

# OFFICER DOWN



A MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVE JOSEPH LIND STORY

PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVE  
**JOSEPH LIND**  
WITH  
CATALINA ‘TALLY’ EVANS  
AS DETECTIVE LIND’S NEW  
‘DETECTIVE-IN-TRAINING’ PARTNER  
**OFFICER DOWN**

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This is the sixty-eighth story concerning the life, times, and Homicide Cases of Murder Squad Detective Joseph Lind. His newest 'recruit', Detective-in-Training Catalina 'Tally' Evans achieves her Detective Grade with flying colours as the two investigate the homicide shooting death of a popular young Constable in a small bush town that Detective Lind had previously visited around a decade ago.

His presence not appreciated by some of the townsfolk who thought he was the cause for the implosion of several well-known and respected families. Many again accusing him of doing a similar thing with this Case.

A new construction site not appreciated by most of the townsfolk exposes human remains which links a former Pastor with racist, fire and brimstone views to the slaying of ten people and the exclusion of the famous Bushranger Ned Kelly from the bush town some one hundred and fifty years ago.

The death of one of their own who has a mixed reputation amongst the townsfolk means a slow and painstaking investigation that at times appears to involve many of the town's businesspeople in a joint collusion to kill the young Constable because of his want to meddle in others' affairs.

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## CHAPTER ONE

He loved this time of morning...past the bewitching hour with the sun to peek over the horizon in a couple of hours. It had been a hot day; a warm night. He'd been doing this nightshift for over five years now...something he had feared with a spike in his anxiety levels when he had first volunteered for the shift...now? He wouldn't have it any other way. To sleep away an above forty-degree day in his air-conditioned Bedroom was his manna...with the night and its cool zephyrs making his shift bearable.

Some had queried his choice of being billeted to a small country town saying that he would be bored stiff with little crime and even less activity. How wrong they had been...

The Day Shift consisted of two Officers and an Office Clerk. An Office 'Friday' who ensured the peaceful running of the Station and a young Hannah Moore, the young niece of the largest enterprise in town...a long haul and Transport enterprise on the outskirts of the town. She the Receptionist/Telephonist who continually complained of little to do. Kalavati's shift from seventeen-hundred hours to oh-three-hundred hours the following morning. The Office unattended from the oh-three-hundred hours to the opening hour of oh-seven-thirty hours on the following morning.

Nothing much happened in this quiet little hamlet about centred in the richest farming land in the country...the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

If anything untoward occurred during those hours of vacancy, the call was automatically pushed through to the Station Sergeant's home. He hated his sleep being interrupted or reduced. Watch out for the poor bastard who got on his wrong side the following morning...the entire station and beyond knew when the poor man's sleep had been interrupted...usually it was a mundane call about some-one's cat missing...or had just become the latest statistic on roadkill...

Senior Constable Dwayne Kalavati would rub shoulders with the dayshift people when he clocked on as they were clocking off. A shared joke, another rumour the latest around town. He'd make himself a coffee to sit and listen to the Senior Sergeant as he relayed the day's events. Usually not much to report except a single vehicle accident on the Highway and a slight altercation and bingle when a vehicle reversed into another as it was backing out from a car space at the local Supermarket carpark...an interesting day concluded was the Senior Constable's comment.

Dwayne Kalavati was not much under two metres tall. A promising AFL player who's playing days were curtailed when his right knee kept him grounded. It would explode at the most

inopportune moment, keeping him off the field more than on. He was shy, a nervous smile when in the vicinity of women his age. A lowered head which improved as the years progressed because his job relied on a visage of confidence; of being in charge yet pleasantly amiable. He'd never married which only egged on the available young women of the district, forever looking for a husband. This embarrassed him to a point of him reverting to his younger years of a shy, awkward boy who always held his head down. His face reddening and his normal easy manner forsaking him whenever they approached him, especially in a 'hunting party' so he would claim.

After listening to the day's happenings, he would write up his Report on the previous night's incidents...very little to chase up...a follow-up interview with a local Cockie who had broken his leg as he hopped down from the huge Combine Harvester he was driving...the paddock's harvest finished off by the Cockie's missus during the night as the gent was being taken to the small, local Hospital.

That was it!

His night began when he cruised the General Store's carpark as the largest shop in town was closing for the night...it was eighteen hundred hours. It had been robbed twice in its twenty-two-year history...it was due for another so the young copper would murmur...then a stop at the local Chemist as the Owner was finishing for the day. The reason for the concern was supposedly because she had been held up one night just before closing time...by an 'out-of-towner'. Five years ago...the rumours had it pegged right as the attractive middle-aged Chemist and Make-up Specialist needed companionship and the occasional 'spiritual guidance' by a young, goodlooking and virile copper. Her marriage was not made in heaven so these regular lessons in 'Karma Sutra' were appreciated...

Next, the local drive-in Bottle-Oh before it closed at nine. The middle-aged proprietress a little nervy at that time of night as she too had recently looked down the barrel of a sawn-off shotgun. The day's takings not worth the five years the three youths received from an angry Judge who stated youth crime was becoming uncontrollable...

This has been the third similar crime in five years...not something that was hitting the bush town like a tsunami!

Next he would return to the Cop Shop for a little relaxation period before setting off to cruise out of town to the local Abattoir before circling back to the Hospital...again to give sustenance and guidance to the attractive Night Shift Sister-in-charge...there was always a spare bed available...again he would return to the Office before cruising out to the 'Town Lake' which supplied the town and most of the surrounding farms with its fresh water. He'd always know who had caught some fish and was not afraid to display their catch for the night.

Kalavati checked for undersized fish and to always receive a prize for his diligence. He wasn't too sure these midnight anglers were having it over him...giving him a good-sized fish so that he would never ask to see their catch...though he kinda knew...

He'd return to the Cop Shop via his cottage to fillet the fish, wrap it in alfoil and pop it into the Freezer...two meals at least! And a couple of good size T-bones from the Abattoirs for his continued presence each night placed beside the fillets. He was pleased with the largesse of the local lads...it was rare he never received a decent sized fish. It wasn't up to him to claim this was some sort of 'buying the cop off' kind of thing...never!

He was one of the most popular local coppers with the townsfolk. Even though his bunged knee prevented participation in all the popular games played by the folk, he was a most vocal supporter of all the inter and intra-town games such as Rugby League, Cricket, and Tennis. Always surrounded by the locals as his shouted quips were enjoyed by all.

He'd make two more slow circuits of the town and its small, orderly suburbia watching for vehicles and people who should not be there at that time of night. An occasional domestic argument to settle before once again returning to the Cop Shop to write up all the incidents of the night...not mentioning any extended times at various addresses.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

He was tired but not too tired to stop at the creek crossing to view the early morning sky. That always enthralled him even when that night sky was partially obliterated by cloud...it would mean rain usually.

He did the same thing as he alighted from the 4WD Police vehicle at the side of his lodgings. A former Farm Manager's cottage that he shared with two other young coppers. The dwelling on a one-hundred-hectare allotment some thirty kilometres from the centre of town. The house and land gifted to the town...in particular, the local coppers by a grateful Cockie's wife who had her husband taken cruelly from her. She with her life-long school friend now managed the large parcel of land that was one third of the Cowdrey's Pastoral Estate that had been extended when additional lands became available during/after the worst drought in one hundred years had cowered too many landholders. Now of course, the drought had broken with record floods and now several years of reasonable rainfall like in the old days meant the good times had returned.

Everyone knew another record-breaking drought was inevitable as night followed day so many prepared for its presence as best they could...however they could. Spending days on a bulldozer digging out additional paddock dams and creating cross-channelling ditches to slow the surface water run-off speed.

He steadied himself with one straight arm on the rear of the Police Vehicle to take in the night sky one last time.

He felt the force kick him sideways before he felt the bullet penetrate his body. The bullet clicking off two vertebrae forcing them sideways away from their normal position. The bullet then pierced his right Kidney before taking a large slice of it out through the enlarged exit wound. He hit the ground heavily on his left side, slowly turning onto his back. The last thought was of the night sky and how beautiful it was before it turned to darkness.

He still hadn't realised he had been shot...

### **CHAPTER THREE**

"The trial has ended Boss. The Jury took thirty-four minutes to deliberate...the Judge has ordered the plaintiff to be held until he announces his sentencing determination early next month..."

"So, you could come home on the late plane to-night?"

"Not a chance Boss...it'd be taxing out to take off heading for Sydney as we speak. The return flight to-morrow morning would be a safer bet...I'd be in the Office by eleven...anyhow, that last plane out was full of people associated with the Court Case. Glad to be getting a seat that would mean a day off for most of them to-morrow".

"Nah...can that Joe. Stay where you are. How far are you from Bungarra?"

"Arrh...about a two-hour drive to Jerilderie than another one and half hour drive south-southwest out to Bungarra. Why?"

"Okay. Pick up Tally from that early flight in tomorrow morning then head towards Bungarra. Soo has cancelled your return flight. The nightshift copper of that sleepy little hamlet has been shot to death...probably the worst thing that has struck the hamlet since Jesus looked at Mary Magdalene in that certain way...ring me after you make acquaintance with the local

mob. Rumours are an irate husband hasn't taken kindly to the young Constable's attention of his wife. I'd expect you to be in the district for at least two weeks...I know Tellie won't like that much but hey, the quicker you wrap it up, the quicker you'll be home. There can't be too many suspects surely".

I exploded with a string of expletives after I hung up not wanting this sojourn. Sure, the whole region had bounced back from the worst drought conditions since weather condition records had commenced in the mid-eighteen hundreds and people had an air of confidence and light-heartedness but it was hot and for some reason heavy grey clouds hung low pushing the humidity through the roof...that was what made things difficult and uncomfortable for me. At least the 4WD vehicle I had hired at Wagga Wagga airport had air-conditioning.

My last visit of two days to Bungarra was for the trial of Victoria McKinnon in twenty-eighteen...in discovering the villain we were in Bungarra for close on a month in Twenty-sixteen. Shelley and I befriended several people while we were there...it would be a pleasure to hook up with them again especially Rowena Prendergast...a good woman and her Reloes, the Cowdreys. I suspected that neither family would still be together...a side effect of Victoria McKinnon's meanderings...and murderous intentions to do away with her lover and unfortunately, his mate which had never been in the scheme of things...but reality meant a change of plans.

I rang Tellie as I began to pack up. Asked her to pack a bag for me for at least a two week stay away from home. Lightweight suits and one change of warm gear. I had provisions for an overnight stay not predicting any longer as the Trial was winding down. As it was, I was in the witness box for fifteen minutes...the last person to give evidence for the Prosecution. I'd need another lightweight suit and say...three business shirts. Stuff the ties! Plus, underwear and socks plus my toiletries and shaving bag. Tally would go by our place tonight to pick them up.

"Ta love...sorry...the life of the best Dee in town has its downfalls...I'll try and make the investigation quick..."

Tellie wasn't happy but was still a lot happier than I was right now...



## CHAPTER FOUR

It had been six...closer to eight years since I had been in the area.

I was surprised to see that the best Café in Jerilderie was still operating and under the same proprietorship. We propped there for a bite to eat and a very reasonable coffee before driving onto Bungarra. An easy two-hour drive where we didn't break any speed restrictions. We enjoyed driving through the countryside that has an almost miraculous ability to bounce back after a devastating drought. The countryside looked rich and lush.

Victoria McKinnon's trial was an event followed closely by the local mob and occurred at the beautiful old Court House in the centre of Jerilderie. Even though I had been there solo without Shelley my partner, I had rubbed shoulders and shared a table with most of the Bungarra people who were tied up in the Court Case or who were there to see justice done...I guess there would still be people who thought I should have let Archie Prendergast's death remain a suicide as my continued detection had disastrous results on several families...I suspected that their reaction in seeing me again may not be a warm experience but one of hate and possible belligerence...this could have an effect on how our investigation proceeded on the 'Officer Down' shooting homicide in nearby Bungarra.

I turned into the side street beside the two-storey Pub to find that parking spaces still existed for patrons of the Pub...tail only to the gutter...it's good to see some things don't change!

I had no idea what Tellie had packed for me but the suitcase weighed a bloody tonne! The Suit rack also seemed over full. I struggled with it as I wheeled it across the rear yard of the Pub up into the small Office that was connected to the main Bar area. Who-ever was on Bar Service also booked in those patrons who wanted a room.

"That's right...two weeks with an extension of two weeks if we need them..." I explained to the sturdy middle-aged Proprietress of the ancient Pub. She looked down her nose at me as though she could connect my face to the disastrous Court Case...

The elderly woman noted my details from my Driver's Licence before she looked up at me.

"Detective Joe Lind isn't it?" She asked as she examined my face. Yep, she'd got it in one. "You were here a couple of years ago...maybe longer...you're the City Dick who cleared Archie Pendergast of suicide, aren't you?" Not waiting for my reply, she added "You sure put the cat amongst the pigeons that's for sure. You here to investigate Senior Constable's murder, aren't you? Watch your back mate, as there are those who still have long memories...and broken hearts over that event. Yeah...watch yer back. I'll get the lad to take your stuff up...the

last two rooms at the end of the corridor facing onto the covered veranda and main street. We've done a bit of work since you were last here...about ten years ago, wasn't it? Each of those rooms facing the street have individual air-conditioning which you'll need over the coming weeks...each has its own Ensuite so's you don't have to walk the length of the corridor to fight your way past the line up waiting to use the toots or showers...we figured we needed to upgrade to get into the twenty-first century...so our regular patrons have always demanded". She tittered at her own joke causing her to choke.

I smiled at that comment as from memory I never had to line up for either. I nodded. Smiled. Murmured conciliatory words to try and thaw the ice that had begun to freeze on the small Office's walls and ornate ceiling rosette.

"Still the same for food...select your breakfast and tea for the following day and leave your choice at the Kitchen door. Same as before no Lunch prepared unless you select it as an extra...I would imagine the tariff has increased since you were last here but it is still a bargain with two good meals included every day...as before, leave what clothes need to be washed or drycleaned in a plastic bag provided. Leave it hanging on the outside doorknob. You'll be charged a token 'handling charge' over that the Dry-Cleaning mob charge us. We do the usual washing for a nominal sum...detailed on the price list on the back of your door. A bar full of regulars who won't be too shy in reminding you how you fucked up several historical families...you wouldn't be their Number One bloke, let me tell you!"

I nodded, paid the deposit for both rooms, collected the keys, and helped the young bloke up the stairs with our luggage. There was a stuffiness in both rooms so we opened the double doors out onto the covered veranda. Stepped outside to view the main street below...which was devoid of traffic. After hanging up those items requiring such attention and heaved the half empty suitcase up onto the small indent in the shelf that ran the length of the room, I bounced on the bed. A firm mattress. I laid down to assess its comfort scale...ten out of ten. A large flatscreen TV sat on the opposite end of the shelf. You could either comfortably watch from the Queen-sized bed or as you sat at a small divan or a sofa chair with small table nearby to do the same. That was good as I never liked watching a TV screen while lying in bed. It was something I could never get accustomed to.

Tally strolled into my room from the veranda as I was putting on a fresh shirt.

"Good size rooms. A big comfy bed that is changed every week so a document in one of the drawers informed me...the rooms vacuumed every second day...how could you want to go home!"

I hadn't got that far. I splashed water on my face wiping it with a warm fluffy towel...the towel rack was heated!

“Why’d you pick the end room, Tally?” I asked. A smile to go with the enquiry.

“It’s the closest to the external fire escape. These old buildings flare up bloody quick once they catch fire”.

I nodded, smiled again as we ascended the internal staircase. Depositing our meal selection for tonight and tomorrow’s Breakfast I led Tally out the back door, across the gravel backyard that had several lightweight carports across the rear fence line. All occupied...the ‘Help’ I thought got first pickings-. The local Cop Shop was next door...a handy location if the ‘natives’ get out of hand which I was assured could happen when the Shearing Gangs hit town.

I pulled my ID Card for the Desk Constable to view. He looked up at me then at the Card again to ensure I wasn’t the reincarnation of Ben Hall or some other Bushranger from around these precincts two hundred years ago. He looked closer at Tally’s face as though sucking in every crease and cleft. Satisfied, he looked up at me, a smile his greeting.

“We expected you tomorrow...did you get on the early flight this morning...into Jerilderie?”

“Arrh, my partner here did but I was in Deniliquin for a Court Appearance...The Case finished earlier than expected...yesterday. The Sergeant in?”

“Arrh...Senior Constable Caleb Collins is the Station Commander...he’s out on a call. Come in. Sit. I’ll get the Clerk to make you a coffee...”

I glanced at my watch. Nodded as I followed the man around the counter and into a back room that doubled as a Lunchroom and Conference Room combined, I suspected. The Aircon was humming away quietly. We were introduced to Dolores ‘Dolly’ Watson who I and Shelley had known when we were here on the Archie Prendergast homicide some eight years ago.

“You sure ran through this town like a giant willy-willy you know. There were huge changes when the correct verdict of Archie’s death became known...no-one here believed Archie had killed himself but at the time that is what the Senior Sarge was convinced of...sure backfired for him. He was given an ultimatum...take early retirement or suffer the twelve lashes before being stood down with loss to his entitlements. He didn’t have that long to go so he took early retirement...lives up in Queensland. Caboolture I think...no...”

“Batemans Bay”. The Desk Constable-on-duty corrected her.

She turned to pour the boiling water into the four mugs sitting on the sink top.

“Sugar on the table. I’ll get the milk”. She volunteered as she set the mugs on the table. It was obvious that she and the Desk Constable were joining us. She sat with a sigh opposite me. It was obvious she wanted a piece of me.

“You’re the same big city copper who proved Archie Prendergast didn’t take his own life way back...what. Eight...nine years ago. People round these parts were pleased with your work...until families started to fall apart...”

I looked at her over the rim of my coffee mug...shit coffee...cheap coffee that tasted like dirt. I will forever regret not coming back at her and how the truth can hurt those the most who fail to live by it.

“Nobody told you at the Trial up at the Jerilderie Court House. Did they? Nah...don’t suppose as you were there for five minutes and then you were gone...the Cowdrey family and the McKinnon family pulled apart. The Sergeant’s too. Good families. Generations of the families lived around here. Respected, liked. Had big spreads...the largest around these parts. Good family stock pulled apart all because you said Archie, bless his soul didn’t take his own life...you should be proud of yerself but yer didn’t stick around long enough to see the repercussions, did ya!”

There was nothing to gain by responding to her. It was obvious that the folks around here had formed an opinion and nothing I said in my defence was going to change that. Instead, I sat there like a stunned mullet unsure how I was going to utter a fact that would change the stance of these people. My thoughts were stymied as Caleb Collins walked into the room. I stood to shake his hand but instead I was engulfed in his man hug.

