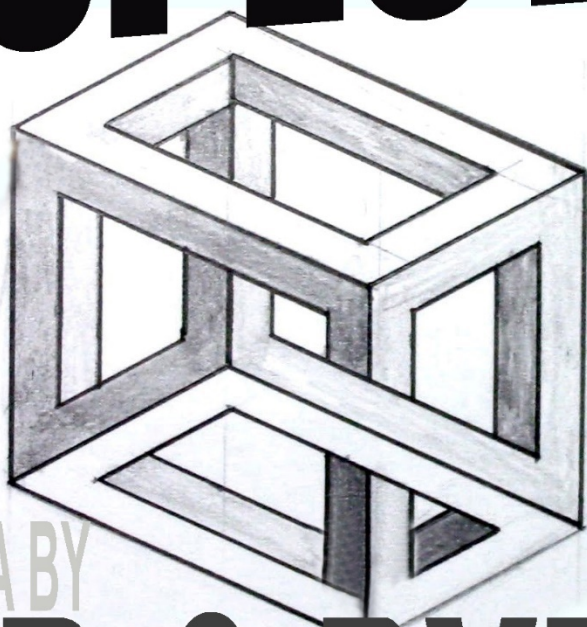


MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES  
JOSEPH LIND AND SHELLEY ANNE SHIELDS

# A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE



A CRIME NOVELLA BY

# PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES

JOSEPH LIND  
SHELLEY ANNE SHIELDS

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This is the 55<sup>th</sup> Novella in the series detailing the life and times of Detective Grade Four, Joseph Lind and his Partner, Detective Grade Three, Shelley Anne Shields.

A man's body is tossed like garbage from a moving car. With his dying breath, the dead man walking manages to crawl to the nearest house to knock feebly before dying. The Deceased stabbed seven times with the same knife. With no identification and his disappearance never included in the Missing Persons Register, the Case slips down that greasy pole of inactivity to become a Cold Case.

Our two Murder Dees given the Case to 'fill out their day'. It would appear that from the highest echelons of Government, there is a noticeable effort for the two to dismiss the Case and have it returned to just another Cold Case that cannot proceed through lack of witnesses and evidence.

Who is this man and why are there persons 'On High Street' who do not want the Case to proceed?

Three deaths in one night at a Nursing Home for the Aged piques the interest of our two Detectives. While there are those who are suspicious of the coincidence, others are willing to accept these deaths as just another night's consequence.

A different perspective is held by those in charge of the Establishment as death walks silently down the corridors of most Homes for the Aged.

## CHAPTER ONE

I settled back in my chair happy that it still curled around my body. Glad to be back at work. It was the end of January and I had begun these holidays at the end of the School Term before Christmas. Over six weeks...mingling so it seemed, with half the population of Australia who were taking their Annual Holidays at the same time!

And heading to the area in the south-east of Queensland which, is the Australian way...

“Good to have you back, Joe. Did you enjoy your break?” Shelley had taken two weeks over the Christmas and New Year period. With the number of Public Holidays, her break was just on three weeks. That was enough for her.

Her question I had to think about...sure, the time I spent with Tellie and the two girls was pure joy, but after six weeks with them living in my pocket, I was ready to come back to work. You would never hear me repeat that out loud, especially within earshot of Tellie, but...I let out a deep sigh to be sitting at my familiar desk again. The smells of slightly stale gym gear still hung about...that familiar body odour of sitting at your desk for eight to nine hours seemed to permeate every surface...every material.

Those still working had made my desk the easy repository for all files not required by them at that moment. There was even a pile of telephone message chits with someone waiting patiently for my return to get the ball rolling once again. How silly is that? Something of prime importance may have been lost by the hiatus.

*‘Yes, Detective Lind will be back on deck in two weeks...’* And that was all! No can I help? Is it important? Does it concern any Homicide Murder Cases I might have been involved in...perhaps a missed appearance in Court that would ensure the guilty party is let loose again...maybe that is a bit over the top, but you get my concern...the matter should be dealt with by whomever has taken the call, not just a telephone chit filled out as the Detective will be back on deck next week...or the week after...you get my drift!

“Anything exciting happen while I was off? Like...the homicide of the century? No? When did you come back on deck, Shells?”

“Three weeks ago...and no! It has been a quiet period. Not up to the normal scrap at this time of year...I’d say less alcohol was consumed...very few family spats...there is no other reason...perhaps we haven’t had a full moon over the period...who’s to know...”

I had to smile as my alcohol intake was zero and my caffeine fix was also well below my average. It was as if Tellie and I had signed a pact to kill the alcohol and caffeine daily fix we had become so use to...so the extended Holiday appeared to be of some use!

I took a mighty gulp of my extra-large container of coffee...it was heaven, though my head spun for a bit...

“You go away, girl?”

“Nah...oh, I flew up to Brisbane for a couple of days off to stay at my friend’s place...Brenda O’Bourne’s place. You remember her, don’t you? Did a heap of painting though...we have about finished our house reno project...it’s taken us almost three years...glad it is almost over...but we have plans for more extensions partly to give Brin a Man’s Shed...he deserves it. We’ll enlarge the garage to do it...”

Shelley and her partner Brin, who was a Uniformed Constable out of the Liverpool Station, had been on this mammoth project of extending their house for...jeez...about the last ten years or so, so it seemed. I amazed that more renovations were in the pipeline as I was sure enough was enough in so many ways! It would appear they are Reno Tragicists with an addictive streak to heap more punishment onto themselves!

“What are you going to do with your every waking moment now?”

She shrugged her shoulders, gave a little giggle.

I didn’t know how to interpret that and for a moment pregnancy flashed in my brain. I audibly groaned. I doubted whether I could train up another partner like either Marge Hendricks or Shelley. They were both above the usual Dee grade expertise in female personnel without sounding sexist. Both were the type to constantly think outside the square. It was my luck to have been partnered with both. A decision by Abbey that turned out to be more than luck...

I couldn’t be so darn lucky a third time...that’s really pushing my share of luck!

I had to pull myself up again as I had gone almost mental when my first partner of note had announced she was pregnant, and she didn’t know whether she would be back after the mandatory maternity leave. She had triplets and was under greater pressure taking care of the three than any day at work...but she was loving it. The triplets were now going to School with Marge never wishing it any other way...a shiver went through me. That partnership lasted close to ten years, and I reckon, made in heaven. To be given another female partner who slipped easily into an easy arrangement with me was really, too much to expect...but we had been a successful duo for some time now, Shelley and me.

*‘No, please God, don’t let her be pregnant...’* You can tell how mixed up I was when I revert to asking God to help this crazy atheist!

Typical me, always just thinking of how it *may* affect me and failing to look at the bigger picture, like the happiness that it would bring Shelley. She’d make a fantastic Mum just like Marjory Hendricks before her. I had to look at it selflessly. I knew she wanted kids and the old biological clock was a-ticking...she was running out of time.

The question of what I would do when the dreams became a reality, and the search would be on for her replacement to partner me. I doubted that our new Boss, Denny Turner would be as astute as DS Church aka Abbey who hand selected both Marge and Shells as my partner.

Slotting in beautifully with this awkward, aging Mammoth! Besides, two correct decisions diminishes the chances it could occur again...don't you think?

## CHAPTER TWO

“Okay people, welcome back into the fold those of you who have returned from your holidays at this time of year. Buggered and broke...and needing a rest, I reckon! I must tell you that while you've been basking in the sun up around Surfers Paradise relaxing your toes off, we left to carry the burden have been busting our guts...no, that is not true. This year, this period has been the quietest on record. Usually, we are so flat out we don't even have the time for Chrissie drinks. The natives are usually going wild killing one another. This year...there is very little to relate which I guess to some, is a glorious thing...but for our bread and butter, it's a worrisome statistic”. She gave a smile to show her humour influenced her...and only her.

This was our habitual Monday Morning staff meeting to air our dirty laundry, catch up with our colleagues and whinge about the Australian Cricket Team and how far they can fall. As there were no problems with those Cases still current that some of the Team were investigating, the meeting ended earlier than usual.

Shelley and I returned to our desks, trying hard to look busy doing nothing. A chore that I detested!

“Bugger this, Joe! Let's go and grab a coffee and sit at the Ferry wharf...maybe a ferry will be docking to liven things up, eh?”

We weren't the only ones who had this thought as Sean Senior and his partner Jack Parsons were sitting on one of the many bench seats located on the Ferry Dock. Both cradling a large coffee.

“Sit with us...” Senior offered, as he squeezed up a bit to allow us to sit on the same length of the seat.

Senior and Parsons had been a team for yonks. It was said that their partnership was so long, they were the original Dee Team called out on the Cain and Abel homicide murder.

“Yer the same as us, huh? Hate sitting there twiddling yer thumbs when there is no work. We have often come down here especially when the weather is warm...”

“It's funny we haven't run into you before...” I countered, watching a Rivercat Ferry turn to address the Dock. It would be ‘All Stations’ back to Circular Quay. A slow but relaxing way to arrive in the CBD bang on twelve noon.

“Why don't we go for the ride?” Parsons suggested good humouredly.

“Because we have no way of getting back to the Office if we have a ‘call out’. Otherwise, we’d be in it in a flash”. Senior responded. “Though I reckon I could put the house on not being called out to a death scene. That’s how things have been so far this year”.

“Yeah, in some ways let’s hope it continues this way though our jobs could be on the line if things don’t pick up. It has happened before where selected Murder Dees were transferred to other areas that were short of manpower...being sent down to Fraud or Blue-Collar Crime is not my idea of time worth spent...they’d have to carry me downstairs if it happens again...either that or I’ll take a temporary job in the Sandwich Shop downstairs”.

We watched as the Ferry debarked its passengers. A woman wearing a hijab denoting her religious beliefs was having trouble wheeling a double-sized pram down the gangplank onto the Dock. Several times, the pram almost came to grief, almost falling off the gangplank. Both Shelley and I sprang to the woman’s aid, being stopped by a man holding another youngster by the hand.

“We do not need your help”. He uttered to both of us, holding his arm up to stop us. “She will do it OK if only you would let her”.

“Perhaps you should have done the honours...” I stated curtly.

“That is woman’s work. She has the babies; she has the role of mothering in their upbringing...safely if Allah decrees it as so”.

I gave the man a glare that was meant to throw him backwards...he remained in the same spot between Shells and I and his wife. Shelley pulled at my shirt, calmly offering words of conciliation as she led me away, back to the seat beside Senior and Parson.

“Yer can’t figure ‘em, can you? Yer were just trying to help the poor woman. I could see me stripping off and diving into the water to save the two mites...I wonder whether that would have been appreciated, huh?” Senior scoffed.

“You’ve gotta ask yerself how powerful a Religion can be when it completely controls everything during yer waking hours...can’t they see the mind-control going on continuously?”

“All they see is that reward when they die...if they live in total subjugation to His word. Everything that happens appears to be Allah’s will...good or bad. I guess in a way it is a kind of a mind-numbing effect like a powerful sedative to lessen the jolt of the reality of a situation...but there is no anger in accepting the Will of Allah in a certain situation. They just accept their fate all activated and directed by Allah...me being an Atheist of monumental dimensions cannot grasp the sheer blind faith of most Muslims...I guess there was a comparable situation throughout History where the Faithful followed blindly in the path of some Saint, Pope, Cardinal or Priest...”

Both Senior and Parsons nodded in unison.

“They see things completely different to us...” Sean offered. “Our first Case of this New Year involved a Croat savagely killing a bloke whom he saw in the street. He trailed this guy waiting for the chance to clobber him. Why? The guy he killed was a Serb. During the Balkans War, the Croat guy had watched in hiding as this Serb guy killed the bloke’s Mother and Father and his three sisters...assassination type killings where the guy just walked up to the family and shot them. A bullet to the head of each of them...and just rolled each body into the ditch beside the road where the family had been stopped by this marauding pack of Serb soldiers. The Third Balkan War was when? Around twenty years ago...late Nineteen-nineties...they held that grudge, that hatred for that long after hostilities ceased. Makes yer wonder, huh?”

“Over there where families can be traced back centuries and allegiances are built on trust over decades, twenty years is a drop in the bucket”.

We all nodded our understanding of the situation though we would never feel it in our hearts as they do. He shook his head wondering I think, on the savagery of us human beings.

“I asked him was he sure it was the same guy. The murder of his family occurred twenty-odd years ago...you change a bit over all those years...he just shrugged his shoulders. The chance of him being wrong never entered his head”.

“Yugoslavs, all of them...they are a proud and stubborn race...they got clobbered during the War by the Nazis...and they never forget...they’re like bloody bull elephants”.

“Anyhow...after he had bashed the guy into the next life, he calmly rang ‘Triple Zero’ and waited at the scene until the local guys came. They then called us in. All the time, this guy just sat on his haunches smoking...close to the mangled body. We couldn’t believe it. Do you know what he said? His family name had now been avenged! As though that was his defence in Court. He was married and had four kids. Paying off a mortgage on a house. A responsible position in one of the large Insurance Companies with an Office here in Parramatta...”

He faded away as though he was now watching a slo-mo replay footage of the incident.

“We transported him back here to formally charge him with the Homicide murder. I asked him what would now happen to his wife...his kids...”

He shook his head, a hint of disbelief in the action.

“He said that his wife would wake every morning proud of what he had done. Honour had now again been restored on the family name. His kids would know him as a hero...”

“All very well...” Jack Parsons said “...but how will they survive? Keep the roof over their heads?”



“Our large family is strong here in Sydney...and Wollongong. They will keep them safe...that was it...all about Honour and avenging the family name...twenty years after the fact...they look at things a little different to us, know what I mean?”

“A different perspective...” Sean Senior added. “Look at that case just now with the woman with the pram coming down the gang-plank? She would have been embarrassed if we had helped...as though she somehow thought she had failed in her role as a mother...and the hubby?” He shook his head. “God help us!”

“Going back to that Croat ‘incident’. There would be those Christians who would approach the middle-aged Serb to shake his hand, pray over him asking God to forgive the man of his worldly sins...as he too would forgive the man...know what I mean...to hell with all that bullshit! Just let us live our lives in peace...what do yer reckon?”

“We get to see them in a different light to most of Society. Frankly, I think there should be a ban on permitting immigration from that part of the World...or any region that has been involved in any form of warfare...we are letting in people who have psychological scars due to the brutal conflict all around them...we will pay a price over the coming years...look, I’m not talking about barring people because of their Religion, but more to do with those who have experienced wholesale warfare in their countries of birth...which happens to be mainly those Muslim Countries in the Middle East.”

I really didn’t want to get involved in this type of discussion. I guess I was more than a ‘left-leaner’ for want of a definition. I was out there alone as most of the floor were centre right conservatives. Sean Senior especially, could be so...intense when it revolved around this subject...and I guess he wasn’t the Sole Believer in our Society when the curtains were pulled back, so to speak...if you get my meaning.

“Sean, listen...we had three huge waves of immigration straight after the War...the Second World War. British, Italian and Greeks...all of whom affected by battles that raged around them. Whether they were psychologically scarred or not is not that important as sixty years after the event, our Society has not gone down the gurgler because of the sheer number of PTSD sufferers who were in those first waves of immigration...and think about the surge of Vietnamese who came here after that War fell in a heap. They were subject to a greater number of bombs being dropped on their land than in the whole of World War Two...and quite frankly, our Society has grown in so many ways because of their industry. Sure, there were those who reckoned we were going to hell on a pack-horse because these Vietnamese, Greek and Italian people were not of our stock...that has been shown to be a load of bullshit...people are just people, most wanting a peaceful haven to bring up their kids...”

There was silence for some time.

“Yeah...” Sean eventually replied. “But they weren’t Muslim or wore clothes that were completely foreign to us...”

“You never know mate. One day we all may be forced to wear similar clothes to protect us from a savage sun...” My snide humour lost on them both. Shelley raised her eyebrows and stifled a giggle.

I finished off my coffee and stood to deposit the cardboard container into a Waste Bin.

“So...it comes down to your opposition to their Religion...”

“Joe? You just saw it...the woman would not...could not accept our help...because of her Religion...”

“You don’t know that Sean...”

“C’mon Joe. It was as plain as the nose on our faces...they will never fit into our core values...not like the Italians and the Greeks...and yeah, even the Poms...”

“Sean, it still took around two to three generations of those people to blend into our Society. The same for these people, I reckon. There were plenty of the old ‘White Australia Policy’ Believers who continually ranted that they would never blend in...and they have! You’ve only got to look around you...”

“I don’t believe that Joe. I don’t believe they’ll ever blend in.”

“History shows a different outcome, Sean...the exact opposite of all those White Australia Policy disciples and far-right White Supremist jerk-offs who ranted about Armageddon because we let those ‘coloureds’ in...these people who are so different to us. They even don’t like Vegemite or Weet Bix for breakfast!” This was said sternly without any hint of comedy as though this was the main reason why they should not be permitted citizenship in Australia!

Sean and Jack stood, stretched, and walked a couple of steps to place their empty coffee containers into a nearby Waste Bin.

“I think we should make a show at the Office...it will be Lunchtime by the time we show, eh?”

We walked back together with nothing more said on the subject. We had both voiced our opinions which seemed diametrically opposed to one another. It did not affect the relationship we had with our work colleagues...it never did.

## CHAPTER THREE

“Do you reckon that’s the house?” I asked a little surprise. “That house is what? No more than twenty years old...I thought after reading the Murder Book, we would be looking at a house from the Sixties...or thereabouts. What do you reckon?”

“Yeah, there were a couple of crime-scene photos that showed bits of the front of the house...to me, definitely a typical Project home of around that era...and definitely not that house, that’s for sure!”

“Arrh...have we got the right address? Umm...she not only is a Detective of some note, but she is also an expert of the Project Home Design of the Sixties vintage...”

“If you don’t want an answer, don’t ask the question...even your horse would know about that, Tonto”. She looked over at me, a scowl to tell me she was not in the mood. It was one of those days...we did not want to remain in the Office. After six weeks away from work I craved for the outdoors, not to be sealed in an artificially air-treated Office environment. On a whim, we decided to drive by the address where the man had died over three decades ago.

Our new Boss, Denny Turner had been pulling her hair out because we had very few Cases between all the dayshift Murder Dee Teams. She apparently had hit on a half solution, gathering up all the Night Shift guys’ ‘Unsolves’ to hand out to us. This may have solved the problem of what we should do during the day and helping the Night Shift in whittling away the Cases gathering dust on their desks, but...

She admitted that she had a few hints from higher up the chain, complaining of the number of hours certain Detectives were using up by sitting away the hours drinking coffee on the Parramatta Ferry Dock. The thing I thought was the comedy of the situation, was that those Detectives were considered the best of the bunch and yet they did not understand that they stuck out like sore thumbs for any member of the hierarchy to notice just by a glance from their Office window in the upper levels of the Police Building!

Smart bastards, eh? We sure can be a little dumb at times, huh?

Shelley and I were given the oldest of these ‘Unsolves’ to get our teeth into...a murder committed in Suburbia some thirty years ago. Nineteen Eighty-nine to be exact. By way of explanation, Denny said as she plopped the four volumes of the Murder Book onto my desk was that the Case needed a set of new eyes...a different perspective. As the Number One Team, we should be able to crack it.

“Go to it guys...show me how clever you are”. She muttered as she headed towards her Office, satisfied that all those Teams not having any Cases were now suitably employed. The Nightshift guys forever appreciative of our help. There was no thought of the Night guys dragging the chain. The problem was there was not enough hours of the night, too many Cases and insufficient nightshift Dees to manage the nightly number of homicides.

