

BLOOD LUST



A
Crime
Novella
by

PETER C. EYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVE
GRADE FOUR JOSEPH LIND
AND GRADE THREE SIMONE BARTHOLOMEW
AND DOUG CHALMERS

BLOOD LUST

Copyright © Peter C Byrnes 2019

This is an authorised free digital edition from www.obooko.com

Although you do not have to pay for this e-book, the author's intellectual property rights remain fully protected by international Copyright law. You are licensed to use this digital copy strictly for your personal enjoyment only. This edition must not be hosted or redistributed on other websites nor offered for sale in any form. If you paid for this free edition, or to gain access to it, we suggest you demand an immediate refund and report the transaction to the author and obooko.

This is the 57th Instalment in the series dealing with the career and life of Murder Squad Detective Joseph Lind.

In this story he finds himself flying solo before he becomes the mentor and partner of two Grade Three Detectives Simone Bartholomew and Douglas Chalmers who have transferred from other areas of the Police Force. From an early stage in mentoring them, Lind is aware of the difference between other Departments within the Force and the Murder Squad. He would like to formalise a Training Course for anyone who is interested in taking up a position in the Murder Squad. Several weeks or longer as his experience, even of the Grading of these two latest Officers, shows a severe lack of training and understanding of what is involved in pursuing a Homicide Case through to a successful conclusion.

His long-term partner Detective Shelley Anne Shields becomes pregnant again. To minimise the chance of losing this baby, she decides to make the hard decision of leaving the Police Force for the duration, hoping that such a radical move will help in her going full term and getting through a successful birth.

Synopsis

You can easily kill a person with one lunge of a large knife.

What then causes a frenzied attack with a knife on a person where the number of knife wounds cannot be fully assessed as there are so many?

Is it a blood lust?

An instance where the Perpetrator cannot stop himself?

A payback mentality where each lunge of the knife accounts for countless previous indiscretions against the Perp...or is it just pure, unadulterated anger controlling the act?

CHAPTER ONE

It was a warm day, promising to get even hotter in the afternoon. The glare as I exited the Hospital made me squint, a bad habit since I was a young lad. I quickly dropped my sunglasses down off my forehead to cover my eyes.

From an early age I have always had a problem with glary bloody days. As a thirteen-year-old doing the paper run after School, usually finishing as the sun dipped, I would end up with a blinding headache and watery eyes. My face in some type of frozen state from continuously squinting. Those were the days when it was uncool to wear sunglasses unless you were a Beatnik or a Uni Student trying to look cool.

Me as that usual geek teenager, wearing sunglasses was not approved of but frowned upon in that particular social standing in the inner western suburbs of Sydney. The usual comment about my sexuality deterred me further from wearing sunglasses. It was not cool to publicise your predilection for the same sex even if it was untrue. Back then it was a capital crime and wearing sunglasses the litmus test for ungodly antisocial behaviour!

My own discomfort my punishment for such stupidity.

It truly was stupid, as it was cool to wear the bloody things in the *middle* of the night some five years later! How fads can hurt a guy...the mate and I used to walk up Taylors Square around seven-thirty/eight at night wearing sunglasses. Not knowing we had entered that part of the City known as the gay 'hangout' area...us branding ourselves unconsciously as two gay guys with Beatle haircuts gone to bush...all we thought we were doing was being cool going to Beatle Village for a 'grouse' or 'mickey mouse' night out picking up chicks!

What a couple of stupid drongos! So, filled with our version of coolness, we failed to see how stupid it really was!

I was relieved after speaking to Shelley's Doctor. A little more upbeat. It looked as though Shelley was going to be released from the Hospital sometime in the next day or two. She a terrible Patient who just wanted to go home. I reckon the Nursing staff would sigh a sigh of relief when they could see the back of her. I didn't blame her, as her lot for the next twenty-odd weeks was to remain horizontal as much as possible...she'd be crawling up walls by the fortieth week!

This pregnancy hadn't been planned and she and her life live-in partner Brin Schofield had been making enquiries as to adoption and foster children as the preferred alternative. At the

time it was a case of an easy-as conception. It was obvious the two could make babies very easily...it was carrying them to full term that was the problem. The woman in Child Protection who was my girl Danni's Case Manager was helping as much as she could to untie knots and clear the way for a quicker adoption process for Shells and Brin...that was now on hold. Hopefully, her expertise would not be required...but...Shells would prefer to be home in any case and there was enough room and more left over for her mother to be at her beck and call twenty-four-seven. Shells was going to try her hardest to go full term...even if it meant seven months in bed! Arrangements made for the local Birthing Sister to pop in twice a week to see how she was doing.

Because of this, I had lost another perfect partner to similar events as that of my first long-term partner Marge Hendricks who ended up having triplets. That I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, but I must admit both Marge and her life-partner revelled in the challenge. As far as successful partners were concerned, I was more than apprehensive about finding another to slot in with my 'funny' ways, as many described my eccentricities. To have Marge Hendricks for so many years then to find Shelley Anne Shields of similar traits was a Godsend...a sheer stroke of luck.

To expect a third long term professional partner of the same ilk was asking for way too much.

Until then, I was flying solo with the occasional Detective accompanying me to test the waters...and for me to determine whether they would make a reasonable if not exceptional Murder Dee. I reckon it was going to be a slow old process for some-one to dovetail into my way of doing things and I was comfortable in flying solo for the duration until that suitable candidate dropped into my lap. Though my wishes looked as though they were a losing brand. Getting three from three was long odds even for me!

CHAPTER TWO

I felt like shit.

Puking was not my favourite way of enjoying the day or the introduction to a new Homicide Case.

I held my stomach tightly with one arm while I steadied myself with the other held stiffly touching the brick wall in front of me. Leaning so that myself, my pants and tie and my shoes

were well out of the way of the ghastly gut propellant! Several times I wretched though there was little left to puke up. My stomach muscles spasmed in tight and loose sequences. I eventually straightened, trying to spit the lousy taste from my mouth, failing dismally. It tended to linger for too long, making my gut wrenches even more worrying...and painful!

“Bad, huh?”

I nodded; my eyes still misty from the tears that welled as my stomach twisted inside out for far too long.

“The entire family...” Not a question, more a statement.

“Um...yeah...almost...the two parents, so I’ve been told. Two kids. The third boy is missing, presumed to be the alleged perp by some not in the circle of decent Detectives. He was the eldest son by some years...he was around twenty...twenty-two. Here, have a couple of gulps of water followed by a Peppermint Lifesaver...it should help to get that shitty taste out of your mouth...” Drew Waller, the Forensic Pathologist called out on this Case, offered his solution to that bile taste that seemed to linger for ages.

I took the offered water bottle and Lifesaver, rinsing the water around my mouth before spitting it out. I then took several healthy gulps of water emptying the bottle followed by the Lifesaver which I slowly sucked on.

“That’s so unlike you, Joe, you know. Letting a couple of bloodied bodies turn your stomach. You okay?”

“Yeah, thanks for that. The older I get, the softer I seem to get”. I spat out the taste again, standing erect though still holding my still sore stomach. “I thought it was the other way around. The older you got, the harder you got!”

Drew Waller shook his head slowly, seeming to understand my plight.

“Don’t know, Joe. Life works in mysterious ways...you seen enough? I’ll get my Assists to prepare the bodies for transfer to the Morgue. I reckon the day after to-morrow before I get to them. You up to it?”

“Not really, no...how can a person...you know? Do what was done to those poor people...what type of person can do that? That has got to be the worst example of frenzied

stabbing of people I have seen in my entire career span...jeez...who would do such a thing? I doubt he has finished. He's got the taste for it, I reckon".

I shook my head as I looked around, not wanting any other eyes noticing my unpleasant condition. I still had a little pride left...deep down somewhere.

"Wrong questions, Joe. You do not need to ask such questions as it only draws you into the scene more...you must retain your distance and ambivalence towards the death scene and the Vics...it's hard, but if you don't allow that distance, it will send you batty in the end. You know that mate. It is something you and my professions are constantly reminded of...to keep that distance...that disconnect".

I nodded with me still sucking on the Lifesaver. I knew all that...but it was still hard. I waved my hand as I wandered around the back and front yards of the death house. I peered over the top of the back fence looking at a backyard that could belong to half the residences in Sydney. Nothing spectacular, just a neatly trimmed lawn with a couple of fruit trees and a small Veggie garden down one side. A large Gum too close to the back of the house. A deck, an obvious after-thought on the back of the house. The deck fully enclosed in shade cloth making it extremely difficult to make out anything or anybody on the deck. May be that was the idea. There was no evidence of young kids, unless they were super-neat. No, there were none of the usual signs of kids about.

"Hey!" Someone yelled. "Get the fuck out of it, will ya. Bernie will have your balls if'n he catches yer in his back yard".

I waved a hand, still unable to make out the body that the voice belonged to.

"Hear me, AO? Get the fuck away from there and out of Bernie's yard..."

A figure materialised from the shaded deck, holding a rake as his defensive weapon like some Knight of Olde. Middle-aged, overweight with a receding hairline. Wearing nothing but a pair of stubby shorts and thongs on his feet. The look was not of a Knight of Olde! I distractedly wondered how a Knight's set of body armour could be fashioned to go around the man's swollen gut! It wasn't that hot a day, I thought to myself to warrant just a pair of stubbies and thongs. Obviously not his work uniform, I thought sarcastically.

He strode with purpose up close to the back fence, though keeping a safe distance, just in case I decided to lunge at him over the fence. I doubted I could vault the fence in one action. More

than likely coming to grief with a leg on either side of the fence. My face red from the pain I was feeling. I shook away the image and held my ID card at arm's length towards him.

“Copper! What are you doing in Bernie's yard?”

“Good morning to you, sir. A lovely morning, isn't it? Have you known the occupants of this property for long?” I countered. My toes already hurting from standing tippy toed. I must have looked like Foo, I thought crazily to myself, with just my eyes level with the top of the metal fence.

“Yeah...” He looked around scratching his head as he did so. “We moved in within a couple of months of one another. At one time there was no fences back then so's we got to know one another...with our bloody dogs having a bloody field day because of the lack of fencing. We all had our kids around the same time with them all attending the same schools together. The kids played in the same football...you know, the same Rugby League team and cricket team together. The girls in the same Netball and tennis clubs. They all belonged to the same swimming club together up at the local pool. They were all good at sport...and good mates which still exists to this day. Good to see, huh?”

He scratched his bum as if to emphasise the point.

I nodded in reply, not really interested in his opinion of this social experiment! I felt that the rose-coloured glasses were firmly in place as this was not Nirvana!

“When did you say Bernie Lewis and you moved here?”

“Jeez...um...twenty-five...no closer to thirty years ago now...why all these questions?”

I ignored his query.

“Has there been any fracas or ill-will in the neighbourhood that you know of?”

“Around here? Narh...we's all know one another...often we's meet up at the Club on a Friday or Saturday night. Been doing it for years. Up to ten couples all who live within pissing distance of one another...we're all good friends. I guess it has been because of our kids...they all play together. A cricket match can suddenly start up down my street...it's a cul-de-sac so's it's safer...”

“Isn’t there a Park up the road?” I was beginning to tire of this man, living his life looking through a pair of rose-coloured glasses I suspected.

“Yeah...but with them playing in our street, we can all keep an eye on them...boys and girls get into the game enjoying themselves”. He chuckled. “Even a dog or two. They’s all good kids...and you didn’t answer my question. What are you doing in Bernie’s backyard?”

“All your kids would be grown up by now, seeing as how you moved into the neighbourhood some thirty years ago now...there wouldn’t be that noise of kids playing...” I wanted to end this conversation but at the same time I was egging the bloke on!

He nodded. A deep frown wrinkling his brow.

“Yeah...it’s a shame in some ways, huh? All grown up with kids of their own...don’t see them much no more...they’s always too busy living their own lives...” A tinge of sorrow in his voice.

The time of death for the family was decidedly iffy...four to ten days so I was hanging out in the breeze a little. You can’t ask a bloke what he was doing for the last four to ten days, can you?

“Um...Mister Lewis? Bernie, yes...his wife Pauline and a son and daughter have been found dead in their house...” I knew that truth would blow the wind out of his sails. “You haven’t seen anything out of the ordinary over the last week? Strange cars? People who are strangers to the area? Blokes hanging about looking suspicious?”

“No...no...strange cars? Strangers? Not at all...dead?? They’s all dead!! Bloody Jesus! You reckon Bernie done it!? Bullshit...narh, not on. He wouldn’t do such a thing...sure, sometimes when he gets drunk something can kick-start his fiery temper...but to kill his wife and kids...I don’t think so. He wasn’t that type of bloke...he was a bloody push-over, easy to calm down when-ever he got in one of those moods...a bloody softie! I’ve never seen him fly right off the handle...”

He pushed the rake into the ground so that he could lean on it, otherwise I think he may have fallen over.

“Sorry sir...you have misunderstood me, sir. Bernie was also killed...” I corrected him.

“Arrh, shit!! What!? Like...they’s all dead? Murdered? In their home? Around here? Narh...not possible...dead? Where’s Simon? He there too? He was the eldest son...just had his twenty-first a couple of months ago...he was a bookworm...very brainy...doing several Courses at Uni...flying through them...he dead too? You want me to confirm their identity? That’s what they do on TV, isn’t it?”

“Um...we may get you to come in to identify them after the Post-mortems if we cannot track down any close relatives in proximity. Your name, sir...and a telephone number to contact you...we’ll pick you up in a Patrol Car...bring you home, yeah? Just in case...you know...no reloes come forward”.

The bloke was visibly upset, now going off at tangents in his answers to my questions.

“Anyone that you know who has had a disagreement...an altercation with the Lewis family?”

“What, around here!? No...we’re like a tribal group, doing things together...even going camping as a group...but the kids are getting a little too old for that...a pity as those were the days...yes, them were the good days...Officer, I need to go inside and have a laydown...if there is nothing else? I...arrh...I don’t feel that good...dead you say...bloody hell...Jeezuz fucking Christ! Murdered!? Bloody hell, me missus will be devastated. Around here, next to impossible, I’d say...that’s so sad...the entire family you say...bloody hell!”

He swayed visibly as he walked back towards his house. The belligerence of an hour ago now gone. He seemed to age before my eyes. He had not supplied his name or contact number. No matter, the Uniforms will get it once they start canvassing the nearby neighbours later in the day.

CHAPTER THREE

I stepped out of the way to allow the body bags to be carried on separate stretchers to the Morgue van.

By now, a sizable crowd of local people were forced to gather behind the Crime tape that was tied from pillar to post to gate. The intention to isolate the property from all the local sticky-beaks. All sorts of speculation and gossip was being bandied about, accompanied by the

comment that since those Arab and Lebanese looking people had purchased into the neighbourhood, the suburb, the City, and the State was going to wrack and ruin.

Something should be done about that, was the solution to their woes. Who was to take on the problem was not of their concern...they just needed to do something about the problem with the suburb swamped with those types...and the School! It was starting to look like a Refugee Compound!

I walked back inside and wandered slowly through the house, looking in every room, pausing to look around, sometimes turning so much I got giddy. Pulling drawers and rifling through cupboards and wardrobes. Thinking and not thinking. Looking at photos or Glam Shots blue-tacked to the walls of the obvious teenager Bedrooms. At messages taped to computer screens...at knick-knacks on shelving and Dressing Tables. I eventually had to enter the Death Scene bedroom again. It wasn't as bad, now the four bodies had been removed, but that tangy smell of blood hung heavily in the air. The amount of blood spatter seemed to grow up the nearest wall and across the ceiling. It drips down the walls in some grotesque copy of a Psychiatrist's book on Ink Blots! The bed sheets now stained for their entire size. The blood soaking through to the mattress.

The Clean-up Crew will have a Devil's own job to rid the room of all the material evidence of absolute fury.

"The two kids? Around fifteen or sixteen I would imagine..."

"The girl? Shantelle? She had not long turned nineteen. October three, Two Thousand. The boy? Shayne? Twenty. Twenty-one November, Nineteen Ninety-eight...the older boy? Simon Andrew Lewis. He is the only child with a middle name. Aged twenty-one. August Sixteen, Nineteen-ninety-seven".

"Mmm...yes..." I noted this information into my iPad. "What were they doing in the same bed as their parents. A little too old for that, don't you think?"

Drew Waller was leaning against the door frame of the entryway into the Bedroom. He shrugged his shoulders. I gathered that seeing me flying solo, he had to help in any way he could. Down to the person whom I could bounce questions, ideas, and facts off. He had always been reticent when Shells and I turned up at one of his Cases, regardless of the condition of the body...or bodies. I wondered why he now felt obligated to follow me around, bouncing his take on the homicide murders off me.

“Joe? If there is nothing else?” He eventually said. “We want to wrap this up and head back to the Morgue...” That kind of wrecked my thoughts on his benevolence in wanting to help me...maybe he was looking to see me stuff up? Nah...that was just playing to my paranoia and insecurities.

“Arrh...right. No...who called it in?”

The local Station Sergeant eased passed Waller who continued to stand blocking access through the doorway.

“The local Postie...he...arrh...he delivers to the Station as well”. The Station Sergeant confided. “He came in this morning saying he was a little perturbed as the letterbox at this address had not been cleared...so unlike Bernie Lewis or his missus to not clear out their letterbox daily...it had never happened before. I sent a Patrol Wagon around to investigate. The young Officer called it in between convulsions...we organised an Ambulance to take her to Hospital...she was in shock...” He nodded as though this reinforced his little speech.

“The bedrooms of the kids...”

“Made up...not slept in...”

“So, they were all in bed together, yes? A bit strange, don’t you think?”

“Arrh...yes...a little unusual now that you point it out...easier for the Perp to control the four when they were all together perhaps...no...that doesn’t work, does it?”

I shook my head. The whole scene of the family in bed together, didn’t gel with me. To me it was staged by the Perp for some reason unknown to me at present.

“No signs of a struggle in the other Bedrooms...no blood...no residue?”

“The beds were made up...” He repeated.

I turned to the lead Forensic Trace Officer who was standing at the door next to the Sarge.

