Its top speed well above the prescribed 100 which meant little to the 'pilot' of this huge road-train. Even the obvious sight of about a dozen Uniform Cops on both sides of the road had no effect on the driver as though he was immune to their presence.

Sticking his finger up and sneering his thoughts on what he thought of cops.

The smell of cattle and dun sandblasting up our noses seeming to linger long after the passage

of the behemoth had occurred. I felt that I could almost dust it off my clothes such was its 'heaviness'!

Sixty kilometres south of Dubbo on a straight, flat section of road. Slightly raised above the surrounding parched farm land. A culvert crossing over a small creek bed. A parking area, better described as a “ Travellers' Rest Area” on both sides of the creek down off the Highway bitumen. On both sides of the road and the bridge, giving the tired caravan and mobile home traveller an area to 'prop' overnight...or just to stop for a breather and a cup of coffee.

These areas were usually formed some two hundred kilometres apart or positioned at some local “spot” of interest. Used regularly by the Grey Nomads as free-camping sites for that overnight 'prop'. Even longer depending on finances, though this habit was not sanctioned by the powers to be. The Stray Greys waiting for Pension Day to arrive before heading into town and a cosier place to bed down with electricity, water and sullage connection at the town Caravan Park.

Out here at these designated Rest Stops, they had to rely on Solar panels and a bright sun for their power. Some even had small generators to ensure that precious ingredient.

Power. Annoying the crap out of their fellow travellers who may have inadvertently pitched camp within earshot! The generator humming away for most of the night, recharging low batteries.

Supposedly you were only allowed to “bush camp” at these off-road areas for no more than twenty-four hours. It would appear that the persons who had called in the find had been there for three days!

Their Pension just arrived in time for them to head towards Dubbo after the initial Crime Scene Officer had made himself known. They breathed a sigh of relief as fines are hefty if this basic requirement is ignored.

Non-existent water in the creek, the constant whooshing of Road-trains especially in the middle of the night and the clouds of flies because of nearby cattle and sheep, not my idea of that perfect Bush Camp....but then I wasn't or would never travel on the smell of an oily rag.

There had to be better Camps though, well off the highway down some dry dirt, corrugated track or road. But some of these guys would rather prop in locations like this instead of ever subjecting their “rigs” to the roughness and dirt stained back-track away from the busy inland Highway.

These modern day Adventurers still lived it rough, I sarcastically thought as I looked around at the area! A Bush Loo. Shade trees and BBQ bench seat and table settings anchored to the ground scattered throughout the area.

2

I'd disembarked from the plane knowing that it was going to be a hot day.

It greeted me immediately as I stuck my head out of the plane's rear door to negotiate the wheeled in set of steps. A slap in the face. Feeling as though you'd gone from the cool air-conditioned space of the plane straight into a furnace. An oven. It took your breath away such was the shock.

I picked up my hire car from the smiling Hire Car Firm attendant at the Airport and headed for the Dubbo Police Station. That false smile a pre-requisite in getting the job. The more false the smile, the higher up the employee role of promotion!

It was still miles too early to drop my things at the Hotel.

It was still too early for the Day Shift Senior Constable to sign on for the day so I thought. *I* would have met me at the Airport....but then I was that type of friendly guy. Friendly was a strained emotion after three years of severe drought around these parts, apparently.

I left my things in the car in the designated Visitors car position at the rear of the Police Station yard and took a wander through Town, glancing at window displays. I wandered into a small Coffee Cafe and ordered. The coffee on the plane way below standard.

I needed a stronger fix if I was to function all day.

Waking at 3 in the morning to catch that early flight out of Sydney was going to bugger me for the rest of the day...and the week!

"Detective." Not a question but a statement.

I turned to see a tall, red-headed solid woman standing behind me.

"Senior Constable Debra Taylor. Dubbo Central LAC." She thrust out her hand.

"Am I that easy to spot?" I replied. A smile on my face as I shook her hand.

"The usual, thanks Carol...and what-ever this gentleman wants. Put it on my tab." She turned back to me. "A table, perhaps? And I saw you drive into the rear yard of the Station. An overnight bag on the back seat.....I'll take the kudos that I am an excellent Cop with above average deductive reasoning instead of knowing in advance that you'd be on the early flight in and would arrive at the Station at a certain time as long as the flight was on time....and that is a hire car from the Firm that has a contract with the State Government." She again smiled. "I apologise for not meeting you at the Airport. I had to organise the roster for the coming days for all the guys who we'll need out at the body dump.....and make sure all the right equipment was available before the Forensic guys

asked for it.....it's been a bit hectic around here. I'm sure you understand as we don't get that many body remains being found under bridges in dried up creek beds.” She giggled at her own joke.

I nodded my head. Returned her smile.

We sat at a corner table against the window line of the shop. Views out across the wide side-street off the main road shopping strip.

“You been out to the site?”

“Yes. Yesterday. After we got the call from a retired couple who were free-camping out there. They noticed the remains and called it in. Gruesome, let me tell you.”

“The Forensic Team from Sydney here yet?”

“Yeah. Came in late last night. They'd be heading out to the site soon if they're not already there this morning. They're all staying at the Pub just south of town. That's where I guess you'll be staying too. Eh? Some wild nights coming up.” This said with a broad grin on her face. “How long are you booked in for?”

“Three nights....”

“You'll enjoy it. An historic Pub. One of the best around. The food.....you'll put on kilograms while you're here, let me tell you.”

“Is it safe to jog around the streets at night? By the sounds I'll need to get in my normal exercise regime....” I patted my stomach for effect. I still needed to lose an inch or two off my waistline, I always told myself. Something that I was finding harder and harder to do as I aged. I liked an exceptional red far too much for my own good!

“Where do you think you are? Some black suburb in the deep south of America? Nah, there's very little problems out that way....the only problem you may have is dodging other like minded persons out pounding the pavement....I was called out one night not far from where you'll be staying. On the usual drunken Domestic Violence issue. Surprise, surprise! I happened to look up the street as I came back to my Beat Vehicle. There was this mass of dim small lights bobbing up and down....not much....seeming to hover just above the ground. A ground mist swirling about. For the life of me I couldn't work it out....for a split moment I thought I was in the middle of a Close Encounter....” She giggled. Hiding her mouth with her hand. “They came closer. I was rooted to the spot beside the vehicle. Took me some time for it to click. It was a local Jogging Club. All out. All the members wearing those Head Torches....Gawd, it was a bloody funny sight!”

“I guess that I am spoilt when I jog around home before sunrise. There is more than enough streetlights which make it almost seem like day! I couldn't imagine wearing one of those headlights while I was jogging...I think that they'd make me dizzy....they'd be more hindrance than help, I reckon.” I replied. Laughing at the mental image of half a dozen bobbing lights coming into view over a crest of a road. Yeah, it would look kind of eerie at that time of morning. Mist swirling around hiding the road surface. Just the disassociated small lights a metre or so above the mist

layer.

We kept up the banter for some time, almost forgetting about the responsibilities that the day had in store for us.

We finished off our coffee and headed back to the Police Station two blocks away.

SC Taylor followed me to the Pub where Hendo, our Chief Clerk and the real Power in the Murder Squad Room had me booked in. Even though it was way too early to place my things into the Reserved Room, I was invited to leave them in the Office. They would carry them upstairs to the room when it had been vacated and cleaned.

Fine by me.

I hopped up into Taylor's large 4WD and we headed towards the body dump site. The hiring of the small sedan for my use while I was here may have been a superfluous exercise if this morning's arrangements was anything to go by!

3

“Stay there, Detective. There's another Road-train coming the other way....”

“Road-train!” Somebody yelled out just before I was again hit with the double action of the wind created by the speeding progress of the behemoth.

“Is it like this all day?”

“Not really....this time of morning, after the trucks leave Melbourne around midnight. Ten O'clock....and maybe late afternoon with them heading back from Brisbane....or further afield....”

“On this road? I mean we're miles from no-where and heading towards....where?”

“Yeah, well...it's the most direct route from Melbourne to Rockhampton in Queensland....then onto Townsville and Cairns. And also the trucks heading up to Darwin use this road then branch off onto the Mitchell Highway in town. Either that or it's a longer trip through to Port Augusta in South Australia and then up to Darwin through the middle.....but this Highway? It's about the busiest route in Australia for Road-trains, especially. Maybe equal to the M1 with the trucks leaving from Sydney heading north.....but we've got a couple of radar cars about a kay either side of this culvert crossing trying to slow the bastards down....the word hasn't got out yet. It takes a bit of time, but they'll get down to 80 pretty soon....we've set up a restricted speed limit area of around a kay long with the road bridge in the middle.....I think they'll get the Indicator Signs on about now. That'll slow them down....with the radar Patrol Cars positioned as they are. The CB waves will be alive

with the speed check information real soon, let me tell you!”

“You can't tell me those two guys were under the speed limit....”

“No....they weren't. But what do you do...they were baiting us to react, I reckon.”

“Well.....??”

“What do you want us to do, Detective? Spend our precious time racing around after those cowboys instead of figuring out who this person is buried under the bridge? We'll get the 'Jockeys' in the end, don't you worry. Their Rego details would have been radioed through to the Transport guys. They'll stop them on the other side of town and go over those rigs with a fine tooth comb.....they'll get them on something unroadworthy let me tell you....every time!”

We walked back along the shoulder of the Highway towards the Culvert Crossing. It wasn't a typical Box Culvert construction but a fair dinkum concrete bridge across a creek bed. The sides of the creek were steep with the bed of the stream about 5 metres below the surrounding levels and the road surface.

“During a reasonable year with the rainfall around average, the creek would be full with the water no more than a metre...maybe one point five metres below the soffit underside of the bridge. Not flowing fast but none-the-less, it could propel you along pretty good. Now of course, without our normal rainfall for nigh on four years now, we've got puddles and pools. The Cockies....the Farmers are sweating chips hanging on for that good fall of rain. Typically, we more than likely will have flood conditions when the drought breaks. Typical boom or bust of Australian farmers.” She shook her head. “Some guys are just about ready to walk off the land. That's how desperate things are getting out here....but you city slickers don't seem to know or care, eh?” This said with a smile on her face. She was like a lot of country folk. In for the stir. Treating adversity with a smile and an air of optimism.

The rain? It will get here eventually. Nothing you can do but hang on!

The Forensic team had taken over and the four Parking areas on either side of the creek bed and the highway, were taped off.

Two Light Towers were being set up, one either side of the bridge adjacent to the creek embankment. Positioned so as to direct their light in under the bridge.

It was a bit gloomy under there.

There won't be any complaint about lack of light that's for sure, I thought cynically, once the portable generators start up and the lights spring into action.

“That's going to upset a few people, I reckon.” SC Taylor murmured. Nodding her head towards the four cleared and flat areas of the roadside Rest Areas. Large Rubbish Bins. Several very large shade trees. A new Bush Chemical Toilet Shed on one of the sites. The one on the southern approach side of the creek. Picnic tables close to the creek embankment and scattered around

through several groves of trees.

Rather picturesque in an Australian sort of way.

“Bit late for that, isn't it?” I asked. “What, the bodies have been here for over 12 months, more than likely longer, so I understand. I doubt that there would be any forensic trace to be found anywhere.....especially after the rains that exposed the remains....”

“You never know....and the attitude is they've got to try on the off-chance....they'll even check for fingerprints on every table and bench seat and the Loo.....it's amazing what peripheral evidence and trace of a known felon springs to life and can be identified even out here!”

“Eternal optimists....” I countered.

“Could be, I suppose, but you never know. I reckon they'll do a cursory investigation of the southern area so that we can get all these vehicles off the shoulders of the Highway. It makes it a little choke point....I wouldn't want two Road-trains to meet at that point even if they have reduced their speed down to 60.....”

4

We jogged across the bitumen and walked down the entry track into the Rest Area on the southern side of the highway bridge. Staying within the taped pathway that had been cleared previously by a forensic sweep.

I again had a problem squirming into the Forensic boiler suit. Taylor found this rather amusing, several times assisting to slide the suit up over my body.

“I've never before seen some-one have so much trouble getting into a Forensic suit....”

“You wait and see me trying to get out of the blasted thing!” I replied. Laughing at my own inadequacies.

“You'd make a shit male stripper...a starring role in that pommy film...you know the one where the guys strip starkers.....that would be well outside your league....”

“...and not just for the awkwardness of my undressing, let me tell you....”

This must have tickled a funny bone in her as her giggles erupted, causing people to look up at our presence. By this stage we were standing at the top of the creek bank near the shadow of the bridge that spanned the gully. The gully only small but formed by eons of intermittent water-flow.

We wandered in under the bridge. There was a surprising feel of a breeze whistling through

though it hadn't been evident when we had been standing up on the Highway level.

A familiar figure looked up at me from the bed of the Creek.

“Muscles! Mate, what you doing out here?” I exclaimed. Surprised to see the Deputy Head of the Morgue Pathology Department from Sydney away from his young family.

“Two of my team are down with the Flu....one on holidays and another on Long Service Leave...had no choice.....your shout to-night. It seems that we are all bunked down at the same Pub...that historic one. Nice rooms. They all open out onto a bloody wide and long verandah, so no funny business tonight after you have got me drunk, huh?”

It was unusual that Muscles could be forced to even think of being away from Marge Hendricks, my former Detective Partner and his three young kids, now close to 18 months old. It must have been a terribly hard decision for him to make.

“Hear on the grape-vine that you're flying solo, my friend. Marge reckons that you'll perish under those conditions. You've always needed a woman to figure out the harder points of a Case.....so she says.....”

“Yeah, yeah. I expected you to at least back your mate up....”

“Don't shoot me, mate. I'm just the messenger....”

While this banter was proceeding, Brian 'Muscles' Sarvich climbed up the ladder leaning against the steep incline of the creek bank.

He straightened up with a loud groan, hands on hips. He always had had a gummy back for as long as I had known him. And that was well before they were searching for a manger in a Barn, I reckon!

“Getting too old for this....the Forensic Anthropologist....you may have meet him before. He and his wife were a formidable team in their chosen sphere. World renown. The two of them were with me when we did that Fromelles dig to find the missing Aussie soldiers. His Missus died from bullet wounds while the two of them were investigating several Body Dumps near the Thai/Malaysian Border several months ago.....he came back here. Has semi-retired. Knocked him for six. He came out here as a favour to me....says an initial probe of the exposed bones would indicate a two to five year old dump....won't know more until the body is fully exposed. Maybe not until it is examined back in Sydney....”

“Sex? Age?”

“Nah...too early. What he has suggested is a trawl up and downstream for any bones that may have been swept away in that recent storm...that heavy rain event that was sorely needed around these parts.....not good for us though....but then, if we hadn't had the rain, I guess the bodies may have laid here for however long.....”

“Why upstream?”

“Animal activity. Seems there is signs of it with some of the bones of the foot and leg.....an arm missing....and the complete skull.....”

“I guess that will be me and a number of Uniforms.....any time-line on something more positive?” SC Taylor cut across our conversation. I introduced her to my old friend. They shook hands. Sized up one another.

“You the Crime Scene Leader?” My old mate asked.

“No. Not really. My Boss has given that honour to one of my Juniors, thank God. I wouldn't like to be out here sitting on my bum for twelve hours or so recording all the comings and goings. I've been assigned to provide the personnel and equipment. You need anything extra, see me. OK?”

Muscles shook his head.

“No. Yeah. We're right, I think. We brought a lot of our own stuff in the Mobile Forensic Units. Two of them actually. We, plus the Forensic Team, there's about a dozen of us.....thanks. You've done well.....just keep those Grey Nomads away from the areas. We had one as we got out here this morning going right off. They needed to use the toilet and have a cuppa, so they said.....they had their own toot in the caravan but they thought it their right not to be prevented from using the “free” camping facilities.....they'd been camped down the road about fifty kays....all they could do was complain about the Roadtrains....all night....there's no pleasing some people.”

“We'll get some of the local SES volunteers out here to help with that trawl.” Taylor interrupted. “.....and yeah, some are really nice people. True Adventurers. Others? You wonder why they're travelling in that manner.....”

I nodded my head to acknowledge her comment. I wouldn't know a Grey Nomad from a Red Kangaroo!

“Maybe tomorrow when the entire cadaver is exposed....we have to be careful not to disturb any forensic trace though we doubt that there'll be much about.....maybe as we turn aside the earth and sand.....I'd say this spot was picked as it is out of line of sight from the roadway and the creek bed there is quite sandy. Gritty. Loamy....” He stuck out his jaw to indicate the site of the skeleton.

“Who-ever our culprit is who done the digging, he only thought out his strategy to burying the body. Giving scant regard for the prospect of any wet weather down the track.....”

“Yeah.....ease of digging. Close to where his vehicle was parked more than likely and out of sight of any persons travelling on the road above.....”

“Yeah, but still a chancy thing. At any time a traveller could have driven off the Highway for a rest. A piddle. A cup of coffee even.....”

“Yeah....and the Stray Brigade.....you know, the retired people who have bought the new 4WD

and caravan and plan on spending the rest of their lives travelling the by-ways and the highways. They could prop here for a couple of days until Pension day which would allow them to pay for a week or two in a Caravan Park nearer to town.....a risk that's for sure!"

"So...what should we be looking for as we stroll down the creek bed?" Taylor asked 'Muscles' Sarvich.

"Maybe clothing. Anything that looks out of place. Shouldn't be there. Any bone fragments. Complete bones.....if any animals have taken the bones, maybe fragments, though it would be a safe bet that if dogs or dingos, maybe Quolls were involved, there'd be bugger all left. What-ever. They'd have exited the creek bed for the higher ground where they can see more of the surrounding land.....as they feasted on their find.....maybe up in the dense foliage cover beside either bank that is not ploughed over....."

"Your take?"

"Me? Hell no! That's according to a couple of the local guys and Colin down there.....they're the experts.....so not just the creek bed but the land either side of the course of the creek, just to complicate matters more, eh? I'm sure that you will enjoy yourself, mate. A stroll in the countryside. Just what the Doctor ordered....you were getting a little jaded back in the city, my boy. A little jaded." He laughed at his gentle 'dig'.

He never failed to get one over me at every opportunity. It was twice as bad after a glass of Red or two. Looks like we'd be firing on all fours for the next couple of nights after we'd knocked off for the day. I knew from experience that when Muscles got the 'taste', then we both suffered. But what-ever, the stay would be enjoyable as Muscles was an exceptionally funny man when he got a couple under his belt.....but the next morning could be a problem!

What the heck, you needed a laugh in this line of work.

5

It wasn't an easy job to "stroll" down the Creek bed.

There were pools, ponds and billabongs. Dirty water. Sludge and mud up to your elbows. The farmland above the Creek bed wasn't much better with an area along the banks not having been tilled. Left in its natural condition with trees and bush, tangled root systems and felled trees slowing any progress. Cut-a-ways and undercuts in the earth banks that exposed an entrapment of tree roots.

In two days we may have ventured no more than 500 metres downstream from the body dump.

Bits of material, clothing, rubbish, drink bottles and cans and a few fragments of bone was all the product of our endeavours. All dutifully catalogued, photographed and fixed by GPS co-ordinates. It would appear that the positioning of these 'finds' could have been the force of rushing water or animal activity. No-one was too sure of which may have been the culprit.....and we were expected to continue with the 'trawl' for at least another 500 metres downstream and the same upstream!

I will never complain again about the drudgery of a homicide investigation. I think in hindsight, watching grass grow would have been more exciting than the slow trawl down both sides of that creek bed! At least the numerous quips and witticisms from all us 'searchers' kept us all in light-hearted spirits.

Almost!

I should have bought more clothes.

Luckily, I was of a size that permitted me to borrow several changes of Boiler Suit and Wellington Boots. The temperature meant that both pieces of apparel were bloody hot and uncomfortable.

The nightly shower was eagerly awaited and sought.

That old fashioned Pub meal and a cold beer was even more eagerly anticipated!

I extended my stay from the original 3 days to a complete week, not looking forward to the flight back to the City such was our enjoyment of the country hospitality on show.

That meant to be somewhat tongue-in-cheek! To show that all wasn't beer and skittles!

I must preface that statement by saying that the accommodation was first rate, the food fantastic and plentiful and the company superb.....and that was the crux of the matter. I could have gotten myself into heaps of trouble except that my discipline and love for my long term love, Tellie Sanchez was so strong I managed to stay any of the pressures that were regularly passed before my eyes. Though on a number of nights, my memory for making it to my room was lost in drunken depths. The reason for this aberration was my missing my better half is all I'll say, though some hinted at many things just to make me feel guilty!

On the 2nd day in completely uncovering the remains under the Bridge supports and span, it was found that another body was lying under the first.....and enough bone fragments were found in close proximity to the body dump site within that week to cause a more thorough search of surrounds. This would indicate that a third body might also have been involved. It was presumed that this body may have been completely unearthed by animal activity and/or the recent down pour which came and went extremely quickly.

Not enough to satisfy the surrounding Farmers who were in their third year of drought. Nevertheless, it was enough to seriously hinder the catchment of any reliable forensic evidence.

We had to quicken our efforts as the long range forecasts were predicting very good rains in the coming week or two.

Any samples not discovered prior to this event, would more than likely be for-ever lost.

Regardless of what may have been unearthed by the army of local cops, SES and Volunteers during these trawls, nothing would be learnt from all the detritus until it was taken back to the Forensic Laboratory in Sydney.

The remains too, would not be scientifically examined until they were taken to the City Morgue at Glebe in Sydney.

I would have little to work with for quite some time.

The initial indications of the remains were that two were definitely female. In an age group between 18 to 35 years of age. Small in stature at around 5'-1" or 5'-2". Around 152 cms tall. Of slight build. Possibly buried around 2-3 years ago. Definitely homicides with both identifiable remains showing death by gunshot to the base of the skull. Execution style.

Several conclusions could be drawn from this.

Most theories had to do with Bikie gangs and their moles or unwilling females being forced into prostitution. The murders of the persons occurring at the same time.

So was the opinions of those who should know.

But the execution and burial of the remains were definitely not the work of local lads.

Why this bridge and creek bed were selected was anyone's guess.

Did it involve local knowledge?

Maybe.

There was nothing at this stage to help in the identity of the third person.



At least it gave me a base to commence the arduous and boring task of trolling through the thousands of Missing Persons Records, all of which were now digitised. This enabled me to narrow the field somewhat and before any conclusive Report was received from Forensics or the Morgue on the three subjects, I had a list of thirty females who had been reported missing in that time-line that somewhat fitted the basic criteria so far known.

How-ever, in hindsight that method of searching through the files was somewhat misguided. The MPF's in Australia were State Police force operated and enforced. There was no National Data Base to search. So what I should have done at that early stage for want of no other alternatives, was to trawl through the Records of Victoria, NSW and Queensland at least. I may have been more successful.

I was drawing up a list to hand onto Forensics so that DNA samples could be gathered from family or relatives to compare with any taken from the Deceased.

It proved to be a complete waste of nearly two weeks of looking through the old Records whenever I could. The bashing Homicide of the "Two Lads in the Park" case took front and centre concentration of my and my two young Partners, Shelley Shields and Dallas Courtney time and effort.

I must explain the arrangement as I had previously asserted that I was free of my two young former partners.

While the two had been set free as a Murder Team of their own, any and all Cases that we may still have been involved in together would still require the input of us three until an outcome at Court was recognised. This meant that my two former young partners still scampered around my feet in the "Two Lads in the Park" Bashing Homicides and the William Dean Worseley bashing death

In my absence of wading up and down the bloody creek bed and both banks, they had tracked down four suspects and begun extradition proceedings to have them transported from Brisbane back to our Holding Cells.

Their questioning, official arrest procedures and charging and their up and coming Bail proceedings took up all our time. We desperately wanted their Bail refused as the four suspects represented a flight risk, as was shown by their immediate action when we had first interviewed them on the first night in the Park. Meetings with the DPP Prosecutor and the Forensic Team meant I had little time to concentrate on my new "Bones Under The Bridge" case, as it was now titled.

If that wasn't enough, we had one of those 'brain snapping' incidences where all the pieces in the puzzle fell into place.

This occurred with the Bashing Homicide of William "Billie" Dean Worseley and the subsequent arrest and charging of Professor Stephenson. The non-Research Head of the Laboratory where Worseley had been the Head Research Fellow.

That is never the end of the story with meetings with the DPP on Trial techniques and strategy, the gathering of all pertinent "Proof of Guilt" material, the re-interviewing of all Witnesses, friends and family and the gathering of all forensic evidence into a coherent stream that could be presented to Court. Rejecting some, requesting further evidence to strengthen the Case. There was always the little things. These matters taking up an exorbitant amount of our time. For both the Preliminary Hearing and the Trial proper.

This process is long, slow and involved and had to be organised in between current cases and those on a similar time frame.

Your time is never your own and the feeling of finality does not hit home until the Suspect is found guilty in a Court of Law. This could be, and usually does occur some months or years after that moment when you charge the Suspect.

Satisfaction in a job well done at the completion of the Court sentencing seems to be diluted by the absorbed time-line of the proceedings. Of course, you could have an Appeals Process which further adds to the workload and the time schedule of the entire investigation.

If you want immediate satisfaction and closure, do not become a Murder Detective!

7

A meeting with the Forensic people indicated that the 'truck-load' of detritus that had been removed from close proximity to the three remains from under the bridge span was a list of over ten pages long!

The entire pile had been minutely examined, catalogued, bagged and tagged regardless of whether it was associated with the crime or not. It was impossible to tell either way on-site, so everything was thus attended to. What it proved to me was that we were a "litter-bug" society without any qualms to defacing and rubbishing the countryside.

At least 30 bullet slugs were retrieved from the creek bed and banks around the abutments of the bridge. A number of bullet casings were also collected.

Out around these parts, shooting anything that moved was a favourite past-time amongst the bored youth of the District and overnight sojourns and drinking parties were often held at either of the four Roadside Rest Areas. The Highway Police Patrols and local guys soon cottoned onto visiting these sites in particular as genuine Tourists and Grey Nomads who used these Rest Areas as overnight "prop" places were complaining bitterly at the conduct of these local yahoos.

All the shells and spent bullets were entered into the National Data base. They may never be of importance....but you never knew!

Fragments of bullets were found inside the skulls of the two complete skeletons. The slugs too mangled to be able to be use as comparison or base examples. Both had remained in the skulls and rotated and bounced off the skull bone to turn the brains to mush. At least the victims would be unaware of this, having died almost instantaneously.

Amongst this pile of brass casings and mangled bullet slugs found, was a 9 mm. shell and badly deformed slug.

It was theorised that the bullet may have been fired up into the concrete soffit underside of the bridge. Ricocheting back down into the creek bed. Perhaps as a warning shot. The slug was too damaged to be able to obtain any usable information from it, but the firing pin characteristics on the only 9 mm shell found in the area, when entered into the Data Base, revealed that the weapon used at that time, did have a history involving a Criminal of some notoriety in both the Melbourne and Sydney Underworld.

This was a questionable finding and conclusion, as firing pin characteristics were not set in concrete, especially when the weapon was a Pistol.

But it gave us a base. A connection however tenuous.

This information was lost in the mountain of e-mails that I failed to attend to regularly that littered my In-box.

The habit of ignoring this aspect of my house-cleaning practises was going to be the death of me, one day! Or disciplinary action for sure!

8

“Oriental. Chinese more than likely. The other perhaps Japanese though that is not set in concrete. The Chinese girl....Oh.....the three of them are definitely female.....could be mainland Chinese or Taiwanese....or perhaps Korean....but definitely not any further south than Korea.....”

“Captive Sex Workers.” I muttered. The theory firming in my brain.

“That your take on it, Joe? From my experience here in the Morgue, the nationality of the girl involved in that side of prostitution, is normally Thai or Filipino.....I doubt that I have come across any Chinese Nationals involved....or Japanese for that matter.....”

“Mmm....It's the only thing that fits the remote scene of the body dump, the manner of execution style death as far as I am concerned. You got something else?”

“Hey Joe.....I'll give you everything I can on the Remains. Cause and time of death. Sex. Age.....and other particulars....the theory on why and where-fore is outside my field of expertise....but I think there maybe something else going on with these three young women.....”

“Tour Bus.....”

“Too many witnesses....how about a mini-bus?”

“Witnesses there too.....”

“Yeah...yes....unless the deaths in such a brutal manner, was some type of warning to the rest of the passengers....I'd say who were female....”

“That's a leap....and what is a mini-bus full of presumably young female tourists, doing out there in the middle of no-where?”

“Beats me Joe....stopping for a coffee break. A widdle perhaps....that's your field of expertise and deductive reasoning. Not mine. I'll have a full Report to you by the end of the week....in your In-box....if you care to check. I've had a talk with the Forensic Lead....very little usable or relevant trace....except for the 9mm shell casing which may or may not be a link to the three homicides....two of the Deceased were shot with a 9mm slug but that's not set in concrete as the slugs were not recovered intact.....we're going on the entry wounds in the skulls.....which would also indicate that they were shot elsewhere possibly as no usable amount of blood was recovered from the scene....though it could have been washed away. They have had minor rainfall periods over the past two to five years. Not enough to break the drought or provide any usable rain, but perhaps enough to rinse away any blood deposits.....no other forensic evidence is notable.....in fact nothing that will help, actually. Looks like it's down to plain old-fashion Cop work and shoe leather.”

