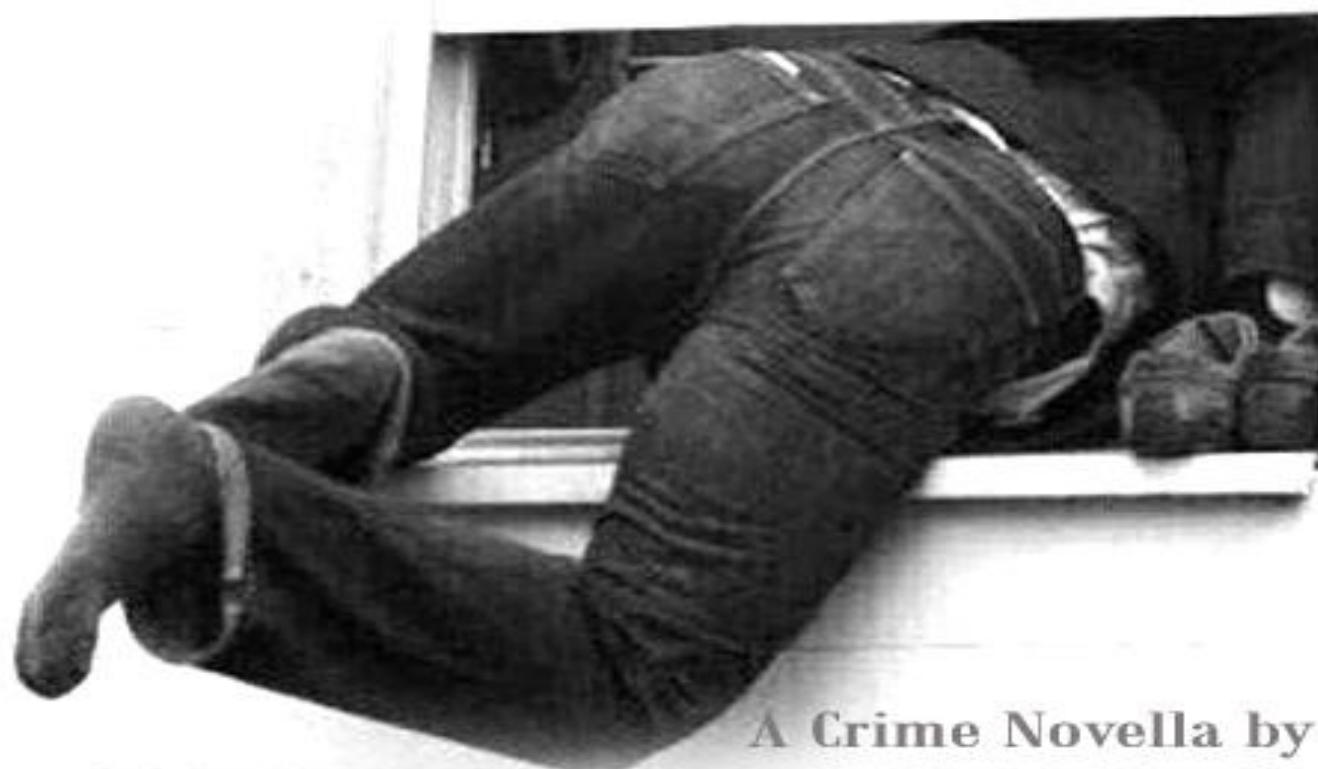


MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES JOSEPH LIND AND SHELLEY ANNE SHIELDS

UNDUE FORCE



A Crime Novella by

PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES
JOSEPH LIND
AND
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CHAPTER ONE

It was an unusual situation.

We didn't have one ongoing investigation.

An open Case.

Not one!

Sure, we had Trial Appearances pending and several scheduled meetings with the DPP Reps on the 'Bush Graves' and 'The Hammer in the Head' Case that occurred in Ballina recently. Both cases we had just wrapped up. Forensic, Autopsy and Toxicology Papers had all been received, signed statements and witness documents and the final full Reports given to the relevant DPP Rep for their perusal.

Apart from that, we had a clean slate.

Very unusual.

It was never likely to continue for long.

A full moon was scheduled before the end of the month.

That usually saw a peak occur in the madness of some of the population!

So instead of the sporadic visit to the Hospital when work time permitted, we had begun to visit our old partner Dallas Courtney three times a week helping him in his rehabilitation process. Encouraging him and supporting him.

Literally.

The advance that he showed was incredible and astounding.

With a smile on his face and a cheeriness that was never there when he had been the third member of our little trio for just over a year, he approached the slow and painful process of learning to support himself and walk unaided with zeal and bravery.

"I've promised myself that I will walk unaided up the aisle in fifteen months' time!" He beamed as he told us.

"You're getting married!?" Shelley squealed. Rushing him to hug him. Almost causing him to over-balance.

"That's usually the only way that you can walk up the aisle with your new wife." He countered. "That I know of." He added, laughing at his own joke.

I had never seen such a change in a person who was enduring daily pain and continuous slow, painful and unending exercise regimes.

The mysteries of love in unlocking a hidden personality foreign to me!

"Congratulations to you and Bennie." I slapped him on the back. Gave him a hug which didn't seem out of place.

Julia 'Bennie' Anderson had been the girlfriend of one William 'Billie'Dean Worseley, a Cross-dresser who had been violently killed by his Coordinator and co-worker just over a year ago now. Bennie had at one stage been a POI in the case and as such, should have been 'out of bounds' to any Investigator involved in the investigation. But there was something almost palpable between the two and it seemed only several short weeks before Dallas and she were living together.

A big no-no! Especially while the Case was an on-going exercise.

He and Shelley, as a team of Murder Dees in their own right, had been on 'Slip Team' Duties that particular week-end when Dallas was involved in a horrific accident on his way home after doing a 36 hour stretch.

If the particulars of his living arrangements had come out and with whom, he could have been in all sorts of strife, not the least, instant dismissal thus losing all his benefits including the compensation and Workers Insurance Cover under which he was receiving this intensive rehabilitative process. It was scheduled to go on for a lot more years yet!

Our illustrious boss, DS John Clifford James Church aka Abbey, was a freak with names and all the detritus of all the cases being handled by his Murder Dees. He must have known the connection...he must have, but chose to remain tight lipped.

God bless his cotton socks.

"Um...your parents? Do they know?"

"Mum hasn't come to see me at all...I'd say she's made the decision in favour of her religion...Bennie being a... hah... a fence-sitter...well, really, she's denounced any interest or belief in any religion. Dad? He's been a couple of times. Talk is rather stilted, as you can imagine. I can't keep making excuses for their bigotry. If that's their decision, then they'll be the ones who are missing out, though it would have been nice to have had their backing...this is going to be a slow trip and we could have done with the extra help...oh well...such is life and the ways of the world, especially when religion is involved,

unfortunately...you'd think that it would be the opposite, actually, eh? The God of Love, Mercy and Forgiveness and all that shit!"

My Mobile plucked out the opening bars of the instrumental hit 'Bombora' by the Australian band, The Atlantics.

"Joe? You and Shells? You're on an afternoon flight out to Coonabarabran. A body has been found this morning. Identified as one Stanley James 'Jimmy' Albright. A farmer on a property about fifty kilometres south east of the town. He and his neighbouring Property Owner...a Mister George O'Lachlan, have been feuding for some time. Bad blood between the two. Albright? Found beside the property line of his neighbour. A bullet to the head. The dividing fence near his body was found cut. O'Lachlan has been arrested on suspicion of murder. The Station Commander at Coona? You'd know him. Bernie Holden from Night Shift? 2IC under DS Barry Bellamy a couple of years back. Remember him?"

I nodded my head as though he was standing beside me.

We had spent one or two late nights crying into our beers on the subject of Night Duty responsibilities versus those of the Day Shift guys. Bernie was suffering the long-term effects of night duty and what that was doing to his health and to his family life.

I had heard through the grape-vine that he eventually bit the bullet a couple of years back and applied for a Senior Detective Grade in his old home town when it became vacant. Coonabarabran. His application had been successful, so I recalled.

Hendo cut across my reminiscing.

"He's a relative, apparently, of the murdered man. That's why he's called us in...the three-thirty flight out of Mascot. Go home. Pack a bag. Your tickets will be waiting at Check-in. Both of you are booked into the Town and Country Motel in town. A car at Coonabarabran Airport. You're booked in for the rest of the week...if you like the place, you can extend your stay over the week-end. See you next Monday. Cheers."

Shit!

There go my possible week-end plans.

Shit!

I immediately rang Tellie, my better half, to tell her of my arrangements which would possibly wreck our week-end with my father and step-mother up at Port Macquarie. They had moved up to my half-sister's property just outside Port, out along the Wauchope Road. Both were becoming less able to care for themselves, and as Dad was wheelchair bound, Step-mum was finding it more and more difficult to cope. It was their fiftieth Wedding

Anniversary and a complete family re-union was organised to celebrate. A rare occurrence where all my half-brothers and sisters got together. Seven of them with each now having a tribe of kids each.

A real tribal gathering!

CHAPTER TWO

"If it's okay by you, we'd like to have a look at the crime scene first. The alleged Perp isn't going anywhere. He's still in lock up, I presume?"

We'd gone through the usual procedure of shaking hands and exchanging germs. I always headed to the toots after such procedures to thoroughly wash my hands.

Obsessive Compulsive?

Maybe...I like to think it has more to do with general personal hygiene!

My first encounter with my old mate 'Knackers'Waszackinack, the undercover AFP Officer flashed across my mind. Meeting him for the first time after I had skilfully avenged my wife's death. Meeting the guy in the Male Toilets refusing to shake his hand until he had washed them!

The memory brought a smile to my face which I found hard to disguise.

"No. That's fine. We'll get out there around the time of the shooting about, according to the Forensic Pathologist from Dubbo. The body is being transported back to the Dubbo Base Hospital Morgue Laboratory now. A possible post mortem tomorrow or the next day. Before the week-end in any case. How about we follow you to your digs. You can book in, organise your meals. Leave your car there and come with me and my Station Dee in our 4WD out to the site. There's a fair bit of dirt road travelling in any case, so our vehicle would be better suited than that little Hatchback. OK?" The Station Commander, Bernie Holden suggested.

Bernie Holden and I had history.

Bernie had been an old style country cop out of Coonabarabran where his entire family was from. Some say it was his family who made the decision for him. He could stay in the Big Smoke or follow them back home. He had come to the City to further his career. Night Duty responsibilities could be a fast track for that goal. He was a lot like DS Barry Bellamy, his boss. A larger than life character, a big man physically and in presence, who would never take a backward step and always said his mind regardless. To his credit, his first thought was always for his Officers on Night Duty. This made him enemies in some circles and

there were those who whispered that his relocation back to Coonabarabran may have had political overtones. Out of sight, out of mind. He took the job offer of Coonabarabran Station Senior Detective which had become vacant at the most opportune time for him. From there it was but a short step up to Station Commander. The most senior cop in the district.

We'd occasional lean at the bar talking over a Case that straddled night and day shifts. I always found his company good for the soul as his slant on life, love and the worse of cases was similar to mine. The funny thing was that like his Boss Bellamy, who I had a great deal of respect for, we never stood over a BBQ in his or my backyard. A beer or two? Yes, any time that either of us thought about it, but never more than that!

Funny that!

I hadn't seen him for a number of years.

He looked better for the move.

In fact, he hadn't looked healthier for all the years that he had been on Night Duty as a good Boss and cop.

Night Duty could do that to a person who was not really cut out to have his life turned inside out. It could be a hard grind. Suitable to a very select few.

Country air sure agreed with him though.

I told him so as I slapped him on the back. The two of us doing a shoulder dance.

"Sure. Good. Sounds like a plan." I replied to his suggestions. "Good to see you looking so well, Bernie."

We organised ourselves as suggested, climbing up into the rear dusty seats of the Police vehicle as the temperature started to drop. A degree or two! It was still well over forty!

We headed south-east out of town on a narrow, ill-maintained road of rough macadam. Poorly repaired potholes and crumbling edges onto a narrow dirt verge. If we continued to follow its meandering course, the road would take us into Quirindi via little, quaint sounding hamlets or what once may have been little villages during the boom times. Ghost towns now more than likely if there was any evidence at all of a hamlet being sited there, once upon a time.

"So, Commander?"

"Call me Bernie, mate, will you? Out here. Away from the Station, eh? We've known each

other for too many years to get involved in silly politics or name calling."

He chuckled at this.

"Sure...um...why have we been called in? From what I understand, it is cut and dry. A foregone conclusion on Murder One. Am I right?"

He glanced out the driver's window. Waved at an oncoming farm vehicle that had to move off the bitumen to let us pass.

The countryside was dry and parched.

In the grip of another drought.

They had not really recovered from the last one.