“Joe...I was hoping it would be you...good to see you man. I’ll bet Dolly here has been trying to nail you to the cross, eh? Don’t listen to her or those of similar ilk...” He hugged me again. “I hear you were in Deniliquin. Didn’t have long to travel. This pretty thing your partner. What ever happened to...arrh...Shelley wasn’t it? You sure have an eye for pretty things eh?”.

I was uncomfortable with his rhetoric, not sure where it was heading.

“Congrats on your promotion to Station Head...”

“Yeah, well. At the time completely unexpected. I’d say I was the only participant who really wanted to stay here...the rest were looking purely at it as a stepping stone...it’s hard enough to get blokes who want to stay around these parts...um...you’ve met most of my staff. Jeff Collins...no relation, is posted at the crime scene you would want to look at and Tilly Pappas is this minute guarding an area where remains have just been unearthed...arrh...come through

to my Office...Providence has played a hand knowing you'd be in the area. I betcha you catch this Case too". A smile as he turned asking Dotty to make fresh coffees and one for him...not the shit she would have shelled out to us. "Sorry Joe. It is a given that all callers who want a coffee always gets the cheap shit...we normally can't stand the stuff!"

We followed him through to his Office. A view of the wide side street through one window and a view of the rear of the Pub through another on an adjacent wall. The room was light and airy not requiring a light to be on. An aircon hummed quietly keeping temperatures comfortable. As we settled in there was a light knock on the door. Dolly entered expertly carrying the three mugs of coffee and a pack of biscuits held under her chin. Her ample bosom helping in the exercise.

"Thanks Darls..." Caleb thanked the robust woman who stood close to six feet tall. A country girl in all regards. After she had retreated and closed the door, Caleb offered that the Station could not perform without her presence...but watch out for her tongue.

"I get the impression we are not held in high regard around these parts, eh?" I offered as I took a sip of coffee. Arrh...one hundred and twenty percent better than the last offering.

"Umm...people are funny...can be extremely fickle...yes, initially you were considered one of Moses' sons...I have no idea where they placed Shelley...a lovely person...where is she now?"

I got the impression Caleb Collins, Senior Constable-in-Charge was nervous.

"Yeah...Shells. She adopted a couple of babies. Loving the home life. We keep in regular contact...arrh...I was so sorry when she made that decision over the cop life but it was the best decision she has ever made. I'm not looking forward when I see Tally here follow her out of the Force..."

I heard a soft growl. Caleb smiled.

"Careful partner..." Tally muttered quietly.

"Right...let's leave it there and get on with business..." A knock at the door.

"Boss? They've found another set of remains". The door closed.

"Cal? Let's take a look at those remains. We may have to call in the Forensic Pathologist team and a couple of Forensic Trace personnel from Sydney if they've got anyone to spare".

“Yeah...okay...thank Christ you’re here as I’m a little out of my depth to be truthful...nothing like this has happened in the town’s history...”

“Mmm...how...why were the remains unearthed?”

“Um...the existing small Mall...about five shops is having extensions built on. Woolworths and a Big ‘W’ Store. Shows Bungarra has arrived...the land on which the extension and the carpark are on was once the Commercial Hotel...in competition with the existing Bungarra Hills Pub you’re staying at now”. I nodded thinking the name had some significance. “Yeah...the Cowdrey family also own the Pub and several stores here in town. The Commercial Hotel burnt down in...well before my time...late sixty, early seventies I think...everything a pile of ash. The area cleared and left. Became an unofficial carpark used by most of the locals when they come to town. The first lot of remains that I saw was where the old Barn and Stables were located out the back of where the Pub once stood...now another lot of remains which would mean they were likely buried before the late sixties...they’re doing foundation work...this’ll slow them down. I’ve put a temporary stay on any further works...seems as though they ignored that order...they’ve no option now but to stop work what with the second lot of remains”.

“I’ll get onto the Forensic Branch in Sydney. We may get lucky with enough people on the ground not effected by Covid. They can charter a flight to land here at the Bungarra Strip...before nightfall tonight”.

“Yeah...it’s a grass strip but will take a flight that carries up to twelve passengers...”

“That will be the best plan...allowing for their gear and overnight stay I’d say we’ll be looking at a three-man forensic trace team and a four-man pathology team. Can we hire say...three 4WDs for them...they’ll need them for all their equipment...have you any of those small collapsible tents?”

“Arrh...Jerilderie...and the rental 4WDs...they’ll have to come from Deniliquin...”

“Before we organise that, let’s see if we can get the teams from Sydney first. If they can get the numbers it will take some four hours minimum before they’re off the ground. They’ll need to get clothes for a minimum four day stay. That’ll give us plenty of time to organise the tents and vehicles to be here when the plane lands...okay?”

Caleb nodded his head thankful he had someone on hand to take control. He looked worried for a moment.

“Arrh...the Constable Kalavati homicide shooting. He’s one of us which usually means that the Standards and Ethics guys would have first choice of the scene over you...”

I nodded.

“Yeah...you’re right but apparently covid has stripped the Branch bare...left a Receptionist and the boss which leaves us to take over. They may show up in weeks to come”.

## CHAPTER FIVE

I held up my hand as I walked out of the Police Station to quell further conversation as I dialled in the Forensic Science Lab. It took some time for the phone to pick up at that end. Profuse apologies didn’t help as I sat under the shade of a huge Pepper Tree at the rear of the cop shop property.

“Sorry, but I need two two-man teams down here in Bungarra. Three bodies and I suspect more to come...one a homicide shooting of a local Police Officer and two remains uncovered during a construction build in the middle of town”.

“Yer got the luck of the Irish, Detective. We’ve had five officers come back this week from Covid isolation...Bungarra...where in hell is that?”

“Out from Jerilderie. There’s a light plane strip that will take a small charter flight...ten seat maximum...” A little conservative on the numbers I had previously been given. What the heck, I didn’t want to be responsible for a pile-up and the deaths of all passengers on the flight. “Umm...you need to land before six to-night as that is when the aerodrome closes its doors. I must ask for Forensic Pathology help also...two two-man teams. The lot of you can combine arrangements...I’ll book you all into the Bungarra Hills Pub where we are staying...plenty of room. Aircon to each room. Good tucker...”

“It’s not one of those old Pubs where you must line up for the communal shower and toot facilities is it? In the middle of the night hearing someone barking into the toilet bowl...or just missing...or a fight in the corridor outside yer room...”

“Hell no...since I was last here on that shooting death of...Grieves...Grieves...that was his name...where the perp was imprisoned for killing him...we landed into the thick of things as the Perp...jeez I wish I had the memory of Marge Hendricks or Shelley Shields as they were both so good with names...Campbell...yeah, that’s right...Maggie Campbell...arrh...they’ve

done major renovations. Now big rooms. An Ensuite and a small cooking area if you want to do your own meals. Each room air-con which you'll need out here. The rooms regularly cleaned with new linen each week. I'll book eight extra rooms...we can hassle about numbers when they get here. I'll leave you to organise the two teams of Forensic Pathologists..."

"You're a coward Joseph Lind. You don't want to be yelled at by Muscles who is bound to explode. His numbers too have been decimated with the current bout of Covid...no worries...I'll get onto it. Um...you say the remains uncovered are historical? Could be the local cemetery...or a First Nations Burial site. I should ask for a Forensic Anthropologist and an Assistant".

"Jeez...this is getting bigger than a Ben Hur production. All I know at this stage is that an adult female was shot in the back of her head and the remains buried with her that of an adolescent female had her head split open...cleaved open".

"Mother and daughter?"

"Don't know...that will require DNA examination. Can I expect everyone to arrive here tomorrow night?"

"Don't know. I'll see what I can organise but the light plane flight is falling out of favour as the time to organise everything will mean we'll miss the latest time that it could fly out of Mascot to land down there before six...we may have to plan for a convoy drive overnight...let you know".

## **CHAPTER SIX**

As we headed outside to the Station 4WD, my phone began its buzzing in my pocket.

"Lind!" I answered nonchalantly.

"Lind? Muscles...we can't do what you want. We cannot charter a flight to take my team plus the Forensic Trace Team to land at Bungarra before 1800 hundred hours. Have booked both teams on a commercial flight getting into Jerilderie 0950 to-morrow morning. I can't spare you two teams of Forensic Pathologists...I haven't got the numbers. One team of two with us borrowing the Forensic Photographer when we need him...arrh...I have engaged an Historical Forensic Researcher under the correct responsibility codes for the Case...she will be accompanying the gang tomorrow with a young Assistant. That's a total of seven



bods...we better have results as personnel are tight up here...don't ask for another favour for a while as you'll be knocked back".

The line went dead. I was of the opinion my mate was mad at something...I didn't have a clue at what...

I hopped into the 4WD that was ticking over as I had finished my conversation with the City Morgue 2IC. Relayed the conversation to Senior Constable-in-Charge Caleb Collins.

"Mmm...I'll let the Station know...they'll need to organise those 4WDs from Deniliquin to drive overnight to Jerilderie to meet your crowd...and a couple of collapsible tents...three enough?"

I nodded as we headed towards the main street of Bungarra.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

I squatted looking out over the construction site. It was quite large when you considered the parking area which now was where the site huts and construction paraphernalia was located. The rest of the site was a series of dirt mounds and footing strips zigzagging all over the site. The large Drilling Rig was at that moment digging a hole that was some five metres deep...like the rest of the pylon holes across the site.

"They've come too close to the 'dig' site. Mister Conway? You were asked to leave a six metre 'no-go' zone around the burial plots..." I pointed towards the Drilling Rig, shouting above the noise of the machine. A Labourer was standing close to where the hole was being dug, occasionally placing a muddy foot too close to the 'no-go' zone.

"Mister Conway? Stop that operation and move the whole rig away...at least six metres away. We'll have our forensic people here tomorrow wanting safe access...that is not safe at the moment. If you like, I can organise a Court Order that will close the entire site until we have completed our work...understand?" I yelled above the diesel noise. I turned to Caleb. "Can you organise some star-pickets and police tape to ensure these cowboys stay well clear of the area? Make sure the designated area is larger than what we require..."

Caleb nodded as he took out his Mobile Phone, speed dialling in the Station barking orders to comply with my wishes as we stood close to the unearthed cadavers.

The Works Foreman gave me a glance that could kill if I were a little more sensitive...and receptive to such things. A shrill whistle and a sign of a hand being cut across his throat stopped further work. The man did not want the entire site brought to a halt...it meant money...big money to him. The Site Foreman followed another bloke to the other side of the site and a temporary Plan Table. After some deliberation, the Drilling Rig rumbled away from where we were standing. Muddy boot imprints displayed the workmen's complete disregard for the burial site.

An Aboriginal Burial Site was the majority opinion...not a big problem. Chuck the bones and let us get on with the job was the words heard. Construction workers annoyed at having their site restricted.

I learnt that the Little Digger which had uncovered the remains was operated by a First Nations bloke...such sites were sacred to his people...though he showed scant regard to such things. A steady weekly wage meant more to him than ancestors uncovered under his watch.

I turned to instruct the young female Constable who was supposed to be not only guarding the area but preventing the Builder from fudging too close to the cadavers...she had failed in her job. Caleb Collins gave her a dressing down not heard by anyone else as the Drilling Rig rumbled, clanged, and snorted its way across the site...

"We got enough time to visit the site where that young Senior Constable of yours was shot?"

Collins glanced at his watch. Nodded and after saying additional words to the young female Constable headed towards our vehicle. A black look that did not leave him until we had driven some way from the site.

As we headed out of town he slowed the large 4WD down to a stop. Turning to me he began.

"I don't want to harp on this but by closing time at the Pub, your name will be shit. The more those building blokes drink, the more their anger will build over you...you don't get it do you?"

"No Cal...I do, but I have a job to do and I do not take lightly to bloody imbeciles who think they can ignore official police directions..."

"Joe...Joe. When you left Jerilderie what...eight...ten years ago, there were those who thought you were a bloody Prince. A clever bastard who solved Archie Prendergast's suicide, arresting Victoria McKinnon for his murder. Then slowly, those positive thoughts faded as the town and its people were confronted with long-standing relationships and families imploding...no...no". He held up his hands. "No...yer gunna say something about the truth

hurting or yer can't live under a bush all yer lives...but they were and when the truth caused massive upheavals to well-respected and liked families, they looked around for some-one to blame...and they found you! Easy as...if you had let things lie...like Archie Prendergast killing himself then the status quo would have remained...and the clever Dee from Sydney would be regarded as one clever Dee for all time...instead..."

"Until the next upheaval like now...the underbelly of a small country town can be more poisonous than anything you can image in the Big Smoke I reckon..." I commented more as an aside.

"Jeezuz Detective! All you see is black and white...Gus McKinnon filed for divorce a week about after you had charged his missus with one count of murder and one count of attempted murder with intent...and he let it be known that he was willing to sell the property at the right price. Dianne and Tim Cowdrey wanted out as soon as it was common knowledge that Tim had an affair with Victoria McKinnon. He wanted to end it because he felt guilty of deceiving his missus. Little did he know that Dianne...his missus' regular visits to Sydney were yes; to see her father-in-Law John Cowdrey Senior and her two University kids...but there was another reason...she was seeing some bloke on the side down there. When that came out, it almost broke Tim Cowdrey's heart. He wanted out of the ownership of Rosedale Station. This huge upheaval in the Cowdrey family meant that John, the eldest Cowdrey male lost heart in being the owner of Wheeribah Creek Station...they had a consensus of three from three to sell up the Cowdrey Holdings...luckily, Rowena had inherited a sizable amount from Archie her husband. He still had the full amount with interest on the sale of his parent's property on the north side of town. With a loan from the Bank and lower resale values for farm properties because of the drought, Rowena bought out her two brothers properties and...and the McKinnon Property...for far less than was expected. Gus McKinnon? John and his ex-missus and John and his missus? No-one is too sure where they are now...and Angela Prendergast nee Cowdrey now has the largest spread around these parts...all amalgamated and registered under the Bungarra Hills Station name. Now that times are good, she has permanent water with a Manager in running the combined Wheeribah and Rosedale Stations with another Manager living with his wife, mother, and father and four kids in that beautiful old two-storey colonial house. He looks after the old McKinnon spread and the original Bungarra Hills Station...Rowena and her friend are raking in the money, so they say..."

He left the narrow, dusty verge and began to speed up over the corrugated dirt road. Satisfied he had said sufficient for me to understand the undercurrents of the bush town.

"I guess it is easier to blame some-one who kilometres away cannot defend himself than for them to blame each other. They all enjoyed the continual steamy rumours that engulfed the town for years not really believing them...but believing in them".

Collins nodded before glancing at me with an expression I could not fathom.

“The Sergeant? It was deemed that his lack of due diligence in Archie Prendergast’s death meant he lost a few of those kudos for his life-long service as a small-town copper. The hierarchy were not impressed with his performance which added to the long list of perceived misdemeanours that he had accrued. He was given an ultimatum...take early retirement with full entitlements intact or be suspended for an uncertain period before his long service record is picked through with a fine-tooth comb. They’d be looking for things to add to the score to end his career...with all entitlements lost...it wasn’t a hard decision for him but many in town thought he was being used as the sacrificial lamb...and they knew who to blame. The Sergeant had been the town copper for close on twenty years...he was extremely popular...again his punishment as that is how they viewed his sudden departure caused by the big city Detective...get the picture? You Detective were in the crosshairs back then and still are with some people...just a quiet word to forewarn you”.

We rode in silence for the rest of the short journey out to young Constable Kalavati’s last resting place.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

Caleb slowed the large 4WD Police vehicle to a crawl before he began to turn into a farm track in a break of trees that shadowed the dirt road.

I looked up towards the crest of the slight ridgeline some four hundred metres away. The track was straight and narrow leading to a large carport that was an extension to the house. The building itself elevated on thin concrete piles much the same as a typical Queenslander Homestead. There was enough space under for a sedan vehicle or similar. To prove the point a car was up on jacks...having the shock-absorbers replaced due to the corrugated dirt road out front I surmised!

“This it then?” I asked as Caleb began to drive slowly up the track to the crest of the ridge. “Can you stop for a moment? I’d like to get out and wander about for a while...get my bearings...breathe in the air...”

He propped the vehicle before the gate opening and a wide cattle grid. I waited to allow the cocky comb of dust to settle. It had rained the previous day but not enough apparently to settle the dust.

I wandered out into the centre of the dirt road not concerned about being run over. I doubted there would be less than a dozen vehicles speeding along the road each day...if that! Tally came to stand beside me, a hand shading her eyes as she looked up and down the dirt road. The dirt track skirted by a narrow band of dense bush and tall trees on either side. The road lost as a crest hid the route in its travel.

“Where does this road lead to?” I asked Caleb as he too came to stand on my other side.

“Um...it dips down to turn a sharp left-hander. Crosses a culvert causeway crossing before swinging hard into a sharp right-hander before continuing servicing several other farms before meeting up with the main road about an hour away. Turn right and you’re back in Jerilderie in about an hour...hour and a half. Turn left and you make Barham in about two...”.

I nodded, scratched my neck, and waved away a cloud of flies. I turned and walked to the other side of our vehicle to look up the slope to the cottage.

“This was ‘gifted’ to the local people...especially the local coppers because there was scant rental accommodation for any of the local people...by the Bungarra Holdings P/L in appreciation for the work done on investigating Archie Prendergast’s death...that about right? How many coppers are living there at the moment?” I was hinting that it was my solving of the Prendergast suicide/murder that was the reason for Missus Prendergast’s largesse.

“Arrmm...just Tilly Pappas...our Deceased lived there with allowances for another two bods...now Tilly is here by herself. I have no idea what she thinks of living out here by herself especially now knowing there is a shooter running free. With everything going on I’ve not had a chance to speak to her about it. Sorry...Jeff Collins lives here too...that’s his car up on blocks under the house...he is a good mechanic so Dwayne used to say”.

“Dwayne?”

“Yeah...Dwayne Kalavati...our Vic”.

I nodded, angry at myself for not remembering the Vic’s name. As I stewed inwardly, I watched Tally walk around the large 4WD cop vehicle to stand at the beginning of the cattle grid looking up at the house as though in a trance. I was about to shout to her when she shook her head and walked slowly to the gate post that had been isolated with police tape hung from tree to post several times. She nodded to herself before bending down to look at something on the front of our vehicle. She stood, a satisfied look on her face as she came to stand beside me.

“That LED strip light? On the front of the vehicle?” She asked Caleb as she pointed towards the front of the vehicle.

“Yeah...they’re fantastic. Gives an almost one-eighty degree spread out in front of us. Far better than anything we had before. When you’re driving at night you can see anything before it begins to hop or run towards the road in front of you. It gives you so much more time to take evasive action...”

“All the 4WDs at the Station similarly fitted with the light?”

“Yeah. The lot...why?”

“Because the shooter could not have been standing at the gate post...and that is a bloody good shot at about four hundred metres. He was standing behind that thick growth of tall trees across the road”. She turned to point at a grove of trees on the other side of the road opposite the property gate and cattle grid.

