



SUDDEN

DEATH

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVE
GRADE FOUR JOSEPH LIND
STORY BY

PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES

JOSEPH LIND
AND
ISABELLA ‘SOPHIE’ GRASSO

introducing

Detectives Angelica ‘Angie’ De Longo and Catalina ‘Tally’ Evans

SUDDEN DEATH

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Death is with us all. Every day of the week, fifty-two weeks of the year.

If not a close family member, a relative, a work colleague then the hundreds reported as daily 'flash numbers' on the nightly news on the radio or TV.

We cannot escape it...either we steel ourselves for the declining health of a loved one...or ourself...the sudden death...the brutal death of countless others across the world...it is a part of our lives.

Some people are more effected by the sudden death of innocent people on the other side of the world...others not effected at all so their existence continues on...for another beautiful day.

Home Invasion incidents are becoming more common. Injuries and yes, sudden deaths seem to be the outcome of these senseless activities by complete strangers looking for easy cash and objects that can be easily hocked for cash to buy the next supply...that will take them far from their mean existence...and sudden death can be their future by others looking for that next high...and possibly a sudden death by a toxic concoction...but with these deaths there are few mourning the loss of a loved one...while others deeply feel the unexpected and sudden loss...

CHAPTER ONE

I stood stiffly to answer the knock on the door. None of my champion guard dogs had issued a growl, a snarl, or a bark. AU2 lifted her head as if to ask, '*was that a knock at the back door?*' Satisfied that it was, she dropped her head onto her front paws and went back to sleep...she was getting old with a painful gait and often a tail lowered as she partly hobbled to a spot, standing there transfixed wondering why and where was she. Sad to see but she still seemed to see me whenever I came home from work...or had suddenly appeared from an adjoining room. Po and Mo, my two chirpy Maltese X slept through the sudden knock...and the squeaking side gate.

I was curious as only our friends would come in via the side gate. Anyone who didn't know would always knock at the front door.

Tellie whispered who? I shrugged my shoulders as I slid back the heavy curtains covering the glass door out onto the deck.

Two Uniforms standing at attention...one with a nervous smile which bade bad news.

Not a good sign when coppers knock at your door late at night. My stomach fell to my knees. Danni...something has happened to Danni down in Melbourne...yes?

“Oh! Detective! Sorry...we didn't know this was your place...” A sudden realisation and identity of me being one of them. “Sorry...arrh...Melisa Lind. She is your daughter-in-law. She has you listed as next of kin...”

I felt Tellie coming to stand by my side, circling her arm through the crook of my arm. Tightly.

“Mel? What's happened? Is she alright. She's not, is she, otherwise you wouldn't be knocking on our back door...what's happened?” Tellie was approaching meltdown. I tried to calm her down while encouraging the two to tell us what had happened.

“Mz Lind works for the Anti-Terrorist and Drug Intelligence Unit within the AFP. She has been based in Manila, the Philippines for the past two and a half years. She lives within a compound where several countries' personnel with close ties to the Philippine Government are accommodated...that speaks loads to the current conditions over there...um...sorry, sir...there was an explosion within the compound that caused a two-storey building to collapse...um...Mz Lind is still missing...she has not been located...um...from local feedback there is little chance of any survivors being pulled from the rubble...um...they more than likely would have been killed by the blast effect. The AFP will keep you across any further developments...sorry sir...missus”.

He looked very sorry as though he was about to burst out crying at any moment.

“Um...sir? This is the number in the AFP that you can ring for up-to-date information...um...sorry to be the bearer of sad news...”

He bowed his head as he stepped backwards. Spinning, he followed his colleague who had said little...in fact nothing at all. Knowing the system and how it worked, our spokesperson was either an Officer of a higher grade...or they had flipped a coin on who should be the spokesperson to inform us of Mel's status.

CHAPTER TWO

He swung his legs over the bedside and sat up effortlessly on the edge of the bed.

“Let’s get this straight Doctor...my operation is cancelled! C’mon Doc! I was about to have my pre-med after finishing my talk with the Anaesthetist and you come bowling in to tell me my op has been cancelled! To ask the obvious, why?”

The guy was agitated with good cause. The man had a busy schedule himself not dissimilar to the Surgeon standing before him. The Patient was bald with a protruding vein vertically down his forehead. His mounting annoyance broadcast by the redness of his face...his entire head...and the alarming pulsation of that prominent vein.

“I’m sorry Mister...” The Doctor glanced down at the Patient’s Medical Chart that he held in both hands. “Mister Campriani ...several cases of more urgency have emerged that require my immediate attention. Your Op will be re-scheduled for the coming weeks...my Office will be in touched...you’ll need to void your bowel again...a sorrowful time, I know but we have no choice...these other cases are of more urgency”.

“Doctor? My Op was required...considered urgent less than forty-eight hours ago...now it’s not! When will my condition become more urgent requiring immediate attention?”

“Sir...your condition is not life-threatening...unlike both these cases that require my immediate attention...”

“My condition was deemed urgent at one point...now it’s not. As an Atheist I cannot say you are playing God...but Doctor...you are playing with people’s lives...more importantly, with my life!”

CHAPTER THREE

I walked around the car several times while Sophie sat on her haunches viewing the Vic who was lying prone on the concrete surface of the driveway half under the vehicle.

“One stab wound to the base of the skull rendering her spine and the major spinal cord severed. A very neat job. I’d conclude that it was a surgical cut...very neat...very clean. Our poor love would not have felt a thing...maybe a stinging sensation as she collapsed. Very

little blood and the forensic trace around here of little value according to the Forensic Trace Unit Officers...” Brenda Wzerlic offered as she stood off to one side wriggling out of her bio-suit and booties. She stretched her back as though in some pain.

“By her apparel, she was a Nursing Sister...” Sophie muttered softly as though unsure of her conclusion.

“Yes...a bit above that. She was a Theatre Sister at Westmead Private Hospital and Westmead Childrens. A stone’s throw away...she would walk to work...according to her husband...he...arrh...he called it in. He...arrh...he discovered her body partially under the vehicle...”

“What was she doing in that case, getting out of her vehicle...” Sophie offered.

“...or hopping in...” I ventured, standing on the other side of the vehicle. “Her death was quick...sudden...” I scratched my head. “The manner of death Bren? Hard to achieve?”

“Not if you knew how...it would take some pressure to sever the spinal cord, but if you knew what you were doing, it would be an easy enough task once you made that initial hard lunge”.

“If she was hopping into her car...the way she was dressed, she was going to work so our Perp knew of her daily agenda...didn’t someone say she normally walked to work from here? If so, why was she going by car this time?” Sophie suggested. “Her name...what is the name of our victim?”

“Um...Veronica Agatha Purvey nee Vellace known to all as Ronnie...” Wzerlic supplied as she looked at her iPhone. “Her husband George Gerrard Purvey is inside a little peeved that he is going to be late for work...showing very little emotion to his wife’s death...not exactly shattered by the news...in fact to me, he was not affected at all. More interested in his life’s work than the sudden death of his wife of fourteen years...this is his vehicle...too good to allow his wife to drive...he found her as he deposited his Briefcase onto the passenger side seat. Walked around to the driver’s side and found her half under the vehicle...he phoned it into Triple O, returned to the house to make himself a coffee and sit waiting for all of us to appear... and here we are...” A grim smile to end her recitation. “Um...I interviewed him when we first got here to the site...his only gripe was that he would be late for work...”

“Mmm...I guess a word with our husband may shed light onto the situation. You get what he did for a job?”

“Um...” Wzerlic again referred to her iPhone. “He works for the RBA...upper management...he’s a Specialist Analysis Accountant whatever that means. I didn’t want to

dig anymore as he is a prickly man...not a nice bloke at all...you go and see him Joe. You'll be able to get more out of him than me...here's hoping".

CHAPTER FOUR

"You are Mister Purvey? I'm Detective Lind with my partner Sophie Grasso from the Murder Squad. Could we have a word with you...about your wife's sudden death?"

"Good Lord! How many people are going to ask me the same bloody questions repeatedly...is there a line-up of people at the front door. Sudden death...you can bank on that. Very sudden and very unexpected. Just like her to fuck up one of the most important dates on the calendar for the RBA...and me. We are going to release the Report on Australia's health and its outcome for the next twelve months...I need to be there! When can I leave?"

"When we have completed our enquiries, sir".

"She is such a selfish bitch...thinks only of herself..."

"What did your wife do...is she a Nurse?"

"No...she's an Operating Assistant...she's the Number Two so she skites at the operating table. I hardly think that is right as there is a Surgeon, his Assistance, an Anaesthetist...she is way down the list as far as I am concerned..."

"How long have you been married sir?"

"Oh...fourteen years...the first ten were acceptable...she was the person I married...then she wanted her own life. She never suggested divorce as that would mean a stepdown in society and her living standards...all this..." He waved an arm around referring to the mock Tudor manor more suitable to the English countryside. "...and the latest electric car...an Audi...a marvellous car...she has one too...and now this..."

"You reported finding your wife's body at 1415 hours this afternoon. Where were you during the hour before you reported finding her body?"

"That is insulting, Detective. Are you accusing me of killing my wife? You can leave now!"

“Mister Purvey! We can do this one of three ways. You can answer our questions and allow us to search your premises and scan your security camera footage...or we can obtain a warrant to do the same which will mean we have a number of Uniform Constables scouring your property in their size fifteens...or thirdly, we can reschedule a search with an accompanying search warrant of your premises with your Solicitor being present...it’s up to you...which way do you wish to go?”

He appeared uncertain not knowing which option to select. Under those conditions we suggested the third option, scanning his house and property with a search warrant and with his Solicitor being present...with this type of man it might curtail any objections or bitchiness the man might voice...hopefully.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Phew...that man is toxic! How could you ignore his attitude to continue interviewing him. I reckon I would have called him a couple of names if it were me...”

“That’s not a good interviewing technique, Sophs. Don’t get me wrong, I was on the verge a couple of times in calling him a bastard...but you cannot get personal at any time no matter how hard you want to retaliate in some way. Our Mister Purvey has just become our Number One suspect. The crime scene would have his DNA all over it...and possibly his DNA on his missus’s person so we must look at other areas to try and trip him up...I don’t reckon we’ll ever get a confession from him...he’s into self-preservation in a big way...and his own self-importance”.

Instead of walking towards our Unmarked, I veered away to go and stand at the kerb line of the little travelled back street. It was a quiet backwater, an enlarged cull-d-sac where the ‘other half’ lived. On property that was a minimum one acre. All presumably ‘Professional People’ judging by the large, architectural designed houses around me. Not a Project Home in sight...or a Ford or Holden!

“Let’s do a door knock though I suspect there will not be many people home at this hour but I reckon most homes around this street will have security cameras of some sort. We could be lucky in getting views of the Purvey residence that will shed light on the homicide...making things easier for us”.

“Boss...” Sophie was stubbornly sticking to her habit of calling me Boss. “Boss...it’s close to five. If we’re going to do a doorknock of this dead-end street, we should get approval from

the Boss to work the overtime...we'll be here for over two hours depending on what we can learn..."

"Mmm? Yes...ring DI Turner for that approval...yes". I took out my mobile and speed dialled Tellie's number.

"You home?"

"Yes..."

"Any news?"

"I rang that number we were given after getting home from picking up the girls...no news. They've still got her missing believed dead...nothing will change until they find her body...or she turns up alive after spending a week in Tokyo...but her Boss would have known of her location...Manila or Tokyo...here's hoping she was in Tokyo...or Ho Che Ming City...well away from the blast zone".

Us humans have a tendency to do that...whitewash the incident hoping our loved one has somehow cheated death...logic invariably flies out the window to be replaced with big portions of hope.

"A bit early for that. They were pulling survivors out of the rubble caused by that earthquake in Turkey and Syria...a week after the quake hit...even a horse was rescued from under the rubble...early days love. Don't worry about me for tea...don't know what time I'll be home. Could be extremely late the way things are looking. I'll get something to eat on the way home...or duck into our favourite Pizza Joint for a take-away..."

"Get some garlic bread too..."

"What, I've got to share my meal, huh?"

"The smell when you get home will be enough to make me hungry all over again...see you whenever...but not too late as I don't like going to bed on a full stomach...I'll be farting garlic laced air all night if you are late home...not a pretty thought".

"Rules and regulations...you can't get away from them! I think I'll have a sit-down meal at that Pizza Joint".

"If you do not want to sleep out in the Van to-night than don't you dare".

I could hear her laughing as I signed off...

CHAPTER SIX

We'd knocked on several homes for no luck. The next house almost opposite Purvey's dwelling produced a result. A young teen-age Private School girl opened the door. She still had her school uniform on. I knew the School in question as several years ago it was awash with drugs.

"Show me your ID again. You could be anyone for all I know. I could get an exact copy of that shield off the Internet...it'd fool anyone!"

That's all I needed, a precocious brat who thinks she knows all the answers...and questions...and beside that my stomach was beginning to rubble.

"Mum!?" She yelled back into the house. "A couple of bods here saying they are Murder Detectives...who's been murdered?"

A frazzled, middle-aged woman who did deportment classes when she was young came to the door. An embarrassed smile an apology for her daughter. As a sign of her embarrassment, she played with her hair at the back of her neck...rescuing errant strands to push into a hairband instead of having them fall around her face.

"Sorry..." She smiled. A few grey strands, wrinkle lines around her eyes and at the corners of her mouth. She was tall, taller than Sophie. "Yes...a friend told me about poor Ronnie..." I was lost for a bit with the shortened nickname for Veronica. "Um...I won't say she deserved it as she gave that brute of a husband as much as he dished out...but they always were arguing...even out onto their driveway for everyone to hear. He is a man who is hard to take and only getting worse as he climbs the promotion ladder. My hubbie says he is finding it hard to produce...if an Analytical Accountant can produce. When we first built here we were all friends like...we'd have regular BBQs together...the kids were of an age where they could use the pool without much supervision...they all got on though not all went to Private Schools...there are two closer than the Public High School one suburb over...having less than a reputable reputation...so, I don't think we can help you much, but ask away..."

"Were you home around two this afternoon?"

“A bit early for me. I try to be home when the kids come home from school...around three fifteen...yes, I was home then and I saw all the people concentrated around George’s car. Some of your people had to move their cars...there was flashing lights everywhere...it looked pretty but they blocked the entrance into my driveway...they took some time to allow me entry up my driveway. I felt they saw me as a suspect. I figured by all you people about that he had at last killed Ronnie...it was only a matter of time...”

The number of children had blown out to five now crowded around their mother.

“Was there any suggestion of violence in the marriage?”

“Oh, yes...regular like. Old Missus Schneider was always ringing you cops as the arguments could get quite vocal...she lives with her brother in the house next door...the one with the lattice front fence”. She pointed towards the house across the road from here. “Her husband...a good man...died years ago. The brother came to look after her after that as she was getting old and feeble...she’s been like that for years...her four kids are all overseas making top money according to her. I invite her over for a chat and a cup of tea at least once a week on the day I don’t work...or the weekend whatever suits...”

While this discourse was continuing, Sophie had excused herself to check in with the local lads on the degree of a local patrol visiting the Purveys...it wasn’t as bad as the woman hinted but the address was known to the local coppers. This Sophie whispered to me as we walked away from the residence.

“One thing...I noticed you have a number of security cameras on the front façade of your home. Can we look at any footage that may give us a clue as to what transpired earlier this afternoon?”

“The whole system has broken down...we have three cameras...we installed them when we were having problems with hoodlums trying to enter...it doesn’t happen anymore so the young gits must have been arrested...”

“...or grown out of the habit...or suffered from an overdose...” A giggle from one of the youngest of the five-person clan. A stern reprimand from their mother.

That took the wind out of my sails as I had thought this home would be the feather in our caps. Now we were running out of alternatives but still I had noticed several vehicles drive slowly down the street. Each in turn the woman and her kids would wave at the driver.

Another hour and we had exhausted all homes except Missus Schneider who we would knock at her door in the morning...I’d had enough for the day and it was close to eight...enough!

The worst role I had as a Murder Dee was attending an autopsy of a poor victim. Coming in a close second was knocking on the door of a family to tell them their 'loved-one' had died...especially when it was a violent death.

That was the last function we had for a long and dreary day. Telling the family of Veronica Purvey nee Vellace that their daughter/sister/granddaughter had been killed. To have the family wanting to take out their vengeance on the messenger...accusing the husband of continual domestic violence on their daughter and no matter how hard they tried, their much-loved daughter went back to the overbearing, violent husband. Why, they chorused together. All I could do was apologise without offering any logical reason why she would continually return to the marital home...there is no logical reason for the practise that we saw time after time...on too many occasions!

CHAPTER SEVEN

We returned to the Office after our attendance at the autopsy of Veronica Purvey. It never gets any easier. Initial indications detailed years of physical abuse which made the whole process sad for me. I could never understand a woman allowing herself to be repeatedly abused...get out I would silently roar...before it is too late!

“How can an intelligent person continue to be abused? Seeing the man, I doubt it stopped at physical abuse...financial and emotional abuse would also be an ever-present event...she was an intelligent woman with a full and responsible job...how could she continue under such a cloud of oppression?”

I had no answers as we saw it all the time. At each DV death you asked the same questions. DV attacks straddled the whole spectrum of society...without rhyme nor reason.

We were hoping that 'paper' would be waiting for us to obtain evidence from Ronnie Purvey's Doctor, one for the Hospital to collect their records on how many times the poor woman was admitted, and another for us to scour the family home.

I was a little angry at the slow process to obtain all these Orders and I could see ourselves sitting around picking our noses...waiting.

“Boss? We don't need a Court Order to interview Missus Schneider...might as well fill in time...”

“Mmm...yeah...let’s go”.

We parked at the kerb line outside the Schneider residence. I noticed a Patrol wagon parked in the position where the black Audi had previously been positioned. I wasn’t too sure whether that was allowable when it should have been located at the kerbside adjacent to the gutter crossing and driveway onto the property. I felt it wasn’t my duty to point this out to the driver of the Patrol wagon. I waved getting a response. I knew the Officer would be typing in our presence, time and our Unmarked’s particulars into the Crime Scene log.

It was a warm day and as I knocked on the Schneider’s front door, I slipped my ‘sunnies’ into my shirt pocket, preparing myself with a friendly smile when the door opened.

“Mister Schneider?” I asked as Sophs and I produced our ID Cards.

“Arrh no. I am David Winters which is the family name. Schneider is my sister’s married name...come through. You want to ask us questions about poor Ronnie’s death...please sit”.

An elderly woman came into the room leaning on a wheeled Walking Frame.

“I am Dietr Schneider...please excuse my tardiness...call me Ditty as everyone else does...”

She sat heavily asking her much younger brother to put the kettle on.

“No...please. We’re fine”. Both Sophie and I chorused.

“An old German custom. You invite people in, you provide them with sustenance...we expected you to knock on our door last night...”

“Sorry...we were concentrating on those that we could not contact during the day. We knew you would be home during the day...and we had a late night as it was”.

“Yes...we’re home most hours of the day. Usually. Coffee or tea? We have green tea if you prefer...”