"To tell you the truth? Coonabarabran...it's a good-sized town. Not too big. Not too small. Still, everyone knows everyone else, especially if you got kids, played sport yourself or involved yourself in the administration side of the various sports that are played around the district. I'm fifth generation local family. The first eldest son not to stay on the land. Dad was so disappointed, but he got over it, though he still likes a jab every now and then. He still potters about with my brother on their farm though to be truthful, it's getting beyond him now. My other brother has an adjoining farm. Bert and Beryl who run the Motel that you're both staying at? Cousins. The victim? Jimmy Albright? Second cousin on my mother's side. The alleged Perp? Known him all my life...in fact the three of us were in the same class almost all the way through school. From Kindy, upwards. Played in the same football team from Under Sixes upwards. Same Cricket team...know what I mean? Only lost contact with them when I decided to enrol in the cops. Picked up again where we left off when I came back into town...the best decision that I've ever made...and to tell you the truth, it saved my marriage and my family going down the gurgler."

I shook my head. I got the picture.

It was not only a question of doing the right thing, but appearing to do the right thing.

Regardless of the outcome either way, he was caught between a rock and a hard place.

There would be some who would continue to criticise.

To point the finger, regardless.

That was the truth of the world.

"You know, there are those, some in my own family, who are hinting that I should just conclude it as an accident. It happens out here. Bullet wounds. A pure accident. Easy

as...and they're right. It would be an easy matter to brush it under the carpet that way...but...it's not my way. Justice has to be seen to be done as well being done. Know what I mean? I couldn't sleep easy if I relented...Georgie O'Lachlan? Would give you the shirt off his back. Is a respected Leader of the SES. The Rural Fire Brigade. Treasurer of the Coonabarabran Fire Brand Cricket Club and a former Coach of the Little Leagues Under Ten side that has won the four past Grand Finals of the District...but...in his younger days, he had a reputation as a bit of a fire brand himself. All the visiting Football Teams knew that young Georgie O'Lachlan had a short fuse. Niggle him and we'd be one short, if you know what I mean? Spent more time off the field than on...oh, that's a bit of an exaggeration, but you know what I mean? The myth has taken on the depth of legends."

We bounced over a rickety old timber bridge. The creek bed some metres down, dry. Not a wet gibber stone or puddle to be seen. Tired Gum trees lined the dry water course. Gum leaves hanging down like dried out tongues from a thirst starved steer. Covered in dust. That beautiful blue-green tinge of the Eucalypt gone.

"I understand that there was bad blood between the two? Is that correct?"

"Yes and no... bad blood? Perhaps a little melodramatic, but it's what you'll hear from all the gossipers...the rumour-mongers. The two had been having an off-on again tiff about water...as you can see, very little, if any around these parts...been that way for nigh on five years now. Before that we had a ten-year drought. Then solid rains that filled the farm dams and made the water courses run a-banker...but then nothing else since. The ground did not get enough steady rain over several months to relieve the stress of the drought before and we were flung straight into another dry run that because of the previous drought, is twice as bad now. I know a lot of Cockies who are close to walking off. Just shutting up shop and leaving their properties to the Banks. A lot. Including one of my brothers..."

He braked sharply to negotiate a right-hand bend and another old timber bridge. After rattling across it a sharp left hand bend before the road straightened out again.

A doozy at night, I thought to myself.

"Arakoonah...that's George's family spread. Been in the family for generations. Longer than mine. This is the first time in history where there hasn't been running water on the property...same as Parsonella Run. That's Stan Albright's farm. A beautiful property. Good soil. Good mixture between hilly country and flat pastures. Good pasture. Wheat and beef and sheep. Some sorghum, and he's been getting into Canola of late. It too had guaranteed running water...up until this drought. One of the only Springs east of the Warrumbungle's is on Arakoonah. Not much, but it provides a little relief...there was a gentlemen's agreement that permitted Stan to water his stock from the Spring Dam. The joint property line between the two farms is not that long... maybe about three hundred metres and that has an old ROW...an old Stock Route of about four hundred metres wide that separated the two. Both always took advantage of the feed that was there. Both had a set of gates for ease of access.

But...oh...about nine months ago, George put a lock on the gate that stopped Stan from bringing his herd across the Stock Route into water on George's property. He says it was because the spring flow was decreasing and there was just sufficient flow to support his stock and sheep...nothing more..."

"He was within his rights, wasn't he? The Spring was on his property?"

"Mmm...yes and no. It could be argued that the arrangement had existed for some time during every drought that had occurred...since local records existed...thus the precedent had been set. It was by mutual consent...a gentlemen's agreement which, on a handshake is as good as a written and signed contract. George in locking the gate, did not enter into any discussion with Stan of his intention to bar his way...which was morally wrong by those Townie people who see themselves as horse-back Lawyers."

"So, Stan's nose is right out of joint..."

"You could say that...and I don't blame him. To cart in water is a very expensive business. Just about every property around here has decimated their stock to almost nil...maybe keeping a small breeding herd for when times improve. They're all hand feeding too..."

"So, what was Stan doing cutting the road boundary fencing of George's property line?"

"He has a Stock Yard and loading facilities about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile down the road. We think he was going to drive his herd up the road and in through the breach. The Spring and dam is in that bottom or road paddock of George's...he was going to do it during the night."

"Hasn't George the right to protect his property. I understand boundary fencing breaches can cost severe fines if stock wander out onto the road...but still, he has the right to protect his property from Trespassers...hasn't he? Regardless of what may have transpired previously?"

"Yeah, yer right, but it depends on the severity of your efforts to protect your property. Undue Force? What degree of reasonable force is considered sufficient to protect...to defend your castle? There's the crux of the matter. How do you define reasonable force? I doubt that shooting the man in the head would be seen as 'reasonable' force. In fact, the complete opposite, I would have thought. What do you think?"

"I'm not a Lawyer, but I've heard cases before the Court that have been in favour of the Defendant..."

"Where the Intruder has also been armed, surely? Or where the Property owner challenges the intruder, telling him to leave immediately? Or...where the Property Owner becomes embroiled in a fight to the death and it therefore is classified as self-defence?"

"Yes. I'll give you that point. Yes."

"...and it's not our business to second guess the Rule of Law. That's the domain of better

minds then ours. We just bring in the alleged guilty party and then the Courts can squabble over the problem like little children at times. Right?"

I nodded my head in agreement.

I could see that Bernie was doing a poor act of washing his hands of the matter. Leaving us to be the bad boys in the minds of a lot of the local people.

The city folk cops.

Wouldn't know if some-one was up us, so the locals would say in concord.

I guess if the tables were turned, and I was the Station Cop with a good reputation, a standing in the community that possibly could go south over the dealing of the incident, then perhaps I too, would call in the City boys to take all the flak.

I mean, his long and close association with both Victim and Perpetrator would mean that some-one from outside should be called in, in any case.

So be it.

It wouldn't be the first time and it certainly wouldn't be the last!

CHAPTER THREE

We came to a road junction where dirt roads came in from the left and right.

A large turning circle denoted the end of the school Bus Run, so I presumed.

There was a surprising assortment of Mail Boxes.

44 gallon drums brightly painted.

An old fashion galvanised Milk container, even a stainless steel 9-gallon beer keg cut in two with a weather-proof swing lid on each section. One for mail. The other for papers and such.

A forlorn looking lean-to with a definite lean would provide shade and protection from the rain, when it came, for those waiting for the bus.

I wondered for how much longer it would stand! To me, you were taking your life into your hands in sheltering under its cock-eyed galvanised, corrugated roof!

The bitumen stopped here as though the Council suddenly ran out of funds!

"End of the road, eh?" I observed.

"For the School Bus, yeah. It's dirt to Quirindi from here. Some say it's a better road than what we have just travelled over. They'd be about right in that summation. At least the dirt gets graded once a year or more often after rains. There seems to be some talk that the Federal Government is providing a grant soon under the Country Roads Improvement Program to re-align, upgrade and widen that section of road from here back into town. Replace those wooden bridges and get rid of the three causeways along its length. There's a groundswell of people wanting it to happen sooner as they say when you start a major road project, especially around here, it's bound to rain..."

He gave a chuckle.

"Eternal Optimists are country folk...with dry senses of humour to boot. Yer gotta love 'em."

He laughed at that.

"How many kids hop on the bus?" Shelley asked. Looking around at the surprising number of RMB containers with not a homestead in sight.

"Full almost. About twenty kids. Not all here of cause. Along the length of the route. Some adults always going into town for the day. Doctors. Dentists. Some such. Just a day of shopping and catch up with neighbours and friends. It's convenient to get the bus, especially if they have a wine or two. Coming back out on the return afternoon run. A hairy, bumpy ride which is more dangerous after or during rain. One of those Causeways has caused grief several times..."

I shook my head.

"We don't know how well off we are in the city. Mobile coverage. TV stations galore. Turn on a tap. Instant water. Hot and cold. Need some milk. A walk to the shop or a five-minute drive to the local Supermarket. A cold beer at the local Pub or Club. An unsteady walk home. A ten-minute drive or a walk to take the kids to school. The beach close by. If not, the Council Pool within walking distance...every convenience around the neighbourhood...how lucky are we?"

"Could be right, you know...but you don't have the fresh air, the lay-back life-style of the friendly neighbours...um...usually, huh...yeah...um...Arakoonah is about five kays down to the right. Won't be long."

He picked up speed along the dirt road.

He was right, the ride was far better than the bitumen surface that we had been driving over.

A long cocky comb of dust bloomed out behind us. People for miles around would be able to notice our progress just from the plume of dust.

He slowed to a halt.

"Don't open the doors just yet. Let the dust settle...shows yer how dry it is, eh?"

We sat there for some minutes, the engine idling over and the air-conditioning working hard. I would have preferred to have a window open regardless of the heat, but these guys lived through the highs of summer all the time. I guess it could get kind of tiresome every summer in a heat that cowered you. Besides that, we'd be assaulted by that bloody cloud of dust coming into the vehicle.

"OK. She's about settled."

Four doors opened simultaneously to disgorge the passengers. The heat hit. I almost jumped back into the relative coolness of the interior of the 4WD.

I must remember to bring a hat next time, I scolded myself.

We walked off the road onto the wide verge. What little grass there was, was bone coloured and dry. Several tall gums gave us mottled protection from the afternoon sun. A mixture of Acacia trees and bushes made the verge difficult to negotiate. A Crow cried its lament at the heat. His companion returned the comment in the same mournful way. It was as if the Crows had been acclimatised to the heat and dry for countless centuries which effected their vocal outlook a bit.

Lonesome. Mournful. That for-ever complaining tone. It was eerie, sad yet beautiful at the same time.

"Here." Bernie indicated with a wave of his arm.

Spray paint denoted the spot where the man had fallen.

Spots of blood.

I looked up across a dry, barren paddock to a slight rise. A low sprawling farmhouse with a wide shaded veranda around three sides sat squat on the peak of the hillock. About six, maybe ten metres above our standing position beside the dirt road.

"Two hundred and two metres." The Station Detective, Duane Burgess stated as though reading my mind.

"Six hundred feet...a good shot. A bloody good shot in anyone's language."

"Mmm...the Serge didn't tell you. George is the top shot in the District. Belonged to the

Rifle Club in town...if he had practised more, there are those who would say he could have gone to the Olympics..."

"Not good, eh?" Bernie commented as he turned to me.

The evidence was stacking up against the man.

"What type of rifle?"

"George's baby. A Kruger bolt action point 222...a beautiful rifle...that wasn't his competition rifle but more of his farm gun. For the pigs. They're getting a little gamer looking for water...he pots them from his veranda when they come in to water."

"Sights?"

"Yeah. Kleig and Jarmen. The best almost."

I nodded my head.

I'd fired a Kruger. A good choice of rifle. I'd bet he'd seed his own bullets too.

"Who found Stan's body?"

"His daughter-in-law. Bringing the kids out to the Junction for the School Bus. Not good, eh? About seven this morning."

"His vehicle?" Shelley asked as she looked up and down the road.

"See that thicket of trees about two hundred yards away? In amongst that. On the other side of that thicket, Jimmy's property line starts. Well, that Right of Way 'long' paddock at least. Just to the other side, it's where he's got his holding yards and loading facilities. The entryway onto his property. His vehicle couldn't be seen from the homestead...George's place. So he knew what he was doing wasn't right."

"A bit of pre-meditation in his actions...cutting the fence...bringing his herd into this front paddock."

"Yeah..."

"The time of death? Approximate or is it down to a definite time?" Shelley asked as she inspected the fence.

"Ouch!" She yelled as she jumped. "Bloody Bull Ant's nest. There wouldn't have been much of the body left if they had all night to work on it..."

"Yeah, it was a bit of a mess. They don't take long to strip a cadaver to clean bones. Time of death?" He looked at his watch. "About the same time as now...say six-thirty to around nine-thirty last night."

"It had to have been before nightfall, wouldn't it? It would be as black as the Ace of Spades out here unless we had a full moon and plenty of starlight...and don't forget, the shot was fired on a negative depression...it would have been darker looking down from the farmhouse to the roadway."

"No moon last night and a light high cloud cover that would have stopped the effectiveness of any starlight..."

"If George was standing on his veranda looking down into the darkness of the tree line along this boundary line and road, he wouldn't have seen anything at all once the night set in. Bigger all to aim at...especially looking down into the gloom of this bush verge. "Shelley concurred with my thoughts."So it had to happen while there was still sufficient light to be able to see down into this area."

"Yeah...we thought of that too...so the TOD had to have been no later than mid-dusk...say no later than seven-thirty after which it does get bloody dark with no moonlight...the trouble is, all of George's family say that they heard the shot just after eight..."

