

IT'S IN THE BLOOD

A clear plastic bag filled with dried cannabis buds, with some buds spilling out onto the surface below.

A DETECTIVE JOSEPH LIND CRIME NOVELLA
PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES

JOSEPH LIND
SHELLEY ANNE SHIELDS
AND RUTH KINDLE

IT'S IN THE BLOOD

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 55th Novella in the series dealing with the life and times of Detective Joseph Lind and his partner Detective Shelley Shields of the Murder Squad.

It's the Festive Season and almost half of the Murder Squad Detectives take Annual Holidays leaving the Office floor looking vacant. In the case of the partnership of Don Ballard and his young D2 Ruth Kindle, Don has taken time off until the end of January. The recent appointee Ruth Kindle cannot take on any work by herself, so she is partnered with Lind and Shields...not an uncommon duty mentoring these young new bloods.

The reoffending rate for criminals in Australia is around 60%. Society paying for these crims to sharpen their talents whilst inside. Incarcerated one, two or three times, the majority hone their skills. The young blokes mixing with the hardened criminal element.

The statistics indicate that six out of ten criminals have it in their blood for assorted reasons, most dealing early in their lives with alcohol and/or child abuse and violence on a daily basis. At an early age they 'hit' the streets. The only way to survive is by illegal means for so many.

There is almost a gentleman's agreement within the underworld of Sydney that ensures their boundaries for the distribution and selling of illegal substances remains intact. The people of influence within these areas are loath to kill anyone as a payback or a warning to others as this only brings down the wrath of the Law, upsetting the equilibrium that had existed.

Who then, is seeing life as cheap and expendable and how is marijuana of guaranteed quantity and quality being transported into the Newcastle and Sydney basin from hidden hydroponic farms in the hinterland on the North Coast of NSW?

Who is behind it...and why all the killing?

CHAPTER ONE

His name was Lindsey Carlisle.

A seventeen-year-old tear-away who left home for good when he was around twelve years of age. A street kid who had the cunning and nous way beyond his years. The local cops knew of his existence from the time the kid had turned twelve! Or even a little before that, so I was told.

Always running away from a home that never welcomed or warmed him. From a father whose hug was a bear-hug that hurt. A hug that made him cry which was what the old man wanted. Happy that he could make his son cry from a simple hug. He was a bully and sadist in the extreme, reigning supreme over a wife and five kids who were always on tender hooks when they knew the old man had been at the Pub for several hours. All his kids the product of his drunken bouts, that really was the raping of his wife...a sad indictment of how much he cared for his spouse and his kids.

Wondering what the old man might do in a drunken rage when he got home, no matter the time.

Home was where Lindsey was always nervous of what would come next. A back-hander that would throw him backwards across the room. Knocking him out when his head hit the opposite wall. Teeth shattering in his mouth with blood dripping down his chin, the slight metallic taste of blood dripping down the back of his throat. Lindsey gave up trying to protect his mother and his siblings...he got more beltings when he did that...he figured after several beatings that it wasn't worth it. He would wander the local streets all night when he knew that his old man had been drinking. He escaped the punishment, but he felt bad in a way, knowing his siblings would be getting it...worse than if he took some of the beatings himself. He eventually drove those thoughts of empathy and sympathy from his mind. What he couldn't change placed at the back of his brain...his thoughts of his mother and brothers and sisters gradually disappearing.

Self-preservation can do that to anyone.

He seldom went home from about the age of eleven, living it rough on the streets.

That was what the young Lindsey Carlisle remembered as home. Fear, hurt, and punishment handed out for no sane reason by a man who couldn't be influenced or talked to when he was

in one of those drunken moods. A mother who was always crying; always trying to hide the bruising on her face or body.

His young nickname was Castle. Castle Carlisle.

Why?

Anyone's guess, but he told me once that he had seen a show on television about a Castle Carlisle. Over in England, he thought. It was impressive. It looked solid. It looked as though it could repel all invaders and according to the man in the TV had repelled all who had tried. All those who wanted a piece of the Manor land...as solid as that Castle...that was going to be him!

I had just completed my undercover days with my partner Barry 'Bazza' Holtz. He wanted more from his chosen career than the thin line we often straddled, many times requiring an illegal act to stay alive ourselves. After Bazza had been gone for a couple of weeks and I had no-one to watch my back, I picked up the young Lindsey 'Castle' Carlisle for having a saleable quantity of marijuana in his possession. Small fry but I wanted to teach the kid a lesson...if you're gunna deal, make sure your product is not shit!

I confiscated the admittedly, inferior quality grass for my own personal use. Kicked the guy up the behind, warning him that if I ever saw him again with a saleable quantity of weed, I would charge him. This time it was only two twenty-dollar notes. Knowing of his background, this looking the other way was my way of trying to help him. Money for the stash I took from him that helping hand. Hopefully, he bought food with the notes. It would never work but it took me some time to come to that realisation that at age twelve, he was already set in his ways.

I suffered from smoking the confiscated weed which was full of stem and very little leaf and buds.

It didn't take long, three weeks later, our paths crossed again.

Again, a saleable quantity of grass of reasonable quality thank God, as the last lot contained a fair amount of stem and lawn grass, I reckoned. I explained to him that he was lucky he was only seventeen and could not be charged and sentenced as an adult, which would have earned him jail time.

He shrugged his shoulders, looking up at me with a defiant expression.

“Jail? It can’t be that bad. Three square meals and a comfortable bed away from that bastard who dares calls himself my father...”

The same old story heard so many times you tended to close your mind to it, knowing you were looking at a repeat offender who would join the constant merry-go-round of aging crims. For some reason, this kid made me look at him. I mean, really look at him. I didn’t have a clue why, maybe it was his boyish looks...or his want never to buckle under any circumstance. He was on that early pathway to being a crim all his life. I wanted to help him get off the treadmill, knowing full well that such a life was in the blood of some. Hopefully not for him...my wishes for him leading a worthwhile life were based on emotion only. Not a realistic assessment of his life up until that time.

I could always hope, I guess.

I’d like to think he was different.

“Son? You, as a good-looking young bloke will find yourself as the ‘fresh meat’ that will be auctioned off for a fuck every day you are inside...and worse. Not even toothpaste will take away the taste if you get my drift. Understand? Never consider yourself lucky to be given a jail term. It ain’t a holiday, not even close”.

His attitude was...so what! He had been fucked by his father at least twice a week since he was a young mite...the wrong attitude, I tried to warn him, but I fear it went in one ear and out the other. Father role-models were not in his sense of life...and he considered all adult males as copies of his old man.

I hoped he would take my advice. It was for free. And with a word from me to the local Magistrate, the lad given a suspended sentence with a two-year good behaviour bond. He thought it was because of the spiel he gave on the habits and ways of his old man. He would never believe that I had put a good word in for him.

CHAPTER TWO

I applied to get out of doing undercover narcotics work. To be truthful, I was close to melt-down, the affliction that many undercover operatives are prone to. The first five years I had my friend Barry Holtz watching my back. We at times get each other out of sticky situations and if that meant we needed to 'neutralise' the threat, we did that without thinking twice. To work in that environment as a solo operator became increasingly dangerous with my life expectancy cut in four...

The criminal element in Sydney was really a small family at that time where everyone knew everyone else. Not a good climate for a young, ruggedly handsome fellow who tried hard to be some-one who he wasn't, just to have that foothold in the middle strata of the criminal fraternity.

I was forgetting the story that was my 'made up' life for any week...or month. A stuff-up and a corpse waiting to happen. While my 'Hit Parade' was impressive, I knew it could not go on for much longer. I had seen other Undercover guys burn out, commit suicide, or join the 'dark side'. At that time in the history of the NSW Police Force, there was scant regard for those Officers who chose...or who were selected into the undercover scene. There was no back-up, no Operating or Supervising Officer or any thought as to how the Boys in Blue were ever going to rescue you if you did get found out...and not shoot you in the back because they failed to realise you were one of them!

Not a good scene to produce longevity...but for some it was in the blood, and they rode the waves of highs and lows to get that fix. Me? I wanted a better life than to hang by the short and curlies, but such a transition was often frowned upon by those in charge of the Narcotics Branch. To lose an undercover guy by natural progression or he wanting out of the dangerous life was to have the Section's clearance rate effected...which was a big no-no.

We were considered expendable back then, before 'Duty of Care' was an expression in the English language.

You were on your own in those days. Even Court time was fraught with danger as you, as a witness, had to stand in Court to give your evidence. To be cross-examined...all in front of the Public Gallery. That arrangement thank God, has been changed...except in conservative Queensland!

At that time as you can understand, it was a death sentence as ‘associates’ of the Accused were seated in the Public Gallery! Your walk out of the Courthouse was fraught with danger and the knowledge that that walk could well be your last!

I had heard of undercover cops being killed by Cops who were not aware of the identity of the guy standing before them with a gun in his hand. In a couple of cases, there were whispers that the undercover guy was getting too close to the Sarge’s back-handers and illegal enterprises, so the order would go out that the poor sod had been turned. An easy target for a gun-happy copper. Easy money given to the Sarge for various enterprises that required police protection in an underhand sort of way. Pity the guy who crossed that line. Either Crim or Undercover guy, the result was the same. A bullet to the back of the head and a grave usually in the sandhills behind the old Anzac Rifle Range at Malabar Point.

That was not going to be me. I had seen too many go that way...and a couple by my hand.

Unfortunately, the ‘burn out syndrome’ was not widely accepted as a fair dinkum medical condition in those days and you were looked down on when you came in from the cold. *‘Not a man but a bloody whinger...a sook! A bludger who can’t stand the heat’* was the common remark even from your colleagues.

I was unceremoniously dumped into Narcotics as a desk warmer. The decision made because I had an extraordinary knowledge of the Sydney criminal hierarchy and their many tentacles which could be positive in later investigations. Thus, I was chained to a desk! This I hated! The only way out was to return to an undercover Vice operative as a way of escaping the desk job. That lasted less than a year before I was rescued, and my career bloomed when I became a Murder Dee.

See how the Police Force acted in the bad old days?

Use the bastard until he is either killed by friendly or enemy fire...or until he goes bananas! No different to them as another couple of suckers were coming through the Academy every six months. These bright young guys still believed in Biggles stories and right and wrong, and honesty is the best medicine...and Peter Rabbit is alive and well and a dear friend of Santa Claus!

It was in this role that I crossed ‘Castle’ Carlisle path once again, in possession of a saleable quantity of grass and at least a dozen baggies of Cocaine. The kid had jumped up a notch in being a ‘Shopkeeper’ giving his customers a varied stock to choose from...

“Sorry kid, but I can’t protect you this time. You are what, twenty...twenty-one? Too old to be protected”.

“Yeah, so what?”

“Yer still got that pretty young boy-look about you. You’ll be in constant demand when you’re inside. You should know that by now and I would have thought the last thing you wanted was not to be going back inside. Sorry, but I can’t help you. With your stash for sale, you will go down for maybe two years. You may get parole after eighteen months, but you will definitely walk with a loose arse for evermore”.

I don’t know if he understood...or really cared. It wasn’t as if he didn’t know what was instore...this would be his third stint inside...but this time as an adult inmate.

Fair dinkum, they can be so bloody dumb!

The lifestyle that they doggedly had chosen seemed to indicate it was in their blood and nothing done to break that cycle. You saw it too often to get that fuzzy feeling in the heart when one of them would promise to lead a ‘straight’ life...that they were never going to go back inside...yeah, yeah! You heard it so many times that fuzzy feeling just vanished!

I took his stash of weed...definitely a better grade from the last lot...at least he took my advice to improve the quality of his product! I arrested and charged him on the Cocaine stash as it was considered a large, saleable amount.

Coke was starting to wash into the country at that time and was the choice of drug of the upper mobile dudes who would become stalwarts of the commercial world one day...even a Politician or two if they lasted that long.

Castle got three years written down to two with time served. With parole conditions, he would be back on the street inside eighteen months.

That was my introduction into the guy’s life...I somehow had wished better for the young bloke...but with that latest stretch I lost contact of where he was or what he was doing...which is a shame as he wasn’t a bad kid...just one who had the luck of life bashed out of his body.

CHAPTER THREE

I am pretty sure that I had relocated myself into the Murder Squad thanks to the then Head of the Squad, Detective Superintendent John Church aka 'Abbey'. He saw something in my character worth saving. Most didn't, sniggering at my relocation saying I would never make it as a Murder Dee.

My tenure would be short-lived, so they stated confidently, and the bets were in. The 'Book' on me surviving no more than six months before I was out, had quite a lot of money against me. I threw in a one-hundred-dollar note quoting at least a five-year tenure.

I won the sizable pot, given to me on the fifth anniversary of me being a Murder Dee! It cost me more than the pot at the Pub later that day when the 'Pot Winner' was always expected to do the shouting for the bar!

Thank Christ a lot of the 'old boys' had retired or were dead, otherwise the cost to me may have been considerably more! There was a sprinkling of Retirees present. I was glad to see a few of them, their careers a model of consistency, honesty, and motivation. On the flip side there were a few who I would rather 'pass by in the street' if you get my drift. Still, it was good to see so many at the Bar who had bet against my lasting for so long. A more insecure person may shiver at the number who held little hope for me. Me? I was glad to see certain persons so I could personally shove my thumb up to them...all shenanigans treated in the manner it was meant...I think, maybe.

My initial Interview with Abbey was spent with me leaning towards him as he spoke...very quietly. He offered me the job as long as I would place my time as an Undercover Cop behind me with all its looseness and sins forgotten. I would need to toe the line in all matters, learning the Policy and Procedures Manual off by heart and adhering to its every word during every working day for the rest of my life.

It took me over six months but the words in that Cop 'Bible' have protected me on numerous occasions since.

Has there been times when I was on the verge of straying?

Too right! Blood Oath! And those times of uncertainty and straying off the straight and narrow seemed too infrequent to concern the ones above me to worry about...so I told myself.

But what saved me was those quiet but forceful words that Abbey spoke, almost challenging me to break the Laws of this State and Nation. How he knew of a fair number of my sins I will never know but it didn't take me long to respect the man immensely. He quickly became that father figure I never had while I was growing up. He never confessed to knowing any of my previous indiscretions, but you knew just by the way he looked...or said something that would not be a problem to anyone else, except I knew exactly what he had meant...that occurred on too many occasions to be a fluke...a grasp of something in the air...I knew he could have me drawn and quartered and ran out of the Force. I often wondered why he never did as he was a straight arrow in so many other ways. To me it seemed that as that father figure, he was willing to take it a little further...or perhaps as I have inferred previously, he saw something in me that others had never spied!

The early days in the Murder Squad were sprinkled with a couple of high-level homicides. With a lot of help from my then partner Marjory Hendricks, we cracked a couple that earned me a feather in my cap. This a little skew-if, as I was the one who was following the leader even though she was a grade below me. In those times, there was very few females even in the rank and file, even less in the mid-level managerial jobs.

It was during those early days in the Murder Squad that I heard through the grapevine that Castle Carlisle had broken his parole conditions being nabbed for selling and having a commercial amount of Coke and several 'Party' drugs on him with intent to on-sell them. He was unceremoniously chucked back into Prison to serve out his original sentence with a couple of years added on.

The news of his third period of imprisonment was hard for me to grasp as I had always considered him a cut above the rest. Fully capable of being what-ever he wanted to be. I was wrong in that regard.

For some it is in the blood...always, which was a shame as I had expected more from him. Once a crim, always a crim was one of the favourite mantras of many men in blue. I had hoped for better things, only to be proven wrong.

That pull towards easy money no matter how short lived and false it may be, was a strong motivator. The merry-go-round where after each time spent in custody ensures the guy will walk out of that prison a more hardened criminal.

The amount of crims recirculating is close to sixty percent. A very high ratio!

There is something wrong with that figure as Society has created such a system whereby the Crims benefitted. It was guilty of creating nothing but a training program for crims to learn their desired skills in a particular area. With each additional incarceration period, the crim was always honing his skills more successfully. Mixing with older crims who knew a little more was always going to impress those coming up behind. Whether every word was gospel is doubtful, but those younger impressionable crims only saw success...forgetting the fact that their mentor was in the jug as well!!

Nothing but a School for crims financed by the hapless taxpayers of to-day's society.

CHAPTER FOUR

Now, thirty odd years later, I did not have a clue as to his whereabouts...and the young, now middle-aged I guess, good-looking bloke had slipped from my memory banks, only re-surfacing by a gentle jog of the old grey matter at peculiar times. Usually when I was hosting friends at a Sunday Roast and the Red Wine was being shared and enjoyed. Telling a story that could involve myriad characters that had been a part of my life during those terrible times. Castle Carlisle was mentioned on more than one such occasion.

I knew he had not re-offended...well, within the State of NSW but there were six other States he could have migrated to. As I had not heard a bloody thing of the lad, one could only hope he had got off the merry-go-round experienced by most criminals. That pleased me as the life of crime was in the blood for most of them...in the blood until the day they died...like a drug, it pulled them back, repeatedly.

That always had me buggered!

If they stopped and took a squiz at their lives, they would realise they had wasted about half of it in prison for little monetary gain. The rest of the time, they may have made about two dollars an hour averaging it all out. If they had got a job and knuckled down, they would earn the minimum wage of close on twenty-one dollars an hour...so why the fix to remain a crim?

But no, they were always looking for that one big 'hit' that would set them up for life.

It never happened, of course...and they were too bloody dense...or just plain stupid to realise that a life of crime would never make a millionaire out of the gutter-swipes they were who would always take the fall!

The man at the top, faceless and unknown, was the only guy to make the money and he would never go to Jail.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Joseph? We have one for you. Shelley says that if you are close to the Office, stay out on Macquarie Street and she will wait for you at the side of the Plaza. A nice trip for you. Shelley has the details, but it is on the M1 at the dual Service Stations at Wyong. The northbound Caltex Servo. Local guys on site. If you are quick, you may beat the Forensic Trace and Morgue people to the death scene”. Hendo informed me, that cheeky smile of his reflected in his words.

“Jeez, Hendo, you can be lucky. I’ve just turned into Macquarie to go down the ‘IN’ ramp under our building. I wanted to have a couple of laps of the pool before I started this morning. Feeling a little stiff...what the hell! There’s always to-morrow. Another morning where I do no exercise can’t hurt, eh? There’s Shelley...what a good girl. She has two coffee containers...what an ace! See ya, Hendo, it’s a beautiful day to be outdoors”. I was in a pleasant mood, in love with life and nothing was going to occur that would change it, hopefully!

I slowed to a stop at the kerb. For once I remained behind the wheel. I don’t know why, and an answer will never be offered! Shelley opened the passenger side door and without making any comment about the driver arrangements for the morning, swung her large shoulder bag in before she handed me both coffee containers, plopping down in the passenger seat with a heavy sigh.

“A good morning to you, James. Up the Central Coast as fast as you dare. Don’t spare the gas, young man”.

I placed both coffee containers in the holders, handed her my iPad so she could transfer the details she had on this latest Case over to it. A new folio titled “Motorway Murder”. As she did this, she hummed a tune...way out of tune that was a bit grating. She was in one very

good mood this morning so there was no way I was going to upset her. I thought of asking her the reason for this happiness but felt it may dribble down to innuendo and outright political incorrectness.

You must be bloody careful these days!

“Arrh, Jeezus! A good old-fashion snog and more first thing of the morning sure does give a girl an excellent outlook for the rest of the day. I wonder whether he’ll be up to a repeat performance of such brilliance to-night”. Shelley beamed.

Who cares about political correctness...it suits Politicians and no-one else! And have you ever noticed that when a female is being politically *incorrect*, it is then okay by their skewed sense of justice? But us poor downtrodden men must be so careful nowadays as us uttering such words would have us before the S&E Panel in no time flat. Referred by some thin-skinned female who must prove something to the world!

“Lucky you! I’m being drip-fed and for the life of me I can’t figure out why”. This said as I nudged out into the traffic stream.

“You poor duckling. At your age you should be thinking about retiring Gorbachev in any case...”

Gorbachev? Gorbachev? What the...? I glanced over at her as she took a swig from her coffee container.

“Gorbachev? What are you talking about?” I enquired. It didn’t make sense to me as though she was talking Swahili!

“I call Brin’s thing-a-ma-jig...you know...the little boy...I call it Gorbachev as it always knocks down any wall of resistance I may have”. She laughed. A throaty laugh that I could not resist. “You know, President Reagan, I think it was, instructing Gorbachev to tear down the wall...I have often instructed Brin to tear down the bloody wall of resistance...and it has worked every time! I guess it may lose something in interpretation, huh?”

“Isn’t he the guy who had that red mark on his forehead? They reckoned it was the mark of the Devil...some people thought that in any case...I wonder how they reconciled their opinion of him when he was instrumental in the collapse of the old USSR...now that wasn’t the Devil’s work, don’t you reckon? Don’t tell me Brin is also marked similarly...you know...but down there?”

“Okay, I won’t tell you”.

I had trouble driving trying to stop my eyes from tearing up I was holding in the laughter so much.

Arrh...some mornings she can make the world seemed more beautiful, but on other days she casts a giant shadow over the day...go figure.

CHAPTER SIX

We made good time travelling north up the M1 without rarely having to turn on the siren, just relying on the flashing grille lights with headlights flashing on high beam. An occasional blast of the horn and a less used siren to batter the lazy or dream-state drivers out of the fast lane was sufficient. Thank Christ for that as the siren on continuously almost causes industrial deafness!

We veered down the off-ramp into the large Servo with huge hard-standing areas for both vehicles and caravans and a separate one for large articulated and Double ‘Bee’ and ‘Dee’ vehicles. An entire area cordoned off at one end of the large Restaurant building. Just at the beginning of the separate entry road for large vehicles to get back onto the motorway.

A Constable waved us over to a spot where a plethora of police vehicles, Forensic Trace, Forensic Pathology and Morgue vehicles and a scattering of Media vehicles with their round dishes extended on top of the roofs were parked neatly nearby.

“Detective Lind. G’day!” I looked at the man vaguely thinking that I may have met him at some time in the dark days of my tenure with the Force.

“Pines...Geoff Pines. We worked together for a while when we had that idiot trapped in the middle of the Hawkesbury River Bridge. You went and had a word with the guy against all recommendations. You got an Award for that arrest, didn’t you? We travelled together with the perp up to Terrigal where he had killed his Uncle...who was a retired Judge...or Magistrate down at Manly Courthouse, I think...Remember? The Judge had been having sex with the kid from an early age. He used to give twenty bucks to the boy’s father to go watch the football while he did the boy...remember that? I still have the occasional nightmare about that...I never want to go through that again”.

“Yeah...sorry...” We then spent some time getting up to date on his and my service with the Force. He still a Highway Patrol Cop and loving it and me still a Murder Dee having its days! Some good, an occasional beauty and a lot, piss poor!

Shells and I eventually signed on to the Site Register and parked where told to. We locked the Unmarked and walked slowly towards the crime scene tape that isolated a fair swathe of the tarmac area and bush behind it. There was just enough width to allow a Semi-trailer to squeeze through and out onto the Motorway on-ramp. We headed for two tents with all but one side down to give some air circulation while providing a secure area away from the prying eyes of all sightseers and members of the Media. I was surprised that there were few. They got sick and tired of standing around looking at nothing but the white sides of two demountable tents and the coming and going of personnel in white forensic scrubs.

“Good morning, Joe. A good morning for a race up the Motorway. I was hanging on for dear life as I was not aware that my colleague here was a racing driver on her days off”.

Smiles all around.

Andrew Waller had been Brenda Wzerlic’s ‘Two’ for many a year. He had now stepped from her shadows to be his own man. A very capable Forensic Pathologist.

I slapped him on the back as a hello.

“That’s why I drove up here. Shelley gets that white line fever thing travelling up the road with all lights and siren on wanting to see what maximum speed she can achieve. With me driving, we had a sedate run and as you can see, arriving here in one piece!”

Laughter and giggles with Shelley frowning at the same time as smiling.

“What have we got, Drew?” That was his preferred name.

“Hah...nothing much at this stage. We were shoo-ed away from the area until Trace had the first run and second run through. From what I could see, we have an adult male, bashed to an inch of his life. There will be no ident by visual means...his face smashed into next week with his hands and his feet chopped off and dumped God knows where. He was stabbed multiple times...that’s all I can tell you. No ID on him but he had several hundred dollars rolled up with an elastic band in a pants pocket”.

“Mmm...obviously not a robbery gone bad then? Don’t these Perps know about DNA comparison testing? If they did, they wouldn’t have worried about defacing and dismembering him so that identification was impossible...stupid sons of bitches!”

I looked around at the large Parking Area.

“What is a long-haul driver doing with that much cash in his pocket?” Shelley asked, interrupting my thought patterns. It happened a lot though these types of interruptions from her often put me on a different course of thinking. I nodded in agreement with her question to no-one.

“Any vehicles without a driver? Any vehicle remaining here from last night? That is your timeline, isn’t it? Overnight?” I asked as I turned, taking in the expanse of hard-standing area that was about a third full.

“Yes and no. We are pretty sure that death occurred sometime in the early evening yesterday. Too early to tell yet, Joe...but yeah, that would be a good guess. Maybe the CCTV network that they have here on-site will give you an idea. The Forensic Trace people have one of their people in the Office already. I guess on that”.

“Mmm...Shells and I will take a walk...to get a feel for the surroundings”.

“Yeah, okay. I’ll see you later. I doubt we’ll be through by early evening and the way things are going, we’ll might be back here to-morrow”.

“What did you mean by a long-haul driver, Shells?”

We were standing beside one of those two-trailer rig behemoths...easy to jump to that conclusion. I still hadn’t connected the dots. Let’s just say that I was not willing to theorise at such an early stage in the investigation. I would always wait for more information before offering such a statement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I walked twice around the ‘Double Bee’ double articulated Fuel Tanker that was hiding the death scene from the rest of the establishment. Its very size creating a shadow across the area

in both light, CCTV coverage and sight. It looked new with some of the tyres on the last trailer still having those rubber pimples that new tyres have.

“Arrh, Detective? Could you keep well away from that Truck? We are pretty sure that our victim may have been the driver of the rig as we’re informed it has been here all night. I’ll get the Uniforms to completely ring the rig with police tape and a fair amount of the area around it. We will need that area to search for any trace. Okay?”

I waved a hand in acknowledgement as both Shelley, and I turned and headed for the Cafeteria.

“Shit. I feel like a bloody Murder Dee without a corpse, a death scene or anyone to question”. I murmured out of the side of my mouth to Shelley. The sick humour not lost on her.

“A coffee, Joe. I don’t care about dead bodies or gruesome death scenes. I just want a half decent coffee. To the Cafeteria, young man I say. It should be of reasonable quality, hopefully. When we’ve finished, we may have something rewarding to do that is connected to our poor victim”.

“Ha! The Night Staff of this Cafeteria will be tucked up nice and tight with the curtains drawn dreaming whatever those types of people dream about. Money and stardom, don’t you reckon? We will have to stay here until they clock on at six to-night to be able to question some-one who may offer us some worthwhile information”.

Shelley glanced at me.

“I’m not intending to stick around here all day waiting for the night staff to arrive, are you? I have an appointment to-night that I cannot cancel. If that is the case, drive me to Wyong Station around three this afternoon. You can continue on your own, matey. Notice the Rig is registered in Queensland. That maybe a good avenue to source out initially. Their registration rates are a lot lower than NSW. South Australia is the same”.

“Victoria, too”. I added to show how good my general knowledge was.

I gave her a ‘so what’ expression, shrugging to show I had not followed her. To me it didn’t seem to matter much what State or Territory the large Rig was registered in...it had little to do with the dead body we still had not seen!

I wasn’t intending to welcome the night staff onto their shift either, but I figured I had no other option. To go and knock on the door of a Night Shift person halfway through their sleep

pattern does not garner reasonable responses. I know, as I have done it accidentally on several occasions...and had it done to me!

“Mmm...we’ll need the Boss to liaison with the Queensland Authorities to find out who owns the rig. Give him a ring to start the ball rolling while I get us that java and a bite to eat, eh?”

I sat at a small table positioned right at the front plate-glass window line that gave views out onto the expansive hard-standing area. I was amazed as vehicles came and went as though the population of the State was on the move. I gave the Boss the details of the rig and the Registration Number.

“Fifteen minutes, Joe. It shouldn’t take that long”. He signed off with the promise he would get back to me shortly.

I placed my Mobile gently onto the table as Shelley pushed a large mug of coffee towards me before she sat opposite.

“Bloody hell, you paid extra to up-size, huh?”

“No, the Manager says it’s on the house...and it’s out of the Staffs’ pot of coffee which is a better blend than that available to the Public, so he reckons”. She fluttered her eyelashes at me. “Have a sandwich and be satisfied that this girl can still bat her eyelashes to get what she wants...a decent coffee”. She smiled. “I got you an egg and lettuce with mayo...that okay?”

I nodded my head as I began to unravel the sandwich container. You needed a bloody hunting knife to do it justice!

“Whoops, there goes your reputation of never being for sale, my dear”. I turned and nodded at the Manager, thanking him for his show of largesse. He gave me a thumbs up as acknowledgement. I tried the coffee...it was bloody good! The sandwich was one of those pre-package things. If you believe the date, it was only made yesterday...still, it tasted good as well.

“Jeezuz, he’s doing it the wrong way around. He should be giving this to the customers and the other stuff to cops on the take! A bloody nice drop”. I took another bite of the sandwich, a sip of coffee. “We could be here for a long time waiting until the forensic teams have done their bit. This will improve our wait. You...arrh...you want to try and hook a ride with one of the teams heading back to Sydney this afternoon? It looks as though the Forensic Trace

team are packing up and moving away from the death site...next, that Rig a 'once over' for them. I wonder if they have found anything pertinent..."

"It's just as easy for me to catch a train at Wyong, change trains if I have to at Hornsby...if not Strathfield to catch a train out to Ingleburn. I think it would be just as quick for me to go by train all the way". She nodded to show she had made up her mind.

"Fine. I'll drive you to either Wyong or Tuggerah Station after I get some local advice. I can see me sitting around until the night shift people come on duty...and for all that sitting around, I bet I get bugger all out of them".

"Yeah...that's usually the way..." Shelley responded with a cut off laugh. "I'll bet you...take me to the Station say around two...or three this arvo...oh, shit! One of the Forensic guys wants us".

I tucked my half-eaten sandwich back into its packaging and placed it in a coat pocket. The mug of coffee each we took with us. We walked out into the heat and glare of late morning, wandering over to the FO who had caught our attention. That large mug of coffee firmly in our hands.

"What have you got?"

He handed me a clear evidence bag that was not sealed or initialled as per regulations.

"Detective? This was found in the cabin of his rig confirming him as our driver".

It didn't to me. I required something more concrete than a wallet. I wanted a photo ID on the License and a forensic match to the Vic. No fingerprints as his hands were chopped off. As far as I was concerned, a DNA match from something in the Cabin to the dead guy was the proof I would accept...nothing short of that would do!