“First yer say that a four hundred metre shot is a bloody good shot but then yer extend it by another twenty or so metres. What makes you say that?”

“It was an almost cloudless night last night. He loved the night sky and could name every star and constellation in the southern sky...that was one of the reasons why he volunteered for the night shift. He was standing at the rear right corner of his vehicle. His right arm straight hanging onto the rear of the vehicle for balance. His left hand up shading his eyes looking up at the Milky Way that he so loved. The position from our Vic to down here is around twenty...twenty-five metre elevation. The shooter was firing upwards. The bullet entered the side of his body at around the bottom of his left side of his rib cage going up to blast out the heart...coming out of his right shoulder...the guy was about dead when he hit the ground. The force of the shot spinning him around so that he landed on his left shoulder...”

“A brilliant piece of deduction Detective, but a postmortem has yet to be conducted...”

“I’ll bet me house that my assertion will be close to the truth...the reason why our shooter was not standing at the gate post? He would have been seen as Dwayne slowly swung his truck onto the house driveway...I’ll bet he had those LED lights plus his high beam on...it was what...around four in the morning...even without the moonlight of last night, our shooter would have been seen in that location. Hiding behind those large trees across the road, he would have been in shadow as Wayne’s vehicle approached and once the vehicle began its slow ascent up to the house, he had plenty of time to prepare himself for the shoot”.

I smiled, giving my young partner a slap on the back...I was also convinced of her logic. Even Cal nodded his acknowledgement after thinking deeply about the young woman's theory.

"Mmm...good one Tally. I'm sure that no GSR will be found anywhere around that gate post but will be found around that thicket of large gums on the other side of the road...good one girl. Good work but let's not hang our hats on that theory until we have it backed up with facts and forensic evidence".

## CHAPTER NINE

We slowly crawled up the incline towards the cottage that was sitting up on concrete piles. Perhaps to obtain greater views over the creek valley. Not a word was spoken between the three of us as we mulled over Tally's assumptions. The more I thought about it, the more I felt she had hit the nail on the head though I was not about to add to the words of encouragement I had already voiced. I also wasn't about to set those thoughts into concrete. She had done good which she was pleased about...that was more than enough though I was more than satisfied with her growth. She would make an excellent Detective if she continued to improve...that I was confident about. She was showing more promise than Shelley Shield and Sophie Grasso combined, my two long term partners before her. She was showing more talent than they when they were in similar time zones...that pleased me no end.

We came to a stop beside the police tape decorated Deceased's Police vehicle. It looked more like a Christmas present...all that it required was a large bow! Our vehicle too close to our Deceased's vehicle to my way of thinking. It took me some effort not to say anything. Again, as the builder's attitude to being too close to the unearthed remains, Forensic Trace would always require a wider border to the death vehicle. I felt that basic procedures to a Death Scene were not being realised or adopted by these bush coppers.

As we alighted a figure emerged from the large Carport holding a mug...I presumed coffee.

He held out his hand as he came towards me.

"Constable Jeff Collins...pleased to meetcha. You're the Detectives from the Big Smoke here to help us with Dwayne's death, aren't yers?"

I nodded as I shook his hand.

“Detective Joe Lind. My young partner Detective Catalina Evans...everyone knows her as Tally”.

“Jeff is not related...” Senior Constable-in-charge Caleb Collins mentioned as though this was an important point to him. The young Constable beamed as he looked closely at Tally. She was a little unnerved by the attention. I was sure that this was the second time Cal had made the fact known in the last couple of hours...I couldn’t figure why he found it necessary to make the claim.

“You live here...” It wasn’t a question, more of a statement.

“Yeah...with Dwayne...” He choked up a bit. “Um...yeah...with Tilly Pappas and Alexandra Cross. Alex works as an Assistant in the Chemist in town. She was mighty upset by Dwayne’s death and this morning she drove back to her parents’ farm further down the road...we now have three empty bedrooms...it was a gas here for a while...now...who knows what’s gunna happen”.

“Arrh...when you get a moment can you place Police Tape around that grove of trees on the other side of the road opposite the farm gate. Um, especially the one that has a fork about shoulder height...” I was sure that this was where the shooter had stood waiting for the Constable to return home. He would have had plenty of time to zero in on his target as the Police vehicle slowly ascended the grade.

“Arrh, yeah. No worries. You know for sure that is where the shooter stood?”

“He couldn’t have been standing anywhere else and not been spotted. Forensic trace will confirm it, I’m sure...mmm...” I looked around. “Why didn’t Dwayne park his vehicle up under the carport?”

The young Constable shrugged looking a little confused as though the fact had not registered with him.

I casually strolled around the vehicle wrapped in police crime scene tape as though it was going to be a Christmas present for someone. I had this unnerving feeling that Caleb and his namesake were feeling guilty about something. I stopped at the painted surround of where the young Constable had died. Arms and legs spread-eagled. His fixed gaze looking up at his sky...even in death he wanted that last moment clearly...indelibly marked into his brain of the wonders of the Universe.

“Who did the death outline?”



“I did...” Jeff Collins admitted.

“While our Vic lay there?”

“Um...no. After the Morgue attendants had removed the body...”

“So, this is only approximately the position of our Vic...” I turned away from the man in sheer frustration. Pinched my nose’ pulled at my right earlobe.

“Yes...I guess”.

“You took a lot of photos before the body was removed? With a flash and indicator measurements”.

“Arrh...no. When Collins here rang through to the Station, at that time of morning it is unattended. The call is automatically transferred to my home phone”. Senior Constable Caleb Collins offered. “In my haste to arrive at the scene...after all, it was one of my Officers who had been shot dead, I did not gather up the digital camera. It is kept under lock and key at the Station...so no, no photos were taken of the scene...”

I turned around several times, hands on hips, my blood pressure through the roof. These guys have gotten so used to the easy life out here they forget the words in the Procedures Manual. As there would be very few homicides out this way in any one year, they lose the ability to think outside the square which was their little world of a country cop. I knew I was being a little unkind but what the heck, photographic evidence of the crime scene was paramount and formed a basic part of the Prosecution Case when it made Court.

“Your Mobile Phones...they have excellent abilities in taking good photos...good enough for any Court procedure...”

The two Officers bowed their heads. They knew they had fucked up right royally!

“Where was the body taken for a postmortem?”

“Arrh...the two morgue attendants were from the Funeral Business in Jerilderie. They would have transported the body to Wagga Wagga Base Hospital”. He glanced at his watch. “They’d about be there by now. Wagga has excellent autopsy facilities”.

I stood just outside the painted outline of the dead Senior Constable looking down the slope towards the road. I could clearly see the thick grove of tall trees and surrounding bush...but I did not have a straight-line sight of the thick gate post. I nodded to myself and stepped towards

the rear of the vehicle again having difficulty with the line of sight of the gate post. The straight-line approach was interrupted by a small low bush halfway down the slope. No more than a metre tall. I slapped my thigh and tried to control my growing anger. There had been no thoughtful investigation of the entire death scene or surrounds. I turned to stand where our Vic stood when he was shot. I could not see the elevated veranda of the cottage. The large 4WD blocking my view...whether it meant something or not wasn't the point. It was one of many points that could mean something or nothing...only time would tell.

I decided not to haul anyone over the coals for these mounting examples of laxness...why...I had no idea.

I turned to my young Partner explaining what I was doing and congratulated her on her previous assumptions of the location of the shooter.

“They haven't done a good job on examining the area or being creative, have they? And you are mightily pissed at their carelessness, huh?” She remarked quietly out of the corner of her mouth.

I nodded. Smiled then pursed my lips.

“Let this be a lesson to you girlie. You can never be too careful or thoughtful while taking in the crime scene and the surrounds. Take notice of everything...take loads of photos...you can always delete those not considered relevant at a later stage...”

I was saying this as she took careful aim with her Mobile Phone camera. Taking landscape perspectives and portrait shots. Zooming in and out. Moving a couple of steps to the right and then to the left before she murmured she had enough...this activity she did almost as a mime activity, partly to rub it into the onlookers...so I thought as it bought a smile to my lips.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

I was standing on the veranda looking down the slope towards the secondary dirt road. Tally standing beside me. The three country cops uncomfortable in their stance under the carport some metres from us. We were looking down on them reinforcing our position of power.

“Who discovered Dwayne's body?” I asked as I turned to them. Jeff Collins shuffled about eventually owning up.

“I did...or maybe Tilly Pappas and me together”. He admitted cautiously.

“How long after you heard the shot?”

“Yeah...um...it woke me. I thought it a Roo shooter...or a dog or pig shooter as there was no second or third shot after the first which is unusual. I was rolling over wanting to get back to sleep when Tilly came into my room. She also was awakened by the shot but was worried as Dwayne was not in the Kitchen making himself a meal. He did that every night after he got off his shift. He’d have the TV down low watching whatever until he had finished his meal...Tilly was worried that he wasn’t here. I got out of bed and went outside...we both saw him lying beside his truck...”

“Did you have a torch?”

“No...I don’t think there is a torch in the place. Both Tilly and I used our torches on our Mobiles though the moonlight was bright enough to illuminate our passage...we could see him lying flat on his back beside the police vehicle”.

“You were using your Mobiles?”

“Yeah...” Missing the importance and negligence of his actions. “I rang the Boss straight away...took him maybe thirty minutes to get here...” He was waffling. He could see where he had fucked up...badly.

“It would have been fifteen minutes...”

“Fifteen...twenty...” I added.

“Yeah...about that...”

“Did you see any movement on the road. Hear a vehicle starting up and heading off. The shooter would have left his vehicle down near the causeway I suspect. He would have sprinted to his vehicle in five flat. At that time of morning the air is crisp and noises travel. You didn’t hear a vehicle starting up or driving off. Did you see any headlights?”

“No...but the moon was bright enough for him to drive without his headlights on...and the trees and bushes on both sides of the road would have hidden his progress even after he had driven over the causeway...”

I nodded.

“Good point”. I conceded. “But you never heard a motor ticking over?”

Both Pappas and Collins shook their heads. If it had been a diesel they would have heard something...

From the added height of the veranda, you could not you see the road as it went over the creek causeway to continue towards the low ridgeline though the route was clearly marked by the tall gums and vegetation on either side of the road. The creek was the same...sure, you could follow its meandering course through the landscape by the abundant tall trees that edged both banks but the water course, as per the road surface were well hidden. It was a lovely scene with the wheat paddocks and stubble greeting the horizon. Large mobs of sheep grazed on the wheat stubble.

“You keep a couple of sheep here, huh?” I asked no-one.

“No...we permit Stan Close to agist about a hundred sheep here every Spring and Autumn. His property follows the creek line up to the far ridgeline. His gate is opposite the creek crossing. He shallow turns the soil up here each year to encourage good growth and the good rains have ensured a good cover of grass...it would be ashamed to see it go to waste...and there is nothing more peaceful than to have a mob of sheep munching on good grass close to the house...”

“You a farmer’s boy?” I asked Jeff Collins who had come to stand beside Tally and me. It was obvious he enjoyed the view as well.

“Yeah...out of Canowindra. Both Mum and Dad were disappointed when I didn’t take up farm life, instead of becoming a copper...I may go back home...I don’t think this is my life...”

He’d left the decision open that was obvious. This incident had upset him. I reckon he was angry at himself for stuffing up at the first major hurdle he had encountered. Not once but several times!

“Don’t be too down on yerself. We all fuck up at times...just remember your mistakes so you don’t repeat them...arrh...coffee? Yer got any decent stuff. We missed out on Lunch so a decent coffee would go down well...after I have a squiz into Kalavati’s room. I won’t enter it until after the Forensic Trace people have their head in the room. Has he a computer?” I asked as I headed for the front door of the cottage. I stopped and turned to face the three local coppers. “Is there a Forensic Digital Officer down this way?”

“Yes...there is a two-man unit in Wagga Wagga...”

“Get onto them, Caleb. I want them here around the same time as my forensic trace team enter the young man’s bedroom...say around ten...eleven tomorrow morning hopefully”. I winced as I issued this order as it sounded as though I was usurping his authority. Maybe yes, maybe no, but they knew I knew they had stuffed up with about every step of this investigation so far. I thought it about time we got the Case back on the rails and already, we were entering the third day of the investigation with no scientific people yet on site.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Thank you...that sure hit the spot”.

It is remarkable how the air cleared as we all sat around the scarred and marked table. Having a couple of ham and cheese toasted sandwiches flushed down by a passable coffee...pod stuff but it was reasonable. We spoke about anything and everything. Laughter and titters improved the mood remarkably. While we may never be firm friends, we cleared the air and learnt a great deal about the surrounding countryside, its unique characters, and eccentric locals. The last ‘Big Dry’ and when it was expected again...it will always occur as night follows day...that’s the way of the Australian climatic conditions and life in the Bush.

I eased back in my chair. Coughed to begin and to get everyone’s attention.

“Right...back to work. I doubt the Forensic people from Sydney will be here much before mid-day tomorrow. By the time we settle them into their rooms at the Pub and bring them up to speed it’ll be well after lunch. Constable Pappas? Could you stay with the Forensic Pathologist and that Forensic Anthropologist and their Assistants until they do not need to be on-site. Four...five days but if they find anymore remains, that’ll blow those times out the window...and make new targets for the Builder to carry on about...”

I heard Tilly Pappas exhale in frustration.

“Yeah, I know it’s a boring assignment that you are well over, but we must have confidence in the chain of evidence as it is unearthed. Keep a log of who is on-site and a photographic trace of what those people are doing...that includes all the Builder’s people and our people as well...”

“Won’t those people do something similar?”

“Too right if they know what they’re doing...but never rely on another person doing the right thing. We don’t know what we’ve got yet. A First Nations burial ground...an old cemetery site or a case of multiple homicides...”

“So what!” The young Constable exploded looking across to her Boss, Senior Constable Caleb Collins. “No matter the cause of these remains, it matters little. The remains could be over a hundred years old...who cares if they died naturally or were killed by some-one’s hand. It’s a little long in the tooth to worry about the cause of death...or who they were...”

“Not the right attitude young lady” I responded coolly. “We must examine every unexplained or sudden death that comes to our notice in the State...that is an imperative and tied up in legislation...it is our duty. That is part of your principles of being a copper too! You shouldn’t forget that!”

I was steaming up again. I saw my young partner glance across at me, telling me silently to cool it...I nodded. Took several sips of coffee to allow things to settle.

“Arrh...Constable Collins. I want you to accompany the Forensic Trace people...in one of their vehicles out here...I’ll instruct the Trace people to concentrate on the Police vehicle and surrounds before they enter the cottage. Okay? When they’re finished with the vehicle and hopefully it doesn’t take too long, drive out to Barham...by the way, has Barham its own cop Station?”

“Yes...though it is only manned for fifteen...sixteen hours a day. Good people...” Caleb offered. I nodded.

“Arrh, Constable? Get onto them to get them into gear looking for what you want. Once you have Kalavati’s Police vehicle, head out over the causeway...turn left to Barham at the highway. What we want is any vision...I’d say it would be a 4WD that enters town between say oh-five-thirty hours to oh-six-thirty hours on the morning of the shooting...yesterday. The local guys will be able to advise on whether CCTV cameras are mounted on...say...shopfronts...petrol stations or truck stops at the edge of town...if there’s nothing evident, duplicate your enquiries with the Jerilderie Police Station...our suspect can only turn left or right at the highway...”

“You want me to drive to Barham and Jerilderie tomorrow afternoon?” He asked incredulously.

I nodded, took a sip of coffee that was now cold. I excused myself from the table to make myself a new mug of coffee.

“What? It’s a two-hour drive between the two towns...from the farm cottage to Barham via the back road would be about the same. If you explain to them exactly what you are looking for like this afternoon, it may save you a trip to either town...what’s the hassle?” I ran my fingers through my thinning hair. “People? This is a homicide murder investigation which takes precedence over all other issues and may involve overtime or missed sleep...I do not think I should constantly remind you of that fact...okay? We know what we need to do. Yes?” I turned to Senior Constable Collins. “Did you get onto those Digital Experts in Wagga Wagga?”

“Yes...They will be here around lunchtime tomorrow...if not earlier depending on what time they leave their Office...it’s about a four-hour drive maximum from Wagga to Bungarra, right?”

Caleb agreed with a nod of his head.

“They may have to stand around while Forensic Trace have done their bit but I want them to digitally search through our Vic’s laptop and report on anything suss...they can work at your Station, okay?”

Caleb nodded while he continued to write into his Laptop. It was obvious that he had typed every order I had given. Rightly or wrongly, it was evident he was a little miffed at me giving orders to his subordinates...and himself but I was still of the opinion that I had taken responsibility from him in every regard.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

I didn’t stir at the light knock on the door. Even when it became more pronounced, I hardly stirred, just rolling over to continue with my dreams. A sudden slap on my exposed bum woke me with a fright...scaring the bejesus out of me. Bleary-eyed I found my Travel Clock.

“What tha!?” I complained angrily. “It’s not even seven yet!” My normal wake-up time now that I had hit fifty-five. “DeeDee...what tha!?”

“By the looks of it, I’ve been part of your dream...”

“Not bloody likely...” I responded embarrassingly, finding it difficult to find enough sheets and blankets to hide my manliness. “What are you doing here?”

“Obeying your request as far as I know...no matter how hard we attempted to comply with the maximum load limit on the plane, we always had to leave something off, knowing for sure we would need it down here. It’s handy being in the same building as the Forensic Pathology Team as we sorted out our requirements, made sure they were all included in our emergency outside dual-axle trailer, grabbed some clothes and left the Morgue precinct at around six last night. We had three 4WDs and the large trailer. Little traffic and we took turns at driving for an hour...an hour and a half before we changed drivers. Most slept as we tootled along. The Pub was still open when we got here. Figured out our sleeping arrangements...my bed couldn’t have been more comfortable. Anyhow, by the time you get up, have a shower, and dressed we all should be down in the Dining Room enjoying our first coffee of the day so hurry up. We can sort out our responsibilities for the day as we have breakfast...hurry up!” She ordered as she closed the bedroom door.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

By the time we were ready to walk over to the adjacent Police Station, we were all comfortably sated with each of us having a vacuum flask of coffee. We made short work of introductions and meting out responsibilities. Again, Senior Constable Caleb Collins let me take the lead with nary a concern shown by the other Station coppers. All now satisfied with the pecking order.

As we were finishing up, two men with authority written all over their mien strolled into the Lunchroom come Conference Room. The two Digital Forensic Officers from Wagga Wagga. Again, introductions all round with me taking the lead.

“You guys can follow our Forensic Trace people out to the murder site. Constable Collins can go with them to show them the way. He can then use the Deceased’s vehicle after it has been examined with all trace obtained to travel to Barham and Jerilderie. You guys can come back into town whenever you like...or can you examine the Deceased’s Laptop there...or would you prefer to return to town?”