“Thanks for that, Muscles....see you next week-end.”

“Yeah...your shout with the Red. Make sure its a reasonable one. That Cleanskin that we had last time was a bit rough. OK? See ya then. 6 sharp. The kids will want to see Tellie before we put them down.”

My live-in partner in life, Tellie Sanchez who was a Forensic Officer Team Leader, was a favourite of Marge and Muscles' triplets. Two girls and a boy who were about the happiest human beings on earth. Always smiling and laughing. Gurgling. Muttering to each other and using their lungs in a contagious manner as though they were having conversations with one another that only they could decipher.

I sometimes thought that Tellie and my decision not to become parents again as part of our relationship, was robbing Tellie of that chance at motherhood. She was so clucky when-ever she was with the kids and there was an instant connection between them and she. When-ever I brought this point up, Tellie would let out her little giggle, saying that though she loved the triplets dearly, she had the best of both worlds as she could always give them back to Marge when things got a little “heavy”. But it was always Tellie who was volunteering for both of us, or my son Bill and his partner Malisa, to babysit at any time!

Go figure.



We walked out of the latest Strategy Meeting with the DPP Representatives after going around in circles for several hours. I was angry. Tired and frustrated. The meeting was chaired by the latest “gee whiz, gun” Prosecutor to worm his way out of the scrum of eager young Solicitors looking to make a name for themselves before moving into Private Practise.

Our Instructions?

To find the person who had discovered the body of William Dean Worseley. The person who had used a stolen mobile phone, to wit, the Deceased's mobile phone, to make the call when presumably, he had discovered the body at the back of the Pub. Who presumably had been a customer of the Oxford Hotel and who, because of the person's patronage at the Hotel, was in fact a Cross-dresser himself.

This a leap in logical sequence, I thought to myself as I gave the young man with a mini-mohawk, a filthy look.

It didn't seem to bother him.

He was as cheerful as when he first stepped into the room earlier in the day.

That infuriated me no end!

We had a sealed confession from The Professor. The reason and why-for. The means of transport to the crime scene. Video proof of that fact. The weapon with trace from both Victim and Suspect and the return trip away from the scene some minutes after the event in a vehicle that was not registered to him. It is concluded that he used this vehicle as a way of throwing us off the trail of any suspect too close to his home.

We had Means. Method. Reason. And a signed confession.

As far as we were concerned, the case was rolled up and won.

Any fool could see that!

But this young dude seemed to focus on the fact that an unknown person had discovered the body and called it in. A person unknown who had arrived, loitered and then left the scene of the crime. A loose thread that the Defence may capitalise on. Drawing attention away from the provable facts of the Case into “what ifs” and why was this mysterious person in the vicinity if not for suspicious reasons.

Introducing “Reasonable Doubt!”

I had mumbled something about Perry Mason being on the Case for the Defence, which brought covered smirks and downward glances. The young Dude was not amused.

I gave myself a reminder to ask my son what the Office thought of this young go-getter.

I was less than impressed.

We all walked out of the meeting feeling deflated. Except my former young partner, Dallas Courtney. He seemed to be very upbeat, in fact.

“I’ll go through the interior Video streams of the Pub. OK?” Dallas offered. “Does anyone know where Billie kept his mobile? On his person? How about when he was dressed up? I’ll get onto his former partner, Julia ‘Bennie’ Anderson. She should know about these things....”

He seemed to jump at the chance of re-acquainting himself with the girl.

I had warned him off any such relationship while ever the Case was current and “alive”.

I gave him a look which was meant to convey my apprehension.

“Why don’t you let Shelley do the honours, Dallas?”

“I’ll be OK. Really.”

I didn’t like the look on his face but let it slide.

After all, we were really no longer a team.

Both Shelley and Dallas had now earned their wings and were a formidable Detective team of their own. We were only that old three man team while ever the Worseley bashing homicide and the “Two Lads in the Park” Bashing murders remained current on our desks.

Those two cases were rolled up and packaged as far as we were concerned.

I was taking on other cases, the same as my two young, former partners.

I was proud of their progression.

My tuition, mentoring and fathering skills in action. Success reflected in the combined skills that the two had shown in large shovel fulls.

I noticed that Dallas grabbed his gun and badge and his coat and walked quickly from the room. Shelley raised her eye-brows at the sudden departure of her partner.

I was troubled.

10

I glanced over at Shelley.

She gave me a look of, *'well, what do you expect me to do?'*

She nodded her head. "I'll have a quiet word with him, Joe. OK?"

I replied gruffly as I picked up my phone. "More than a bloody word with him, Shells. A bloody great kick up the arse is what he requires. I have warned him once....and now it is none of my business unless I have definite proof of him cavorting with a witness and a major player in an on-going case. Then I am obliged to go to the Boss. He knows that, Shells....." I held up my hand to silence any reply. "Yes, this is Detective Lind of the Murder Squad in Sydney." I stated into the phone. "Would Senior Constable Debra Taylor be available?.....yes, I'll hang on."

This more or less ended the conversation that I was having with Shelley. Maybe I should have continued instead of ringing the Senior Constable who had been in charge of the "Body Dump" site under the bridge just south of Dubbo.

It may have saved a lot of heart-ache later on.

The friendly tones of the SC came over the phone.

"Detective? I was wondering if I was ever going to hear from you again. Any progress on the identity of the three bodies that we found?"

I filled her in on what little progress we had made.

"Well....that's at least something. Female. Oriental. Young. Not many of those about, eh? Missing Persons Records any good?"

"I spent days on the files, basing my trawl on the information that that Forensic Anthropologist gave us on site. At that stage there was no mention of the Oriental angle. I'd narrowed down my trawl to something like 30 Possibles.....now that is all up in the air! A total waste of time.....and I had only gone through the NSW MPF's Register.....so I guess I was lucky in a sense." I laughed at my own perceived stuff-up.

"There you go Detective.....that should teach you not to go off half cocked....what can I do for you?"

"Brothels in Dubbo....."

"Thinking of coming back out to our lovely City? Enjoying yourself, eh? I guess it beats the Dubbo Plains Zoo for a bloke of your age and virility....."

I had to chuckle at that come-back.

“Arrh yes! To tell you the truth, I've never had a need to use an establishment like that though I am familiar with several of their interiors.....another story for another time. I doubt that I ever will....need the use of one that is.....and the Zoo? I'd have liked to have visited it while I was out that way....never mind....next time.....but....how many have you got in your fine City? Who runs them? Who owns them and is there any affiliation with Outlaw Motorbike gangs from any of the Capital Cities?”

“Zoos? What do you need that information for? We have only one out here and it is affiliated with Taronga Park Zoo down there in Sydney.....” She let out a laugh. I just had to join in though I was shaking my head all the same. We both calmed down. “You were thinking down that line while you were here, Detective?” She got back on track. “Anything of substance to continue with that mind set?”

“The manner of dispatch of each of the victims....as we definitely know for two of them, then it would be safe to assume the third victim went in a similar manner....and being Oriental kind of strengthens the theory of Captive Sex Workers.....”

“Didn't you say Chinese with a possibility of one of the victims being Japanese? That doesn't compute with my understanding of the majority of that type of girl. They're usually Thai, Malay, Indian or Filipino, aren't they?”

This was the second time that my theory was called into question. I needed to keep a more open mind.

“Um.....it's just a theory. A starting point to allow the investigation to proceed....and to be frank, I cannot think of any other reason why three young women would be travelling on that road and be in some sort of trouble that would result in that manner of death. Execution style. Underworld connections. Dispatched and buried without so much as a “how's your father” with not one of their deaths causing grief to family or friends.....that we have been able to discern up to this point.”

“On your own admission, you really haven't exhausted the Missing Persons Files based on the victims race.....”

I was becoming a little peeved with this woman. While her attitude and quick wit had been a point of relief while we had trudged up and down the banks of that bloody creek a couple of weeks back, her obvious retorts questioning my point of view on the matter were wearing thin.

I was supposed to be the expert detective from Sydney....not to be outsmarted or second-guessed by some Senior Constable from the outer “sticks!”

That was totally the wrong attitude.

I silently remonstrated myself.

A lot can be learned from throw-away lines and discussions with various other members of the Force.

Even Marge Hendricks when next we had Dinner at her place. The conversations on those nights nearly always reverted to the latest Cases that I was involved with.

Marge sure missed the “game”. That was obvious. Forget the fact that discussing such matters with any person outside the Force was a big no-no, it was not what one would normally consider as riveting Dinner conversation!

“You mentioned yourself while we were sweating our gonads off down that creek bed that the Newell Highway is the most direct route from north to south. Coming back onto the coast at Rockhampton. Then you have the Mitchell Highway branching off at Dubbo to head towards Darwin via Longreach and Mount Isa. We are coming into the southern Winter where there is a huge shift of population northwards and the Tourist season in the northern tropics is just commencing in full swing. You would not take a group of girls....captive sex workers.....on a commercial flight....or by train to the northern Queensland cities or Northern Territory Capital. You'd do it by road, with the girls possibly trussed up...or at least in a blacked-out bus or some such. The only time that you would stop would be to get fuel and have a piss stop, preferably at a remote Highway Rest Area.....like the one 60 kays south of Dubbo where those 3 girls met their end.....that is my way of thinking.....”

“OK...I go along with that up to a point. They would not be the only group of tourists of Oriental extraction who would be going from Point A to Point B via the Newell Highway.....”

“Who else then....in somewhat of a captive situation.....controlled by criminals who think nothing of blowing their brains out if they play up....”

“If that is what happened....”

“I'll concede that point....the *why* is definitely not known as yet....but everything points to underworld characters.”

“OK. Yes. I agree.....and the one shell casing that was recovered did indicate that a gun....presumably the one used on the three deceased persons, has had history with criminal activity in both Sydney and Melbourne.....is that right?”

“Yes....that is why I am continuing with that scenario. Nothing else at this stage ticks all the probable boxes.....”

“Mmm, yes. I agree.....um....Your query about Brothels in our fair city....I'm not certain on number, ownership or connection to Biekie gangs on the east coast....I'll ask around and get back to you. See ya....”

I think she may have realised that my attitude towards her was becoming strained. At least she knew when it was time to shut up!

I had to stop and question myself though. On my attitude. Was my opinion of the possible scenario so set in concrete that I was bending over backwards trying to convince others or was my thoughts in the matter so much on shaky ground that instead of trying to convince others of my theory, I was spending most of my words on myself.

Trying to convince myself on the veracity of the hypothesis?

I needed some-one to bounce ideas off as I was floundering somewhat.

Now I was doubting my own abilities!

Second guessing myself!

I needed a couple of laps in the Sub-Basement heated pool to rid my brain of this melancholy that was commencing to mire my thinking.



I organised the Forensic Unit to search all Missing Persons Files on the data base for a female.
Oriental.

Possibly Chinese. Japanese. Korean. Taiwanese. Nothing south of Korea.

18-35 years of age. The make-up of the bones and pelvic arch could not narrow down that age group. It was evident though, that none of three had experienced child birth so the lower age limit was more favoured. Perhaps around 18-25, though the scientific criteria would remain for the moment until more was known of the three.

150-152 centimetres tall.

Possibly captive sex worker.

Backpacker.

Student.

In Australia on a 12 month Working or Tourist Visa. Or a Student Visa which a lot of young ones use to gain entry into the country.

If the Date of Death was accurate, then the 417A Work Visas were not in force at that time.

The time of death or disappearance could not be further ratified from the 1-3 years commencing around one year ago. This was a huge window of examination, but what the heck, we

had nothing more accurate.

If they were Overseas Nationals, then they would have been allowed entry into the country on a Tourist Visa. Maybe a Work Visa for twelve months which was the arrangement prior to the 417A legislation. Most Captive Sex workers had come into the country in this manner. A promise of steady work, good money with Naturalisation Papers at the end of the rainbow. Instead they were forced into seedy brothels to work off the cost of bringing them into the Country. Very few achieved this, instead hooked on drugs to keep them quiet and manageable. After a couple of years they were unceremoniously dumped back to their country of origin.

A burnt out shell!

I had no idea why I had included the Backpacker and Student classification items into the search equation. Possibly just trying to cover as many bases as I could on this second pass of the MP Files catalogue.

As the Program began its 'search' mode, I placed a call to the Victorian Police Force. Vice Squad.

The Detective Superintendent of the Victorian Vice Squad came on the line. I explained my role as Lead Detective in the three murders and the recent discovery of the bodies. The Victims were possibly from a Victorian Brothel that would be or may be using Captive Sex workers.

Did they have any intelligence that a number of the Workers had gone missing over the past couple of years?

I repeated this enquiry to both the NSW Vice Squad and that of Queensland.

My mobile chirped and then began John Farnham's "Your the Voice." Quite a change from AC/DC and then Requiem. You had to keep the populace in the office guessing.

"Detective Lind? This is Colin Basset. We met recently on that three body case out near Dubbo. I was the Forensic Anthropologist from the Sydney Museum. Brian Sarvich invited me to participate on the dig. Yes?"

"Arrh, yes, Professor Basset. How are you? How can I help?"

"I think that I maybe able to help you. We have a refined Computer program that one of my colleagues has been working on for some time. He obtained the original some years back from the FBI HQ at Quantico in the States when he was over there on a Fellowship. Basically it allows the computer to build a likeness of the person from the basic skull bone formation. Very good. He has enhanced it. Improved the basic model so to speak. I've had a talk with Brian Sarvich on the matter and he is willing to obtain an MIR of the complete skull of the two specimens that we were able to retrieve at the dig site. What do you think?"

"Anything at all to help, Professor....."

“Arrh.....Detective, there is a cost....”

There always is! I thought to myself.

“We can bill whatever is involved against the Homicide Case Number. I'll clear it with my Boss and get back to you before COB this day. I'll ring you back.....um.....can you give me an approximate costing on the exercise?”

“Oh.....around 3 for each specimen.....”

“You broke over there?”

“Sorry?.....Oh.....you are trying to be funny, Detective.....”

Sarcastic actually, I thought to myself, almost putting it into words.

“OK. No more than 5 for the two eh, Professor?”

“Yes....it is an involved process....the computer time and memory requirement is quite large...”

“Yes....I figured it would be.....I'll ring you back.....oh, Professor? The time-line. How long would it take for the two specimens?”

“Once we have the MIR imagery, perhaps for the two? A week-end....four days at the most.”

“An entire week-end?”

“Yes.....and some-one would need to be there to load in the second image....thus the cost....”

“Boy! Your Union? They must be pretty good with the negotiations on penalty rates over your way....”

“I was told that you are a funny man.”

If that be the case, then how about a little chuckle, Professor? I thought to myself.

12

“Got a minute Boss?” I asked as I rapped on DS Church's Office door.

He gestured me in and to sit opposite him. He placed the file that he had been perusing on his desk and leant back in his chair.

I ran through the investigation so far, giving him my alternate thoughts on the case.

“I'll need your approval to spend that type of money on a computer enhancement 'build up' of

the two skulls that we have.....”

“Hasn't our Forensic people got a similar program?”

“No actually. They're looking at the one at the University that the Professor told me about. Apparently they can get it under License but the bottom line price is causing some grief.....to be expected, huh?”

DS Church aka Abbey nodded his head.

“Yeah. The same old same old. Anything new to help in the apprehension of felons and the Bean Counters have heart attacks. As far as they're concerned we should be back walking the beat and blowing whistles like they did in the 'good old days'.....yeah. Go ahead with that. The Pathology Department will possibly take a good week on getting the MIR's on the skulls. They will have to wait until other more important 'live' Patients have their stint with the machine at the Hospital. So I guess, what? Another three...maybe four weeks before you get any images of the heads.....?”

I nodded in agreement.

“Yeah. Around that, I suppose. Another thing, I'll need approvals to either go to Border Protection and Customs....or the AFP to have them investigate through the back files on the Entry Permits and Passports for the three.....”

“Bloody Hell! That'll take some doing. Immigration and Customs....and the AFP won't act quickly on a request like that.....and how do you determine the time line of the entry of the three. Sure, it is estimated that they were murdered what.....two to three years ago as the best estimation so far received? But how long have they been in Australia prior to that?”

“If they were on some Student or Working Visa, then it would probably be within a twelve month window around the time of their deaths.....to be on the safe side I would imagine that we would need to add a one year slippage on the back-date of the estimation. The time-line therefore, should be noted as one to four years ago.....”

“That's a long shot Joe.....”

“Yeah I know, but I think that we have to go down that track Boss.....it shouldn't be too big a stretch once we obtain the Computer Enhancement details of the two deceased.....the facial configurations of those work-ups will be compared with Passport Photos using Photographic Recognition Techniques. Our Forensic people should be able to run that through.....”

“If Immigration allow their Records to be used....”

“A Court Order request?”

“You want to make more enemies Joe?” He smiled as he said this. “Look, leave it with me. While the time-frame maybe a little iffy, we have possibles on the nationality, gender and age of the three deceased persons which will help no end. Let me know when you have more information

available on that Computer Enhancement ID, will you. I'll see what I can do through the back door with Immigration and Customs."

I walked from the office feeling a little more positive on the progress of the Case.

Still, I signed out and headed for the Sub-Basement Gym. Perhaps I should have utilised the time in scanning through my In-box.

What the heck, it will still be there this afternoon!

13

Light drizzle welcomed me as I ran towards the neighbourhood Sports Field for my 10 lap jog first thing on the Monday morning. The sun tried but failed miserably to materialise through the misty rain.

A lethargic drive into work following the rest of the phlebs doing the same thing in drizzly rain. The chirpy sounds of an idiot Broadcaster on the car radio only making matters worse!

A half-hearted 10 laps of the pool and 15 minutes on the Running machine, a 15 minute rub down and a hot shower afterwards didn't improve my lethargy.

I sat at my desk not thrilled with being there this morning. Stuck my feet up on my desk, took a sip of coffee and closed my eyes to block out the world. Lent my head as far back as it would go.

Not wanting to start and really not knowing where to start as I felt that much work piling up on me. Which wasn't the truth. I'd been snowed under with a lot more work in my time....it was just my general outlook this morning.

Pissed at the world.

"Joe? A minute, please."

Abbey came up to my desk then retreated towards his Office. I followed obediently.

"You may not have heard but Dallas was involved in a car accident yesterday morning. Bad. Not good. Prognosis....." He shook his head. "I was at the Hospital late yesterday afternoon when he came out of surgery. An induced coma. Out of action for some time...."

"Work?"

"Arrh, yes. Going home from an all-nighter that he and Shelley had pulled.....they've pulled "Slip Team" duties for three consecutive week-ends now. This was the second week-end where

they've snagged a Case.....” He sat heavily into his Executive Chair. Gestured for me to sit opposite him. “It adds to their workload and ensures lack of sleep. Not a good combination to attack cases with.....He's moved. Did you know that?”

I shook my head.

“A place in Ultimo. Shares it with a woman named Julia Anderson....do you know the name? Anything that you want to say? To tell me, Joe?”

I shook my head. Looked down at my hands. The trouble was that if I stated the obvious, then Dallas would be in all sorts of trouble. The worst being that he would not be covered under the Workers Compensation Scheme for all the injuries and time that he will be off work because of this accident. Moving in with an important witness in a still open homicide case would ensure that such entitlements as Workers Comp for the accident maybe in jeopardy. I knew that my knowledge now placed me in an unenviable situation.

I kind of looked at it philosophically. It wasn't the first time and it certainly wouldn't be the last! The only thing was that I didn't like lying to the Boss.....well, not lying as such, just not divulging the truth of the matter.

“I didn't know that he'd changed addresses, Boss.” I stated truthfully. I returned my gaze to Abbey, the best Boss that I had ever known or worked with. “I did know that he had been thinking about moving out of his parents' home for some time though. It would appear that they are very religious and straight-shirted.....they weren't that thrilled that he was now doing the Devil's work....working with the Force.....they won't be too happy that he's taken up lodgings with a woman out of wedlock, that's for sure.....they're that type of people who would possibly disown their son on the grounds that it was against their beliefs.”

Half-truths and truths mixed in with a healthy round-about true story was always my offensive action. Abbey looked at me as though he knew that I was bullshitting or telling only the half-truth. At least I didn't tell an outright whopper....like....*no Boss, I didn't know that...or I've never heard of the lady's name before and no, Boss, I didn't know Dallas was shackled up with an important witness in a still open investigation and had in fact shown an attraction to the woman when we had first interviewed her in relation to the William Worseley Bashing Homicide investigation.*

“Mmm....yes....but that name rings a bell somehow. You know what I mean?.....anyhow, because of this sorry incident, I do not want to leave Shelley to her own devices. I think that she is still a bit too green to go solo for how-ever long.....so....I'm going to place her back in your care, Joe. As just a temporary arrangement until Dallas gets back on deck. OK? Which kind of fouls things up a bit.....Tom McPhillemy? He wants out of Sonny's Team. Seems that he is having major problems with ongoing Child Homicide Cases.....you would have been good for him, Joe. He's a bit of an awkward character, if you know what I mean?”

I nodded my head.

I had heard the rumours.

D3 Peta Daniels who was his nominal Line Supervisor had indicated frustratingly to me once that she could not understand why the man was a Cop at all! He was better fitted to a Bank as a minor Accountant or Clerk who did not need to really think outside the accepted work practises and Office protocols.

He was described as a round peg in a square hole by Daniels who I considered the Number One Detective in the entire Squad. She and my former partner Marge Hendricks were on a par yet Male Officers in the Squad advanced up the ladder a lot faster than either women. Marge had retired as a Grade 3 while Peta would have to wait until 'Sonny' Liston retired before she would ever obtain a 4 Grade Detective. Even then it could be expected that a male may leap-frog her to take up Sonny Liston's nominal position over her.

It wasn't right, but them's the breaks in the Force, sadly.

I secretly sighed a sigh of relief. To have McPhillemy as a Partner was not something that I would look forward to. I secretly wished Dallas a long recovery from his injuries, then felt guilty over the thought.

I walked out of Abbey's Office worried about Dallas Courtney's future. The name of the woman will jig with the Boss at some time in the future and there will be all hell to pay more than likely.

This sudden change of arrangements did not enforce a change in my mood.

In fact it made me feel as though I should just knock off for the day and go home to lie in my bed and pull the covers up over me!

14

Shelley Shields walked in as I was finishing my second coffee of the morning.

"How is he?" I asked after she had settled at her desk.

"Not good. Bunged up real bad.....prognosis very iffy.....in an induced coma as his brain has taken a real drumming.....prognosis not positive for a decent recovery.....looks like we'll be a pair for the foreseeable future eh, Joe? Can't get rid of me that easy, so it seems..... Arrh.....Abbey rang me as I was leaving the Hospital. Has he had a word with you yet?"

I nodded my head. Displayed my annoyance at having learnt that Dallas had changed addresses and was now shackled up with "Bennie" Anderson. A major witness and the former partner of William Dean Worseley who had been bashed to death outside a Pub in Oxford Street Darlinghurst

some months back.

The case still very much current.

That big no-no that Dallas had chosen to ignore. He had even ignored my advice and caution on the subject.

“He told you, huh? I didn't know Joe. True! Um.....what should we do?”

“Nothing...though I think that Abbey will twig to it soon enough. He's good with names and knows every minûte detail of every Case that every one of us has so it will not be long before he connects the dots. How long has he been living with Bennie?”

“Um.....” She shook her head. Shrugged her shoulders. Looked away momentarily. “I don't know. Fair dinkum.”

“Don't know or don't want to know or don't want me to know?”

“A, B, and C.....and all of the above.” She gave me a weak smile.

“Well, never mind. We're all in the poo now if it ever gets out.....OK? Let's talk about your cases....the ones that you and Dallas have collected as a team.....and then I'll fill you in on my one little brain-teaser. The others you know about.”

“You feel like a walk, Joe? A cup of coffee downstairs? I do!”

I didn't but Shells didn't sound or look right. She was suffering. I presumed at what had happened to her partner. It's funny how such an association can become like a marriage in so many ways so quickly after the partnership is formed.

I filled in Hendo our Chief Clerk and the real Head of the Squad on our intended whereabouts as I passed his desk, following Shelley towards the Lift Lobby.

She walked with her head down. Eyes down cast. She was in a bad space. I guess that I too would be greatly effected if my partner was bunged up real bad in hospital.

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I ordered for both of us as I settled back into a chair positioned at the back of the Cafe.

“It's OK to be concerned about the health of your partner, Shells.....”

She shook her head. As she glanced up at me I noticed tears in her eyes.

“It's not that, Joe.....um.....I've just about had enough. I think I'm going to put my Termination papers in.....”

“What? Coming back to partner with me affected you that much!?”

She let out a little giggle. Shook her head again and sat back as our coffees and toast were placed in front of us. She took her time placing sugar in her coffee, stirring it in and placing the mug to her lips for a quick sip.

“Um.....Dallas and I....and it is only because of our want to volunteer to be on 'Slip Team' for almost every week-end....or at least three out of every four week-ends since we became a team on our own. That has resulted in three cases for us. All Domestic Violence Cases. All involving homicide and suicide. All with kids involved. Either left without both parents or been the subject of homicide themselves.....it's getting too heavy, Joe. I'm having trouble with it. Can't sleep. Snapping with Greg my live-in love to the point where he's walking out not wanting to react.....every one a bloody ghastly scene.....kids.....shit. It's too much.....then Dallas goes and has this accident after we pulled an all-nighter last week-end.....and I'm just so.....tired. Physically and mentally drained. I don't think I want to pick myself up from this....I just want out.”

“Have you had a word with Abbey?”

“No....he'll just refer me to the Cop shrink.....won't he?”

“Maybe yes. Maybe no.....I wouldn't knock it back though. Don't get me wrong, I've been led kicking and screaming to her Suite a couple of times, but looking back it was the best thing I could have done.....I could have so easily gone around the twist....or resigned.....and to tell you the truth, I've stood with my toes curled on the edge of that abyss....I wouldn't be surprised if most cops have been there at some time or other.....like you're thinking. In fact I did at one stage, but Abbey ripped it up in front of me....which he can't do even though he said he could.....” I shook my head at the memory. A smile on my face. “I'm bloody glad that he did. You know? She's bloody good....the shrink....and if she isn't for you for any reason, you can be referred to another outside the Force if you prefer.....”

“It's just not that, Joe. Dallas? He's high maintenance, if you get my drift. I reckon the last time that I had a good laugh was when we were working as a three man team together. He's so intense. So focussed. I doubt that he has a funny bone in his body.....I need those light-hearted moments....”

“We all do, Shells. The job dictates that we do. I noticed that Dallas was wound as tight as a clock spring....I thought then that one day he was going to explode. It's a bastard of a job where we see the dregs of society. The ones that society has rejected. The ones that think life owes them a favour. The druggies. Drunks. Bullies and the 'couldn't care less' bastards. We get spat on by the responsible members of society. Name called. Ridiculed.....until those bastards need us....and then we get hounded for not doing it quick enough or good enough in their eyes....and our every move is now being recorded and scrutinised by bastards who have never been in a scrap or in a similar situation but still think they know the correct way and we don't.....a no-win situation....we are the

ultimate masochists to want to continue in this line of work.....but.....shit.....I don't think there would be any other type of job that I would be as happy in.....to tell you the truth, I was having trouble this morning wondering what the fuck was I doing in the Office....I couldn't get motivated so what is your beef, girlie? Get a handle on it, sweet-heart. I don't need a bleeding heart as my partner....understand?"

I had no idea if this slant was going to help or hinder, but what the heck. Like a bull in a China Shop someone once described me. The most unsympathetic, unfeeling bastard around!

"Joe Lind? You call me girlie or sweetheart one more time and fair dinkum, you'll get my knee to your groin when you least expect it.....and your whining? Cut the fucking crap, will you....I'm the one having the hard time at the moment, not you! So give me a break will you?"

"That's more like it. Finish off your toast and coffee and I'll introduce you to the person who knows more about me than my mother...who was really my grandmother...."

"What???"

"No matter. I might tell you one day. Ok, come on. Let's take that walk."

16

I sat with Shells and the beautiful Doctor Samantha Dawn Somners for some time until I felt that Shelley was thawing to the woman. A made my exit as flawlessly as possible without breaking the flow. Promising to the Doc that I would re-acquaint with her in the near future. Both of us knowing that was not likely to occur at any time soon....unless she was somewhat persistent in her demands!

I descended the internal staircase down towards the Eighth and the Squad Room.

I came out by mistake onto the Ninth. It suddenly occurred to me that I should check in on the Forensic Team and their search for that elusive Crime Stoppers caller in the Worseley Homicide case. It was still early for the appointed meeting. I stood in the Lift Lobby wanting to catch a Lift back up to the Twelfth and the Forensic Video and Audio Section.

Realising that the Police Intelligence Service was on the Ninth where I stood, I delayed my visit to the Forensic Section.

Scatter brain. Indecisive. I scolded myself for my momentary lapse, blaming Shelley's condition and Dallas's scant regard for protocol for my present condition.

