


OLD MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES
JOSEPH LIND
AND
SHELLEY ANNE SHIELDS

HABITS
**DIE**

A
Crime
Novella
by
HARD
PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES

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CHAPTER ONE

In Fairfield and Canley Vale, neighbouring suburbs on the main south-western rail-line out of Sydney, there is one after the other. Both sides of many streets. A blight that sprawled across the near western suburbs in the Sixties and Seventies. Small Builders getting a foothold in the building boom. In the Property Development market. Several large Building Conglomerates that now dominated the Australian Unit Development market began their illustrious careers in this manner.

These little monstrosities either constructed of bland blond brick or wire-cut red brick, rising three floors above an open parking area as minimalist cubes or rectangular blocks. Either flat roofs or pitched, terracotta-tiled roofs that did not do much for the aesthetics of these complexes...or the neighbouring streetscape.

During one or two Christmas Holidays and yes, mid-year Holidays when I was sixteen or seventeen, I had laboured on a building site just like these ones once were. Many young kids did so to earn 'pocket money', University fees or money for Backpackers to continue their roam around Australia. The money earned enabled me to get a car when I turned eighteen. My Nanna had laid down the law that she could not afford to help in the purchase *or* the running of the car so it was left up to my devices. It was my responsibility.

Many a week-end that little faded red Mini sat forlornly in the driveway because I did not have the money to pay for petrol!

So low on money even purchasing fuel for a Mini that ran on the smell of an oily rag proved next to impossible!

A little red Mini that could have done with a cut and polish...or a new duco spray, if the truth be known! Oh! The memories! I often wondered how I survived in that car...and a Mini is not the greatest love-nest alternative at the one Drive-in Theatre still running in the western suburbs during the Eighties! The equivalent of having sex in a Telephone Booth with a chair provided by the thoughtful 'would-be' lover. Everything was against you achieving your goal. Too little room for arms, legs and bodies trying desperately to achieve a suitable position. Two heat-fuelled, sex-starved teenagers trying every combination to copulate comfortably, usually failing dismally!

I must admit that by the time I purchased the vehicle, the glamour and status of owning a little red Mini had worn off. More 'groovy' machines were making their mark on young people. I looked on as a poor 'throw-back' and chicks of that time not turned on by my little Mini as had been the case in the hey-day of the vehicle in the Sixties...and by then, even base model vehicles had 'layback' seats...or a decent back seat to migrate to comfortably!

But I digress...my mind flung back to those times as Shelley drove the Unmarked towards our new Case of Homicide through suburban streets that had a faint familiarity about them.

These ugly little Unit complexes the disease of the sixties and seventies where very little imagination was utilised to design these rectangular brick edifices. Three storeys high. Any higher and Building Regulations demanded that you included a Lift. An elevator to all floors, plus fire-rated access/escape stairs. That financial disadvantage too much to consider, with the return added outlay not commiserate with the asking price of each Unit.

Usually four or eight small two Bedroom Units to each floor. Two or more on either side of each stairwell landing was the standard design if the block of ground permitted such an arrangement. If not, then one Unit either side of this access stairwell landing was the norm. Open parking positions on the ground floor or perhaps individual garages with swing up garage doors in the classier suburbs. An excuse for a Balcony, one to each Unit. Small and narrow as though the Builder or Developer had originally intended to overlay the concrete floor with gold leaf, thus the reduced size, but opted out at the last minute when the cantilevered Balcony floors already formed up, and the concrete poured. Their life now one of a neat concrete finish, not even tiles to brighten up the floor area!

As I have stated, not much imagination or architectural input required in those days!

On the narrow, short Balcony you had enough space for a chair to sit on with your feet firmly positioned on the top railing of the open, wrought-iron balustrading. The narrowness forcing you to bend your knees almost to your chest! The only way to straighten your legs was to let them cantilever out over the top of the railing. Your calves resting uncomfortably on the top hand-railing.

The only time that you conversed with your fellow Unit neighbour was perhaps when you were both out on your Balcony having a smoke, a stubbie in hand. The entire neighbourhood aware of the conversation. The words echoing off the straight, bland brick sides of neighbouring Unit complexes that squeezed each other tightly as that is how close each neighbouring building was.

CHAPTER TWO

This morning, as was his habit whenever the weather permitted, Josh Blackwood had just finished his breakfast and was sitting outside on the Balcony having a smoke. The last before he went to bed. A coffee mug on the concrete floor beside him. The sliding glass door into the small Lounge/Dining area closed tightly so that the smelly cigarette smoke did not waft inside.

His missus had laid down that law. No smoking inside the Unit, especially now the Bubs was born!

He had knocked off work only an hour and a half before after a tiring night of deliveries for the Firm he had worked for since coming out of Prison on parole several years previously.

He had behaved himself, had a clean sheet with the Boss who had given him this second chance of life and believed in him and he was deliriously in love with his young missus. He was happy with his lot. His Boss wanted him to get a License that would enable the young man to drive large articulated vehicles and Double 'B's. To drive long-haul stuff. The Boss looking to expand his business and he needed, so he thought, Drivers he could trust and who would treat these behemoths with respect and care. They were a huge financial investment for the small Firm.

Josh was the chosen man to begin the operation but the young bloke was not in favour of that idea as it would mean more time away from his wife and new bubs.

He had talked it over with his missus before making that decision. Money may have been better, but hours on the road was shit! He would be away from the family for too long.

He knocked back the offer, much to the disappointment of the Boss, who said regretfully that he understood the young bloke's decision.

The young bloke heard the tickle of breaking glass before he heard the reverb of the first shot. As he stood to look out towards the street that was very close by, he was hit in the chest by a blow that sent him backwards towards the closed sliding glass door. Before he hit the large pane of glass, another belt to the lower abdomen doubled him over. He then fell head-first onto the cold, hard concrete surface of the small Balcony.

His little son screaming at the top of his lungs was all he heard before he heard no more, not even the loud thud as he hit the cold concrete of that narrow, open Balcony. His blood glinting in the early morning sun as it stained the concrete floor of the small area. Not gold leaf but something more valuable...blood, the stuff of life slowly oozing from his inert form.

CHAPTER THREE

We had hardly made the Office when both my partner and I got the ‘call-out’.

Not even enough time to do a couple of laps down in the Sub-Basement Gym. Fifteen on the Rowing Machine and thirty on the Running Machine to be completed this afternoon hopefully...or maybe to-morrow morning to make up for the lost regime.

Once you got in the habit of easily dismissing the daily exercise, it was very hard to adopt the regime again!

That is what I think, in any case.

I stood and stretched. Had a quick glance about over the balustrading of the narrow Balcony at the roadway below. The number of official vehicles parked higgledy-piggledy on the road below amazed me somewhat. I gave some attention at an adjacent Unit Block of very similar design. Looked over at the main rail-line of several tracks on the other side of the road. I wondered on the noise generated by a speeding passenger train.

As if to answer my thought, a train roared passed.

“A simple drive-by shooting, by the looks...” I muttered to no-one in particular.

I pulled at my ear-lobe and ran my fingers threw my thinning hair. Well, that is what I thought, in any case. A daily morning ritual peering into the mirror at the thinning mat of hair, especially on the top of my head...that was very difficult to see a reflection of and required a Shaving Mirror for me to get a look at it by double reflection! Tellie had sprung me doing this one morning and accused me of being a vain old bastard! That did not help matters as the hair remained thin to my way of thinking with my anxiety levels topping out at dangerous levels.

“The guy got colour?” I asked as I straightened up, still looking down at the young victim curled in an almost foetal position.

“No...and that is why we are here and not the Gang Related Crime Unit guys. Our Vic has no known association with any Bikie gang that we know of.” My long-term, silently suffering partner, Shelley Shields replied as she stood to walk back inside the small but neat Unit. Furniture minimal with most good quality second-hand except for the large, flat-screen TV.

“An Associate, perhaps.” I doggedly suggested.

The Bikie link firmly fixed in my mind for no reason except my own misconceptions and intolerances, but ‘drive-byes’ were a favourite ploy of theirs...and the Victim being an ex-crim, he must have slipped back into the ‘easy’ life somehow!

My enthusiasm for a ‘solve’ diminishing rapidly. As far as I was concerned, they could go on killing each other until none of them were left! Not the right attitude for a copper to have, but what the heck, I was becoming sick and tired of their mindless, sick games.

Shelley turned to give me one of her disgusted looks as though she could read my mind.

“Bloody hell! No! I’ll say it again so that your aging grey matter can grasp it! Not according to the GRCU guys.” She stated over her shoulder. Now somewhat miffed by my continued and obstinate musings.

“Mmm...he has put some-one’s nose out of joint, that’s for sure...and we are looking at the typical Bikie way of doing business as a ‘pay-back’ for some slight or imagined crime against a particular gang. The baby hurt at all?” I asked as I followed my partner into the dim interior of the Unit, stepping over the concrete hob that separated the tiny cantilevered Balcony from the inside of the Apartment.

“Flying specks of glass from the shot that went through the Bedroom window-pane hit his face. He has some scratches. A bit of blood. Nothing serious. Thankfully nothing went into his eyes. The mother just missed getting that bullet in her shoulder. Very close. Our Vic, two to the body which may be considered a bit unlucky when you have a look at the way the shots have been sprayed about.” Brenda Wzerlic added quietly, stepping into my conversation with my partner.

She, as the Lead Forensic Pathologist, had followed me inside having completed her examination of the body.

Breecocked her head and raised her eye-brows. A smirk on her face. She knew she was overstepping from her area of expertise. She was doing it to get a rise out of me.

This morning?

Not on.

I was not in the mood.

“You reckon it was meant to be a warning but the guy happened to be out on his Balcony having a smoke. Wrong place, wrong time, eh?”

“Seems that way to me, Joe.” She replied, turning toward me before she began to head for the front door of the Unit. “They say smoking will kill you. Here’s evidence of it! Seen

enough? We want to move the body.” She advised as she propped at the chocked front door. Tearing off her latex gloves as she did so, to deposit into a Bio-bin.

“Yeah...no worries.” Again, ignoring her stir.

She gave me a glance that seemed to ask what was biting me this morning, though prudently, she chose to remain silent. Sometimes the best policy when I was in one of my ‘down’ moods.

I thought then that I should re-engage with the Force Shrink. Even Tellie had remarked on the extended length of my melancholia. I for the life of me, could not work out what was biting me. Even Work was becoming a chore, not the usual happy scene that it once was. Perhaps it was my age catching up with me? Maybe the Male ‘Change of Life’ syndrome, although I was not rushing about wanting to purchase a Sports Car, a Harley Motorbike or endure a trek to Upper Mongolia to prove I still had it!

I again poked my head out through the door opening to look down at the crumpled body of the young man for the last time. He doubled up on himself at an awkward angle. His arms splayed out either side of his torso. His head at an unnatural angle. Wzerlic suggested that he may have broken his neck as he flew backwards impacting the glass door with some force. He then crumpled to the cold concrete floor of the small Balcony.

I wondered why the glass of the door hadnot shuttered from the force of his body hitting it.

A silly and superfluous thought, I suppose.

Shelly interrupted my musings.

I turnedback into the small Lounge Room to listen to her. The room seemingly splitting at the seams with so many people present. It would normally seem full with just two personspresent was my assumption. That is how pitifully small these Units were. There would have to be almost a dozen people milling about, almost shoulder to shoulder.

“Joshua ‘Josh’ Blackwood. Also known as ‘Jake’ Blackwood.” Shelley stated matter-of-factly as she gazed down at her Tablet, totally ignoring my present state of mind. “Did time five and a half years ago for several counts of ‘Drink Driving’ and ‘Driving with a Prohibited Drug in his System’ and ‘In Possession of a Commercial Quantity of Drugs’. Cannabis. Caught five times within an eighteen-month period for DUI. Sentenced to two and a half years. Did twenty months. According to his old Parole Officer, a Robert Sinclair with the Prison Parole Office, one of his success stories. Hasn’t touch drugs, very little alcohol since, so says the Report. A model prisoner while doing time. Turned his life around when out on parole. Got a job almost immediately which he has held since his release. Married and has a ten-month old son. Doing good...and expected to stay that way, according to the man. He has kept a fatherly eye on the guy, so he says. Even after the

parole period expired. Not his normal habit because of the workload, but young Blackwood had got under his skin. Impressed him, he a seasoned old cynical Parole Officer...his words!" She added with a smile.

I nodded my head. Ran my fingers through my hair to realise that *it was* thinning, so I thought. I cocked my head and gave my scalp a scratch. Pulled at my ear-lobe.

"He has gone off the rails somehow." I stated sadly. Again, going back to the tried and tested explanation that I was familiar with...and felt comfortable with. "Gone back to the bad old days of easy money. The 'Boys' don't go around shooting up a particular Unit for nothing, do they? With the result they killed their target, instead of just giving him a warning...he has trod on some-one's toes, that's for bloody sure!" I remarked quietly. My partner gave me one of her condescending looks. Glanced at BreeWzerlic who nodded her head slightly, agreeing with Shelley's unstated negative opinion of me as she disappeared down the stairwell.

"Target practise maybe." Shelley replied patronisingly. "For something else they've planned, perhaps. Maybe even the wrong address...it's known to have happened before...who else lives in this complex?"

I didnot know. I turned to the Lead Uniform on-site and asked the question.

"My boys are still knocking on doors. They'll have to repeat the process later to-night as most residents have left for work presumably...as they're not answering the door knock."

"Mmm...yeah. No peep-holes, spy-holes on any of the doors?"

"No...I don't think so."

I asked the question merely because there would be some who would refuse to open their front doors after spying Uniform Cops on the other side as they peeked through their 'spy holes'. Call me cynical, but it was a known reaction to a copper knocking! And there was nothing we could do about it, even if we had an inkling some-one was standing on the other side of the door.

"Okay, let us know how you go...and provide us with a complete list of names of all residents. I think we should do a background check on the lot just to make sure it wasn't a warning meant for some-one else in the building...and the young bloke copped it by mistake. Be a crying shame if he did...bloody bad luck!"

CHAPTER FOUR

“Your husband? He served time.”

It came out as a statement, not a question. Not a good start. I knew that the grieving young widow would be on the defensive straight away due to me not thinking before I opened my mouth.

The opening gambit failed dismally as she jumped down my throat! I will say that she would have heard all the banter that occurred that morning within her Unit. It was not that large that conversations were lost in the distance!

“Jeezuz, you guys. You never let them fucking be, do you?” She had shredded several tissues, now a ball of wet yuk in her hand. “He did time, yeah! Hated it inside and never fucking wants to go back there again. He tries so hard...he’s a good husband, a good father, comes home every day after work, and I love him so much. I don’t know what I’m gunnado now...without him. Leave him alone, will you? He is a good person! He just went off the rails a bit when he was younger and he’ll be the first to say he was a fucking idiot at the time! Just give him credit where credit’s due, will you?”

She was sitting on the edge of the double bed holding the Bubs in her arms. She began sobbing again, angrily taking another Tissue from the box on a bedside chest-of-drawers to curl around the large glob that she held. The baby resting fitfully in her arms. Small scratches on his tiny cheeks the result of small shards of flying glass. The Paramedics had cleaned up the small wounds. Superficial, they said.

I shuffled my feet and felt a pang of guilt.

The words like others I had often heard when-ever it was thought we were hassling a former Crim who was trying so hard to stay straight...most did not! That was our experience in any case...but then we only saw those who did not stick to the straight and narrow once released, so how were we suppose to know!

In my defence, I knew that the recidivist rate was very high. Surprise, surprise. As long as the Penal System is used for punishment only, then that rate will not change. It seems that only those with a bit of back-bone and ones who have never touched drugs or alcohol are more likely to succeed in remaining out of prison once they had served their allotted sentence.

The rest?

It is a revolving door!

Some could argue that my cynicism was shading my ability to look at the situation in an impartial manner. Maybe yes, maybe no!

Shelley sat down beside the young woman and casually placed a hand on the woman's shoulder to show sympathy for her loss.

The room just big enough for the Queen-size bed and a small chest-of-drawers on either side of the bed. A bedside lamp on each. One with several framed photographs. A swatch of brightly coloured material above the bed-head. The bed neat and tidy with a multi-coloured Doona cover folded at the bed-end. A built-in Wardrobe with sliding doors at the end of the bed. A large mirror was glued to one of the doors. That was it for the Master Bedroom! You couldn't fit anything else in even if you wanted to!

"Would you have any idea why your Home Unit was targeted? Why your husband would have been the target?" Shelley asked quietly in a soothing voice after giving me a look meant to silence me.

It worked!

"No!!" She cried. "If they had've hit that creep who lives over the road, yeah, I'd get it! But us? I haven't a clue. What am I supposed to do now? I don't have enough money to even pay for next fortnight's rent, let alone pay for food just for little Bobby...where do I go? What do I do?"

I had no answers for her and after about thirty minutes of repetition in both questions and answers, we left. A team of Forensic Trace people would be there for a couple of more hours invading her space. The Ballistics team also would spend the rest of the day searching for bullets and the local Uniform boys would be there in some form or another for a couple more days. Mainly to keep the Media Reps in check.

There was not a mother, Auntie or mother-in-law who would offer solace to the young girl. The marriage successful up until that time despite both family's opposition to the union. A close girlfriend was summoned to help the girl in the coming days. Looking after the young bubs and trying to deal with the death of her husband, thinking what her future would be was the insurmountable subject at this time.

The poor thing, she was on her own, with a new baby and all!

We were still none-the-wiser why the outside of the place would be peppered with 9mm slugs, more than likely from a semi-auto handgun.

We walked glumly from the building after talking to several Uniforms and instructing the Lead Officer what we wanted of him. Mainly another trawl of adjacent neighbours and nearby residents of the Unit Complex after Business hours. Maybe the 'drive-by' was meant

as a warning to another tenant, I did not know, but as the Vic was an ex-crim, that is the way our investigation would proceed...that was a given!

I felt we needed to check on the bloke's mates that he had possibly befriended while in the clink. Shelley angrily thought that a total waste of time as the time lapse was several years.

"He could still be in contact with them...if he had become mates while inside."

"Yeah, yeah...just to close that side of the investigation, I suppose." Shelley angrily retorted.

We would get the Report on the identity of the other Residents in a day or two, though I was not confident of obtaining anything worthwhile or unusual.

Maybe it was just the mood I was in, but this negative feeling had enveloped the entire crime scene area and those who walked through it. I felt that the guy had weakened and started to associate with the wrong crowd again, thus his sudden demise. It was the easier path especially when the young bloke may have thought he was forced into a life he may not have really wanted. Now feeling trapped with his life mapped out for him...maybe. I thought that I should check the date that the two were married and the birth date of the Bubs.

When I mentioned this to my partner, she had walked purposefully and angrily away from me, shaking her head vigorously.

I believed we saw it all the time!

It was not that I believed 'Once a crim, always a crim'...but the lad would be pushing shit uphill if he thought he could turn his back on that life. It was a hard road and there were a lot of people who had preconceived ideas about ex-crims. He had been one of the lucky ones to score a good, steady job not long after his Released date from Prison, but...

Old habits die hard.

"His place of employment?" Shelley asked as she opened the door of the Unmarked. A scowl still evident. It looked as though I would sit in the Unmarked with a 'wall of silence' separating me and my partner for the rest of the day!

I nodded my head in agreement.

We had very few other avenues of investigation open to us.

CHAPTER FIVE

Instead of slumping into the front passenger seat of the Unmarked as I usually did, I thought better of it. I slowly closed the Unmarked's passenger front door as I told Shelley I would not be long. I walked back under the crime-scene tape that cordoned off the entire length of street in front of the Unit complex to stand beside the small group of Ballistics guys. They were playing with some type of laser equipment, as a couple of their colleagues balanced precariously about the small Balcony where Blackwood unluckily met his end. They were identifying and marking each ricochet on the façade of the building. By cross-tabulation, they could ascertain the exact position of the shooter.

Whether that was worth the climbing up thirty-foot ladders, I was not too sure, but I admired their resolve.

There was no way you would have me scaling a thirty-foot ladder to examine a nick in a brick!

"Anything?" I asked, thinking perhaps I was a little early in my request.

A tall chap turned towards me and excused himself from the pack of Officers.

"Ballistics Officer Jerry Branson, Detective. We've spoken several times over the phone on other Cases." He stood tall, offering his hand. "The George Hillier Shooting Homicide a while ago now was one of them that I remember. The greyhound trainer. Parramatta Park. Some idiot was determined to wipe out every male in Sydney with the surname of Hillier, if my memory serves me correctly."

I nodded my head. For some reason that Case had stuck with me. A Bad Seed the culprit, from memory.

"Yeah, well...the shooter was a woman from memory...and not exactly every Hillier in Sydney, but a few did die before we got the culprit thanks mainly to your evidence."

Not exactly true, but it never fails to give a little compliment occasionally. Especially to these 'back-end' boys who are several steps removed from the furnace. They would rarely get the thrill of cornering the prey. Of being a part of the investigation when they were so far removed from the pointy end.

"Yeah, good job." I smiled at the Leading Ballistics Officer. "I always thought you guys were stuck in the Office..."

"Usually are, as cases like this don't come along that frequently, so it's good to get out when-ever we can. According to the Station Sergeant, there were several witnesses...people

who looked out their windows when the shooting commenced. A small, dark SUV...model and make indeterminate, momentarily paused at this position...or near enough to this position to commence shooting. The Shooter emptied his handgun...possibly ten rounds into the side of the building...over the top of his vehicle.”

“That would put him on the wrong side of the road, you think?” I looked around at our position.“As you are located here? In the parking lane? Facing away from Railway Parade?Cutting across the road because this was the only vacant parking position available, perhaps...he sees his Target sitting out on the Balcony so he swings his vehicle to the wrong side of the road....”

“According to two witnesses who reside in that Unit Complex there, opposite our Crime-Scene, yes, the vehicle veered across the road to this parking lane, stopping suddenly as though he spotted his target out on the Balcony...possibly drove past here several times a week and this was the first time his target was visible. He hopped out of his vehicle and fired off a complete magazine over the roof-line of the vehicle...”

I nodded my head, thinking about his words. I looked up and down the street and then peered up at the Balcony where Blackwood had died. Pulled at my ear-lobe which was a habit when I was thinking deeply, concerned at so many guesses with no facts stated.

“Mmm...we have no evidence that the shooter drove past here on several occasions wanting to spot his target out on the Balcony. If that was the case, this constant driving by, then the shooting was deliberate, a planned exercise and not a random ‘drive-by’ spraying of bullets...would that be a fair assumption?”

Ballistics Officer Branson realised that he was getting into deep water. He shook his head, smiled then pursed his lips, looking a little embarrassed.

“I should keep my mouth shut, eh Detective?” He retorted.

“No, not at all. All these...arrh...assumptions...theories from other Officers can be helpful.”

I surprised myself with that answer, wanting to be conciliatory for a change, not wanting to get the man off-side. A first for me, perhaps. I smiled to myself and tucked the information away in my grey matter. It could be useful as the Case unfolds.

“So, the driver of the vehicle was the Shooter. You could assume that he was on his own in that vehicle...that goes without saying, don’t you think?”

“Yes, Detective. I’ll go along with that summation...” He smiled as he realised he was offering an opinion again not based on known facts at this stage.

“Shell Casings?”

“We have retrieved a dozen. More than enough to obtain comparison firing pin characteristics. Most of the slugs maybe too damaged after ricocheting off the brick building façade to be able to get comparison characteristics...”

“How many slugs have you retrieved?”

“Only a few...but we will keep searching. From what the Forensic Pathologist indicates, the Deceased has two bullets in him which may give us more. We’ll let you know. We think it was a Colt semi-automatic. The shell casings are for a point three two bullet which would confirm that type of handgun. A Colt...could be an early Berretta, a Browning. We’ll know more when we examine what we got, back at the Lab.”

I nodded my head, slapped the Officer on the back to indicate a job well done and walked back towards the Unmarked.

Shelley had remained in the vehicle, the motor ticking over, the air-conditioning on full bore, fiddling on her iPad.

“Anything?” She asked tersely as she continued to pay attention to her iPad. “I’m just putting some words together on this morning’s proceedings for the Murder Book. Okay?”

“Yeah...one of us should.”

I relayed what I had learned.

“Mmm...a targeted shooting, by the sounds of it...maybe...perhaps. So it seems. You reckon?”

Her tone of voice not filled with confidence. I didnot like her dilly-dallying, wondering how she could be so indecisive when all the indications led to a positive conclusion. Just like her, I thought angrily. She did it regularly on crime-sites.

I rubbed my face with my hands, wanting to rub away this shitty melancholia.

CHAPTER SIX

“Conrad Beyerfeld.” He introduced himself, shaking my hand and then Shelley’s. “You’re cops, so my girl tells me. How can I help you guys?”

He was short of breath, having trotted from a group of sheds some distance away down the back of the Yard.

