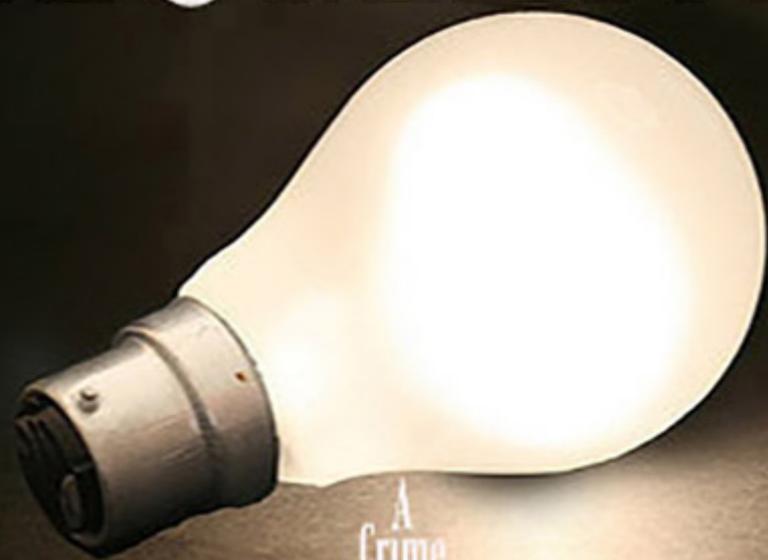


MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES JOSEPH LIND, MARJORY HENDRICKS  
and introducing  
DALLAS COURTNEY

# A LIGHT BULB MOMENT



A  
Crime  
Novella  
by

PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES JOSEPH LIND  
AND MARJORY HENDRICKS  
and introducing  
DETECTIVE GRADE 2, DALLAS COURTNEY

# A LIGHT BULB MOMENT

PETER C BYRNES

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## CHAPTER ONE

We at one time, would use tents and swags. Going away for an extended week-end at least twice a year on what became known as the 'Boys Time Out'.

A bonding session between father and son.

Now of course, with Billy close to twenty-two years of age, these were just week-ends where we could chill out together. Two adults enjoying each other's company. Ben, Billy's best mate since Kindergarten, would usually go with us. A habit that I guess I had encouraged at one time knowing that 'Dad' could not enthrall the young Bill as much as when he was eight or nine years of age.

Ben had never really known his Dad, just a memory of him bashing the tripe out of his mother and often disappearing, returning battered and bruised from some week-end of binge drinking. Or some other alcoholic event, never fully explained.

So I guess that I had become the surrogate father. A role that I rather enjoyed as Ben was a good kid. Basically, it was he more adopting me as his presence was for-ever at my place. There had been rather overt manipulations by both boys at some point to pair Ben's mother Maureen and I off as a couple. Sure, we had enjoyed each other's company on those occasions that we managed to hook up, and sure, there was a bit of a spark, but nothing ever seemed to come of it. To tell the truth, I was never too sure why we hadn't paired up. She was a nice person, a nice woman and quite witty which was a complimentary quality to my superb sense of humour!

So I always told myself.

The two boys now in residence in the main part of my house with their partners.

I forced....no, more happily relegated, to the Granny Flat that was tacked onto the rear of the house with the backyard pool a decent dive through my bedroom picture window. Of course, Tellie, Lestelle Sanchez, a Forensic technician of some note and my live-in partner for some eighteen months now, would chide me when-ever I bought this up, telling me in no uncertain terms to act my age!

She and I have been an item (as it is so simplistically described by the 'younger set') for close on a year I guess, before we began cohabiting in the re-painted, re-furnished, delightful, airy and sunny Grannie Flat. While women seem to remember these dates better than men for some reason, I must admit to being an almost different person since these arrangements have existed. I guess I had known Tellie less than three months when she surprised me with the suggestion of shacking up together! I couldn't have thought of a better arrangement and had worked feverishly at painting out every room while Tellie, Malisa and

Ben's 'live-in' Samantha hunted the second-hand market and Furniture Stores for the preferred décor items. Lugging them home to fill the available space in my Man's Shed!