There had been several attempts at easing this problem with none of the ideas productive. The reason was more than obvious...not enough Dees on the Night or Dog Shift times, but suitable Dees did not grow on trees and men to fill the obvious voids were hard to come by if at all! The answer was not to increase the hourly rate of a Night Dee or even to introduce a 'difficulty payment' of an extra one hundred dollars per week. This meet with resistant from right across the Rank and File and Unions with others demanding a similar 'difficulty payment' for work carried out beyond what was considered a normal work environment.

It was pointed out that the night Dees were already receiving a penalty payment for being just that...working either the night shift or the dog shift. A resolution was hard to come by so the whole idea was tossed into the too hard basket and forgotten. The only solution to have some effect was this exercise to transfer any Case slowly taking on the name of an 'Unsolved' onto dayshift Murder teams whenever they became light on in Cases.

## CHAPTER FOUR

"Did they have computers back in the Nineteen Eighties?"

"I don't think so...I don't think they became a fixture on everyone's desk until the mid to late-Nineties...and it became quite clear very quickly that the addition of a computer on everyone's desk was not going to make significant savings in the amount of paper used...that was one of the 'catch cries' back then that we would save a Football size field of Amazonian Rainforest for every computer supplied...the computer companies must have made a squillion back then..."

"You finished, Kemosabe? Get down off your little pinto horse, will you. We have work to do".

"What are you talking about? You asked a question, I succinctly replied".

She waved away my question, instead looking sincerely at me.

"DNA protocols?"

She was at it again...and she blames me for carrying on with mindless thoughts and ravings!

"Nah, that I do know for sure...why?"

"How did they solve anything back in those days!?"

"Maybe they had cleverer Dees back then..."

“That’s a thought...you really know how to gee up a girl, don’t you? Cleverer Dees be bugged! How do you reckon that makes me feel? Like a second-class citizen...” She giggled. “How do you want to manage this then?” She was getting back on track. This constant changing of subject matter grating on me at times. I never thought I was so frivolous!

“We both read the Murder Book and its four Volumes cover to cover to accustom ourselves with what went down...and then we figure what there is still available to give to Forensic Trace for DNA and other trace that is evident...we visit the site and acquaint ourselves with all the witnesses and surroundings...and we go through the Autopsy details with Muscles or one of his staff...that’s for starters...okay? You want first go of the Murder Books?”

“No...you go first. It will save us moving about from your desk to mine all the time...before I start on the details, I’d like to visit the site. Kogarah”.

I looked up at her. Our entire conversation up until now appeared to be totally useless...she wants to visit the site first before we even start on the Murder Books. Bloody Hell!! How do I remain sane?

“Who were the Dees on the Case?”

I flipped through the first Murder Book with its Index Pages, the catalogue of folios added with the date, a brief description of the added papers, the date and time and who had done the insertion of those papers. The next set of details was a list of all persons who had anything to do with the Case, even those who were of no consequence to the continuum of the investigation. Their address, telephone numbers and their Employer all dutiful recorded. The next list was the Investigating Persons, their grading and Badge Number and their telephone number. The top of that list was the Supervising Officer and then the two Officers who were allotted the Case at the time of its execution.

“Steggard...Brian Stanley...Dee 3 and his partner Hulio Elias...nickname Benny...Dee 2. The oversighting Boss was Abbey. DS Church...and there’s been...six...seven sets of Detectives since then having a go...even Woody, your old partner when he was partnered with Doug Thoroughgood. I vaguely remember him. A real dapper guy...he always looked as though he was heading to the races...I can’t recall whether he retired, moved out of the Murder Squad, or died on the job...Jeez, this Case has been looked at by a lot of Dees. It doesn’t look good from where I am sitting as they were all good guys...there’s bugger all new folios added so it seems...those other Detective Teams didn’t get very far at all”.

“Well, we’ll just have to show them how good we are...” She looked up, that tight smile challenging me. I knew from experience the best strategy was just to shut my mouth. “Don’t be such a kill-joy, Joe. It doesn’t sit well on your shoulders”.

I shrugged my shoulders wondering what the hell she was talking about. For effect, I brushed both shoulders as though there was a tonne of dandruff needing to be brushed away. I heard a groan from Shelley’s direction. I smiled to myself.

“He had a long and illustrious career here in the Murder Squad, didn’t he? Abbey, I mean. I don’t know the Investigating Officers...the names don’t ring any bells with me...well before my time...although, as I said, I knew Woody and Thoroughgood...mmm...Professor Bernie Ford was the Forensic Pathologist on site and the ‘Cutter’ as well. Brenda O’Bourne was his Assist”. I looked up at my partner, knowing that she had become firm friends with the woman. “I didn’t think she was that old! Have you kept in contact?”

“Yeah...as you know she was living at my place for a while before she went back to Ireland. That Case concerning the rape, mutilation, and murder of three and four years old little girls taken from a Park up the Coast pushed her over the edge. She wasn’t pleased to be back home as her father nagged at her to stiffen up. That was the way you got over such things. He didn’t have a clue how to handle a severe case of PTSD and deep depression. She came back out here...oh...about five...six years ago, but she was never going to improve. She tried to take her own life in Two Thousand and Thirteen...an overdose of sleeping tablets...but Brin came home early and caught her in time...she spent a year out at that place out of Orange...Summerfields I think it was called. Looked like the quintessential building for a horror film...”

“Huh, that’s funny. My old mate Knackers? He spent about six months out there. I used to go visit him...that’s where I was bailed up by a drug-fuelled idiot on a back road leaving there...I wasn’t lost, just a little confused. Summerville? I thought it one beautiful old building...different perspectives, huh? Where is she now?”

“Queensland with the Coroners’ Office up there...she’s Number Two Forensic Officer. Happy as a pig in shit. Got herself a very nice squeeze...a lovely lady who has done O’Bourne good. She has three adult children herself which causes a rowdy home at times. She has come out which has been a real load off her shoulders. I reckon that was half her problem, trying to ignore what she was for most of her life...and not wanting to upset the very devout Catholic family with such a disclosure, even though they were all back in Ireland. Now? As I said, she is very happy...going great guns. I actually flew up there over the New Year period...really to get away from Brin and his colour-blind input into what paint colour was to be used on the walls of our Bedroom”.

I didn’t recall she had tried to take her own life...and I was even unaware she had returned to Australia after only a short stint in her native country...and being gay? That was news to me!

Shelley was visibly upset by the telling. I left it alone, volunteering to get the coffees. I guess it showed I had a way to go myself as my empathetic valve was set on open where I too, became upset by the story. I remembered the woman. She had that typical Irish humour and a glint in her eye. She brought a smile to my face every time she opened her mouth, regardless of the brutality of the death scene.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“What do you want to do now?” As though this trip was my idea!

We were sitting outside the house where the body had allegedly been found, though that original house had long ago been demolished to have a pseudo-Mediterranean double-storey eyesore sitting in its place.

I always wondered on the Planning Laws of the Local Council permitting such eyesores having no connection to the rest of the streetscape. I guess brown-paper bags were in vogue back in those dark days!

“We’re here. Let’s go and do a bit of door knocking...okay by you? We can treat this Case as though it had just occurred; not thirty years ago...and adopt our usual practise of investigation from the get-go. Door knocking the neighbourhood...what a bloody trial but it has to be done!”

“Yeah, why not, though we could just be duplicating what the original guys had done...wearing out shoe leather for no results. If they had canvassed the neighbourhood, I reckon the residents will be sick and tired of stupid Dees asking the same questions. Really, what is the point as everything has changed in this neighbourhood...after twenty-odd years...”

“You’d expect that, I guess. Nothing stays the same”.

I walked up onto the Porch area and rang the doorbell. A muffled sound of chimes from inside the house heard through the thick timber and glass door. High pitched yaps from just inside the door. It took some time for the door to open slowly. An elderly woman as tall as she was wide, huffed out wanting to know why we had knocked on her door. Technically we hadn’t...we had pressed the doorbell...but who is going to argue the point!

“Good morning, missus. I am Detective Joseph Lind...” I turned to Shelley. “This is my partner, Detective Shelley Shields. Do you mind if we ask a few questions?”

“Wot for? I don’t know who you are...you show a fancy badge...wot that mean. Wot we done wrong? Nuffin’. I get my husband”. She closed the door in our faces. Shelley lowered her head to hide a smile.

“Good to see we are well respected around here, eh?” I mumbled as the door was again opened slowly. An elderly man stood at the threshold, his wife behind him, egging him on as she cradled a small mousey-looking dog in her arms. Protecting the little fellow because it was obvious, we were going to steal the little pooch...we had that look about us.

“Mister...arrh?”

“Bourdon Bovisa...you are Detectives? Can I see some sort of identification, please?” He spoke with nary an accent.

We saw that a lot.

Where the husband mingled with fellow Australians, their English improved quickly. The woman of the house assigned to the house where little association with the outside world took place. As in most cases, the head of the household died first leaving a woman sadly devoid of social graces, and unaware of what to do when outside her front gate...her children helped but the anxiety of the old woman was almost palpable...a sad situation seen in every suburb of every city and town in Australia.

We again flashed our badges. He seemed satisfied that they were real.

“Wot does a Murder Squad Detective want with us?”

“You have lived here for how many years, Mister Bovisa? In this house?”

“A long time...maybe twenty years...we purchased the house here before...a small house. Me and my two sons knock it down. Build this place. It is too big for us now...we only live on the ground floor. Neither of us can get up the stairs no more...the kids have all gone. The house is half empty...but full when everyone comes over for a Birthday...or just to see their mama and papa...Easter, Christmas time the house is full of screaming kids and arguing adults. Things never change, huh?” He laughed.

“Yes...do you remember who owned the other house...the one you demolished?”

“Oh, dear...no. Old woman. She died. The house was a...how you say...a deceased estate...is that right? I don’t remember the family name...my Solicitor? He would know”.

“Your Solicitor, where is his Office?”

“Kogarah...on the main street above the NAB Bank. Bovisa, Stella and Associates...”

“Your son, perhaps?”

“Wot can I say...” His arms wide, pride in his smile. “Yes, our son...his first Case...wot...almost twenty years ago now. You want me to ring him?”

“No, sir...we’ll walk up and see him”.



## CHAPTER SIX

“I understand your reticence, sir. We are investigating a homicide murder that took place in Nineteen Eighty-nine. A man died on the doorstep of the house before it was demolished, and your family home was built”.

“But the woman is dead, isn’t that right?”

“Yes sir, but we want to track down her children. We understand it was a big family...we are hoping their mother may have confided in one of the kids...this is a Cold Case which we are just beginning to investigate...there has been little progress for a lot of years. We’re hoping to stir the pot...crack it open...get it started again”.

The guy slowly nodded his head.

“Good luck with that...what are the odds?”

“We now have more investigative procedures and protocols that weren’t available back then...so we are hoping for a successful completion in the Case...”

“Yeah...you wonder what it would have been like”. He smiled “No computers. No Mobile phones...I doubt I could work without my Laptop...you wonder...and it is amazing as it wasn’t that long ago...twenty years...twenty-five years ago...I can recall quite easily what they were saying back then...within ten years there will be computers small enough to fit into your pocket...personal mobile phones no bigger than a pack of cigarettes! Those predictions turned out to be true...though we dismissed the claims at the time as being utter nonsense, uh?” He shook his head. “How they all lived in that tiny house I’ll never know. You don’t know the names or addresses of the children...they’d all be adults with families of their own...I can’t remember the family name, but I can remember the Solicitor’s Firm they used in the Deceased Estate sale of the home...um...one moment...it was my first case”. He tapped away on a Laptop for some time. “Yes, here it is. The Family name is Harris. Their Solicitor was Warwick Saunders and Partners. They still operate under that name...”

He gave us an address in Pitt Street in the City.

We thanked him and walked out into the bright sunshine.

“Isn’t it good when you have guys like that...I mean, he could have been an absolute crud and demanded a Court Order before he disclosed anything...I’m a bit peckish. How about we have something to eat before we head into the City?”

“That’s a good plan, Tonto. A good plan”.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

“Sir? We thought we’d head in this direction as the number of Harrises in the Phone Directory is almost impossible to count...and there is nothing to show that the children have not been cast to the four winds...all we want is an indication of their names and addresses so we can ask whether they remember the incident...and whether their mother had said anything to them. That is all, sir”.

“I understand sir. Under normal circumstances you should have a Court Order for us to give you that information. Um...the eldest son still does Business through us. Would you mind if I ring him first before I divulge his whereabouts?”

I nodded my head, gesturing for him to go ahead. The Solicitor walked out of his Office to make the call...an officious sod, I thought to myself.

“Yes, he will see you at four-fifteen at the NSW Supreme Court Building up the street. Level Seventeen. He will make arrangements for you to park your vehicle in the underground car park off Macquarie Street. In saying that, in allowing you to interview him, he doubts whether he can be that helpful...” He shrugged his shoulders and gestured with his hands as any good Greek boy would.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

After obtaining Security Clearance ‘Visitor’ Badges, we were escorted to the Seventeenth Floor of the NSW Courts Building. Tom Harris invited us into his Office, offering coffee and biscuits which were quickly organised.

I looked around his Office and the larger General Office area.

“What do you do here, Mister Harris?”

“My kids like to call me Head Sheriff...which I guess I am. I organise Court Sheriffs to attend any Court proceedings, the delivery of alleged Perps who are usually held in our cells overnight and the general security of the entire building...a mundane existence, not like you Detectives...I couldn’t do what you guys do. We get a fair indication of what your involvement is whenever a gory Murder Case is before the Court. Yer got that job for yourselves”.

A tea trolley was wheeled into the room and our orders filled. I inwardly groaned when I saw the ‘Tea Lady’. It was usually a forewarning on the grading of the coffee in the ‘shit’ levels. I was surprised when I tasted the coffee as it was first class. I said as much to the old dear who immediately smiled and puffed out her chest.

“The Judges...” She confided in a querulous voice. “I think we are perhaps the last bastion of the Tea Lady set...all due to the Judges influence. The poor dears think it is below their station in life to whizz down the street to the nearest Gloria Jeans for the caffeine fix...suits me!” Another smile. “Tom? Your usual?”

He nodded his head.

“A peppermint Tea for you and regular coffees for both your guests”.

The Tea Trolley wheeled silently out of the Office. The strawberry-coloured hair of the old woman giving colour to a staid Office environment.

“She’s a dear old thing...now, while we enjoy these offerings from the Government...I don’t know whether I can help you much. I remember the event, but I had moved out of home to marry and start a family of my own. Had two kids by then. I know Mum was flattened by the incident. She never really recovered and refused to answer the front door...ever! After it happened! She got worse after Dad died, thinking that an Oriental man was out to kill her. If she saw an oriental person while she was out shopping, she would collapse on the ground in a nervous bundle. We had to have her admitted...she died some months after that...poor Mum, she didn’t deserve that type of thing to envelope her...that is about all I can tell you of the incident. I know we had to make statements to the original Detectives in charge of the Case...I thought then that they were in trouble...the Case still hasn’t been resolved, has it? It’s been what? Twenty-Five years? Good luck on it being solved”.

“We have been given the Case as a new Team can often look at the Case in a different way...giving the Homicide of long ago a different perspective...and we have the added bonus of huge steps in forensic trace and DNA strategies”.

“Mmm...but you haven’t travelled that far, have you? In resolving the Case?”

I shook my head not wanting to elaborate or even confide that we yet had not read the Murder Books all the way through or the original on-site notes which sometimes can hint at something that is not chased out further but lingers, eventually being forgotten.

“You have a sister?”

“Who by that time had...no...she was travelling through Europe with a couple of friends. She got a job in London and didn’t return home until Mum died so she could attend the funeral. She is back over there in a darn good job...no, that is wrong as she came home for Dad’s funeral first...she was a bit worried as she had just landed this important job...but she was well and truly out of it...” He took a slow sip of his tea, sighing deeply at its taste.

“...and your younger brother?”

“Duncan...yeah, he was living at home when the incident occurred. I think he the best person to talk to...I’ll ring to see when he would be available for you to talk to. He’s always

been a bit nervy...you know, but that dead man on our front doorstep didn't help the cause much..."

## CHAPTER NINE

"Mister Harris? Duncan Harris..."

The woman tapped on a keyboard as she fingered my ID badge.

"Sir? The police are here to have a talk...Murder Squad Detectives..." She uttered quietly, her microphone just that...so small you could hardly make it out arching across the side of her face to her mouth. She listened for some moments. "Yes, sir. I will bring them up to you..." She nodded, handed back my badge taking off her headset to stand as she did. "Detectives? If you would follow me".

Where his older brother looked the polished Head of Court Security with regular Gym visits noticeable in his build, the much younger brother Duncan, was the absolute reverse. Small and rotund though his energy levels showed through by the manner he greeted and led us into his office. He reminded me of a Bumble Bee on MDMA in his constant movements.

"Tom not of much use, I would imagine...and Christine? She was never home...she and Mum used to argue...I reckon it was because they were so alike...the twin girls? Yeah, they were home but...I can't remember. If it were a Tuesday night, they'd be swimming training...yeah...and my younger twin brothers? Same thing but if it had of been a Wednesday night, they'd a been at karate lessons"

"Did your mother confide in you much?" I was still trying to get my head around his reasoning. I was more than confused.

"Sometimes I thought more than she talked to Dad...that is being a little cruel to Dad's memory...but finding that dead guy on the front door-step? It really started her downward spiral...she cascaded down very quickly. Um...has the guy been named? You know, some new stuff been found to open the Case up once more? No!?"

"No...we are going over old ground just kicking sods over hoping that something may pop up..."

The guy sat there not continuing as though in a trance.

I looked up at the shelving on the adjacent walls. Photographs of a much younger and trimmer Duncan Harris standing beside immaculately cared for early model Holdens. There was a fine display of superb die-cast models of various Holden models.

"You a Holden man, eh?" I asked, a smile splitting my face.

There were only two types of man in Australia when it came to V8 Supercars. GMH Holdens and Ford Falcons. That whole sub-species would slowly die out now that both Holdens and Falcons were no longer manufactured in Australia.

“Yeah...all my life. A lot of hard work...and plenty of dosh to ‘do up’ an earlier model Holden. Done up three...no, four! The HQ sedan with Monaro trim with a worked 253 was my last. That has basically stopped due to work pressures...a wife and five kids...I’m waiting until I retire and may take up the hobby again...might...” He laughed. “Anyhow...mmm...umm...” He ran his fingers through what little hair he had. “Um...thirty years...it’s a long time”. He stood awkwardly, walking slowly to a picture on the opposite wall to his desk. He swung the picture to one side and twirled on a wall safe. He took a wooden box wrapped in several rolls of plastic from the safe and closed off the door, swinging back the picture.

“I don’t know...this could help, maybe. Actually, I guess I have committed a crime by withholding this from you Detectives...I was what? Twenty, I think and several thousands of dollars falling into my hands was a little Godsend to my way of thinking back then. I took nothing else from the wallet...God knows why I kept it for all this time...I should have just turfed it”.

I snapped on a pair of latex as Shelley excused herself to return to our Unmarked to get a DNA Swab and Fingerprint Kit.

A dank and stale smell exuded from the wallet after I had rolled off the last of the plastic sheathing. I gently open the wallet and searched through its various pockets. I dare not take any of the papers out of these pockets for fear of destroying them.

“How long have you had the wallet?”

The man looked nervously about, as though seeing his Office for the first time. He frowned, coughing several times as though his throat was constricted. He went to say something, but the sound never left his mouth. He coughed again. To me, he was one worried fellow now. He sunk slowly back into his Executive Chair.

“I can still picture it”. He sighed as he ran a hand over his face. “I heard Mum scream out to me. I can remember sprinting to the front of the house...I was in the back garage...I was building or more correctly, doing up a EH Holden Stationwagon...I was about to start rebuilding a V8 253 motor to put into the vehicle...as I said, I sprinted down the side passage...um...the driveway to mount the front steps. I...um...I saw the wallet lying beside the body. I picked it up to put back into the guy’s back pocket but then I saw the money. A great wad of one-hundred-dollar bills...about two thousand bucks! That would well and truly enable me to finish off my pet project and buy me a couple of things I needed...you know, for my Men’s Shed”.