A small, rotund bloke with a grey, receding hair-line, a chubby face, and alert brown eyes. He looked to be one of those guys that ran on nervous energy. He smelt as though he had not had a shower this morning. Either that, or he was a profound sweater even in comfortable temperatures.

He was in my bad books straight way!

I looked around, hoping he would take the hint.

We had waited for some ten minutes while he extracted himself from some far-flung corner of his enterprise. Loudspeakers positioned around the site blaring out his name. The last such summons, more distinct. More succinct.

“Boss, you’re wanted urgently in the Office. A couple of Coppers to see you. Hurry up!”

He scurried towards the three temporary Site-hut buildings that represented the Office complex. We were standing out on the suspended veranda that ran along the length of the building. Several ‘Butt trays’ were positioned on its length indicating that most of the Office Staff smoked. The building up on a framework to permit parking under to possibly conform with local Council requirements for staff parking numbers. The entire yard one large open area except for these buildings and several others joined together on the rear boundary, presumably Mechanical Workshops. A Washdown Bay adjacent in a far corner of the yard.

By the time he hurried up the steps to the open veranda, he had run out of puff and his complexion had taken on a dangerous hue. He shook our hands, wiping his vigorously down the sides of his pants. He kept his smile so it could just be a nervous habit thing and not a reaction to shaking a couple of cops by the hand.

“Your Office, perhaps?” I asked as he stood there transfixed. He looked as though he was having trouble speaking for the moment.

“Yes, of course.” He eventually got the hint, hitting his thigh with an open hand. Hitching up his strides to a high-water mark around his ample waist. “Yes, my Office. Follow me, please.” He huffed out.

It had been a while since I had seen an Office in such disarray.

There was not a flat surface that did not have a pile of paper, Folders and what-ever leaning at precarious angles, threatening to fall when the next earthquake of even minor proportions occurred. Even every square inch of every wall covered in some type of page, graph, or calendar. Blue-tacked to the wall! I was amazed and appalled at the same time. The man had to scoop up a pile of papers off the chairs for us to sit...he spared the exercise for his own Executive chair. He didnot apologise for the mess, so he must think differently about the state of his domain than I did!

Go figure!

“Now, how can I help?” He beamed, clasping his hands together on his expanded stomach. Swivelling slightly in his chair which gave out a small squeak on each turn!

I found that bloody annoying! I was on the verge of suggesting he return to the Mechanics Workshop to retrieve a can of light oil to apply! Maybe some WD40, perhaps!

“Um...You have a young bloke working for you...Joshua Blackwood?”

“Joshua, yes. Jake...there are three Joshuas on the night shift which is from eleven the previous night through to eight in the morning. We have given them all knick-names so we can distinguish them and it makes the Delivery Schedule that much easier...yes, Jake. A good boy. Respectful, punctual, knows how to treat his truck, never been in an accident...or even close that we can determine...he has Aboriginal blood in him...somewhere...”

I couldnot see the relevance of that last piece of information unless he thought that most of that race were the complete opposite! That would be a slap in the face to the Race, for sure! The man showed his true character perhaps. Maybe a racist, but thought of a Saint because he employed ex-crimis and managed to keep most on the straight and narrow on the road to rehabilitation.

“You know you can rely on him to complete his rounds every shift...yeah...one of those employees every Boss dreams of having. Pity about some of them...so...Jake? Why are you asking questions about the boy?”

“He was shot to death this morning...”

The guy spluttered, turning an ugly hue.

I asked was he okay, half rising from my chair. Getting a wave of a hand as his reply.

He stood slowly from his black leather Executive chair and walked unsteadily to a small Bar Frig to extract a bottle of water. Took several hurried gulps to wash down several pills that

he jiggled from a pill jar that he had taken from a desk drawer. He held onto the edge of his desk steadying himself as he returned to his chair.

“Sorry, Officers.” He apologised as he slumped back into his chair. “Dead, you say? Shot!? Jake? How!?”

“It is early in the investigation but it would appear to be a ‘drive-by’ incident. Would you know why anyone would want the young mandead?”

“Me!? God no...as I said before, he was a model employee...a delight. I paid him more than the other drivers because I thought he was worth it...you know? Yer mad if’n you don’t want to keep guys like him...dead! Why? I have no idea. There wasn’t a person here who didn’t like him. He was that popular. In fact, I was thinking of making him my Yard Overseer on day duty pretty soon. He had a brain and knew how to use it...and he knew how to treat his colleagues without being judgemental or over-bearing. He would make a better task of it than my existing Yard Overseer...jeez...um...if there is nothing else, I’ve been on duty all night. I think I should go home...maybe via my Doctor...I don’t feel that good.”

I immediately forgave the man for not showering, especially as he had been on-duty all night. I knew from personal experience what it is like when some had a heavier BO more than others.

“Could you give us a list of all his close co-workers? You know, work-mates. Friends he may have here. We would like to question them, if we may. When it suits...”

“As I said, that would be everyone about...oh, maybe a couple of blokes his own age...nah, Bill was like a father to him...so Bill too...all those Drivers on Night Duty...the one Office guy who worked to midnight...most of the Day Shift...and the Office Staff. Everyone, Officers, in my employ...” He half-muttered to himself, as though his mind was unravelling.

“The names and addresses would be greatly appreciated...” I prompted.

“Yes, sure...” He looked over at me as though surprised that I was sitting in his Office. Glanced at Shelley with the same expression on his face. “Um...a moment. You want their names and addresses. Those on his shift and some whom he was mates with on Day Shift. Um...yes.”

He removed a thick sheath of papers to place it on another pile that seemed to be growing from the time that we sat. It now leaning precariously to one side. In moving the pile, he exposed a keyboard. He began tapping away, shaking his head all the time, muttering incoherently to himself. A Printer whirled to life on a table beside his desk. It too, buried in several piles of paper.

“These I guess, would be his closest mates here...if you don’t mind?” He stood, showing us the door.

He was still an ugly colour!

CHAPTER SEVEN

Maybe it was a bad idea to try and interview these guys at this hour of the day. That is, those Night Shift employees who worked with Blackwood.

We woke up everyone of them which did not bode well for cooperation, pleasant replies, and welcoming manners.

In fact, two slammed their doors in our faces when they discovered we were cops!

“Yeah, well, I guess I don’t blame them...” I muttered as we drove away from the last address on the list. “I’d not be happy either to be woken from that deep sleep by two coppers pounding on the front door...I guess we will have to organise ourselves better so that we are on-site at the Yard when the Night Shift drivers come off duty and the Day Shift guys start...you volunteering?”

“No bloody way...and you know what the Boss thinks of extended working hours, O/T and ‘Time off in lieu’. None of it exists at the moment.”

“Then how the hell are we supposed to interview these guys?”

“Get the local guys involved or continue to knock on doors like a couple of Evangelists!”

“Could be worse, I guess. Seventh Day Adventists...”

“Or young Mormons wanting to save their souls. All bright-eyed and bushy-tailed! White shirts and black skinny ties...it must be some type of mandatory uniform they are expected to wear whenever out in public on their ‘Mission’.”

Shelley gave me one of her looks. I accepted it graciously. It was for free!

We learnt little from the sleepy persons who did answer their doors to give us the time of day. All confirming that young Jake Blackwood was a top bloke. His death a complete mystery to them. The common reply was that no-one would want to kill him. He was a top bloke, having not an enemy in the World.

“What for?” They asked, shocked looks on their faces. “There was no reason. He was on the straight and narrow and they were hoping to buy their own home this year...they had started looking around...shit! What a bloody waste of a good bloke! His missus? A real cool chick. Shit! She’s gonna be lost without him...shit!”

“What now?” Shelley asked as she put her seat-belt on and started up the Unmarked.

“I really don’t know. Maybe if we wait for the Ballistics Report we may have a match to previous situations...crime scenes or drive-byes...that could give us a direction and a possible name...” I did not sound convincing.

“That may tell us that the gun has been used before but not by whom or the why!” Shelley spat out angrily. “Here’s a guy who has turned around his life and is making a fair fist of it...is shot for no apparent reason...it’s not fair, is it?”

“No, it’s not. Never has been and never will be, I’m afraid.”

“The Bible according to Saint Joseph.” Shelley blurted out as she began to giggle. “Is that what you advocate for all the sinners when you knock on their door?”

I laughed.

“I don’t own a skinny black tie...No...I yell out at the top of my voice that it is all a hoax that has been instilled onto the populace for several thousand years...place the word ‘Hope’ instead of ‘God’ and you have the reason why it has lasted so long...and people required it back then in Year One AD and to-day, a promise of everlasting life of a magnitude that one will believe that someday...after death, a better life exists...can you really believe that? False ideology in the extreme...who would be so dumb to accept such fiction when the original reason was to keep the populace malleable and obedient. Saved thousands of Roman Legions from being stationed in The Holy Land to quell rebellious outbursts from young Christian rebels...and the gullible and those who require a crutch to live out their pitiful lives still grasp onto it enthusiastically! These people still exist to-day and cannot believe in anything else but something that was written by a muck of Monks in some back room almost two thousand years ago who didn’t have a clue about the Darwinian theory, life on other Planets, the leaps and bounds in Medical Science since then and that LGBTI people do not have a choice in their style of living exactly as heterosexual persons do not have a choice in their sexuality or gender...”

Shelley glanced across at me as she followed the line of traffic, a smirk her thoughts on the matter. She could so easily get me on my soap box...she succeeded on nearly every occasion.

“Tell me, what is your conversion rate, oh, Wise One?”

“Next to nil, but that won’t stop me from continuing to try!”

Shelley shook her head, giggled, and swore at some miscreant who broke the rules of the road in front of us. Pity we could not pull these silly bastards over and book them!

“I reckon I would have a better conversion rate than you ever could achieve.” She challenged good-naturedly.

“Yeah!? Maybe we should have a competition on it one day...”

“How are you going to confirm that you have turned a true Believer into a true Atheist?”

“By the fact that he was struck by lightning not long after his inauguration into the growing ranks of my Brethren!”

“Ho, ho, ho and ho!” Shelley countered.

“No...not into the ranks of Santa Believers, but into the Church of Atheism and other Dark Beliefs.”

“Give me strength...” Shelley muttered as she turned the Unmarked out into the intersection to turn right to head for the Office.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I sat with Beyerfeld as the Day Shift Drivers came into the Lunchroom to clock on for the shift. A mug of instant coffee not my standard pick-me-up start to the day which may explain my mood.

I had finished interviewing all of Blackwoods’ mates on the nightshift as they had come in to sign off from their shift that same morning. Only five guys. Most wary of any closeness to a cop and thus were not that helpful. It was only the pleasant nature of their boss that convinced them to be more cooperative! Their narrow experience with any cop was not anything to write home about, as far as they all were concerned. Bad vibes where you could cut the air with a knife made for an uncomfortable couple of hours.

Go figure.

Every person had a Rap Sheet and had done time. I would need to follow up on each guy and his background just to dot the I’s and cross the T’s. A task that would tie both Shelley

and I to the Office for a week or two. Getting sore necks leaning forward towards the Computer Screen for long hours.

Bugger!

I know that I should go and get my eyes checked as I'm told that your eye-sight starts to diminish after the age of forty! In which case I was doing okay at fifty-one and a couple more years before I resigned myself to wearing glasses was something I could live with.

Me vain!? Not on your life!

"They all need that one decent break that will start them off on the right foot." Beyerfeld explained, somewhat exasperated by my shortness with each and every staff member. My depth of mercy and trust not that profound! My abruptness towards his staff getting to the guy as he was the type who believed everyone needed a decent break, and would always be the first to provide it for his staff. A good bloke, but I could never be as enthusiastic or charitable as he. It just was not in my genes!

I nodded my head, not so sure of his charitable take on hiring ex-criminals. Wondering whether he paid the guys below the Award Rate...or something! Call me a cynic! As I have stated before, I had very limited experience with Criminals who stayed on the straight and narrow. All my life experience involved felons never changing...so crucify me!

"Seems the nightshift numbers are well below the dayshift..."

"Yeah. The Dayshift is around three times that of the nightshift...around fifteen drivers...though we have two of those as 'on-call' drivers. These guys knock off around Four in the afternoon so there is a gap of some hours before the Night Drivers show up. The Day Shift are a lot busier on their shift."

I nodded my head.

"You normally work the nightshift? The morning that Blackwood was shot, when we informed you of Jake's shooting death, you mentioned you had worked all night. That your standard time-scale?"

"No, thank God. I doubt I would last very long if I had to become a night person. I really don't know how they do it, the night-shift boys. We had a bit of a problem with the Distribution Warehouse Company which I had to sort out...took most of the night, unfortunately...and we had three Vans off the road that we needed to repair to be ready for the day shift guys...I think I need to employ another decent Mechanic. I have feelers out with the Parole Officers to be on the look-out for one."

I glanced at the man. He was an incorrigible and unquestioning optimist!

“You employ ex-Crims exclusively?”

“Um...yes and no. All my Office Staff aren't such...and about a third of my drivers are the same. To tell you the truth, a lot of ex-Crims have lost their licenses for some reason, mostly drug or alcohol related offences so it is unwise to hire that sort of guy...but there are exceptions...like Joshua...Jake.”

I again nodded my head.

Shelley had not accompanied me on this early morning ‘start’. It was too difficult for her to arrange the transport to make Parramatta so early. I therefore had driven straight from home to the Transport Yard. The Boss, Clive Butler did not need to know of my early commencement on duty. He would have been ropeable as there was nil overtime available and ‘time off in lieu’ had been curtailed for some months.

“Who is that? The Distribution Warehouse Company that you spoke about?”

“The Buzzano Brothers down the street. They have an enormous Warehouse. They do the lucrative Sydney-Melbourne and Sydney-Brisbane routes. We purchased the Sydney Basin and Newcastle and Wollongong Delivery Areas from them around two, maybe three years ago. They have a huge fleet of articulated and Double ‘B’ Trucks and they did not want to worry themselves with vans...beats me as that is where the moolah is...in the suburban runs. Small Van runs. Wollongong through to Newcastle.”

I did a double take at the name.

Beyerfeld noticed.

“You had dealings with the Buzzano Brothers?” He asked earnestly.

“Yeah...gee...a while ago now. Their father...um...’Spot’ Bezzano...he was involved in drug distribution with a Biekie gang in SA...Hells Angels I think it was...that was in the sixties...yeah, the Hells Angels from memory. He went missing with his body only found...about five years ago...no, closer to ten years ago now. I inherited the Case as an ‘Unsolved’ from a long-term Murder Dick who retired...gee...a while back now. The Case had sat on the edge of my desk mocking me as I could not progress the matter...until ‘Spot’ Bezzano’s body found and identified. Shot in the head...yeah, I have had dealings with the Buzzano Brothers...how time flies...”

“Good people, let me tell you, regardless what their father or grandfather may have been. A lot of rumours, mostly unfounded...there’s always some bastard who wants to stir the pot for idiotic reasons only known to him.”

“Oh!? What about? Drug stuff?”

“Distribution, yeah...just gutter talk started by some-one with a chip on their shoulder...um...Jake Blackwood’s missus? I have suggested that she move in to a little Grannie Flat I have out the back of my place. Very comfortable with air-conditioning. The lot. My home a couple of streets away so it’s handier than her current address. My Missus can look after the young bubs while Brandy can work here in the Yard...or maybe the Office. I could do with some-one to tidy up my desk...” He gave me an embarrassed smile. “I’ll charge her a nominal rental fee per week which should help her get back on her feet. To have a young bubs and losing her hubbie the way she did...it’s only right that I help her get back on her feet, otherwise she’ll be down for the rest of her life. She deserves better than that.”

I glanced at him, wondering whether the feat to tidy up his office was achievable or whether he was taking the mickey out of himself.

“That’s mighty good of you, sir. Mighty good of you.” I stated earnestly, nodding my head to stress the point.

“The least I could do...he was a bloody good bloke...Jake. He will be sorely missed.”

I polished off my coffee and stood, a little dejectedly. I had found out bugger all interviewing Blackwood’s mates, but at least it rounded out the character that was the man. To close one avenue of the investigation, it was also something that had to be done, unfortunately.

The early start...well...about an hour earlier than my normal appearance down in the Gym, not mentioned or rewarded within earshot of the Boss for fear of recriminations and strong language from him.

The Boss was not looking kindly at any additional hours worked. He had a real bee in his bonnet at the moment about extra hours worked. That saying again returned my thought processes back to the Buzzano Brothers.

Why? I had no idea.

CHAPTER NINE

I carefully placed a coffee container on Shelley’s desk as I walked past.

“Oh, thanks for that Joe. You’re a life-saver. How’d you go?”

I shook my head as I removed the clip from my Glock and checked the spout before placing it in my lockable Gun Drawer. Took off my coat and carefully hung it on the coat hanger. I took the spare clip from my belt to lie it beside my handgun. I was the only Murder Detective to carry a spare clip...old habits die hard, is all I will say on the subject. I had some time ago, done away with the ankle holster and the knife, both of which now locked away in my Floor Safe at home. The 'throw-away' totally illegal of course, but a necessity when you worked undercover, like in the bad old days. I flipped my ID Badge off my belt to also dropped it into the lockable receptacle before closing and locking the drawer, pocketing the key.

This process repeated every time that we entered or left the Building. Our handgun always on our person whenever we entered the outside world.

No matter what, we always carried.

I groaned as I slumped into my chair, slowly sipping on my coffee wanting desperately to wash away the insipid and dirty taste of the Instant Coffee that I had endured at the Transport Company this morning.

"Not much...nothing actually." I eventually answered Shelley's enquiry. "The guy was popular, well-respected, diligent and honest...the honest bit seemed to me to be plastered on a bit thick..."

"You are nothing but a suspicious, old bloody cynic, Joe..."

I shook my head.

"Nah...maybe. The Company sub-contracts to the Buzzano Brothers...a name from the past. I think Marge Hendricks had just become my partner when we had dealings with them. Human remains found in a dried-up Billabong out around Broken Hill. A backwater to the Darling River." I laughed at the memory.

Spending several days sinking to my crutch in the ooze...and an entire week-end at an historic Pub in Broken Hill with Dominique Sherbaverst who at that stage was Number Two in the Forensic Pathology Laboratory. She now the Head of the Forensic Pathology Department in WA. Happily married with a couple of kids. We always hooked up whenever she travelled east for some Course or other, usually she as the Guest Speaker. Catching up, usually at a Dinner hosted by Muscles and Marge. Tellie not privileged to that piece of ancient history. She had hinted after one such Dinner that there were sparks between Dom and I. I pretended not to notice and denied any such attraction to the woman...but oh! The memories!!!

I shook my head to rid it of the ancient reminiscences and to wipe the smirk from my face.

“The remains were those of the two Buzzano Brothers’ father. ‘Spot’ Bezzano. A shot to the head his going away present administered by The Angels Bikie gang members who thought he was short-changing them on drugs. Two sadistic felons are doing ‘life’ for the killing, never to be released. That murder along with a string of others including the shooting death of my first wife...”

Shelley looked astonishingly at me. I thought I had told her about my first wife Helene and how she had died. Apparently not, going on her expression. I was amazed that the memory of Helene still caused me to choke up a bit. I was surprised that it did after so many years...over twenty years in fact!

She cocked her head, a questioning look, wanting to know more.

“Um...I’ll tell you about it another time...where was I? Yeah, the brothers changed the surname to Buzzano when the Delivery Carrier Service was implemented.” Again, I laughed. “Buzz Buzzano...as *‘busy as a bee’* was the slogan back in the old days. A small World, huh? Five, ten years ago, about...maybe a little longer. Um...Beyerfeld has taken Blackwood’s widow under his arm, giving her accommodation at the back of his place so his missus can look after the bubs while she tries to tidy up Beyerfeld’s desk! I’d say a long-term arrangement, the way he was talking. A PA maybe a good thing, huh?”

“Good luck with that one...he seems to be one of those rare Bosses...really cares for his employees.”

“Mmm...”

“What! You don’t agree?”

I waved away the query. There was something biting me.

“I’ll tell you something, Joe. Nearly every employee in the Firm...the Drivers that is, has done time...mostly for small-time stuff. The bloke, one of those rare breed, who wants to give the Crims a second chance...and from what he stated the other morning when we questioned him, he has nothing but glowing reports on his people. A good man all round.”

“No-one is that saintly...” I muttered, more to get up Shelley’s nose. “Has he got a Rap Sheet himself?”

Shelley gave me a cold look.

“Fuck you, Joe! You can give me the shits at times! And no, I checked him out early in the piece. A couple of Speeding Infringements and a Parking Fine or two is all this excellent civilian has against his name, and they were obtained when he was a lot younger and before he started up this Courier business.”

She spun her chair around and buried her head into what-ever she was doing.

I left with a smirk on my dial knowing I had got up her nose. I felt proud of myself. Rather childish though, when I thought about it later!

CHAPTER TEN

“You see the Ballistics Report on that Drive-by?”

“Nah. Anything of substance show up?”

“No...a Colt Thirty-Two automatic by all accounts. An early model...another illegal handgun in the hands of a Bikie gang, more than likely...it has a history. Another Drive-by shoot-up of a Tattoo Parlour back in Two Thousand and Ten. There was one shot dead and another injured after which the Shop burnt to the ground. The two bodies were removed before the place was torched. Intel indicates that the Shop run by a Nomad member which would constitute another Gang elbowing into some-one else's turf. Thought to be the work of the 'Fallen Angels' who have morphed into the 'Blind Hunters' MC gang. Both those groups were a splinter group of the 'Angels'. Several members of the 'Fallen Angels' were arrested and charged with various offences back in the day for the two shootings. Two of the top dogs skipped Bail, last seen around some Baltic State living the life of Riley. The 'Fallen Angels' basically gutted at that time, thus the new splinter group now known as 'The Blind Hunters'. The Gang Related guys can be a mine of information if you ask the right questions the right way...and over the phone...”

“Why do you say that?” I asked as she turned to face me. She appeared to be over her dummy-spit.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Why else indeed?” I answered for her when she was not forthcoming. I thought she was having a dig of me. “We need to think along those lines and not be fettered with the sole thought of it being a Bikie incident. What and who were they trying to intimidate if it was a Bikie 'hit'? No-one we can nail down, that's for sure...so what is the alternative?”

There was no answer from my partner and I had no theories to offer to fill the void. Yes, we could surmise it was a targeted attack but we have nothing really to confirm those suspicions. There was not an iota of information that would indicate the Victim had upset anyone! Especially of a nature that would warrant a targeted attack. I said as much. Shelley nodded her agreement.

“Let’s go and interview the Buzzano Brothers...” I suddenly suggested.

“What for?” She asked, surprise in her voice.

The thought had suddenly leapt into my brain.

“To get some background on our Deceased and to see what they think of the Beyerfeld Enterprise and the Beyerfeld Haulage and Delivery Service...and to get out of the Office to stop the frustration growing exponentially on this Case.”

She shrugged her shoulders not following my logic. I had no idea myself, so I was grateful that she did not say anything.

We gathered up our stuff and headed out of the office.

“Where is the Buzzano Business located?” Shelley asked as she negotiated out of the bowels of the Police Building.

“Smithfield...I would imagine it is still at the same address. A stone’s throw from the Beyerfeld property. Just up the road in the same Industrial Park.” I had programmed our destination into the GPS with succinct but annoying instructions from the nasally sounding woman given at every major and minor intersection, so it seemed.

Fair Dinkum, that unseen, annoying woman was going to meet a grisly end at some stage...before I retired, I promised myself.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“You look surprised, Detective. Were you expecting to see my father perhaps? Or my Uncle?”

“Well, yes...both...or either man.” I stammered.

“Come in.” She offered her hand as she opened the door wider into her domain. This one was in total opposition to that of Conrad Beyerfeld’s. Hardly a loose sheath of papers anywhere. A Laptop sat central on a large desk. A couple of photo frames and three telephones and a Mobile in its dock.

“Please, sit. Rita Bezzano. I have retained the family name. I have always considered Dad’s choice to change his name by Deed Poll from Alfonso Bezzano Junior to Buzz Buzzano as rather childish. An Americanism in the extreme that I personally hate!The thing silly in fact,

but my father and Uncle thought it very clever...you had dealings with my father some time ago?"

She looked down at the Laptop screen. Apparently, it was of national importance as she folded the lid quickly. Perhaps she had been playing Spider patience.

"Well, yes. I was trying to remember when, actually. Almost ten, maybe twelve years ago. I was the Lead Detective at the time trying to identify human remains found in a dried-up Billabong...out Broken Hill way along the Darling River. We were required to obtain a DNA sample from both your Uncle and father so that we could confirm the identity of the remains."

"Arrh...my illustrious Grandfather...the infamous Drug Smuggler and Bikie member, yes?An embarrassment to the family name, unfortunately. It still causes an upset tummy at times. Silly really."

I nodded my head.

"Your father?"