“Can you check out the beds...in the other bedrooms, please...and around them? We may get lucky on trace transfer identifying our Perp...”

“If he is already in the system, Joe”. Quipped Drew Waller, forever the pessimist!

“Yeah...a big if, but let’s hope, eh?”

“There was nothing there that made us think the beds had been made up by some-one...what? You think the two kids were killed in their beds and then transferred to their parent’s bed?”

“I don’t know what I think, Sergeant, but it appears to me to be a little strange they all were asleep together...if they were young kids, yeah, but late teenage, early twenty-something adults...a little weird to me”.

I nodded as I followed the tiny Forensic Officer into each of the other three bedrooms in turn. Slowly lifting the bedlinen to show smears of blood in what had to be the girl’s and the younger boy’s bedrooms. They had been knifed to death as they slept. The third bedroom showed no signs of being used at all. There was no indications of disturbance or blood anywhere in that room. For the first time, I noticed Text and Reference Books opened beside the Laptop which had been closed. That’s why, I thought to myself. He was up studying giving an indication of time of death maybe if we can get into the laptop.

I heard the Forensic Officer ring through for an additional Team to present itself to this address...

“This is the older boy’s Bedroom. Look at the books all neatly displayed. He was doing some heavy shit at Uni, huh? I’d say we’re going to be here for a while yet. We’ll need to check for trace on each of those beds...and the entire bedrooms...the Perp had to leave some trace as he re-made those beds...” She stopped to scratch an ear. “Why would he bother unless he is an OCD freak, perhaps”. She turned to look up at me. “Why would he bother?” She repeated. “It would be hard to carry the two young adults into the parent’s bedroom...especially if they were dead...”

“Or even alive it would still be a bit of a chore...”

“Why bother? There is no rhyme or reason that I can think of why he found it necessary to place them all together...”

“Perhaps...” I paused. “Perhaps in placing the four bodies together he had better control of continuing the blind blood lust of knifing them. Drew? Can you check as you do the autopsy whether the Vics were dead as he commenced in on the ferocious attack with a knife? You know whether one knife lunge killed each of them...but he goes into a fury for some reason when he has the four bodies together”.

He nodded. I got the impression he wasn't impressed with my assessment though I knew he would do as instructed.

"I think it is safe to assume that both the adult male and female were not dead as he started in...the two kids? They would have been dead I'd say, but I'll check that assumption as I progress in the post-mortem. Just going on the blood splatter up the wall and ceiling, I reckon I'm correct" He looked from me to the Forensic Officer. "If there's nothing else, we'll be out of your hair. Joe? Maybe tomorrow afternoon but more than likely the day after for the autopsy".

I nodded in agreement. I would have taken it further in saying the four Vics were all alive as he started in on his blood lust.

I mentioned the smeared blood on the back fence. She nodded saying in defence that they had yet to examine any outside areas. They'd get to the externals in due course.

It was going to be a couple of long days for the forensic teams.

I turned to the Station Sergeant and requested an 'All Points' on the lad and the family car, an Oh-Five Commodore, white in colour. Plates BL 1971...and have the Trace guys search through both vehicles still on site...one in the double garage and the other in the driveway. I had obtained the details of the Commodore by getting into the RMS Data Base...easy as.

"Can you lend me two of your best Uniforms in interviewing techniques. I want to begin a trawl around the area...and can you check for vehicles that shouldn't be there...you know, around in proximity...um...any surveillance cameras that may have spot-videoed something out of place over the past week...especially in the Cul-de-sac over the back fence of the adjacent property. By the blood smears on the back fence, our Perp may have exited that way..."

"I don't know, Detective. We're searching for a missing son and the family car which we can presume were driven away from the front of this residence...who exactly has vaulted over the back fence leaving bloody smear marks to show which way some-one may have run..."

"An accomplice?" The FO offered, a smirk on her face as she now leaned against the door frame making it difficult for anyone to come and go.

“Nah...I don’t think so...it maybe a furphy just to throw us off...or maybe one of the family ran that way, bouncing off the fence because he/she was in such a state after being stabbed so many times...our Perp caught up and carried said escapee back into the house...”

“No...I don’t know. There is no blood trail indicating some-one was running about...and why go to the trouble, if that was the case, of placing the errant Victim back into the double bed with the others...and there have been no reports of screaming, has there? Yeah...I think it could have been an accomplice...maybe he had been cut by his own knife as one of the victims fought him off. Just to be sure...” I turned back to Waller who had made the front door on his way out. “When you begin your autopsies on the four, can you check for external signs of them being outside...perhaps running away from the Perp...and any defensive wounds...”

As soon as I said it, I didn’t think it fitted...an accomplice made a lot of sense. Four persons stabbed to death in a brutal and savage attack...why kill the two kids in their beds then transfer them into the parents’ bed to then savagely stab the four victims multiple times? In fact, so many times, the stab wounds often overlaid each other...perhaps the blood smears on the back fence were made by the oldest son trying to escape the frenzied attacks...though that had a ring of falsehood about it as well. Maybe he did vault over the back fence and then doubled back to leave in the family car...

Maybe yes, maybe no. I needed to consider every angle, building on some and rejecting others. Still, nothing made sense at this stage of the investigation.

“The mail that was apparently jamming up the mailbox. Is it still there or has it been brought into the house?” I asked no-one.

“Arrh...it’s all on the Kitchen table...”

“Mmm...I guess it won’t mean much in this day and age of snail mail. It can now take six to seven days delivery time unless you are willing to pay more for same day service”.

I wandered towards the Kitchen, picking up the heap of mail. Most was trash mail with five business envelopes. If I took notice of the ‘cancelling date’ on the envelope, the family were killed two weeks ago! Even I knew that wasn’t the case. I dropped the pile back onto the table surface, a little pissed as at each turn, I was being tested and yes, laughed at, so I thought.

I stayed in the suburb for three more days, speaking nonsense and hearing it returned.

Within the block that included the Cul-de-sac, there was nothing but positive vibes with the over-all opinion that young Simon Andrew Lewis...SAL to all, was incapable of harming anyone, especially his own family. The lad had worked as a Delivery Boy for the local Chemist for three years from the age of twelve. Dependable, reliable, courteous with a wonderful smile for all who encountered him. His School Teachers and University Lecturers spoke highly of a young man who was the student most likely to leave a mark on humanity...and yet this young man had gone to ground somewhere within the State. The vehicle and young man unsighted...two Plastic Cards unused and the meagre amount in his Bank Account untouched which would normally mean the kid wasn't alive but had been murdered at the same time as the rest of the family...but why the different manner if he weren't the guilty party in the death of the rest of his family?

I struck out on every avenue I approached in the search for the lad. I must admit that during this time of several months, all efforts were concentrated on the missing Simon Lewis as the culprit with not a thought given to any other lines of enquiry. A major fault on my part.

CHAPTER FOUR

“G'day mate...heard you shared your breakfast the other day with anyone who cared...that's not like you mate. Getting soft as you age, huh?”

He couldn't help it. We had stirred one another for years both on a work-related basis or the usual patter across the Dining Table or beside the BBQ on every other weekend that the two families socialised. I was standing in the 'Viewing Gallery' above the 'Cutting Room' where the four members of the Lewis family were laid out on separate tables, pale in their nudity and the loss of blood made worse from the bright overhead lights

The grapevine had been working overtime. Some would love that bit of information, others not.

Drew Waller had the two youngsters while Pogowski was cutting the two Adults. Bree Wzerlic was on 'stand-by', the next to be called out if need be. She was sitting at a stainless-steel desk against one wall equidistant from the four bodies looking as though she was the audience in this terrible consequence of dying in a gruesome manner. There were four Assistants to the two 'Cutters' plus the Official Forensic camera-man. The area was looking a little crowded with all the ancillary staff and staff-in-training. A volunteered move by many

Medical Students wanting to see whether cutting up a corpse was better than cutting up a living human being.

Their preference hard to judge by their stature or facial inflections. These types of multi-autopsy operations where the brutality of dying is most pronounced always drew a larger than usual spectator crowd straining their necks around me and Muscles to look down into the brightly lit 'Cutting Room'.

The wall opposite Bree and below our eyrie was a continuous wall of slide-out 'stretchers', six high for the entire length of the room. They often bragged that even if a loaded 747 came down, they would have room for the entire passenger list in that length of wall! Something positive to know, eh? The installation mirrored on the opposite side of the Body Fridge with another 'Cutting Room' of similar dimensions located there.

"Not soft, mate...maybe a little more empathetic as I age..." A grin on my face. I had arrived at the best time. The bodies washed down, and all surface dried blood washed away. What was left was a jig-saw pattern of knife wounds discernible as dark slashes across the skin, most surrounded by slight bruising.

"You don't even know what that word means, mate; let alone pretend to act in such a manner..."

"In that case, I don't know why I should have wanted to share my breakfast..." I chuckled, looking down at my feet, thankful I could still see them. "Maybe I ate an 'off' Weetbix!" I gave a cut-off laugh. "If there is such a thing..."

"Hah! That'd be right...what do you reckon with this family?"

"Looking down at the bodies, they certainly were subjected to frenzied attacks...they've stopped counting at thirty wounds on each body...and the teen-age girl? She'd been raped when she was close to death...yeah...they tell me she was still alive...just. Semen visible which will give us DNA of our Suspect and his identity if he is on the National DNA Data Base..."

"One sick puppy, eh? The likely suspect is the older brother, isn't it?"

"I don't know...yes, he is our Number One POI, but...I don't know...it doesn't fit somehow...I have my doubts but now there is no other POI...not even in the picture. Maybe one may spring out to surprise us as we get further down the track".

“See! It wasn’t Shelley after all...it is you mucking around with other people’s heads”. He gave a chuckle. “...speaking of Shells, how is she?”

I glanced over at my mate who was the Deputy Head of the Forensic Pathology Department. He now was seldomly called out for an on-site Pathology examination and rarely took the Lead in any autopsy. He was leaving the knife-work to his younger set, which is what a Deputy Head should do, that was to work on the tedious paperwork associated with any Public Service Department. He had made a series of selections on ‘wannabe’ Pathologists-in-training which now saw the Department working like clockwork...a degree of hard work on his part to achieve this. The terrible days of that stuffy, self-important pig hired from some English Forensic Pathology Department merely on the recommendations of some Head who wanted rid of the man was now history and a dim memory. Thankfully, we too were rid of the AO but not before he had almost done irreparable damage to the NSW Forensic Pathology Science Department with several staff deaths and many transfers attributable to the man.

“A picture of health. Looks as though she may carry through to the end. Cross fingers all round. Here’s hoping in any case. They are transporting her home to-day...I saw her yesterday...no, the day before. I got this Lewis family call out just as I was leaving the Hospital...she’s looking good and is full of positive thoughts”. I smiled at my mate, both of us straight-armed leaning against the railing. This stopping us from hitting the thick glass that was angled to permit a clear visual down over each ‘cutting table’. A TV monitor was also positioned to permit those standing in the ‘viewing area’ to view each action of the Forensic Pathologists.

It was after all, a training establishment for ‘wannabe’ FPs.

I jutted my chin at the macabre scene below.

“You know...there is no sign of any damage to any genital area and only a few stab wounds to the chest area. Mostly the attacks on all four was around the abdomen areas. No defensive wounds which *could* indicate they were all dead before the frenzied knife attack began on each of them...an interesting observation. I don’t think we are dealing with some type of sex pervert...it doesn’t fit...well...if you disregard the act of sex on the young girl...but it doesn’t fit anything I have encountered before...maybe pure blood lust on the part of the Perp. The sight of blood gets him going to produce more lunges with the knife...maybe...I really don’t know”.

“C’mon Joe! He has had sex with a dead person...give me a break, boy...Gawd...I hate to think what that sounded like...”

“Mmm...if it was blood lust, he is going to attack again...that smell of blood is now in his system...in his nostrils...he won’t be able to ignore its pull...”

“You can tell that from here!? Man, you sure have improved since going solo...in heaps and bounds...” Again, that gentle jibe that both of us could easily apply to one another...a typical Australian attitude between close mates.

“Nah...hah...look at the four of them...stabbed so many times it is almost impossible to distinguish each stab wound...this is a frenzied attack not originating in any form of sexual gratification. This guy has got his jollies off...after he has unloaded in the girl...in the act where rage has overtaken his ability to control his anger issues...he is in this state because of blood lust...plain and simple...”

Muscles looked over at me, amazement in his expression.

“You, um...are you doing a Psychiatric Degree behind my back or something?”

We both chuckled. I stood, stretching my back. I’d seen enough before they started the ‘Y’ incision and the cranium lop.

“This afternoon? Is that okay to bring in Mister Lewis’s older brother and the Missus’ sister? They can both confirm the identify of each of the kids as well”.

“Um...” Muscles looked down at the tables bathed in bright, white light. “Say after two...”

“Three or thereabouts?”

“No problems”. Muscles stood up beside me and slapped me on the back. “A fucking terrible waste, eh?”

“I bet you say that of all murder victims who unfortunately, come in here”.

“Yeah...too right!”

I walked outside and swung my Mobile up looking at the numbers on my iPad. I confirmed the time I would pick each of the Relatives up so they could confirm the identity of our Vics.

I had a couple of hours to kill so I went back to the death scene and did a walk-through once again, hoping something might jump out.

Nothing did, unfortunately.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Arrh...thanks Joe. I’ve been hanging out for this...” She took a couple of sips of the hot liquid as though it was nectar from the Gods. There were several sarcastic asides and accusations about my ulterior motives in patting the Boss’s back. It is called ‘Brown Nosing’ in this part of the forest. “Understand Joe, it doesn’t give you any brownie points, you know”. A smile to accompany the put down. She took several more sips of the steaming hot coffee. “C’mon people, settle down...we’ve got a lot to get through this morning...who wants to start? Oh, wait...there are several things we need to discuss before getting onto team Cases...certain edicts that have been handed down from on high. I don’t think any of them should worry us too much, but I need to inform you of them as that is why I am the Boss...load you with bullshit and leave you standing there without a shovel...that’s my prerogative...I’m the Boss”.

The Boss had a way with words, is all I’ll say!

This was the usual Monday morning staff meeting that had begun with our former Boss, Detective Sergeant John Clifford Church aka Abbey introducing it years ago. With some of the Cases, having your colleagues look at that proverbial brick wall which seems insurmountable to the pair of Detectives involved, can sometimes be broken down by that pair of fresh eyes. An opinion from a different viewpoint. An indication that you are not the only Detective having a problem with progressing a Case can be so comforting to know when you have flogged yourself for being such a dummkopf!

It was always difficult to begin the process, but once someone had begun, colleagues lined up to get the free advice on a Case that was sending them batty!

Two new adult Detectives, Simone Bartholomew and Doug Chalmers had shifted into the Murder Squad at the same time. Simone from Child Protection and Doug from White-Collar Crime and Robbery. They were immediately paired by the Boss which saved her the game of musical chairs in finding partners for these two newcomers. She felt that the two as Adult Officers and being of a grade three level, they would settle quickly into our rhythm of operations. This arrangement may have made it easy for Denny...but I was still out on that proverbial branch by myself.

To be honest, I was not that lonesome, just chugging along without breaking any speed records or working up much of a sweat!

“Simone? You are at your wit’s end on the first Case you and your partner have been lumbered with since joining us what, two months ago now?” Denny looked from one to the other, waiting for either one to take the stage. It didn’t matter to her who was going to be the star in the relationship, as long as one of them stepped forward. Neither took the bit between the teeth.

“Um...Joe? I think I should place you with Simmie and Doug as I think we may have a problem here...both Cases that both of you have are worryingly similar. Simmie? Do you want to give us a brief outline of your Case?”

Simone Bartholomew was a tall woman. Some would say regal and I could imagine her in a Ballgown with tiara waiting to be knighted by the Queen...do women get knighted by the Queen? A sword to both shoulders as they kneel before Her Highness. A silly bloody thought actually...but the image fitted well in my mind. I grinned at the image. She had represented her State in Netball and was a very good player. The only problem was her sense of right and wrong. She was never afraid to come forward on matters being discussed and choosing the narrow path between right and wrong. There was never any grey toning for her. This did result in many a teary moment and one felt that her days in Child Protection would have been a continuous tear-fest! I was unsure whether she was in the right career and especially if the Murder Squad was her cup of tea. Congratulations were hard come by, and enthusiasm was a self-help kind of thing. Satisfaction was dealt out like grains of sand.

“Um...sure...um...Christine Grebble, aged twenty-seven, lived alone in an Apartment Tower only recently completed in North Parramatta. She was the first Owner /Occupier in the block to move in. That would be scary to me...alone in the large multi-storey building. Up until she took up residence there, she shared with several other Nursing Sisters, male and female closer to the Hospital. Six in total. In an old-style, free-standing bungalow. I would think she purchased off plans. That is yet to be confirmed. A view of the upper reaches of Parramatta River her lot. Not a bad vista if you can ignore the Motorway outside her windows”.

I wondered how all these ‘fuzzy’ little facts were relevant! Several others must have had similar thoughts as there was a general buzz and movement of bodies wanting to get more comfortable in uncomfortable chairs.

“She was a Nursing Sister at Westmead Children’s Hospital; having worked there for a number of years. Not far to travel to get to work for her. Well-liked and respected by friends

and co-workers. She's estranged from her family whom she had no contact with for some years...over five, so I am led to believe. No indication of her walking on the wild side of the street. Not into drugs of any kind...and yes...one of those little homebodies and a regular Churchgoer. She was found by a work colleague and a VBF, Claudia Pengelly who also works at Westmead as a Nursing Sister. Christine did not turn up for her shifts on two consecutive days. Pengelly was concerned as it was so unlike her friend to not turn up for work or not notify them that she was sick or something. She could not raise her on her Mobile..."

"This Claudia Pengelly? Did she have a key to Grebble's Unit?"