“Arrh, no. Coffee will be fine...thank you...you may still conform to certain German customs so how long has your family been in Australia?” Small talk to get them used to answering our questions.

“Oh...my grandfather immigrated straight after the First World War. He was a Doctor...saw terrible things in the trenches...not confined to one side or the other...and as he said, he wanted to be as far as possible away from Europe as he suspected things would not improve.

When the Nazis came to power in nineteen thirty-three, he convinced most of his family and relatives to follow him here to Australia...most were Jews...he sponsored most of the family...almost fifty of us...the rest died in Concentration Camps in Germany and Poland...he was terribly disappointed that he couldn't save them all".

David Winters walked steadily into the room carrying a tray with all the essential ingredients necessary including dark chocolate Tim Tams. He carefully placed the tray on a small table beside the old girl's chair, carrying our coffees to us. Both Sophs and I would be taking notes so I asked if I could place my cup and saucer onto a centrally located coffee table. He slid the table closer to Sophie and me...a Tim Tam each.

"Tim Tams...especially dark chocolate ones are the greatest gift to mankind that Australia has given us!" A broad grin. A chuckle. A sip of coffee before he took a small bite of the delicacy.

The elderly woman continued as though she had not been interrupted.

"Being German, most of the broader family were interned in a camp near Ipswich in Queensland for the entire War...Jews have and will pay forevermore for their sins in killing Christ...I...and my family are not practising Jews. I was born in that camp in nineteen thirty-nine...I don't remember anything about it although I was near on six when we were all released...expected to immediately take up where we left off at the beginning of the War...my Grandfather and father worked hard to start up a medical practise first in Brisbane then here in Sydney...and we are now living off the benefits of their labour...bless their souls...they worked long hours for a lot of years"

"Your recollections of Missus Purvey..."

"A lovely woman...highly intelligent. She used to come over here for a cuppa at least once...sometimes twice a week. At times living in that house saddened her. Her husband was a bully and you knew when the poor woman visited us more than once a week, she was escaping the abuse. My husband on several occasions fronted George threatening physical abuse if he didn't stop treating his wife in such a shameful way. This would curtail any suffering of Ronnie for sometimes weeks...sometimes months but it would always start up again. I got into the habit of ringing the local Police hoping this would reduce the attacks...it did and it didn't..."

"Do you think that George Purvey would be capable of murdering his wife?" Sophie asked before I could stop her. This was a leading question that we should never ask!

The old girl smiled at the same time wiping away tears.

“Is he capable? Most certainly! What type of man would kill a pet cat because it shed hairs on his favourite sofa chair...three cats and a dog met similar fates...Ronnie must have seen the writing on the wall when he kicked a four-month-old puppy to death. I called the Police as Ronnie was screaming...the loudest I’ve ever heard her scream...”

CHAPTER EIGHT

“How’s the ‘Body under the Audi’ going, Joe?”

The Boss had sat one bum cheek onto the corner of my desk. Crossed her arms across her chest. I bowed my head to massage the back of my neck.

“Slowly Boss...we are snowed under with unsubstantiated material but nothing to positively prove George Purvey killed his wife...he is a bully and a wife beater but I’m having doubts about his guilt in killing his wife...”

“The knife attack. Quick and expertly achieved...required some knowledge of Anatomy and medical procedures I would think...”

I looked up at her nodding my head.

“The Vic was a Theatre Sister...there would be countless medical books around that house...that I am confident about when we receive the ‘paper’ to enter and search the joint...”

“Mmm...still thin Joe...”

“If a man can cold-bloodedly kill three kittens and kick a puppy to death for dropping fur around the house, then he is capable of murdering his wife...”

“I don’t disagree Joe...but it doesn’t prove he killed his wife. We need more substance. A witness. A video recording...something of substance”.

“Maybe searching through the house might give something up...and yes, we want ‘paper’ to visit her and his Doctor...the local Vet and to interview all Uniforms who had turned up at the family home after being called by ‘Ditty’ Schneider...the next door neighbour...that especially could take a week depending on their present shifts”.

She slapped her calf and stood, turning to me.

“Don’t let the amount of circumstantial evidence close your eyes to other alternatives...blind you to keeping an open mind Joe”.

With that, she strode through the Murder Room to her Office.

CHAPTER NINE

It took us a week to exhaust every avenue of examination with or without ‘paper’. The G.P.s of the two provided substantial evidence of abuse suffered by Ronnie Purvey over five or six years. The Vet we interviewed stated forcefully that he would never supply any animals to the couple again...but there was no evidence to conclusively prove Purvey’s involvement in his wife’s murder...we had gone to Court previously with nothing but innuendo and circumstantial evidence...and won. I was not convinced of a similar outcome for George Purvey...

George Purvey’s Solicitor had employed every trick in the book to prevent us from interviewing the man and searching through his property. Eventually time ran out and the Court was becoming impatient with the dilly-dallying, ordering the ‘paper’ be served on the man.

Because of the Covid continued infection we were reduced to five Dees from the Murder Squad floor. We requested an additional half-dozen Uniforms from the closest Police Station which could have been deemed over-zealousness on our part...but we wanted to get under the skin of our Suspect as quickly as possible. We figured this was the best way...at no time was the paired Coppers able to be controlled and supervised causing Purvey to begin tearing out what little hair he had as each pair descended onto every room, nick, and cranny of the premises.

The man’s anger was about to reach breaking point especially as Sophie and me began to examine every book on the extensive shelving in the Lounge Room. Purvey and his Solicitor requested they remain in the room as we fingered every volume and tome...this to me was significant as they did not request to accompany any of the coppers to other rooms of the house.

“Detectives? What are you looking for?” The Solicitor demanded. “If you are willing to tell us which book you consider important, then we maybe able to point it out for you...let’s not waste each other’s time, eh?”

I acknowledged his suggestion with a nod but continued on with our search.

I was surprised at how time fled when I glanced out of a window. It was almost dark...overtime again. This would not bode well as the overtime chit for the Uniforms would come out of the Murder Squad allowance. I called for all to stop their examinations stating that we would continue with the examination on the morrow...oh ten hundred hours which immediately caused Purvey to erupt in a series of expletives only calmed by quiet murmurs from his Solicitor.

He considered himself so important, a day's lost could cause Australia to sink into an economic depression that would be hard to break out of.

I knew in my gut we would not find anything to implicate the man. There was not a single Medical Book noticeable on the generous shelving. My gut told me these books had been tossed during the days we dilly-dallied on providing the Court Order. Certain books were missing from the shelving which was obvious to see...I would drill the guy tomorrow...until then I was hoping he had a restless and sleepless night!

CHAPTER TEN

“Joseph? Sophie? When you are settled, come into my Office...with a coffee for me”.

Sophie missed out as it was her shout. While she was away, I settled into one of the visitor chairs facing the Boss.

“Before Sophie returns...her application to transfer to the Missing Persons Unit has come through...next week if we can organise her shift in that time. I've already got the Building Manager keyed in for next weekend coming to move all of her gear so on Friday she will need to concentrate all her energy on packing her stuff. She'll be given half-a-dozen packing cases...that should be plenty”.

I shook my head as I had to admit I will miss her silly little ways...calling me Boss is one of those silly little ways that I will miss. Plus, her morning enthusiasm and smile that helped me over the morning blues...

“I'll be flying solo Boss...until another bright young spark joins me...”

“They’re rare at the moment Joe. The last Class out of the Academy did not have one cadet selecting the Murder Squad as their first choice...and the Superintendent of the Academy could not point out any student who showed enough promise to be with us...or for that matter, second or third spot...this is the first time that has happened during my tenure as Boss of the Squad...and there is no transfer applications on the horizon. Your style and leadership goes before you...”

“C’mon Boss!” I exploded.

It took me a moment to realise her jibe which I must admit was said with a smile...I’m slow this morning.

Sophie walked into the Office carrying three large coffee containers. The smell something that picked me up straight away. Sophs handed out her load to sit comfortably into a visitor’s chair beside me.

“Thanks for that Sophie”. The Boss offered. “This’ll do me good...um...Sophie? I’ve already told Joe...the Missing Persons Unit has accepted your transfer application...effective next Monday morning. I’ll come with you so call in here and we’ll walk down to the third floor together. Arrangements also made for all your stuff to be transferred over the weekend. Friday you stay in the Office to pack all your things...you know the drill...your phone remains with you but our Com Officer will change the IP address over to Missing Persons...saves you stuffing around with a new number...you may get calls associated with us and our Cases for some time which I doubt. If they still get through they’ll peter out after a short period”.

Sophie looked at me, patted my upper arm before the tears began.

“I’ll miss you Joe...and all your stupid ways...you stay in contact...please. Pop in to see me at home occasionally, will you. Without your guidance, friendship and care I doubt I would have made it this far...thank you, Boss...”

For the first time the nametag did not bother me as I realised it was a statement of love and respect. I nodded, my throat restricting...

“Right...to other business. You may as well stay Sophie...um...the Nightshift guys want us to take over a horrible Home Invasion Case that they dealt with early this morning. They suggest in partnership with them. They are sure it is a case of mistaken identity as the tenants had only been in the premises for no more than a month. They want us to chase out the previous tenants whom they think were the real targets...there were drugs involved that is why those tenants were chucked out...the whole street knew the house as a drug joint...”

“Don’t like those partnership arrangements Boss. On the two Cases I’ve been involved with them it hasn’t turned out well...”

“I thought you would say that. I put my foot down to say if we take fifty percent...we take it all...”

I nodded my assent.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Well girlie, this is a momentous occasion...our last day as a team. You haven’t lasted as long as either my first partner Marge Hendricks...just under ten years...or Shelley Shield who was my partner for slightly longer...”

“I have never met her but isn’t she married to the Head of the Forensic Pathology Labs?”

“Marge? Yeah...that’s right. I never thought of them as a happy married couple...never thought of them as attracted to one another but...time is their testament of longevity...with their triplets they are a fine couple. We share a meal together with their and my kids loving each other...as often as we can which is not that often”.

“A regular thing?”

“Sorry?”

“Those times you share...are they are regular thing?”

I had a funny feeling this was not going in the right direction.

“Not regular...I guess I might see my second partner Shelley Shields who is married to a Sergeant out of the Liverpool District Area around once a month...or every six weeks. They...um...they had a problem falling pregnant and she so wanted kids...lost six...seven in the first trimester all the while working with me. They spent a small fortune and embarrassing moments on IVF procedures...they worked but the bubs wanted out during the first trimester in most cases. They adopted a brother and sister a couple of months old. I don’t see her as much as I would like but with this job...” I left the sentence hanging.

“I’ll miss you Joe. You know that”.

“Just drop in with that MG you have finished...the latest one with a small V8 and supercharger...take me for a ride...”

“That’s a Healey Six Joe...but yeah...I’ll take you up on that...when the vehicle is finished and I get a roadworthy and registration certificate for it...” She smiled. Every time she talked about one of her MG or Healey ‘fixes’, she beamed...

“That’s strange...” I commented as we slowly pulled up at the driveway entrance into the death house. Two Forensic Trace vans were tail to front in the driveway. I reckon they’d be here all day...or possibly longer.

“What Joe?”

“An Unmarked is on duty across the street. See it? Usually, it’s a Paddy Wagon or a Highway Patrol vehicle with all of its decals on display which you cannot miss as coppers on guard...I wonder why...and yeah...there’s one further up the street on our side and another parked on the opposite side of the road. I guess the only reason is they expect trouble of some kind...why weren’t we informed of the arrangement? That would have been protocol”.

There was a tap on the window. Neither of us had noticed the man’s approach. I turned to see an ID Card held up against my window. I lowered the glass to have a tall man bend to look at me.

“Detectives?” A menacing tone.

I nodded. I immediately thought that the Home Invasion gone wrong that we had inherited was not as it seems. Another vehicle further up the street was where our sudden apparition had come from.

“What are three Unmarked Police vehicles doing guarding a simple Home Invasion gone wrong...and I noticed from your ID Card that you are from the Gang Related Crime Unit. Arrh...the Murder Squad day shift guys have taken control of this situation...so what are you guys doing here?”

“You can’t stay here...you cannot view the inside of the death house and we respectfully ask you to piss off...as quickly as possible”.

I opened my passenger side door with some force, forcing the Detective to step backwards. I alighted quickly to stand tall glaring at my opposite number in the GRCU. I could hear Sophie talking quietly on her mobile. In a loud whisper she began to call my name, getting

increasingly louder the longer I ignored her. I knew who she had rung. I bent down to take the mobile from her outstretched hand.

“Yes Boss?”

“If you are standing beside your vehicle, get back inside and get the hell out of there...you’ve lost the case! Come straight back into the Office. Hear me Joe? That is an order that can’t be ignored”.

“But...but Boss...”

“Do as I say Joe. That is an order!”

I slumped back into my seat, slammed the passenger door shut and gestured for Sophs to high tail it out of there.

“This is the quickest we’ve ever lost a case...what, we pick it up no more than an hour ago, now we’ve lost it...a sudden death!”

Sophie slowly drove the length of the street as I sat fuming. We both made a point of staring into the Unmarked parked further up the street as we passed...we couldn’t see a thing through the darkened windows...our childish reaction was no skin off our noses...or theirs so it seemed.

“The Real Estate place that looks after this place...it’s in the Gladesville Shopping precinct. Get back onto Victoria Road...” That was a long shot but I was willing to back it.

“Joe...”

“Just do as I say, Sophs...just drive up to Victoria Road and head for the Gladesville Shopping Precinct...there’s a parking area in behind a run of shops”.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I showed the Manager my ID Card. Sophie did the same.

“What can we do for you Detectives? Looking to rent a property around here. Sorry, but rental properties are scarcer than hen’s teeth...we have none to spare on our books”.

“The property at ninety-three Waterview Parade? You recently let that property...about a month ago. Two weeks ago, maybe more accurate. You let it to the Mezza family. Husband, wife, three kids and the parents of the wife...” All of this supplied as part of the new Murder Book that the Boss had organised for us.

The woman nodded.

“For how much per week?”

“I cannot disclose that information without a Court Order instructing me to divulge that information...go get that ‘paper’ and I may cooperate with you”. A tight smile to go with her information.

“They offered you more than the going rate...” I was flying by the seat of my pants. “When situations like this arise, don’t you ever think there is something funny going on. A normal family with both husband and wife working, cannot afford the increased cost that the Mezza family offered you...twice as much as other renters offered...how can a family who hardly speak English approach you with a rental offer you can’t afford...aiding and abetting the miscarriage of justice has a heavy penalty attached...” It was my turn with the tight smile.

She looked down at her shoe that she had poked out from her long skirt. Massaged the back of her neck.

“I’m sorry Detectives, I cannot help you any further...if you would leave these premises...” Another practised tight smile and steady glare our marching orders. She held open the outside door for us to scamper...a sweeter smile as we stepped through the doorway onto the Council path.

After we had exited the premises I turned to Sophie.

“There’s more than decent coffee joint just across the road...I’m ready for a fix as we missed our normal this morning”.

We waited at a pedestrian crossing until the traffic stopped on the red light. Traffic was so dense there was little chance of crossing the main arterial road playing ‘chicken’ with the steady stream of traffic without the aid of the pedestrian crossing controlled by traffic lights. Settled at a small table at the front of the Café that gave us views across Victoria Road. I looked around at the busy little Café always amazed at the business these small establishments earned at odd hours.

“Shelley and I would always drop in when we were heading down Victoria Road towards the city...a good drop”.

“I’ll say one thing Joe...this is my last day with you but you sure are making it memorable...who do you expect to see going into that Real Estate Agent?”

“Mmm...don’t know...but it will be interesting to see who visits in the next hour, mmm?”

My Mobile rang softly. I knew who it was.

“Hello Boss...” Being a little smart arse...it was that time of the day.

“What part of coming straight back into the Office didn’t you understand?”

“Boss...we’re having our lunch break...”

“It’s only just gone eleven...where are you? I’ll lay a bet and say you are within sight of a Real Estate Agents’ shopfront in the Gladesville shopping strip...why? Because you have this funny feeling that the Real Estate Agent looks after a certain rental property that was shot up, two people killed with another in a critical condition early this morning. I’d say our illustrious Murder Detective sniffed a connection between the two...a financial scam going on between certain high paying tenants and a certain Real Estate Agent located in the middle of the Gladesville shopping strip...the coffee joint on the opposite side of Victoria Road serves a nice drop. When I was just a new-skin learning the job, me and my partner would often stop at that little Café...a nice drop...finish your toasties and coffee and get your arse back to the Office quick smart. I do not want to repeat myself. My Office. Thirty-five minutes”. She cut the call.

“The Boss is angry...”

“I could hear her...she was as mad as a cut snake...”

“I think we should organise our coffees and toasties to go...”

“Good idea Joe”.

We waited patiently to be served with both of us selecting a ham and tomato ‘toastie’ to go with our coffee.

“How’s your boarders going? No troubles?” I asked to fill in the silence.

“Yeah, I wish!”

“Oh?” I asked as I peered out at the shopfront window across the street to the Agency. I turned to look at my young partner. I tried to think what her best attributes were in our partnership...she kept me young sprung to my mind...yeah, that’s what it was...

“The two had an almighty squabble...fisticuffs and all...a stupid situation now exists...you can cut the air with a knife when the two are in the same room...but...but neither are prepared to move out. I don’t know what to do...”

“It’s your choice...you are the boss. A decision that many of us must make in our lives. You’ll think of something or both will give notice of them leaving at the same time...you never know”.

She nodded, looked up at me.

“Here’s hoping, eh?”

Time drifted slowly as we sat and had ‘fill-ups’ while we sat waiting...for something to occur. I was hoping certain Plainclothes personnel would enter the Agency...

“Joe? We’ve had two coffee ‘fill-ups’ and finished eating whatever. Why are we still here when the Boss wanted us back in the Office an hour ago?”

I nodded.

“Seems like my gut feeling was wrong for once...”

“That’s another thing you’ve taught me...to trust that gut reaction. Nine times out of ten it is right...”

“Yep...this is one of those one out of ten times that is wrong. C’mon, let’s go and entertain the Boss”.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“What did you find out, Joe?” The Boss asked calmly.

“I expected one of the GRCU lads to pay the Real Estate Office a visit. As soon as we left the premises the woman was on the phone”.

“You reckon it would be one of the GRCU guys?”

“Yeah...but who-ever didn't bite...”

“Sorry I was so tough on you Joe but the Assistant Manager GRCU was sitting where you are now sitting. There's something underhand going on...sure two people died of bullet wounds this morning with another touch and go. They were quick to hand the Case over to us but I think when they learnt the identity of the victims, shit street happened...but I don't know what...the Mezza family is a new identity in town wanting a share in the lucrative drugs trade for the inner northwest of Sydney. They have not impressed certain people of their intrusion”.

“A scam on tenancy rental figures seems a little frail...but I can't think of anything else...but it is something that some senior Officer in GRCU don't want us to know...even when there may be three sudden deaths which should automatically involve us!”