"Um...they also want to remove the body. A quick look, okay? We have been through the cabin of this Double Bee Rig. You can have a look around if you want and the Digital Forensic guy wants you to pop into that large Mobile Home when you get a chance. He has some good footage of the scene taken last night...um...from the various CCTV cameras around the site".

The three of us circled around looking for all the CCTV locations. The pirouette de trio must have been an amusing sight.

“When you have finished looking through that stuff...” He nodded at the stuff he had handed me. I noticed that he had signed and initialled the evidence bag not to break the evidence chain. I would need to sign and initial it also as I sealed the bag and its contents. “Can you seal and initial it and give it back to me...we’re pretty sure that is the Deceased guy’s Rig but will do a comparison DNA trace check taken from inside the cabin back to our victim...um...the guy’s name is Dragan Polkowski with an address in Chipping Norton on the banks of the river according to his License which was in his wallet in the cabin of the truck”.

I held up a hand to stop the FO from rambling.

“Is a photo ID License in the wallet...” I stopped to think. “That really doesn’t help us, does it? His face was bashed off his head, so we have no way of making a comparative examination. We are flying with nothing but guesses at the moment. We may have to wait to do a DNA comparison test of close family...if he has any, that is...so...”

“Yes Detective, I am aware that is yet to be confirmed. We understand that. We checked on Google Earth and think we have the right address...a very palatial abode for a bloody truck driver...I’m thinking of changing jobs!” He gave a chuckle as he turned to walk away. “Oh!” He said as he spun to address us again. “Me and my assistant will be heading back to the Office around three this afternoon, so we’ll be here for a while yet. I reckon we will be back to-morrow so some-one will have to organise a night-watch Uniform to guard the site”.

“The truck? The rig? Will you be taking that back to the Vehicle Impoundment Yard at Glebe?”

“Jeez, I don’t know...I doubt it as we wouldn’t have the room to accommodate it. The large tanks are empty and have been vented so it shouldn’t represent a danger if it stays here until another driver from the Firm comes to take it away. We have taken everything there is to take from the Cab so I can’t see the point in impounding it for any length of time. Check with the Lead Forensic Officer. Your Missus, I think I heard some-one say...”

I looked gobsmacked at him.

We had been here for about two hours, and she had failed to identify herself or even to just say g’day. I will let the girl know I was not impressed with that. While I was standing there with a coffee in one hand and the evidence bag in the other, Tellie walked up to me and gave me a quick smack on the cheek.

“Hello Sunshine. Sorry Joe that it has taken so long. Hi, Shells, how are you? This is one hell of a death scene. Trace by the bucket load that may give us a lead to the Perps...we’ll know within ten days. I’d say you will be here until the night staffers come on duty. Get yourself a take-away to-night as I don’t feel like cooking you a meal at some ungodly time of the night when you get home. Sorry...” She slipped the white mask back onto her face, hiding her identity. She gave me a dig in the ribs, a little wave and a wink and she was gone.

I was still holding the coffee mug going cold in my right hand, the evidence bag of goodies in the other and a dried-out sandwich in my coat pocket. What else did I need?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Going on overheard conversations from several Uniforms and Techs, the body was quite gruesome. As we circled around the large Rig, the name started to echo around in my head.

Dragan Polkowski.

For some reason I knew the name, but I couldn’t put a face or timeline on why it jiggled with me. I stopped and leant against the large bull-bar on the front of the rig, placing the coffee mug and the evidence bag on the top of the gigantic, combined bumper bar and bull-bar. I opened my iPad, getting onto the Criminal Register for NSW. I scrolled through to the ‘Ps’. ...Dragan Polkowski...small time crim and muscle-bound part-time Bouncer that dabbled in drug supply at certain Musicfests. He obtained his drugs for selling through the Ortello/Tennelli/Bocca conduit. That was stressed as pure speculation based on unreliable intel. He had hanged himself while waiting for his day in Court.

Nineteen Eighty-two.

You’d have to ask yourself why a small-time crim would want to hang himself. It was obvious that the question was never asked at the time. His association with the Bocca/Tenelli pair was a bit of a worry...I was meandering into stuff that had no bearing to this case more than likely. I did that more often these days...rambling myself!

Something twigged. That was the year that I left undercover work behind me and joined the ranks of the Murder Squad. While the face of the man still avoided me, I remembered the incident, mainly because several ‘Screws’ were charged with drug offences. They were doing

their 'rounds' instead of paying attention to certain inmates who had a score to settle. Dragan Polkowski was the man...he preferred to take his own life instead of a wallop by either the 'Screws' or the marauding inmates so it was suggested.

It would seem we had a case of stolen identity...but why?

These thoughts abruptly ended as we stepped into the bush surrounding the death scene and came upon the body. The good coffee I was drinking seeped up the back of my throat. The guy didn't have a face as it had been belted off his head. The bottom jaw and most of the teeth on the upper jaw were missing. The face now just a bloodied mess. I waved my hand to indicate I had seen enough. Shelley though, sat on her haunches as she studied the body closely, looking around at the surrounding trampled grass and bushes before she once again, levelled her gaze to the body.

"Was he dead when most of these injuries occurred?" She asked quietly.

"No, I don't think so..." Drew Waller replied quietly as he stood beside her. "I think a couple of the twenty-odd stab wounds to his body may have done the trick but there are indications that those stab wound injuries came after the intense blows to his face and head. They sure wanted the guy dead but gave him one hell of a hiding before he died to teach him a lesson or something...a bit sadistic, don't you reckon? Over the top aggression I would think. There's plenty of that type of crim about, liking a little too much the damage he was causing to another human being".

"Yeah, I'll go with that assessment too. He did something mightily wrong to piss off the wrong guys. What though? The implement? That amount of damage could not occur with just fists..."

"Mmm...maybe a decent knuckle-duster...or some sort of short club, which I think is more the case. We have taken what looks like wooden splinters from various positions on his head...but I will reserve judgement until we are back at the Office, and I can put the various things we took from his many injuries under a microscope".

I was standing some distant from the body, barely able to look too closely. Instead, I looked around at the way the grass and shrubs had been trundled and trampled down. A real party happened here.

“By the looks of the way various shrubs and grass have been trodden down, he gave a pretty good account of himself before he was brought to his knees...” Shelley could always read my mind.

“Yeah...Forensic Trace took a fair few bits and pieces from around the area. It remains unknown whether they represent anything substantial and relevant to the crime or are just the detritus of the passing parade...the scene is a bit messy according to the Lead Forensic Officer. Your missus, Joe”. As if he had to get that in for some reason that only he knew. “Your funeral humour is rubbing off on her...um...maybe that is why they lopped off his hands. Too much trace evidence that may ID the Perps, perhaps...but if they were that paranoid, they should have been a little more careful in dancing the ‘two-step’ with the guy for some time. They left behind chewing gum, spit and perspiration trace...well...that is what the Trace Team have isolated hoping that it all belongs to the Vic and/or the Perps”.

“Yeah, could be, I guess. A week or two and we may know. The criminal world is starting to catch up on the fact that very little trace is required to identify them”. I pulled at my earlobe and turned around several times, taking in the whole scene. “Too lazy to use a bloody bin, eh? To spit their chewing gum into...or that half-smoked cigarette, eh? It might be to our benefit hopefully, eh?”

“Yeah, could be. Have you seen enough, Detective? We want to get him back to the Morgue”. Drew inquired quietly.

I was still some distance from the body, but as I responded I drew closer to our Vic. Somehow, I seemed to be drawn to him even though I could not look at the remains for any length of time.

Go figure.

“You’ve just moved into new premises, haven’t you?” I asked, wanting an excuse to loiter around the site for a little longer, hoping that something of import may jump out at me...or make me suspicious.

“Yes. Bloody marvellous. The final move of all our stuff we wanted to keep, will be done this afternoon so they say. Not that we wanted much of our old stuff, as all and more is shining brand new...and some of the new stuff? We’ve been salivating for years waiting for it to be budgeted and provided. We have the Coroner’s Office, the Morgue, gleaming stainless-steel Autopsy Rooms that will allow a dozen post-mortems to be undertaken simultaneously, a body freezer that could accommodate an entire trainload of people, new Forensic trace

facilities and Blood and Toxicology laboratories with the Ballistics Section thrown in for good measure. Top of the range and the largest combined facilities in the southern hemisphere...up there with the best in the world". He smiled gleefully, rubbing his hands together through two layers of latex gloves. "The Coroners' Office will stay where it is at Glebe until the New Year. I don't know why they couldn't have been relocated with all of us". He stood, as proud as punch. Shrugged his shoulders to indicate that that quandary was above his level of need to know. "The old Lidcombe quarantine facility was knocked down to allow this rambling building to be constructed. Plenty of staff and public parking...couldn't be better. I couldn't wait much longer for the move to take place. Getting to the old Coroner's Office at Glebe was an absolute nightmare. Getting to Lidcombe for me is so much easier...going against the traffic in the morning and going home...and you are within walking distance from a train station and regular bus services...and the staff parking area? Jeez, it's to dream about. It should take about ten years before a building extension will eat into that...but for now, it is heaven".

Shelley nodded her head as she stood, only taking in half what Drew Waller was rambling on about. She gave him a smile, rubbing her hands over her hips as a way of cleansing them, I thought. She turned to see me on the edge of the tarmac looking at the big Rig. She gave me a smile.

"Seen enough, Tonto?"

I nodded my head. I reckon I had seen too much after thirty seconds! It was as if the poor bloke had his face exfoliated right down to the sub-humus layers...as though his entire face had been subject to a vicious flaying exercise which was way too much for me!

CHAPTER NINE

I wandered around the big Rig several times before climbing up into the cabin. Fingerprint ink smudge marks were everywhere on every surface.

"Some people never grow up. Such large toys bring out the boy in certain men...it's as though it's in the blood for most men, huh?" Shelley smiled as she balanced on the lowest step up into the cab. "I'll climb up the other side into the passenger seat to see whether I am affected the same way, huh?"

I had grasped the steering wheel and jostled it a couple of times. Barely enough to warrant such a poor put-down comment from my partner, but then again, I should always expect it.

“Jeez, they’re right, you know. If a car was trapped sideways under the front bumper-bar, the driver has a hell of a job noticing it there, huh?” She leaned forward to look down. “I now know why drivers of these things are smiling as they pass you or vice-versa. They get a good look into the car’s interior where a lot of women have hosed up their dress or skirt to be more comfortable when they drive. Unknowingly displaying a real leg show”. She giggled. “I’ll have to watch myself in future. Ha, I have never given that a thought. You?”

“Me!? I always keep my skirt hem around my ankles whenever I drive...my hairy legs would be a dead giveaway and I’d lay odds stop those jockeys from smiling up in their eyries”.

“Give me strength”. She retorted, trying to stop a giggling session from beginning. “That name? The victim’s name. What was it?”

I repeated it for her benefit as she tapped it into her iPad. I couldn’t be bothered stopping her from uncovering the information I had dug up half an hour ago.

“Mmm...I guess there can always be two people with the same name, but the Dragan Polkowski I have listed here *was* a small-time crim with jail time to his name who hanged himself...thirty-odd years ago in Silverwater Detention Centre. Do you believe in reincarnation? Or bloody twins given the same name at birth?”

“Huh...no to both and yep, you’re right. That’s him. A small time weed distributor and seller. I knew him when I was still working as an undercover Narcs Officer. Ran into him several times but I was never responsible for nabbing him...but he was well known to the Force especially out around Campbelltown in the early days. He was considered a small cog selling shit on the street obtained through the Ortello/Tennelli/Bocca connection. They were only beginning to make their mark back then...they themselves were only small time just starting out, all though Ortello had inherited a large chunk of the ‘trade’ through his family down in Melbourne. Amazing what thirty years can do to a drug empire”.

Shelley looked across at me. Impressed so I thought, on my memory for such minute detail. I wasn’t about to confess to my earlier delving into the Police Records.

“Could this be a case of Identity Theft?”

“Mmm...frankly, I thought it seemed to be more a murder case...”

“Bloody hell, Joe. You should warn me when you’re in one of those smart-arse moods so I can keep as far away as possible! Leave it with me Tonto, I’ll make some enquiries into this obvious Identity theft”.

I leaned out of the cabin as a Forensic Officer still in a white bio-suit walked past.

“Officer? Is the Print Officer still around?” I asked as I leant half out of the cab.

“Um, yes Detective. I think so. She may be over in the Forensic Van. Do you want me to get her for you?”

“No, I am wanted over there in any case. Thanks”.

I must admit it was easier climbing up into the cabin of this behemoth than climbing down. If you missed a foothold and fell to the ground, you could easily injure yourself. It would be akin to falling several metres such was the height of the cabin. Shelley volunteered to stay in the cab and have a look around as I made solid ground. I gave her a wave as I took off my suit coat. It was warming up. I noticed she had already climbed over into the driver’s seat and was pretending to drive the rig...that made me smile. I left her to her childhood dreams.

It had just gone past eleven o’clock.

CHAPTER TEN

I stuck my head into what I thought was just a large Mobile Home. Cold air rushed out as I held the door open.

“Shut the fucking door!” Someone yelled out. “If you’re coming in, make it quick and shut the flaming door behind you. If not, still shut the fucking door behind you as you disappear!”

I stepped up the two interior steps, quickly closing the door behind me. I was amazed at the interior. This was no ordinary Motor Home. Everything you expected to see wasn’t there. There was a long ‘desk’ down one wall for the entire internal length of the Campervan. The other wall divided into different workstations, each having a different piece of equipment. I recognised a top of the range electronic microscope and not much else. There was a small lab sink towards the front of the Van with an electric jug and a small micro-wave above. Below

the sink were two fridges and a separate large Freezer unit. I let out a low whistle. Above the driver's cabin there was a double bed for those who might need it. My imagination commenced churning through the various scenarios that my dirty mind could conger up...

“Um...excuse me. Which one of you is the Fingerprint Specialist?”

A figure turned towards me, a friendly smile welcoming me aboard.

“Detective? Forensic Officer Carla Batich. I guess it's me you are looking for. I am just digitising all the prints that I have taken from the crime scene and the heavy articulated vehicle that we assume is the rig that our Deceased drove. After I complete the digitising exercise, I will pass every example through the system to see whether we get a comparison match. Give us fifteen, will you?”

“Yeah, no worries. What a castle you guys work in. It must be new as I have never seen it before at death sites...it's got what? Two of those fold-up stretcher beds as well. Talk about taking your work home with you, this is the absolute opposite of that practise, eh?”

The three people who were working on the bench counters turned as one to smile their assent. There was still enough room and equipment to take another half dozen bods easily.

“Brand new, Detective. Came with our new lodgings at Lidcombe...there are two other similar models. We are catching up with the World at last! We are still working everything out...and what specialised equipment is inside and what we need to obtain to make this one hell of a travelling Lab. It will allow us...in several scientific areas, to determine quickly what we had to wait several days or weeks to confirm. Mind you, we still will consider any such evidence a preliminary result until we can confirm it back at the Office with...arrh...more exacting laboratory equipment”.

Then why have it, was my immediate response. I kept the thought to myself not wanting to be on the wrong side of these people when they were still enjoying its 'newness'.

I nodded my head. I bloke right at the end of the long desk-like length stuck his arm up. Above his head were several small flat screens, below which looked like up to six DVD players. From those machines down to the desktop was an array of switches, buttons and toggle switches with small LED lights flashing or static adding to the feel of Christmas cheer...which was still some weeks away.

“Detective?” He spun around on his small stool like a child at the Kitchen bench awaiting eagerly for some food. “Um, I have not yet downloaded all the images from every CCTV point as there are several ‘feeds’ from the small Truck fuel filling points that I have not registered into the system yet. I may not get to those until tomorrow back at the Office and I feel sure they will reveal more than what I have at the moment...grab a stool, I’ll roll a tape that I have constructed from what I have so far viewed. It will give you a general idea cut to minutes from the almost twelve hours that every feed covers”.

I leaned back to view one of the flat screens as it came to life above my head.

“The time commences at 1707 hours yesterday afternoon...but will jig about as I added or deleted the minutes and hours from specific CCTV locations. Notice where the Double Bee Articulated Vehicle will stop. It’s in an area of low light which is further enhanced by the shadow effect of the Semi when it arrives and stops at that location...see? It’s as if the guy knew to park there so his last moments on this earth would be in shadow and away from the prying eyes of the CCTV locations...or busy-bodies”.

I nodded my head. The positioning of the Road-train was a deliberate act, so it would seem.

“Okay, I have cut out most of the following except for when the driver climbs down out of the rig and walks into the Cafeteria...but he remains in his cab for several minutes after he has turned off the engine and lights but leaves with just the running lights on. Um...I think he could be making a call...that assumption is strengthened by him constantly looking at his Mobile while he sits and waits inside the Cafeteria...with a coffee he has purchased at the counter. I have already sent off a request to our Digital Communications Liaison Officer to provide the information I want. The history of his mobile phone and the caller ID, phone numbers and a recording of the conversations...those things take some time...like up to ten weeks turnaround unless you want a rocket attached?”

“As quickly as possible without upsetting the Boss trying to get her to hurry things along”.

“Yes, the Lead FO...um...your wife I think someone said, she has got the ball rolling. Apparently, we have taken a lucky break as the Telco Carrier for the Mobile in question is Telstra. They keep records of every phone call made...either landline or mobile for two years. The others are still trying to catch up even though the Federal Government bought in new anti-terrorist laws early in two thousand and eighteen that required all Telcos to abide by that Law...but it will still take us about twenty working days before we get something back”.

I nodded, understanding the mechanics of the Federal Government edict.

He leaned back and straightened his back. He did this several times as though he had been sitting on the stool for some time.

“They’ve gotta replace these stools with chairs with a decent back to lean back on”. He complained to no-one. The other two FOs concurred with his assessment. “Okay...again, I have cut out the more than an hour duration of him sitting, sipping on the coffee, and constantly looking out through the front window of the Cafeteria. Notice he has his Mobile sitting on the tabletop, which he looks at impatiently as though who-ever he was expecting, was running late”.

I sat rigidly viewing the screen where a time log jumped several times as though sections of the original footage had been cut out.

“Have you a better shot of the guy? He had his face rearranged so if you have a reasonable shot of his face, it may help when we visit his address and commence asking questions”.

“Yes sir...just a minute and I’ll bring it up...taken as he was buying his coffee”.

An image appeared suddenly on an adjacent screen of our victim ordering, then paying for a container of coffee. The image was frozen. The picture zoomed in and out several times until it settled on an ‘up-close’ facial image that had little pixelation.

“This is the best I could do...sorry”. He panned in tightly on the image to reveal a very reasonable image.

I shook my head saying it was more than I expected.

“He was captured by a camera as he went to pay for his coffee...decent quality cameras can make all the difference”.

“Excellent...almost as good as a Studio shot!”

The FO scoffed at that remark as though he considered it well below par, very much below par. His level of excellence and acceptance was obviously a lot higher than mine.

“Can I have a copy of that image sent to my iPad?” I gave him my e-mail address. I had to admit that the image I was looking at matched very closely the Driver’s License photograph we found in the Prime mover cabin. We had the right man, but unfortunately not his correct name. I still wondered why he should find it necessary to change his name.

“Not a problem...” He tapped away on his keyboard. “Done, Detective...now watch. This is kind of spooky...” My iPad beeped letting me know I had received the photograph.

I again looked up at the first screen as a large Pantech truck slowly drove down the ‘off-ramp’ to crawl through the expansive hard-standing area and headed towards the exit ramp that would take him back onto the Motorway. I could see a white vehicle up the clanger of the truck as though it was trying to hide its existence. At the last moment, the tall Pantech truck veered into the second last parking space hard up against the Cafeteria walkway while the white vehicle took the last place, now completely hidden from view by the bulk of the Pantech.

“Have you been able to get a shot of that vehicle’s registration plates?”

“Not at the moment...no... but as I said, I have examined only about fifty percent of the footage available to me. I have not as yet been able to show that a person or persons alighted from that vehicle to walk across the exit way and around behind the Semi-trailer...but I can assume that is what happened at this stage because our friendly driver also appeared to walk around behind his rig to greet his maker...after the white vehicle stopped with the occupants alighting from the vehicle...we cannot see that on any of the camera locations that we have at present. Hopefully, I should get something as I search through all the video feeds. There’s enough around the entire premises to get something decent if we are lucky”.

“He got killed in a nasty way for his troubles”.

“Yes...I’d take a bet and say he was unaware of his fate because he seemed somewhat relaxed in the Cafeteria. Watch when the white vehicle takes off some forty-five minutes later, that Pantech hangs off the rear bumper of the white vehicle so again we cannot make out a number plate as they both exit up the on-ramp onto the Motorway heading north”.

“That Pantech? It would have its number plate in clear view, wouldn’t it?”

“It should have but it had neither a front nor rear plate that I could make out...”

“They’ve gone to a lot of trouble, even identifying all the CCTV cameras around the place...that would have taken several trips, I would imagine...you know, to reconnoitre the entire parking area and all the CCTV locations”.

“Maybe...I may know more when I have been through the entire catalogue of footage...but there is one set of cameras those vehicles cannot hide from. Those Roads and Maritime

Service Traffic cameras. Even if both vehicles continued north up the Motorway, they would have been picked up on those cameras. However, I'm hoping they exited off the motorway at the next available exit point. The Morisset Interchange to turn back onto the Motorway to head south back past this Truck stop. The cameras are just before the Wyong off-ramp...I have a call into the RMS Traffic Division. I gave them an approximate time scale. I expect something back from them within a week".

"That's excellent, mate. Bloody fantastic...and the photo? It's a pearl".

I stood, patted the young bloke on the shoulder to show my pleasure and to indicate I thought he was doing a bloody excellent job.

I turned back to him, a little concerned.

"We have been assuming that all this subterfuge with the Pantech and the 4WD was so the vehicles could not be identified from their Number Plates...but...um...it seems to me their shenanigans may have more to do with the persons...and how many of them were in those vehicles. If one of the CCTV cameras had direct line of sight say...of the windscreen, those persons in the front seats may have been photographed well enough to be identified".

The young Forensic Officer looked up at me.

"Yeah...could be. A good thought, Detective".

I headed towards the door nodding my head, to be stopped in my tracks by the Fingerprint Technician.

"Detective Lind? I have a match for the prints identified within the Cabin of the Double 'Bee'. These prints were the most common of all that I found in the interior of the Prime Mover and the only ones noticeable on the steering wheel. They match perfectly with a small-time crim called Jeremy Wilson aka Jerry Hunter aka Hunter Clyde. His Rap Sheet shows he has been clean for a number of years".

"The Licence details we have is for a bloke called Dragan Polkowski..." I responded. "Why the subterfuge?"

I sat on a chair beside the attractive woman and took out the wallet and other paperwork from the plastic evidence bag. The contents that identified our Vic as Dragan Polkowski. I shucked into a pair of latex and began to sift through the wallet and contents as FO Batich looked on.

“Mmm...let me do a bit of digging, huh? I’ll get a photo of our Vic so I can run it through the Facial Recognition Database. Something may come up especially if he was a crim with a record”.

There was silence as FO Batich tapped away on her Laptop that was connected to the ‘cloud’ or whatever, as how else could she enter into the NSW Police Crime Register.

“Hmm...our Jeremy Wilson...that is the known name of our Vic. He is fifty-two. DoB Feb Nineteen, sixty-six. Has lost his Driver’s Licence six times over a twenty-year period from the age of eighteen...he is a serial offender. All for drink driving with not one offence showing an alcohol reading below nought point two. That is very heavy...and a very high reading...he did a twelve month stretch in Silverwater for the last event. Losing his License for twelve months which seems so bloody stupid as he spent that period in jail...you know, he could immediately apply for a new Driver’s License as the punishment and the sentence coincided...what a stupid arrangement!”

She shook her head at the idiocy of the arrangement.

“And here he is in control of a Double Bee Heavy vehicle weighing what? Over sixty tonnes when fully loaded with over seventy thousand litres of highly flammable liquid...shit! And using a false name and license to drive the bloody thing! Jeez it makes you so mad, huh? I’ll make sure they do a blood tox for illegal substances and alcohol. Driving such a large rig he should have nil results. I’ll text that through to the Morgue to make sure they do the blood test”.

“That would be an active test under the circumstances, wouldn’t it?”

“Yeah, usually...but just in case they forget...it’s been known to happen...and his bloody record...that would be enough to make him look for an alias, don’t you think?”

Batich tittered at that. I felt sure she was thinking about a smart-arse Dee always thinking he was the most intelligent person in the Universe. She looked up at me, a smile that showed yellowing teeth. Too young for it, I thought. But it disclosed she was a ferocious coffee drinker and a cigarillo person. She looked to be that type of person. That made me jerk my head, a smile on my face as that was my first thought when I had met Tellie for the first time.

“He ain’t gunna be a danger to his fellow man anymore, no matter what...and I’d like to be a fly on the wall when he gets his arse kicked to Hell!”

“Mmm...yeah...whatever. When do you think you can send us a Report?” I wasn’t about to discuss the merits of either Heaven or Hell!

“When it’s done, Detective. When it’s done...sometime within the next ten days, I expect”.

Not as good as my favourite Digital FO, but what the heck...I guess there was a good reason why our Vic went from being known as Jeremy Wilson to Dragan Polkowski...why? We’ll never know, for sure. Maybe that was all it was...a guy who wanted to work and the only way he figured he could, was by adopting some-one else’s identity. Simple as that...with nothing more sinister than that!

I took out the Driver’s License and held it up beside the last mug shot of Jeremy Wilson that we had...it was not a definite as too many years had gone by between the two photos.

“I’ll do that FR Database...that will tell us it is the same person. Two weeks Detective, okay?”

“Mmm...a normal bloke in society would not even think of doing something like that. It was the product of that part of society who couldn’t give a damn about Laws and why they were in place...just poking his nose at society and having no remorse about doing it. If anything, that type of person doing such things considered themselves smart as...” I commented.

It was a drastic change going from a good English name to a Polish moniker. I smiled as I thought this. I bet he never looked like a Polish man no matter what...and a quick glance at his License photo confirmed that for me, but...I guess the name Polkowski was the next out of the box being held by these Identity fraud guys.

It seemed to me that all these Forensic people have spent too long waiting for their Chinese. Ten minute...ten minute! Your noodles ready in ten minute, which all these scientific people have turned into ten days or two weeks when we should have a Report ready for your perusal...the same difference when you work a five-day week. I wondered if they ever thought along those lines. More than likely not...it takes the excellent mind of a Murder Dee to be able to draw that conclusion...a completely useless and superfluous piece of dollop!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

My Mobile chirped in my pocket before I grabbed at it. It was the Boss apologising for taking so long to get back to me. I sat back down on a vacant stool in front of a screen rolling through with nothing but numbers. I reckon they do that when a bloke of limited knowledge in such things sits in front of the screen...just to show how clever they are and how stupid the guy is.

I could be wrong but as this has happened several times, they must think I am one of those computer illiterate blokes who knows bugger all! As far as computers go, I am...but...I am improving all the time. One day I will be able to converse with these guys on the same level...but thinking about, why should I?

“The Queensland coppers have been having a bit of a problem trying to investigate the firm of Capricornia Fuel Distributors. The Company was registered in Queensland in nineteen sixty-two with three names on the Register. A Harvey Wilcox, a Suzanna Wilcox, and a Bradley O’Dwyer. The firm ceased to operate upon the death of Harvey and his missus about fifteen years later. The whole operation was taken over by another company that does fuel distribution throughout Queensland. The name re-surfaced again around ten years ago and has been operating since then. A Post Office Box Number in the Underwood Mail Delivery Centre as the Company address with the same three names as the Company Directors even though the three of them are now deceased. They couldn’t get past that point. An examination of the Owners of the Post Office Box shows the three as owners of the box with an address in Underwood being a vacant block of ground. Apart from that there is nothing else except to say someone has gone to a lot of trouble to hide their identities and residential addresses so they can control and run this business. The Queensland Fraud Squad have taken over the case. They’ll get back to us...”

“Yeah, right. When? In the next millennium, I reckon. There’s something suspicious right away. Someone has gone to a lot of trouble hiding the Directors of the Firm...or the single owner as I bet it is now in the hands of one joker...and picking a Firm that was in this type of hiatus...then re-arranging the whole thing operating from a Post Office box. Same with our Victim...he has adopted another name to obtain his Heavy Vehicle License. A trip up to sunny Queensland maybe necessary, Boss”.

“Nice try, Joe, but no bananas. Things remain as is until I say something different. Okay?”

“Yes Boss...whatever you say”. Said in my most patronising tone.

I heard him growl as he hung up which made me smile.

CHAPTER TWELVE

We were walking back to the Cafeteria looking for something decent to eat for Lunch as my half-eaten sandwich had dried in the heat.

“Detective?” Sergeant Pines caught up with us. “I don’t know whether it is of any importance or connected to the killing last night, but the Rig? There have been several complaints of it parked across several people’s driveways all night at an address in Long Jetty. Obstructing their driveways. A Patrol Wagon has gone to the address and instructed the driver to park across the road which is the street shoulder of a small Park...like a village green type of park...so it doesn’t cause a problem even though it is frowned upon...to have such a rig parked in suburbia...this has occurred several times over the years...and there are reports that the rig has parked at that address, usually on the other side of the road, about every month or so for quite a few years.”

“The address? Do you have it?”

“Yes...um...it’s only happened a couple of times. You know, where the rig is parked blocking people’s driveways. It does usually park on the shoulder of the Park opposite. The driver’s sister lives there. Usually, he parks the rig on the opposite side of the street parallel to the park’s extremity. If you get my explanation”.

I nodded. The repetition grating on me.

“This rig?”

He nodded in reply.

“Yeah...same rego plates”. He responded confidently. “Queensland Plates”.

“How often did you say?”

“About once a month as though he does an interstate run in between. Stays here for a good night’s sleep before he heads north, I reckon”.

“Up north through to Queensland”. A statement more than a question. I took down the details as the Sergeant offered them to me. “It wouldn’t have a full fuel load, I would imagine. Parking in a suburban street would be a no-no on so many fronts if the tanks were full”.

The tall Uniformed Sergeant nodded, but his body language showed that he didn’t know the rules for such a thing. I was going by the seat of my pants myself.

“A sister, you say?”

“Yeah...a Missus Dixon. Fiona Dixon”.

I looked at Shelley. Glanced at my watch.

“Do it now?” I suggested. “We can have lunch at The Entrance beside the sea. I can then drop you off at Tuggerah Railway Station on the way back here while I wait for the nightshift to come on duty”.

“Sounds like a good plan, Joe. About time you put yourself out for the Firm!” Her eyes twinkled as she said this, waiting for a response from me.

It never happened!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

We knocked on the door of the address given to us. A second time, then a third before we started to turn away, stepping down off the front porch. I did not hear the door open, but we were assaulted by a mixture of stale spilt beer and the unmistakeable odour of marijuana.

“Yeah? What you want?” A voice as rough as sandpaper, her words slurred to give you a hint of what lunch had been. The drifting smell of alcohol every time she opened her mouth.