"Collusion? Fibs?"

"Welllll...so it seems, but knowing the family? I don't know. They're not the type of people to lie, regardless of the circumstances."

CHAPTER FOUR

I stood and looked up at the homestead, now in the afterglow of the setting sun and the gathering of dusk.

"I'd like to go up and interview the O'Lachlan family. Look down this way from the front veranda...in this light. Then possibly call around to the Albright property..."

"Um...it's getting late. It'll be after dark...well after dark by the time that we get back to town if'n you do that...I'd say the meals will be well and truly off by that time too."

I understood.

Another cop who preferred to work at a more leisurely pace. Nine to five or thereabouts.

Then again, I doubted that his overtime chit involved nurse-minding us city cops. They were doing this on love money...none at all, just for the love of the job!

"Um...I told the families that we wouldn't bother them today. Leave them alone with their sorrow. I've organised the O'Lachlan clan to come into the Station first thing tomorrow morning for formal Interviews and signed statements. Ditto the Albrights in the afternoon after lunch, if that's okay?"

I glanced his way.

My annoyance showing as I slapped the side of my thigh.

I still would have liked to have stood on that veranda to catch the view. To get a measurement of the gloom and the night descending.

Still? I saw no point in making enemies. Especially one whom I considered as a mate for a lot of years.

These people out here work to a different time zone. A different master.

I nodded my head, steeled a glance towards Shelley and began to walk towards the Police 4WD.

"No worries, Bernie. That'll suit me." I said sourly. "Though I would like to stand on that farmhouse verandah at the approximate time of the shooting...maybe the day after tomorrow, eh?"

Though I wasn't holding my breath!

The tone of my voice may have conveyed something entirely different, but what the heck, I was famished.

A late tea was on the cards in any case, by the time we made it back into town.

CHAPTER FIVE

The meal was beautiful.

Superb.

One of the best Steak Diane's I had ever tasted, except when I made the sauce to go with my famous BBQ steak.

I asked the pretty young Waitress to pass on my compliments to the Chef.

It happened to be the Owner of the Motel. Beryl of Bert and Beryl fame.

"What do you think, Shells? You've been very quiet all afternoon. What gives?"

"The ride in the back of the vehicle over all those kilometres of bumps and swerves, pot-holes and jolts. I thought that I would throw up...first time ever. I bag the front seat if it ever happens again!"

"I'll keep it in mind, young lady. So, what do you think, though? About the case?"

She shook her head.

"If the entire O'Lachlan family swear that they heard the shot around eight after it got dark, then I'd say we have reasonable doubt. At that time, on a moonless night to boot, he could not have made out a figure at the boundary fence down in the hollow and in amongst all those trees. Unless the figure was lit up by the headlights of his car...or he wore one of those light hats...or those headlamps that fishermen wear. Which we know neither was the case. His car was what? Two hundred metres away? And he didn't have one of those hat-lights on...did he? It must have been just as hard for him to see in the pitch black. I do not think that the DPP would want to waste Taxpayers money on a flimsy case such as this...where would it be tried, Joe, if it got that far? Here in town?"

"I don't think so. The closest Criminal Court would be in Dubbo, I suspect...or...I'm not too sure."

We both looked over at the TV as images of an ISIS attack in Syria had been repelled by Syrian Government forces in some bombed out city that looked like so many German cities after the War. Piles of rubble and nothing else!

"Where do they go to?"

"What? Where do who go to what?"

"When they fire up into the air like that. They do it all the time over there, as though bullets were free and in plentiful supply."

"Oh...you mean the bullets when they fire their AK47's up into the air? You know those lines that stretch from the North Pole to the South Pole? Longitudinal lines? Meridian lines...I'm not too sure what they call them. There is one that is magnetised...connects the two poles....you know, like that TV Show? The Dome I think it was called..."

"Stephen King wrote the screenplay...and those lines are imaginary lines, Joe."

"No they're not. You look at most world Atlases and World globes. The lines are on them...so they must be real...whatever. The lead slugs are suspended above the earth on that line. Or one of the lines only. Held by the magnetism stemming from the North to the South Poles connection. It's very thin so that is why you never see it in photos taken from the International Space Station...but apparently, it contains millions of lead slugs...from bullets shot into the air...like the ring around Saturn except it's a lot thinner. Smaller..."

"Nice try, Einstein. I'm not that gullible...but you never hear of a bullet coming back down to hit some-one in the skull...or peppering a home going straight through the roof tiles or the ceiling and landing in the dinner plate...or going through a car roof...you don't, do you? I shot an arrow into the air; it fell to earth I know not where..."

"There you go. Even in the days of Bows and Arrows, there were people who were thinking of the same thing...what was that, by the way?"

"Oh...Some Poem from School days written by an Indian Philosopher, I think... but it's an interesting question, don't you think? And when the bullet...or an arrow reaches its maximum height, does it turn around as it plummets back down to earth? You know, pointy end first?"

"I would think so...aerodynamics and all that...though most of the weight of a bullet is not in the sharp end, is it?"

"So...would it be going fast enough to penetrate a human skull by the time that it came back to earth?"

"There's a formula that determines how fast it goes, isn't there?" I asked. Losing interest. "That's not how Albright died by all accounts. He was hit in the side of the head."

I mentioned that in passing as Shelley's line of thought was looking for alternate solutions to a very simple conclusion that slapped you in the face, it was that cut and dry!

"That's for terminal velocity, Joe...something about squared squared...I guess, it may be going fast enough...to you know...kill some-one. It would make for interesting research..."

"No research has ever been attempted, I would suspect. What bloody good could come from the findings in any case? A vexing question though...and it would be all but impossible for it to go straight up then straight down...it goes in a tighter curve, a parabolic curve because of the rotation of the Earth...even if you could send it exactly in a vertical plane."

"You're so full of it, Joseph Lind. Full of it..." She shook her head in mock disgust. "You going to have any Dessert? I am."

I shook my head as I listened to the next five second sound bite on World Affairs.

"How bloody stupid! Did you hear that, Shells?" I didn't wait for her reply. "The Vatican has summarily dismissed... sacked a Priest for coming out and declaring himself as gay...what a load of hooey! They haven't got their heads around it have they...the paedophile thing as opposed to the gay thing. Talk about duplicity, stupidity, ignorance, naivety and small-mindedness..."

"I am not going to allow the rants of a zealous Atheist to undermine my beliefs, Joe." She stated forcefully as she glanced over the top of the Menu.

"Mmm...something to think about...would you call an Atheist, a zealot? A fanatic? As you would describe those Muslim Radicals? Interesting..."

I was in one of those moods.

If looks could kill, I would have missed out on Dessert!

CHAPTER SIX

We spent all day cooped up in a small, stuffy Interview Room with bad air-conditioning and two video cameras on tripods zeroed in on Shelley and I and the person being interviewed. Shoulder to shoulder with the local Solicitor of choice on the other side of a small stainless steel topped table. It and the chairs were bolted to the floor.

The chairs positioned too far away from the table to allow ease of writing. Whoever had located the chairs to the table must have had long arms, is all I'll say!

Not a friendly environment to interview Relatives of the Deceased or of the alleged Perp!

The thing that impressed me after we had spoken to and obtained formal, signed statements of Interview from both families was the attitude of them all.

While each family could understand the relevant actions of both the victim and the alleged assailant, every one of them had some sympathy, contrition and sorrow for the aftermath and the death of one and the internment of the other. There was no animosity or hate, just an understanding that I found hard to comprehend.

It was something that I had never experienced before in my entire career as a cop.

I was flabbergasted.

We had a quick Dinner and returned to the Station to interview the alleged Perp. George

O'Lachlan.

"I did not aim at Stan...Jimmy...if there is one thing that I have always stressed to my boys is that never aim a gun, loaded *or* unloaded, at another human being...and the other thing, looking down along the road boundary fence-line, it was impossible to make out anyone at that time of night...Ben Hall could have been standing there and I wouldn't have seen him! Santa Claus even!"

"Why were you carrying the loaded rifle in any case?" Shelley asked.

The sixty-four-dollar question.

The rangy guy shook his head slowly.

"Paranoia I suppose you could call it...I was freaking out about the Spring flow diminishing. If it stopped then I...we were up shit street. I doubt that I could borrow any more cash from the Bank...we are up to our armpits in debt. Like most of us, actually. Especially around here. The Spring is the only flowing water for miles around. The birds. Roos. Emus. You name it, they were attracted to the Spring Dam. Drinking the bloody water that we needed for what stock we had left. Eating the immature grass that was shooting because of the moisture about there. We would normally set off a couple of detonators close by...or a couple of shotgun pellets into the air...I can't tell you why I grabbed the Kruger. My youngest boy would often ride the Quad Bike down to the dam a couple of times a night to scare them all away...we reckon that they would get the message sooner or later...I am sure that I fired the rifle into the air. Guaranteed! I would never fire a bullet towards the road. Never. I have too much respect for the power of my guns to do something so stupid. I've been the Secretary of the local Gun Club for oh...ten years, I guess. Longer. I respect fire-arms...and am fully aware of their power to harm. To kill."

"How many do you own?"

"The Kruger. A Remington. My target rifle. An old Lee-Enfield .303 that was my Dad's. My Grandfather's. Two single shot shotguns. A couple of pump action Browning .22's....a nice little rifle that we would holster whenever we were going on a property drive on the Quads or the Ute. I have a couple of Competition Rifles that are kept locked down at the Club...that's it...we did have some semi-automatics and the like before that Gun Buy-back that John Howard organised after the Port Arthur Massacre...but really, we really didn't need that type of gun...it sure beats me the attitude of the Yanks and their penchant...their absolute desire to have Military Assault weapons and handguns in their homes...crazy! For protection! What do they expect to come rampaging through their front doors? A Battalion of Russians? A mob of Muslims or a bore of Mormons brandishing the Book of Mormon!?"

"Those rifles that you described? Where are they kept?"

"Usually in an approved locked Gun Cabinet...we kept one of the shotguns out with the

shells on top of the Fridge in the Kitchen when we started this scare campaign with the wild life...and again, none of us, no one in the family would deliberately aim and shoot at any wildlife...it's not the way we do things...just trying to scare them off. That's all."

He started sobbing, repeating over and over how sorry he was.

"We will not object to Bail being approved on his own cognisance, Counsellor." I informed O'Lachlan's Solicitor who had sat stoically throughout the entire proceedings. "I understand that the Bail Hearing will be sometime early next week. Is that right?"

He nodded his head in agreement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"What do you reckon?"

I shook my head as I watched a mob of Roos crouch to enjoy the young grass shoots around the Spring Dam. Their ears twitching as the sounds of our voices reached them. They stood erect and looked in our direction.

"Magnificent view." I commented as Dotty O'Lachlan backed out through the screen door with two steaming coffee mugs in her hands.

"Yeah...even when it's like this and it makes your heart cry, it still is a wonderful view. You should see it in a good season with everything thriving...the old homestead was further up on the higher hill behind us...now that had views, but it copped the weather more. I don't suppose you can tell me anything...you know?"

"Sorry, Missus O...we can't talk about an ongoing investigation to a member of the family..."

"Will they let him out on bail?"

"Yes. No problems. A well respected local. We won't be opposing bail. I doubt that your husband would suddenly let out for Brazil or somewhere."

"No" She smiled. "Though this time, we feel like walking off...the first time that we've spoken like that. It seems to be getting tougher, that's for sure. You heading back to Sydney?"

"Yes. This afternoon's flight out."

"Um...Stan's body? Um...Stan's missus, Daphne, a really nice person...a good friend...she asked me to ask you."

"A bit hard to tell. No later than mid next week, I'd say, though there is some hold up in the Hospital...a back log of cases requiring autopsies. Ring Commander Bernie Holden early next week. He may know by then."

I finished off the coffee and flung the dregs onto the ground in front of me. It didn't even seem to discolour the earth it was that dry.

"We should be going...locals? Anyone else close by?"

"The MacGregors. Follow the road up towards the Albright's entry gate. Theirs is on the other side of the road about another hundred metres or so further on. Greg and Betty...they're getting on...we at one stage was considering putting in a bid for their property...some time back. Now?" She shook her head. "Thanks Detectives, for everything that both of you've done."

She took the mugs from Shell and I and disappeared inside the gloom of the house.

A broken woman...or near broken. It wouldn't take much more to completely cower her, I thought as I stepped off the veranda and headed for the Police 4WD that we had borrowed this morning.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"You're the Detectives from Sydney, ah?" He peered at our badges. "Very impressive, though not as good as the Yank Cops. They have gold Shields..."

"Only on TV Shows..."

I smiled at the elderly man. Tall. Ramrod straight. Thin. Sharp features. Hair with tinges of grey at the temples. Alert blue eyes that would have seen a lot over the years. A 'giggle' hat pulled well down over his eyes.

"You sure? A Marine in Nam was a Yank cop. I'm sure his badge was gold...anyhow, come in. Bin expecting ya. Coffee? Betty? The Police from Sydney are here asking about the other night. Put the kettle on dear, will ya, deary?"