“Mmm...I'll make some discrete enquiries and I'll keep you in the loop. Please don't jeopardise your career by sniffing around as you normally try to do...and if you have an idea let me know before you bash your way through that China Shop. Okay? Out of my Office while I try to contact old snitches of mine for the latest news in drug distribution and selling...”.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I watched Sophie walk out of the Office after giving and taking hugs all round. She sniffled as she left the floor...I wondered how she'd cope in her choice of fitting into the Missing Persons Branch. It is true that they had a more ordered and orderly life when compared to the Murder Squad life...but that 'charge' that you get when you are on the hunt cannot be compared or fabricated in any other Branch of the NSW Police Force.

The following week was quiet...the additional day searching through the Purvey home yielded nothing but suspicions and my gut feelings being chastised for not being right for once! I had to sooner or later bite the bullet and charged the man with first degree murder...or leave him alone and that was still not an option to me. The man and his Solicitor sat comfortably as we again searched every room of the place. I had no idea what we were looking for but whatever it was, both men treated it with patient smiles as though they knew the truth of JFK's assassination!

I thanked all the Uniforms for their help. They dispersed rapidly leaving me fuming standing on the kerb beside my Unmarked. I slapped my thigh several times knowing this Case was going to hell on a packhorse...it would sit on the corner of my desk as an 'Unsolved' mocking my pathetic attempts at solving the murder.

My Mobile buzzed then began its boring chimes. It was the Boss.

"You still at the Purvey home?"

"Yes Boss...just finished". My voice said it all.

"Nothing huh?"

"Not a fucking thing but growing suspicion that the man is guilty...with nothing to prove it with two volumes of evidence showing the man is a cad...a wife-beater and more..."

"Leave it lie for a bit...a man has been killed on his front lawn...Number Twelve Boomerang Close Top Ryde. Local people there with Forensic Trace and Pathology on their way. Yours Joe".

I had the feeling that the Boss was giving me this Case to soften the ineffectual investigation of Ronnie Purvey's sudden death. I could be right...then again I may not be!

I climbed out of my Unmarked and lifted the police tape to walk under. Signed into the Crime Scene Register, commenting that the day was getting hotter. I walked up to Christina Rouse who was usually Wzerlic's Number Two.

"You're on your own, huh? Out of the shadow of Bree Wzerlic. She's losing a few Assistants huh. Congratulations. What're we got, beautiful?"

She was a stunning woman even with half her face covered by a surgical mask. Big blue eyes that killed me every time. She had been Wzerlic' Number Two for ages...she was now on her own having passed all her medical and autopsy protocols with flying colours.

“Bloody hell, Joe. Like you, we just got here...stay away from the vic and the entire front yard. It is yet to be examined...nothing more to relate”. A cut-off smile as she wiggled into a bio-suit. Looking at me continuously as she squirmed into the soft blue outfit. I reckon she was daring me to do the same...that to me was not an option. I looked around at the gathering crowd of people wondering not for the first time what they expected to happen...or to see. Nothing of importance as the wheels at this stage turned very slow...everyone having a role to play excluding me.

I replaced my spectacles with my prescription sunglasses and headed towards the house opposite the crime scene. No one was at home as was the situation with most of the houses up and down the street. I wandered back to the crime scene in the front yard of a neat and tidy house. The front yard a burst of spring flowers.

“The Vic was dragged from his vehicle up under that bush where you would hardly spy his body. I think our Vic was killed late yesterday afternoon as a Liver temp indicates a steady lowering of body temp. I’m not willing to give you a cause of death at the moment...suffice to say his neck was broken...”

“Nothing else?”

“What do you want? A picture of our Perp...no can do...we may get an idea of who our Perp is as there are two CCTV cameras positioned on either side of the house. Our Vic’s name? Perry Montrose...he works at the Children’s Hospital...Westmead...I’ll take his ride any day of the week. Your old partner...she’s left you, huh? Flying solo are we? That would be a change for you going on whispers from the bleachers...”

I was leaning against the railing that led up the steps onto a front veranda. I looked across at his ‘wheels’ parked in the driveway hard up against the garage door. A light blue MGB in showroom nick. I scratched my head trying to think of what may have gone down.

‘He was going to open the double ‘roller door’ of the garage. I figured he’d never leave his pride and joy out in the open overnight...yeah, he was taken from behind as he went to lift the garage door...neat...our Vic may have never known who his Assailant was as the approach would have been quick...and silent’.

“Can I get into the house?” I asked as I roused myself into the present.

“Arrh...check with Forensic Trace. I think they’re still working the scene”.

I nodded in response as I turned to step up the front steps onto the veranda. Instead of going inside I was stopped from doing so by my lovely wife dressed in a full bio-suit.

“Sorry, Detective. I can’t let you go inside at the moment...” She commanded in a serious voice. She smiled at me as she tippy toed to kiss me on the cheek.

“At least our Vic is not covered in blood. A neat form of kill...the Perp doesn’t like blood”. My wife playing the Detective role. She did that a lot at murder scenes where I was the Leading Dee. I smiled at her suppositions. I nodded, not really thinking of what my wife had just said.

“Has anyone checked the Hard Drive of the security cameras?”

“Not yet, no. We’ll let you know if there is anything on the Hard Drive when we get to it. Go and grab a bottle of water from our Ute and sit on that outside settee for a while. We shouldn’t be too long...better still, go around the back as there is a lovely outdoor BBQ setting to sit under the shade away from the prying eyes of members of the public...and the media if they have turned up yet”.

“Yeah...good idea...” I responded as I stood. Dialling in Sophie’s number as I walked leisurely around to the back yard.

“Perry Montrose...know him?”

“Yes...and a warm hello to you too. Arrh...Perry is the Australian MG Sports Car Club Treasurer...or was. He drives a pale blue ‘B’ in showroom condition. He has offered to buy the ‘Healey Six’ that I have almost finished. Just waiting on Roadworthy and Rego papers...it’ll be good as I’ve just purchased an ‘E’ Type Jag...a straight six...the engine is missing...the seats, the wheels too but the undercarriage is there...the shell is roughed up so it will be a more severe labour of love than the MGs were...”

“You’ve said that about the ‘A’, the ‘B’ and the Healey you’ve fixed up. The Jag will cost considerably more to fix up to showroom condition, won’t it?”

“Yeah...parts are scarce here in Australia so I’ll have to import a lot of stuff from England...time and money so I was pleased when Perry offered me top dollar for the ‘Healey Six’...”

“Umm...sorry to inform you but his body has just been found...killed some time last night...late yesterday afternoon after he knocked off from work I imagine. Taken from behind as he was about to lift his garage door up...dragged some way across the front lawn into a corner where there were several bushy plants...his body only discovered this morning...”

“Shit! He is a lovely bloke. Works at the Hospital...an Anaesthetist from memory...he wasn't married but had been in a long-term relationship which only ended a while ago...shit! He didn't deserve to die that way ...at least it was a sudden death I would imagine”.

“Yes...I doubt he felt much at all. Do you know the woman's name? His long term squeeze?” I asked as I sat on the steps in the shade.

“Geez...you're stretching it a bit, Joe. Um...the MG Owners' Club may have her listed...I'll ring you back...on the hunt again, eh?” There was a smile in her voice.

I nodded, a smile in response.

“The trouble with your Boarders? Worked it out?”

“Not yet...I'd say the only thing that will solve the situation is them murdering each other...”

“Don't wish that Sophs...Montrose's lady friend...can you get that for me?”

“I'll try. I'll ring you back”.

This was the second murder of a professional person from the Hospital...I wondered if there was a connection. A visit may prove profitable later in the day or tomorrow if nothing else comes up. I wrote a reminder to myself into the file notes on my very clever Smartphone to leave time in the coming days to pay the hospital a visit.

I was doing my usual trick of walking through the house one way then reversing my route to look at the same things but from a different perspective when my phone rang. It was Sophie.

“Her name is Petula Ramsey...a British subject who has been in Australia for some years. She and Perry Montrose seemed to have hooked up not long after she arrived in Sydney...been together since...except for the last month or two when they separated...nothing untoward so my friend says...everything was rosy about the split”.

“What does she do for a job?”

“A Physiotherapist...”

“Her current address?”

“Sorry...she has her address listed at Perry Montrose's place...”

“Mmm...she may have changed her License details to her new address...thanks. I’ll follow it through”.

I went to stand as my name was called.

“Detective? You’d better have a look at this...” One of the Forensic Trace people requested. I followed her back into the house to stand beside her in the Lounge Room. Several bio-suited persons were standing watching the TV.

“Play it in slowmo, my love”. I suggested to my wife.

I watched as Montrose drove the MG carefully into his driveway and up close to the garage door. He slipped out of the low-slung sports car and stood at the garage door ready to unlock it. A figure appeared, walking up quickly behind the tall man. Our Perp hit the taller man on the right-hand side of the neck then viciously grabbed Perry’s head and twisted it savagely. Perry collapsed being caught by the assailant who dragged the limp figure over the front lawn to a far corner of the property line. The way he was handling the Deceased could mean the Vic was a little heavy for our Perp. He appeared to check the status of our Vic before heading towards the driveway entrance. Several moments later there was a glimpse of a sedan slowly passing the property.

“Anyone get that vehicle make?” I asked.

“Yeah...an early model Toyota Corolla Hatchback...I used to own one”.

I nodded as I also thought of it being a Toyota Seca Hatchback. It was a start.

“Can you play it again?” I requested. “Can you toggle the camera lens to get in closer to our Perp when he first appears...I think there is a good side view of his face. He was extremely careful to keep his head bowed as he entered and exited the property...we may get lucky with another silhouette shot...”

I scanned each image carefully...repeating the process several more times. I requested Tellie who was the Lead Forensic Trace Officer to split screen the images of both cameras simultaneously. There was something not right in the whole process from the moment our perp broke Montrose’s neck to the Perp dragging the inert body over to a bushy corner of the front yard. Sure, as it turns out, this action ensured the body wasn’t discovered until mid-morning of the following day...but...

I spun around several times hoping that the images gave me a clue into what was worrying me...I didn’t have a partner so I began to murmur softly to myself.

'What's wrong with this process, Joe?' I asked myself. 'Our Perp is about fifteen centimetres shorter than our Victim. He had trouble gripping Montrose's head to snap his neck...if our Vic was that much shorter...about the same height as our Perp, would the same method used to kill Ronnie Purvey be used to kill Perry Montrose? Are the two homicides linked? Maybe...Montrose had stooped to place the key in the garage door to unlock it. Wouldn't that have been a more satisfactory method of hiding the body than to place it into a bushy corner of the front yard...placing the body in the garage and throwing away the keys...into the bushy corner of the front yard...' I nodded to myself. That made more sense to me...so what?

I replayed the tape as a 'split screen image...and again.

"Joe? We'll keep the master tape but we will transfer two copies of each camera's images to your Murder File...you can play it as many times as you like...in the privacy of your Office. We want you out of here as we have not done a trace analysis of this area...okay?" Tellie my wife as the Lead FO requested forcefully with authority.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"I don't like saying a person is irreplaceable, but in Veronica Purvey's case...I'm afraid she is. It takes several years for an operating theatre team to come together successfully and without Veronica, that team is tethered...um...they'd not run like a well-oiled component until the new bod bedded in...every surgical team has the same problem when a member dies...or leaves. The Surgeon relies on the rest of the team for a surgical success".

"Would that team also include an Anaesthetist?"

"Why do you ask Detective? Yes, they also are a rare breed...we are always having to call in other chaps from different hospitals but again, an Anaesthetist who has worked as a member of an operating theatre team for several years is also hard to replace successfully..."

"Perry Montrose...his body was found this morning...he had his neck broken...dragged into a bushy front corner of his property..."

The man frowned, ran his hands down his face and sat back in his chair.

"Oh! Dear God..." He leant forward to rest his elbows on his desk hiding his face with his hands. He took a deep breath. "What happened?" A muffled question that I hardly picked up.

“What little we know at present is that the man was a targeted attack...no question about it. Would you know of any person who would want Montrose dead?”

“...and Veronica Purvey too...no Detective! Both were well liked by all their colleagues here at the Hospital. I cannot vouch for personal friends outside the Hospital atmosphere”.

“I’ll need to interview all members of that Operating Team you mentioned over the next couple of days...”

“Yes...yes of course...I’ll organise something so that they are all available for you. I’ll ring you...this is terrible. Both Veronica, Robyn, and now Perry...this is terrible...Perry’s long-term partner Petula Ramsey works here. You’ll need to interview her I suspect...yes? I’ll ring through to see if she is on deck for you...and...this is terrible...yes, I’ll see if Petty is available, yes?”

The man was close to tears and I imagined that he would shed a few after I left his Office. A rare breed, a Boss who cares deeply about his staff. I would imagine he would know every person...several hundred I would imagine by their first name who worked at this Hospital...and treat them all as friends...but something wasn’t right. The man had diffused any thought of us interviewing his subordinates, instead turning our attention to the former live-in love of our Deceased.

I noted that fact into my iPad.

He had mentioned Robyn...I didn’t know who she was. Perhaps an older person who retired...I didn’t know and I deleted her name from my mind instead of asking for a clarification from the CEO.

He had allowed me to use the small Conference Room attached to his Office. A doorway that led into his Office and another that led onto the wide passageway; one of many that led through the labyrinthian interior of the hospital.

There was a gentle knock before she opened the outside door. She straightened, brushing down her uniform as I gestured for her to sit opposite me...our feet almost touching. I did not want a table interfering with the ease that I was trying to create and maintain.

She was around one seventy centimetres tall, wide hipped, smallish breasts. Shocking red hair that reminded me of my wife’s fuzz always held in check with a large elastic band. Ramsey held hers in check with a green ribbon which was the colour of her eyes. Freckles across the bridge of her nose and across her upper cheeks. Just a dash of eye make-up a frugal attempt at womanhood. Early thirties perhaps...

“Thank you for interrupting your busy schedule to see me...Mz...yes...Mz Ramsey”. I began...

“Did I have a choice? What is this all about?” She demanded. One who was used to leading. Not a Shrinking Violet that was for sure! There was a slight brogue to her softly spoken English. I wasn’t experienced enough to place that slight accent...it could have been anywhere across the length or breadth of Great Britain, Ireland, South Africa or even New Zealand!

“Yes...I am Detective Joseph Lind from the Murder Squad...” I had my credentials out on the table for her to see. “I am the lead Detective on a homicide committed yesterday late afternoon...where were you between five and six-thirty yesterday afternoon?”

“Who died? Killed?” She astonishingly responded. A surprised look on her face.

I knew this moment would come. I was not going to enjoy it. I steeled myself waiting for her reaction.

“Perry Montrose...a deliberate attack...”

She looked at me...through me. She stiffened, not blinking, or moving a muscle. I expected a wail of a banshee at any moment...instead there was...nothing.

“How?” She eventually asked, her body though was still set in concrete. She was stiff from head to foot.

“He had his neck broken...a targeted attack”. I repeated looking closely at her.

“So, he would not have felt anything...no?”

“No...I doubt it...” I was still expecting a banshee wail, being disappointed that it wasn’t coming. “How long have you been in Australia?” I asked hoping to ease her down to her normal relaxed self...

“Four...almost five years now. Joined this Hospital by responding to an advertisement in our local Health Department Magazine in Manchester...Northern England. I thought of giving it a try as I was sick and tired of the cold, wet conditions in Northern England...here you feel alive just because of the splendid weather...when it rains it rains. Not that rain that is one step above a heavy mist. When it’s hot it is comfortable...and the sky is a different hue than back

home...the wide blue umbrella makes you smile, lucky to be alive...um...Perry. Poor Perry...ummm...who?"

I ignored her question...answering with a question of my own.

"You only recently broke off the relationship with him..."

"Am I a suspect? I guess I am...we met only weeks after I began work here...I was staying in the Nurse's Quarters attached to the Hospital...there was no accommodation outside and what little there was, was excessively high in rent...and the relationship ending was by mutual consent...we now are better friends than we were while living together...don't get me wrong, he was always a pure gentleman no matter what...we go out at least once a fortnight...an enjoyable night with no strings attached...we're just friends. But I guess if I ever got itchy, I would call on Perry...now...". She shrug her shoulders.

"So how did you meet up?"

"Um...gee, it seems so long ago now..." She looked up at the ceiling smiling and giving a harrumph. "He...um...he dislocated his shoulder while he was out running...tripped over his own feet so he always said...I was massaging his shoulder...you get to talk while you're doing your work...one thing led to another and within three weeks I was living at his place...no...no hanky-panky...it's a big house...four bedrooms with a 'servant's quarters' as he would always joke...he was a tragic Anglophile...just look at his choice of cars...and his other car is a Rover...early model V8. I preferred to ride in that than the Sports Car in which you felt every bump in the road. I'd say within six weeks we were living together sharing the same bed...um...it wasn't love...like deep love but it satisfied both of our needs...you know, for nigh on three years. Then I just packed my three suitcases and walked out! No bitchy scenes or tempers...or bad words. It was as if we had agreed to the split without saying a word...it was a bit...strange, thinking about it now..."

"And now?"

"I share a Unit near here...I really don't need my car but it is a token of independence for me...two Nursing Sisters and an Admin Clerk...am enjoying it. No need for theatrics when Perry and I had sex..."

I thought that was a weird thing to say. I said as much.

"Yeah, well. You men so want us to let you know...every time...that you are a good lover and need that constant reassurance...so much insecurity with Australian males...you look at the carry-ons when a goal is scored, a try occurs or someone hits a six...like a pack of rabid

homosexuals the way they go on...and they all share the same cool down pool...or spa...all in together..."

I ignored her rave wondering why it was important for her to mention such a thing...perhaps her relationship with Perry Montrose wasn't as wonderful as the way she conveys her feelings. Perhaps she did have cause to strike out against him. I needed to delve deeper into the relationship having it confirmed either way by at least two persons who knew them...I wrote a note to myself to ring Sophie for her opinion on the relationship.

"No scenes...no bad feelings?"

"No...in fact we are better friends now than when we were a 'couple' if you know what I mean...we would ring one another up if we felt like a meal...I enjoyed those outings with him more than a night out with my flatmates". She sucked in air as I thought she was about to break that wall of resistance. "Nothing more? Then I have a busy afternoon...what's left of it!"

She stood and walked briskly to the door. I thought then her back view was similar in a lot of ways to Montrose's killer on that CCTV coverage. She had the muscle and knowledge to be able to kill her former lover...I wondered...

It was then that I remembered she had not answered the question on her whereabouts at the time of Montrose's death.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Before interviewing anyone else, I speed-dialled Sophie's mobile number.

"Joe...my Boss is going to get his back up with your calls...what do you want this time?"

"Um...the relationship between Perry Montrose and Petula Ramsey...how best would you describe it?"

"Okay...I was not that close to them...um...Celeste Irwin...she's Perry's cousin I think. The three of them were as thick as thieves at about every 'meet'...once a month. I think she would be a better person to speak to than me...my opinion? They seemed more like friends than lovers...I very much doubt sex was a part of their relationship. Perhaps Perry was impotent...I don't rightly know..."

“Have you got Irwin’s number?”

“No, I haven’t but the Club I’m sure would have it...I’ll ring you back”.