I turned back. A woman of matchstick thinness leaned on the open door-edge having trouble standing and staying awake. Her eyes droopy, she was having trouble opening them not able to withstand the glare of mid-day. Her arms almost devoid of anything but bone. Her face that angular sharpness that you would see from some-one with one of the eating disorders.

“Fiona Dixon, is it?” I asked as I stepped back up onto the small front porch.

“Yep...so what! Who’s asking?”

She swayed towards us grabbing at the opposite door jamb to stop from falling out the door. I bent ready to catch her. The smell of stale beer and the pungent odour of marijuana smoke seemed to fall out through the door opening, assaulting my olfactory senses. I squeezed my nostrils shut as tears came to my eyes.

“Detective Lind and my partner Detective Shields...”

She had trouble turning her head to look at both of us. It was a shade above very difficult for her to focus on my ID Card that I held in front of her. She seemed to give up the effort required to lock onto us, with the focus onto our ID cards way beyond her.

“You have a brother? Jerry Wilson?”

“Coppers...jeez...whata do ya want? My brother? Yeah, nah. He ain’t my brother...yeah...he is my brother. My foster brother...”

“Jerry Wilson? He stays here with you about once a month. Stays overnight so we believe”.

I didn’t know that for sure but was willing to wing it as this woman wasn’t taking anything in. She bucked up in answering as though the name had just melted some of those frozen brain cells.

“Yep! He’s the man!” An upbeat inflection of happiness. I glanced across at Shelley wondering what we had. A true picture of what marijuana can do to some people.

Her saying ‘he’s the man’ used to be used during my days as an undercover Narcs Officer. It meant that he was that person’s drug supplier. I looked at the woman. I guessed she would be in her late thirties, early forties. Her hair hung in dirty strands. Her clothes needed to be chunked in the bin.

“Wait...wait right there...” She slurred as she turned and disappeared into the gloom of the house. I glanced at Shelley and we both acted simultaneously. Stepping away from each other and away from the open door. If she came out shooting, we were in the right spot according to our Procedures Manual. If she came out shooting, I think I may crap myself. The Joe of younger days had well and truly died! Both of us unclipped our holsters and placed our hands

around the grip of our Glocks just in case...standing with feet apart and solidly based we were ready for about anything. Seeing her trying to stand without the need to cling onto something solid meant she would more than likely fall over backwards from the recoil of her first shot. Either that or she would come out spraying bullets every which way.

She came back suddenly, lurching to the door opening holding a stubby of beer in her hand. I breathed deeply and clipped my holster. Shelley didn't, moving back and further away from the door but keeping that line of sight on the woman.

"What did you want...I got no money so's I can't give you anything even though it is only two weeks till Christmas".

"Jeremy Wilson..."

"I ain't got him...so's I can't give him to yers". She giggled at her own joke. "He's my brother...no, my foster brother..."

"What do you mean by that?" Shelley asked quietly, taking a step closer to the woman.

"We had the same foster parents. That's how we met...and we suffered together from that arsehole of a foster father. We told the cops, the DoCs Counsellors, even the Salvos. No one believed us. Every payday the bastard would come home drunk. Do me and Jerry up the arse and his missus as well. A disgusting human being. What about Jer? He's fine, isn't he? I need him to be fine...cause..." She stopped before she may have said something incriminating. She was street smart enough to not go down that road.

I lifted the photo I had of Dragan Polkowski aka Jeremy Wilson on my Mobile Phone.

"That's my Jer..." She muttered courageously as she bent to look closely at the print while hanging on grimly to the door jamb. Spilling some beer which got her attention for a longer period then when she had peered at the Wilson/Polkowski's picture. A smile that displayed discoloured teeth. There was more missing than what she had.

"Why did he have a Driver's Licence in the name of Dragan Polkowski?"

"Whadayafuckinreckon?" She yelled forcefully, gesturing with the hand that held the stubby. More of the liquid splashed onto the concrete surface of the porch...and my shoes. Looking up at me with a jerk of her head, she whined at the top of her voice. "You bastard coppers

took his licence off him. A coupla times. He couldn't drive no more. He had to work to survive so he got a Licence in another name, no worries. If there's nuttin' more, I wanna go ta sleep".

She shut the door in our faces, leaving us standing there with our mouths agape! My shoes splashed with beer.

Shelley started walking towards our Unmarked shaking her head.

"Is it me or just the mood I am in to-day? Do you get the feeling that society is going to hell in a basket? Are there any law-abiding, normal people left in the world? It doesn't seem so to me...we are seeing it more and more".

"Hang on Shells...this morning you were on top of the world when I picked you up...get that feeling back, huh?"

She glanced at me, nodding as she reached the Unmarked.

"You know, there's us and all the people we know. All upstanding generous, warm human beings". I waved at her as we stood beside the Unmarked. I was a little confused as it is normally me who whinges about the coming apocalypse. I looked across the expanse of the car roof, a worried look on my face.

"You okay? As I said, you were on top of the world this morning...you were glowing. Bring back that feeling, will you girlie?"

She glared at me but did not reply or go crook about how I had addressed her. I clucked my tongue.

"C'mon. Drive across to Tuggerah Railway Station so you can go home, will you?"

"Hang on Joe, what about lunch by the sea...and it has been the same bloke who has made the call to the local blokes about the rig obstructing his driveway. We may get something useful out of him".

I again glared at her wondering not for the first time how she could change her mood so bloody quickly. I had to trot to catch up to her as we walked two doors up the street. We stopped and looked around before walking in step down the driveway. There was no front fence or gate.

“Yeah? If ya selling, I ain’t buying. If’n ya preaching, I’m a non-believer, if you want money for some greenie cause, I’m broke ‘cause I’m on the measly pension and if you are something other than that, I don’t give a fuck”. The voice strained as he ran out of breath. He coughed then spat out an ‘oyster’ onto the flower bed in front of the veranda. A sizable spit of volume and carry, I thought. I smiled and nodded at the man. I hoped I have the lung capacity when I’m the same age to be able to do the same thing...as long as I divorced Tellie. There’s no way she would condone such a habit...into a bottle maybe...but onto her precious flower beds?

“Sir, we are Murder Detectives from Sydney. Joseph Lind and my partner Shelley Shield. We have been told that a very large Roadtrain has on occasions been obstructing your driveway, sir...is that correct?”

“So? That kinda doesn’t warrant two bloody cops coming all the way from Sydney for the caper, now does it? Wanting ta interview me as though I was the guilty person. I have paid me Taxes all me life so two of yers can trapeze all the way up here to ask about a bloody big double semi-trailer blocking my driveway on occasions!? Give me strength! That don’t add up to an economic solution or economy of scale to my way of thinking and a total waste of me contributions all me life”.

Another rough throaty hack, another oyster fertilising the front garden.

“Sir, we are investigating the death last night of the driver of said Rig who has parked here several times, so we have been told. Including the night before last...is that correct, sir?”

“The driver died...murdered you reckon? Serves him bloody right for parking across me drive-way...what a bloody pity. Serves the bloody sod right”. He repeated. “One of me neighbours getting a bit pissed off, so he whacks him because of the way he parks, huh? Now that’s a little hard to believe...even by me who has become somewhat of a cynic since I retired”. He wiped the drool from his mouth with a filthy, balled up handkerchief. “Once a month about. Sometimes less, sometimes more. As regular as clockwork...every month. What? Because I complained several times of him obstructing my driveway, I am considered a suspect into his death!? Un-bloody-believable!”

“No sir...we’re just looking into the man’s habits and background. His sister lives two down...I would just like to know your opinion of what you may have observed when he came to his sister’s address each month and parked his Rig on the street”.

The man grunted and stood to walk unsteadily to the veranda edge. Coming closer to us. His two crutches helped him to stand, still a little unsteadily.

“Good...I’d shake your hands but in doing so, I probably would fall over. I need to sit back down again...in the shade. Come up and sit yourselves...that drugged out bitch two doors down is his sister! That’s a turn-up for the book. She’s got a mouth on her that a navvy would be proud of! She’d make wharfies blush, that one”.

“We’re right, sir. It’s nice here in the sun”.

“Okay...but yer gotta look out for melanomas...they only come out when yer my age...sitting there silently inside ya somewhere, waiting for that chance to show themselves...like when yer old, like me”. He eased himself back onto a chair closer to us. “Good...he’s dead, you say”.

I nodded, suddenly realising that Fiona Dixon had not grabbed or understood the condition of her foster brother.

The gentleman coughed up phlegm again, spitting it out onto the flower bed that shouldered the veranda edge.

“I always have wondered what skulduggery the man was getting up to. Always in the middle of each month...or thereabouts. Every time he parked here, he would sling one of those silver tarps over the rig...you know, the gap between the first and second trailer...as though if’n it rains it may cause some damage. What I don’t know, but he did it every time he parked here. About four in the morning a white tradie’s van would pull up tight beside the Semi and open its rear door so that too, supported some of the tarp and kept the back of the van outa sight. I don’t know what they were doing but it sure looked suss to me. I was never game to take a closer look, but the two trailers were Fuel Tankers...what would they be doing? Siphoning off fuel I suspect and selling it on the black market seems to me. That’s about all I can say, Detectives, but I hope it is useful to you two”. He stood with some effort, turning towards the open front door into the house. “I need to go in for my lunch. My wife will be kicking me up the bum if I don’t go in soon. We both know who the captain of this ship is...it started the minute I retired, let me tell you. Take my advice, Officers. Die on the job, that way she can’t get to boss yers about”.

With some effort he unsteadily walked to the open door, waving us good-bye over his shoulder as he disappeared into the gloom of the house.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I sat for some moments in the Unmarked letting the air-conditioning cool the interior.

“I don’t know...siphoning off fuel out of the Tanker...seems a little...you know, far-fetched”. I shook my head and pulled at my earlobe. “I mean, how many litres can you hold in jerry cans in the back of a work van. Not much to make the process worthwhile I would think. Small change shit. I suppose there are some who aren’t too greedy and like the feel of doing something illegal”.

“Maybe that is where the cash came from that was found in our Vic’s pocket”.

“Mmm...I guess. They were well-worn notes, that’s for sure. Six hundred and eighty dollars in small notes...yeah...maybe”.

I wasn’t convinced but was willing to go with it for the time being. There was silence as Shelley moved off slowly.

“Mmm...die on the job, eh? Not bad advice...” This said with a smile on my face.

“Bloody hell, Joe. You’ve tried twice to go out that way. I don’t think I could survive number three”.

“Jeez it’s nice to be loved!”

I took out my mobile and scrolled down to the Wyong Copshop number. I identified myself to the pleasantly sounding Uniform who took the call.

“Um...I am the Lead Detective on the Case of the body found at the Mobil Service Station and Truck stop off the M1 at Wyong this morning. Detective Joseph Lind. We are pretty sure we have identified the poor man and have spoken to a ‘foster’ sister of the Vic. The woman’s name is Fiona Dixon”. I gave her the address. “Um...what I want to know *is* the woman and/or the address known to you local guys?”

I was asked to hold as she tapped away.

“Detective? Fiona Dixon has had several charges brought against her...um...drunk in public, offensive language and resisting arrest. She has been charged several times with no prison time afforded”.

“Any drug charges?”

“Um...yeah...um, again, several. In possession of a commercial quantity and several counts of selling cannabis. No time served”.

“She’s been exceptionally lucky, by the sounds of it”.

“More than lucky...an emphatic Magistrate, I reckon”.

“Do you have any...arrh...any exercise in place that may involve surveillance of her home...or herself”.

“No, Detective. She is considered small fry...”

“What about her supplier. Don’t you want to catch the next guy up the ladder. By the sounds of it...and going on the aroma that spilled out of her house when she opened the door to our incessant knocking just now, she is in a continual fugue state...like all the time”.

“I understand, Detective. While there are no ongoing operations, I will pass it up the line for consideration”.

A sudden thought made me sit up straight. I had trouble tempering my excitement. That light globe I often mention, was blinking crazy-like.

“Too late, young lady”. I muttered. “Her supplier was killed in a most brutal manner last night. A day after he slept at her place. She may be entering a very bad patch where even her mind could be affected by the fact her ready supply has been terminated...leave it for a month and then check up on her, will you. I suspect she is going to go through hell because her ready supply of weed is no more”.

I thanked the Officer and hung up, sitting there for some moments letting thoughts whizz around in my head.

Shells looked over at me, her eyebrows raised in a questioning manner.

“You think?”

“I don’t know really, but it just came to me from out of left field and beyond. It makes sense, doesn’t it? The rig is driven to Queensland regularly. Either going up the coast or coming back on the return trip, he picks up a supply of weed for his foster sister”.

“It’s as good as any other theory we have...”

“He can’t stop at her place on the way down as he has a full load of fuel and to park the rig in suburbia would be a big no-no...but with an empty truck with him heading back up north, he hasn’t the same limitations on where he can park...it’s a drug stop at that address, is all”.

“Where would he keep the stash?”

“I don’t know...maybe in the cabin, I guess...I remember a case where the Rebel Motorcycle Gang had several large rigs that drove between Sydney and Perth and back again...all legit...jeez...going back when I had just been taken on in the Murder Squad. A little before that. The Transport Company owned by the gang completely legit...except they had installed several additional fuel tanks onto both sides of the Prime Mover. These were filled with whatever drugs were available...moving them east-west or west to east. It took some time for the cops to twig to the arrangement with my old mate Knackers taking the prize for figuring it out. The gang then took to small planes to carry the contraband but in a way, a plane is more noticeable...sticks out like the proverbial...and when you have a man on the inside as Knackers was, the gang took a huge beating in losing a large stash of drugs, cash loss and loyal members”.

Thinking of my old mate Knackers made me smile and feel heavy-hearted at the same time. It had been a while since I had thought of him.

“You still miss him?” As though she could read my mind.

“Yeah...funny really. We didn’t have that type of friendship that needed constant contact and the opening of any raw emotions, secret thoughts, or troubles...you know? Talking buddy-style was not our go. But I consider that friendship on par with Muscles who we see at least once a fortnight or more...not including those times we rub shoulders with one another during working hours”.

“He doesn’t come out to death scenes any more...”

“Muscles? Nah. His back...I reckon he will call it quits soon...it looks like it”.

“Who will take his seat if that happens?”

“The only contender worthy of his chair is Brenda Wzerlic as far as I am concerned...”

Shelley nodded, leaned forward, and engaged the engine. She took off slowly saying she will head for Wyong Railway Station and leave me to my chores with the Night Shift members. The need for Lunch long forgotten. She'll remember it halfway to Sydney when she can't do a bloody thing about it. Suburban trains do not have a café carriage!

“You know when you said that Polkowski would always get a stash of weed for his foster sister? Why would he just leave it at that? Why not a bloody big load to on-sell?”

“Mmm...no, I don't think so. Even though those rigs are huge, there isn't that many places he can hide the stash of sufficient quantity to make it all worthwhile...”

“False fuel tanks?”

“Surely the Forensic people would ping to that”.

I rang Tellie who was still at the scene. I went over the gist of the conversation Shells and I had.

“Mmm...possible Joe...but no, there is no false fuel tanks. That method of concealing drugs is a subject of its own in Forensic Sciences one-oh-one. We scoured that truck from top to bottom. The only way he could transport even a small amount, say a couple of kilos of compressed bricks of cannabis, is behind the cabin in the Cat-Nap bin...”

“You know, a false base...a false side or back in that area...”

“Yeah...I'm sure that my guys would have checked that out, but I'll get them to go over the area again, okay?”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

What a beautiful morning, he thought to himself as he quietly closed the front door of his palatial home that had river frontage at Chipping Norton. It had just gone sun-up and there was still a chill in the air, soon to dissipate by the sun's warming rays.

He left for work at this time of day like clockwork, after a decent coffee, some orange juice and two boiled eggs before he hopped under a cold shower. The shower cubicle at the back of the house that was normally associated with the pool and outdoor activities with his kids. He never used the master bedroom's ensuite at this time of morning. His clothes for the next day always provided by his wife sometime during the day. Left hanging in the dressing area of the pool's adjacent ensuite, shower and toot.

He clicked a button on his keyring and the garage door began to rise slowly and silently.

As he waited for the door to rise to its maximum height, he looked at the cloudless sky. The blue of early morning always bringing a smile on how wonderful it was to be alive. He bent under the opening door and sat in his car waiting for the Garage door to open to its maximum height. When this occurred, he slipped the car out of gear and disengaged the handbrake. The natural slope of the Garage floor meant there was no effort required in letting the vehicle roll out of the Garage. He pushed the button for the door to descend and as he waited, he started up the engine. A meaty raw emanated from the sports car. This the reason for his habit every morning not wanting to wake any member of his family this early. That throaty note echoed then reverberated throughout the entire house if he started up the engine whilst still parked inside the Garage. His missus had threatened divorce if he ever started up the car in the garage, waking up the entire family. She hated losing sleep.

He scrolled both front windows down and activated the roof to disappear into its secret spot behind him thinking that on this morning, a drive into the Office with the roof down would be close to superlative! Again, he let the vehicle roll down to the kerb crossing where it stopped of its own accord because of the opposite camber of the roadway. He pushed the gear-lever into reverse, his left foot on the brake and turned to his left to await an opening in the traffic that allowed him to reverse out onto the road.

He felt more than saw a figure run towards him from the opposite direction.

All in black including a black hoodie.

The figure thrust a handgun towards him, almost touching him.

Bam, bam...bam, bam, bam.

Five shots. One into the head, the other four into his chest.

The guy was dead as the car began to reverse under its own steam, travelling slowly across the road, hit from the left and then the right, then crashing into a parked car on the other side of the road.

A Smash Repairer's dream of several busted vehicles.

The Shooter took off like a startled rabbit caught in a light beam. Running firstly down the road away from the carnage he had created, turning into a Council access footpath where he ran at top speed for its entire length between houses. This brought him out onto a small cul-de-sac where he hopped onto the back of a motorbike, casually putting on a helmet as the bike took off.

Its own meaty raw breaking the silence of the early morning.

They were out of the area before the first wail of a siren was even heard.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I knocked on the door three times and was turning away before we heard some-one tapping their way towards us. He opened the door slowly, having trouble getting his 'walker' in a position to permit him to open the door fully. I was about to utter something smart asking for a cup of water as we had waited so long to get an answer to our knock.

It was then that I understood the guy was blind.

"Um...sorry to trouble you, sir". I muttered, my embarrassment in the tone of my voice. I let him feel my and Shelley's ID Cards that had braille embedded. "Detective Joseph Lind and my partner Detective Shelley Shields..." I didn't have any idea why I had added volume to my voice as he was not wearing Hearing Aids. "Would a Mister Dragan Polkowski live at this address?"

“Who?” The old bloke asked in a croaky voice. He leant towards us as if this added weight to his enquiry. “Never heard of him...a Polish name. I’m sorry I can’t help you. Good morning to the two of you”. He began to close the door, again having problems manoeuvring the ‘walker’ out of the way before doing so.

“A Mister Jeremy Wilson, sir? Maybe you have heard of that name?”

He grunted as he stopped trying to close the door in our faces.

“A Mister Wilson? Jerry Wilson? I think he used to own this place before my son and daughter-in-law purchased it ten years ago, about...yes, ten years ago now. No...that’s not right. Oh...I forget so much these days. Um...Wilson...yes, he used to be the previous owner of this house. Jerry Wilson was the personal driver...like a chauffeur...or something like that. He wasn’t related to the original Owners, so my son had once said. That Mister Wilson lived in a sort of Grannie Flat underneath” He motioned downwards with a hand. “That’s where I live now. It’s comfortable, not too big where I can get lost like here in the ‘big house’. That’s why it took me a while to answer your knock. I was downstairs. There’s a single person lift”. Mentioning this to indicate to us how he had made it up to this level. Nodding continuously to stress the point.

“Who did Mister Wilson chauffeur?” Shelley asked.

“Oh...I’m getting mixed up. Mister Wilson? Yes, he lived here before my son purchased the house.

“Would you happen to have an address for him? His new address, perhaps?”

“Oh, dear. I don’t know...you mean the people who used to own this place or Mister Jerry Wilson? Mmm...I doubt it...and why would we have an address for him after so many years?”

Why indeed, I thought, almost saying the words.

“I do recall the Owners were in partnership...or something like that with a bloke who owns the Independent Service Station out on Newbridge Road...halfway up the hill...yes, halfway up the hill from the river...heading towards Liverpool”.

I nodded, thanking him for his time. As we stepped down from the Porch area, he was still having trouble closing the door with his ‘walker’ constantly stopping him from doing so.

I turned to ask whether he needed help only to find he had eventually succeeded.

“Be a proper bastard, wouldn’t it...being blind”.

“Yeah...though I know a few people who have twenty-twenty vision but are as blind as bats!”

Shelley left it alone.

We deliberately left the organised chaos two streets down well enough alone.

Another Murder Squad team had that sorry state well in hand. A bloke had been shot to death as he reversed off his property in the early hours of yesterday morning. The Shooter unknown. The Vic well known to us cops. Jamas ‘Jimmy’ Tennelli who was in partnership with Leonardo ‘Tony’ Bocca in a firm that supplied Bodyguards to the famous and near famous and wannabe stars, both national and international ones visiting our shores. The Firm also supplied Bouncers to certain Dives and reputable Dance Clubs, Musicfests and the more upmarket Leagues Clubs, Pubs, and the like.

Their business crossed over this great land from Sydney to Perth.

We knew the firm colloquially as ‘Heavies for Hire’ though their registered name was a little more sedate...and obtuse. TB Enterprises. Neat, huh? Their boys were often like that, causing as much damage to drunken sods and anyone who took their fancy as that disease. It had been whispered for a long time that these Bouncers and Bodyguards were the ones who supplied the majority of drugs at Rave Parties and the like. There was little to back up that theory...the whispers though, constantly resurfaced making you wonder on the veracity of the claims.

I stopped when we got to our Unmarked. Shelley stood at the driver’s door, looking around wondering what I had noticed as I stared into the middle distance.

“We could have saved ourselves a lot of shoe-leather and time Shells, by just looking up the RG Records to find out who were the original Owners. They would also have a forwarding address...maybe another source would be the Local Council...” I was repeating what she had just said.

Shelley nodded, a tight smile as she looked at me over the roofline of our Unmarked.

“The local Council should have something like that, shouldn’t they? The people we are looking for I reckon, built the house some ten years ago”. Looking back at the house that took

up the entire building block. “They’d have the name on the Building Applications submitted to Council. Also, you know, Council Rates, Water Rates, stuff like that...Liverpool Council I reckon...narh...more than likely Bankstown Council”.

“Good one, Shells. That’s where we will go after finding this Petrol Station, eh?”

We both sat and waited to allow the air-con to cool the interior of the car.

“Get onto Newbridge Road”. I instructed, saving the directions being muttered by that infuriating woman within the thing-a-ma-jig.

We followed Newbridge Road almost into Liverpool before we hit any Petrol Stations at all along this stretch of road. Shelley turned slowly into an Independent Service Station a generous spit away from Liverpool.

“Mmm...notice the name above the entry door. It certainly isn’t Wilson. I’ll just ask to be on the safe side, eh?”

I groaned as I alighted from the Unmarked. It was getting lower and lower to my way of thinking. Harder and harder to alight or plop back into the passenger seat. I would never say a word of this to Shelley especially when she was on my case for not keeping up the regular exercise regime morning and night down in the Basement Gym. I reckon I may have put on a couple of pounds because of my reticence for that daily regime. I could tell that Shelley kept up with the swimming and whatever by the smell of chlorine emanating from the closed area of the Unmarked.

I ambled into the Service Counter, showing my ID Card to a more and more nervous chap behind the counter. Geez, he’d be hard to break at a serious interrogation, I thought as I smiled at the man. His brow had popped dozens of sweat beads already!

“Your name, sir?”

“M...M...Marek Mohammod...” He stuttered nervously. His demeanour was starting to massage the hairs on the back of my neck. The fact that I was a Murder Detective only adding to his discomfort.

“Are you the registered Owner of this Business, sir?”

“Yes...me, my two brothers and two cousins. My father looks after the books...the business is in his name”. The singsong of Pakistani or Indian people made me smile. I loved the musical tone within the speech.

“How long have you run this Business with your family?”

“Oh...some ten years, I suppose. Yes, ten years”. He nodded to emphasise his statement. “Yes, that is right...” He repeated as though he was having a conversation with himself.

“Do you recall the name of the chap who you purchased the Business from?”

“Oh no...not at all, Officer. My father did all the negotiations when we were buying the Service Station...”

“Does the name Jeremy Wilson or Jerry Wilson jig with you?”

“Oh, I do not know your Mister Wilson, Officer. I am sorry”.

“How about Dragan Polkowski?”

He shook his head vigorously.

“No, I do not know that name, Officer. I am sorry”.

“Who do you get your fuel from?”

“Oh! Two Firms that I know of. One here in Sydney from the Silverwater Refinery and the other from a Firm named Capricornia Fuel Distributors. They supply every three to four weeks...or more regular-like if we need it”.

I nodded my head, placing two bottles of chilled water on the counter. I am not a believer in coincidences, so the name of the Firm jolted me.

“Same driver every time?”

“I cannot be certain as I am not here when they come to top up our supply...usually early to late evening, I think. I finish my shift at six which is before the tanker comes in, yes? Oh, Officer. That is fine. We always want to thank our brave Police Officers for keeping us safe”.

I held up a hand placing a five dollar note in front of him.

“We always pay our way, sir. That way there can be no accusations of misconduct or bribery”.

I walked out of the Service Station wondering why the guy had been so nervous...even with the casual banter we had just conducted.

We never made it to the Liverpool Council buildings as we were summoned to be back-up for a drive-by shooting on the Restaurant strip at Church Street, Parramatta. Apparently, all hell had broken loose with various customers and people being hurt in the need to escape the melee...and in doing so, only adding weight to the stampede.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

He was as nervous as all hell!

Even jumping at his own shadow since his partner was shot dead outside the family home a few days ago. He did not consider it a random attack but a planned targeted exercise. For the life of him he could not even guess at the reason, though he could name a few arseholes who might have been behind the hit. If they targeted Jimmy, it was only a matter of time before they came looking for him, so he thought nervously.

He had three of his most trusted ‘Bouncers’ stationed in or in front of the Office Building his Firm occupied. Scaring the bejesus out of his small group of Office staff who were unused to having the stern-faced musclemen standing over them. The comforting words of the Office Supervisor crooning that it was for their own safety seemed to fall on deaf ears. They took the offered words of sympathy as though they were in deep trouble themselves and no amount of cooing decreased their anxiety levels.

Since his partner had been gunned down two days ago now, he had been interviewed by the local cops and two Murder Detectives who had pushed hard, almost accusing him of organising his partner’s demise. Then three Detectives from the Gang Related Team had interviewed him less than an hour ago. All this did was to heighten his anxiety levels as he knew by all these cops’ visits, they didn’t have a clue who was behind Tennelli’s shooting.

As long as the shooter remained out there, his life wasn’t worth a celery stick!

He knew he needed to act quickly and decisively to show the rest of the ‘boys’ that he was in control and not worried by his partner and long-time mate’s shooting death. What he should do to repay the favour, he hadn’t worked out yet, but he knew he had to retaliate otherwise his name wasn’t worth zilch in the eyes of those he would normally impress.

The biggest problem with that was the fact like the cops, he didn’t have a clue who was behind the shooting of his friend and business partner. He’d put out ‘feelers’ to try and find out but several had already come back with nothing to show for the splash of cash he had provided.

The phone rang, put through by his ever-suffering Private Secretary who he reckoned, could control the business by herself. If this tit-for-tat killing continued, she may very well need to do so. He smiled at the notion and thought it a bloody silly idea. There was no need to press fate, he murmured to himself as he picked up the receiver.

“Tony? Louis Ortello for you. Watch him, as he is a snake in the grass only loyal to the highest bidder”. She advised him as though she had a finger on the pulse of the Underworld. She knew little in fact, about the other side of the business that involved both he and Tennelli. Ortello had been the ‘line’ Boss for ages. Both Tennelli and he had been green-horn runners for the big man as they had started their business. Ortello had been the one to provide the initial cash injection to start it up. Tony Bocca had no qualms that Ortello would ‘remove’ an irritation if it got too out of hand. While Ortello demanded loyalty from his underlings, he wasn’t averse to blowing away any guy who tried to get the better of *The Man*.

Tony Bocca took some moments to answer, suddenly realising that the cops would already have tabs on all Office calls and those Mobiles he had. Three to be exact.

“Louis? Good to hear from you. It’s been a while”. The false bonhomie laid on thick. “I think it’s about time we shared another coffee, eh? At our usual place, right? Say in two hours? Okay by you? Sure, see you then”.

He knew that the big man would have sussed out the problem pretty quick knowing the cops would have quickly tapped every phone line in and out of the Firm. Thus, the invite for coffee and a neutral zone that they had used before when discussing business...of the other kind.

The meeting took place in a very public place. One of Parramatta’s best known and most popular Cafes where the front doors were pushed back for the entire width of the shop so that the tables and chairs seemed to just extend out onto the wide public footpath. This was so for nearly every Café on the famous Church Street Restaurant strip. The seating area now even

went out into the Parking lane that was now a series of 'in and outs' to accommodate the extra seating that this encroachment permitted.

Approval by a Council edict giving the area a certain cosmopolitan feel.

They shook hands, knuckle kissed and shoulder-tapped before sitting at a table that was less than a metre from the cruising traffic. They were in the process of ordering a light meal and coffee when for a split second, the Universe seemed to stand still...silently...waiting. If they saw anything suspicious it was hard to tell as a Motorbike seemed to prop beside them. The pillion-rider leaned across almost touching the target before opening fire with a bam, bam...bam, bam, bam.

Five bullets all of which found their mark.

Leonardi Bocca looked up in surprise, slumped forward, that stunned and surprised look his final gesture that quickly, slid off his face. He then slipped sideways as the fusillade of bullets found their mark. He momentarily sagged then fell sideways off his chair, dead before he hit the ground.

Louis Ortello went to slowly unholstered his small handgun as the bike kicked into gear and sped away, turning the next corner, to quickly disappear. In the absolute mayhem that followed, Ortello drifted into the mob of people going each and every way just wanting to get the hell out of there.

It would be later that night that I would notice his presence at the shooting scene by an exhaustive examination of all CCTV footage that gave a decent view of the kill zone.

When all persons were interviewed, most could recall the staccato and rhythm of the gun shots and very little else. There was uncertainty as to whether the Shooter was in a car or on a bike as a pillion-passenger. Very little was learnt by the cops when going through the various versions from those who admitted seeing the shooting and who were near the Victim. There were even ridiculous theories that Ortello had been with a very beautiful woman who turned a lot of heads. The beautiful woman with the other man and not Bocca, the victim.

People wonder why eye-witness accounts of the gorier cases do not hold much sway as far as the Police are concerned, but if you had the ability to listen through the myriad versions from persons almost rubbing shoulders with the Victim, you would then understand the reticence of the Police to take much notice or weight of the witness statements.