"Joe Lind. Long time. Hope yer keeping well. Don't look as though yer are, though. How can I

help?" The squat woman asked. Sparkling eyes. Clear skin. A pleasant personality. She did look as though she was taking care of herself and in a good space at that moment.

I explained the "Bones under the Bridge" Case south of Dubbo and my wish to dig into past records for possible women of Oriental persuasion entering Australia on Tourist, Student or Working Visas in a window of two to four years ago.

She listened intently until I had finished.

"Mainland Chinese. Taiwanese or Japanese.....that doesn't sound like Enslaved Sex Workers to me. Thai, Filipino, Malay and with a pinch, Indian would be involved in that type of scam.....not those that you described.....but.....I can put out a "Feeler" to our equivalent in Victoria....and to Vice...."

"I've already spoken to Vice down there...."

"Any good?"

"No. Not really. They seemed to think that three girls missing from one of those types of Brothels wouldn't cause a ripple.....and to them it was good riddance...or so I seemed to gather."

"Mmm....let me try with the other State's equivalent of PI. Your supposition of them being transported north for the northern Tourist season doesn't ring true with me.....they would not, I suspect, be transported anywhere but kept under lock and key somewhere within the neighbourhood brothel building.....drugged to the eye-balls....they'd be extra careful not to give the girls any possible opportunity to talk, to see, to communicate with anyone in the wider world...."

"If that be the case, how would they do their job properly....you know....interact with the Client?"

"Joe! Come on. Some of these Punters who are looking for a cheap and easy one aren't too interested in the condition of the body; they just want it warm....and sometimes, I think you men don't even care about that! The last thing these types want to do is to conduct a conversation on the affairs of the world....or the meaning of life, if you get my drift...."

"That's so....bloody hell....animalistic! Is that a word?"

"Don't know but I get your meaning....some guys.....just a warm body....unresponsive? Who cares? They don't, that's for sure."

"Drugged?"

"Out of their minds....the girls.....and being transported that way all the way from Melbourne to Cairns or Darwin. That's good Joe, but not reality. No. Not on. Not all that way....."

My Number One supposition again being questioned by others. I was just about ready to give up on the theory but the trouble was I was lost for another!

She cut across my musing with a look of intense interest.

“Um.....the shell casing? You said that there was a match? With whom?”

I looked across the office. Persons hunched over keyboards. The general click broadcasting a mass of Intelligence being imputed into their secure memory banks. Then gone and forgotten.

“Um....it's on a Report from Forensics in my In-box....I haven't dragged it out yet....”

“Do it here.....”

“Here!? Um.....you'll be able to come across my stuff any time you want....”

She shook her head. A smile on her face.

“Joe. Joe. Don't believe the Office Gossip. He's usually wrong....”

“I thought it was a female....”

“Be careful, Einstein. Don't go there, Joe.” This said with a cut off laugh accompanying the threat. “Come on. Get to it.....to tell you the truth, if we really wanted to, we could come across your stuff any time that we wanted to Joe. Believe me.....you're not that important or up to no good that I know of....not lately so I've been told.....” She let out a chuckle at this. I didn't know whether to believe her or not. By the look on my face I must have telegraphed this point as she broke out in a raucous laugh.

What I did surmise was that I was at some time here at the Police Building, the subject of gossip. Past around the various Units, Teams and Departments like some deformed species open to conjecture and scorn.....I was still in a bad mood! My paranoia creeping up the vertical scale to dangerous levels.

“Here we are....” I mumbled as I bent over the keyboard and screen trying to hide my Password from her prying eyes. She chuckled at this obvious subterfuge. “Um.....a series of shots fired at a vehicle and dwelling at an address in Cronulla two years ago.....shell casings match with the firing pin pattern.....that....more than likely after the date of the execution of the three women.....well after in fact....the vehicle and residence belonged to a Dieter Winter....mmm.....who had been married to one Francesca Rzorbicello.....I know that name....” I murmured to myself.

I read out the relevant e-mail to her that Ballistics had forwarded to me almost two weeks ago. I needed to get into a habit, I thought to myself, to clear my In-box regular-like.

“Geez, Joe. That e-mail is almost two weeks old, you know. You one of those types who never empties out their In-box regular like? Bad habit, Joe. Bad habit.” She look over at me with a smirk on her face. “You're a bloody mammoth, Joe Lind. A throwback from the bad old days. Yer gotta savvy up, young man, else yer'll be left in the scree.....” She glanced at the computer screen. Nodded her head.

“Interesting family....hang on, I'll bring up Dieter first....”

Her hands sped over the keyboard on the computer. I noticed that she hadn't closed down my In-Box offerings. I mentioned it.

"Joseph Lind? You're bloody paranoid." She made a copy and then closed my Account down. Bent over to a small Printer to take out the A4 offering. Thrust it towards me.

"A present from the Gods, Joe. Try and get your share in a regular manner. It can help, you know." Looked up at me as she explained what she had done. A smug smirk on her face.

She flitted through several Reports, scrolling so fast down the pages my head spun. My eyes hurt.

"Here....disappeared November 2013 presumed killed. Body never found. Good riddance. Small time hood that began flexing his muscles around the late nineties through to 2005. Mostly drugs supply. Suspected of manufacturing and distribution from Cronulla down to around Nowra. A patch that was owned by the Rebel MC Gang. Tried to break into the Melbourne scene through his wife's connections and name. Dieter wasn't a nice guy. Very pushy. Domineering. Angry. No panache if you get my drift. Would use his fists or a knife in preference to conciliatory words. Lost his wife at the same time as being run out of Melbourne. Out of the Rzorbicello mob. At one stage he had dreams of the entire south coast from Sydney to Melbourne. Took on the wrong crowd."

She positioned a mug shot of the guy centre screen.

"Not a nice guy...." She commented more to herself.

I knew the face but could not place from where.....he looked mean. Bad. Not to be crossed.

"Suspects for his disappearance? Start with the Rebels then work your way down in the gutter to the Rzorbicello family. You name it, they're into it. Strong rumours have them connected to the Sicilian Mafia....one of the Australian families who brought the old ways out to their new home. Left Sicily after the War in dribs and drabs up to the Sixties. Five or six of the Family in prison but it makes no difference. A son or three, maybe a group of cousins pop out of the woodwork to ensure the lineage continues in the family business....you know like that mystical monster of Greek mythology, wasn't it? Chop off a head and another grows in its place....that's right isn't it?" She looked over at me. I had no idea what she was on about. Greek mythology was way down on the subject list that I wanted to know about. "....there are several books on the subject, written by ex-cops or Crime Reporters. The subject matter of those books particular to that family who also have ties to the Adelaide and Perth mob....go to the Library and read up on the family. It will be good research for you if your bodies are connected in any way to that family....though I have no idea how, but then reality is stranger than fiction so they say....you would have seen it all on TV with the Chicago, New York and Las Vegas Boys. Same thing here. I'd lay a tenner on the desk and say that the slaying of the girls is tied up in some way with that family. Guaranteed! Brothels? Sure they're into it but it's not their style to execute burnt out girls....or even be involved in that type of enslavement....not their style at all.....I'll tell you that much."

I obtained copies of pertinent papers that were available to the general rank and file which

meant I received a scant overview of the history of the family. Little detail but a start. Police Intelligence thought that they operated in isolation. That all data collected was not for general usage but for the eyes only of the Deputy Commissioner and above!

I downloaded as much information that was made available into my In-box to peruse again in the comfort of my Desk. Something maybe of importance but I wasn't holding my breath on it being anything conclusive.

She mumbled some garbled comment about it now being lost to the ether world as I was some type of mammoth. I ignored the jibe.

I was now heading in another direction but had no idea where it would lead.

I had that funny feeling in the pit of my stomach that this case, because it may involve well-known Interstate Crime Gangs, would go the same way as that Pinicello case of a couple of years ago.

AFP would usurp control and another murder investigation would go south for an over-riding drugs bust of international importance that would shower the AFP in kudos. The Victims of the murders losing importance and impetus to slid down that slippery totem pole of priorities that only the AFP are aware of!

Bugger!

17

Forensic Officer-in-charge Gordon Varotich of the Audio and Visual Forensic Investigation Team displayed his annoyance at my tardiness.

I was over a good half hour late and getting close to the normal knock-off time for most personnel.

I got the impression that he was looking to knock off a bit early on this day.

The last thing that I wanted to do was to get on the wrong side of him or his small four man team. They had all pulled long hours scanning and examining thousands of hours of Video feed from Traffic Light cameras, other traffic flow positions, CCTV from private Businesses, the Harbour Tunnel and Bridge and the Warringah and Lane Cove Motorways to eventually nail "The Professor" for the bashing death of William Dean Worseley.

Without their dogged persistence, patience and lateral thinking in pursuing the traffic flows and times that vehicles negotiated the length of Darlinghurst Road adjacent to the Park and "The Crying

Wall”, the “Two Boys in the Park” bashing homicides would not have been concluded successfully either.

On both Cases, they had gone above and beyond and worked tirelessly for many hours. Boring, continuous work that would have driven me nuts!

As I said, the last thing that I wanted to do was to get up Gordon Varotich's nose.

I apologised profusely suggesting that it maybe better if I came back on the morrow or later in the week instead of forcing he and his 2IC to work back to please me.

“Um.....this shouldn't take too long, but if you need to go over the evidence a couple of times or question our methodology, then I would suggest that we wait until another day....mmm?”

Of course he was tacitly saying don't you dare! Our methodology and procedures were exact and according to our protocol procedures. You question them and we're out of here!

“Um....by the way, why was it necessary that we identify this person?”

I shook my head to display my frustration.

“Our Prosecuting Solicitor from the DDP's Office concedes that the Case is tied up all ways to Sunday, but considers that the person who phoned in the discovery of Worseley's body is a loose string, so to speak. He feels that the Defence may use this “mysterious” person as an alternate culprit to cast that shadow of doubt over the Prosecution Case.....”

“Bullshit! That's crap?” The Section 2IC, Senior Forensic Officer Beverley Waters exclaimed in a forceful voice.

“Yeah, well....I don't disagree with you.....but.....” I shrugged my shoulders. “Have you been able to isolate the bugger?”

Waters shook her head.

“Yes. We think so. As you know, the Forensic Team and Uniforms gravitated around the Pub every night for close on four weeks when the Pub was open for business after the homicide, hoping to catch as many of the Pub crowd who were there on that Saturday night and Sunday morning. They took Statements and fingerprints.....along with 'head shots' of all those that they managed to interview....which was a job in itself as almost half did not want to be identified or have mug shots taken of them in 'femme' mode....as they call it. Almost three hundred persons even though the actual numbers of punters there on the night in question seems to be around one hundred and no more. The internal area of each of the two Bar areas had four video feeds each. Two out on the Oxford Street frontage and main entrances to both Bars but only one out the back.....the reason for this was once explained to me.....but I choose to forget it!”

Varotich turned to beckon his 2IC to continue more quickly with the discourse. It was obvious that he wanted to be elsewhere.

“Look, I'm sorry Detective, but I have to be elsewhere in little over an hour. Can I get Bev here to continue? She worked with me for most of the time as we perused and evaluated all the video feeds.”

I shook my head in agreement. After all, I was close to an hour overdue to our agreed time of meeting. Varotich scurried away after giving his Off-sider a set of instructions.

“Ok...” She agreed as she turned to a keyboard to dance over its keys. Watching a large screen as she did so.

“Initially we kept our attention on those subjects who had close contact with the deceased inside the Pub....and who were obviously males in female clothing.” She turned to me as way of explanation. “We know it was a male who called in the body find to Crime Stoppers. OK? We know from your partner, Detective Dallas Courtney that Worseley always kept his mobile in his purse. His bag.....which for the entire time that we were able to track him inside the Pub, he kept over his shoulder. At all times. From the four feeds we were able to track him for around 75% of the time that he was in the Bar area before he exited outside. That by the way has been caught on video feed. He leaving the Bar via the rear access door some thirty minutes prior to the approximate time of his death.....um....it obviously was a pre-arranged meeting going on the manner in which Worseley prepared for it....and he was nervous. We have three Persons of Interest who could have.....and had the opportunity of stealing the mobile phone.....for those times that we are able to produce....which leaves a window of almost an hour where we have no coverage of him.....or any contact with others in the Pub....there's a couple of black spots where the cameras don't film.....it would appear to us as we tracked the Deceased that he was a very popular figure and was often sought out by others who it was obvious on the film, were having some type of trauma in their life....a lot of tears....the choice of life-style would ensure that, I would imagine....their choice is still not accepted in any way by the general populace....”

The look on her face was enough for me to guess that she too, had problems with accepting that males should want to dress up as a female. It occurred to me then that this attitude didn't cross the gender line. Females dressing as males or in an androgynous manner would not engender the same feelings in women as a general conclusion. In fact it would not even cross a female's mind that there was anything wrong for a female to dress in such a manner, such is the way that females have full reign over their choice of attire, hair style and mannerisms.

Not so in the opposite direction, though.

From my experience in questioning hundreds of people in this Case investigation, I felt that women were more likely to accept the behaviour either way more than men....as long it wasn't too close to home!

Then it became a different matter.

It perhaps was a similar attitude that plagued lesbians and gays in the 1950's through to the 80's.

Society had a long way to go in accepting this class of person, which again according to all the literature, was a product of genetics and what occurred within the womb during pregnancy.

The fact that there was over an hour not accountable for Worseley's time at the Pub was not good as it again opened up an opportunity that the Defence to manipulate. I said as much to the middle aged woman. My tone must have been somewhat antagonistic as she turned to face me and went on the attack.

"In tabulating that length of time, it should be stressed that it was not an hour block....if you get my drift. Five minutes here, a minute there...it added up...."

"Still..." I added. "I would have preferred that that wasn't made common knowledge as it could be used and construed incorrectly....and have aspersions cast on Worseley's character. You know, there is a ten minute block where the Victim could not be accounted for...what was the guy doing?....even if it can be categorically stated that he was not into anything abnormal.....well....you know....involved in any sexual activity which some of the members of that group are involved in.....it would cast doubt on the guy's character.....even though he was the sad victim. Another strategy to try and bend the jurors minds....away from the guilt of the alleged perpetrator onto the 'ghastly habits' of the victim. A tried and true manner of attack for the Defence Counsel."

She shook her head to show that she understood. I was not criticising as such, just being the Devil's Advocate as I knew the Defence Team would jump all over it.

"Perhaps we should interview those three persons that we have highlighted before we throw in the towel, eh Detective?"

I felt suitably chastised. These people were doing as well as expected with what they were given. It did not warrant my back-handed negativity.

"I feel sure that this person would be my Number One....." She lent toward the screen as she replayed the scene. Manipulating the view to zoom into the image which to me only helped to distort the poor quality of the video even further.

"Notice that? He comes out of the Toilets behind Worseley.....both were in there for quite some time. Almost twenty minutes actually. Possibly talking, doing their hair, fixing up their make-up. No funny business as we know that Worseley wasn't into that."

She turned to me for validation of that statement as though she still wasn't too sure. These people are.....you know.....different.....therefore they must practise some weird sexual perversions. I gave her a filthy look. We did not need to judge these people regardless of their perceived peculiarities.

They were still human.

I mean, I cried through the movie The Elephant Man and while he sure looked different, he was no different to us inside.

She seemed to sense my growing impatience of her and her narrowness and blinkered, judgemental outlook. If she, as a member of the Police Force, had that attitude, what chance did these people have out there with the general public.

“Um.....if he is like all females who are spending time touching up the make-up, he would possibly half empty his bag in order to get to what make-up he needs.....possibly putting his mobile down beside his bag.....forgetting or not seeing it as he exits the Toilets.....notice that the person follows Worseley out with a mobile in his hand. From the Records of Interviews, his name is Lee “Leanne” Saunders. Lives in Manly Vale.”

I noted the name and address and that of the two other POI's. One in Pymont, the other in Bondi.

“When will I get the official Report?”

“We'll send you down a full Report with Video coverage mid-next week. OK? Do you want a full length video of the night....that only shows our subject?”

“Um....I'll need two copies of that. One for my files and one for the DPP....and an edited version that shows each of those POI in close contact with the Deceased.....thanks. DVD?”

“Yes....a DVD format via snail mail and a real time copy via your In-box?”

I knew she was taking a dig at my habit of ignoring my In-box for weeks on end. I wouldn't give her the satisfaction of requesting just a paper Report. It was usual practise in any case to accompany an e-mail Report with a follow-up written Report suitably assembled and contained in a hard cover. An additional copy if it was considered important enough.

I nodded my head.

It was going onto six, well past her knock off time.

I wanted to do a couple of laps and some running down in the Gym before I headed for home. I also wanted to check in with Shelley and her opinion of the Police Shrink and whether she felt she had received some help from her after a mammoth visit that had to have lasted all afternoon.

From my experience in visiting the Shrink for a long period, she would be both mentally and physically exhausted.

Completely spent.

18

The Lift door whispered open and I almost crashed into the Boss as he went to step into the Lift.

“Joe! Where've you been? Your mobile is shut down.....”

He backed into the Lobby and moved me to one side to allow the impatient throng to rush into the Lift carriage. Everyone wanting to head home. Either that or a couple of quick ones at the Local before catching that train.

I took my mobile out of my pocket.

“Shit, Boss. Sorry. I turned it off when Shells and I went to see the Shrink. I wanted her to have a talk with her. She's in a bit of a state....”

“You're right about that...where've you been?”

“The twelfth. Video and Audio Forensics on the Worseley homicide. We need to identify the person who called the body find into Crime Stoppers. We're sure it was some-one....a customer from the Pub who was using the Deceased's Mobile....we think that he must have flinched it from Worseley earlier in the night.....and before that I was with Police Intelligence on the “Bones under the Bridge” case....we may have a match with the shell casing that was found on-site with the Rzorbicello family in Melbourne. That will muddy the waters somewhat.....”

Abbey was shaking his head

“Yeah. OK. The DPP's Office explained the reason for this line of enquiry on the Worseley Case. Frankly I think they're being a little paranoid, but what the heck. Find anything worthwhile?”

“Three possibles. One's handy at Manly Vale so I thought....you know, a late evening door-knock, I may catch him at home.....”

“Crossdresser?”

I nodded my head.

Abbey shook his head in agreement.

“You approving the overtime, Boss?” I commented. A smile on face.

“Um.....yes. I think that you'll be pushed for time from to-morrow onward. Shelley has been given time off until further notice by the Doc. Stress. Not handling those three cases that Dallas and she were lumped with....and I guess you would be aware, she has been thinking about tendering her resignation papers.....she's too good an Officer to throw it all away, but that's a little too early to

think about just now.....we have to have an overhaul of this whole 'Slip Team' process as I reckon it isn't the most judicious use of manpower. I need to involve Bellamy from the Night Squad to come up with a better arrangement. Dallas and Shelley can work the entire week-end without a break almost, collect a couple of Cases and still have their normal week workload besides.....which in their case was two other open cases. All of them Domestic Violence related. All involving young kids in the effected families.....I think that we'll be going to Plan B later this week. You with Thomas McPhillemy and all Shelley and Dallas's Cases being taken over by Sonny and Peta's Unit as it involves infants.....”

I let out a groan.

He looked over at me with a smile on his face.

“The bashing death of William Dean Worseley? A visit would be prudent I think....and for the other two? Early to-morrow morning....it was three wasn't it?”

“Yes Boss. Yes it was. Any indication as to how long she maybe off on Stress Leave?”

“Not easy to assess....and way too early to take a guess.....so.....until then, I think you should mentor young McPhillemy...at least until we can assess Shelley's condition. OK?”

I figured that my usual after work thirty minute Gym time was to be held in abeyance. Completely forgotten about! Also my early morning run before Breakfast was out as well!

Bugger!

My enthusiasm in partnering young McPhillemy was not peaking either. His reputation as a square peg in a round hole had preceded him. For the life of me, I could not figure why he was still a member of the Murder Squad. We were usually ruthless in discarding those Officers who showed little attributes as future Murder Detectives. Or if their personalities showed them as being completely inept as Murder Dees within a team situation, they were shuffled out quick smart. It was no good to anyone for them to linger in the role if it was obvious that their talents lay elsewhere.

It would appear that this case was different somehow.

I wanted to have a word with Peta Daniels who was his Line Boss for the length of time that he was in The Special Homicide Unit.

She should know.

19

I had a bit of a problem trying to locate Lee “Leanne” Saunders' address. Even after managing to compute it into the Laptop GPS set-up in my Unmarked.

It was tucked away in a battle-axe block in a winding cul-de-sac behind row upon row of three storey box-type home unit blocks. Easy money for an Italian Builder of the sixties and seventies vintage!

The guy came to the door on my second knock

Slight. Effeminate in voice and manner. Quick, nervous gestures.

“Lee Saunders?”

“Yes it is. Who's asking?”

I showed him my Badge and ID Card.

“Oh....Cops. I don't think that I can help you.....”

“I'm the Lead Detective on the homicide death of one William Dean Worseley on the 18th November last year.....”

“Who?”

A voice came from inside the house.

“Who is it, dear?”

“Um....a Detective, love....” He called over his shoulder. “I don't think I can help...please...my wife.....” He said. A look of anguish on his face. “I prefer to be left out of any investigation into her death....yes, I knew her. Everyone did who frequented the Oxford....but I know nothing about her death....please.....”

There was a rush of noise as a woman stepped up behind her husband.

“What's this about then?” She asked in a commanding voice.

“Um.....there was an incident several months back near your husband's place of employment....we have reached that proverbial brick wall with our investigation and are widening our enquiries to include locations near the incident.....”

“What kind of incident?” She demanded.

“A man was killed. I'm not sure that your husband can help but we are asking anyone that we

knew who worked in the area to come to the local Police Station so that we may show them a series of photographs hoping that some-one may select one to give us a lead.....much more than we have at the moment.....”

“You'd better go with the man, Love....um...can I see some form of identification first, though?”

A child's cry came from inside the house. The both looked towards the cries.

“Go and settle them Lee before you go, will you. I've just about had them already!”

The guy disappeared as the woman scanned my ID details.

That made me a bit nervous on several fronts.

I shuffled slightly to one side so that I could see clearly up the length of the Hallway. You never know and as the Training Manual repeats time and again, be prepared for the unexpected, especially if you are working alone. I remembered that I had not informed Despatch of my whereabouts or reasons for being in this location or my projected time out of the Unmarked.

Basic Police Procedure 101 when out in the field.

Shit!

The cries and hurt accusations of several children calmed to murmurs. The man came down the corridor holding a child. About six years of age. A look of hurt on the young pretty face. He handed the child to his wife.

“Lee's so much better than me when they start in on each other.....he's the real mother.”

The man shot me a nervous look and trod tentatively over the threshold.

“Um....will this take long, Detective?”

“No....no more then thirty minutes. Manly District Police Station to view about a dozen photographs and then I'll drop you back home if you like....or arrange that lift in any case.”

You could almost hear the audible sigh from both adults.

20

“Thank you Detective.....”

I nodded my head. Shrugged my shoulders as though the subterfuge was nothing.

The 2IC of the Peninsular LAC at Manly Police Station was sitting beside me, opposite Lee Saunders.

“My job is to ensure that the bad guys are put away for homicide matters, Mister Saunders. That doesn't mean that I have to wreck people's lives who are on the periphery of the investigation and possibly not involved at all....”

The local Senior Constable looked at me sideways, not understanding the gist of the exchange.

“Am I involved? Will I need to go to Court? I understand that the guy who killed Billie has been charged. Is that correct?”

“A person has been charged with the homicide. Yes.....”

“Billie's immediate boss so I've been told....”

“Who by? Who gave you that information?”

“Um...it was common knowledge at the Pub.....Dolly I think. She's a bit of the Mother Hen to us all.....or at least to those who are not as strong....if you get what I mean?” He glanced across at the other officer. Embarrassment written all over his face.

“Were you at the Oxford Hotel on the night that William Dean Worseley was killed?”

“Yeah....funny....I only knew him by his femme name. Billie.....a good person.....yes. I was there that night....”

“Did you take the Deceased mobile phone from him when both he and you were in the Toilets together?”

“Steal his phone?.....who told you that we were in the Toots together?”

“Were you?”

“Um...it's been a while....I guess....um...Billie.....a lot of the girls...you know....they used to speak to Billie about...you know. He was a good listener and the advice he gave...it made sense. Made one like me feel better about myself.....I guess we went to the toots together. It's a good place for a private conversation....steal his mobile? What for? I have my own. You can check if you like....”

“You were seen following Worseley from the Toilets using a mobile phone....”

“I guess...if that is the case it would have been my own, I guess. You can check that out can't you.....they keep the mobile phone records for two years now, don't they.”

He gave me his mobile phone number for me trace it out.

“What time did you leave the Pub that night?”

“The usual time so's my wife doesn't worry too much about me. Before 10.....I go to one of the girl's places to get changed. Straight from Work. You know. Take off my femme persona.....Samantha Pierce.....she lives at Pymont. I leave all my gear there. I go to her place to get dressed. We go to the Pub together and go back to her place together.....she can't stay late as she starts work early....as a guy....”

The name and address was the second POI that the Video and Audio Team had provided. One cancelled out the other. I only needed to visit the address in Bondi the following morning. That simplified matters no end for once.

“How can you be so sure that is what time you left on that night?”

“Because it's always that time. I go to the Pub dressed up in drag once a month.....I'd like to be able to do it more often but my wife...my family.....um...my family doesn't know of my...um...you know...my need.....”

I nodded my head.

I believed the man.

What a secret to carry around.

It would eventually back-fire I was sure with his whole life coming down on top of him like a house of cards. Keeping secrets like that takes their toll.

If the statistics were correct, then these people who live in the shadows with gender issues have a suicide rate close to 40%. A frightening statistic and a reflection of what the general populace really think of them! How they are treated with even those close not really wanting to understand or accept their different life-style.

We a tolerant society?

I don't think so!

These views had only started to surface when I first got involved in the Worseley Homicide investigation. Over dinner with Tellie and my son and the entire expanded family unit; and in talks with my former partner and Muscles, I had begun to understand this shadowy world of gender diaspora. A subject which I was completely ignorant of. Sure, I had seen a couple of popular movies on the subject, replayed nauseously every now and then, but there was no understanding of the

underlying emotions and mental anguish of the participants. From my days long ago as an Undercover Cop for Narcotics, there was always a certain mixing with the Gay movement. In those days an underground and hush-hush section of society. Again, those who had made a name for themselves were the toast of the “In Crowd” but to have a gay friend tainted your sexual preferences according to the *tolerant* public. Back then.

A similar experience in the shadows was the manner in which these people now travelled.

Disdain and intolerance their partner in life.

We really needed to loosen up as a Society and accept that 'normal' was and had always been the abnormal for countless centuries. Especially behind closed doors. There would always be those who fell outside an accepted norm. That didn't make them freaks. People with a contagious condition or hurtful thoughts. Sure they were different.....I sure as well hoped that I was different to the maddening throng, I sure hoped that I was!

I drove Saunders back to his home address, assuring the man that his name and his proclivity would not be highlighted or his input required in the Case at any stage in the future. There was an almost instant relief shown by the man. A huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

He must have been dreading such a visit since his friend's death.

He thanked me profusely as he got out of the Unmarked.

I felt that I had done good for once.

Go figure!

21

Even though it was now late I figured that I should visit the address in Pymont. Samantha Pierce.

It was an easy drive over the Bridge at this hour. Pierce lived in one of those new Apartment Developments that have sprung up all around the area. Impressive. A step away from the normal high-rise Unit Developments of not that long ago.

Architects must have taken a couple of imagination pills!

“Yes?” A screechy voice emanated from the small voice box. These Intercom systems had not improved though, so it seemed.

I identified myself, asking that I be let in to ask a few questions on the homicide death of Billie

Worseley.

There was silence for some moments, then a scratchy reply.

“I don't think so....”

“I have just finishing interviewing a Mister Lee Saunders. I just need to collaborate his and your whereabouts on the night of the homicide.”

“At the Oxford.” He shot back. “We get there early. Both of us. Leanne comes over here. We go together. We leave at around 10 every Saturday night. I start work early. Six AM. Police Emergency Calls. Triple '0'. They are not aware of my....you know. That night was no different to any other. Will that do. Poor Billie....he was a love. Nothing else. Then I'll say goodnight to you Detective. Good night.”

There was the sound of the phone being placed back onto its arm. The line went dead.

Nothing else.

I could press the button again. What the heck, nothing further would be gained and the guy would more than likely clam up.

I headed for home.

22

The sound of the voice was woolly. I'd obviously woken the guy up.

“Who are you?” He asked through the Intercom.

I identified myself again.

“Murder Squad Detective! What do you want from me? I haven't seen any murders lately....”

“How about the homicide death of William Dean Worseley also known as Billie Worseley. You were at the Hotel on the night of his death.....”

There was silence.

“Mister Emery? Are you there? Sir?”

“I prefer to be known as Sally Anne Emery, if you don't mind. A pre-op transgender person. OK, copper?”

The voice took on an edge. Something that I did not want to happen. To have to solicit some

form of understanding and acceptance for this man was not a problem for me, but his attacking manner was not going to achieve anything at all.