There was a light knock and the door swung open at my order for the person to enter. I didn’t have a clue who it was. He introduced himself as he shook my hand. I sat gesturing him to the chair opposite me.

“Doctor Hewson...Barwon Chadwick Hewson...I’m Barty to most...um...” He glanced about the room uncomfortably as though he didn’t know what he was supposed to say next.

I nodded as I eased myself back into the comfortable chair letting the moment drag as I took him in. Above average height at around 178cms. Receding hairline with a tinge of grey at the temples. He kept his hair trimmed...a fortnightly investment I thought. Clean shaven. A fluorescent light tan giving him a slightly anaemic look. Light blue eyes that seemed to take in everything worth noting. Long fingers with short nails as though he had just finished at a Manicurist. Surprisingly, Jeans low slung on his hips with a studded belt that went out in the Sixties. High top runners that I used to wear until I was told a T-Shirt and jeans were not what one must wear to be a successful Murder Dee which made me give up the suave comfortable ‘easy’ style for a suit and tie...with Police Force Safety Boots with elastic sides and steel toe.

“I am Detective Joseph Lind of the Murder Squad, the Lead Detective into the killing of Perry Montrose sometime yesterday evening and Veronica Purvey a week ago...you know of both incidents?”

“Yes...the news has spread through the Hospital like wildfire...sad, very sad. Both were invaluable members of my Operating Theatre team. It will take some time to select and then to train up their replacements...”

“It can be done?”

“Yes...yes, of course. A necessity if I want to continue to conduct surgery here at this Hospital. During the Covid Restrictions, operations were organised on a priority system...in a sense we were playing God. Whenever one of the team was restricted to ‘house duties’...that is what we labelled their absence and infection, we had to draw on an ever-increasing circle of available people who could fill those vacant shoes...not satisfactory but it was the only way we could save some patients. Because of that, we were able to deduce satisfactory persons who would fit well into the team without a lot of training. The whole Covid thing had us playing with peoples’ lives...and we still do. The Infection hasn’t died just because it was yesterday’s news. Others died because we couldn’t operate on them in time to save them. Yes,

a very problematic period. Again, we will need to cast our net wide to temporarily replace those two...a terrible problem. It is said both were killed...murdered...is that correct?"

I nodded then remembered I was taping this conversation.

"Um...yes. Would you know of anyone who would want these two members of your team killed. An irate patient..." I held my arms akimbo. "A professional person who felt he had been overlooked in being selected for your team...anyone?"

He sat slightly rocking his body in a non-rocking chair. Pursed his lips, squeezing them more with finger and thumb. He shook his head several times before replying/

"Barking up the wrong tree Detective...someone close to both I would have thought..."

"We are sure both your people were the subject of a targeted attack...by the same person".

"Oh, Dear God! I wouldn't have thought either were in a relationship with each other...but you never know, do you? A secret lover of both...a cockcold husband in payback mood...the Hospital can be a haven of intrigue and secret relationships...but no, I cannot think someone was out to ruin my reputation...I am sure that the two deaths are linked though...it would be a smaller number of suspects, wouldn't it?"

I frowned at that assessment and opinion. He was trying hard to release himself of any involvement in the two sudden deaths. It was something that had not entered my head. I needed to chase out that angle. Mz Ramsey had said the relationship between she and Montrose had ended in an amiable separation...months ago...I needed to check that out and to see if anyone else had filled the vacancy left by her leaving Montrose's bed. It struck me then that the 'break-up' was staged...or was my imagination way off centre?

My Mobile spat out its buzz and vibration as it jittered across the table. I apologised for the interruption which offended the Doctor. His time was important to him and he hated being interrupted...me too!

"Sophs? Yep...do you know the number? That's a work number? Here at the Hospital...Personnel you think...ta...speak to you later. I again apologised to the Doctor. He responded with a nod though his eyes weren't as forgiving.

"Are you aware of any friendships between any of your team and anyone else at the Hospital? Close friendship or deeper? A romantic attachment?"

“Arrh Doctor. You are asking a lot of this Surgeon. I’ll have to think a little harder over that quandary before I reply...um...if there is nothing else, I have an emergency op to attend to at the RPA...some of us will be transported by helicopter from here to Newtown...I’ll keep your questions in mind and ring you if anything surfaces”.

I watched him walk from the room. A picture of self-confidence, suaveness, and aplomb who knew his place in society...at the upper echelons. I needed to investigate the Doctor further...how I missed that partner standing beside me questioning my thoughts and suspicions.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I spent some time typing up my thoughts on the interviews I’d organised that afternoon. I was lounging back in the chair tempted to place my feet up on the table to read through my ‘shorthand’ notes that I had scribbled on a yellow legal pad.

“Well...it must have gone well”. The CEO of the Hospital remarked with a smile. I did not hear him come into the room from the inner door from his ‘cavern’.

“Mmm...” I straightened up in the chair. “Nothing sticking out...err...how many people in an Operating Theatre during an operation?”

“Depends...on the complexity of the operation and the scheduled time it takes...the longer it takes the more people...starts off at around six for a simple operation and the whims of the Surgeon...it can get so crowded it is hard to move around but that is the exception...how did you go?”

“There are two homicides...the common factor is Doctor Hewson and his surgical team. I have a few more persons to interview from that Operating Theatre Team...maybe tomorrow”.

I stood, closing down my Laptop, shuffling the papers into a neat pile to place in a folder that I inserted into the Laptop Bag. It was a habit on which I was more and more relying. Filling a yellow writing pad with rushed thoughts as I was interviewing someone. Not really necessary so some would say as every word had been recorded on the Laptop with Mister Microsoft typing out the verbal communication and placing it into a folio which to me was magical...and it saved heaps of time. Sometimes there was a little hiccup which had more to do with Orstrailyan Strine than anything else. I always responded that the squiggles were more sudden thoughts of the way the interviewee responded, sat, expressed, or didn’t respond

to a question of mine. Things that could be swallowed and forgotten by time and pressure of the Case...or the introduction of another Case! If Sophie or Shelley had been sitting in on the interview, they would always pick up those silly points that could mean a lot...or simply nothing.

I walked somewhat despondently out to my Unmarked feeling I had achieved little...again having Sophie...or Shelley beside me would have ensured my attitude was more joyous at an afternoon well spent...on my own, I wasn't as sure.

I settled back into the driver's seat of my Unmarked. Place my laptop in the passenger side footwell. Rang the number that Sophie had given me.

"Good afternoon. Is that Celeste Irwin?" I asked.

"Yes. Who is asking...and how did you get this number?"

"Umm...sorry. I'm Detective Joseph Lind of the Murder Squad. I am Lead Detective into the death of Perry Montrose. We think he was killed yesterday late afternoon but his body was not discovered until this morning...are you his close cousin?"

"So sad...yes, I am his cousin. We have been close since baby times...yes, my mother rang me this morning. I was going to skip work for a couple of days but sitting with my mother with both of us sniffing into over-wet tissues was not something I wanted to look forward to. You want to ask me some questions, yes?"

"Yes...we obtained your number from the MG Club...I hope you will forgive my subterfuge...aarrh... I would prefer a sit-down face-to-face interview. I'm at the Hospital now...or just leaving...but I can retrace my steps to the CEO's Conference Room if that is alright with you?"

"Oh! Yeah...nah. We have some privacy rooms here in the Personnel Unit. Third floor directly below the Chief's Office suite...can you find us?"

"Yes, no worries. I'll be there in fifteen hopefully".

I grabbed my Laptop again and sprinted through the large Entry Lobby. Punched for the Lift too many times according to some people standing with me. Got out on the Third wondering where in hell I was supposed to go now. Followed a green line on the floor to the door marked 'Personnel. Authorised persons only'. Went through thinking I was an authorised person though I didn't know who authorised me.

After identifying myself at a lengthy counter, I was shown to a small Interview Room Number One...I had no idea why it was thus named as it was the only Interview Room so I learnt as I exited the area.

Celeste Irwin was a middle-aged woman who was losing the battle with middle-aged spread though she had a jovial look about her. I needed to check Montrose's age if the fact that they were friends from babies was correct.

We swapped germs in a warm handshake as I noticed a box of tissues and a small waste bin already overflowing with used tissues...I was turned off straight away.

"Um...Perry Montrose was your cousin..."

"Yes...on our mothers' side...sisters".

"How would you describe the relationship Perry had with Petula Ramsey?"

"Arrh..." She pursed her lips, gave a shrug of indifference. "Arrh...they had a good thing going...they were close...had the same dorky sense of humour...both loved the little sports cars which they both drove in time trials and hill climbs on the monthly Meets...nothing that may damage the cars as they had spent a bit purchasing them...Perry was Treasurer of the Club but had made it public he was standing down from that esteem service when the next AGM took place...later this year...in July I think. It would have been a pity as he loved being involved in the Club...and there were little complaints against him in that role...he was very popular with all the other members..."

"So why was he standing down from that position?"

"He was being called on as an Anaesthetist both here at the private Hospital and other Hospitals around Sydney...he had an extremely good reputation as a Number One gasman".

"And Petula?"

"Petty...in name only". She offered. Someone else had referred to her as Petty but I couldn't think who it was.

"Umm...so Petty had her own sports car?"

"Oh yes. They were so competitive...Petty purchased her 'Bug eyed' Sprite several years ago. They had a good relationship...was always good for a laugh..."

“So why did they separate? Was Perry seeing someone else?”

“Yes...I think so”.

“Who?”

“I have no idea but if you are suggesting that Petty killed Perry because of him finding another love, then you are so far out in the Universe, its hardly worth talking about. Yes, Petty said she could not share him...she wasn't into threesomes...so they agreed to split before their love and respect for each other faded...they're still great friends...sorry...were...Petty would be devastated”.

I didn't get that opinion when I had interviewed her earlier.

“Could you think of anyone who would want to harm your cousin...kill him?”

“I've thought about it...” She stated. “But I have no idea...truly...”

We spoke about different things for another thirty minutes before I called it quits. There was nothing else...

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I started up the engine and turned up the a/c as it was stuffy inside the vehicle. I breathed deeply thinking of the past couple of hours. A ‘throwaway’ comment from Doctor Hewson crossed my mind... *'you never know who is in a relationship'*. The hospital environment would be a hot bed of intrigue and secret sex...a one-off situation or one where the relationship was firming...my mobile rang breaking that line of thought. I plugged it into the ‘dock’ and placed the caller through the radio speakers of the Unmarked. It was Tellie.

“Joe?” She sounded upset.

“What's up?” I asked quickly. “Is everything alright...one of the girls...Danni in Melbourne...”

“Joe!” She shouted over me. “Arrh...AU2...the girls thought she was dead...I confirmed it as there was no heartbeat...sorry Joe...”

AU2 was dead! How can that be? She'd be no more than...jeez...fourteen or fifteen years of age. Pure bred Kelpies were known to live much longer than that!

“Where was she...where did the girls find her?”

“She was lying on that piece of cardboard that she always sleeps on during the day...underneath the caravan. I'd say her heart gave up the ghost...the girls have started digging her a hole beside where you buried AU...you okay?”

No, I wasn't...she was too young to die...a sudden death with no tell-tails...if we'd known we could have taken her to the Vet...she'd be still alive...it was as if Tellie could read my thoughts.

“Joe? She was old. She is around fifteen which is a long life for a dog...it's funny but Mo and Po knew something was up...they're walking around with their tail and head down, growling softly...they know. Will you be home soon? If you will be late I'll have to stop the girls from trying to bury her...you'd want to be here for that, wouldn't you?”

“Yeah...no problems. I'm at Westmead Kids' Hospital...just finished...yeah, I'll come straight home to help with the girls...about an hour depending on the traffic. I'll ring the Office to let them know I won't go in just to knock off...yeah...I'm okay...see you soon...AU2 dead...”. I repeated to no-one as I broke the connection...I sat there in silence...stiff...unmoving...my mind empty of thoughts...

I wasn't and after I had terminated the call, the sobs came easily. I rested my forehead on the top of the steering wheel and let the tears drop from my eyes. The deep sobs hurting my chest...this on top of Melisa still missing...

CHAPTER NINETEEN

After I had settled and driven home, I found that my three ladies had dug a suitable burial hole. By the look of Tellie, she had done the most work but that was challenged by my two daughters. They also had slid the cardboard that AU2 was 'sleeping' on and somehow managed to slide it into a large black plastic garbage bag.

I refrained from taking a last look at my faithful friend, instead going inside to change out of my business suit and shoes. If the truth be known I was close to tears and that last image of that beautiful dog would have set me off again.

I put on my 'gardening' clothes and helped place the dog in the bottom of the hole. With each shovel full of dirt placed over the dog, my heart almost exploded. I was left to finish the chore as Tellie and the two girls rushed inside to empty a box full of tissues.

"Dad, we should place a gravestone over the body..."

Tellie and I had this conversation when we had buried AU. I had even phoned a gravestone company to be told a price neither Tellie or I could afford at that time...so a gravestone was never erected.

Al and Sam would not take no for an answer so I promised to dig out a suitable alternative. A piece of one-twenty by ninety centimetre by ten millimetre thick fibrous cement boarding painted, having a heart bored through near the top and RIP engraved into the hard surface of the board with both AU and AU2 etched below. The whole thing fixed in place with several stainless-steel screws to the rear of the 'My Shed' above the dogs' last resting places. This appeased both girls and for several years they both ensured flowers were placed in an urn on top of the grave...I thought the idea would run out of steam after only days but was pleasantly surprised by their continued habit for several years until both left for their sabbatical tour of Europe with Danni...I promised to ensure flowers were always placed there...but I ran out of steam after only days had passed!

CHAPTER TWENTY

It felt queer. This was not the first time that I had attended the usual Monday morning Staff Meeting alone but it was the first where I was without a partner. I did not have to walk into the Boss's Office thinking that I had to select two empty chairs side by side.

As always, the women of the Murder Squad went first detailing their stubborn and non-progressive Cases. This bias had first been attributed to the late Peta Daniels who was by far the best female Detective we have ever had. Her death had been a surprise just weeks after her retirement date. She was sixty-eight...too young to suddenly drop dead...in a large Shopping Mall where stickybeak onlookers formed a ring of people as the Amboes valiantly tried to revive her...everything was tried but nothing seemed to work. She was declared dead as the Ambulance approached Westmead Private Hospital. Her sudden death had shaken all of us who had known her for years. Her long thought out plans were excitedly anticipated for her retirement...every Detective of the Squad and every retired Dee still alive had attended her funeral ...the 'drinks to her memory' was graced by all her colleagues, past and present.

I'd always felt that her suggestion to have the female colleagues be first at every Monday morning meeting to be sexist, discriminatory, and totally against the unsaid comments of my colleagues...I quickly lost that argument as she was several Grades above me at that time!

Angelica 'Angie' De Longo and her Grade Three Detective Catalina 'Tally' Evans looked awkward. Their one and only Case had ground to a halt much to their chagrin. They were up next to detail their Case. The death of one Robyn Hillary.

I had missed the two previous Staff meetings so their predicament was new to me.

"Boss? We've interviewed every household within cooee of the Vic's address, checked every security camera in the area for nil results except we think...stress *think* our Perp may be driving a red Toyota Corolla Hatchback". Something clicked on hearing that. "We've annoyed her family, her friends and work colleagues for nil result. Where once we were convinced it was a 'targeted hit', now we are leaning towards a random killing...we do not know in what direction we should now proceed..."

"Autopsy results?" A colleague murmured.

"Um...she was a thirty-year-old female in peak condition. She was a regular gym junkie...um...there was a large bruise in the middle of her back which suggests she was either kicked or belted causing her to fall hitting the concrete driveway hard which caused damage to her face...split her head open. Her neck was then broken and her body dragged into the open garage. The garage door was then lowered...we suspect she came home from work, had an automatic garage door opener as she drove straight into the garage. She alighted and walked back to her Letterbox where she obtained three letters...all bills. As she returned towards the garage we assume is the moment she was attacked".

"How long did she lay there before being discovered?"

"We think at least two...three days...a visitor noticed a blood trail coming from under the garage door. He had gone to her address after failing to rouse her for several days. He phoned us cops..."

"Who was this visitor?"

"Um...the Vic's part-time live-in lover and work colleague Darren Piazzi...yes, we've followed him up three ways to Sunday for nil results. According to her landline number and Mobile, she may have had several other lovers...we're not too sure on that point...and could be stretching the truth a little though her social calendar makes mine look as though it belongs to some spinster group...or a nun...she was a Social Butterfly who enjoyed life to the fullest".

My brain was spinning as the method for the killing was not dissimilar to the Vics of my two Cases. I shuffled my feet about before looking at De Longo, the more attractive of the two...and the one with more experience than her partner 'Tally' Evans by several years. De Longo had come from Highway Patrol as a direct transfer. Her reason was she had enough of being first on scene at some traffic accident where sudden death and mangled bodies were the norm. At least in the Murder Squad you had a chance to build up resistance to a bloodied body...and nothing on earth could replicate the gruesomeness and horror of a fatal car accident...even injuries suffered in a minor bingle were bloodier than a shot to the head!

"Where did she work?" I murmured not really wanting an answer...knowing what the answer would be.

"Um...Westmead Private Hospital. She was the Admission and Priority Planner for the Operating Teams..." I nodded. "She prepared the Operation Priority List which was always fluid as it depended on sudden cases that had to jump up the List...a heavy load".

"...and the live-in?" I added quietly.

"An Anaesthetist Assistant at the same Hospital though he also worked at the Kids Hospital nearby...across the road".

I glanced at the Boss and was about to request that the Case be given over to me because it would seem my Cases and this one were connected. Blind Freddy could see that!

"Joe?" The Boss began. "I can see a connection between the Cases so I want you Joe, to join Angie and Tally to combine your talents...I think we have a common Perp for all Cases...what would be the odds against it?" She glanced at me and held up her hand to stop me from complaining. "Joe? It will not be a precedent for you to join your two colleagues in a three-person team...you have been involved in similar arrangements several times before. The three of you get together and progress the Cases...now, Ballard and Tony? Your problem..."

I spun out on the rest of the meeting wondering how I was to handle two women I knew were both Delta Ladies...and with my outlook on feminism still firmly grounded in the Seventies and Eighties, there was bound to be fireworks!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

We spent the rest of that Monday and the following Tuesday and Wednesday getting to know one another, how each of us worked, whether we listened to ‘voices’, gut feelings and how each of us progressed a Case. Whether we gelled as Investigators remained to be seen but the petite ‘Tally’ Evans was closer than De Longo to my methods of investigation.

“You are very good at maintaining your Murder Books but I didn’t think it was permitted to write down thoughts and possible avenues of further research in the margins and across the pages of the Murder Book...” Tally Evans commented with a glint in her eye. Her first attempt at geeing me up...

“Mmmph! I’ve outlasted Abbey’s cranky asides, CB’s, Abbey again, Peta Daniels and now Denny Turner’s objections to that habit of mine...even the DPP Reps have had a go...to no avail as I still maintain the habit...too hard to break I reckon...and Turner always reads the scribbles before turning the page because quite frequently they offer pertinent information or ask appropriate questions...and it helps me remind myself of something I may have missed...in about every Case I have investigated. Marge Hendricks, my first long term partner would near pull out her hair at the habit but it made no difference...”