Luckily, there was more than enough CCTV coverage of the area to obtain an accurate picture of the proceedings. However, there would be up to a fortnight's delay while all that digital footage was analysed and accorded some usefulness in the progress of the Case. It would then be passed onto the Murder Team in charge.

The entire block was shut down causing massive traffic chaos and constant complaints from other Restaurant owners who were now missing the early Friday night eaters. No matter what we said to placate their whinging, they still carried on waving their arms about for added emphasis. When they realised we could have this area, including several other streets closed to all traffic for most of the night, they went into apoplectic fits.

Both Shells and I stayed with the two Lead Detectives, Don Ballard, and Ruth Kindle until we had completed every interview with those who may have seen something that could help...for nil result.

The Digital Forensic Group was cataloguing all CCTV footage of the area. Two guys sitting in this new Camper-home fiddling dials, switches, and rocker buttons. I was looking over the shoulder of another Digital Forensic Officer who was tabulating the feed.

"Stop, Nathan!" I yelled into his ear. "That's Louis Ortello, isn't it?"

No one could help me with the identification. I asked for a close-up print of the well-dressed hood so that I could pass it around to those Witnesses who were still to be interviewed.

"Who's he?" Detective Ruth Kindle asked as I gave her a copy of the print.

"Louis Ortello. A gun for hire who was best mates with Gatto...the Melbourne Crime Lord. What is he doing in Parramatta and more importantly, dining with Bocca whose life was to end within minutes I don't know but he was sitting there to identify the target sitting opposite him...perhaps? Has anyone interviewed him?"

"Not that I am aware of, no." Kindle replied, still a little fazed by it all.

She had been in the Murder Squad for about eighteen months with not that many 'kills' to her belt buckle. Don Ballard was another Dee Three who was in the twilight years of his career and if one were to believe the rumours, was going out within a couple of months, expending his Sick Leave and a bit of his Long Service leave to enable him to go out earlier.

I canvassed the remaining witnesses with the print of Ortello. No-one recognised him or could place him sitting opposite the target.

Not one person!

I stood with Ballard, Kindle and Shells going over what we knew.

“Ortello is a Melbourne based hood and stand-over merchant. Muscle for hire though I do not think he is into murder yet. It may prove fruitful in contacting the Victorian coppers to update you on that assessment. To be honest, I’d say he passes on his requests to much younger ‘heavies’ rather than doing it himself like in the old days when he was considerably younger”. I stood there looking at the scene as the Forensic people commenced packing up their gear. “I wouldn’t be surprised that Ortello was used as the ‘point man’. Sitting in that position to identify the target for the shooter. That would suggest they are out-of-towners who knew the big bloke quite well...and didn’t have a clue as to the identity of their target. Brought in from Interstate and you can bet they are halfway back to Melbourne on the early evening shuttle flight”.

No-one replied making me feel as though my opinion was way out past left field. I looked at Ballard who stroked his chin as he slipped his iPad into his coat pocket. He glanced at me, nodding in agreement. I was thankful that I had at least one ally in the group, even if it was somewhat ‘iffy’ in its exuberance.

I left the situation with Ballard and Kindle knowing I was leaving the Case in very capable hands.

“Don? Are you aware that Tony Bocca is the long-time partner and friend of Jimmy Tennelli? He was gunned down in not dissimilar circumstances to Bocca. A couple of days ago. Early morning out the front of his residence. A coincidence, huh?”

Ballard was like me; coincidences didn’t occur very often. He knew who the Murder Squad team was who were looking after the Tennelli hit.

“Might be a clever idea to get together and start a collaborative exercise, don’t you think?” Ballard replied. “Someone sure doesn’t like what the two were doing...or maybe the other way, not doing”.

I nodded thinking that a tit-for-tat was now on the cards. The trouble with that was we didn’t have a clue who might have done the shootings...and the why! It could be an old established

gang, a Bikie hit or an Interstate concern wanting to take over the drug territory of the two up here...it could even be Ortello wanting to punish the two because they went over his head in organising the hit of Wilson...if we wanted to hold onto that theory!

I shook my head to clear it of all these guesses...

“I’ll pass it by the Boss before we do”.

He had been in the job long enough to know that a Crime Team allocation for two obvious hits could only be commenced by the Boss after he had received approvals to do so from upstairs. From the ‘shoulder-boards’.

I nodded, slapped him on the shoulder and said our farewells for the night. It was past ten and it had been a long day. Shelley had left some hours ago wanting to catch Brin as he came off duty at the Liverpool Police Station. He could drive her to her car parked at Ingleburn Railway Station, then follow her home. A safe alternative.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“They just took him to Hospital...” Shelley was white-faced, her hands trembled.

“What’s the word?”

“Not looking good”.

“Has his family been notified?”

“Yes. The Deputy Commissioner did the honours. I believe his wife is in the Waiting Area at the Hospital while they do their magic on the man...fair dinkum, he needed to lose a lot of that weight he had on him. He was a time-bomb waiting to explode”.

“He was that weight when he was the 2IC Night Shift under Bellamy. That’s what? Almost five years ago now. I don’t know whether he ever took the need to lose weight seriously...like Bellamy, it’s bound to catch up with you...um...what happens with his vacant seat? You know, the Head of the Murder Squad?”

“Hoping to warm it, are you?” A smile on her face as she knew I had no wishes to jump up to that managerial level.

“Shit no! I have always been vocal in my objection to be placed in that role even if it is only acting there until he bounces back...if he does...”

“You’re the most senior Detective, Joe. You’re next in line”. She replied quietly.

“Fuck that. I don’t want it...you’ve been my partner for what? Close to ten years? When have you ever heard me saying I wanted that job?”

“Well...yeah, I know but it could be said you are blocking the way of those under you who do and would take on the challenge”.

“That has been pointed out to me before even when Peta Daniels was still here and did a bit of seat warming when both Abbey or Butler took time off. Them’s the breaks, huh? I’d say I may have just become your acting boss!” I smiled glumly.

“Bloody hell, can this get any worse?” Shelley moaned. She still had that tight smile, so I knew she was just wanting to stir me up!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I was conducting the usual Monday morning Staff meeting except it was Thursday, my second day of ‘warming’ Clive Butler’s chair. For how long no one knew, but I wanted to stamp my authority on my fellow Detectives while I could.

After going through the usual conduct that was expected of all of us, I centred onto the investigation that was causing some heartburn in some of the Dees. We were copping a fair bit of flak from certain members of the Media, accusing us of not investigating the deaths of both men as they were nothing but crims...good riddance!

“Right...” I clearly stated, looking to Waters and DeSilva who were investigating the Tennelli shooting...and Ballard and Kindle who had snagged the Bocca death. “Tony Bocca and Jimmy Tennelli have been an inseparable item going back to the days when they stuck stringently to crucifixion for common thieves. They’ve done time together and operated

several very lucrative business deals together, both legit and straddling the line. Drug supply and selling appears to have been their lot on the illegal side of their business, earning them squillions over almost a ten-year period of operations. It has me buggered why Narcs or the Gang Related Crimes Team haven't done a fly-by or a pick-up on the two..."

"Don't go and start any rumours by your innuendos, Joe. Besides, the two of them are smart enough...or were smart enough for so many years to be well and truly away from the coal face. It's always the little blokes who take the fall. You should know that from your days with the Narcotics Branch".

I nodded to show I was in agreement with the sentiments. I continued.

"Yeah...but their guilty ways have finally caught up to them. We have this common staccato of gunfire that is the connecting fact that both blokes were hit by the same Shooter".

"That's a bit broad, Joe...what? Are you going on the rhythm of the gunshots? That's not exactly kosher, is it?"

I looked at the four Detectives facing me who had Bocca and Tennelli's Cases, thunderstruck that they had not even made that connection. It bounced out at me when I read the Murder Files on both deaths. Perhaps it was their fault because they did not converse with one another...maybe! To be fair, they had no reason at that time to collaborate with one another. Reading each other's Murder Book was never thought of. The added work in doing so not appreciated by any of the four.

The next item for discussion I knew CB had the warm and fuzzies over.

I wanted to fling both reports prepared by each team on the shooting deaths out through the bloody window, telling the four of them they needed to do an English Grammar Course before they commenced writing something up in a Murder Book for my information...and they needed to converse with one another better than they have done up until now.

"You must remember the four of you, these Murder Books can be used in Court...and this applies to all those who have failed to do any back Course that is available to you". I looked around at the rest of the Murder Squad members. There were groans from quite a few as this had been one of CB's favourite and oft repeated mantras. "It appears to me most of you need to do these courses again...or for the first time, it is obvious that you are reticent in putting up your hand for the short course...so...I am doing it for you. Understand? For those who type away with Word Spellcheck and Grammar-check on to help them construct their daily

Reports and comments, you may just escape. Yes? You know how to use those two very efficient tools, don't you? No? Yes? And also check to see we have Australian English as the preferred spelling of words? You haven't a clue what I am talking about, do you? Most of you? Have any of you done a Computer Class that the Force makes available to you? I think I know the answer to that! I think I will organise those who obviously need it to do a suitable computer lesson or three. I think one each from either team will do it together while the other two continue with the Cases and then vicey-versa. Okay? I'll let you know the scheduling in the next couple of days. Another thing that maybe fruitful...when you have completed a Report ready for my signature, read through it carefully and pick up bad grammar and spelling mistakes...even repetition of the facts...proof-read your work! Don't just accept as done, okay!?"

There were more collective groans as most realised their fate.

I will bet a ten that one of them mutters something about power going to my head. I can half see why CB used to grumble about certain Reports that he had to spend useless hours amending and re-writing. I was not going to go down that road. The guilty parties had to realise they needed to buck up in certain areas. Grammar was one of the big ones. In a sense I could not blame them for their shortcomings. Most of them were old school, born and educated before computers became the Teacher's Pet. I had to wonder how they had managed to slip through the net for the Computer classes that the Force regularly ran for such miscreants. Their reply to that question was a shrug of the shoulders and a dumb looking expression that almost had me laughing.

As their boss, that would not be a good look.

I looked up and eyed each in turn.

"You will be handed back any Report that fails my test...not a red or blue colour anywhere when you e-mail them to my computer...which is the same as yours. I am not here as your English Grammar Teacher or Tutor either, so you better take notice and learn when you sit in those classes...understand? And for Christ's sake, do a read-through and amendment of every Report you prepare for my signature. You will be continuously asked to fix the Report before I ever put my signature to it. Understand".

I again looked at all who sat opposite, nodding as I did.

"Right...Bocca and Tennelli...partners in crime for decades".

Again, I addressed the four.

These killings were the biggest skulduggery to hit our desks for a long time. We already had the Gang Related Crimes team breathing down our necks wanting to take over both Cases. That was not going to happen while I warmed the seat.

“Good mates for even longer. Do not believe they had been operating nothing but a very legit business for the last decade or two, and that is all. The two would still have fingers in the profitable portion of the drug trade, don’t you worry about that. They began as runners for several famous Kings Cross thugs in the Nineteen Eighties including the Ortello franchise. They’ve come a long way since then. Who would want both dead and why? *Why*, that is the important question you must ask yourselves every day. Those guys and all their cohorts do not like rocking the boat as they have appeared to have done in the last week or two...very violently so it seems going on someone’s response. Why kick the bloody can down the street so everyone can hear it and have enough time to react to it. That little word *why*! You need to find that out. *Why* were the two killed by the same shooter...why?”

I cleared my throat before continuing.

“As I said, the why. Check with Gang Related Crimes to see whether any persons were killed, threatened, or jumped the queue which would not be viewed very favourable with either side. See if there has been any evidence of mischief going on below eye level...anything that warrants the killing of Tennelli and Bocca as payback. Have a sit-down conference with the people in the Police Intelligence Team. They may know something. Have another sit-down conference with the Uniforms who patrol the area of the homes of the two...they may know something...ditto Vice and Narcotics...okay? Do your research on the two...that may give you a why which would be halfway to identifying the shooters, okay?”

I could hear their groans of opposition as they filed out of the Office...my Office until further notice.

“Um...Ballard, Kindle, Cec Waters and DeSilva? Stay here and close the door after all the others have departed”.

We sat there in silence for some moments. I shuffled some papers placing them in a manila folder as I waited. Ruth Kindle waited beside the door to close it after the rest of the team had left.

“Right...as much as we dislike these types of tit-for-tat shootings, neither do the Crims of this fair city. A major re-shuffle of the Underworld is taking place right before our eyes, so I believe. Some little boys have grown impatient with the guys above them and have successfully eliminated them leaving a sizable slice of the drug market up for grabs with the fittest and strongest gaining a larger share than they had previously. As I said before, the Narc boys, Police Intelligence and Gang Related Crime people should have some idea on that theory. Use them. Wring them dry on any intel they may have”.

I held up one of the Murder books to them.

“You four must realise the cross-connections you have with you, Don and Ruth Kindle handling Tennelli’s shooting death and you Cec and ‘Missin’ D’Silva covering the Bocca shooting death. I’ll take a long shot that has not been confirmed yet and say the same shooter carried out both shootings...Ballistics will be able to tie the handgun to both deaths. Worry them until they start telling you to piss off. I doubt they would use the same pistol, but you never know. Bocca and Tennelli were partners going back years as I’ve already said. I’d like the four of you to combine efforts in the two shootings...”

“You want us to set up a Task Force, Joe?”

I indicated with my hand to cool it.

“No, not a Task Force. You know as well as I do that such a team cannot be formed without the specific orders from on high...and you should know from experience that as soon as you mention those two words, the Media is all over it! No, I want you four to work together until further notice. Understand? Swapping thoughts and evidence gathered, not as a Task Force but as a group counsel between researching Murder Dees”.

They all nodded. All had a look of ‘why Boss’ as though they were still not comprehending the need to cooperate with each other.

“Keep me across it at all times, okay. I will watch your back. Okay, that’s it but I still expect you to make yourselves available for those Courses. Okay?”

They filed out of the Office in an upbeat mood I would like to think. Unfortunately, the way they walked out did not indicate that.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I leaned back in the Executive black leather chair and made the arrangements for almost half of the daytime Murder Dees to attend those computer classes. As I was signing off, hopefully catching all those who had not attended these classes in the mid-Jurassic Period, Shelley ambled into the Office. I shook my head as Clive Butler had also missed those classes. It was as if he felt he didn't need to go...or didn't want to go so the exercise for all others who showed their reluctance were struck off the list for these important classes. Here he was, moaning about the standard of the Reports provided for his perusal and signature with him possibly not much better than those he complained about. That was a notion that had no basis in fact, but I was willing to go with it.

"You're really not enjoying yourself, are you?" She commented as she sat opposite me. "I'm bugged if I can get past the positive identification of our victim found at the early Truck Stop up Wyong way".

"You've come to a complete stop, huh? No idea where or which way you should go?"

She nodded and looked down at her hands.

"Just about". She replied sullenly.

"You okay?" I asked as I leaned forward as though I was interrogating my partner.

"Yeah...nah...I don't know".

"It seems a little stupid but that old bloke? Up the Central Coast at Long Jetty? Two up from Fiona Dixon's place? He may have been hitting the nail on the head about fuel robbery..."

She shook her head.

"Can't see it, Joe...truly. Think about it. Wilson aka Polkowski is killed in a most brutal way...but his tankers, both trailers were void of any juice. Now, common sense would tell you that while each tanker may take thirty-odd thousand litres of fuel, the same amount would not fit into a Tradie's van! For what it's worth, let's be generous and say he had maybe five hundred litres of fuel to place into the van...sure, petrol doesn't weigh as much as water but what would be the maximum load such a van could carry? Let's say around two hundred litres max was transferred to the van. Where is the profit in that?"

“Mmm...yeah, I see what you mean...maybe that is it. What he had managed to keep for his little operation was the last of the juice. He was heading back up to Queensland to get another load...he earning money on the side from this little scam...it's possible. You know as well as I that these small-time crims have never completed a course in Economics or Accountancy at Sydney Uni”.

“Yeah...that makes sense...I know what you mean but still...they pay less fuel excise in Queensland. It's cheaper per litre up there than down here, especially the wholesale prices. I don't know the margins, but with a full fuel load in the Roadtrain, there had to be a sizable profit margin...but in the van? I have my doubts. Those Pakis out along Newbridge Road? They admitted to a load every three to four weeks...there would have to be others willing to take it on as well as they could not accommodate seventy-odd thousand litres by themselves in that Service Station...and they sure wouldn't sell that amount of fuel in a week...so the Tanker had other places where he could drop the fuel off...and that is not an easy task to park the thing out of the way. At a Service Station would make sense and not raise too many eyebrows...all privately owned affairs I would imagine. Not a corporate Service Station. The question of a Road Tanker keeping up to five hundred litres of fuel in the tanks is not right. Leaving an amount like that is cause for concern as the fuel/air ratio would be such that it would be a travelling bomb ready to blast at the slightest spark. They completely void each and every segmented part of a tanker and vent it for some time so that there is no build-up of vapours...that kind of dispels the theory of a little fuel on the side as pocket-money”.

“Yeah...maybe that is worthwhile following up. See if the Fraud Squad has had any eyes on privately owned concerns...or whether they are aware of such a practise...now...what's eating you?”

She sat back though her shoulders sagged. She was about to tell me when she turned to see the Deputy Commissioner and several people in toe, enter the Office. Shelley knew when she wasn't wanted. She stood, nodding to the Deputy Commissioner who was not her favourite man. She raised her eyebrows at me as she walked to the door, closing it behind her as she stepped out onto the squad room floor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

“A quiet word with you, Detective Lind”.

He leant towards me as though he was going to tell me the secret location of Hitler’s gold!

I nodded, gesturing them to four chairs opposite me with a wave of my arm. You could never object to his presence no matter what time or what work you had on your plate. It didn’t work that way! When he walked in, all other commitments stopped, and you placed your attention squarely on him.

The DC cleared his throat, not bothering to introduce me to his colleagues though I knew them by sight. The woman looked more familiar than the other two men.

“You’ve made it clear in the past that you do not enjoy sitting in this chair. Would I be right in stating that, Detective?” The DC again leant towards me as he asked the question. He was obviously used to chatting with others in the stratosphere he shares with similar graded persons. Always talking to one another in muttered terms so the gist of the conversation can never be divulged to one who may be eavesdropping, but was not of the sufficient grade to really belong...

“Yes. I have made it obvious that I prefer to be a Murder Detective doing what a Murder Detective is supposed to do. Solve the murders and put away the person or persons responsible”.

“And very capably, if I must say so, Detective Lind. You do realise that there were many eyes watching you when you did that stint being Head of that Task Force in the AFP a few years ago now. You not only surprised many people, but there were those who always stated you were a cut above the ordinary Officer with that rare skill in dealing with people. Every one of those persons whom you selected to be a part of your team wrote glowing reports as to your ability to control, lead and to permit them some latitude in how to do their job. A few people were a little concerned about the people you picked, but in hindsight, they were all the right people to bring that sad exercise to an end. We were all pleased with your performance. Why is it that you now do not want staff control when you did so well in that instance?”

I looked down at the desktop, trying to put into words what my brain was kicking over. Eventually I replied, if not a little unsteadily.

“Um...I...um...I thought about it a lot...and to be fair, I had a lot of help during that period with those above me who permitted me to do a few crazy things. And my family and close circle of friends helped me continuously. To be honest, it took me a lot of soul-searching and words of encouragement from many unnamed people to carry me through that stint. That scenario was slightly different to the day to day running of the Murder Squad. Even though I was head of that Task Force, I felt as though my abilities as a Detective were being used...I felt that I was still working at the coal face, a part of a Special Task Force. Advising and asking questions of my team to permit them to think outside the box. Too many times you hear about a person not fitting the mould, unable to think outside that square. All the people that I picked for that team, were willing to do that...and more importantly, allow me to lead...and follow without a thought of the gradings and hierarchy above them. Here, as the Head of the Dayshift Murder Group, I would be more remote from that activity...quarantined in any case, sitting in this Office just listening to people describe their thoughts about their Cases”.

“I see...you do realise that as the most senior and the highest graded Officer on the floor, you are blocking those below you from ever volunteering for the overseeing role”.

“With respect sir, I believe that with three Grade Four Detectives on the Daylight Shift and four on the night shift, there is sufficient numbers of Grade Fours to select from without including me...”

“But you are the first choice...not only in days served seniority, but in capability, honesty, integrity and work ethic, Joe”.

I nodded to acknowledge his compliment.

“You have heard of the Peter Principle?” I let the meaning hang in the air.

“I cannot order you to take on this job...or to enjoy it. It is wrong in the scheme of things to just promote a person because he maybe next in line. Because of that, I intend to slot Denise Turner into this position”. He turned to the woman sitting uncomfortably beside him. She had looked familiar to me, but I was lost as to why...or where. “This is Denise Turner. She has carried out promotional assignments as head of the Fraud Squad, the Child Abuse Team and White-Collar Crime. Very professionally and without a bad report from her juniors or those above her. I am suggesting she sit in Clive’s position until further notice. Are you okay with that?”

“Arrh...yes sir. Welcome aboard Mz?”

“Missus Turner. I have been married to the same lazy bloke for close on twenty years. Two kids who I adore and love as much as my husband. Most refer to me as Denise or Denny. I’ll accept either over Missus Turner though I should be addressed as such when the hierarchy are about”. She smiled. There was not a trace of bombast in the tone of her voice. Quite the opposite. She appeared to be one of those females who stepped up the ladder through genuine talent, perseverance, and hard work.

I nodded at her, stood, and extended my arm to shake her hand. She gave me a broad smile.

“You have built a very notable reputation for yourself, Detective. I hope we can work together with you helping me through any hiccups that may come my way. I would like to think I can approach you at any time for advice...and your opinion on all your fellow Detectives would be a good start”.

“It will be my pleasure, Mis...umm...Denny. I will always make myself available if you are unsure of which direction you need to take on any Case...or with staff problems, though there are few with most teams tasking very well...there are no bludgers on the floor which for such a considerable number, is very unusual. We have been blessed with good men and women across the board. Even our Clerical staff members are hand-picked for their industry and talents. You can thank our Head Clerk...and DS Church and DS Clive Butler for that arrangement”.

I had heard of a/g DS Turner through the corridors of rumour. She was a straight shooter, very resilient though a little bit Mother Hen with her staff. I will have to see her in action before I pass comment. Even though Peta Daniels had sat in this chair for extended periods, it was the first time that a woman would be in control of the Squad for the foreseeable future. That made me think of Clive Butler.

“How is he, sir?” I asked as I focused back onto the DC.

“Not good. I doubt he will ever fully recover or be well enough to take up the baton for us. The prognosis doesn’t fill oneself with any confidence, I’m afraid”.

“Can he take any visitors? I know there are a few of us who want to go see him. He was our boss for a lot of years”.

“I think they are limiting visitors at this stage. Family mostly. That sort of thing”.

I glanced at a section of wall to the right of the floor to ceiling window. There were A4 sized photographs of our previous Bosses, going back in time to the hectic nineteen seventies. There were eight photos arranged carefully with little brass plaques on the bottom of each photo. Name, age at retirement or death, number of years spent being the 'Captain' of the Murder Squad. It was Abbey's idea to give a sense of history and importance. Clive was the last photo on the montage. The placing of the brass plaque onto the photo frame was the responsibility of the most senior Detective. The task would fall to me.

Turner followed my gaze.

"I guess I will need a formal photograph of myself to go up on the Rogues' Wall. I will organise the Police Photographer to do a sitting...can you arrange for the A4 frame and the little brass plate?"

I nodded. It seemed that was her way of letting it be known that the chances of CB coming back to work was close to zero. My heart felt for the guy...and his family. They would be hurting for some time...a thought flashed through my brain. That was, why would a person continue with those habits that he knew himself, and been advised by his Doctor each time he had an appointment, that his present course was going to kill him prematurely?

An Alcoholic...or a Drug Addict may possibly have a similar inspired thought...but most continued with their nasty habit...smokers? Similar...

"If that is all, Detective, I will leave Superintendent Detective Turner in your capable hands. I am confident she will slip easily and professionally into the role as she has with every station she has served".

He stood, waiting for me to walk around the desk, shake his hand and open the office door for him. Then he was gone.

"Who were the others with him?" I whispered to Denny.

"Um...the little guy was his Personal Secretary, Alf Peters and the Police Union Rep, Hugh Jefferson...yeah...I found that a little rude not introducing them to you, but..." She shrugged, letting me know she was not happy with the way the DC had acted.

"Yeah, he is a man unto himself who is always busy pottering about with staff relocations. In his defence, he has always been right in where he puts who with whom..."

“Let’s hope he is correct with my re-assignment”. She smiled as she said this. A little nervously, I thought.

“You’ll be right. There are few twits in the Squad...except for me...and there are no womanhaters amongst us. We have never had a woman leader before so it will be a new experience for all of us...”

“You seem to have a high percentage of women on the floor”. She uttered as she peered out through the glass wall and the open doorway.

“Mmm...yes. It has steadily grown through the years. When I was first accepted into the Murder Squad ranks, there were two...Peta Daniels who was a fantastic Detective and Marge Hendricks who very quickly became my partner...for more than ten years before she accepted motherhood over the Murder Squad. She says she has never been happier. The Night Shift is entirely men. Remarkable really. That will be one of the first things you need to do before the beginning of each shift. Have a talk with the Night Shift Boss on the status of jobs. It is common for them to slide a Case or two over to us because of their workload. At the moment, things are a bit quiet for us. We are waiting for the mad Christmas season to be upon us when DV Cases will go through the roof...um...the Murder Squad will be reduced to a skeleton crew over the Christmas and New Year period...um...right up to the end of the school holidays at the end of January”.

I popped my head out of the Office to ask Shelley to go get three coffees. We then sat down to introduce Denny into the ways of the Murder Squad. Later that day, those on the floor were all squeezed into the Office so she could be introduced to them and their Cases.

It was a very relaxed introduction with several whispering that the change-over couldn’t come at a more fortuitous moment as I was getting a rather large head. One thing for sure, Denny wasn’t about to change any arrangements that I had made for the staff. Several moans were heard knowing that the computer classes were still on.

Bad luck, eh?

I could see over the coming months, she would sit with a Murder Squad team to listen and learn of their latest Case, or one that was lingering. She would say, as I have stated at times, that the verbal edition can be different to the written Report she would peruse while sitting sedately in her office.

I reckon she'll be fine as I think she may be doing more than warming Clive Butler's chair. She would also be arming herself with knowledge when the decision was made to advertise the position, she being the one with the advantage over all other applicants. This woman was heading to the top!

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tellie placed a hand on my upper arm. A furrowed brow went with the action.

"You OK, love?"

"Yeah...why? I think so...nah, maybe. I'm not sure".

"You sound entirely unsure. Something has been eating you for the past couple of days. What's up?"

I shook my head, ran a hand across my eyes.

"I don't know, really. I just...I'm not depressed...just shitty. Something is eating at me which I cannot fathom".

"Mmm...you pissed at not sitting in the Boss's chair...and a woman has taken the role from you..."

"Don't be ridiculous, sweetheart". Her words bringing a smile and a half-laugh. "You know I did not want the job. I've made that plain over a number of years, even when it has been for only short periods when CB took time off for holidays and sickness bouts. And no, just because a female has now got the acting position doesn't faze me one iota. You should know me better than that".

She looked up at me. She sitting on one of our tall kitchen stools. Me standing opposite her with the breakfast bar in between.

"Well, what then?"

I shook my head.

“Christmas...” I muttered. “Bah humbug!”

“Joseph? Bloody hell! Do not let your melancholia rub off onto the girls. It is their Christmas, not yours so keep your bloody mouth closed when you are around them...and the guest list has increased to over thirty for Christmas Day lunch so gee yourself up or confine yourself to the bedroom, so you don’t pass on the grinch to anyone! Hear me?”

I nodded though her words didn’t thrill or take away this feeling that I felt every Christmas that I could remember...this false cheer when everything was going to hell on a fast train. I gave her a half-grin, pecking her on the cheek for good measure. I don’t know if it helped her as I was still trying to figure out if it was helping me. I stood and walked into the Laundry taking AU2’s leash from its hook. The dog knew immediately what that meant and scampered up to me, her tail causing her body to rotate from her front legs. A genuine canine smile at what lay ahead. As I bent to clip the leash to her collar, I murmured that I was going for a walk...and no, I would not be that Christmas grinch. With a couple of sips of a decent red wine, I would become the perfect host on the morrow.

“Don’t be too long. I’ll need a hand to start to prepare for to-morrow. I want you to marinate the steaks and stuff”.

I waved a back-hand farewell as I headed for the back door, my faithful dog heeling faithfully beside me.

I fast walked to the Athletic and Playing fields some two kilometres from home. This is where I would meet my old partner Marge Hendricks to do a couple of fast laps around the field any time of the day or night that work allowed...and if I couldn’t sleep and she was awake herself, early in the morning before the sun came up. That was some ten years ago. Now it was a slow jog for a couple of circuits before my body began to complain, especially my knees. I walked up onto the concrete pathway in front of the amenities shed, found the external tap, and turned it on. I made a scoop with my hands for AU2 to drink before tossing several handfuls over my head and face to cool me off.

“Good dog yer got there. He kept pace with yer, heeling all the way at the same distance from yer. A Kelpie, eh? Good stock by the looks of it. Good stature, fine bones with clear eyes and a moist snout, ears always alert...yep, a good dog with breeding in her genes”.

I looked up, wondering who had spoken. I was sure that there was no-one around as I had bent down in front of the tap.

“Yeah...she’s a beauty. Got her as a pup...jeez...a few years ago now. She’d be close to six or seven years old, now”.

I turned the tap off and stood, nodding at the old bloke sitting on the bench seat close to me. I again nodded at him as a farewell gesture. I commenced to walk away, wiping the water from my eyes.

“Yer got any idea why Tennelli and Bocca were shot to death? Very calculated, so it seems to me...”

I turned and looked at the man. He was old, in his seventies though his voice was strong without the timbre of losing his breath. He had little hair and what he did have was well-trimmed. Hooded eyes and a mouth that was hooked into a smile. He casually had his right leg crossed over his left leg slowly swinging that right leg to and fro. He rested his left elbow on the back of the bench seat while he clasped his hands together, his right arm resting casually on top of the slight announcement of his belly. A pair of jeans, walking shoes and an expensive golf shirt. A silver chain around his neck, a similar chain hung loosely around his left wrist.

I stepped closer to him.

“Do I know you?” I asked, peering at his face.

“I doubt it. You may have heard of me if you were ten years older so, no, you don’t know me”.

“What about the Tennelli and Bocca homicides?”

He waved his hands as though dismissing the enquiry.

“It’s amazing, isn’t it? These Crims should look back through the history of this town. They would...or should realise that a life of crime brings them down all too early. But Crims don’t bother with such rubbish, do they? Neither do countries and politicians as we make the same mistakes repeatedly. These tribal battles...in the Middle East, in the Balkans...and here in this beautiful fair city. It’s killing hundreds of thousands of people. Just a repeat over and over. The Knights Templar and their many quests to make Jerusalem the seat of Christianity showed the folly in repeating the same mistakes. Warring with the Arabs...the Muslims. Nothing has changed in two thousand years...sad really”. He sniffled a bit as though the speech had an effect on him.