I must admit, the results were outstanding though you would only hear me say so during a weak moment!

These living arrangements have been in existence for some time now with Bill's partner, Malisa doing remarkable things with the décor and external appearance of the place. A real dynamo of a woman who held a very responsible position with the Australian Federal Police Force. An Overseer Operative of an Electronic Surveillance and Cyber Investigation Team. What that actually meant and entailed we were never to learn as talking of her responsibilities could ensure a time in Prison. But at least that usually entailed a nine to six working day that would only differ if the security of the Western World was being challenged.

Unlike my ridiculous staggered and often ad hoc hours of most weeks.

Bill, on the other hand, often would enthral us with tales of Cases that he was involved in as a Junior Law Clerk with the DPP's Office. This I imagine, would have him front and centre at the Chief Prosecutor's Office if it became common knowledge.

Ben had gained employment with a high-flying Law Enterprise. Again, the need for privacy of individual Cases would more than likely be ignored.

What-ever...

I was waiting for the day that both sat on opposite sides of the Court representing some criminal matter. I promised myself that no matter what, I would ensure that I sat in the Public gallery for that one!

## **CHAPTER TWO**

It had been a very hot, long summer with record temperatures extending into mid-Autumn.

We at last, had managed to snare a four-day week-end that suited us all.

We were camped in some distant, secluded camping spot in the Barrington Tops National Park, having arrived there early on the Friday after leaving home around four in the morning. Well before the first fingers of light peeked over the horizon. Me still half asleep lounging in the rear seat of my new 4WD vehicle. The caravan behind, I hoped! Billy driving. Ben in the passenger seat. The music up loud. The thumping of the base

reverberating throughout the vehicle...and my body!

This arrangement, the choice of music the Boys idea, not mine. Luckily, I had ear-plugs to lessen the impact!

"Dad?" The two suggested after we had hitched up the caravan and checked that we had everything required for a four day stay in the bush. "Dad? You still look half asleep. I'll drive if you like. You hop in the back seat, if you like...get a bit more shut eye."

Bill was a thoughtful lad, though the music was starting to affect that sentiment, that opinion of him that I had!

With everything now in the caravan, there was very little to do in setting up camp. Maybe level up the van and roll out the awning, gather sufficient wood for the built-in steel BBQ settings provided with their 'swing out' pot and billy holder. These positioned thoughtfully at regular intervals around the camping area. This superb set-up complimented by heavy, hardwood picnic table and bench seat arrangements located in close proximity. A large heap of sawn timber off-cuts at the Camp Ground entrance ensured that we never had to get out the small gas BBQ slide-out on the van.

The smell of burning eucalypt sawn off-cuts while you cooked the meal over the open flames was always pleasurable to me...even when the breeze was blowing in the wrong direction saturating your clothing in that distinctive aroma of stale wood smoke!

We had often suggested that our women accompany us on these sojourns but trying to organise 'long week-ends' for the six of us was all but impossible. The women apologetically adding that the house devoid of male noises and smells was as just as good a break for them as sitting shivering beside a roaring fire out in the bush, being eaten alive by insects and other nasties and accosted by snakes and goannas at every turn.

I picked up that there was some reticence by the three females to accompany us. A decidedly unenthusiastic attitude that my superior detective skills deduced!

We did not even unhitch the van from my new 4WD, leaving it hooked up and levelled for the entire stay. Intending to either bush-walk or ride our mountain bikes along the various Fire Trails further into the bush.

With two eighty litre freshwater tanks, solar panels and a generator for power, we could stay bush indefinitely...or until the beer ran out at least.

An invigorating splash-pool created by a small waterfall nearby was our washing point. Chilly but clean...and if that failed to excite, there was always the external warm shower facilities on the rear of the Caravan.