“She’s married to ‘Muscles’, the Forensic Pathology Head, isn’t she?”

“Yeah...who’d have thought...their triplets are energetic teenagers now causing Marge to still pull out her hair...but she loves the three of them. No-one saw her marriage to Muscles coming...not even me...and the triplets? A surprise for everyone”.

“What’s your gut telling you now that you’ve gone through our Murder Book Volumes, our scribbled yellow legal pad thoughts and queries?”

“I still have no idea...with Robyn Hillary’s death copying to some degree my two homicides, our Perp must be either a regular Hospital visitor who so easily dismantles any defences they may have at becoming friendly with a stranger...or works at the Hospital and was a colleague of those three that were killed...or...”

“But you have Perry Montrose in the middle. First Veronica Purvey, then Montrose and last...Robyn Hillary...”

“Not the last I don’t think...be ready for another homicide on similar grounds...our Perp hasn’t finished yet”.

“Your gut feeling?” De Longo asked.

I nodded as I tapped the side of my nose.

“Can we visit Robyn Hillary’s residence?” I requested with one of my best smiles.

“Um...it’s been close to a month since Trace and Pathology were there...I guess we still have police tape over the residence...front door...let me check with Forensic Trace to obtain the front door key...they can meet us there...”

“You said a month? Um...that means she was the first Vic before Ronnie Purvey’s death...anything in that?”

They both glanced at me as we left the Squad floor. Shaking their heads, they muttered something like *‘boxing at shadows in a darkened room’*. I smiled.

Both women weren’t chatty about their Case. I had the distinct feeling they were not going to open up to me unless I triggered some response in them.

“You see the news last Night? Those two Russian fighter planes forcing an American Surveillance Drone down into the Black Sea...in international waters...they’re running close to the wind, huh? What do you think of the Ukraine War, Joe?”

I couldn’t see what this had to do with any of our Cases but what the heck, I’ll play their silly game.

“Mmm...everyone is predicting that Russia will bankrupt itself...I don’t think so. The amount of Aid that the U.S. has given the Ukraine has placed the US into further debt...and China is sitting back looking at this...the Chinese attitude towards Taiwan is much the same as that of Russia towards Ukraine and Crimea. That is, both Super-powers believe that Taiwan and that of Ukraine are territories belonging to China and Russia respectively. It’s a bet that China will endeavour to invade Taiwan, drawing America into the conflict...costing countless millions of dollars to the Yanks as the Ukraine conflict has cost...sabre rattling to an extent and like Russia, China looks at their losses in men and material in a conflict with Taiwan and its allies as collateral damage...they can afford to lose thousands...hundreds of thousands of men but in doing so causing the collapse of the American economy...”

That shut them up as neither women commented further. We travelled in silence until nearing Hillary’s address.

Hillary's abode was one Villa in an assortment of Villas that stretched along both sides of a suburban street. A spindly sapling fronting each Villa frontage...in a couple of years those Gums will soften the whole street...maybe one day causing a tree 'tunnel' for the length of the street. No electricity poles, no Foxtel spaghetti from pole to pole. Street lighting was the only erect poles in the entire street.

"She renting?"

"No...she was helped by her parents with them paying seventy-five percent of the original cost...most of both complexes are let to Hospital personnel...about a third are being purchased...a State Government incentive to provide affordable housing to the medical and education sectors".

A Forensic Trace Ute was parked in the short driveway, half its length poking out over the Council footpath.

As the Unmarked came to a slow stop out front of the villa, I was impressed with the entire complex.

"Was she involved?" I asked from the back seat. It would seem this was my position when out and about in the unmarked with both women present sitting up like cockies in the front seats...Tally always the driver...Angie riding shotgun! Me in the back seat. At least I can console myself by thinking it was the safest seat in the car...backed up by statistics!

"Um...no...though that assumption could change as we proceed further. We both felt after examining her as a person and considering comments made by her co-workers, family, and colleagues she was not a person who would accept being on her own for too long. Regardless, we could not link her romantically with anyone else..."

"A lesbian affair...that would make some wanting to hide it...but didn't you say previously she was involved with a hospital colleague? A male colleague?"

"Yes... Darren Piazzzi...but it wasn't intense...more of a casual relationship".

"In this day and age...it's an acceptable situation..." The double meaning lost on both Detectives.

"For some yes...but for others depending on their upbringing, family, friends and their sphere of influence, it would still be a disappointing road to take".

Both women glanced at one another as they opened the front doors of the Unmarked. At seeing Tellie alight from the Forensic Trace vehicle, I walked quickly to her giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“You be home on time tonight, lover boy?”

“I hope so...you on the team that scoured through this property after Hillary’s body was found?”

“Yeah...both Dee Dee and me...we’re down a third of our staff due to the latest covid scare... me, Dee Dee, and two lower grade Forensic Officers were it! Devon Hastings and Grahame Sandler...nothing much to report...you join up with the two girls?”

“Not my choice but...”

“I betcha you were led screaming and shouting into their sphere of influence...” A smile.

“No...not really. It was bound to happen when the causes of death of their Robyn Hillary and my Ronnie Purvey and Perry Montrose deaths were so similar...”

“Oh! Now that piques my interest...” She dropped a new roll of yellow police tape and a staple gun to unlock the front door. “Arrh...this is still part of a crime scene so I need the three of you to wear latex, booties and hair cover...follow me back to my wagon...you can suit up in the entrance hallway before you go any deeper into the premises...bio-suits would be an overkill!”

“You’re not coming in?” De Longo asked Tellie as she stopped at the front door.

“No...I’ve seen enough of this place to last a lifetime”.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I followed my two colleagues in through the front door and stopped dead! At the end of the short hallway there was a painting of a size that took up most of the end wall. Around two metres high by one point five wide with a non-reflective glass protecting the subjects. Charcoal on white in a black frame. What got my attention was the style of the painting and the way the swirls and curls could not be mistaken for anything else but two naked women entwined...

I stood there transfixed trying to remember who...what...how and why the portrait had reminded me of another time...another place but for the life of me I could not draw up the faded memories. I wished to have Shelley or Marge standing beside me...even Sophie may have helped me jig memories free from my grey matter.

Tally Evans stuck her head around the door opening asking whether I was all right. I nodded slowly, poking a finger towards the painting. She turned her head to take in what I could see.

“Yeah...not bad, eh?” She commented as she came to stand beside me.

“Yeah...pretty bloody good...and the chap who painted it, Mark...Mark...um...Szallovic...I think that was his surname”. I surprise myself by having his name come so easy to me. “Yeah...Marcos. He was shot to death in his bed in arrh...two thousand and fourteen...around that time. His body not discovered for several days. By his boyfriend who was shattered as were other people who knew him. He was one of those people who found everything he tried coming easily to them...my bet is one of the models who sat for that portrait was Robyn Hillary...with her young lover...he drew a similar painting...charcoal on white canvas of...”

I let my memory slide back to that time...Bill and Janey Wynyard who had a thriving Cleaning Business cleaning most of the Units in the multi-storey building situated in Surrey Hills. Bill and Janey...lovely people...I taught their two young sons how to surf...how to stand up on a board at my home turf at Freshwater Beach. I have lost contact with them when we used to see them nearly every weekend for one brief summer...why? I had no idea...we picked up the friendship again when the Boarding School the two boys went to up in the Blue Mountains became a murder scene and a hive of paedophile activity...a Catholic Boarding School where the two young Wynyard brothers were spared from the ghastly practise of two paedophile Teaching Brothers...other young lads didn't escape unfortunately!

A streak of guilt flashed through my mind at having let the friendship lapse...they were good people and close friends for a summer or two...

“Um...two thousand and fourteen! That's nine years ago. She would have been in her mid-teens...underaged...um...isn't there something about using underage models for such things being a criminal offence?”

“Yes...but what are you going to do? Robyn is dead and so is Marcos...that's his signature...the portrait would be worth a bit I reckon...and I wonder who Robyn's lover was back then...or were they still an item up until the day she was killed...it puts a different perspective on her killing, don't you think?”

“You saying she was a lesbian?”

“I’m not saying any such thing but it makes you think, huh? It introduces several more avenues of investigation”.

De Longo now poked her head around the same door opening wanting to know what was going on.

“Joe’s added two and two together to get five...come on, take a look at the rest of the house...”

“Where does that door lead to?” I asked unexpectedly. Ignoring the jibe from Evans as I headed back towards the front door.

“The Garage”. Tally Evans replied.

I wiggled the door handle...it was locked. I turned and walked onto the Porch area where Tellie was sitting on the top step.

“Tells? Have you got a key to the garage...the inside door?”

She stood, nodding her head. She stepped through the front door opening and unlocked the garage door.

“Did either one of you look into the garage when you were doing your search of the place? No? You never know what you’ll find in peoples’ garages...take it from me as it can be a microcosm of clues...or nothing at all”.

I turned on a light and stepped back, whistling softly at what surprised me. A Healey ‘bug-eyed’ Sprite in mint condition. A Mini Cooper ‘S’ beside it in racing livery and in between the two, a Ducati 900 Le Mans. She would have to be a member of either the MG Sports Car Club, the English Sports Car Club, or the Ducati Fan Club. The list of suspects either increased exponentially or decreased to members of either Club. She would have known Purvey and by extension his once live-in lover Petula Ramsey...and also my old mate Sophie Grasso.

I walked down the couple of steps onto the Garage floor proper, threading my way through the vehicles to find the double garage door ‘open’ buttons. After the garage door had reached its opening height I again walked out to where Tellie was sitting.

“Tells? Can you organise a lift for these two vehicles and the motorbike to the Vehicle Impoundment Unit. A complete scientific examination of the three testing especially for fingerprints and DNA trace as an urgent exercise please”.

She nodded as she came to stand beside me looking back into the garage. She whistled softly.

“Either vehicle will do...you can have the bike...”

Then the memories came flooding back for both of us...my Ducati...which Bill my son loved as much as me...his career-ending crash and his gradual decline into a vegetative state and eventual death...we hugged one another before the present took charge again.

“Can do, Joe. Can do”. Tellie replied as she swiped away the tears as she took out her Mobile.

I walked past her to speed dial Sophie...

“I’ll have to start sending you a bill for subcontractors’ information. What this time?” She sounded a little miffed.

“Ummm...Robyn Hillary? Know her?”

“Yeah...you taking over her recent homicide death? I had heard through the Club of her death...she was murdered so I was told...can you believe it!”

“In very similar circumstances as Veronica Purvey and Perry Montrose...Hillary was the first being killed some three weeks before Purvey...so you knew her?”

“Yes...a sad case, actually. She was a person who was waging a war with herself...”

“How do you mean?”

“From what I’ve been told her family and family friends were devout religious nutters, who could never accept one of theirs being gay...she tried so hard and you can see what she drove or raced, she was part-living a male life...or at least competing in that sphere...she was an exceptional and very competitive racer...both on her favourite ‘Duke’ and her Mini Cooper and ‘bug-eyed’ Sprite...she was very good but that wasn’t enough for her...she worked at the Westmead Private Hospital...”

“Yeah, so I believe. She was the Admission and Priority Planner for several Operating Teams...a very responsible job. Anything else?”

“Not at this point. No...I’m sure I’ll hear from you again...shortly...you owe me a meal”.

“Not a problem...I hope you like Pizza...”

“I prefer French...”

“There’s a good French Restaurant in Parramatta...I’ll call”.

I walked slowly past the Cooper ‘S’ realising for the first time how small these vehicles were. I propped and turned around to view out through the garage door. Something some-one had said whizzed through the grey matter and was gone. I slapped my thigh in frustration as I turned to open a rear door of the garage and turned on a light. A rear wall of mirrors with my reflection staring back at me, a good sampling of gym equipment and several sets of leathers that one would wear while riding the ‘Duke’. This woman had been a serious bike rider and car enthusiast...and a gym junkie to boot.

The whole box and dice reminded me of someone who was trying their best to be a male equivalent.

I nodded at the sadness and cruelty of life for some people who live in the shadows. She could never be a ‘gun’ male racing enthusiast but that would never stop her from trying. I climbed the stairs and began my slow tour through the Villa...doing it twice before repeating the process the other way round which had my two colleagues scratching their heads and hiding smiles behind their hands.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I stood in front of a wall of shelving, some supporting bric-a-brac, other shelving sections books and others filled with racing paraphernalia and awards. The Awards and winning medals impressive...the choice of books was enlightening...

“She was a talented driver...and rider...” I said more to myself.

“Yeah...a talented girl who had a dreary job...she makes up for it in her private pursuits...”

I turned to face De Longo.

“You can’t see anything on these shelves that may speak more about the girl’s struggles than anything we have encountered so far? Arrh...did she have a Laptop or Desktop computer?”

“Yes...a desktop. The Tower is with our Digital Forensic people...”

“Four...five weeks...nothing back as yet?”

“I guess we should shake the tree a little. They do seem to be dragging the chain a bit...I reckon Covid may have left them understaffed...” Evans complained in a soft voice.

“But you don’t know that as a fact, do you? Ring them...in the meantime De Longo, check through these shelves looking for material that could disclose the struggle the poor girl had with her gender...her sexuality and the way she lived...”

“Will you want to go see her boyfriend?”

“No...he probably was just a token boyfriend to legitimise her gender...was there anything on her computer that could lead us to her secret lover...or killer? Her phone records could lead us to that person...have you requested a full list of callers and her favourite numbers?”

“Yes...again we should shake that tree...we’ve been a little slack...you kind of forget these things once they’re out of your mind”.

She bowed her head to hide her embarrassment. She knew both she and Evans were being shown up as not the world’s best Detectives...coming in the lower half of the class!

“No, not slack but you seem to think that once you pass on information...or a request to supply you with information...that’s it! You should be onto them at least a week after your request is lodged...people are known to slip priorities around...those that do not account for ‘follow ups’ can often have their priority re-arranged...Tally? Once you’ve finished with the Digital Analysis Group, get onto her telephone service provider...for her landline and Mobile details...who rang her...SMSed her and vice versa...hear me?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

My mobile buzzed in my pocket before beginning its de-default ring. Gone are the days of AC/DC or Zeppelin blasting out their intros.

“Mister Lind? It’s David Winters. I look after my elderly sister and live next to George and Veronica Purvey...Ronnie was killed in her driveway a couple of weeks ago”.

“Yes, yes Mister Winters”. I smiled at the way many members of the public must describe in detail what/where they fit into the scheme of things as though the entire Case has slipped from my memory...like others I know! “What can I do for you?”

“Um...I was going to place a new disc into the hard-drive that is connected to our three security cameras...”

“Where’s the third...I thought you had just the two on the front of your home”.

“The third provides a view of the rear of the house...that’s the one I think you should look at as it catches the rear of the Purvey house as well. The only time I really look at these images is when I go to place a new CD into the driver...I keep the full CDs for twelve weeks before wiping them clean. I think it may help in your investigations to find Ronnie’s killer”.

That sounded promising...and a little exaggerated going on experience with members of the public...everyone wants to be a Detective! I glanced at my watch.

“Um...around four. Would that suit you?”

“Yes Mister Detective Lind. We’re not going anywhere...we did our weekly shopping this morning...Ditty has gone down for a nap...the exercise has exhausted her...and the price of stuff...thank God I’m not on an Old Age Pension...I don’t know how those people exist especially if they also rent which is a fair share of them according to the TV...”

“Perhaps another time...” I stated as I broke into his musings.

“No...no! Four is fine...I’ll see you around that time, yes?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I plopped myself into the rear seat of the Unmarked with a groan. Slapped my thigh out of frustration. I wiped my hands over my face wanting the last half hour to be deleted from the hard drive of reality. I wondered how often these sojourns to ‘neighbours’ places’ turned out to be a gross waste of time...

“A total waste of time!” De Longo retorted angrily as Evans turned the engine over. It would appear that my two colleagues had agreed early in their partnership that Evans would always be the driver.

“No...we left him feeling as though he had achieved something and he was an important cog in the local community and in our investigations. As his life had been mapped out for him for the past twenty-odd years as the Carer for his elderly frail sister, his day-to-day experiences have been regimented...and yes, boring. He would have felt his life before him was not of his doing...and now he was able to hold his head high...he had assisted the coppers in a murder investigation...yes, he felt important...good on him! For every ten of these useless examinations there will be one that produces the goods...so keep on with those calls...um...Tally? Drop me at the Train Station...turn left here and follow this road...”

“You sure...it will mean a fair train ride for you...we’re going over the Bridge so we can drop you at Chatswood...or you can take the Unmarked and we’ll catch that train...yes, that’s a better solution”. She glanced at De Longo who agreed with a nod of her head.

I nodded. I can think about the Case just as easily whether I’m driving in air-conditioned comfort or sitting in a swaying train carriage...but what came to me was that I didn’t know where my two partners lived...that was a terrible realisation.

I had Dave Winters’ CD in a sealed evidence bag which I would ‘break’ sometime this evening and go through the content once again at my leisurely pace...just to check we had not missed anything in our previous examination of its content at Winters’ place.

I shouldn’t feel that exasperated and frustrated by Winters’ want to help in any way. It is people like that who contact ‘000’ with information on every crime imaginable carried out by someone in their street, their neighbourhood, or their town. Narcotics information especially through Crime Stoppers are the grassroots of all Narcotic Detectives’ work and can lead to some spectacular arrests.

None-the-less, this CD will not help in our investigations into Ronnie Purvey’s demise...no matter how hard I examined the contents.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The following morning, I found the ‘hard copy’ report centre on my desk from the Digital Analysis Group examining the computer tower belonging to Robyn Hillary. An SMS on my smartphone confirmed its existence. A report that ran to one hundred and sixty-four pages...every e-mail sent and received by the woman over the past three months. I wondered if that was a sufficient timeline.

I scanned through it quickly noting that the Analysis Group had marked those e-mails signed off by 'Bunny' as the most frequent. Those were coloured in yellow and amounted to over one hundred for the prescribed time. There were then e-mails marked in grey, blue, and red to designated e-mails from other persons but those did not number those sent and received by 'Bunny'. I could assume 'Bunny' was Robyn Hillary's secret lover...a bit of a jump but I was willing to run with it!

The DAG also assumed this as they had dug into the IP Address protocols to determine that 'Bunny' was Lena 'Lenny' Kozlowski of an address in Wentworthville, close to the Westmead Hospital.

I googled up the name to find a Lenny Kozlowski was the thirty-seven-year-old Head Sister in charge of the daytime shift at the Post-Ops Recovery Ward at the hospital. I was sure we had the right girl because of her relationship to the hospital so as I stood I called for Tally Evans to come with me leaving the report for De Longo to wade through. I figured we wouldn't be long. De Longo informed me as I passed her desk that she had also received a Report from the woman's Telecom Provider.

"If there is anything that jumps out, give us a call, will you?"

We weren't even out of the building before Tally asked me about retirement.

"Steady on girl...the earliest I can retire because of my birth date is at sixty-seven. That's a fair way into the future...some twelve years...if my brain and body can hold out until then".