"Had a Stroke maybe ten years ago. Left him incapacitated unable even to feed himself. He died some years after that. My Uncle took the incident rather badly. Thought Dad's stroke was some type of omen. He retired leaving the entire Company in my hands. He is very happy and living the life of Riley on the Gold Coast...so, anything and everything you want to know about the Company, you can ask me. I have surrounded myself with very capable personnel who really run the day to daybusiness and not me...you might say that I am just the figure-head...to keep the control within the family. How can I help you?"

"I'm sorry to hear of your loss..."

She waved away the condolences, wanting the interview over as quickly as possible, so I thought. Yep, she was on a run and had completed ten games of Patience in a row! A record for her!

"We're investigating the shooting death of Joshua Blackwood just over a week ago. He was Beyerfeld's top Driver on night duty..."

"I'm afraid I did not know the man...yes, I heard about the incident but that is all. I have very little to do with the running of the Company as I said...and night duty matters even less...same for the Sub-Contractors that we use. Sorry. Beyerfeld would be the best to ask. If there is nothing else?"

I did not like losing control of a conversation. This woman at first was friendly and outgoing, wanting us to be impressed with her status. As soon as the questions turned to why we were at her Office, she was closing the interview down. That made my nose itch!

“Umm...yes! There have been whispers of a drug distribution network set up within your Haulage Firm...”

Shelley shot me a glance, wondering where that had come from.

Rita Bezzano smiled at this, cutting across the rest of my question.

“The Tall Poppy Syndrome, I would suspect.” She looked down her nose at me. “Detective? I am not aware of any such dirty business within the Firm or its several subsidiaries. Drugs and the partaking of drugs by any of my personnel is never tolerated, especially when vehicles, large vehicles are involved and driven long distances on Public Roads. I take that responsibility very seriously...we do regular alcohol and drug tests on all our employees...drivers especially. They show a positive reading, they are out the door quick smart.” She looked down at her tailored Business coat and brushed away an imaginary speck of dust...or dandruff. She looked over at me with a stony look. “Really, Detective, even if I was up to my tits in drug distribution, do you think I would come and confess so easily to you to-day? Please, Detective, grant me a little intelligence, nous and cunning. After all, I have been the successful CEO of this Enterprise for close on ten years and we have been going from strength to strength...I do not need the evasiveness of drug taking or distribution to taint this Firm’s respected name. My father and uncle worked hard for too many years to build this empire to have it tarnished in such a manner...Detectives? If there is nothing else. I said that I could only afford a couple of minutes. I have a meeting to attend.”

She stood and made her way to the Office door. A certain degree of stubbornness and yes, anger in her mien. She felt insulted, I was certain just by the way she held herself. That was good enough for me.

“Officers?” She beckoned with a sweep of her arm as she opened the door. “I have a busy schedule for the day. If you can? If I ever smell a whiff of such carry-ons, you will be the first people I inform.” A smile her assurance.

We shook hands and left the building.

Whisked out quicker than garbage or a super virulent strain of Anthrax.

“Do you get the impression we were given the Order of the Boot?” I asked as Shelley started up the engine of the Unmarked. “One minute she offers that we can ask any question we like as she is the one with the finger on the pulse...and then she states that she has little to do with the running of the Firm...a little evasive, don’t you think, just to be rid of us?”

“Jeez Joe, you are so suspicious of people, you know that? If you were a Doctor, I doubt you would have any Patients! Your bed manners would be appalling!”

“That’s what makes me an excellent Copper...but yeah, maybe a lousy Doctor. She was upset because she felt insulted by the accusation of drug distribution in her Company. If she had of known of any such scam within her Corporation, she would not have been so angry...I reckon she would be more belligerent and suspicious of the accusation. She would have vehemently denied the accusation...because she didn’t, I believe she was telling the truth...”

“Or just not aware of such a scam going on under her nose...”

“Who’s the suspicious one now?”

“Hah...yagotta be kidding!” Shelley turned to me. Disbelief in her expression.

“Shells, just think about it. Grand-dad ‘Spot’ Bezzano saw the wisdom in transporting drugs across the country using long-haul vehicles some twenty, thirty-five years ago, so he encourages the Bikie Gang in South Australia to set up a freight business. They hide squillions of dollars-worth of drugs in two false fuel tanks on each vehicle doing the long-haul Interstate runs that no-one was any wiser about for years...I can’t remember the details of why he was executed, but I seem to remember he branching out to offer other Bikie Gangs the use of the network. No wait...um...the CEO of the Angels thought that he was skimming off the top as the drug load was, according to certain cretins, lighter or had less bulk...that was it...less bulk after it had been transported across the continent as it did not fill up those fuel tanks as it had done when the journey was commenced. Make sense, huh? Doh! It did apparently, to certain Bikie intellectuals...now that is an oxymoron, don’t you think? An intellectual Bikie?”

I looked over at my partner who scowled in response.

I shrugged my shoulders.

“What-ever, a total waste of a good man. Now you have his descendants being in charge of a very large enterprise...a long-haul freight business...doesn’t it make your nose itch?”

“Apples don’t fall far from the tree, you reckon Joe?”

“Yeah, old habits die hard...you’ve got to admit, a ready-made distribution network on the east coast of the Nation in her hands. When it comes down to distributing in the Sydney Basin, Wollongong, or Newcastle areas, the sub-contracted Van Courier business is ideal...but the drugs originate from the parent Company. The BezzanoHeavy Haulage and Freight Company.”

“Ha-huh...yeah...okay...you reckon?” Scorn in the words. “...but...arrh...where does Blackwood’s death fit into this little scheme of yours? Your little piece of fiction!”

“Mmm...yeah...maybe...just maybe, some of these Bikie dudes do not like this Courier Business butting into what had always been their territory. They think Blackwood is acting alone and the shooting was to be a warning for the young bloke to back off...but the bloke was just unlucky to be sitting out on his Balcony...wrong place, wrong time.”

“A bit weak, Joe. Too many holes, I reckon...yagotta think up something better than that I’m afraid, to match the facts of the Case as we know them at the moment.”

“Yer reckon? Give me a better theory, will ya?”

“I’m not into wild theories Joe, just facts! You’re painting a picture of the young bloke that does not fit the facts as we have gathered on the guy...no, sure, I go along with him being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was not the intended target at all, is my way of thinking...it was a sad accident, is all...”

“Or a case of mistaken identity, maybe...”

“Could be, Joe. Could be.”

That made me think along those lines. Not for too long, but at least it gave me something different to think about for a bit!

CHAPTER TWELVE

My mobile began its standard, factory fitted chime.

Long gone were the days of some tune blaring out. A tribute to the Sixties and Seventies when the best music was composed. The habit now dead. A pity, really. If maturity meant the cessation of such a practise that represented a fair degree of individualism, then I am sorry that I have matured!

“Where are you, Joe?” Hendo our Chief Clerk enquired.

The only reason he would be asking the question was to load us with another Case. Bet the house on it.

“At Smithfield. A large Industrial Estate out here. Just starting to head towards the Office...”

“So, you’re near Canley Vale?”

“Well, yeah, kind of...why? You don’t need to be so subtle, my man. Just give us the details, will you!”

“Another ‘drive-by’...sorry. Are they linked? That is why you are paid a lot more than me. To find out, huh?”

He gave me the address and the Murder File Number.

“I’ll text the details over to you...”

“It’s almost bloody mid-day...a bit game to carry out a ‘drive-by’ in the middle of the day, I reckon.”

“You know what they say, crime never sleeps, Joe...and it has a while to go before lunchtime, I’m afraid. I doubt I’ll be able to wait that long...”

“Your waistline, young man...you are starting to look as though you are suffering from the dreaded middle-aged spread!”

“Well...as I am fast approaching sixty, I reckon I have held it at arm’s length for quite some time...not like others I know!”

As I rang off, I could hear his laughter echo down the line. I heard the beeps that I had a message come through on my Tablet. I read the details out to Shelley as I programmed the address into the GPS and forwarded the Case details over to Shelley’s tablet.

What did they do in the “old” days before all this stuff...you know, pre-Google days? When I thought about it, I was the of the generation that straddled that time and the digital age. I at some stage, would have had to rely on old-fashion methods and wait until we returned to the Office to receive a new Case.

Now?

It was frightening!

“Bloody hell, you can’t tell me these two Cases aren’t linked...” Shelley commented as she swung the Unmarked around, obeying the ‘headless’ voice that one day will also be speechless. That a promise I intended to keep before I retired as ‘The Voice’ drove me crazy!

“Okay, I won’t.” I countered quickly.

“Railway Parade and Railway Street, Canley Vale. There’s your reason for Blackwood’s death last week. Wrong person! Wrong address! These twits don’t do much research on their intended victim, do they? Like checking out the right address...double checking it...measure twice, cut once. Isn’t that the term used?”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, huh? We ain’t building a bloody house, Shells...”

“Now *you’re* the one who wants to stick to the facts. Man, you can be so infuriating at times, Joseph Lind.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Detectives Serge Hazza and his partner Jack Henley, were already on-site.

The two were colleagues of ours from the Murder Squad. The young Dees had not been with us for that long. Their partnership causing grief within the Murder Squad ranks as both were ‘new’ to the game. The excuse from Clive Butler was that there were no experienced Dees available that the two could be mentored with individually. I shut my mouth about Shells and I being used in such a manner. I did not want to lose my partner of a lot of years. Us as a team split up to partner one each was not on my radar at the moment. As if I had much say in such a decision!

I reckon that CB thought the same.

Splitting the most successful team on the Floor was not the way to go, though we had been split previously when it suited. I guess it was only a matter of time! Both Shells, as a Grade Three and me as a Grade Four, could be used as mentors to young up-and-comers. As I said before, I kept my mouth shut as I did not want the split from my long-term partner. We were both in a comfortable space.

“What? You guys muscling in on our Case?” I asked good-naturedly as I shook both guy’s hands.

“No...we’ve got enough of our own, Joe. Heard the call go out over the Cop airwaves of shots fired. We were only up the road so we thought we’d have a squiz and see if we were needed.”

I nodded my head.

“I hear you got your Sniper this morning. Well done. A quick and easy Case, huh?”

“As if any of them are.” He gave a cut-off chuckle. “Paperwork is more than a pain on any Case. This guy...” He shook his head. “It never fails to amaze me the reasons why Crims do what they do, you know?” As though he had years of experience under his belt! “Our Sniper? He sat up on the southern Headland at Bondi Beach each day for several weeks until yesterday morning when he brings his illegal semi-automatic Ruger rifle with him. His excuse for never turning in his rifle during any of those Gun Amnesties? It was like his baby and he couldn’t bear to think that his baby maybe squashed and burned up...and besides, it had cost him a pretty penny when he had purchased the rifle way back in the dark ages.”

“Why did he start shooting the Surfers as they caught waves? It would have been a pretty hard shot, wouldn’t it...with the Surfers in the ‘take-off’ zone?”

“He wanted to see whether blood in the water attracted Sharks...”

“Bloody Hell...google it, yer silly bastard! That’ll tell ya!!How many did he get?”

“Sharks or victims?”

“Both...”

“Two Surfers with bullet wounds that were non-life threatening. One DOA at the Hospital. Thus our involvement. No sighting of any sharks, but that is contested by several locals who surf that section of the Beach every morning.”

“The absurd reasons for killing your fellow man...what? He live out this way, huh?”

“Yeah, Fairfield South. A stone’s throw away. We have been going through his house...well his parent’s joint, at least.”

I shook my head at the absurdity of some people as I surveyed the scene in front of me.

“Must be a slow day as just about every man and his dog appear to be here.” I looked about me. People in blue bio-suits were scurrying about as though they were vultures at a feast! “How many Deceased here?”

“Just the one, Joe. A targeted shoot, we both reckon. We’ll get out of your hair. Have a good one...the other Vic? It’s touch and go, so we were informed by the Paramedics as they loaded her into an Ambulance...”

“You can stay if you want...”

“Nah, you know what they say about too many Dees...see you in the Office.”

The two Detectives walked up the street towards their Unmarked. A Suburban train roared past on the tracks on the opposite side of the road...Railway Parade. It makes sense. The same Railway Parade that followed the main line through several Stations and suburbs.

I turned to Shelley.

“What do they say about too many Dees being on-site together, Shells?”

She shrugged her shoulders, gave me one of her looks.

“Something about the combined IQ not threatening the temperature of the day...”

“Mmm...they reckon it’s gonna be warm to-day...it already is, out this way. About mid-thirties, I’d say.” The saying still not seeming to sink in.

Shelley gave a groan, shook her head, and walked towards the Officer who had the Crime Scene Register, wondering perhaps when she was going to be rid of this aging cretin.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“What have we got?” Shelley asked the Senior Constable as she signed in on the Crime-Scene Register.

“One Deceased. A single gunshot to the upper chest. Evidence of several others hitting the façade of the building around the Balcony location on the Second Floor Unit. Several shots through the glass of the sliding door that leads out onto the Balcony. The slugs embedding themselves into the internal Lounge Room wall opposite. Several shots through a front window that was the Kitchen. A bullet hitting the missus of the house. In the head, not good.”

“The Victim was sitting out on the Balcony?”

“Yes, having a cup of coffee...he works Night Duty and was getting ready to retire...”

Another suburban train roared passed. I turned to watch its progress. Glanced at my watch. It was close to ten in the morning.

“A lousy place to live if you are working odd hours...” I commented.

“I’m told you get used to it to the extent you don’t even hear them roaring passed. I live in a Villa Unit right on the Highway up near Wahroonga. I don’t even hear the traffic day or

night...you get used to it...oh, maybe the occasional hoon burning rubber...the odd siren, but nothing else really.”

I nodded my head. I doubted I ever would get use to such a scenario. But then, I lived in a quiet backwater away from any main roads or through-traffic noise. The sound of a clock ticking was enough to keep me awake on occasions!

“Who’s the Forensic Pathologist on-site?” I asked as I noticed too many people in Bio-suits crammed out onto the cantilevered Balcony. I wondered on the ability of the structure to support so many bods!

“Um...Daniel Pogowski. He has three Assists...two getting work experience, apparently. I could think of better ways...”

“Yes, I agree.” Shelley harrumphed. “Medical Students wondering what Branch of Medicine they would like to consider as a career path for the rest of their lives. At least dead bodies can’t sue for malpractice, huh?”

The Senior Constable chuckled at that.

While this exchange was occurring, I was standing in the middle of the road looking up at the property, astounded by the physical similarities this Unit Complex shared with our other where Blackwood died over a week ago now. It was if the same Architect, if employed at all, had been used again...or maybe the same plans had been used to construct both complexes. The same long narrow building extending almost for the full length of the block of ground. The same blonde, rough textured brick. The same simple style of roofline with the same coloured roofing tile. The same narrow, short Balconies with the same wrought-iron balustrading. The narrow street façade having these inconsequential little Balconies with others cantilevered down the side of the building denoting how many small Units were in the complex. The Balconies hanging out over the communal driveway. Four Units to each floor. Three floors of Units with two entry stairwells. Open parking bays underneath between brick columns. The Units facing the street were lucky. They had two Balconies. One to the street and the other to the side elevation.

These constructed Unit complexes cheaper by the dozen. Bound to be dozens of the same design in the neighbourhood. By the time the Builder and all his cronies had finished the lot and retired as wealthy people, they’d be constructing the bloody things with their eyes shut! The narrow strip of land down the other side and across the rear becoming a garbage dump. Litter thrown through the open windows by tenants too lazy to use a garbage Wheelie Bin positioned downstairs in their allotted Garbage Enclosure!

Shelley came to stand beside me.

“You okay? You look as though you’ve seen a ghost.”

“I think I have...the residents of the complex where Blackwood was shot? Have we a complete list?”

“I think so, Joe. The Uniforms completed the trawl two days after the homicide. It is on the Murder File. Why?”

“We need to check that point and see whether there were any ‘couch-dwellers’ on that particular night. Was that question asked, by the way? We need to do a complete background check on every one of them...the lot! The same here as well.”

“Okay, sure. Yeah...we can do that...we will, when we get the chance...but why? What’s the problem? We know that is a chore we still have to get to.”

I shrugged my shoulders as I walked towards the front entry stairwell. I didn’t know, but I felt it was important. It was something I felt we could not just let drift. I had this funny feeling that perhaps the shooting death of young Blackwood a week ago, had been a mistake and this shooting repaired the damage. At last the real target eliminated in this latest shooting!

As I climbed the stairs up to the First-Floor level, I shook my head to rid it of such a stupid idea...the absurdity had only entered my head because? The Unit complex of last week built with the same blond brick!!

What!?

I could not shake the idea though.

I turned to Shelley.

“We need to investigate the links...the connections between these Vics with the Blackwood family. There has to be a link as I think this is the culmination of the two drive-byes. Jake Blackwood a case of mistaken address...Railway Parade. One suburb out.”

I could tell by Shelley’s scornful expression she did not agree with me. Fair enough, that is why I was a Grade Four Dee while she was a Grade Three.

That really would have ended my day if I had mouthed such thoughts. I can be prudent at times.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Um...a Bradley Mallet. A male Nursing Sister at Westmead Hospital. Lives here with his partner Lee Po ‘Betty’ Seng who is also a Ward Sister at Westmead. She DOA at Westmead Hospital this morning. We received notification of the death not that long ago. There was never much hope she would survive due to her wounds, unfortunately. They both worked night duty. A targeted attack or a random act? I don’t know, Joe. That is for you guys to figure out. My two new Assists. MalleryKando and Lee Soo. Detective Joseph Lind and his partner, Detective Shelley Shields. Two of the best.”

We shook hands. Nodded our heads. I was surprised at Pog’s estimate of us, sure that he had always looked at us with disdain. The compliment a surprise, even for Shelley.

Pogowski’s permanent Assist, the ever-suffering Evonne Sattler, gave us a smile as she shucked out of her bio-suit, throwing it into a Bio-bin near the front door of the Unit. She too, known for her reticence and economy of words. She and her Boss worked well together, both enveloped in that ‘cone of silence’ working comfortably side by side. Both knowing what each wanted and would do next without communicating. A whale of a time with many jokes told...just joking, Joyce!

The Balcony now occupied by the lone body sprawled on the hard, cold concrete surface. There was very little blood. Both Pog and I standing at the open sliding glass door that led out onto the small, narrow Balcony that reminded me so much of Blackwood’s Unit. Maybe a little larger, perhaps. The Lounge Room especially was a good size larger than that of the Blackwood’s residence. The U-shaped Kitchen opening into a Dining Alcove. Two reasonably sized Bedrooms.

The body of Mallet in a similar position as to Blackwood in his demise a week previously.

As if reading my mind, Pogowski commented quietly.

“A lucky shot, I’d say going on the number of shots fired and the spread of them. A fatal shot straight through the heart. I’d say he was dead before he even began to fall off the chair. I doubt there’ll be much worthwhile forensic evidence up here except maybe ballistics history, perhaps. Apparently, the driver stood from the car and fired off about seven shots over the top of the car-roof before driving off. So several witnesses have stated. Two went straight through the front Kitchen window where Betty was standing, doing the washing up. A shot straight in the head. She hung on for some time, so I was told. DOA at Westmead, sadly.”

I was amazed at the similarity in the telling of the Shooter’s position and him firing over the roof of his vehicle that had been relayed to me by the Ballistics Officer at the Blackwood crime scene. I immediately pinned the information as important and that the method of the

firing position meant perhaps the same shooter was involved. When we eventually caught the guy, I would need a forensic trace search on the roofline of his vehicle for Gunshot Residue.

We may get lucky.

He shrugged his shoulders as though this ended the commentary. Enough words for him. The sheer brutality and senselessness of the two killings seemed lost on him. He was looking at two specimens, as far as he was concerned. I shook my head a couple of times wondering on the conscience of the man. He walked to the front door shucking out of his bio-suit and gloves. I following him with my eyes, a slight smirk on my face. Shelley raised her eye-brows at me, wondering what had amused me.

I again shook my head to warn her off.

“Take a quick look, you two, please. I want him out of the sun as quickly as possible...it is a hot day.” Pog commanded before he disappeared out of the Unit. “Evie?” I could hear him shout out. His voice echoing around the stairwell. “I’ll have the Morgue guys come up to transport him downstairs. A bit of a difficult job as these Units not designed to carry dead bodies down the stairwells...I guess they have had worse situations, huh? Um...we may need to rope him down the outside of the building...maybe a better solution.”

We obeyed the command and then wandered around the Flat doing what we always did.

The joint was neat and tidy, not crowded out with bulky furniture items. The selection, a careful exercise to retain a certain perspective and charm in keeping with the rest of the décor. There were very few bric-a-brac pieces, or photographs. I picked up one framed shot, a frown as I looked intently at the photo. The Best Man in a large family Wedding shot was vaguely familiar, though I could not place him. I did not know whether it was important or not. Just in case, I took a photo of it with my phone camera. I would place the copy on the Murder File.

I gave Shelley the Photo frame asking whether the guy I pointed out, was familiar to her. She looked at intently before shaking her head.

“Important?” She asked, still looking at the photograph.

“Don’t know, but it is one of those things that could drive me mad for months. Whether it is important to this Case...or something else, I haven’t a clue, but as I have said, it will drive me crazy.”

Shelley walked away from me after placing the Photo-frame back in its position.

“Malaysian?” I asked quietly.

“Mmm...no, Vietnamese, I suspect. Could be Chinese, I suppose.” Shelley replied as she looked at a large Studio shot of a very attractive woman that hung central on a stub wall that formed a small alcove to the front entry door. The only piece to adorn any wall of the place. A Studio image in black and white. A beautiful shot with a striking model its subject. It was a very good portrait shot of ‘Betty’ Seng.

“I wonder if Mallet took the shot?”

“Mmm...if he did, he’s not a half-bad photographer...” Shelley commented as she stood beside me.

We remained at the Scene for another two hours almost, rummaging through drawers and personal papers looking for ‘Next of Kin’ information. Seeing whether there was anything that may give us a clue to the shooting.

“I tell you what, it should be a mandatory thing right across the Nation that everyone carries in their Wallet or Purse. A NoK Card prepared by the State Government like the Photo License Card. It would make it so much easier not only for us, but for all Emergency Services and First Attendance Officers if ever it is required.”

“Yeah, I agree. I’ve seen Coppers spending an inordinate amount of time at a crash site going through a person’s Mobile Phone trying to find family names to contact...that’s why some families only learn of a fatal accident on the Newscasts that night because that Next of Kin information is not readily available.”

“Maybe Westmead Hospital would have that information in their Personnel Files. You know, of both deceased persons.”

“Mmm...yeah...good idea. The Human Resources Department of the Hospital.” I looked out the front window that had several bullet holes crazed into the pane. “We’re not that far from the Hospital. Let’s drive over...and afterwards, back to the Blackwood address. I’d like to substantiate that list of residents in the complex that we received from the Uniforms.”

“Wrong time of day, partner.”

“Maybe later to-day before we knock off.”

“Jeezus, you’re like a bloody dog with a bone, Joseph Lind! No O/T and never likely to be approved. Get the local Uniforms to do a re-check though you will not be their favourite Dick for questioning their quality of examination that they have completed...but what else is new, huh? Let’s go. It is depressing in here now when I can see that love and cheer were bountiful in this place once. You can feel it in the air though it is slowly dissipating.”

I looked around wondering where she got that feeling from. For the life of me I could not pick up any such vibes.

Cold hearted and insensitive me!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The information we got from the Hospital was most helpful.

The two Deceased met in Vietnam when Mallet had committed to a twelve-month exchange program for Hospital staff. He and Betty were married in a civil service to permit Betty to immigrate to Australia. They had never organised a marriage ceremony or civil union here in Australia. The reasons unknown.

They had a reputation as a hard-working, very close and loving couple.

“You could almost see the aura emanating from them both whenever they were together. One of those very rare couples.” The Assistant Head of Human Resources had explained between sniffles.

Lee Po ‘Betty’ Seng had no relatives living in Australia.

Bradley’s parents were still alive and were retired to a beautiful lake-side gated village at Toronto. There was a sister living in Lakemba and a brother in Burwood. We obtained the addresses and the work details which meant that we could interview both siblings as they worked close by to their residential addresses, not that far from the Hospital.

We rang the Boss as we left the Hospital heading for Lakemba. He would need to confer with the Toronto Police Station so that the Station Sergeant could inform the parents of their son and daughter-in-law’s deaths.

Shelley eased the Unmarked into a ‘Visitor Only’ Parking Bay in front of a modern Office building and Warehouse complex at the back of Silverwater.

We were ushered quietly into the Manager’s Office by a young Office Worker who seemed to know the gravity of the situation. We glad for the reprieve from the hot day by being inside the air-conditioned building. The Office not the tidiest I had seen but antiseptically clean when compared to Beyerfeld’s offering. Two women sat opposite a robust woman sitting straight-backed behind a large Office desk. She looked as though she was lost, not certain as to how she should react with her two employees. Both were crying, holding hands as though their lives depended upon it!

Shelley took control of the situation and after finding out which was the sister of the Deceased, sat with her.