“Look, I'm the lead detective in your friend's homicide. Even though we have the bastard who did it, we still need to make a water-tight case against him for the Court Case. I do not want this guy to slip through the net because we...and Billie's friends, wouldn't cooperate with one another...”

There was further silence. I was beginning to think that I may have lost him. I did not want to come in with a heavy hand. Nothing would be achieved.

“I'll let you in. Second floor. The second door on the left after you step out of the Lift. I'll leave the door unlatched for you. I've just got to spruce myself up as I had a late night last night....well, early this morning.”

I sighed a sigh of relief. Pushed open the electric door on the buzzing sound and mounted the staircase to the second floor.

If something was going to happen it would either as I exited the Lift or at the person's front door.

Usually!

I stood and knocked on the closed door. There was no way I was going to open the door and just walk in. You never knew what awaited you on the other side.

As it was, I was confronted with a sight just this side of hell when the door was eventually opened.

“I must look a sight. Sorry. I didn't even take my make-up off last night. I just fell into bed!”

The hair was a frizzy mess. Make-up smudged across her face. Mascara spreading down her cheeks.

“You know it's bad for your skin to go to bed with your make-up on, don't you?”

She beckoned me into her Unit. Her Wrap falling open to show a trim figure draped in a figure hugging night-dress. Ample breasts. Tall, especially in the high heels that she wore.

“You guys are bloody careful, aren't you? What, you expected to see me sitting across the room with a double barrel shotgun aimed at the door.....that only happens in Movies and Cop Thriller Books....Coffee? Please, sit. Anywhere.”

“Arrh, yes. Coffee would be fine.” It was early and my usual time for breakfast. My stomach growls told me so!

The thick aroma of coffee made from coffee beans wafted out of the kitchen.

Sally Anne Emery checked her reflection in the chrome two door Fridge. A note of shock was followed by a series of apologies.

“Billie Worseley....” She began as I heard the coffee being poured. “I loved that girl.....”

“Then why did you leave the scene?” I asked as I dropped one sugar into my cup. Milk from a delicate small jug came next.

She shook her head to will away the tears. It didn't succeed which only added to the surreal appearance of her face. She lent towards me across the Coffee Table to rip several tissues from a box. The show of bare breasts was intentional so I thought. She was proud of them!

“It was you who called in the discovery of Worseley's body to Crime Stoppers, wasn't it?”

She bowed her head. Blew her nose. Wiped her eyes which spread the smear even further!

She eventually nodded her head.

I took a sip of coffee.

It was excellent. I congratulated her on her good taste in coffee. I considered myself something of an expert! The constant need to change the pronoun to suit was confusing!

“You stole Billie's mobile.....”

She vigorously shook her head. “No.....I.....I thought that if I used mine to make the call, then you Cops would be able to trace me.....she always kept hers in a pouch on the front of her bag.....” She sniffled again, blowing her nose on what must have been a mess of a tissue. “She.....I saw her legs poking out from behind those Garbage Containers....I recognised her shoes. They were new. We were commenting on them only hours before. Earlier in the night. They were gorgeous. She loved them....and surprise, surprise, they didn't hurt!”

“You kept her mobile....”

“I was so upset....shocked.....guttled.....as I was ringing you cops I was running down the lane. I couldn't stay....”

“But you had enough nous to figure not to use your phone. You didn't flinch the mobile earlier in the evening?”

“No....I took it out of her bag that was lying at her feet.....I don't think that I even left my fingerprints I was that careful.....I didn't want to be involved....you Cops would have concentrated on me....a freak....and the Papers and the TV Shows would have had a field day.....we're not exactly accepted.....understood by the wider community, you know.”

“How did you know that she was dead?”

“The pool of blood.....the look of surprise on her face...her eyes wide open without a flutter or movement....she just looked dead, you know?”

“I'll need to get a formal statement from you....”

“What for? You've got the bastard haven't you?”

“I'll still need to get that formal statement. Perhaps if you could get yourself ready, we can get it over and done with this morning?”

She looked stonily at me. Eventually she nodded her head, drinking the dregs of her coffee as she stood.

“I'll bring out the coffee pot so you can top yours up. Give me about thirty minutes will you....I'll need to ring work to tell them.....about Lunchtime you reckon?”

“Where do you work?”

“I'm a Research Fellow at the Harvard Institute. That's a subsidiary of the UNSW. Out at Randwick. Lab Team Coordinator. Can I get a lift from you back to work after we have finished?”

“I don't see why not....way you go. Hurry up then....um, one thing. Do you still have Billie's phone?”

She whirled back to face me. A look of anguish on her face. She strode to the Kitchen. I heard a cupboard door open then close. She tossed a mobile phone at me. Then the sim card and battery. I asked for a plastic bag, if she had one. She left one on the Kitchen counter as she walked quickly through to the Bathroom. I followed her to make sure that was where she was heading. Her urgency and quick movements made me feel a little nervous.

“Detective? I don't own a gun. I couldn't stab a T-bone and my cricket bat is out where you should be. In the lounge Room.”

A feisty lady!

I wondered why so many of these people seemed to be very intelligent...or very artistic. Or both. To me it was similar to gay and lesbians. They seemed to have the monopoly as far as brains, personality, brashness and artistic virtues were concerned. Even caring, empathetic adults! I know that is a generalisation...so shoot me!

23

With that final Statement from Brendan Emery aka Sally Anne Emery, the DPP Prosecutor seemed to wilted back into the shadows of the DPP's Office and left us alone.

For the rest of the week I made an effort to familiarise myself with my new partner and patiently listened to his volumes of woes and dissatisfaction.

After only a day I felt that it wasn't going to work.

His whining tone was aggravating from the start and when-ever I swung the conversation around to my “live” Case, he seemed to drift away. Total disinterest oozed from his body. In the end I steered him to a quiet nook in the Park opposite the Police Building and sympathetically tried to gently prise from him his history. His likes and dislikes and why he had ever wanted to be a Murder Dee.

Even after close to an hour of this behaviour which was a real effort on my part as it was so foreign to me, I gave up in disgust and strode away. The guy was either so thick skinned that nothing penetrated or he was a bloody complete idiot!

Or both!

This was not going to work out well.

When I relayed these sentiments to Abbey the following morning before McPhillemy had even fronted for work, he listened patiently before offering his condolences with a quick quip to get over it. These working arrangements with mentoring and stewardship was not always going to be successful.

Give it time, he mumbled as he lead me from his Office.

McPhillemy still had not appeared for work!

24

“Joe? You've got a live one!”

Hendo in his usual early morning quip of trying to be funny of another dead body having been discovered.

I didn't want it.

I didn't need it.

My time was all but booked up for the next two weeks to two months!

Preliminary Hearings.

Coronal Enquiries.

DPP's strategy meetings.

Court appearances.

The usual thing when all the hard work had been undertaken and completed on a Case with the Culprit stitched up seven ways to Sunday. Why can't we just pass the thing on after that point. Let some desk bound jockey look after all the little boring bits and pieces. The detritus. The loose threads. The imagined spectres that may...but never do, cause problems in Court.

I stretched. Stood.

At least I'd be out of the office for the day more than likely.

“OK. OK. Whereabouts, my young man?” I beckoned to Tom McPhillemy to accompany me in learning from Hendo the initial facts of the crime.

Tom was what we referred to as an “Adult Newbie”, having selected to be a Homicide Squad Detective rather late in life. He had been in the Force for almost 15 years before making the decision to obtain his Detective Grading and requesting a transfer into the Squad.

From what I'd heard in whispered tones was that he had been a “pen pusher” in one of the academic areas of the Force. Cocooned in some windowless room transferring files from one pile to another after placing his short-hand signature on the file front page to show that yes, indeed, he had actioned the file!

I mean, there must be similar personnel in all Organisations. Able to carry out the demands of the day as long as those activities are written down in detail so that they can be rigorously adhered to. Mental callisthenics and thinking outside the square not required or demanded.

Hardly a prerequisite in becoming a Murder Dee!

There had been hints of incompetence and character flaws coming from both Sonny Liston and his brilliant 2IC, Peta Daniels.

If Daniels has intimated that McPhillemy was not cut out for Homicide Squad work, then it was a safe bet that he was due for a quick flip out of the Squad. Why the Boss thought that I maybe able to resurrect his flagging fortunes was beyond me. Feeling the way that I did this morning, this temporary arrangement was doomed to failure before I had even settled into the front seat of the Unmarked!

What was I supposed to be?

Some sort of miracle worker?

Just because I had a modicum of success with Shelley Shields and Dallas Courtney was no guarantee that I was the preferred “Baby Sitter” on the Day Shift roster!

OK, you noticed....I was in a bad mood this morning.

Why? I had no idea. A relaxing week-end had ensured that I had caught up on my sleep.

Several sweaty bouts with my partner Tellie Sanchez had produced a more than pleasing number of coos and cuddles and our week-end jog with my extended family and my dog AU2, had ensured all was well within the extended family. A boozy dinner date at Muscles' and my former partner Marge Hendricks' place had resulted in a funny and pleasurable Saturday night. Tellie always got clucky and spent considerable time with Muscles and Marge's triplets who were growing at an alarming rate.

All was right with the world.....except me on this morning!

“Tom, can you program in the address we gotta get to into the GPS thing-a-ma-jig?”

“How?”

This was not a good start.

I didn't know how to do it, either! Well, that's not true, but it would take the rest of the day!

“Um.....can you do it on your smart phone, Tom?”

“You got to be joking.....I belong to the missing generation....missing in action when all that shit was learnt!”

“Mmmm.....”

Not looking good this morning for sure.

25

It was going to be a hot day. Very hot. No change from 40!

The last blast of Summer before the cooler months began.

Hopefully.

A blanket smoke haze covered the Blue Mountains as bush fires blazed for their second consecutive week in the valley systems below the high plateau. The Rural Fire Service and their HQ were hoping to have all the fires under control within the next day or two. Hopefully in any case, as furnace hot, gusty north-west winds were forecast for the following week-end which would reignite and fan the fires into ferocious walls of flame.

Not to mention causing the thermometer to climb past 42, night and day.

A Hell!

With a lot of trial and error, we both managed to compute our destination into the in-built car laptop computer. Funny thing, we could both see the funny side of the situation as two grown men of less than acceptable computer knowledge floundered around on Google Maps and GWS location and destination computations.

It was just as well we could look at the problem with a sense of humour, otherwise we may have both taken out our Service Pistols and showered the bloody little computer with full clips of bullets.

The amount of paperwork required to accompany the Fault Report would have been mountainous! To say the least, which only managed to bring on fits of the giggles from both of us!

The Entrance Gates and Entry Area into St. Columbus Of The Martyrs Catholic Boarding School were flash in the extreme. The Vatican would be envious of them...and at the entrance of superb grounds that unfurled as we drove along the circuitous bitumen road inside the sprawling establishment.

We eventually came upon the crime scene after what seemed like several kilometres of winding road and rolling green grass liberally spotted with what looked like every known tree in existence. An Arboriculturist would have been in second heaven. Amateur or Professional!

We signed into the Crime Scene log and bent under the crime tape that covered a large area at the entrance into a wing of the School. The wing dominated by a combined Clock and Bell Tower at its furthest end. Standing ominously above the two forensic pathology tents. All the flap sides were down. The tents marked the last resting place of the victim. Hard up to the tallest section of an impressive stone building of some four floors in height, so it seemed counting on the rows of equidistant large portals and windows. The wing formed one side of a U-shaped building of impressive dimensions. The internal area of the 'U' was a beautiful, formal garden and radiating pathways. Balanced. Concentric. Peaceful with a small fountain dead centre sending out that peaceful sound of water cascading in volume. Birds fluttered and dived into the splash-pool or perched on the stone edge partaking of the liquid offered.

It was a hot morning and the birds knew instinctively where to cool down so it seemed by the number present. Their bright colours competing with the blossoms in the garden beds.

Presumably the Deceased had fallen from this corner high point so the initial Report inferred.

I pushed open the side flap of the tent and stepped through.

The young Forensic Pathologist Brenda Wzerlic and her Assistant, Harriet O'Bourne with the lilting Irish accent were squatting over a figure lying on the crushed gravel section of pathway. A halo of blood around the warped and disjointed head.

It had been a while since I had been on a homicide case where the pretty young thing was the Forensic Pathologist. The red haired Irish lass was also a rare sight to see.

"You two missed out on a good trip to Dubbo a couple of weeks back...." I stated by way of

introduction.

“We didn't miss much, by the sounds of it, although the drinking parties every night were a sight to behold. So we've been told.” The lilting accent would always bring a smile to my face.

It had been some time since I had come across Wzerlic, but I remembered that she had impressed me with her professionalism and knowledge the last time that we had crossed paths on a homicide investigation.

My long term live-in, love-of-my life, Estelle “Tellie” Sanchez looked up at me as I entered. She, as a Lead Forensic Crime Scene Officer was in charge of the entire initial forensic process and its subsequent analysis in the Lab.

I guess it had to happen eventually.

We had crossed paths on only one other recent Investigation.

That of the “Girls in the Park” Homicide case of recent times.....and that had not panned out well.

I blame my want to be in charge in every way at a Crime Scene which resulted in Tellie Sanchez not talking to me for several days and sleeping in another part of the house for close on a week. It was me who had to crawl and show how servile and conciliatory I could be before she would relent and return to our bed!

I did not want a repeat performance.

I raised my eye-brows and nodded to register her presence.

“Ladies....arrh...my new partner.....” I swung around to introduce Tom McPhillemy. He had exited the tent faster than he had entered. The smell of blood and an unrecognisable, warped head and features caused by falling some height with a sudden hard stop were too much for him.

“Mmm.....seems like my partner has something against a tent full of beautiful women.....”

That went down as well as my partner's disappearance. How some people interpret a genuine complement as a sexist slagging has me beat!

It was going to be a long day!

26

“Um...OK...what have we got?” My sense of humour and wit not appreciated this morning.

“The Deceased is Father Franz Wilhelm Hertz. Better known as Father Frank. Has been here at the School as the Boarding Master or for the uninitiated, the Dormitory Master for the past three years....um...he has form.” Tellie stood and walked over to me. “Child abuse. Was convicted in 1989 to 18 months. Suspended sentence. Was again convicted in 1997 to two years and three months. Served 18 months.....has been mentioned some months back in the Royal Commission into Institutionalised Child Abuse.....is on the Witness list for future appearance apparently. The Commission Investigation Officers are still compiling evidence against him...it maybe worth your while to speak to them some time soon.....”

“Thank you for your advice.” I said coolly. “He's the Boarding Master? What?Who? Why was he allowed anywhere near this type of institution? Homicide?”

She shook her head.

“That's your realm of investigation. I'll provide the facts of any forensic trace that may help to substantiate either homicide or suicide....”

“Suicide? It's in your calculations?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“He fell from the Bell Tower.....what was he doing up there first thing in the morning?” I stroked my chin like a contemplative, forgetful Professor as I asked the question.

“Morning bell. Nine AM. Classes begin. They have various bells and chimes for individual purposes. Lights out. Reverie. Showers. Breakfast. Prayers and so forth. The Bell represents the beginning of the School day....they once a upon a time rang six bells each morning for morning prayers....but the locals complained about its use every morning so the Nine O'clock bell is the only one used now.....apart from the chimes that are broadcast only inside the various buildings where the students may be at any particular time.....”

“Rather regimented. Disciplined. Similar to a prison sentence.....”

“Mmm...yes, well..you obviously didn't attend a private Catholic Boarding School...um...there was a group of three students up in the Tower with him. The Father nominates who is to toll the bell.....military precision. After the exercise, the boys started back down thinking that the Father was behind them...he came down the quick way....”

“How old are the boys?”

“Too young to interview without the School Head and/or Parents being present....”

“How old?” I had this funny taste in my mouth. I had drawn blood by biting my lower lip as she was relaying this information to me.

“Eleven...the three of them.”

“You suggesting that they conspired to kill the priest?” I looked at her in amazement.

“No. I am The Forensic Officer in charge of this investigation. I will give you the forensic facts of the case. It's your responsibility to ascertain the nature of the crime.” She replied icily.

We were having a little one-upmanship contest. She smirked. I couldn't help but complement the expression. It looked sexy. That wiped it away quick smart to be replaced by that stony look that she had accomplished. She hated having me getting too informal and 'chummy' she had once explained. It wasn't good for her juniors to see that side of her. I thought that was a load of crock but bowed to her insistent request. I wasn't going to win. No way!

“Where are they now?”

“With Father Henry, the School Head and Brother Camonelli who is their Class Master...and Deputy Head of the School. In the Main Administration Office. The parents have been summoned. All the boys in the School have been confined to their dormitory wings.”

I walked to bend over the body.

A middle aged man turning to fat. Small stature. Sharp, mousey features. Protruding upper jaw though this may have been caused by the sudden stop. His skull was twisted and deformed. One eye protruded. His tongue was out, his mouth agape. One arm and leg were grossly deformed and twisted under his body. Blood pooling around his head. His torso. One shoe was off.

“Um...Joe....” Brenda came over to me to speak quietly into my ear. “There's signs of recent ejaculation.....”

“Arh, shit!”

I stamped out of the tent only vaguely aware that McPhillemy was sitting on a nearby bench seat. Eyes closed. Face to the sun.

For the first time in ages I felt like a cigarette. My lip hurt where I had bitten it. I was furious on so many levels for so many reasons. I couldn't stand still, instead I walked around as though I was taking in all the details of the site but I was oblivious to my surroundings.

I dialled in the Office.

“Boss?”

I filled him in on the details of the scene that I was aware of so far.

“I think we need to have at least Peta Daniels out here and perhaps a team from the Child Abuse Section....and I think it would be a good idea in you contacting the investigation guys involved in the Royal Commission on Institutionalised Child Abuse. To compare notes. To give them a heads up. They may want to be involved...or at least we may learn more on the guy as they had him listed as a witness.....”

It suddenly struck me that McPhillemy had requested a transfer out of Sonny Liston's group because of the number of Cases that involved children. He could not handle it! Here he was smack dab in the middle of another Child Abuse case.....possibly.

I may be jumping at shadows too early, but the facts sadly pointed in that direction in this Case.

27

“Tom! What are you doing?”

With a jerk of his head McPhillemy opened his eyes.

“I want to begin to interview some of the older pupils to get a feel for the School. The Staff. The Boys. Did you take any notes at all or were you just sun-baking instead of applying yourself?”

“Sorry, Joe....I used to go to a school like this. St. Pat's out at Bathurst. It brought back memories....that I'd rather forget.”

I gave him a look that said that I didn't really want to know. Or care about his school-yard days!

“I've spoken to the Boss. Abbey indicated that he may accompany D3 Peta Daniels and D2 Sophia Schofields on a “day trip” up to the Mountains to pay us a visit. He was going to have a word with the Child Abuse Team to see if they wanted an input as it is obvious that there has been a grave miscarriage of justice within the School.” I shook my head at the complete lack of acknowledgement from my partner. It was if he was partially closed down. “Um.....It is now possible to lay charges against the Church hierarchy where it is obvious that convicted paedophiles were being protected by the relevant Institution. Our Vic is such a specimen, understand?”

I could have been speaking to the stone wall in front of me such was the reaction from McPhillemy.

“You OK?” I enquired, to only receive a blank look and a nod of his head.

I walked into the Ground Floor of the Dormitory wing.

A Father MacNicholls introduced himself stating that he was at our disposal. He would help in any way that he could.

We stepped up the wide main staircase up to the next floor. Entered his cupboard of an Office that had trouble accommodating the three of us.

“Were you aware of Father Frank's history?” I asked rather gruffly, as I sat across a small, scarred desk from the man. Tom stood behind me.

He shook his head but he could not look me in the eye.

“He was a convicted Child Abuser. A Paedophile. Were you or your fellow clergy aware of that?”

“There were some whispers to that affect.....” He eventually replied in a quiet, even voice. “Yes.”

“Why was the man allowed the freedom of the Dorms if it was known that he had a past history of abuse?”

The Brother shook his head slowly.

“Perhaps the Monsignor or the Bishop would be the best equipped to answer such a question. It would seem that prayer and meditation were his saving graces.....and he had paid his penance to society and to his God.”

The man was earnest with that pronouncement!

Go figure!!!

Again I boiled inside. Wanting desperately to be rid of the man. I explained that I wished to interview some of the senior students in the first instance.

“Um....I'm afraid that I cannot allow you to interview any of the boys without the presence of Father Henry. Those words have been conveyed by Father Henry's Assistance. Brother...um...Brother Camonelli.”

“I see.....well, then there is little that we can achieve at this point in time by being in this wing. I think that the senior boys could be interviewed as adults.....but I won't argue the point at this early stage of proceedings. I think that we need to speak with the Father before we carry on any further. Thank you for your time.” I commented curtly. “Um....would you be aware of any student that may want to harm the Father?”

He looked at me momentarily before examining his hands clasped together resting on the desk top.

“Such questions should be referred to Father Henry as the nominal Head of this School. I do not wish to comment at all on your suspicions as it maybe construed in the wrong light.....”

This was said in that calm, even voice with no inflection or emotion as he continued to look down at his clasped hands.

I didn't even bade farewell such was my inner turmoil. I rose and followed Mc.Phillemy from the room.

"Did you get that down....or record it on your iPad?"

"We cannot record any meeting without permission or the knowledge of the person being interviewed....." He replied defensively.

"Tom....you can and you will! In any Homicide Investigation, you can use those tools to record any conversation that maybe pertinent to the investigation....."

"But.....but this has not been deemed a homicide investigation."

I stopped dead in my tracks and whirled him around to face me. A quick glance to ensure that no-one was within earshot.

"Tom...if you had been privy to the conversation inside the Body Tent, you would be aware that this is leaning towards a homicide investigation with an outside chance of it being a suicide....a slim alternative...."

"How?"

"Tom....." I forced myself to rein in my frustration and anger. I managed to minimise speaking the words through clenched teeth. "I do not intend to have to repeat everything about a case merely because you choose not to be present because of a weak stomach or some such....no matter the circumstance, you record all conversations pertinent to an investigation. That is why there is a two man team. One to ask the questions while the other records those words and vice versa. Detective School Class 101. Remember?"

I walked on a few steps but thought better of it. I spun around to face him again.

"Abbey is coming up here with Daniels and possibly a team from Child Abuse so I think we should delay any conversation with the School hierarchy until they arrive....what do you suggest we should do as an alternative?"

He looked awkwardly at me. Shrugged his shoulders.

"Any ideas at all? What would be a prudent action at this point in time?"

He glanced up at the Bell Tower.

"Perhaps we should have a look up there. There are a couple of forensic people up there already."

I nodded my head and started to walk back towards the building and the entrance that we had just left.

“Joe? Um.....I'm scared of heights.....I don't think that I could climb up there....”

Shit!

It was going to be a longer day then I had thought before!

28

I again headed towards the impressive Entry Vestibule of the stone building. Anger in every step. At the last moment I veered towards the Crime tent and flipped up the side flap to enter.

“Brenda? Will you be doing the post mortem?”

“I would imagine so, yes. Why do you ask?”

“Could you take special interest in any bruising which may indicate that he was involved in a scuffle....or indicate whether he may have been bodily lifted across the parapet to fall to his death....you know. Under the arms. The upper legs or around the knees.....”

“Mmm....the state of the body may make any such evidence hard to come by....you firming to a theory where he was aided.....so to speak?”

“I don't know...it maybe a complete furphy...but with his prior history and the fact that he had three minors up there alone with him, so it has been assumed, it is a scenario that can't be ignored.”

“Fair 'nuff.....but what!? You're suggesting that three eleven year old boys may have conspired to cause the death of their Dorm Master....that's a bit far-fetched, isn't it, Detective?”

“Um...I'm hoping that it belongs to the realms of fiction, but I can't ignore the possibility. OK?”

“Sure....I'll see what I can do. I'll keep an eye out for any sub bruising in those areas where young boys would need to hold the guy in order to heave him up and over the parapet of the Bell Tower.” She stood looking at the ground for some moments. Glanced at the body still lying on the rough gravel chip pathway. “He's only a little bloke.....doesn't weigh much.....maybe 70 kilos at the outside.....soaking wet....three young boys....could be possible I suppose.....knowing the history of the Father....could be possible.”

I nodded my head.

“Thanks” I muttered as I half turned. Tellie caught my eye as I did so.

“You've got an evil mind, ma man. An evil eye!” She commented with a smile on her face. A

twinkle in her eye. All the women in the tent had a giggle over this.

29

I climbed the beautiful old staircase to the fourth floor. Access to the upper sections of the tower then became a little more difficult. The steep narrow staircase up into the ceiling was completely walled in and I noticed that there was a lockable door at this fourth floor landing area into the narrow staircase that led to the Bell Tower.

Old fashion, heavy, dark timber wall panelling that must really hem you in as you ascended this very narrow staircase. I really didn't want to even think about climbing this staircase.

I laughingly thought to myself that I was having a McPhillemy moment!

"I'm sorry Detective. I can't allow you access as yet. We're still examining the stair treads and handrails. The bloody staircase is so narrow you wouldn't be able to get past one of my FO's in any case. Even further up, the Clock Chamber, ladder access and floor hatch and the open Bell Tower above? It's a one at a time thing. OK?....there's an awful lot of trace. Fingerprints. Scrapings and.....um.....sperm deposits. It looks as though the Clock Chamber in particular, was a veritable hot spot and a favourite for the boys to wank off in private."

"If that was all that took place in that secret place, though I doubt it."

"Oh?....."

"Never mind. Tell me, is there any signs of a struggle up on the open bell tower level?"

"Hard to tell. The floor membrane looks relatively new. Like that malthoid stuff. You know, like bituminous tar sheeting. There is some markings to it.....but whether it denotes a struggle had occurred would be hard to surmise.....even more difficult to prove, I would imagine."

"Around the area from where the Vic must have fallen from?"

"Yes. In that area. Yes."

"No where else on that level? A safe bet, perhaps?"

"You're out on that proverbial limb, Detective. An assumption that I doubt I could provide sufficient proof to turn into fact.....no matter, I'll get the FO up in the Bell Tower to pay extra attention to the area involved.....but if I include it in my final Report will be up to the Forensic Lead officer....and I'll tell you now, it is purely an assumption, she will not allow its inclusion."

"OK.....um.....the corresponding area of the parapet, near these scuff marks? On the inside and

outside areas?...um....and Officer? Could you let me know as soon as possible the height and the width of the parapet, please?"

"Sure. No worries. I'm pretty sure we have that in hand in any case, Detective."

He glanced at me with a look of "*do you think we are idiots*" on his face. And here I thought I was being so clever!

Doh!

30

"Tom, I think it maybe a good idea if you head back to the Office. You maybe able to get things moving from there, OK?"

"Sure, but what about you? How'll you get back?"

"The Boss is coming up with Daniels and Schofields who more than likely will come up in their own vehicle.....and....arrh....there's a team coming up from the Child Abuse Section so there'll be ample alternatives to get a ride back down to the Office later to-day. Even a Forensic van would be OK."

I walked out into the sunlight again. It was starting to bite. I slipped on my sunglasses as I ambled passed the forensic tent. I stopped some distance away and glanced up at the Bell Tower. McPhillemy had followed me.

"How tall do you think that Forensic Officer is?" I stabbed my jaw in the direction of the Bell Tower.

McPhillemy shrugged his shoulders as he squinted up at the tower.

"C'mon, Tom. Hazard a guess....."

"About 160 centimetres tall. Maybe another 5. Maybe 10 more. Why?"

"Let's say around 165 centimetres tall. How tall was Father Frank in his hey day, do you reckon?"

"I didn't get that good a look at him...."

He was baffled at my musings.

This is when Marge and I, or in later times, Shelley and I would bounce off one another with conflicting theories and guesses. Something always came of those moments though. Here,

McPhillemy didn't have a clue! To extend himself into the realms of educational guesses and suppositions was well beyond him.

I again, not for the first time, wondered why this guy wanted to be a Murder Dee and what or whom it was that continued to endorse his presence within the Squad.

“An old bloke....around sixty I'd say.” I said by way of exclamation. “He was jockey size though....maybe around 155 if that. 60 kilos or lighter probably. Not a big bloke.”

Again McPhillemy gave me a befuddled look.

“That parapet....it's got to be around 120....maybe 130 centimetres tall.....there's no way that you could fall accidentally over that parapet line....”

“He jumped.....”

“Oh? An educated guess or a theory worth pursuing?....Mmm.....possible I guess.....at his age he wouldn't be walking around its edge as some sort of dare....he could have been heaved over though....”

McPhillemy gave me a look of shock.

“What.....he was picked up and thrown over....by those boys who were supposedly with him this morning? Those boys are about eleven years of age! Young boys, Joe! That is a ghastly thought.....no. Not on!”

“We don't know what may have happened. In fact we are not too certain who was up there with him.....in fact we have no idea what he was doing up on the exposed bell tower level. To toll the bell you only need to be on the level lower. In the Clock chamber. That is where you ring the bell from.....so why was he....and presumably others, on the upper level? Tom, never dismiss an alternate scenario until you have sufficient evidence that negates that theory.....and always think of an alternative.....”

“I have. He committed suicide....”

“Why?” I asked. My arms held akimbo like an Italian asking the question. “What would make him commit suicide?”