“Tennelli and Bocca? Do *you* know why they were killed?” I asked, now more than inquisitive. I looked about at the Playing Fields and the car park. The several Soccer teams doing their weekly training had dispersed. There wasn’t another soul about, even though the overhead lights still illuminated the Grounds.

“Power...strength and a bid to take over the very lucrative drug trade that the two were head of. Check within...who will benefit the most by the two being shoved unceremoniously out of the way?”

I shook my head. I didn’t have a clue.

“Arrh...maybe Ortello?” I muttered. He shook his head slightly, sure of his assumptions. Tisk-tisked a couple of times at my lousy bid to sound clever.

“Ask some of the former Drug Coppers who have been retired for years...or maybe an old codger that keeps putting off his retirement date as he has nothing to retire to!”

“Like yourself perhaps?”

“Me!? Hah...you’re climbing up the wrong tree with me, lad. I’m from the other side of the street but woke up to what my fate would be if I continued with my criminal ways...haven’t set a foot wrong for close on thirty years now...best decision I ever made. You speak to a couple of the old hands in the Force and mention me to them. ‘Sly’ Ferguson. That should bring a smile to a couple of old faces for sure...the Sydney crim world is going through a series of turmoil...challenging old ways, old boundaries, alliances, friendship and yes, even bosses”.

He peered up at me as I stood over him, that slight smile never leaving his face as though he knew the secret of the Holy Grail where none of us plebes had a clue.

“How do you know my position in the cop force?”

“Come on, son. If ever a man looked like a cop, it is you...and you have had a couple of TV roles over the years. The Murder Detective who cannot follow rules...would I be right? You impressing the bods on high with quite a conundrum. Should the lad be given an award for bravery or time off without pay because he didn’t follow Policy and Procedures as it is written? Seems like the Awards won out, I reckon...not that I’ve been keeping a count of them...” He gave a chuckle which turned into a wheeze he had trouble controlling. He gave

a mighty hoy and spat out an impressive dolly. It looked like a bloody oyster in the middle of the path. I did not like the colour of it at all. Unhealthy that was for sure.

I went to sit down but was shooed away.

“Ain’t got no more time to talk. Me missus will skin me alive if’n I’m late for Dinner...see, even ex-crimns have settled into a mundane suburban life-style...” He chuckled as he stood to walk briskly if a little stooped to a late model Beamer.

It’s a tough life, I thought sarcastically to myself as I watched him reverse out of the car space and drive slowly out of the carpark.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“You ever heard of a bloke named Sly Ferguson? Has to be around eighty, I reckon”.

“A former Crim?” Shelley asked, a startled look at my sudden enquiry. “Nah. What about him?”

I told her of my encounter with the gentleman on Christmas eve night.

“Mmm...serendipitous, you reckon?”

“Isn’t that a great word...I love the sound of it, but what does it mean?” I asked, that dumb look that I can muster up at any time splattered across my dial.

“Chance...unexpected...unanticipated. What? I am not only your partner, but I have become your Thesaurus and the book that holds all former crimns by name! Look up the NSW Criminal Register to see whether it has a Ferguson listed as a Crim in the early days”.

“I’m doing that now...Ferguson...there’s about ten listed. Must have been a hoot at Christmas time with everyone giving each other presents...all stolen...” It’s just my wicked sense of humour that Shelley finds hard to swallow. She surprised me by having a chuckle. It must be the Festive Season that has thawed her a bit...and the perfume and wine I gave her and her Brin Christmas afternoon. She gave me a book of Dad jokes, hoping I could improve my repertoire.

“It is all in the giving that makes Christmas such a fun time...” Shelley mumbled, not able to keep her mouth shut.

“Bah humbug, is all I’ll say...here we are. Colin Ferguson aka ‘Sly’ Ferguson. Born Nineteen Thirty-five...makes him...arrh...eighty-three? Yeah? He didn’t seem to be that old. Did time as a juvenile. Two stints in Silverwater as an adult. Seems B & E was his favourite past-time. All criminal activity seemed to cease around nineteen seventy-five...was married that year. Seems as though his missus wouldn’t stand for any shenanigans, huh? That is the last thing noted. Mmm...the pull of a good woman”.

“Happens, Joe. It happens...’cause all us women are good. You should not question that statement...” That patronising look that she had mastered so well. A bat of her eyelashes. I shook my head trying to think of something smart to respond.

“Arrh, yeah...just look at Fiona Dixon...” It was the best I could muster.

For that, I got a fierce look and a biro thrown in my direction. I was becoming the victim of workplace bullying, it would seem. While it may seem a little trivial, the effect it had on me was more mental. I wondered not for the first time what would happen if I placed a complaint against my partner to the correct Branch of the Force...I reckon I would be charged with wasting the S & E Panel’s time...so what else is new?

“What did Santa bring you?” Shelley asked, throwing a spanner in the works of my thoughts.

“I was lucky this year. Not one pair of socks, underdaks, handkerchiefs, or ties. I got two books, one on White Collar Crime, the other on Sydney’s underbelly...oh...and over a dozen bottles of Red, most of superior quality...except the three bottles Muscles and Marge gave me. How about you?”

“Um...my favourite perfume, some underwear that I needed urgently, a Book of Poems, another on the intricacies of tending to injured wild-life and from you, some extra dib-dabs for my favourite bracelet...and a perfume that I have never tried but absolutely adore. Thank you. The dib-dabs for my bracelet...they were cool...all Australian animals...I know I said it on Christmas afternoon when we came over, but I’ll say it again, thanks very much...Tellie purchased them, didn’t she?”

I gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. I didn’t feel self-conscious as there was very few teams on deck to see the show of emotion.

“To be honest, no. I looked out for them, shopped, and paid for them when I was baby-sitting the two girls one afternoon in early December...truly, it was my choice...yeah, except for the perfume. That was Tellie’s doing”.

“Wonders...but yes, I love them”.

“Okay, back to work. Police Intelligence. How about we wander up there after lunch time”.

“What? To get more info on Ferguson?”

“No...to see whether they have any information on why Tennelli, Bocca and Jeremy Wilson were killed. Ferguson mentioned that there is a groundswell occurring in the Sydney underworld scene that is seeing middle-management crims flexing their muscles tired of the old ways. I don’t know whether Jerry Wilson would fall into that category, but Tennelli and Bocca just might”.

“You’re going to take the word of an old, former crim to base your research on?” She looked over the top of her glasses that she had to wear whenever she was on the computer. They were at least six months old, but that was the first time I noticed them...a Detective of superhuman qualities, huh? “You think they are connected? Come on Joe, there is no evidence to even suggest that”.

“Shells? I am not even suggesting that. Good grief, stop punching at shadows, will yer? All I want to do is find out whether they have much on the three Deceased persons that may help us in our quest for justice...jeez”.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

It seemed all wrong to me.

At this time of year, the incidents of Domestic Violence, Assaults and bloody murders peaked. We should have had a full Murder Squad complement. Instead, we had less than half present! With the way Christmas and New Year fell this year, if you worked it right with all the Public Holidays, if you took six days off on Annual Rostered Leave, you were away from work for two weeks. It was obvious that many people took advantage of that.

I know I had not approved such an arrangement for over fifty percent of the day shift staff, so the approvals must have come earlier in the year with CB approving them at that time...but it still was an embarrassment...and I was pissed that I had not thought of the situation and placed a request to do something similar!

It is said that those with kids in the eleven years of age group, up to High School age had an advantage in obtaining approval for annual holidays during this time. Those with kids up to the age of around ten or eleven could take leave at any time during the calendar year as kids that age were less likely to be disadvantaged by taking time off during a school term.

So goes the sentiment...and yes, I agreed with it.

The problem was that those who remained had to pick up the Cases of those who had achieved this arrangement. We were forced to tackle Cases as they came in during that period. As it was, Shells and I inherited the Tennelli and Bocca Shooting Deaths as Ballard, Waters and 'Missin' DeSilva had successfully applied for leave. I shouldn't complain as most of those who were off had kids...and yes, I am complaining! Also, we had to progress those Cases of those who had approved Annual leave...picking up a Case halfway through was an absolute bastard. Thankfully, we were not in that boat, but several other teams moaned. We had been lucky. I felt that the situation existed and had been constructed by Clive Butler so that we Shells and I, could pick up any Case that occurred during the Festive Season.

Ruth Kindle, as the junior to Don Ballard, could not perform alone as a Dee2, so Denny, our new Leader teamed her up with Shells and me. She came across to us with the Tennelli Homicide Case and because there was some relation in the two, the Bocca Case was also given to us.

The initiation into Shells and I partnership was compressed. As she had bought over the Tennelli Case, we had about half an hour to familiarise ourselves with that Case. The three of us crammed in getting to know the Bocca Case in quick-smart time. We took our time describing the 'M1 Murder' up Wyong way to her...realistically, we all knew it would take several days of carefully reading the Murder Books on the three Cases to bring ourselves up to scratch on all three.

It was the day after the New Year's Day Public Holiday, and I felt we had hovered over the cases long enough. What we didn't know, we could have conversations in the car as we went 'hither and thither'!

“Come on ladies, let’s take a walk up to Police Intelligence and see what they have on Tennelli and Bocca and our Roadtrain driver Jeremy Wilson aka Jerry Hunter aka Hunter Clyde aka Dragan Polkowski, huh?”

I led the two women into the Police Information Service on the floor above us. There appears to be no way the intelligence gathering group can be named that doesn’t provoke sniggers and bad jokes. As the former Police Intelligence Squad got the piss taken out of them, I failed to see how the new name would be any better.

As we came out on the PIS floor, there appeared to be a fair few vacant desks. Morrie, along with a handful of others were all the crew noticeable on the floor. But in this Branch, I guess it was not as important to survive on a skeleton crew during this period. They were not investigative officers...more gatherers of information.

I knew Morris Crown from the old days. He was close to my age and had once been an Undercover Narcs Officer as well. We shared a number of operations together back then. Unfortunately, he took a bullet fragment to the spine which left him partially paralysed. Through hard work, dogged persistence, and many painful episodes, he managed to overcome his disadvantages and convince the hierarchy to have him placed somewhere...anywhere where he could contribute. A move to PIS helped enormously as there was no need to leave the floor to scrub it with Crims. He became a cog in the wheel that was almost irreplaceable, so it was overheard on many occasions...and luckily, he loved the work.

“Morrie? How come you’re just about it while all your colleagues take this Christmas and New Year time off?”

“Just luck, I guess. Good to see you, Joe. It’s been a while. Thanks for that bottle of wine for Christmas...you knock it off or did you just request several dozen from a cooperative liquor merchant?” A smile that made him look like a boy...or at least half his age at just on sixty-three.

“Yeah, right...are you suggesting I may have called in a few favours, mate? Don’t you know my reputation as the straightest of straight Detectives? You cracked it yet?”

“Jeezus mate...that reputation...it hasn’t climbed to the Ninth Floor yet...surprise, surprise. I guess you can change, huh? All those bad whispers of your time undercover been put to bed?”

“I certainly bloody hope so...” I responded quickly. Neither Shelley or Kindle were in on the joke, tending to take things as given even if it was meant as a stir...a joke.

“That bottle? It’s a superb vintage, you know. It is too good to taste it now. Another three...maybe four years and it will be coming into its own”. He looked up at me from his specially designed wheelchair that allowed him to address his specially designed desk. “Who are the beautiful ladies...oops, sorry. I can’t say that now, can I?”

“Of course you can, Morrie. It is good for a woman to get a compliment occasionally especially when she works with a drongo like Joe”. Shelley muttered. We all smiled. Shelley nodding.

“Morrie? This is Ruth Kindle. She is a newcomer to the Murder Squad. She has been partnered with Don Ballard, but while he is off on Annual Leave, she has been lucky to make us a threesome...and this is my permanent partner Shelley Shields”.

Morrie did a double take, opening his mouth before Shelley interrupted first.

“Yeah...Detective ‘Rusty’ Shields was my father...and as far as I know, as bent as they have whispered...who-ever *they* are”.

“Arrh, Don. A good operator. You’ll learn a lot from that old bloke...he is on leave? Amazing, how come they have it approved and not us, eh? You can’t tell me he has school-aged kids at home”. He wheeled his chair back to his desk. “Enough of the niceties. What can I do for you three?”

“Um...Jeremy Wilson aka Jerry Hunter aka Hunter Clyde aka Dragan Polkowski and Jamas ‘Jimmy’ Tenelli and his partner Leonardo ‘Tony’ Bocca. What can you tell us about those three?”

“I’d say they are all dead...in suspicious circumstances seeing as how you are asking about them”. He nodded. He began to type on a small flat keyboard that was anchored to the left armrest of his chair. A small directional lever at the base of keyboard controlled the cursor direction on a large flat screen sitting erect on his desk.

“Dragan first...as Jeremy Wilson he lost his Driver’s License twice for drink driving charges. He has...or had a drink problem. He spent thirteen months in Silverwater for the second charge. We were not aware of his alias as Dragan Polkowski until we had an update about his death. We have tried to screen his life as Dragan without much success. All I can tell you

about the firm he drove for was the name Capricornia Petroleum Distributors with an address in a southern suburb of Brisbane. I can only give you an estimate of when he obtained his Driver's License in the name of Polkowski. Sometime longer than three years ago. He was pulled over in a standard Road Stop on the NSW/Queensland border at that time. That is the first time that we came across the name. Everything was hunky-dory with not one point of fault of his rig at that time. He was again pulled over some eighteen months later with the only defect being two of his traffic lights...you know, those lights down the side of a semi? Two were blown. Hard to prove they didn't blow minutes before he was stopped. That's it".

"What about him as Jerry Wilson? He may have led a kind of duplicate life with both names being used in parallel?"

"He had two other aliases, Joe. What about them?" Shelley added.

"Yeah...them too". I replied, a little miffed that Shelley had to remind me of those.

"No...sorry. All his known aliases have a link to each other, so they come up at the same time. Nothing. Nothing at all, though he had family under the Jeremy Hunter alias. That's about all I can give you on the gentleman. Why was he killed? I understand in a very gruesome way. No idea...sorry".

"Yeah, we know about the 'foster' sister who is an alcoholic and drug addict. She lives at Long Jetty on the Central Coast".

"Yes, we have her logged...but no, he also had a son, Cameron Hunter. Wilson was in a casual relationship with a Lorraine Hunter nee Fordham in between his two bouts in jail. The lad would be in his twenties by now".

"Have you got an address for her and the boy?"

"Yes...but it is what? Twenty...twenty-five years old. She with the baby on her hip visited him a number of times while he was inside for the second time".

He printed out a mug shot of Lorraine Hunter taken when she was arrested with a commercial quantity of grass on her person in nineteen ninety-two".

"That's the last known address you have for her?"

"Unfortunately, yes".

“That’s strange. We have no background on him *after* he was released on parole back what? Fifteen years? Twenty years ago? We don’t even know whether he hooked up again with Lorraine Hunter as his de facto. Nothing for all that time up until he was brutally murdered a couple of weeks ago...and we have nothing on his de facto since that time. Clean slates on both...I maybe a cynic but that sounds too good to be true”.

“Once a crim, always a crim, hey Joe”. Morrie stated a smile on his face.

“Mmm...usually there are links, Joe. Local Rates, Voting information, Taxation records and so on. He has been making a living I suspect, for that entire period...driving a Double ‘B’ Roadtrain God forbid, without any of the usual links being visible. Flying under the radar with that Polish name...but to his credit, he has not strayed...even in any of his former aliases”.

I scratched my head. This was not how old crims lived after they come out of Prison.

“How about Centrelink?” Shelley offered. “On all those aliases...you know, Newstart Allowances...the Dole”.

“I can tell you now that the answer is no. With our program, all the usual ‘tie-ins’ were searched through rapidly. Yes, he was on Centrelink payments when he was on parole for the second stint in Long Bay. But he voluntarily removed himself from further payments six months after his date of release...close to the end of his parole period”.

“Have you an address for that time he was on the Dole? Shit...a stranger...a mystery man. Did he have a Parole Officer?”

“Mmm...not listed but he had to have one...I’ll chase that out for you...and the address he used for Centrelink. In terms of listing a suspect pool for his death, which I have been told was rather gory, I cannot provide one because we have so little to go on. A mysterious gap of some ten years makes it almost impossible to create such a list...um...what I can provide for you after I do a little more digging, is his associations while he was in jail. That could lead somewhere”.

There it is again, I thought. That ten-year period. Something happened around that time in the past for it to be all coincidental. The house being sold in Chipping Norton for example. The Servo out near Liverpool changing hands...around that decade ago...

“He must have plastic...an account somewhere”. I added, frustration in my words. “Everyone has plastic...”

“Sorry Joe. No. Nothing comes up...”

“Plastic...he has to have plastic, Morrie...how else would he pay for diesel fuel on his trip up and down the coast?”

“Mmm...he very well could have a ‘plastic card’ in the name of the Firm he worked for...you know, for fuel, accommodation and meals. That way he doesn’t need plastic for his personal use”.

That is something that I failed to notice as I had his wallet and had gone through it very carefully. I had failed to notice the absence of ‘plastic’ or the Company plastic that was in his wallet! Not good enough, I scolded myself.

We were quiet for a while, each of us thinking about the man in our own peculiar way. Putting all our heads together had resulted in bugger all!

“Maybe that is what that wad of money found on him was for”. Ruth Kindle quietly offered.

“That makes sense”. I responded. “More so than the money coming from a scam on the side dealing with cheap petrol...but if it isn’t such a scam, then what is the elaborate use of a large tarpaulin placed over the tanker and the small tradie’s van...what were they doing that required such a stealthy action?”

“Drugs”. Shelley muttered. “It’s always about drugs. You said as much when you were talking to the Wyong Station Sergeant. A false section in the tanker where they can hide the drugs. As he is heading up to Queensland, he is either picking up a quantity up there or on his run down the NSW northern coastline...and the money found on him? Wouldn’t pay for a total diesel fill up”.

“Is that possible? You know, having a false section in the tanker?” I responded to Shelley’s supposition while looking at Morrie.

“I think it’s been done before...let me spend some time on that...” Morrie uttered quietly.

“Works for cash and deals in cash...an invisible line that is his life. The only thing that kind of stands out is that his employer must also have been cooking the books so they can pay their

staff in dollars with no taxation or superannuation being paid...an invisible person both ways”.

“Yer gotta ask yourself, why?”

“Because whatever he and his employer are doing, it is illegal”.

“Selling a small amount of fuel on the side? That seems a little over the top to go to all that trouble...but the transportation of drugs? That adds weight to all this sneaking around...”

“Mmm...the Roadtrain. Maybe we can follow that to see whether the replacement trusted driver does a ‘drug pick up’”.

“I do not have details of the truck, Joe. Do you?”

“Yes...it’s on file...and on my iPad which is in my desk drawer. I’ll get it for you later in the day. Okay...Tennelli and Bocca? What have you got on them?”

“Before we move off Wilson...here’s the address he used with Centrelink. An address in Chipping Norton...which is the address that Lorraine Hunter used for her Parole Officer and Centrelink for the single parent pension...”

“Yep...we have just gone full circle. We knocked on the door of that address where a blind old man answered our knock. He knew bugger all, like who lived at that address before his family purchased the home. Any other address for the woman and her son?”

“No, that is the last we have...no, hang on...a Lorraine *Wilson*...not Lorraine Hunter, applied to Centrelink for the single parent pension...15A Riverbank Close, Georges Hall. I betcha she is obtaining two pensions under both the Wilson and the Hunter surnames”.

“We may need to pay that address a visit and the one at Chipping Norton...later in the evening or at best, late afternoon to catch the people at home and not that blind old bloke again...maybe before we do that, a visit to the local Council Office...either Liverpool or Bankstown I would think...to see what their records show in relation to that property”.

“Okay, as you said, before we move off Wilson, let me make a ‘to-do’ list”. His claw-like hand sped across the keyboard like a butterfly searching for nectar. In no time at all he had a list on Wilson, another on Lorraine Hunter, another on the son Cameron Hunter, one on the

large roadtrain and the last on Centrelink accounts and Parole Officers for both Wilson and Hunter.

“Um...with that list it may take me some time to get back to you...I will when I have something...and I can dig into Local Council Records from here on those things you want answered. Like the previous owner of eighty-eight Wallacia Crescent, Chipping Norton. Give me time and I should have info on that and the same for Tennelli’s home at Number six, Wattle Grove, Chipping Norton”.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

“Tennelli and Bocca”. I mused, wanting to move the investigation along. It was coming up to lunch time.

“Sorry Detectives, I have a meeting straight after lunch and I have to have a bite to eat at lunch. I’m diabetic, so can I take a raincheck on that? I’m sure we have heaps of intel on those two going back years...to when they first started as ‘runners’ for Hemois ‘Henry’ Varga back in the late Seventies, early Eighties. Varga drowned in wild surf up around Byron Bay several years ago. The two switched their allegiance over to Ortello around that time. What they have now is quite a lucrative business which was financed by Ortello...if you want to believe the rumours. I will have to dig a bit to find out who has taken over the operations on the death of the two...if some-one has, that is. After all, it has been only a couple of weeks with Christmas and the New Year chucked into the middle of it. I’ll formulate a precise history of the two and send it off to you Joe, sometime late the week after next. Sorry, but that is the best I can do as it is the busiest part of the year for us...and as you can see...” He swivelled his arm awkwardly at the empty Workstations on the floor.

“Us too...” I uttered, adding that we will wait for his Report.

“Oh! One other thing”. I added as I turned back to face him. “Can you give us a story on Sly Ferguson...he’s over eighty now I suspect. I want to know of any connection to those people we have been talking about. Okay?”

As we waited for the Lift down to our floor, I suggested we eat out on the banks of the river.

“What a good idea. Good to get out of the building”. Kindle uttered. “We can go up to the Gang Related Crime Team straight after”.

“Do you reckon they would know any more than what we have at the moment? Frankly, I would prefer to return to our desks. There is a lot we can do while we are waiting...”

“Oh? Like what?”

“Who picked up the Truck after Forensics was finished with it up the coast...where is it now...we need to authorise a tail on the truck as it crosses the Queensland border to see where it goes and what it may pick up on its way down the coast. We need to speak with the Lead Forensic guy who would have searched the truck to see whether they picked up on a secret compartment or not...and get onto either Liverpool or Bankstown Council to see what they have on their Register for the Design and Building Applications going back further than ten years for the residential building in Chipping Norton. Who the person was, any forwarding addresses when they sold the place at Chipping Norton around ten years ago...names and addresses that is what we need. Also, contact any firms who manufacture the fuel trailers for fuel haulage and whether a secret compartment can be installed at the time of manufacture and how it would be utilised and opened while the rest of the tank has a full load of petrol”.

“...and we need to liaison with our counterparts in Queensland to put a watch on the address...a Post Office Box number to see who clears it and where that person goes with any mail”. Shelley offered.

“Jeez! I forgot that element. Yes! A tenner says she sends it off to another Post Office Box number here in NSW. I’ll further bet that the address is somewhere close to Chipping Norton...or close to where the hot-shot who controls the purse strings now resides”.

Both women looked at me, nodding as they committed those points to memory.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

It was such a beautiful day with the temperature hanging in the late twenties, early thirties. We decided to visit the latest address we had for Lorraine Hunter, hooking back to visit Clive Butler, our suffering Boss in Westmead Private Hospital.

As Shelley drove towards Georges Hall, I put a call into the Lead Forensic person on the Wilson/Polkowski M1 Roadtrain death scene. My wife.

“Sweetheart...” I heard her cough. “That Roadtrain up at the MI Rest Area and Petrol Station...um...who picked up the rig and what was the date?”

“Um...hang on Joe...my official Title is Lead Forensic Trace Officer Grade three...”

“Sweetheart...um...” I interrupted. “LFTO Grade three is so much longer and so impersonal, especially having been married to you for what? Close to nine years...”

“Okay, okay Detective. I haven’t the time to go toe to toe with you...too much work...um...we were given the information by the on-scene Constable...arrh...here it is. It was collected two days after the murder...meaning Christmas eve, by a man who had the necessary paperwork authorising him to take the vehicle. He worked for Capricornia Fuel Distributors...his name is Lester Yeager...any help?”

“Nah...well...I don’t know as the name is not familiar at all. Thanks for that love, see you to-night”.

“Don’t forget we are going out for dinner to-night. Marge and Muscles and Dallas and Benny. Bill and Mal have offered to babysit the triplets and our two for the couple of hours. I thought we should go to that Pizza joint that you and Knackers used to visit. I’m told it is quite special”.

Something caught in my throat, and I had to cough before I could begin to talk.

“Yeah, no worries. I’ll be home in time...”

“You’d forgotten, hadn’t you? Jeez Joe...your memory seems to be getting more sketchier of late...”

“Just a bit too much work on our plate, that’s all. Same as you guys. Until tonight”.

I hung up as Shelley glanced at me.

“It’s not only your brain that is aging Joe. You are having problems with your knees, the right one especially”.

“Just a tweak now and then...”

“Yeah right. Go see a Doc about it. You may need knee replacement surgery. I’ve been telling you for ages that pounding the pavement...any hard surface is not doing you any favours. The way you land only makes things worse. You are supposed to spring from your toes and land likewise. You land with your entire foot flat on the ground which is sending a jolt up your leg to your knee each time you stride...I’ve spoken to you before about this...and so has John down in the Basement Gym. You are terribly flat footed. You are following in the footsteps of coppers long ago”.

I pretended not to hear, instead peering out the window as suburbia flew past. I could sense that Shelley was getting exasperated.

“Fuck Joe...” She shook her head and sighed deeply. “Ruth, can you hunt down the name Yeager? First name Lester. Try the NSW Criminal Register first”.

We turned off Henry Lawson Drive onto a narrow street. Houses on either side looked as though they were all built by the same Developer at the same time...more than likely had. Another two turns and we had the river on our right, stopping at Number Fifteen on our left.

“I’ll stay in the car while I do that search on Yeager, okay?”

“Yep, she’s fine. No worries”.

We knocked several times on the front door for nil results.

“Wasn’t it Number Fifteen A?”

“Yeah, possibly a converted garage out the back. Let’s go around the side of the house”.

I lifted the catch on the side gate to be confronted by a fluffy ball of fur that looked up at us and growled. It’s snout almost lost in the fur, its bottom jaw jutting out way past the upper jawline. I muttered that a Dental Pathologist or whatever they call them, should look at that.

“Watch those ankle-biters, Joe...”

“Yeah, you should. They can nip yer ankles off...Who are yers?” The woman rasped. That nasally whine a pointer to the lower Australian class.

We produced our ID cards to show to the robust woman who was standing at the corner of the house under an expanse of a double carport roof. She was holding onto the brick corner for support.

“Are you Missus Lorraine Wilson...or is it Lorraine Hunter. Centrelink has those two listings for this address”.

She seemed to draw in on herself, but then she gathered herself and began the same old litany about the Pension not fit for a person to live on, how it is extremely difficult to bring up children by yourself and how that bastard ex-husband had run out on her never to be seen again...and he never paid a friggin’ cent.

“You go find that bastard and get the child maintenance off him that he owes me. Gotta be at least a hundred a week over eighteen years that my kids were with me. You work it out and let me know”.

With that she turned on her heel and with a command for the little dog to follow her, she skittered towards the back yard. As we got to the end of the carport, we heard a door slam shut. We were right, it was a garage that had been converted into a dwelling. We knocked several times to have her scream for us to fuck off.

I had to get the last comment in. I just had to.

“The Centrelink Detectives will be following up...more than likely you will do jail time, missus. Be prepared for that”.

As we walked out the front of the premises, I ducked down and looked in the mailbox, sliding out several envelopes.

“A Mister Cameron Hunter...her son and daughter-in-law live in the house”.

Shelley stood looking up and down the street.

“Do you ever get the feeling that this Case does not want to be solved. We get half-leads that fizzle out with nothing adding to the Case...we’re almost chasing our bloody tails”.

“It’s Christmas...it always gets me down as well”. I thought I was being supportive, understanding her melancholia. It always hits me at this time of the year.

Shelley glared at me, blew out a stream of air so that her lips rippled. She shook her head, stamped both feet and mumbled something that I could not decipher.

“Sorry Shells? What did you say?”

“Nothing Joe. Absolutely nothing that you would understand...shish!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I was standing at a window wall looking down onto the factory floor. The size of the factory floor was astounding. I said as much as I turned to face the head man of this complex, Mister Alex Hence. He was standing there like a father who had just spied his baby girl for the first time.

“You should see our parent Company in Geelong, Victoria”. He beamed. “It is around five times larger. We get a lot of our parts and special bits and pieces from down there. They had run out of room to expand which was necessary if we were to maintain our market share...and to compliment the entire operations in a building twice the size was going to cost more than we were willing to invest. Some bright spark down there suggested we build up here, only limiting the size of this building to the size we thought we required to enlarge the Company down there. Forging is not undertaken here. We have more than enough capacity in our metal forging shop down there to meet demand well into the next twenty years”. He said proudly as he came to stand beside me.

“Are all these Fuel Tankers?”

“Arrh...yes...no. The last in line is a bulk milk trailer”. He pointed his finger at the last tanker in line.

“Are they any different to a fuel tanker?”

“They can be the same size but are usually smaller. They require an ingress point into the interior as they need to be thoroughly steam-cleaned out after each voiding of the milk for health reasons. To accommodate that requirement, we include a pressure fitted door in the end of each tanker. Like a bulkhead pressure door in a submarine or ship...know what I mean?”

I nodded, looked down at my shoes and scratched my head.

“Could you do the same with a fuel tanker?”

“You could, no troubles, but why?” He asked as he turned to me. Thinking he had a not so bright Detective in his Office. “There’s no need to. By the time they need a decent clean-out, they are about at the end of their economic life. We do what we call ‘cut and joins’ of older tankers once they have been cleaned out to meet demand...and a cut and weld job is less expensive than a brand-spanking new tanker. The fuel filler points at the top of each tanker can give access into each compartment. The whole top can just be taken off if there is a need to clean them out. Large enough for a man to be able to get inside...after they have been voided of all fumes”.

“Fuel Tankers? They are divided into separate compartments, aren’t they?”

“Yes. Depending on their length, they are divided into four sections usually...with baffles to stop any sway of the fuel in each compartment. The total capacity of the longest tanker on our roads permitted by Law, is around thirty-five thousand litres capacity. Either all petrol or a combination of E10 fuel, ULP and/or diesel”.

“So, you could have...say...two trailers in the one Roadtrain transporting up to seventy thousand litres of fuel on our highways?”

“Yes...and with those monster Roadtrains out west with three trailers, there could be around one hundred thousand litres of fuel on board...two of the trailers would more than likely be diesel”.

I nodded my head. Out west, about every farm machine is diesel...the same as most farm vehicles. Diesel is easier to store and less volatile than petrol.