"Yes, as a fail-safe kind of thing...and vice-versa with Chrissie. I have the same arrangement with a girlfriend of mine...um...where was I? Um, yes, they had spoken about Claudia moving into Chrissie's Apartment but as the woman had a long-term lease on an Apartment within walking distance of the Hospital, that arrangement was put on the back burner...this may have indicated Christine was having problems with repayments on the property. We ran her financials through our various checklists and yes, she was running close to the wind...maybe too close for her liking. We know she placed a 'Flyer' looking for Flatmates on a Hospital Notice Board used for such things, but after questioning half the staff at the Hospital so it seemed, we were no closer to the truth and we are uncertain of who she may have interviewed to become her flatmate. According to friends whom we spoke to, she interviewed quite a few persons to no avail, so it seemed. She may have been a little picky so said one of her friends in hindsight".

Her partner Doug Chalmers took over seamlessly. A nod and sideways glance from his partner his primer.

"We had her Phone and Laptop pulled apart by our Techs with not a person itching their noses apparently, although they have yet to formally reply with their findings. There was...arrh..." He glanced at his partner before proceeding. "A...um...fair amount of blood as though the Perp had a score to settle with Christy. There were no hits on the genital area which was clean...though there was deep bruising to both shoulders which may have indicated our Vic being held down that way...also deep bruising to the right side of her face. A fractured jaw and a fractured right eye-socket which would indicate she may have been knocked unconscious before the stabbing began...he had sat on her body holding her down by the shoulders. With her continuing to struggle, he might have swung a 'haymaker' to quieten her...doing the damage to her face and jaw..."

“Rape?” I asked quietly. “...and another thing, was there any evidence of the girlfriend...any forensic trace of her being inside the Unit...was she requested to provide a DNA sample for exemplar purposes?”

“Um...no. we didn’t think it necessary...and to answer your other question, there were signs of penetration, but no semen was deposited...”

“Our Perp wore a condom, eh?”

“Yeah, maybe...or used something else to penetrate the poor girl. Apart from the knife wounds, the rest of her body was relatively clean of any sort of defensive wounds or bruising...something that came up at the PM that was not picked up at the Death Scene...” He again glanced at his partner, getting a nod in return as though there was some sort of foreplay between them when they were giving a verbal report.

I saw the Boss lower her head to hide a slight smile. She was giving them plenty of rope as they were fresh to the Murder Squad, and one makes allowances for debutantes. Especially with the long-winded discourse. They would learn sooner or later to be more succinct in meetings like this. Their colleagues’ growing impatience was hard to miss!

“Um...it wasn’t noted on the FP’s initial site report. A slight bruising behind but below the right ear that upon examination as part of the PM indicated a long shiv-type of weapon that possibly left her unable to fight off her attacker...maybe more like a meat skewer that had been honed to a very long sharp point...maybe around twenty-five to thirty centimetres long...I would image it would have had a sizable handle as an investigation of the wound site confirmed there had been three or four insertions...plunges at the same point but varying in angles as it was forced upwards and inwards into the brain...would have killed her instantly...but if not, it may have caused instant paralysis...”

“That’s a bit of over-kill, don’t you think? She is knocked to Kingdom Come by several blows to the head and face...presumably she is now unconscious. Why the need to shiv her in that area and then stab her around the abdomen area?” Some-one asked, taking the words out of my mouth. I did not know whether the Lewis family had been subjected to a similar fate with a shiv...it made sense as it would have immediately paralysed the Vics if not killed them! They could have been killed instantaneously without a word or movement noticed.

“There’s hate there...” I observed quietly. Several nods of heads showing agreement though Simmie seemed immune to such a suggestion. “...and because she is female, and a nurse, have recent patients of the girl been evaluated?”

“Um...we are not privy to the mind of the Perp.” Bartholomew uttered sharply. She blushed a deep red and held up a hand as a form of apology. “He...um...he obviously had his reasons which we cannot appreciate at this time...um...that’s about it...” Simone added. “We have not been able to get past that point...”

“Friends? Family? Possibly some-one in the Apartment Block?”

Both Simone and Doug shook their heads.

“We drove people mad day and night...and no Boss, we did not claim for overtime or extra hours off ‘in lieu’. Nothing...”

The Boss held up her hand.

“Um, Simone? Do not let that practise become a habit. If you can’t fit in what you need to do within a day, then to-morrow is but empty hours until you begin to fill them. Hear me? There has been too many examples of Officers getting into trouble while they have been on unapproved overtime...okay...it’s not on!”

“Boss...it was a case of knocking on doors knowing people would have returned home from work at that time...”

“Straight into their cooking and/or mealtimes. I know I’d be fuming if someone knocked on my door at that time. Yes, I understand why you and every team at some stage during any investigation do that, but there is no block on overtime when it is considered necessary. Fill in an overtime chit with a meal allowance form before you do anything else...both of you...everyone else? That doesn’t mean a loosening of attitude on overtime. The final decision will be mine, understand people?”

There were nods and murmured replies. After the general mutterings quietened down, I filled in the silence wanting the conversation to get back on track.

“What was the address of the Vic?” I asked. A taste of bile climbing up the back of my throat. The thought running around in the back of my mind was something that no copper wanted to acknowledge...serial killer. Serial killers were far and few on the ground, but just the thought unnerved a lot of people and electrified the Media who would be jumping over themselves for every little detail to publicise...it was dogfood to them!

“Um...Apartment twelve-oh-four, ten-forty Byrnes Street, North Parramatta. Views of Parramatta Lake through the trees...quite pretty...um...James Ruse Drive between the tower block and the Lake. All the windows were either double glazed or had that ‘smart’ glass in every window and door as the sound of traffic could not be heard with all windows and doors closed. Why do you ask?” Doug Chalmers asked.

I sat there nodding my head slowly, my mouth going dry.

“Is that close to Northmead?”

“Um...” Each of us looked at one another. “Um...I don’t know!” Simone replied. “Why?”

“My Case involves an entire family being stabbed to death. In Northmead. Mother, father, daughter, and youngest son. My Number One POI is the eldest son in the family who has done a runner though neither his bank accounts nor his Plastic Cards have been used since the attack...he...arrh...he worked part-time as a Wardsman at Westmead Hospital...a coincidence, right? A red flag in my book, no? So, would he know your Perp, do you think? Maybe a work colleague? Does a Wardsman have a Ward where they work, or do they just go to a destination where their services are required? You know, get called over the speaker system to get their arse...with a bed...to such-and-such ward?”

Simone and Doug turned to me, blank expressions all round. They did not grasp the similarities in both Cases and now, the proximity and the connection to the Hospital for both Cases. Me? My stomach was churning as there were too many coincidences to be accidental...too many connections.

“Arrh...Bennie and I have a homicide knifing death...” Patricia offered timidly. “Um...she was also a Nursing Sister at Westmead Hospital...” Patricia Hynes looked a little embarrassed in speaking up. Her partner Benjamin Stiller was an old boy in the Murder Squad, having come in at the same time as Peta Daniels. While Daniels had been a ‘climber’, Bennie was a plodder. A man you could rely on to investigate a Case until there were no loose ends or questions on the guilt of the Perp. The case squeezed of any doubt...may have taken a little longer some may claim but they could never attack Bennie’s investigative skills.

“Um...we are pretty sure we know who the Perp is...the Vic’s former boyfriend who is unbelievably angry at her for ending the relationship and beginning another so quickly after...”

“This type of crime appears to be occurring more and more. A clear message that men are becoming more and more chauvinistic wanting to control, to manipulate their female partners...”

This of course, caused a heated debate on the role of women and men in modern day society and how that abrasiveness between the sexes was becoming more pronounced.

Nothing was achieved, but most present had an opinion on the subject. The Boss encouraged this type of dialogue at these times. She would sit back, a tight smile glancing from one person to another. Very rarely offering her opinion but often stirring the coals.

Ninety minutes later, we were winding up the Staff Meeting. One thing I had noticed with this meeting and the several since Shelley had left, was the total lack of stirs and innuendo and comic relief that had been a part of every meeting I could recall. Was it Shelley who began such behaviour? Encouraged it? Ran with it? I do not know...but I sure missed her smiling face and stupid chatter.

“Joe? Simone and Doug? Stay here after the others file out of my Office, please”.

I was ordered to close the door after one or two dawdlers took their time to get back to work.

“Okay...you have an inkling why I wanted you to stay. I, as all the people who have warmed this chair, have always kept abreast of Cases under their control. We constantly read up all entries that you insert into the Murder Book volumes or electronic entries that you save to the Murder Book file. Now...” She stood and went to the floor to ceiling narrow window adjacent to her desk as had Abbey and CD done before her. She turned to stare at me. “Joe? Why didn’t you take it further?”

I knew what her short-hand comment was referring to.

“The last thing anyone wants from the Commissioner down, is the hint that a Serial Killer is on the loose...even though I have complete confidence in all my colleagues’ abilities to shut their mouths, such information always filters out to the wide, wide world. Personally? I do not need that type of pressure now...and if it was designated a serial killing, then the pressure increases ten-fold. I doubted that Simmie and Doug would want that”.

Very quickly Simone’s name had been shortened to Simmie. She didn’t seem to mind the short-hand label. It was a typical Australian thing. If it wasn’t something more obtuse, it was a lazy shortening of either their birth or surname.

Denny nodded her head.

“Good...that’s good, Joe”.

I glanced over at Simmie and Doug. The expressions on their faces indicated they were on level one while Denny and I had loped up to the sixtieth!

“Very similar frenzied attacks using a knife on all the Victims. When I read your file, Joe...I thought it may have been rooted...um, psychologically...in a pregnant mother completely ignoring the impressionable little boy which has resulted in some form of Freudian reaction thus the attacks on the stomach area and nowhere else”. She shrugged her shoulders and held her arms akimbo. “But the father and young son were also assaulted and killed in a similar manner...that kind of blew away my attempt at figuring why the guy did what he did...” She dropped her head to give a delightful little giggle. “...and raping the still warm daughter? Your Perp is not the older brother, Joe...from where I stand it just doesn’t fit. Where is he? He’s dead, Joe. Killed by the Perp...now this type of behaviour just didn’t begin with the Lewis family and then shift to your poor Christine Grebble...the icing on the cake? That death caused by a shiv...a meat skewer up into the brain from a point just behind the ear...if it is the same person committing the murders, then why wasn’t the same approach adopted for the entire Lewis family? Such a method of killing is very unusual...and I would guess was utilised by a Perp who had some knowledge of the human body...you know, had a bit of medical knowledge. I am not about to classify the homicides as committed by the same person, but as the three of you progress, I want you to keep in mind the similarities of the two Cases”.

She looked at the two newly appointed Murder Detectives.

“He was working his way up to these particularly brutal attacks...first question. One! Is he a staff member of Westmead Hospital? If the answer is possibly, then he would be to my way of thinking, a fairly new recruit. Two! If he isn’t a Hospital employee, what is the connection between the Hospital and two of the Victims? If the Hospital is not in any way connected to these five brutal murders, then what and where is the connection between both homicides?”

“If there is a connection at all!” Doug chimed in to have his point agreed upon by the boss with a nod.

“Agreed Doug...and if our killer does live on that adrenalin rush in stabbing to death his quarry, how does he select his next victim? I am admitting that there may be further victims...yes, I believe it hasn’t finished yet but in saying that I stress...I stress that none of you are to admit investigating a possible serial killer. Now, I want the three of you to work as

a group..." She held up her hand as I opened my mouth. "No Joe. You are the Senior Officer, you will be lead. Keep in mind that both of your colleagues here, have very good qualities to add to the investigation. Okay?"

She returned to her chair, a subtle way of saying the meeting had ended.

"How about we get a coffee and sit and think, eh?" Simone suggested as we walked out of Denny's office. "I know a little coffee dive not far from here where we will be left alone".

"Count me in." I muttered before I headed towards my desk to gather up my gun, badge and iPad which had a File where everything pertinent to the 'Family in Bed' Knifing Case was entered and saved as a separate entity. An exact copy of the Murder Book volumes and a copy of what was on my Office Laptop. I would at some stage, request Simone to transfer all data on their Case across to my iPad so I could get up to speed...and vice-versa. They needed to peruse the Murder Book sitting on the left-hand side of my desk and offer any thoughts that the exercise might engender.

As I stood to leave the Squad Floor, I stopped and rang through to Muscles.

"G'day, mate. The Lewis family homicides? You up to speed on them?"

"Arrh...yes. As well as any Supervising Officer should be. Why?"

"Was there any indication that any one of the Lewis family was killed by a shiv pushed up into the brain from that soft spot just below and behind the ear?"

There was silence for some moments. I heard the rapid rhythm of a computer keyboard.

"Arrh...sorry, Joe. It is not noted".

"Can you have it checked out? You still have the bodies, don't you?"

"Yes...you're lucky. They were supposed to be released to a Funeral Home of their choice to-morrow morning...the brother and sister-in-law are accepting responsibility. I'll get onto it. I have full staff numbers so it shouldn't take too much time. I'll let you know".

"More than likely on the right side of their necks".

"Yeah. Right. Get back to you".

CHAPTER SIX

I had never been to this little coffee dive before. In fact, I didn't even know it existed!

Pokey with half-a-dozen to a dozen tables with four chairs to each table. Four people with utensils would be a little cosy to say the least! Starched red-checked linen table clothes and yes, a small, thin vase bearing a single stem flower on each table.

I peered around for a beret wearing artist or two. Maybe a painting or two of 'still life' or a lake and stone bridge with flowers bursting with colour...not a one, which disappointed me.

It was ten steps down off the Council footpath, two blocks from the Office...the saving grace was he served a darn good brew while a catalogue of guitar playing tunes softly wafted in the background! The Barista didn't have an extended moustache, or a black beret worn at a rakish angle...I was disappointed!

My iPad pinged that a message had just been received from Muscles informing me that he had a red flag to highlight the similarities between the Christine Grebble and the Lewis family stabbings. He would explain further when we could speak...sometime tomorrow as he was unavailable for the rest of the day. I nodded my understanding.

"Okay, you guys first...what do you think?"

Simone shook her head, stating softly that they were not at the point where a reasonable thought on the death of Christine Grebble was possible.

Doug was a quiet sort of guy who could think outside the square and could appreciate the various shades and nuances of a Case. He gave his partner a glance that I thought was his way of challenging her statement in not so many words.

"Yeah, I think our Perp at some stage, worked at the Hospital. He doesn't now...and he has had run-ins with both our Christine Grebble and your Simon Lewis while he worked there...at the Hospital...thus the frenzied attacks...all similar...the connections have been identified..."

I nodded at this assumption. It made sense but I was also impressed with him stating that the Perp no longer worked at the Hospital. A theory from out of the blue. Grasped and connected to his logical take on the Case. Whether it was fact will have to wait until further bits and pieces are gathered or fall into or hands on the Case.

“Doug!? Where in hell have you gleaned that piece of information?” Simone asked, her voice rising. She looked embarrassingly around the Café to check whether anyone was interested in our conversation. To me, it showed she was not capable of running off at a tangent based purely on a hunch. She would always react on confirmed and validated facts before going anywhere. Maybe that was a good thing while ever she was teamed with Chalmers...a kind of ying and yang partnership...a bit like Shells and me. I could see them being a successful duo once they had settled in.

“We don’t even know who our Perp is...” She continued in a tone that was part ‘put-down’ directed at Doug. “The one POI on the Lewis Case is nowhere to be found...to place both Cases inside the Hospital with a Hospital employee to blame is to me, muddying the water now. Jumping at shadows showing that you are a little paranoid”.

I waited while the Barista placed steaming coffees in front of us. The aroma a perfect way to dull the senses...or heighten them. I always reacted to the latter point. Caffeine had become my fix!

“Simmie? We are just discussing possibilities...at this stage we have nothing, but we will continue to have nothing if we sit on our bloody hands and not extend ourselves. These guesses maybe full of hot air, but one may...I repeat, *may* twig with one of us. There is no harm in theorising”. I gave her my best smile, looking around the Café. “That is why we are here...if my memory serves me well...” A tight smile finishing my little speech.

The comments not meant to antagonise the woman, but I believed any such disagreement wounded her. She could not take too much alienation. A characteristic that would see her floundering as Cases came and went. This surprised me as her love of Netball and her skill causing her to represent her State would seem like plenty of ups and downs throughout that sporting career. Disappointments and sheer elation seemed out of kilt with her. Doug was about to reply but was cut short by the Postie coming into the Café. All yellow wet-weather gear flying. His safety boots echoing off the timber floor. He chuckled at the Café Owner as he handed him a pile of letters.

“Sorry Ramah...all Bills today...it’s gunna rain. A terrible time to be out and about...take pity on me, eh?” Again, the chuckle, this time joined by the man standing behind the small counter. The Postie gave a backward wave, wishing all an enjoyable day as he left the Coffee Joint.

“Okay...” Doug began again. “We have interviewed everyone close to Christine for nil result. Often this is caused by us not asking the correct question of the right person...at any stage,

did we ask whether there were any signs of descension or disagreement between her and any colleague?”

“Not exactly that way, no...but we did ask people *within* her sphere of responsibility within the Hospital area whether she had any squabble or altercation with any co-workers...”

“Maybe she may have had a run-in with a Hospital worker outside her normal work area...or work shifts...and the incident has been forgotten by most...or the incident did not occur in the area she now worked in...” I offered, just to keep the conversation going. “What about her Church?” I added further. “She was a regular worshipper, wasn’t she?”

“Yes...but no...we have never gone down that path...no”. Simone replied curtly, as though that oversight may have been her own. By the glance that Doug gave his partner, I felt sure Simone had scoffed at the idea. There were no sinners in the congregation as far as she was concerned.

“They’re all sinners...Churchgoers, I mean”. I retorted. A sarcastic smirk to emphasise the point. “That’s their reason for habitual visitations each and every week...to be absolved of all sin...to be cleansed of all worldly dirt...” Glancing quickly at Simone to see whether I had drawn blood. By her reaction to my words, it would appear we may clash heads over Religion in the future...bring it on, I thought to myself. I’ve missed a good stir since Shelley left me. I smiled at the thought.