“His past ways.....” His tone indicated that he was not too thrilled with that comment.

“Paedophiles....Child Abusers. They have little guilt or contrition towards their actions.....or at least the majority don't see their actions as wrong.....”

I looked at the man. It would appear that he could never contemplate something that maybe abhorrent to his senses. If he was to last in the Murder Squad, he needed to extricate himself from that mental straight-jacket.

He was no good to me here. More of a hindrance if I was going to be fair dinkum. I thought

about what I wanted him to do. Back in the office. I deliberately piled the tasks up to see if he was any good at multi-tasking.

“Back in the Office....Um....I want you to do a full search on the Victim....Father Franz “Frank” Wilhelm Hertz, including any and all Court Records from previous convictions and from the ongoing Royal Commission into Child Abuse. I want a full history of the Vic's appointments from the time that he left the Seminary. A full history, understand. That may involve some telephone calls although I think that information would have been made available to the Royal Commission. You may need to talk to one of their Investigating Officers. Also....um, Tom.....”

I glanced across at the guy standing obliquely to me.

“Um.....I think you should note these instructions in your Note Book.....there's a lot that I want you to do, so don't rely on memory, OK?”

He looked at me sheepishly, fumbling to get his Case Note-book out of his pocket. Then a pen. I counted the seconds!

“Right. Ready? Get onto the Communication Liaison Officer. I want the latest into our request to Customs and Immigration for all Tourist Visa applications and approvals for females of Japanese, mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean Nationalities for the time-window of one year ago through to five years ago and who fall within the age and height criteria as described in the Post Mortem Report.....”

He looked at me with a worried look on his face.

“Um....for this case?” He enquired with a strange tone to his voice. “What's that got to do with this case?” He repeated.

“Tom....you are my partner. Thus any and all Cases that I have on our books is also your concern. We may be juggling up to half a dozen cases at any one time....all in various stages of the investigation. As you know, we really do not lose a case until the sod is sentenced....but then you can have Appeal Processes that may or may not involve our input. Got that? Right. These enquiries that I want you to make and to follow through relate to the “Bones under the Bridge” Case out past Dubbo.....OK? Got that?.....um.....most importantly, if they are willing to provide such information, I require a copy of a Passport Photo of the subjects. It needs to be of sufficient quality to allow a PRT.....Photographic Recognition Technique comparison trawl to be done against the Skull “Work-ups” from Professor Colin Basset. Ditto the AFP.....you can get all the particulars from the Murder Book on my desk. It's marked as the “Bones under the Bridge” Case. I doubt that I need to give you the full file number as it's the only three volume file set sitting there in full view. If that information is available from Immigration and Customs and the Skull Work-ups are available, clue up the Forensic Section that you are taking the data to them for them to carry out the comparison testing.....Um.....key in the File Case Number on my Laptop. It should spew out all pertinent folios on the Case from my In-box. Go through them, print them out and catalogue them into the correct order for attachment into the Murder Book. Keep a list out for my information and

flag any memos that you think are important. If any appear to be especially important, give me a tingle. Don't forget what-ever goes into the Murder Book has to be fully entered as an addendum note on the "History Page" of the Book. Make sure all particulars are noted. The date of the memo. Who from. A curt precis of its content. The date thus attached and your signature.....um.....the skull work-ups.....that's a Professor Basset from The National Museum. See where he is on the production of the two skulls that were found in that case.....what's his time-line on providing full 3-D imagery on these two subjects. Additionally, any information relating to that case from either the Victorian or Queensland Vice Squad and whether there is any pertinent information relating to the case from Police Intelligence. Um.....I want you to re-enter the search criteria of the three Deceased persons into the Missing Persons File Register and see what pops out.....carry out a similar search with the Victorian, Queensland and Northern Territory Missing Persons files using those new criteria of the two remains, and.....Read and memorise the full Murder Book information. Got that? All written down? Yeah? Good. Here's the car keys. Don't prang it. See you back in the Office late this afternoon. Stay there until I show, OK?"

There was no way that all those tasks would have been completed by the time that I made the office this afternoon, but I wanted to see how he had tackled some of them and in what order and how thorough he had attacked each task. I had to determine what he was good at. He had come from an academic and clerical background so this type of tabulation and transfer of information maybe his forte.

He'd spent no more than a month with the "Special Crimes" Section under 'Sonny' Liston and Peta Daniels. I figured perhaps he had been chucked into the deep end as the work load within the Team was extraordinary....and yet Abbey had assigned the five cases that Shelley Shields and Dallas Courtney had to them. Admittedly they were cut and dried. Neatly packaged...or as much as a bloody Domestic Violence Homicide and suicide case could be. So I figured that McPhillemy had been left to his own devices with a couple of the more 'easier' cases for want of a better description.

It seemed that DV cases may have been too close to the bone for the guy. Unfortunately they make up over 60% of our over-all cases, so there was no getting away from them or the fact that children are part of the 'collateral damage' in just about 75% of these investigations.

They were definitely not McPhillemy's cup of tea.

Obviously it wasn't visiting murder scenes or Catholic Schools either!

Or climbing to some heights!

I was starting to get a list on the guy. All negative at this stage. It wasn't looking good.

He needed to slurp a teaspoon of concrete if he was going to survive as a Murder Dee.

We'll start with small steps first though!

31

“Father.....”

I sat opposite the man who used his large desk as a fortification to hide behind, so it seemed to me.

“Detective....I see that you are from the Murder Squad. I thought that poor Father Hertz's death was a self-inflicted end....a sin in our Saviour's eyes. He'll be suitably chastised. It is hoped that his life-long service to Our Lord will be recognised to lessen his time in Purgatory....”

“He was a convicted Child Abuser, Father.....two counts.”

“.....who paid for his sins and with prayer and meditation was seen to have turned his back on such abominable behaviour.....”

“Is that your take on the situation or the Church's? I should point out to you that experience has shown that is rarely the case, Father.”

For some reason I wanted to continually put this guy into a situation that he did not want to be in. Plus he had that smug attitude about himself that drove me crazy. I know that personal emotions should not be allowed to taint my opinion of a person....but what the heck, first impressions could often be a guiding light in my line of work.

The man looked at me with hooded eyes. He did not comment further.

“How long have you been Head of this School, Father?”

“I have been Head for close on five years now. For five years prior to that I was Deputy Head.”

“So you weren't here when Father Hertz was first charged...in 1989 or 1997.....”

“As I have said, he has paid penance to Our Lord for those aberrations....”

“Aberrations? Now that's a fancy word for Child Abuse.....what about the findings of the Royal Commission earlier this year? Father Frank was found to have.....um...indulged further with his propensity to want to abuse young boys.....so it seems.....”

“The Royal Commission is not a Court of Law and is somewhat of a witch-hunt.....until the Father is brought before the Courts, under the laws of this State and Commonwealth, he is innocent until proven guilty.....in that Court. That is the Westminster System of Law, Detective. You should know that.”

I shook my head slowly to let the moment slide away. To let my anger dissipate. What I really wanted to do was leap across the desk and wallop the man.

“So.....” I commented slowly. “The Church under those conditions didn't feel it necessary to remove the Father from further temptation.....I understand that he was removed from any Church run School when he received the suspended sentence in 1986. Sent to a Parish Church in South Australia so I am led to believe. Why then and not now?....and who has the authority to hire and fire or relocate members of the Clergy from the school?”

“The School Board.”

“Who is on the School Board?”

“That information is freely available....”

“I am asking you, sir. Who is on the School Board and has responsibility to veto any suggestion that a member of the clergy be removed from the establishment?”

He looked stubbornly at me for some moments before raising his glance to the ceiling.

“The Bishop. His Administration Head. The local Parish Priest. My deputy and myself....and the Shire and School Accountant.....”

“The Accountant's name, sir?” I was madly scribbling the information into my Note Book.

“Father Dominic Batock. He is the State Head Accountant of the Church.”

“No outside representatives then.....no member of the Parents and Friends of the school or the Church.....old pupils? The three lads.....” The sudden change in direction didn't have the desired effect. He followed me easily and at ease.

“Were not present....”

“Oh....you have already interviewed them? I was under the impression that no-one was to talk to them until their parents were present.....what do you mean, *were not present*?”

The last phrase said through clenched teeth. I needed to back off otherwise I felt an awful comment coming on!

“They had already begun to descend the ladder access towards the lower level....”

“They admitted to this?.....that they had been on the open bell tower level?”

“No, Detective.” He again employed his hooded eyes as though this gesture was meant to concern me. It may work with ten year olds, but it looked slightly comical to me. “They were descending from the lower level....what we call the Clock Chamber....towards the fourth floor vestibule level.....the top of the main staircase.....”

“On what level is the Nine O'clock bell tolled from?”

“Why is that important?”

“What level, sir?”

“The Clock Chamber. The level below the open Bell Tower. The bell rope falls through a small aperture of the Bell Tower floor into the Clock Chamber. To one side. You would blow your ears if you were present on the upper level when the bell was tolled.....”

I had already been given this information by Father MacNicholls.

“So what were the boys and Father Frank doing on the upper level after they had rung the bell?”

He had already stated that the boys were not on the upper level. I wanted to see what his response was to the question being asked in a different manner.

He again gave me that stony look. He had no idea or he knew everything. I couldn't decide which! He may have thought that he was protecting the honour and integrity of the Church and the School, but to my way of thinking, he was just stone-walling. Making things more difficult. I had the impression of the man that he would not be capable of making those decisions himself and had in fact been given instructions from higher authority....no inference intended! I'm just a naturally suspicious person.

I heard the Office door open then close softly. I turned to see a tallish man walk purposefully across the thick carpet towards me. I rose to shake his offered hand.

“Brother Camonelli. The Deputy Head here. Athletic Couch. Maths and Science Master. Camera Club and Chess Club Convenor and general dog's body actually.” A warm wide smile accompanied the self introduction.

He spoke with a soft, clear voice. A hint of an accent. I could not place its origin. Perhaps Greek. Italian or one of the Baltic countries.

I felt more than saw a disfigurement on his right hand. Part of a finger was missing with the remaining stump calloused and stiff.

Camonelli glanced over at his Boss. There appeared to be a significant relaxing of the body of the senior ranked man as though his rod had eventually appeared to help in the matter of a nosy Detective.

I wondered whether the Deputy had been summoned by some signal from the Head to diffuse and interrupt the proceedings thus far.

As I have intimated, I'm a suspicious and cynically sod!

32

I was still standing facing Father Camonelli. Sizing him up. Wondering where he fitted into the clique of clergy in the place. It had been Father MacNicholls who had said that sadly, the clergy were now outnumbered by Lay teachers. None of whom lived on-site.

There was a faint knock on the door before it was silently opened.

“Father?” I turned to see the elderly woman who sat at a desk directly outside the inner sanctum poking her head around the large, thick mahogany door.

“Father? There is a Detective Superintendent R.J.C. Church here. He is the Head of the Murder Squad, sir. With his Deputy, sir. A Detective Daniels and a Detective Schofield is also present. Female Detectives.....” As though this was completely abhorrent to the patriarchal system as adhered to in this establishment, otherwise why mention it? “.....and sir, there is two representatives from the Child Protection Unit of the NSW Police Force. Detectives Prentis and Saletti, sir.”

There was a quaver in her voice. It was as though the death of the Dorm Master was almost too much to bear. The appearance of so many ranking Police Officers seemed to overwhelm her.

This was not a simple accident she had suddenly surmised. Her position within the thick walls of this old building had, up until now, been her protection from the evils of the outside world.

I smiled to myself at Abbey's full title. It was I think, the first time that I had heard it said aloud. It seemed rather appropriate to the circumstance. To my sick little mind.

Abbey, Daniels and Schofield entered the room single file as though they had ascended the stairs onto a stage to receive some sort of award or prize for their existence.

As I was introducing them, Detectives Abe Prentis and Sally Saletti from the Child Protection Unit followed close on their heels. Father Henry seemed to be overcome by the presence of so many Cops and when the late arrivals were introduced, he seemed to go inside himself. A sheen of perspiration on his brow noticeable in the bright lights of the large Office. Brother Camonelli was the figure of the congenial host with small talk and witticisms flowing from him. He asked that before any student was interviewed by either the Murder Squad or the Child Protection Unit, he needed to check with his Bishop and Legal Officer attached to the Church.

This to me was a stalling tactic on his Boss's behalf which was stated bluntly by Detective Prentis as I thought it.

Stony looks was the response.

“Never-the-less, I have a right to seek further legal advice in that regard before you commence

with your interviews. After all, we are the protectors of these children given to us.”

Yes, I thought.....but your responsibilities in that regard seem to fail dismally in so many cases.

Prentis was a 'no nonsense' type of person and had been known to rub people the wrong way with his curt language and approach. His manner with teens and children was in stark contrast to the manner in which he treated most adults. Even I had been subject to his acerbic tongue on the number of times I had come across him on various investigations. You learnt to take his attitude with a grain of salt. I reckon that if I was full time in Child Protection, I too would be most curt with adults!

After small banter and a familiarisation process, Abbey ushered us all out into the front quadrangle away from prying eyes and ears. The air was heavy with perfume. The area a series of formed, formal gardens, which at this late stage in summer, were still a mass of blooms. As Father Hertz's body, wrapped in a black morgue bag, was being transported to the blacked out Wagon of the State Morgue, I filled all my compatriots in on what had transpired that morning and the sorry history of the Deceased. This was collaborated by the Crime Scene lead, my live-in partner, Tellie Sanchez.

“So you are leaning away from suicide?” Abbey asked.

“Um...I'm not discounting it but with the two convictions and his non-appearance before the Royal Commission earlier this year on new charges, I seem to think that there could well have been a conspiracy to murder by one or more of the three boys present at the bell-tolling exercise this morning...or by a person or persons unknown who could have...may have been also present...perhaps unseen on the higher, open bell level....”

I was surprised by the number of Police Officers present.

For the first time in my career, I understood how the presence of so many cops could be unnerving to some members of the Public. Others would find it confrontational! What with the LAC Uniform guys standing around protecting the integrity of the Crime Scene and keeping members of the press from entering the property, the forensic people in their light blue “onesys” scurrying about and the huddle of us serious looking plains-clothes guys, there would be close to twenty five cops about! The number of Police vehicles parked willy-nilly all over the place, some with light bars still illuminated, would add to the feeling of a Police State.

It could look a little overpowering to those not used to Police procedure in murder investigations.

As I was thinking this, I watched a familiar vehicle slow to a halt in the Visitors' car park that was now brimming to over-full with Police Vehicles and the vehicles of parents who had been urgently summoned by the School Head and his Assistant.

The tall skinny guy waved an arm at me after he had alighted from his vehicle. The good looking tall woman also looked my way, a strained smile on her face as she recognised me.

I had a bad feeling swelling in the pit of my stomach.

This was not going to end well.

Bill Wynyard and his wife Janey started to head for the main Entry Vestibule into the Administration wing. I excused myself from the knot of cops and walked quickly to their side.

I shook Bill's hand and kissed Janey on the cheek.

"Mate.....your boys? They're pupils here....." It wasn't a question.

"Yeah. Small world. Father Henry....um.....no....Brother Camonelli rang us about the accident. The twins are with Brother Camonelli at the moment. They apparently saw the accident.....what are you doing here if it was an accident, Joe?"

"Um.....any accidental death or sudden unexplained death.....we're called in to investigate. A mere formality to adhere to the Law.....for the Coronal Enquiry that always follows. We're not too sure if it was accidental or suicide....we may never know, but we have to prepare the necessary paperwork for the Coroner...."

He glanced over at the knot of cops. By their very stature you could tell they were high ranking Officers.

"Yes.....yes. Of course....." He knew me well enough to know when I was bullshitting. He knew me well enough not to take it any further. "Um.....you be there on Sunday?"

I first met Bill and Janey Wynyard when it was necessary to question them in the Surrey Tower homicide/suicide/IVF bungle case some 2, maybe 3 years ago now. They were the Cleaners used by several occupants of the Surrey Tower....by close on half of the residents actually and also had the contract to clean all "common areas" including the external garden areas. We quickly became friends and it was unusual not to be invited to their place at least once a month....or vice versa.....or be involved in some fantastic Dinner dates at my former partner Marge Hendricks and Muscles Sarvich's place. The occasional picnic as per arranged for next Sunday at Freshwater Beach near Manly was also a regular event during the warmer months. Their twin boys, though eleven years of age, loved my tuition on teaching them to ride a surf board.

Thinking about it, the discussion rarely evolved to include questions on their schooling and if it did, it was never specific in regards to where they went to school. Sure, I knew that they boarded at some Catholic College somewhere. Being picked up by their parents on Friday nights to be dropped back late on Sunday evening.

That was it.

To think that the twins maybe two of the three boys who were now central to a possible murder investigation threw a huge spanner in the works.

I excused myself, patting Janey on the back giving her a half cuddle and returned to the knot of

cops who were still in earnest conversation.

“Um...Boss? You got a moment?”

He looked across at me with a look that was as easy to interpret as that of The Sphinx. Or Mona Lisa!

“Where's Tom McPhillemy?” He asked as he held up a hand to stay my comments.

“Arrh.....I sent him back to the Office....look, I'll fill you in on that as soon as I explain my situation. OK?”

I then informed him of my association with Bill and Janey Wynyard and my suspicion that their eleven year old twin boys were possible the main players in my supposition of the three lads being involved in a conspiracy to murder Father Hertz.

He listened to me patiently, swearing expansively after I had finished.

“Shit.....I knew for some reason this morning when I was having breakfast that today was not going to turn out a good day. Peta Daniels' group is chin deep in cases. You have to excuse yourself from the investigation and get the hell out of here. Let's fill the others in on this fucking mess....Daniels will not be impressed.....sorry, Joe. I'm not mad at you but at the situation.”

He walked back to the tight grouping as though he had just been straddled with the weight of the world on his shoulders.....maybe with the bigger picture that he saw, he had been.

33

“How you thinking of getting back to the Office, Joe?”

“With you, Boss.....if you're heading that way.”

“Not to-day, I'm afraid. You'll have to make alternate arrangements. Perhaps a train, then?” This said with a smile.

Not a bad idea, I actually thought. It would be a nice trip down the mountains to Parramatta. Then I thought better of it.

“The Forensic Team....or maybe the Pathology Team will be heading back soon. I maybe able to hitch a ride in one of their vans.”

Abbey nodded his head.

“So....why did you send McPhillemy back to the Office?”

He listened patiently as I went through the list of reasons for my decision and my wish to see if his talents lay in the basic actions of any Homicide Investigation. Methodical questioning and the painstaking unearthing of facts through various means that did not involve direct human contact.

“Hmm...he's a bit of a worry. Daniels had just about had enough of him....I don't know what we can do with him if he fails here. He has indicated that he doesn't wish to return to his previous position....besides, I think that is not an option as the tasks, so I am led to believe, have been taken over by civvies....clerks.....to free cops from such basic drudgery for which they are not trained....”

“What did McPhillemy do before he joined the Murder Squad as an adult transfer?”

“File Registry....it is becoming less important now that most files are computer bound with only past Murder Books and trial evidence and transcripts requiring movement into the depths of the Records Registry dungeon.....and those who look after that part of things are mostly civvies in clerical positions. McPhillemy was about the last cop to be transferred out of the Section....I think that chap who came in to act in my position when I had that heart attack....remember that? He may have been his last Boss. What was his name? He went down to the Victorian Police Integrity Unit from memory....Christ that annoys me...it's happening more and more where I forget names, like that lass that Dallas Courtney is shackled up with.....her name and where I've heard of it before.....”

He gave me a side-ways glance.

Bingo. I tried hard to hold my facial expressions in neutral as the sudden reference to Dallas Courtney had thrown me.

Abbey was like that.

He mentioned it purely to let me know obliquely that he had connected the dots and that he too was now in the unenviable position of having Dallas's future in his hands. With him not wanting to do anything about it either which really placed him on shaky ground if it was ever to come to the fore....or be learnt by the Standard and Ethics Unit....they would have us all drawn and quartered, I felt sure.

“.....I guess I can now see why he was the last Uniform out of that area....no-where else to go.....to place him.....still, we have to give him a reasonable chance to prove himself.....so....you just can't hang around like a shag on a rock.....”

“If it's okay by you, I think I'd like to poke around a bit....”

“Stay out of trouble, Joe and stay away from the Case. It's not yours now. I'm going to sit in on those interviews with any and all of the boys...the students. Want to come?”

“No, Boss. I'll just poke about...”

“Mark my words Joe, OK.”

34

“Father MacNicholls? I'm led to believe that you have a key to the Bell Tower access staircase.”

I'd entered the Priest's inner sanctum without a sound. He jumped at my voice.

“Detective....you gave me such a fright.....”

“Your digs? Your living quarters? They up on this floor?”

“Yes. Yes. Small and devoid of any home comforts one would normally expect in the 21st Century...but then I don't want for much.”

“On this floor?”

“Yes...” He gestured with an arm a door to one side of the tiny Office.

“You just look after the boys on this floor.”

“Yes. I help. You might say that I was Father Frank's Deputy here in the Dormitory Wing. The three floors. I am the Gym Master here.”

“Long way to walk every morning....”

“Oh...it's not that bad. Straight through the top floor Dorm across to the older boys' wing. Down the Lift and across the Quadrangle....bad when it is raining.....or snowing.” A smile lit his face.

“How long have you been the Gym Master?”

“And Cricket Coach. Basketball. Boxing. Swimming and Weight-lifting.” Again a smile of pride animated his face. “Oh, dear.....for almost as long as I've been here....fifteen.....twenty...years I guess....”

I looked closely at the guy. Again a short stature man. I twigged him for a former Boxer or a half-back in some teen League team. Muscle bound, short neck on wide shoulders. Short pepper and salt hair. Only a slight shadow of a beard line. Alert clear eyes. A wide honest mouth. I would guess his age to be mid-forties. As he stood, he bounced on his feet.

I made a mental note to ring through to McPhillemy to get a search done on the man.

“You've been in the Priesthood all your life?”

“Didn't want to do anything else from a young age....very young age, actually. When I was a Page Boy. A Father O'Shaunessy....yes, an Irishman with a warm and funny disposition and a big

heart was my idol and mentor.” A smile at the warm memories.

“Where'd you grow up?”

“Ballarat. Victorian Goldfields. God's country.”

“So I've heard.” Sarcasm laced my words.

It was a place of the Devil as illustrated by the recent Royal Commission Hearing Sitzings in the town. A landlocked bastion of the Catholic faith that harboured a clutch of paedophile Priests and was the birthplace of Cardinal Pell. I doubted if all the sins were exposed fully during those sets of Hearings. Just the tip of the ice-berg possibly.

“Detective, I know that our Church has taken a hiding over recent years both here and overseas. I must stress that there are many good people who carry out God's work within the Church. A lot of good people who take their vows extremely serious. We are not all sinners....or been attracted or tempted by the Devil's work.”

“Yes, I agree with you but the stance of the Church is still, after all this time and with all these terrible revelations, very hypocritical in the extreme. Imagine if the Law of the Land was similarly debased....”

“That's just it, Detective. It is.”

“Mmm....I'd like to sit here and discuss the sordid underbelly happenings of Society and the Church, but I have work to do. You know the boys well?”

He appeared to go on the defensive.

“What are you getting at, Detective?”

“Are the younger ones...or even the older boys....do they generally want to seek confidences with you....or the other Dorm Managers?”

He looked at me for some moments.

“What you are asking me is whether any of the boys have ever confided in me on the alleged actions of....let's say....Father Frank? I think that you are not of a Catholic upbringing or belief.....if any of the boys wish to confide in some-one of their sins, then they do so in Confession....in prayer.”

“But to be sexually abused is not of their choosing ...or their fault. Why should they have a need to confess?”

“As I mentioned previously, you are not of the Faith, therefore it is outside your realm of understanding....”

I looked at him for some moments. My opinion of the man not really changing. He didn't want to know the truth. Accept it as fact or concede that the Devil may be haunting these old hallways

and dormitories.

“You have a key to the access stairway? And to Father Frank's quarters?” I asked icily. That last request was thrown from some dark corner of my brain all of a sudden.

“Yes....but both have Crime tape attached to the doors.”

“To stop unauthorised persons entering until further notice.....and I am the most senior Detective on the case....until my Boss turned up a little while ago, that is.”

“Yes, I noticed the large clutch of cops outside.....you must think that there is something going on here at the school....”

“Is there?”

He couldn't hold eye contact.

“You are aware of Father Frank's previous criminal record?”

“Gossip! I do not listen to gossip...”

“Unfortunately Father, it is more than gossip....it is fact and I fail to understand how a man with that history can be given a position of responsibility with young boys. That Father, is criminal! I can assure you that those responsible for such an absurd situation will be held accountable regardless of the criminal death or not of Father Frank.....may I have those keys, please?”

Detective School 101 requires that all officers remain aloof and their personal opinions on a particular case are just that. Personal and are not to be broadcast as a sermon or derogatory statement. So sue me. It isn't the first time that my angst has caused me to voice my opinion in an investigation. It's got me into trouble before and I doubt that it won't happen again.

So be it!

Frustration and sometimes anger loosens lips!

So sue me!

35

I showed my badge and ID Number to the Uniform Cop guarding the door of Father Frank's quarters. He stood aside and unlocked the door. I'd forgotten that a Constable would be placed at such a location, and the internal access stairway to the Bell Tower for however long the Forensic Lead thought applicable.....and that each Officer would have a key to the door.

That made me think back to a comment on the security arrangement of the School. All keys, including a masterkey system, was kept in Brother Camonelli's Office. Under lock and key. There was no other copies held, except by each member who had sole access to their own sanctum.

Here it would appear that we had three copies of the key to Father Frank's Office and residence and to the access stairs. That made me suspicious.

"They've only just finished in here, Detective. Minutes ago. Do you mind if I zip off. Nature calls.....and I need to get some Crime tape to seal the door after you've finished, sir. OK?"

"Yes, Constable. I'll wait for your return."

I wrestled into a double pair of latex gloves and stepped inside the small ante room come Office. Walked slowly around the small room and into his quarters. Looking at things. Picking things up and turning them over for a cursory look.

I wandered back out into the Office area.

This was about twice as big as Father MacNicholls.

Seniority has its rewards.

It was neat and tidy.

Stacks of communications, e-mails and papers on a scarred desk. I picked them all up to flip through them. A small bookcase with a surprising eclectic choice of reading matter. I flipped through every book. A two-drawer filing cabinet. All drawers were locked including those of the desk. I took out my small set of picks. Had no problems with the desk drawers or the two drawer cabinet. The bottom drawer of the File Cabinet revealed several suspension folders of names. Presumably students' names....and a star rating. My stomach turned over. I slide the drawer all the way out and placed it on the desk intending to go through the lists at a leisurely speed. Taped to the back of the drawer was a large envelope. Disgusting photographs of young boys in various sexual stances with, I presumed, the Father as the recipient of the students' "favours".

I rang Tellie and informed her of what I had found.

"Where were they?" She asked incredulously. "My people overlooked that, apparently. It's not on their list of Discovery....the list of students with a star rating was copied.....I'll be right up with a Forensic Officer. Don't move, Joe, otherwise you could taint the recording of evidence."

Tellie was spitting chips when she arrived with two young Assistants.

"I cannot believe that you would even overlook such a simple hiding spot. I want you to again go through these quarters with a fine tooth comb. Rip up the floor coverings if it looks as though there has been any evidence to suggest that a corner of the carpet, the rug or the lino has been turned over regularly. Do it again! Every surface, nook and cranny. Hear me!!! Photograph. Record. Bag. Sign! Understand?"

I stayed off to one side as the young Assistants again rifled carefully through the Office first. Dragging out every drawer and examining them carefully. I shuffled through the photographs quickly with Tellie looking over my shoulder.

“Disgusting....those poor boys....”

“School Uniform.....”

“Mmm...and the boys look no more than the junior grades....the fucking bastard....I hope he suffered as he fell!” Tellie spat out. Tears in her eyes.

“He had an accomplice.” I stated matter-of-factly.

“That's a bit of a stretch, Joe. One in the school is bad enough, but a pair of predators. The boys wouldn't have had a chance....”

“Don't let your anger mar or deaden your deductive reasoning. Who took the photos?”

Tellie looked at me with a new sense of respect for my ability. So I thought in any case. It felt good, so I'm flying with it!

“These drawers were locked when we were up here last, Boss. We couldn't get into them and figured that we'd need some form of authorisation to gain entry.....” One of the young Assistants muttered to Tellie, desperately trying any reason to justify their supposed ineptitude. Unfortunately she hit the nail on the head! She gave me a sideways glance that insinuated my subterfuge.

Tellie let out a stream of air in exasperation, spun around to face me. Hands on hips giving me the filthiest of looks.

“Joe, you can't do that!! You've possibly jeopardised the entire investigation. Bloody hell, Joe.....”

With women it can change in a heart-beat!

Amazing, isn't it!?

“Joe, if you did what I suspect you did, then all this evidence is not allowable.” She stated more reasonably.