“No...we’ll see. We can just as easy transfer any incriminating material from the Laptop to our base server from there or here...we’ll see what the reception is like when we get there...”

“It should be acceptable...” Offered Constable Tilly Pappas.

“Arrh...okay. Catalina? You accompany the Forensic Trace people. I’ll stay here in town with the Forensic Pathologist and her Assist and the Forensic Anthropologist and her team.



See you to-night. Right! Everyone know what they need to do and their work for the next week about...then let's go".

There was no objections as we all rose from our chairs, the scraping of chairs the only sound muffling any disparaging asides from the mob.

"One thing Joe. Depending on what forensic trace we find in the vehicle, we may need to impound it and have it transported back here..."

"Mmm...let's wait and see what you may find, huh? Um...on second thoughts Catalina, stay here with me. I doubt we'll have much to see at the burial site so we can commence interviewing persons who knew our Victim...Constable Pappas first while we're at the burial site...then...maybe she can lead us to persons who knew Constable Dwayne Kalavati personally here in town".

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

We stood and watched the Forensic Pathologist and her Assistant prepare the site before they permitted the Anthropologist to step forward. This was mainly because the couple from the Morgue Precinct had their DNA registered with the Force's database while the professional woman and her assistant were not so registered so I was solemnly informed.

After an hour of little progress, we transferred to camp chairs to watch little progress again except that several 'ready-erect' tents were placed over the site of those bones unearthed and a security fence carefully laid out around the burial zone. This all undertaken at a snail's pace and murmured conversation between the four women.

As I watched this process unfold, I wondered why women manned this profession more than men...even the Forensic Photographer was a sturdy middle-aged woman!

In sheer frustration I blew out a stream of air, stood, grabbed my uncomfortable chair, and stamped towards the Station 4WD some metres away. I unrolled the awning attached to the side of the vehicle and sat with an audible groan. Tally had helped with the awning 'unroll' exercise. She moved her camp chair closer to me.

"Joe? What's got up your nose?" A distressed look to go with the question. I gently shook my head, slowing my breath as a mental exercise.

“At the rate those four are going we’ll be here for God knows how long...and we don’t even know the story behind these remains. Bungarra never had its own newspaper did it?” Changing my train of thought drastically...a habit for which I was known!

“Arrh...” She looked over at me with a stunned look. The two statements didn’t equate with her. “I’ll look it up, Boss”. She opened her Smartphone. “Arrh...no Boss. The Jerilderie ‘Examiner’ existed between eighteen ninety and nineteen thirty. The Wagga Wagga ‘Wag’ as it was known...fair dinkum...still exists to-day but in a weekly broadsheet...first appeared in eighteen sixty-four...”

“Then that’s where we’ll go tomorrow...a good three-hour drive from here...”

Tally sat there stunned; her brow furrowed.

“It’ll be Saturday, Boss. Wouldn’t it be best to fly...” Tally suggested.

“Mmm...I’ll think about it...while we’re sitting here doing nothing, why don’t we interview Constable Pappas. She lived with our Deceased for what? Four or five years. She’d have to know him better than anyone else around here. After her we’ll call on the young Constable Collins who also lived with our deceased Constable. Both should be able to give us clues as to who in the District Constable Kalavati may have been close to...yeah...and we need to interview Senior Constable Caleb Collins, the current boss of the Station. He should have reasonable insights into our victim’s character and friends. It was he who approved the Vic’s suggestion of being appointed to the nightshift. I doubt it would have been an urgent requirement in this burg...so why did he commit to the idea?”

A small point but one that would irk me if I didn’t address it.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

I gestured to the young Constable to come and join us under the awning out of the biting sun. After she had sat in her camp chair and composed herself, I began.

I mentioned the time and date and the location of this interview. I identified myself, my Badge Number and Grading. Then I identified my young partner for the record. This process unsettled our young bush copper who would not be too familiar with such proceedings and she displayed nervousness and uncertainty.

“Um...settled down Constable. This is a normal procedure when a homicide death is committed, especially when it concerns one of our own...” I suddenly thought that this was not as per Policy and Procedures when one of our own had been shot. The Standards and Ethics guys should have been all over it...leaving us standing around scratching our heads wondering what in hell were we doing in this smallish outback town. I shook my head and blinked several times wondering not for the first time if we were the sacrificial lambs...or those ‘clever city boys’ who would wind up the investigation with the S&E guys stepping in to arrest and charge the felon taking all the glory. I coughed, crossed my legs, making a note to ring the Boss on my cynical thoughts later in the afternoon.

“Arrh...um...understand Constable, we are interviewing you as part of the investigation into the homicide shooting death of Constable Grade Three Dwayne Kalavati on Wednesday the third of this month. We will be recording this interview and the transcript of this conversation will form part of the proceedings against the person or persons who caused the death of the young Constable. Do you understand Constable Pappas?”

She nodded nervously. As per Procedures, she quoted her full name, grading, and badge number for the recording. She opened her mouth to begin. Her mouth was dry. She took several large gulps from her water bottle before beginning.

“Let’s get one thing clear...I did not live with Dwayne. We shared the cottage with several others. I rarely saw him let alone converse with him and when we did talk, it was about the job and what the AOs in Sydney had altered to benefit us on the job...it rarely did...our standard pay structure was dismal...we all were hoping for a major incident after-hours so we could claim overtime for a bit”.

“Careful Constable. This is being recorded and will form part of the investigation into Constable Kalavati’s homicide shooting...and could be used in Court. Copies will be made available for the prosecution and Defence tables...so think before you offer an opinion or a...arrh...a slight on the hierarchy. Going forward, where were you first posted after completing your tuition at the Goulburn Academy?”

“Um...Armidale for three years. During that time, I was posted to Glen Innes for a short period right in the middle of winter. It was a bloody cold year. I was transferred to Campbelltown in southwest Sydney for another five years before accepting a position here at Bungarra. I’ve been here now for four years...”

“You got around...”

“You had to accept locations that you may not have accepted to eventually get the posting you wanted. I named Bungarra because I thought it was close to my parents’ farm south of

Wagga. As it turns out, from Campbelltown to Wagga is the same distance as Bungarra to Wagga...never mind, I enjoy it here...it's peaceful without being boring...the people are nice and respectful. Peaceable. I never really knew Dwayne. I doubt anyone did! When he knocked off work anywhere between three and four in the morning, I was fast asleep...and when I left for work at seven, he was fast asleep. We may have rubbed shoulders when I was about to knock off as he would often clock on earlier than normal. On those occasions if we talked, it was mostly about work”.

She took a swig from her water bottle. Looked down at the burial grounds where all four women were on their knees brushing, scabbling and looking closely at bones thus exposed.

“Weekends? You’d spend free time together, wouldn’t you?”

“I had other interests and closer friends that I mixed with on weekends. Again, we rarely mixed. As I said, I doubt anyone really knew the guy. He was popular with the younger set mainly because of his looks, build and height...and yeah...his availability but he rarely if ever mixed with the crowd. Yeah...he was good looking but not my style of bloke. He was too quiet and reticent...not a people person”.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“He never spoke much of his youth, if at all”. Senior Constable Caleb Collins muttered more to himself. “Grew up on a farm on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. Barley. Wheat and sheep. One of seven siblings...he in the middle. Never got on with either parent or his siblings so he walked away when he was around fourteen...drifted around the farming communities in South Oz, Victoria and here in New South Wales...”

“Seems he talked a bit about his upbringing...his family history...” My young partner ‘Tally’ Evans commented.

“Hah...no. As part of their Psyche testing while the young recruits are down in the Goulburn Police Academy, they are asked to author an essay on their upbringing and lives before they were accepted into the Force. Most of it was dribble...most conformed to a set pattern of warm childhood memories and close family ties. Dwayne? He stood out as the odd man out, describing his ‘drifter’ days in detail with little description of his family...a comment of note in his ‘memoir’ was that the family would settle down to become that model farming family once he left...as though he thought he was the cause...the instigator of all the family feuds. The family didn’t lodge a Missing Person’s Report...says a lot, eh? I had the devil’s own job

tracking the family down. Still on the land south of Maitland on the Eyre Peninsular. The old man had nothing good to say about his son even when he was informed that his son was a copper here...glowing reports on his dependability, reliability, honesty, and diligence. *'Can't be me son'* was the offered reply. He refused to come to Bungarra to identify Wayne, contribute in any way for funeral costs saying that his son wasn't worth the investment...nice, eh? Yer get an inkling on the young Constable's character right, from that response eh?"

"With that type of character flaw how was he accepted into the Force?" Tally asked softly.

Collins shrugged his shoulders. Looking down at the Forensic Pathologists and Assistants who were placing recovered bones out on a long table. Two cadavers were near completion with all bones examined, tagged, and placed in the accepted form.

"He's spent all his policing in bush towns...that doesn't explain it to me but I've got nothing else..."

I nodded, thinking back to my days at the Academy. Long hard days. Many nights cramming. Others spent at the Railway Pub in Goulburn and freezing to death in the middle of winter walking across town to our barracks because no cab would pick us up...four to six rowdy drunks...

"To your knowledge, has Constable Kalavati formed any relationships here in town?" Tally asked; a very pertinent point so I thought. She was thinking about the subject and responding to information given by the Senior Constable. He smiled at her, nodding at her question.

"Ignoring town gossips and rumours doing the rounds regularly, he and 'Bendy' Bowman gravitated to each other early in the peace. Can't tell you why as Bendy is gay...always has been and suspected as such for a lot longer before she came out, but she is the best Coach this town has ever seen...or the entire District for that matter. She has coached the Under Seventeens since they were Under Thirteens...they've won the Under Fifteens, Sixteens and Seventeens in consecutive years. Dwayne became her Assistant Coach not long after being appointed to this town some five...six years ago. I'd suggest that she knows Dwayne more than he knows himself..."

"Where can we find her?"

"She's the Manager of the town Hardware Store...two blocks down the main road through town".

The Senior Constable went to rise but was stopped by a wave of Tally's hand.

“Arrh...one other thing, you mentioned rumours going around town...about what?”

The Senior Officer of this bush town glanced at the Forensic Pathologists conducting their work to uncover all the bones of the two cadavers. That was the limit of the find going on the chatter of the four women.

“Detective? Like you I am a Police Officer who relies on facts as presented and not on rumours and innuendo. I do not intend to repeat such nonsense!”

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

My mobile buzzed in my pocket before beginning its standard ringtone. One of these days it will fall from my pocket after rubbing a hole in the bottom of the pocket for the bloody thing to slide out!

I checked the ID Caller name. It was the Boss, Denny Turner. Something must be up as I only spoke to her yesterday.

“Yes Boss, a good day for it...”

“Can you do without Detective-in-training ‘Tally’ Evans for two weeks. A sudden cancellation has left an opening in the Detective Class at Goulburn. It could be her lucky break...”

How could I refuse. It could mean that she came back to me as a Murder Squad Detective Grade One. If her results were good enough, maybe a Grade Two!

“No worries Boss. She’ll pass with flying colours. I’ll put her on a plane out of Jerilderie this afternoon if I can get a seat for her...the last flight out on a Friday night going directly to Sydney. How you going Boss? You don’t sound your normal chirpy self?”

“I know we’ve discussed this before but can I change your mind on acting in my position long term?”

“Long term...no way Boss even if it’s for longer than two weeks. I’ve gotta ask, why?”

“Between you, me, and the gate post, okay. I have advanced breast cancer that has now moved into various other parts of my body. The prognosis not good...um...like other silly buggers

in the Force, I ignored the early symptoms because there was something pressing at work and am now paying the consequences. I'm going into Hospital next Monday morning...don't expect to come out but by feet first..."

"Denny? Not the right attitude...you can beat it...how old are you?"

"Huh...fifty-nine...a spring chicken as my husband keeps saying so don't you start...yeah. Look, I've gotta go...see you in a couple of weeks after surgery scheduled for next Wednesday..."

I didn't know at that time that would be the last conversation I had with my Boss...the second-best Boss after Abbey under whom I had worked. She died twelve days later...she did not have the surgery as it was deemed too drastic for her to survive...either way she was staring at death!

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

I was looking down at the neat piles of bluestone cobble stones removed from the ground that had once been the Stables at the rear of the Commercial Hotel. Stacked neatly to be removed at some stage. They'd be worth a fortune I thought, to someone. These thoughts a smoke-stream to block out the news that the Boss had confided in me. I had this creeping feeling it was not going to end well for her. From what I could find out she did not have surgery for her chances of survival were next to nil...and in not having the surgery, her chances of survival were about the same. She was kept alive by machines and massive doses of morphine...not the way she would have wanted it...

Someone made the decision twelve days later to turn off the machines. She exhaled her last breath not long after...a sad ending for a wonderful woman, a beautiful wife and mother and an exceptional copper and boss...

Her funeral was held seven days later. By that stage, my young colleague had returned to my side, dux of the class and a proud Murder Squad Detective Grade Two. Both she and my wife Tellie in full 'dress' uniforms, accompanied me to the Service and the later wake held in her honour. It was my third 'uniform fit' in close to twenty-five years, something that I thought wasn't too bad considering...until Tellie jokingly stated that with all my daily exercises down in the Sub-Basement Gym and pool, I should have been down in weight to my halcyon days of an undercover cop...I reckon I wasn't far off that mark! That got the responses it deserved. Discouraging remarks on my memory...

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

After a tray bearing coffee mugs, milk, and sugar were left on the woman's tidy desk, we settled into our interview manner. The Office was neat and tidy. A set of shelving behind the Manager held similar hard-backed folders, each having a date inscribed neatly on the sleeve.

An up-to-date computer on a small side desk, a phone having more extensions than I noted and a single photograph frame of a three dogs. A Cattle Dog. A Jack Russell and a non-descript long-haired Terrier.

"How long have you lived here...in Bungarra?"

"I was born here". She replied pleasantly. "I guess I was young when I decided I was not like other girls my age. No playing with dolls and dress-ups for me. I was out with the boys of my age playing Australian Rules, Soccer and Cricket...or climbing trees...or going cross-country on our bikes. Even then, I was accepted as one of the boys. It seems I had a natural attribute for cricket and was always the first picked when choosing sides...that lasted right up until my early teenage years when the more permanent fixture of District Cricket took over. Then I became a permanent in the Under Twelves...Thirteens and so on. For years I was the number one runs scorer and the taker of the most wickets with my slow googlies...they still don't know what and which way the ball will spin...that's where the nickname came from. They all reckon I could bend it further than Warnie...I don't know about that...but...".

She smiled, took several sips of her tea while we persevered with the 'tinned' coffee.

"So, you've been here all your life?" My young partner asked more I think, to keep the attractive woman talking.

"Hah!" She exclaimed. "No...I had a strict father who could not reconcile with the fact that at best I maybe butch, at worst God forbid, I maybe gay. I couldn't handle his constant whines about getting a 'nice boy' to settle down with so I up and left. Mum lived in the shadows of the Old Man so there was nary a peek out of her Bless her soul. Dad and I have come to a comfortable level of understanding in our relationship. He's in a local Retirement Village here in town. If I'm not coaching on a particular night, I have Tea with him...usually at the local Bowling Club". She nodded. Smiled. Took another sip of her tea.

"So, you and your father have come to an understanding?" Evans offered. She wished to lead the conversation.



“Hah! Kinda...he was the local Church of England Parish Pastor for more years than I can remember. My sexuality must have given him heart palpitations considering the stance of the Church and his Bible”. She giggled into her hand.

“Seems like you lead a fairly busy life...” Constable Evans contended.

“Yeah...I guess but I would not have it any other way”. A smile. A crossing of her legs.

“So, you skedaddled from this lovely bush town to where?” Evans enquired wanting control of proceedings.

“I began an Animal Husbandry Course at Armidale University. I still can’t tell you why I picked that Course. I lasted nary three months before I realised it was the wrong direction for me...I began a Sports Management and Coaching Course at ANU which I loved. Flew through the four-year course with flying colours. Was extremely happy in a gay relationship living off-campus in a joint where the inhabitants came and went. Our small rallies to coincide with the larger LGBTQI March in Sydney that had just begun. Like them, we suffered at the hands of the local coppers and ‘threatened’ men of society. Our relationship broke up because of the continued raids from the cops looking for contraband and stuff...sure they always found our stash but because they could not connect the hoard to one or two persons, they just confiscated the lot for their own pleasure...yeah...Barbs and I broke up during that period...her parents while accepting her sexuality could not accept her ‘closeness’ to prohibited drugs...they were well-known in society circles in Sydney...hah! The shallowness of people...”

“How did you and Constable Kalavati get together?”

I would have preferred that question to be her opening gambit instead of steering her around her entire life. I smiled as I nodded. I doubted she understood the reasons for my actions.

“How’d we get together? Gee...I don’t remember...he just was at every coaching session with each age group...I may have asked him whether he was interested in becoming my assistant coach...or he may have asked me...I don’t remember”.

“No indication of...arrh...you know...wanting to get closer to any girl...” She showed in her apprehension she was a little unsure on how to broach the subject of sexual assault...or a minor form of it.

‘Bendy’ Bowman sat back in her chair. A sense of anger crossed her face. She took a deep breath before answering.

“Detective? Do not assume because you coach younger girls...or even boys for that matter that you have some hidden desire to molest them. Dwayne would never do such a thing...our time together is over. You know your way out. Good morning Detectives!”

As we descended the staircase to the ground floor, I muttered that that question sure got up her nose. Tally nodded, adding that because of her sexuality she may have been bombarded with similar insinuations early in her coaching career. It wouldn't have ceased until after her successes with the youngsters becoming District champions for consecutive years.

I grunted, thinking she was more than right. She had read the situation correctly long before I came to that realisation.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

The ‘Sit ‘n Sip’ Coffee shop in the centre of town and opposite the Bungarra Hills Pub was arguably the most popular ‘watering hole’ for locals, older folk, tourists and caravanners alike. On warm sunny days like today, most customers preferred to sit out on the extremely wide footpath under the expansive awning and even in blustery, wintery days there were the ‘die-hards’ sitting out there...usually because the inside tables were all taken.

Even though it was the main road through town with a lumbering Roadtrain rattling past at least one an hour, the normal traffic was that of a small, quiet bush town.

We had selected our table, ordered a light lunch and I was sitting back hard in the chair when I felt the first bars of the buzz then the standard ring broke my reverie. It was Brenda Wzerlic, my favourite Forensic Pathologist.

“Joe? We’ve got another two sets of remains. In the last...the eighth stall where we think the hay was stacked. A little early for definite confirmation but I’d say we have a male adult and a male teenager...more than likely First Nation persons. Both with an obvious bullet hole to the side of the head. Both Daisy Goddard and her young assistant Judith Cameron are of the opinion that the remaining six stall locations will contain remains...of mixed blood...sad huh?”

I was trying to jig who in hell were Daisy Goddard and Judith Cameron! I mouthed the question to my young colleague who shook her head in disgust.