We followed the man down a wide hall with family portraits hung in a sort of age sequence as the kids got older on both walls. Groupings to demonstrate each decade, perhaps. Right up and past fancy marriages and then births of grand-kids.

I liked the arrangement.

"Big family..." Shelley commented.

"Yeah. Eleven kids...and proud of the lot of them. My eldest is doing most of the work on the farm now...me? I just kinda potter about, though there ain't much to do at the moment with this drought. Hand feeding the stock. Bringing in water. Re-doing some of the bigger dams makin' 'em deeper for when the rains come...you can betcha left one that they's will, all in good time...more'n we want more'n likely. That's how it goes."

He led us right through the house to a back veranda. We could have walked around as the house was completely encircled with a wide low veranda. Deep in shade. Quite cool, actually. A mosaic tiled surface that must have been slippery if wet by blown in rain.

"Sit. Please. Betty will bring out the coffees. A bite to eat."

Betty MacGregor came out to introduce herself.

The epitome of the rotund, cherry cheeked, large farm mama. Her face alive with laughter and smile lines. I could see her cuddling each child in turn to her ample breasts. Love in every action. She fussed about a small coffee table, dragging it into a central position and depositing a coffee plunger jug, milk and cream pitchers and a large plate of Arnott's Iced VoVo's.

I didn't think they made them anymore.

I half expected her to bring out a plate of Lamingtons also!

She sat and did the honours for all of us while old man Greg sat back and waited until she had finished.

"Lovely dear." He responded as he took a sip of the coffee. "Just how I like it."

As though this had been her first attempt not the umpteenth million in their married life!

He turned to me.

"Terrible business. Stan and George. Knowed both of them when they were knee-high...a tragedy...both the girls will be devastated. They are good friends. All their lives...makes you wonder how their friendship will survive...terrible, hey dear?"

He turned to his wife for confirmation. She wiped away a tear. Blew her nose.

"So...you were at home, Mister MacGregor?"

"Oh, yes. We'd just finished tea. I'd gone out onto the front veranda for a smoke...down to three a day...one after each meal. A cigarillo..."

"Nasty things." Betty interrupted with a smile.

"...though Betty won't let me light up in the house no more...she usta smoke heavier than me once...Catalyst was about to start. On Channel Two. Tuesday night. Bam. His Kruger. Knows the sound of the gun. Like an amphitheatre here...the sound of the shot resonates up and down the valley..."

"You sure of the time on that night?"

"Sure...always like watching Catalyst. Every week. Have that last smoke then settle in to watch a bit of TV though there ain't much else on, on Tuesdays...Monday's the best night. Seven Thirty we watch while having tea. Australian Story. Four Corners. Media Watch, Q & A. A good night for TV."

"You sure that it was a Kruger rifle...and it was shot from the O'Lachlan place?"

"Oh, sure. Knows the sound of his .303. The shotgun. The 22 when the wind is right. He's trying to keep the ferals away from his Spring dam...the flows drying up, so he says...though I reckon he's losing more from evaporation when it discharges into that dam...it's a pretty big sized dam. Deep too...we's put a couple of those pool covers over our bottom dam. Makes one hell of a difference. Fenced it off and it feeds water into a shallow, narrow drinking trough...makes one hell of a difference...especially when you gotta pay to have the stuff trucked in. Makes one helluva difference, but George? He's not too sure about the way we done it...now look what's happened! A terrible thing."

He shook his head, sure that there was a connection between the pool covers he used over his bottom dam and the death of Stan 'Jimmy' Albright.

Betty MacGregor nodded her head to show that she agreed with the assumption.

We sat and went over the history of the farming community. The Albrights and the O'Lachlan relationship. The trials and tribulations of the area. The last good rains and when the drought was expected to break...maybe later this year. Next year. Forever optimists!

Time slipped away quickly.

If we wanted to keep our flight reservations, we needed to get going as it was another hour at least back into town. Another meeting with Bernie Holden before we headed for the Airport to fly out.

I'd be home too late to accompany Tellie and my son Bill and his 'live-in love' Malisa before they hooked up the Caravan to the 4WD and headed for Port Macquarie.

I'd be at least two hours behind them.

Riding the Ducati which to be honest, I was looking forward to, even though I had not ridden it for such a distance in years.

I expected to be sore and sorry by the time that I made Port!

Though the thrill of the ride still excited me!

I just hoped it didn't rain during the ride!

Bugger the fact that country folks were hanging out for rain out further west! Riding a bike in the rain on a long trip was asking for trouble, to my way of thinking.

CHAPTER NINE

Coppers are no different to 85% of the working population.

Energetic, enthusiastic and conscientious. Love their job!

The big difference is, like Ambos, SES and other emergency staff, there are times when the 8 to 6 regimes cannot be adhered to.

A Murder Dee for example, cannot visit a crime scene, look briefly at the victim, glance at his watch and then knock off!

Consequently, most coppers are owed big time in Flexitime and 'Time off in lieu' chits.

When the hierarchy periodically scan the Official Time Sheets, they are appalled at the time that some Officers accrue with little chance of reducing the time to a more manageable amount. In some respects, they are right in their assessment as these Officers, in trying to get rid of that incremental increase, would be off for weeks if not months, leaving Divisions and Squads seriously undermanned.

Some would say that this could be solved by the hiring of more trained Officers.

Not so.

This would only mean that there would be more officers working under those conditions. Experiencing the same difficulty in maintaining that delicate balance.

There was no simple solution except to reinforce a strict adherence for every Officer to attempt to keep on top of this practise and endeavour to take the time off as soon after it has accrued... if their case load permitted.

Unfortunately, dead bodies may not live by the clock and neither do we. A dead body has to be investigated at the time of discovery. You can't just say '*chuck a blanket over it and I'll look at it at nine to-morrow morning*' as it is the normal knock-off time now.

It just doesn't work that way!

Talking to some Officers, they are averse to do this in any case, as the family home is empty, friends, relatives and mates are at work and you can only do so much fishing, gardening or painting the house before it becomes boring...and expensive!

And sitting in an empty house drinking the day away, has innate problems!

Of course, the haphazard nature of serious road accidents, homicide and unlawful acts only adds to the problem as they do not respect the working hours of mere mortals!

We knew that we'd have a light week with just the one case and nothing to progress it until the post mortem was conducted and the slug removed from the Vic's head and transferred to Ballistics in Sydney.

We therefore spent time in the Gym on the following Monday morning flogging ourselves for having enjoyed the Coonabarabran trip.

I was still aching from the Bike ride to Port Macquarie and back. Though the entire week-end was spent with my entire half-brothers and sisters and their kids. The occasion? My step-mum's 65th. Birthday and their Wedding Anniversary.

A rugged work-out was my way of reducing the pain...go figure.

I had to admit that perhaps I had bitten off more than I could chew in taking on the distance on the 'Duke' and not admitting to advancing years. Perhaps the sporadic occurrences that I actually rode the bike had more to do with my body rebelling.

Bill was the one who rode the Bike every day into town.

Regardless, it had been an enormous week-end up in Port with everyone there except the sister-in-law from Brisbane. She was the bitch Journalist who felt that as she was related to me, she was entitled to 'inside' information on the more sensational homicide cases. We had locked horns on several occasions. Every time that she saw me, was a duel of wits and steel. I was not impressed with her at all, so it was good that she was absent. Her husband, my eldest half-brother, made the effort with his two kids.

CHAPTER TEN

"Joe? Shelley? Come in, will you?" Abbey grabbed us as we passed his Office and were heading back to our desks.

"The Coonabarabran Homicide Shooting..."

"I've labelled it '*The Shot in the Dark*' case, boss."

A smirk on my face.

Proud of my own cleverness.

Shelley shook her head.

Abbey seemed to look through me for some moments before responding.

"Yesss....seems to be on shaky ground, doesn't it?"

"Undue Force." Shelley replied. "Regardless of it being a lucky shot or not...which is the Perp's take on the matter, it is at the least, Accidental Homicide. Manslaughter."

I gave her a glance that should have pinned her to the wall.

"Boss? Both families are devastated. The entire District is also extremely upset over the matter...if it occurred as the facts seem to indicate, then the Vic could not have been seen on the road boundary and the fact that he was cutting the boundary fence...which I'll grant you is an Offence...that is neither here nor there. O'Lachlan says that he fired the gun to scare away the animals taking his water...from the only full, spring fed farm dam in the District...they are into their fifth year of a very severe drought with water a very precious commodity."

"That's his story...the Perp's...concocted! An easy alibi as such to construct. Regardless Joe, he pulled the trigger which shot and killed a person who was not even on his property...not threatening him or trespassing. He was on Crown Land. He killed the man with one shot!"

"Boss? Why is Lady Justice blindfolded...and what has happened to the quality of Mercy?"
I turned angrily to my young partner.

"The Law does not need to deal in just black and white...this is a case in question where

common sense, decency and mercy should apply. A person is found guilty of a crime in a Criminal Court and sentenced not just for retributive justice but to rehabilitate the guilty party. In this case, all parties...all parties...will suffer for the rest of their lives in their own personal sort of sentencing...the Law should make allowances for such matters. Shouldn't it?"

"Christ, Joe...are you going to break out reciting some famous speech from Shakespeare? He shot a man...regardless whether it was a neighbour. A mate or an enemy. He should spend time in prison."

Shelley had that look of a zealot. The blaze in the eyes. That jutting chin and clenched fists. She could only see the case in the narrow black and white spectrum.

"OK...OK, you two. I should remind both of you that your job is to arrest the guilty party. Charge them and leave it in the hands of the DPP for them to question the wisdom of the Charges...or whether the Charges should be dropped. Understand? So do your job and not pontificate on whether the Law can be a complete ass at times...which we all know, it can be. OK? More important things...I'm assuming that both of you may have not had time to go through your In-box while you have been away? Yes? No?"

"Yes, Boss. We had the nights free. What else do you expect us to do? Which by the way, we have not claimed as overtime duty for going through our e-mails which were pertinent to our job at that time of night. After we had enjoyed Dinner."

Abbey looked at me. Again, that look that looked through me. Past me. He shook his head as though I was a lost cause.

"Then you are aware of the usual six-month cyclic rant that the hierarchy are on at the moment. The degree by which Officers seem to accrue Holidays, Flex days and 'Time off in lieu' days...instead of taking them as they occur."

"C'mon, boss! That is nigh on impossible to comply with in most instances...especially for us in the Murder Squad who are dealing with two or three cases simultaneously...and the hierarchy? They're scared of the huge bill that will have to be paid out if we kark it prematurely...all at the same time!...or all retired together, which will involve a much larger wages bill..."

"Maybe yes; maybe no, Joe...but two of my Day Teams...and a Night Shift team have been ordered to take time off. Immediately...I'm only complying with Orders issued from on high...because these teams have accrued over six months of leave owing to them which has not been taken...because of that, it now becomes a problem for the entire Squad...being short staffed!"

"We're conscientious, boss..." I muttered.

"The two of you are getting into dangerous territory also. With your accrued time...and Joe, you have one current case at this point in time. You know that the hierarchy are negotiating with the Staff Associations to have these excesses cut from the Entitlement packages...without any monetary remuneration, don't you?"

"Won't succeed, boss. The Association will not agree to it and if it went to the Tribunal, then it would be thrown out..."

"You would hope so, Joe. You would stand to lose a fair amount of time worked if the Case was upheld in the Tribunal...is that something that you would want to chance?"

He said this with a smile on his face that belied his tone of voice.

He continued to ignore my mutterings. He knew what I was trying to do...get him off the subject!

"Right, a Public Holiday next Thursday. This week. You and Shells, along with at least 50% of the Day Staff will be having that day, Wednesday the preceding day, the Friday and the following Monday off to try and reduce the days owing to each Officer. If you don't use it up, you may lose it. Understand? And you will religiously take your Flex day each month from here on in...now, back to your 'Shot in the Dark' Case? When is the Post Mortem?"

"It should have been late last week...either this afternoon or first thing tomorrow...they've had a backlog of cases at Dubbo Base Hospital..."

"And?"

"We're expecting Prelim. Results by the middle of next week. No Toxicology results but the slug will be sent down here to Ballistics. Don't expect any surprises."

"OK. Get your Report up to date and ready to submit to the DPP...I would think we could be looking at Community Service Time and not a Prison term going on your description...and what you have written in your reports thus far...what is the plea?"

"Uncertain at this stage though I suspect it may be changed to a Guilty plea and thus save Court time...thrown to the mercy of the Judge."

"That's a bit iffy, isn't it? He risks time in jail instead of Community Service."

Shelley again shook her head and raised her eye-brows in mock opposition. She was still going for Murder One!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I walked from the Boss's Office grumbling under my breath.

I knew that Shelley would enjoy the break, pottering around her farm-let up the Leppington Road, re-acquainting herself with the menagerie of animals that she had accumulated over time. Taking in the injured ones, nursing them back to health. They then taking up residence as she continued to feed them instead of looking for foster homes for the recuperated animal...or bird. Reptile!

Me?

My one big chore was the Garage and attached Shed!