“Tellie, just photograph it, record and bag it. OK? The guy is dead. Any evidence found that implicates him with further acts of child abuse will only reinforce what will come out when the Child Protection people interview all the students and staff....how this evidence surfaced will be lost in the mountain of statements taken over the coming days and weeks.”

Tellie gave me another stare. Shook her head slowly as if she was looking at the biggest incompetent, shady fool ever! And one that was trying to coerce her into aiding me in the deceitful and illegal act.

“Hang on.” I muttered as I grabbed the handful of photographs. I flipped through them until I

came to the one that I wanted. I took out my mobile phone and flashed a copy on the camera.

Tellie looked at me as though I had lost my mind.

I figured that I could be sleeping alone for at least a week.

We carefully examined the Living Quarters of the Deceased. A little more salubrious than Father MacNicholls down stairs. These quarters had a separate Bedroom. Small. Minimalist furniture. A single bed. An old Victorian or more correctly Edwardian Wardrobe that would be worth a bit in today's money. A chair and a small antique pine chest of drawers. I searched under the bed, behind every furniture piece and lifted up the meagre lino sheeting to see if anything had been tucked under. Slid all the drawers right out to look at the rear side. Underneath. Nothing! A small Ensuite. A shower stall. A toilet and a shaving cabinet above it with a small mirror insert. You almost had to straddle the toilet pan to use the mirror. The wash basin was the smallest that I had ever seen. Off to one side. Nothing bigger would have fitted though in the tiny cubicle. On the outside wall facing into the Office was a very basic Tea prep area. A small stainless steel sink and drainer. An electric jug. An electric cooking ring sitting on a bar sized fridge. Nothing under the sink except exposed plumbing lines and a dead cockroach. Nothing in the fridge except for a half litre of milk. Relatively fresh. Three rows of shelving above the sink filled with various tins, cans and bottles.

"Every one of them examined? Sifted through?" I asked no-one in particular.

"Yes.....there was several rolls of film in one of the canisters. They have been bagged for examination back at the Lab...."

"Mmm.....no camera? No Laptop?"

"We bagged the laptop. Top of the range Toshiba. Worth a bit....but no camera found. No."

"The accomplice must have it then. It will be with an old 35 mil SLR. A digital camera. Find that and you'll identify the accomplice....."

"Joe, even Priests have digital cameras. That doesn't make them all paedophiles."

"No...not all....all we want is one fellow. That's all....and he very well could be our murderer!"

She again gave me that look. Some would say that it telegraphed that she felt that I had fallen off my perch. I'd like to think that it was that loving look of respect for my talents again.

Whatever!

36

"I'd like to get up and have a close look at the Bell Tower"

"We've finished up there. We returned the key. We don't have a key to the access door..."

I fished the key out of my pocket.

"Who did you return it too?"

"Um...Brother Camonelli....he has control of all security on the grounds. The buildings...."

"Mmm....interesting." I replied softly.

"Um...Where did you get that? That key. Father Henry stated that he had the Masterkey that would open every door in the school and that a copy of that plus a copy of every individual key to every door and hatch in the school was kept under lock and key in a special cupboard in Brother Camonelli's Office...and that was it. No other copies existed for individual doors.....and that only the Brother had a key to that cupboard. We gave the masterkey back to the Father....."

"Father MacNicholls downstairs. It seems that he has keys....Father Frank too, that the hierarchy are unaware of. He says he's like Father Frank's Deputy.....and he is the Gym Master. Coaches in Swimming. Cricket. Basketball. Weightlifting and a couple of other sports for the pupils. They are apparently big in sports, winning medals and ribbons galore at the combined Catholic Schools Games which is held every two years."

The Uniform Constable was back. We filled him in on our progress and the fact that two Forensic Officers were conducting another search of the suite. We would be up in the Bell Tower if we were required elsewhere.

Tape had been placed on the access door. We removed some of it to swing open the door.

The staircase was steep and narrow. One way traffic only. Some treads creaked as you placed your weight on them. The staircase turned around the far wall to disappear into and above the ceiling line of the staircase lobby area.

"Shit....I don't like this much." I muttered. Sweat popping out on my forehead. Under my arms. There were several naked globes but they must have been around the 5W mark as they did not illuminate the staircase to my liking.

"I've found your weak spot. You don't like confined, dirty and dark places."

"Could be....I might tell you a story some day that could explain that little problem. It's not dirty though....this is fingerprint powder, isn't it?"

“Yeah....we did a complete trawl for the entire length of the stairs. A lot of prints which will mean we'll need to get all the boy's prints for exemplars....”

“Just do the ten to twelve year age group first. I have a suspicion that was the only age group who were permitted up here.”

“You think?”

“Uh huh.”

I pushed open a door that could be locked from inside the Chamber. A padbolt. Not expertly attached. We came out into the Clock chamber. I sat down on a long bench type stool that went for the entire length of one wall. The clock mechanism and gearing was on the opposite wall centrally located. Several connecting rods and gears connected the two faces of the clock that were on opposite sides. One facing into the garden area. At a guess due east. There were grey smudge areas of fingerprint powder on every surface.

“I'll say one thing. It looks as though you were pretty thorough up here.”

“Yes. This is where the large sperm deposits were found....they're marked by those chalk lines....”

“Struth.....a bloody shooting gallery!”

Tellie shook her head, perhaps wondering why little boys never grew up.

“You reckon this is were Father Frank brought the boys for his ...um...pleasure?”

“Yeah. I'd say so. If you look at some of those photos, I'd say the edge of this stool run is in a fair few of them.....” I got out my mobile and showed her the image.

“Wouldn't you need a flash in here? It would show up through the clock face wouldn't it?”

“Mmm.....maybe. What's the time? Almost eleven. The sun looks as though it shines straight in early in the morning which would suggest that it streams in on the other face from early afternoon through to sundown. I would imagine that would shadow any effect of a flash during those periods. Or.....that white glass may allow a fair amount of light to beam through so that a flash was not required. Father MacNicholls said that he often came up to meditate in the late afternoon. Early evening. It would be nice.”

Tellie sat heavily onto the bench seat beside me.

“It gives me the shivers.....it looks like a torture chamber what with all those gears and rods.....seen enough?”

“I want to climb up to the Bell Tower open area. You?”

“Yeah. I'll come with you.”

Access to the upper level was via a narrow ladder bolted to the floor and the Hatchway perimeter frame at the ceiling level. The ladder almost vertical and hard against the northern wall of the Clock Chamber. As I got to the top, I had to push open the hatch that would give us access out onto the open area.

“Bloody Hell!!! This bloody hatch is heavy to lift open.”

It took me some moments to swing it up into a vertical position. I felt that it would be impossible for a slight young chap to open it. There was a sliding arm to stop the hatch from closing accidentally. Falling on fingers perhaps.

The open clock tower level was surrounded on four sides by a 140 centimetre tall stone and brick parapet wall. The bell hung suspended from a large thick beam that held the bell central under a pyramid style roof. The roof supported by four large posts springing from the parapet points on each corner.

I clambered up out of the hatchway.

The hatch, in the way that it opened, did not allow a view of the remaining floor area. You could not see this until you stepped out onto the floor area and stood upright. You could then step around the hatchway to see the rest of the open area. The bell, which I thought looked small, could be seen clearly. I perhaps was expecting to see some giant of a bell like Big Ben or something. I doubted that the bell peel would explode anyone's ear drums as Father Henry had indicated.

I was rather disappointed by its size.

The parapet height meant that you had to stand against it to clearly see the view on offer. It was rather spectacular, especially away to the west. I walked around to where Father Hertz must have fallen on the eastern face to allow him to land with a thud on the loose gravel pathway below. Only perhaps six storeys below. Because of the age of the building and it's approximate 4 metre high ceilings, this would have been increased to around a normal eight storey building of to-day's dimensions.

“There's no way he fell accidentally...well....not unless he was walking around the parapet edge....was he seen at all?”

“Not that we have been able to ascertain. No. I doubt that a sixty-odd year old man would want to walk around the top of the parapet wall in any case. There appears to be no-body who saw him actually falling either. It is possible that he laid on the pathway for some time before his body was discovered. You still of the opinion that the three eleven year old boys were to blame. Picking up Father Frank and tossing him over the side?”

“Um.....you know who two of the boys were? Bill and Janey Wynyard's twin boys....Jack and Jake.”

She leant hard against one of the thick vertical posts that held the pyramid roof and the bell and beam. Shook her head slowly. Tears welled in her eyes. She covered her mouth with both her

hands.

“No....not on, Joe! No!!! Shit! They couldn't....wouldn't do something like that. When did you intend telling me that? I'll have to excuse myself from any further involvement....you too, Joe. We have to get the hell out of here.....you shouldn't be poking around Joe. All this could go to Hell in a basket.”

I had to smile. That was one of my expressions.

“I just did. I have. Sorry, Tellie...I now have my doubts that the three boys were involved...when your Officers first climbed up here, was the Hatch open or shut?”

“Joe...you numbskull. Didn't you hear a word I just said? Jesus.....Joe, you can be so bloody stubborn at times....I don't know....the Hatch cover up or down? Do you think it is important?”

“Yes, I do. Can you find out for me, please?”

Tellie plucked her Mobile from her belt pouch and fast dialled in a number.

“Gary? Were you the first Forensic Officer up onto the Bell Tower's open area on top? OK. Was the hatch down or up? Down? Thanks mate....no, that's good. Did you get any photographs of it down from underneath? Before you opened it? Great. Good work. Thanks.”

“No way could one eleven year old boy lift that Hatch open....or for that matter close it as he descended the ladder. No way....”

“...and the ladder isn't wide enough to allow the three of them to stand side by side on the ladder to help one another to lift the Hatch.....so.....they couldn't have thrown Father Hertz over the edge....”

“But some-one did.....or he jumped.....”

“Yes. It appears that way....what a glorious view...in every direction.”

“Puts you that much closer to God” I offered.

“That's a joke coming from you!” Tellie stated with a laugh. “I mean, you could sit down on the floor and no-one would know that you were up here....”

“Unless they were below in the Clock Chamber and noticed the Hatch open....but yeah, you would be hidden from anyone down at ground level out in the garden. I would imagine it would be a good house-keeping practise to close the Hatch up when there was no-one up here.....so that rain could not get down into the Clock Chamber....or further down to stain the stair lobby ceiling.”

“Mmm.....”

“What now?”

“Nothing. Nothing. Just thinking....”

“You seem to do a lot of that when you're on the job. You know that, ma man?”

She put her arm around my waist and came to me, kissing me lightly on the lips.

“We could....you know....”

“You're one sick bastard, Joe Lind. The body's not even cold and you're thinking of sex....here.... where God knows what has happened up here.”

“So shoot me...”

“One day I just might.”

She kissed me again.

37

Tellie rang her Boss back at the Police Building to explain why she could not examine any forensic evidence that may have been collected at the school. After obtaining his approval, she had a long conversation with Brenda Wzerlic and her Forensic Pathologist Assistant. Her Deputy Crime Scene Forensic Officer was also present. He would take over the role of Senior Crime Scene Leader and FO Team leader on this case.

She formally passed control over to FO Gary “Ozzie” Osbourne.

“Well...ma man? What do you want to do now?”

“Sit in on a couple of interviews with the Child Protection Unit.....and possibly get a chance to ask Brother Camonelli a few questions....”

“Would Abbey permit that?”

“Don't know, but I noticed that his car is not in the car park, so I guess he has left the scene.”

“So who's in control.....who would be the Lead Detective?”

“If Child Protection haven't formally taken control of the case as yet, then it would be Peta Daniels and her young partner, Sophia Schofields. I think that what we have to say to Peta will ensure that it becomes a homicide investigation.....or remains in the hands of the Murder Squad personnel.....um.....has exemplar fingerprints of Camonelli, Henry and MacNicholls been obtained?”

“Not the Head, Father Henry....”

“Arrange it will you? Let's go and pay Brother Camonelli a visit, shall we? And have your Gary Osbourne join us, will you?”

38

I called Peta Daniels out of the office that was being used as an Interview Room. While Peta and her 2IC, D2 Sophia Schofields were interviewing all the teachers of the school, both Clergy and Lay Teachers, which I thought was a good strategy, the Child Protection Team was slowly questioning the students.

Starting at the ten to twelve age group as I had suggested.

These meetings were taking place in Father Henry's office as the Lead, Detective Prentis wanted the boys to be off-balance a bit. The boys were being questioned with either both or one parent being present. The presence of Father Henry or Brother Camonelli was noticeable by their absence.

I felt this was the wrong strategy as the boys at that age would be more forthcoming if relaxed and comfortable in their surroundings. Definitely not the Headmaster's inner sanctum which they would only be summoned to if in trouble, so I thought.

Peta advised that apparently Father Henry had minimal interaction with the pupils of the school and they would never have been called into his Office. All matters relating to punishment meted out or earnest discussions with a pupil, was left to Brother Camonelli.

“Who vetoed the Priests' participation?” I whispered into Peta's ear.

“Prentis....his thought was that if either one were involved even peripherally in the abuse, it would be an unwanted form of pressure on the boys.....”

“Mmm.....I agree...I hadn't thought of that angle.”

“Um.....your friends? The Wynyards? Their twin boys have been interviewed. The parents, Bill and Jane? They're taking them home for the rest of the week. Thinking about whether they will continue to board them up here. Prentis thinks that both of them, the twins, may have been approached at some stage...just obliquely. It would appear that the sight of Priests does not represent something...arrh.....magical? Threatening? Overbearing? Authoritarian? To them. They seem to be able to stand up for themselves. Apparently that was why they volunteered this week to be present when the morning bell was rung. It would appear that their mate.....um.....Davis Jennings, the third boy....may have been previously approached....or even abused to some extent.....and the twins were determined to protect him. They stated that they left Father Frank in the Clock Chamber

but the hatch to the Bell Tower was open so they assumed that some-one was up at that level. They don't know whom, though.”

I nodded my head. Tapped my mobile with my finger.

“What's the bet on Brother Camonelli?”

I gave Peta a copy of a particular photo that I had transferred onto my Mobile that showed clearly the shortened and deformed finger of Brother Camonelli. His hand clearly displayed on the head of a boy as he guided it. The timber section of boarding which was plain to see in the shot was the edge of the bench seat positioned down one wall of the Clock Chamber. One could assume that the adult taking the photo was Father Frank. I gave her a complete over-view of my actions over the past hour and my determinations.

“I would hazard a guess and say that Brother Camonelli was present at the time of Father Frank's fall.....whether he was thrown over the edge of the parapet or threw himself over, I cannot determine.”

“Send that shot through to my phone will you Joe? And good work....but I can't help but comment by saying that I think you were acting against orders. I'll leave that for the Boss to mull over and take what-ever action he deems appropriate. I think you should head for the office....in fact, get the fuck outa here!” She whispered into my ear. “Thanks, though.”

One rarely gets a kick up the backside at the same time as one is given a rub of the head as congratulations for a job well done.

It was a rare experience!

39

I headed back down the Mountains towards Parramatta feeling empty. While the train trip was relaxing, it took its time on the descent, seeming to stop at every station that it came to.

I really didn't want to return to work and it would be around four-ish by the time I slumped at my desk.

Exhausted.

Mentally shattered.

I had no idea how the Officers of the Child Protection Unit continued to operate at such an optimum output.

They were the real heroes of the Force.

The only reason I came back into the office was to collect my Unmarked.quiz McPhillemy on his actions over the past five hours or so and perhaps do a few laps of the pool. The enthusiasm for that quickly waned. I had to force myself to participate.

Once you found an excuse to abstain from the tradition, it become exceedingly easier as time went on to find further excuses to refrain.

I spent almost ¾ of an hour flogging myself mercilessly, trying vainly to sweat out the thoughts and images that the day had seared into my brain.

I slumped back into my Office Chair after rounding off the afternoon with a couple of bouts with “Big Red”. The large red leather Punching Bag that still took pride of place in the centre of the Office. Used nearly every day by one of us to belt out our frustrations, the joy of a successful completion of a case or to just to let off steam!

“Joe?” Abbey summoned from his Office door.

I wandered down knowing what to expect. Strips torn off me. My back left in welts from the cat-o-nine tails!

“I could kick the shit outa ya, Joe, but to be truthful, I knew what you would do the minute my back was turned.....you're getting too easy to manipulate, Joe.” He laughed at this. I could not really see the funny side of things. “Though I didn't think that you would go as far as solving the ghastly thing.....Daniels will be for-ever in your debt. She made the remark as I was leaving the site that she doubted that she would be able to give one hundred per cent on the case because of her existing workload. She has just got to tidy up the dregs now, so it seems. She'll be up there with Schofield for the rest of the week I imagine.....I'm going to transfer Gordon and Hella over to the Unit. Liston's group has an unfair proportion of the workload in the Squad unfortunately. Says something about our modern society eh? Anyhow, good detective work, Joe.”

I nodded my head.

“Um.....Shelley...she wants back to work....um...I've spoked to The Shrink and although she is a little concerned at such a brief...um...interlude....she will not stop her for coming back as long as Shelley sees her first thing to-morrow morning. Now.....what to do with McPhillemy! Do you know where he is?”

I hadn't really noticed him not sitting at his desk such was my pre-occupation when coming back into the Office. I said as much.

“Hmm.....no-one has seen him.....Hendo seems to think that he hasn't even returned to the Office. He just thought that he was with you.”

I shook my head. Groaned. That meant that not one instruction that I had given him well before Lunch had been undertaken.

“Sorry Boss. That's just not good enough. I gave him about 10 things to do as soon as he return to the office. It would have kept him bloody busy as all hell all afternoon. I wanted to see whether he was capable of doing these things. Accepting instructions and carrying them out. Simple tasks.....nothing particularly involved or requiring a flash of brilliance....”

“What case?”

“All to do with the Dubbo job. The “Bones under the Bridge” Case. I'm getting a little lax with it, especially, I must admit, with clearing my In-box of relevant material.....I'll do that now. Before I knock off.”

Abbey nodded his head. I didn't need any further encouragement.

I spent the next hour clearing the dribble and detritus from my In-box.

What a bloody boring chore!

40

I signed off and was wondering where Mc.Phillemy and my vehicle were.

I rang down to the Sub-Basement Attendant who recorded and approved every vehicle entry and exit.

“Nah. Sorry Detective, your vehicle hasn't come in that I can see. You signed out early, around zero eight thirty-five this morning. That's it, sir. Sorry.”

I took my Mobile out of my pocket and scrolled down to Mc.Phillemy's number.

“Joe? Before you go....they've found Mc.Phillemy. The Katoomba LAC.....the fucking idiot has gassed himself in your car....up near Mount Victoria. Off a side fire-trail. Some kids on trail bikes found the car with the motor still ticking over.....McPhillemy's dead Joe. Shit!”

I sat down heavily in a dazed state. Abbey came up to sit in Shelley chair. Whirled it around to face me.

“I've rung the beautiful Doctor Samantha Dawn Somners. He had a regular with her which I didn't know about. She'll need to be across it quickly as the Standards and Ethics Unit will be all over the thing.....you need to get your mind around what happened up at the Boarding School this morning and what you instructed him to do.....you'll need to write it down...and include your take on your motivation, your tone and the way you handle him....stay back and write it all down while it's still fresh in your mind. You're going to be asked to explain it all to The Panel.....you should

know them all by their first names, eh Joe? I'll get a Report out also and I'll have to get 'Sonny' Liston to do the same thing as he was his immediate Unit Boss up until this morning.....sorry Joe. I'll arrange a substitute vehicle now. Give me that Report before you leave.”

I spun around in my chair a couple of times as Abbey walked back to his Office. That didn't do any good. I bounced up and gave the Punching Bag a hammering. It moaned and groaned at the punishment that I dealt out to it.....

One sentence echoed through my brain.

'*Worked To Death*'.....was he really? Did I pile too much onto him? So much that he could not handle the pressure? Or was that step out of the cocoon that he had enjoyed for most of his working life in the Force been two steps too high for him to handle?

Don't know.

Does the fact that he took his life by carbon monoxide poisoning in my car instead of blowing out his brains at his own residence with his service pistol, hint at anything? Was he saying that it was my fault? I had pushed him over the edge?

Don't know....and really do not want to know for my own sanity.

What I do know is that every one has their limit and it isn't the same for every one.

I remember in the early days in Vice just after I and my old buddy Barry Holtz had been relieved from Narcotics and our undercover role, which was to be truthful, pushing me past my limit of mental endurance as it did with many Undercover Cops. When Computers were not a pre-requisite on every officer's desk, we had a Typists Pool. There were about ½ a dozen Typists assigned to us. For normal File Notes and Updates, if there were any spelling or “typo” mistakes we would just either “white out” the mistake and edit it or place a slash through the letter and place the correct letter above it or in the margin. For any Inter-Office memo or Case Transcription that could end up in Court, we would ask for a re-type of that page usually. No big deal.....but one of the more senior Typists, I can't remember her name now, would take this as a personal affront and think that we thought her a bad typist. She suffered a mental “melt down” one day when such a document was given back to her with a number of corrections required.

You just don't know.

I don't think anybody really can understand the underlying influences that causes a person to take their life. Their thought processes at that moment when the decision is made. Knowing that there is no turning back....and not wanting to. Abhorrent and inexplicable to a lot of people. Reasonable to others.

I thought of Father Frank....and I must admit I felt some sorrow for him too. Trapped in a world, in a habit, an overpowering abnormal desire that he had no control over. Why it existed and the powers that kept it alive completely foreign to most people....but logical and reasonable to that person. Was it that much different to the secret desires of William Dean “Billie” Worseley? He

didn't want to be a woman but just wanted to spoil himself as a woman does every time that she dresses up to kill. Liked the pampering. The feel. The look.

Was there any connection in these base human desires? Where do these base secret desires and want to destroy yourself live? Deep within the brain? And why do some people have these requirements while others sail through life without a single dark thought? Or a secret desire that is outside what society considers normal? What is it that makes us that different from each other? What really is normal and does such a state exist?

Who knows.

I was starting to get maudlin.

That led me into dark places that I had not been into for such a long time.

I sat down a mass of sweat and began to tap out the Report to get my mind off regressing.

41

It was close to eight that night before I was satisfied with the Report.

Abbey had made several suggestions and hints of editing. After several re-drafts, we felt that it was acceptable for the Standards and Ethics Unit who were called in on every similar situation.

Suicides within the Force kept them busy!

For the first time in for-ever, Abbey and I sat in his Office and shared a Port together. A good drop actually. A very good drop! Neither of us ready to go home. Perhaps afraid of what sleep may bring. Daniels had walked in while I was still fussing over my written word to type up her own edition of the truth of Thomas Parkson McPhillemy.

A loner.

A confirmed bachelor who had no immediate family.

His next of kin to call in the case of an emergency was his old line Boss down in Central Registry. Now retired.

Sad.

Daniels too, enjoyed the quiet moments of sitting with us in Abbey's office. She with a cup of Peppermint Tea.

“You did good this morning, Joe. You know that? How did you know that hand in the photo

was Brother Camonelli's?" She asked as she placed the cup and saucer on Abbey's desk.

"You know when you go to shake hands with some-one? One of the participants always looks down to ensure that the hands will meet in the correct manner....ever notice that.....it's very rarely both persons. Fair dinkum....well, when I was introduced to him it was I who glanced down at his hand to ensure that they met in the correct manner.....and I just noticed it. Felt it too, I guess, more than saw it. It didn't mean much, really, at the time.....but when I saw that photo, it just twigged like that proverbial light bulb in your brain.....and then the Hatch. I'll lay odds and say that he did that damage when the Hatch accidentally fell onto his hand....almost made it but got one finger...that'd hurt, by jeeesus."

"I doubt if we will ever know for sure whether it was murder or suicide. The Brother is saying that Father Frank just dived over the parapet wall....but there are those scuff marks...."

"...which do not positively denote that a scuffle took place at that spot....at that time....do you believe his side of things?"

"No. Not really, but without a confession, I doubt that forensic trace will be strong enough to convict him of first degree homicide. I know those suggestions of a scuffle aren't good enough to convict him. What-ever, he will go down for a long time. He's been a practising Child Abuser and Paedophile at the school for a long time. He claims he had it in check until Hertz came on the scene and really inflamed his wanton desires. It was he who insisted that Hertz be re-employed after his prison time. He convinced Father Henry who seems to be a very wishy-washy person in the extreme. Got the job because he was there not because of his attributes."

"Did Brother Camonelli indicate why he had gone up to the Bell Tower at that time? Admit to being in the Tower?"

"Yes. To meditate. He said he did it regular like, especially when the weather was good."

"Bullshit.....I'd say it had to do with what the two of them were into...or there was a falling out between the two and the Brother wanted to patch it up....something, but not to meditate or pray to his Maker, that's for sure...."

"What-ever. I don't know if it is of any consequence as I doubt that the DPP will press charges or want to take him to Court on what we've got at the moment. Maybe not murder or conspiracy to commit murder but he may spend more time in prison for hisum...loathsome habit. Still, I think there will be some very worried persons on that School Board who will, by the time that all this settles, be facing serious charges....especially if Prentis gets his way....he's a fucking bulldog, that one. Thank Christ to-day is almost over."

We all drank to that.

I made a quick stop at the Hospital on the way home.

The ICU Ward.

I need not have bothered. Dallas was a mass of bandages in an induced coma. His prognosis not positive. Nothing had changed.

I had just missed “Bennie” Anderson who had been there since she knocked off work.

She was suffering.

Another broken heart in such quick succession. A hard time for anyone.

I promised myself that I would call in to see her.

Sometime.

Soon.

It was well after midnight by the time I crawled into bed.

42

I was flat for the rest of the week.

In fact the entire Squad Room was flat over the death of McPhillemy.

He may not have won any “Mister Personality” Awards or been voted the Squad's Number One son, but still, he was a member of the Squad.

It hit us all hard.

Some had good reason.

Others just because they were caring adults who did not take that extra step to help out the ugly duckling!

During the next ten days I had three appearances before the Standards and Ethics Committee into his death. Abbey, Liston, Daniels and two other Officers of the Squad were also called.

With all this heightened activity, we would still never be given a copy of the Committee findings into his death.

He was buried early that following week with the funeral expenses deducted from his Long Service Leave, Holiday Pay owing and “Time off in Lieu” payments. No money forthcoming from the NSW Government, the Force or the Police Association.

A suicide is not seen as a good omen or a positive advertisement for the Force.

Members of the hierarchy stayed away.

Rather callous I thought.

Some distant relative who did not even know the man was the recipient of a small windfall in the amount left.

None of us received any counselling from the Force for our grief....and in some cases it was more guilt that stained the flat feeling that engulfed the office for some time!

It left a nasty taste in my mouth.

Sometimes my opinion of the Force and its tall poppies made me feel bitter. Asking myself why I bothered with it at all.

Things must be a lot better on “the outside.”

43

I was angry with myself.

It had been close on six weeks since I had last been over to my Dad's and step-mother's place.

My fault. What with the week spent out at Dubbo and then the Mountains debacle and aftermath.

I was making excuses.

Dad waved away reasons for it being a while since our last visit.

“Son.....you're a cop. Say no more. OK? It's good to see you.”

I must admit that I was a bit taken aback by the appearance of the old man. For the first time, to me he looked like an old man with that grey, washed out look.

“I've had a cold. It's going around. Can't seem to shake it....”

The usual litany.

We'd finished our meal and were sitting around the table having a coffee with a Port. Dad's way of relaxing. It was also good for continuing the conversation.

I lent forward and opened my mouth. It just tumbled out.....from where it had sprung from, I had no idea. It had been ages since I even thought of my biological mother. She wasn't even a dim figure in my memories. She had walked out when I was no more than eighteen months old. I had no

concept of her. All I had was a low grade, grainy, out of focus shot of her that my father had given me not long after I had discovered his existence.

Tellie looked over at me with a surprised look on her face. It was not something that was the subject of any conversation with her. My mother was my Grandmother. That was how I was brought up. It was upon the death of the old girl that I had found out the truth. It had hit me for a bit....then I buried it, as I had buried the existence of a father, even.

“Dad? My Mum? Can you remember what she wanted to be as the two of you were together at High School?”

“A Teacher....she would have made a good teacher....son? Your a Cop. Why don't you see if you can chase her down?”

“We can't do that....”

“No. I didn't mean through official channels. I knew that you would be in strife if you tried something like that when it was for a personal reason.....but....you still know where to go when you chase something like that out.....you must do it all the time for your Murder Cases, eh?”

“Yeah, I suppose. I hadn't thought about it really. Bit stupid, eh?Doh!! Birth Deaths and Marriages would be the first step....then the Electoral Role.....white pages.....Council Registries.....the Internet.....newspapers and the Obit files.”

“Why the Birth, Deaths and Marriages first? That's the Registrar General Department, isn't it?” My Step-mother commented. She was ready for bed. We'll have to leave soon to allow these people their sleep. Late nights disagree with the Oldies, I thought to myself. I must be getting old!

“Well, if you can ascertain that she has died from their records, then you don't need to go any further....in fact you can just Google her name....you'd be surprised what that turns up.....also BD & M will give you her married name...if she has married....”

“It could turn out that you have a whole tribe of half brothers and sisters like our side of the family....” Dad gave out his wheezy giggle.