“So, you kept the wallet? Why didn’t you just take the money and place the wallet back where you found it...or in his pocket. You know for thirty years we have not known the identity of the bloke. He was buried in an unmarked grave...a pauper’s grave...because you

stole his wallet...and his identification which has had severe consequences on the progression of the Case of who killed him and why! Good men have toiled over this Case...it would be a safe bet to assume whoever was responsible for his death, would be dead as well..."

Shelley tugged at my coat hem telling me I was starting to get riled. The tone and volume of my voice had ratcheted up a few notches!

"Can I be charged with any offence?" He asked nervously.

The guy showed back then when he had flinched the wallet from a dying man, and now, that he only thought of himself. I would have loved to handcuff him and frog-march him out of the building. While the Statute of Limitations did not apply to a lot of crimes, the crime of removing property from a dead person did not fall into that category...so I thought.

As I was rolling the wallet once again in its sheathing and placing it into an Evidence Bag that Shelley had retrieved from the Unmarked, she obtained a DNA sample and fingerprints off Duncan Harris.

"Why do you need these things from me?"

"Purely for exemplar samples. More than likely, your finger-prints and DNA trace are on the plastic sheathing and wallet. We just need to rule those out and concentrate on whatever other trace elements come from the forensic search...um...as far as your culpability, I don't think we can charge you with any crime or misdemeanour, especially after all this time". I was on the verge of adding 'unfortunately' to the sentence before common sense took hold. It is an important part of policing that you keep personal opinions and thoughts to yourself...even though I was renowned for breaking that important tenet.

I was on the verge of asking the guy that one important question. 'Why?'

Why wait for thirty years to hand over the wallet?

Why to us? Was it because the guilt had been slowly building for all these years? Sleepless nights, perhaps. A guilty conscience making sleep difficult to come by every night.

Why to us when it would have been far easier just to throw the thing into the garbage...was there some sort of confessional need? Did he need to distance himself from the object?

I guess we'll never know...and I doubt his response would be that enlightening in any case.

We now had stepped that one huge step over the remains of our past colleagues. We had kicked over that sod of earth to show a piece of information that will help us enormously in progressing forward on the Case...so it was part luck, part good detective reasoning. I don't doubt Duncan Harris had been interviewed by all those good Detectives who had passed before us for nil result...call it serendipitous...I surely will!

## CHAPTER TEN

I thumped my hands on my knees as Shelley wheeled the Unmarked up the exit ramp of the underground Parking area.

“Bloody Hell!” I retorted. “That guy doesn’t know the number of Dees who have sweated pints of blood on this Case for the last thirty years. Good men and women who didn’t deserve to be taken for a ride...how much money did he say?”

“Two thousand or thereabouts...a goodly amount back then...can’t we get him on a Robbery Charge? Removing personal property from a dead man?” She glanced across at me as we came out of the exit ramp and had to stop waiting for a break in traffic. I shook my head, though I wasn’t sure myself. “Why would the guy be carrying so much dosh on him? A gambling windfall perhaps...maybe a loan cashed in...did you get the name of the bloke when you look briefly through that wallet?”

“He had a current Drivers Licence...arrh...for that time, yeah...um...Soon Leung Woo. I don’t know if that is the correct pronunciation...”

“Chinese?”

“Back then, highly unlikely...thirty years ago there would have been very few Chinese about...and they all ran Chinese Restaurants...”

“That’s so politically incorrect and racist, Joe...”

I waved my hand to show I really didn’t care. Who was going to object when there was only Shells and I...this whole shift into politically correct country was way beyond me with me lagging in the politically correct World!

“Okay, okay”. I retorted, peeved at a need to now watch everything you said on the off chance some person would feel affronted. “I don’t think it is Japanese...Nineteen Eighty-nine? Could be Vietnamese...the War ended in ‘Seventy-Five...a lot of Vietnamese Boat people were flooding the country back then. I vaguely recall the Malaysian Government crying out for International support and help as they had two Immigration Compounds for Boat people on some island not large enough to take all the ‘boat people’...thousands of people...I wonder how long it took them to bring that number of Refugees down to zero. Do you remember the terrible conditions those first Boat people were forced to live in? Like bloody animals or big-time gang leaders who were seeing out a life-time sentence when all they have done is flee from a country taken over by the Communists. Their crime? Supporting the Allies throughout the War”.

“I’d say no more so that our present batch living under ‘house arrest’ on Nauru and Manus Islands...it never stops, does it? I betcha most people would have forgotten about the waves of Vietnamese Boat people who came into Australia...it was on the behest of Malcolm Fraser who was our Prime Minister back then...he had adopted the attitude that seeing as

how we had bombed and shelled the crap out of the Country, the least we could do was to take in a few refugees...how noble of the man!"

"Mmm...there is a different mindset to-day on Refugees...a different perspective than on what the general population thought of it back then. I think to-day we are more insulated...more against the whole movement of immigration, full stop!"

"I don't know Shells...while I was a young bloke during the Vietnam War, I can still remember the general feeling on letting those thousands of Boat People into the Country over a number of years...there was one hell of a backlash over it...look at them now...model citizens. We have more problems with certain Lebanese cliques and others from that area of the Middle East who think the only way to resolve a situation is by strong-arm tactics and a hail of bullets..."

"That's a really broad brush that you've got, Tonto...you're a lot older than I am as I cannot remember anything during that time though what I do know I learnt at School or TV Documentaries...so, you're going with our Vic being Vietnamese?"

"That's just a guess Shells, based purely on the end of the Vietnam War in Seventy-Five, wasn't it?"

"Don't ask me, Tonto. I was only born in Eighty-four...wouldn't there have been a DNA examination done on tissue long before this that would have been kept...that would have ascertained his nationality, wouldn't it?"

"Mmm...don't know, Shells? Really, we're pissing into the wind a bit, don't you reckon? Let's get this wallet back to Forensics and begin a read through of all the Murder Book Volumes, huh? It's got to be done even if we are trying hard to delay the obvious".

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Sorry about the delay in getting back to you, Joe..."

"Oh! That's alright...this Case has been lingering, floating about in the ether-world since Nineteen Eighty-nine, so a couple of hours more won't cause it any pain..."

"Joe, no need to get nasty. I recognised the Case as soon as you began giving me the Case Number. It was my first Case as an Assistant to Professor Bernie Ford. It was my first on-site examination and my first cut with Bernie looking over my shoulder at every little thing I did...I was as nervous as a young boy being seduced by a much older woman..."

"Now that sure does put it into context...that from personal experience, huh?"



“Well...Marj as you know, is several years older than me...don't tell me you've caught the Case...”

“Okay, I won't. I think we are the sixth...maybe the seventh lot of Murder Dees who have had a go at it...”

“Steggard...Brian Steggard!” Muscles suddenly shouted. “...and his partner, Hulio Elias were the first pair of Dees on the job. Jeez, it's funny what you can remember, huh? It progressed very slowly until it came to a complete stop. Steggard? He was a funny bloke...he volunteered out of the Murder Squad not long after the body was found. He was a lanky bloke, skinny as a rake handle. His Adam's Apple didn't stop moving up or down...there were whispers on why Brian volunteered out while his mate got out on a Disability Pension at the same time...there was a bit of scuttlebutt about the sudden departure of them both...”

“The John Doe Case, Muscles...let's keep it on target, huh?”

“Yeah sure. I read my Report from back then. Very clinical. Very exact...not like my ramble beside the cutting table. A tall man for an Oriental. One seventy-eight. One hundred kilograms. Age between fifty-five to sixty-five. Chinese or Vietnamese...nothing more southerly like Thailand or Cambodian...not Japanese or Korean. His body in good nick and it looked as though he kept up a regular exercise regime...that could indicate a Military man as it rarely leaves you...that exercise regime. In excellent health though he would have problems with his kidneys as there was a lot of extraneous fatty tissue...I suspected a drinker. He had a blood alcohol reading of nought point one nine at the time of death. There were five separate slash wounds on his upper chest and back...possibly old knife wounds that required stitching...very shoddy workmanship. Teeth in excellent condition...ditto heart, liver though I'd say he was a heavy smoker as his lungs showed some signs of deterioration. The wounds on his body all around the upper chest area. Seven stab wounds that were all around the seventy-five-millimetre depth. In what looked like a definite pattern. No defensive wounds. There were what one could describe as ligature bruising on each wrist...not made by rope or any tethering material...this was not recorded in the final Report, but to me it looked as though he had been held forcefully by the wrists by persons unknown. It's possible he was stood in front of a pole with his arms extended back behind the post by persons unknown. A very painful position if that was the case and an easy way to hold a person in a certain position...exposing his chest...so there were at least three persons involved...and injuries to his body would indicate to me that he was pushed from a speeding vehicle, again not recorded as it was considered a personal opinion not backed by any solid evidence...but it fitted with the scene. That is, he stood...and began staggering to the closest residence only to collapse and die on the door-step...he had some minor contusions to his limbs which to me could have been caused by the fall from the vehicle”.

“The woman who called it in? She went slowly bonkers after opening the door to his last feeble knocks...and the son stole some two thousand dollars from the guy's wallet...he kept the wallet, only offering up the wallet as we began to question him yesterday...”

“So! You have progressed...simply good detective work, you’re going to tell me...not one stroke of luck...but at least you have got the thing going. So like you, mate. So, do you have a name for the poor bastard? After what? Thirty years!?” He went silent for some moments. “That’s right, the young bloke was doing up a....it was a Stationwagon...from the get-go. He had just re-painted the shell...that was all there was, a bloody shell...that’s right, a EH Nineteen Sixty-four Holden...he had this V8 all in pieces which he was getting shaved, polished and balanced...twin carbs, extractor system...twin exhausts straight through...reworked suspension system that would lower the car and make it look shit-hot...would have cost him a fair bit...hence the need for money, eh? I was extremely impressed with his work and almost perfectionist treatment of the car...I would have loved to see the result...I reckon it would have gone like the clappers”.

“Yeah, well...We don’t have it yet. His name that is. I sent the wallet up to Forensics yesterday afternoon...”

“So, you have progress? That one mighty step forward with a name yet to be confirmed will help heaps...a different team, a different perspective...I don’t think any of the other teams involved ever interviewed the family passed the old woman who opened her door...maybe having the thing on his mind for so long...he just had to confess...either that or the stern countenance of the Lead Detective had him shaking in his boots...”

“Hah...I don’t know mate, but it sure was a strange thing...he seemed to sigh before he stood and went to his wall safe...but it sure will open up the investigation, that’s for sure. That’s right, I’m not good with early model vehicles but I know a EH Holden when I see one...that was my first car...after the Mini which I wrote off...he had several photos of one on the shelving behind his desk...and a whole heap of die-cast models...all Holdens models. They’re not cheap, are they? Around the Three Hundred mark, huh?”

“Mmm...yeah...don’t know...our Vic? You got his name?”

“He had a current Drivers licence in his wallet...with a Licence photograph...Soon Leung Woo. I think that was right...We’ll start the usual in-depth investigation of the name after we have finished with you. We’ve both read the four thick Volumes of the Murder Book and both Shells and I have several pages of notes and mind-joggers to work through. I’ll get Shells to start on the Background examination using the computer pro-forma while I dabble around the edges...”

“You Dees? You have all the fun”.

“Yeah, we certainly do...having to listen to the boring reminiscences of an aging Forensic Pathologist...him giving us a personal on the Autopsy results”.

“My first cut, man. My very first...it was beautiful”.

“And so say all of us. Would you still have tissue tucked away in some Repository you guys use?”

“Mmm...as the Case never closed and there was no identity known of the Vic, then yes, we should have tissue samples tucked away somewhere. You want a DNA comparison run done on that tissue sample if I can find it...including country of origin. Leave that with me...I'll get back to you”.

“See you next week, my place...and pick up on your choice of wines as they have been below par, these past couple of weeks...”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

We stayed glued to our seats for the rest of the week unless it was one or the other's turn to shout the coffees. Reading through the four volumes of the Murder Book twice, writing down discrepancies, questions, and things to follow up...boring shit that was the bread and butter of us Murder Dees.

I pushed back from my desk to rest my feet up on the edge of my desk. I'd had enough and needed to rest my eyes...they were a little sore. Glasses! I must get my eyes checked for glasses. They say once you hit forty, things start going wrong. I rubbed my eyes which only made them sorer.

“How are you doing with the pro-forma search?”

“Not that well...it seems he and his family...read Uncles and Aunts, nieces and nephews along with his paternal and maternal grandparents and his immediate family of wife and five kids were given Refugee Status back in Nineteen Seventy-nine. That's a little bit rich, isn't it? The majority would be Pension age or near to it...they come out here and at once go onto some type of Government hand-out...no wonder Australia's going broke! You know, the whole bloody family? And it looks to me he and his extended family may have been given...arrh...an inside running on getting that Status approval”.

“Maybe it's a case of who you know...”

“Or how big the brown paper bag was...or who you helped during the Vietnam War...you hear stories, know what I mean?”

“I'm not too sure but I think they may have closed that hole where the entire family...for several generations...was closed around oh-ten. Two thousand and ten when we had that influx of Boat People from the Middle East. I could be wrong. Why is it a bloody problem for you?”

“Several of the family are eligible straight away for the Old Age Pension...that's a rort to my way of thinking...”

“What, you want them to live on fresh air or something?”

“They should not have been given Refugee Status! Not by a long shot...it is not a discrimination or racist thing but one of pure economics...they get here and immediately, half of them are on Benefits like the Old Age Pension. Isn't the whole idea of immigration to pick those people who are a benefit to the country...instead of being a liability?”

“You're getting it all mixed up. These people were permitted Refugee Status because they would be in danger of being killed if forced back to Vietnam...it is a purely a humanitarian act for this country to accept them...not on whether they are a bloody Doctor or not...that is a completely different immigration focus on those wanting to immigrate to Australia...”

“Listen to the left-wing, humanitarian Greenie in the man”.

“So! These elderly people...family...who were looked after by the younger members of the family say back in Vietnam, are suddenly tossed to the wolves with the rest of the family sailing off towards Australia...is that what you want to do? Cut that umbilical cord that the elderly members of the family rely on, huh? Just because the rest of the family have been given Refugee Status in Australia”.

“Jeez...no...I know what you mean, but...I don't know...it means that...you know...”

“That the family...the entire family are still together. Australians are so...divorced from the elderly members of the family more so than a lot of other Nationalities who respect their elderly reloses so much more than us...”

Shelley nodded though I doubted she totally agreed with me.

“They were all naturalised on Australia Day in Eighty-three...”

“There you go! Proud to be Aussies...and good Aussies at that...”

“Except the ‘head man’ involved himself in something that got him stabbed and chucked from a moving vehicle...what do you reckon would be the reason?”

“Loved his grandparents far too much which caused ‘The Aussie Truth Pollies’ to give him the old one, two, three heave-ho...jeez Shells...you are looking under every rock looking for things that have gone awry to place on their shoulders just to reinforce your disapproval of them even being here...give them a break, Shells...one thing, if we were invaded by...say...Indonesia who were putting all Australian Nationals into Concentration Camps, wouldn't you expect New Zealand to take in your entire family, Mum, Dad, three Aunties and Uncles with twenty-two cousins as refugees?”

“That's silly Joe...”

“Why!? All I'm doing is theorising a parallel example to show that if you were placed in a comparable situation, you'd want your entire family to escape to New Zealand as refugees...”

“Jeez...why do I even try!”

“Okay...you’re got a tunnel vision on the problem like so many Australians. Um...I googled up his name...nothing much at all...the Naturalisation process...and he was the Secretary for The Vietnamese Friendly Society for several years...a couple of photo opportunities with the Pollie in power at the time. I’m trying to isolate a couple of the shots so I can photoshop them to produce a half-decent shot of him. All we have is the Post-mortem shots...”

“What about the Driver’s License photo?” Shelley offered over her shoulder. She still had the shits with me.

“Yeah, got that too...I just wanted to see if I could get a couple more for the Vic’s montage”.

“That address? Where is it...on the Driver’s License?”

“Um...an address in Canley Vale...Railway Parade. But that was in Eighty-nine. He had a three-year license which had only been renewed the year before he died”.

“Worth a visit?”

“You reckon?”

“Get us out of the Office...I’m about all computered-out at the moment! You?”

“Yeah. Let’s go...hang on, I’ll just finish those sets of photographs of him. They may come in handy...and...hang on. Supposedly, we still should have all the clothes he wore on that fateful night. I want Forensic Trace to give those things a careful once over for DNA Trace at least”.

I rang Tellie, speaking in my best telephone voice so she would know I was speaking of a Case, and I needed her help.

“Eighty-nine!? Jeez, Joe...I guess we still should have those things somewhere in Archives. Give me the Case Number...you say you may have a name for the Vic? What is it?”

“Soon Leung Woo...it is yet to be confirmed but we are chasing down other members of the family and any descendant for a DNA familial analysis...”

“Okay, leave it with me, Officer Lind...I’ll get back to you. It may be a good subject to discuss in a post-coital fugue...”

I heard her giggling as she rang off. Here she goes telling me...no demanding that I keep a professional attitude whenever we need each other’s input workwise...but she is always the one to add that last teasing sentence that is just between husband and wife.

I was scowling as I hurried to catch up to Shelley as she waited for me out in the Lift Lobby.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

You could hear the strident oriental tones of presumably Vietnamese coming from within, but it still took some time for our knock on the door to be answered. We had our ID Cards out as the door swung slowly inwards.

I had to bend as the woman was that tiny.

“Missus? Is this the home of Soon Leung Woo?” I showed her several shots of our victim which she looked at closely before nodding.

“Who are you?” She asked in faltering English.

“Missus, we are Detectives from the NSW Police Force. Would Mister Leung Woo have lived here some thirty years ago”.

“He no live here!” She replied sharply. She then closed the door a lot quicker than she opened it.

“What do you reckon? Knock again or leave it?”

Shelley started to turn to return to our Unmarked.

“Leave it, Joe. We’ll need a Court Order to have a go at the Local Council Ratepayers list. That would confirm it either way. How about we head to the Vietnamese Friendship Society...they maybe a little more helpful...”

“I don’t know, Shells. She confirmed it for me. Her expression changed when we identified ourselves as Police Officers...and when she glanced at the photos...”

“Yeah...and so did her reaction time change...she couldn’t close that door fast enough...”

“Which proves to me she knew the gentleman from all those years ago...I’ll bet this was his home...just a thought, why didn’t the family report the bloke missing to the local Cop Station? That seems a bit strange to me...”

“Yeah, maybe...but again, you saw the reaction when she realised that we were cops. These people do not trust any form of Government Business or Representative. They left a country where it was rife with criminal activity, dishonesty and corruption”.

“According to our computer searches, they have been in the country for nigh on forty years. That should have shown them we are nothing like the ‘old’ country”.

“Old habits die hard, Joe...in some, depending on how much the government of the time interfered, they never lost that suspicious, terrified reaction to anyone asking them questions”.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

We programmed the GPS. The Vietnamese Friendly Society wasn't that far away. The next suburb in fact in the main street of Cabramatta.

We were ushered into a room above a large Vietnamese Restaurant. The smells intoxicating. Eventually a small man entered, apologising for keeping us waiting.

“Sorry for my tardiness. I was tied up with a woman whose husband is dying of cancer. A tragedy...um...you're the second or third lot of Detectives asking questions about Leung Woo...he is dead more than likely...”

“Why would you suggest that sir? Did you provide any information that might have been helpful to the other Detectives?”

“From memory, no. They did not even have a name...you have pronounced it incorrectly like so many of your countrymen...and the photo they showed me...it was a death mask...at least you have better photos of the man”.