We went through the similarities, the people who might have connections to each of the Vics and the possible reasons why our Perp had reacted so savagely. Nothing was really achieved except I had a better understanding of my two new partners. Their differing method in looking at a Homicide Case and their failings in allowing their first Case to proceed or really, to come to a full stop...and apart from that I have found another coffee joint where I can sit and think without interference or interruption.

I paid the Bill and began to head for the door. Simmie and Doug shoved me back inside. It was raining very heavily. It made me feel sorry for the poor Postie who would be out in the middle of it. We returned to our table and ordered again, this time with something to eat as we figured we could be here for a while.

I rang Hendo, our Chief Clerk and the real ‘Head’ of the Murder Squad to let him know where the three of us were and why we had not returned to the Office.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Have either of you had a chance to read the final Post-mortem Report on the Lewis family deaths?”

In asking this of them, I had accepted them as my partners. Both looked up at me, shaking their heads. Before I asked the question, I checked that a copy of the Report had been sent to both their Laptops. I was a little miffed with their response but held my tongue as I had a reputation for years in not regularly checking my e-mails. It was Marjory Hendricks and then Shelley Shields who repeatedly filled me in on the latest gossip and other vital information that came via e-mail. It usually sitting somewhere in the ether-world on my computer only to see the light of day when I was emphatically reminded to check this important investigative tool!

“Both of you read it please and tell me what you think of it”.

I guess it may have been another thirty minutes before Simone spun her chair to face me. The look on her face like a Kindy-Kid answering a question from her Teacher.

“No surprises, Joe. Straight forward as you have thought all along”.

“No...I have not thought that at all. Unless these are confirmed facts, you stay unconvinced of all data you receive on a Case until collaborative evidence confirms its authenticity. That of course does not include any information we receive from the Forensic Scientific Department and such things as PM results. Doug? Even then, the details may hide a clue that the ‘Cutting Boys’ are not supposed to highlight and comment on...anything stick out to you?”

The way I asked must have shaken Simone as she turned back to her desk and I presume, had another quick read of the Report.

“Semen found in the vaginal canal of Shantelle Lewis cannot be matched to any known felon”. Simmie reported unconvincingly. She was grabbing at straws wanting to be the top kid in the class, but she was doing a huge non-service to herself more than anything else.

“Yes, I read that. It would have been nice to have something matching, eh? The family were regarded as a model family...everyone interviewed gave that impression to the three of

us...remember? The Blood/Alcohol reading of the old man was exceptionally high...he was a drunk...bet the house on it”.

“...who carefully shielded that aspect of his life from the entire neighbourhood...” Doug added. “Though being a drunk or a bloke who likes his grog is not viewed as being anti-social, especially in that part of Australian society...”

“Hah!” I interrupted. “It’s a perfectly normal practise for the entire nation, let me tell you. Alcohol is the insidious drug of choice for a fair proportion of the population...”

“Yeah...okay. If he can perform his normal daytime duties without any hiccup, he is considered an okay bloke. Just because he always seems a bit tiddly on those wonderful family neighbourhood get-togethers is neither here nor there, according to everyone. His love of the grog is acceptable today. Such a pity really, when medical evidence points to a sizable number of complaints brought on by too much alcohol intake. It reminds me of the Tobacco era...you know, when it commenced, and most people could find nothing wrong with being addicted to the bloody smoke...”

I didn’t continue as I sounded like a bloody prig, even to my ears.

“Mores the pity...” Simone butted in with a stern voice. It reminded me of one or two persons I had met over the years who looked down their noses at such a habit! I wondered then what Church she belonged to...one that was way too busy controlling the lives of the parishioners.

I nodded as my thoughts would remain just that...my thoughts!

“There is very little DNA trace of another person in the house at that time which means everything that occurred was at the hands of the members of the family...so it would seem. Because Simon was the only one who fled would suggest he did all the damage to the family...”

“Yes...good. I’ll agree with you up to a point. We should not set that scenario in concrete until Simon Lewis is found...alive or dead...and this does not help in the scenario where the same person was involved in the Lewis Family deaths and that of Christine Grebble. Would it be likely that two persons could have a similar style in wielding a knife in the extreme? I doubt it. Such a behaviour is a parallel to fingerprints...they belong to only one person...as per the actions of wielding a knife during a frenzied attack...”

Doug Chalmers turned to Simone Bartholomew, both having that twisted expression that would indicate they didn't have a clue.

"The manner in which the knife was wielded on both Christine Grebble and Missus Pauline Lewis is very similar...manic attention to the abdomen of both with very little injury to any other part of the body..."

"Shantelle Lewis..." Bartholomew began before I interrupted her.

"It would appear a shiv was used on Shantelle which may have paralysed her...which allowed our perp to penetrate the poor girl as she lay there completely unable to resist in any way..."

I waited for some response which was not forthcoming...it was going to be a slow old race is all I thought as I exhaled in frustration. Neither Bartholomew or Chalmers commented or acknowledged my sign of annoyance.

"Let's think about it, eh? Let's see whether we can determine a connection between the two sets of murders that would help in their successful completion".

I once again buried my head in the post-mortem results but jolted as another thought came to me.

"We have been treating these two cases as connected somehow...but the comment of two persons having the same style in wielding a knife really means we are talking about one person...that is also borne out by the forensic trace, as nothing unusual showed up in both Cases...but we need to wait as we only have the Prelim. Report on the Grebble Case. That could suggest that the Perp was a regular visitor to both abodes as his DNA trace does not ring as an outsider...but shows he was a regular visitor to both addresses...a tentative theory which we should run with until fact forces us to exclude the thought".

CHAPTER EIGHT

Perhaps every year or five, the Water Police and the attached Diving Squad, would clean out the bottom of several rivers within the Sydney Basin. Selecting those points which seemed to be favoured by those who had stolen a vehicle for any dozens of reasons to eventually drive the car into the waters of the river. Always in some secluded spot unlikely to be witnessed by

other persons. On every occasion this exercise was mounted, up to twenty vehicles were recovered, most having been reported to the Police as having been stolen. One or two may have been a scam to milk money from Insurance Companies but mostly, these stolen vehicles were at best used for a 'burn' around the streets before being dumped while others would be involved in anything from smash and grab through to drive-by shootings...

One such vehicle recovered was an Oh-five white Commodore with a bloated body sitting in the Driver's seat, still trapped by the seatbelt.

I was immediately informed as the vehicle had an 'All Points' out on it. This three months after the death of the Lewis family with the investigation into the tragedy grinding slowly to a halt.

I felt sure that this find would give impetus to this Case that was dragging...

Because this meant forward movement in the Case, we all wanted to look at said vehicle. We made the site in record time, screaming tyres with siren blaring from the time that we left the Police Building. Admittedly, the site was on the banks of Lake Parramatta perhaps two kilometres from the Parramatta Police Building and within spitting distance of both the Lewis and Grebble abodes. In fact, we could make out the Grebble Apartment Tower through the trees.

Me and my two 'green' partners were standing around the vehicle as the Forensic Pathology Team erected a tent over the car which was still dripping water. From what I saw, the Vic was not a pretty sight. Three months submerged in dirty river water was not kind to the boy. Eels were said to be the main culprit along this stretch of river with a lot of flesh stripped cleanly from the body.

"Well..." I began, standing outside the tent not wanting to venture inside for another look. "We know where our missing boy has been hiding for the last three months. The Boss was correct in her assumption that Simon Lewis was dead..."

We didn't stay for long, leaving the scene before the body was removed from the family's Holden Commodore. I emphatically declined the offer to view the Post-mortem while Doug Chalmers indicated that one of us should attend, volunteering himself and his female partner. They both looked at me, indicating that the Lead Investigating Officer should always attend such an important part of the Case.

I shrugged my shoulders before commencing to walk away. I turned to address my two partners.

“One thing for sure, with him dead, we have no-one who can confirm any of our scenarios we think may have been the Lewis family deaths and final moments...we can discuss it in detail until the cows come home, but we will never know for sure. I’ll write it up for the Coroner’s Enquiry and give you both the opportunity to add your thoughts before we all sign off on it and pass it onto the Boss for her confirming signature. Okay?”

By those words, I was tossing in the towel. That was something for which I was not known. My usual approach in any Case even when either Hendricks or Shields partnered me was that my attitude was described as a dog with a bone...

I again shook my head. There was no way I was going to stand there and watch as the skin and flesh dropped away from the bones during the autopsy...nah, not on! I don’t give a damn what anyone says...even my two junior partners!

CHAPTER NINE

I slouched in the driver’s seat of my Unmarked across the road from the building watching people emerge from the gloom of the Church interior like ants erupting from their nest thinking their home had been breached. I could never figure on why these people needed a Church to worship their Christ when it was he who had scoffed at buildings being built to worship him. Maybe it all stemmed from the fact that the Roman Catholic Church was embarrassed by the amount of money deposited every Sunday in the Collection Plates as tithing. Millions from around the world. How to invest such riches to ensure the Church remained financially strong? Build beautiful edifices to their God and invest in property. That sounded reasonable to this old cynical Atheist.

Sunday morning services had just ended as a line of Faithful Followers began to walk slowly out of the main double doors of the Church. Each Parishioner shaking the Father’s hand, receiving quiet words in return. After, the parishioners gathered, talking animatedly with each other on the wide vehicular U-shaped roadway that fronted the Church. The fine crushed stone noisy as Parishioners walked towards their cars parked on the street. There was a gradual dwindling as they all headed for their vehicles or walked in the direction of their homes. I particularly took note of those appearing to walk casually towards their domicile. The clicking

of my phone camera with a zoom lens attachment the only sound until others turned over their motors and began to crawl down the street away from the Church. Their souls having been given a service and a grease and oil change that morning.

I waited until my progress across the street was not noticed by many people. The priest having long returned to the Church's dim interior.

I went to open the front doors as one swung opened towards me, nearly bowling me over. A bloody safety issue in the making I thought as I rubbed my wrist.

"Sorry mate..." The man offered, him blushing a deep red at his offence.

"No worries, mate. She's fine". I replied conciliatorily though my wrist hurt a bit from the jolt.

I took a double take at the fellow thinking where had I seen the guy before as I walked into the gloom of the Church. The near collision at the front door must have caused some commotion as the figure of the Father walked towards me as I let the door behind me close quietly.

"Can I help you, my son?" The man cooed in that quiet uninflected voice that so many Priests mastered. As though they thought as a collective, it was the required tone of voice to sooth the souls of the masses. I wondered who may have encouraged the practise back in history...a silly thought I know, but such pearls often jumped into my thoughts.

I held up my ID card and identified myself as the Lead Detective on the Christine Grebble Murder Case.

"Arrh...yes. A terrible thing and a sad loss to this parish. I understand her body will be released early next week. No-one has come forward with the funeral expenses. I think next week I will discuss the poor girl's demise as a tragedy that seldom few will be affected by, fortunately".

"From what I know, she has sufficient funds to cover all expenses necessary...and from what I have been able to garner since her death, she was a very popular and well-respected woman...at work and here...a very popular Parishioner".

The Father nodded his head. A portion of the weight suddenly disappearing from his shoulders. A Pauper's Funeral was avoided with the Church not having to foot the Bill!

“You knew her well?” I asked to fill in the silence.

“As well as any of my congregation...maybe a little more with her as she seemed to respect my word...”

“No family?”

“When she spoke of them, it was in anger. Agitation...she would become quite uptight. While I cannot reveal what was said during Confessionals, we did talk as we sat...like you and I sitting in this pew in the front row at this moment. She was more comfortable outside the limitations of the Confessional Box...she was abused by an angry, alcoholic father...we see more of that every day as society breaks down and more people turn their back on the one person who could help them...God and his Holy Son”. He crossed himself several times.

I wished I could be so sure of those facts when it was his Church that could be countered as the basis of the populace going to hell on a fast pack horse. Their loyalty, trust and respect being smashed to smithereens by all the sordid business occurring at regular intervals around the very seat of Christianity. Their belief system left empty with nothing else to help fill the void that so many people seemed to think was of paramount importance to fill.

“Did she say at any time where her family was?”

“Um...yes...um, somewhere on the Central Coast. Kilcare Heights, I think it is called. People of some affluence called the suburb home...so she would say, a sneer always accompanying those words”.

It had been some months since her premature demise with no-one coming forward to claim the body...thus that condition reinforced by the fact she was alienated by her family. Sad, huh? Such a lovely person left alone and unclaimed chilling in that multi-stretcher Refrigerator in the Morgue.

“Did she bond with any other Parishioner?”

“Um...let me think about that...yes...she was a quiet girl...a home body who shied away from the bright lights her friends regularly sought. Not necessarily shy but perhaps badgered into silence by certain members of her family. From what she described to me, it was not a happy family...under those circumstances, I guess anyone would cower under the constant bullying and badgering. She gained her Nursing Degree and worked at Gosford Hospital for several years. She shared accommodation with three others...um...I think that is

correct...three other Nursing Sisters...arrh...one was a Radiologist or something. In a Unit development near Gosford Railway Station. Then she took a Posting down here at Westmead...she had sufficient funds to begin the purchase of a Unit near here...within walking distance..." He stopped to run a hand through his receding hairline. "She once said that she had saved the money while her Flatmates went and partied at every opportunity...even going to Bali, Thailand and the States...she stayed at home looking after the Flat, the Goldfish and the cat..." He paused, a smile on his face as he imagined her life. "She never showed any regrets in not joining the others in their youthful zing at life...she would just shrug her shoulders and state that that lifestyle was not for her...she always spoke with fondness of her flatmates and as far as I could discern, she was still very best friends with the lot of them. If an occasion meant that these people needed to come to Sydney as a group, they would invariably hunker down at Chrissie's place overnight, regardless of Chrissie being on duty, on call or whatever".

"Would you have any names...the whereabouts of this flat up near Gosford?"

There was silence for some moments as the Priest pondered. He cleared his throat with a cough before eventually replying softly. "No, sorry..."

"Have you managed to think about my question of Mz Grebble forming any friendship with any member of the congregation?"

"No, I'm sorry...none that I can think of...no."

CHAPTER TEN

I walked slowly along the viewing area to join my two colleagues as the post-mortem on Simon Andrew Lewis was finishing.

"Cause of death?" I asked as I flipped the switch to permit me to talk to Drew Waller who had performed the autopsy.

"Good morning, Detective. Good to see you care enough for your POIs that you do make it before I finish up...you have the timing of a Comic!" He chastised as he looked up at me. "Cause of death? I won't assume, Joe. The guy was under the water for close to twelve

weeks...hard to make an educated guess. Um...let me wait for blood and tox results but at a guess, he could have slashed his own wrists..."

That made me sit back with surprise.

"You say could have, Drew. How sure are you?"

He shook his head and again glanced up at the viewing stalls where we and several other persons were seated.

"Eels can be a ravenous species and tear shreds of skin and flesh from bones...the simple fact that the body was submerged for three months almost, doesn't help in coming to a conclusive opinion. I can't be sure...sorry. All I'll say is that his wrists appeared to be slashed quite savagely. The other areas of his body such as his upper arms and for the length of both legs did not show duplicate injuries. These were the result of hungry eels and were different to the damage to his wrists. I will not give you a definitive opinion on why that is...okay?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"What do you reckon we should do this week to progress both Cases?" I asked as Simone returned with three coffees from downstairs. There were blank expressions on their faces.

"Christine Grebble's Mobile phone? Have you downloaded everything off it?"

"What for? She is our poor Vic...why would we do..." Chalmers stopped as he looked up at me. My expression black, next to a major thunderclap in anger and frustration.

"Her Mobile will give us up to three months of movement...where she went, where she came from". I said between clenched teeth. "Or more, prior to her murder. Her phone messages sent and received will give us a list of persons who may be able to help us. Ditto her conversations...those received and sent will indicate her very close friends, the occasional lover perhaps and if we are lucky, her killer...and you can bet your yearly bonus that her contact list will be enormous. Even if it shows only a name and the contact number, we can obtain the full name and address from the Reverse Phone Book...any one of those persons could be...I stress, could be our felon...or be able to help in our enquiries towards arresting our man...no?"

I let them absorb what I had just said. Unfortunately, their expressions didn't change so they could not grasp what I was trying to say. Their previous postings really didn't help when they transferred into the Murder Squad. I decided to bring up the matter with the Boss for her to organise some type of Training program for such Officers wanting to come over to the wild side regardless of their Grade or not. If two Grade Threes were having trouble in grasping certain procedures and why we did what we did in certain circumstances, I could imagine what lower grades must have endured. I checked myself as those Officers I was involved with over the years appeared to be okay when tossed into the deep end. Perhaps Bartholomew and Chalmers lacked that certain something that held others apart from the mainstream. I was guessing as I really didn't know. Were Murder Dees a special breed? While my vain self may agree with that thought, I knew that wasn't true...what made a good Murder Dee? I was sure that Simmie and Doug in time, would make an excellent team if both were willing to persevere...maybe that was all it was! Patience, nous, and perseverance...and enough different Cases to enable rounded experience in the art of catching the Perp...

“Okay, where is all the information you have pulled from the Mobile?”

“Um...I guess it is with the Digital Investigation Team...they handle that type of thing, don't they?”

Again, my expression must have been black as both my colleagues turned away to hide their faces, taking several sips of their coffees hoping I would chill during that time.

I took a deep breath.

“Okay, gather up your things as we are out of here!” This uttered angrily.

“Where we going?” They both asked in unison.

“To the Forensic Laboratory at Lidcombe...”

I remembered having to repeat myself with the young Dallas Courtney and the lovely Aleesha Petrova until I thought it had become a mantra for me. The information that can be gleaned from a Victim's Mobile phone can be a veritable treasure trove!

With each updated model, they were increasing the amount of information stored on these wonderful implements. Information that could be very important to us.