“Is it possible to segment those tankers so you have a small, sealed section at one end allowing access through one of those doors that you mentioned?”

“Yes, it is possible...but for what reason?” He held his arms wide as though he couldn’t believe the question.

“Drug smuggling...”

“Oh...um...we have never been requested to fit such an arrangement, but any...no...maybe a Firm with less integrity that specialises in tank construction could do such a thing...yes, it is possible”.

“Dangerous?”

“No, not really, as long as the panel forming the false bulkhead separator is welded in place before the elliptical end is fitted and welded...”

“Which would suggest a firm such as yourself who is fabricating the trailer from the ground up...”

“Detective, I do not like your inference or the direction that your words are taking. We are one of only a few in the country who have accreditation to manufacture these tankers. There are several other firms who are not accredited that also perform this work. We would never consider constructing such an arrangement as it obviously would be for illegal purposes. I suggest you go have a word with them...those other manufacturers. A good morning to you. You can see yourselves out, okay? I have a busy morning ahead of me”.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

“Jeez, Joe. You pushed him a little hard, didn’t you? Do you think it was warranted?”

I walked towards the Unmarked parked in the Visitors Bay, nodding my head.

“You’re going with the drug carrying business, are you? You have convinced yourself of that, huh?” She kept it going which annoyed me no end.

“That and the procurement of cheap petrol in Queensland to on-sell at a number of Petrol Stations down here in Sydney. Two very profitable aspects in the one trip. What more could you ask for?”

“Where did this theory spring from?” Shelley asked as she pressed the key-button to unlock the car.

As I plopped into the passenger seat, I turned to her, grabbing her large shoulder-bag that she straight-armed over to me. Fitting it down in the floor well between my feet.

“You ever thought of getting a smaller bag. It seems to get in the road a helluva lot”.

She ignored me and repeated the question of why I had been a little hard on the guy.

“Jeremy Wilson was killed by persons unknown because, *one*: he had crossed over into someone else’s drug territory which is worked out years ago by the Heavies of the day or *two*: he was killed by heavies in his own network because he was skimming off the top. In fuel and cannabis. Or *three*; it was thought that a guaranteed quantity of the highest quality hydroponically grown weed was taking customers away from the opposition people of Wilson’s concern which they did not like”. I looked over at her, a fierceness that I did not want to convey. “His sister looked as though she hadn’t come down off her high for weeks. She couldn’t afford that type of habit on the Pension, so dear foster brother was slicing her a kilo or four at basement sale prices...or a minimal charge...or no charge at all. Take your pick...and she has been arrested on-selling weed on the streets. She had to be given more than she could use inside a month for her to take on that dangerous occupation. Whether Wilson was transporting more weed to on-sell I do not know...but it is a fair guess that he was...I mean, it makes sense, doesn’t it?”

“That’s three theories with a couple of others tacked on...you’re a little short on alternate theories, ma man. What? You slowing down in your more mature age?”

“Stop the bullshit and head for Bankstown Council Offices in the middle of Bankstown”.

“Why?”

“To find out who owned that property in Chipping Norton, when was the house built and whose signature is on the Design and Building Applications, and what was the forwarding address if it was supplied at the time it was sold to the family of the old blind guy...ditto for the property owned by Tennelli a couple of streets over. We might as well include that as well”.

“Wasn’t Morrie Crown up in PIS going to find out those things?”

“Yeah, with a two-weeks wait for us from the other day when we spoke to him. We are almost at Bankstown so a visit wouldn’t be out of form, huh?”

“Okay, Tonto...then we can head straight over to Westmead Private Hospital to see how the Boss is?”

We had not heard a word from Kindle all morning. She coughed as though ridding her throat of some solidified plug that was caught halfway down her throat.

Shelley wouldn't let it ride.

“I think you were a little out of line myself, Joe. I really do, hombre. There was no call that I could think of for you to fluff up your biceps. I think you can expect a call from the gentleman putting in a complaint on the way you were acting...and the manner you were asking questions and inferring his Firm maybe, could be involved”.

She fell silent as she started the vehicle and slowly drove out of the ‘reserved for visitors’ parking spot.

“He was a little thin-skinned, I thought. Could that be a guilty conscience?”

Shelley shook her head and gave me an icy glance.

“It was as though I had hit the nail on the head first up and the accusation kind of panicked him...”

“Jeez Joe...proof...evidence is what we deal in...concrete evidence that can be confirmed seven ways to Sunday...not guesses, innuendo or bullshit! As far as our investigation is concerned, I would have thought such an accusation had little to with it...or am I wrong in that regard?”

I waved my hands about trying to smooth choppy waters. By her sigh, I wasn't too sure if I succeeded.

“Look, he was in the box seat to carry out those alterations inside the carcass of a Tanker, so why should I wipe him merely because he got a little upset. With your suspicious mind, I felt sure you would have been all over him when he came across as being hurt by my insinuations...if there is such a thing as this false section primarily to house high quality weed, the opening on top of the tanker would need to be of a size to allow dried weed to be squeezed into the false compartment...”

Again, Kindle coughed to shift that plug so she could talk with sufficient volume for us to hear what she was saying from the front seats.

“You think there is a connection because the two properties were two streets from one another in the same upmarket suburb. Is that what you are thinking, Joe? Is that why you have included both premises in our search?”

“Well, it is worthwhile examining the coincidences, don’t you think? And you must admit, they do look as though they could have been constructed by the same Builder and/or designed by the same Architect...and the two homes changed hands around the same time. That can’t be a coincident to my way of thinking...um...Ruth, I forgot to ask you, did you find anything interesting on Lester Yeager while we were with Lorraine Hunter?”

“Yes...and no. Lester Benjamin Yeager. The only son of Austrian immigrants who came here to help on the Warragamba Dam project. Yeager Senior was a hydrographic engineer. Yeager Junior, born March five, Nineteen sixty-three here in Sydney. Went off the rails early in his teenage years spending twenty-two months in juvenile prison. Matriculated to the big boy’s jail at Long Bay for possession and carrying a prohibited firearm. He had two more stints before he turned thirty. His Rap Sheet goes on and on...he is seriously bad company by the looks of his rap sheet. Nothing for the last ten to twelve years that I can discover...known associate of Jeremy Wilson aka Dragan Polkowski. Shared the same cell with Wilson with the two released within days of one another. Also, an associate of Edward ‘Teddy’ Bell...”

“Who’s he?”

“Another crim thinking he will break into the big time before he retires. Was run over and killed up Grafton way about six months ago. Here is the interesting part, he was a long-haul driver for CFD...Capricornia Fuel Distributors”.

“Ooo...shit, that makes my nose itch when ex-crims gather at the same Firm for which we know bugger all about. We are looking at a sizable operation where cronies in crime have gathered...very bloody interesting!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

A friendly smile and an interested look on her face as she listened to Shelley trying to explain what we required.

“Um...first up, I’ll have a Planning Officer come down to see you. I feel sure the Officer will be able to help you with everything you are after. This could take a little while with them trying to figure out who would be the best person to help you”. Another smile as she tapped away on a computer thing that was also the internal telephone directory. “Please take a seat. I will call you when I have something for you”.

Arrh...bureaucracy...there’s not much difference in BS-speak between Local, State or Federal Governments. They all seemed to be educated from the same manual...or the same teacher!

I figured there was an internal conflict occurring at this moment upstairs as no-one in the Planning Section wanted us dumped on their desk!

We sat there for some time, talking quietly between ourselves. Me becoming more riled as time ticked over slowly.

“Good morning to you Detectives. I understand you have requested certain information that could take several days for us to uncover. A fee of two hundred and sixty dollars is required to be paid before we embark on those several tasks. I am Makissa Elba, the Deputy Head of the Planning Branch and the Rate Payers Register. I believe that a Court Order and payment of that fee will be necessary before I delegate the various tasks”.

She nodded and began to walk away.

“Um...Missus? Mz. Elbar...”

“E.L.B.A. Elba if you don’t mind”. She conveyed haughtily as she turned back to us.

“Yes...sorry Mz Elba. Um...as a State Government Agency, I would have thought such payments were not required. If, however you persist, I will require a couple of days to organise such an Order and the cheque. We cannot deal in cash as that could be construed as some sort of underhand payment, don’t you think?”

“You can think anything you like, Detective, but I have no intention of commencing anything until I have both those things in my hot little hand. A good day to you, Detectives. I hope the rest of your day is a little more fruitful”.

The patronising bitch! I thought.

I nodded, knowing that we had just added a couple more days onto the investigation, all because some self-important person throws her weight around. As we waited for the Lift to take us to the Ground Floor, I rang our new Boss to see what she thought of the situation.

“Total B.S!” Was her comment. “Leave it with me...I’ll get back to you, Joe”.

I could see an interesting conversation taking place between two ‘alpha’ females. I doubted that Denny Turner would give an inch and would argue that the NSW Police Force did not require, under Law, to provide any payment listed as an Administration Fee to a local government enterprise. I was sure that our enquiries to that Local Council did not require a Court Order to prise information out of the local government agency as all such information was in the public domain with access granted under legislation.

We had a late lunch at Picnic Point at the river near to East Hills Railway Station. They had extended the line over the river to Campbelltown. In my younger days before I had a Driver’s license but the heart of a young lover, I would often find myself asleep on some bitterly cold Railway Station having missed the last train out! At that time, the East Hills line terminated at East Hills.

I guess you can’t stop progress.

Nowadays, a young bloke would be taking his life in his hands trying to sleep on a cold hard Railway seat waiting for that first train of a morning to get him home.

“What’s the grin for, Joe?”

I shook my head. There were some things that I would never divulge that occurred during my young turbulent years. I shrugged my shoulders and bowed my head to hide the smile...yep...there were certain things I could never divulge as the telling would broker more questions that I could never answer. Everyone has these secrets. Skeletons in the closet they call them of a rougher, more belligerent, and cockier lad who was absolutely lucky never to have been knifed between the shoulder blades...while several would-be adversaries would never see their next birthday.

Man, I was lucky!

Especially around this district in the mid-eighties.

Again, these reminiscences brought a smile to my lips which only made Shelley more inquisitive. Ruth just sat there taking in the banter of us two older persons whom she thought were on the verge of shooting one another. When she stated this, we almost lost our lunch that we had just digested because of the belly laughs from both of us.

As we sat there drinking the last drops of Ice Coffee and having exhausted our cheerfulness, Shelley turned to me with a serious look on her face.

“Joe? How come your first suspicions on several homicides now has it centred around the drug scene, especially when there wasn’t a skerrick of proof drugs were not involved? Like on the M1 Rest Stop homicide at Wyong...and several others?”

I looked at her then looked away, finishing off my Iced Coffee.

“You must remember Shells...it was my bread and butter...I cut my teeth on the drug trade when Baz and I worked undercover straight after we matriculated from the Goulburn Academy. I ...we earned our keep learning how the drug trade operated...and it still uses the same principals even today...and it is twenty times more profitable than in those days...”

“Seems to me you didn’t do your job that well if it has grown by such a degree”.

The want to place my Glock up my partner’s nose had never been stronger. Instead, I made light of the situation.

“Yeah...think where we would be today if we had hooked our wagon to some up-and-coming star in the trade. We’d be millionaires today!”

“Or dead...” Shells replied glumly. That wasn’t far off the mark...

After we had eaten, we headed towards the Hospital to see Clive Butler. It really was a waste of time as we were permitted a couple of minutes only. We stood beside the bed knowing our presence was not recorded in any way...the guy was out of it, trapped in a little world that only he could see or feel. A sad ending for an intelligent man...he had been a good boss.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The next morning, the three of us walked into Denny Turner's Office to sit opposite her after we had come up from the Basement Gym. Compared to the generous proportions of Clive Butler, she looked totally lost and tiny behind the desk in the large Executive chair that easily accommodated CB's massive size. Looks can be deceiving as I thought she filled the chair more comfortably than CB ever had. The size wasn't important, it was the presence that a person radiated that people noticed. Denny had it in spades.

"The information you required. It should be in an e-mail perhaps early next week...with all the answers listed...now, what else is there?" There was a smirk indicating a fiery conversation with the second in charge of the Planning Section at Bankstown Council.

"A couple of things, Boss. The official address for Capricornia Fuel Distributors is a Post Office Box at a Mail Sorting establishment in a southern suburb of Brisbane. We would like a twenty-four-hour surveillance operation placed on that Mail Centre capable of also following who-ever picks up the mail for CFD...and two, an 'All Points Alert' placed on the Roadtrain that is central to our enquiries on the Bashing Murder of Jeremy Wilson. We would like a tail placed on that rig from Queensland right down to Sydney...and the return journey as well".

She looked down at her hands clasped together, resting on the desktop.

"I can see where you are coming from Joseph, with those requests. However, I do not know whether our budget will cover such arrangements...and you can bet that the Queensland coppers will demand top dollar for a twenty-four/seven surveillance op on that location. I'll have to go upstairs cup in hand before we go any further. It would be a nice little job for two undercover cops just out of the Academy, eh?" I smile, a giggle her response.

I gave her the details so that further information could be gleaned if possible, during those two operations.

"Okay, Joe. You are asking a lot especially with this tailing exercise. You know as well as I do such an exercise could involve up to half a dozen vehicles, especially if you want close surveillance for the entire trip...up and back. I'll let you know if I can organise such an operation. When was the Roadtrain released from our care...and who was the person who picked it up?"

Shelley scrolled through her iPad until she came to that section.

“The Roadtrain was released by Forensics three days after the murder of its driver. A bloke by the name of Lester Yeager. He supplied a letter of authorisation, very fancy indeed, from the alleged head of East Coast Haulage. On official letterhead paper, the signature totally unreadable. It’s in the Murder Book on Joe’s desk”.

“Les Yeager!? Wonder if that person is the same Les Yeager, I knew of years ago...a lot of years ago...around thirty years about when I was a young lass working Plainclothes. He was heavy trouble, let me tell you. He had a twisted sense of logic and a sadistic trait to match. I had always thought that he would not make his next birthday...seems as though he has seen quite a few go past...if it is the same guy. I don’t suppose you’ve got a shot of him, do you?” Denny smiled at the memory that only she could visualise.

Glancing at Shelley I knew she had, just by her smug smile and the way she sat. She again scrolled through several folios until she came to the photo she wanted. Thrusting her iPad towards me, she stated that the man in question appeared to be the Headman...or at least high up within the firm of East Coast Haulage.

Denny looked closely at the photograph on Shelley’s iPad.

“There is a couple there, Boss. Just scroll up or down”.

She scrolled up and down, trying to place the middle-aged man.

“I could say with a bit of cheating, he could very well be the Yeager I knew early in my career. Maybe it is, maybe it isn’t”. She smiled at both Shells and I, handing the iPad back to Shelley.

“Anything else?”

“No...I’ll get Ruth here to liaison with the Company Register at the RG Department. I want to know who the honchos are that head Capricornia Fuel Distributors...and now East Coast Haulage”.

“While you and Shelly do what, Joe?”

“Bring the Murder Books up to date on the Jerry Wilson murder and that of Tennelli and Bocca”.

“Yes, you are getting behind a little. I have had nothing compelling to read that was up-to-date”. A smile and a chuckle to let us know she was joking. She’ll fit in, I thought. Very easily especially if she keeps that easy-going manner. “Um, your request to ask the Queensland Police to cooperate with a bit of surveillance duties...I will need to get approval from on high as the Queensland coppers will want to charge us for the privilege...ditto with that tail on the Rig...do you think it will uncover anything for the cost involved?”

“The truck...in my opinion...um... the truck is picking up a sizable load of weed as it is coming south with a full load of fuel...or picking it up on the way up north while the tanker is empty with all segments voided. The latter more plausible. It would be easier for him to pick up the load of weed while his tankers are empty and voided, especially if he has to do any back-country driving...”

“A huge truck like that!? You don’t really suspect that a truck of those dimensions would travel the back roads up in the North Coast hinterland, do you?”

“No, not really, but it would need to be parked in a place that does not raise any suspicions from the locals. If my notions are correct, there could be an amount over a tonne...could be closer to two tonnes needing to be moved from one vehicle into the Double Bee...”

“Mmm...yes. I don’t know whether we will get approvals for such an operation...going up or down it will still take a fair few resources...resources that we may not have up around that area, but...I’ll give it a go, okay? Understand, in me requesting such a two-pronged operation, the powers upstairs may want the Narc boys involved. What do you think about that?”

“I don’t”. I replied curtly.

“Fair ‘nuff” She responded good humouredly. “I’ll see what I can do”.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

We sat in silence for some time before Kindle suggested a coffee break. We jumped at it! She took a fiver from both of us and scampered away as though she needed the caffeine fix more than Shelley or me!

“What have you been doing Tonto, slouched down behind your computer screen?”

“We’ve got the Forensic and Fingerprint Reports in on the Jeremy Wilson murder. Also, the full Report on the CCTV coverage with a full DVD of all the camera feeds around the place...plus RMS photos of both the Double Bee rig, that Pantech vehicle and the mystery vehicle that tried so hard to hide itself”.

“Anything jump out?” Shelley spun her chair around to face me.

“First up, the Forensic Report. They managed to isolate only one person from all the shit in the area around the death scene. A Mister Lester ‘Les’ Yeager...our mystery Co-Director we think, of East Coast Haulage...surprise, surprise...but they put a rider on his name...um...as there was a mountain of forensic trace within a twenty-metre radius of where the body of Wilson was located, they cannot say with any certainty that the DNA trace that identified Mister Yeager was in fact, a part of the murder scene. It could have been deposited within a ninety-six-hour window prior to the murder occurring. All other trace proved negative to any known person with a prison record within the last twenty years. Apparently, the collection of DNA from prison detainees has only been rigorously enforced from that time...mid to late nineties...I didn’t know that”.

“About there, yeah. The Courts only accepted the veracity of DNA trace taken from a crime scene as undeniable evidence from the mid to late Nineties. That was after Great Britain accepted it as fool-proof evidence to be used in a Court Case”.

“Mmm...that could mean that the persons responsible are older than...let’s say forty years of age...and have kept their noses clean for the last twenty years...while our Mister Yeager hasn’t. That could indicate that all our felons tied up to this homicide are over forty...maybe fifty years of age. We could be dealing with geriatrics here!” I smiled at my own joke; Shelley gave me a frozen look.

“I’ll go along with that...until something is unearthed that will shoot down that supposition”. She murmured with just a modicum of anger noticeable.

“The condition of the body and the obvious ferociousness of the attack would indicate they were serious thugs...you know, like those blokes in the employ of JB Enterprises...um...the CCTV camera footage was recorded from the day before the attack. The digital forensic guys were not looking for Mister Les Yeager loitering about the area twenty-four-hours before hand. Our Mister Yeager was loitering in the area for a more sinister reason. To ascertain the locations of all the cameras...what do you reckon?”

Kindle placed a large coffee container on my and Shells' desks. The aroma was beautiful which produced murmurs from our remaining colleagues on the floor.

"Did you mention a Mister Yeager, just then?" Kindle asked as she wheeled her desk chair up to my desk. She wanted to belong to our pow-wow sessions as much as possible. She slid the loose change from each of our 'fivers' across to both of us. I gave Shelley a look. She never returned any change if it was from a 'fiver'. Then again, neither did I! Bigger stuff, sure, but a fiver? Maybe Kindle didn't like the feel of loose change in her pocket. Weighing her down, day after day. I don't know, I'm just peeing into the wind. She had been reared in a God-fearing family where honesty was the religion I supposed.

"Yes, Yeager was the only person identified from all the trace collected within a twenty-metre radius of the Wilson death scene...his name has been coming up a bit in the last day or two, huh?"

"That's funny. I did some more digging on the Yeager name while you have been transporting me around Sydney and suburbs. Lester 'Les' Benjamin Yeager is listed as a person in partnership in both firms. That is East Coast Haulage and Capricornia Fuel Distributors..."

"Arrh...wait..." I sat back in my chair, playing with my Biro which I pointed at her. "How does that compute as Jeremy Wilson was the main driver for Capricornia Fuel Distributors, wasn't he?"

"I searched the Criminal Data Base for Yeager's name. He has a list of convictions going back years. The last time he did time was for 'assault causing grievous bodily harm', resisting arrest and foul language which he got five years for, paroled after three and a half years. That was in two thousand and seven. I'd say the longevity of the sentence was because of his thug-type reputation. Nothing for the last ten years. A list of known associates looks like the who's who of the Sydney Underworld...he was a 'heavy for hire' of some repute for hire to the highest bidder according to the Intel..."

"A thug for hire, eh? But a Co-Director of two firms firmly in our sights". Shelley replied as I nodded my head in agreement. "It's getting interesting..."

"Looks like it...can we just put Yeager aside for one moment...forensic trace? That's about all they could give us. Perhaps we can match up DNA trace to a body as we work on this case. The CCTV footage? I will refrain from further comment until I have looked through the footage myself...where is Dallas Courtney when you need him. He used to love shit like that! Going through miles of footage or reams of paper. The Pantech and Toyota Landcruiser? The

Pantech had no number plates and a dollar to ten says it was stolen anyway. The Toyota? The same thing. Stolen plates in any case. I'll laid odds and say it will be found within the next couple of months burnt out with nothing of value salvageable. Um...Fingerprint Report? We basically knew all there was to know...without a confirming word from our Vic but considering the number and positioning of prints within and on the Roadtrain, especially within the Cabin, we can be pretty sure that Jerry Wilson was the driver of the rig...and DNA comparison examinations taken from various points in the Cabin of the Prime Mover and his body confirms pretty much that assumption...now...what else have we got?"

We all took a sip of our coffees as though some masterful puppeteer was controlling us.

"Wilson? He was murdered because he was taking slurps of fuel and I'd say marijuana from the load...his bosses found out and killed him. They possibly were going to just give him a lesson, but the taste of blood got to them". Kindle seemed pleased with her offering.

"Mmm...but...the fact that Yeager has been identified *at* the scene...and the fact that he has been identified as a Company Director of CFD, doesn't that add another dimension to the equation? And isn't the punishment a little out of sync with the crime committed? All they had to do was fire him, surely. I mean, smashing his face off his head seems a little extreme with the punishment not really fitting the crime the way I'm looking at it..."

"Perhaps they were worried about loose lips...you know, Wilson spilling the beans through Crime Stoppers as a way of getting back at being fired, so to their skewered logic, they needed to get rid of him...and thinking of Yeager, he was there only if you allow the possibility that he was at the scene identifying the camera locations...and the location? Seems to me they could have picked any lonely stretch of road between here and the border to do what they did to Wilson. That Truck Stop and Rest area must be one of the busiest in the State! It would be the last place I would identify for bashing someone to death. The amount of traffic and foot movement across that entire establishment is huge...a lonely out of the way place with bush all around would be my preference for an ambush". Kindle reddened as Shells and I looked at her. I was pleased with her logic and thinking powers.

"Does that really matter though? The camera locations? Our Suspects drive into the area in stolen vehicles with stolen number plates...who gives a fig about camera positions..."

"...and it is obvious that Wilson knew his attackers...and the rendezvous had been agreed upon by all parties...and Wilson was not nervous about the arrangement going on the way he was sitting...and even when he was walking to his death. He didn't have a clue about that...he was quite loose if anything. If the rendezvous was arranged to take place on some lonely

stretch of roadway up north, I reckon Wilson would have been less inclined to be cooperative”.

We sat there with our heads down, thinking about what had been divulged... trying to get our heads around what was becoming patently clear as a crime of some magnitude that was tied into other things.

“The Perps? They may have been tailing Wilson in the Rig out to his sister’s place at Long Jetty. Filmed the transfer of fuel and/or drugs during the night...”

“I don’t think so. I reckon this meeting had been arranged for some time. The Rig was empty of fuel which says that it had visited several Service Stations in the metropolitan area to dump fuel...and sat somewhere out of the road until another ‘fill’ was required. It was empty so it was on the way back up the coast for a re-fill...where to rendezvous? The large Truck Stop at Wyong...handy for everyone...”

“So? I know what you mean, but...”

“I think we should have a serious talk with Yeager. To-morrow, huh?”

There was silence for some time, each caught in their own world.

“Maybe we are looking at it the wrong way...” Shelley muttered under her breath. You could rely on Shelley to toss that proverbial spanner. “Maybe...no...seems to me that Yeager may have been the ‘gun for hire’...”

“No Shells. Ruth has burrowed out the information on Yeager. He was a part of CFD...a partner in crime, as a matter in fact...more to the point, a partner in the firm...so why would he be involved in the death of their main driver?”

“No loyalty in that crowd, Joe, even if Yeager was a partner in Capricornia and East Coast. His work history has always shown him as a ‘gun for hire’...stay with what we know...a clever dick once told that to me”.

I interrupted, getting a little short.

“Maybe he found loyalty when he was placed in a partnership...you know, he matured. I mean, what...he has been clean for around ten years”.

There was that ten-year period again.

“Good luck with that thought, Joe. What-ever...but maybe the rort that was being committed in cheaper fuel and drug transportation and distribution...”

“We have no proof to that theory as yet, Shells...about the transportation of massive quantities of weed...”

She gave me another of her frozen stares and raised her hand to quieten my interruptions. It was something we parried at every Case we had been involved in...no skin off my back...or hers!

“...maybe the scheme was noticed by...who-ever...who did not like the sudden appearance of good quality grass flooding onto the market with the distribution area starting to creep into some-one else’s territory...that’s a big no-no, in the world of drug distribution...maybe Tennelli and Bocca were the ones who noticed this imbalance and ordered a hit...I would imagine they would be losing heaps...in both reputation, quality of product and regularity of supply...if Yeager has a history of being a ‘basher for hire’...he arrh...he could have taken on the case, especially if the price was right...it would be no skin off his nose if the victim was actually under his employ.”

“Okay...but who ordered the hit on Tennelli and Bocca? And what connection is their deaths to Wilson’s. We are pretty sure both were killed by the same duo on a motorbike...by the description, a Ducati more than likely...and I’ll bet a pound to a penny they were from interstate...more than likely Melbourne is their hometown...”

“The hit advertised with the two being put through a grilling before being accepted by Jeremy Wilson’s bosses. They were looking for revenge of their top driver being killed...I mean, he had to protect his reputation in that world. He could not afford to just sit back and take the killing of Wilson without reacting in some way...so there goes Tennelli and Bocca...the hiring of Yeager to do the initial hit on Wilson not even suspected by the head guy of CFD and East Coast Haulage. The two could be best of mates for all we know”.

“Jeez, Shell...” I shook my head partly in exasperation, partly in admiration as her words had slowed down all those things whizzing around in my head with that proverbial light globe flashing off and on. I really had to admire the woman as she was at least three strides ahead of me at times. That made me worried as it was becoming more noticeable as I grew older.

“I’d say this scam has been going on for years...”

“Yeah...the fuel thing, yeah, I’ll go along with that. But the decent quality marijuana in substantial amounts...that may have been organised in the last couple of years...it would take that amount of time to set up a decent hydroponic set-up under plastic”. I could not let her dismantle the evidence whizzing about, the orbits yet to balance out with a theory firming into fact.

My two colleagues nodded their heads in agreement. The added information that Kindle had unearthed from the Registrar General’s Department Company Register was forgotten in the conversation.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The next morning after the three of us had a shortened swimming and aerobic session, we purchased a coffee each as we headed to our Unmarked on the second level of the Basement parking area. Ruth Kindle had begun to accompany us each morning and afternoon for a swim and some time on the treadmill or rowing machine, pleased with her aerobic fitness.

“Put the address into the GPS, will you Joe. I’m not too sure how to get there”.

I glanced down at the last known address of Lester Yeager that we had. A road in Tennyson Point, a suburb of which I had never heard. But then again, with so many Points and Headlands within the body of water known as Port Jackson, I’d be lucky to know more than half-a-dozen!

We had barely made it onto the street heading towards Victoria Road as instructed by that smarmy voiced woman in the GPS thing-a-ma-jig when my Mobile rang its infuriating boring ring tone.

“Yes Boss...you’re on speaker phone, boss”. I placed the call through the car’s speakers so we all could hear the conversation.

“We’ve just got a heads-up from the Queensland Police. A retired woman...arrh...a Missus Lorna Hillsborough...umm...she clears the Post Office Box used by CFD. She has been getting fifty a week to check for mail. The money automatically deposited into her account each fortnight. A hundred bucks. I asked them to trace out where the money comes from...they’ll let us know. Hillsborough checks the Post Office box twice a week. She then

places it into an already addressed envelope, a pile of which she received some years ago, seals it and enters the Post Office to have it weighed and stamped. She then drops it into the Posting Box...good money if you can get it. She is on an Old Age Pension so one hundred bucks extra no strings attached with no income tax required keeps the wolf at bay, huh?"

"Jeez, and I bet she doesn't remember being given that pile of pre-addressed envelopes or by whom. What's the new address?"

"An address...a post office box at Toronto Post Office, NSW. We'll need to have a surveillance operation there as well...the elderly woman? She is in shock after learning what she was doing...tied up with murderers and drug lords. She cannot remember how long she has been doing it...a good couple of years, she reckons. She has now been given the scare of her life with Charges over her head with possible jail time. Some-one from the Queensland Cops was nominated to take over the operation at my request...we haven't enough information yet to lay charges at this end, have we? We need to keep that arrangement progressing so that our POI does not get a sniff we are onto him...who-ever he is".

"No...yeah...but I think we are getting close..."

"So is Christmas this year but we have just enjoyed the Yuletide greetings for the last one. Keep me in the loop, okay? My talk with the guys upstairs about the tail on the Truck Tanker? They are not willing to approve the expenditure for that...but the surveillance on the Queensland Post Office Box has proved fruitful inside forty-eight hours...we can cheat a bit and organise a similar watch on Toronto NSW as that is where the re-addressed mail ends up. Have done that already".

"Yes Boss. Thanks for that". I hung up. Thought over the information. "We're getting closer, I can feel it".

"Toronto...on the western side of the lake...a nice address for whom-ever".

"Better than Chipping Norton?"

"Oh, God yeah...depending if you are on the lake frontage especially...why did you mention Chipping Norton, Ruth?"

"I don't know. I had never heard of Chipping Norton until this case and some of the houses there look really superb...you know, Tennelli and Bocca's joints. Way beyond the other houses around the area".

“Talking about them, where’s the connection with the Wilson murder”.

We tended to go over theories and thoughts time and again wanting something to emerge that would bind the whole lot together...it could take hours, days or may never occur such is the beast!

“You mentioned a possible connection yesterday afternoon, didn’t you?”

“Yeah...but I was just chewing the fat...rambling on...something I am noted for, girly”.

“He does a fair bit of that, Ruth. Don’t take too much notice of it unless it jogs something for you. He spews forth nothing but bullshit most of the time and it’s hard to tell the piss from the shit most of the time...usually it is all just effluent”.

“That’s hard coming from the tall one wearing a white hat on a big white horse...does your face show a sunburn line after you take off the mask?”

“Only because I’m white...you as a Plains Red Indian Tonto, you never get sunburn as you’re already red...”