I nodded my head, asking again if he could help with a former address, a place of employment. He shook his head though I doubted his sincerity. He was just not going to be that helpful. We would need to dig it out of the man. He suddenly perked up.

“Old, aged people don't fare well in those Re-education Camps...”

“Sorry?”

“I was told he went back to Vietnam. The Communist Government is always looking out for former Vietnamese people who supported the corrupt South Vietnamese and the cowardly American forces who went back home like village dogs with their tails between their legs...”

“Do you support the communist regime?”

“No, not at all, but they were victorious in the struggle to unite Vietnam into the one country...”

“There you go...from what I have read on the War, the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese Regular Army were not victors in any one single battle where they were pitched against American forces or its allies. Another year or two North Vietnam would be down to

thirteen-year-old boys fighting in the NVA...and they were running out of equipment and money to continue the fight. America left because of fifth column activity in their home country...a superb communist plot rigidly controlled from North Vietnam with help from Russia. The last major battle fought to take over Saigon and thus take control of the country was against a phantom Army. At that time, there were only nine US soldiers in the country protecting the US Embassy. That was all...there was not any other American or Allied force in the country...and because the Americans left their South Vietnamese allies in the lurch...the will to fight and win was exorcised from those troops...they had no fight in them”.

I walked slowly towards the staircase that would take us out onto the street.

“Did you get that?” I asked Shelley as I stood at the top of the staircase. “Several Detective Teams asked him questions about Soon Leung Woo...but they didn’t know the identity of the Victim...how come he did?”

She turned to face me on the lower mid-landing. Looking up at me she shrugged her shoulders.

“You think it important, Joe?”

I returned her shrug.

“How come you consider yourself a bit of an expert on that War? On the Second World War too?”

“I don’t know really...but there are very few books that I enjoy reading...those subjects...and Australia’s input into both the First and Second World Wars I enjoy”.

“So, what you said about the Vietnam War...you gained that opinion from reading, huh? That I guess, is one way to look at it...but you can’t get around two things. Firstly, Vietnam is now one united country...a communist country and two...America ran out on its Allies...”

“Mmm...” I nodded my head slowly. “The most powerful thing the North Vietnamese had, was Russia as its ally...or in those days, the USSR with its world-wide stretch of negative propaganda which slowly awakened firstly the student bodies then gradually the general populace of the US, Britain and Australia. That is what won the communists the War...that and the combined negative Media of those countries. That was the first and last War beamed into people’s homes in real time...as families sat down for Dinner to have burnt bodies and mounting body bags as their Desserts. Did you know that Vietnam and China had a few fights between themselves in the late Seventies? China actually invaded Vietnam...that is not well known, you know”.

Shelley coughed, following me back into the room we had just vacated, to confront the man who looked up at us as we entered. A surprised look on his face at our entrance.



“Um...did you know Woo?” I asked succinctly.

“No...I was not born when the man stupidly went back to Vietnam. He must have known that arrest was on the cards if he ever entered the country...”

“Why are you so adamant in that regard?”

“I was told he was the Leader of a Government appointed Assassination Squad. Villagers were the true victims of that war. The Vietcong, then the North Viet Regulars were always putting pressure on these people to supply rice and other things to the troops. If they objected or refused, members of the small communities were shot...and in most cases, the Village consisted of a nucleus of one to five families...then these Assassination Squads headed by Woo would hear of a certain village contributing to the enemy. They would come in and kill the entire community...”

“You seem to be upset, young man. You were born well after hostilities ended...why?”

“My entire extended family was killed in such a manner...sure, I am now two generations after the end of the War, but my adopted family still talk of such brutality...no-one won that War”.

“So how are you aware of Woo and what he allegedly did during hostilities?”

“Again, listening to my adopted Elders. They fought in the War and fled the country by boat four years after hostilities ended...in Nineteen Seventy-nine. They knew of Woo’s actions. They saw the aftermath...the burnt bodies all thrown into a bomb crater. Petrol poured on top and a match...and the entire village was destroyed. If they arrested and killed Woo, they did humanity a service...”

Shelley place several photos back onto the table.

“You know his name purely listening to the elders of your foster family?”

“Yes, that is so”. He replied as he scrutinised the photographs. “I’m sorry, I cannot tell you whether that is Woo or not...”

“Those elderly gentlemen you spoke of. Could they help us?”

“Yes, I suppose”.

“Could you take us to them?” Shelley at her most manipulative best.

“Yes...can we use your car, and can you bring me back here afterwards as I help in the Restaurant downstairs”.

“Sure, no worries...easy as”.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

We were shown to a large circular table with an empty 'Lazy Susan' at its centre. Given coffee as we sat without being asked. The smell of cooking was once again teasing my stomach. A young woman helped an elderly man to sit opposite us. She on one side with our middle-aged host on the other. They went through a ritual tea sipping ceremony before the old man looked up at me. He spoke only Vietnamese translated by either our guide or the young woman.

"He was a Colonel in the South Vietnamese Regular Army. He saw a lot of death and blood..." She paused while the old bloke continued in a quiet monotone as though each word took some effort. "He has little regard for Americans and their tactics. That is why he has settled in Australia...he knew Soon Leung Woo, even going to the same secondary School and Military College together. He considers Woo a murderer, a woman and child killer. There was always whispers about the Squad...only whispers, but if you went on patrol, you saw the after-effects of their work. I felt ashamed to be a Colonel in the President's Home Guard...it wasn't right".

The old man paused to take several sips of tea. His hands were shaking slightly. It was hard to gauge his age, but he had to be in his nineties, I thought as I looked closely at him. Shelley took the moment to slide the photographs over for him to look at. He looked minutely at all the shots, nodding his head occasionally.

"Is that Soon Leung Woo?" Shelley asked in a quiet voice.

The old man nodded.

"Without doubt..." He said forcefully in English. I smiled thinking he could possibly speak better English than Shells or me!

"He is dead...killed in Eighty-nine...seven stab wounds in his chest...your Nephew here thinks he went back to Vietnam and was killed by the Communist Government for crimes against the People".

"That is a story that may have found its origin in friends of Woo hoping to close the chapter on the brutal man. No question would be asked if that was accepted as the truth". The old man again sipped more tea. He seemed to fall off to sleep before he sat up suddenly. "Seven wounds?" The old man repeated. "Each wound made with the same knife?"

"At a guess I'd say yes as the entry wounds and the depth of the wound was the same for each of the wounds. There were no signs of him trussed up, but instead held by the arms by two separate persons...there was bruising to his upper arms and wrists...they were not made by rope or some such, but more than likely by others holding him. Perhaps he was held by others exposing his chest so each person could thrust the knife into a small area on his chest..."

The old man smiled, nodded his head slowly.

“There would have been seven persons present...at least...each given the same knife to thrust into his chest. They would have lost family to his tactics during the War...he was killed here in Australia?”

I nodded my head.

“He did not fly over to Vietnam as we thought?”

“I don’t know why or who started that rumour...”

“To help protect those who were responsible. The Police here have a very respected reputation with no personal corruption known and they are exceptionally good at their job. Where and how was he left?” The pretence of his granddaughter or our host interpreting for the old man was cast aside. For such an old bloke, his voice was remarkably strong. “One person begins the rumour and when it is picked up by others, the rumour becomes the truth...the longer the time from his death to now only reinforces that lie into the truth...as the wind blows so does the truth of the lie”.

“We think perhaps he was pushed out of a speeding vehicle...he died on the veranda of a house whose family within had no connection to the man. We think he may have crawled to the nearest house to raise the alarm...he died on the front doorstep. The woman of the house never fully recovered from the shock of finding the bloodied body...”

“He was still alive at that point...as it should be. They stabbed him in such a way he would slowly bleed out...that he remained alive and knew he was being thrown from the speeding vehicle. It was a way of telling him what they thought of him. The people involved knew what they were doing...treated him like trash as he had treated his victims...good. Thrown from a moving car like trash...A word of caution if I may?”

Again, I nodded, seriously looking at him.

“Forget the Case...close it as one of those murders that will never be resolved...yes, it was a revenge killing by some of my countrymen...I could never be surer...”

“This is Australia and not the Vietnam you knew during that time. We do not condone such killings...and we will always endeavour to solve the homicide murder if we can...sounds noble...but it is true”.

He looked over at me for some moments, slowly nodding his head. His hooded eyes covering what they may be showing.

“In Eighty-nine you say...thirty years ago now. The seven men involved are all dead, so you will be spinning your wheels...is that the correct saying?”

“You seem pretty sure that all the Perps are dead...why are you so sure?”

“Killed in Eighty-nine...fourteen years after hostilities ended in Seventy-five. I would hazard a guess and say that all your perpetrators served in that War...putting their ages around the mid-twenties to the mid-thirties...forty-four years ago placing their age now at between seventy to eighty years of age...old men...not as old as me but still old. I would also suggest that several may have committed suicide after the act so they could not cast shame on their families...those who had families out here...maybe a few didn't...if that is all, I would wish you good fortune. I must have my afternoon nap”.

At the invitation of our guide, we had a slap-bang beautiful meal which should take me a week to get over!

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“Bloody Hell! I need an afternoon nap to get over that meal!”

“Me too...what do you think?”

“About what? The meal? The Case or an afternoon nap?”

“The Case, mostly...” Shells uttered, a disgusted look detracting from her usual pleasant features. “Could we be construed of accepting a bribe by enjoying that meal?”

“Don't lose sleep over it Shells...as far as the Case goes, I think we may have reached that point that most of our colleagues had reached, I'd say. They then took their foot off the accelerator...but then, they didn't have the luxury of a name for the Vic...”

“Do you agree with the statement that most if not all the Perps would be dead by now?”

“I can remember Abbey always saying to me that we were the gatherers of facts. The morality...the credibility and the way those facts are used is up to others to cogitate over...whether all the Perps are dead or not is no concern to us...we don't know whether the story as told by the old bloke is true or not...and if it is true, how does he know of it?”

Shelley nodded, squirming in the driver's seat to try and get comfortable which is difficult when you have a full stomach...well...may be overfull.

“Back then, I guess the Vietnamese community would have stuck together...a new land, a new set of values”. She begun. “They would have stuck together like a sect...for security. The story could have been doing the rounds since the late Nineteen Eighties when the murder was committed...what's the time? By the time we get back to the Office...and I really don't want to do fifteen laps of the pool. With the amount of food I've had, I reckon I would sink!” Shelley laughed at her own joke, but truthfully, I felt the same.

“Drop me off at Cabramatta Station so I can pick up a train going out to Ingleburn. See you Monday morning”.

I nodded my head, dropping her off at the Station after which I headed for the Office. I wanted to see what our automatic pro-forma search on our Vic may have turned up. I couldn't wait that long over a weekend to see the results! And truthfully, I had to do laps of the pool to counterbalance the meal we had just sat through...a delicious feast which one can only have once in a lifetime.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Our new Boss, Denny Turner was more like our old Boss, DS Church aka Abbey and not his replacement, Clive Butler. Like Abbey, she had an encyclopaedic memory knowing every nuance in each of our Cases.

She did not how-ever, like the usual Monday Morning squeeze into her Office of all the Dayshift Murder Teams. Instead, she would hold those meetings out on the floor, gathered around some-one's desk as she discussed all the Cases and more. She also would often detail a new procedure being aired by the hierarchy. Giving us her view...and often her understanding of a new protocol that could involve us in our daily regime.

It was on one of those Monday morning gatherings that she asked Shells and I to follow her into her Office as the Dayshift colleagues ambled back to their desks. The normal banter and stir very noticeable.

“Close the door, will you?” She commanded over her shoulder as we walked the length of the Squad floor. She waited until we were seated in the comfortable visitor chairs. She comfortable in one of the chairs beside us around her small coffee table. This was to be a friendly chat. If it were more official, she would have sat in her executive chair behind her desk. She hated talking to her subordinates over her large desk, as though that may stop a concerted effort of one of us to throttle her. Throwing ourselves over the broad, uncluttered top of her desk to get to her. It was the complete opposite where my wild imagination could not go! She preferred the air of equality and not some burdensome bossy person having tight control over the Teams...she wanted us to feel a part of the whole team...all of us Murder Dees on an equal footing.

“Arrh...your Cold Case on the John Doe homicide...where are you at with it?”

We filled her in on our progress. In the telling, it would appear we had progressed little when compared with the efforts of our predecessors.

“At least we have a name...” Shells uttered in our defence.

“Yet to be confirmed, is my understanding...” Turner responded, a tight smile to show her displeasure. “Um...I have had several obtuse conversations with one or two of the hierarchy which always concluded the same way...to drop any further investigations into the Case as our association with the Vietnamese community at large maybe affected...this said several times I might add. Who is this person who died on a family home’s threshold some thirty years ago?”

“Yeah...there appears to be more rumour than fact, but we at least have determined the following...” Shelley then gave an appraisal of our efforts so far, emphasising the facts and identifying the rumours yet to be proven false or not.

“So, you are saying our Vic may have been Head of some type of Death Squad condoned...no...supported by the South Vietnamese regime of the time? And by association, known but a turning of a blind eye to the carry-ons of the Squad by all the Allied forces in the country...even the Australian people on the ground ignoring the practise. If that be the case, then perhaps certain persons are a little nervous if those rumours were proven as fact. An embarrassment at least if the facts emerged”.

“Yet to be substantiated...but yes, I agree with your assessment”. I confirmed. “We have nothing back from Forensics on the wallet and its contents, they are carrying out DNA testing on the clothes our Vic wore on that day, and we are also waiting on the DNA testing of tissue that was kept. If we are lucky, we may get a match between the wallet and the stored tissue...that is a giant step over what our predecessors had achieved...we are sure of the name. Soon Leung Woo as well...my pronunciation maybe a little wacked though”.

“...which will not necessarily prove the identity of the man...but confirm that the tissue sample and the wallet belonged to the same person...you will need to obtain DNA samples from male off-spring to authenticate the identity of the man...would that be about right?”

Both Shells and I nodded our heads. I wondered where this was going as Denny’s phone beeped its existence. She leaned backwards to pick it up, holding up her hand to ask us to remain.

“Yes...I have two of my best sitting opposite me as we speak. Lind and Shields...yes. I will get them to deal with your request. Yes...okay...have a good one”.

She stood and walked around her desk to sit in the same chair that had once held the ample body of Clive Butler for four short years. Turner seemed to get swallowed by its ample size, though she had hinted that it was the most comfortable chair she had ever sat in anywhere within the building.

She wrote something on her pad, ripped it off and handed the page to me.

“That was yer mate, Muscles. He has two Pathologists at this address...Wzerlic and Pogowski with their Assistants...a Nursing Home where three people have died overnight...a very unusual occurrence, so goes the talk. I thought Pogowski left to take up a

Post in the US? No? Yes? What, he get homesick longing for the parched Red Centre, the sandy beaches and constant waves and the more layback way of living here in Oz?"

"No...he was the Lead Forensic Pathologist in Denver, I think it was. While he was examining a Crime Scene and body count, he was fired on, by the same guy who had shot to death some ten of his immediate family. The cops had not secured the Scene...even though they knew the Shooter was holed up somewhere close. Luckily, Pogowski was not hit but it scared the hell out of him. He requested a return here which Muscles immediately approved. Muscles has again a full complement of Pathologists...that has made him very pleased as the workload was killing your mate".

Turner glanced at both of us.

"Okay...here is the address...and about your Cold Case? Leave it with me for a bit. I need to unearth why certain members of our hierarchy want it squashed. I am not in favour with that course of action...it is possible that the identity was a staged thing...that his wallet was not his but was the property of a guy that had flown back to Vietnam...where his history was known and he was unceremoniously shot upon his return...there is a problem with that theory...why would the man return to Vietnam when he certainly knew his fate in doing so...why? Um...I'll get Hendo to prepare a new Murder Book while you are out of the Office...away you go...and good hunting".

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"I've got a funny feeling that is why that Case has not progressed that far. There has been the input of ones above us fouling it up...gentle hints maybe at first, then a more concerted effort to cease investigations...which begs the question, who is our Victim and what relationship he has with those in power?"

"And what is his ability to thwart any investigation for thirty bloody years? C'mon, Joe...that means that there has been a similar degree of shenanigans over several Deputy Commissioners that have spanned the past thirty years...that kind of thing just doesn't happen...we're reading too much into it with conspiracy theories all around".

"Until now!" I stated patronisingly, suddenly emerging into the bright sunshine as we exited the 'ramp up' out of the bowels of our building. "If I wanted to sound paranoid and into conspiracy theories, I would suggest we have a protected species with the name of Woo...the Government keeping a close eye on the man because of some clandestine agreement way back when..."

Shelley had to prop waiting for an opening in the traffic.

“And if I wanted to sound uncompromising, I would agree with your assumption. The names of the previous Murder Dees who had a part in the investigation, are there any still alive?”

“What for?” I enquired, feeling a little left behind. She had veered in a different direction to my thinking, making me wonder where in hell I was...and where in hell she was going!

“To see whether they too had been hog-tied...tethered in progressing the Case. Ask them a few questions...”

“Brian Steggard...he’s still alive...I was at...whose retirement function a while back...I can’t remember...”

“Christ, he’d have to be in his eighties, wouldn’t he?”

“He went out straight after his partner went out on a Disability Pension...Brian went the same way when he hadn’t reached fifty, so my excellent memory serves...I had a few words with him...he asked what Cases I engaged in...seemed very interested...”

“That sounds a little ‘iffy’...jeez, this traffic is getting worse...there we go...thank you, sir. Such a lovely gentleman letting me in to the stream of traffic”. She gave a wave of her hand in response to the kindness of the driver. “Do you want to go out on a Disability Pension?” She asked unexpectedly.

“What for? I wouldn’t comply...”

“Did Brian Steggard or his partner Hulo Elias comply? I don’t think so...they were shafted so they couldn’t continue with the investigation. I’d like to know what happened to all the other teams who had a go at the investigation...that’s something to look into when we have a spare moment...”

“Yer reckon!? And yer call me paranoid! If some-one high up is pulling the strings...and had inherited the Case of protecting the identity and the career of our John Doe, why is the Case still current and sitting on our desk? If they have the clout to pension out Officers who aren’t ready for retirement, they have the power to make the Case just disappear! They haven’t done that...why not?”

“Bloody Hell, Joe! You have no way of telling that is the truth...from where I am standing the Case has gone hot and cold for years because there has been little to progress it...arrh...like putting a name to the official Autopsy Photo. We still do not have anything to ratify that assumption...I think we will need to burrow out those five kids, wasn’t it? The five kids of Mister Woo...that would be good title for a Movie...”

“What!?” She’d lost me again.

“You know, to compare and confirm the DNA familial connection before we go off at tangents bullshitting and bouncing our way across the years...”



“Bouncing my way across the years!? Going off at tangents bullshitting my way across facts that are still rumour!?” I repeated, a grin a mile wide only making things worse.

“I did not say that Joe...jeez, you can be a bloody dead weight at times. We do the investigation as we have always done...concentrating on the facts as we know them...”

“Yeah, okay. I agree...but sometimes...nearly always what has opened up the Case for us has been that scrap of evidence viewed from an unfamiliar perspective...that morsel that has droppeth from Heaven when we least expected it...true?”.

That shut her up as she knew that it was true!

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Nursing Home was a large sprawling single storey building that partially wrapped around several small courtyards with beautiful gardens and surroundings. There were single care accommodation units, units to accommodate husband and wife and ‘high care’ rooms that either accommodated single or several patients. I was mightily impressed with the grounds where hidden private seating afforded a close view of fishponds and small waterfalls. The sounds of the gurgling water mixing freely with several species of native birds attracted by the bountiful natural bushes, water, and tall Gum trees.

“Good morning, Brenda...” I gave her a peck on the cheek. “Good to see you back, Pog. Those Yanks not to your liking?”