“You have to remember that the Mobile Phone of any POI *or* Vic is perhaps the most crucial tool we have in any murder investigation. With it you can ascertain where our POI *or* Vic was, where she went, who she contacted, who contacted her, who she texted and vice versa and who she considered important enough to be included on her Contact List and in her photo gallery on her mobile. Since Home Grown Terrorism became a well-worn Heading in our vocabulary, these handy little implements can have their memories uncovered for up to two years...I repeat, an extremely important investigative tool! Every investigation given to you and as you view the Vic at the death scene, you should have placed the Vic’s mobile into an Evidence Bag to send off to the Digital and Electronic Forensic Team...every Case! And remember, it will be you who doggedly goes through said information to try and find that ‘missing link’...not the Forensic people. Us!! They just supply the information for us to do the figuring...got it?” I turned away to gather up my stuff. “Remember...it has happened several times. The Vic has recorded her death and even got a photo of the Perp which helped enormously in closing several Homicide Cases...”

I finished gathering up my things in silence to allow the steam to slowly abate. I walked towards the Lift Lobby, placing our intended whereabouts up on the electronic ‘WHERE’ Board. My two partners falling into line behind me with their tails between their legs and their look downtrodden.

Even Hendo gave me a wink and a tight smile as he looked up at the little procession.

I had about enough of my two colleagues...then again, as I hinted at before, newcomers to the Murder Squad should not be tossed into the deep end. Even Grade Three Officers who you would think, required very little tuition into investigative procedures for Homicide Cases should be made to attend such tuitions.

The more I thought about it, the more it made sense to me. Even having a couple of weeks Course down at the Academy in Goulburn for these Transferees to attend. Those requested to attend could live on site for the duration. I promised myself I would have a sit-down discussion with the Boss suggesting every newcomer onto our floor be required to attend some sort of Revision and Practical Procedures Short Course in investigating a Homicide Case. With all the people who had come through the Murder Squad ranks, there was one blaring obvious shortcoming...the intricacies and comprehension of pursuing a case through to completion. A lot of it was common sense and a logical, educated mind to follow certain critical pathways...but then a lot of it was a learnt art...

CHAPTER TWELVE

I scratched my head as I leaned against the work bench.

“Even though the Court Order says to provide all conversations that have been recorded against the said Mobile Phone Number for the past two years, I think we can hold in abeyance that requirement. Her location for that period would be of more benefit to us, I think. I also think the Numbers she called...and received...plus all text messages she received and has sent during say the last six months period. We can then use the Reverse Directory to obtain the Owner of each user’s Mobile. Then we can reference the name to a photo on a Driver’s License to obtain further information...yes, the last six months should suffice at this stage. We can always take a bigger slice if the six-month examination doesn’t help us...but I am confident it will”.

The Forensic Officer nodded. Looking at me smiling as she began the process...something that I thought should have been organised three months ago...then my memory jagged as I had not examined the Lewis’s mobiles...Shelley would be kicking me up the backside if she were here!

“No probs...we can do that for you...give us say ten days...that could expand or shrink depending on how fast the Network Carrier for her Mobile responds. We’ll let you know”.

It occurred to me that Simmie and Doug had given Christine Grebble’s Mobile Phone to the experts...but without any instructions or the Murder Book Number that is required to permit allotment of their time spent on the project, the Mobile had sat there gathering dust.

“Um...Detective? The Case Number if you can, so we can itemise our time to that relevant Case...that is what we have been waiting for”. A tight smile as she glanced at my two young partners. The expression noticeable as to nail the two to the wall.

“Yes, sorry...” I gave her the necessary detail that would permit her to proceed, a little angry again at my two colleagues who had failed to carry out this very important procedure. Forgetting my own transgression...perhaps it was some sort of hitch waiting for one or both of my colleagues to pull me up...of course that didn’t happen.

I nodded, smiling at her as I pushed away from the desk that had four computer screens arranged like some type of panoramic viewing palette. Working at that workstation would

send me crazy. I thanked the FO for her participation and with my entourage following meekly, I headed towards the exit out onto the Parking Area.

As I stood in the warm sun, I cleared my throat before I begun. Leaning against the Unmarked and making sure there were no persons within cooee, I tried to get a hold of the head of steam that must have been shooting out of my ears.

“Okay...you did the right thing in giving the Mobile to the correct people. You must understand though, they would not look at it until they had firm instructions...and the Murder Book Registration Number to allocate their time to...the bloody thing could have sat there for the duration. Alone and afraid...always...always be succinct and thorough in requesting any work from any of our Departments...and always give them the Murder Book Number...” I was mad, spinning around several times with my arms akimbo. “Surely...surely both of you would have been involved in offering a Book Number or a Crime Number so whomever can get on with their speciality...eh? Back from where you both came from...eh?”

I looked from one to the other. They nodded their heads telling me they had carried out this procedure in their previous roles. What had made them both forget the protocol for this job I had no idea about but once again, I went through the steps and the why’s and where-fore’s of their responsibilities.

They could not give me an excuse for this major blunder.

For that, a bad Report on their behaviour would be passed onto the Boss.

“Okay. Good...we’re getting somewhere...let’s pay a visit to Westmead Hospital, eh?” I offered, again to two blank looks from my partners. It was becoming something that made me smile...or grimace...I wasn’t too sure.

“I thought we had covered that aspect of the investigation...” Chalmers stated bluntly, feeling a little challenged as though their first assault of the Hospital was being questioned and held in doubt...which it was!

Doh!

“Who did you question?” I asked, already aware of who they approached and questioned.

“Where our Deceased worked...the entire Ward...for all shifts...”

“Which was only a relatively small area as all Nursing staff and Sisters are sometimes moved around due to a staff shortage in a particular area. The Ward where you conducted your enquiries may have been an area where...sure...our Deceased worked for some time...the reason for such a savage attack may have occurred on a different Ward or location though...months before that transfer...we need to see if there is any mention of a fracas...a confrontation described on her file...and whether the on-site Union Rep was aware of any such incident along with the Personnel Department or Human Resources Branch...as they now like to be called...and whether such a disturbance was the cause for any remedial action against our Vic or the Perp. Remember, this fracas...if indeed there was one, could be a reason for her death...but it may have occurred months ago...well before the date of her death, understand?”

I felt that I had been lumbered with two fuckwits...nah...in some ways they both impressed me...but that feeling was slowly being diluted by what they *didn't* do. All of it logical and spelled out in our Policy and Procedures Manuals! Both looked a little sheepish as Simmie unlocked the Unmarked. Both knew that their investigation up to this point was lacking in thought, planning and good old fashion common sense and logic with the Policy and Procedures Manual tossed into the shithouse to be ignored!

Again, I thought that any person wanting to transfer into the Murder Squad needed to do a series of lessons as investigating any homicide did not seem to be like examining a Robbery or any other major crime going on the actions of these two.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Head of Personnel was a ‘no nonsense’ sour woman who needed to chill out when dealing with such enquiries.

“I cannot release any information pertaining to any staff member of this Hospital without a Court Order...understand? Now, if there is nothing else, I am an extremely busy person...” She stood gesturing us towards her Office door.

I slipped the Court Order out from the inside pocket of suit coat...yes, I was wearing a suit of dark grey with pinstripes, a light blue Business shirt and a tie of various shades of light grey. Black Loafers with black socks...surprise, surprise, how the man has fallen from a great

height. I now possessed four suits and umpteen business shirts...and yes, dozens of black socks...you can't end up with lonesome single sets of socks if they are all black!

This chrysalis had occurred several years ago when I was sequestered to the AFP for several months. Gone went my usual gear that I wore up until then. A white T-shirt, jeans, ankle high gym boots with the laces untied and a mid-brown leather bomber jacket that had signs of wear. In winter I wore a long-sleeved T-shirt under the jacket! The jacket loose off my shoulders that hid my Police issue Glock in a shoulder-holster and my little Berretta that was in a belt holster in the small of my back. This had been my uniform from the very first days of working undercover with my mate of long ago, Barry Holtz...and it continued against several attempts for me to change my attire close on fifteen years in the Murder Squad.

I had been given the word that a Supervising Detective within the ranks of the AFP must be suitably attired. At that determination, I was on the verge of rescinding the offer to lead a small group of Detectives in investigating the shooting death of a well-known and well-loved Commonwealth Judge...until I was taken aside and told the truth of the temporary transfer...that I was being groomed for better things! Whatever, I lead that group to a successful closure of the crime which gave me enough kudos on my Personnel File to override the plethora of red marks throughout its reams of paper.

I am still wearing the prerequisite suit to hide the now belt holster for my Glock with the little Berretta never worn unless I thought a back-up was required, in which case I wore an ankle holster.

While such talk may have caused me to get my hackles up, my continued future in the Cop Force was reinforced by my relationship with Tellie and the possibility that I could very well become a father again. All this in the back of my head where it would never discover the light of day! A comfortable outfit that was my 'trademark' that made me melt into the crowd and had done me in good stead for a lot of years. The suit and tie had me standing out from that crowd...but I guess I had to bow to the whispers if I wanted to go far in the Police Department as a 'super' Detective, where there was an accepted standard of dress...for us men, at least!

The woman looked down her nose at the folded document, almost afraid of touching it as she knew it meant extra work for her or her choice of delegation to a mere mortal. Both Chalmers and Bartholomew looked at me, wondering when I had organised these Court Order documents as this was the third this morning!

I wiggled my eyebrows and pretended to pull a rabbit from a hat, a charade not noticed by the Head of Personnel...hopefully!

“Yes...um...yes”. She murmured as she backtracked to her chair, beckoning us to sit in the comfortable looking visitors’ chairs. “Yes...” She repeated. “This shouldn’t take long.”

She booted up her computer and began to battle with the keyboard, bashing them as though they were the fault of her morning going to hell on a donkey! I smiled and looked out through the external window that gave views of a busy suburban road. Traffic moved lethargically as though ordered to such a pace by several sets of lights in proximity.

“Yes...Sister Christine Aubrey Grebble...very good reports on her Ward responsibilities. Well-liked and respected...nothing untoward in her ability to undertake her required duties. Yes...she transferred from Gosford Hospital with the highest of recommendations...one black mark against her name...no...that’s wrong. She accused a Wards man of harassment, stalking her over several weeks and indiscrete comments of a sexual nature about her when she was within earshot...”

“When was this, Missus Fielding?”

“Um...around eighteen months ago...no...over two years ago. The chap was fired...Alan Corbello...there’s a full Report...” She looked up at me. “I suppose you want a copy of everything relating to this incident...or really, a series of incidents spread over almost six months...nine months...yes? The man was nothing but persistence, so it seems!” She smiled tightly at this attempt at levity.

I nodded hoping that conveyed what I wanted.

“Yes...” She uttered sternly. “Of course, you do. I’ll get one of my staff to do the honours”. She picked up her phone and pushed several numbers, asking the person to come immediately.

A nervy, middle-aged woman with a permanent curve to her spine giving you the impression she was cowering from her Boss, walked quickly into the Office. Her perfume like a heavy cloak around her...at least it was not too bad a scent!

“Steph? These Police people are investigating the horrible death of our Sister Grebble. They would like a complete copy of Christine Grebble’s problems with a Wardman, Alan Corbello that caused the sacking of the gentleman. Take these Officers into the Conference Annex and provide them with all the information...okay?” She stood, whacking the Court Order against her hip as though punishing its very existence. She walked purposefully to her Office door, closing it gently after we had vacated.

“Yer gotta take her mood with a grain of salt. She’s actually a very good Boss once you get passed the initial growl...now...where were we?” She asked as she sat at a large table with several Laptops sitting proudly at chair positions. “I’ll boot up all these computers so you can see what you want me to send to the Printer”.

We sat there patiently for close on ninety minutes as folder after folder was made available to us. An electronic version copied to an external USB.

“The Union Rep...who would that be?”

“Barbara Hatton...I’ll get her to come down”. She wheeled her chair to a small credenza in a corner behind her as another woman carried in a pile of A4 photo-copied material, dumping it on the conference table furthest from our seated positions. Nice appeared to a missing commodity amongst these people. I was surprised at the pile. Doug Chalmers stood and walked to the end of the table to begin to go through the pile, passing on each sheet to Bartholomew after he had perused each page.

An elderly woman knocked on the ghost wall that would have isolated and walled in the annex.

“Arrh...Barbs. Thanks for coming down so quickly”. She introduced the Union Rep to each of us before explaining our purpose.

“A terrible business...have you got the guy yet? That killed our Christine?”

“No...but I think our search may have just homed in onto the guy...although we have several POIs that we are investigating. They all have ties with the Deceased”.

There was a sigh from Stephanie Joyner.

“Detectives...we have video of the last altercation between Sister Grebble and the Wardman who I guess is Alan Corbello. It occurred some twenty-seven months ago”.

The Union Rep stood and walked behind Stephanie to view the images.

“Yes...I remember that incident. It’s quite a while ago now. Two years maybe...no, longer than that. Created quite a stir that went right to the top. Corbello pushed the Sister over. She landed heavily and hit her head against the wall...she had trouble after that with her tailbone...gave her heaps. Corbello was a shit of a man. I was glad to be rid of him as he was

a bloody whinger. Forever burning my ear with stupid objections and concerns that were not in his sphere of things. As the Union Rep, I did not object to him being fired”.

“A copy of that video please, if you could?” I requested quietly. “This could be our man”.

“I’ll just go and get another Flash-drive to copy the video of the incident and a digital copy of all the pages we have given you from the Sister’s Personnel File...do you have any idea when she will be given a funeral?”

“Sometime this week or early next week...at the Church of All Saints at Northmead. She was a regular attendee...” I gave them the name of the priest and his telephone number.

“Thanks for that...I’ll send the information off as an all-persons e-mail. I know a lot of people would like to attend her funeral. She was extremely popular, respected and loved. Her death effected a lot of people, all of whom I would imagine would want to pay their last respects...one thing before you go. Is there any connection between Sister Grebble’s...arrh...death and that of Sister Prasarta...she was an excellent Nursing Sister who was reliable and very chirpy. She was stabbed to death at the end of her shift as she went to sit in her car parked in the Staff Parking Area. I understand the whole thing was captured on CCTV. Her ex-boyfriend has been arrested so the TV said the other night...another case of a male acquaintance not willing to respect the wishes of a former girlfriend or some such...do you think there is a connection...both she and Chrissie Grebble were stabbed to death...”

“Um, no. There is no connection other than the two were Nursing Sisters here at the Hospital, and yes, the Perp has been arrested. There seems to be a different mindset of people born in India, Sri Lanka, and most of the Middle Eastern Nations where the woman is treated as the servant, and at the beck and call of the husband at every turn. There is no such thing as equality of the sexes. We see a far bit of that with the make-up of the population changing from the old ten-pound Pom. Those days are over”.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

We attended the funeral of Christine Aubrey Grebble surprised by the numbers who turned up to pay their last respects. This forced some people to gather around the entry doors or out onto the crushed stone driveway. I silently hoped that there was no sudden emergency at the Hospital as half the staff were present at the Church.

I had stood with the Priest as people dawdled into the Church, very few addressing the Father as though they knew the guy. A tall gangly guy shook hands with the Father who returned the smile thanking the man for his attendance on this sad occasion.

It was Alan Corbello.

I recognised his face from the video feed we had of the incident that had caused his immediate sacking from the Hospital some years previously. As he walked past and made his way down the aisle, the Priest turned quickly to me to indicate the man. I did not need confirmation...and the way he had passed me made me think of another time, but for the life of me, I couldn't place it.

After the service, people crowded in small and large groups at the front of the Church...waiting for what I didn't know. The three of us tried to talk to as many persons as we could, gaining approval to video that person as we asked the questions. Where did they know Christine from and what was their status with the Deceased? One of the larger groups present was the group of old friends from the days that Grebble worked at Gosford Hospital. As a group, they had been invited to a 'wake' at the local Bowling Club. Nibbles and sandwiches while Alcohol was a pay as you go affair.

We three also invited ourselves mingling with those who knew Chrissie. She was popular and well-respected...why is it that those who make a difference to others always are the ones who cop a premature death?

The Priest stayed for some time and there was a notable exclusion.

Alan Corbello.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"Let's dig into Alan Corbello's life before we do anything else, eh? He is our only POI for Chrissie Grebble's stabbing murder and he has a motive and possible means...he was sacked immediately after assaulting and stalking our Vic. That's a bloody good reason to kill in some people's eyes. I want to know what the guy has for breakfast, who he socialises with and where, what his finances are like...get it? Everything! Okay?"

“Before we do, can we have a word?”

Chalmers looked around the large Office area. I took the hint and ushered my two colleagues into one of the small Interview Rooms. We settled ourselves, a coffee container warming our hands. Why I had no idea as the Aircon was humming away and it was a warm day outside.

“We’ve stuffed up big time, haven’t we?”

I bowed my head and held the coffee container a bit tighter, thinking quickly of how I should answer...

“No, I don’t think so...” I commenced “What I do know is that coming from say...you two...coming from Child Protection and you Doug, coming from Robbery and Major Crime...there’s a different mindset required within the Murder Squad that you have not as yet grasped”. I paused to think of what and how I wanted to continue. I didn’t want to beat the wind out of their combined sails as I think they will eventually serve the Murder Squad with acumen and loyalty. “Um...as I would find it difficult...and would need a period of settling into the rhythm and ways of Child Protection...or Major Crimes...” Looking at one to the other. “So...um... so you two need some time to settle in, to get your mind around the nuance and rhythm of the Murder Squad. On this floor you need a long memory, a way at looking at the facts as they unroll on you that is slightly different to your former ‘home’ and a logical, shrewd, and enquiring mind...and the stomach to be able to look at bloodied corpses without losing three meals onto your shoes. Often with all Homicide Detectives, that thought out of left field can make all the difference. You have not failed but what you did do is sit on your hands when you thought there was no way forward. You allowed the situation to force this negative thinking from both of you...to control you instead of you controlling the situation. That was not the right choice”. I looked from one to the other. “Under those circumstances, you needed to change your direction of logic and examination...instead of trying to concentrate on the Perp which gave you that proverbial brick wall, you should have shifted your thoughts into a different direction. In this case, the Vic. Examine her. Her likes and dislikes. Her employment and the way she lived. Her friends and acquaintances and if she liked Pearl Jam, was that the reason why she was killed”. I took a breath and a sip of coffee. “That’s all I did, look at her life. That is what you have failed to do...and the link to her Personnel File? Not a brainwave but instead a logical, common-sense thing to do. This is your first Case, guys. Give yourselves a break and don’t be too downhearted about it. I’ve just made thirty years in the Murder Squad, and I still make gigantic mistakes, let me tell you...I too have hit that brick wall. We all have similar Cases...it is not a symptom of newly joined participants such as yourselves. Just look at the Lewis Family Case...it’s not going

anywhere...a sad reflection of myself? No...but a timely reminder that we all have a Case like that. Understand?"