“Jaydeen Mallet? I am sorry to inform you that your brother died from a bullet wound this morning. We would like to ask a few questions, if we may? I know that it is perhaps not the best time, but unfortunately, we have a job to do...”

The woman already informed of the tragedy and she was onto her second box of tissues.

“Officer, if I may. I have arranged for Jay here to be driven home. Her friend also works here so she will take her home. Both can take the rest of the week off...someone should be with her for a couple of days, at least.” The stoic Manager cooed quietly.

I nodded my head. The fact that I was addressed while Shelley seemed to be in control always amazed me. We saw it so many times. Shelley at times, allowed the obvious sexism of the situation to upset her. Male or female, it didn’t matter. Me as the male, always was the focus regardless of the situation.

“Does my brother and parents know?”The woman asked, her eyes tear-smeared and red-rimmed.

“We have arranged for your parents to be informed. We intend seeing your brother straight from here.”

“Perhaps I could go with you, if you don’t mind. We can then go straight up to Mum and Dad’s place with my brother. Mum and Dad will need us.Franny here can come with us...um...to my brother’s. We can drop her off home on the way up the Coast.”

Indicating the woman who sat beside her. She looked to be in as big a mess as Jaydeen Mallet! The arrangements worked out already. A woman who liked to be in control...usually. I noticed that the two glanced at each other when it was stated that she would not be accompanying the woman and her brother north to Toronto.A slight nod of her head, her acquiescence.

“Okay, yes. That’s fine. We would like to interview your parents also...perhaps to-morrow. It maybe of some advantage if the family is together, in fact. That may spark further recollections on the events that have led to this tragedy...would you have any idea why your brother Brad, would be targeted?”

“No...none. Not at all...they were...you know...both were so well liked. They didn’t have an enemy in the World.”

We sat with the woman for another half hour about before we headed to the employment address of the older brother, Bryant Mallet in Wentworthville.

He did not bear the news of his younger brother and sister-in-law being shot to death that well, having to remove himself from the room for some time. He came back in rather sheepishly, his sister with him.

“Sorry...” He murmured as he sat. “Um...do you know why they were killed?”

“No, we don’t. We are hoping you maybe able to help with our enquiries along those lines...”

He nodded his head slightly as though mulling over my words. For the umpteenth time, blowing his nose.

“Brad and Po used to come over to my place at least once a week....” There was a sideways glance at his sister. Perhaps there was some animosity there. Shelley felt it also as I saw her write something quickly into her Tablet. “Um...the two had made a decision never to have kids...there was some problems that way in any case...but they love my two kids. The kids adored them, especially Po...um...Betty or Betts, we called her.”

“Has there been any problems? Family-wise? Perhaps because Po Seng was an Oriental?”

“No...no. Nothing like that!” He glanced again at his sister. “Brad mentioned...oh...about a month ago now...one evening, that he felt they were being stalked. They both had this feeling that someone was watching them...they mentioned a dark car often parked out the front of the block of Units when they both came home from work of a morning...”

Again, he glanced at his sister.

“Could be just some worker picking up a workmate that time of morning.” Jayleen Mallet commented logically.

Our thoughts exactly.

I thought her offering a little strange under the circumstances, though. Here she was dismissing the possible threat as an everyday simple occurrence. It did not sit well. Her girlfriend had her head lowered during this exchange and I wondered on the relationship of the two, whether it was anything more than just a friendship. I had no idea what that would have to do with the price of fish in Denmark, but it was worth a follow-up, so I thought. Bryant also seemed a little...anxious...maybe miffed at sitting with his sister. There appeared to be a little animosity between the two.

I glanced at Shelley.

I am sure that she had noticed it too.

“Was it mentioned just that once...or was it commented on again, further down the track?” Shelley asked.

“Um...we spoke at length about it that night...when Brad brought it up...he seemed worried about it, more for Po’s benefit, I think...no, it was never mentioned again, I’m sure. Both gone, shit. My missus is going to be really upset. If there is nothing else, Detectives? I’d like for us to get home, pack a few things and all of us head up to Mum and Dad’s. They’ll need us.” As an afterthought, he addressed his sister’s friend. Advising her that they would drop her home before they headed north to Toronto.

Again, that agitation...that slight curtness clouded the room.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Whenever in another Police District, it is good manners to identify yourselves at the local Police Station and provide the reasons for your visit. You would also always ask where the best feedwas available for Lunch.

We were sitting under the shade of a shop awning out the front of a Café recommended by the local Constabulary. A spread of tables and chairs on the wide footpath. We had ordered and werewaiting for our Lunch to arrive. A soft sea breeze came in off the Lake. We were at the eastern end of the Toronto Shopping precinct towards the Lake shore.

“I don’t think we learned any more than we knew previously.” Shelley broke my pleasure at viewing the lake, wharf, and swimming pool area.

“I don’t know. We’ve always known it’s a nice drive up here. We should enjoy our Lunch... and we learnt the pecking order of the Mallet family...”

Shelley gave me one of her looks. I smiled inside.

“Yes, the young Bradley the baby of the family and the favourite. Jayleen without her girl-friend, is a little lost and not accepted by the family for her gender preference...that was obvious...and the beautiful Po Seng lauded for her oriental-ness...but trowelled on a little thick, I think. Did you get the same impression? It was obvious yesterday that there is bad blood between Bryant and his sister. The family definitely not in favour of her life choice, that’s for sure...except the old man who was a wonderful old bloke. Must be hard for him to live with that bloody ogre!”

“You cottoned on quickly to Jayleen being in a lesbian relationship?”

“Joe, it was blaringly obvious!”

I was a little miffed, thinking that I was slowing down a bit. Thinking that perhaps my driveway didn't meet the roadway with that distance increasing!

“Yeah, I guess...and there lies a story.” I countered, a little on the defensive. “Is Po's acceptance as a cherished daughter-in-law to show the world that they are a progressive, tolerant family towards oriental immigrants...trowelled on thick which must irk Jayleen and her girl-friend who are not held in high regard...that point was more than obvious which kind of...doesn't make real sense, eh? You know when they were trying so hard in front of us to convey that sense of tolerance...but that annoyance at their daughter's preference of life partner was obvious, which doesn't gel with their outward signs of racial tolerance, does it?”

“Yeah, I picked that up as well. Is there sufficient hate at the narrowness and duplicity of the family towards the only daughter and her chosen life-style to force her to take such drastic action? Is that what you are getting at?”

“Her *chosen* life-style...that is how they would see it. Especially the mother. She said it several times, looking down her nose at her daughter. That must have hurt every time. A barb flung. I doubt she would ever be able to reconcile that a daughter like that was of her doing, *coming from her body*, thus the narrow-mindedness of her only daughter *choosing* such a path. Taking any responsibility on her part for the *defect* out of the equation. The father? Behind the scenes, his only daughter is the apple of his eye and he does not seem to care what she is, as long as she is happy...but he has to live with his wife, I guess. I can't see it, Joe. Jayleen the shooter? Because she is jealous of her brother and sister-in-law and how much the family adore them over her and her partner? No...I did not get that impression...I say again, I can't see it.”

“The girl-friend? FranceneMcGregor? Could she be forced into such action because she and her lover are not accepted by the Mallet family?”

“A long bow, Joe. A long bow.”

“We need to investigate the two women a little more closely.”

So ended the conversation as our meal and coffees placed in front of us. The Waiter cheery and friendly. The smell? The aroma? I had not realised how hungry I was. I glanced at my watch.

It was close to two.

If Tellie knew, she would be up on her high horse forcefully lashing at my ad hoc eating times.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

We had intended to knock off after our visit to Toronto. Heading to the Office purely for our afternoon Gym session. Instead, we ended up at Old Toongabbie out the front of Jayleen and Franny's address. A free-standing house in a street of free-standing houses, again seemingly built by the same Builder in the period between the Wars. One after the other, all the same design, the same brick and terracotta tiled roof. A poor man's version of a mock Californian Bungalow.

The house front yard was a blaze of colour of just about every bloom known to humanity, so it seemed.

We had rung beforehand, confident that the woman would be at home. She too, permitted time off work due to the tragic shooting.

"Jay rang me...after you left this morning. Come in, please."

We followed her down a light and breezy Hallway. These houses were usually dim. I looked up to see several skylights giving ample illumination on what was once that configuration. We followed the woman down the Hallway and into a light-filled Lounge Room and invited to sit into large and comfy sofa chairs from another era.

"You suitably impressed with the family? Such intolerant AO's, aren't they? Can I get you a coffee?" She added pleasantly. The lead-in comment laced with sarcasm.

The Hallway and this room crowded out with paintings on every wall.

"Who's the art collector? You or Jayleen? You have some very good pieces here..." Marge commented as she surveyed the room.

"Yes. Thank you...both of us. Jay and I have that common interest...and the garden. We buy and sell when we feel like it. We are thinking of opening our own Gallery...not around here, maybe somewhere in the Eastern Suburbs. Paddington perhaps. At the moment, we do most of our sales through Gumtree and e-Bay."

She came back into the Lounge Room with a mug of steaming coffee for each of us. She sat opposite me as Shelley continued to look at the examples on all four walls.

"I like that..." She commented.

"It's yours for...ten big ones...you have an excellent eye. That young female artist from Kiama you will hear of, very soon. She will take the Sydney scene by storm very soon. We have at least half a dozen of her works..."

“You have such an eclectic collection...”

“That’s Jay’s influence...she is the one with the eye for the future.”

“Doesn’t it worry you. All these excellent pieces of art...here...know what I mean?”

She laughed.

“In this part of the World, you mean? It is a groovy place here. Such a mish-mash of people. The Restaurants around Parramatta are so varied...the Church Street strip is making quite a name for itself. Our stuff being knocked off? Look carefully, we have a state of the art security system installed that can be streamed live onto our Mobiles if any movement detected...thanks to a very good friend of ours in that business. All the windows have break-free glass and alarm sensors. The doors...now, you did not come here solely to learn of Jay and I passions in life...or what security arrangements we have in place. What would you like to know?”

“You own a black Honda SUV?”

“Yes...a seven-seat People Mover that has all the rear seats permanently folded down...it is borrowed...was borrowed by Brad and Po more times than I drove it, I have to admit.” She gave a little chuckle. A lovely smile. “We use Jay’s little Hatchback to get to work each day. Jay is the Paymaster at the Firm where I work as the PA to the Boss. A good Firm to work for. Full of very nice people. A microcosm of society actually, in all regards.”

The situation of the vehicle solved that problem that had hung over us.

Bradley Mallet would have known and identified the vehicle if it had been Fran who was the shooter who had sat outside their home in a dark coloured vehicle for any length of time before the shooting.

“Oh? Didn’t he have a vehicle of his own. He and Betty?”

“Yes, but Po goes to the Flemmo Markets every second week-end...well...used to.” She sniffled, bent towards a small Coffee Table to pluck a Tissue from a box to blow her nose. “Sorry...um...she buys sufficient for them, us and just about everyone in their Unit complex...she and Brad used to take my People-mover as it holds a darn sight more than their car, let me tell you. We have the vehicle because of the artworks we buy...”

“Bradley didn’t have the same degree of...um...intolerance towards his sister and your relationship shown by the rest of the family? We noticed the way they treated Jayleen this morning when we were up at Toronto interviewing the family.”

“Hah, I stay away from there as much as I can. They...especially old Missus Mallet can be an absolute bitch towards us...Jay...Jay’s old man? No...he is really cool...funny, isn’t it?”

Bryant loved Po and his little brother...a 'mixed marriage' as they used to say in the old days...but couldn't reconcile that his sister was gay and in a long-term lesbian relationship. They were regular visitors here...Brad and Po...but...the rest of the family? To be fair, Jay's father is a good old stick. Whenever he comes down to Sydney on his own, usually for some medical check-up at RNS, RPA or Westmead, he always drops in here...we're a stone's throw from the Station...when he comes alone, that is. The old girl is nothing but a narrow-minded, frustrated, old bigot...and Bryant seems to follow in his mother's foot-steps that way in treating us unfairly...but not Po. Funny, huh? The world is full of them, isn't it? No rhyme or reason for their intolerances..."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Wow! The amount of money they have tied up in those paintings? The mind boggles..."

Shelley started up the car and drove up the quiet suburban street. I glanced at my watch. It was close to five-thirty.

"Shells? What Railway Station would be handy for you to get home?"

"Arrh, here. Toongabbie maybe. I can get a train down to Granville and then one straight out to Liverpool...I park my car at Ingleburn. It is only a couple of kays from my place as the crow flies."

"Okay, Toongabbie Station it is. Just down the road. Perhaps we are looking at the Brad Mallet shooting all wrong. Maybe he was shot because he was cohabitating with an oriental..."

"Jeez, Joe. One day your imagination will get you into trouble...their deaths' having racial overtones? In this day and age? Nah...both well-respected Nursing Sisters at the Hospital...I reckon that is the connection...what do they call a male Sister?"

I shrugged my shoulders. In this age of enlightenment and political correctness, there had to be a more 'gender-less' tag. Surely!

"What do you base that on? The racist angle?" I asked incredulously. "Shells, just look at the way old woman Mallet treated her daughter in front of us. Us complete strangers! She was downright rude and patronising towards her daughter. Can you imagine what she would be like if there was just her and her daughter. It would be caustic! It's not too hard a shell to crack to think that same attitude could cause some-one to react adversely to an Australian being married to an Oriental."

She shrugged her shoulders. Gave me one of her looks. That condescending smirk that at other times, would shit me right off!

I pulled up at the Train Station.

“See you to-morra...”

“Sure, see you then. It wasn’t that long ago that you were flirting with the idea that the same shooter was involved in both our Homicide Cases...and that the two Cases were linked somehow...”

“Shells? You gotta have an open mind. Think of the different scenarios that fit and don’t fit. I’ve said this before young lady...you then throw out those that do not fit the facts...”

“So you have rejected that past scenario?”

“I’m thinking about it...”

Shelley held the door open for me as I came around the car.

“You are impossible, sir!” She stated with a smile.

As I drove home, Shelley’s words bounced around inside my head. We needed to interview all their co-workers on the same shift.

I let out a groan.

They were ‘night shift people’!

I really did not want to repeat the exercise that I had undertaken in the recent ‘Body on the Train’ Case and the Beyerfeld Courier business where I was interviewing Cleaning Staff and drivers at some ungodly hour in the morning. To-morrow, we would swing by the Hospital to get a full list of the pair’s co-workers and arrange decent times that suited us both to interview them.

‘That’s a plan, Joe, my man.’ I mumbled to myself.

CHAPTER TWENTY

It took us three days to line things up so that we could interview Mallet and Seng’s co-workers at reasonable hours to suit both sides. Another ten days to interview all of Po and

Brad Mallet's colleagues combine. An exhausting and frustrating process that both Shelley and I were looking forward to concluding!

"He was well respected. A good Boss to work for because he was fair...and didn't treat you like a dummy."

"Was there any animosity shown by the staff...your co-workers, for example, who may have had a grievance against either Bradley Mallet or his partner...um...his wife, Po Seng?"

"What? Enough to want to kill them both. No...no-one...I couldn't imagine..."

"Was there any animosity or opposition towards Betty Seng being the Ward Sister?"

That question treated with disdain and astonishment by just about every person who worked with and under Betty's leadership.

We were getting sick and tired of the repetition of both questions and answers.

"Um...there was a Patient who tried to get a little too friendly with Betty...in Surgical Two. It was very rare that both Brad and she worked the same Shift location...I don't think it ever happened...but this guy...not that long ago...it happened...a big guy got the hots for her. She is extremely attractive. Gregarious. Friendly. Miss Personality Plus if you know what I mean. It really upset her and she ran to tell Brad about the incident. She was very distressed. Brad came onto the Ward and gave the guy a right royal dressing down. There was a formal report lodged on the guy."

"Do you remember his name?"

"No...but you should be able to access the Ward Reports. It got written up..."

I would imagine that a Court Order would be necessary to open such records. The Hospital would not permit anyone access on a whim. We can at least ask, I thought. A follow-up with the Hospital people once we have finished our interviews this morning.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

We once again sat with the Human Resources Assistant Manager, who smiled condescendingly at our request when we first approached her.

"As I said the other day when you contacted me on the subject Detective, you will need a Court Order for us to divulge that information..."

With a flourish, I produced the Paperwork.

“Okay...” She eventually remarked after reading the Order carefully. “I’ll see if I can pull up the Ward Report in question...do you have an approximate date? No? How about which Ward?”

“Surgical Two....and I guess it may have been within a month of the demise of the two.”

“Mmm...” She tapped away on her Computer. Scrolled through various Reports, craning her neck as though she required new glasses. “Here we are. A WayneJonathon West...had a severe Hernia repair...”

The name surprised me as he was the day shift Yard Overseer at Beyerfelds. We had interviewed him when we had sat that morning going through both the night and day shift drivers and other employees from the Beyerfeld firm. We had yet to complete a follow-up background check on all the employees. At no time did the guy make my nose itch...it did now though!

I noted the home address of the man.

Canley Vale Road, Smithfield.

Not far away at all.

I glanced at my watch.

We would have enough time to make the house call and not incur the wrath of the Boss for working past our normal knock-off time. He was getting touchy with several teams in the Murder Squad who thought they could work hours outside the norm. It was not just us but more than half of the Day Shift adopting the habit!

“What was the nature of the complaint?”

“Um...inappropriate behaviour. Physical contact of an abusive and sexual nature, assault, and abusive language not appropriate for the area, meaning a General Hospital Ward. The complaint lodged by Bradley Mallet on behalf of his wife, Po ‘Betty’ Seng. I believe that Po was very upset about the behaviour but would have preferred the matter to be overlooked...forgotten about.”

“Why wasn’t the Police called?”

“We only notify the Police in extreme events...”

“I would consider this extreme as it very well could have caused the death of the two...perhaps.”

Shelley was fired up but still, there was no need to explain the obvious...especially when all the facts were still not known. I scowled at her. We did not need to fuel the situation.

“What was the outcome?”

“We told the Patient that if he continued to harangue any of the Staff in such a manner, we would make a formal complaint to the Police. The Patient appeared to not want the Police involved. That threat seemed to do the trick. He quietened down considerably. Po Seng did not want to take it any further, no matter what.”

“She was very attractive, according to the photographs we saw of her in their Flat...”

“She was an excellent Nurse wanting to do her Second Certificate in Obstets next year. She would have breezed through. It was bad enough losing one of them...but the two of them? It is a great loss to the Hospital. Both were very popular with all their fellow Nursing Staff, Doctors, and Patients alike. A terrible loss...” She drew a deep breath and stood. “If there is nothing else, Detectives?”

“A copy of the Report?”

She again breathed in deeply, hoping that we would not press the point. I nodded my head. Gave her my best little boy smile. It seemed to have some effect as she sat back down and tapped on the keyboard. A printer came to life and a twenty-page document with Witness Statements and Conclusions was handed over to us.

Hospitals seemed to be very thorough hoping to avoid Court Time which could have easily occurred in this instance. I thanked the woman and followed Shelley out of the office, wanting desperately to read the Report in full before we arrived at the guy’s address.

“Wayne West? I don’t suppose it is the same Wayne West who is employed by Beyerfeld Couriers as their day shift Yard Overseer, by any chance...”

“If it is, it is a small world and the man has just popped up as our most important Person of Interest in the Case. He more than likely has a past Crim record. I wonder what for? Didn’t we do a full background check on all the employees?”

“Um...no. Only the Drivers on both shifts...and Beyerfeld himself.”

“If he is our guy, I wonder what the connection is between the Blackwood and the Mallet/Seng shootings?”

“Beats me. Let’s pay the bloke a visit. He should have knocked off by now...”

“Check with the Firm before we waste our time...he could go to the local after work.”

“Mmm...yeah. Just stay put while I put the call through. You peruse that Hospital Report to keep yourself busy. You can fill me in on any juicy parts as we head over to his residential address.”

“Yes Boss. Anything you say, Boss!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“Wayne Jonathon West...”I asked as he quickly swung the door open. I braced myself thinking perhaps he was going to rush us. Instead, he leant against the door jamb in an almost comical manner. Seeming to be pleased in the way he had made his entrance!

“Fucking Hell!! Coppers. What has some broken-hearted chick said about me now?” He laughed at his own joke.

He looked Shelley up and down in a sleazy sort of way.

Shelley turned her head away, more to hide the scowl, I thought. I didnot think his sleazy witticism even warranted a grin.

We had stopped down the street from West’s home address while Shelley completed reading the Report. I did a shallow search on the guy as she read . It was all I needed. He was a serial pest, a Bikie with former connections to the ‘Blind Hunters’ MC gang. A former member with ‘colour’. He had previous Court appearances for indecent acts and bad language in public and making a bloody nuisance of himself.Touching women in the street in an inappropriate manner. Stuff like that.He also had anger management issues. I wondered on the sanity of the guy and whether he may have been in the Autism Range.

He considered a smart-arse turd with a capital ‘S’ going on the reports of Arresting Officers!

“You were in Westmead Hospital some months ago, no? At which time you were counselled about the way you treated the nursing staff...in particular, a Chinese Australian named Po Seng...called Betty by her colleagues. You were confronted by her angry husband because your abuse was considered over the top.”

“Bloody jeezuz! Yer can’t even have a decent flirt with the Nurses. Yer know what there’re like, don’tcha?” A slimy grin accompanied the comment. “This political correctness is killing the art are romance, don’tcha coppers reckon? Really cramps the style, if’n yer know what I mean...”

“Sir, what type of handgun do you own?”

The question threw him.

“None...and yer not gunna find that out by waltzing into me house like as though it was a raid or something...”

“Where were you on the morning of the Ninth, earlier this month? It was a Tuesday morning. Bright and sunny.”

“Yergotta be kidding. Wait ‘til I consult with my Diary as my social calendar is always full.”

A frown and a growl as he slammed the door in our faces.

It was a waste of time standing there as he had no intention of coming back to us. We summarily dismissed by him closing the door on us. I opened and closed my fists several times as we walked back to the Unmarked.

“Lovely bloke...” Shelley stated quietly. “Sure knows how to win over a lady. Just give me ten minutes with him and I’ll have him singing in the Vienna Boys Choir! The absolute turd!”

“You weren’t his type, that was obvious. He prefers small breasted, short but curvy, attractive, very attractive Orientals, is my bet. With a flashing smile and a friendly disposition. He gave you a couple of leery looks up and down and dismissed you entirely...I bet your ego took a battering.”

“I’m shattered!” She replied sarcastically. “Seems like we will have to wait for the Ballistics Report. It’s dragging the chain a bit, isn’t it?”

“All forensic evidence is dragging the chain, at the moment...on every bloody case! Okay, back to the Office to knock off. I want a swim as I feel a little dirty.”

“Do you think a Court Order to turn his house upside down would be worthwhile?”

“Nah...not unless we also include the Bikie MC Clubhouse which would mean nothing even if we tripped over the handgun used. There is no proof of use on his part in the shooting.”

“Another one appears to be slipping through our fingers.”

She started up the car and slipped out into the heavy traffic heading back to the Office.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“Detective Lind?”

“Yes, it is he. How can I help you?”

“Ballistics Officer Davina Davidson...I think I may be able to help you. Sorry this has taken so long to provide you with information. I have two separate Case Files of yours. The Jake Blackwood shooting homicide and...um...the husband and wife shooting homicide. Bradley Mallet and his partner, Po ‘Betty’ Seng...” She quoted both Murder File Numbers. “I’ll have the Reports for you by the middle of next week but in both Cases, there is history with the handguns.Um...firstly, the handgun used to shoot Jake Blackwood last month. The Sixteenth of last month...a Colt Thirty-Two.”

There was silence for some moments as she cupped her hand over the phone.

“Sorry about that. We have had a bug go through here like Epson Salts...December, Nineteen Ninety-Eight.The pistol used to pepper the then residence of ‘Slug’ Mason. Gerald Charles Mason. DoB Three December,Sixty-Eight. A known ‘Heavy’ used exclusively by the ‘White Skulls’ MC Gang for stand-over tactics and to rough up people on their hate list. Almost twelve months later to the day, Mason shot to death with the same handgun outside his residence. Up Close and Personal the way some guys like to do their business...especially if of Lebanese descent. Back of the head.No arrests over the homicide have occurred, but Insiders say it was perhaps some-one within the ‘Nomads’ or the ‘Fallen Angels’, both gangs had issues with the ‘White Skulls’ back then. You would already know that a splinter group emerged from the ‘Fallen Angels’ calling themselves the ‘Blind Hunters’. Members and Associates I am unsure of but I think if you have a talk with either Police Intelligence or the Gang Related Unit, they will be able to fill you in.”

Wayne Jonathon West immediately leapt into my mind. He did have ‘colour’ with the ‘Blind Hunters’ MC gang at one stage, particularly around that time of the shooting homicide of ‘Slug’ Mason. I would need to have a talk with the GRCU guys. Therefore, he could have been a member of the ‘Fallen Angels’ or ‘The Nomads’ before that. He now was an important figure in our enquiries in my mind.