We slowly joined the traffic in the one-way street that circled our building, breaking off at another busy intersection to head towards Westmead...the streets around the Paramatta CBD were almost as 'grid-locked' as those in the City CBD. Tally continued the line of conversation she had started as we edged towards a slow traffic light signal.

"Yer think you'll have problems making it to that date...now that is cruel. Yer save every available dollar yer have...sinking it into your superannuation and yer die before yer can really enjoy what that money can buy for you...yep, that's cruel".

"Well, I guess that's one way of seeing it...but my family has longevity on their side so I will be able to enjoy that investment...hopefully".

"As you said hopefully...unless a stray bullet gets you first". Said so matter-of-factly without any comedy in the words. "I've noticed that as Murder Dees age, they lose any sense of humour or empathy".

That made me flinch. As far as I was concerned I had not lost any of my humour...well...I must admit it has been derailed for a while now...and my empathy!? Well...yes. I'm more adamant on the guilty party serving time...but that isn't empathy lost...that is life's lesson learnt!

I was a little taken aback by the young lady's sudden verbal assault as though she was using me as her whipping boy...the elderly one who had enforced these terrible laws onto her generation.

"Yes, it does seem a little unfair until you have a conversation with any elderly person who is forced onto the Old Aged Pension because such a superannuation system wasn't available for them during their working lives...the mean death rate for an Australian male I think is eighty-three...females a little older...that's a lot of years for you to survive on the Pension..."

"Mmm...I guess...where do we go?"

"Around to your right. There are several car spaces purely for Police vehicles...there to the left...we'll continue this conversation later, eh?"

"If you like..."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

We were lost twice before given more precise instructions to find the Post-Op Recovery Ward. A set of double doors with 'No Admittance' in big red letters which also told us to ring the bell...an arrow pointed to the small button adjacent to the doors.

The Battle with Covid was still raging...

We rang the button three times in about ten minutes! It would seem they or whomever would only react to the bell ringing after it was obvious we would not go away. Eventually, a larger-than-life Male Nurse opened one of these doors to advise us that members of the public, relatives or close friends of the Patients in the Recovery Ward were not permitted through the double doors as indicated...Covid was still striking down the elderly and those with lower auto-immune symptoms thus the precautions though he was not wearing a mask!

We offered our ID Cards asking to speak with Lena 'Lenny' Kozlowski who we knew was the head Sister of the Ward.

“No can do...Detectives? We’re exceptionally busy this morning. If you care to wait I will inform Lenny of your presence...and you want to speak with her. There is a Waiting Lounge for relatives and friends of Patients just around the corner at the end of this corridor”. I turned to look where he was indicating...I truthfully thought the Covid virus couldn’t jump that far! These Hospital types knew better so it seemed. “I cannot give you any information as to when Lenny can see you...we are two down because of Covid...please be patient”.

We shared the Waiting Area with two separate groups, both sure that there ‘loved ones’ had died on the operating table, were jolted back to life, and were now clinging desperately to life...not a good scene at all. I eventually stood, nodding to Tally that we should depart this weepathon! It was pissing me off!

We almost bumped into Lena Kozlowski...her name tag identified her as Head Sister Kozlowski. She was a slightly built woman having that almost masculine Slovak-shaped face. Dirty blonde hair held back in a short ponytail that accentuated that Slovak look. Her voice though was as soft as a kitten’s purr...an Australian accent soften by her tone.

“Can we go somewhere a little more private?” Tally Evans requested. It was apparent she wanted to take charge of the interview...we followed the Sister along the corridor to a small ‘quiet room’ that was designated by a small sign on the door. She slid her name tag across an electronic device that caused the door to click open and for the sign to show that the room was now occupied.

We sat opposite the Sister as she looked carefully at me then at Tally, nodding as Tally began.

“We are the Lead Detectives in the homicide killing of Robyn Hillary some weeks ago...you are aware that she was killed, are you not?”

A slight nod from the Sister.

“I’ll take that as a yes...we are taping and videoing these proceedings so we would appreciate your vocal response, yes?”

A slight nod from the sister.

“Sorry...yes”.

“What was your relationship to the Deceased?”

She swivelled her hands, bit down on her lower lip.

“I...” She shrugged. “I don’t know how to answer that question...” She looked down at her hands now clasped in her lap. “Yes...we were friends...”

“Just friends?”

“Yes...in an off and on sort of way. Robyn was having enormous problems with her sexuality...and gender. I tried to help her...it got so I didn’t have a life of my own. A ten to twelve hour working day and then often, hours on the phone...e-mails...what can I say?”

“In what way?”

“Getting to help her to accept her homosexuality...her family and long-standing friends were...shall we say were limited in accepting her that way. Their religion forbade such nonsense...that was the sticking point. She could not let go of her family in order to accept herself as not a heterosexual female...she had lesbian tendencies and in order to...to make those feelings go away she lived on the edge...in mostly manly ways. When this was pointed out to her, she would dive into deep depression. For the past month or two I was very concerned for her...”

“She was showing suicide tendencies?”

“Yes...but she refused my offers of taking her to see her Doctor...or the Gender Centre where she could discuss the situation with a Professional who knew how to relate with her about *‘her problem’*”. She wiggled her fingers to accentuate the words. “The trouble was, she was still deeply religious and could not accept the teachings concerning homosexuality...or rather the Gospel Teachings were at loggerheads with how she felt”.

“Did you kill her?”

The woman looked closely at Evans before sighing deeply.

“I find that question unacceptable...I spend every working minute trying to save lives...no...no matter what, I couldn’t harm her...yes...sometimes with words...but...no! I did not kill her!” She had frosted over. “Now, if you don’t mind, I have patients who need my assistance”.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

“What do you think?”

“I believe her...she was just trying to help a friend...and I’m sure she isn’t a Lesbian herself...”

“Mmm...Darren Piazzzi...we need to talk to him again...while we’re here at the hospital. Let’s see if he is working the day shift”.

We returned to the Entry Lobby to consult with the General Enquiries desk who immediately referred us to the Personnel Officer on an upper floor. Again, getting lost in the labyrinth of corridors and passageways. A Wardsman led us to the Personnel Office which we must have passed on several occasions. They sent off a pager response for him to front up asap.

He wandered into the Office area looking flustered. A sheen of sweat glistened his face and arms. He was not in the normal hospital dress but was in gym clothes. He looked down at his gear apologising for his demeanour.

“Sorry...I knocked off an hour ago...been in the Hospital staff gym. It’s better than the gym close to my place...you need to talk to me...” He looked at Tally Evans frowning as he recognised her. “Oh!...you’re the cop who questioned me when I found Robbie dead...what do you want this time?” There was a certain degree of belligerence in his tone. Over-confidence which made me ask myself why he would be so cocksure of himself.

“Is there somewhere where we can sit in private on this floor?”

He gestured towards the woman sitting behind the main counter.

“Bella...you got any Interview Rooms vacant?”

“Yeah...take your pick. Yer got one to choose from. Come through the counter flap and I’ll take you down...”

We were shown into a small room where the three of us would be the limit.

“Thanks for your time...” I began, having been given the nod for me to conduct the interview. It was the best approach as Tally may just repeat the questions she had asked previously.

“No worries...how can I help?” Yep, cocksure of himself.

“You stated in your first interview with Detectives De Longo and Evans here that you had tried several times to contact the Deceased over several days...”

He nodded.

“Um...you stated that you began to get worried that is why you went to her place...”

He nodded again.

“But you also stated that you were the Deceased’s live-in lover...”

“Yes...”

“Where were you when you made all those phone calls to Robyn Hillary’s place?”

“At the Hospital...I’m on call...”

“Mmm...they don’t show up on your monthly communications report...or on Robyn’s account list. Care to comment on that fact...”

“Um...yes...I made the calls on the public telephone in the Ground Floor Lobby of the Hospital”.

“Why...when you had your mobile...yes? The Report on Hillary’s incoming calls shows no telephone calls from either your mobile or a public phone at the Hospital. How would you explain that?”

“Arrh...yes...”

“Mister Piazzzi? Would you care to comment? You stated previously that you were the live-in lover of the deceased...for how long had that arrangement existed and how established was that arrangement?”

“Yes...arrh...yes...we both agreed with the deal...”

“You are aware she was a lesbian?”

“Words...she was no more a lesbian than I am gay...too many people were getting into her mind. How could she be a lesbian if we were having regular sex?”

“How indeed. You are an Assistant Anaesthetist. Is that correct?”

“Arrh...yes...”

His cocksure demeanour had diminished. He was now looking around unsure of the direction my questioning was taking.

“It is not necessary for you to be at the Hospital on a set timetable...you are on-call...would that be correct?”

“Arrh...yes”.

“You were at the Deceased’s address on the morning of her death...the GPS on your mobile details that...you left but returned some thirty minutes later...where did you go?”

“Good grief...we are talking about a morning some weeks ago...a month ago...buggered if I know!”

“I’ll help you Mister Piazzi. You went to the Hospital...you left your mobile in your cloths locker...why? Did you suddenly realise that your movements could be traced through that Mobile...that two-thousand-dollar Mobile phone you own...” I stopped to have a brain snap that linked several pieces of the puzzle together. “...and then you returned to Hillary’s address where you stayed all day waiting for her to knock off. When she did she drove straight into the garage because she had a remote button in her vehicle for the garage door. She walked back to the letterbox to collect her mail and that is when you attacked her from behind...your vehicle has been recorded by several security cameras on neighbouring properties parked in the street all day... ..one clearly shows you sliding down in the driver’s seat as Hillary drove slowly passed your vehicle...”

I stopped as something wasn’t right. When I had examined Robyn’s garage there was just enough room to accommodate the Cooper ‘S’, The ‘bug-eyed’ Sprite, and the Ducati...so where would she park her own ‘every day’ vehicle...in the driveway I suspected but a memory flash of the Forensic Trace Ute showed it parked in the driveway with half its length almost crossing the Council footpath. There had been no detail of Hillary’s vehicle in the Murder Books...a slight oversight according to my logic.

“Um...Mister Piazzi? What type of vehicle did Robyn drive around. It was the Sprite or the Cooper ‘S’ was it? Both were track vehicles. They’re not registered to drive on public roads. Did she park her everyday vehicle in the driveway?”

“Aarrh yes. A Toyota Rav4...she used that to tow a trailer for whichever vehicle she was going to race on that weekend...time trials...hill climbs...”

“She parked the Rav in the driveway, yes?”

A nod was his reply.

“Who was her mechanic? Her pit crew?”

“Me...”

“Mmm...getting back to the original conversation...that particular CCTV camera shows you alighting from your vehicle to rush towards her disappearing figure...you hit her hard in the small of her back which caused her to fall flat on her face...you drag her into the garage, break her neck, roll down the garage door after which you drove back to the Hospital, collected your Mobile and drove back to Hillary’s address after which you rang the Police...how does that sound?”

Those accusations had come to me suddenly while I was looking intently at the man opposite me. Loose ends and facts unexpectedly linked together in my mind...as often happens.

He sagged in the chair dropping his forehead to the tabletop. He repeated how she was a ‘silly bitch’ who didn’t really know whether she was Arthur or Martha. He sat up straight, tears running down his cheeks.

“She said she didn’t love me...never had and I was just an experiment as though I was a Lab Rat or something just as trivial...it was my expertise as a mechanic that helped her win races...shit...and she never acknowledged that!”

I called for a Paddy Wagon to transport Piazzi back to our cells. We would charge him tomorrow morning after he had discussed his position with a Solicitor of his choosing.

We sat in silence for some time after Piazzi had been escorted from the tiny room. Tally Evans coughed before she began to speak.

“Do you always do that? You know, ramble on with so much bullshit?”

“It wasn’t bullshit...it was educated guesses and yes, I often fly by the seat of my pants but the more I spoke, the more truthful it became...the more facts linked into a logical sequence...”

“Wow! Take me along for the ride...I reckon I can learn a lot from you. You know they have three or four of your Cases down at the Academy...one or two on how to conduct a proper investigation and one or two on how not to conduct an investigation...”

“Go on! Fair Dinkum!?”

“Yep...and you are placed at the top of the list of successful investigators. Our Tutor lamented your absence from the Academy saying he thought you would be a brilliant Tutor and Teacher”.

“Fair Dinkum!” I retorted.

I had heard whispers of a similar ilk at various times. I had no wish to stand at the front of a class and watch bleary-eyed students slowly having their eyes glaze over...at my boring lectures...that thought had been repudiated but I was still not happy with the thought...maybe as I get older I’ll change but for now putting away murderers was my sole interest.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The formal arrest and charging, the time spent between the alleged felon and his Solicitor and the arraignment and Bail Hearing takes up valuable time...we knew the guy was guilty as sin but in accordance with Westminster Law, he is innocent until proven otherwise. If the felon admitted guilt from the start (which is rare) then the time schedules are severely crunched. No ‘twelve man and true’ but an examination of the proof before one to three Judges which again cuts our appearance time in half...

While these slow machinations proceeded, De Longo was scanning through the Murder Book volumes and following up on loose ends and witnesses...gathering further evidence from communication providers and digital analysis experts to tie up my suppositions that I had uttered on the previous day before our suspected Perp.

Several meetings over weeks with the DPP Reps again ensured loose ends were cut or explained and additional information sought/required to ensure a seamless Prosecution Case...boring...utterly boring paper chases which De Longo seemed happy to undertake!

I sat behind my desk the day after Bail was granted with few conditions...the usual. Twiddling my pen as I slouched in my desk chair, feet up on the pulled out bottom drawer...thinking of nothing...I wondered how my inclusion into the merry band of three had an impact on solving my colleagues’ Case while my two remained stationary...dead in the water!

The Robyn Hillary homicide Case was the first in line...then Veronica ‘Ronnie’ Purvey with Perry Montrose the last of the three.

The connections?

- They knew one another through the Hospital grapevine.
- They all worked at both Westmead Private and/or Childrens' Hospitals.
- Their deaths were similar.
- The three were killed mid to late afternoon in broad daylight suggesting our Perp had a regular day job.
- There was a connection, in two cases of belonging to the MG Sports Car Club or having an interest in racing vehicles or motorbikes.
- All had some involvement in the LGBTQI factions at the Hospitals however small.
- All held responsible positions and had been high achievers.

I stood and walked over to one of the narrow floor to ceiling windows on the Murder Squad Floor that gave views over Parramatta Park, the river, and its shoreline. Looking at nothing but looking inward...

“Penny for your thoughts Joe”.

“Huh? Yeah...nothing...no...I was amusing myself by remembering I had solved the girls' Case for them but had left my two Cases wafting in the breeze...I was thinking of all the similarities in the three Cases and wondering whether our alleged Felon in the Robyn Hillary Case could have committed the homicides of Purvey and Montrose...I don't know...but there is something there that ignites the synopsis...”

“How have you found working with the two?”

“Evans is the one who could be hinted at as closer to my way of doing things...and she knows when to lead and when to shut up...and she is thinking of the Case in hand all the time...and she is a good driver. De Longo? I haven't spent a lot of time with her though I think she is more aloof, always stiff, lacks comedic moments and is the stodgier of the pair...and she doesn't mind the slog of examining written matter instead of being outside chasing felons...in some ways she reminds me of the young Dallas Courtney...” The Boss nodded. “She is good with computers and loves the tedious delving into histories and information”.

“Where are they?”

“Getting coffees...”

“It takes two now!?”

“Hah...don't be too picky as we've had a hard couple of days...”

“No...I realise your combined workload to get the Hillary Case past the post was excessive and demanding...the DPP have been especially impressed with the standard of your submission...no...just a nudge from me...they're back going on the sudden aroma of coffee preceding them...” She turned to look at Evans as she handed me a large. “None for me I see...I'll be gone for fifteen getting one for myself. I wasn't wanting until the aroma hit me. Good job the three of you...well done on that Robyn Hillary Homicide Case...and you better buck up on your two homicides Joe...they're dead in the water”.

CHAPTER THIRTY

“Joe?”

“Sophs...are you alright?”

“Um...no...any chance you can give yourself an early mark?”

“Yeah...sure. I'll be about twenty minutes. Okay?”

“Thanks Joe...yeah”.

I surprised Sophie who had not heard me drive up and park under the Carport. Or my route through the open Garage and back door. When she saw me she melted into my arms and began to sob.

“Looks like you may have the beginning of a shiner...”

“Yeah...” She stood back away from me to touch the bruise under her left eye. “Yeah...I don't know who is shitting me off the most...me for not ducking the right way or at Janet for scratching the side of the Healey...”

“What did she do that for?” I asked softly.

Sophie shook her head. Shrugged.

“I have no idea...it was a sudden explosion”.

“Where is she now?”

“Packing up...she is leaving...”

“Okay...I’ll have a word with her...”

“Leave it go Joe...”

“No...I’ll not let it go. She needs to learn a few truths!” I waved away Sophie’s objections as I walked the length of the Hallway to the front of the house. I knocked on the ajar door and entered.

“Who are you?” Janet challenged.

“A friend of Sophie’s...”

“Arrh...you’re her former partner...Lind...Detective Joe Lind. Murder Squad. There’s nothing you can say that will make matters better. I’m out of here...”

“Seems to me you came off second best...you’re out on the street having cruelled a good arrangement, especially in the rental amount. I’ll tell you one thing, if I ever hear of you getting into another fisticuffs I will arrest and charge you...there goes your career in the Force. I’m that close to acting on that threat now. Hear me? Consider this your lucky day as it would mean a mountain of paperwork for me...I’m not in the mood”. I turned to leave instead turning back to her with my finger raised. “Why did you leave a scratch in the Healey...Sophs was this close to selling it...now she’ll need a new front mudguard to work on...I think it would be a good idea if you fronted her with the cash...”

“Not on! Hear me!?” Her hackles were rising again...an easy exercise. I couldn’t see her lasting for long before her anger gets her in strife. She stared at me but looked away. My Number One spot remained...

“You find a decent place to stay?” I asked wanting to break the iciness around her.

“Yes...” She wasn’t about to elaborate. It wasn’t any of my business in any case. I was just trying to be friendly...she wasn’t into friendlies!

“Okay...sure. I’ll help you with your stuff...”

“No need...I can do it!”

She passed us five times as we sat enjoying a coffee...Sophie's second best offering to mankind. I followed Janet out when I thought she had placed all her belongings into her car. She was forcing the hatch down that's how much shit she had.

"Your wheels..."

She stared through me as she walked to the driver's side.

"No... a friend's. His mother owns it. My car is in for repairs. A good car...I like driving it..."

I nodded. A Toyota Corolla Hatchback. A good car...it looked in good nick...

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

"You okay Joe? You look a little over-done...a hard day, eh?" Tellie had a way of finding the underlying cause of things in quick time.

I nodded tiredly, telling her about Sophie and her war in kicking out one of her Boarders.

"Mmm...Boarders! Renters! Yer gotta take the good with the bad...what? She's now refusing to advertise for another Boarder? That's money out of her pocket. She should try again...you know...get back on the bike. She should try a young male copper this time...it may work out better..."