It had long ago been agreed upon that I would sleep in my comfortable swag under the Van Awning while the two boys slept in comfort on the inner-spring mattresses of the single beds inside the Van. This supposedly because of the fact that Billy did nothing but complain about my snoring on the one night when we had shared the Van together. It never woke me, was my constant remark and the sounds of the two boys snoring sounded like the Production Test Line in a Chainsaw Factory!

But they never woke each other up...go figure!

I've often wondered if I've been conned on that point!

While early morning 'wake-up' calls for the Job are an extremely testing event, when-ever I am asleep in my Swag under the awning of the Caravan, I invariably awake as the sun's early morning light awakens the bush and the lazy ground mist slithers across the nearby grassy surface of the camp ground. I have had a Goanna or two and Roos come up close to sniff my presence and then go back to their early morning regime. As the Goanna would amble away, it would be constantly bombarded by Magpies, Hooded Lapwings or Noisy Minors worried about their nests being invaded for that early egg feast. King Parrots and Eastern Rosellas would strut their stuff chewing on the grass seeds. Wattlebirds would squawk their guttural morning call.

I'd be up, have the fire-pit roaring, the kettle bubbling away and bacon, eggs, tomatoes and mushrooms cooking as the aroma forced the boys from the Van.

Bleary-eyed they would mumble their discontent of the morning.

Me?

I'd be as chirpy as a flock of Rosellas.

Go figure.

We'd tidied up, kitted up and locked up the van and truck by the time that the sun peeked through the crowns of the trees.

We'd wheeled our bikes over to the edge of the track ready to ride the fire trail when a dusty Utility went past us at a million miles an hour. A cocky's-comb of dust and stones were kicked up by its passage causing our sudden disappearance into its midst. Coughing and spluttering as we re-emerged.

"Bloody hell!" I exclaimed. "What a bloody idiot!"

If we had started off the track on our bikes two minutes earlier, God knows what our fate would have been. Bonnet trophies more than likely.

The boys somehow linking our safe passage from the incident to their bleary, belated welcome to the morning.

After a round of stirring banter, we quickly forgot the incident as we mounted our bikes and began what we hoped would be an exhilarating day of bike riding along the Gilfoyle's Gully Track that took us deeper into the hinterland.

## CHAPTER THREE

Our maps had shown us that the track followed the meanderings of the rock-strewn creek bed, with its gurgling cascades and its gentle flow of water in other sections. Meandering, shadowing the creek's course for some ten kilometres with the track crossing the creek several times in its twists and turns. Spanning the creek either by well-constructed bridges or shallow causeways. At around that ten-kilometre mark, the Chinaman's Flats Camping Area, designed for tents only, sat adjacent to a cascade and pristine swimming hole. From there, the track swung away from the creek bed to weave its way up the side of a valley wall to then follow interconnecting ridge-lines further into the bush. Becoming a Fire Trail that at sections, was extremely difficult to traverse because of slides and wash a-ways.

Dense forest.

A myriad bird calls.

The freshness of the bush.

We stopped on the top side of the cascades where an inviting pool had us swimming before having our lunch. After sunning ourselves on a rock platform and drying off, we took the top walking trail that would lead us through the 'Chinaman's Flat' Camp Ground back out onto Gilfoyle's Gully Track.

We waved to a woman lounging against a tree. Asleep. A small fire smoked silently in the well-formed 'concrete pipe' BBQ setting. A kettle burred its statement that it was hot enough. A large two-man dome tent with an awning attached sat glumly to one side of the flat area. Birds shrilled and squawked their presence in the dense foliage.

Perhaps no more than half a dozen campers could be comfortably accommodated on the lush green flats. At dawn and dusk the Roos would be here in numbers munching on the rich grass. Bollards and log kerbs prevented vehicle access onto the area. A small loop track and parking indent would accommodate around a dozen vehicles maximum, off to one side.

This track just a short spur off the main track.

Gilfoyle's Gully Track.

We walked through the area. The bird life screeched at our intrusion into the calm surroundings.

We'd made the log kerbs and were lifting our bikes over them when I stopped.

"Bill? Hang onto my bike, will you?"