"But that's the point!" Simone countered. "We should have been able to extend ourselves instead of being so narrow in our examination of the Deceased's employment record".

"No...now that you are standing at the point where facts may fall into line...it's easy to say that is what you *should have* done...in this game, never second-guess yourselves or your ability to work out facts...it will send you batty. Now...it's almost knock off time and I intend to do my customary swimming regime before heading for home...but before that, I will teach you the easiest way to carry out an in-depth examination of any Person of Interest...it could take all week-end to burrow through...a former brilliant guy from our ranks now employed by the AFP can take the kudos for its inception...he could wander through the back-end of a computer as easy as taking a piss". I smiled at the memory, silently chastising myself for having not kept in regular contact with him or his missus. "He constructed this data-base that simultaneously will look through multiple data records and countless unnamed data bases to allow us to get an idea of our POI Number One's life, loves and hates...his very life...okay?"

I spent half an hour going through the steps to have the Search Engines begin.

"That simple? It will take several hours, huh? That's brilliant. How come you guys have it while other Departments miss out?" Doug Chalmers asked. He had shown he had a better understanding on all things computers than either Simone or I put together.

"Bugged if I know. As far as I know, we don't have some sort of ownership rights on it"

Doug bent down to my Laptop and pressed some command keys. I was on the verge of telling him to leave it alone, thinking the thing could be deleted...or even blow the program to Kingdom Come!

"Here's a list of the Data Bases that will start off the search...this is bloody incredible. I hope the guy got some form of reward for this. He deserves a million bucks!"

"Nothing as far as I know..."

"Typical...bloody typical!" Doug denounced.

"Yeah, what more would we expect...if our POI has or had a library Card in Charters Towers Queensland, it will give us a complete run-down on his borrowing and history of late

returns...of no use to us really, but what can I say, the system cannot differentiate between the chaff and the hay...as I said, it could take several hours...or all week-end...who's to know. Then comes the arduous work for us. Spending for however long in collating the bits that will be helpful for our Case”.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I wandered back on to the Murder Squad floor, my hair still wet from my swim. My eyes sore from the chlorinated water even though I wore goggles during any swimming time. Both Simmie and Doug had knocked off as their desks were tidy yet empty.

“Joe! You still here. I gotta go but you're it, dude”.

Hendo, our ever-present and loved Head Clerk handed me the ‘call out’ data on a homicide.

“C’mon, mate...shit...I’m heading home...it’s Friday night for God’s sake!” Disgust in my tone as I glanced around the Office. None of the Night Shift guys had signed on yet, they were still doing laps of the pool downstairs.

“Sorry to do it to you mate, but you know the rules. You haven’t yet signed off and you are the most senior and the only Murder Dick on the floor now. Have fun”.

I hurled a string of expletives at his disappearing figure, louder still when I realised the address was up on the Central Coast. I took a kick at Hendo’s desk, stubbing my toe as my only prize...it throbbed for some time. I ran back to my desk and grabbed my phone, unsure who I should ring first. Tellie to tell her I had no idea when I’d be home or trying Doug Chalmers phone to see whether I could pick him up on the way north. Simone lived out this way, Toongabbie or Girraween I thought, while Doug lived around Hornsby somewhere so it would be easier for me to pick him up on the way.

Doug came first. Shows my priorities, doesn’t it?

Tellie always said I was married more to the job than her...which was silly really, as we had never married, living in sin for all these years. We both had had several conversations about some sort of marriage ceremony especially now that the girls were getting older. Nothing ever eventuated as though we both were quite comfortable with the situation as it was.

Doug was not overly impressed with the situation when I spoke to him, but he knew he couldn't let me down. He was still on the train heading north towards Cowan, so it was easy to hop off at Hornsby and wait for me to turn up in the Unmarked.

“Hornsby Railway Station on the western side...I'll be there in about fifteen, I reckon. I imagine you will be a little longer”. He groaned. “The missus ain't going to be very happy...it's her mother's birthday with a family re-union to celebrate that. It is happening to-night”.

“Sorry, Doug. I can tell you I had other things to do myself, but...” I left it unsaid. If you are a Murder Dee...or a cop on General Beat, you were on duty twenty-four-seven...no ifs nor buts!

I rang Tellie as I drove out of the Police building. She too, wasn't impressed as she knew I could be away for most of the weekend. It had happened before. Thank Christ Malisa and Bill will be there to help with the three girls.

I picked up Doug almost forty-five minutes later. The Friday night migration of half the populace heading north for the weekend crowding the roads.

Chalmers settled into the passenger seat, doing up his seat belt as he examined the 'call-out' chit that had all the necessary details of the incident. He would transfer the information into a new Folio on his iPad and then pass the same information over to my iPad. Easy as...

“Joe? You know who our Vic is?”

I shook my head as we joined the traffic stream heading north on the M1.

“Who?” I asked after not receiving a reply.

“Could be just a coincident, I suppose. A Mister Arthur Grebble. Stabbed to death. A number of the family managed to escape while the senior Grebble was being killed...there is a stand-off situation occurring at this moment at that address”.

He lent forward and took the radio mike, talking softly into it to inform 'Comcentral' of our whereabouts and time of arrival at the address so the information could be transferred to the Lead Uniform on-site.

“Is there any mention...any id of the Perp?”

Doug shook his head. I turned on the siren, radiator lights and flashing headlights as I accelerated up the Motorway, still muttering under my breath about this call-out.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

We made good time up to the Central Coast with nary a problem, though I noted Doug had his feet planted on stiff legs in the Unmarked's passenger foot-well. He also was hanging on tightly to the 'panic handle' above his head. It couldn't be my driving, I thought to myself. We had a particularly 'safe' but very fast drive up the M1. I was on the car horn non-stop as drivers appeared not to notice my progress up their backsides. The drive around the shoreline of Brisbane Waters to Koolewong was also a bit hairy as the one lane each way winding road meant that drivers had very few places to pull over to let us past.

The local guys had the entire small suburb cordoned off with no thoroughfare to Woy Woy permitted. It would be a long detour for some. I uttered that the road should be blocked at West Gosford to stop traffic continuing the shoreline road in a southerly direction.

I mentioned this to the Lead Sergeant who informed me icily that the situation was well in hand and all traffic to the Peninsular was being diverted via Woy Woy Road up at the Kariiong interchange while all traffic wanting to use Brisbane Water Drive from West Gosford heading south was being diverted unless they were residents in the suburbs north of Koolewong to the West Gosford shopping area. I hadn't noticed such a diversion at the intersection but what the hell, I didn't want to get off-side with the local Uniforms before I'd even got out of the Unmarked. It was a major Police Operation that others had under control...

Senior Sergeant Pines I had met before some years back. It took him a while to thaw out but once he could place me, we were like two long lost brothers...I guess in a way we were as he had been of great assistance those many years ago when the retired Magistrate of the Northern Beaches Peninsular, His Honour James Parker had been bound up and subjected to some horrific torture by his nephew, Andrew Parker. The young boy had been 'leased' by his parents to be the subject of a weekly arse-fuck by his Uncle, the Honourable James Parker. He had been looking for revenge in a big way! In his mind he had achieved that in spades, but I doubted the young man would ever see the lights of freedom again as he went down primarily for the torture and slaying of his uncle. Several other homicides were linked to him, these while on parole after having been incarcerated for the senseless homicide of the brother

of Penny Catts. The book was thrown at him and it was realised the young Parker would never lose that will to kill senselessly...he had that blood lust which would never diminish.

I smiled to myself at the memory of Penny Catts. I had not thought of her for a while. Her death still stung. I was surprised at the hurt emerging after so many years.

“You’re looking good, Pines. Been a while, eh? You in charge?”

He nodded his head slowly. “Yes, unfortunately. We’re just hanging back waiting for the heavies. The Tactical Response Team from Sydney. We know that the boy has stabbed his father to death...his mother and two younger sisters made their escape from the home while the lad attracted his father’s attention away from them. By the sounds, he has almost disembowelled the old bloke”. His head slumped as he shook it several times, finding it hard to process the evil described to him. “Arrm...from what we can glean from neighbours, the old bloke was a drunk, and whenever inebriated, would attack the kids big time. The eldest daughter left home and has never spoken to the family for something like five years...this address is known to our local boys. Called out regular like when the old man would come home pissed to the eyeballs and began to threaten the entire family big time. We’d usually put him into the drunk tank and let him go the next morning when he had sobered up ...not exactly *de rigueur* today...I guess we should have charged him at some stage for his...um...you know? It possibly may have saved his life”. He shook his head as he again looked down at his large size sixteen feet. “Bit late for that talk, eh? Yer kinda caught in the middle...buggered if you do...and accused of Police brutality and buggered if you don’t, called out on how the Law was going soft...buggered if I know!”

This attitude of local cops had to be re-assessed. Invariably, the situation would just get worse as this incident has clearly shown...and was repeated so many times the local cops had to think twice about their involvement.

“...and she is dead herself. Stabbed to death in a frenzied attack so I understand...I could be convinced that it may have been her brother...inside the house there...”

“Anything’s possible, I guess”. I replied icily but that suggestion had a whiff of certainty about it.

“The old bloke? When he is drunk, his favourite past-time was waving a sharp knife about. He has pierced the skin of all his kids...so I have been told. There’s been numerous callouts to this address over the years. Too many to count...”

“Mmm...thus the interest in frenzied attacks with a knife...that’s how his sister...his older sister went with the FP stopping the count after thirty stab wounds to her abdomen...

“Arrh shit! How long ago?”

“Three months about...no...closer to four now...” This made me take a hard look at myself. That Case was beginning to take on the appearance of a Cold Case...not on my shift, I murmured to myself. A promise to roll up the Case felt a little false going on what we knew and didn’t know. It seemed kind of funny that Christine’s younger brother would knife his father to death. Plunging the knife so many times his guts were hanging...a frenzied attack that could be blood lust more than anything else...I was thinking what the connection might be and whether there had been any forensic trace that would prove the young bloke’s presence at his sister’s Apartment.

“Your Case?” Pines broke my meanderings.

“Yeah...and we may have inherited this one by the looks of it”.

“Some people have all the luck...” He countered. We both shared the joke. Doug was out of it, not finding anything humorous in our conversation.

We heard a pop and a windscreen of a nearby cop car exploded. Our reactions a little slow as we only ducked after being showered with glass crystals.

“Shit...that has just escalated the situation up a notch or two...”

“A twenty-two...”

“Yeah, a pea shooter but it can still kill yers...we better get back and behind something solid”.

He spoke quietly into a hand-held Radio that would have limited range, advising of shots being fired.

“You two got vests? I would advise you to go get them and put them on...this could be a late night for us, all things considered...bugger...I had better things to do to-night...bugger!”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The kid eventually was talked down to surrender in the early hours of the morning. He came out and fell onto the grass. He was spread-eagled by a boot carefully aimed just after three on the Saturday morning. His surrender with no force required...or shown as he was talked down by the Chief Negotiator attached to the TRU from Sydney.

The kid was roughed up a bit, cuffed, read his rights, and bundled carelessly into the back of a Paddy Wagon. He would be taken to Gosford Police Station for charging and prepared for a Bail Hearing held that morning at the Gosford Court building.

I wandered into the house as a Forensic Trace team asked me to leave until they had completed their sweep.

“Relax, okay? The kid has confessed to stabbing his father to death. I just want a quick look at the old bugger...”

I walked into the Lounge Room. My eyes automatically followed the blood spatter up two walls and across the ceiling. I'd say the old bloke refused to die. His body lay partially on a two-seater Lounge Suite and the floor. There was blood spatter on about every piece of furniture in the room. His body a mess of entry wounds from his head, his arms, and his torso.

This was not the same pattern that had killed Christine Grebble or any of the Lewis family. This was an attack that increased in ferocity at each stabbing motion. A build-up of emotions left to ferment for a lot of years. Each stab wound would be for each time the old man came home drunk and began to deliver fear to the whole family...but the young bloke was not the killer of his older sister or the Lewis family...I was sure of that fact.

Chalmers sighed at the broken, bloodied body, contending that the wound marks and position were different from those meted out to Chrissie Grebble.

“Yeah...we're still looking for her killer, aren't we?” He murmured as he stepped around the body shaking his head. “He sure got worked up, didn't he? It's as if each thrust of the knife egged him on...I doubt there's a limb or any part of the body that has not received a number of stab wounds...a fine example of some-one completely out of control...”

“Yeah...could be...but I’d say the opposite, Doug. Each thrust was payback for some slight, some threat or some physical abuse handed out over the years by the old bloke...payback...pure and simple...to me it definitely isn’t blood lust but pure revenge!”

I walked slowly towards the front door, nodding my head at Drew Waller, the Forensic Pathologist, and a young Assist and a four-man team of Forensic Trace waited patiently to get into the death room.

Me? I’d had enough with the metallic smell of blood seeming to seep into every pore of my body. Even though I had some food while we waited patiently for the kid to surrender, I was not going to give it up without a fight. I went outside and around to the side of the house waiting for that initial burst of energy that would throw what was in my stomach some metres.

It didn’t happen with Pines offering me a bottle of water and a packet of Lifesavers.

I must be the only cop in the Force who doesn’t carry these peppermint lollies.

“Joe? Our POI? Still Corbello, huh?”

I nodded my head at my young partner. He appeared to be a whiter shade of pale than I! I offered him the water bottle which he refused but he took several Lifesavers. We still had to formally charge the Grebble boy and prepare him for Court for a Bail Hearing sometime this morning. I believed we should not oppose Bail but leave him in the care of his mother and other family members. Pines agreed with me understanding the torment the boy must have suffered for a lot of years.

“With the right Solicitor, the boy may get off with a Home Detention Sentence. Here’s hoping in any case. I’ll make sure whoever the Solicitor is, he’ll know the years of horror the boy lived through...”

I felt that was the least we could do.

I nodded at the big man and slapped him on the shoulder before asking for permission to put the head down for a couple of hours. Nearly every Police Station in the country had a designated ‘quiet room’ where coppers could bed down trying to catch up on sleep...it was a coppers’ disease!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I was living on adrenalin and countless cups of coffee. The couple of hours sleep in the special 'Retirement Room' at Gosford Police Station didn't seem to help that much. After standing under a hot then cold shower and putting on the same clothes, which once again drew me back into that 'groggy' state, I figured I was getting too old for this shit of going long hours on adrenalin and cat naps.

I longed for my own King-size bed! Maybe in about seven or eight hours depending on what happened in Court in the coming hours.

As I sat in the small, clean Interview Room with Doug sitting beside me as though he had just clambered out of bed and had a shower, so his appearance seemed to say, I wondered how on hell I was going to get home...sometime to-day hopefully.

A faint knock and the door opened. Dylan Grebble was frog-marched into the room and dumped forcefully onto a chair bolted to the floor opposite us. I held my tongue but the display of police impatience with the boy did not impress me.

"Arrh, Constable? Enough with the rough-house tactics, okay? And could you please take the manacles off the boy?"

I watched the middle-aged Constable wrestle with the manacles, trying his hardest to wrench the boy's shoulders out of their sockets. The man must have been one of those that had pulled the 'all-nighter' and was not happy about it!

"Thank you, Constable...could you get us something to drink, please? Perhaps a soft drink for the lad and water for us...thank you".

This only requested to get further up the guy's nose. He had obvious anger management problems, or he couldn't take an 'all-nighter' that the boy had lobbed onto him. I waited until the order was filled and we were left in silence. During all that time, I had looked fiercely at the young man, now old enough to shave each day if he wanted...that was a chore not attended to looking at the chin-fluff on the lad's face.

"Dylan Grebble? Is that right? D.Y.L.A.N. Is that right?"

“Dylan Chandler Grebble if you want it recorded correctly...and yes, that is how my First name is spelt”. The lad looked as though he had just woken...probably had! From a sleep of the innocent. The guy was showing attitude.

We had both video and sound recording concentrated on us for the entire proceedings. Both Chalmers and I identified ourselves, our badge numbers, the time and date and the reason for our presence.

“Dylan? How old are you?”

“Almost nineteen...”

“Left School, eh? What are you doing to fill in time?”

“I work at a Sound Studio in Sydney...a kind of an Apprenticeship without any paperwork. Do I enjoy it? Blood Oath! It’s long hours...usually a topsy-turvy day where you can be called in at ten at night and not get home for a sleep until three days later...”

“Sounds like our work hours at times”. I mentioned, a laugh in the words. He was not sympathetic at my admission.

“Your sister...”

“Christie...yeah, I heard. She was killed a couple of months ago...you got anyone for it yet?”

I shook my head and consoled myself by giving the usual reply of having several POIs and leads that we were looking into...the standard reply.

“Wouldn’t be surprised if Chrissie had been killed by our father...” A throw-away comment meant to get up our noses.

“Oh!? What makes you say that?”

“She was knifed, wasn’t she? Stabbed to death? The old man used to love threatening us with a knife. Nipping our skin to draw blood. Playing with us waving the knife around in front of our faces. He liked to see the fear in our eyes...a grand way to bring up yer kids, eh!”

I nodded.

Thought about his comment.

The connection made sense, but we didn't have cause or really, the reason why. It would be quite easy for the old bloke to come down and knock on her door. The pretence being he wanted to look at her new pad...maybe that is how it played out. Him getting mad when she refused to let him in...no, I didn't think so. There was more weight in the Corbello alternative as far as I could see though I guess, that could change as we gathered more facts on the Case.

"Could you tell us what happened last night?"