You could hardly move in either and it was one of those jobs that had been at the top of the list for several years now thanks to Malisa's habit of trolling the Junk Shops and second hand Market affairs. Bringing home what-ever took her fancy for later attention so she always said. Slowly refurbishing the main section of the house though of late, it had seemed to stall. Instead, the stuff always found its way to the top of the pile in the Garage or Shed to await that moment of inspiration and clarity when she would turn a piece of trash into an item of sheer beauty...so she alone always thought.

Bill just sat back and nodded his head. Giving glib words of encouragement while offering not a minute of sanding or painting time!

"Children? Don't get too comfortable. We have an interesting one for you...out MacArthur way. South of Campbelltown in one of those new Estates. Chap found on his bedroom floor in a pool of blood. One knife wound so it seems. Been there for some time is the consensus. Found by his Carer stroke Housekeeper this morning. A Missus Sheryl Canter. No more than fifteen minutes ago. The Victim? Bonito 'Ben' Molipopolous. Seventy years of age. His daughter lives behind him, apparently. There's the Case File Number up on the board. A new Murder Book to put on your desk so that it doesn't look so barren as though you are out of work...it's a nice day for a drive. See you...and stop grumbling, at least you get days off for all the extra work you do. Us poor Clerical staff don't have the lurks and perks that you guys have. Sitting around in the sun sipping on lattes..."

We gave him our best return fire comments that managed only howls of crocodile tears and comments that no-one appreciated him amid snide comments from who-ever was within earshot in the Squad Room.

We wandered back to our desks to gather up our things and to compute what little we had on the new case into our iPads.

"Did you catch the address?"

"Yeah...do you think that we can cancel our days off because of this?"

"No way, Joe. I could do with some time off. I'm going to ring Garry to see if he can con some time off himself at the same time. A dirty week-end away perhaps?"

"What happened to looking after all your animals?"

"Oh...they still know me after working all these shitty times, so another week-end of my absence won't hurt them..."

"Loyalty! A fading attribute in today's society. C'mon, you ready? Let's go." I started to walk out of the Squad Room. Stopped and turned back to her.

"When you take these dirty week-ends away...if you ever do, who looks after the animals?"

"Garry's sister. A close neighbour. A couple down the road. We are not lacking for the occasional volunteer who comes in...the elderly couple down the street stroll in of their own accord which can be a bit off-putting at times. But they're good people. Give us heaps of food and stuff...I think they're just a bit lonely...why?"

"Oh! No reason. None. Just wondered."

I headed towards the Lift Lobby.

CHAPTER TWELVE

These newer estates at least had an occasional large tree still standing.

Large houses on small blocks, though. At least the penchant for a double storey mansion was becoming out of reach of the ordinary citizen.

Their presence noticeable by the lack of numbers in this area at least.

I thought that this was a friendlier neighbourhood because of this fact. Some of the Estates had nothing but two-storey McMansions crowding into one another, giving the appearance of battlements constructed to repel the invaders. An unfriendly statement of warning to stay away. Maybe it was my early years in a typical 50's style street. Not a two-storeydwelling within cooe. Ample green grass. Trees to climb and shrubs to hide behind and still plenty of room to run around.

I was surprised that the Forensic Pathologist Van and Morgue vehicle was already on site.

A young bloke who I hadn't met before was being assisted by Brenda Wzerlic's young partner, the ever-smiling Harriet O'Bourne with the lilting Irish accent. Brenda, so I was informed, was relieving on night duty.

I was even further surprised to see the Lead Forensic Officer.

My 'live-in love' Estelle 'Tellie' Sanchez.

I had the distinct impression that we were to be kept away from the same crime scene since the episode at the Catholic Boarding School in the Blue Mountains. It was still the subject of corridor gossip at the Police Building in Parramatta, so I had been informed.

"This is a surprise..." I mumbled, as I went to peck her on the cheek.

"Joseph..."

The sound like a warning snarl from an attack dog.

I backed off.

"Shelley? How are you?" Tellie enthused. A complete opposite greeting for my work partner.

How do you figure these women?

They can be cheery and full of camaraderie to one of their own sex, but put the apple of her eye beside her on the job and she turns into that growling, snapping Doberman.

A little civility to her better half would be much appreciated...I have a mind to turn the tap off for several weeks...okay, maybe a night to display my disappointment at her stance...if that was at all possible!

"Do you want to kit up, Shells?"

"Sure...you still having trouble slipping into something more comfortable, old man?" Shelley commented smartly as she turned to me.

I have no idea why, but I struggled something fierce trying to squirm into the forensic boiler suit. Putting the overlay 'booties' on tested me, also!

Go figure.

"Any indication of time of death...um...we haven't met before, I believe?"

I held out my hand to the new face Lead Forensic Pathologist.

"Sorry, I should have done the honours. Scott Landers? Meet the famous Joseph Lind and his partner, Shelley Shields of the NSW Murder Squad."

The broad Irish accent made me smile. I hoped that she would never lose it.

We shook hands.

I looked the lad up and down, surprised that such young persons were passing the rigorous medical exams to allow them to become Forensic Pathologists at such a young age.

"Scott is on loan from Auckland, en-zed..."

That explained it. They had a fast track system over there...they must have!

The four of us were crowded around the doorway of the room that was clearly the old bloke's bedroom. Shelley stepped into the room and walked slowly towards the only window. Poked her head out as a Forensic Officer worked on the external surfaces.

"That's blood." She muttered to no-one in particular.

The FO nodded his head. Muttered something that I failed to pick up.

"Mmm...cause of death?" Shelley asked, turning to the young Kiwi who still stood at the doorway.

"As far as we can tell at the moment, a single knife thrust up under the rib cage that should have...may have pierced his heart...that will be confirmed at the time of the post mortem....and the...arrh...TOD? From around midnight last night to about three...maybe four this morning. I doubt that we'll be much more precise than that. Sorry."

I shook my head to wash away the apology.

"Home Invasion gone wrong?" I suggested, as I turned to Shelley who had just returned from the Bedroom where the victim lay.

"They usually don't come in through a bloody window in most cases of home invasion, Joe. They just burst in through the front door! I'd say the old bloke was defending his patch from a night-time intruder. A burglar who forced the bedroom window. Didn't count on the guy being aggressive perhaps...not worth your life trying to protect hearth and belongings from a drug addled or drunk guy hell-bent on collecting enough booty for his next fix..."

"You reckon?"

She nodded her head confidently.

"It would seem that the Vic may have got one on the Intruder. There's blood on the window sill... a fair bit. And down the driveway."

"We should give a call to the local Hospital. Any medical Centres nearby...for a heads up."

"Already done."

"Good."

"We should interview the House-keeper..." Shelley commented as she shucked out of the forensic gear, tossing it into a bio-mat bin on the front veranda of the house.

"He must have had a bit of dosh if he could afford one of those. A House-Keeper. You'd reckon."

"Joe..." Tellie turned to me with a sad look on her face. "It's available for those elderly people who wish to remain in their own home but need help with the day to day things. You can get help for house-work, cooking, washing, shopping...even showering or what-ever. If you need it. The Federal Government helps to finance the program."

"Oh..."

I didn't have a clue, and wondered why my father and step-mum hadn't taken advantage of the services available, instead of passing on the responsibility to Glenda, my half-sister in Port Macquarie.

"I wasn't aware of such a thing... ain't Australia a fantastic country in which to live..."

"It still comes out of our taxes, my man."

"So? I'm not complaining."

"Yeah, well! There's plenty that do!"

"Whingers...bloody hell, nothing but bloody whingers. Take them to some country where running water is a luxury. Where the sewerage runs down the middle of the street, your only light at night-time is a single weak bulb for your one room shanty and an Old Aged pension is only for the ruling class and then let them whinge!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Missus Sheryl Canter?"

She nodded her head.

She was shaking.

We introduced ourselves, confirming that the woman sitting beside her was the victim's daughter. Shandrina Grecco. Her married name.

We sat in a couple of Lounge chairs opposite the two women.

"I understand that you found Ben's body only about an hour ago? Could you tell us what happened?"

"Yes..."

She dabbed her eyes delicately with a lace handkerchief. An old fashion type of woman, I concluded.

"I'm Mister Molipopolous's House-keeper."

She gave me a look, apparently chastising me for referring to the Deceased by his first name.

"Every Monday morning. Nine to mid-day. Vacuum. Dust. A bit of his washing. Make a couple of meals of stew. Spaghetti and meatballs. Always bake a cake for him. A wonderful man. Polite. Always charming and happy...this is so terrible...he had trouble getting about... and I've noticed that his mind is starting to go..."

"You have a key, then?"

"Um...no. When I couldn't raise him with my knocking on the front door, I called the Office. They rang his daughter who lives directly at the back of this block. Her details are kept on file back in the office...in a case such as this...or you know..." She looked up. Tears in her eyes. "She came and opened up the front door but wouldn't go inside. She didn't want to see her father dead in bed if that was the case. I...um...I saw him on the floor in the second Bedroom with blood all around..."

"This isn't the first time, yer know!" The daughter butted in. "Twice before to-day. Over the past two years since we moved in here. Nothing of value missing though Pops didn't have that much...seems that Pops was picked on because he had a Housekeeper. If he could afford a Housekeeper, then he must be rich. That's their thinking on the matter. The local cops came, yer know. Seems that they suspect who the culprit might be. An Aboriginal...a young indigenous boy from the Housing Commission block a couple of streets away. They's got a

couple spread through this Estate. A social experiment. Seems they think we can educate them into being better citizens...all that's happening is we keep getting robbed. Held up if we walk in the Park after dark. They trash our cars. Graffiti everything. Us educating them...they's turning a couple of the hotheads to their ways of thinking. Living. Drugs. Booze...know what I'm saying? Social experiment, my arse!"

My Mobile rang as a Uniform Constable walked quietly up to me.

"Detective? They think that they may have found the alleged Intruder..."

I held up my hand.

I stood and walked towards the front door after excusing myself from their presence as I went to answer my mobile.

It was the Office.

Hendo. Informing me in his normal chirpy manner of the finding of a young indigenous youth stabbed in the stomach several times. Dead. Behind an Electrical Sub-Station at the entrance to the Park less than two blocks from our location.

I thanked him and rung off.

Turning to the Constable, I beckoned that he followed me outside onto the front lawn.

Brenda Wzerlic and Tellie and her assistant were already walking up the block. Weighed down with Crime Scene bags and photographic equipment. A weird parade of blue clad figures in their forensic "onesies". They had shucked out of their previous suits into new ones so as not to cross-contaminate the new crime scene.

Shelley had volunteered to stay at the house and continue to question the two women.

There was still several Forensic Scene Officers on all fours on the side driveway looking for trace.

Several screens erected to hide their activity from the gathered snoopery throng of neighbours.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The knife wounds were severe.

A deep slash down the right arm a defensive wound. A wound that may have punctured the youth's kidneys. Another perhaps making a mess of the lower intestines.

The old bloke sure used Undue Force!

Then again, it could be argued that the old man was at some stage, fighting for his life. It was obvious that the knife had changed hands a couple of times if you looked at the stab wounds of both participants.

On paper, it would be the old man who had first held the knife.

Perhaps the youth had lunged at him...no, I didn't like that supposition.

We would need to determine the owner of the knife before we went down that track.

"The knife?" I asked Tellie as we both sat on our haunches over the body. "Did it belong with any grouping at the house?"

"Bit hard to tell, Joe. I'll chase that out when we finish here. You should ask the daughter, perhaps."

"I think I may get a more reasonable answer from the Housekeeper." I responded quickly.

I took a shot of the knife with my mobile and sent it through to Shelley back at the house.

Moments later a one worded SMS came back in the negative.

I could now assert with some confidence that the young bloke had bought it with him.

That kind of made things a little easier.

The old bloke had been woken by the noise of the intruder trying to force the window. Crept from his bed into the second Bedroom, challenging the guy as he had climbed through the window.

A scuffle.

A couple of swings.

The old bloke would have been stronger, but now found himself fighting for his life.

The young bloke high on Ice and fizzed up on adrenalin and the effects of the drug.

It would make no difference to the satisfaction that the old man should have felt if he had survived. Then again, if he had, he very well could have been looking at a Prison Sentence for his attempt at protecting his valuables.

Reasonable Force to apply...what-ever that meant!

I doubted that scenario. The guy was fighting for his life. Not just his worldly possessions. Whatever the case, even if the old bloke had responded out of some ancient macho instinct to protect whatever was his, even if that seemed to be pittance in the eyes of any bystanders, it had cost him his life.

It didn't seem to be worth the sacrifice, if that proved to be the case.

Another Morgue Van was called upon and the Forensic Van was requested to make the short trip up the block to provide some more screens to shield the inert figure.

"You know the lad?" I asked the Uniformed Cop who had accompanied me on the short walk. By now of course there were at least a dozen cops milling about at both locations for fear of any vengeful backlash.

"Yeah...a local mischief maker for sure...but you have to feel sorry for him. His home life isn't exactly rosy. His mother and father are alcoholics. Bashing the tripe out of one another on most days. The kids too. His siblings? They shouldn't be living in that environment...what can you do? What with all the news on the stolen generation, DoCs are loathe to remove kids from the domicile even if it is seen that they are in possible danger...There may be a bit of a backlash where everyone else is to blame, including us cops, and the 'whiteys' living around here, for the death...it's to be expected. It'll blow over as quick as it came. Jason Waters is the kid's name. Been chucked out of school on so many occasions...using drugs himself now, it was bound to happen. Seventeen...a bloody sad life...and death!"