I walked quickly back to the prone figure of the woman and shook her shoulder. Felt for a pulse.

She was dead.

"Dad? She all right?"

"No. Stay back guys...she's dead. I can't see any injuries. Maybe a heart attack."

"She's a little young for that, isn't she Dad?" Bill proclaimed as he and Ben sidled up to me. Completely ignoring my instructions. I was just trying to shield them from seeing a dead body...but hell, they were now young twenty-year-old. They'd back-packed through Europe together for almost three months. They may have seen sights that I could only imagine at, so what was my beef?

I glanced at my son. He seemed more inquisitive than shocked.

"Mmm..." I replied to his comment. He was right of course, but you can't rule anything out.

She had a rough bandage on her right leg and foot. A poor example of a pressure bandage.

"Take the bandage off. It might be a snake bite or something that she's tried to slow down...that Ute going hell bent for leather this morning...perhaps he was going for help."

"You'd think that he'd take her with him, wouldn't you?" Ben chimed in.

That made sense to me.

I said as much.

"Maybe he was panicking. Not thinking straight." Bill responded.

"Could be." I murmured.

I walked to the tent and looked inside it. Neat. Tidy. A large double Sleeping Bag on a thick

ground sheet and blanket. Two small overnight bags with the essential clothes and toiletries for a couple of days of camping. Very little food-stuff about. It could have been in a container in the Ute. Perhaps a twelve-volt Fridge and Freezer. Coffee. Tea. Sugar in a tamper proof container along with a small camping bag with a set of utensils. Plates. Mugs. All neatly placed on a lightweight table and chair set positioned under the awning of the tent.

"Should I go back to the van and get the Sat-phone?" Bill asked.

"Yeah...no... the guy in the Ute may have been speeding out to somewhere where there was Mobile Phone coverage." Scolding myself at the same time for not bringing along the sat-phone.

"If he did, he should have returned by now, don't you think?"

"Mmm..."

I swung my backpack off my shoulders, taking out my ePERB. An individual/personal emergency and rescue beacon device.

I activated it.

"It should be about thirty, maybe forty-five minutes before some-one turns up. We'll take advantage of the coffee to make ourselves a cuppa. Don't come over here guys. Leave this area free....it could well be a crime scene. Settle down over near those bollards in the shade of those trees. I'll bring the kettle, coffee and mugs over to you. OK?"

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

I must have fallen asleep...as one does in close proximity to a dead body. I knew that both of the boys would not even be able to relax, let alone sleep. I was awoken roughly by Bill shaking my shoulder.

I glanced at my watch.

Over an hour had sped by.

The unmistakable blurt of Trail Bikes could be heard further down the valley. Cops, I thought to myself. About bloody time. By the time that we went through the preliminaries, we'd be lucky to make our camp by nightfall!

The Bikes came to a sudden stop in the parking indent. A cloud of dust enveloped the riders as they dismounted. Two large Cop 4WD's followed closely behind. A 4WD Paramedics Rescue van was the last in the parade.

A Senior Constable alighted from one of the 4WDs.

I offered my hand. Introduced myself, leaving the fact that I was a Murder Detective with the Murder Squad down in Sydney out of the equation. A young, twenty-something guy almost fell out of the rear of the vehicle, looking pale and shaky.

"Your ePERB?" The Senior Constable asked, establishing the pecking order.

I nodded my head.

"Turn it off..." He turned to a young Constable. "Get onto the Station to tell them that we've found the Owner of the ePERB. All is well. Inform Canberra..."

All ePERB activations were initially beamed from a satellite straight to the Emergency Coordination Centre in Canberra. It was they who would locate the signal activation point and call in the closest local Rescue people. Land or sea. A good system if you weren't holding your breath or hanging by the short and curlies. For over an hour!

But the system had saved hundreds of lives since its inception. Anyone who ventured onto the sea or into the outback or just the Bush, should always invest in the cost of an ePERB. They were light, compact and could very well save your life...unless you were bitten by a snake or falling halfway down a hundred-metre cliff at the time of activation!

With the other half, still to go!