“Yeah...” I gave a chuckle at the thought. “Um....I don't know if I could handle another tribe on top.....I sometimes feel as though I'm drowning to be a brother and an Uncle to so many.....after such a long time of thinking that I was an only child in so many respects.....”

“At your own speed, Joe. At your own speed. You'll know when you are ready to find her....it'll be a big step for you finding her.....”

I didn't know whether I'd ever be ready for that step.

I figured that my father had already worked that out.

Maybe.

One day.

44

“So....we're we at?” Shelley asked as she spun her chair around to face me.

It was good to have her back even though I felt she should have stayed off for a little longer.

I filled her in on the Father Hertz homicide; possible suicide. The instructions that I gave Tom McPhillemy that may have very well pushed him over the edge. The current status of the “Bones under the Bridge” Case that had not progressed at all.

“Have you begun a missing persons search based on the updated criteria?”

“Yes and no....um I had started the search before we got called out to the Catholic School thing.....I stopped it, so no....I had instructed McPhillemy that that should have been his No.1 task when he hit the Office.....” I lowered my head. On some level, I felt guilty. But I also knew that a suicidal person is not really thinking of punishing some-one but is solely engrossed in their own inadequacies.....that their life was such a mess that they think there is no light at the end of that tunnel. It was self-absorption in the extreme. I know. I had almost been there!

“You know that we should expand that to include Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory.....” Shelley cut across my musing.

“Why only those States?”

“The probable point of entry into Australia.”

“Wouldn't it make sense to include every State and the Northern Territory? Maybe omitting Tasmania. It is more than likely that the girls' homicides occurred some time after their landing in the country.....perhaps close to the end of their twelve month visa term. More than likely they would have contacted their families back home of their travelling itinerary as they travelled.....you know, sending home happy shots....what a grouse time they were having...that type of thing.”

“You've changed your slant on them being captive sex workers to happy backpackers. You know that?”

I truly hadn't noticed and I wondered why that was so. I leaned back in my chair pleased that I had at last some one to bounce things off again. This lack had been stifling me and suppressing my enthusiasm and motivation.

Shelley shook her head, looking earnestly at me. I had the idea that she too, was glad to be

back in the fold. Back on deck. She was like me. Any long period away from work and being involved in days of non-activity bored the bejesus out of her.

“OK. I'll chase up with Missing Person in each State and re-run the search in NSW.....you, Joe, can chase out the current standing on those Skull Work-ups and where they are and contact Customs and Border Protection to obtain the information on persons matching the current criteria who have landed in Australia from those suspect countries in that one to five year window.....at least Customs and Border Protection is a Federal body....”

“I think it maybe a little early to contact the AFP....”

“Have we got anything back from the Queensland or Victorian Vice Units on possible missing sex workers from abroad?”

“Yes. In my In-box. No indication of any sex slave workers, especially three girls of those nationalities going missing together in the last five years. Nothing at all.”

“Do you think it is worthwhile contacting say South and Western Australia?”

“No. Not at this stage.”

“OK...we have a plan of action.....Joe? I'm glad to see that you're on top of your In-box e-mails”

She gave me a smile before grabbing the first Volume of the three volume set of the Murder Book. The First Volume always contained a list of all Phone numbers and names of persons contacted on the case since it began. It was located always after the History precis at the front of the folder. Little did she know it had only been three days ago that I had attended to the task of checking my In-box and transferring relevant material over to the Murder Book!

“Um, Joe? That time line. Commencing from a year ago through to five years ago? Is there any way that we can narrow that down as its a bloody wide window.....”

“All we've got is the post mortem results and collected trace at the site. They can't be more specific. Sorry. I know its a pain, but we're kind of ham-strung.”

She nodded her head as though I was spitting bullshit.

I guess she could easily stumble onto the date discrepancy between the date of the e-mail and the date of attachment into the Volume by reading through the precis History with the date of each e-mail and the date when it was attached to the file. If she did she did not jib me about it. Maybe later, huh?

45

“Detective, you are asking a bloody lot, you know. You want a list? Names, addresses, DOB's and next-of-kin with the Passport photo attached? Of every female between the ages of 18 through to 35 of either Japanese, Taiwanese, Korean or Chinese extraction that may have entered Australia in the last one to five years!!!!?? Fuck!!! Do you realise Detective, the number of persons who would have entered Australia in that time-frame on Tourist, Student, Working, and several other visa types? Within those criteria markers that you have provided.....fucking over one hundred thousand in total. Perhaps two hundred thousand? Per fucking year!! And you want Border protection and Customs to scramble through that many people who have entered Australia who have a north-east Asian Country of origin! Females only??!! It would be easier for you to send the Make-up images to us so that we can run them through our data banks for photo comparison.....if we had the data in our computers for every point of entry in Australia.....and the computer program to be able to seek it out....thank the Government for that oversight in not allowing a sum of money to be made available for us people to be able to do just that! We'd love to have it! It would make our job, especially in terms of Terrorist identification, so much easier!.....and if we had the time and the fucking resources on top, it could be possible! Understand, Detective? I doubt that the NSW Police Force would approve the monetary value that we would require from you to carry out such a task. Or vicey versa.....if we were capable! Thank you Detective. Take it easy, huh? Nice talking to you.”

He sounded pissed I thought. A bucketful!

The phone went dead.

“You take it easy too, dick-head.” I muttered into the sound of the dial tone.

I just had to get the last word in!

Some of these Commonwealth pen pushers have an over-important sense of self, I muttered to myself! Belatedly realising that I was a State Public servant....not much different!

46

“Joe? Look at this, will you?”

I scooted my chair around to Shelley's desk to peer at her computer screen. It was a newspaper article from a small provincial City in Victoria.

“I just Googled up 'three missing backpackers'. While I was waiting for the Missing Persons files to spew out some possibles based on that criteria from 'Muscles' Sarvich in the Post Mortem Report. Sure, I got Milat and the Belangalo Forest killing spree.....and a couple of others. One in Western Australia and another in Queensland where in both, one or two girls went missing together....and there is a frightening number of missing girls right around Australia, but this brought up a link to a TV Show....one of those Current Affairs Shows on the ABC on Backpacker employment where the kids are charged exorbitant amounts for accommodation in a country town, for food and expected to work without the normal breaks for up to 14 hours a day for an hourly rate far lower than the basic wage rate.....with some crud Contract Employee charging the farms involved the correct sums under Australian law with them pocketing the difference...or not paying the kids at all! Far out!”

“Any names?”

“The Whistle-blowers? The Backpackers, you mean?”

“Yeah.....”

“No....but let me contact the Newspaper and the Producer of the TV Show.”

My Mobile chirped its latest tune to celebrate the life and times of Cilla Black. The first bars of “Your My World” entertained the Squad Room.

“Detective Joe Lind. Murder Squad.” I murmured.

“Professor Basset from the National Museum, Detective.....I must apologise for the delay in providing those Skull Work-ups for you. You know the specimens gathered from under that bridge out Dubbo way a couple of weeks aback?”

“Yes Professor....” It had been close to two months since I spent a week out there. Never mind.

“Yes....sorry about that. We've had problems with the Program. It won't settle properly....”

“Does that mean that you cannot provide the 3-D imagery of the skulls?”

“Um...er....yes. Maybe no. We are not confident of the end result being close to that of the deceased persons.....because of that we will not charge you for the end result. My colleague needs to work on it a little longer....something to do with alternate algorithms or something. Sorry Detective.....I'm sending over the end result by Courier as we speak. The total file content was way too large to stream to you. Expect it within the hour. Two DVD's with back-up disc. Bye for now.”

Bugger, I thought to myself. We were hanging a fair bit of progress on those work-ups. We had nothing to make comparison tests with possible Missing Persons registry photographs.

My phone chirped again. I was sure that I heard some-one mutter *answer your fucking phone*. Some people have no respect for the recent dead.....how could you not like the music and voice of the great Cilla Black. Then again, a similar response was noticed when Dusty Springfield, Lesley

Gore and the anniversary date of Laura Branigan was celebrated by my mobile!

You can't please everyone, so it would seem.

I picked my mobile up and answered briskly. I wanted to stop the meek answering style I was getting into. Not good for people's perception of who was on the other end of the phone.

"Oh.....Detective Lind? I may have the wrong number. This number was left for me to ring...."

"Who is speaking?"

"Um.....Debbie Dayson-Lee. Hyphenated. I'm an Investigative Journalist with the ABC...."

I nearly dropped my mobile back onto its base. I loathed talking to the Media and distrusted them enormously. All of them, no exceptions!

"Debbie Dayson-Lee?" I repeated more for Shelley's benefit than anyone else. She spun around quickly at the sound of the name to nod her head vigorously.

"She was the Reporter on that story in The Enquirer in Shepparton some years back." Shelley loudly whispered and mouthed at the same time. "And the TV expose a little while ago."

I shook my head.

"Yes....you're right. It was my partner who left a message for you to ring us.....Shelley Shields....I understand that you did a piece for the Shepparton Enquirer some years back on the plight of underpaid and over-worked Backpackers in the area...."

"Oh, God. Yes. A while ago now.....a bloody travesty of justice that should not occur in this country. In fact we did an exposé some months ago for Channel Two....did you see it?"

"No...I'm afraid that I missed it...."

"Murder Squad Detective! Why are you kicking over old stones?" The Journalist in the woman came to the fore.

"All I can say is that I am the Lead Detective on a case that was widely reported on, a couple of months ago when human remains were discovered out near Dubbo....."

"Dubbo? Yes. I remember that....I thought....then more pressing things....um...what is it that you want from me? May I ask if you think that there is a relationship between those remains.....three persons wasn't it?....and my story of....gee.....three, maybe three and a half years ago. The paper lost a lot of staff around that time. Down-sizing and all that. I was unemployed for almost a year until I snagged this job with the ABC....any connections?"

"I'm sorry but I cannot comment on the case. All I will say is that we are still trying to identify the remains...."

"How did they die? How were they buried? Is there any evidence of foul play? There must be

if they were buried at such a remote locationand Homicide Cops investigating the case.....wasn't it under a bridge? Yes? Any evidence of foul play?.....”

“Mzzz.....Dayson-Lee. Look, I'm sorry. I can't divulge any information pertaining to the case. What I am asking is whether you had any names and photographs of the subject workers that were central to your story on file that you did not divulge in your story, way back?....or the TV show?.....and if so, why was such information left out of that story?....and if you do have photographs of the subjects, can we get a copy for comparison with our MPF's?”

There was silence on the end of the line.

“Mz Dayson-Lee?”

“Debbie will do.....look, I know that there is a story in this....I want exclusivity to the story...what-ever comes of it for any information that I may divulge to you....”

“Um...Mz Dayson-Lee.....this is a possible multiple murder investigation.....”

“I knew it. I knew it!”

Fuck!

I'd gone too far. I had a little bitch bulldog on the end of the line who now had her hackles up! And she would not give in without a fight!

Fuck!

“I'm sorry. We cannot, under any circumstance, make such an arrangement with a member of the Media. Good morning, Mz Dayson-Lee.”

47

I was printing out the newspaper article of almost 3 ½ years ago to attached to the Murder Book. Shelley had found the TV story. A short 10 minute story that didn't really provide much hard information but was filled with innuendo and inferences. Only one name was mentioned in the entire “bite”. Rzorbicello. My blood ran cold.

Shells yelled out to me.

“Joe? We've got 32 missing persons that fall within the base criteria and who have gone missing in that window time-line of between one and five years ago....”

“Thirty-two! That's averaging 6 to 8 a year! In Australia! Bloody hell!how many

Japanese?”

“Only two.....why did you ask about Japanese?”

“Well....I would imagine that the larger number are from mainland China. Japan being a more open and accessible country, there would be little need to actually lose yourself in Australia. Thus it could be assumed that those who have been reported missing have met foul play.....”

“That's good Joe. Impressive!”

“Stay with me, young lady and I'll teach you the world.” I flung my arms wide as though I was about to break out in song. Shelley shook her head. Ducked down as though hiding from notes flung high.

I ignored the obvious sleight.

I was in a good mood and nothing was going to spoil it.

I felt that we at last were progressing positively with the case.

“You'll need Abbey's approval before you organise a DNA sample to be taken from identified members of the families back in Japan for comparison. Better get onto it straight away as it will take some time in any case. Put only the two Japanese girls and there information on the file.....I would imagine that there are too many Taiwanese and Korean girls to worry about them.....”

“No....three Korean and one Taiwanese.....I'll do the same with them. The remainder are mainland Chinese. Twenty-six.....”

“A fair few of them would have wanted to disappear into the landscape, I would imagine.”

“Mmm....”

Hendo brought up a package to my desk.

“This was just dropped downstairs at the Reception Counter. From the National Museum. A Professor Basset.”

“Beauty.....Shells....start the ball rolling on those overseas DNA samples and then help me with this stuff. You maybe able to manage it a lot better than I. I'm bound to stuff it up.”

It was well after lunch before we downloaded the 3-D imagery skull work-ups.

“Hell, what's up with these? They look as though they're alive. Bloody marvellous what computers are capable of doing these days....”

“Pity that there are still mammoths about who have trouble playing Spider Patience!”

“If you must know Shells, I'm enrolled into a Computer Course starting next month. Three half days a week for.....six weeks I think it is. A couple of other “Mammoths” as you and Dallas describe me as, are also enrolled. Abbey's doing, actually. I didn't ask for it!”

“I bet you didn't.....About bloody time.....Joe? Look at that! That's one of the girls.....the Taiwanese...or is it the Korean on the MPF's.....a bloody good likeness. No doubt.....download the other file....”

“What? There's more?”

“Yeah.....there's four discs. A back-up each. They did the work on the two complete skulls that were discovered. Remember?”

She gave me a look as though she thought Alzheimers had finally arrived!

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The following day we were pretty sure that we had identified the two complete bodies. The third, or more correctly the last to be placed into the burial site, may never be identified....unless we can trace out the travelling companions of the two that we had identified.

We would have to wait for DNA substantiation before any more information on the identities was release to the Media and the Public.

A Japanese girl. Ikowa “Iggy” Podowa. Aged 20. A native of Tokyo. Travelling on a working visa for 12 months. Had arrived in Australia three to four short months before her suspected death.

A Korean girl. Benlin Ograhasa. Also aged 20. A native of a small village just south of Seoul in South Korea. Had a cancelled Student Visa with a Working Visa almost expired.

Now that we had two names we could begin the long and arduous task of tracing their movements around Australia to the time of their death.

We had Uniforms saturate backpacker Hostels and Student quarters around NSW with the names and two photographs of each girl. One a copy of their passport Photo and the other a copy of the skull work-up. We widened the search to include Queensland, Victoria, WA and NT with the co-operation of those State Police Forces.

I had only sat at my desk some days into the trawl. Straight after a hurried lunch. Shelley was holding the fort while I wasted my time!

My head numb.

Ready to explode.

Too full of “things” that I wondered would never be of any use.

I'd had a morning of mind-blowing tuition on the cleverness of Computers, iPads and smartphones. A simple over-view before we stepped into complete chaos of each instrument and their interconnectivity and uses.

My head was whirling.

A hurried gulp of a large coffee mug didn't make it any better.

My phone rang. Still on Cilla Black. Her rendition of the Righteous Brothers song "You've Lost that Loving Feeling." Again there were those who wouldn't or couldn't respect the dead!

"My spies tell me that there is a blanket search being conducted in four States concentrating on two persons in particular. "Iggy" Podowa from Japan and Benlin "Bee" or "Benji" Ograhasa from South Korea. Funny enough they were two of the girls my original story rotated around. Along with six other girls that I interviewed. I'm willing to provide the names of all the girls questioned for that Newspaper piece back all those years ago, including a rough route of their travels up to then, several photographs including group photos and family and employment history. All transcribed from a series of taped interviews that I undertook over four days in the Spring of 2012...um....for exclusive rights to your investigation....."

I was on the verge of telling her where to go...or threatening her with a Court Order to prise the information out of her.

I thought better of it.

"Give me your phone number Mz. Dayson-Lee and I'll ring you back inside fifteen. OK?"

"I'll wait for your return call."

I filled Shelley in on the developments.

"Can she provide much more than what we've got?" She asked. We were always very reluctant to involve the Press in this way, as though there was a tit-for-tat arrangement. Something that most cops loathed.

Abbey asked the same question.

"Boss, it may make all the difference, especially if she can supply names and faces of fellow travellers. That will possibly lead us close to identifying the third cadaver....and a clue to the "How", the "Why" and "Where". Witnesses and friends who can possibly supply names of POI's."

Abbey nodded his head.

"Mmm....she asking for exclusivity? We can't guarantee that. See if you can appeal to her sense of decency and altruism." He smiled at that.

We thought collectively as cops, that most people in the Media lacked common decency, honesty and a heart!

49

“Thanks for coming. Come through....um....the place is a bit of a mess. Mind the cat. The dog won't bite you, instead just cover you in warm sloppy kisses....”

We followed the woman down the narrow hallway. Our footsteps echoing on the bare timber boards.

“I purchased this house partly with my severance payment from Fairfax, thinking that I would turn it into Le Grande Chateaux! Wild dreams. Wild ideas and not much understanding of what time and effort it really takes to turn the reality into a semblance of your dream. Two years and I'm still living out of two rooms!” She laughed at this. “Mind your head on that plank. The last thing I want is to be sued by members of the Murder Squad.....buried bodies and all that. I bet you know of some good ways of disposing of a body.”

“Yes. Under a pile of paint spilt drop sheets.....lying about in the Hallway of an ABC Reporter.” We all had a giggle over that comment.

“Please sit. Please. Push the dog off. Jack! Down! Show a bit of hospitality to our visitors.” The little Jack Russell gave me a filthy look before jumping from the lounge suite.

“I've made a jug of coffee. Fill when you want. Butterfly cakes? Before Jack devours them....um....I had a think after I spoke to you.....I think that I may have contributed to the death of those poor girls. Plunging in where angels fear to tread I think may explain a lot. The blind enthusiasm of the too eager Cub Reporter.”

Debbie Dayson-Lee was a short bundle of energy. An attractive face. Long dirty blondish hair pulled back in an untidy bun. Piercing large eyes. A sensuous mouth. A body that had a low centre of gravity with too wide a hip line that would give her the appearance of a ripe Pear if she ever turned to fat. I felt that her facial structure would ensure that she was photogenic. She looked to be in her teens though our research of her had put her in her mid-thirties. Single. Never married. Obtained her English Lit and Journalism Degree at Melbourne MIT in 2002. One cat. One dog and a mother whom she adores who lived in country Victoria. Shepparton in fact.

The girl returned to her roots so to speak, for a while at least.

Now home in Cammeray on the northern side of the Harbour. Close to the ABC studios across the Bridge.

“I won't mess about. I've provided you with a copy of the various videos that I took as I interviewed the respective girls...mainly. Individually and as small groups. Most of the footage is of Overseas Backpackers. From all over the place, not just Asian countries. Plus copies of all notes

that I took at other times....can you read shorthand? Um.....it was two British...Pommy girls who I first spoke to. Barbara Forrest and Diane Street. Liverpudlians.....”

She spun a couple of 8X4 colour head shots across the table at us. Attractive Caucasian young women with that healthy look of the wide outdoors. I made a comment implying as much.

“Yeah.....” Dayson-Lee replied. “Under the summer sun....not too good for the skin but they seemed to enjoy the experience....up to a point.....Um.....They came into the Office as I was coming in from some assignment. A fact-gathering mission on how Missus Greene down Main Street was doing in Hospital most likely....after a fall in her Kitchen! Such is the life of a reporter in a small provincial newspaper.”

She giggled at this.

Took a sip of coffee.

Bit into a Butterfly cake.

Motioned for us to join her.

How could one refuse?

“I was there, so I ran with it. They wanted to know whether it was true that Australia had a minimum wage and whether they were entitled to it as Backpacker 'Pickers'. Of course I wanted to know why they were asking, offering to go to the local Coffee Shop and have a discussion over a nice cup. They were very reticent about being seen with me just in case some-one saw them speaking to me...a Reporter. It would get them into trouble. So I took them to one of the small ante rooms and recorded the first conversation. Underpayment of wages. Withholding wages. Expected to work 12 to 14 hours a day without breaks. Ten to twelve days straight without penalty rates. Exorbitant rental costs where 10 to 20 people were in the one house paying \$50 to \$120 a week for the right to the accommodation. Food on top....and it was worse for non-speaking English Backpackers who didn't have a clue about Industrial Relations or the laws of employment. From where they come from, life wasn't like that or the rights of the worker protected. A bloody great scam. A rort is how I saw it.”

She stopped and turned her Laptop around so that we could see it. Started up the video of the first interview with the two girls. The two girls most vocal and angry as they continued their story, occasionally listening to the advice given to them. At one stage a large smarmy man popped his head into the Office to listen to the conversation. He left not long after he had heard the gist of the conversation.

“Your Editor?” Shells asked as the video finished.

“Yes. Bill Vittoria.....I don't know where he is now though. He lost his job at the same time as I did.”

“The two Pommies? What happened?”

"I had three interviews with them over a week...all recorded. Everything was going fine until they suddenly said that they were pissing off. Heading for Perth. They'd been threatened apparently. By one of the Boss's lackeys.....who by the way, it is alleged raped several of the Chinese and Korean girls. The same guy bought the food. Drove the little bus that picked them up before dawn from their accommodation to drop them off at some farm. Picked them up on sundown to drive them back to the same house in town. So much for seeing the local sights or for that matter travelling the highways and the by-ways of this great country. The guy would have a key to the house and would let himself in to drop off the food once or twice a week. It was said that there was evidence that he rifled through belongings.....and if some-one was home sick or something, invariably they would be raped....."

"Why weren't the local Police informed?"

"Those feisty Poms? Said it was too much trouble hanging over their heads....the Asian girls? Their opinion of coppers wasn't good.....you know, back in their home countries the cops are feared.....and the language barrier? Don't make waves is a big part of their lives."

"How about you?"

She looked down at the coffee mug. Swirled it in her hand. Shrugged her shoulders.

"To tell you the truth, all I could see was a huge breaking story.....with my own by-line."

I looked across at her. Her anguish seemed real. I was almost convinced of her honesty. Wanting to appease her guilt and possible part in the three deaths by emptying her soul.

"What nationalities?"

"All?.....or mostly Asian. Filipino. Malay. Korean. Chinese. Japs. Thais. Taiwanese. The lot....there is a huge floating mass of people out there every year following the harvest times from Queensland down through NSW to Victoria. Some then go to Tassie but most head back up to Queensland for the later picking season. Even a lot of the Grey Nomads have learnt about the good money that can be made for part of the year. In fact, you can follow the harvest time right around Australia if you want to....and physically capable of handling the work. And the travel. Mostly there's no problems. Most Farmers....the majority are good. Honest. Fair dinkum. But there is that small minority who prey upon the naive. The non-English speaking Backpackers who don't know their rights. Work practises or ethics of this country and often get trapped in that cycle where the Contract Employer uses them for months at a time. Skimming the cream off the top.....abuses what they're supposed to be paid.....where they live."

"So how are these unscrupulous Operators getting these young people year after year?"

"You've just explained it yourself.....year after year a new crop of Backpackers. Remember it's a 12 month visa permit. These guys usually speak their lingo....or have people who recruit them from Hostels or even straight off the plane...or pay the Hostels Owners a premium to spread the word...or simply advertise by flyers left at those Hostels....simple really. The young ones come over

here intent on travelling around and have heard of the money that can be had that helps with their travel itinerary....it fits like a glove. One with the other.”

“But surely.....”

“No....remember, that huge floating population base....the short period of time and the timidity and suspicion of any Government authority that a lot of the young ones have. It's an inbred sort of thing for some of these people. Guys and girls.”

Shelley shook her head.

“Yes...it is kind of made for some bastard ready to exploit, I guess....”

Dayson-Lee nodded her head in agreement.

“So what happened? The story was published in the local paper but then appeared to die....and it was rather tipid. The story you tell wasn't really printed. Why?....there wasn't a lot of content as you have just described.....in fact it was rather sanitised.”

“As you can see when you read the Article, the crux of the story had been watered down....I was told...no ordered to water it down. I had already assured the girls that I would not publish their names or use any photos of them....they were dead scared actually....but my Editor really cut the story to the bone with the crux of the article eventually being on the huge itinerant worker population and how it benefited the local community and economy.....nothing really outspoken about how so many of the Backpacker community were being abused, raped and robbed of entitlements....”

“Seems to me as though your Editor was in the loop with these dishonest and criminal Contract Employers....”

“Yeah.....I thought that too and began to dig around....until I was told to stop....which was not that long before I was paid off.”

“Mmm....you have names? Dates?”

“Yep. It's all in the transcriptions....”

“You are now an Investigative Reporter for the ABC. Television?”

“Yes...”

“Why haven't you expanded on your knowledge of the rort? Began a story on it?”

“I have. We are. With the blessing of the Director....but I want to tread lightly because....as I said....I think I contributed to the death of those girls....I do not want a repeat. I couldn't live with myself if it happened again.....so I want to ride the wave on your back....if I could?”

I nodded my head. I trusted her. I felt sorry for her. I knew how she must have felt.

“What happened to the two Pommy girls?”

“I don't know and that is what troubles me the most....I just don't know. They could be dead!”

“OK....we have their names. Age. Their place of birth. Their approximate time of entering Australia? Is that true?....and we are pretty sure after searching through the Missing Person Files of every State in Australia for that time-frame, that their names are not listed.....so sleep easy in that regard. OK?”

“Yes. Well....that's what they told me and I've got no reason to not believe what they said in that regard. They landed at Sydney straight from London.”

“OK. We'll find out where they are before we go any further with other enquiries. OK? We'll let you know as soon as we discover anything. OK?”

Shelley was silent for some time as we headed back towards Parramatta.

“OK Shells. What?”

“You're a bloody softy when it comes to big, beautiful eyes and the sniffles. I don't know whether Abbey meant that we would keep her closely informed.....”

“My take was that we should analyse what information she had and whether it would be relevant to our enquiries. If it is, then we may negotiate....”

“Analysis hasn't happened yet as far as I can see and the relevance to our investigation is a long way off, yet...”

“Arrh...details, Shells. Details. Mere details.”

She shook her head slowly and turned to peer out the window as suburbia slipped by.

50

We gave all the photographs that we received from Dayson-Lee to our Forensic Group. They would analyse and compare those photos and all the subjects against the Passport, MPF shots and the skull work-ups to see whether we could confirm identities.

We would still require DNA samples from family members to be absolutely sure.

“What? You guys angling for a trip to England....or a couple of Asian countries.....no flies, eh Joe?”

“If'n ya don't ask ya got no way of gettin', Boss!”

“I suspect that you really know the answer before you even ask....so why ask?”

“Just to see the expression on your face, Boss!”

He nodded his head, a broad smile on his face.

“OK...touché....Border Protection and Customs? You have the girls' names, DOB's, date of entry and City of Birth....they will have an address on their records so that New Scotland Yard can do the digging for you. Mind you, it's been what? Three years? Four years? They could be anywhere....even here in Australia. As far as the Japanese and Korean girls are concerned? The AFP will need to be informed so they can chase out the parents for DNA comparison samples....and you are confident of finding the identity of the third girl?”

“Yes....from the transcriptions of the interviews with the group of girls we should be able to narrow down the possibles with names of their fellow Backpackers with the lists of Oriental girls that we have from the MPF's.....we'll get there Boss.”

“Good....OK, we have who they are.....why and who did the dirty deeds?”

“Mmm....I have my theory, but let's take it one step at a time.”

I sat heavily at my desk.

“Bugger!” I exclaimed.

“What? We are not going to get permission to go overseas? You weren't seriously thinking we had a chance, did you?” Shelley asked between fits of the giggles.

“Would have been nice” I said. “A first, even. To solve three murders it wouldn't be that high a price to pay.....”

“Christ, Joe. You amaze me at times....look, let's grab one of the Interview Rooms and start to run through those videos at the same time that we read through the transcriptions. We may learn something.”

We began the slow process of familiarising ourselves with the transcriptions, videos and shorthand notes. Shelley at least went through the short hand notes.

That afternoon, we knocked off early knowing that the task would take several days of plodding, boring work but it was possibly the only way that we could progress the case.

We did a dozen laps of the pool and 15 minutes on running machines. Shelley did 100 metres more over my distance for the length of time. I was bloody amazed!

After a rub-down and a shower, we headed to the Hospital.

Nothing had changed much. Fresh bandaging not as extensive, covered his head. His face yellow with tinges of black. It looked as though he took a serious head clash in the accident. Apart from the thigh and hip which were a mangled mess apparently. The other guy had been drunk as,

and going at a fast speed when he T-boned Dallas. Right in the driver's side door. It was miraculous that Dallas had survived at all. There were whispers for a while that suggested he may have been better off if he hadn't. I can't follow that logic at all! But then.....I'm not the one who maybe confined to a wheelchair and be incapable of speech or other functions for the rest of my life....but then, Dallas maybe one of those that astound medical science!

We stayed for 30 minutes.

A figure came to the door and then receded.

"That was his father, I think." Shelley murmured.