"Yeh, like I said...it was about nine...maybe closer to ten. I walked in after having a couple with a couple of mates. He had Mum stuck hard up to the Kitchen sink. Holding a knife to her throat. My two younger sisters were hugging together crying over in a corner in the Dining Room. It looked as though he may have hit them both about their heads...they had blood through their hair..." He paused and took a deep breath. The tears began to fall down his cheeks. He sadly shook his head. "He's always been a bastard. I grabbed the first thing handy like..." He stopped the description to suck on the bottle of Sugar-free Coke. He sat back in his chair and swiped his arm across his mouth as though he had dribbled liquid all over the place. "Um...I just grabbed the first thing I could within easy reach. A large frypan...hit him twice over the head, bloody hard, you know!? It put a bloody dent in the bottom of the pan...man...I had hit him as hard as I could. I got worried then that he would turn around and go for me...in a way that is what I wanted so Mum and the girls could skedaddle...fuck...he acted as though he had hardly felt it...you know? Bloody hell, I had hit him real hard...I was afraid he...in surprise...you know...he may have slipped with the knife and stabbed Mum in the neck..."

Tears dripped down the boy's cheeks.

"What happened then?" I asked quietly.

"I told Mum and the girls to run...to go next door and call you coppers...Dad hit me...bloody hard and he came at me with the knife raised...all I seemed to do was get out of the way from his swings...I got into my Bedroom and closed and locked the door. Grabbed my twenty-two, loaded up a magazine and shot through the door...I heard a moan...a couple of swear words and then I heard what I thought was him falling to the floor...I sat on my bed thinking it through...I had killed my old man...the bastard...he deserved it. But then I panicked and shouted out to the couple of cops who were at the front door to piss off before I took a pot-shot at them...I panicked...I thought I was going to be in real strife...I was shitting bricks...and I think you know the rest".

“No, we don’t, boy. There was no mention of a bullet wound by the Forensic Pathologist who examined your father...he had been stabbed in a frenzied manner...there was not an area that did not have knife thrusts...all over his body. That is the initial cause of death in the Pathologist’s site notes”. I leafed through the initial file notes I had taken while talking to the Forensic Pathologist.

The lad looked up at me, slowly rocking back and forth. Tears still falling down his cheeks.

I then thought I should ring Andrew Waller and ask him to have a good look at the body for any bullet wounds. I then remembered I should ask him also to examine the old bloke’s head and brain for any damage caused by two great whacks of a frypan. What little sleep I had didn’t help the brain function.

“I was sure I hit him...I guess not...after a few minutes with nothing but silence, I sneaked out of my room...I crossed over to the Lounge Room. He was sitting on the Lounge...his eyes closed...slurring something...the knife had dropped to the floor...I picked it up and began slashing him. One for each time he had knocked me out or put me into Hospital...ditto for Chrissie and Mum...and Ashley and Tandra...I just lost control...”

“Were you carrying the rifle?” Doug asked.

“Um...I don’t know...yeah...I’m not too sure...why?”

“Why pick up the knife when you had the gun?”

“Because...” He looked around as though the answer was somewhere in the room. “Because he always brandished the knife at us...every time he had a drunken go at us...it was with a knife...”

That said reams to me and should be the point emphasised in his defence.

“Did he know you had a gun?”

“No...well...I’m pretty sure he didn’t. I had a loan of it from a mate...a couple of years ago and then I bought it off him early this year...Dad was getting worse. I figured I needed it as there was gunna be a time when I was gunna protect Mum and the girls from him”.

That comment worried me as it showed forethought and malice. I nodded, almost feeling sorry for the kid. I wouldn't know half of what the young bloke had experienced in his young life, and I got the impression that he felt responsible for his mother and sisters.

"You know the name of a good Lawyer?" I asked quietly, writing down several names. All good Criminal Lawyers who would go into bat for him. One even practising on the Central Coast if my grapevine was up to date.

We signed out of interview to indicate we thought it over. I stood and leaned across the table, sure that my actions were shadowed from the video camera.

"No one is going to question the fact you killed your father...savagely...but perhaps the torture you lived through should be told to the Court...any one of those persons should help you, son. Good luck".

I slid the paper over to the young bloke.

Doug stared at me. I did not make eye contact as I stood, instead I gathered up my stuff and opened the door to allow the Constable to take the young guy back to the cells waiting for his Bail Hearing.

We would not oppose Bail.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I arrived home in time for Dinner on the Saturday night, having missed a sleep somewhere down the line. I picked at the food before falling into bed. I slept until noon on the Sunday. Waking with my old self noticeable and wanting to do something, I was jumping out of my skin. While the rest of the family and Mal and Bill did the normal practise of a Sunday afternoon by visiting Chatswood Mall, I ran around the nearby Oval with AU2, Po and Go. The two Maltese Terriers could beat me in speed over a short distance but lacked the stamina that AU2 had. She could run all day at pace, beating me every time, a smile telling me she knew how good she was.

We had the usual Monday morning Staff Meeting with us being able to advise of the weekend duty and a possible conclusion to the Chrissie Grebble stabbing murder. We wandered

back to our desks to find a mountain of information had been collated on our Number One POI in both the Grebble and Lewis murders.

“Alan Corbello? Seems we hit the mother lode. We have heaps of stuff on the guy”.

That was my morning greeting as I returned to the Squad floor from the Sub-Basement Gym. I had missed out on the early swim as I had arrived at work a little late with me still trying to catch up on sleep. I wasn't going to miss out on my daily gym routine, work, or no work but I would have been reprimanded if I had missed the usual Staff Meeting.

I scrolled quickly through the information that had been gleaned from that other world, the program constantly automatically searching out bits and pieces on the life of the man while we were having the weekend off...well...one day off for Doug and myself. The program looked as though it had worked on the examination for the entire weekend. There was a lot of information that we would need to digest before doing anything else.

“Doug? You and Simmie start to delve through all that information on Corbello and throw away anything not connected or pertinent to the Case or the man while I write up our little week-end adventure up on the Central Coast. You can then read through my Report on the homicide stabbing of old man Grebble when I have finished and add anything you like on the matter...okay? Oh, Doug? Fill out your chit for overtime from five-thirty last Friday to six on the Saturday night...don't forget to add five meal allowance chits also...okay?”

I walked towards the Boss's Office. Tapping lightly on her door I asked could she spare a couple of minutes.

“Yes, sure. Come in, Joe. I have been wanting a word with you in any case. Come, sit”.

I closed the door behind me as I crossed the floor to sit in a comfortable visitor's chair. This was the corner of the Office where we all gathered for our Monday morning staff meeting.

“You and Doug had a bastard call-out, huh? The same family as your Vic? Any connection?”

“Could be...don't really know. Without searching through all the detail that we have on our Number One POI for the Christine Grebble homicide, I am unsure of any connection except familial...”

She nodded, waiting for me to continue.

“Mmm...I thought by the tone of your reports on Bartholomew and Chalmers it wouldn't be too long before we had a chat on both their progress”.

I nodded. Cleared my throat before I began. I tended to ramble a bit, but Denny did not interrupt my blathering.

“Let me get this straight, Joe. You are suggesting that all Officers who want to be transferred into the Murder Squad...”

“...and those that are thinking about it...”

“...um...yes...attend a series of Instructional Lectures most likely in the Goulburn Academy where those signed up will spend several weeks learning how to become a successful Murder Dee. This based on your experience so far with Doug and Simmie...is that about it?”

“Boss, as Grade Threes, those two should be able to settle into our world without too much trouble. That is not what is occurring. The two of them are struggling, and yes, there have been similar incidents when Officers of a lower grade came into our sphere of operation and performed badly...or not up to their usual standard that they showed in their old positions. I could name half a dozen that didn't cut the mustard. Don't get me wrong, I think Simmie and Doug will make an effective team and be of a huge benefit to the Murder Squad...in time...their personalities and the way they look at a Case is complimentary...like Shells and I and Marge Hendricks before her”.

She returned my smile before picking up the conversation.

“Yes, I agree with you. You are not the only Murder Dee who has voiced that opinion. We might have lost several keen Officers if they had been educated better into our operations. With a homicide case, the Lead Dees on the Case must be very clear of their responsibilities regarding the Laws surrounding our daily ops. I know that has been lacking and I have also thought there is a lack of understanding and nous regarding our Policy and Procedures...and them adhering to certain protocols that are not evident...or not required in other areas of the Force. I feel it is more luck than anything else that we have not lost a Case because of something that was not enacted or was contrary to the P and P guidelines. Yes Joe. I thoroughly agree with you. Just a general question, Joe. How would you feel about undertaking that Instructor role...not full time but maybe one or two days in a week when the Course we are contemplating goes for a two or three-week duration?”

That threw me. It was something that I had never contemplated.

“Arrh...Boss? I...um...I don’t see me as some sort of teacher...”

“You should, Joe. You would make an excellent one. Let’s just think about it for a while and I will make enquiries behind the scenes in how and where we can set something up, eh?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The three of us spent three days chained to our computers going through what had been unearthed by the Courtney Data Base, as I now referred to it...Dallas Courtney deserved as many kudos as could be heaped upon him for the work he did on the pro-forma. I reckon the guy should be given a cash prize or at least some acknowledgement for constructing the computer program. It saved us in the Murder Squad at least, a lot of time in digging into the private life of anyone we deemed to be a part of any investigation.

I thanked Christ that Alan Corbello was not that common a name otherwise we would have circled every Corbello in Australia and spat out their entire lives in shorthand! The others grabbed and spun out of the Ether-world could be discarded without too much effort. Those Corbello names not being relevant to our enquiries were middle to old-aged men as it turned out. There was a concentration of the family name in both Melbourne and South Australia. As it was, our Alan Corbello’s immediate family resided in the Adelaide Hills in SA though he was estranged from his immediate family. Apparently, he had close contact with two cousins living nearby. That was it...a bit of a loner I thought as his history scrolled out.

“Joe? I think we may have a match...” Simmie uttered quietly.

“What do you mean?” I asked as I wheeled my chair around to Simmie’s desk, previously occupied by my long-term partner, Shelley Shield.

“Um...I ran through the surveillance video of the incident that caused Corbello to be tossed off the employee list of the Hospital. For some reason I let it continue. That’s Corbello being thrust against a wall...after he had pushed Christine Grebble over onto her backside causing her injuries. Corbello was immediately suspended awaiting an investigation into the incident. He was sacked within days of the incident occurring...an open and shut case. Um... who do you reckon that chap is who has Corbello pinned to the wall with an arm across the guy’s

throat...let me tell you, okay? A part-time Wardsman by the name of Simon Lewis...a Uni Student who worked part-time at the Hospital as a Wardsman”.

She slowed the video down until the subject of our intense examination turned his head towards the camera position. Not for long but long enough to catch a reasonable full-face image of the man. He released his hold on Corbello and stood back as Security Personnel took charge of the scene. Lewis slowly melded into the background of persons who worked at the Hospital who now had circled the area out of curiosity, or a need to help.

“Can you reverse the image until you can get a full-face image of Corbello?”

“Sure...no probs.” She paused the video when a good shot was available of the man. I shook my head and rubbed my tired eyes.

“I’ve run into him before...” I stood to arch my back and stretch. There was a dull ache in the middle of my back. I could not stand and bend to peer at some-one’s Laptop for too long...old age was creeping into my frame.

“Who? Corbello!? What, he has done time before? Not as far as the search-pattern discovered...you sure, Joe?”

I nodded. I was sure.

“Yep...”

I snapped my fingers as the image flared in my brain.

“He was the Postie who walked into that Coffee joint we went to the other week...well, the other month...down under the building, what? Two blocks south of us...and then he came screaming out of the Church that Chrissie Grebble attended...he almost bowled me over as he flung open the double doors...he had been stalking her...even attending the same Church as she, so it seems to me”. I scratched my head as I leaned back in my chair. “Okay...I reckon we have our man but still, we need to dot our ‘I’s and cross our ‘T’s. Continue to go through all that stuff we have on the man, keeping only what is relevant to our Case and turfing all other stuff...then we should know our man enough to interview the turd. Okay? And that bit where Lewis pins him to the wall...there is our connection to the Lewis family. He figured he wanted to get back at Simon Lewis...I think we may have unearthed the Perp for both Cases...we need to have a few words...unofficially...with the man to see what he has to say about himself”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

We identified ourselves to the Supervising Officer who seemed a little nervous at our appearance.

“Murder Squad Detectives! Um...yeah...he usually finishes his beat around now. Give or take half an hour. That is dependent on the volume of mail and how long he gives himself a break halfway through his round...come into my Office while we wait for him...um...is he involved in some murder thing? You know, do you think he is involved in something unsavoury?”

The guy was waffling. The redness of his face had increased and the movement of his hands and fingers had become more agitated. Ted Reynolds was his name. As we followed the man into his Office, I indicated for Doug to do a little digging of the man on his iPad. He got my nose itching purely by his mannerisms.

“Would you care for coffees?” He asked as a rotund bloke knocked on the Office door that Reynolds had shut behind us. Reynolds shook his head at the intruder who ignored his Boss’s attempts at shooing him away. Instead, he opened the door and leaving it opened, introduced himself in a booming voice.

“Gilbert Pravas. I’m the local Union Rep for these scallywags. You’re coppers. I can tell by the way our illustrious leader is sweating globules that you weren’t any high-up twits from Head Office...and you carry yourselves with that easy, confident swagger. One of my boys in a bit of trouble? If that be the case, I will stay here while you interview him...or are we talking about one of our lovely women Posties?”

I really didn’t want this self-important twit to be present as we interviewed the man, but to ask him to leave could cause a walk-out or the Rep telling our POI to shut his gob and not say a word. I did not voice my opinion either way, instead asking Mister Ted Reynolds for a coffee if he could.

He scurried away to do the honours, Pravas sneering at the back of the man as he vacated his office.

“Who do you want to interview? What is your interest in the man and what has he allegedly done to deserve three coppers’ presence?”

This said as he stood beside the open door, again his voice loud enough to carry around the large Posties' Sorting area. No flies on this guy. He was out to show he had the back of every employee in the joint who belonged to his Union. Reynolds struggled with a coffee mug in each hand while a pleasant looking woman carried the remaining mugs in a professional manner.

"Not one for me, eh? I now know where I stand with this matter..."

"Thank you, so you know the situation. At this stage we are interviewing Mister Reynolds here whom you do not represent...I would hazard a guess and say he is not in your Union. Would I be right in that assumption?"

Pravas flung me a filthy look that continued onto Reynolds before he walked from the Office slamming the Office door behind him in a show of petulance. Those Posties who had finished their round and were readying to knock off, gathered around their Union Rep to hear what had transpired over the preceding minutes. He obviously fudging his role in the matter.

I turned my attention back to the Boss of this Mail Sorting Annex, asking him his opinion of Alan Corbello, his employment record, his reliability in turning up to work and in completing his round in an acceptable time, any suggestion from people on his route that he may be harassing or causing embarrassment especially to any young women and the way he mixed with his fellow Posties.

There was silence for some moments before Reynolds replied. His nervous disposition having calmed. This guy I thought was a heart attack waiting to happen. Overweight and an obvious drinker and smoker.

"Corbello? You're Murder Squad Detectives so I assume he is wanted in some way..."

"Don't assume anything sir. We merely would like to talk to Corbello about a possible homicide that occurred...possibly on his route...nothing more, nothing less".

Reynolds remained silent for some moments. He knew that we would not divulge too much to him or anyone else for that matter.

"Yes...um...yes, he is a quite sort of bloke. I understand he was a Wardsman at Westmead Kids Hospital before signing on with us a little over two years ago now. He doesn't mix that well with other employees and has been the subject of gentle stirs and bullying...you know, a typical Australian reaction to any newcomer. To help defuse this matter, I have him ear-

marked to spend time at neighbouring Centres as a temporary “fill-in” Postie when they have an employee unexpectedly being off crook...holidays...that sort of thing”.

“So, he isn’t based here at the moment?”

“Yes...he has just come back from filling in at the Seven Hills Mail Centre...”

“Does that include Northmead or North Parramatta areas?”

“Um...we do North Parramatta from here and Northmead and surrounding suburbs are handled from Seven Hills Distribution Centre...”

“Does Alan Corbello do a ‘fill-in’ at Seven Hills? That allows him to do the route that includes Northmead?”

“His nominal route out of this Centre includes North Parramatta...but as far as him carrying out a ‘fill-in’ that would include Northmead, I have no idea. I’ll ring Seven Hills to find out, okay?”

As Reynolds spoke on the phone, Doug showed me his iPad that displayed nil information on Reynolds except for some outstanding Parking fines. I nodded my head as Reynolds covered the mouthpiece of the phone to inform us that Corbello had just driven onto the property. I too had heard several bikes entering the Bike Shed but for the life of me, I couldn’t distinguish each bike by the sound they made. He and two other Posties. I noticed Gilbert Pravas walking briskly into the Motorbike Storage area. I must admit to being impressed by both Pravas and Reynolds picking out the sound of Corbello’s bike over several others that had entered the property at the same time.

“That’s a yes to Corbello usually filling in with the Northmead route whenever he went across to Seven Hills. The reason why he would always get the Northmead route was because he was used to that route and the guy who was the nominal Postie also knew several other routes out of the Seven Hills Depot...so there would be a shuffling of staff to ease the situation at any one time. There is a fluidity in the situation”.

He quietly replaced the phone receiver and with a smile asked would we like to interview Corbello. As I nodded my head, I noticed that Corbello walked onto the Sorting area closely followed by Gilbert Pravas. Corbello was summoned into the Office by a wave of Reynolds’ arm.

He came into the Office looking around at us as though we were specimens from a different Planet. He was asked to sit so that I sat directly opposite him with Simmie and Doug either side of him. Reynolds knew the score and began to back out of his Office, asking that Pravas do likewise.

“Al needs his Union Rep with him...” He scolded in a loud voice. Again, for the benefit of a fistful of Posties crowded together in the Sorting area.

“So! You are Mister Corbello’s Legal Counsel, are you sir? Not only this building’s Union Rep but its Solicitor as well?” Surprise in the tone of the question.

“Why does he need Legal Counsel?”