“Joe...Goddard is the Forensic Anthropologist and her Assistant is Judy Cameron. Bloody hell Joe, you spent some time last night flirting with the attractive young Judy...” This loud enough for Bree Wzerlic to overhear.

“Joe...you bloody imbecile! Tally is right. While Goddard went to bed early...she doesn’t drink, Judy was there for the night. As far as I know, the young Constable Jeff Collins and she spent a fair bit of time together...after she had curtly cut off an elderly Lothario earlier in the night who was becoming boorish...”

“Who!? Me! Not on...”

“You don’t remember do you Joe?”

“You don’t sound the best...” I recounted ignoring her jibe.

“Yeah...and I went to bed before you! How are you feeling this morning”.

“As though someone spiked my drinks!”

“Hah! No-one to blame but you old man...”

“What you are saying is that you’ll be scratching about for at least another week...” Wanting to steer away from the present discussion. That put my presence here in town to three weeks even if we roll up Kalavati’s homicide Case within that time.

Bree and I had moments over the years...mostly as she was suspecting her ‘wayward’ husband of cheating on her and then a messy divorce that saw her move within walking distance of the Forensic Science Building at Lidcombe. Nothing sexual but more as an older brother comforting his favourite younger sister. Tellie and I had helped her look for suitable lodgings after the beautifully restored terrace in Paddington was sold which she claimed most of as part of the divorce settlement...a mutual arrangement, I might add.

“At least...” She added with a smile or a grimace I wasn’t sure.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I had just placed my mobile on the tabletop and leaned back to allow our order to be placed there when the darn thing began its buzz to vibrate across the table. It was Dee Symonds, the Lead Forensic Trace Officer at the shooting homicide location.

“We can’t do much more here, Joe. I’d like to transport the victim’s police vehicle back to Sydney for further examination...there’s a lot to decipher in that vehicle, let me tell you. He used it as a mobile boudoir from what trace we have been able to identify. There’s a lot more to examine...”

Christ, I thought. The Murder Squad annual budget will be expended on this bloody job!

“Tally was right about the shooter’s position. There was chewing gum jammed into the fork of the tree which showed the greater amount of GSR. That confirms he would have used that location to fire the fatal shot...a good shot at around four hundred and twenty-six metres...it indicates he would have been there waiting for some time...so he wasn’t sure of the Constable’s timetable for that night. There were also two fingernail remnants which would indicate a nail-biter...not much use until you find our shooter then those two elements will nail him to that spot. Pun intended...Um...I’m sending two of my team home today and transferring our forensic photographer over to the burial site full time...”

“You’ll be here by yerself...” I commented.

“Yeah...only to the end of the week I reckon. The burial team won’t find any further remains”.

“Arrh...hate to spoil yer fun but they have found remains in ‘Stalls one and two’ and ‘Stall eight’. They’re of the opinion that the remaining stalls will yield further remains...”

“Geez...and here I was hoping to get back to the living by the weekend...my partner is missing me and I’m missing her...and the chatter from your Tellie keeps me sane...bugger!”

“We’ll see, huh”.

Again, I had not placed the mobile on the tabletop to take my first sip of coffee when the bloody thing began its vibrating dance.

“Is that Detective Lind who is Lead Investigator at the Bungarra homicide shooting? The Grade Four Murder Detective?”

“Yes it is. Who am I speaking with?”

“Arrh...I’m the Digital Forensic Officer out of Wagga Wagga. Arista Singh. We have three Laptop computers taken from a cottage located at RMB 4242 The Back Road Bungarra...”

“You have three!?”

“Yes, one belonging to our victim, Constable Dwayne Kalavati. Another to a Constable Tilly Pappas and the last to Constable Jeff Collins. All inhabitants of the cottage. The one belonging to Tilly Pappas is drawing our interest, at present. She has regular e-mail exchanges with a local resident Bendy Bowman and has had a sexual relationship with our victim. Short and not so sweet according to her e-mails. The victim’s e-mail traffic is quite large with regular exchanges with more than half a dozen local females whom we are yet to identify...but that won’t take long once we transfer our interest over to the other two...”

“You are sure of the exchanges between Bowman and Pappas. What type of e-mail?”

“Arrh...let’s just say some are quite explicit as to sexual acts between the two and the want of Pappas to be rid of Kalavati from the cottage...he shits her off to quote one e-mail. Ever since the drunken exchange some weeks previously, he has been hounding her for further sex...unquote”.

My heart quickened as I sat up straight backed. I would not react to this information until I had confirmation from the Digital people in Wagga Wagga. But then again, why not. At least we could dig into Pappas’s history and sexual orientation. It would appear at the moment that she may swing both ways which to me showed a flawed character trait. Enough to kill? I had no idea. I was in the middle of telling my young colleague of the content of the phone call when it vibrated again...I felt like turning the bloody thing off until we finished our Lunch. I had yet to bite into my CHT toasted sandwich...I’m betting it had gone cold. I turned towards the elderly waiter as I picked up the plate.

“Could you re-heat this for me?” I asked pleasantly.

She coughed at the suggestion saying that I should turn off my phone while I was having my lunch. ‘It was my time’, she informed me. I smiled. ‘We’ll make another for you as long as you turn off that bloody phone...you’re the city coppers on poor Dwayne’s death...and you were the copper who was here some ten years ago...you turned the town inside out. Locals didn’t like that much and some still don’t like it. See it don’t happen again or you’ll be driven from town on a two-horse dray!’ Her voice had turned sour. She was one of those souls who Caleb had warned me about...I was amazed that people could hold grudges for so long...

I had picked up my mobile while those exchanges were taking place. Apologising to the caller for keeping her hanging loose.

“It’s Bree again Joe. The autopsy of Constable Dwayne Kalavati is scheduled for tomorrow AM. Arrm...me and the Anthropologist Daisy Goddard will go up to Jerilderie in time for the autopsy. Judith Cameron her Assistant will stay here to scabble about some more...you interested?”

“Shit! We’ve got local people and students lined up to question over the homicide...and the following day we’re going up to Jerilderie and Wagga Wagga to sift through historical records...no can do though I would have liked to be there with you...”

“No worries, if there’s anything interesting I’ll let you know though I doubt there’ll be that golden bullet...seems I’ll be here for bit longer than I had anticipated”.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO**

It always amazes me with kids. They usually see a darn sight more than the parents or other adult townsfolk of things evolving around them.

I’d selected to interview the older pupils with their favourite Teacher present out in a private part of the grounds. The five girls that represented Year Twelve at the School astonished me...I could not imagine what it would be like in a Class size of that number as every class I was in during my High school days numbered more than thirty every year. Thinking about it, it was the same from Kindergarten up...and they talk about Teacher shortages now!

“Nah...yeah...there’s another two but they don’t hang with us. Last year there was only four students in Year Twelve and there was talk about closing Year Eleven and Twelve down which would have been painful for us as we’d either be billeted in Barham or Jerilderie...yer know...like...it would have been our choice”.

“You know why we wish to talk with you?”

“Yeah...the talk of the town. Like Dwayne’s death...he was shot, wasn’t he?” There were giggles within the group. I did not think there was anything to laugh about and said so...to be greeted by smirks and ‘look aways’.

I ignored their question to ask one of my own to get the ball rolling on a more adult and serious tone.

“You all play cricket?” The answer wasn’t important but the continued conversation was.

“Katy does...she plays in the Under Eighteen Mixed team. Champions of the District last year. We all gave it up around thirteen or fourteen...but we still rock up to Katy’s every game...”

“Cause punky Dwayne would always be there...he’s her Assistant Coach”.

“Along with half the population of the teenage females in the District waiting for the man to notice them...”. One of the girls stated amid a squeal of laughter from the group. This quest of mine for a more adult treatment of the shooting was not going to work. If one of them ‘*told a funny*’ then the entire group would explode in hoots, squeals, and laughter!

“Which he never did...”

“As he was only turned on by older women...”

“The Oedipus syndrome...” One of the group offered.

“Or something like that...”

“Why would you accuse him of such a thing?” I asked, not sure where this may lead.

“We’ve watched him of a night...Kate is the only one with a Driver’s License and is allowed to borrow her Mum’s car...he first visits the General Store as it is closing...he stays for at least half an hour to an hour. He then goes to the Chemist...same thing. Then the Drive-in Bottle Shop...the Butcher when Mister Kaine is waiting for a delivery from the Mildura Abattoirs...then he visits the Hospital at midnight...same thing...”

“You think he is having sexual relations with all these women!?”

“Yeah...for sure...” More smirks.

“On the same night!?” Un-bloody-believable I thought.

“And he repeats it every night for his shift...”

A bloody prized Ram I thought to myself though the scenario opens a whole can of worms about the possible suspect pool. I wiped my hand across my brow and through my hair, glancing at Tally as I did. She nodded her acknowledgement of the possibles having gone from none earlier that day to more than we could manage right now.

“What about Mister Kaine, the Butcher?” I asked which to me threw a spanner into their summation. They could not produce a reasonable solution...

“Perhaps Mister Kaine swings both ways...” One of them offered.

“Then so must Dwayne!” An unthinkable conclusion for them all. That quelled their enthusiasm for the dreamy guy of half an hour ago.

We thanked the young women and the two Teachers who volunteered to fill in for the girls’ parents as we turned to leave the School precinct.

“We should question those women next I reckon. I think they may have a lot to answer for their actions...combined I think. I think they colluded together to be rid of Constable Dwayne as things were getting a little hot...” Tally turned to me for confirmation. “Some may have even been feeling guilty over their affair with Constable Dwayne”.

I nodded, lowered my head, scratched my chin, and momentarily bent to look at my shoes. I was proud of the fact I could still spy them. I grunted in satisfaction as we headed for the School gate. I thought all this was a dreamtime scenario kept alive by the enthusiasm of the girls...a sliver of their combined imaginations.

“Tally? I think we should interview the husbands of those women first. A man would more than likely use a rifle at medium range to kill the adversary more than a woman. And if that husband knew of the clandestine meetings between his wife and Constable Dwayne he is more than likely to conduct the deed than the other way around”.

“I agree Boss. We’re we going to first?”



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“We heading for the Church, Joe...why?”

“I couldn’t get a return flight...that was a good suggestion of yours to fly up to Wagga Wagga as a return drive via Jerilderie is about six hundred kays...too long for a one day drive...um...I couldn’t get a return flight via Jerilderie returning to Bungarra before six O’clock which is closing time for the airstrip each day...so after our interviews with as many townsfolk and teenagers as possible, the next best thing to gain historical information about mixed blood relationships has to be the local Church. We’ll deal with the Anglican Church first before heading towards the others...and the local cemetery can at times be a wealth of information. Um...we fly out at six to-morrow morning for Wagga...okay? No sleep-in for a Sunday morning this week, okay?”

My young partner missed a step and almost fell over as we entered the Church grounds. I thought that six was well before her normal ‘get-up’ time. I smiled to myself.

“A little early for you, Tally?”

“Well yeah...but no worries Chief, I’ll be ready with rings on my fingers and bells on my toes when you knock on my door...a little early for breakfast huh?”

“No...they’ll provide us with the normal service...only a six-minute drive out to the local airstrip which opens at six so we’ll be the first flight out in the morning”.

She seemed to trip again with me catching her by the arm.

“Whoops...there you go...keep your wits about you, huh? Do you need glasses? Have you had your eyes checked recently?” I asked, frowning.

“Nah...why?”

“You seem to trip over easily...on uneven ground or hard to see steps”.

She shook her head. That ended that conversation. I put it into a file in the back of my mind to resurrect at a more convenient time...like when we were back in the Office in Sydney.

There didn’t appear to be anyone in the church.

As I walked slowly down the main aisle towards the Altar, I was momentarily struck by the enormity of this building in a second-rate bush town. Why was this colossus built in this burg in the mid-nineteenth century when the population of the fledging bush township would be lucky to strike one thousand persons...no, I reckon five hundred persons at most.

Then again, it had had two pubs during that time that I knew of...could have been more...so lash me with a cat-a-nine-tails for thinking.

The curved timber arches that supported the high ceiling line always made me wonder how in hell it was constructed. Larger cathedrals in Europe made me ask the question louder...and I also wondered how many craftsmen fell to their deaths building these artifacts to an unseeing and unheard-of God!

“Good morning young lady...and to you sir...” The voice as smooth as silk spoken in a quite hush tone that seemed to resonate around the inside of the building. I jumped before gathering my wits. I held up my Detective ID card. Tally did the same. I nodded. I had not seen the man approach but to be honest I was looking ‘skywards’ enwrapped in the vaulted ceiling, flying arches and bluestone support columns.

“The acoustics are phenomenal”. I commented pleasantly.

“Yes...beautiful isn’t it? You are the two city Detectives looking into Dwane Kalavati’s death”. He looked me up and down with a cautionary glance at Tally. I wondered if this was a feint so not to be accused of ogling the young woman...I’m a cynic as far as religion and religious persons are concerned...if you haven’t discovered that yet. “And you sir are the Detective who split this fine town apart say ten years ago...and when the Court Case was in progress eight years ago, the destruction was renewed. I think there would be many people in this town who would prefer not to be of help in your current investigation afraid you may do a similar thing again...do you feel the animosity around you?”

“I don’t have time for such nonsense. We are looking for the truth and if the truth cannot be digested by the townsfolk that is not my fault or concern”. Starting to dislike the man already. “You were the Pastor during that period?”

“No...Pastor Aziah Bowman was this town’s pastor at that time...I took up the clergy in twenty-seventeen...asked forcefully to do so as it wasn’t my calling according to my moral compass when no apparent Bowman was in line for the seat. Pastor Aziah is living peacefully in the Retirement Village within walking distance of here though he rarely attends. He was the last in-line of several Pastor Bowmans going back to when this Church first had its cornerstone laid in eighteen sixty-two. The building of the church may not have happened without the hard work, zealous outrage and supposed bullying of Pastor Ignatus Bowman. It

is said that he may have driven several parishioners to death with his one-eyed obsessive want to build a Church that would stand for at least two centuries...and be attended by a fervent flock as this town managed to keep other religions at bay for most of its history...we are still a majority Anglican parish so the last Census indicated". There was...pride...perhaps a hint of arrogance, self-importance, and haughtiness in his words. Well...that was the opinion of a confirmed Atheist who felt such life-long careers was for those divorced from reality.

"It has been said that Pastor Ignatus Bowman was given a choice. Immigrate to Australia or face being defrocked for his fire and brimstone sermons while inebriated...it is said that he hated this town...a Gomorrah in the middle of this Devil's land...he administered the Gospel as though it was the Law of the Land and he was well above that with God guiding him...sounds like a massacre waiting to happen". I commented casually.

The Pastor returned my smile and took some time to answer.

"I find the truth in prayer as God does guide me...I do not hold the rumours of this town to account. You cannot stop the words of the Devil but you can have faith in His wisdom to recognise the truth..."

"I find the truth in recognised facts but as I've found through life, there is always a glimmer of truth in every rumour...good or bad. As I have stated, truth comes through amassing facts...not faith. There is the difference between you and me. A family of mixed blood is at last seeing the light again. All murdered with one shot to the head. All executed. I intend to find the answer to their plight with or without your help. I have been told that as a Pastor you are obliged to keep a daily diary...would Pastor Ignatus have kept such a record of his term as Pastor here? And if so, have you read such a manuscript?"

He stuttered, surprised at my direction of questioning.

"Each person's log is returned to the Central Anglican Repository in Canterbury, England. It is the responsibility of each incumbent to fulfill that role as quickly as possible after taking up the position...without reading a word of that document..."

"Seems such a waste of energy not to learn from those who have gone before. Why the providence in keeping such a document when no-one is privy to its content..."

"It is God's will..."

"Arrh...seems as though God himself has issued such a decree to possibly protect the author of such a document...convenient in some circumstances eh?"

“Are you here investigating the death of Dwayne Kalavati or the discovery of human remains where once stood the old stables of the Commercial Hotel?”

“As members of the NSW Police Force we are obliged as Murder Detectives to investigate any sudden death, unexplained death or suicide that has befallen any citizen of NSW. That is why we are here in Bungarra...does that explain it sufficiently for you?” The bugger was getting under my skin. I didn’t know if it was his haughty nature, his beliefs or just his general demeanour...it didn’t matter, I’d had enough. As I turned to walk the length of the aisle he asked me...

“If you find the guilty partner in those deaths of over a century and a half ago that have just been unearthed, what then?”

“We can give closure to the Case and show what a supposedly religious township can stoop to in the name of their God!”

He stepped backwards as though he had been slapped in the face. Good, I had gotten under his skin!

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

“Didn’t he say it was within walking distance of the Church?” I asked my young partner as I looked up and down the wide street lined with tall densely crowned Gums. “Mmm...later, as I’m hanging out for a decent coffee and a bite to eat. A short walk into town and our favourite coffee joint, huh?”

It was a good day for walking and as I strolled along looking at the trees and the dwellings on each side of the road, I replayed my conversation with the Pastor. I was sure those dairies still existed somewhere within the Church and every Pastor after Pastor Ignatus Bowman had not only harboured them but read them minutely. My cynicism of all things religion could be tainting my thoughts I had to admit to myself.

Ten minutes and we were sitting at an outside setting of our choice...outside on the footpath with little wind, a warm sun and only the occasional Roadtrain to tolerate.

As the Waiter bought out our order, I asked her whether Missus K was in. The waiter looked nervously about her, rubbing her hands down the side of both thighs.

“She’s tied up at the moment...signing off papers...”

“Oh! I hope she is alright...nothing serious...”. I rejoined, concern a wrinkled brow.

“Oh! Yes...yeah. She is retiring. Selling this place and her husband is selling up...or should I say closing up shop as soon as the Supermarket is open. Missus Stanwick who owns the General Store is also closing the shop as soon as the Supermarket opens its doors. She has been trying to sell the store...the building that is, for as long as we’ve known that complex was given the go ahead...it really has put a cat among the pigeons with us locals not thrilled with the development. I’ll let Missus K know you need to have a chat with her...she’s about finished”.

I was down to the dregs of my coffee, Tally her tea before Missus K came to sit heavily at our table. She signalled for a top-up and a fresh one for herself. She then sat silently looking up and down the street. A stray vehicle or a farm ute crawled at half the speed limit of the main road of town.

“Hah! The price of freedom hurts those who least can afford it...” She eventually offered, as she took a long draft of her coffee which was steaming hot.

“You and your husband...”

“Clem Kaine...third...fourth generation Butcher in the same store. That’s my beautiful husband. With the price of this business and our home, we’ve enough put aside to retire and move to the coast. Bermagui, Narooma with both of us favouring Merimbula further down the coast. More facilities and better conditions for us old folk. I doubt I could hold on for much longer but now you pokey coppers are influencing our plans. I’m told the Supermarket complex completion date is back six months because of you and your mob pussyfooting about”. She covered my hand with her own. Smiling at me. I saw an ounce of sadness in the gesture. “Sorry...nothing meant by it”.