"Yes it was." Bennie Anderson replied as she walked into the room. "He's come twice so far and according to the Day Staff he has been here a couple of times during the day. Not for long. Stays. Appears to pray over Dallas then pisses off...."

"Thawing, you reckon?"

"Nah. Don't think so. I think it maybe just some form of guilt...or some righteous sense that drives him to think that he may be able to help in his son's healing process but doesn't want anything to do with anyone who is outside his narrow life-style...."

"Mmm.....don't be too critical.....you'd be no better then them....try to bridge the divide...."

"Fuck them....you wouldn't believe what they've done to their children...not just Dallas...but..."

She waved her arm to dispel the conversation

I don't like Hospitals at the best of time. To-night I felt a feeling of complete release as we stepped out into the cool night.

A change of seasons was in the air.

"I always thought that Dallas was an only child." Shelley commented as we headed towards our Unmarked. Shells had acquired a spare from the Basement Car Pool knowing that it was going to be a late night, and where she lived, transport was pretty rare at this time of night.

I shrugged my shoulders but the comment tugged at my brain. The comment gently pulled at lost comments that were said by.....I didn't know.

As on many occasions when an investigation was proceeding at a snail's pace but the feeling was that we were close to cracking it, I went home and slept on it. Something would whiz around in my subconscious mind as I slept and gently lock into place. Tellie would really get the burps because of the broken sleep, but I would be none-the-wiser. Walking energetically around the Flat or donning my running gear, no matter what time it was, to mull over the little gem of information that had fallen from the stars, as I jogged into the night!

There was no hope of getting back to sleep!

No matter how much I tried.

If I tried, then a bruised back was the consequence from Tellie as I tossed and turned, keeping her too, from further sleep.

Something that she hated immensely. If she didn't get the required eight hours without disruption, she didn't function the following day. At all!

51

I drove into town and parked in the basement vehicle parking area of the College Street Police HQ building.

It was a brisk walk across the Park to Macquarie Street and the Registrar Generals Department. There were quite a few people mulling around in the Public Waiting Area. I walked up to a manned cubicle position at the long counter and flashed my badge.

A pleasant overweight woman looked up and hit me with a practised smile.

“Can I help you, Detective?”

What a stupid question, I thought to myself. If I didn't need her help I would not have approached her! Doh!

“Yes....um...I hope so. I have a need to locate a person. An ongoing Cold case of some forty-six years ago.” That brought me up short. I *was* getting old. “Could have rung it through but it's a nice day. Better out here than in the stuffy Office....”

Cool it, I thought to myself. You're trying too hard!

“What is the name of your suspect?”

That didn't sound right.

“Um..... Beverley McCullough. Spelt the same way as that Australian author. The Thornbirds.”

“Yes....” The woman replied as she tapped the keys. “Um...do you have the approval form?”

I'd forgotten about that. When you flashed the Badge, it was immediately thought that it was an official matter. I had made it worse by stating that it was an old case.

“Um.....hell, I left it in the Unmarked. Its parked down at Police HQ....look, i'll pay for it as long as you give me an official receipt. I can recoup when I get back to the Office.”

“OK....that's \$175.....um if you need more than her place of birth, DOB and her married name, place and date of marriage we'll need a another \$175.....such as present address and marital status....”

“Hell...Um...look, I'm pressed for time. Card OK? I can chase out the rest through the normal police channels....oh....to make it a bit easier for me.....is she still married to the same guy?”

The woman looked at me with a stony stare.

“I shouldn't but, yes.”

She handed me a print-out with the information.

I paid the amount and was gone. The print-out folded tightly and placed in my coat pocket. I didn't know whether I could look at it.

Ever.

52

“Remember Dayson-Lee mentioning her Editor coming into the room momentarily as she interviewed the two Pommy girls?” I asked Shelley. I was half lounging in my desk chair. The back wound as far back as it would go. My feet up on my desk. It looked as though I'd been here half the night.

If the truth be known, I had, scanning through the Murder Book looking for something to hit me in the face.

I didn't have a clue but I sure would feel it when it did!

“Yeah...no.....I can't remember. Why? What is so important about it that it has made you camp here for half the night?”

“Is it that obvious? I have no idea....you want a coffee?”

“I need a couple of laps of the pool....you?”

“Nah. Coffee. Join me. Downstairs in the Coffee Jar. Some Vegemite and toast. Hmmm? My shout.”

“Mmm....sounds more leisurely than 10 laps of the pool.”

Our order came.

The smell of fresh toast and Vegemite filling my nostrils. I must be getting old as it gave me a sense of euphoria that not even sex at that time of morning could match.

I'll say no more!

"Remember you said that you thought Dallas was an only child.....and....and..... Diane Street, the second of the Pommy Backpackers....she was an only child....."

"Yes? Go on....."

I shook my head. I'd lost it. It had come to wake me up. Satisfied at its success, it had immediately flown....to some lonely planet I reckon.

"Shit.....an only child. No brothers or sisters...."

"Forget it, Joe. Wipe it from your memory banks...then it'll come back. Keep on trying to remember it, and it will hide behind the moon for ever....my father used to say that. Huh. Funny how things like that come at odd times." She shook her head. "Huh, my old man! Shit. What a time to think about him." She took a sip of coffee.

"You don't like talking about him, do you Shells?"

"No. Not really.....a bent cop is a bent cop...."

"But you became a cop because of him....I mean.....at the time of you making that decision, you didn't know that he was a bent cop, did you?"

"No....I didn't actually. I remember when he and Mum were still married....I guess I was around ten years of age....I thought he looked the most magnificent man in the whole wide world dressed up in his uniform....." She smiled

I near upset the table trying to take my mobile out of my pocket.

"Shit!" I exclaimed as I scrolled down to the number that I wanted, hitting the green button excitedly.

"Joe! It's good to hear from you, but I'm on the train. Coming to work.....sheer magnetism eh?" She chuckled.

"Your perfume, my dear..."

"Don't wear perfume, Joe."

"Your pheromones then..." I chuckled.

"That musky smell after...." She laughed. "Joe? People are starting to take an interest in our conversation. What do you want at this hour of the morning....couldn't you sleep?"

"To tell you the truth, no! Remember when you gave me a run-down on the Rzorbicello family in Melbourne?"

“Joe. Joe. You think that you are the only Officer that fronts my desk with a look like a forlorn puppy asking questions about various things? That was what? Several weeks ago.....”

“Yeah. Yeah. You remember then?”

“Bloody Hell, Joe. OK....OK. What about the family?”

“You said that one of the sons....or a cousin, perhaps, married a girl from a big Italian family that had large family holdings around the Shepparton area in Victoria and around Leeton in NSW. Remember? What was that family name?”

“The Vittoria family. Fourteen kids. One of the girls married Renald Rzorbicello who was the third son of the brother who controlled the Melbourne Mafia.....with ties in Adelaide and Perth. All from the same Sicilian village. On the south coast of the island. Came out at the same time to Australia. The family name back on the island well known to the Anti-Mafia Police. Still into the rackets. Drugs a big component now. Good money for little effort. It is purported that quite a bit of the drug trade coming into Australia originates with that family. Several big heists by the AFP in conjunction with several State Police Forces has been embarrassing and expensive for the two families. It is even whispered that the Rzorbicello family have a severe cash flow problem at the moment....I hope that there is no member of the Press occupying a near seat on this train, Joe.....I'd have a hard time explaining this to my superiors.”

“....and one of the Vittoria brothers was the Editor for the Shepparton Enquirer. Lost his job a couple of years back during that big Fairfax shake-up of provincial newspapers.....”

“Don't know about that, Joe. You know more than I on that side of things.”

“That is why there was never any big stories about the Rzorbicello *or* Vittoria Holdings in farms in both locations.....”

“So?”

“You're a bloody genius, my love. A bloody genius.”

I heard a muffled *I know* as I withdrew the mobile from my ear and signed off.

For the rest of the week I obtained every scrap of information that I could on both the Rzorbicello and Vittoria families and dutifully logged it into the Murder Book which now had blossomed to five Volumes.

53

“Detective Joseph Lind? This is Senior Constable Benjamin O'Toole of New Scotland Yard. Immigration Liaisons Office for Commonwealth countries. We were asked by your AFP Office in Canberra to track down two young girls who had backpacked around Australia in 2012-2013.....”

“Yes? 'Owyagoin'?”

“Sorry?”

“It's all right, Officer. How can I help you?”

“I believe I can help you. Our enquiries.....the two girls in question. Barbara Elizabeth Forrest and Diane Dorothy Street. Both now 23 years of age. One still lives in Liverpool and is engaged. She has indicated that she is willing to talk to you at any time that fits into her time-table. Preferably around Dinner Time local time. Seven to eight in the evening. I guess that would be around 4 or 5 in the morning for you. I've spoken personally to Dianne Dorothy Street.....”

Bloody hell that's a stupid statement! Speaking personally.....how else do you speak to a person? Impersonally?! Pommies don't know how to speak the Queen's English!

“.....who now lives in Sydney. Hornsby Heights. 43 Valleyview Street.....um.....do you want her phone number and e-Mail address? She was a bit concerned about speaking to you on the events that led up to them leaving Victoria so suddenly all those years ago, but if you can keep her name out of the limelight, she would be willing to see you. She is married. One child. Only just born. ”

My heart skipped a beat.

“Thank you Senior Constable. That is a huge help, sir. I hope one day to be able to return the favour....”

“I'll hold you to that, Detective. Pity about The Ashes.....next time perhaps! You Aussies have just got to remember that after all, it's just a game of cricket!” He chuckled at his comment.

Just a game of cricket be buggered!

It was the closest thing to a declaration of war that a mother and son could achieve!

Typical Pom!!! Just had to get the dig in though. Wait until the return 'leg' and we'll thrash you like last time. 5 zip!

54

A small, white painted weatherboard and fibro dwelling in need of a paint and a clean of its tiled roof. I couldn't see any valley views. An example of a 60's style War Service Home of the era. A neat garden. Several tall gums in one corner at the front boundary. An old Mazda under a Carport that required a bit of attention. It would collapse in a decent blow I thought to myself as we walked under it to get to the front door.

A young woman answered the front door, expecting us at this time.

Clear skin. Shiny eyes. Laughter lines. Perhaps looking a little tired. A new Bubs would explain that. Long dirty brown hair pulled back in a ponytail. Trackies and a T-shirt spotted with yuck.

"Sorry, I've just finished breast-feeding. I cop it sometimes. Let me put a clean shirt on." The smell was recognisable from many years ago. There was no mistaking the smell of regurgitated breast milk.

She ushered us into a neat Lounge Room. Minimal furniture. Cheap but clean. She sat opposite us.

Offered coffee which we declined.

"I'm.....I'm not too sure now how they met one another, but the three of them became as thick as thieves....I think it may have been Airlie Beach. In Queensland. They were short of dosh so they hooked up with a group going up to the Atherton Tablelands to do picking. When me and Barby met them, they'd been on the "Picking trail" for a good four months....with not much to show for it except a sore back, a suntan and calloused hands!"

She giggled at the memories.

"Um...let me think...I've got some photographs of them....."

She stood and went to a series of shelves balanced on painted concrete blocks to reef out a Photograph Album. One of many. Photography was a hobby so it seemed. Placing it on a couple of milk crates that was the coffee table, she flipped the pages until she came to the photos that she wanted.

Tapped them with a finger.

We took a good look at the shots. Several showing a large group of youths of various nationalities. Most with broad smiles. Broad hats.

"That's down outside Leeton. On the Murrumbidgee. That was where I first met my Darryl. He

went one way to follow the surf and I with a lot of that group ended up down around Shepparton....with that arsehole Italian who robbed us blind.....I met up with Darryl again when we were over in Western Australian. Margaret River. Quite by accident.....and the rest is history as they say....and I wouldn't have it any other way. Miss my family a bit, but they're coming out later in the year. The start of the northern winter in fact. They'll complain bitterly about the heat, but they wouldn't be fair dinkum Poms if they didn't." She couldn't be mistaken for anything else either, with still a broad Liverpudlian accent.

She smiled. Flipped over a couple of pages as though she hadn't looked at them for a while.

I opened up my file and placed a copy of several "head shots" in front of her.

"Um.....So there was.....a Japanese girl.....Ikowa "Iggy" Podowa.....yeah. Her!" She tapped her finger on the photograph that I had placed in front of her. She nodded her head. "Yeah, she could speak credible English.....and Benlin Ograhasa. Yeah, her." Again there was recognition and a smile at past memories. "She couldn't speak a word of English...or Japanese for that matter....we called her Benji. She used to follow Iggy around like a lost puppy.....and.....yeah....." She looked at the last photograph that I placed in front of her. "Yeah....huh....can't remember her proper name but we called her Shelley...." She looked up at my partner with a glimpse of sadness on her face. "She had a small pile of shells that she had collected around the place...mainly in Queensland I guess. Korean too, I'm pretty sure. We seemed to get on well....you actually had to as you were living in each other's pocket. On top of one another in that bloody house in.....Shepparton. I'm going to go back there one day and tell the bastards that I'm going to put them into the Cops....for something!"

"No need to. We're onto them.....and the third girl that you called Shells? Ishaya Isharya. South Korean also."

"Yeah, that was it. How can you forget such a beautiful name like that...it meant something.....I forget.....I noticed that you were Murder Detectives. Why are you asking about Iggy and the others?"

She flipped over a couple of pages of her Album. It seemed to hit her as she sat there. She looked from Shelley to me. Tears welling up in her eyes. She sprang to feet and excused herself. We could hear muffled sobs for some moments before she composed herself. She came back into the room blowing her nose. Shells had stood to see if she was OK.

"Sorry....they're dead aren't they? I'd often wondered why I never got any replies to my e-mails.....we exchanged e-mail addresses with Iggy before Barby and I split from Victoria. We warned them....we said that they should come with us but....they were promised to be paid the money owing to them if they agreed to travel back up to Queensland for the late Picking season.....yeah, pigs might fly too....they're dead, aren't they. Murdered?"

"Why would you say that?"

"You're Murder Cops....and....they were sleazy bastards. We fronted them after we spoke to that Reporter who told us about the minimum wage and conditions here in Australia. Barby lashed

out at the crud. Hit the guy in the balls....boy, she could get rough when she wanted to....or if her hackles were up.....we screamed that we were going to the Cops as we reckoned that they owed us over two grand each.....that's when they got real creepy.....grabbing both of us by the throats. Threatening us....we lit out that night. Didn't hang around. Got on the road about one in the morning. Caught the first train out to Melbourne first, then a bus across to Perth. We wanted as much space as we could between them and us.....they were scary dudes, let me tell you.”

“Were the other three there when all this happened?”

“Yeah. Standing beside us with about....Oh, I forget.....maybe half a dozen other backpackers who were staying in the house. We were all owed money. Big time for a couple of them. Iggy. Benji and Shells.....shit. They were killed because of what Barby and I found out.....No! No!”

I placed a couple of shots of different “bad guys” that did not jolt her memory.

“Um....I'm sure that I got a couple of shots that included the creep that drove the bus.....” She flipped a couple of pages. Back again. “Yeah. Here. That dude was *the* creeps. There were whispers that he rifled through our gear while we were out picking....and raped a couple if they were at the house pulling a sickie....threatening to take all the money if they said anything.....”

I looked down at the shot of a skinny guy in shorts and T-shirt. I had seen the face before. I asked if we could take a photo of the photo. She removed the photograph from the plastic sleeve.

She turned over the pages.

“Here....this is the Italian guy. The Boss who held the money. Bloody great wads that he carried about thinking that it impressed us. I reckon most of it was ours! See that guy beside him....oriental looking guy. An Australian though. He could speak about a dozen languages. Mandarin. Korean and a bit of Japanese besides. He was a nice guy actually, though I guess he must have been as bad as the other two to be associated with them.” She wiped her eyes with another tissue. Shook her head.

“I guess that Barby and I were lucky to get out of there, eh? Shit, we tried to talk Iggy and the others to come with us....shit. Shit!”

We took copies of those shots and several of the group

“Did they kill Iggy and the others?”

“We suspect so...but proving it maybe a little difficult after all this time.....we need witnesses and a lot more forensic evidence....”

The attractive young woman nodded her head. Wiped tears from her eyes.

A baby started to cry from the front of the house.

“James.....he must have a dirty nappy.....these babies sure can shit. I need my Mum. I can't wait for her to come out to give me a hand. I never thought it would be this hard.....”

We excused ourselves, letting ourselves out of the house as she fussed over the new-born.

I sat in the driver's seat of the Unmarked and sighed.

“Bloody very little links the bastards to the homicide deaths. We need a lot more....I can take a guess at why the girls were killed but that doesn't get us any closer....do you think that a trip down to Shepparton would be prudent, Shells?”

She was on the phone talking to Dayson-Lee. Giving her Dianne Dorothy Street 's details. The young woman had approved the arrangement, especially after we hinted that there maybe a payment involved for her story.

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“Yeah, Boss. We're watching it!” I shook my head in disbelief. “No wonder we always think twice about cooperating with the Media....I'd say that we will get bugger all out of anybody down here now.”

I promised myself that I would never again befriend another Journalist in my life-time. I think this maybe the fourth or fifth time that I had made that promise to myself!

We were in Shepparton, armed with several Court Orders to look through employment records of three farms and a local Employment Contractor. The Contractor one Renald Rzorbicello who seemed to have a monopoly on the movement of Backpacker “Pickers” on the entire east coast seaboard across three States.

The Channel Two one hour story fleshed out the prior 10 minute byte. It laid out the relationships of a certain family with the Sicilian Mafia and its continued ties to “the family” on that island. It gave precise details of the illegal activities of the Family in Australia and its involved and circuitous tentacles in various cities and State Capitals. A Family tree was studiously examined with off-shoot rogues, far second and third cousins investigated. Hinted at or found guilty by association. This included large farming establishments in Victoria, NSW and southern Queensland. Naming names. Photographing and filming persons that had unsavoury family and criminal connections. Some leaning against tractors talking to the “unsavoury” relatives.

The depth of the investigative reporting was breathtaking with the cream being the various deaths associated with the families (now plural) including our three “Bones under the Bridge” investigations.

Their identity broadcast as though DNA confirmation had occurred.

There was also a tenuous link to a disappearance and probable slaying of a local Politician many years ago when the area had been the centre of marijuana plantations in this part of Australia.

Our “Bones under the Bridge” only three of a purported dozen homicides attributable to the “Association”.

It was a staggering piece of investigative journalism that must have taken some time, subterfuge and cunning to piece together. I thought back to my couple of conversations with Dayson-Lee. There had been no instances where she had intimated that such an investigative coup was in the pipe-line, or in fact, close to broadcasting! In fact I got the distinct impression that she felt terribly guilty about knocking the Hornet's nest those couple of years ago with her first conversations with the girls causing their deaths.

We were obviously hoodwinked, being subtly coerced into us providing her with information with scant results the other way.....then I thought about it. We had obtained valuable photographic evidence of the three and Dianne Dorothy Street's collaborative story which basically enabled us to obtain these Court Orders.

How-ever, I knew then that we would be wasting our time in this Victorian farming community. What-ever incriminating evidence there may have been was well and truly buried, burnt or gotten rid of, so I thought!

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We walked into the office of Sunshine Farms Temporary Employment Contractors armed with a specific Order to examine all Contract employment records in a five year window between 2010 through to 2014.

The woman, who identified herself as the Office Manager appeared extremely nervous at our perceived intrusion.

“Um....Renny....um.....Mister Rzorbicello? He isn't here. He's in Ipswich. In Queensland on a “Picker” Trip.....”

“Is that a regular thing?” I asked her as I handed her the Court Order to search the premises.

“Um.....” She looked at the sheath of papers. “.....um.....twice a year, what's this stuff?”

“A Court Order permitting us to search these premises thoroughly....”

“I don't think I can allow that without the Boss being present....”

“You have no choice in the matter.....Missus?”

“Loretta Lucia...um....Rennie is actually my uncle even though he is younger than me.....can I ring him?”

“Sure, but that won't stop us, I'm afraid. Which way is your Filing Room....where you keep all the old Records....you do keep your old records for seven years don't you. Your old financial records for seven years.....”

“Yes....” She waved an arm towards the rear of the open office area. I nodded my head to the four Victorian Coppers and the two Forensic Officers that had accompanied us from Sydney. Directed them to a door set in the rear wall that lead out to an attached garage large enough to house a 'medium sized' mini-bus with another room off that.

The store room.

“Mister Rzorbicello's Office?” I asked as I came back into the general office area.

“He doesn't like anyone going into it when-ever he isn't here.....”

“We can either rip the door from the frame or you can get the keys for us.....We'll be right, Missus.....is it open?”

She offered us a handful of keys, picking one out explaining that was the key to the Office. The question of Safe and drawer keys turned her face pale.

“Are you the only office person?” Shelley asked as she was handed a smaller bunch of keys.

“No....usually there are two.....sometimes three of us here. Renny's wife went with him on this trip. She sometimes does to get away for a bit.....and my Office Clerk and Receptionist called in sick this morning....I'd say it had something to do with that dreadful show last night....”

“You saw it then?”

“A bit of it....I turned it off after a while.....it was so.....so loose with the truth....”

“Oh?” Shelley exclaimed. She glanced across at me. “Loretta? Perhaps we can grab a coffee and let the boys do their job, eh?”

“Shouldn't I be here at all times?”

“We're all coppers....and truthfully, what is there to pinch of value in this place....”

The woman lead Shelley to a small tea prep area towards the rear, tucked in beside a single bowl toilet cubicle. A table and chairs nearby denoted it as the 'Lunch Area'. The woman would not desert her post while ever we were here, that's for sure!

“Files for the Financial Years 2010/11, 20011/12, 2012/13 through to last year. You are looking for specific mention of Ikowa “Iggy” Podowa, Benlin “Benji” Ograhasa and Ishaya “Shelley” Isharya. Also Dianne Dorothy Street and Barbara Elizabeth Forrest. The work times and dates and their payment amounts. Dates. For all five. Anything that you find to be photographed, copied, catalogued and bagged.

I opened up Renny's office. Let the FO take a couple of still shots and a video, especially of the desk, two lots of filing cabinets and a wall safe behind a blinding painting. An original by some obscure Australian Painter who I had never heard of.

The Painting was glorious though. Full of colour and life.

My every move was videoed. A swung away the Painting and opened the safe. Cash. Two gold bars. Papers that were all photographed.....and a thick Exercise book. The kind where additional pages could be added when needed.

I flipped through the pages.

“Bingo....it looks like this is a record of payments to the Backpacker 'Pickers' as they truly were. Names. Dates. Time worked. Amount due. Amount paid by the Farmers for hours worked. Amount paid to the Pickers which in most cases, is substantially less. Exorbitant debited amounts for accommodation, food and transport. A second set of 'books' that itemised the true capital flow of the enterprise.....the ATO would love a look at this.....this goes back to when he started in 2004/05 financial year....a good money earner since then I'd say. Surely he must have known that to have such evidence would be a bombshell.....”

“Unless he was supremely confident that there was never going to be any investigation....you saw the show.....contacts with several high ranking Politicians. Huge sums of money given for....who knows what favours. Besides, I reckon that he would the type of man to pour over this book from time to time just for the kick of it.....it is so neat....”

“.....and detailed.” I added.

There was further papers and several books that I ordered to be catalogued and bagged.

I unlocked all of the desk drawers. Slid them all out to place on the desk top.

A phone rang somewhere in the Office and was picked up quickly.

Missus Lucia came to the Office door and knocked lightly.

“Um...The Boss? He's on the phone.....wants to talk to you....”

“Tell him that I'm busy at the moment. There's a lot of interesting stuff in his desk drawers and safe. I can't wait to open up the File Cabinets. If he wishes to speak to me later....say an hour? No. Two. Ring back then.”

I wanted the bastard to sweat a bit. The woman seemed to melt away. I got the impression that the Boss rarely was disobeyed....and if he ever was, he would go ape-shit!

“Detective?” One of the FO's came up beside me holding a plastic bag full of cheap looking gold jewellery and another bag of sea-shells.

I almost whooped for joy. Instead I yelled out to Shelley to come through to the office. I asked whether the discovery of these items was filmed as they were detected.

“Yes....it was Chris here with the Recorder who noticed them.....zoomed in and out a couple of times to show the exact location.”

“Fantastic....Shells? Get onto Abbey. We need an Arrest Warrant for Renald Rzorbicello and who-ever is travelling with him who is a part of this Firm. We'll need the Queensland Coppers to make the arrest....I reckon there could be a flight risk involved knowing that he is a well-worn overseas traveller. Now Shells. Before we lose him.”

We required a Victorian vehicle to transport all the information that we obtained from the Office raid back to the Forensic Unit in Sydney. We thought that we may have obtained enough to fill a suitcase perhaps, so that it could accompany us by air!

Our joy soon turned to melancholia when it was learnt that Rzorbicello, his wife and his latest 'henchman' had immediately left for Brisbane Airport as soon as he hung up the phone from his Office Manager.

They flew out that night heading towards Rome with very little luggage. Perhaps enough for a week away....like to Ipswich and back!

We could not put into place all the paperwork, Court orders and Arrest Warrant papers necessary in time to have them detained in Rome.

They slipped through the net into the underworld haunts of the island of Sicily.

An International Arrest warrant was issued against them from Interpol. That took less time than our internal paper trail to obtain a warrant in the name of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Bureaucracy can be a frustrating bastard!

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Three weeks later we had substantiation of the ownership of nearly all the jewellery pieces. DNA trace on the jewellery and the shells confirmed that it belonged to the three girls, Ikowa “Iggy” Podowa, Benlin “Benji” Ograhasa and Ishaya “Shelley” Isharya.

Two other separate DNA samples taken from other unidentified pieces hinted at others lying in lonely graves.

Our case would never be watertight as we still had no proof who actually shot the girls. Sure, it was a safe bet to assume that they were shot to keep their mouths shut as to the financial scam and the goings-on of Winter's criminal activities on the side. The last thing that either man would want would be to have cops crawling all about their safe little "money earner" just a little on the wrong side of the law....or so would be their take on the matter, at least!

It was more in character with Dieter Winter, who had been Rzorbicello's “henchman” for a short period that coincided with the deaths of the three girls. I could guess and say that as Winter's marriage fell apart with Francesca Rzorbicello, so too did the relationship with Renald Rzorbicello. Winter, so it was said, became more and more of an embarrassment in his actions and it could be assumed that due to this and the possibility of the Police eventually being called in to investigate certain allegations of crimes against certain female Backpackers, he was deemed too volatile to remain alive.

The ownership of certain jewellery items was collaborated by several photographs that we had obtained from Dianne Street. These shots clearly showed all the girls amongst a group of about a dozen young travellers standing at the side of a mini-bus. Winter's existence in the scheme of things was confirmed also in a couple of the shots with him leaning against the corner of the bull-bar of the mini-bus just in shot. Others so provided were more individual shots of the girls. Head shots that clearly showed earrings, necklaces and/or bracelets that were included in the little treasure trove of 'goodies' that were unearthed in the search of the Office in Shepparton, Victoria.

There was no real proof that Rzorbicello was involved in the execution style death of Winter in Sydney several years later. We may guess for-ever on the reasons why and the how, but without a signed confession coming from Rzorbicello, that was all it was.

Guesswork!

Sure the discovery of the jewellery and the pile of shells in his office does lead to a connection with the disappearance and murder of the three, but there was still no conclusive proof in that regard.

The case may stay open for eternity, which really shat me off no end.

Another thug side-steps conviction and sentencing.

What further added 'irk' to the 'shittiness' that I felt over the affair was that it was obvious that another two Backpacker 'Pickers' were lying unidentified in lonely bush graves somewhere between Melbourne and Ipswich in Queensland.

Without the bodies being discovered, we would be pissing into the wind as to the possible identity of the two.

Maybe one day.....

Perhaps there were some moments of joy in the winding down of the investigation.

The Australian Taxation Office also obtained an Open Arrest Warrant on Renald Rzorbicello for Tax Evasion over a 10 year period with an amount close to ½ million dollars involved.

As all evidence pointed to Rzorbicello being the sole 'family' member involved in the scam, it meant that he had also robbed a lot of his close relatives and 'Family'.

Further investigations would indicate that all Farms who used the 'Pickers' directly employed by the Contract Labour Firm, had paid the correct labour hourly rates involved. It was insinuated at a Staff meeting to round off the Case, that this scam was organised by the 'Family' as a way of 'laundering' funds gained from illegal means. If that was the case, then the entire three tiered family would be involved and would warrant further attention by the Police Forces of Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

As it was, we were warned off any further investigation into the 'Family' by the AFP. This was relayed in no uncertain terms and one can only get the impression that the AFP had this entire criminal 'nest' well in hand.

I await eagerly the outcome!

Regardless, if this was just some story....some form of subterfuge on the part of the AFP, then it was only a matter of time before "The Family" required some form of recompense from one of their own.

I smiled at the probable outcome.

An execution style murder of Renald and his wife on some mountaintop in Sicily.

It would happen I told myself. It would happen eventually.

You do not rob 'The Family', especially when you are within its inner circle!

There was some consolation in thinking that way. Knowing that eventually he would go the same way as his victims did. A bullet to the base of the skull.

That thought made me smile for a bit!

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