"Yes and no...she's not too sure..."

There was a timid knock on the back sliding door. My stomach dropped thinking it was confirmation of Mal's demise as her body had been found. Instead, as I turned I saw Mal's image...a nervous smile...her hand raised, a slight wave with her fingers. Both Tellie and I rushed for the door, beaten by Mo and Po, my two Maltese X dogs who couldn't wait for the door to be slid back. They were howling with excitement.

I half-carried Mal into the Lounge Room, again nearly being bowled over by Al and Sam as they had come to investigate the happy howls of both dogs.

"Mal? What!?! What's going on?" Both Tellie and I had to wait until she had paid attention to the dogs and my two daughters. We came in a lousy fifth and sixth in the queue.

“Sorry about the melodrama...my cover was blown as we shadowed a Filipino gang wanting to tranship over two tonne of cocaine into Australia...sorry, but my death was the best way of getting them off my tail. The shipment is due into Port Botany tomorrow morning...I want to be close when the ship docks...we have the final destination of the container covered here in Sydney. A southwest suburb...surprise, surprise. East of the Solomon Islands...arrh...several teams of AFP, Border Force, and ADF personnel boarded the Container Vessel. We poured the powder over the side, replacing it with Baking Soda...this sting has taken eighteen months to mature. We’ll nab people in Manila and other areas and those persons who would be receiving the powder...I’m really sorry about having you on tender hooks but it was the only way we could ensure the transshipment continued...it was persons in the Philippines who planted the bomb as a warning for us to back off...we didn’t take the advice. Several good persons died in that explosion...”

Tellie handed her a large mug of coffee.

“Ta...I’ve been holding out for a decent coffee...this is good...um...can’t stay long as my presence could bring down the wrath of certain persons...on your head. I’m staying in a safe House until this is over and we have all persons waiting Court time...no Bail approved hopefully...”

I looked at her...and immediately I saw Knackers in her words and activity. Mal too had been bitten by the same ‘bug’ as Knackers...overseas ops now in her blood. All I hoped was that she would not go the same way as Knackers had...I crossed my fingers.

“Arrm...as I said, I can’t stay long and I need to be up before sparrow’s fart to greet that Vessel”.

She stayed for another hour spending most of her time with the girls and my two dogs, though she held my hand for a good time...holding on tight.

We heard a honk of a car horn.

“That’s my ride...gotta go...I promise we won’t do that again to you...promise”. A kiss, a tight hug, a smile, and she was gone...

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Neither Tellie or I could sleep so we cracked a bottle of Red, wrapped ourselves in several blankets and lay on the Banana Chair as we had done many times before. The older we got, the more uncomfortable these chairs and our closeness became. We agreed to relax on adjoining chairs as those teenage years of closeness were long gone. Comfort now took the highest priority with cuddles and closeness running a poor second.

“What do you think?” Tellie asked as she took her first sip of wine. “Mmm...a nice choice, Mister Waiter”.

“Thank you...selected especially for you, madame...worrying...the bug has got her and I suspect she was being tailored long before Knackers was killed...he’d be on the look-out for any protégé that could carry on his want to rid the world of questionable characters...Mal has put her hand up...”

“Do you think she would have known what awaited her when she opted for that job in Manila...it sounded so mundane...”

“She would have known exactly what her job was well before she took on the job...more of the AFP picking her than the other way around...”

“Mmm...scary...Sophie...what’s going on there?”

I filled her in on what had transpired earlier on in the afternoon...what had happened and what I thought had happened...I was suddenly feeling very tired...

“You had enough wine...we’ve shared the bottle and I don’t think another shared bottle will see us bushy-tailed tomorrow morning...whoops...this morning...let’s go to bed, huh?”

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

For two days the three of us sat around talking, dissecting, and following fanciful lines of logic trying to knock that apple out of the tree...for nil results!

It was Friday and I’d had enough of reading the same words over and over again, listening to the same patter and adding my penny-worth to always lighten the mood...sometimes

successful, sometimes not. I was firming in my thoughts that De Longo was a stick in the mud and Tally Evans was more to my liking.

I asked Tally if De Longo had always been like this while De Longo went for coffees...it was her turn. Catalina Evans raised her eyebrows and let out a stream of air...

“Here comes De Longo with arms full...I’ll tell you a story some time when we have more time to tell it...”

Her Mobile twanged meaning she had a message. She scrolled down to read the contents.

“Mmmm...a plethora of fingerprints on all three vehicles, most unknown not having comparison studies in the Data Base. Apart from two sets that did have comparisons in the system...one ex-ADF...the other a former crim who it appeared was now stepping that line of a perfect citizen with other sets from Piazzini...”

“He was in the system”. I exclaimed incredulously. “What for?”

“Calm down Joe...Angie obeyed protocols and had his fingerprints placed in the system when we thought he was our Number One suspect...our only suspect...”

I drank my coffee quickly and headed towards the Sub-Basement pool and gym giving myself an early mark...so I hoped.

I glanced at the large wall clock as I came back onto the Murder Squad Floor. Swore under my breath as I had wanted to get away well before the official knock-off time...instead I would be heading for home twenty minutes after that time. The floor was empty and as I headed for my desk to pick up my ID Card, gun and holster and the week’s dirty exercise clothing, towels and swimming togs that had a certain aroma, I passed Angie De Longo sitting by herself.

“What are you still doing here De Longo? You wet your bed? It’s a quiet Friday arvo and most of your colleagues have deserted you...go home!”

She replied with a grunt...maybe it was a groan that went better with her personality. I smiled to myself as I reached my desk and dug out my ‘dirty clothes’ bag. I hadn’t realised Denny Turner had walked up to me until she spoke.

“Joe? I’m...arrh...I’m sorry to do this on a Friday arvo...late...but you and De Longo are it until the nightshift mob get onto the floor...in about thirty minutes...you and De Longo...a body found in a dust bin...an otto-bin...at Westmead Private...you have two Homicide Cases

of Hospital people...this could very well be connected...you know...with your lot...you have penalty rates the minute you leave the Floor”. She handed me the details, a Murder Case File Number, a Murder Book, and the details of who I could contact at the Hospital...my mobile pinged letting me know that our Clerk had transferred details onto my Mobile before she departed for the afternoon. I knew those particulars as we were working with the Hospital Security people on our other two Cases. Denny gave me a tight smile, a shrug of apology before returning to her Office where she would stay until the Nightshift Boss sat at her desk in a larger Office on the other side of the floor in around twenty minutes.

I again swore under my breath before ringing Tellie to say I had no idea when I'd be home. I jiggled De Longo into life, following her out to the Lift Lobby offering to drive the Unmarked. I didn't wait until we had driven out of the Sub-Base parking level before I began.

“You don't seem that happy working in the Murder Squad...”

“No...that's not true. I've been a Murder Dee now for five years. Two of them with Tally...I've got no complaints...and there's been no complaints about my performance here at work”. I nodded, wanting her to continue. “I feel as though I am doing something important to rid society of twits who have no qualms in killing someone else...something worthwhile...” She was silent for some moments until we exited the Police Building egress lane. “Look, I know I give the impression of not enjoying the job...not enjoying life but my life has been on a rollercoaster ride for the past couple of months. I know I could have applied for time off, but all I would do is feel sorry for myself and cut off all contact with those close to me...at least at work my mind is constantly thinking of something else than just me...and I really do not like the vision of me sharing my time with my family”

Again, I nodded as I turned left at the major intersection that would take us directly to the Westmead Private Hospital.

“Have you ever thought of a talk with the Force Shrink? She has saved me several times from packing it in...curling my toes over the rim of that abyss”.

“Oh? You!?” She looked at me wondering whether I was slinging a beauty. It took her some moments to realise I wasn't lying. “Um...Denny hinted at it a couple of weeks ago...a day or two before you joined Tally and me...I don't know...”

“Take it from me, she is exceptional...proof in the pudding if the Boss recommended the Shrink...and if for some reason you don't click, she can refer you on...”

“The tough Murder Dee who everyone looks up to...”

“I don’t know about that...but promise me to give it some thought...what’s that saying about us being rocks in a stormy sea...or something like that...and I’ve been told I have a warm and non-judgemental ear...”

“Yeah...something like that”. She tried hard not to giggle...it was a good sound that up until that point had been sadly missing.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

We were directed around to the back of the Hospital which was euphemistically known as the ‘Service Area’. Where all deliveries were made and garbage removed including dead bodies. Our recently deceased person was in the correct area. We were stopped from going any further by the yellow police tape stretched across the entrance area. We both tiredly alighted ducking under the tape to find the ‘sign-on’ Constable.

“Has the Vic been identified?” I asked.

“No sir...the body is jammed into that wheelie bin where all the action is at the moment. Jammed in and naked...head first! All you can see is his hairy arse and his ball sack...hard to identify the bloke when that is all you can see and Forensic Trace personnel are keeping everyone at bay until they have finished...”

I nodded my thanks and walked up to the young Toby Alcott who had recently passed all his exams and autopsy protocols so he was now flying with two Assistant Forensic Pathologists of his own. Forensic Pathology Services was again with the correct number of ‘Cutters’. I could see Muscles preparing to retire with his wish of his replacement Brenda Wzerlic having a full complement of medical and clerical staff. A good feeling when you are retiring...all ship-shape and above boards...

“Too early? And congratulations on your first...it is your first, isn’t it?”

“Yes Detective...what are you two doing on a nightshift cadaver case?”

“We’ve been asking ourselves the same question...we weren’t quick enough out the door so it seems...anything you can tell us?”

“No...but the Delivery Manager is pulling his hair out as he wants the Dock and hard-standing area given over to him...he has deliveries coming in for the next two hours...and the Garbage

Truck is due any time soon...I can tell Forensic Trace will want the entire dock face, upper dock level and this concrete hard-standing area for at least the next hour or two...then it will be our turn...hard titties! The poor guy will be bald by the time he has his area back!”

I noticed Nevada Singh, the CEO of the Private Hospital standing amongst a group of hospital workers. He as always a picture of authoritative calm. A chap beside him a picture of complete nervousness, a sheen of sweat on his face regardless of the early evening chill. I figured he the Delivery Manager. His area of control no longer in his control and getting worse as the minutes pass.

I wandered towards the CEO, a nod of my head my acknowledgement of his presence. His colleagues stepped backwards as though I was bringing cholera to the small group. We shook hands as I introduced De Longo and in turn we were introduced to the Delivery Manager Gordon Fuller.

“When can I have my area back?” Gordon Fuller demanded angrily.

“When the Forensic Trace and Forensic Pathologist have finished their examination of the area”.

“And that will be...” He countered.

“I’m sorry sir. I have no idea...” I looked at him with some sympathy. “They will finish their investigations when they think they have everything that they can examine and bag. Sorry sir”.

“Understand Detective...” The CEO began. “We can take a lot of deliveries through the front doors...not a good look but...” He smiled at me. “Understand though, we only have a morgue refrigerator that will comfortable hold no more than seven cadavers...we’re almost full...understand, we cannot take those bodies...or the funeral people cannot take those bodies out through the front door...and those yellow otto bins? Medical waste that must be removed within three days...they’re due to be picked up tomorrow morning...understand they must be removed within that period otherwise they could be deemed a health hazard and special precautions must be used to dispose of them ...costing a princely sum”.

Understand appeared to be his favourite word...we all have one which we used too often.

“Gentlemen, I can understand your predicament but this is classified as a Homicide Investigation...all other demands on this area take second place until the body is removed...in an hour or tomorrow morning...I don’t know...sorry”.

As I spoke a screen was being erected around the bin that had the attention of all persons looking at the scene. Toby Alcott's Assist jogged over to me asking that De Longo and myself be present as the bin is emptied of its 'guest'.

I turned to Nevada Singh and Gordon Fuller to advised them that this rear 'service area' could be turned back over to them quicker than we had originally predicted.

"That would be appreciated". The CEO murmured, a smile of pleasure and thanks his good-bye as he turned to walk back into the rear door of the Hospital. His entourage following him. Fuller remained, a frown still deep on his forehead.

I walked in behind the privacy screen as the bin was upended and the body pulled out and lifted onto a stretcher that was then raised to a comfortable level to examine the contents. De Longo suggested she fetch the CEO as that maybe the only way we could identify the person.

"Yeah...go chase him out..."

"Two...three days since out Vic breathed his last. A broken neck. He's a slight...a little bloke so someone taller and more solid than he could easily overpower him...not set in concrete but a talking point for further conjecture...reasonable muscle tone...no other points of damage or contusions...two tats on the point of both shoulders...possibly surprised...similar to...what was his name? I was Bree Wzerlic's Second Assist on the recent case...Perry Montrose...that was it! Our Vic here went the same way".

I heard footsteps and a voice asking could he enter...I turned to see Nevada Singh once again fronting the Police Tape. I invited him behind the privacy screen to possibly identify our Vic.

"That's Harendra Singh...no relation...he is the Assistant Anaesthetist to Perry Montrose...he also works in the Childrens' Hospital across the road...a nice man. Quiet and respectful...popular with everyone he encountered...some of the nurses loved him...this has completely decimated Doctor Hewson and his surgical team...it now fails to exist". He shook his head as he wiped his hands over his face...he had looked incredibly tired at that point.

"Would you think these deaths have been organised to cause Doctor Hewson grief?"

"I don't know what to think...there's been no indication of any ill will towards the Doctor or the Hospital...we have a Complaints Section that handles every sour thought...I'm sure that Doctor Hewson and his team have never been the subject of a complaint...I'll check to make sure..." He turned away from me to dial up the Complaints Section. Spoke softly before turning back to me, speaking louder so I could be a part of the conversation. "Nothing of any

substance for the four years Doctor Hewson and his team have practise at this Hospital...nothing...thanks Rose for your time”. He disconnected before nodding to me.

“Squeaky clean”. I assumed.

The CEO nodded. I had my doubts. No-one is squeaky clean.

“Do we have ‘next-of-kin’ details on our man?”

“He would have supplied that information on his Registration Form...um...I’ll get onto Personnel”.

He came back to me with an address that sounded familiar.

“And his ‘next-of-kin’ details? A Missus Schneider and a Mister Winters...”

“They never mentioned anything about Boarders”. Angie De Longo offered. I nodded in agreement before walking away from the privacy screen.

“Only because we didn’t ask the right questions...” I countered. “We had no reason to! I’d say a quick detour to their address before we knock off...I hate being in that situation having to inform next of kin of their loss...though I doubt there is any familial connection in this case”.

We made good time to the Schneider address as the evening peak hour had well and truly ended.

“Good evening Detectives...why are you here again?” David Winters asked.

“Harendra Singh? Is he a Boarder at this address?”

“Ooh! Are we in trouble with the Tax Department if I confirm your question?”

“Mister Winters, we are with the Murder Squad. We have nothing to do with the ATO...the question of him being a Boarder at this address may pique the interest of the ATO when the matter goes to Court, but it is of no interest to us...Mister Singh has you down as ‘next-of-kin’ on his Registration Form with the Westmead Private Hospital...and I’d venture to say that he has similar details with the Westmead Childrens’ Hospital also”.

“Has something terrible happened to him...we seldom heard him unless he was on night duty...sounds seem amplified at night but that’s the only time we would hear him. We sometimes meet at the clothesline. Have a chat...that’s about it”.

“Do you know of any friends...family?”

“No...he asked us first if we could be registered as his ‘Next of Kin’ as he had no relatives here in Australia. He explained he had no family in India or Pakistan...none that he spoke to and I doubt he rarely accepted visitors...he was a lonely man...such a pity as he was a very nice man. What has happened?”

“His body was found this afternoon...”

“Oh, that’s terrible...he died suddenly?”

“He was murdered...we haven’t any details at this stage...arrh...can I ask you to visit the Morgue tomorrow morning to give the man formal identification?”

“Yes...that’s the least we can do...I suppose we should offer him a decent burial...”

“That’s your choice. I’ll make arrangements for a Police vehicle to pick you up here say at eight tomorrow morning. Can we look through the Deceased’s Flat?”

“Yes...yes...wait until I get the front door key...and let my sister know where I’ll be...won’t be a moment”.

I sighed a sigh of relief as his approval would mean a Court Order was not required even though technically, we should have provided one...

He was as good as his word and we followed him around the side of the house to the Flat’s front door. Two Bedrooms...one being used as a Computer Room. Clean smelling of air fragrance. I walked alone through each room then again the opposite way. I leafed through books, recent bestselling novels. He was a reader of cop, thriller, and legally bent stories...much the same as my preferred reading...when I had the time which was rarely! Opened drawers and wardrobes with nothing sticking out to me. Everything was neatly stacked, stored, and clean...not the look of a Bachelor’s pad at all!

“He has a vehicle?”

“Yes...he drives it to the hospital though he could almost jog there it is that close...a little white sports car...I don’t know what type...I’m not good at that sort of thing”.

I patted him on the shoulder before turning to De Longo who nodded, turning to exit the room. She would request a Uniform Constable request to find and impound his vehicle...make, model, and number plate details unknown...a quick check through the Vehicle Registration data base should surrender the details.

There was nothing that stood out...and I was running out of steam...it was just on ten and we had been on the go since eight this morning.

“Thanks for that Mister Winters...arm...a vehicle will be here tomorrow morning for you at eight...and to return you home”.

“Yes...I’ll be waiting...a good night to you lady Detective and gentleman Detective”.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

As I’ve indicated previously, autopsies were not my favourite way to pass the time...morning or evening. I sat in the upper viewing chamber overlooking the morgue chamber below. My hands in a fist-like tight grip, my legs crossed though straight with every muscle down both legs tight.

Angie De Longo looked relax and bored while Tally Evans was on the edge of her seat...she was either excited at what was soon to occur or she was ready to make a dash to the toilets to lose her breakfast...I wasn’t sure which...

Toby Alcott looked up at us to offer a good morning.

“This won’t take long Detectives...a simple autopsy where the greater time will be waiting for the tox and blood workups. I must say Forensic Trace Officers are not confident of finding any ‘smoking gun’. It seems the hard-standing and dock area are hosed down regularly...every day. Hosed and broomed down...and all wheelie bins are water-jetted after they are emptied...inside and out. They’re left squeaky clean. Their only hope could be the internal and external surfaces of the wheelie bin our Vic was stuffed into which may produce some worthwhile trace...here’s hoping...are we ready?” He asked his two Assistants, one who was already taking digital photos as he walked slowly around the stainless-steel cutting table. The Vic stretched out naked on the table...a skinny chap who needed several pounds of fat to fill him out. “Then let’s begin”.

I felt a gentle nudge to the side of my ribcage.

“It’s over Sunshine. You can open your eyes. This will be our little secret”.

I nodded, before sitting up straight.

“I’m okay until that first slice of the scalpel to commence the ‘Y’ incision...” I whispered back.

“I don’t think so Sunshine. Your body goes into a locked frozen position with your legs stretched out as far as they go...why do you find it so bad. You’d’ve seen some terrible sights during your career...why do you find this process so bad?”