I looked down at the prone figure.

A large puddle of blood had oozed into the grass around him.

You had to feel sorry for him.

Born behind the eight ball with his life mapped out for him from an early age...nothing was going to change it...and nothing did!

Defiant right to the end! He still clutched the knife in one hand.

We'd have to wait for DNA trace and forensic evidence, hopefully a couple of good fingerprints at the home, preferably on inside surfaces and maybe a clear trace on the ownership of the knife that he still held in his hand before we could write the Case up and close with a succinct conclusion.

The paperwork on the Case for a Coronal Enquiry only.

Cut and dry.

Straight forward for once!

We spent the rest of the day at the address interviewing close neighbours of Ben Molipopolous.

When we visited the address of the parents of the lad, there was a moment when I thought that we would need reinforcements. Everyone within the small block of semi-detached houses circling a cul-de-sac seemed to know already of the incident and the deaths involved. Anger would be the word to describe the feeling bubbling within those people who quickly appeared at our arrival. Wanting to remonstrate. Wanting to blame some-one other than themselves. The figures of Authority in us Cops being the obvious choice.

Things haven't changed.

A Cop smell could apparently be detected within a hundred metres of the address!

We eventually returned to the scene of Waters' death. He had been removed and the scene had been examined. It was now being washed clean. Any trace of the last place that the young boy lay was being removed.

Life went on.

We spent the following day back at the Molipopolous residence following the daughter around making sure that nothing had gone missing. Perhaps it may have been a wiser choice to involve the elderly House-keeper because it seemed that the daughter rarely set foot inside the house and knew little of her father's belongings...except whenever we came across an item that may have had some value attached. These the woman stacked into a large plastic Bin.

Kids? Aren't they wonderful?

I again felt sad for the world and some of its inhabitants.

Again, a team of two Forensic Specialists were at the home going over the areas that had been examined the previous day. Ensuring nothing had been missed. Everything accounted

for.

It was standard procedure, especially in cases such as this where the forensic evidence would be the only story-teller.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

It was the Tuesday.

Our second day on site at the Molipopolous residence.

Shelley and I had driven into the new Shopping Plaza only fifteen minutes away from the house to get some lunch and sit out in the sun that was slowly being hidden behind storm clouds rolling in from the south-west.

It had been forecast for once.

Rain tonight...and all the next week, in fact.

I may have to forego my planned use of the six-day sojourn of cleaning out the Garage and Shed, I thought happily to myself! But then I realised that I had no Plan 'B' in case of rain. Maybe I could hook up the van and head up the coast. Do a bit of surfing. Drop in to see Dad without the Clan being present. I had hardly spent any valuable time with just him last week-end. Most of the time it was group discussions with Dad and Step-mum sitting there silently, reminiscing over things that were mentioned by their large family. Happy to watch the large clan interact with one another.

I liked that idea. It sounded better!

My mobile rang out "Hotel California" by The Eagles.

"Is that...um...Joseph Lind. Detective Joseph Lind?"

I nodded my head.

"Who's calling please?"

"Doctor Graeme Meads. Dubbo Base Hospital..."

"Arrh, yes, Doctor. You are speaking to Joe Lind." I raised my eye-brows at Shelley. She shrugged her shoulders always perplexed by my want not to identify myself until the other person had done so.

I don't know why.

Paranoia perhaps?

Anxiety maybe?

"Yes, Detective. I've just completed the autopsy on...arrh...one Mister Stanley James Albright aka Jimmy Albright of Parsonella Run on the Quirindi Back Road out of Coonabarabran..."

"Yes, Doctor. Any surprises?"

"Not really. Being hit with a point two two two slug to the side of your head will always leave your brain cells in somewhat of a broth state. Healthy apart from that. All organs within prescribed allowances for a male of that age group. Rather healthy actually. Unfortunately, because of the delay in the autopsy operation, a lot of his organs could not be utilised. A sorry state of affairs...we have to do better..."

"Yes Doctor. It would be a pity...arrh, not to be able to utilise those organs fit for recycling." My memory was jogged by a similar comment made by the late Professor Bernie Ford at the site of the shooting homicide of 'The Helpful Neighbour' Case, I think it was.

"The slug? I've referred it on to Sydney. The Ballistics people. I do not want to speak out of turn, and God forbid, Ballistics is not my forte, but it has deformation not usually associated with just hitting and piercing a human skull. Understand what I am saying, sir?"

"I think I may...you seem to think that additional deformation may have been caused by a ricochet or something similar. Would that be a fair take on your suspicion, Doctor?"

"Yes. I think so...I'm...um...sending trace down to Sydney for further examination...from around the entry hole....um, the post mortem Report. I should have it to you by the middle of next week. Thank you, Detective...were you the Sydney Detective that was at the scene...oh...two years...maybe eighteen months ago? The old Cockie and at one stage the Mayor of Nyngan. Cec Barnes. Committed suicide on top of Fossickers Rest about two hours out of town. Diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer...all indications are he would not have lasted much longer in any case. A sad affair. I came in by Helicopter to pick up the body...a bloody hairy landing on top of that bloody little pimple of a hill. But it was the highest point around for miles...beautiful view. I could think of worst places to die. You had two young Detectives with you that you were mentoring..."

"Yes, Doctor. Yes. Now I remember you..."

Though I didn't, but what the heck, it made him happier by all accounts.

"Yes. Beautiful country out there..."

"Yes Doctor. I thank you for your diligence and in contacting me so quickly...I must go as I am knee deep in a murder investigation out near Campbelltown."

"Yes. Yes, of course. It was on the News last night...this world? It's getting out of hand, I think...though I would imagine that some Jewish Doctor in Munich may have said the same thing in 1933 as he watched Hitler's Brown Shirts march...Hope to see you again. Cheers."

He hung up.

I relayed all that was said to Shelley. Including the reference that the World was going mad!

"BS! A ricochet bullet. An accidental shooting of a one in a million chance of occurring! Bullshit!...and I can't agree with his observation...the World has been in a state of madness since Eve realised that she was a bloody nudist! Nothing has changed that way!"

People turned their heads at the language.

I smiled wanly to apologise to them.

I rang Abbey and explained the situation.

What I wanted was a Forensic Team sent out to Coonabarabran to see if they could locate the site...the location of the object that the slug might have ricocheted off. A long shot but it would close the case out...in my favour much to the annoyance of Shelley, so I thought!

"Arrh Joe? How would they be able to locate such a rock... if indeed that is what it has ricocheted off."

"Laser string lines. A bullet will only ricochet up to a maximum angle depending on what it has hit and still retain its kinetic energy...worth a try, boss."

"Let me think about it. I'll let you know."

"Thanks Boss."

I knew that he would go along with the request. He was like that. Willing to accept my BS as fact. I had no idea about the maximum angle of a ricocheting bullet but it sounded reasonable to me.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Tellie, my 'live-in love', gave me an almighty shove in the back that had me landing heavily onto the floor.

"Answer yer bloody phone, you bloody cretin!" She mumbled before turning over and drifting back to sleep.

I groped for my Mobile in its dock on the bedside set of drawers, only half understanding what I was doing on the floor and groping around in the dark for my phone.

I thought the sound of the bell was for the second round. The first three-minute bout seemed to have lasted half a second with me ending up on the canvass by a TKO!

A bloody weird and frightening dream!

I had no idea how the brain did that. It had happened to me before where the brain makes up this scenario to suit the conditions as they were happening...in real time...and then you wake up in a completely confused state!

"Joe? We're up..."

"What do you mean we're up?"

I heard Tellie half roll and mumbled a stream of expletives. Wake her from a deep sleep and she was the biggest bitch...the slowest moron on Earth the following day! I rolled over and stood, hurrying from the Bedroom, shutting the door quietly behind me. Flipping on the Kitchen light, I turned on the Coffee Maker which was on 'stand-by' for a more comfortable time in the morning. I glanced at the wall clock.

Just after three on the Saturday morning!

Shhit!

"OK...I'm up. What do you mean that we're up? We're on an extended long week-end courtesy of the boss...I'm heading up to see my Dad up Port Macquarie way...I intend leaving early this morning..."

"Yeah, well...it's early this morning already...you did that last week-end, didn't you? Someone forgot to cancel our 'slip team' roster duty for this week-end."

"Shhhhit...look, call up the secondary team..."

"No can do, Charley. We're it. It's that simple. The head of the team forgot to cancel out... the silly bastard!"

"That's the responsibility of the junior member to look after those minor arrangements..."

"Shit!!! Abbey is going to have a huge piece of us...shit!"

"No matter Joe. A B&E with the Owner of the premises taking it upon himself to protect his property...one dead burglar the result, by the sound of it."

"To paraphrase a certain person...Undue Force! Whereabouts? And have you got a vehicle?"

"Stanmore and no...I thought...well I assumed...never mind..."

"An hour and twenty...remember to put in a chit for the use of your private vehicle."

I took down the particulars.

"See you there..."

"You won't go back to bed again, Joe?"

I had no idea how they figured it out...that is, who to ring at such an ungodly hour knowing that that person would be firing on all fours by the time that the conversation had ended. My former partner Marjory Hendricks was the first to receive these 'call-out' procedures. Then my young partner Dallas Courtney and now Shelley. There must be some type of rating system that is used by the Head Clerk on Night Duty. My complete inability to usually bounce out of bed at such an hour must be written down in some obscure secret script and kept safely in a location only available to that chap...or am I being a mite paranoid?

"Me? No...not likely." I replied earnestly. "My better half has now taken sole ownership of our bed...we've got to buy a king size one..."

"Trust me, Joe. It's no better, let me tell you. It just gives those who are greedy more room to move! They still crowd you out if you're the effected and innocent soul." She let out a little giggle. "See you there."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Grey tongues of dawn were paling the leaden sky.

Storm clouds hung low and heavy.
Rain was forecast.

I double-parked opposite the address.

Flashing blue and red light-bars lit up the early morning air and bounced off the low clouds from at least a dozen cop cars and ancillary services.

Blurry-eyed neighbours looked from front verandas wondering what all the fuss was about.

"A raid on the Muslim Brotherhood?" One neighbour suggested.

"What? Marty's place? He's as far from a Muslim as I am from the bloody Pope!" Some-one else retorted.

"He's murdered some-one." Another voice offered.

"Yeah, well...he's got a temper. Remember the time he chased that young bloke down the street because the guy rode his skate-board onto his front lawn...the bit near the gutter...the Council own it, don't they? No wonder his missus left him. That's a while ago now...I reckon he usta bash into her...and the kid. The son. I often see him over there though he don't stay long. What was his name?"

Silence as they all pondered the question as though it would free the world of hate and crime.

"Bradley" Some-one offered.

"Nah...but something like that...Brad...Bray...Bramin."

As though the name would unlock the secrets of the Universe.

"Remember? He tried to chase the young guy...almost gave himself a heart attack. Him hobbling along the road with his bloody walking stick yelling out the foulest language!"

There were sniggers and laughs at the memory.

Theories and way out claims.

The rumourmongers were out in force even at this early time of the morning.

I opened my car door as I saw Shelley walking up the side of the street. A furred umbrella in her hand. I offered her a container of coffee that I had purchased from the fast food outlet down the block. She took it greedily.

"Ta. I needed that." She rejoiced as she took several sips.

"Good morning for it...you know the guy's name?"

"The alleged Perp and Owner of the residence? Yes. Marten Waughblaum. Forty-one years of age. Divorced. By all accounts living alone. Don't know the identification of the Deceased."

We showed our Badges.

Signed into the Crime Scene Visitors Form.

Took a quick squiz around.

Walked into the house.

A middle-agedman was sitting in a large 'Lazi-boy' chair in the front Lounge area. Wrapped tightly in a Dressing Gown. Slippers on his feet. A young female Constable sitting on a two-seater lounge beside him cradling a steaming mug of coffee.

She looked up and nodded at our entrance.

Brenda Wzerlic came through from the back area of the house. Fully kitted up. Nodding her head when she saw us. She looked as though the Night Duty relief was not agreeing with her. She indicated for us to follow her back into the gloom of the house.

"Night duty doesn't look as though it is agreeing with you." Shelley offered. A concerned look on her face.

Brenda slowly shook her head. Smiled...or was it a grimace, I wasn't too sure.

"Nah...I reckon that my bio-rhythms will just be getting in sync when the Relief Duties end. A bastard. I couldn't do it full time, let me tell you. It plays havoc with what little social life I had left...which was next to zilch, but I did have some way back when...."

We followed her up a narrow hallway and into what must have been a second bedroom.

Not a pretty sight.

The room was lit up like a bloody lighthouse.

A figure was half in, half out of the only window in the room.

The window narrow and tall like one of those in many a Victorian Terrace house.

Almost fully open.

The body slumped over the sill with both arms dangling. Hands touching the floor as though he was testing the temperature of a large pool of blood spreading on the lino surface below him.

Blood having dripped from a massive head wound at the back of the skull.

Brenda let us take in the scene.

We both stepped around a Forensic Officer who was on all fours on the floor beside the body.