“It would be ashamed to see you go. This place has been a bit of an institution since before you purchased it...a meeting place between the locals, blow-ins and stray greys in their Motorhomes and caravans”.

“Between you, I, and the gatepost, I’ve seen the latest edition of the plans for that monstrous complex. There is a Coffee Café intended to be opposite the Supermarket entrance...that’ll reduce the clientele here by over fifty percent...a little hard to make a go of it at those projections”.

“You sly old dog...”

“You’re not here to talk about my business acumen” She patted my hand. “You want information on Constable Dwayne if I am not mistaken...I’ll tell you a little story. The Butcher stays open late on every second Thursday and Friday night. That was to allow the two-week supply of meat and produce to be delivered from the Mildura and/or Griffith Abattoirs. Not long before Constable Dwayne commenced duty here, Clem was held up and robbed...with a point three-oh rifle...just as he was closing after receiving his supplies from Mildura...just after ten at night. The local coppers believed it to be an inside job and the felon was arrested some weeks after the deed...he’d be out by now I reckon. Clem was a wreck, declaring positively he was going to close the shop straight away as he could not live through another episode like that again. As you know, he is still open thanks in no part to Constable Dwayne who once he began on night duty, would drop in around eight at night to make sure Clem was okay...and he’d stay and chat with my old man for about half an hour. Every week. Didn’t fail...would wait until Clem closed the shop and headed for home. Without that presence I am sure Clem would have called it a day some four...five years ago”.

I held up my hand as this was opposite to what I had been told previously on the young Constable’s nightly visits and their purpose though I must admit there was an air of innuendo in the past telling...the girls maybe permitting their imaginations to run a little wild...teenage girls...you can never be too sure of the veracity of their claims.

“So, you’re not too long for this place...your place of birth?” I asked.

“Hah! No...I was born in Barham...so was Clem. We hooked up while we at High School over there. He took over the Butcher Shop here after his father had a stroke. I stayed with him and helped in the shop...got to know all the natives and more besides. As you know, I purchased this place...four years ago...well before that construction was mooted. We figured it would be a money spinner with hard work...and it has been. The ink has dried on the document and we have a buyer for the house...it will be a sad day that we both aren’t looking towards but the world keeps turning...I sure will miss the entire town”. Tears fell.

“I reckon there’ll be a lot of locals who will sorely miss you and your husband. The town won’t be the same without its General Store, Butcher, and favourite coffee place”. Tally concluded which bought a further deluge of tears.

“Um...Missus K? Before we go...where is the local Retirement Home that Pastor Bowman resides in? We were at the Church and the School where we were told the Home was next door to the Church...we couldn’t find it...”

“Yes...” She blew her nose and wiped her eyes with a paper serviette. “Um...there’s no sign up and the driveway twists and turns and bends behind a small ridgeline. You cannot see the

buildings for the trees and slope of the land...just follow the next driveway leading off Church Street on from the Church. Drive over...that's the easiest".

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

"Thank you for providing the time to see us, sir". We were shaking hands. His grasp just as tight as mine.

"I wouldn't thank me yet Detective until I have answered your questions. You may not approve of my responses...I should thank you for this brief interlude into my mostly tedious time living in this place where every conversation commences with an ailment list..." A hint of a smile gave me the impression that this man, though approaching ninety had all his facilities intact. "Follow me out into the garden area. It's out of the wind and the number of birds that visit is staggering...and we will not be interrupted by stickybeaks and the curious..."

He led the way outside, the retirement units all facing into the enclosed garden area. A veranda and roofline followed the U-shaped structure of single roomed accommodation. The strong smell of perfumed blooms filled my nostrils...I wondered on those who may suffer hay fever. It would be a curse to be a client here. We were led to an all-weather table and chair setting and as we were getting settled, we had coffee and nibbles placed before us.

"So, what would you like to ask me? Constable Dwayne? One of Nature's true gentlemen even though he was young. He would often drop in to see me...especially when there were no cricket matches on. We'd talk about everything and nothing. I looked forward to his frequent visits...now...someone with a heart of stone has taken away one of God's excellent creations..."

"Would you have any idea..."

The old man shook his head sadly.

"No...as I said, only a person with a heart of stone would do such a thing...a slice of the Devil in him. He would not be a member of the Church and I know he wasn't when I was the Pastor".

"You're sure he was not one of your parishioners?"

“Oh! Lord no. As I’ve stated I’m ninety and have been living here for nigh on twenty years. Constable Dwayne was drafted here no more than five years ago. He volunteered for the nightshift job four years ago when it was created...no-one knows why such a nightshift position was required in any case and no-one is too sure why he volunteered for the job...but he confided in me that to look up at the stars...the universe...always made him feel alive. Made him smile and gave him the opinion that everything was right with our world. He was well researched in that sphere. He knew all the names of the major and minor stars, their constellations, and their distances from earth...a beautiful man...”

“Pastor Ignatus Bowman...”

“Yes...I’ve been waiting for his name to pop up...a brimstone and firebrand Reverend who believed in scaring the hell out of his parishioners. His favourite weapon was a Colt revolving carbine which fired nought point five six bullets which he would often wave about. It was also the gun preferred by Ned Kelly. If you look carefully, there are still two bullet holes in the vaulted atrium above the pulpit...hah!...still there! His doing when he was a little too inebriated...which was often”.

“Are you aware of the Daily Diaries?”

“Oh, yes. We are obliged under Church canon to keep the log up to date...as a brief history of a bush town church”.

“You did?”

“Oh, yes...we all did”.

“Did you ever read the other Pastors’ words?”

“Hah! Some yes...others no. Some were true descriptions of individual parishioners...some were just dribble. For all his reputation as being mostly or always drunk, our Ignatus was a true recorder of the times he lived in...and he improved with age. Some-one should transcribe his words and author a book on the life and times of this bush pastor. Riveting reading I would contend...you must remember that it was one hundred and fifty years ago that the alleged murders took place. Another time; another era. It was in a small township where religion played an especially important part in the lives of these people. Religion and its various canons held sway. There was no tolerance as persons of colour were considered the soldiers of the Devil who lost the War of the Heavens and were forever branded and where the word of the Pastor was *the* law. Mixed marriages or relationships were forbidden with death the punishment...so much different than the tolerant and enlightened times we now experience...looking at the world now some may say nay”.



I opened my mouth to ask another question as the he held up his hand to stay me.

“Detective. I have given you enough information for you to progress your Case and to make a fair assumption of who massacred the entire Jimmy River’s family including Mary Collins and her daughter Sarah...I need my afternoon nap so I’ll say farewell to you...”

With that he stood unsteadily leaving the two of us sitting like shags on a rock.

“Little information that can be used in the Report to the Coroner. None that we have is collaborative information...” Tally lamented.

“Mmm...but we have several lines of enquiry that we can chase out...and the best way to do that is in the lines of the local Newspapers of the time...and Reports listed by the local Constabulary of the time...if they have been kept and digitised. Fingers crossed for that reality to have occurred”.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX**

The Wagga Wagga Advertiser first appeared as a fortnightly edition in December eighteen sixty-eight. It wasn’t until Nineteen thirteen that it was published as a daily ‘rag’. Thankfully, the Paper had digitised all its ‘back copy’ in the Two Thousands. I wondered whether the murders at Bungarra would be picked up by a fortnightly issue when in those days three hundred odd kilometres was a world away. But the comforting thought was that in Eighteen seventy-nine, Ned Kelly and his gang held up the Jerilderie Police Station, the local Bank, and several official looking people at gun point in the middle of town. This event most definitely would have made the pages of the Wagga Wagga Advertiser. With that in mind, I was confident that the incident in Bungarra would have been mentioned.

Unfortunately, the only mention is a ‘short space’ piece on the disappearance of Mary Collins, her daughter Sarah, Jimmy Rivers and his son, and a tribe of mix blood children who had ‘adopted’ the family. It was assumed they had gone bush as mixed relationships were frowned upon especially in that ultra-conservative Anglican bush town. It was speculated in the brief account that they were driven from the village by the townsfolk...and the Pastor of the time. Pastor Ignatus Bowman...that was not enough to state as fact...

There were incidents of similar disappearances of mixed marriage couples and their children within a ten-year period of around the eighteen-eighties...nothing more...not even names.

I was disappointed with the results thinking that the Reporter of the time...and those across New South Wales were more interested in Ned Kelly and his story and manifesto...and his capture in eighteen-eighty at Glenrowan; not that of ten missing persons who had been banished from the small bush town of Bungarra.

Perhaps the former Police Records of the time in both Wagga Wagga and Jerilderie would be more forthcoming but again, the records showed a propensity to concentrate on the Ned Kelly saga. There was one 'minor' report of a family of mixed blood going missing from the township of Bungarra. The reason for its inclusion was the fact that Mary Collins was the wife of a prominent landholder who had tragically lost his life in a horse fall in the mid-eighteen-sixties and she had stayed on at the bush property to manage things...that was it...a courageous woman especially in those times when living on the land was tough and especially so for a woman doing it on her own.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

It was Tuesday morning and I wasn't thrilled about going down to the Dining Room to share breakfast with the mob. I ordered a coffee and a slice of toast to be bought up to my room. A light knock and she entered carrying a pot of coffee, a mug, and a slice of toast, butter, and vegemite.

"Not up to it this morning, Detective. By the tone of your partner, yesterday was a waste of time".

"I wouldn't say a waste of time. I think it was something we needed to do...if we hadn't, it would be that something in the back of your mind you should have done. All was not lost as I learnt a lot about Ned Kelly and his gang that I didn't know before...we're right in the middle of the area where he and his gang operated with impunity for some years".

"If that is what you wanted to know, you could have visited our local Museum and Historical Society. Kelly and his gang spent a week here in town well before he and his gang made headlines and an eight-thousand-pound reward for their capture...and before riding up to Jerilderie and holding the township and its coppers to ransom...ransacking the Police Station, holding up the local Bank and causing several deaths. Their stay here in town almost caused the local Pastor to have a 'freak-out' so they reckon. Pastor Ignatus Bowman couldn't reconcile with the fact he had a God-fearing Bushranger of some repute staying in his town. The Commercial Hotel was almost set alight to get them out of town...didn't matter as it burnt to the ground some thirty years later..." She harrumphed as she placed the platter carefully

on the bedside table. “It was rebuilt but it again burnt down some fifty years after that...it had the Devil’s mark against it...it was left as a charred stain on the ground up until now”.

I wondered what the truth was and what was myth. The Kelly legacy was one of ‘a Robin Hood’ syndrome where the poor folks and dissidents of the ‘British system’ governing the land at that time praised the Kelly Gang for their exploits against the upper classes that ruled the land. It was certainly still alive to-day!

Purely out of curiosity I finished off my ‘light’ breakfast, had a shower and dressed casually walked into the Dining Room to see whether Detective ‘Tally’ Evans wanted to accompany me to the Museum.

“Huh...yeah...sure. Can you wait while I have a shower and put on more suitable clothing”.

“Yeah...no worries. I’ll sit out on the veranda outside my room...come through when you’re ready”.

Many bush and provincial towns across Australia have their own Museum. Proudly maintained and manned by enthusiastic Retirees, relaying in excited tones bits of bric-a-brac that should have been relegated to the local tip...and yes, were perhaps foraged from that same tip many years previously.

You strolled and ambled through aisles and rooms filled to overflowing with bric-a-brac, knick-knacks, broken and damaged curios, the more well-preserved examples having made the Auction Rooms many times over.

“You’ve nothing of Kelly and his gang here?” I asked the elderly gentleman hobbling along behind me.

“No...we once had his whip but we donated it to the Kelly Museum in Glenrowan. There are still people who believe Dan Kelly, Ned’s brother spent the night at the old Commercial Hotel with the Proprietor’s wife...and that is why God burnt it to the ground. A nice story with not an ounce of truth in the telling. There is not a skerrick of evidence to support the Kelly gang ever entering this township and even less about Dan Kelly and his sexual exploits...and the old Hotel burnt down in nineteen ten, some thirty years after the Kelly Gang were rounded up or killed...God may work in many mysterious ways but he was never known to be so lax. That piece of logic still escapes those who believe those silly rumours...”

I got the impression once set free, the old bloke could ramble on without breathing for hours...

“You’re the Detective who some still believe tore this town asunder some ten years ago when you came to investigate the suspicious death of Archie Prendergast. You sure shook up the town with several longstanding, historical families imploding. Poor Rowena Prendergast who now goes by her birth name has endured many a snide remark by those who still hold grudges...on what, I ask? Rowena Cowdrey has now amassed and amalgamated a huge parcel of land west of town under the name of Bungarra Hills Holdings...even owns the Bungarra Hills Hotel. Because she prospered after the Trial there are those who even now believe the wrong woman was prosecuted for the murder of Archie Prendergast and say it was Rowena, his wife who did the dastardly deed in order to get Archie’s money that came from the sale of his parent’s spread to the north of town”.

I gave him a steely look meant to put him back on his haunches...it didn’t make one iota of difference to his gait...I’m definitely losing the magic since my first partner and I parted ways.

I shook my head, chastising myself for not having visited Rowena...it was almost four weeks now since I hit town! That should have been the first thing I did...

“Arrh...sometimes it is harder to live with unpalpable truth than to exist with the mild tang of lies”. The old bloke murmured...never a truer thought spoken.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT**

You could see the farmhouse as you drove over the cattlegrid and headed up the slight rise towards the low-roofed cottage. Harry Henley was sitting out under the front veranda concentrating on whatever he was doing. It wasn’t until we drew level with the man’s position that I noticed he was cleaning several rifles...all large bore pig guns.

I alighted slowly, checking to see whether my Glock was close and handy. I was not keen in addressing anyone I didn’t know who was cleaning and oiling several rifles. The three fully automatic I assumed!

The man stopped his endeavours to squint at me then Detective Evans as she alighted from the 4WD.

“Afternoon Detectives. How can I help?”

“Can we ask you a few questions on Constable Kalavati’s shooting homicide. I believe he was shot with a large bore rifle such as one of those...are you licensed to own such weapons?”

“Arrh...Sergeant Collins keeps an eye on me...and I have the necessary papers and lockable storage to say that as a licensed Pig Shooter, I can possess such rifles. I am also licensed to buy and sell such firearms. It took me several tries before I found a rifle that suited me...I still have the others though my wife wants them gone...”

“Missus Gwen Henley your wife. The local Chemist in town?”

He nodded. Smiled as though he thought me smart...or otherwise.

“This the tri-monthly cleaning process?”

“Yes and no...we’ve got an upsurge in feral pig numbers so several of us are organising a ‘pig shoot’ for next weekend. In the foothills of Stan Cross’s property. The bastards break through the fence line onto my property and kill me sheep...for the fun of it. Gut the lambs wide open as the large boars like to do...then leave them there slowly dying for the foxes and dogs to devour. So, the numbers of dogs and foxes are increasing because of the ready food...in regard to large bore pig rifles...there’s plenty of them around the District. Pigs have been a problem for bloody years. Who would want to shoot Constable Dwayne?” He shook his head, as he carefully assembled the Ruger...I knew that much.

“Detective, the lad was a bloody saint. If it weren’t for him, me missus would have shut the doors on the Chemist Shop and closed the business. I don’t know, he had a sense for people in stress...Missus K at the Coffee café. Missus Stanwick at the General Store. Clem Kaine, Missus K’s husband the Butcher. Blossom Elder at the Bottle Shop...yeah, my missus at the Chemist in town and Sister Patton at the Hospital. He would call in to see them all as they shut shop for the night. Especially in winter when it got dark early-like. Stay with them as they did the day’s cash, share a laugh, a cup of coffee and escort them to their car...he was a bloody saint as I said before...no-one in this town would want to shoot him...no-one!”

I nodded several times thinking that someone wanted to do just that! Looking at the mass of gun parts laid out on cleaning cloths on the table my stomach bottomed as to follow up with Senior Constable Caleb Collins on who owned a large bore pig gun would open a can of worms and half the landowners in the District would become immediate suspects. I groaned inwardly.

“Which was is your favourite?” I asked jutting my chin at the table.

“At the moment...the PSA PA-10, point 308, Gen 3 with Win charged bullets...although this Ruger here...” He tapped the stock of the rifle he had reassembled. “This long gun runs a close second...”

“You have no idea who may have pulled the trigger on Constable Dwayne?”

“Detective...” He deliberately stopped his work to look up at me. A frown to show his annoyance. “I am getting the feeling you think one of us husbands may have done it out of rage thinking the young bloke may have been hitting on the missus! Doesn’t say much for how you view our missuses, does it? All our missuses were open and honest from the get-go. They all confided in their husbands shouting platitudes in favour of the young bloke...there was no reason to suspect him dillydallying...none what so-ever. If there is nothing else Detectives, I would ask you to leave my property...yer looking up the wrong bloody tree Detective...the wrong fucking tree!”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

We pulled to a stop outside the only Butchers Shop in Bungarra. Clem Kaine was expecting us telling his ‘off-sider’ and counterwoman to do without him for ten...twenty minutes after getting a nod of acknowledgement from me.

“Let’s go out the back, grab a coffee and sit in the sun. It’s a beautiful day...”

“You know why we want to ask a few questions of you, don’t you?”

“Yeah...more or less. To talk about the death of Constable Wayne as everyone knew him as...and to try and come up with the name of his killer. I don’t know if I’ll be that helpful in that regard as the missus and I have racked our brains trying to think of whom would do such a thing...but we gotta give it a try”.

He turned away from us as the water jug boiled.

“Milk and sugar on the table...I’m going outside for a smoke before you two come and join me...a dying breed I am I said”.

We ambled outside into a sunny corner of the building that blocked any cold wind from three directions. An outdoor table setting was strewn with dried coffee cup rings and an overflowing ash tray.

He nodded at us as we sat. It was a warm day but a cooling breeze kept it bearable. This time he gestured with a shake of his head.

“Me and the missus have organised Removalists for the beginning of next month. I’ll be sorry to go...same as the missus but our time is up...the killing of Constable Dwayne was the last straw when I was over that bloody hold-up some time back. We want to remember this place with warm feelings...good memories...now is the time to go”. He took a large gulp of his coffee and stubbed the last of his cigarette. “That’s the last one. I’m not sure why I started up again after Dwayne’s terrible death but there it is...that was the last of it!” He again took a large gulp of his coffee and threw the remnants onto the ground in front of him. “Detectives, I reckon me and Missus K know every soul living in the town, hereabouts and even in Barham. Yep, we’re sure of it...more than anyone else in the whole District and neither of us can point a finger at any person here in town or hereabouts in the District who would...or could murder the young man...no-one! Not one living soul! This place is like one big happy family...”

After saying our farewells and best wishes for the future we settled into the borrowed 4WD police vehicle. I wiped my hands down both sides of my face partly out of frustration, partly out of anger.

“I’ve been a copper now for nigh on forty years and I am yet to find a ‘one big happy family’ anywhere!”