There was silence for some moments as though she was preparing herself for another precis. Perhaps another coughing fit.

“The Colt is not a particularly accurate past an effective range of about fifteen metres. From our tabulations, the distance was close to twenty-one metres if the shooter was position on the opposite side of the road. Our tabulations and Witness Statements that our supposition on the position of the Shooter has confirm the information as accurate.”

“So a lucky shot killed Jake Blackwood?”

“I will not speculate on that point, Detective.”

“Okeydokey...that is my assumption. The Mallet and Seng Homicide shootings?”

“Um, yes...secondly...the pistol used to shoot to death Mallet and Seng was unfortunately a Police issue 9mm. Glock Fifteen, taken from Senior Constable Glen Stewart who had been involved in a high-speed pursuit through several western suburbs. Last year. Seven May, Two Thousand and Sixteen. He lost control of his Highway Pursuit vehicle. Severely injured in the subsequent collision with a telegraph pole. The pursuit called off immediately the accident reported through Crime Stoppers...um...no-one ever arrested or charged with the theft. The accident occurred not far from the ‘Blind Hunters’ MC Gang Headquarters. Coincidence or not, several members were by-standers as S.C. Stewart carefully cut from the wreckage of his vehicle. He has only recently returned to active duty. The witnesses questioned with strong suspicions held as to who the guilty parties may have been who stole the handgun from the injured Senior Constable. Nothing further of substance learnt and the incident slipped from view. Surprising really. There is little more I can relate and as I stated before, a full Report will be available to you no later than middle of next week. Again, I apologise for the tardiness displayed but we are down on numbers with workloads piling up on us...Gotta go.”

“Mmm...thanks.” I said into a dead phone.

I slipped my Mobile back into my pocket thinking perhaps I should have attached it for hands-free use so that I did not have to repeat the information to Shelley.

“Anything interesting?” Shelley asked as we sat in a row of vehicles in a righthand turn at a major intersection. It was then that I realised it was the same intersection where we had been ‘T-boned’ and turned around several times some time ago.

“Careful, Shells. This intersection is bad luck for us, remember?”

“I don’t need reminding, Tonto...Joe? Ballistics was it? Anything juicy?”

I relayed the gist of the conversation.

“Didn’t you say that Wayne West had colour with the ‘Blind Hunters’ MC gang?”

“Had, Shells. Had. They kicked him out...some time ago from the Club...an embarrassment, apparently. That would be a first, wouldn't it? Conrad Beyerfeld straightened him out. Settled him down.”

I had my doubts about that statement from what I had seen and heard of the man...but who am I to judge. It would appear I look at ex-criminals through slightly frosted glasses.

“Did he ever live further out in the western suburbs? Like around where the accident occurred that involved the Highway Patrol vehicle?”

“I don't know, but first thing Monday, I think it would be a good idea to find out.”

“That Colt Thirty-Two goes back a while. Kept for emergencies by an aging, ex-Bikie, perhaps? A former member of the 'Nomads' or the 'Fallen Angels', maybe. Before it came into the hands of a 'Blind Hunters' gang member...or a former 'hit man' of theirs, at least.”

“I didn't think of that, Shells. Maybe...but what would be the connection to Jake Blackwood and the Mallet homicides be?”

“Don't know, but one minute I thought it was slipping through our fingers. Now? We have a direction, perhaps.”

“Yeah. You're right, but it still has me buggered what the connection is to the two homicide shootings about a week apart.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I was trying to catch my breath after a two-lap speed swim to end our half-hour lap swimming exercise session. Shelley comfortably beat me by a good half lap! Her arm and shoulder almost back to how it was before she had the accident, when bowled over by a tank of a bloke who came roaring out his back door hoping to get away from us.

We had only knocked on his door for information.

Unbeknown to us, the guy was the subject of a heavy surveillance operation by the Drug Squad. He had hit Shelley hard sending her flying off a back porch landing area falling awkwardly on the point of her shoulder. This resulted in two bouts of hospitalisation and several operations for her.

“Whew...I'm slowing down...”

“You’re becoming an old man who is now over fifty...the next highlight of your life is reaching sixty...if you do!” She laughed. “I reckon you may have eaten too much rich food over the week-end. You go to Muscles’ on Saturday night?”

I didnot have the breath to reply with any witticism. I nodded my head. Patted my stomach to show that yes indeedy, I had way too much to eat...and drink...and then I had her, Brin her partner, Sasha Blayney, and several other old colleagues over for a BBQ on the Sunday.

Too much good food, wine and laughter was my excuse. It was not as though this week-end ritual was habitual!

Who am I kidding!

“I...um...huh...I woke up about three this morning with the names Buzzano and Beyerfeld buzzing around inside my head. Couldn’t get back to sleep...after the Staff Meeting this morning, I think I’ll go up to Police Intelligence to have a word with them on those two concerns...see if they have anything in their data banks.” That commentary coming in bursts of breath. I noticed that my recovery rate after such a bout of heavy exercise was becoming sluggish.

Shelley gave me a look.

“Yeah. Right. Whatever. I can’t see what that may have to do with the Blackwood homicide shooting, but whatever you think, partner. I’ll stay at my desk and plod through some background stuff, eh?”

I nodded my head in agreement, not too sure what I was looking for in any case.

“I should also ask about any intelligence they may have on Wayne Jonathon West...and see what the Gang Related Crimes Unit has on him also.”

Shelley nodded her head.

“See you for Lunch. My shout. I feel like Fish and Chips...”

“That’s a fair walk from the Office, Shells...”

“Then you better start walking now, old man.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I placed a large Flat White onto Jerry Stanton's desk and sat heavily onto a visitor's chair facing him.

"Thanks, Joe. That is greatly appreciated. You smell of chlorine. Don't tell me you are one of the Gym junkies that we have?"

"Regular as...or as often as our work allows. My partner and I try for morning and afternoon bouts each day." I was used to getting stirred about it.

He took a couple of swigs of the steaming liquid. A smile on his face. A shake of his head as though he thought me a lost cause.

We danced through the niceties catching up on Office scuttlebutt and innuendo. Shared a couple of laughs before we got down to business. Jerry was old school. A man not to meddle with in the old days when he was in Vice. He was my age and had done his Academy days in Goulburn in the intake behind me, from memory. That is where I first met him, though we travelled in different circles at that time. He took a bad fall that left him permanently in a wheelchair while working in Vice while I was working undercover Narcs. When he was able, after an exorbitant time in rehabilitation, he transferred across to Police Intelligence and by sheer luck, he found his true niche in life. It was Jerry who had worked behind the scenes trying to ensure Dallas Courtney remained within the Force, only to have the young guy transfer over to the AFP partly because the young man could drive his electric wheelchair from his home on Harris Street, Pyrmont up to the AFP Headquarters at Redfern every day. Something he could not do with the Police Force building being in Parramatta.

Jerry Stanton had arranged special daily transport from Courtney's home to Parramatta and back in a special taxi van for wheelchair bound persons. That still was not enough as the AFP had dangled the ultimate carrot. They wanted Dallas to head a special International Digital Surveillance Section that followed the money trails of known felons and even legitimate businessmen overseas. Playing with the 'Big Fish' which enthralled him no end.

Dallas Courtney could not ignore that offer!

"How's Dallas going? Seen him at all lately?" Jerry asked.

I shook my head, feeling guilty.

"No. Not for a while. I must give him a ring to catch up."

I did not want Dallas going the same way as many colleagues. Meaning to catch up but the weeks turn to months and then to years. Jerry nodded his head, knowing what I meant and how I felt. He and I had a similar relationship, unfortunately. I glanced at a small photo montage frame showing a photo of his wife and two kids, and him receiving a Gold Medal in consecutive Para-Olympics for Archery.

He was especially proud of the lot! He was the type of guy who never saw himself as wheelchair bound as that was a misconception held by all able-bodied persons, not himself!

His constant gripe was that the General Populace saw him in a wheelchair, and immediately had him pegged as some type of ignoramus! It was as though people could not get past these misconceptions, intolerances, ignorance and short-sightedness!

“Okay, you wanted some background on Beyerfeld Inter-City Parcel Delivery Service. Also Beyerfeld Courier Service and Twenty-Four Seven Delivery Service operate out of the same yard. A Tax thing, I think. Nothing untoward except to say that the man is one step down from sainthood. An opinion shared by quite a few because of his penchant to hire ex-crim and recently released guys from the ‘Click’...and then keep them on the straight and narrow. There was a serious covert surveillance operation undertaken on the firm maybe three years ago. An Operation that spanned almost three months for bloody no result...a couple of parking fines that was all...”

“Mmm...” That was not what I wanted to hear. I pulled at my ear-lobe and took a couple of sips from my coffee container.

“You sound disappointed, Joe...”

I shook my head.

“My nose itches...my internal radar buzzes at the name...that Blackwood homicide shooting is somehow tied up with the Firm...that is my gut feeling but it appears to be more in the realms of fiction unfortunately, the longer the investigation drags on. I don’t have any alternative ideas on the homicide...and the Case has stalled, which bugs me no end! I would hate it to sit on the edge of my desk as an ‘Unsolved’. Gathering dust and mocking my ability as a Murder Dee.”

“You take it personally, eh? Maybe a simple case of wrong place, wrong time. Who else lives in the Unit complex? Or nearby?”

“Why do you ask that?”

“Not the first time it’s happened...those dudes who like to spray bullets about aren’t known for their level of IQ.”

The man shrugged his shoulders, wheeled his wheelchair away from the desk so that he did not have to look at me sideways. His neck could not stand the angle change for too long which makes you wonder why he was such an excellent Archer.

“Hah, that’s been mentioned before...a question. Why was the covert surveillance operation organised on the Firm in the first place?”

Jerry chuckled, shaking his head in disbelief.

“You guys especially, get your noses out of joint when you hear these statistics. You *really* think you are the supreme Investigative Officers of the Force whose superior intellect, patience and nous are the qualities that breaks open all your Cases. Sadly, statistics point in another direction...” He smiled as he turned back to his Computer and keyboard and began typing at a speed I could only hope to achieve. “Umm...over sixty percent of all investigations across the Board are solved by ‘tip-offs’....and are commenced because of a similar occurrence...”

I knew where this was going as it was something that did irk a lot of us Murder Dees.

“Anonymous calls to Crime Stoppers or Snitches advice?” I asked light-heartedly, already knowing the answer to some extent.

“You know as well as I do, Joe, that over fifty percent of those calls and snitch advice are greatly exaggerated, half-true or simply fabrications for what-ever reason...but...the other fifty per cent? They provide the information for over sixty percent of all Police Cases to reach a successful completion as I have stated...um...” He looked across to me, a grin a mile wide on his dial. “Um...an anonymous Crime Stoppers call resulted in the covert surveillance operation on the Firm for zero outcome...some-one was playing silly buggers or had a chip on their shoulder about the Firm for some banal reason, more than likely. But as you know, if we...meaning the Force, gets such a call, we are obliged to investigate the claim...as I said, in this case for zero results...but we do see results, as you know.”

“Where there’s smoke, there usually is fire...”

“Granted...but not in this case or in your other enquiry concerning the Buzzano Freight and Interstate Haulage Firm. A two-month covert surveillance operation also resulted in zero findings. Sorry, Joe. Your nose is out of whack on those two...”

“Wayne Jonathon West?” I asked.

“Now there is a cracked egg.” Jerry Stanton replied as he again began tapping on his keyboard at warp speed. “I personally think his driveway doesn’t reach the road! He has been in and out of the Clink for minor stuff for most of his life. Whispered as the ‘Heavy’ that several Bikie gangs used when-ever they required a ‘hit’ on some-one. A set-up that didn’t require much planning or nous, just a load of guts, street smarts and brazen

machoism! Years ago, now. Nothing has stuck since those days for all the whispers still abounding. As I said, a cracked egg who lives as though he has the backing of several of the gangs. That is a no...confirmed from several sources...though he lives with that belief firmly embedded in his mind. Still!!! That surveillance we had going on Beyerfelds? The man was front and centre. Nothing untoward except to say he worked hard, ruled that yard and the day shift drivers with an iron rod...but there wasn't a whiff of impropriety or illegitimate dealings. Beyerfeld had the guy seeing the light. How? Has us beat!"

I took a couple more swigs of coffee to empty the container. I was becoming sick and tired of continually hearing about Beyerfeld's miraculous healing powers. What I saw of the man did not indicate any such talent...and I consider myself an excellent judge of character.

"Maybe fake news by the gangs to protect 'their man'..." I replied, a smile on my face, hoping for even a tad of guilt!

"Nice try, Joe, but no...it has been around four...maybe five years perhaps, since he was shovelled to one side by the 'Blind Hunters' for being an idiot who drew too much attention to them, so the word goes...nothing at all on the guy. Frankly, I think Conrad Beyerfeld's influence has been the calming effect on the man. He has been employed by the Firm for the past couple of years since the Firm started up, and since that time, there has been nothing on him."

That is not what I wanted to hear as it left us with nothing. Motive, opportunity, method, and identity of the Perp still not known. I doubted that I would learn anymore of the man by going up to the GRCU team on the floor above.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

"How'd you go?" Shelley asked as I slumped down into my Office chair.

I shook my head, suddenly stood, surprising my partner and went a couple of rounds with 'Big Red', our famous red leather Punching bag situated in the middle of the Office floor. Everyone kept their mouths zipped tight, knowing I was trying to sweat out my growing frustration on both Cases.

"Like that, huh? Not what you wanted, eh?" Shelley muttered as I again sat down.

"Joe?" Hendo, our always suffering Head Clerk dropped a new Murder Book onto my desk as I was towelling the sweat from my face and arms. "Just to round out your day, boy. A Petrol Station Attendant shot dead in a robbery attempt in broad daylight...betcha the perps were high on Ice or coming off a week long high...so be careful."

I glanced at my watch as I slowed my breath. Growled under my breath at the obvious need to have to drop our two “drive-by” shootings for this new Case.

I grabbed my Backpack to head for the Sub-Basement showers for a quick washdown. I looked down at the address. Out Campbelltown way. Bugger, another late knock-off day that didn't involve any sort of compensation or payment!

As we headed out that way, I filled in Shelley on my earlier meeting with Jerry Stanton up in Police Intelligence.

She was silent for some time before she began.

“While you were out chasing your bloody tail, I was doing what I do best. Excellent detective work! Solid basic investigative digging. We know that our friend whom we visited the other day, works at Beyerfelds, right?”

“Yeah...Stanton mentioned that he thought Beyerfeld was his saving angel as there has been nought on the guy since Beyerfeld took him under his wing...so?”

“Well...his kid brother works at Buzzano Brothers...interesting, huh?”

“Coincidental?”

“Uh-huh. No, I don't think so...”

“Yeah, well, I agree with you. What do they do there?”

“Wayne is the Day Shift Yard Overseer at Beyerfelds, as you know. Michael, his younger brother is some type of Floor Manager on the morning shift at Buzzanos...both have worked at the respective Firms for years. Both worked their way up from Drivers...didn't Conrad Beyerfeld mention when we first interviewed him in regards to Jake Blackwood's shooting death that he had the young bloke ear-marked to take over the Yard Overseer job? Because the incumbent was not up to scratch?”

“Mmm...yeah, something along those lines...is that good enough reason to shoot the bloke?”

“Weelll...West is...or was an ex-Bikie. His affiliation supposedly ending years back...but old habits die hard. Spraying the façade of a building was and is a known form of intimidation by those clowns...ex-Bikie or not! He may have been feeling a little insecure about his job...and we know his history. Maybe he did target Blackwood. With the young bloke out of the way, he would surmise that his job was secure.”

I fell silent, closing my eyes to chew over these latest tit-bits. Somethings come easy, others not. Our supposition on the reasons such a reaction occurred was extremely tenuous...but the connection was a tantalising fact that constantly circled my grey matter, itching my nose.

“I like that, Shells. I doubt that he would spray the building as a warning though. There is no connection...but...but to target the young bloke, yes...and the spraying of the façade? Just an old habit. I would like to know the order of the bullets fired. I’d bet my house on the fatal bullet being in the lead, I reckon. And the whole scenario just how an ex-Bikie would react to solve the problem.”

“Shows promise, huh? But proving it may be a problem. I don’t see West coming forward voluntarily to confess to the crime...it wouldn’t be in his make-up.”

“Mmm...I reckon you’re right. Was Michael West, Wayne’s brother, ever a ‘Blind Hunters’ MC gangmember?” I eventually asked, breaking the silence as Shelley manoeuvred the Unmarked through the traffic on the Motorway.

“Not that records show...but...”

I shook my head, suspicious of the connection.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I held my hand up to quell any further discussion between us as I heard gabble that appeared important coming over the Police Radio Channel. I leant forward to turn up the volume of the Central Communications Radio chatter.

“Repeat...One deceased. One severely injured. It is alleged that both youths were involved in the robbery and homicide of a Convenience and Service Station at nearby McKellar at eleven-oh-four this morning. First Assist Officers and Paramedics are on the scene...” The scratchy voice evenly stated as though she was giving the latest weather forecast.

“To the Crash Site or the Service Station?” I asked, wondering silently where the hell I was!

“They serve one-dollar coffees at the Service Station that aren’t half bad...and after all, we are Homicide Cops, so we should head to the primary scene...”

“Your cold logic infuriates me at times, partner. You know the area, do you?”

“Arrh, Joe? I live out this way. Doh!!! A stone’s throw away up the Leppington Road.”

I was none-the-wiser.

“Okay, okay. Don’t get your knickers in a knot! We will continue to obey the bodiless voice of Miss Direction and turn onto the next exit ramp to head towards McKellar, where-ever that may be. All these new suburbs...they are appearing way too fast for me. Pretty soon, Bathurst will be an outer western suburb of Sydney.”

“I hope I’ve been dead for bloody years before that happens, Joe. McKellar? It’s a mainly Housing Commission ghetto that has existed for years, Joe. Turn you around twice if you are away from your residential address in the neighbouring suburb, and you are totally lost.”

I gave her a scornful look. She chose to ignore it.

It did not take us long to arrive at our destination once we left the Motorway.

The entire Service Station block cordoned off, and crammed with various Force vehicles. A fair few still illuminating the area with their flashing bar-lights. The red and blue colour washing quickly over the shiny white soffit of the large weather awning giving the area a surreal hue. We parked our vehicle on the Entry kerb crossing on the outside of the taped-off area and headed for the First-on-Scene Officer who held the On-Scene Register. Entered our names, Badge Number, Area of Employment which some scoffed at, the time, date, and our signature.

We would complete the cycle as we left the scene, signing off with the time to complete proceedings.

“Christ! Where were you two? Newcastle!?” Pogowski exploded.

I have never seen him so worked up.

“I want to remove the body but have to wait as per protocol so you two get to cast your eyes over the scene. Can you hurry up? Please!?” He added more as an after-thought!

I opened my mouth to say something but was summarily cut off by Shelley.

“Sorry, Pogs. We were delayed...the car wouldn’t start...”

“And my mother’s name is Elizabeth, Queen of the Commonwealth!” He scoffed.

“So why do this shitty job. A castle, a million-dollar annual stipend and countless buxom courtesans await you...all wanting your attention.” Shelley replied pleasantly, fluttering her eye-lashes at the sullen man.

He looked across at Shelley. The scowl most evident slowly disappeared, replaced with a grin. He knew that he had come on way too strong. He shook his head and waved his hand as a form of apology.

“Yeah? How many?” A brief smile appeared, washing away his sullen look. “My mother never told me about them. All good looking, are they? I think she was wanting to save me for some good-looking Princess. They’re scarce on the ground at the moment, so she tells me.”

“And rich in their own right...and could teach you a thing or two about Karma Sutra...”

“Just my luck...”

A switch was thrown, and his demeanour changed before our eyes as though the behaviour just displayed was an aberration. He became all business-like as was his usual demeanour.

“Frakseen ‘Frank’ Mahamod. Pakistani National owns this franchise business. Beats me how they do it. Thirty-nine years of age. Married with seven kids all still back in the home country. Was saving to bring the lot out here when he became an Australian citizen...how? I have no idea. All this conveyed by his distraught...um...de facto wife.” He shook his head as though the arrangement was completely against every belief he held. “Um...stabbed four times with a large kitchen knife. One I’d say, hitting a vital organ causing him to bleed out very quickly. No-body here to help the poor man. He was on his own. Seen enough? Can I move the body?”

“The suspects have driven the get-away vehicle into a tree out along Camden Valley Way. One deceased, the other in a bad way.” Shelley stated. “Not expected to make it, either.”

Pogowski nodded his head and began to walk towards the Store’s automatic sliding entry doors now permanently open. He disappeared outside heading towards his van, peeling off his latex gloves as he did so. Not uttering another word. He had finished his on-scene responsibilities.

Shelley raised her eye-brows, looked around and headed for the coffee dispenser, signalling the question whether I wanted a cup. I sighed and nodded my head.

“Security camera vision?” I asked no-one in particular.

“Yes...three camera locations, one of them outside captured the entire scene which lasted less than five minutes. Forensic Trace have it in their Van. The woman who had her vehicle stolen as she filled up with petrol was taken to Hospital with a broken arm and in shock.” A Forensic Trace Officer offered the information.

“They walked onto the site?”

“Yes, sir. Appears so, according to the video.”

“Jeez...came well prepared. A long knife with adrenalin flowing...local kids, eh?”

“I reckon...not adrenalin but Ice juice coming down, I would suspect, Detective. Didn’t really know what they wanted to do until they saw the Service Station and money and smokes immediately entered their tiny blown minds. Thank Christ there were no pedestrians about when they began their walk otherwise we could have had more victims...all this just to get a bit of coin...and a couple of packets of smokes.” He shook his head in disbelief.

“Ice! Shit! No rhyme or reason.” I also shook my head. We were seeing it more and more. An unexpected and violent reaction to the drug. “Any other witnesses?”

“No, sir. Just the Deceased and Missus Bella Valuta, the lone customer.”

I nodded my head as I too headed for the entry doors and the Forensic Van.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

I knocked on the door of the Forensic Van, really a rather large Motorhome converted into a travelling forensic laboratory that was only a recent purchase by the State Government. Two others of very similar size and a larger one still. It said that the purchase of these vehicles had something to do with imminent Terrorist attacks that may occur anytime soon around Sydney or environs. The sifting of clues at those confused crime sites of multiple homicides and injury enhanced by their proximity.

Maybe yes, maybe no. Who was to really know! Like any large Government Department, they liked their toys and the expansion of empire!

The Mobile Forensic Laboratory Outside Trace Unit (MOFLOTU for short in bureaucracy-speak) now had three such vehicles. A boon at Murder Scenes, so it seemed.

“Stephen! You’re out on your own?” I yelled enthusiastically when I recognised the guy standing at a bench inside the Unit. He beamed, proudly wanting to share his new ‘baby’ with all those interested...or otherwise.

Stephen Bragge had been Tellie, my better half’s Second Assist way back in history when Tellie was working full-time and I had just met her.

“Huh! At last I’ve past my Finals with flying colours. Third time I must admit, but with all the shake-ups occurring and a fair number of Officers returning to the fold who had left due

to baby commitments, things have been bubbling along nicely for me. Welcome to my travelling Lab!” He laughed as he looked around, arms held wide. “And my two Assistants. Donald Shelby and Donetta Wozowski, another bloody Pole!”

She did not look like a typical Pole at all with delicate features, dark auburn hair, a triangular face, a hint of oriental eyes, the stature of a long-distance runner and close to six feet tall in the old scale. Don Shelby, I had met before. An up and coming Forensic Scientist who, according to Tellie, will one day shake the Forensic World to the boot straps. He held in high regard by all those in the know.

Why he should be First Assist to Bragge was a mystery to me. I must remember to ask Tellie or Dee Dee Symonds about the placement. Dee Dee still Tellie’s best friend and frequent visitor to our place even though she and Tellie worked in different areas of the Forensic Trace Unit now that Tellie was back there part-time...and loving it.

With a flourish, Bragge invited us into his realm just as his Mobile chirped.

He apologised as he answered and listened intently. Shelley’s Mobile also rang and she stepped back outside to answer it.

“Joe?” Shelley ducked her head into the door opening and quietly called my name. “They’ve identified the two Perps and supplied their addresses. Just around the corner in Coleman Close. Two houses up...Jonathon Priestley. Directly opposite lives Marco ‘Mark’ Feltzberg. Both not yet seventeen. They suggest we check out both addresses as several attempts to communicate to those two addresses by phone have failed...”

“Maybe they work...” I replied rather lamely, the pit of my stomach around my knees. I nodded my head and shrugged my shoulders at Bragge who asked for one moment to whoever he was speaking to.

“The Perps have been identified. They live around the corner in Coleman Close...” He mimicked Shelley’s advice as he took his Mobile away from his ear.