A Photographer was still snapping photos at a furious rate.

We had to almost adopt a form of dancing to move around the small bedroom. A single bed and an old pine Chest of drawers the only furniture.

"The resident...the owner of the house." Brenda began. "Marten 'Marty' Waughblaum says he was awoken just before three this morning. About 2:45. Some bloke making a terrible amount of noise trying to break into the house through this window. Marty is on a Disability Pension after a work accident left him incapacitated almost ten years ago. Requires a walking stick to get around. Has trouble standing for long periods of time. In constant pain. He creeps from his bedroom into this one. It's pitch black. He's not game enough to turn on the light. All he says he sees is a dark silhouette of someone climbing in through the window. Half in. Half out. The lad is making so much noise huffing and puffing, he doesn't hear or even see Marty sneak up to him. Kind of sees the chap trying to get in through the window. Whacks him with his walking stick. The bloke seems to pass out. Marty walks back to the Lounge Room and rings Triple 'O'. A Divvy van is in the area and is on scene within four minutes. Rings in the incident four minutes later at 2:58 after determining that the Intruder is deceased."

"Jeez...what is it?... things coming in threes..."

"A full moon, perhaps Joe?" Shelley asks.

"Pitch black or thereabouts. Low cloud cover. A waxing moon. It was a no moon night last week, wasn't it? When we were in Coonabarabran..."

"How was that trip?" Brenda asked. "Nice country out there. My parents talk of camping in the Warrumbungle's before they got married...that's out that way, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Beautiful country even though it's in the grip of its second drought in under a dozen years. Really dry. A shame. It would be God's country in a good season or two."

"Yeah, my parents say the same thing...the walking stick? It looks a bit like a bloody golf Wood...a Driver. A huge clump that fits neatly into a large hand...would do plenty of

damage...um...may have initially knocked the guy out but caused massive damage to the brain I think...took the scalp off from the base or nape of the neck for about 7 centimetres as though he had been skinned...or scalped using a skinning knife. By the position of the head in relation to the neck, I'd say there could be partial disconnection. We'll know for sure with X-rays back at the Office. But if that summation is correct, then the Deceased could have been partially paralysed...but a guess. He died from massive internal brain haemorrhaging I would contend...he was hit extremely hard. But more a glancing blow. A bloody good golf swing none the less! I doubt that the old bloke knew how strong he was."

I bent down to take a look at the Deceased.

A young bloke about seventeen. Eighteen. Uncombed, dirty hair. Mid length. Over the collar. Swept over the eyes as is seen in those latest Boy Band crazes. A bad case of acne. A stunned look on the face. Eyes open wide. A dirty hoody on. Dirty jeans. A black Metallica T-shirt. He had bruising to the forehead. A broken nose that had bled some.

"The injuries to his face? Caused by his head hitting the wall below the window sill as a result of the blow to the back of the head...for each action...and all that..."

"We got any ID?"

"Yeah...um...a Brian Alec Brewster. An address in Leichhardt. A Driver's License. DOB September 1997. A ten dollar note in the wallet. Bugger all else. Some loose change in his pocket though we haven't got that far yet."

"The walking stick?"

"On the bed in an evidence bag. Been tagged and signed off, so be careful."

I stretched on two layers of latex as I stood. My knees cracked.

"Jeezus...I can't sit on my haunches for too long without my knees and calf muscles giving me heaps." I complained as I stood and stretched.

"Old age, Joe."

"You young ones continually remind us more senior persons of that fact, all the time, as though you are confident that age will never catch up with you...to that extent. Have I got news for you!"

I picked up the walking stick.

"Quite a weapon. Well weighted. Well balanced as though it was made with this use in mind."

"Your imagination getting away from you, Joe. Again!"

Shelley took a good look at the handle. Peering over my shoulder.

"Skin and hair deposits..." The older Forensic Trace Officer commented as she took the stick from my hands. Giving me a filthy look as much as to say that I may have tainted important evidence.

It was getting crowded in the small room. The temperature was rising.

I nodded to Shelley.

"You want to do the honours while I trawl the neighbourhood?"

"Sure...my turn in any case...and Joe? Undue Force!"

"BS, my young partner...he too could have been killed if he didn't incapacitate the intruder. You never know what these young guys, especially if they're fuelled on Ice, will do. They can explode into a psychotic rage that takes five or six cops to hold them down...Shells, you've seen that...I know what I'd do under the circumstances. Exactly what Waughblaum appeared to have done. Get in first. Get in big time. No worries. Bugger the stupidity of the Law if it wants to take this further."

"Joe? Remember what Abbey said. Just book the guy for Manslaughter at least and let the DPP worry over the intricacies."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It was raining heavily as I sprinted back to the Waughblaum residence.

As I was brushing off my jacket and stamping my feet on the 'Welcome' mat at the front door, Shelley came out onto the verandah. A far-away look on her face.

"You okay?" I asked.

"Yeah...sure...it's just..." She shook and then bowed her head.

"What...something doesn't fit well..."

"Yeah...no...I don't know. I wished I smoked again right at this moment. You should have

taken my umbrella, Joe. You knew that you were going to get caught in it."

We stood there watching the rain tumble down for some minutes.

"We should check out the Deceased place of residence. Any good with the neighbours?"

"Nothing really. Plenty of gossip. Innuendo. Theories and tales of the old bloke and his temper. Leave your car here and we'll go in the Unmarked...first things first. I could do with some breakfast."

We joined the line of Tradies and early morning School Students getting their caffeine fix for the day. The Breakfast meal hadn't improved though the coffee wasn't half bad.

We arrived at the address in Leichhardt as the rain was easing. A woman was standing on the threshold unfurling an umbrella in an awkward way as we opened the front gate. It's squeals of opposition to our pressure to swing the gate open made the woman look up at our approach.

"Missus Brewster?"

"Who's asking?"

A hardness in her voice.

I displayed my badge.

"What's the bastard done now?" She asked as she dropped the umbrella down. She looked as though she had had a hard night. Perhaps juggling two jobs to make ends meet, I thought.

"Excuse me? Um...can we go inside, please?"

"Must be bloody bad...look...I'm due at work in fifteen. Ya got five to explain. If he's mugged some-one again, I can't help him...he's been a worry since me and the old drunk got divorced."

We followed her as she quickly ushered us into a front Lounge Room. Dingy. Dirty in need of a good clean. Furniture threadbare and mismatched.

"Missus Brewster...your son? Brian Brewster...I'm afraid that he was killed earlier this morning..."

She seemed to freeze for some moments before her shoulders sunk. She looked over at me with an indecipherable expression that filled me with suspicion. She gathered her thoughts.

"Good riddance..." She eventually stated. "At least I might have enough money to go around now instead of on his drug needs...and grog."

It was not the response we were expecting, or for that matter had ever received before!

"Me car? He's got it. Where is it? Was it a car accident? It's uninsured...Christ...that'd be the last straw...anyone else hurt? Am I up for any more money? I can't afford a funeral. Ask his father though he's on a Disability Pension..."

"We were not aware that a vehicle was involved...he was killed as he tried to enter a residence illegally. Your vehicle? Make and model?"

She gave us the details. I phoned through to the Crime Scene Lead. Lucky to catch them as they were packing up. They had only delayed waiting until the rain eased.

"We'll trawl the street, Detective. Get back to you."

"So? When can I get me car back? It's in one piece? Not involved in an accident? Thank God."

My Mobile chirped the sound effects from the Roadrunner. Beep-beep and then the sound of him speeding away.

Missus Brewster laughed.

"Cute...can I get that too?"

I didn't have the patience or the want to explain how she could download the Apps. I identified myself then listened for some moments.

"Um...thanks, Constable. That will be all. We'll arrange for it to be transported to the Vehicle Forensics Lab at Glebe...we'll be back on site in a while...say in an hour. Can you stay until the car is taken away? Sure. OK. See you then."

"My car? When do I get it back?"

"Missus Brewster...it's a normal procedure under the circumstances. Perhaps a week. Two at the most..."

"Bloody hell! You cops are gotta hide...you tell me that my son is dead but not involved in any vehicle accident...but...the car's mine and you keep it from me."

"Missus Brewster? Your son was killed this morning...as he was climbing in through a forced window with intent to steal what-ever he could from some-one else's property..."

"That ain't my worry. He was eighteen. An adult supposedly. He knew what he was doing...getting drug money more'n likely. I need to get to work...if you can let me leave

now... otherwise I'll be late."

I glanced at Shelley.

Raised my eye-brows at the total lack of emotion.

It wasn't a shock reaction thing. It was complete disinterest!

No wonder the kid was up to his eye-balls in petty crime.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Three separate cases inside two weeks all but rolled up.

Maybe if we were lucky, very little Trial Time involved in any of them though Coronal Enquiries would be involved in two of them which means that we would still need to dot the 'i's and cross the 't's.

These three were an exception though both of us were not celebrating.

The amount of paperwork now required to get them to a Coronal Enquiry or to the satisfaction of the DPP Office was mind boggling which could drag on for several months.

Pre-Enquiry meetings.

Prelim meetings and Final Meetings with three different DPP Prosecutors getting to know and act on their personal preferences to ensure that their Trial Strategies would be successful.

A bloody headache!

We had a while to get to that point.

We were still awaiting Forensics, Ballistics and Autopsy results including Toxicology and DNA outcomes.

At least with the three cases and the associated paperwork and still awaiting Trial matters on the 'Bush Graves' case and the 'Hammer in the Head' case from Ballina, we would be spared any additional cases unless matters got unduly hectic.

We crossed our fingers.

"Joe? You see the preliminary ballistic report on the 'Shot in the Dark' Case out at Coonabarabran?"

"Yeah. Just read it. I wonder how they went with that forensic Laser test for ricochet...if they thought it was worthwhile, that is..."

"Or not!" Shelley muttered.

A smug look on her face as she spun around to face me.

I read out the pertinent conclusion on the Ballistic Report of the Point two-two-two bullet.

"Deformation of the bullet would indicate damage by other means more than when penetrating through the skull...that is, the bullet shows all the signs of ricocheting off another hard surface or object, unknown at this stage, before entering the Victim's skull. The angle of deflection was such that the ricochet did not hinder the speed or energy of the bullet's path to lessen its ability to penetrate a human skull. This would indicate a possible deflection angle of less than seven degrees to the right or left or in depression or elevation. The bullet did indicate microscopic residues of Ferris Oxide which may indicate the ricochet object may be made of metal. Tests on the subject Kruger Rifle, Serial Number KAF 00543F6336 has indicated that the rifle was well maintained and in top condition with no traces of Ferris Oxide present in any of its working parts, breach or barrel. One can conclude that the traces of Ferris Oxide may have come from external sources. At this stage unknown."

I looked over my Computer screen at Shelley. Wiggled my eye-brows. Gave her a wink. A smug grin.

Something jigged, as I printed out the Report for the Murder Book. After I had attached the Ballistic Report, I rummaged through the pile of crime scene photographs until I found what I was looking for.

I spun it around so that Shelley could see it. I produced a couple more.

"That was located near that road boundary fence. Not far from where Albright was standing cutting the boundary fence wire..."

"No, Joe. It was about halfway between that position and the homestead...O'Lachlan? Remember? He could never recall the exact position in which he held his rifle...or whether he fired into the air or onto the ground. That's the result of the shock of what occurred, more than likely. He did say that he would never point a rifle, loaded or not, at another human...or in the direction of the roadway which would have to be a negative elevation shot in any case... what? The House has to be on that hillock basically level with the top of that old windmill structure...if he held the rifle level...or slightly lowered when it went off, it may have ricocheted off that old steel structure straight into Stan Albright's head. A complete

accidental event...OK. OK." She held up her hands in mock surrender."I have to agree with you Joe, on this one. Well done, dude."

She just had to get it in. By the smile on her face I had to laugh.

I rang up to Forensics, not too sure whether it should be a Forensics or Ballistics responsibility.

"No...we had a three-man team drive out there. One day up. Two days on site making the locals wag their tongues a mile a minute and a one day drive back. They've just landed back in the Office. Give us a couple of days to get the information together and a Report out, will you....um...between you and me, it's looking productive. Next week, OK?"

"Confirmation of a ricochet bullet, Shells. A true shot in the dark, so it seems..."
It was my turn to have a smug look on my face.

All she did was stick her tongue out at me before she spun her chair back around to give me the cold shoulder!

"A bad loser." I mumbled under my breath.

She ignored the comment.

I suddenly remembered the comment that the Doctor who had undertaken the autopsy at Dubbo Base Hospital had said to me. He was going to forward trace material from around the entry wound on to The Forensic Services Department here in Sydney for analysis.

I rang up to Forensics and was shuffled from one person to the next until I had been connected to the pertinent Officer.

"You the Lead Detective on the shooting? Out around Coonabarabran?" She quoted the Murder Number back to me.

Yeah...have you been able to identify any of the trace taken from around the wound area?"

"Um...you'll get a Report by the end of the week..." I heard the tapping of a keyboard.
"Traces of Ferris oxide...rust in other words and zinc oxide. Galvanising of a steel structure. As we have no notion of the crime scene or surrounds, we cannot ascertain from what structure the bullet obviously ricocheted off...though a ricochet would be the answer."