“You didn’t answer the question, Mister Pravas. Are you intending to represent Alan Corbello here?”

“No! I’m no lawyer...”

“Then your presence is not required. Close the door on the way out will you please?”

The man didn’t know what to do. Either way he was about to lose face with his subjects. He glared at me before turning his attention to Corbello.

“You need me, son...just wave your hand, okay?” Again, loud enough for others to hear.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“Do I need a Lawyer?” Corbello asked in a soft querulous voice. His Adam’s apple bobbed up and down as though caught between a vacuum and a nine-fold atmosphere somewhere down his windpipe. He was a gangly sort of bloke who could never look comfortable in one of those straight-backed office chairs. He tried to slouch but the straight-backed chair would not allow it.

“That is your option sir. If you so choose, we will take you to the Police Building in Parramatta and wait until your man is available. Could be to-day maybe...could draw out until to-morrow or the next day depending on what he is doing. Regardless, you will be kept in the cells until

we are ready to interview you with your legal counsel present. We will charge you with the homicide murder of Christine Grebble and five members of the Lewis family...and we will oppose Bail...or we can have a nice little chat here without rocking too many boats, eh? It's your call, young man. What's it to be?"

He shook his head. He had straightened then doubled over with his brow almost touching the desktop.

"Is that a no, sir?"

He raised his head, again shaking his head.

"Okay...this interview will be recorded...understand, sir?" I nodded as I commenced. "How long ago did you work at Westmead Hospital as a Wardsman?"

"Jeez...um...almost eighteen months about". He licked his lips. His mouth and lips were dry. He was offered a coffee which he declined, preferring a bottle of water. "No, maybe a bit longer than that. About two...two and a half years ago, I reckon".

"Why did you leave, sir?"

He looked at me, squinting giving the impression he was smiling.

"You know already...look, why are you questioning me. Either tell me what this is all about or else I'm outa here".

I nodded slightly. I'd have to be a little careful otherwise we could lose him, and his legal Rep would not have us speaking to him again leaving us out on that proverbial limb without a paddle!

He had the right to stand and walk out of the small Office. If he did, we would immediately cuff him and charge him on suspicion of homicide murder of Christine Grebble. We could change the charge sheet at any time while we had him in the Parramatta Holding Cells.

"Very well...did you report the possible murders of the Lewis family?"

"Yes and no...the local Cop Shop is on my route...I just informed them of my suspicions..."

“Why?” I had cut him off from whatever he was going to say. I chided myself for doing so knowing that the comments he was going to offer would never come around again.

“Um...they had not cleared their Mailbox for close on a week...it was full of mail and junk mail...I had the dickens job to place the mail for that day into the mail slot of their letterbox”.

I slowly nodded, giving the impression I was deep in thought. I wasn't and it was just a ploy to annoy the man. This was one of Shelley's favourite ploys which worked well for her in this age of equality; where the Perp or the man being questioned would begin to think he had it over this silly little woman. I couldn't expect the same conclusion, but then again, most of the Perps sitting in this situation thought they were much better than the bumbling coppers sitting opposite them...who knew bugger all!

“How many times had you done that route? You were a fill-in Postie, weren't you?”

“Yes...that was my first time on that route and yes, I filled in for a week about...”

“So, after a week of deliveries to that locality...that address, you assumed there must have been some monkey business going on? The occupants could have gone away on holidays...it is not a prerequisite that the local Postie be informed of such arrangements, is it? You reported the matter to the local cops who, on your suspicion, sent a Wagon around to the address...to find Mister and Missus Lewis...and their daughter Shantelle and youngest son Shayne stabbed to death...with the eldest son Simon Lewis missing”.

“Well, I was right, wasn't I?” He sat up, again that smile that appeared whenever he squinted. His body seemed to grow with confidence as he sat up straight looking intently at Simmie who could not hold his stare.

“That particular day you didn't finish your route for what? Two hours you were overdue, weren't you? The Boss was about to launch a rescue party out to find you...”

“I got lost...” He murmured.

“For two hours or so!? Where did you get to? Wollongong or somewhere? Do you expect me to believe that? By your own admission, you had been doing that route for seven days...”

He looked about confused by the change. He reached for his bottle of water as a token relief to slow down the questioning. He was wasting time to allow his mind to take in the diversion.

I was sure he could not answer that question without implicating himself in a multiple homicide

“Have you ever been inside Christine Grebble’s Apartment in North Parramatta?”

Again, the change in direction throwing him completely. He looked about, the proud position of a moment ago slowly collapsing.

“Well...Mister Corbello? Have you ever been inside Christine Grebble’s Apartment at North Parramatta?”

He nodded and once again, he lowered his head to almost touch the desktop.

“You knew Sister Christine Grebble when you worked as a Wardsman at Westmead Hospital. That’s when you got the hots for her...you followed her around like a love-sick puppy...she accused you of harassment and stalking which got you fired, didn’t it? You physically assaulted her...you were lucky the matter was not referred to us coppers...you could be doing time right now, for that infringement. You even began attending Services at her Church so you could be near her...didn’t you? Stalking is a crime, you know...”

My Mobile buzzed in my pocket before beginning its boring ring tone. It broke the rhythm and cadence of the line of questioning. I spoke for the recording, giving the date and time of my departing from the Interview Room, swearing under my breath before excusing myself, nodding to Doug and Simmie to keep the seat warm as I walked out into the morning summer glare.

“Joe? It’s Dee Dee Symonds in Forensic Trace...”

“Bad timing, my love. What-ever, the moment is lost. Why are you ringing?”

“We’ve just got the final Report on the forensic search of the Grebble Apartment. We have been waiting for DNA results on various blood spots found there...mostly small spots of blood on the wash basin sides...um...we have a match, Joe. Her father...he also may have had a shower as blood residue in the shower waste was the Victim’s blood. I’d say the father may have been covered in her blood so that is the reason for a shower...um...while he was getting rid of the blood off himself, it would appear he ran his clothes through the Washing Machine and Dryer. His fingerprints were on the shower taps and certain areas on the tiled walls of the shower cubicle...and around the Washing Machine and door of the dryer. Sorry

this has taken so long to get to you, but when we realised it was possibly the father...he had left a lot of trace throughout the Unit...”

There was silence for some moments as he appeared to catch her breathe. I was pleased for the interlude.

“Um...where was I? Um...we only received Arthur Grebble’s DNA make-up after he was killed by his son three weekends ago. It immediately threw up several red flags for us. We got back to the Pathology Team at the Coroners’ building asking to have Grebble’s fingerprints sent across to us. We have a match with them as well. I know this only shows him present in the Apartment and not him stabbing his eldest daughter, but...I think with the knowledge of him having a shower, blood stain fingerprints, and what other trace he left behind, we can confidently say he knifed his daughter to death. We thought there must have been a mistake, so we ran the analysis and comparative tests a second time. That is why it has taken some time to get to you...and the fact that the father’s DNA was only put through the system some days ago...sorry, but we couldn’t perform miracles with only half a prayer being said...” Her attempt at humour which I enjoyed.

I turned around to check that I was alone.

“Why would he kill her? What’s the motive?” I asked quietly.

“That is your responsibility to work out...why you get that fat pay packet each fortnight...”

“Yeah...well, thanks for that...looks as though we will need to question Chrissie’s little brother on a different tack and not just because he knifed Arthur Grebble, his father to death...”

The question on why the old man killed his oldest and dearest daughter kept whirling around in my head. Maybe he visited her on the pretence of looking at her new Apartment...or he thought now she was living by herself; she was easy game for him...or maybe his two younger daughters were not to his liking...sheer guesses that will never be answered.

Christine Grebble was dead.

So was her father.

We could guess at the whys until the cows came home and still never be positive of the truth...the Coroner will be the one who may be able to give us some answers as we won’t!

“Joe? You still there?”

“Yeh...yeah. Um...sorry”. Something clicked within my grey matter and several things fell in line. “Bloody Hell!! Why didn’t you run a DNA sample of Christine Grebble and place it in the system? Wouldn’t that have given you a familial connection to those DNA traces you say were all through the Apartment. From her father as it turns out. The familial connection would have been enough to put Bartholomew and Chalmers straight onto Christine’s father...and in a funny sort of way, saved him from being killed by Dylan, his son several months later”.

There was silence for some time.

“Yes Joe, you’re right”. There was regret in her voice. “We didn’t and look at the poo that has caused...”

“In a way my two Grade Three Officers should have picked up on that slip and requested it of you...fuck...too late now, I guess. Remember it for next time and hope like hell it doesn’t raise its ugly head as some-one in your Department...and mine, will have a sore arse because of it”.

“Yeah...I’m already hurting actually. The omission has been picked up during our internal review of the Case up until now...your wife and my best friend can be scathing when she feels some-one has let the side down...you might see her anger to-night...see ya”.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I slowly sat, thinking of what Dee Dee had just reported. I rubbed my eyes and ran my hands roughly down the sides of my face. I again identified myself giving the date and time.

Perhaps we had the reason for Dylan Grebble’s savage attack on his father arse about face and not as we expected but for a different reason entirely. Not for revenge on the countless years old man Grebble heaped abuse and fear onto his family, but because in his drunken state, the old man had admitted to killing his eldest and favourite daughter, Chrissie which may have enraged the young Dylan as he hinted at when we interviewed him. Regardless, with the homicide death of the old man, we were back at Step One and would never be able to satisfactorily close the Case. That pissed me, especially now when we had forensic proof

of him being in his Daughter's Apartment with blood remains that would strengthen the Case against him. Sure, it was only superficial evidence, but we had sent other bastards to Court for a successful Case on less. On the other hand, if we admit old man Grebble killed his daughter, then Corbello couldn't have...but he still was high in my estimation of killing the Lewis family though I still did not know how that would have gone down.

We now had him...but didn't...bugger! That always made me as mad as hell!!!

I looked at Simmie and Doug. It was obvious they hadn't progressed the conversation at all in my absence. I had hoped they would have conducted a friendly chat at least to settle the guy down. They hadn't so while the silence stretched for some ten minutes, Bordello's nerves would also stretch to breaking point.

"Okay..." I leaned in to grab my bottle of water, trying to remember where I was before the interruption.

"Again, I ask whether you have been inside Christine Grebble's Apartment? Did you spot her 'flyer' pinned to the Staff Information Board looking for possible Boarders so Chrissie could have a bit more money to live on...you saw that Flyer, didn't you?"

He still had his head bowed but he nodded several times.

"Why did you become a Wardsman?"

I needed to return to the rhythm and cadence before I was interrupted. I found it very difficult to pick it up again. I swore to myself, realising the moment could be lost.

"Um..." He straightened, looking at me as he spoke.

"I wanted to become a Male Nurse, but I hadn't the necessary qualifications from School to be able to get into Nursing...I had a choice of becoming a Nurse's Aide or a Wardsman. I sailed through the requirements...um...not straight from School as I took on a Labourer's job on several construction jobs. Good money but you worked like a navy. I was twenty-two when I applied for the Hospital Job. It was good to leave the shit and hard work behind for a job that was steady...and not hard for reasonable wages...and some of those nurses...you know? They were honeys...you know?"

He let the inference hang in the air, a smirk on his face as though we were being let in on the joke.

“So why now a Postie?”

“Um...yeah...what can I say. I am not really enjoying it especially if it is pissing down cats and dogs...a lousy day...”

He let the utterance hang in the air. After some moments, I asked the question again, not wanting to give him too much time that would allow him to cogitate over every question. There needed to be a certain rhythm in any question-and-answer style...Shelley was an expert in the art, way above my expertise...

“Yeah...I accidentally pushed Sister Grebble over. She hurt her tail bone...or her head...I don’t remember which. No-one believed me when I said it was an accident and there was nothing meant by it...they accused me of harassing and stalking Chrissie...they wouldn’t listen to me as their minds were made up...they wanted to be rid of me and this was the perfect moment to see me gone...it was a bloody set-up!”

“Why did you push her?”

“She...um...she turned her back on me...sneered at me...said she wouldn’t want to know me even if I was the last male on Earth...all I was trying to do was to be nice to her. Yer know, make conversation”.

“Where was this?”

“At the Nurses’ Station in ICU...”

“Was that Sister Grebble’s usual workstation?”

“No...it could change week in, week out”.

“Did anyone come to Grebble’s aid?”

“Yes...about everyone on the floor, so it seemed. Simon Lewis punched me in the guts...which hurt...and had me pinned to the wall with his arm across my throat...that hurt too...I thought he was a mate of mine...you know, he was a Wardsman too...part time...he was a Uni student...doing several Courses. He was a brain, so I was told”.

“Is that why you killed him? Because he had you up against the wall?”

He nodded his head slowly as though thinking over his response. His head cocked to one side as though he was giving the question deep consideration. He failed to lock eyes with anyone and as he failed to give any satisfactory answer, I pressed on. I wanted him off-balance and wondering where each question was taking him.

“You killed him...you made it look like suicide by slashing his wrists to bits before making the white Commodore accelerate into the water beside the boat ramp at the end of Wharf Road...just a short walk from where you left your Postie’s bike at the Lewis address...but before that, you had to silence the family as they were ganging up on you, weren’t they? They had you cornered, didn’t they? They were threatening to ring the Police, weren’t they? You killed the entire Lewis family because Simon Lewis had hurt you...stopping you from abusing Chrissie Grebble any more...isn’t that right sir?”

“I couldn’t hurt Chrissie...she was beautiful...and I loved her...and when I found out she had been killed...I had to see my priest...to rid myself of all those sick cruel things I would have done to her killer...you know...like...”

I cut him short as I really didn’t want to know any details of what he wanted to do. I wanted to know details of what he *did* do...

“You confessed to him, didn’t you? That you had killed the entire family...but...yes, you did visit Chrissie’s Apartment hoping she would permit you to become a Boarder of hers...a Flatmate, yeah?”

“She laughed at me. Telling me not in a million years would she ever let me into her Unit again...the fucking bitch...I loved her, and she laughed at me!”

“Because she rejected you, you killed her too...stabbed her so many times it was almost impossible to count the individual stab wounds...”

“Yeah...nah...I wanted to, but I didn’t”. He looked up and glared at me. “I didn’t touch her. By the time I had thought up a plan of action, she was dead in any case...it broke my heart”.

For all his fabrications and straight out lies, there was a ring of truth in what he had just confessed.

“So why the entire Lewis family? Why kill them all?” Again, a complete change of direction which, in this case, caused him to smile...a grin of a madman! He considered himself better than I and he had a secret that I would never know about or understand.

“Do you know...” He twisted his hands together. “Do you know how easy it is to kill someone?” There was a strange look...a look of calmness crossed his face. “They are asleep, and they never wake up...oh! The boy woke and looked at me. Sheer terror in the look...do you know what that is like? To have that power over another human being?”

I stared at him as things seemed to click into place. Looking at my two colleagues, they had a way to go to get to that point if they ever would which I doubted. They had shown scant talent to be able to get to that level of expertise. Both my former partners Marge Hendricks and Shelley Shields had that innate ability. These two? It will be a slow learning curve.

I glared at the guy sitting opposite me. I had this hateful wave go over me. Swamping me with its intensity and weight. This was one sick little puppy, I thought as I stared at him. He oblivious to the act making others...and me puke up my breakfast and everything else in my stomach while he got his rocks off!

“How do you explain your semen inside young Shantelle Lewis’s vagina?” I asked him coldly. “You had sex with her as she was dying, you piece of shit!!” I slapped the tabletop making the guy sit up suddenly, him blinking wildly half expecting me to throw myself over the table to grab him by the throat, which I had thought about. I took a couple of deep breaths, never taking my eyes off him. “She was close to death, and you raped her, you piece of shit...she was dying, asshole. Can you imagine the sheer torment she would have gone through at that time? Can you!?”

I doubted he could feel any empathy to the young woman...or to any of his victims.

“Yes...and Chrissie Grebble?” I leaned towards him in a menacing manner. “Just so’s you know, she was stabbed to death by her own father”. I stated icily in a quiet voice. I wanted him to feel a little pain if he could. I wanted him to suffer as he had made all the Lewis family suffer.

The change in Corbello was dramatic. That really shook him. First, he looked at me, a startled glare that said a thousand words, then he began to wail like a baby. We had no problems in formerly charging him with the Lewis family homicides...five people in total. We would need to repeat the process at another time when he had recovered so that he fully understood the charges laid against him. All in the presence of his legal counsel.

Both Simmie and Doug looked at me as though I had grown two heads, wondering how I had added two plus two to get five in the one family.

Me? I was very pleased with myself having cracked not only the Lewis family deaths, but I now knew how Chrissie's death had gone down. Her father had confronted her in knocking on her front door. Wanting her to stand under his warped umbrella once again so that he could pick up the abuse on her where it had ended. Possibly his younger daughters were railing against his behaviour and his memory of Chrissie included her being more servile and manageable than both his other daughters. Maybe yes, maybe no...getting the full story was never going to happen and guesses seemed so futile and not having weight.

The young woman deserved more.

I was now confident in rolling up both the Lewis and Christine Grebble Homicide Cases.

At this point I would normally give Shelley the 'lead' as she liked to officially charge the perp with the crimes. Now? As she was not here, I could give the thrill to either Simmie or Doug. Thinking about it, I was not in favour of doing either as all through the Lewis, Chrissie Grebble and Dylan Grebble's homicide murder of his father, they had both been two steps behind me.

They needed a little more time...so that meant I would do the honours. That was something I was looking forward to, surprising myself with the intensity of the emotion.

I hardly slept that night knowing on the morn that I would charge the guy with multiple homicides...

pcb

11/08/2019

If you enjoyed reading **Blood Lust** please leave a star rating and send some feedback via the author's obooko.com [download page](#).

This book is an authorised free edition from www.obooko.com

Although you do not have to pay for this book, the author's intellectual property rights remain fully protected by international Copyright laws. You are licensed to use this digital copy strictly for your personal enjoyment only. This edition must not be hosted or redistributed on other websites without the author's written permission nor offered for sale in any form. If you paid for this book, or to gain access to it, we suggest you demand a refund and report the transaction to the author.