“Yeah, thanks. We just found out ourselves. We’ll grab a couple of Uniforms and check out the homes. We may need your input if I am not mistaken and my suspicions are correct.” He nodded his head in understanding and turned away to continue with his phone conversation. His audience no longer interested in his new toy so he was not going to be outwardly friendly for a second longer!

I had to jog after Shelley who had commandeered a pair of Uniform Constables to accompany her. They were walking briskly up around the corner to the first house.

I instructed that one Constable remain with me while the other accompanied Shelley to the rear of the house. I gave them five minutes to settle before pounding on the front door and

yelling out 'Police' that would have woken the entire neighbourhood. After some moments, the door opened slowly and the Constable came outside to spew into the front garden.

"Yep, a psychotic rage caused by Ice, I reckon..." Shelley said tremulously as she came to stand on the door threshold. Her complexion the colour of paste. "You better get Pog and Stephen Bragge up here quick smart."

I stepped up to her and led her to a small chair on the veranda.

"You do that while I have a squiz...arrh, Shells? Shelley? Ring the Coroner to get him out here as the alleged perps are both deceased...and a locksmith to get into the Feltzberg house, opposite. We have due cause." I stated quietly over my shoulder as I stepped over the threshold into the dim interior of the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I walked slowly through the premises, stepping over the body of a middle-aged woman who was lying in the Lounge Room doorway leading to the back Kitchen. A small bundle of white fur lying beside her. The faithful Maltese Terrier still alive. I did not know how it had survived its terrible injuries.

I wandered through the house not touching anything, just looking, taking everything in.

A Vacuum Cleaner in the middle of the floor of the Lounge Room, its power lead pulled violently from a wall socket going on the way the lead was now lying across the room. Blood oozed down a small section of a wall in the same room. I surmised it was the dog's. I would imagine they had swung the dog by the tail, hitting its head repeatedly against the wall. I was surprised the little thing was still alive. This ascertained by the movement of its eyes and a slight, very faint wag of its tail as I sat on my haunches beside it.

The sight of the dog hanging on, curled into its mistress's body seemed to affect me more than the crumpled form of the woman.

Go figure!

I stood slowly, stepping over the inert body to once again, enter the Kitchen area.

A Teapot with a knitted woollen cosy over it to keep in the heat. The metal sides still emitting heat. A shiny dog bowl with dogfood still there positioned in a corner. The dirty dishes from Breakfast soaking in the sink. The soapy water now cold. A bottle of milk placed centre on a small Kitchen table. I tempted to put it back into the small Refrigerator before it warmed.

I smiled at the thought. It was one of my pet hates, letting the milk warm!

It looked as though breakfast was not long over and the woman had begun her daily chores before being violently interrupted.

I returned to the body of the woman. Got down on one knee to take a closer look. Leant in close to the prone figure, looking intently at the neck wounds and facial injuries. The damage done suggested several hits to the jaw and mouth. Two big hits at least! My guess that would have laid the slight middle-aged woman out cold.

It looked as though the woman's neck was broken, her position indicating that the door swung with force to collide with her head and neck region multiple times. For her to be in this position, she more than likely was sucker-punched. Maybe positioned deliberately so they could carry out their dastardly little game with the door. I imagined them giggling like idiots as they continued with their sadistic little game.

I stood and again walked through the house, out into the back yard to breathe deeply before once again, repeating the exercise to get it clear in my head the possible scenario that went down this morning in this house.

Maybe the sound of the Vacuum Cleaner had triggered the psychotic reaction of both boys. Perhaps the dog barking when-ever the Vacuum Cleaner was turned on which was the trigger for the insane reaction...maybe yes, maybe no!

We would never know for sure.

It was extremely rare that both boys would be thrust into such a psychotic state at the same time...extremely rare. Maybe one of them with the other going along for the ride, perhaps.

"Joe?" Shelley's voice broke my concentration. "Pogowski is here with his two Assists. They have organised another Forensic Team to attend this scene and several more Uniforms have been arranged as the Media are in attendance...the ghouls can smell blood and a sensational story..."

I nodded my head and as Pogowski came to stand beside me, I muttered that the dog was still alive.

"Perhaps you could arrange for it to be put to sleep immediately, huh?"

My priorities seemed out of whack in the circumstances.

He nodded his head as he instructed his Assist to do the honours. He was truthful when he stated that he could not. Both Assistants sniggered. Here was a man who spent the greater part of his working week cutting up dead bodies. Some beyond recognition! He would

spend some time knelt over the woman peering at her injuries and possible cause of death, yet he did not have the stomach to apply the ‘coup de grace’ to the poor dog!

Go figure!

I smiled to myself as I walked from the house, wondering at the ways of the World. Walked slowly across the street to the Feltzberg house. Knocked on the door several times. Looked around. The street now cordoned off at both ends. At a cross-street further down and at the Service Station on the corner where Forensic Trace people still worked the scene there. Uniforms were going from house to house in the cordoned-off section of the street interviewing anyone who was at home.

I walked around the back and tried the back door. It swung open. I stretched another pair of latex gloves on and tentatively pushed open the door further.

“You stay here, Shells....” I murmured after I yelled out our presence, to be greeted by silence.

“Not on your life, Joe...I’m still your partner and a Murder Dee as well, Tonto.”

Both of us unclipped our Service pistols, me holding a ‘maglite’ over the top of my handgun as we slowly and carefully entered the house.

She followed me into the interior of the home. A slight smell of cooking. The house clean and tidy. Airy with light flooding into every room from well-proportioned windows. Well-loved and well-worn pieces of furniture. Nick-knacks and photo-frames adorned the walls. A picture of Christ centre-piece in the narrow front Hallway. Three Bedrooms. All beds made including two in what was obviously a little girls’ room.

No bodies.

I seemed to take a deep breath. Shelley too, seemed to relax and the air seemed fresher for the result.

“We’ll need to contact the adult Feltzbergs, at their work. I’ll get the Senior Sergeant onto that chore.”

I still sounded as though I was talking with a mouthful of cotton wool...or uttering words down a long tube.

We walked outside and back across the road. This house now a hive of activity.

A locksmith turned up and we apologised for the call-out, explaining that the back door of the Feltzberg house was unlocked, and we did not need his services. He gave me a funny

look as though he did not believe me. He shrugged his shoulders and left. A smile, a wave of his hand knowing that he still could claim for the call out.

I sat on the front brick fence and began to make notes into my iPad before the events of the morning clouded my memory.

“The poor dog...” Shelley murmured.

I nodded my head, feeling nauseous as the image of the dog came back. The body of the woman not causing a second glance.

Funny, huh?

CHAPTER THIRTY

Cases like this really irked me!

There would be no arrests or formal charges laid. No culprit for us to interview. No-one punished for the crime. Or do time. However, the same amount of paperwork was involved and usually, the same degree of shoe-leather lost in interviewing witnesses, family, friends, work colleagues, and neighbours.

A mountain of evidence gathered for a Coronal Enquiry that would make certain assumptions; name the Accused, and offer conclusions as to the why and where-fore about the brutal events. Getting into the minds of the alleged perpetrators was never going to happen and the reasons for the insane events never fully explained. No-one could be quite sure as to the why...

The effects of drugs.

A common remark heard now-a-days.

A sad litany on the way modern society was heading downhill in a basket...fast, according to some people.

Me? After spending so much time in Narcotics at the commencement of my career, I was not so sure. There appeared to me to be a certain proportion of the youth who would always want to take the risk. The percentage not changing that much from some twenty-five...thirty years ago. Admittedly, I had no statistics to back that thought up, and perhaps my opinion had more to do with my optimistic outlook on life, but I would be interested to know whether my gut feeling was way off the mark or not.

I doubted it!

Ice was the culprit, later confirmed by blood and Toxicology work-ups on both youths.

These cold, precis conclusions that would never reflect the true nature of the crime handed down by the Coroner who would listen to countless person's testimony before making a learned judgement based purely on the facts. Emotions and feelings removed from the process. The waste of humanity and the insidious nature of the drug that was taking more and more young adults into its hideous grasp the unsung culprit!

Sure, not every Ice Addict suffered these psychotic and self-destructive episodes. There were some who function quite normally even when coming down off a three-day high...and you would never know except for the skinniness of that person...but then you had...

Even if the alleged Perps had survived the horrific vehicle crash, it is very doubtful that a sane reason would ever be forthcoming from either of them. The memories of this morning's events completely erased from whoa to go!

The only positive aspect was that the two wrapped themselves around a tree, not involving any further innocent lives. Whether it was the final act of rebellion, a sudden realisation of what they had done that morning, a suicidal pact, or just a simple case of going too fast, losing control of the vehicle would never be known. At an age where one could not yet obtain a Driver's Licence in this State, one could assume that the driver was completely inexperienced, and driving at a speed where he had no control over the vehicle resulting in accidently wrapping themselves around that tree.

That left me feeling completely helpless, gutted, angry, and frustrated! Mainly because there would be no guilty party standing in Court and no punishment ever established.

Oh, how I sometimes wished to believe in a 'Higher Being' who wisely accorded the required sentencing before the guilty sods permitted entry through the 'Pearly Gates.' But then, that was an easy way to look at things. We all knew that life was not easy, that sinners and saints all died the same way...to rot in the ground or reduced to ashes...there was nothing else except how we lived our lives to separate, advertise and categorise our existence! To make us famous, infamous or die as an unknown.

The great majority dying just as simple, honest civilians that did not create any sort of history.

Kind of sad, huh?

I guess not all of us can be famous, huh? The memories of our existence slowly fading after about two generations. That means that my Grandkids could very well be the last generation having any knowledge of my existence here on Earth. No wonder there were some who

thought that “Life after Death” was a fact. It would be a kind of heart-warming experience getting to know the great-great-great Grandfather for the first time...and they say that familial similarities are noticeable down through the generations with even spitting images occurring!

As I stated, a warming thought. Pity it wasn't true as I would have liked to meet some of my past generations. They were supposedly not very nice people according to my Nanna and guardian. But then, she had a bent opinion of every male member down through the ages!

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

My partner and I laboured for almost three weeks on the ‘Multiple Ice Murders’ Case as it was now known.

Neither of us achieving any form of satisfaction in collating all the information, re-interviewing family, friends, relatives, and work colleagues of all those deceased. We still required Forensic Trace of the three crime scenes, Post Mortem results, and Blood Work-ups on the two alleged Perps before we could bundle the lot up for the Coroners’ interest.

With that achieved, and after we had obtained the Boss’s signature on the full Report and made sure nothing was missing in the multiple Murder Book Volumes, we gave ourselves an early mark.

Sweating out our frustrations that the Case had caused us down in the Gym.

The next morning Shelley found me bent over my computer pounding away on the keyboard as she had come in earlier than usual to further reduce her frustrations of the ‘Multiple Ice Murder’ Case by swimming laps of the Pool.

“Did you go home last night, Joe? It doesn’t look as though you did!” She chuckled, though there was a frown of concern on her face.

I let out a chuckle and sat back in my chair, pushing the keyboard away from me.

“I feel as though I had very little sleep, that’s for sure. You know that nagging comment some-one said but you can’t remember who? The more it nags at you, the greater its imagined importance becomes, until you are so mad that you cannot recall it! There is no way you can sleep. You do nothing but toss and turn!”

Shelley nodded her head. Grinned.

We had all been there, every one of us!

“Anyhow, I figured it out, but I could not come across the details of the Uniforms’ trawl of the area from my Computer at home, so I came in to sort it out...”

“What time?”

“Oh, about four, maybe a little after. I couldn’t stay at home as I was giving Tellie the heebie-jeebies and you know what she is like if she loses sleep...remember when we were interviewing Jake Blackwood’s young wife after the lad was shot? She said something that seemed so innocuous at the time that we bounced over it, I think. She stated that we should investigate the guy across the road because she felt he was the target and not her husband. This stated as her husband was still oozing blood from two bullet wounds. Slumped down on the front Balcony of their Unit.”

I took a long draw of coffee that I had made at home. It was in one of those ‘thermo-containers’ that keep the liquid hot for months...or maybe not so long as the liquid was chilling!

Shelley nodded her head, sitting down at her chair which she had swivelled around to face me. Most of the Night Duty staff were in the process of packing up and calling it a day. Waving their farewells to both of us.

“Yeah...” She answered uncertainly.

“Google ‘Streetscape’ is a wonderful thing...” I continued after I decided to throw the rest of the coffee down the drain when I had a chance. Then again, I had made it around three. It was now past seven!

Shelley gave me a smile. I wondered if she was following me.

“Let me explain...Railway Parade parallels the main western railway line. Railway Street meets Railway Parade at a T-intersection. On the northern side of that intersection, Blackwood’s Unit complex sits on the corner. A dozen Units, four to each floor. Two to each stairwell landing, front and back. The length of the building going down Railway Street. The narrow front façade on the Railway Parade side.”

Shelley was nodding her head in exasperation. I was dribbling, so she thought. I continued unconcerned.

“Blackwood’s address is *Unit 2, Number One on Railway Street, Canley Vale*. Their floor the one above the undercover Ground Floor parking area bays. On the opposite corner sits another Unit complex almost mirror image to Blackwood’s, except that it is twice as long, eight Units to each floor around three stairwells. Both have open parking positions under the

building on the ground floor for residents' vehicle parking. The rest of the building above for both complexes supported by concrete and brick columns. *Unit I, Number Two, Railway Street* is leased to a Dieter Kalavic...this Unit also on the First Floor above the Parking Area bays with the Unit facing Railway Parade...Kalavic is an interesting fellow..."

I looked at my partner. She still had that smart little smirk on her face. Her arms crossed. I could not for the life of me figure out why she appeared so smug...and they call me an expert Detective!

"A former Comanchero MC Gang member. Walked out supposedly around twenty years ago. In Ninety-five. Done time for Cannabis related offences, concealed weapons charges, and various assault charges. Not a nice bloke at all going on his Rap Sheet. DoB April Twelve, Nineteen Fifty-Nine. Making him an old bloke at fifty-eight years of age. Walked out of the gang situation in Nineteen Ninety-Five with the former wife of the Comanchero's Number One man...not a nice situation at all. A situation just waiting for a payback hit as old habits die hard. A drive-by 'spray' just to liven things up, maybe. They got the wrong address...wrong Unit block. Arse about face with their numbers of the Unit Block..."

I sat there giving Shelley a satisfied smile, pleased with my morning's work. She shook her head condescendingly and slowly placed her feet up onto the edge of my desk. She had slipped her feet from her flat shoes.

"Joe, come on!" She uttered, her arms spread wide in exasperation. "There has been nothing for close on twenty, almost twenty-five years. The guy is clean as...jeez!" She exclaimed. "Those Bikie gang members do not wait for twenty years before giving a wake-up call, Joe. They hammer the guy within forty-eight hours, not twenty years later." She shook her head. "Kalavic is currently on Centrelink Benefits and remains on that because he does the required volunteer work hours per week. Volunteers at Smithies and at the Kids Hospital where he is held in very high regard...regardless of his tats, his body jewellery and his muscle-bound, overbearing, belligerent appearance...the Kids Hospital absolutely adore him as he is great with the kids and is always kind, courteous and punctual. Ditto a glowing Report from The Smith Family...and the Soup Kitchen where he helps two times per week before he goes off to the Hospital have the same opinion of the guy."

She nodded her head once as if to make a point. A grin on her face. Placed the point of her heel onto the edge of my desk and leant back as far as her chair would allow.

That smart, condescending air.

She then stood and curtsied.

"How did you find that out?" I asked, not really wanting to know.

As far as I was concerned, I had just wasted an entire night's tossing and turning for nothing. Whatever my partner had dug up, she should have informed me if it was relevant to the Case.

I was pissed off! My blood pressure climbing!

"The same way you did...and before the 'Multiple Ice Murder' Case hit the fan. I think maybe at the time you were running around like a chook with its head chopped off visiting old mates up in Police Intelligence, the GRC Unit and Vice, wasn't it? Did I miss any? You should read up on the Murder Book occasionally. I had placed a copy of his stats in the Book, Tonto."

"You should tell your partner what you found!" I hit back, anger in my voice. My eyes glaring at my partner. I had wasted a night's worth of sleep! For SFA, so I thought.

"If I thought it important and relevant to the case, I would have." Again, the patronising air. "Perhaps you should read the Murder Book more often, maybe, partner." Repeating the stir.

"You've dismissed the idea that it could have been a mistake...an accident...a mix-up with the addresses. Some people don't know whether the Unit Number should come first, or the Street Number..." I would not let it go.

"I've dismissed the man entirely." She looked down her nose at me as she spun her chair around and stood up again. She was going to head for the Gym as soon as she divested herself of the usual. "*He*, my stumbling, bumble-footed partner, has been under the influence of a good woman for over twenty years and has stayed out of trouble. Turned his life around for love. Don't you just love it?"

"Arrh, shit!! Give me bloody strength! I'm going home to catch up on some missed sleep...no-one will be home so the place will be quiet!"

"No, you don't!" She commanded. "You have signed on, so let's go down the Basement and sweep those cobwebs away. Betcha I can beat you again, old man..."

I sulked for a bit, realising that that mood would ensure a lousy day. I simmered for a bit longer before ridding myself of the feeling. I stood and gathered up my Backpack that contained fresh Gym and swimming gear. A couple of washed towels.

"Put your money where your mouth is, young lady." I challenged, cooling swiftly. My competitive spirit coming to the fore.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

“Cops...” Neither a question nor an answer. Just a correct observation.

He looked around to see if anyone was within earshot. He was out near the Nurses Station, his leg crossed one over the other, taking all his weight on the straight leg, talking cheerfully to a Nurse sitting behind the counter.

He looked up as we came onto the Ward. He picked us in one though we were a good fifty metres from where he stood.

We walked towards him as he straightened to stare at our progress. He strolled casually away from the Nurses’ Station to a small alcove that may hold a bed in an emergency. Leant against the wall, a slight smirk on his face as we neared him.

A big bloke. No change from one eighty-five centimetres. His shoulders almost as wide. He was fast approaching sixty but his skin was still tight. He did weights. Not a steroid user. Every square inch of skin was tattcovered. His head bald but a multi hue of fancy tats. The body jewellery was enough to weigh me down and make me feel tired! Through his eyebrows, ears, lips, cheeks, nose, and tongue too, I thought. His eyes were alert, always on the move. He was nervous of our interest in him. Maybe a life-time habit thing. Old habits die hard with some people, especially when they are close to cops!

“Bloody Christ! I thought you guys were out of my hair a long time ago...yer can’t leave an ex-crim alone, can you. What are you trying to stitch me up with now?” This said in a quiet hiss. “Took you long enough though. I thought you’d be straight onta me. You blokes are slowing down close to stop, I reckon.”

“Old habits die hard, my friend. You Dieter Kalavic?”

“You know I am! Get out of my hair, will you?” Again, said in a quiet tone. The words menacing in their delivery.

The humour not lost on me. He was as bald as a badger!

“Look!” He began, spreading his legs which put both of us on the defensive. “I volunteer at the Smith Family two days a week. Help in a Soup Kitchen twice a week and come here to cheer the kids up two afternoons a week. I do that because I thoroughly enjoy it...and yes, it is a requirement so that I can stay on Benefits...but I’d do it regardless. The kids are non-judgemental and do not categorise or place people in boxes because of appearances. I cheer them up, sing songs to them, teach a few how to play the guitar, read to them, talk, and listen to them...and leave them alone when they want to be left alone. I am not a bad boy to them...so leave me alone. I left that life over twenty years ago and your records would show

that...so I shouldn't be a bad boy to you guys either, eh? I say again, your Records should show that I've been clean for over twenty years...so piss off and leave me in peace. You got no right to harass me, okay?"

"But the traces of that life haven't left you..." Shelley remarked, looking him up and down.

"Yeah, well. There is no Law against having tats or body jewellery, now is there?" He swayed from one foot to the other. I half expected him to 'shape-up' in front of us. If he did, I reckon he would have the wood on us! Instead, he looked down, his voice quiet and non-menacing.

"That's what I teach them...not to do what I did when I was young, getting in with the wrong crowd and going crazy, and regretting it for most of my life...pity you guys don't let that knowledge sway your preconceived thoughts on a person. I know why you are here...mistaken identity, eh? Wrong joint sprayed with bullets with an innocent man killed for being in the wrong spot at the wrong time, eh? Who would want to kill me? Or warn me? Fucking no-one, coppers! And I can't help with your enquiries as to why the young bloke was picked on." He hissed so the nearby kids couldn't hear the language. "So, leave me alone! As there is nothing more to say, I suggest you back-track outa here, okay?"

He walked away towards a bed doing a penguin walk. The child lying passively in the bed suddenly smiled the smile of an innocent that lit up his face.

That was worth more than all the tea in China!

I had to admit to myself that I especially did have preconceived ideas. Shelley had not been in favour of confronting the guy. For me, old habits die hard, is all I'll say!

I couldn't get past that thought!

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

"Where you going now?" I asked as Shelley turned the Unmarked away from the direction of Paramatta. I glanced at my watch. "It's almost knock-off time...or will be by the time we get back to the Office. Where you going?"

"The Beyerfeld Yard."

"Why, for God's sake?"

"I don't know..."

“Bloody Hell!”

It didn't take us that long to make the Beyerfeld Yard. The Day Shift drivers were coming into the yard to knock off. We parked in the one available spot under the elevated Office building and quickly climbed the stairs. We were ushered into Conrad Beyerfeld's Office for the second time in about ten weeks.

This time, the man did not need to be summoned from some far corner of the Yard.

He was sitting at a small side-desk to his beautiful new Office Desk staring at a Computer Screen. Looking bored in the process. He brightened up as we entered the room. I sat before instructed to do so. It was some ten, perhaps eleven weeks since we were last here. The difference was purely amazing!

I cast an eye around wondering whether it was the same Office that we had entered almost three months ago. New furnishings, an impressive desk, matching side desk, and executive chair, a small credenza which supported a CopyingMachine and an array of land-line and mobile telephones sitting in their charging docks and three two-way radio sets similarly positioned. A vase of colourful flowers that I suspected were artificial. What the heck, they added beauty to the room. A beautiful, colourful print on one wall, its primary colours matching those of the flowers. Definitely a woman's touch. The large window that looked over the yard area cleaned with new venetians protecting the room from the setting sun, an air-conditioning unit that hummed away quietly, a large White Board with what looked like vehicle information as to mileage and service information written on it utilising some sort of printing device...and just a keyboard on a very clean desk. There was not a wayward piece of paper anywhere to be seen in the Office.

Beyerfeld was beaming. Proud of the resurrection of his Office that had been choking to death on piles of paper.

“A terrible business was Jake Blackwood's death but there is always a positive that comes from the ashes, isn't there? The best thing I could ever have done was to hire his young widow. She went through here like a bloody fire-storm. My Office and the General Office. She has the place humming along nicely. She practically runs the place now. Things went off the rails for a little while after Jake died. I had to sack two drivers for fighting. A pity, as I reckon they may slip back into petty crime...a real pity, but the Yard Overseer couldn't seem to control them, so he says...”

“Who is that?” Shelley asked as she looked around the Office, her eyes taking in the large White Board off to one side against a wall. It was one of those fancy ones that most Schools have now. It connected by Bluetooth to the Computer Tower tucked out of sight somewhere.

“Brandy’s work...idea...a real time and money saver. She is an absolute wizard. No specific training but she has a brain in her head. Like Jake had. A real, quick learner...who are they? The guys I had to get rid of? Bruce Saunders and Charlie Sayers...early twenties. Petty charges that put them in the Pen...now, who’s to know where they’ll end up.” The sadness the man felt was an indication to the depth he felt for his employees.

“No. Your Yard Overseer?”

“I had Jake pegged for that job...he would have made a better fist of it than Westie...he is not really a people person but instead, uses his considerable presence to intimidate some of the drivers who he thinks maybe stepping out of line. To tell you the truth, he has been on thin ice several times with me...that is why I wanted to have Jake take over the job. I was just waiting for the right time...now? The status quo remains. Why did you ask about him?”

Shelley shook her head.

“No reason...just crossing the ‘T’s.”

“Mmm...” Beyerfelddid not look convinced.

“He was a former ‘Blind Hunters’ gang member...” Shelley stated.

“Yeah! So?”

The man’s attitude to be applauded in one way. Treated with a degree of unease in another way. He saw only good in people and was convinced that no-one was all bad, just led astray perhaps.

Again, Shelley shook her head. Stood to show that the conversation was over. She gestured with a wide sweep of her arm. “I’m impressed, sir. Let Missus Blackwood know, will you?”

The rotund Beyerfeld stood from his chair and walked around his desk. A beaming smile to show he too, was impressed.

“Would you believe I have more hours in the day now. My Office Staff are happier and everything is ticking along nicely. We have streamlined our delivery services and saved money...but one thing that has come up is the number of deliveries. That doesn’t seem to match the amount received for the delivery service...but Brandy is on to and will sort it out, I’m sure.”

“Maybe you should promote her as your Assistant General Manager and have her look after the day shift operations, huh?” I offered. “Take a load off your shoulders, I would think.”