"That's great. I have been there and know what the structure is. Good work. Thanks."

After I had hung up I thought perhaps the FO would want to know. I went to pick up my mobile to ring back. Instead I stirred Shelley again on the outcome.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I looked at the series of A4 photographs taken from the O'Lachlan farmstead veranda back down the front paddock to the roadway and the site where the victim was shot. Clearly in the shot was a steel trellised wind-mill that was used to pump water from the spring fed dam up into a water trough.

"We did a laser string-line of the various trajectories that we thought that the bullet may have taken. If the rifle was being held in a loose but level position, then it would be possible to hit one of the steel members of the windmill structure. We examined the structure minutely to find what we think, is evidence of the bullet ricochet. A small deflection would be involved for it to hit Albright in the side of the head... we can categorically claim that the bullet did indeed ricochet from that structure. Trace evidence taken from the entry hole wound and the side of the slug matched that material found around the point of contact with the steel support member of the windmill. The Accused has mentioned that he was firing the rifle to scare away the large number of animals that gather at the dam around dusk and early evening...I would state that the shooting death of Jim Albright was purely accidental with all charges being dropped... that is the opinion of the DPP Office."

Shells and I shared a moment of joy at this outcome.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I pulled the Molipopolous/Waters Case Murder Book towards me.

The death of the young Aboriginal Intruder and the elderly Protector sparked heated debate in the Media on the prudence of trying to defend yourself against an armed Intruder, and how much is 'Reasonable Force' in the eyes of the Law.

The Australian attitude, a hereditary aspect from English landlords, was to defend the battlements of the castle against all intruders and vagabonds who would endeavour to challenge the wishes of the Manor. It was almost instinctive in the national psyche and God forbid anyone who had the gall to test the history of the lore. If death of the Intruder was the outcome, then so be it!

He was asking for it!

The law was a little different in its interpretation.

The knife was found to have belonged to the Waters' Kitchen, though a flick-knife that the lad carried in a back pocket of his dirty jeans was a far more ugly, lethal looking weapon.

I wondered why he found it necessary to take a large carving knife with him on the mission when I felt the flick knife was a far more balanced and terrifying device.

The forensic evidence would not provide that cherry which would illustrate the exact sequence of events that led to the two deaths.

We could theorise until the cows came home, but we would never know for sure.

I wrote up the final report for both the DPP and the Coronal Enquiry, attaching all the relevant copies of Forensic and post mortem results. I let Shelley read over the final Draft before giving it to the Boss to peruse and make final comments in the margins for a re-type. His signature would be front and centre on the final Copy. A dozen would be collated by one of the Clerical staff with both Shells and I and DS Church's signatures to be attached.

"Good work, you two. Nothing very worrying. The 'Shot in the Dark' case? I read your final Draft, Shells. Well done...the guy should be absolved of all charges. A good outcome though I'd say that he will suffer for the rest of his life."

"Yes, boss. Seems they are selling their last shares in the farm to the eldest son and moving to the Coast. Early Retirement by all accounts. He was Joe's age, or thereabouts. I think he'll never sleep the sleep of the innocents again. Pity."

"OK. What are you waiting on with the 'Bush Graves' Case? It seems to be languishing behind."

"C'mon, boss! We've both been concentrating for close on ten days with those two other cases. We aren't magicians. We have everything we need to make up the final Reports....that and the Waughblaum case. That one also seems to be straight forward and we have everything collated, so it's just getting the time, boss."

"OK. OK. I know how long these last procedures are in wrapping up a case ready for Trial. There's no loose ends on that one?"

"No boss. Very similar to the others...just the time involved in the paperwork, is all."

"OK. Get onto it while you have the chance. Both of you are going on enforced lay-offs to cull your built-up Flexitime and 'Time off in lieu' credits. Two weeks' time. No discord."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

It was bound to happen sooner or later I guess, though perhaps it should be avoided at all costs.

My son Bill, had been working as a young solicitor in the DPP's Office for some years since he completed his Bar Exams with more than credible results.

In the top five in the State actually.

I was proud of him.

His mate for for-ever and joint house-mate living in the main part of the house while Tellie and I shared the Granny flat, Ben Stewart, had started in the DPP's Office with Bill. He left after about a year to try his luck in the wide, cruel world of Criminal Defence. Being plucked up by one of Sydney's leading Criminal Law Firms.

It was only a matter of time before the two would be on opposite sides in a Court Case. I had always feared that day, not knowing how their friendship would survive, especially if it was a fiery and sensational Case.

We were seated in the small Conference Room on the Squad Room floor.

It was our first meeting with the DPP Rep and his Assistant.

Bill hadn't warned me that it would be he who would be prosecuting the Brian Brewster death.

"Um...Detective? I'm not at all satisfied in the manner in which this investigation has been handled."

My son was actually questioning my ability in conducting a murder investigation!

At first, I was somewhat taken aback.

Thinking about it instead of getting my nose out of joint, I was proud of him, though there was a tiny spark of anger which I managed to extinguish.

Shelley looked agog.

Bill's older Assistant gave him a surprised sideways glance.

"Oh? How so, sir?"

I almost said son!

"The Autopsy Report on the Deceased, Brian Brewster?"

"Yes..."

I didn't want to go on the defensive, yet I did not want to attack this line of questioning from my son, regardless whether he was the DPP Rep or not on the 'Body in the Window' Case. That was what we were calling the Brian Brewster Death. An accidental death where it was unfortunate that the swing of the Walking Stick that killed him was hit a mite too hard, according to the DPP. We did not want to prosecute the case any further, but we needed to present a reasonable case for the Coronal Enquiry and to the Court for a Preliminary Hearing to see if Marten Waughblaum had a case to answer.

"The bruising around the lower back of the Deceased? In a straight line...."

"Yes...from the window frame...actually the window sash falling onto him as he tried to gain access through that window. He had lifted the sash up to permit his entry..."

"...and you are saying that the sash slipped back down onto his lower back as he squirmed through the opening..."

"Yes..."

"The Crime Scene photographs taken that morning detail the sash almost open to its highest extremity..."

"Yes...as the Accused stated, the Deceased was making one hell of a racket which include sliding the sash back up to allow him to slide through into the bedroom..."

"Then how come it stayed in that position and not slide back down again? Onto the body of the youth who was half in, half out of the window."

"Excuse me?"

It was a stalling tactic on my part. I needed to get my head around the question.

"Um...perhaps in its maximum opening state it was a little sticky. Those old houses...the windows are those old...what do they call them...they slide up and down and have a mighty heavy cast iron counter weight to help. Hidden inside the window frame...the sashes get painted in...are hard to open, and the counterweight ropes fray and break. Thus, the window sashes have a mind of their own..."

I was dribbling words, trying to get my mind onto a logical progression.

"Did you check the operation of the sash in question, Detective?"

"Um...No...I don't think we did..." I glanced at Shelley who nodded her head slightly.

"We did. It was very hard to slide up or down...perhaps that was the noise the old bloke heard as the young victim tried desperately to slide up the sash...but the internal examination at the time of the autopsy revealed extreme trauma to the young bloke's spine and even a badly bruised spleen and kidneys... just above his hips."

My son sat opposite me. A Cheshire Cat smile on his face that was rather annoying.

"So...what does that prove?" I asked defensively.

It hit me before Bill had time to answer.

"It could not have fallen onto the Decease's lumbar region with the force necessary to cause the severe bruising to that area of his back that was noticeable at the time of the autopsy...am I correct, Mister Lind?"

He smiled the smile of a contented cat...with claws still extended.

I knew instinctively that every time that we had a joint meal, which was usually when I was shouting and firing up the Barbie, which was at least three times a week if not more, I would be for-ever reminded of this little gem.

Still, I was proud of him.

Annoyed with myself and Shelley for not having picked up on this point.

I'll blame the fact on the three cases and the left-over paperwork necessary on our two other cases, for the oversight.

Unfortunately, it put a whole new perspective on the case.

"Perhaps further investigation into the Case is required, Detective. We will bid you a good day, Detectives."

They gathered up their papers and folios to walk swiftly from the room.

We needed to dig into the history of the lad and the two adult players.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Marten Waughblaum was surprised to see us.

So was Missus Irene Brewster sitting opposite him in the front Lounge Room of the Stanmore house!

In fact, we were just as surprised to see her as she us!

We sat waiting through the silence to be filled in on the arrangements of the household. It really didn't matter as we had done the additional homework. We thought we were pretty sure on all the answers.

"So..." I eventually commented. "If you don't wish to fill in the blanks, how about I tell you what happened that morning...firstly, a little bit of background, eh?"

I looked over at Shelley.

Her Tablet was positioned squarely on her knees facing Waughblaum.

"The two of you are not actually divorced. According to our investigations. Fair assumption? Separated would be the correct terminology for Centrelink purposes. You're getting the Deserted wife's pension? No? How about the full Carers Pension? And allowance perhaps? In your married name of Waughblaum....you come over here three to four days a week after your part-time job to clean the house and do the things that Marten couldn't do. That was one of the things that surprised me about the house. It was clean as a whistle...outside the realms of a bachelor and a person on a disability pension to boot having a serious disability.... you're working part-time under the name of Brewster. Your maiden name...for what? The last ten years. Young Brian, at that age, around eight, found it difficult to accept the changes in his life. Gradually got out of control. I think that the local Police first became aware of him in his thirteenth year. Tried to help by enlisting him in the local PCYC where there were concerted efforts to keep the hot-headed and angry young boy on the straight and narrow. He fell through the cracks...how'm I going?"

I looked from Brewster to Waughblaum.

"He's well known to the local cops and shop owners. Flinching here and there. Small stuff, but a bloody nuisance. But it increased, didn't it? Embarrassing to you especially Missus Brewster, as the cops come a-calling at least each other week...would that be about right?"

"You got the idea of this Intruder thing-a-ma-jig from a case that occurred out near Campbelltown only a week before your scheme was put into action." Shelley stated. Shells looked across at me and kept on going.

"Your son was wrecking both your lives. You, Missus Brewster, had a nice little scam going

but it never seemed to be enough money to go around. Your son was pilfering money from your purse leaving you always broke. He was angry. Always. He'd have a fight with you, he'd disappear to his father's place for a little bit. Here. Not too long as you, Marten, had a short fuse...you'd challenge him on something minor and the boy would swear a bit and just walk out...to return to his mother's joint. You were easier on him, I reckon." Turning to look at her.

"I get head-aches from the accident. I'm always in pain. Can't do the things I once could. Having to rely on other people. Living like an old-age Pensioner with nothing to look forward to...this is my life mapped out for me...It's made me short. I've just turned forty for Christ sake. He was stealing me pension money. Even me painkillers. I'd chuck him out. He'd go back to Irene's. He didn't seem to care. It was if he was trying his hardest to punish us...what for? We tried to be good parents to him..."

"He was...trying to get his own back for you two wrecking his stability. His purpose in life. His security even though that must have been minuscule." I interjected angrily.

I shouldn't have, as Waughblaum shut up for a while. Looked down at his hands.

Brewster gave me the impression that she couldn't help herself. She had to get it off her chest.

She coughed to clear her throat. Waughblaum glowered at her trying to shut her up as though he knew that she was about to spill the beans. If she had shut up, we had a grand theory with nothing concrete to back it up.

"I took his key. To here. To this place. Started a fight with him, knowing he'd head here in any case. He ran over here. Not that far. I drove me car. Got here ahead of him. It was a dark night...I forgot...I thought that he'd see me car parked right out the front. You know the rest except that Marten slid the window down onto his back...real hard...it must have hurt...but the little bugger, he hardly made a sound...we turned the light on and then Marten took a swing with his walking stick...the noise. I'll never forget the noise on his head. We wasn't too sure what to do. Marten said for me to walk home...leave the car there as though Briny had driven it here...he'd fix it...he did...but..."

We read them their rights, charged them with the homicide murder of their son, turned them around and cuffed them both.

We took them back to the Parramatta Holding Cells and began the process of formal charges.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"Ever thought of becoming a cop?" I asked my son after I had conveyed the outcome of the Case.

We had enjoyed one of those warm Friday night meals where I was the Provider of all things, being the cook extraordinaire and even providing a slab of beer which Bill and Ben drank with gusto.

"Nah... it'd be too cliché following in your father's foot-treads...and I doubt that I could ever be as good a cop as you, Dad. The shoes would be too large to fill."

"You'd make a good cop, you know Bill. Yer gotta nose for it and all the logic in the world."

"Stop trying, Dad. It'll never happen."

Still, it would make me so proud...well...perhaps as proud as I am now of the young man. For what he has achieved so far in his young life.

I was lucky to have such a fine specimen of a son.

It could have so easily gone out the window when his mother was killed all those years ago. When he was a fragile ten years of age.

You are never too sure how things will turn out. You just hope and pray for it to turn out OK...well, pray as much as an atheist should pray for such good fortune!

I gave him a hug, telling him how proud of him I was.

"Son? Give me a warning next time you try that on me, huh? But really, that took a lot of guts..."

"I hardly slept the night before, Dad...and I was as nervous as all hell. I was glad to get the hell out of the room. I ran to the toots to have a shit."

We both laughed, sounding very similar.

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