The Senior Constable turned to the ashen faced young guy. Mumbled some words into his ear. A nod of acknowledgement from the bloke. A wave of his hand to several Paramedics who were bent over the prone figure. Some further explanations that I did not hear...or really want to hear. The young bloke looked distraught...or perhaps a little less than his actions indicated if you looked closely at his eyes. I was good like that, able to assess a person's reaction, actions to a tense situation...and also my cynical side would always suspect something amiss even when there was nothing suspicious in the event.

The Senior Constable came over to us three, took our particulars, where we were camped and our intended departure. Our story. I doubted that the boys would want to remain for another day and a half so I informed the Bossman that we'd be heading out to-morrow morning. Considering the circumstances.

He nodded his head.

"I reckon that you better start heading back towards your camp if you want to make it before

nightfall. It's a full moon to-night so it won't be too bad, but still...there's nothing more that you can do here. We may need to get back in touch...I doubt it...but you never know. Good afternoon. Thanks for carrying that device. It saves lives."

With that he walked towards the group of people milling around the body. I noticed that the young bloke was packing up his gear and placing it in the back of one of the Police vehicles. I thought that a bit odd...but not exceptionally so, I guess.

I heard the words 'snake bite' drift over to us as we mounted our bikes and headed out.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

"So you had a bit of a disrupted week-end, then?"

"Yeah. Not how we expected or really wanted it to end. No. And short by a day and a half through no fault of ours...pity really. It really is a superb area. Beautiful. The weather was perfect. We'll have to head back up there again. Maybe next time...you and Muscles?"

The question left to hang in the air.

We hopped out of our Unmarked.

A typical suburban street. Ex-Housing Commission double-fronted, fibro-clad dwellings. At least the area looked as though people cared about their property. Trees and bushes now fully grown where everything would have been bulldozed when the Suburb had been created.

A tree-less desert in the middle of bushland in the Nineteen Sixties. A funny way to grow houses. Bull-doze everything to the ground and hope for the best!

"A Mister Bryan O'Donnell. Married for almost forty years to Doreen. Allegedly stabbed her to death in the Kitchen of their home that they had lived in all their married lives. Five kids. All grown up and left the nest...a typical suburban scenario...the culmination of an argument over whether the TV should be turned on so early in the morning...apparently, some-one couldn't sleep. Don't know at this stage which one."

"So, was it snake bite?" Marge asked as she glanced to me as we stood from our Unmarked.

"What? On the week-end? Yeah...so I presume...so I heard."

We walked up the front path, up three steps onto the small front veranda.

"Why don't you and Muscles come camping with us? There's a long week-end coming up isn't there? Soon?"

"What? Me camping? Miserable weather. Chilled to the bone. Not washing or having a bath for days on end. Nothing but burnt offerings off a filthy BBQ plate that a thousand Possums have pissed and shat on before your entrance to the area. Somewhere out in the back-blocks. Miles from no-where without a Coffee Shop within cooe. If it rains, which it normally does on camping week-ends, you get sick and tired of doing nothing, hunched over in a tent that you can't stand straight in...playing cards becomes the game of choice...sleeping, reading perhaps if you're into that and have not forgotten the batteries to the only torch available...touch the sides of the tent and everything gets wet...give me a five star joint with a huge heated swimming pool where you hang over a Balcony while the Maid makes your bed."

"Had a couple of bad experiences, eh? But the smell of the bush, the birds, the animals...and the rain drops falling on canvass or on the roof of the Caravan has to be heard to be believed..."

"Creepy-crawlies that invade your sleeping bag. Snakes. Large spiders with their webs that you constantly walk into..."

By this stage, we were walking down the hallway of the small home. Who-ever lived here was not house proud. It had been some time since a decent clean, a vacuum and a dusting had been undertaken.

"What have we got, Caramine? A dead body, eh?"

"You'll make a half-decent Detective, one of these days with observational talents like that...one stab wound to the chest. Deep...you can tell it was a stab wound that did her in by the fact that the knife is still deep inside her chest...the handle jutting out in that position even Blind Freddy could make it out...seems as if your legendary observation skills are firing this morning."