“Racist!” I had to get the last word in, but it usually was a race between me or her!

We both heard Kindle giggling away in the rear seat. A little girl giggle. It felt good just to hear it. I noticed Shelley smiling.

“At the next set of lights, turn right”. The directions said in a calming manner cut across my thoughts.

“Yeah, yeah...except you cannot turn right at that set of bloody lights, you silly bitch! Fair dinkum, one of these days I’m gunna stick my Glock right up your screen-face and blast you to kingdom come!” I screamed, as I leant towards the little screen, pointing a stiffened fourth finger at the GPS thing-a-jig.

“Notice how our illustrious leader talks to a machine...an inanimate object that can’t answer back? It sheds some light on his domestic scene and his state of mind, doesn’t it?”

That quip did not please me at all...or help to appease the anger I had for that dumb unseen bird. The two women thought it hilarious. Laughing at my expense only made the matter worse from where I was standing.

“You can change the voice in that GPS thing if you want...” Kindle advised us.

That surprised me. I didn’t know that. I thought about it then replied glumly.

“It would be akin to us gunning some-one down in the street...some-one we didn’t even know!”

“Jeezuz, give me strength!” Shelley replied as she did an illegal youie on the main drag to drive back to the set of lights, all the time being told to *‘turn left at the next set of lights’*.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

“Good morning missus...” I chirped happily.

“I can’t afford what you’re selling!” The middle-aged woman stated sternly.

“Sorry missus...” I responded as I showed her my credentials. “I am Detective Lind with my partners Detectives Shelley Shields and Ruth Kindle...from the Murder Squad”.

She ignored me and looked at both Shelley and Ruth. She jutted her chin towards Kindle.

“You not a cop...you too young to be a cop”. Even though Kindle still had her ID card held at arm’s length towards the woman.

“What you want?” She eventually asked having convinced herself of our authenticity.

“Does a Lester Yeager live here?”

“Who? Never heard of him”. She began to close the door. I moved towards her ready to stick my size tens into the ajar door.

“Missus, how long have you lived here?”

“Ten year about...my son and my husband built this place...nice and strong...yeah, maybe ten year ago”.

“Did some-one live on this block before your husband built this beautiful house?”

“Oh, yes. A long time ago. My husband and son bought the land and sub-divided it. They built the house next door as well...nice and strong”.

“Who did they purchase the property from?”

“Oh...long time ago. An old couple who moved into a Nursing Home...we go see them a coupla times before they both passed”. She crossed herself. “A lovely couple. We take them flowers and oranges”.

“Can you remember their names?”

“Bertha and George, yes? Very old but nice people...we go see them in the Nursing Home not far upta road...”

“Their surnames? Can you remember their surname, missus?”

“Ohh! Long time ago...Brandon...Braddon...Bingham...something like that, yes. Sorry, that is all I remember. It was a long time ago...”

“Yes, ten years. A long time ago...what Council area covers your property?”

“Council? I don’t know. My husband and son had a lot of trouble with the Council men over us wanting to build two houses here...they say we couldn’t. We showed them. My husband took the Councilmen to some sort of meeting in town with the big boys of Government. My husband, he and my son won so we build both houses...nice and strong. You can see both these houses are built strong so no bulldozer will ever knock them down...Gladesville Council I think...a good day to you...” She silently closed the door as we stood on the small front Porch.

As I got to our Unmarked, I looked back at the two dwellings.

“I think I can see what Council was objecting to”.

Both dwellings were two storeys high, an open veranda on the ground and first floor levels with white painted balusters like some neo-Grecian pedestals surrounding each open veranda. Every window and door opening had an arched head. The roof looked as though it was accessible as its perimeter too was lined with those bulky Mediterranean balusters.

I looked up and down the street at the number of California bungalows and Fifties style Australiana houses. These two dwellings stuck out like sore thumbs. Their only saving grace was both had absolute water frontage which would be *the* selling point when both came on the market. Bulldozer proof they may be, but I could not see them lasting in the next exchange of sale!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

“Shells, go park down at that river-side park so that Ruth can get through to Gladesville Council...” I twisted in my seat to face her. “You up to it, my dear?”

Kindle nodded her head and took out her Mobile as Shelley slowly drove to the head of the spit. We left the front doors of our vehicle open to allow the weak nor-easterly to blow through the vehicle. It was a beautiful day and with a slight breeze coming off the Harbour waters, it wasn't uncomfortably hot. As Kindle began her spiel both Shelley and I stood from the vehicle and walked slowly through the park to the water's edge. A slow slap of the wavelets onto the sandstone outcropping was at a steady and hypnotic beat.

“When does Sydney Harbour...or more precisely Port Jackson stop, and Parramatta River begin?”

Shelley gave me one of her looks.

“Stuff like that worry you, huh partner?”

“Well...it is just something I thought about...”

Shelley rocked from one foot to the other, trying very hard not to explode. I smiled as I had ‘got’ her!

“This whole business is starting to give me the shivers, Joe. You?”

“It's too nice a day to get the shivers but yes, I know what you mean. I reckon we will be dealing with some ‘heavies’ from the Sydney Underworld before this is finished, something that I could do without. I reckon we are looking at tit-for-tat killings and before it is through, I reckon we could be looking at a couple more bods bashed or shot to death”.

“So, you have changed your mind, Joe? You think all are connected?”

“Yep, I’m bending that way...the whole business may have started out with transporting cheaper fuel...diesel, ULP and E10 petrol. Organised and controlled by our mysterious ‘big man’. It would have remained just a scam involving one party...involving only one gang. Thirty-six thousand litres in each of those tankers driving on our roads...geez...that’s some barbeque if the Roadtrain was involved in an accident...anyhow...the status quo would have remained but no...who-ever is our fuel scammer saw another way to make quick bucks...bringing enormous quantities of weed down into Sydney. That is where rival parties became interested...or were affected. There would have been a certain amount of muscle twitching before it became serious...dead bodies...firstly Jerry Wilson aka Dragan Polkowski...then Tennelli and Bocca as payback. I’m waiting for the next body to fall”.

She looked up at me, a frown creasing her brow.

“Why Tennelli and Bocca? And you forgot that Bell guy who was a driver for CFD”.

I nodded my head, but I wasn’t too sure that he was in the circle that we were now looking at.

“Mmm...Bell? It was deemed an accident which I think, isn’t involved in these later matters. They ordered the hit on Wilson purely as a warning, letting our mystery man know they were not happy with the sudden appearance of excellent quality grass. They could have even been on-site to watch it happen! It is more than gossip that those two had the scene sown up with not only grass but all the party drugs as well...” I stopped to look at the white caps forming on the water. “A bit of a southerly change coming...” I looked around and suggested we sit at a table and bench arrangement under a very large Port Jackson fig in the middle of the Park, some distance from the water’s edge.

I sighed as I sat.

“Then we have the appearance of Louis Ortello...now he is heavy shit both here in NSW and Victoria. He really opened that proverbial can of worms. Going through all the CCTV footage that recorded the assassination of Tony Bocca, I was surprised that there were no personal bodyguards for Louie...they were there but well hidden, I reckon, maybe on a neighbouring table, close enough but just far enough away not to cause any suspicion, I reckon...his purpose was to place the spotlight onto Bocca which would suggest the two on the bike were from interstate and did not have a clue who Bocca was. To place himself in such a situation meant that his toes were being trodden on too...seriously, I would imagine. I’d say he was losing big money with the punters preferring the better stuff coming down in quantity and quality

from the North Coast and on-sold by Yeager and who-ever. I find it difficult that we cannot identify Yeager's partner". I scratched my head and stood to take off my coat.

"Um, Joe? Your gun stands out like a bloody beacon. Put your coat back on".

I ignored the advice looking around to see whether there was any body within cooee. Nah...we were the only bods in the Park.

"To me, there is no other solution that fits the jigsaw. So, Ortello has a rival, something that he would not stand for...someone muscling in on his territory. He has been the king out around western Sydney for quite a few years...and he was hoping to expand his territory...except some small-time bloke euchres him...that would hurt and if he is the brute we think he is, he wouldn't take that lying down".

"Weren't Tennelli and Bocca kind of his allies? You know, like the pair were working for Ortello?"

"Yeah, according to Morrie Crown they worked under Louis Ortello...but there are no loyalties in the trade. As soon as Louis even suspected that the two were involved in Wilson's death, he felt his authority was being usurped...even for a bloody hit on the man. He is the one that makes decisions like that. Not his underlings. Ortello is no fool...that is why he has been in business for so long...that hit on Wilson was Tennelli and Bocca's death knell".

"Hard to prove...and even if we got to do a formal interview with the guy, he would be lawyered up. As you said, he's no fool. You know, first you say Wilson's death was a warning then you say that Tennelli and Bocca were killed by their Boss, Ortello for flexing their muscles without his specific orders to do so...there is no connection there...you are not making sense, Joe. You are contradicting yourself...you don't have a bloody clue, do you?"

I nodded. If we didn't get a lucky break in this domino effect, then those responsible would never be brought to justice no matter how hard we worked...and that really pissed me off right royally!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Kindle walked briskly towards us, a look of victory as she sat beside Shelley with a satisfied sigh. I wondered whether it was a conscious thing, like a car salesman who talks only to the man when it is the wife who was buying the car.

She addressed me, not Shells.

“Berta and Gorgio Gaddin. They transferred to the Bayview Nursing Home at Woolwich which is a couple of bays around from here. Around seven years ago. I rang the Nursing Home to be advised that both Berta and Gorgio had both passed. Their immediate family is still alive with one daughter living at Gladesville...not far away. She is home and is expecting us. I’d say she herself is in her late sixties the way she spoke...oh...and before I forget, Yeager? Lester Yeager is in partnership with a Mister Lindsey Carlisle in four petrol stations. One in Toronto, another at Gladesville here, one at Burwood and the last at Campbelltown. They did at one time own one on Newbridge Road, Liverpool which they sold about ten years ago. Cut price petrol. The Service Stations trade under the name of Capricornia Budget Fuels. It is a listed Partnership”.

I sat there like a stunned mullet. The name Carlisle whizzing around in my head, eventually falling into line on the centre bar.

“Castle Carlisle. I betcha! Lindsey Carlisle, jeez!” I muttered more to myself. “I never believe in coincidences, but this one is a beauty!”

“Like to fill us in, Tonto. You look as though you’ve seen a ghost”.

“Too right...once it lodges there, it never leaves...it’s in the blood. That’s what an old hand once told me. He didn’t believe that crims could be saved from a further life in crime. He always said that once a crim, always a crim...it was in the blood”. I shook my head, an image of ‘Sly’ Ferguson coming into focus...there is always the exception, I heard the old bloke whisper inside my head.

Shelley looked at me closely wondering what in hell I was talking about.

“I’ll explain later when a couple more facts fall into place. Let’s go and see the daughter...”

I looked at Kindle, a shrug denoting my question. Kindle looked from me to Shelley wondering what in hell was going on between us two. I nodded for Kindle to continue.

“Um...yeah, sorry. Vanessa Bell. Her husband died a couple of months ago...and her two kids are interstate, but it didn't sound as though she was that lonely. She sounded like a very pleasant older woman...a nice lady”.

“Bell...I wonder...” I muttered to myself. “That would complete a nice little circle for us, wouldn't it...if she is *the* Missus Bell whose husband was accidentally killed just south of Grafton?”

“When we get back into the Office, I want you to drag out as much information as you can on Yeager and Carlisle...and Wilson and Bell...home addresses and telephone numbers are paramount...check the Mobile Phone Directories of all the carriers in Australia. That I think will be more fruitful than the old landline directory...okay? You'd already have as much as you can dig up on Yeager but the other three? Oh...and Ruth, excellent work with what you have just completed. You followed a logical line of investigation that has helped enormously...that circle is slowly closing”.

She nodded her head, giving me a beautiful wide smile. I don't think I could have received a better reaction even if I had patted her head...

I computed Missus Bell's address into that frustrating bloody machine and off we went, again falling foul of the directions because we could not turn right onto Victoria Road to head towards Gladesville.

Vanessa Bell lived in a beautifully kept large Californian bungalow well away from the constant whoosh of traffic on Victoria Road. In a quiet suburban street; its flanks a ribbon of colour from the various Grevillea trees. The screech of Rainbow Lorikeets piercing the still morning air as they feasted on the nectar of the bushes was quite exciting to me. I stood from the Unmarked and watched the kamikaze flights of these colourful birds. There was no melody in their calls just a shrill unmusical chirp, but the beauty was in their colouring. I could have stood entranced at their antics all day.

Kindle knocked on the door several times before it was opened slowly.

“Missus Bell? I rang you about thirty minutes ago. I am Detective Ruth Kindle. These are my colleagues Detectives Lind and Shields”.

The woman stood erect, her back ramrod straight displaying a trim figure, her eyes a lustrous blue, her hair a halo, glowing from the sunlight coursing through a sunlight roof tube illuminating the Hallway behind her. She looked Kindle up and down then cast her inspection to Shells and me.

“You’re a slight but pretty thing, aren’t you?” She opined. “I was under the misconception that Detectives went around in twos...or even alone...three of you? And there is no way you could break the six-foot barrier of old to gain an entrance into the Police Academy. Let me see some identification please”. She stayed behind the security screen door which was locked. She had checked it several times. She spoke as though totally in control of her world but the several times she checked the screen door showed there was a nervous insecurity there.

We all fished out our ID cards, thrusting them towards her at eye-level. She peered at them closely before nodding her head.

“Mmm...I still think you are far too young and of a slight build to be a Policewoman, my dear...but in this age of enlightenment, I suppose anything goes. What is it you want of me? You will not object if I leave this door closed and locked...my security between you and I...you may have all the right identification to prove you are Detectives, but I still have doubts...”

“Umm...we are endeavouring to gather as much information as we can on a chap going by the name of Lester Yeager...”

“Les? Don’t tell me he has gone off the rails again. A lovely man...who never gave Mum or Dad a moment of aggression or worry...a really lovely man...but you could feel the turmoil inside of him”.

“So, he lived with you at your home in Tennyson Point...with your mum and dad?”

“I see you have already made some headway in your search...yes, as a lodger for...oh...a fair few years. That was a glorious house. That is why my Teddy, and I bought this one. It reminded me so much of the house at Tennyson Point. We have done a lot to this house over the years, but the outside still remains the same”.

“Why did you say something about aggression and worry? Did the man occasionally display those traits while he lodged with your parents?”

“Um...he showed nothing of the sort...but Mum would sometime say that he was a man whose spring was wound very tightly...he was nothing but a gentleman to both Mum and Dad and us kids”.

“What did your father do for a living?”

“He was second-in-charge at Callan Park...the Security Officers when it was a ‘mad house’. When Dad retired, they sold the house and moved into a Nursing Home just down the road...no, about ten years after he retired, I guess. Time flies, doesn’t it? I used to visit them regularly each week before they passed. Bless their memory...”

“Did your parents take in many ex-cons?”

“Yes...most were nice people who got out of the bed on the wrong side, as my Dad used to say. Ran out of luck...he used to say. We were blessed not to have been born in similar circumstance, he would also say. Les for example...he sold marijuana before it was a well-known illegal drug. A lovely man who thought the only way he could make it was by illegal means. He had a brain. Dad would say that if he had concentrated a bit more, he could have been anything he liked but no, like so many of those petty crims, he was just too lazy to try...they had the confidence in their being bashed out of them when they were young...most of them...my Dad used to say”.

“How long did he live with you?”

“He was the last...he lodged with us after Dad retired. I got married late you may say, but I was looking for the right man...and lucky me, I found him. Unfortunately, we did not have a life-time relationship as he was taken early. Now without him...and the kids having gone, I guess this house is really a little too big for just me...but it holds so many memories...Les used to pop in occasionally, especially after my Teddy passed. He’d give me money and food...even clothes and furniture”.

“What was he doing to earn that type of money?”

“I never asked. He just needed to give as his way of thanking Mum and Dad for treating him well”.

The three of us nodded our heads in unison, knowing that the woman would have been well aware of where the largesse stemmed from. Once a crim, always a crim but she couldn’t see

it while she wore those rose-coloured glasses. She had them on for most of her life if you believe her blessed Teddy was just an honest man.

For most crims, it was in the blood.

“What did your Teddy do?”

“He was a long-haul driver. He used to drive those terribly big double Trailer things from here to Brisbane and back”.

“Fuel tankers”. I stated, neither a question or answer. Another ball rolled into place.

She glanced across at me, nodding her head slightly.

“Was your husband ever in jail?” Kindle asked, wanting to regain the lead in the conversation. I couldn’t doubt her enthusiasm.

The older woman stood there as stiff as a board, hardly breathing. She seemed to come out of that state slowly, glaring malevolently at Kindle. All the softness and womanliness were gone. She folded her arms across her breasts putting up another wall between us.

“Teddy would often say that the cops would always have it in for him knowing he was an *ex-con!*” The emphasis on the ‘ex’. “He would say that he was always being pulled over for no sane reason at all, just because he was an *ex-con*...he was the gentlest man I ever knew”.

Several red lights were going off and on in my brain.

“What did he do time for...your Teddy?” I asked.

“He was young and stupid. Wanted to make a quid to kick-start his life. He did eighteen months for having a commercial quantity of marijuana on himself...that was all!” As though this should not be a legitimate reason to spend time in jail. There were a fair few people who thought that. The world was going soft on marijuana use as a chargeable offence with some Countries and States de-criminalising its use altogether.

“Did Ted know Les Yeager?”

“They were mates...while they were in prison...and in civvies...Teddy worked hard for Yeager when he came out. Les was like that, always wanting to help...especially *ex-crim*s

who needed that kick-start to get on with their lives after they came out of prison. I look at it that it was my father who showed a Christian side to ex-crimis that was the example that Les followed”.

An easy and well-sourced employment pool, I thought to myself. Any crim worth his salt would grab the opportunity in both hands as the work also gave them the opportunity to skim a bit off the top for their own enterprise...I think that is why Jeremy Wilson was killed...he took just a little too much as far as the boss was concerned.

I had turned a full one hundred and eighty degrees...thinking that Wilson wasn't murdered by Tennelli and Bocca but by the bloke's employer. That kind of left Tennelli and Bocca's murders out on a limb...if Wilson's boss had been involved in his murder, why were the other two killed? Were they connected at all? I now had serious doubts about any connection.

“How did your husband die?”

“Never investigated properly...he was found beside the road up Grafton way. Beside the old Pacific Highway. Lying *under* the wheels of the Rig he was driving. No-one was ever convicted for the crime. You cops never investigated the matter properly, stating it was an accidental death. Accidental be buggered, ‘scuse my French”.

She gave what could only be described as an angry snort. She stopped looking at us, instead bending slightly to stare at the floor. We were losing her.

“Would you have an address or phone number for Yeager?”

She looked up at us suspiciously before she replied.

“No...he lives up north somewhere...Central Coast, maybe a little further north than that”.

“Perhaps up around Toronto on the shores of Lake Macquarie perhaps?”

She glared back at me, shaking her head slowly...she was not about to agree with me.

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“Um...a while ago now. Yes...some time ago”.

I could tell she wasn't being totally honest with us. It was as if a blind had come down in front of her, hiding the woman that we first met. She was not going to be any more cooperative.

We said our byes, thanking her for her frankness and honesty. Walking down the pathway to the front gate she yelled out to us to make sure we shut the gate properly as though that was the one weakness in the battlements that ran around her property.

"She knows where he lives, has his phone number and is well aware of where all the gifts came from...from easy and illegal money. She could be booked for '*benefitting from illegal means*' or *being in possession of stolen goods*, couldn't she?" Kindle asked angrily before dropping into the back seat of our Unmarked.

Shelley nodded her head.

"She has closed her mind to that revelation I'd say, for most of her life...as did her mother and father before her, I reckon".

We left that suburban address and got back onto Victoria Road without much problem. As we headed back towards our Office, Shelley slowed and pulled off the road into a Servo.

"We don't need petrol, do we? It was full this morning when we pulled out of the Police building".

"Yeah, I know...but the name...the name".

She stopped right outside the entry doorway into the building. The sliding glass door opening and shutting because our Unmarked was registering on the automatic pulse. The bloke behind the counter at the register point was leaning towards the glass window, knocking on the glass to get out attention. He wanted us to move.

"Check out the name of the owners above the entry door. Capricornia Budget Fuels. Directors L. Carlisle and L. Yeager...no need to get onto the Company's Directory, Ruth. We just saved you a bit of work".

"Neat, huh? L. Carlisle...there it is again. He would have the intellect and nous to get this group of companies up and running...the guy never gave the 'game' away because it is in his blood. The funny thing is, I betcha he works eighteen hour-days like any Director of a smallish Firm does...Betcha!"

That was the paradox for me...the illegal bearings of the firm meant he had to work long hours. Wouldn't that kind of gel as a silly arrangement? Wouldn't that monetary incentive make the silly buggers see that they could work legitimately and not have to worry about feuding Drug lords or others wanting a piece of the action? Surely, they could see the stupidity of their actions...

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

I stood from my desk and walked around, frustration and anger mingling together. I had not addressed 'Big Red' for some time and even though I felt like smashing the innards out of the bloody thing at this precise moment, I felt my stamina and muscle-power was lacking to give it a go. I was getting too old for a round or two to occur!

"What's eating you, Joe?" Shelley looked up from her computer screen, a furrowed brow telling me she had caught my mood. I shook my head a couple of times and walked away.

"My turn to shout...coffee only. You want something to nibble, go get it yourselves..." I despondently replied over my shoulder as I headed towards the Lift lobby. I just wanted to get out of the Office for five...or ten, I wasn't too sure. "Just look at what I have dug up on the death of Edward 'Teddy' Bell while I'm away and you may understand my mood".

I returned to the Murder Squad floor half-an-hour later feeling a little better. I placed large coffee containers on Shelley and Ruth's desks. Opened a paper bag revealing half-a-dozen Cupcakes.

"Two each if you are so inclined. If not, I am sure I can finish them off myself".

"Your waist-line, Joe. I have noticed that you have put on weight...so we will eat our share to look after you".

"Come on, Shells. We have just gone through the Festive Season and New Year's Day celebrations. I've done nothing but eat and drink...my share".

"More than your share by the look of it...and that is the first time you have ever brought us cupcakes and volunteered to eat our share if we don't want them..."

“Okay, you don’t want one...more for me”.

“I didn’t say that Joe...oh, I give up. Give me my two, huh?”

I gave her my best patronising glare. She missed it.

“It’s no-one’s fault, Joe...and didn’t some-one once say it looks simpler in hindsight...what, you’re disputing the findings of the local gendarmes?” I had to take a double-take to catch up with her commentary. She obviously had obeyed my direction and read through the Case notes into Bell’s death.

I nodded vigorously, spraying butterfly cake crumbs all over my desk.

“Too right! Blood oath!” I answered forcefully. “Blind Freddy could see it was a deliberate act of running the guy down. That finding was made by a local Sergeant who couldn’t be bothered looking further into it. An accident be buggered! Run over by his own Rig when he got out to have a pee and to check the rig...come on! I didn’t come down in the last shower even though I’m wet to the skin!”

Kindle chuckled; Shell had a momentary smile that vanished quickly.

“You thinking our Jeremy Wilson and Teddy Bell took turns in driving the rig north to Queensland to fill up with cheaper fuel?”

“Yeah, blood oath! And filling to capacity that false tank within the length of the tanker. That or the company owns two large rigs doing the same run”.

“Hang on, Joe. We are pretty sure that the road trips occurred like...once a month...”

“Or whenever demand dictated they needed another Tanker load, right?”

Shelley shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows.

“My uncle does haulage trips to Brisbane and Melbourne driving one of those monster Roadtrains”. Kindle offered. “It’s bloody hard work according to him. I had a go a couple of years ago and I thoroughly concur with his opinion”.

Shelley shook her head, looking up at me standing beside my desk. The coffee container in one hand, a cup-cake in the other.

“We would need a darn sight more facts before we could pull that incident of Bell’s death from Accidental Death to a Murder Enquiry...we just haven’t got anything to swing on”. Shelley added.

“The dates...just over six months between Bell’s death and that of Jeremy Wilson’s. Someone was giving who-ever owns Capricornia Fuel Distributors a warning...a dire warning...which he chose to ignore, I reckon. Instead, he hires two heavies to assassinate the two people *who he thinks* were behind the death of his two drivers. We now know who the nominal head of CFD is, East Coast Haulage and Capricornia Budget Fuels. Carlisle would be the one who gave the orders for Tennelli and Bocca to be killed”.

I had to stop and think about what I had just detailed. If that be the case, the boy I once knew so many years ago, had developed into a cold-hearted killer. I still had my doubts on that rationale even though the facts leaned that way.

I was standing as I sipped on my coffee and had another bite of my cupcake.

“We already know that Joe, if we are going to take any notice of that sign-writing above the door of that Budget Servo. Ruth? Check the Telephone Directory with the two names and even the Electoral Roles...got it? We have to assume that all this subterfuge in trying to keep the dealings of these three firms a secret in plain view has been constructed to stay under the radar with both the Police Force...”

“...and the Taxation Department. I bet neither Company Directors...or staff...or the three Companies that we know of have ever paid any sort of taxes. Federal, State, or local. I’ll get onto our Taxation Liaison guy so they can worry out those Firms at their leisure...sometimes they have better luck than us in carrying out these investigations...and it will possibly scare the bejeesus out of our POIs”. Shelley offered, not wanting Kindle to be slugged with all the fun.

Go figure

She enthusiastically nodded her head and turned back to her desk to begin the boring exercise Shelley had given her. Shelley caught my eye...she didn’t believe all the shit jobs should be channelled to the young woman. I shrugged my shoulders...as long as I didn’t have to do them, it was fine by me, and Kindle showed a rare enthusiasm to get her fingers sore with so much work on the computer.

I sat back in my chair and placed my feet up on my desk, held the back of my head with my hands clasped together and closed my eyes.

Just as quickly I again stood. Carrying my coffee container, I quickly walked off the floor heading for the internal staircase yelling out over my shoulder that I would be around an hour...thirty minutes if I found what I was looking for.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

“G’day Joe...you’ve come out of your man-cave to shout me a drink, huh? I bet the man-cave looks a little more feminine now that you have two female partners. Now that is what I’d call living in the fast lane...”

“If Shelley heard you say something like that, you’d be feeling her Glock up your nose right now!”

“Nothing else? Even at my age I feel as though I could respond...”

“Gawd, some people never change, do they mate?”

“You’re right...and that tells me that I should get the fuck outa here...these new rules pandering to the poor female population of this organisation raises my hackles...and political correctness? Let’s not go there...I’ll take a promise on that shout before I go...”

“You figuring pretty soon, Ben?”

“Yep...I have a heap of days off in lieu, Holidays owing, and a couple of years Long Service Leave up my kilt. I’ve put in for time off commencing at the start of this February. Worked it out to the bloody day...and the superannuation owing to me will allow me to do what me and me missus have always wanted to do...go on a couple of those Cruises. You know, around NZ, down some of these European Rivers...looking forward to it, mate”.

“No other person has done more to deserve it”. I cooed.

“Alright, stop the brown-nosing and arse-licking, will you? You want something? Spill it out”.

I ran through the story, not omitting anything. Emphasising when it was pure or part theory; stressing the facts as I knew them.

Ben Bancroft listened intently, occasionally nodding. He was something close to a sainthood in Narcotics. The only guy who always saw his undercover guys as assets and not expendable figures. Unfortunately, I had never worked under him when I was an undercover narcotics asset, which was a pity as he and I had always hit it off. It would be a shame to lose him, not just because of his wealth of knowledge, but also because he was one of the good guys. Never seeking promotion, more having it handed to him on a platter because of his ability to handle staff and the hierarchy more than adequately. He could rub shoulders with the Queen or the street bum and get a laugh out of both without too much trouble.

“North Coast, you say? Transported in a false section of a Fuel Tanker? Possible I guess, and not somewhere where the Narc boys would ever look, fearful they could have thirty thousand litres of fuel pouring over them...”

“Not likely to happen, mate. All Tankers are divided into segments...so yeah, it is possible you pick the wrong Tanker but even if you did, the maximum you are likely to spill would be around the seven to nine thousand litres...all depending on the length of the individual Tanker”.

“You been doing your homework, huh? How do they get at the shit?”

“Yeah, mainly because I couldn’t get my head around it or believe in the concept until I visited a fabrication company out Smithfield way who builds the Tankers from scratch...but a lot of Tankers...mainly bulk milk carriers have a...you know...like one of those watertight compartment doors you see on ships and submarines. The same thing inserted into the end of the Tanker so they can carry out steam-cleaning of the innards after every trip...so yes, you can have a similar thing on a Fuel Tanker with a false compartment and another bulkhead say six hundred millimetres behind that...um...with access through one of those doors into this two-foot deep...” I spread my arms to indicate the maximum depth I would imagine the false segment to be. “...or what-ever...compartment. Easy as...”

“Did that visit to that Fabricator get your nose a-twitching, huh?”

I shook my head.

“No, but the head honcho said it was possible to do, none-the-less. He did add that he would never do such a design because it smacks of illegal carry-ons. I had to believe him as he

seemed like a straight arrow...and I reckon he knew of the consequences if the scheme went pear-shaped. He'd lose all he had worked for...for most of his adult life".

I looked around the vast room which had less than fifty percent occupancy. It seems just about all Branches of the Force do what we did. Lose so many staff over the Christmas and New Year's break they become almost inoperable.

"The guy runs a tight ship and apparently his Firm is one of the few in the business who has full accreditation. Like in everything, there would be a small number of businesses who would gladly undertake the alterations, no questions asked, and all work done for cash without a receipt required".

The big man nodded his head, rocked slightly back and forward in his office chair.

"Yeah, right. Let me think for an hour or two, make a few calls and I'll get back to you at the latest to-morrow morning, okay?"

"No worries...she'll be fine. Seems like I'll owe you a few before the end of January, huh?"

"Yeah, and I'll keep you to it mate".

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

It was mid-morning yet still the smell of chlorine wafted around our little corner of the Murder Squad floor.

"There seems to be a parent company that all the other companies work under...I'm having an awful lot of problems trying to get the information we want out of the Company's list..." Kindle complained.

"Is it possible? These three Companies not listed in the ATO records...is it possible that those companies have never been registered? That they are operating under the radar in so many ways?" Shelley bent her head sideways and gave me a wiggle of her eyebrows.

"Yeah...I guess. It does seem probable because there is no reference to them in the NSW Companies list. But if that is the case, then why bother with the subterfuge?"

“Because with some of the operations, they have to appear fair dinkum. I mean, they couldn’t get any fuel at wholesale prices in Queensland if they didn’t operate as a Company up there...with an address albeit a Post Office Box to allow them to operate. Who in the Refinery or elsewhere would double check to see if they were legitimate? But...they must be registered to get an Australian Business Number...you need that ABN to operate...hire staff, get tax discounts on new vehicles and office equipment...unless they are totally under the radar”. She stood and walked around my desk. “Is it possible that the Firms so named are all registered in Queensland which would mean we need to get across their records?”