“Not when every second person seems to be carrying a gun...or a knife or even an assault rifle. That is not a happy and safe society. I’d had enough when I was fired on as I examined a Vic who had multiple gunshot wounds. The reason? He had parked his car in front of the bloke’s driveway...he was blown away because of that! The driver? He had stopped to ask the guy whether a kid’s bike belonged to the guy’s kid! It had been left in the middle of the road. Doing the right thing...and he gets blown away for his troubles...nah, that’s not my world”. He stood and stretched his back. “A week before that, three kids were shot to death in a local School...by a fellow student who was pissed at not being included in the group. The incident hardly rating a mention on the News as it only involved three dead kids...not a major event...The gradual decline of a once great Nation”. He shook his head sadly. “No-one is even trying to stop it as all the local State and National Governments seem to be arguing amongst themselves on the rights of individuals...a common stalemate exists right across the country. We get called out all the time to Opioid Deaths and overdoses. It is a bloody crisis over there. Guess how it started? The Drug Companies wanted good sales so they canvassed Doctors’ Surgeries with money, holidays, new cars if they would start prescribing these Painkillers for health problems that really didn’t require such tablets...Doctors bought off! Is that unethical? To some it maybe, to others not...it depended on your perspective...jeez!”

“Society ailments...is it much better over here? The Ice scourge blowing away good kids who think they can dabble and not get caught...”

“There is a difference, but you’d be surprised how many Yanks used the same excuse. I need my AR-15 for protection...you guys in Australia have a similar problem...with knives...I would say I have yet to see a knife on full automatic mowing down twenty-thirty people...they don’t get it, always falling back on the Second Amendment...no matter how hard you try to discuss the situation based on logic, they just don’t want to understand...*we have the right to bear arms*...so on and so on! Thousands of fellow Americans die each year from gunshot wounds while the NRA gives real heavy money amounts to the Senators representing their people who are dodging bloody bullets...it’s absolutely crazy with these Groups constantly buying out the people who are supposed to be ensuring their constituents’ safety...what a joke! Anyhow, meanwhile we have a minor problem...three patients die in one night. Nothing unusual in that except it is the first time three very elderly persons have karked it on the same night at this establishment...not unusual? Depends on which side of the street you’re standing on. I maybe a little paranoid but...” He shrugged his shoulders.

One thing America was good for him, so it seemed, was ridding him of his reticence. It was mighty noticeable before he left these shores...now? It was a case of wanting to shut him up!

“We may have to wait until the Post-mortems before we can safely state cause of death”.

Pog nodded. Brenda looked up at me, a sly grin denoting her agreement at Shelley’s conclusion.

“You’ve got a ‘full house’ now?”

“Yeah...first time in what? Eight...ten years. That’s even Assists, Laboratory Assists, Forensic Assists, and all the required clerical staff to support us. Since that obnoxious twit from London cleared out many people with his lack of people skills...he’s somewhere in New Zealand so I recollect”.

“Dunedin. South Island. A one man show where he can revel in his self-induced belief of being the best ‘cutter’ on earth. I must admit he was exceptionally good at the cutting table, but it was his general demeanour and treatment of his colleagues that cause so many to flee from his presence...”

“Yeah...as it turns out now, we have a system of one week on night duty, three weeks on day duty...a system worked out with the lot of us putting in our tuppence. A good happy environment that is what Muscles always wanted...he’s now got it!”

## CHAPTER TWENTY

We spent the rest of the day questioning everyone of importance in the place, even getting the Night staff to come in several hours before their shifts started. There was no way I was going to return in the middle of the night to speak to them.

“You’re the Head Nurse on the night shift?” The fifty-something woman nodded, grinding her teeth so that the muscles on the back of her jawline tensed then released. Something I said had upset her.

“Head Sister...” She forcefully said, correcting my error. A hardness in her eyes and the way she held her mouth tightly denoted you didn’t mess with her. “With two Nurses, a Cleaner and two Nurse’s Aids. The Kitchen staff commence duty an hour before we are handing over to the day shift staff”.

“Are you the only person on Nightshift who can legally give injections...and pass out medications?”

She nodded. Again, the coldness of her eyes was noticeable.

“The two Nurses can give out the nightly medications as long as I check and sign them off on the Med Charts. I am the only one who has access to the Drug Cupboard, and it is me who prepares the nightly requirements. One of the Nurses I would trust to give injections as long as I was looking over her shoulder...”

“Would there be anyone on Night Duty...or otherwise, who would want to cause harm to any of these patients?”

“What you are asking is if I suspect anyone who would want to murder three of our Patients last night...no. No-one. In fact, I would suggest to you that the question...or reference is rather insulting...”

I wasn’t much concerned how the woman viewed my questions or even me suspecting something untoward had occurred here last night. I was just doing my job.

“The three patients who died last night? Would you consider them the sickest in this establishment?”

“It’s all relative depending on where you stand...but if they were considered the worse than that would mean their demise last night was to be expected...if there is nothing else, Detectives?” She stood to look down at me. “I want a meal before I commence my shift...and to calm my staff as you have caused them all to have thoughts that they have done something wrong that could have caused the deaths of those three...and I know that was never the case...good afternoon to the both of you”.

She stamped out of the room. I was intrigued by her actions as I thought it a little over the top. I waited until she had closed the door before I turned to Shelley.

“Did you get all that? I want another look at her responses...”

“You are one sick puppy, Joseph Lind...one sick and suspicious puppy. Yeah, I got it all including the responses from all the staff...”

“She...arrh...did she stand out to you...the Night Sister?”

Shelley showed little enthusiasm to reply.

“You could take that two ways, couldn’t you?” I continued.

“What?” Shelley replied acidly, giving me a glance that told me to shut my mouth.

“She was confident none of her staff were responsible for the demise of the three...because...”

“Yeah, I heard you...because she has complete confidence in her staff because she knows who did the deed...”

“Or she did it herself...”

Shelley shook her head as she stood. Stretched her back and slapped her thigh in sheer frustration.

“We need to give all the Staff a thorough background check”.

“Why don’t we wait until we receive the Post-mortem results...including blood and Tox results...we could be saving ourselves a load of work...the post-mortem results showing they had died of natural causes...”

“Yeah...nah...a background check first. Check with Muscles...or Brenda or Pog may know when the Post-mortems will be conducted”.

I stood and walked from the room. Shelley followed until we entered the main corridor, she going in the opposite direction to me.

“Where are you going, Joe?” Her voice echoing along the straight, long corridor.

“You go see if they can give you a straight answer on the post-mortem times...I just want another word with the Matron before she knocks off”.

I glanced at my watch. It was close to four which was her knock-off time. She would not be happy to be delayed...no-one ever is...but I wanted her a bit riled.

I knocked on her door and entered before being summoned. She looked up at me as I sat opposite her.

“I’m just finalising a Report on all this carry-on...everyone is terribly upset by the passing of those three...and the way the whole thing is being investigated. You accuse members of my staff of murder without a shred of evidence to support that accusation!”

“Matron, I have to ask those questions. It is my job. My partner and I have been called in because of the suspicious circumstances of the three deaths. If persons are upset over the way I conduct the interviews, then you can make a formal complaint...all I am trying to do is get past the wishy-washy responses to most of my questions. If there is a guilt feeling that surfaces because of my manner, then that twitches my nose. To tell you the truth, I am amazed at the number of persons who do display that aggression...that feeling of guilt especially amongst the Night Shift Staff...umm...do you have any Club girls relieving positions?”

“Yes...we have two staff off who are on the ‘in between shift’ of two in the afternoon to ten at night...”

“I don’t think I spoke to those two...”

“No, you wouldn’t have as my permanents came back on duty this afternoon. You spoke to them. The Club Nurses were Pauline Pappas and Lockie...um...Lachlan Perdie...”

“Both Nurses?”

“Double Certificate Nurses and exceptionally good ones. I try to always get those two when the permanents are off on Sick Leave or Holidays...it’s not always possible, unfortunately”.

“Their details, if you could”.

“Yes, of course”. She turned to sit in front of her Laptop. Tapped something into the computer. I heard a Printer start up. She gave me one A4 sized piece of paper with the particulars of both ‘Club’ Nurses on it. I thanked her and stood to leave. Thinking better of it I sat again which earned me several agitated sighs and a look that could kill. She glanced angrily at her watch before relaxing back into her chair. Accepting that regardless of what she may say or do, I was not going to let her off with an ‘early mark’.

“Your Sister Jane Launder?”

“A very capable and well-liked Head Nurse. If she seemed upset...perhaps quite angry, it is because of the way you are interviewing the staff and in doing so, getting them off-side. Sister Launder has been our Sister-in-Charge of the Night Shift for about five years. I cannot speak highly enough of the person...about those deaths last night? This is a Nursing Home where death walks the corridors...yes, it is very unusual for three Patients to pass away on the same night...but...what can I say?” She looked across at me, a tight smile to show that as far as she was concerned, the interview was over. To me, this attitude was quite

incredible and was a similar response from all the Staff we interviewed that day. This disassociation and disbelief that anything untoward had occurred...maybe, just maybe it hadn't!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I slowly sunk down onto the park-type bench seat beside Shelley. Handed her a mug of coffee that I had purloined from the small Lunch Area for the staff. I looked around at the beautiful setting. The strong smell of blooms filled my nostrils as one or two bees buzzed past on their constant search for nectar.

'Too good for a Nursing Home'. I thought. The gurgle of a fountain, the strident shrieks and sweet trills of colourful Rainbow Lorikeets made me smile. The hollow piercing note of Eastern Rosellas and the beautiful warble of Magpies and their cousins, Butcherbirds answering one another.

"Thanks for that Joe. I've been hanging out for it..."

"What are you doing?" I asked as I peered at her Laptop.

"Um...I got back to the Naturalisation Ceremony when Soon Leung Woo and his family were in attendance. I got the names of his kids, specifically his sons. Then I cross-reference those names over to the Roads and Maritime Services Data Base to get up to date photos of the three kids...three sons...the daughters have long been married...um...they're kids no more, more middle-aged persons".

I looked around at my surroundings. Made a wide gesture with my arms.

"What?" Shelley asked, a little concerned at my apparent puzzlement. "Yes, it is beautiful. That's why I am sitting out here and not inside".

"We have three possible Homicides here...and you're friggin' around with our other Case".

"They're not Homicides, Joe. They just checked out of the building as their bodies gave out...nothing more; nothing less..."

"This you know for sure, young lady?"

"Yep...if you think it is worth more of our time, Google up Sister Jane Launder first. The Night Shift Sister. She didn't, you know have anything to do with the deaths...even though her responses seemed...you know...tinted with anger...and...you know...a little manufactured?"

I nodded as I got out my iPad. I had a sip of coffee surprised that I was down to the dregs. I asked for Shells mug before I stood to go and get us refills.

“You’re not intending to go back to the Office, huh?” Shelley asked as she took the re-charged mug.

“What, it is almost five and it would take us what? Close to an Hour to get back to the Office. Nah...we do a bit of detective work...you on your Laptop; me on my iPad. We call it quits very soon. I reckon I could drive you home from here quicker than you getting a train...”

“You’ve never experienced the going home peak-hour crawl out this way, have you? But I’ll accept your offer, no matter what”.

She gave me a smile meant to thank me for the offer. I was starting to think I had made the wrong choice, now thinking I should have kept my mouth shut!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“Sister Jane Launder nee Sister Jane Cortez...I found some interesting stuff on her. Twenty-five years ago, she was Sister-in-Charge at a Nursing Home in Gerringong where two people died on her shift...the same night. In Two Thousand and Two she was Sister-in-Charge of Day Duty staff at the Seaview Nursing Home at Kiama. Four people died on her shift. Two Thousand and Seven, now known as Sister Launder...she must...I guess she was separated or divorcing her husband during that time...she was Sister-in-Charge of Night Duty Staff when she had five deaths...supposedly the Flu killed them...but according to her testimony, she had assisted the Doctor giving all Patients a Flu jab. Now we have these three deaths...she attracts death and the dying...”

“Was there any investigation on any of the deaths you’ve mentioned?”

“Not that I could find...no. Every one of the deaths was signed off by the Visiting Doctor. There was no post-mortems carried out on any of the Deceased, though several relatives...a husband and several children of another who died that night indicated their suspicions and the way the places were run...but it does not appear to have gone any further”.

I glanced at Shelley, shaking my head slowly as though I thought she was punching at shadows, even though it was I and not Shells who had this suspicious ‘take’ on the woman.

“It is after-all, an industry that does promote death and dying...a steady procession of new Patients means more money in their bank accounts...”

Shelley did not know whether she should believe me. I gave her a tight smile, shrugged my shoulders.

“Yeah!? Is that right? My mother has said to me a few times that she will not go easily into a Nursing Home. They are for the dying she says, and she has a fair time to go in any case. She wants to die in her own bed looking out the window at the length of Bondi Beach and the surf...that’s how she wants to go”.

“Very few people get to be that lucky where they can have their wishes granted”.

“Yeah, I know...about our Sister Launder?”

“Any post-mortems carried out? No? So according to several Doctors who would have signed off on the various death certificates, there was no surprise that these Patients dropped dead...during the shift time of our Sister Launder which appears to be coincidental, eh?”

Shelley looked up at me. I knew I was going to have an argument over the issue. I got in first.

“So, you did some Internet searching last night to dig out all this history on the woman? I don’t know how many times I’ve said it, but you should never take your work home with you...I again say the same thing. What do you want to do with all this latest information we have on the lady?”

“Umm...wait until we have the Post-mortem and Tox and Blood work-ups on the three before I decide. That full Forensic Report should be here by next week. They’re just waiting for the tox and blood results. Okay?”

I nodded. Scratched my earlobe before sliding further down in the seat placing my feet on the seat opposite.

“Then we can concentrate on the Woo Homicide, huh?”

“Yep, if that turns you on...I want to have a talk with Brian Steggard before we progress too much further on that Case”.

“I agree...um...do we know where he is living now. A visit over to Chatswood to-morrow morning...”

“What for?”

“The eldest son of Woo...arrh...” I leaned forward to look at my laptop. “Um...Yao Tang Woo. He is an Optometrist in a Practise over there in the middle of Chatswood”.

“Okay, let’s go...” She shut down her Laptop placing it in her shoulder bag she used all the time. Finished off the coffee then stopped abruptly. Straightening up, she gave me the evil eye. “So! When did you find out about Yao Woo? I had his and his siblings’ names wanting to do a background check on them as I sat out here in this wonderful Rest Area...you could only have taken the search deeper at home last night...and you pull me over the coals for doing something similar...jeez, yer got a hide!”



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“Good afternoon to you, sir. I rang you to see when we could see you at your convenience. So...here we are”. I held out my ID Card. “I’m Detective Joseph Lind and my Partner, Detective Shelley Shields...”

“Yes, good morning. You are here to ask me about my father, Leung Woo. He died thirty years ago this year...”

“Primarily we are here to obtain a DNA sample from you. It should give us confirmation that the body we had all those years ago, is in fact your father...”

“Here? In Australia? He died here? Is that what you are saying? No...he went home to Vietnam where they placed him in a Re-Education facility. I am told he was shot when his particulars became known...now you are telling me he was killed here in Australia?”

“We believe so, yes. I understand that you may have thought he went back to Vietnam and was arrested and transported to one of those Re-education Camps...”

“More than likely shot! That’s what we all thought”.

“What occurred that you thought he may have gone home to his place of birth?”

“He was talking about it more and more as the years past...as though he needed to do something to exorcise some of the demons he had in his head. He always had trouble sleeping...we all assumed he was re-living some of the horrors he may have seen...”

“Is that why you never worried about going to the Police when he disappeared?”

“What good would they have done if he had flown back to Saigon...Ho Chi Minh City so they call it now. The Police Force over here would not have been able to help us...so no, we did not report him missing. Where did he die?”

“We would rather not say too much until we have confirmation that the man who died some thirty years ago is in fact your father”.

“Yes, I understand. What do you need from me?”

Shelley ask him whether he had any warm or hot beverages in the last hour. When he murmured no, she took a swab of the inside of his cheek and recorded his fingerprints on her iPad. As we spoke about the incident, his fingerprints came back without a match. Shelley looked at me and shook her head slightly.

“Thank you very much, sir. You have four siblings, don’t you?”

“Once upon a time, yes. My youngest brother died of cancer...we always have said it was Agent Orange that caused his death. One of my two sisters died in a car smash with her two children. I am not sure whether my father did the right thing wanting to come to Australia...and now you say he was stabbed to death here...in Australia! Not a practical choice, I think. My spit? That is all you need to tell you that I am my father’s son?”

“Yes...” The man looked as though he had just received unwelcome news.

“Is it fool-proof?”

“All Courts around the World will permit its submission in a vast variety of circumstances. Its success rate is almost one hundred percent. The chance of it being wrong is miniscule...to such an extent it would be called fool-proof”.

His behaviour and reactions were starting to worry me.

“You have another two brothers, don’t you?”

“Arrh, yes...won’t my DNA sample be enough?”

The man seemed guarded, becoming more nervous as time went on which gave me an itchy nose.

“We would like samples taken from them also...just to ensure we do not have any stuff ups. Do you have their addresses? Are they close?”

“My brother...I am fifty-three...Dyet Lam Woo is now the baby of the group at forty-nine. Sol Sadie Woo is Fifty -two. She lives with Dyet. She suffered terribly on the boat voyage away from Vietnam, being raped several times by Pirates...she also suffered in the Refugee Camp in Singapore...almost died. I’ll get you Dyet’s address. One moment...”

We drove back over the Harbour to an address in Kogarah. The fact not lost on me as Leung Woo was stabbed in the chest seven times then pushed out of a moving car in Kogarah...near to Dyet’s home, in fact.

“Coincidence, eh?” Shelley mumbled.

I stayed silent.

It took some time for our knock to be answered.

“Sorry...I was giving my sister a shower...she...um...she made a mess in her bed. Come through while I tidy things up. Yao rang to say you were coming...funny but it has been a while since we last spoke”.

Sadie Woo had a beautiful smile though the wretchedness of her body could not be ignored. We apologised for the intrusion and obtained a DNA sample from both persons before walking quickly from the residence.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

We spent the next week again chained to our desks. Shelley searched out the entire histories of everyone in the Woo family. I was left to look more closely at the career path of Sister Jane Launder.

“Shells? That visit to Brian Steggard. This afternoon. A nice drive up to the Central Coast...Brooklyn on the Hawkesbury...we could be a little late coming back. Is that okay?”

“No worries, she’s fine...easy as”. She was having a go at me somehow. I think it may have been a little too obtuse for me to catch the humour.

It was a glorious day for a drive and in some ways too good to spend some hours reminiscing with an elderly man and his missus. We drove up the M1 and doubled back over the old Hawkesbury River Bridge. I could almost make out the Commodore stopped mid-span with only me between living and dying for the young sadist who had made a complete mess of his Uncle. He the Magistrate on the Peninsular. Retired up to Terrigal where the young bloke did his surgery without anaesthetic. A payback for the years that the Uncle had paid his brother each week for the ‘use’ when the young man was but a boy.

I almost stopped...thinking of how some will always suffer more than others. Why? I have no answer to that question.

Brian Steggard’s place was towards the end of the road, not that far from the Brooklyn Railway Station and the Ferry wharf. A beautiful house that the old couple had bought to spend their retirement in...that and the motor launch. Both were getting beyond them, and they had the boat and house up for sale, they already having picked out the Nursing Home they were going to transfer to with views of Brisbane Waters and the salt air which they loved.

Brian must have been in his early eighties, a bit slow with a mind that had slowed, until he began to reminisce on the good old days working under DS Church. As I was shaking his hand and introducing him to Shelley, I suddenly remembered the last time I had seen or spoken to him. At Abbey’s farewell bash...attended so it seemed, by half the Force, a good sprinkling of AFP, Customs and Border Force guys and as many again who had preceded Abbey into retirement.