“As I said...that initial instance when the scalpel digs into the chest...I’m out of it. Toby Alcott isn’t as bad as some...Muscles used to detail every little step that makes the whole procedure terrible for me. I think he did it because he knew my Achilles Heel. He played with me I reckon...okay, lets get out of here...nothing earth-shaking to report, eh?”

“No...nothing Boss”. I felt this a sarcastic comment just to have a dig at me.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

We parked near Lidcombe Station as a small Chinese Restaurant with reasonable prices and an extensive ‘Dinner Menu’ was located opposite the Railway Station. Yes, there were no reasonable prices as I scanned the menu.

“Bloody Hell!” I exclaimed. “Chinese was once a reasonable alternative for a bite to eat over those ‘Golden Arches’ offerings. The prices have doubled since I last had Chinese!”

After we had ordered we settled into a relaxed aura.

“What’s on for this afternoon?” Angie De Longo enquired, breaking the silence after she had sipped some water.

“Um...bring the Murder Book up to date and think back through the four homicides to see if we have missed anything”.

“Four homicides!? You including Robyn Hillary with the others!? We have arrested and charged her Killer...”

“He never admitted to the killing...in fact he has been most verbose in yelling out his innocence. Because of the similarities between the four deaths, we have to include Hillary’s death as a mystery also...possibly linked to the other three”.

“He’s been charged and released on bail, Joe. There’ll be red faces all round if we do a double take on our one positive solution...Angie and I will have sore arses for months if you let this thing get out...it’s just your way of inclusion isn’t it? You’re not questioning the guilt of our man, are you?”

“Think about it Ladies...Hillary was the first of four...all similar methods of killing our Vics...I was the one who pushed for Darren Piazza to be arrested and charged. It’s my neck on the chopping block, no-one else’s. Those similarities should be enough to re-look at the case. Um...tonight I want you to lay in bed before you go to sleep thinking through all our Cases. It often is the case that when you wake, you have an answer to our problems. Not always but sometimes. It’s worth a try because we have bugger all to go on except me having this gut feeling we stuffed up with the Robyn Hillary Case...I woke this morning having this dreaded feeling that Piazza was innocence of the crime of him murdering anyone!”.

That buggered up any further conversation and we ate in silence.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

“Okay...we have reserved an Interview Room for four hours. I don’t think we’ll need it for that duration...” I wiggled my hand. “My shout on the coffees...um...while I’m gone, get one of your Murder Book summaries up on the large screen and wheel in one of those white boards that you can also hook up to your iPhones so we can see the facts up in front of us...pick the one between you that you consider the neater writer and devoid of any personal comments in the commentary...okay? We’ll brainstorm and comment on all the Cases...no logical sequence and nothing excluded...okay? I won’t be long”.

“Okay...let’s put up ‘bullet style’ all the participants in the four homicides...” De Longo suggested as I came back into the small room laden with coffee containers and nibblies which both women frowned at...but they ate most of the offerings...I barely got a look-in!

Angie stood to address the white board.

- “First...Robyn Margaret Hillary.
Killed 12th.of last month.

Her neck broken.

The Admission and Priority Planner for the Operating Teams. Closely associated with Doctor Hewson's surgical team.

She had serious sex and gender issues which caused her constant grief. Her family and most of her family friends were all part of a congregation of serious religious types who could not handle her situation.

Darren Piazzi part-time lover and an Anaesthetist Assistant at both Westmead Private and the Kids' Hospital across the road.

Has been arrested and charged for Hillary's homicide.

Hillary a member of the Australasian Sports Car Club and the British Sports Car Club. Warmly regarded by all members of these two Clubs.

A common connection to several other persons of the same Club or similar interest who were later killed or were on the periphery.

Lenny Kozlowski Head Sister Recovery Ward friend of Hillary who tried to help her come to terms with her gender issues".

- "Second... Veronica 'Ronnie' Purvey.
- Killed 28th. Last month.

Killed by a thrust of a knife into her vertebrae severing her spinal cord. Her body found under the husband's vehicle...by her husband.

She was the Theatre Sister and valuable Team member of Doctor Hewson's surgical team.

She had been physically, mentally and financially abused by her husband George Purvey for several years before her death. There was talk amongst her friends that the Deceased was planning to leave her husband...that fact cannot now be confirmed.

Her husband would be the chief suspect except the fact that all four persons were killed in a similar manner and George Purvey had little or no dealings with the other deceased persons...leaving possible suspects up in the air.

- "Third... Perry Montrose.

Killed 3rd of this month.

A week after Ronnie Purvey. Neck broken.

Body discovered the following day.

Head Anaesthetist and valuable team member of Hewson's surgical team.

Had been in a long-term relationship with Petula Ramsey Physiotherapist who worked at both the Private Hospital and the Kids across the road.

Relationship only recently ended.

The Deceased had begun a new relationship...with whom??...and was it in existence at the same time as Perry and Petula.

Avid Anglophile. His pride and joy an MG Sports Car...and a V8 Rover Sedan

Montrose was the present Treasurer of the MG Sports Club.

His recent squeeze who had taken up residence not long after Ramsey left is also a keen British Sports Car freak...who is she?

- “Fourth... Harendra Singh.

Assistant Anaesthetist to Perry Montrose at the Private Hospital.

.....Killed 18th. of this month.

Body not discovered for two days after the Deceased died.

“Okay...anything else we should put up there?” I asked my two colleagues. They glanced at one another wondering whether they were back at the Academy and being asked as a class to solve the four homicides...it was a bit like that...and to tell the truth, sitting back listening and watching proceedings I felt a little like the ‘Professor’ surveying his class.

“Um...periphery persons who may have had something to do with the homicides...or was connected in some way”.

“Okay, I’ll go along with that...who first?”

- “Lena ‘Lenny’ Kozlowski Head Sister Recovery Ward...it seemed to be a strong association with Hillary but she seemed ‘cool’...not surprised at Hillary’s death. She seemed to expect it...but knowing Hillary’s torment, it would be a suicide...not a homicide that the woman took in her stride”.
-
- “Doctor Hewson...Barwon Chadwick Hewson leader of the Operating team...unfazed by the deaths with no appreciation that his surgical team was now non-existent. He did not even consider these homicides were meant to harm him. Super-confident and I reckon, a real ladies’ man...and oblivious to how these homicides affect him professionally and financially...romantic relationships with who?”.
-
- “Doctor Hewson’s wife. She has never been interviewed. Do we need to consider her?”.
- “Mister Purvey is a prickly man who is more concerned with the fact he could not get to work while his wife is dead lying under his vehicle...has there been any recent associations with the man that could have caused him to kill his wife...”
-
- Missus Schneider and her brother David Winters. Harendra Singh boarded at their address.
-

- The MG Sports Car Club and the British Sports Car Club. Both had members who were either killed or who were close to those killed. Relationships developed while members were attending race ‘meets’. Who?

“There’s no evidence linking Purvey with the death of his wife...okay, is that all?”

“Um...the connection between several persons and their love of vintage British Sports Cars...that has not been investigated”.

“Good point...anything else? No? Okay...keeping in mind those bullet points, let’s now brainstorm with those facts front and centre. What have we got? Four similar homicides. It appears to me the four homicides of Robyn Hillary, Ronnie Purvey, Perry Montrose and now Harendra Singh points to only one conclusion...whoever committed these homicides was out to ruin Doctor Hewson...or cause him psychological damage”.

“I’d say due to the similarities in the homicides, the same person committed all killings. You don’t get different persons having the same MO”.

“No...not in the Case of the Robyn Hillary homicide”.

“We can’t rule out that we arrested and charged the wrong man due simply to the fact all four homicides are similar...and the attacks were committed around the same time in the late afternoon”.

“Okay...but who has stood on someone’s toes to get a reaction of causing the Doctor grief?”

“That doesn’t work for me Joe...” Angie De Longo stood and walked around towards the white board. “Wouldn’t it be easier to just kill the Doctor instead of committing four homicides instead?”

“That rings true for me too...” Tally Evans suggested, nodding her head.

“Yeah...my impression of the man was he was cool, full of self-confidence and yes...certainly a lady’s man...we haven’t done much digging into the man. I think we should put the man under the microscope...”

“Yes...and Petula Ramsey as well”.

“Why?” I asked, a little shocked by the suggestion. “If we include her we should also check out Lena ‘Lenny’ Kozlowski. By her own admission she was close to Robyn Hillary...maybe

she saw more than a woman struggling with her sexuality and gender...and was shocked by someone taking advantage of the woman's struggles”.

“Like whom for Christ sake!? We've closed off her Homicide Case with Darren Piazza being charged!”

“He at no stage confessed...on the contrary, he was most verbose about his innocence...”

“Doctor Hewson...maybe”. I muttered, cutting across Tally's assertions.

“Mmm...I think Doctor Hewson and Petula Ramsey have been having an affair for some time. I wouldn't be surprised if Perry Montrose found out about the affair and chucked the delightful Petula from his house...Hewson cannot or will not support her or find a 'love nest' for the two. She reacts thinking she has been used but it is the way the man operates. He's married...have we any information on her?”

“No Joe. Why are you considering just females?”

“The only images we have are on the entry of a person who committed the homicide of Perry Montrose...it appears to me to be of a woman...admittedly it was a back view only but to me it was a woman...and she struggled to move the body to a bushy corner of the front yard”.

“Montrose was a tall man...at least above average and as a dead weight, I'd have troubles moving him...remember she caught Montrose as he was falling...that's not a woman!”

“Yesss...I'll agree with that up to a point. Anything else?”

“No...”

“Pretty slim Joe...”

I sat down opposite my two partners and screwed up my face...there was something missing!

“I think we should lean on Petula Ramsey a little harder. She confesses she knew the first three Vics, she is also into British Sports Cars herself...”

“...and she is now living with several more Hospital employees...” Angie stated forcefully, though I wondered what that had to do with the price of fish in Denmark.

“She certainly would have the muscle and anatomical knowledge to carry out the four homicides...but what is her reason?”

“She was shafted by the Doc...”

“No...no...to me that doesn't add up Angie...it's not how a woman would commit murder unless she had a very good reason to do so...and I don't think she had a very good reason...especially to kill the four...not at all”. De Longo explained.

“Okay...” Angie was like a dog with a bone...she would not let the matter go. I smiled to myself happy at how the two were interacting. “Okay...the MG Sports Club is intrinsically entwined with at least three of our Vics...and several peripheral persons...is that the missing connection?”

At that point we gave it away, the three of us frustrated with what seemed like a nothing conclusion. We were starting to go around in circles as there was something...large missing from our endeavours. We copied the White Board material onto the Murder Book Volume 5 and onto our iPhones, ensuring the white board was clean.

We returned to our desks with me shaking my head as I passed the Boss's Office door. A reaction to her raised eyebrows of enquiry.

I went down to the sub-basement gym to do twenty laps of the pool. A quick hot and cold shower and I was out of the place thirty minutes before the normal knock-off time.

I was still frustrated, exasperated, and dissatisfied...

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

I knew I would be hauled over hot coals and be flayed to an inch of my life on the 'turnaround' of guilty to innocence for Darren Piazzi...that was an understatement. The DPP Rep didn't know how to respond with my Boss's Boss...the head of the Major Crimes Unit which included the Murder Squad and several other Branches commanded me to front the Standards and Ethics Unit...something that I was familiar with having rested my arse in front of a three men panel on several occasions who basically had it in for me ...so far I had stayed one foot in front of them...they would continue trying to demote me down the Constable...or out of the Service entirely. I certainly got that feeling of antagonism towards me.

“I was not aware of the Robyn Hillary Case until I eventually attended the regular Monday morning staff meeting. I had missed the previous two meetings because of work commitments...”

“Are you not expected to attend those Monday meetings?”

“Yes...when you can. I was at Court...something you cannot ignore...”

“Yes...um...you were convinced of Piazzzi’s guilt once you became familiar with the Case...what changed your mind?”

“The similarity between the four homicide Cases...the method used in each case was very similar, suggesting the same Perpetrator. Piazzzi by that stage had been arrested, charged, was on remand awaiting his Bail Hearing...he could not have killed Perry Montrose or Singh as he was still in prison on remand...his time in remand was certainly lengthy and not the norm. I cannot offer any information that would explain those circumstances”.

“Is that right? Convenient...” Sarcasm dripped from his every word. One of three ‘Panellists’ trying to ream me a new hole.

“I wouldn’t quite put it that way...a lucky break...especially for him...”

“The man would be in his rights to sue the Force for false arrest and imprisonment...are you confident that you could convince a Jury in a Civil Case that you thought initially, based on the evidence you had against the man *at that time* that he was guilty...then convince that same Jury that your guilty man did not commit the homicide he was arrested and charged with several weeks later...”

“Very confident...it all has to do with dates on a calendar...”

One of the three Panellists nodded his head...the other two were still not convinced.

“Who is your new felon for these four homicides?”

“We have not proceeded that far yet...we are going back through the five Volumes of the Murder Book hoping we can jag a name...that is what my two partners are doing at present while I entertain you lot...and give you justification for your role in the Police Force”.

“Steady on Detective. Your file indicates that you have a strong opinion of our role...you are aggressive at every appearance in front of the panel...for no positive reason...”

“Because you as a collective...are wasting everyone’s time...including yours...”

“Aarrh...gentlemen? Is there anything else that you wish to ask of our guest?”

That comment almost had me on my feet and walking after I had tongue-lashed the three almighty bastards. Instead I sat there listening to Marge Hendricks my first partner whisper in my ear.

“Joseph? It was a throwaway line to see how you would react. They are with you at present...don’t stuff it up!”

I listened to her wise words and sat silently before being dismissed not knowing either way how the Panel would write the report that would be forever on my file...joining half-a-dozen similarly written reports by other Panellists.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

A week after I fronted the S & E Panel I was sitting at my desk talking to my former partner Sophie Grasso on the phone when the beeps warned me I had an incoming call.

I hung up and picked up the call.

“Someone told me you have been bashing your head against the wall on your four Homicide Cases. I may be able to help to solve your problems...if I can I become your favourite again?”.

“A back massage and a bottle of excellent Dry White would do the trick I reckon”.

“Yes...that too if it gets you out of the shitty mood you’ve been in over the past week or two. We’ve just got the Final Report on forensic trace that was found inside the wheelie bin that Harendra Singh had been shoved into, leaving him there for two days after his death. Two long strands of hair...a female...DNA comparison tests have surprisingly thrown up a name...”

“Who sweetheart? Who?” I sprung to my feet. “Who?” I excitedly asked.

“She’s a member of the Force. A Uniform Constable out of the Gladesville Station...a Janet Campriani...”

“Do you know if she is on duty at present?”

“What else would you like me to do...sharpen your pencils?”

“I don’t have any pencils...”

“See what you’re missing out on, my love”.

“Ta my love...if this pans out I’ll give you a back massage...and sharpen your pencils”.

“I have a few...it will be an excessively hard job...”

“A massage every half-dozen pencils...”

“Open to negotiation...”

I hung up, I smile of my face...a soft laugh that both my partners heard causing them to suddenly look up at me. I began to get my gear together urging my two partners into action. As I was sprinting off the floor a sudden thought hit me. I speed dialled Sophie Grasso back.

“Joe? We haven’t the time to continually ring each other. My Boss is staring at me...”

“Tell him you’ve just solved four homicides...that Boarder...Janet...”

“Yeah...Janet Campriani...she is now working out of Gladesville...day shift...”

She was talking to clear air.

We made Gladesville from Parramatta in record time. Me filling in the blanks as we drove...me taking the back seat...at least it is the safest seat in a vehicle according to statistics. I hoped those stats were correct as Tally Evans drove as though in a bloody sports car. Me hanging on for dear life!

“Why would she be involved?”

“I have no idea. We’ll find out when we talk to her...okay!?”

CHAPTER FORTY

The blood drained from her face when she saw the three of us enter the suburban cop shop. I nodded at her as we addressed the counter. We produced our ID Cards for her to peruse.

“No need...I know who you are”.

“Can we have a talk somewhere private-like. You’d have an Interview Room here, wouldn’t you?”

I had rung the Station Sergeant of Gladesville and filled him in on our suppositions and the reason for our rushed appearance.

“Yeah...she can go off like Mount Vesuvius on occasions. I’ve told her several times that she needs to learn how to control her temper...she mumbled something about her father’s sudden death a couple of months ago...we have an Interview Room connected to several recording devices...and a ubiquitous one-way mirror. I can sit in there to ensure there is no funny business...”

“Great! Yes...a good call”.

We settled into the small Interview Room. Someone provided coffee containers for us. A mocha for Janet and a ‘No Sugar’ Cola for the Station’s Union Rep as he sat beside his work colleague. She had refused legal Counsel.

We sat there looking at one another as we sipped on our drinks before I eventually broke the silence.

“You’ve moved back with your mother so I believe...yes? Tennyson Point...a nice spot...been there often...”.

“Raven Point. Further down the Point from Tennyson. Overlooks Doodys Bay...we have a boat moored there...what do you want Detective?”

“Your vehicle...”

“Yes...it’s a red Toyota Corolla Hatchback...why do you need it?”

“Was that the car you were driving when I saw you at Detective Sophie Grasso’s address?”

“You know it was...”

“You said it was your friend’s...his mother’s actually”.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Why the deception?”

Another shrug of the shoulders.

“Have you your Glock on you?”

“Like you, we don’t carry when we are inside the building...”

“Your father died suddenly...a couple of months ago...while you were boarding at Sophie Grasso’s place...that’s when control of your temper began to fail”.

“Yes...a sudden death...we weren’t expecting it. We felt that if it was a serious death threat, the Hospital Doctor and Surgeon would be straight onto it and operate...but no...he was shuffled down the Operation List until it was too late. If he had been looked at when the symptoms first appeared he may be still alive today...he was shuffled four times further down the list...”

“His Surgeon?”

“Doctor Hewson...Mister Pretty Boy Hewson so he thought. He even came onto me, would you believe. My mother was standing beside me for fuck’s sake. We were talking to him wondering why if my father’s condition required urgent attention that needed his attendance immediately at the Hospital after he took the weekend to shit his bowel clean, why he was then shuffled down the list on four separate occasions...he couldn’t supply a straight answer...the bastard! Something about the operating list being fluid”. She was growing angrier by the word.

“You blame the Doctor for your father’s death?”

“Too bloody right! Wouldn’t you!?” She thumped the table. A moment of pain then she covered it up to settle back in her chair.

“Four times...”

“Yes...four fucking times!” She again leaned forward and thumped the table.

“Is that why you killed four of the Doctor’s staff?”

She glared at me.

“Too fucking right...” She replied between clenched teeth.

“Arrh...Constable Janet Campriani. You have just admitted to the homicide killing of four persons...all of whom worked on Doctor Hewson’s Surgical Team...why didn’t you just kill the Doctor?”

“If I had of killed him he would not be in the pickle he now finds himself...even he, an arrogant ‘love thy self’ bastard will now suffer knowing he had caused the death of all those colleagues of his...he can’t escape it...” A sudden change in her expression as she looked at the wall above my head. “Who’ll look after my mother...”

“You should have thought about that before you began your vengeful wrath...stand up, turn around. You know the score”.

I stood back to allow De Longo to do the honours. She deserved it...

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