“If that be the case, then they would still register with the ATO...unless there is another layer under which they operate...”

“Mmm...the mystery man at the top...it seems way beyond the limitations of the man who we now think is head honcho of the whole operation...I can’t see Carlisle being the thinker of this entire scam...maybe...I have my doubts...then again, there has been a lot of water under the bridge since I knew the young bloke and I must admit, he was a savvy young bloke back then...so why not now?” I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes for some moments. I straightened up suddenly. “Kindle? Ruth? Give the NSW Companies List a miss. See if you can get into the same kind of thing but in Queensland...as I said, to be able to operate and to receive a tanker’s worth of juice, he had to have some legal looking documents that the locals up there would recognise as legit...”

I noticed Ben Bancroft waddling towards us. He sat beside me with an exaggerated sigh of relief.

He’d always been a big man, but he starts off well above the norm for catching the middle-aged spread. He was a bit like our own boss, Clive Butler...carrying way too much fat on his frame. He needed to lose some weight if he was going to enjoy those cruises both he and his missus were dreaming of.

“A bit of history...” He offered as he swiped away beads of sweat bursting out on his brow.

Shelley and Kindle wheeled up to hear what he had to report.

“Um...most of the transportation and selling of just about every illegal substance has always been the responsibility of most of the illegal Bikie gangs known to us...for bloody ages...they have taken a beating over the past five to ten years or so in membership losses as more and more of their members rest their arses in prison. Not all Bikies are dumb clucks, and someone came up with the idea that to remain in business and to ensure their future, they needed

to shift their base enterprise. There was a flurry of purchases of small allotments...anything from ten to a hundred acres...hobby farms they're called, with a trusted and respected member of the gang being selected to run the farm. Up the North Coast and into the hinterland. They have done extra well over a short period of time but in this age of drones and light plane pass-overs, they knew they couldn't just plant marijuana out in the open...or planted amongst the trees". He again took a couple of deep breaths. The uptake was dismal...the guy had to be living on borrowed time. "They knew from the beginning that this type of cultivation was not going to give them optimum output and quality of product. Hydroponics was the way of the future. What-ever building works were required on these allotments was done in the correct manner...but you gotta ask yourself why a Hobby Farm of twenty-five acres requires a Machinery Shed challenging the biggest in the State...sure, a quarter of the area would be used and designated as a machinery shed...the rest, to hydroponically grown shit".

He stopped to wipe his brow again with his shirtsleeve, the mechanics of talking and concentrating causing him some anguish, so it seemed.

"I have to admit that these arrangements took us too long to do anything about. Now though, we have all 'Bush' Councils on board. They let us know when such a plan is deposited for Design and Building approvals when it means a Hobby Farm is going green. We then keep a closer watch on that particular farm..."

"Where are most of these small farms?" Shelley asked.

"On the north coast and hinterlands, but there is a scattering down south and in the southern highlands. I can't give you any intelligence on the 'take-out' rates, but in closing down such an operation, the gangs lose twice over". He looked over at the three of us, a hand held up as he counted off the numbers. "*One*...their investment in building these sheds...*two*...the investment in the hydroponic set-up and *thirdly*...the investment in purchasing these farms as we take that from them also. It is deemed as property purchased with illegal funds...the State Government coffers love it...for about the last ten years they have been getting a little cagey. They bury large shipping containers welded together with sides cut out to provide one large area usually bigger than a suburban house. These are harder...very hard to locate from the air but with improved heat-sourcing cameras, we are beginning to break even...the Bikies in response, are burying or piling more layers of dirt onto these 'submerged' containers to mask the heat source from within. They still leave some type of trail as a pathway leading from...say the Farmhouse out to the side of a hill where it stops...that is a dead give-away".

He chuckled at that comment.

“Is that the final chapter on these hydroponic set-ups?”

“Yes...all they do is farm the shit with the transporting and distribution left to others...for them to take the risk...they are staying well outside that loop...but...everything about these operations is fluid so it may not be too long into the future when they commence once again, the transportation of their crop down into the Sydney basin and Newcastle...taking out that middle man because that is costing them too...the money is made at the point of sale...not at the growing, drying and compressing end”.

“Enter Capricornia Fuel Distributors”.

“Who?” Bancroft asked, a little baffled.

I thought I had gone through our entire case the day before with the man.

“Yes...yes, sorry. Yes, you mentioned that Firm yesterday, didn’t you? Yes, like that possibility although it is a theory with nothing backing it up. I must admit that the shit on the streets is a lot better product than that of the old days. That we have been noticing...both the strength, purity and quantity is so much better. They are becoming very good farmers...” He again chuckled at his own joke.

He glanced at his watch.

“Whoops, if there is nothing else, ladies and gentleman...it’s lunchtime, friends. I gotta go”.

You knew where he was heading. Down to the Club within walking distance of the Police Building. The will to extend himself in the job long gone. He was just warming the seat for another two weeks so buggered if he was going to take on any more work. He had basically retired several weeks ago, before Christmas at least, so I was lucky to get anything out of him. He had put out the feelers to gain this information for me, so good on him. His swansong perhaps.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

The three of us were seated on the grass beside Parramatta River enjoying the sun and warmth and munching on our lunches.

My phone rang. I glanced at the caller ID not really wanting to answer especially if it was work related.

“Yes Boss?” I sighed with no inflection or enthusiasm in the tone of my voice.

“Um...sorry to trouble you, Joe”. She didn’t sound at all sorry. “Um...your Murder Cases? And the surveillance exercise going on at Toronto Post Office? We just got a call from the Station Sergeant up there. This morning around ten, they followed a woman who emptied the Post Office Box they were keeping an eye out on...followed her to a large two-storey dwelling with its own pool and jetty. Absolute water frontage on Brighton Avenue right on the Lakeshore at Toronto. A fair hike to the Post Office and back to her residence...someone likes to keep herself in shape. While two cops were following the woman, another checked with the Postmaster to confirm the owner of the Post Box. Capricornia Fuel Distributors...and he identified the woman who cleared the Box as Maggie Carlisle...who had ownership of the PO box”.

“Sounds as though we will make a quick trip up to Toronto this arvo, yes?”

“Can you get up there and back inside your normal knock off time? I will not permit overtime for the three of you, instead ‘time off in lieu’ if you go over the time limit...”

“And here I thought we were going to get a more generous boss warming the chair...”

“Generous? That’s my middle name when my family are concerned. Too generous in fact. I think I have spoilt my tribe rotten...but you guys? Sorry about that! I go over the annual expenditure outlay and I have to front the Financial blokes upstairs”.

“Yeah, while your devoted servants have to beg for the crumbs”.

“Oh, how my heart bleeds for you, young man. Stop this BS and get going so you can return to the Office before knock off time. You may find me down in the Basement Gym if you are lucky. Your enthusiasm for a couple of laps and aerobic exercises has rubbed off onto me. See yers”.

CHAPTER FORTY

“Is Missus Carlisle in?”

“Who wants to know?”

I looked straight at the man behind the insect-screen door.

“Lester Yeager, I presume...” I gave a slight bow to the man standing before me. The screen door between us still shut and locked. “How fortunate as we will want to ask you a couple of questions also, but first...”

“...and you lot will never make a Doctor Livingston”. He thought he was being clever. He gave a leering smile as he looked Ruth up and down...a real creep, I thought though Shells maybe a little miffed at not being the subject of such an inspection.

“Would Missus Carlisle be home?” I totally ignoring his attempt at humour.

The woman walked up silently behind Yeager. When he realised she was standing behind him, he tried to shoo her back into the gloom of the house.

“I believe you are Missus Carlisle...is that correct, missus?” I began, trying hard to keep her in sight as she stood behind Yeager.

“Sorry, you must have the wrong house...”

“Did you empty your Post Office Box this morning around ten?”

She stared at me not wanting to involve herself in the conversation. She was on the verge of closing the front door in our faces.

I showed her a photograph of high quality that had been taken with a long telephoto lens. The Boss had the photo transferred across to my iPad as we had driven north up the Motorway.

“That’s Box Number 1108. That Box is owned by Capricornia Fuel Distributors with the signatures on the Approval papers to take ownership of the Post Office Box being Mister Lindsey Carlisle and Missus Maggie Carlisle...you are Maggie Carlisle, yes? The Postmaster has confirmed your identification...”

She stared at me for some moments then flicked her line of sight to Kindle then Shelley.

“What do you want...you’re Murder coppers! What do you want with me?”

“Missus Carlisle...”

“I am not Missus Carlisle. I have never been married to Lindsey. If you must call me anything at all, you can refer to me as Mz. Maggie Bell...”

That revelation almost knocked me for six. It took me some moments to gather my thoughts again.

“Are you related to Edward ‘Teddy’ Bell?”

“Yes, he is my cousin on my father’s side”.

“Are you aware that he is dead?”

“Of course, I am. I’m not bloody stupid. His death a bloody travesty of justice. You coppers did not do any hard investigating...not a damn thing! Knocked down and killed by his own Rig up near Grafton. Why would the man get out of his rig to go bush for a wee? He had just left Grafton which was a regular pee stop and eating point. He would never go bush for a pee...he was too scared of bloody snakes...no-one came and asked us questions. His missus wasn’t even approached...how’s that for a shitty investigation?”

“The local cops put it down as accidental...”

“Accident my arse!” She hissed; her face having reddened to medical alert status! “The rig decided to roll forward only after he supposedly had a wee and was walking back to the Prime Mover...what a load of bullshit! It was forced to roll uphill once Teddy appeared out of the bush which would be a first...knowing him, he would have preferred to piddle on one of the wheels then venture into the bush...common sense would tell you that a Double ‘B’ cannot roll uphill! It’s easy to see who was bought off...the local coppers...an accident so you Sydney coppers didn’t have to be called in”.

“You went to have a look at the spot, did you?”

“Went with Lindsey. Some-one had to drive the Rig back down to Sydney. The cops were going on about it being a hindrance to the traffic and as it was full of fuel...a full load, it

definitely was a danger...why would Teddy drive down the old Pacific Highway when a new stretch of motorway had just been opened? Tell me why a bloke would prefer to drive a Double 'B' rig on the old highway and not the new stretch of motorway...it doesn't make sense".

Unless he was going that way to pick up a shipment of marijuana. If the shit was compressed into one kilo bricks, the secret compartment we are talking about would take around two tonnes of the shit...a good haul, I thought. A bloody good haul. That would be the only explanation that made any sense...he was going down the old road to pick up the shipment of compressed marijuana leaf and buds somewhere out of the way and away from prying eyes so that the transfer could be done quietly and quickly.

I had to admit the matter should be checked out. I glanced at Shelley. She nodded her head in agreement.

"Lindsey...Castle Carlisle? Is he at home?" I asked as the two were motioning to close the door on us.

The request startled her with its sudden introduction. She placed a hand to the back of her neck as though a headache was coming. Rubbing the nape gently.

"Arrh...no...no, he's not. If there is nothing else, a good day to the three of you. I hope this is the last I see of youse. Hooroo".

With that she gently closed the door.

We returned to our Unmarked. I glanced at my watch.

"We'll be back at the Office before knock-off time. The Boss will be pleased. Well...what did we learn?"

"That we should look again at Teddy Bell's cause of death...and this whole shebang is a family thing, so it seems...though it seems strange all is still tight with the Bells and the Yeager and Carlisle names. If some-one killed my husband...or father, they'd have to have bloody good stories not involving them in the conspiracy".

I nodded my head agreeing with Shelley...but we really had learnt bugger all. Nothing to take to the DPP at this stage. We couldn't press her too much as she was smart enough to just clam up and close the door in our faces...which she did.

“Did she and Yeager seem...you know, close?”

“I don’t know...it would appear that she has been in from the beginning with Carlisle. He, Yeager and she being the nucleus...you know, of all these Firms formed to carry out illegal activities”.

The question again raised its ugly head. Was Carlisle able to conger up these illegal carry-ons. Nah, I replied softly to my own question...but I reckon Maggie Bell just might have the nous...in combination with Carlisle, maybe.

Shelley heard me mumbling and leaned over to me.

“What’s that Tonto...you have a frog in your throat or what. You must speak louder as all of this shooting with my six-guns has made me deaf!”

I explained my theory...

“Yes...” She replied. “You can always rely on the woman to come up with a plausible scheme...and I agree with that scenario more than any other you have constructed for us, Tonto...you may have earned yourself another feather...you’ll look like a rooster’s tail in the not-too-distant future if you keep up the excellent work”.

“Albeit illegal, Kemosabe”. I added, a grin that was meant to show my superiority. I failed dismally as I could hear Kindle giggling from the back seat.

My Mobile chirped breaking my chain of thought. There was something gnawing at the back of my brain.

“Yes Boss?” I answered as I docked my Mobile so that we all could hear what was being said through the car’s speaker system.

“Where are you, Joe?”

“Outside the residence of Maggie Bell...”

“Who?”

“I’ll explain once we get back to the Office. Don’t you go starting your laps before we join you...we’re at Toronto, boss”.

“Joe...that edict about overtime and being back here before COB? Forget it. A body has been found in a formed stormwater drain just off Barellan Street, Jesmond. That’s a suburb of Newcastle. You’d be what? Half an hour from there...maybe forty-five minutes from a western suburb of Newcastle....”

I was about to voice my opposition to being allocated another Homicide Case when she cut across my thoughts.

“Arrh...Joe. The body has been identified as that of Lindsey Carlisle...does that make any difference to what you were about to say...to object to?”

Another ball just fell, clicking into place.

“Overtime on, Boss?”

“At your discretion. I don’t want you standing about jawing with the forensic and morgue people to extend the O/T, Okay? It appears to me there may have been a shift in the main players of the three firms you and the ATO are investigating”.

“How could you think...”

“Joe...you forget. I came up through the ranks myself. Now, no fucking about, just get us to Jesmond”.

Maggie Bell had seemed nervous when I asked about Castle Carlisle about ten minutes ago...or was I being too willing to let the supposition fit the facts instead of the other way around?

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

It was around three by the time we got to the address, an outer western suburb of Newcastle.

A bevy of local Police vehicles had taken up residence on the quiet street that paralleled the formed stormwater channel. When I say formed, it had a good rich carpet of grass getting taller as the centre of the channel was negotiated. The body was lying near the centre of the grassed drain, almost hidden from view by the tall grasses.

The three of us signed onto the Scene Register, exchanging niceties with the Constable. He was especially taken by Ruth Kindle. The Forensics Trace team had yet to arrive. The Forensic Pathologist also was yet to appear. We had an advantage coming up from Toronto while the Trace and Pathology Teams had to come from Sydney.

The sun was on its slide towards the horizon, but the temperature had climbed as usual around this time of the afternoon. There was a real bite to it.

“Who found the body?” We were prevented from getting too close and possibly tainting the site.

‘Here we go again’. I thought. *‘Stopped from looking at the body until such time as the Trace people gave us permission. ‘We could be here for bloody hours’*. I thought angrily, slapping the side of my thigh in frustration.

“Umm...a couple of kids playing in the long grass almost stepped on him”. The senior man in charge replied. “It’s a little bloody...looks as though he was attacked with a very sharp machete...or bush knife...or possibly one of those samurai swords that people are given who do a couple of those Chinese martial arts things”.

“Japanese”. I countered, leaving the guy a little confused.

“Are the Uniforms doing a door to door...strange cars seen...strange people?”

“Yes, they are but this being a working-class suburb, most people are still at work”.

“Mmm...” I nodded my head. “So, we don’t know if anyone heard screams or such”.

“It’s a little early, Detective. Just soak up the O/T as I think you’ll still be here long after sunset”.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

It was close on another hour before the Forensic Trace team arrived. Another twenty minutes after that before Drew Waller and his Assistant came to stand beside me.

“Looking at all the long grass about, I’d say the Trace team will have the area for the next hour or two, hoping to finish their trawl of the area before the sun goes down...and I think the fact that rain is forecast to-morrow will make them hurry along”.

“Yeah, shitty, eh?”

“Where’s your two beautiful partners?”

“Trying to rustle up something to eat and drink...”

“How come you’re here well before us and the FO’s?”

“We were at Toronto, not far south from here...on the ‘Body beside the Roadtrain’ Case...the appearance of this body, identified as Lindsey Carlisle but not confirmed as yet, has thrown a spanner into the works which has us now scratching our heads on that case...”

“You think they’re related?”

“I did...with Wilson and Bell connected and the Tennelli and Bocca deaths related. Now? Jeez, I haven’t a clue as this guy was our Number One POI in the Wilson and possibly with a stretch, the other two shooting deaths...that would have been very difficult to prove...but now that this guy is also dead, we haven’t anything to hang our hats on and charge someone...I think the only way this whole bag full of shit will ever show us the guilty ones will be with some person coming out of the woodwork to confirm what our theories are saying...or someone does the unthinkable and confesses...and to be frank, I doubt that ever occurring...which makes me as mad as hell!”

Ruth and Shells came back and offered me a large tub of Broccoli and Mushroom salad and a large bottle of cold Ice Coffee. I said my buys and walked back to our Unmarked to sit and enjoy the meal.

I was snoozing in the front passenger seat, the engine ticking over and the Aircon up high. I had tuned out the female conversation that Shelley and Ruth were engaged in. I felt a bit left out...get your head around that one!

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

I sunk to my haunches beside the body. Even after all this time, I could still see the boyish good looks in this middle-aged man. I was moved somehow, saddened more so as this was not just another body. Lindsey Carlisle and I had history. Some may say just a slight arrangement but as an Undercover Officer there were those who you could trust amongst the young crims on the take...on the rise. I guess if I looked at it dispassionately, I may have represented a kind of father figure for him...he never squelched on me even though I had put him behind bars on three separate occasions. Once to Juvenile Detention, the other two in the big man's cells at Long Bay. I could only guess at what he went through once he made that grade to adulthood. Even though I stole his stash of weed on two occasions, like I said, he never squealed on me.

That means something...well...to me, in any case.

I guess when I never heard of him again after he came out of Long Bay the second time, I had thought he had seen the error of his ways and had ambled down the straight path. Maybe I wished it for him, but certain types will never change as it is in their blood...until they died...or they were murdered.

I was kind of impressed with his scam, a beautifully thought-out plan...and his ownership of a large petrol rig and four Service Stations. A Beautiful house of some proportion on the edge of Lake Macquarie, a sailboat, a ski-boat, and I bet, a swath of expensive cars. With that, one would have thought he could give the game away...that's what I thought in any case, but it was never in my blood...but then again, catching bad guys was my thing...that was in my blood, so we weren't that different in some ways, I guess.

I had to admire him in some funny way, everything he was doing was illegal but there was a sense of demanding work associated with all the material wealth he had gathered throughout his life. A pity really, that all would become a part of the State's benefit as it will be deemed that everything...every little thing would be classified as purchased with illegal funds...not for the first time had this crossed my mind...sad really. It had worked his guts out to have it all taken from him...but he was dead, so it was nothing to him...

"Seen enough, Joe?" Waller asked.

I looked up at him, my eyes welling with tears.

“You knew him, huh?” He asked quietly.

“Kinda...yeah...a long time ago”.

I stood and walked away from the large circle of light made by three light towers, their diesel engines humming away to keep the lights operating. It was dark outside the corona of light. I had not noticed the change.

“Anything?” I asked Shelley.

“No-body heard or saw anything...and we got every house around the place on both sides of the stormwater channel...” She looked up at me. “You okay?”

I nodded, sniffled, and pinched my nose.

“Yeah...sure. I don’t think there is much more we can do here. We will have to wait for Trace and the autopsy maybe to give us a pointer...he was cut up pretty bad, huh?”

“Yeah, a machete or something similar. I was surprised that you looked at the body for so long...at Wyong with Wilson’s body, you almost threw up...”

“One of those samurai swords”. I suggested quietly, ignoring her stir. “I guess I wasn’t looking at him, Shells. I was flipping through the pages of my life...and his younger days when I knew the lad”.

She nodded her head, taking some moments to reply.

“Why would you say that? You know, about the samurai sword?”

“I read somewhere that Yeager was into those martial arts kind of things...it is becoming clearer what has been going down. Still, a lousy way to die...cut to shreds like that”.

“You knew him, didn’t you? Carlisle. I mean...”

“Yep...a long time ago when I was working undercover...after me and my partner had split, and I was working solo...we crossed each other’s path a bit...he was selling awful shit”. I shook my head, smiling at that long-ago memory. “He was just another kid who was abused by a sadistic father who, to escape the horror, took to the streets...it’s a lucky thing in some ways that he has lasted this long...he had a certain nous...street smarts that I think helped

him through. I am doubtful that he thought up these scams by himself...maybe it took the combined talents of him and Maggie Bell getting their heads together...as her name is on some of the Companies with Carlisle's, their combined talent made all these things possible...now? It looks to me as though she has joined forces with Yeager...shows she obviously prefers to live on the edge...either that and she could see which side her toast was buttered on. Yeager was one for results where Carlisle may have been satisfied with his lot...not good enough for our Maggie Bell”.

I hardly spoke all the way back to Sydney.

By that stage it was close to ten, so Shelley took the Unmarked, dropping me off at home first then Ruth off at Burwood on her way home to Ingleburn.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

“Joe? Where are you?”

“I got a call this morning from the Station Sergeant at Toronto Police Station. The house in Brighton Avenue at Toronto is all locked up. It looks as though Yeager and Maggie Bell may have done a runner...um...I’m going on a hunch, and we are heading towards Gladesville. When we spoke to Vanessa Bell last week, she was very taken with Lester Yeager. She thought he was a pure gentleman, and he was a frequent visitor at the address”.

“The address? Is it Milton Street?”

“Yes, why?”

“A report has just come through of shots having been fired. Some people are saying up to half-a-dozen. So be careful...”

“Arrh, shit! Yeager has lost it, more than likely. He is one dangerous dude whom I think has been responsible for the deaths of Bell, Wilson and now Carlisle...”

“Anything to back that up?”

“Um...for Bell, just a gut feeling...and I am sure the cause of his death will remain accidental unless we have either Maggie Bell or Yeager himself, confessing to the crime which I doubt will never happen...For Wilson? Yeager’s DNA was found at the death scene up Wyong way”.

I scratched at my ear and looked out of the car window. Shelley was making good time with only the radiator blue and red lights flashing along with the headlights.

“Joe? Have I still got you?”

“Sorry, boss...I was trying to get my brain in order...and yes, before you comment, that’s a challenging thing to do. I know because it is my brain. Um...while they cannot be accurate about when the trace was deposited with Yeager himself admitting he was at the site...the day before, so he says...I have serious doubts about that. We have very good CCTV coverage of Wilson enjoying a cup of coffee for close on an hour. He takes a phone call which causes him to walk from the Cafeteria to around behind his rig where he was bludgeoned to death. At no time did Wilson appear to be nervous or anxious. In fact, during the conversation on the phone to summon him, he was seen to laugh so he knew who the caller was and had no fears for his own safety...for Carlisle? This whole series of events began with the death of Bell up near Grafton. It was Maggie Bell who admitted she and Carlisle were in the area but only to recover the Rig and drive it down to Sydney...I’ll lay odds that Yeager was in the area and constructed the ‘accidental death’ of Bell. Knowing of Yeager’s reputation of being volatile and a bit unpredictable, it is a wonder that Carlisle kept the man as his partner for so long. I would say that Carlisle was averse to any sort of skulduggery or even murder, but I could assume that Yeager kept those employees under him in check, leaving Carlisle to work on his businesses as all Businessmen do. Maggie Bell had driven the guy up to the abandoned rig in her Jag...when we went to interview Bell at her home at Toronto, Yeager answered the door with Bell walking up behind him to see who was at the door. They both seemed relaxed and comfortable in each other’s company. Whether Carlisle was already dead or not we will have to wait for the autopsy report, but I’ll lay a tenner that he was. It appears to me that the two travelled down this path to take over the entire operations! Unfortunately, they certainly lack the business acumen of Carlisle in being able to steer these firms for such a long time...I’d say the fuel scam has been going on for between ten to fifteen years. The add-on of the marijuana transportation and distribution I think, has only occurred for the past five years max. Still, they would have made absolute heaps of dough in that period. I wouldn’t mind betting that the house in Toronto has several internal walls stacked with cash...I’ve seen it before...they cannot spend it fast enough!”

“Mmm...that’s somewhat convincing, but like I have been warned, you lack the important ingredient...proof! If you are going to continue the drive to Gladesville, be very careful as it sounds as though Yeager maybe feeling a little trapped...and savage animals don’t like being trapped”.

“Yes boss...she’ll be right”.

“Just remember Joe, you are responsible for your two colleagues...and you have a young family. I do not want to be the one who must tell your wife of your demise. Understand? The other thing...you didn’t mention Tennelli or Bocca as being in the mix. You think they are out of this mess?”

“Umm...” I was silent for a moment shifting facts and theories around in my mind. “Sorry...um...I originally thought that those two shooting deaths were a result of the tit-for-tat actions after the death of Wilson...or...were the result of Ortello thinking that both had gone outside their tenure in killing Wilson...so Ortello organised for their deaths bringing in a couple of shooters to do the trick. Even hoods like this lot do not like the applecart overturned...it immediately draws in us coppers which most of this type do not want. Now? I believe Yeager and some hired ‘heavies’ killed Wilson and he also popped or hired a ‘hit team’ to kill both Tennelli and Bocca. I think the two may have been getting vocal over the distribution and selling of better grade weed with the quantity flooding the market. The two would be losing sales...and influence amongst their own clientele...even feeling threatened by the injection of good shit into their territory. They possibly put out feelers for that to stop...or else they would take revenge. Yeager would not have liked that at all. That type of threat from the opposing side. That is why they were killed. It ticks all the boxes, Boss...more so than the theory that Ortello shot them because they carried out a hit without his consent...the proof? We’ll have to wait and see whether Maggie Bell or Yeager are willing to talk”.

“Mmm...it sounds good, but I repeat, where is the proof? I have been warned of your propensity to go off half-cocked...be sure of your intel and the facts before you fly off the handle, hear me?”

I nodded in reply, not wanting her to hear me mutter anything conciliatory...or on the other side, disrespectful!

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

We were not permitted to drive down the street in front of the well-kept house that we knew as Vanessa Bell's property. We got as close as possible before we were stopped. Those in charge were busy evacuating residents from either side of the property and those directly opposite and behind the premises while waiting for the Tactical Response Unit to arrive.

The TRU was colloquially known as the SWAT Team after some weak American TV Cop Show.

I scrolled through the Folder on my iPad that held all details of the Cases we were investigating. I pulled up Vanessa Bell's phone number and dialled it through. It rang out which was not a good sign. I tried again for the same result. Another go was answered as I was about to call off.

"Missus Bell? Is that you?"

A quiet, wavering voice.

"Yes, it is. Who is speaking, please?"

"Detective Joseph Lind. I, accompanied by my two colleagues was at your house the other week".

"Yes...I remember you. You weren't very kind when you spoke about Les Yeager, were you?"

"Missus Bell? Are you all right, ma'am?"

"Yes...I think I am...and young man, you were right in your opinion of Lester...he killed my Teddy...him and Maggie...killed my Teddy". Sobs and sniffles. "They laughed at me when they told me..." She began sobbing. "Both of them are dead. I shot them, taking Yeager's gun off the bedside table...I shot Les first...two bullets straight to his head. Maggie woke and started screaming. I missed with a couple of shots but got her as she cowered in a corner with me standing over her...Detective, now I can rest in peace..."

"Missus Bell!?" I knew what was going to happen next.

I heard the shot through my Mobile and I heard it reverberating around the quiet street. I yanked open the door of the Unmarked and vaulted towards the property being constantly yelled at to stop, to turn around and even to desist!

I kept on going, running up the front steps onto the front veranda, wrenching open the security screen door and putting my shoulder to the solid front door. It took me three goes but by that time I had four Officers helping me. I noticed Shelley and Ruth running down the side of the house to get to the back. We drew our firearms and began to search through the house.

Missus Vanessa Bell lay on her bed, most of her head, brain and bone matter spread across the pillows and bed linen. The body of Maggie Bell and Yeager found in the guest bedroom, both having at least five bullets in each of their bodies. There was no-one else in the house.

The On-scene Officer came in to chew me out but stopped when he saw the bodies.

I was still slapped with a ‘Please Explain’ which would be handed to the Standard and Ethics Panel for consideration to charge me with an ‘Off-duty on full Pay’ charge or the more serious, ‘Off-duty without Pay’ charge.

I had broken all rules and protocol as it is detailed in our ‘Bible’, the Policy and Procedures Manual and failed to obey the orders shouted at me by the Lead On-site Officer.

I never heard a word from the Panel and to this day I have never fronted them about this incident which was considered by some as insubordination. Rumours put our new Boss as going in to bat for me...I really don’t know as no-one talks about it.

When I fronted the Boss about it, she smiled saying the matter had been dealt with and I shan’t hear another thing on the matter.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

“Detective Lind? This is the Forensic Officer-in-charge, Tellie Lind. We have just received the final report on trace taken from the area around Lindsey Carlisle’s body in the stormwater channel up Newcastle way. We have found trace that placed Lester Benjamin Yeager *and* Maggie Bell at the scene. While we cannot ascertain the time scale when these trace elements

were deposited, it is very doubtful that the man would be in the area for any other purpose but to kill his partner-in-crime Lindsey ‘Castle’ Carlisle”.

“That’s fantastic, Tells, when will I expect the final report?”

“We are awaiting several other aspects to arrive such as ballistics and blood work-ups before we sign off on this affair. One other thing, a samurai sword was taken from the Gladesville premises of Vanessa Bell where Yeager was killed. Only the fingerprints of the man were noted on the hilt and handle of the sword with several blood deposits which matched that of Carlisle in all regards on the sword length”.

“That my love, deserves something special”.

“Joe? How many times must I tell you that while I am at work I am to be treated as a work colleague and not your wife...arrh...tell me softly...what is this something special?” I heard her giggling away as she hung up.

I had only just placed my Mobile back in its charging dock when it commenced its chirps once again.

“Detective Lind?”

“Detective, Barry Fellows from Ballistics. I would usually not bypass the authority of the Lead FO on-site, but I thought you might be thrilled with what I have just discovered”.

“Oh? Now don’t keep me in suspense, sir. Tell us your earth-shattering news”. I sounded a little condescending when I thought about it, but this Fellows chap didn’t miss a beat.

“Maybe not earth-shattering but the handgun that a Vanessa Bell ended her life with...the gun used to shoot both Lester Yeager and Maggie Bell to death? It is a Glock 15 stolen from the Byron Bay Police Station. It went missing some three years ago from the Station. It was also the fire-arm used to shoot Jamas ‘Jimmy’ Tennelli and Leonardo ‘Tony’ Bocca some weeks back”.

In my haste to jump from my desk and go a few rounds with Big Red to my detriment, and in absolute exuberance, I accidentally dropped my mobile straight into my coffee cup!

Pcb 14/01/2019

If you enjoyed reading **It's in the Blood** 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.