We had a light afternoon ‘Drunch’, halfway between Lunch and Dinner. Plate loads of beautifully made sandwiches, good coffee and bright conversation on the outdoor veranda shaded from the biting sun by a large outdoors umbrella. Views of the almost two seventy-

degree vista of the Bay, the Railway causeway and the small marina was worth a million dollars in my estimation. On our second coffee and feeling sated, Janice, Brian's missus excused herself for a mid-afternoon nap.

"Okay..." Steggard murmured as though he had been primed by his missus disappearing into the gloom of the house. "Yer not here stickybeaking on how the old bloke is doing after so many years, what is it you are interested in?"

We told him of our steerage of the Cold Case of the oriental gentleman being neatly stabbed seven times and flung from a moving car like so much garbage.

"Well...if history is anything to learn by you will be told in no uncertain manner that you are no longer needed in the Murder Squad...and you have two options open to you. One is for you two to get used to being in Robbery or White-Collar Crime...or two, accept a Disability Retirement Package. I mean, Benny Elias had a reasonable excuse to go out on a Disability Pension with nary a sleepless night, but me? I have wonder for about thirty years. It was as plain as the nose on yer face we were shafted...and the Case was not to go ahead. Protecting the Perps...or the Victim...take yer pick".

"Woo being a Protected Species, so to speak".

Steggard nodded, or more accurately, rocked his whole body back and forth.

"If it was hoped that the Case would go away, why didn't they just lose all the paperwork on it in the Archives Section...you know, maybe write another name on the Archival Boxes and have it removed to several rows over...I doubt it would ever be found...why this alternate method of fuckin' about has me beat...to lose the Case would seem so much better".

"Or better still, burn the lot!" Steggard added. "Have you two progressed the Case at all? Abbey thinks you two would..."

"You keep in regular contact with the old man, eh?"

"Yeah...he drops a photo and a few lines every couple of weeks. Reports in, you might say. We either have a skype conversation or an e-Mail chat...So, the Case?"

"We are pretty sure we have a name..."

"Which is?"

"Soon Leung Woo..."

Steggard shook his head. He was none the wiser.

"He...um...he was head of an Assassination Squad that was given free-rein during the Vietnam War. He became one of thousands of Boat People who were rescued from

dangerous seas and pirates by the Malaysian Navy. Spent some years in a Refugee Centre in Singapore before he and his extended family of nearly twenty persons were given asylum by the Australian Government. Was naturalised in the early Eighties...”

“And that’s it!”

“We spoke to an old Viet gentleman whom we think maybe the last of the seven Perps still alive...he gave us this information...”

“Why do you believe his story?” Steggard asked, taking a sip of his coffee.

“Um...because we have nothing else...why do you ask that...about the old bloke?”

He sat upright and peered out over the Bay.

“There has got to be more in it than that. To have us pensioned off when fair dinkum, we were a long way from that, kind of intimates that...and we had not progressed at all on the Case...and from what I know, there has been six or seven other teams who had a go at it...with several of them also being given the right heave-ho...for all my years in the Force...and Benny’s too...there has never been such an incident like that before...Vietnamese you reckon? He was tall for an Oriental, wasn’t he? From memory...”

“We thought that too, though it is not a rare thing, apparently. I keep coming back to the question if certain high-end people do not want the thing investigated, why keep on periodically bringing the thing to the surface...as though it is some type of test or something”.

“I’ve never looked at it that way...you guys have the advantage over us in that you have DNA now to be able to look at the Case in a different way...a different perspective where we very quickly ran up against that bloody brick wall...”

“It will be hard to leave this all behind, huh?” I peered out at the serene beauty of the Bay. Various types of vessels bobbed at their mooring, all pointing into a soft nor-easterly.

“Yeah...but...you know...we picked here mainly because it was equidistance for both our kids. The daughter with her tribe is in Cammeray while the son and his family live in Norah Head. We become the Grannies who look after the kids from time to time, especially during School Holidays. They were all old enough to take out fishing...it was a good way to stay close to them...it’s all a little hard now and the kids...well...a couple in Uni and a couple married themselves. It’s a young person’s world now, and the old Grans are left in the wake...it’s just another chapter in life and living is how I look at it...”

He stood and cleared the table as though it was time to leave. He followed us down to our Unmarked, the effort showing. The years telling.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I was driving as I would drop Shelley off at Chatswood, right in the middle of the crush hour. My phone chortled its Magpie call. I was sick and tired of the old standard ringtones. Because of my choice many moons ago that seemed to upset so many people with ACDC or The Beatles...whatever, I settled on Australian birdcalls...wait until I get to the Koel with its shrill whoop-whoop call. That will shake a few of my colleagues up!

It was Tellie.

Shelley explained we were out of the Office and heading towards Sydney. I glanced at my watch. It was well past five. I asked Shelley to patch my phone through the car speakers, letting Tellie know what we were doing. I didn't want to surprise Shells with our often-hot telephone conversations.

"Joe? This is work, okay?"

"What are you still doing at work?" I enquired.

"We've had a spike in demand for DNA comparison tests, forensic examination of a wallet and its contents, familial connections and DNA trace on certain garments...meaning *you* piling loads onto me. The girls are fine. Mal is picking them up from After-School care in about an hour..."

"Okay, but why are you ringing?"

"I wanted you to come up so I could explain..."

"Tell me to-night..."

"Joe, that's not on. We both agreed to withstand that practise...to-morrow morning first thing. My office".

"Yes, ma'am...arrh...hang on, no! That's no good. We have a meeting all morning I'd say with the DPP on that Nursing Home Case. Because of all the hullabaloo with that Royal Commission into the Nursing Home sector, our Case has taken on a whole new impetus...to-morrow arvo, say around three..."

"No good Joe. Um...the following morning? Is that okay by you?"

I glanced at Shelley who nodded.

"Yep...that's fine. See you in your Office the day after tomorrow. Okay?"

"Yep".

She signed off just like that with no niceties or tender words. I wondered why she was clinging to protocols so tightly. I guess I'll have to be patient and wait forty-eight hours. The air at home will be electric for that time, let me tell you.

I pulled up at Chatswood Station, giving Shells the Unmarked to drive home. I would catch a bus and hitch a ride to the Office to-morrow morning with Tellie.

No worries...

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I rambled on for about forty-five minutes, offering a pause in the conversation to enjoy a coffee and a bite to eat. Hendo had phoned down to the Plaza Coffee Jar to make the order. Ten minutes later, there was a knock on the door and one of the regular Waitresses from downstairs placed a large platter with our coffees onto the table. Small snack sandwiches and an assortment of cakes.

"You're lucky this morning", She offered. "The Baker had just brought in the freshest bread and the cakes are still warm...enjoy".

"Arrh...the Bill?" I called after her.

"Hendo has fixed it up. Out of 'Kitty', he said, so's all is good. Easy as".

We sat enjoying the break. My son Billy with his two Assists, Shelley, and me. Small talk was minimal, so the break was short. We were enjoying the freshly made sandwiches and cakes mixed with their superior quality coffee that made conversation trivial.

"This Case..." He begun, heralding the end to the briefest of interludes. "So, it seems to me, has only gained priority because of the Royal Commission that the Government has just orchestrated...because of recent highly publicised cases of cruelty, assault and suspicious deaths in certain Nursing Homes both here and in South Australia. The effected establishments in South Australia have all closed and had their Licences to practice suspended. While your three Cases of death in the one establishment, all on the same night...and with some investigative work on the part of you two Officers, with the same person front and centre in several other Nursing Homes with deaths while on her Shift, there appears to be little that could be ascertained as 'just cause' to charge that person or continue with further examination". He looked over at me, a tight smile that to me was a challenge for me to pick up the cause and run with it.

I went to open my mouth. My son lifted a hand to stop me in my tracks.

"Detective?" He again stated, taunting me to react. "We have had a squad of Officers examine your suppositions and question all and every staff member who worked at those

various Nursing Homes at the same time as your 'Nurse Ratchett'...and we questioned her repeatedly to eventually come to the conclusion that Nursing Homes do have a high death rate...the Doctors who signed off on those earlier deaths stated there was nothing untoward. All you had to do is look at the Patients' Med Charts to see they were not long for this Earth...they were all in terrible shape with death a Godsend..."

"But that is the whole point, Counsellor..." It was extremely hard not to say son...or Billy! I guess he had the same trouble holding back on Dad. "Those deaths occurring as they did would not draw attention to anyone...because of the condition of all the old people...they were on death's doorstep..."

"You're saying that Sister Launder carried out Mercy Killings on those Patients? Allowing them to cheat the agony...or the time spent non compass because of the high dosage of drugs by dying prematurely..."

"Yes...if you read all the Medical Reports of all the inhabitants of a particular Nursing Home, a pattern emerges. Only those who are fading away mostly in severe pain, are subject to an action that causes their premature deaths..."

"That is not what our people have determined...though I doubt they would be as suspicious as you, Detective".

I could see the smile trying to appear. He had a tough time trying to control it.

"Because they have not looked at the bigger picture...or stood on the other side of the road. If you remove that opinion of the Patients' slow demise and look at every Nursing Home with that different perspective, it shows clearly that the Sister was conducting Mercy Killings. We interviewed several families of the recently Deceased, and everyone noted that it was a good thing they went when they did because they were in so much pain...etcetera, etcetera".

"The three who died on the same night? Why were the Police called, then the Forensic Pathologist? Because the Matron of the Establishment thought it a little unnerving as it had never happened before..." Shelley announced. "She was concerned enough to have doubts...even though she has defended Launder to the hilt...she still had doubts, not necessarily centred on Launder, but..."

"But the Post-mortems on all three disclosed bugger all...death by natural causes was the verdict..."

"Yes, because they looked at their Medical Charts and it was as expected...as was the elevated levels of painkiller detected in the bodies...doesn't that strike you as a bit funny?"

"Only if I was paranoid...and living with your partner all my life, he is the prime example of one paranoid son-of-a-bitch when he wants to be...and that little bit obstreperous!"

"I won't argue with that, Counsellor...but where does that leave us?"



“I’ll get my Investigators to cross-check all the Charts of the inmates around the times that these people died...we may have to exhume a number of the Deceased who did not have Post-mortems merely to check whether they also had elevated opioid levels...”

“But they will...” Offered Billy’s First Assist. “It would be completely natural”. She stated forcefully. “We will be wasting our time...”

“Or maybe not”. I smiled at her. “We still have a responsibility to examine the Cases as best we can...it is what we do. What do you want us to do?”

“Interview Sister Launder again about not just the three recent Cases, but all the others you have uncovered. My Investigators also interviewed her but never included those other deaths. I believe you and your partner have a reputation that precedes you...get back to us, huh? We will organise the exhumations of several others after obtaining the Deceased’s families approvals...please keep in mind though that increased painkillers in the system would be quite natural as the daily dosage was increased as the patient entered their last days”.

He was not willing to accept my line of thought.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN**

The three DPP Officers left the room leaving us to finish off what little crumbs were left.

“What do you think, Joe?”

“That there were not enough sandwiches...”

I heard the growl, a shaking of her head before she couldn’t help herself and started to giggle. Trying ridiculously hard to desist which caused her eyes to well with tears. Well...I hope she wasn’t holding back tears of depression! I must admit the sandwiches were excellent, the small cakes above pleasurable.

I thought for a moment that we are putting ourselves out on that limb. I doubt Bill would have gone down the road he has if I were not his father...”

The door opened. Denny Turner, our Boss walked in and sat opposite me.

“How’d it go?”

“They’re willing to run with us with a couple of exhumations and wanting us to re-interview the Head Sister over those deaths we unearthed when she had been the Head Sister back in time...”

Turner nodded.

“Do you think your son gave you the benefit of the doubt because he is your son?”

I opened my mouth to speak, instead having Shelley talk over the top of me.

“Most definitely”.

Turner again nodded. I wondered whether she had the guts to defend us if the whole thing turned to shit.

“Um...our Kitty is light by almost fifty bucks. They weren't that high up in the pecking order to warrant such cash being splashed on them...”

“Mmm...my son? He is a rising young star within the DPP Office...”

“Then I hope he doesn't crash and burn beside his father”. She stood, nodded a couple of times, and then walked quickly from the room.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT**

“Joe? Shelley? Leave off what-ever you are doing and come with me. Leave those coffees for some-one else's pleasure”.

I looked up at the Boss, a surprised look on my dial. We had just come onto the floor after our habitual swim and exercise regime, grabbing a large coffee from the Plaza Coffee Jar as we headed up to the eighth floor. I glanced at the wall clock. It had barely ticked passed eight!

“We have a meeting this morning with Forensic Trace on that Cold Case...”

“Cancel it!” Turner ordered forcefully.

I raised my eyebrows and glanced at Shelley. She too was a little surprised at the urgency and nature of the request. We gave our coffees to Hendo informing him sincerely that neither of us had taken a sip...we hopped in the Lift and were rushed to the fourth level of the Basement...where us mere mortals seldom trod!

The Driver was waiting for us, the Deputy Commissioner Major Crimes already seated in the front passenger seat. We three were expected to rub shoulders with each other crammed into the rear seats.

A nod from the DC his good morning. No-one said a darn thing until we had joined the morning peak hour crawling towards the City. Small talk not on the agenda. I was surprised

when we did not head for the Police HQ Building in College Street, instead being waved through and down into the bowels of the Commonwealth Building in Chifley Square in the City. Again, we were escorted to a mid-level floor of the building to enter another Lift that took us to a higher level.

We came out on a floor with no number telling us which level we had exited the Lift. A small band of men were standing at ease forming a chute for each of us to walk through, discarding our mobile phones, guns, badges, wallets, and anything else that they didn't like the look of.

A door was held open for us. I noticed the Commonwealth Government seal on the door.

"Arrh...there you are. Thank you for coming at short notice".

We shook hands with others in the room and were told to obtain our own refreshments that were on a side table. A platter of different cheeses, various fruits and coffee and tea were offered. All requests handled by a pert young woman who disappeared after all were served and seated around the large elliptical table.

No-one offered their names, rank, or classification. Totally rude, I thought. If this were how the other half ran business, I was glad that I would never reach that level. As if on cue, a gentleman cleared his throat and began, between timid sips of his tea.

"War is a nasty business and depending on where you stand...on which side...and how you perceive the right of the struggle, the only ones to suffer apart from the citizens of said country are the refugees who picked the wrong side of the struggle. War is for the young...and the brave with very few enjoying the experience. There are some...a few who view the struggle as a personal vendetta, even enjoying the battle. A few of such men are chosen to conduct...arrh...let's just say tasks that no ordinary man or soldier would ever want to engage in...and would never be commanded to do so..."

He took several sips of his tea and several dices of Watermelon.

"Sir? While there is a hiatus could you please tell us who we are talking to?" I asked. The DC who was sitting two from me, raised his eyebrows and bowed his head.

"You are Detective Grade Four Joseph Lind..."

"You have that right...but you have me at a disadvantage, sir. You know who we are from the Deputy Commissioner, Major Crimes to us three Murder Detectives...but you four gentlemen have not shown us due respect in identifying yourselves".

There was silence for some moments. I could almost hear the ticking as minds tried to circumvent my appeal. In the end, there was an almost resigned concurrence to my request.

"Very well. I apologise for my oversight". He coughed to hide his embarrassment. I deduced he was the Leader. "I am Phillip Burgess, head of Overseas Operations for ASIO.

To my left is General Dwight Sanger of the US South-east Asian Counter-Operations in the Pentagon. Out of Uniform. Sitting next to him is Gene Corland, from the Australian/US Liaisons Office and to my right is my 2IC Garry Platts with Captain Harry Stanley, of the Commonwealth Warfare Program Office sitting to your left...”

“Thank you, sir...and why are we here with you gentlemen? It would seem to be one of those meetings that never took place...would I be correct on that? What is the purpose of this meeting? Could it have anything to do with one of our Murder Cases. Perhaps the homicide killing of Soon Leung Woo in Nineteen Eighty-nine?”

Several persons coughed to clear their throats, lowering their heads to possibly hide their smirks. All grabbed their coffee or teacups to hide the expressions on their faces.

“I had been forewarned of your...let us say...your bluntness...and yes, your Vic is the reason why this meeting has been called. As I said, there are a few men who love their job, one being our Mister Woo who excelled in being head of an Assassination Squad. Many people of high standing...going right to the top of both the US and Australian Government, who gave certain assurances to our Mister Woo that he would be protected at all costs. Unfortunately, he was not and in those terrible last moments of the War he was left out to wither on the vine. Our Intelligence Services gave certain assurances that the man and his extended family had all been shot by the Communists in the first days of their rule. Nothing more was thought of the matter until one of our Intel Officers was trawling through the huge Refugee Camp in Singapore. Thousands of Vietnamese Boat people had ended up there...it is estimated that that number again had vanished on the open seas, victims of leaky boats, pirates, and coastal storms that rage in that part of the world. This Intel. Officer had served in Vietnam and knew of Woo’s work and the assurances that both our Governments had made to him and his family...both Governments began a large operation in settling the substantial numbers of refugees in both the US and Australia...and other countries right around the Globe. This operation came from the highest Office in both our nations...and was condoned by all political parties at the time. The numbers accepted as Refugee status were a way of camouflaging certain individuals from further scrutiny or questions being asked by certain well-meaning but nosy persons. The death of Mister Woo posed a problem to both Governments. If the identity of the man got out and his exploits during the war publicised, both Governments then and now would be open to some embarrassing questions, especially on why such a man has been looked after by consecutive Governments...”

“Then he was killed by possible fellow Vietnamese refugees as a form of vengeance. These people were aware of his gross behaviour during the War...having first-hand knowledge of the group. This was a two-edged sword depending on the capability and tenacity of the Murder Team who were given responsibility in solving the death of the man...” The Deputy Commissioner added, smiling at both Shelley and me. “Previous Murder Teams were coaxed into leaving the situation as is...”

“Then why not just bury the Files...the case would be forgotten eventually...but instead, good Murder Dees were encouraged to leave well enough alone, and in all cases, either moved out of the Murder Squad...or pensioned out...which is bloody radical...” Shelley became more riled as she spoke. I placed a hand on her back, gently patting her to get her to

calm down. It was usually me who stepped into the fray, both feet firmly jammed into my mouth!

“You have continued down this path for thirty-odd years, having no idea how you were going to make this situation go away. Your judgement...and those who trod before you...are of mediocre quality. Either grip the dragon by the tail or turn and run...you have done neither. You guys are earning twice the money than me I suspect, but you have in no way earned it. Do you want the thing covered up and buried amongst the mountain of bullshit? Or do you want us to pursue the Case to its end? That may not be satisfactory as I would assess that most, if not all the Perpetrators have all died...that would make it easier for you, wouldn't it? Yes? No?”

I looked around at the blank expressions on all the faces. I shook my head. I had begun only because Shelley was painting herself into a corner...I was heading for that same corner.

“I suspect that you all have done your homework on Shelley and I and have come to a decision on our fate...are we as easy to roll as our colleagues before us? I think not, so you are planning another strategy to get us to lie down and roll over...would that be correct?”

“We failed to close down the Case when we should have, leaving good men out there having their careers ended when some did not really want it that way. Tell me, what would be your carrot to stop any further investigations into the incident?”

I leaned back in my chair, glancing side-ways at Shelley. It was she who started in on the gentlemen.

“What kind of people do you think we are? Easily bought off. You haven't done your homework, gentlemen. I do not wish to sit here any further and listen to this bullshit. If you think you can buy off another two Detectives, you have overstepped...your opinion of us is totally wrong! If that is all, it's a good morning to all of you”.