The squat man looked up at me, a frown of concentration on his face.

“I never thought of that...but that maybe a good idea. I’ll think about it.”

We walked out through the General Office area. The three women so located looked up from their routine and gave a smile. The difference in the place was enormous. Even that area was cleaner, neater with nothing out of place.

As Shelley backed the Unmarked out of the ‘Visitor Only’ parking spot under the Office complex, she mumbled something I did not pick up.

“Get your ears checked, old man...that background check on *Michael* West? We never did do it, did we?”

“No. The arrh...the ‘Multiple Ice Murder’ Case got in the way.”

“Maybe we should...along with his brother. Find out a bit more on them. Whether they are close and what is their relationship with each other, huh?”

“Mmm...I guess it is something that is overdue. Blame it on that bloody Ice Case!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

It was one of those things you always said as you welcomed your guest at your front door. That is, it had been way too long since we had seen each other and for sure, it will not happen again. We must stay in contact more frequently.

In my case, it was that guilty feeling of not contacting them regularly, that had eventually force me to invite them over on this fine, sunny Sunday for a friendly BBQ in the backyard. Of course, Muscles and Marge with the triplets were the regular second week-end visitors, especially in Summer when the kids could cavort in the pool all day! They never required an invitation as their second week-end visits were set in concrete. Neither Tellie nor I minded, as Muscles was my best mate with Marge running a close second. That knowledge put Tellie’s nose out of joint as she said that she ran a poor fourth behind Shelley. She wanted to know though, why three out of four were female!

I had no idea and thought it rather inconsequential until Muscles stirred me about it one time. That made me feel guilty, not the least because Tellie was way down the pecking list! Go figure!

Dallas looked healthy.

Bennie beaming, her usual alive and happy disposition warming the hearts of everyone she met.

Malisa, my pseudo daughter-in-law had to be there because of her involvement with Dallas in the Digital Intelligence and Surveillance Section within the AFP. She and my son were firm friends with Dallas and Bennie and tried to see them socially a lot more regularly than I ever had...further twisting the knife into my sensitive guilt complex.

As always, after a delicious meal and a couple of fine Reds, the subject always got around to work.

“Did you see that Current Affairs program the other night?” Dallas asked.

“No...we rarely watch TV and stay well away from Shows like that. They like to jab microphones into people’s faces and crucify them without much thought to proof of evidence or privacy concerns...what was it about?”

Dallas lowered his head. Cleared his throat.

“Maybe...look, I can’t say too much as it is an ongoing investigation, but they ambushed this guy and accused him of just about every crime in the book. He was our leading POI in a drug distribution network...a big concern. He has flown the coop...we don’t know where to...”

I shook my head and uttered a couple of conciliatory words.

“Yeah...they think they are doing the job of us Cops as they think we are not doing our job good enough. Unfortunately, they can do things we cannot do...who was the guy?”

Dallas tried hard to skip around the question before giving up.

“Wayne West...a former ‘Blind Hunters’ member and a stand-over, strongman back in the day though supposedly he has been clean for a couple of years at least...but...”

“Westy!!??” I exploded. “Wayne West? He is the Yard Supervisor for Beyerfeld Courier Services. Since when have you been keeping an eye on him?”

“Jeez...look, I shouldn’t have said as much as I have...”

“I understand.” I replied. “He is our Number One POI in the drive-by shooting homicide of Joshua ‘Jake’ Blackwood...oh...about two and a half months ago now...and the drive-by shooting homicide of Bradley Mallet and his wife, Betty about two weeks after the first event. It was big News for a day and a half then was overtaken by another Trump Tweeter attack.”

That caused asides and chuckles from around the table.

“Why?” Dallas asked as he filled his glass with iced water. He had never drunk alcohol. Bennie though, was enjoying my selection. Muscles contribution to the table wines with his ‘Clean Skin’ selection was not meet with satisfied sighs! More screwed up faces as the wine had turned to vinegar, so we all jokingly asserted, just to dig the shitter out of the man. We still drank all of his contributions for the afternoon!

“He was in Hospital a while ago...a hernia op I think it was. He was pinged and counselled for his behaviour and verbal abuse and sexual innuendo to Betty Seng who was Ward Sister at the time. Appears the man has a fondness for dainty, attractive Oriental women. Got in a bit of hot water and he did not like the rejection by Seng...that is our take on that drive-by. Her partner unfortunately took a stray bullet as well...Jake Blackwood? He was pinged as taking over Westy’s job as Yard Overseer...Beyerfeld has not been satisfied with Westie’s handling of the job for a while apparently. He was going to replace West with Blackwood. That is a rather tenuous summation as we have nothing that really connects the man to both homicides except those facts, but we are still digging. You didn’t have surveillance on the man during that period, did you. You know, some video or tape showing him cleaning a Colt thirty-two or a Glock Fifteen?”

That said more in jest.

“Huh, in your dreams. Your supposition is a bit thin, isn’t it? The reason for a drive-by homicide shooting of two victims? Because he was rejected by an Oriental woman...so he kills her and her husband...I don’t like that, Joe.” Dallas stated, looking earnestly at me. “Shooting the other guy because he thought he might lose his job to him!! That’s a bit weak, too.”

I noticed that Muscles nodded his head in silent agreement. That was unlike the man as he never lost the opportunity to give me a rev-up!

“We knew he was...arrh...a former ‘Blind Hunters’ associate and strong man. He questioned some years ago as a witness to a vehicle accident concerning a cop injured in that collision. Unconscious, upside down in his Highway patrol vehicle. Had his Service pistol stolen from the scene...almost outside the ‘Blind Hunters’ Clubhouse. West named as a person questioned about the incident, suspected of stealing the handgun but nothing could be proven. Other witnesses, mainly other ‘Blind Hunters’ mates of his, swore on their mothers’ graves that West had not gone anywhere near the Patrol Vehicle. Um...the Glock was used as the murder weapon to kill Seng and Mallet.”

“That’s a different bottle of water. Why haven’t you hauled him in?”

“Circumstantial...nothing more concrete to go on...and knowing the guy, he would be a rather hostile witness who would never implicate himself. We need more on him. If you are

right in saying he has flown the coop, then it maybe a while before we link up with him again.”

I shook my head, not liking that scenario one iota.

There was no use flogging ourselves over not having done something, like hauling the guy in for questioning long before he disappeared. Whether he may or may not have confessed to anything or dropped something that we could hang our hats on, was a waste of time and effort thinking about.

He had disappeared, throwing everything out the window. Baby and bathwater included!

It was going to hell in a cane basket pretty quick!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Monday morning during the customary weekly Staff Meeting, I went over what Dallas had relayed tome on the preceding day.

The Boss nodded his head as I finished my little story.

“That’s all you got on the man? Your source? No? You are not going to divulge his name and why he should know about this information.” He looked down at his hands not really expecting me to divulge such information. A bet he knew the score in any case. “Um...I’ll organise an Open Warrant on the Suspect. He can’t have gotten that far, surely. A guy on a Harley sticks out like a pimple on a pumpkin...we’ll get him. Your other case? The Blackwood ‘drive-by’ murder? I notice that too, has stalled somewhat...anything?Or are you hanging your hat on it being the same Perp, huh?”

I nodded my head.

“Mmm...” He mumbled.

The Boss looked down at his hands, turning them over several times to inspect them closely. I half expected him to get out a pair of clippers and start a manicure! He was not of the same opinion of the same Perp being involved in both Drive-by shooting homicides. He did not have to say anything; his general demeanour was sufficient to pass on *that* message.

“The ‘Multiple Ice Murders’ Case...” He eventually stated. “It was rolled up successfully, thank Christ, with a full Report to the Coroner’s Office as we speak. Good work, Shelley. Your Report was of an excellent standard as always...”

Bloody hell!

I had done most of the collating and writing of the major portion of the Report. Shelley had merely corrected the grammar and placed her signature on the thing! It was the back-handed way in which the Boss handed out his displeasure at a job not progressing to his liking. Shelley fluttered her eye-lashes at me as the conversation swung onto Cases handled by our colleagues.

I sat and sulked!

At the end of the meeting, we all walked unenthusiastically in single file out of the Boss's office like a mob of Brown's cows heading away from the Dairy. My lethargy seemed to be contagious this morning, I mused to myself!

"What do you want to do?" Shelley asked as we arrived at our desks.

"Go home..." I moaned.

She glanced at her watch.

"It's almost Lunch. How about we grab a bite to eat and a decent coffee and go sit on the bank of the river across the road. It's a beautiful, fine day and we might get some inspiration from the ducks."

"The ducks?" I countered. "How?"

"You may get some tips on how to waddle properly...you're not doing it right yet."

"Mmm...you poking fun at my age or the fact I may have put on a bit of weight over the week-end?"

"Both...it makes me feel better and every time I can get a dig about you aging, it makes me feel so much younger..."

I was not in the mood to reply with one of my witticism. Instead I waved the comment away with a flick of my hand.

"Mmm...the man is a little moody. A bite to eat and then a visit to Michael West at the Buzzano Warehouse...how about it?" Shells suggested.

"Why?"

"He may be able to put some light on where his brother is."

“I got more chance of winning the Lottery!”

“Pigs might fly...”

“What else have we got?”

“An assurance that pigs will never fly in my life-time...yeah, why not. It is too good a daycramped up in the Office all afternoon. How about we go via Cabramatta and that wonderful Vietnamese Restaurant you know...for lunch?”

“You’re determined to ensure that I put on more weight, aren’t you? Let’s go. I have suddenly got the taste for a decent Vietnamese meal in my mouth.”

My mood improved almost immediately!

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

We eventually arrived at the Warehouse just before three in the afternoon.

An extended Lunch not our usual fare, but what the heck! We reckon we had earned it. We were not like some in the Office who seemed to spend a lot of time at a Restaurant or Pub. Filling in their day instead of doing investigative duties. There were rumours galore about that carry-on by some of the Team! As far as I was concerned there is always room for a little give and take. Most of our Murder Team colleagues put in their pound of flesh and did extra unpaid work without grumbling about no O/T or ‘Days off in Lieu’ being available.

The Boss was fully aware of where each pair stood on the ledger.

We were directed to a rear alcove where the decreasing number of smokers retired to for their coffee breaks.

It was the ‘quiet’ time for the operations of the Business.Night Shift and mornings apparently, was when the operation was frenetic. Michael West was out the back in the designated ‘Smokers Area’. There were perhaps half a dozen smokers sharing the area. Numbers were dropping all the time.

“West? Michael West?” I asked one of the blokes who smelt of stale cigarette smoke. It almost made me gag!

I wondered how I had put up with the stench for so many years. I had never realised the strength of the odour that would have wafted from me. Permanently embedded in the pores

of my skin, my hair, my clothes, and my breath. I wondered how I could never smell myself.

The bloke poked his chin in the direction of a rear corner in full shade. A bloke sat there with a mug of coffee in one hand and a cigarillo in the other, minding his own business. I could smell the distinctive odour from where we stood. We walked up to the table and was about to sit opposite the man.

“Cops! Don’t sit down as you’re not welcome. Fuck off...I got nothing to say.” Said quietly, menacingly.

“You don’t even know what we are going to ask you...a bit premature...in your nature, eh?”

“Huh...the comment still applies regardless whether you think I suffer from premature ejaculation or nay...so fuck off!”

“Your brother...”

“As I have stated several times already, fuck off!” His voice never rose and continued in the same cadence and quiet tone. He never once glanced at either of us as though we were unworthy of that consideration...maybe we were!

“Thanks for your time.” Shelley stated friendly-like. “We *will* see you again, Mister West. You can bet your house on it.”

We turned and left, watched by the other smokers, all sneering at our departure, thinking their Boss was the cleverest man in the Universe.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Two nights later, I was in charge of the BBQ to cook the evening meal, as Tellie had worked that day.

I often wondered how she could reconcile that fact when she did not offer to cook when I worked...every day! I was not going to argue the point how-ever, as I enjoyed the role of BBQ host!

Go figure.

My Mobile chirped in its charging dock. I walked into the Kitchen and picked it up.

“Joe? Turn on your TV. By the time you do it, the story will have finished so watch the ABC News at seven...” Shelley sounded angry. Very angry!

“Why?” I ask, already talking into a dead line.

I did as my partner angrily demanded, returning to check the chicken that I was cooking for tea. Tellie was preparing the Tossed Salad as the girls tried to help. Tellie had boundless patience that way. The Kitchen usually turned into a mess when-ever the girls offered to help. Tellie always took up their offer, raising her eye-brows and explaining that was how she started...and look at her now!

“And you still make a bloody mess!” I joked, as a Cherry Tomato came sailing towards me. This was the signal for the girls to join in with bits and pieces of salad thrown in all directions.

“Come on guys! Enough, already!” My signal for the riot to calm. Tellie thought it hilarious and between giggles, asked who had been on the phone. I went and turned the TV sound up and swivelled it so I could see it from the outdoor dining table where we intended having Dinner.

“Shelley, but all she said was to watch the ABC News at seven. I have no idea why.”

Thankfully, the rear patio area had escaped the general melee relatively cleanly. The girls attempted throws wayward and not that strong! AU2 seemed to like salad items tossed in a Balsamic Vinegar. Go figure. She more than likely would have a rumbling tummy for most of the night!

As I sat enjoying the meal, I kept one eye on the TV screen and when the News piece came on, I was so disgusted I threw first my fork, then my knife into the pool. I stood and started ranting, liberally mixed with expletives.

The girls thought this was a real hoot and tried to emulate my trick. Missing the pool by miles!

“Girls...Sam! Al! Joe? Mind your language in front of the girls, Joe! Bloody hell! And you shouldn't throw things like that into the pool...hear me, girls? You could tread on them when you go for a swim and cut your foot...so do not do it! Understand?” Tellie shouted angrily. The deep scowl on her face enough to scare Hercules.

“Daddy did!” They both chorused.

I was flabbergasted by the News item, swearing loud enough for Tellie to again remonstrate me angrily. I apologised to my three ladies.

“What was it, love?” She asked, concern in the words. She could see how upset I was.

“I’ll tell you after we put the girls down for the night. Do you think I should fish the knife and fork out of the pool?”

“No! The girls will want to join you. They have already had their bath. Leave it until later when they are bedded down...and it has got cooler...” This said with a smile on her face.

I rarely went for a swim in the pool these days, always complaining that the water was too cold, even on the hottest of days in the middle of Summer. The thermometer over forty!

I much preferred the heated Sub-basement pool at work. Just enough to take the chill from the water.

So call me old!

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

It had been a warm night until a slight nor-easterly had picked up keeping things cool. The Cicadas splitting the night air with their incessant cacophony. We re-opened the bottle of Red that we had corked after last night’s meal. One bottle a week between the two of us not an indication of alcohol dependency to my way of thinking! Both our little ones down for the night, already dreaming. Both were good like that. No shenanigans or extending ‘bed time’. As soon as they hit the pillow, they were fast asleep. Well, on most nights in any case.

“The two Cases Shells and I have...” I began. “Have basically stalled...our Number One POI in the Jake Blackwood ‘Drive-by’ has disappeared because some nosy, irresponsible, above the Law, Current Affairs Program stuck a microphone in his face which was beamed into a third of every Living Room in Australia. The guy ran...and we haven’t a clue where. The case against him for the shooting is rather weak and circumstantial but he was our best shot. The Mallet and Seng ‘Drive-by’? Dead in the water though we suspect he may have been the shooter also.”

I picked up my wine glass and gave it a whirl. Smelt the aroma and had a taste.

“Still okay, Tells.” I nodded my head, had several sips before continuing. “We tried to interview the brother of our POI hoping he would divulge his brother’s whereabouts. We had a surveillance operation on both men because of anonymous Crime-Stopper calls that detailed that both brothers were knee-deep in drug distribution and other matters. Nothing! Nil! Nada! Not even a bloody sniff of any impropriety. That was some time ago. Close on six months ago, about. Every person employed by the Firm who our first Victim worked for

is an ex-crim. Now *you could* applaud the chap for his social conscience, his Christian principles and...”

Tellie interrupted my line of thought. She was in one of those moods where my frame of mind was not going to temper her outspokenness.

“But Cops being Cops the World over, you are of the view that old habits die hard, eh Joe?” Said with a certain degree of sarcasm. “Once a Crim, always a Crim and that is what is flavouring your logic on the Case.”

“Come on Tells, you know...” I was becoming angry. That would not achieve anything especially with Tellie. I shook my head, looked away. Reminded myself that I still had to fish the knife and fork out of the bottom of the pool. “Sweetheart, we see it all the time...”

“But you are never across those persons who *do* turn their lives around. You are constantly working with habitual felons...those miscreants who cannot shake that life-style or mind set...for a hell of a lot of reasons known only to themselves and the Prison Psychiatrist...”

I nodded my head, reminded by the love of my life that the thought had crossed my mind only recently.

“So what got you so mad with that News story?” She asked, getting to the crux of my anger and frustration.

I shook my head. Took another sip of wine.

“The AFP conducted several raids across the suburbs to basically roll up the entire ‘Blind Hunters’ membership which included our uncooperative and angry brother. We know that the connection to our three homicides is that Bikie gang! Well...that is what we suspect. We now will have no hope at all, of ever solving our two ‘Drive-by’ Cases...this method of intimidation and shooting is a favourite method of all criminal gangs, especially Bikie gangs. Our three victims we think, are the product of that process...we do not think either Case was a deliberate, targeted attack...well, we aren’t sure, actually. Shelley more so than me, but whatever, our Cases are up in smoke. The AFP will get the kudos for smashing a well-planned, well operated and ingenious drug distribution network that had existed for several years without ever itching the noses of certain Officers...yours truly included as I roamed about in my size sixteens all over the place...”

“You’re got dainty dancers’ feet, Joe. Not size sixteens.” She interrupted.

“Thank you, my love, but whatever, our homicide cases will slide down that slippery slope of publicity and expeditious solving of another drug syndicate’s operation. It’s happened previously whenever the AFP trumped in on us as we undertook a connected murder investigation.”

“Both you and Shelley believe that your Cases were not targeted affairs? And you guys were never suspicious of there being a huge drug operation involved?”

“Not really. No, Tells. When we interviewed both brothers, our antennae went wild, but we thought it was because of the shootings, not drug related as previous surveillance operations on the two had come up zilch! Now that our Suspects are in the hands of the AFP, we will never get a go at them...it has happened before. The AFP always gets the publicity when drug syndicates are busted...we hardly make the front page when we arrest and charge an alleged homicide suspect...and in this case, those three murder victims will possibly never fell revenge with their perpetrators going to Prison for the crimes. Sure...they'll get time, but not for any homicide.”

“That's better than nothing, isn't it? Can't you take a second bite at them when they are released from their drug related sentences...”

“I'll be well and truly dead by then and the homicides would have slid into the 'Unsolved' box. Never to be resurrected.”

“You poor dear...how can I help you in your hour of need?” She moved her hand to my thigh and began kissing my ear.

One glass of good quality Red wine has an amazing effect on her! Well...maybe me as well, though I was noticing a longer period required for me to turn the motor over, so to speak!

I immediately thawed, becoming clay in my wife's hands...the World and its problems forgotten for a time, as how it should be.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

I woke with a start the next morning. It was still dark outside. I had no idea as to the time and for a moment, was unsure where I was.

Something had woken me though AU2 had not barked.

He guarded his domain like a zealous maniac, not letting anyone unheralded or unwanted into our backyard...except one person!

I had not seen Knackers for close on two years. He had to be close to retirement I would have thought and by all accounts, information tabled by both Malisa and Dallas Courtney, he was the best Boss in the World. His roving undercover days were but memories and he comfortably installed as the Head of the Digital Intelligence and Surveillance Section (DISS

I named it in typical bureaucratic parlance...the slang meaning of the word not lost on me. Whenever I could, I always reminded Mal and Dallas of the temporary nature of their Department! Diss that Operation, I would stir! Its repetition becoming annoying as the wit in the initial remark was long lost.)

The Department a hugely successful concern within the bowels of the AFP.

Malisa worked for the Section involved with the Commonwealth arm of the Service while Dallas worked for the International Section. Their paths rarely crossed except for breaks and start-up and knock-off times.

The work they did was mind-blowing.

Mal was a Section Leader within the Internal Surveillance and Collation Section (SCS). This Section organised digital, video, audio, and physical surveillance techniques on a 'target'. A twenty-four-hour operation could be mounted, including an instantaneous digital and electronic connection to all the 'target's' Banking and EFTPOS transactions with constant, immediate feedback.

Nothing was sacred anymore! Especially personal privacy!

Because Knackers was the nominal Head, he was also rarely seen, except on joint conferences when an operation was being planned or a successful operation rolled up. Sitting in only when joint intelligence was needed for the legal Cases to be constructed. This all done in a civilised manner, usually around a huge oval conference table where every utterance recorded for posterity. He taking the kudos for his Department the reason usually for his appearance, so he once told me flippantly. I knew that was bullshit, as he would be the last to hog the trough, wanting all his subordinates who had done the hard yards on that particular Case, to be so rewarded.

How do I know all this? This top-secret stuff?

Tit-bits from Malisa and Dallas who were notoriously tight-lipped about their duties so it has taken many years to obtain this overview. Knackers was usually more forthcoming at those rare times when the two of us got together...

I hopped out of bed and walked naked out onto the rear patio. AU2 following me, encouraging me with a wag of her tail. She jumped down off the deck and trotted to the Unmarked parked up tight to the side of the Caravan under the rear Carport. Occasionally she would prop and turn to me. Another wag of the tail telling me she wanted me to follow her. I obeyed like a faithful servant. What else could I do? The dog communicated to me. She wanted me to check out the Unmarked, that was obvious even to Blind Freddy! Knackers had left his calling card under the windscreen wiper blade. I extracted the card and read the instructions.

I had been summoned.

‘Seven at our favourite place. Thursday night.’

Always at seven. Always at the Pizza Joint that was a favourite AFP hang-out, especially for street operatives and undercover guys. They always ate in a back room that had several entry points. Always on a Thursday night...it never changed as though his missus, whom I had never met, went to Bingo...or Knitting Class Nights on a Thursday night! I had no idea. I would obey partly because of the manner of the summons which always intrigued me and had for yonks, and partly for the timing. It is never a coincidence with Knackers requests. There was always an ulterior purpose which usually was mixed up in an AFP case that had received recent heavy publicity and a parallel and connected Case that Shelley and I were working on.

Guaranteed!! Always!!

CHAPTER FORTY

“Yerlooking good, son.” Knackers stated as he sat awkwardly opposite me.

“You’re back playing up, huh? Old age. Perhaps?” I replied caustically.

“Those lousy Government issue office chairs. They are not built to help complicated and worn out backs like mine...and a life-time of undercover work put me in quite a few tight spots where my back did not like the position...” He chuckled at the innuendo imparted.

I nodded my head, smiled.

“You shaving your head now?”

“It takes away that white-grey, sickly look and gives me a distinctive, macho appearance.” This said with a smile on his face. That was one thing I liked about the man. That self-deprecating sense of humour. “You notice that a lot of top Athletes and Sportsman are doing the same thing...”

“Huh-uh. But they are around a third your age and can run the length of a Soccer Field without breaking into a sweat. I doubt you could run the length of a Cricket Pitch without coughing your guts up.”

I laughed. Poked my finger at his shiny orb with several dips, peaks and valleys noticeable.

“Your wife agrees with that assessment?”

“She says it turns her on...but we both have a bit of a problem getting past that point.”

We both chuckled at the inter-play, something that we always did when meeting.

“Okay. Enough of the niceties. Why was I summoned and how dare you wipe out two of our investigations!” This said with a degree of belligerence.

He held up a hand for me to stop with the theatrics and to quieten down.

“Let’s order first before we get into the nitty-gritty...and why do you always think the worst of me, especially when I am here to help? I’m on your side, never forget that!”

“Your generosity overwhelms me...” I stated scornfully, to get the last word in!

Old Charlie was no longer Mein Host. A heart attack some months previously. His son amply filled the role, being of similar large proportions bordering on obesity. While we waited and munched on a plate of Garlic Bread, we discussed the weather, the latest Government scuttlebutt both Federal and State, Trump’s unfortunate handling of American Foreign Affairs policies and how Knackers was glad the days of undercover work were now over.

“In a way, you are still involved in undercover work...” I offered.

“Yeah, I guess I am...it’s in my blood I suppose...” That boyish grin still discernible.

For once I wanted to lead the conversation instead of being carried along by some disclosure that he wanted to impart. I had my suspicions that he mulled over the way the conversation should go for the preceding week of our meeting. Always in control. Always on top of things. I guess old habits die hard as that is how he spent most of his professional life...in control!

“That place that you are going to retire to? Up on the Queensland coast...”