## **CHAPTER THIRTY**

Blossom Elders’ husband was the only Electrician in town but most of his work was done on the farms spread far and wide. While it would never make him a millionaire or generate enough income to advertise for extra bods, he took the gamble last year to hire an Apprentice Electrician.

Garry Albright was a bright young boy who impress Fred Elders enormously as he interviewed fifteen kids still in School sitting for their Higher School Certificate. Year Twelve who could see themselves as Electricians in three years’ time after serving an Apprenticeship with Elders.

Because of the recent storm, more people required his services than he could manage. The local Electricity Supplier provided additional Electricians to help with the overload. As it was, we had to travel to the other side of Barham to have a word with him.

“Bloody hell!” My young partner exclaimed. “I don’t go this far for holidays. Wouldn’t it have been easier to just have a phone conversation with him?”

“No...when we are getting to the gritty end I like to face the person I’m interviewing. You can see more. Gauge his body language a lot easier. See the pupils of his eyes change size over a question he doesn’t like...assess his blood pressure and heart rate...you can feel those things. You don’t get that from a phone conversation or even one of those phone images things...”

We pulled up beside a farmhouse that had lost part of its roof. Heavy-duty tarpaulins draped over the house like a death shroud over a recent widow’s head and shoulders.

It took us some time to locate Fred Elders, surprised when we did as he looked not much older than twenty years of age. As young as his Apprentice...

“Blossom reckons that the Constable was Heaven sent. He helped her a lot in getting over that last incident. They caught the bastard...he’d be out by now...he should have rotted in jail. She survived several attempted robberies, the worst when she was forced to look down the barrel of a sawn-off shotgun. All she could think about was who was going to scrap her brain bits off the shelving behind her...the things you think about when your brain goes into overdrive...or stops thinking at all”.

He hopped down from the stepladder giving instructions to his apprentice as he did so. We followed him outside into the bright sunshine forcing me to pop my sunnies on. I was surprised at how the sun can be so glory in one location and bearable in another.

“There’s not much I can say Detectives that would help you...”

“Let us be the judge of that Mister Elders”.

We stood in an easy circle as Elders recounted that part of his life that involved Constable Kalavati. After close to an hour, we were no further advanced so we said our farewells to slowly drive down the farm track.

“Wouldn’t you be a bit of an idiot to build your farmhouse on the highest hill around here. Completely exposed...” Tally commented...and rub salt into the wound added that we could have saved ourselves half-a-day troubles with a bloody phone call...

She could have been right!



## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

As we turned from the farm track onto the public dirt road I slapped the top of my thigh hard. We were missing something but for the life of me I didn't have a clue what we were missing. Evans broke across my thoughts.

"Boss? Every woman we know of who Constable Dwayne comforted while on nightshift; they were all business folk of the town. They would all travel in the same circle of friends. They would socialise together, talk amongst themselves. They would all realise they were in the same boat; have the same lifesaver. What if one of his...arrh...his 'subjects' was not of that social clique but shone like a beacon to him. What if she thought Constable Dwayne was coming on to her when in fact he could see she needed his help. She confides in her husband who immediately goes into a brutal rage, hitting his wife and turning his attention to the likable Constable, shooting him dead..."

"Mmm...a good thought Tally. Let it lie for a bit...I like your thought processes though...it makes us both think in a slightly different direction".

"We could approach Senior Constable Collins to name any wife basher in the town...to Constable Dwayne that person would need his comfort and assurances..." Tally wouldn't let it alone.

"Mmm...an approach we have not addressed. Good onya Detective...what time is it?"

"Almost five...if we don't hurry we'll miss the Dinner Bell...if we are late and miss the meal, at least the Kitchen staff will have a decent meal for the day..."

"Cancel Dinner. Turn around. We should visit Rowena Cowdrey while we're on this side of town...turn around girl. Row would know the rumours...the talk around town. She would know".

She slowed the vehicle at the first opportunity where the dirt road widened its verges to permit her a three-point turn.

It had been ten years since I had driven over these back roads and tracks. Nothing appeared familiar. In the Sydney CBD skyline you expect massive office towers to erupt towards the sky within that decade; but in the bush!? Trees grow, secondary canopy species grow which changes the appearance of your surroundings as you remembered them from those times. Any familiarity escaped me.

We went up and down the wrong tracks until picking one that seemed vaguely familiar. We slowly climbed a rise that was on the summit of an ascending ridgeline. I asked Tally to stop as we passed through a grove of trees...perhaps ten...fifteen years old with many saplings evident on the edge of this grove. Someone was into tree planting and I could guess who. Archie Prendergast's smiling features beamed out at me, the weatherproof enamel photograph and epitaph on a large granite boulder. This was where he had died...now a permanent memorial of his life.

I knew where I was and how we could drive to Rowena's farmhouse.

We followed the ridgeline until we could see the farmhouse in the distance. I was glad that we had found our way.

Alighting from our vehicle I was almost bowled over by the enthusiasm of Rowena Cowdrey.

"I was wondering when you were going to call in. Saw your 4WD in the distance coming up the back track...yeah...and I saw you the other week in town at the new construction zone. You looked busy. Frazzled, so I didn't interrupt you as I was sure I would see you before you left town...hopefully...come in...come in. You're looking good even though it's been eight years since the Trial when I saw you last. I'm glad that whole thing has settled down though your appearance has churned up people again. Hello...my...your partners are getting younger and prettier..."

I introduced my young partner to Rowena. They hugged as though they'd been friends for years. Rowena was that type of person.

"Come through...come through. Rains coming to-night...might be a big blow. Jeraldine was about to commence preparing the evening meal...the dogs gave you away. They listened to your progress up and down the wrong tracks, watching you as you eventually found your way. Come...sit. A coffee for both of you? How are you going with that ghastly exhumation? An entire family so goes the rumours...and Constable Dwayne. A terrible business that has rocked the entire town. He was loved by all who knew him...maybe not by the one who shot him. Sit...coffee and nibblies before dinner. Jerry will prepare extra..."

"Don't make a fuss, Rowena...we can't stay for too long..."

"No worries Joe. Tally. Catalina...an unusual first name..."

"My great grandfather flew Catalinas out of Cairns up into the Islands during the War...postal drops. Ammunition. Food. People. Whatever the frontline troops and naval support ships wanted. My father insisted on the name if I was a boy or a girl"

“Nice...very nice...I like it”. Jerry commented as she threw extra items into the stew that was simmering beautifully over the open fire.

“So...I don’t think my magnetic personality has drawn you here Joe. Ask away...” She wasn’t one to beat around the bush was our Rowena.

I sat upright then slithered back to my original position on the leather couch. Rowena hadn’t changed. A smile, a lifted eyebrow as she got straight to the point. I bent forward to take several nibbles from a large earthenware platter realising we had missed lunch. I was famished and the aroma of the stew didn’t help matters. I would have to suffer for at least another hour or two before I could tuck in...so the nibbles looked good.

“Row? My first concern was to see you and to see how you have been. When I’ve asked questions about you in town, the answers have all been positive...remarkably so. I knew you would shine once you put Archie’s death behind you...”

She nodded. Looked over at Jeraldine who I thought was not the same woman who had flown up from Sydney when the news spilt of Archie’s death. The woman who I remembered was one of Rowena’s longtime school friends...

“Before you ask...um...my school friend? Sandra Coolidge? She couldn’t hack the farm life for long. The quietness. The constant work ethic that required twenty-four seven attention. She returned to Sydney but comes up to visit every so often. Stays for a week or two. Jerry...she is a local...a Nursing Ward Sister who had to travel to Jerilderie every week to fill in for a Sister on sick leave. It got too much...we hooked up...enjoy each other’s company. She enjoys the work of a working farm manager more than I...we’ve become firm friends during the past five or so years...and if you are going to ask...it’s none of your business but we sleep in the same bed in the middle of winter. It can get cold and furious here during those months. Thank God we are only mid-way through summer”.

The way they looked at each other said more to me than firm friends but...it was none of my business as the woman said...

“I knew Constable Dwayne...a saint”. Jeraldine sprouted enthusiastically. “A pure saint who loved everyone and cared for those injured and blighted souls. Sister Patton was one of those who Dwayne visited during his night duty shifts...we would say hi...no more than that but I quickly realised the sheer purity and humanity of the man. He should have been a man of the cloth not a copper I reckon”. She nodded to emphasise her point.

The pleasant and at times comical and light-hearted conversation cancelled the minutes as they flew passed quickly. Before we knew it we were hearing a storm building in the

southwest with flashes of lightning becoming more frequent and thunder rolling over the hills of the area.

“I wouldn’t advise you to drive back to town. There are two creek crossing which can become dangerous very quickly depending on the rainfall. In the dark you could make the wrong decision to try and cross either creek if they are running a-banker. I think you should remain here until the morning when we can see how bad the storm was...it is coming over us fast so it should blow itself over before morning...hopefully”.

I nodded, agreeing with Rowena. It gave us an excuse to open another bottle of Red. I rang the Hotel to let them know where we were and that we would be staying here overnight.

“A good decision...it is absolutely pouring down over the town. See you sometime tomorrow morning. I’ll let your colleagues know...okay?” The Hotel Proprietress informed me.

That settled it and after we had inspected our night’s beds, we adjourned to a position around the roaring fire as the storm had chilled the night and the rain was deafening on the tin roof.

“Is there any serial Domestic Violence chaps in town?” I asked out of the blue.

“Arrh, yes. Two that I know of and only because Geraldine works to fill-in any staff shortages. She keeps me up with all the gossip going around town...and there’d be another three or four who take a swing...only one before the missus put the fear of God into him”.

“How often do you do the fill-in shift? You’re a permanent Relief Sister?” I asked Jerry as I turned to her.

She smiled. Nodded as she took a sip of wine.

“Not that often thank God...but yes, I’m on the books as a relief sister. There’s not that many of us. On average once or twice a fortnight...a month I would be called on...day or night shift. Enough to give me a reasonable sum each time I’m paid...” She again nodded. “Um...Tony Berrigan who regularly beats or threatens to beat up his missus...and an absolute coward of a man. He’d run a mile before getting into any Pub fight that he usually starts...and Cory Adams. A Truck driver who is gone for regular intervals. An old bloke where butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth...a nice bloke until you see the damage he can cause his missus...not often but often enough to place him as a serial bully”.

“Um...we’re speaking from left field but we must widen our search. Is either man capable of shooting to death a man they think is coming onto their missus?” My young partner

asked...slightly slurring her words...she was not a drinker as she was at least two glasses behind either me, Rowena, or Jerry.

“You’re asking whether we think either man can kill someone...like Constable Dwayne? If he had approached Maree who is Cory’s wife. It would be like Dwayne to approach Maree if he thought she was suffering. He’d try to be conciliatory with both Maree and Cory instead of scaring Cory with an arrest and charge...that wasn’t Dwayne’s way. I can’t see Cory taking kindly to such tactics. He’d get riled...and worse, accusing Dwayne of meddling where he wasn’t wanted...and Tony Berrigan? A sour man who bosses his wife about when they’re even out in Public...she has presented herself twice at the Hospital when I’ve been doing a relief shift...so you can guess at the number of times it occurs...regular-like”.

Rowena nodded and mused quietly into her wine glass.

“A big call Jer”. She glanced across at her house partner. “I agree with you though Jer”.

We sat around the fire casually talking about possible suspects in town that both Rowena and Jerry could think of...two...maybe three that I could follow through. The occasional huge gust of wind made the roof sheeting thrum and the roof rafters creak. Conversation was almost impossible during those moments and when a more than loud thunderclap exploded above us we all thought of our safety...

“I doubt the two of you will make town tomorrow especially if this rain continues as it has. I have lived here for most of my life never experiencing such a downpour with the lightning and thunder so severe. Both creek crossing that you must cross to make town will be three metres under a roaring torrent...and the road follows the creek for some kilometres which will also be under water...”

“An excuse to refill our glasses...”

There was a scurry of activity as all the farm dogs came into the room as a spectacular lightning strike lit up the sky followed by an ear-splitting thunderclap that shook the footings of the house and caused all the dogs including the two-house dogs to whimper in unison. There was no way that you could coax the farm dogs out of the house while Nature’s fury of this magnitude was on display.

We were stranded at the property for six days. While Rowena, Jerry, and Catalina joined forces with George the Farm Manager and two of his sons to inspect the damage of trees down, fences forced over and damaged walls of several paddock dams, I stayed in the warmth of the dying embers of the large fire in the farmhouse and completed the Report into the ten cadavers recently unearthed. This I transferred to Tally’s computer so she could edit my

edition. The completed Report I then sent to the Boss for her input and signature. I knew she was the type to make many amendments, not satisfied with anyone else's style except her own.

We had not planned for an overnight stay let alone a six-day sojourn. I borrowed clothes from George Parker who was at least twelve centimetres taller and wider than me. Consequently, his clothes tended to hang off me. A new toothbrush and two 'throwaway' woman's razor blades had to do me. Tally was luckier, able to choose clothes from both Rowena and Jeraldine's wardrobes. Their clothes fitting her better than Goerg -e's clothes on me. I slept butt naked which I was used to though it meant an additional blanket over the thick doona to keep me warm during the night while the storm continued. Tiptoeing to the toot in the middle of the night was a bloody ordeal!

We left on the Sunday morning intending to go straight into town promising to stay in touch though we both knew it would be the last time we would see each other.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO**

With the six-day sojourn at the Cowdrey farmhouse, our stay in this township was now out to six weeks...far too long for any murder investigation. I knew the new Boss would not be impressed and I was expecting a blistering telephone conversation soon.

As Tally went to turn left to head into town I stopped her, waving my hand to the right.

"While we're near, let's go see Stan Cross to see how he weathered the storm".

"Not good..."

"Oh?"

"The other day while you were typing up that Report for the Coroner on the ten remains unearthed in town, Stan Cross and his son came over to help Rowena and George Parker assess the damage caused by the storm. We then went over to the Cross farm for a BBQ lunch and to do the same thing..."

"I hear that the young Cody Cross and you hit it off..."

Tally's face reddened as she looked away.

“He’s only one year younger than me...” She whimpered to end the conversation as we drew up to the farmhouse. I alighted to be met by a young, smiling guy who offered his hand.

“We missed you the other day as we checked out both Bungarra Hills and our own property with George Parker and Rowena...” The young man noted, beaming at Tally, quickly ushering her away to other parts of the farm. I noted the offering of Parker before Rowena and wondered whether there was any friction there on who was controlling the Cowdrey Estate. In my dealings with both Rowena and George in the past week or so...usually at the Dinner Table, I did not notice any animosity between the two or who stood at the top of the mountain and who took orders. Yes, there was banter between the two on certain things but the conversations always ended amiably and a consensus was always reached.

A throwback to more sexist and misogynist times I presumed still lingering as the farm appeared to be the male’s domain...then again, you had Rowena swimming against the current...

An older version of the young Cody Cross ambled across from what I thought was a Machinery Shed, wiping his hands down the sides of his jeans before offering his hand.

“Detective? We missed you the other day. Stan Cross...you’ve met my son Cody and I believe you have also met my daughter Alexandra...”

I cocked my head...

“She’s the Assistant to the Chemist in town. Gwen Henley. Been working there now since she left School. Loves it. You had a talk with Gwen’s husband a couple of weeks ago. He wasn’t impressed with your assertion that he may have shot the young Constable thinking he was meddling with his wife...he ordered you from his property angered by your assertion that his missus may have been playing up behind his back. It seems to me you like to rile people...get people off guard like when you were investigating poor Rowena’s husband’s death. You made enemies then and you’re doing it again”.

“My colleague and I have a murder to solve made more difficult by the fact the victim was one of our own. I make no excuses for digging for the truth. If people find that confronting or hurtful than I won’t lose sleep over it! For some, the truth hurts more than the lies they live by...I’m digging for facts...”

“Whoa Detective. I have no axe to grind...let’s start again. Come inside and my missus will make us a cup of tea or coffee and some cake that would have just been pulled out of the oven...if that is your preference”.

I smiled, nodded as I followed him up the front steps onto a wide veranda.

“No boots or shoes only bare feet or socks inside...sorry”.

I toed my boots off before I gingerly stepped across the threshold glancing at the floor as I did so. Bloody beautiful! This is what I want in my dream house. Hardwood flooring ranging in width from fifteen to twenty centimetres wide and going on the building's age around five centimetres thick I would imagine. Brilliantly polished with not a dust mote, a dog hair, a hint of dirt or a smear to be seen anywhere. A long wide corridor with glass fronted display cases on both sides filled with ribbons, sashes, badges, cups, awards, and citations. All for shooting prowess. Mostly of George junior, Cody, and Alexandra.

“Arrh...the smallest cup there is my contribution some years ago”.

I nodded as I stopped at the more outstanding cups and medallions, impressed with the display. After explanations and boastful exaltations, we were led to a large table in the middle of the ‘farmhouse’ Kitchen. The table scarred from family disputes and childish arguments going back several generations.

Several freshly baked cakes filled my nostrils and the smell of properly prepared coffee made me glad I was alive. Missus Betty Close was an enthusiastic member of the local Historical Society who were intending on publishing a book on the history of the township of Bungarra. Her mother also named Betty sat slumped at a corner of the table next to her daughter. Although looking frail and fragile, she was strong of voice and led the conversation on the early days of the township and surrounds. Constantly trying to pry information from me no matter how many times I insisted it was now a Court matter before the Coroner thus I could not divulge any information pertinent to the Case. With all this chatter going on and the insistence on more cake, I did not notice Cody and Tally slip from the room.

I learnt that bush life was hard and at times tragic. George Junior was by far the best shot in the family though his life was cut short by a farm accident. A ‘roll-over’ of an ATV that crushed him.

“George Junior?” I enquired.

“My father was George Senior. Cody's younger brother was killed in a single car accident coming home late one night from the Pub and Stan's older brother who was still living at the Farm at the time shot himself for no understandable reason”.



“It rarely is understandable. Often suicides occur out of the blue...they are not thinking of those around them but more of themselves. Rarely do they give a reasonable explanation...or a note”. I offered softly.

It was proudly announced amidst all this sorrow that Stan boasted of Alex’s prowess with a rifle. Ranked Number Two in the District for ‘fixed’ targets. Also, she held the number one prize for the largest and heaviest boar kill for three consecutive years...and was once an ace tennis player to boot...she had ice in her veins he proudly boasted.

“She has a scar to prove she came dangerously close to being carved up by a large boar’s tusks. She managed to turn her horse so that he would not be gutted but unfortunately the boar collided with Alex’s calf and tore a three hundred rip down the calf muscle. The crazy girl shot the bloody boar with one hand on the gun almost wrenching her wrist in two...we got her to the hospital but she was more concerned with the weight of the boar. It won her first prize last year”. He shook his head.