I was standing as Shelley stood beside me. I noticed that Denny Turner also stood. The three of us looking at the wall behind our adversaries, not wanting to eyeball any of them!

“Arrh, Detectives. Have my driver take you back to the Office...he can then come and pick me up”. The Deputy Commissioner offered.

I was boiling and looking at Shelley, so was she. We grabbed our things and headed for the Lift. A well-dressed chap came with us.

“Um...I need to give you clearance to get to the parking levels”. His response.

I shook my head. I picked up my mobile. There was no signal.

“You have this entire building shielded?”

“No...just these two floors”. A smile to show all was okay.

As we pulled out into the city traffic, I tapped in the names and Departments mentioned. I then Googled them. Not one came up to scrutiny and no name was listed for Officers in those Departments or any Government Department of that name existing in any case. The whole thing a slight of hand, so it would seem. I wondered who was pulling the strings...and the reason for all the subterfuge.

“Why am I not surprised?” I muttered to myself.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I was fuming, asking to be dropped several blocks from the Office.

“We’ll meet you down at the Plaza Coffee Jar, okay?” Shelley asked, knowing me well enough to leave me to wander a bit by myself. I nodded in agreement. As it was with traffic to-day, I had ordered for the two women before they showed. With my eyes closed, I was enjoying the warmth of the sun and did not hear their approach until the scrape of the chairs woke me from my light slumber.

Both women were silent for some time. In the end, Shelley couldn’t help herself.

“What do you think, Joe?”

“You ever wonder if the World stopped spinning, would we all just lift off into space...I suppose we would all be dead, so it doesn’t matter much...in regard to our little meeting this morning...it pales into insignificance when you start worrying about the Earth ceasing to spin...”

“See what I mean?” Shelley turned to Denny Turner. “He can be an absolute crud at times trying to get a decent answer from him”.

I leaned back as our coffees were placed on the table. Both mugs for the women did not look like mine. I’m not a fancy bloke who is quite satisfied with just a flat white on fair dinkum milk while the beverage in the girls’ mugs failed description. Toast with those ‘tablets’ of Butter, Vegemite and Blackberry Jam was placed in the middle leaving little room for our side plates. I lathered up a slice of toast with Vegemite, sighing deeply as I took my first bite.

The Universe I decided, was in equilibrium and all was well.

“Our mysterious Mister Woo...” I muttered between bites of my toast. I was determined to get at least two slices into my mouth before their warmth cooled down. “It was surprising that there was no delegation from The Peoples Republic of Vietnam there this morning...”

“I thought they had a hide wanting to put us in a corner...” Denny responded.

“No, I don’t think that is correct. I think they were waiting for us to do that. I think they knew we would not go lightly into the night, so to speak. They knew from their investigations that we were not going to roll over so easily as others before...the whispered actions of one Mister Woo during the Vietnam War does not merit such bullshit carry-ons. There is a lot they are not telling us...will never tell us”.

“You think that is all there is? That Mister Woo is not...was not the man so described?”

“Yep...I think they knew they had stuffed up after they pensioned off Steggard and Elias. Some-one back then, forgot to bury the file on the homicide murder of Woo and they have been chasing their tails ever since...”

“I don’t know Joe. It is pretty hard to bury files...by that stage there was what? Six Archive boxes on the death of Woo...it’s doubled in size since then...sure, I agree with you on someone stuffing up way back thirty years, but you do not need to be that devious really. All you need to do is change the Vic’s name on the outside of the Archive boxes which would have the Archive Boxes placed several rows away from the ‘W’ file aisle...”

“Yeah...maybe it is as simple as that...we still have to have it confirmed that Woo is his correct name...I wouldn’t mind betting it is not...so the files could not be treated in the manner you describe...maybe...we’re just punching at shadows...I really don’t know...”

“You’re still wanting to proceed with the Case?”

“Bloody Oath! What about you, Shells?”

“I’m with you Tonto...you can’t go and have all the fun by yourself...”

“See what I mean?” I turned to Turner with arms spread wide. “You can’t get a simple answer out of her”.

Denny Turner almost fell off her chair she was laughing that much’

“So, what is your next move?”

“Forensic Trace wants us up there...this morning. Maybe this afternoon now, eh? And I’d like to visit that old bloke again...”

“Okay...watch your arses and I will back you all the way...in whatever direction your investigating takes you...”

“What about our Three Homicide Deaths in the Roma Nursing Home?”

“Yeah...I’m not completely with you on that but I agree that Nursing Sister needs to be re-interviewed with some weighty questions asked, especially since all the other deaths have surfaced...I think you need to keep digging that way. If you can cast any sort of doubt on

multiple homicides during any period where she is in charge, the better your chances are of breaking her...”

I nodded, sure that we would get the woman in the end.

I lifted my Mobile and speed-dialled in Tellie’s number. She answered after several rings sounding as though she was in the middle of something.

“Busy, huh?”

“Yeah. I’m out on site of a ‘B&E’...”

“Anyone hurt?”

“The elderly gentleman of the house was pistol-whipped. Not too bad but he’ll be in hospital for a bit...the guy was in his early seventies, a little frail by all accounts. Who’d be the bastards to do something like that. I’ll be here until late, so organise your and the girls’ Dinners”.

“No worries. Sorry about this morning...greater men than I wanted my attention. When are we likely to link up? It’s about the Cold Case, isn’t it?”

“Yeah...let’s make next Tuesday a definite...after Lunch. Your shout, okay?”

“Now why can’t I organise things like that? See you at home, sometime to-night, huh?”

I rang off wondering what was so important that she needed our presence when a Report sent through my e-mail Account would have been okay by me. No worries. I would find out soon enough.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY**

Laws to strengthen the Anti-terrorist capabilities to examine and bring persons to account have undergone several editions not only here in Australia but in most Democracies around the World. As an off shoot in the legislating these tougher Laws, the ability of a Detective of a certain Grade and above has had the luxury to delve into certain areas once considered taboo without the need to obtain a Court Order or Warrant. As Murder Dees we settled comfortably within that situation. I have never been too sure that our inclusion was what the Legislators intended. I kept thinking that these luxuries given to us would one day disappear when the Pollies realised we were benefitting as well to their supposed ‘Terrorist Legislation’.

This has meant we, as Investigative Detectives especially in homicide murder cases, can use the Internet with a certain degree of immunity for certain tasks.



In the Case of the three homicide deaths of elderly people that was our current Case, I can examine the life-long career of Sister Jane Launder through the Australian Taxation Office records.

“Okay, I’ll trawl through the Tax Records and send the name of the Establishment where she worked starting from her earliest times over to you. You then cross-reference the name of the Nursing Home or Hospital and see if there has been any spike in deaths while she was employed at that place...and when she was on duty...”

“Yep, that makes sense. While you are still coaxing out those records, I’ll just do an in-depth Internet search of her...it’s already been done but I don’t think with much enthusiasm...your first shout with the coffees in about an hour”.

We got stuck into it, listening to each other when a ‘blind’ conveys bugger-all. This always happens and you have just got to navigate around that blockage.

“Born at Wollongong Private in October Nineteen-Sixty-seven. She’sss...fifty-two, about. Is that right? She did her early years as a Nurse at Royal Wollongong. She was there for four years after she had qualified as a Nurse...achieving a First, Second and Third Certificates in that time. She was one driven young lady. She also married during that time...in Nineteen Eighty-nine. She went by her married name of Jane Cortez, getting a divorce in Two Thousand and Six when she reverted back to her family name of Launder. She began her days as a Sister-in-Charge in Nineteen Ninety-five at the Gerringong Hospice for the Aged”.

Shelley listened to my spiel, occasionally typing something that would help her with her search. I began a month-by-month table listing her name of employment, status and what shift she seemed to be on. It is amazing what one can find in old Income Tax Sheets.

We both continued with this dual assessment of her life which took all afternoon and the following morning, but by then we had a complete list of her career. We still had not investigated the death toll at those places where she ‘held court’. That was the next thing, except now I was shouting both Shelley and Tellie a Lunch which I somehow owed them!

Yer can’t win!

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE**

“We have checked this, three times”. Tellie stated earnestly. “The two sons and the daughter as claimed are not Leung Woo’s children...and they are not brothers and sisters...there could be a connection between the woman and her Carer...they may have married at some time...you can chase that out if you consider it important and relevant enough to your investigation”.

I looked at my better half. To describe myself as gobsmacked was an understatement.

“Yes...we were also dumbfounded. The wallet was examined minutely. Trace proved it was the gentleman’s wallet...trace and fingerprints on the plastic sheeting in which the wallet was found in, match the exemplars of Duncan Harris...”

“Wait a minute...” I walked around in a small circle before standing at the screen that showed DNA computations, none of which I understood. “This...um...we haven’t obtained conclusive proof that Leung Woo is indeed Leung Woo. All we have discovered is that his alleged children are not of the Leung Woo family tree. Where does that leave us?”

“Yes...um...I don’t understand what this all means. Without the comparative analysis, you are back at square one, not certain of the guy’s identity...or really...to put it bluntly...his identity still is a mystery even with those whom you have interviewed who have stated categorically, that the photos perused, are in fact of Leung Woo. However, that is not good enough for Court protocols”.

This floored me! I was trying to marry in what we knew, what had happened with that meeting that wasn’t a meeting and all the little titbits that created the gossamer lineage...which had just been blown away...shit!!!

“Um...the tissue that was kept by the Pathology Department? That’s a match to the Trace found on the wallet, isn’t it? The trace that did not compare to the exemplars. Is that right?” Shelley hoped.

Tellie looked across at Shelley and slowly shook her head.

“Sorry guys, but no. The tissue sample we used did not match anything that was found in or on the wallet...there was no match”.

“How’s that possible?” I was almost yelling.

“It is possible Joe and calm down. We are not your enemies”. She touched me on the shoulder. “If that tissue sample was changed at some stage during its storage with the Pathology Department Archival system, you would have this result”.

“Why?” Shelley asked.

“And how?” I added. “And we could assume that the person we thought having a nasty history was not that man at all...”

“Then why kill him and why have this nasty history built up for us?”

“Good questions, Tonto. What do we do now?”

“Arrh...shit...um...let the Boss know. Ring Muscles and say that we think the tissue saved from the body of our long-ago Victim has been switched...and he needs to chase that out if he could...and that old Vietnamese gentleman? We need to have another talk with him”.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

“Bingo! We have him!”

“Who?”

“Chi Ming Ho Minh...”

“Yep!? Fair Dinkum? Who in hell is he when he is not snoring in bed?”

“How do you know he snores?”

“All men do...some softer than others...”

“...and a lot of women, too...but getting back to the matter at hand, Mister Ho Minh is the Head of the Assassination Squad that roamed through the villages of South Vietnam shooting to death anyone vaguely associated with the enemy. Cop, Judge and Jury and Firing Squad”.

“Hang on Tonto, you’ve lost me. I thought our Mister Woo was the Head...”

“Think about it. Woo was the Commander of the Death Squad. Seen by many Villagers as he gave the orders of who was to live and who was to die. He was out in the field with his men. The local Villagers would assume he was head honcho...but the Top Bloke was Mister Ho Minh. That is why there has been all these ‘blinds’ at every turn...they were trying vainly to keep his very life a secret from us. I’ll send a copy of the Preliminary Forensic Report across to you...I’m just going to fill in the Boss”.

I gave Denny Turner my iPad and sat in silence as she read through the Forensic Report twice.

“Woo was number two, huh?”

“Yes Boss, so it seems. This note, along with several others written by the man was in the wallet. Forensics have miraculously managed to reconstruct several notes taken from the wallet and interpret the writing from Vietnamese to English. All those reconstructed and of use to our Case were written by Ho Minh to his subordinate or his Number Two...commanding him to give away the job as Treasurer of the Vietnam Friendship Society as it would place his name and face out in the local Viet papers...where he could be identified by those bent on revenge for what he did during the war. The warning a little too

late...and Mister Ho Minh correctly supplies his address...in Melbourne...at the top of his letters to Woo...”

“Um...well, that was it thirty years ago, at least. Look up the local Phone Directory...”

I shook my head.

“His Handlers...presumably those gentlemen we meet the other day...would have made sure he had a hidden number...in any case, if we were able to contact him and make a date to meet, you can bet your house he would be out of the country within twenty-four hours of the telephone call...”

She leaned back into the large chair, almost disappearing from view. She swung it around a couple of times looking for all the world like a little girl enjoying herself.

“So...two things”. She stated as she stared at me. “You want permission for you and Shelley to fly interstate to interview the elderly gentleman...this Mister Ho Minh who was the nominated Head of the Assassination Squad and protected for all these years presumably by a chorus of Handlers from both the Australian and US Governments...he’d be pretty old, don’t you think...and the second thing, all these blind alleys and incorrect information and a weak attempt to hide the identity of Leung Woo was conducted by one or all of those gentlemen we meet the other week. Some sort of Australian and US Government assurance of protecting the two. This pact enacted once it was felt that the War was winding down...the story about the Refugee Camp in Singapore could also have been b.s, the same as the enlarged family. That story was correct in that a large ‘family’ was given refugee status as two gentlemen either together or travelling alone would possibly pique the interest of those looking for them...it’s a saving face thing with these people. They have suffered through the loss of many of the family, murdered at the behest of those two. Kill them and the families can at last sleep in peace...”

“They’re dead...whether they are sleeping peacefully or not has got nothing to do with it...”  
I replied as Shelley came to sit beside me.

“A different perspective, Joe...many people are not walking to the beat of your drum...in fact more are walking to another beat than to yours...”

“Different perspective be bugger...have we approval to travel to St. Kilda...that’s a classy suburb of Melbourne, isn’t it?”

“Mmm? Yes. You fly out of Sydney first thing and catch the afternoon flight back in...get Hendo to arrange it. Okay?”

“Thanks Boss...at least this will put that Case to rest so we can sleep peacefully...”

“Get out of here Joe. Your tongue will get you into trouble, if you’re not careful...and it really doesn’t put that Case to bed, does it?”

“No...in one sense it never will. Most of the guys who stabbed Leung Woo are dead. I believe there is only one of them still alive. I want to go and sit with him again. I may not get any satisfaction from him, but...”

“Yeah, I know what you mean...but the thing with cultures like the Villager situation that was a major clique before the war...the vendetta does not end with the death of the elder. The challenge is taken up usually by a grandson...usually...and carried through the years...only when the subject of the vendetta is killed, is the debt settled...with all peoples involved then experiencing peaceful sleep”.

She gave me a tight smile. I tried to ignore her humour as Shells and I walked from her Office...I could hear Shelley stifling a giggle as we walked towards our desks. Me back-tracking to ask Hendo to book us a flight in and a flight out to Melbourne on the morrow.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

I pressed the call button that was situated beside the electric double gates. The polished brass plate surrounds located in the face of a stone pillar. A quavering voice eventually answered, sounding metallic through the speaker above the call button.

“Mister Ho Minh? I am Detective Joseph Lind with my partner, Detective Shelley Shields. We are from the Murder Squad in Sydney. Could we have a few words with you?”

“No!” And the system went dead.

I pressed the button again. I heard him pick up, but he did not speak.

“Sir, I can get a Court Order that would allow me access...I do not want to do that as then your name would be known to other people. I could get a couple of bloodhound Reporters who would love the story behind your present position, and I can name your Handlers who really, wouldn't want their names across the front page of the Paper...with yours...but the publicity given would ensure your death by painful means...the vendetta to kill you then paid in full”.

I heard the click then the hum as the double gates began to open. We ran back to the Hire Car and drove through as the gates started to close behind us. We continued along a gently curving roadway, its surface crushed rock. Our progress generously telegraphed as the tyres scrunched over the loose pebbles.

“Let's see how this goes, huh?”

An elderly gentleman stood unsteadily holding on grimly to a Zimmer frame. A woman stood beside him, presumably his Nurse and Bodyguard. He nodded towards us as we

alighted from the small Hire Car. I had sat uncomfortably in the damn thing, so I wasn't looking forward to the trip back out to Tullamarine this afternoon!

"Mister Ho Minh?"

"Yes...you have been sent to question me and if I give the wrong answers, then you will kill me. I always knew it would come to this".

I walked slowly up the wide steps to where the old man was standing. I slowly produced my ID Card as Shelley did the same. The old man's Nurse visibly relaxed to an alert status only.

"May we go inside? I think it will rain soon?" I suggested looking up at the grey leaden sky.

"Of course, how rude of me...follow me".

We were led through the house to a cosy Kitchen of the Country Kitchen style so popular late in the last century. The old bloke sank into an upright chair, gesturing with a wide sweep of his arm that we could choose any number of chairs. We sat opposite him. He nodded his head, smiled with it reaching his eyes.

"You've lived here long?" Shelley asked.

"Yes, perhaps the year I, along with my extended family, were airlifted out of Saigon several months before 'Freedom Day' as it was called back then..."

"You have never been back?"

"Oh, how I wish I could die in my country of birth and be buried in its soil...but that is not possible. Several of my grandsons have been over there for brief visits, though our Guards..." Looking briefly towards his Nurse. "Were not in favour of their visit. My Granddaughter tried to bring in a jar of the earth dug from the fields around my village of birth, but your stupid Customs people confiscated it. It was meant as a ritual where the earth would be scattered over my coffin...a tradition that dates back centuries...now, there is no link...and never will there be...regardless of your worldly role, it is not right to oppose this last request of a dying man..."

I didn't know whether it was the truth, or he was spinning a tale to attract sympathy and compassion. I guess that his history was catching up with him as it did with Leung Woo. I ignored his subtle appeal for compassion though there was little Shelley, or I could do about the arrangement.

"You were head of an internal Assassination Team during the War?"

He tilted his head as a response.

"You and Leung Woo..."

“My Second-in-Command. It turned out he was a silly man...I told him several times that he should not be in such a position that others may recognise him to his detriment...sadly it was as I had predicted. He seemed to want to do some good as though his role during the War was weighing heavily on his soul”.

“You came here with your extended family...are they still around you?”

“Oh, yes. It is our way to respect the elderly. I still have six of my family living here. More than double that have been scattered to the four winds though they still return here to wish their Grandfather best wishes. I doubt we will be here for much longer...how did you track me down so easily?”

“It wasn’t easy sir...purely a serendipitous moment...by an awful bit of luck, Leung Woo’s wallet came into our possession only recently. There were several letters from yourself as part of the contents...”

“You mean thirty years after his death, his wallet suddenly appeared?”

I nodded. Looking at him with a stern expression.

“The Gods have given me a warning...I shall die very soon hoping that the vendetta against me finishes at that point...and not be carried through to my family...I fear though, they will pass the debt down through the generations to have the debt paid in full...”

“Do you honestly think so?”

“It depends on the depth of hate shown towards me and whether the hate will remain boiling inside the stomach of the one so selected to satisfy the meaning of the debt. It may come down to grandsons or great grandsons having the pride of family foremost in their minds. The many people who were killed by my Squad will not sleep easily until I have been killed. I understand that...and after you have left, I will be shuffled off to another address...hopefully still in this country and not overseas. My family means all to me as does those who seek to kill me”.

The nurse followed us out to the car. The rain cell had passed over us.

“I will never understand this...this want...this need to avenge the debt...even generations after the death of the main instigator...” I shook my head. “Sure, if they have this need to save face, then the debt should die with the guilty party and not be handed down to the next generation like some family heirloom”.

“I know what you mean...”

“Is it true, what he said? That he and his family will be moved because if I can find him, then his enemies will also be able to find him...with the whole family being wiped out in one smooth operation...will he be moved?”

She looked over the vast grounds, scanning each quadrant in turn, looking for anything that should not be there.

“The old man is dying...Pancreatic Cancer...not long to go. He actually forced himself out onto the front Portico hoping you were his Killers...it would end the pain...us being moved? I doubt it...and once he dies...and Woo being killed all those years ago, I think between you and I and the fencepost, both the US and Australian Authorities have fulfilled their agreed pact in protecting the two gentlemen...the family? They were add-ons...if you get my drift.