“Not anymore. We will keep the property as an investment...but...two kids in WA and one in New York in the United Nations building, we’re thinking of moving to WA to be closer to the two over there. I would never live in the States. Neither would the missus. It’s the pits as far as we are concerned. A Nation in the throes of disintegration...as Rome burns and all that...We’re getting together, all of us, their families and even In-Laws, this Christmas. The first in a while where we are all together, over at my daughter’s place in Perth. It should be a bloody hoot. Looking forward to it...the house will be busting at the seams. You got anything planned?”

I had not even thought about Christmas, but it was almost here. Too late to apply for any Leave, that was for sure. Tellie would have it all well in hand, though it was getting a little late to stand the Christmas Tree up in the Lounge Room. I remembered that when I was little, Nanna used to like the thing up during the first week of December...to get into the Christmas spirit, she would always say. A plastic and tinsel laden five-foot tree never seemed to do it for me. I thought that a real Pine Tree was the only way, wafting out its aroma even when it was dying two weeks after Christmas.

That was the hint to remove it from the house!

Bugger! I needed to get myself into gear especially for my girls!

I must have looked like an idiot when my mouth dropped wide open and a stunned expression froze on my face. This was the first I had heard of *kids*. I'd known the guy for close on thirty years professionally. Longer if you included his time as my first wife, Helene's partner in the fledging AFP working undercover. My Helene always his 'Catcher'. This was the first mention of any fucking *kids*...not a normal situation between supposedly close mates!

"Three kids!? How old are they?" I asked incredulously. The expression on my face must have said it all.

He actually chuckled.

I thought a reaction as he remembered them, and not as a response that he was aware of my ignorance on the subject. It just did not occur to him. Tellie had never trusted the man from the very first moment she had met him...and she never changed her opinion of him. She always thought he full of bullshit and could never lie straight in bed!

I was starting to think she was right in her assumptions.

"Jeremy. He's the oldest at...um...gee...he's forty-one. Forty-two. Around there somewhere. He is an Assistant to the Australian Ambassador to the United Nations in New York. Um...Wilcott Steven, known as Steve to everyone, thirty-seven. Don't ask me why he was christened Wilcott...especially as he is known as Steve to all and sundry. Works in the Mining Industry as a Geological Engineer based in Perth. He has seven kids, a beautiful and brainy wife and then there is Helene Lisa Maylee. The youngest of my three and the most gorgeous woman. She is my wife's daughter in all regards. A beautiful woman in so many ways. Thirty-five. Lives also in Perth. Married to Steve's wife's brother who is a University Lecturer and successful author. You may have read some of his Novels. No? You're not a reader, are you? She has two young kids."

The fact that he had named his youngest daughter Helene did not escape me. It brought a lump to my throat. I had to look away for some moments and then hide my anguish by gulping down some wine in large portions.

Knackers looked at me, a worried expression on his face.

“You okay?” He asked quietly.

“Yeah. Sure...” I stammered out.

“Okeydokey...Um...where was I? Um...we purchased a large Apartment at Cottesloe Beach about a year ago using the Apartment in Queensland as collateral. The property overlooks the Indian Ocean. Big and roomy. Beautiful views. We rent it out at the moment. We will pay off the loan for that property when we sell here in Sydney. Hopefully, we should have a surplus to help finance our retirement into the twilight years. We have asked the people to vacate the Property at Cottesloe Beach next year. April, May. Thereabouts. Not that far away, is it?”

He looked over at me, a smile splitting his face. His pride almost palpable.

I sat there for some moments trying to reconcile the facts, leaning back in my chair looking agog at the man...knowing the man for thirty-odd years but not really knowing him at all. I still did not know his missus name except to say she was high up in the International Criminal Court.

“Your missus? Still in The Hague, wasn’t it?”

“Geneva. She spent most of her time in Switzerland. No, she is back home. She only had a five-year tenure over there...she has officially retired and is nagging me to do the same thing...I’m thinking about taking an early retirement package...between you and me, that would ensure Malisa would be catapulted into the upper echelons of the Department. Mark my words.”

I looked over at the guy I thought I had known for so long. Absolutely flabbergasted at his confession.

I had been in Undercover Narcotics for just on five years. A short stint of some eighteen months in Undercover Vice after that, before my nerves gave out on me. Knackers had been living in that grey world of half-truths and straight out bull-shit for over thirty years! I did not have a clue how he had done it, but his very existence had depended on him having to remember all the lies he had to spin to be accepted not just by local Australian crime figures, but the wheelers and dealers on the world’s black market and illegal stage of criminal intrigue at the highest order! He had lived in their castles, their fortresses. Living from second to second. No wonder it had caught up to him eventually. His stint out at Summerfield with PTSD had almost ended his career...and his life. I thought quickly back to those times, to those week-ends I had spent with him strolling those fabulous grounds of the remote Respite Institution...and the time I was almost shot to death on a back road as I made my way back home to Sydney after spending one week-end visiting him. I smiled at

the memories...for Knackers to survive that life-style for so long, the bullshit needed, the stories spun just to survive. To stay alive. And to worm his way into the confidence of some Drug Lord or Arms Dealer...or something. The brain power required to recall such giant fibs as though it was the truth at a moment's notice, meant that the truth of his *'real'* life had to be cocooned. Protected at all costs. Kept hidden from prying eyes, and thus the habit extended to even those whom he could trust. Those he regarded as friends.

Those thoughts whizzed about my grey matter in a milli-second, understanding the high cost he had to pay at a personal level. Never really knowing his own family more than likely. I had to wonder when he had the time to be a normal father...and husband. I doubted he had ever experienced that for long periods of time. His kids seemed to survive and blossom so it seemed...and his was a close family, so I thought.

What a life!

What an existence, treading carefully on thin ice for most of it. I maybe romanticizing his career to a certain extent as his undercover work, mainly overseas, was not a continuing day to day existence but an intense couple of months or so while he worked a Case. Still...I knew personally what that could do to your body and your nerves. I had done it for a short period while Knackers lived the life for so many years.

A special brand of human whose exploits would never be known.

Maybe he should write a book during his retirement days. No, the Secrecy Agreement that he had signed at the beginning of his career would mean a term in prison, more than likely, if he did have the gall and the time to sit down and pound out his memoirs!

Maybe a Novel...a fictionalised version of one of his escapades...I shook that idea away as too ridiculous. Knackers would never be into the lonely life as an Author...I had to grin as what was most of his life about?

Disconnection and enforced detachment from reality.

I came to a conclusion, grunting as I finished my pizza thinking I could empathise deeply with the man for all the right reasons and his inclination to hide his personal life even from me, was understandable under the circumstances.

Knackers thought perhaps that I was grunting my pleasure at the food. The wine. Both now finished off.

No...I felt he knew what I was thinking, gaining pleasure from the conclusion I had made on the character of the man. He looked across the small table that separated us with that unreadable and blank expression for some moments, not a word breaking the silence. He then smiled, nodding his head. I got the feeling that he had just read my mind. It made me

uncomfortable for want of a better description. Again that boyish grin and another nod of the head.

He ordered coffees for both of us and got down to business.

“You my friend, not for the first time, have trampled heavily through a very carefully constructed surveillance operation that we were running. Two in fact. We had intelligence suggesting that drugs were distributed through both the Beyerfeld Courier Business and Buzzano Interstate Trucking business. Wayne West was practically running the business from the yard of Beyerfeld’s as Conrad Beyerfeld was drowning in his own paperwork! Things have apparently changed, so I’m reliably informed.” He took a sip from the steaming mug of coffee just placed on our table. The other empty plates and utensils removed. He waited until this procedure completed before continuing. “His brother the same from the floor of Buzzanos. Old habits die hard, but for the life of us, we could not figure out how they were doing it...how it was orchestrated. We had no money trail but the pile of drugs that seemed to be moved, was absolutely astounding and should have resulted in a huge money trail. Nothing. We could not pick up that money trail no matter how hard we pried and picked at the edges...and with this operation, we wanted to close down the entire thing from top to bottom so that meant the whole thing kept going long after we would have normally closed the thing down. The downside was drugs continued to be placed on the street. Unfortunately, we had two overdose deaths during that time...something we were not happy about, let me tell you!”

He paused to take another sip of coffee.

“A Charity Base was the answer...and a free delivery service for the drugs. Very ingenious. Very clever, but we almost lost it when you and your partner came stumbling through again. We had the raids timetable in place, thank God, but we needed to get Wayne West out of the picture, hence that TV Program that scared the bejeezus out of the man. If he stuck around after the raids were completed, he was dead meat even though he had previous ‘colour’ with the ‘Blind Hunters’ gang. It would have been obvious to even the densest of the ‘Blind Hunter’ members that he was our conduit. He became our inside man and Informant. But a price would have been placed on his head even from a Prison cell. We have successfully gutted that MC gang. They do not exist anymore...”

“Want happened to Westie?”

“He’s safe for the moment. We turned him...no, that’s not right. He was never involved in any illegality except to say that he dropped the word to his brother when Jake Blackwood got a sniff of what he was really doing every night of the week. Dropping off drugs ordered through this Charity Organisation that had been set up...using an innocent third party Telephone Answering service to take the orders...as though it was some type of Internet Bartering Business like E-Bay or Gumtree. Jake Blackwood’s fate sealed once he made his suspicions known to Wayne West. Out of brotherly love or maybe misguided loyalty for his

younger brother, Wayne informed his brother Michael that Blackwood had guessed at the scam and was threatening to go to the Police. Michael who only knew one way, peppered the young bloke's home as a kind of warning. An intimidating action...um...we know that for sure. We have a taped phone conversation between the two brothers over Blackwood's allegations. Michael West admitted that he would need to scare the bejeezus out of the young bloke. Unfortunately, a stray bullet got him..."

"Two bullets, Knackers..."

"Mmm...yeah. Michael West may have been involved in the shooting homicide death of 'Slug' Mason way back in history as well. Other conversations that took place in the Biekie's Clubhouse would indicate that fact for sure..."

"Taped?"

"Arrh, no. A confession of sorts during a drunken and drug fuelled night. Michael was a Coke user...and heading down fast. That was another reason for his extreme and unpredictable behaviour..."

"You had a guy on the inside?"

"Wired up yet accepted..."

"He okay?"

"He will be in a couple of months when he transfers across to the Terrorist Unit connected to New Scotland Yard. Yeah. We take care of our own..."

I nodded my head. The same handgun used so it was a given that the same man would have been involved. The reason for the slaying lost in time, unless Michael West ever confessed to his previous indiscretions. That was highly unlikely.

Knackers took several sips of coffee and leaned back in his chair to look at me earnestly. He shook his head and again, leaned forward adopting a conspiratorial pose.

"He was always a trigger-happy dude. Old habits die hard, eh? Although Wayne West had chosen the 'straight path' for a lot of years thanks mainly to Beyerfeld's influence...that guy is a true saint...we were able to explain to Westie that he was always implicated in Blackwood's murder before and after the fact. He knew what his brother would do with the information that he had passed on. We have him in a 'safe house' at the moment. The NSW Police Force permitted to take control of him as he had no input in the drug distribution network at all, that we can surmise...so after the normal...um...negotiations take place between the AFP and the NSW Force at Commissioner level, you will be handed Wayne West on a platter...he agreed to go as State's Witness against his brother for the murder of

Blackwood. I would imagine a reduced sentence can be arranged for Westie...or even a pardon with a new identity and a new life...say in New Zealand...or Christmas Island.”

“I’d say he may have just shortened his life by a fair bit regardless of where you think you can hide him. Wanting to be honest has its drawbacks, especially if you are mixing with Bikie dudes...”

“Maybe you are right...but a means to an end...”

“It can be a cruel business when you start playing with people’s lives, Knackers.”

“Tell me Joe. Do you think those bastards think of all the lives they have shattered by dealing in these drugs? Especially Ice and a new one coming on the market called ‘Gravel’? That is ten times worse than Ice, so I am told.”

“The lines between right and wrong are sure getting confused...”

“Joe? They were blurred way back in the day when you were working Undercover Narcs. Nothing has changed, my man!”

His answer had an angry tone attached.

He excused himself and was gone for some minutes. I thought perhaps he may have left. Taken his bat and ball and gone home!

Nope...as he sat back down opposite me, he complained bitterly of ‘prostate’ problems. He had the dribbles.

“You’re too young yet to have dribbling problems. That’s an old man’s complaint. You should go and see about it, though!” A worried look crossed my dial.

“No-one is sticking their figure up my arse!” He replied coldly, dismissing the subject with a wave of his hand. “Where was I? Yes, they had a great thing going, but like all things, it was never going to last. The ‘Blind Hunters’ had their Clubhouse in one of those concrete walled Units in an Industrial Estate not far from both Beyerfeld’s and Buzzanos premises. Right next door, in two similar type Units was what looked like, a small Courier Service. We looked at them because of their proximity to the Club, but everything appeared above board. What we didn’t know was that this Enterprise was packaging up the drug orders. They had a Cancelling Machine like they use in Australia Post to show that each package or parcel had been through the proper system and channels in the large Australia Post Mail Centre. That it showed that each parcel had been through the X-ray machines and subject to Drug Dog investigation. But the entire process had been by-passed. Each package had the correct stickers denoting money paid for the postage of the Parcel. Bogus of course. These then transported straight to the Warehouse floor at Buzzanos. As far as people knew, these

shipments were direct from the Australia Post Mail Centre and had been sub-contracted out to Buzzanos. They had an Australian-wide distribution network planned using the Buzzano Long Haul Network. That was almost ready to implement. As it was, the Network at the time we closed it down, was from Wollongong through Sydney up to Newcastle and out as far as Lithgow. A bloody big Client Base, eh? Anyhow, these packages were then sent through the automated sorting devices at Buzzanos and via miles of overhead and underfloor chutes, ramps, and slipways, sorted into the required runs to be undertaken by Beyerfeld Courier Service vans. They catalogued and loaded into plastic containers and placed straight into Beyerfeld Vans for delivery, usually by the night shift drivers. The delivery route already pre-determined. An automatic entry chip inserted into the Van's GPS informed the driver where to go and where to stop. A beautiful, innovative and ingenious system that had by-passed all stringent security and drug checks carried out by Australia Post, Customs and Border Security."

"The money trail..."

"A 'ring-in' semi-bogus Charity was set up. Legit, fair dinkum. I don't know if you are aware, but all normal Charities actually pass on less than fifty percent of the value of donations made by the generous Public. Supposedly, the other half goes to Administrative costs. True! Fair Dinkum! In the case of those 'dead-call' Telephone Centre calls that people get, the clear majority of those are run by one or two Firms, the owners of which are very wealthy men living the good life on the Gold or Sunshine Coast! After the costs of running these Call centres, these guys make a fortune. From the money donated! That's fair dinkum."

He finished off his coffee and gave me a smile. He was enjoying this immensely!

Go figure!

"Anyhow, our creative scam. The bloke would ring up the Charity number which would be operating twenty-four seven, leave a donation that happened to correspond with the value of drugs he required. Certain words were code names for the different type of drugs. His name and address taken supposedly for tax purposes, the transaction by Debit or Credit Card with that information going straight to the Warehouse Unit. The money placed in the coffers of the Charity...no tax payable. A certain amount of the money *was always* transferred to the stated Charitable Cause with the rest invested on behalf of the Charity name. There is a huge gap between the wholesale and retail costs of all drugs. It is quite alarming. The bogus Charity wholly owned by several Shelf Companies. There it got more difficult for us to follow but Dallas's group cracked it eventually. Some of those Shelf Companies were often blind alleys with several in Tax Havens like The Caymans, Vanuatu and Bermuda. The chief Shareholder? The Hunter Partnership, owned by several of the 'Blind Hunters' senior members. The wealth they had was staggering...truly."

He shook his head. He too, unable to get around the cash reserves involved. “The money still for all intent and purpose owned in the Charity Name...and as an enticer, the Charity received legitimate donations from members of the Public and Corporations so to even a trained eye, it all looked legit...mickey mouse, eh? Real neat, huh?”

He shook his head. I leaned back, a smile on my face marvelling at the scheme.

“Who thought that up?”

He shook his head. I guess in the washout, it really did not matter. The entire Gang implicated and now rolled up.

“Michael West hasn’t the nous...but I reckon Wayne West might...but he was clean as far as we could determine. No assets, no hidden property. Not on the Registered Owners list of the Charity. In fact, he rented a joint at Canley Vale, would you believe. A small, pokey little Unit in a nondescript block. His Bank Accounts were nothing to get excited about! So! We may never know the identity of the original thinker, but there is bound to be a money trail that will eventually lead us to him...one day, for sure. Um...we have been very surprised by a name that has bubbled to the surface during our investigations. A prominent and well-known Eastern Suburbs Socialite and an Accountant to the Stars. He has the acumen and smarts to think up such a scheme...strange bed-fellows, eh? But we are still building a case against the guy. That could take a little more time. Dallas Courtney and a small band of like-wise Internet ‘worms’ are working exclusively on that project...we’ll get him, you can bet your house on it.”

“Yeah, well...the Top Dog rarely gets nicked...”

“Oh, I don’t know, Joe. Every week there are new investigative procedures open to us...and more Overseas co-operation is occurring every day. We can worm our way into just about any Bank Account worldwide and our ability in that regard is improving all the time...we’ll get him eventually. Guaranteed!”

“When you think about, if this chap was the brains behind the whole scheme, all he needed was a ready supply of drugs for his scheme to work. Who better to approach than a Biekie gang who have been operating in that sphere for years...”

“...and offer a fool-proof scheme that even Blind Freddy could not resist. We’ll get him, Joe, no worries.”

Knackers sat back in his seat and stretched. A smile of satisfaction expressing his conviction. I leaned towards him across the table.

“What about the Mallet and Seng Homicide killings?”

He shook his head sadly. Pursed his lips before wiping them with his napkin which he placed on his empty plate. He stood, smiling down at me.

“The bill has been taken care of. As always, it is good to catch up...Mallet and Seng? We don’t know, really. We think a package may have been delivered to their front door by mistake. Betty Seng may have tried to return it to Australia Post only to be told that it was not one of theirs...the cancellation stamps were fraudulent. Bogus. Seng may have got a little suspicious and opened the package to identify drugs. She may have returned them to the Beyerfeld’s yard and handed them to West...maybe sealing her fate. We don’t know for sure. You may never be able to unlock the truth...um...”

He tugged at his pants, for the first time I noticed that he was nervous.

“Um...I’d like you and your missus to attend my Farewell Retirement Function next March or April. I’ll let you know the exact date and the venue. Hope to see you before then.”

And he was gone, just like that.

I sat there for some time mulling over his words as I always did. He always spoke in half riddles, half-truths, and a lot of supposition. Always had!

I did not buy his story on the Mallet and Seng homicide murders but I would never know either way until I interviewed both West brothers.

That did not fill me with confidence especially as our last such attempt with Michael West was not that successful.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

We sat in a cheery room completely opposite to what you expect of Commonwealth Government properties. A Prison of recent vintage built to house mainly those persons arrested in AFP investigations from across the Nation. As the prison was located outside Ballarat in Victoria, we had to negotiate special permission to travel Interstate.

Michael West was led in with ankle bracing and handcuffs fitted,giving him that ‘prison waddle’. He settled awkwardly into a chair that was bolted to the floor.

“I told you last time we spoke that we would see you again.” Shelley commented pleasantly.A smile to stress the point.

He scowled at her, telling her plainly, where to go.

“Looks as though you will die here in prison, away from all your loved ones. You do know where we are, don’t you? Outside Ballarat in Victoria.”

“They ain’t keeping me inside till I die...no way, bitch!” He stated belligerently.

“No? I doubt you will have much say in it. The drugs charges should be enough...but the homicide deaths of ‘Slug’ Mason, Jake Blackwood, Brad Mallet and Po ‘Betty’ Seng will ensure that you will never breath outside air again...”

“Don’t know whatcha talking about...” His nervousness spoke otherwise. He sat silently for some moments. His head bowed but there was a certain insolence in the way he sat and held himself.

“We know you shot Joshua Blackwood. We know why you shot him. Your brother confessed to the AFP blokes that Blackwood knew what he was delivering night after night. Or at least suspected it. Blackwood discussed the situation with your brother and how he was going to go to the cops about it. He did not like it one iota. Your brother told you that the game may soon be over...your brother has agreed to turn State’s Witness in the matter and I reckon that once he has sung on you and your mates, he may even escape a Prison term...now that would kind of shit me if my brother did that to me. Ensured that I died in Prison. What do you think, huh?” I asked quietly, bringing the man forward so he could hear my words.

Shelley took over, also talking quietly.

“Your brother seems to know it all...how old are you? Middle Fifties? Thirty-year sentence! I have my doubts on you finishing your time...you’ll die before that release date...not something warm and cosy to think about, eh? Inside here as you await your Trial date...knowing your fate already. Have you anything to help your cause? You know, maybe give us something that we can take to the Judge? To lessen your sentence?”

He slowly raised his head to look coldly at Shelley, not batting an eye-lid. His insolence slowly fading.

“Betty Seng. What did she ever do to you?”

The silence stretched for several minutes before he tried to rub his face with both hands. He nodded his head as though he had come to a decision. His voice low, more a growl.

“A stuck-up, little bitch! Better dead than alive...her husband was what? What do they call it? Collateral damage, ain’t it?”

“So why did you shoot Betty Seng? And accidently shoot her husband also?”

He scratched his chin, the sound like sandpaper. He seemed to think long and hard as to what he should disclose. In the end he shrugged his shoulders.

“What th’ heck, it don’t make no diff’rence, does it? Arrh...I was coming ta work. Early-like. Went to the Shopping Centre close to home to buy me lunch...as I always do...you know, a couple of sandwiches. Something ta drink. I would put it in tha frig at work. No-one was game ta knock me stuff off. This stuck-up, rude Oriental woman stole me parking spot near the front door of the Shopping Centre. I was running a bit late. In a hurry and she nicks the parking spot close to the entry doors into the Shopping Centre. Right in front of me, almost! Just like that!” He snapped his fingers. “Orientals! They’s rude, no manners and jabber away in their own language, like...”

I looked at the man gobsmacked. Shelley had trouble hiding her astonishment.

“You followed her home?” Shelley continued after she had cleared her throat, a coughing session her reaction to his offering. She wanting to keep the man talking.

“Yeah! She was coming out of the Supermarket as I brought me Lunch and I was climbing into me car. I followed her out. I was gunna say somethin’ to her but I thought of a better plan. I was thinkin’ about what I’d like to do with her which only made me madder. Yeah, I followed her home. I had to if’n I was gunnashoot her...”

“You shot her and her husband because you think she stole your parking spot. Is that correct? Is that what you are admitting to?”

“I’s already told you that...but I didn’t mean to shoot the husband...he was an Aussie wasn’t he? What is he doing marrying an Oriental for! That should not be allowed, don’tcha reckon?”

My mind whizzed back to the time that Tellie and I had toured Great Britain in a Mobile Home. A small one but not too small to be uncomfortable. I had been apprehensive about Tellie taking to the ‘touring’ Holiday. Turns out she loved it, to such an extent she is the one who nags for a week-end away in our Caravan with the girls.

Go Figure!

It was when we were in Ireland that we met this Australian couple basically doing the same thing as us, except they had spent four months prior to us meeting them, touring mainland Europe and Scandinavia.

Unfortunately, all he could talk about was the shit beer, the shit weather, too many Poms and other Races that were not Australian, all the Castles looked the same and he was sick and tired of walking through Cathedrals and bloody Churches!!!

For the life of me I could not work out why he was travelling so extensively as he did not seem to enjoy it! I thought he would be better off back home, his feet up on the ‘comfy’

stool, a Stubbie in hand watching 'daytime' TV! He would do less damage that way, not advertising the classic, ugly Australian Tourist to other people!

It was as if he thought that Australians were the 'Master Race' and all other Nationalities were still swinging through the trees! Unfortunately, we had to share a night with the sod and his missus...the meeting put a damper on our instinctive 'explorer' mode of travelling for a day or two. Australia for Australians appeared to be his favourite saying! He and his missus were second generation Australian!

He from Kiwi stock...original Kiwi stock; she a Scot!

Figure that one out!

My musings interrupted by Shelley continuing, her voice taking on a higher octave as she became angrier at the sod!

"You sprayed the front of her Unit with bullets...killing both the woman and her husband. The gun you took from an injured and unconscious Senior Constable trapped in his motor vehicle in Two Thousand and Sixteen...you failed to render assistance to the Officer which you were fined for. You like spraying bullets around, don't you, huh?"

He looked across at her. Nodded his head.

"They's shouldn't be allowed into Australia. Theys cause all the problems, even taking all the Dole money. They's paid not to work. That is just wrong."

I stood, signalling for the Guard to transfer the Prisoner back to his cell.

I was disgusted and angry. I shook my head angrily and stomped my feet after the twit vacated the small Interview Room.

There was no satisfaction in solving this Case, except I suppose, I knew that the creep would most certainly die in Prison. All I wanted to do was return to the Office as quickly as possible to belt the tripe out of 'Big Red', our forever suffering Punching Bag hanging in the centre of the Murder Squad floor.

Old habits die hard! Even for me!

pcb

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