I wondered if Alex was capable of shooting Constable Kalavati to death with one shot. I paid more attention to the ribbons and medallions on show in the Display Cases as I exited thinking she was sure capable of the act. Here was the proof but motive...I couldn’t guess at it and the family were not forthcoming with a reason.

After pulling on my safety boots, I stood and looked around at the rolling paddocks spread out before me. It was a good view...one I could retire to. I couldn’t see Tally or Cody and was about to turn to Stan Cross when I heard a slap and an angry expletive. Cody stomped around from the far side of the 4WD Police vehicle rubbing his cheek as my partner straightened her Uniform before climbing into the driver’s seat of the large vehicle.

I nodded, pinched my nose, shook Stan Cross’ hand, thanked Betty Cross profusely for my feeling of a full stomach of chocolate and sponge cake and stepped down off the veranda. As Cody passed me I grabbed him by the arm and spun him around to face me.

“You lay another hand on Tally and I’ll have you up for assault of a Police Officer. Hear me? You keep your fists in your pants pockets, hear me?”

He nodded as he looked away from me, reefing his arm free. He stepped up onto the veranda, tossing his boots off before entering the dimness of the house. I turned to look at our ride...back to the veranda and as I waved a farewell something clicked into place.

I was sure now who had shot Constable Kalavati...

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

“What was that all about?” I asked my young colleague when we were seated in the Police vehicle. She shook her head slightly as she turned the 4WD away from the farmhouse and down the farm track towards the public road. It was obvious she was not going to respond to my query.

“Tally? Why did you slap him? What did he do to you?”

She glanced at me before flipping her hand at me. She obviously felt it was none of my business.

She propped the vehicle at the wide cattle grid.

“Which way?” She asked looking straight ahead.

“You can only go one way until they repair the Causeway...left then over the temporary creek crossing into town...to sit with Alexandra Cross...” I wiped my hands down the side of my face. Suddenly I was feeling tired. “No...Cory Adams first. I’ll plug in his address...”

“No need, I know where he lives on the outskirts of town...”

She was sounding frosty, still upset about me asking personal questions so I thought. I then remembered she went jogging every morning just on sun-up. Around the town and up and down every street and lane in the burg. I sat back and shut up, glancing out the window looking at the scenery as it whizzed past. The land was in good shape having had good rains at the right time for the past half-dozen years. Tally cleared her throat as she was apt to do before glancing over at me.

“I really liked the guy...he made me fizz...you know?”

I didn’t, but I remained quiet. I cannot remember if Tellie ever made me fizz...I’ll have to ask her when I get home.

“He was funny, adventurous, and enthusiastic about life. He said all the right things. I was secretly thinking I could live as a farmer’s wife...out here...it is glorious. A bit ridiculous as we’d barely got to know one another...you know...I was thinking of a life out here. He came onto me as though it was his right. The usual ploy of *‘if you love me, you’ll show me’*. Up against the side of our truck...right there would you believe! His mum and dad...and *you*

standing on the veranda! He began to force himself on me...you know. I slapped him hard...real hard". She shook her head and sniffled.

"You want me to drive?"

"Nah...I'll be right...that's all he wanted...a bloody conquest...how stupid am I?"

We were silent for some time with our own thoughts before she again coughed to clear her throat.

"Why are we seeing Cory Adams? Is he again a POI in the Kalavati Case?"

"He was never off the list. In fact, he has firmed as my top POI..."

"Why?" She asked, surprise in her tone.

"His treatment of his wife...and twice he accused Constable Dwayne of meddling in his life...in his marriage...and the same accusation levelled at me! He has a short fuse. We've seen it. There's the reason and he has had plenty of opportunities to shoot our lad while he was supposed to be 'on the road'...I must check with Senior Constable Caleb Collins on whether the local coppers knew if he had a rifle or not...I should ring Cal now while we're on our way..."

"What about the either guy...Berrigan wasn't it?"

"Yeah...we'll check with Collins when we get into town though I haven't got a fizz about him".

"Ho, ho, Hah ha!" She responded.

My Mobile buzzed than rang. It was the Boss in Sydney.

"Where are you with that Case in Bungarra?" She asked. No *'how's yer father or the weather is fine up here...how about down there'*.

"About wound up, Boss. A couple of loose ends should mean we have our suspects under arrest by the end of the week".

"Good...I want you back in the Office sometime next week at the latest. The Forensic people have left the town haven't they?"

“Yes...last week...Boss? We’ll have to stay for the Bail Application which should be held up in the Jerilderie Court House”.

“Good...yes”. She hung up. Not the best phone etiquette I’ve come across.

“You said suspects...plural! Who?” Tally chimed in to stop me mulling over the Boss and her cryptic ways. I can see her and me coming to blows if she continues with this gruffness. I will need to be careful or I could lose my career over a silly woman who thinks her position allows her to be cryptic and sullen to her staff.

“Yeah...I’ll shut my mouth until I know a little more...”

We sat in silence as Tally expertly negotiated the dirt road heading into town. The track still rutted with ponds and pools of dirty water. Tally’s sudden comment caused me to straighten up in fright.

“Sophie Grasso sends her regards...”

“Sophs! Sophie...how do you know her?”

I had to think when the last time was I had popped in to see her...a bloody while ago that’s for sure. I couldn’t reconcile the fact that I stayed in regular contact with my first partner Marge Hendricks and my second long term partner Shelley Shields. In fact, I had both women over for a BBQ only weeks ago...well...months ago now. Whether it was all their kids...who loved my two daughters and they all got on so well together...or was it because Marge was married to my best mate ‘Muscles’ Sarvich who was head of the Morgue Precinct and Forensic Pathology Department at the Science Laboratory at Lidcombe. That didn’t tell me why I had not stayed in regular contact with Sophie...and her menagerie of British Sports Cars.

“How is she?” I asked a little sheepishly.

“Fine...she is now a D4 in White Collar Crime...next in line for the assistant head of Branch...I reckon she’ll make it one day”.

“Good on her. I always knew she would do well once she found her niche. She is a very clever and intelligent person who unfortunately did not like the sight of bloodied small bodies. What is her latest project in doing up sports cars from scratch?”

“I don’t know. We only had time for a rushed coffee. She drove me back to the Police Building in this howling ‘E’-type Jag convertible. British Racing Green and an exhaust note that got attention...I’m going to buy the thing off her sometime in the future...”

“A V8 racing engine knowing Sophs. You’ll need over one hundred grand young lady. A piece of advice, put it into Real Estate”. I never got around to asking what or why she was sharing a coffee with Sophie...I must pop in to see her soon...I must!

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

We knocked on the front and back doors of the Adams abode for nil result. The back door was not locked so I walked softly through the house. No-one was at home. We walked out to the large shed where a large Prime Mover had its nose poking out of the shed, the bonnet and radiator grille swung out of the way to expose the engine bay. Various tools and bits and pieces were scattered about on the concrete floor and in wheeled red toolboxes.

It was obvious that robbery was low on the agenda and honesty ruled supreme in this town.

“Mmm...let’s go see the Transport Company Cory Adams contracts to just up the road. About a kay up the highway out of town...” I suggested quietly, wondering where Missus Adams might be.

Again, Tally knew the location not needing to be told. Elmoore Transport Company was a second-tier transport company that had most of the transport needs of the District sown up.

We were ushered into the Office of Les Moore, the head of the Company. He looked frazzled as he looked over at both of us gesturing for us to sit into two chairs opposite him.

“Covid and flu...both are bad this year. You know any drivers who are licensed to drive Double ‘Bs’?” He harrumphed at his own joke then smiled as he waved away the question. It had been purely rhetorical. Shook his head slowly looking up at both of us, a frown on his face. “How can I help you Detectives?”

“Cory Adams...is he out on a run?”

“Yep...you can always rely on the old bloke. Has slowed down a bit but he’s still my best and most reliable long-haul Double ‘B’ driver and by far my best Mechanic. Where is he?” He’s doing the ‘produce’ run down to the Melbourne Markets...” Looking at his laptop, he

toggled a couple of keys before looking up at me. “Due in now...will sleep in his rig overnight and backload a full load of wooden pallets due here about this time tomorrow...why? You know his missus walked out on him about a week ago...gone up to her sister’s place in Wagga Wagga...I guess. That’s where she normally goes when Cory hits into her. She vows never to return to the family home but always does...a bloody shame as she is a nice woman...one of the good breed”.

Steam started to build and I was on the verge to ask why he had never reported the assaults if he knew well of them...instead, I sat still glued to the chair.

“Um...” Tally glanced at me before she began. I think she could sense my mood. “The third of last month? Overnight from the second to the third. A cloudless sky. A new moon. Where was Adams on that day?”

He looked at my young colleague about to say something but thought better of it. Instead, he returned to his Laptop and tapped quickly on the keys.

“The second and third of last month? A Thursday...a Wednesday and Thursday. He was on a similar run but up to the Sydney Produce Markets. Flemington. Slept in his boxbed at the Warehouse where a backload of gearbox parts were waiting to be transferred to Adelaide then another backload of food and stuff to the Supermarket Distribution Centre at Albury. Came back here the following day...the Sunday...empty...”

“That can be confirmed?” She asked.

“Arrh, shit. This about he belting into his missus...she’s taken legal action. Suppose it was to be expected as it’s been going on for years...the poor thing. I’ve seen Cory lose it and if yer in cooee yer get outa the way if yer know what’s good for yer...yeah about time I reckon. If it went on for much longer I reckon he’d’ve killed her...”

“Do you have paper confirmation and CCTV coverage that would show he was at those locations at those times?”

The man was flummoxed at our request. He knew it had little to do with domestic violence but he didn’t have a clue what and where our enquiries were going...and what they were about.

“I have paper confirmation. The paper is signed when he arrived at his destination, again signed when the unloading is complete and ditto when he lands at the location for a backload operation. Signed with the date and time clearly marked...do you need a copy? I’m not sure on CCTV but I guess they all have coverage...we certainly do”.

I stood, thanked him for his cooperation stating we may need copies in the future but not now.

“That about clears the old bloke doesn’t it?” Tally sighed as she did up her seatbelt. “Where to now?”

I glanced at my watch. It had just gone four.

“To the Cop Shop, girlie. Don’t spare the gas”.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE**

As we came into the front office of the cop shop, Doris handed me a sheath of papers.

“Came in last night”. She informed me.

“Great...just what we need. Can you transfer the original text over to my phone please?”

“Yeah...no worries. Easy as”.

I speed read the interesting parts, commenting enthusiastically as I did.

“Great! Got them! Got them by the short and curlies”.

Tally came to stand beside me unable to contain her curiosity. I handed her the Report as she handed me a large mug of coffee. We walked slowly into Caleb’s Office. I slumped down in the chair opposite Senior Constable Caleb Collins and beside Constable Tilly Pappas. I let out a stream of air in frustration as Tally slid the papers over to Caleb. He let out a moan that was full of anguish. In several short weeks he would go from a full complement to just himself and Doris, the Office Friday, and the young Telephonist/Receptionist when she decided to turn up for work...

“Not good, huh?” Cal remarked as he handed me the sheath of papers.

I shook my head. Straightened up. I turned to Pappas.

“Do you know what is contained in this sheath of papers?” I asked softly. “Your future and it’s not looking good...these papers are the Final Report of the Forensic Trace team who were on-site for five days straight. They explain the how, the where but not the why...would you

care to enlighten us? Keep in mind that certain personal habits...like chewing gum...or biting your nails can be done as an automatic reaction. Half the time you are unaware that you're chewing gum...or biting your nails. It was a pleasant night that night. Kalavati was late coming home. You'd been in place in the middle of that grove of trees for some time. Long enough for you to spit out the gum you were chewing, ram it into the fork of the tree and even it even had remnants of your fingernails embedded...chewing gum can hold a mountain of DNA evidence...and your DNA and fingerprints were on various parts of the Lee-Enfield point three-oh-three twenty-five rifle. Various spores were also on the gun that could have only occurred if the rifle were held for some time in that location. You did the right thing by disassembling, cleaning, and reassembling the rifle before using it. Your training and love of long guns and fixed target competition came to the fore”.

She remained silent; her head bowed.

“We know the how and the where...but why? By all accounts Kalavati was a saint, loved by all the townsfolk...why did you shoot him dead?”

She remained rigid; her head bowed; slightly rocking her body in the office chair.

“Did you know Kalavati well?” I know I had asked the same question of her early in the piece. I looked around the room.

“Where’s Constable Jeff Collins?” I asked, upsetting my own rhythm. I was hoping others would be as bamboozled as Pappas looked. I wanted her off-balanced.

“Arrh...the School Bus Volunteer Driver tested positive for Covid around mid-day. Jeff volunteered to fill the gap as a lot of kids wouldn’t make home to-night...”

“Has he the correct License to drive a School Bus?” Tally asked, surprise in her voice.

“Arrh...yes, so he has assured me”. Senior Constable Caleb Collins offered, a look of concern on his face. I wasn’t so sure as I felt this cop shop was being led a little haphazardly. Things slipped; things were overlooked or ignored.

“Yesssss...back to my original question...” Hoping my tempo would not be broken again. “Arm...how well did you know Constable Kalavati, Pappas?”

“As well as one could when you’re sharing digs with the bloke. We didn’t have much to do with each other as I was on dayshift and he was on night duty...we rarely met”.

“How about weekends?”



“No...Dwayne was away most of the time with his three soccer or cricket teams whichever was in season...and while I was training, I was down at the Rifle Club in Barham. When I stopped my interest in fixed target competition I was always doing something else...”

“What did you do with your long guns that you used for competition?”

“Sold them to a fellow competitor a good year ago now...no...two...he recently moved to Victoria”.

“You ate well?” I asked completely throwing the young woman. This was my intention as she was as nervous as a Doe at a Bucks’ party.

“Yeah...yer got to in this job...and Dwayne usually had good cuts of beef, lamb and fish which he was willing to share...”

“Expensive...” I added.

“I guess...I never thought that much about it”.

“Would he be given the meat out of gratitude from the local Butcher, Clem Kaine?”

“What for?” Puzzlement written across her face. She sat easily in her chair as though she had not a care in the world.

I shrugged, looked around. Tally came into the room at that moment with a mug of coffee for all of us and a plate full of cake slices and biscuits.

“What for!?” I asked as I picked up the thread after the slight interruption. “I was hoping you could help me in that regard...the fish?” I leaned forward to place the mug of coffee onto the Senior Constable’s desk. It was hot.

“Sorry? What!? The fish! What do you mean?”

I again shrugged. She was becoming nervous. Uncomfortable.

“Do you know Alexandra Cross?”

“Yes...not that well, but yes, I know her. Her parents have the Cross Hills Spread out along the Back Road”.

“Yes...they have two walls of the entry hallway covered by glass-fronted display cases. We were there this morning. I noticed two photographs of you and Alexandra together. She beat you two years in a row...by the same margin. She came second. You third in the fixed target shooting competition. You’re a good shot...”

“Obviously not as good as Alex. She’s an ace...”

“You gave it away...”

“Yes...cop hours...it was difficult to keep up the training hours when you’re a cop...”

“I’m sure the Force would have made arrangements to allow you to continue especially when you showed so much promise”.

She nodded, looked down at her hands. She had forgotten her coffee. She couldn’t keep eye contact with me.

“You didn’t like Wayne Kalavati that well, did you? Why?”

She shuffled her feet, held her arms tight around her ribcage. Shook her head slightly. We were almost there. She straightened her neck to look across at me. Brushed her hair away from her face. She sniffled, diving into her handbag for a tissue as Constable Jeff Collins came into the room. He looked at Pappas than across at me.

“What’s going on?” He asked angrily.

“Jeff? The Detective was asking me why I didn’t like Dwayne”.

“He was a bloody jerk-off...a smug smart arse who knew everything there was to know about the Universe and everything else...he walked around as though he was entertaining his serfs”.

There was silence. Jeff Collins had to fill it.

“...and he raped Tilly...knocked her out with some concoction...she had bad bruising to her buttocks, the inside of her thighs, both breasts, and her shoulders which would indicate extremely rough sex. She woke up the next morning naked, lying on the Kitchen floor. In a lot of pain. I’d taken a week off to go back home to Canowindra. My Dad was crook. In Hospital. I got back here on the late flight in on Sunday night. Took Tilly straight to the Hospital”.

There it was again, ignorance and a casual disregard for State Laws dealing with such matters.

“When?”

“Arrh...about two weeks before he was shot”.

“Why didn’t you report the rape to your superior Officer?”

Both Pappas and Collins looked over at their Superior Officer. Caleb Collins embarrassingly lowered his head. He couldn’t look at me. I stood to spin Jeff Collins around to handcuff him. Tally did the same with Pappas.

“I don’t think that is necessary, Detective”. Senior Constable Collins objected as he stood unsteadily from behind his desk. I had expected something like that from him...he was too soft to be an effective leader. I doubted he would retain the position he now occupied when this Case was put to bed. A simple yes to an early retirement package that would not support him for too long. It suddenly occurred to me that I had never meet his wife and kids...a little too late for that I reckon.

As I snapped on the handcuffs I mentioned to Caleb that this was standard procedure regardless of whether you thought them good people or not. I charged Constable Jeff Collins with third degree homicide, colluding to obscure the execution of a capital crime and conspiring to conduct a capital crime...Tally read Pappas’s list of charges which were similar except she was charged with first degree murder.

They would be transferred to Jerilderie overnight awaiting a Bail Application to which we would not object. I didn’t feel as though we had protected the lives of the townsfolk by arresting these two and I had a hollow feeling in my guts which was not helped by seeing Tellie and my three girls when we finally flew home the following weekend.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX**

“How’d you know Joe?” She asked quietly as she leaned into me. We were on the evening flight heading towards Sydney’s Kings Smith Airport. I was looking forward to seeing my tribe...I had missed them.

“Huh...we’d eliminated about everyone else in the town who would be capable or have a plausible reason to want to kill Kalavati. Remember when you slapped Cody Cross into the next world? You and he were no more than ten metres from me...me standing on the elevated front section of the Cross’s farmhouse veranda. I couldn’t see you...the situation reminded

me of us standing on The Cottage front veranda not being able to see Kalavati's body which had spun and fallen to the side of his 4WD when he was shot. Both Pappas and Collins contradicted one another on who saw the body first. A completely plausible scenario. It was around four in the morning. Both had been woken suddenly and both staggered out onto the veranda to notice the prone figure of Kalavati. They both admitted to that...again completely plausible...but that couldn't have happened and would only occur if both were alibiing each other. The other thing that was an eye-opener was the two photographs in that series of Display Cases in the Cross's Hallway which showed Alexandra Cross and Tilly Pappas showing off their fixed target medallions. Up until that point, we were unaware that Pappas was a competitive shooter...but it was the why that I couldn't grasp. Goes to show, even a saint has a dark side to his personality".

I smiled now more satisfied with my deductive reasoning. I was ready for the next one and hopefully Detective Catalina Evans was standing beside me.

Pcb 05/06/2024

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