I nodded my head as Shelley turned the engine over, clunked into ‘Drive’ and we rolled slowly back down the elongated driveway, the scrunching of the pebbles music to my ears.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

“You know the truth...but you do not have enough *proof* to arrest or charge me. Rather ironic, isn’t it? My nemesis didn’t need proof but often acted on guilt by association...by an itch in his nose...or for no sane reason at all...he just killed others because he liked the power that gave him...”

“You are the last of the group of seven who ceremoniously stabbed to death Leung Woo all those years ago...”

“I could have been...may have been. I am an old man not long for this earth. I have done the right thing and brought my family to this fine land. For that I am forever grateful for the chance...like Woo and his Squad, it was a matter of chance on whether you lived or died...being accepted as Refugees and given asylum...all a matter of chance. Life is so...so fragile with success only one of many outcomes. I will sleep peacefully into eternity knowing that my archenemy has gone before me...if there is nothing more, Detectives? I need my afternoon sleep”.

The old man struggled to his feet, helped by two elderly women, presumably his daughters. His sons and grandsons were nowhere in sight.

“Could I ask one favour of you?” I began, as I stood to step towards him

He slowly turned to look at me. A slight nod requesting I continue.

“You say your nemesis...he is dead...by seven pairs of hands. There is no future in wanting to drag this out...you have avenged your family. The debt has been paid in full. To continue will mean that possibly one of your sons...or your grandsons will spend the rest of his days in prison...not a future you would hope for any of your grandsons, eh? The man you seek is dying...less than six weeks to live...so there is nothing to be gained by continuing. Tell all



your grandsons and great grandsons that the debt has been paid in full...all your relatives who died a horrible death during that horrible war can now sleep peacefully..."

"But they do not, Detective. I can hear their moans and groans even now...it is they who demand that final act before the bastard dies on us..."

He nodded as he turned away from me to hobble from the room.

I settled uneasily into the front passenger seat of our Unmarked. Ran my hands roughly over my face as though washing away all the thoughts of possible tens, perhaps hundreds of dead people demanding revenge for their deaths...the whole thing sending me mad at the stupidity, the insaneness of it all...but then, I was walking on the opposite side of the street with nary a chance of ever crossing to the other side.

"C'mon Shells, let's get the hell out of here..."

"You don't want another feast as they have suggested? They invited us, you know? And they seemed a little put out you declined the offer..."

"Yeah...No...the price maybe way too high for me to ever repay the debt in my lifetime".

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE**

Three days later, a young Viet/Australian was shot dead intruding onto the grounds of one of Melbourne's most famous mansions...the place had been vacant for some time, so went the Media Releases which begged the question why was the young lad trespassing if there was nothing of value to steal?

No-one could offer a plausible story...and I wondered how in hell we had been followed to Melbourne...there was a lot to learn from those old cultures...a lot to learn.

My excuse in allowing us to be so easily followed...we weren't expecting it. It had not even entered our heads!

The last of the Assailants who had stabbed Woo to death all those years ago, died several days after that...the debt not repaid but having earned compound interest in a sense, ensuring those who could not sleep peacefully, would suffer still.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

“It’s strange, I felt completely out of my depth. I mean...the family still fighting for revenge? They gladly came here to escape the fractures occurring with the Communists in full control over both North and South...they wanted to be away from the system that is also riddled with corruption...and yet even after one two and three generations have been born in this country, they are still tethering these young people with a heavy yoke that they must carry out the revenge act...reverting back to customs of the ‘Olde Country’”.

I shook my head, stood partly out of frustration, and went to stand at the floor to ceiling narrow window that gave views of Parramatta River and the Ferry Terminus. It was some moments before I even realised what I was doing...following on a habit that both DS Church and DS Butler were tethered to.

I half-laughed and returned to the chair sitting opposite our new Boss, Denny Turner.

“I don’t know what I can say to you Joe, that will settle your mind...and that Case will never be fully sealed and delivered...never. I think the DPP will recommend that you finish off the Report on the Case and leave it to the Coroners’ Enquiry whenever it will be called. I think we may hear of the family sometime in the future unfortunately...still endeavouring to pay the debt they seem to shoulder valiantly. Just write up the Report, even writing down those suspicions that you cannot prove. Make sure you make note that the words expressed were merely...you know, more than guesses but the thoughts lack the weight of proof to turn them into facts...do it your normal way that you prepare a Report for the Coroner where you offer up both fact and suppositions so he can come to a proper conclusion...”

“Should I mention that little meeting in town?”

“Have you chased out the authenticity of the guys and the Departments they represent?”

“Yes...complete fabrications as far as I could tell...”

“Yes, I did my own examination and agree with you...then yes, include it and your thoughts on the veracity of those people. That should just about put the whole thing to bed...” She shook her bowed head, seeing the parallel of the whole thing. “I’m not religious and I guess I am sitting on the fence, but to me here is another case of a religion...an eastern religion forcing individuals into acts of revenge...”

“Mmm...I don’t know, Boss. Far be it for me to defend any bloody Religion...” I chuckled at the absurdity of it. “I think it has more to do with culture and the importance of family to these people...I think the majority are Buddhists...I doubt the religion would condone such archaic measures...but? I am not conversant enough to even offer a guess...”

“You’ve got that Deaths in a Nursing Home Case...it is also growing of its own accord...have you spoken to any of the Investigators who are conducting the initial

examination for that recently Federally approved Royal Commission? No? It may be a good idea...”

“I want to wait until we have examined the woman’s entire career...I am going through her Tax Records right from the start. Shelley is overseeing each Nursing Home situation that I unearth where she once worked to see if there has been a spike in deaths during her time at that establishment...particularly on her shift...we have got seven questionable deaths so far...we’ll need to keep digging before we bring her in to question her about those deaths”.

“Where does she live?”

“At present? At Helensburgh. She drifted about, depending on where she was working. Mostly in the Wollongong area, with one or two Nursing Homes in the Shire...on the Cronulla Peninsular. We have a while to go...I’ll get back onto it after I have written up the Woo killing and its associated deaths...maybe to-morrow”.

“Joe? I’m sorry I couldn’t give you anything more on the Woo Case. I can tell it has been a troubling experience for you...”

I turned at her door opening and looked back at her. Nodded my head, flip my arm as though that settled it and quietly muttered ‘thank you’ before I headed back to my desk...still heavy of heart and somehow angry at what I perceived as a sorry, stupid affair. To them though, it was a matter of family honour...of appeasing those who had died at the hands of the two gentlemen in question...over what? Forty years ago!!”

WTF!!

‘Get over it’. I mumbled to myself.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN**

It took me longer than I had hoped to draft the Report on the Vietnamese Homicide murder. I kept on making changes and adding and deleting fact and fiction alike. Then Shelley perused the tome, adding more thoughts scribbled into the margins and across several added pages. After I had amended the Report to her satisfaction, I gave it to Turner for her input. She was the final signatory with Shelley and I having our identity given as the Leading Investigating Team on the job.

Again, it came back with red marks, arrows and amendments that took another three whole pages...the whole point to try and construct such a document was that it would become a Court Document and the main investigative tool for the Coroner. A copy of the signed document went to the DPP, another for our Murder Book and the original sent off to the Coroner.

If nothing else, it was a slow and trying exercise which I was pleased in a way, to put behind me. In retrospection, usually in the middle of the night with my sleep being interrupted, I would look at it in a completely different way which made me angry and exasperated...a mood that meant sleep would not come for me that night.

Shells and I spent the rest of that week and all the following week categorising events that to us, smelt of questionable practises in those Nursing Home enterprises and corporations. In the eight such places where Jane Launder worked over her entire career, the total of plausible premature deaths totalled eleven over the thirty-five-year period of the woman's career.

I rang through to the Office of the Investigation into possible mismanagement and deaths in the Nursing Homes Industry across Australia. They had the words '*Royal Commission*' which meant they had huge advantages over us mere Murder Dees. In every avenue of examination, they could do things that if we tried, would have our Case tossed out of Court due to incorrect, misleading, and downright illegal practises!

Oh, to have their power of examination! But then, they could not make arrests or lay charges. At the completion of the Investigation, and after the Head had made his Findings public, all the information would be passed to each State Police Force for them to act upon.

"Detective Lind...why are you ringing us? It is usually the other way around, when we hold out our hand for help...how can I help?"

I ran through the story of Sister Jane Launder and her possible connection to almost a dozen premature deaths in the seven or eight Nursing Homes she had spent time in as the Sister-in-Charge.

"Mmm...what's your next step?"

"Obtain Court Orders to enable us to peruse all documents associated with each person who could very well have received a premature death sentence...see what unfolds. I can see the problems involved in trying to obtain sufficient proof to back up our suppositions...and we may very well fail leaving the woman sitting out there planning her next victim".

"Um...I do not want to do a Pontius Pilot on what you have told me, but I think that is outside our scope of investigation. Sure, we are looking for any abuse to elderly Patients...whether it is physical, mental, or financial...and no-where is it mentioned that we should be looking at homicides. Let me check with my Boss and get back to you. Later today or tomorrow afternoon at the latest".

I nodded as he rang off.

Detective Samuel Holding had been a Murder Dee for a short period of time. An exceptionally good operator from what I could recall. He was selected to be a part of the large Team formed to assess Institutional Child Abuse which burst onto our psyche two years ago now. It apparently drew blood on a lot of the Detectives involved and it was said

that several Dees with strong religious beliefs and back-grounds fell by the wayside or chucked their beliefs down the sewer...yet the major group of Dees had once again stood proud, agreeing to be involved in this new Royal Commission which was supposedly going to expose a lot of abuse in the Nursing Home industry...and to back this up, this Investigation was going to cost ten times more than the fifty million dollars that the 'Child Abuse' case had cost.

This was to be serious shit looking at all avenues of the Old Aged Care Industry!

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Denny walked towards my desk, plopping several Search Warrant Writs in front of me.

"The Judge was really edgy this morning. He has only approved four Search Warrants and attached Court Orders. His comment? *'If this proves to be successful, you can come back to me to obtain the rest. If this exercise proves unsuccessful, then you are to stop this witch hunt at once. Understood, DS Turner?'*

"At least it's a start" I replied, happy that we had any. "Boss? I've been thinking..."

"Why do I think I'm about to have the wool pulled over my eyes?" She smiled.

"Nah...fair dinkum. We are going in search of Medical Charts from an almost forty-year span. Both Shells and I will have trouble reading some of the scrawl adopted by Doctors and we will have bugger-all chance to decipher most of the Patient's medical stuff that involves the way she primed these elderly people for a premature death..."

"Mmm...I never thought about that...some-one from the Forensic Pathology Department out at Lidcombe. They basically do the same Medical Course that Doctors do, only branching off at the last moment to specialise in Forensic Pathology and dissecting bodies...anyone in mind?"

"Who-ever is available, Boss...it may sound better if the request came from you..."

"I knew there was going to be a hook..." She smiled and then laughed. "Okay, what is your time-frame?"

"We've got approval for four". I stated as I quickly leafed through the bundle. "One at Sutherland and one nearby at Woollooware...and two at Miranda. Shells? What do you reckon? Do the two at Miranda first as they are closer...a day, two at each one? Yes...let's make it for the day after to-morrow. We can spend the rest of to-day ringing all four Practises asking that they provide all the medical history of each of our Victims...that will give us a full day to organise stuff from this end".

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

“Joe?” Hendo sauntered up to my desk. That expression that he gets when he is about to hand out another Case.

I was still in wake-up mode having completed twenty laps and fifteen minutes on the Running Machine...and I was only halfway through my first coffee of the day. Hendo's presence in my sphere was definitely not welcomed...I said as much!

“What, I'm Johnny on the spot, eh? Hendo? Do not hand us another Case right at this moment. Who is next in line, Hendo?” I asked, turning to our irreplaceable Head Clerk, hoping like hell that it wasn't another Case. We had eleven homicide Cases, four of which we intended to begin investigating properly on the morrow.

“No...it's nothing like that...” He looked at the piece of notepaper he was holding. “A Ms. Jane Launder is asking for you...she is down in the Ground Floor Foyer”.

“What!??? I don't know whether it is a good idea that we see her. It could blow the whole Case against her out of the water. At the moment, we have circumstantial evidence at best, with most built just on our posturing, built on gut-feelings, supposition, and maybe's. What do you think, Boss?”

“I don't think it would hurt your Case as long as you don't mention it. Let's see what she wants...it maybe all she is asking is the going price of fish in Denmark. Bring her up here and plop her in Interview Room Two. I'll have a word with the Technician as he is on duty looking after the equipment concentrating on Interview Room One...there's a session going on in that Room at the moment...let's do it”.

Shelley and I sat down to nut out a rough strategy.

“Let me come in unexpectedly after you have completed the niceties and small talk, eh? It may throw her a bit”.

I had never met the woman, so I approached the Security Desk.

“Arrh, yes Detective...she was here a moment ago...there, sir. That woman sitting down...in the dark blue outfit.

“Miss? Mz. Launder?” I asked as I approached her. She looked me up and down as she stood. A tall woman...slender for a fifty-odd year-old woman. “I understand you asked for me?”

She looked nervously about at the parade seeming to be going somewhere in a hurry. She rubbed the back of her neck, before looking fixedly at me.

“Is there somewhere where we can talk in private?”

“Yes, certainly. What is this all about? Do you want a coffee?”

“Hah, I’m all coffeed-out...I think I’ll be peeing the stuff for the next week...no thank you. I’m alright”. She gave out a nervous giggled, looking apologetically at me.

I arranged a Visitor’s Security card for her, and she followed me as I headed towards the Lift Lobby.

We settled into Interview Room Two. The Boss had nodded her head as we came onto the Murder Squad Floor before entering Room Two to let me know we had both video and audio ready for this room.

I sighed deeply as I sat, complaining sadly about my phantom arthritis, just to start up the small talk. I doubted she needed the small talk to relax her. She seemed completely relaxed as it was!

“Your body tells you when it thinks it’s just about had it for the duration.

“You’re too young to retire yet, Detective...you’re what? About my age...mid-fifties? It is me who would love to retire right now...”

“What do you do?”

“Come, come, Detective. Let’s not play games. You have requested the medical history of several of my Patients who it would seem, could have...I repeat, could have died prematurely...I still have a lot of friends in a fair few Nursing Homes. I have worked in the field all of my life...and old people can be the best at trying to bullshit me...you need a lot more practise to get to their level, let me tell you...”

There was a slight knock on the door and Shelley came in looking as though she had just run a half-marathon. All frazzled and absent-mindedly as she took forever to settle into the chair beside me. She smiled at the woman sitting opposite, then at me.

“Have I missed anything? Sorry about my tardiness...” She looked at the woman and smiled.

The woman shook her head as she sat more upright. I was of the opinion she saw through our charade...she was no dumb or dumber! She lifted a Laptop from her shoulder bag and placed it gently onto the stainless-steel sheeted table that was anchored securely to the floor. She also placed a sheath of papers that was a list of something neatly beside the Laptop.

“Detectives? I know you have begun proceedings to examine my life...my career as a Nursing Sister. Primarily you are concerned with...what shall we say...the premature deaths of elderly people on my Shift...would that be correct?” She did not wait for a reply from us. “You have organised visits to four Nursing Homes over the next couple of days...all where I worked as the Sister-in-Charge of the Night Shift for some time”.

She sighed deeply before she spoke again.

“I obtained my Nursing Certificate in Nineteen Eighty-six and since then I have obtained One through five Certificates in my chosen career. I have always worked in the sphere of looking after elderly people...and during that time I have doctored the medicinal regime of twenty-nine old people causing their premature demise...”

I blinked several times. Twenty-nine!! We supposed eleven tops...both Shells and I sat there like stunned mullets, finding it difficult to accept what was just confessed to us.

“I am not a murderer, Detectives. All these people were dying...all in a most tortured state...they were being kept alive when there was no sane reason on earth why that should be so...”

“In your mind, you euthanised them? All twenty-nine? You did them a favour...in your mind?”

“I saved them from further pain and an existence dulled by medication...from where I stand, I helped them to die...which should not be an offence. It is cruelty in the extreme...we show more compassion when it comes to the decision to put down a pet that has been your companion for ten...maybe fifteen years. We cry over the decision with most people being present as they die...the family pets drawing their last breath knowing they had been loved...but us humans have no such compassion when it comes to our loved ones...instead we watch them day after day as they slowly...and in most cases...painfully die. It could take but days, weeks or even months. What type of reward is that for a person who has done the right thing all his life?”

I leaned back in my chair glancing at Shelley who looked very worried.

“Um...”

Before I could go any further, she slid across the sheath of papers that she had extracted from her voluminous shoulder bag.

“What’s this?” I asked, a little nervously.

“The date...the Nursing Home with address and telephone number; my Shift hours; the Patient’s name and current ailment at that time; the time that was left for him and the date he died...with a short-hand description on what drugs I gave him to shorten his pain...if that is all?”

She stood, picked up the Laptop and headed towards the door, throwing her bag over her shoulder and her Laptop under her arm.

We let her go...we were still in a state of shock.



“Arrh...Mz. Launder? We need to escort you out of the building”. This was all I could muster.

As Shelley and the woman stepped into a Lift, Denny Turner came to sit opposite me.

“Did I hear right? Twenty-nine? And you have all the details you need to conduct the investigation to confirm her...um...her deeds? She was so calm about it...she thinks she is in the right...that she has done the right thing all the way through her career...as though she was destined to carry out these...these...I really don’t know if I can callously call it murder?”

I nodded. While my personal opinion could very well align with the woman’s take on things, euthanasia as a lawful means to die was not even a Law in our State...and would never be according to several leading Politicians...every one of them religious!

“Until the Law is changed which some say will never happen, it is murder, not euthanasia...or mercy killing...or assisted homicide or what-ever other name is conjured up to describe the act...twenty-nine counts of murder...jeez, we’ve got our hands full for some time unearthing the medical history of all these people. We’ll need that confirmation before we can arrest and charge the woman...”

“No...the latest...just concentrate on the four that you have a Court Order for to examine their medical files while dying in some Nursing Home. We can arrest and charge her with one, two or three. It doesn’t matter...while we go through the usual Bail App., Preliminary Hearing and waiting for Trial Time, you can investigate and charge her with the other twenty-odd deaths. The DPP will more than likely only pursue her on one charge that is the easiest to prove...jeez...I didn’t see this coming...”

“Could we have held her? Now?”

“On suspicion, yes...we could have charged her and permitted Bail while we strengthen our Case against her...it doesn’t matter, I somehow think she is not a flight risk...”

Hendo came into the small room and sat heavily beside Turner. He looked pale and his hands were shaking.

“What a mess...I think I need to go home, Boss...”

“Why? What’s happened?”

“That woman who was just here? She walked out into the path of a Bus...killed instantly I’d say...what has she supposedly done?”

“Killed twenty-nine patients in her care...”

“What? Shit...she looked like a really nice woman. She even gave me a smile because I caught the same Lift as she and Shelley down to the Lobby...she seemed as though she didn't have a care in the world...twenty-nine people? Dear God!”

“Yep...depending on where you stand, it is as simple as a different perspective”.

I ran my fingers through my thinning hair showing my frustration and exasperation at the latest incident. A dead person cannot be charged and sent through the Court System to be found guilty...all we had was the preparation of the Report that would find its way to the Coroner. Hopefully, his Findings would be that the Launder person would be the *only* Person Of Interest in the homicide murder of twenty-nine Patients in various Nursing Homes and Aged Care facilities on the South Coast.

Not a moment of success or exhilaration, but what the heck, we had to get our sense of justice from something, even it was purely the POI being named as the Number One Suspect in the Coroner's Findings!

Pcb 17/04/2019

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