"Oh! Catty. Catty, girl. What got you out of bed in such a fine mood?"

"Yeah...I guess it is one of my good days...just as well, as I become unbearable on a bad day..."

I bent over the body. A large woman. A hard face that had seen better days. St. Vinnie reject clothes. Bedroom slippers on her swollen feet. Stubby, thick fingers. No rings or jewellery of any kind. Flat on her back as though she had fallen that way.

"Death by stabbing..." I observed glumly, just to keep the humour rolling.

"He's good. No doubt about it...next he'll be asking where the husband is...to which I'll inform him that he awaits his piercing interrogative methods in the adjacent Lounge Room. He'll assume rightly I might add, that it was the husband that had done the dirty deed to which I'll reply that the dastardly husband had indeed confessed to the crime. Case solved. Let's pack up and all get back to the office. Another criminal arrested to spend his remaining days in Prison...a safer area to boot! Praise the Lord for clever dicks like him!"  
I looked over at Mar who was kneeling beside the prone figure of the woman.

"No wedding ring..." I murmured softly.

"That's because their marriage was nothing but a sham. Like so many others who have been married for over forty years, it is nothing but habit and a mild hatred of one another."

"Christ, you sure have attitude this morning. Girlie, what's got up your nose?"

Caramine Lees, one of the better Forensic Pathologists with the Coroner's office, was also 2IC to Brian 'Muscles' Sarvich, my partner, Marge Hendricks' live-in partner.

She shook her head. The forensic bonnet almost falling off her head. She swore under her breath. I looked over at her. She was in one hell of a mood.

"You okay, my lovely?"

"Yeah...yeah. I'm just having a bad morning, that's all. Um...you guys finished? We need to get her out of here. I'm needed at another body dump out Minto way. It never stops..."

"Carmie? You need a break, my love. When was the last time you had time off? A decent holiday break?" I asked. A frown on my forehead as I laid my hand on her shoulder.

"Can't afford to take time off and I haven't got the time! I'll be all right. I just need a good night's sleep, is all."

## **CHAPTER SIX**

"Mister O'Donnell, is it? Bryan O'Donnell?"

Marge asked, as we walked into the Lounge Room.

Over-stuffed furniture. Too many Throw Pillows. Dirty with colours fading. An old rickety Bookcase covered in Photograph frames of kids and grand-kids. An old fifties coloured glass vase with plastic flowers shoved carelessly into the neck that should have been

chucked out some twenty years ago. A huge flat-screen TV dominated the room.

The man nodded his head slowly.

"Yeah. I stabbed her. She hasn't been herself for...oh...ten, maybe fifteen years about. Not the girl that I married, that's for sure. Constantly nagging. Finding fault. Not herself...I finally snapped when she woke up...I couldn't sleep so I comes out into the kitchen to make meself a cuppa and turn on the small TV near the table. Was watching some Breakfast show or sumfin for the News. She comes stumbling out...as soon as she sees what shows I's watching, she starts up...I mean, what's it to her, she was asleep! I just snapped. I've had enough after so many years..."

We were still questioning him some thirty minutes later when the room was suddenly filled with people. Crying. Wailing. Hugging the old man.

Hendricks tried to restore some semblance of order.

The Kids of the elderly couple had arrived to comfort their father.

It would appear that the five children had fled the house to marry, just to get out of the Hornet's nest.

"I know you're supposed to love yer Mum, but she was sure a handful. Nothing good to say about anything. Nothing! I don't know how Dad took it...I guess he had enough and just snapped...sure took him long enough! I thought he'd do a runner years back...but he has a loyalty streak a mile wide...sure took him long enough."

That appeared to be the consensus from all the children of the marriage and neighbours all around. All offering their presence for the old man's sake at the Trial. All claiming that he was some type of saint who had the patience and loyalty of some God!

Unfortunately, a Domestic Violence Homicide is still a homicide, regardless of the extenuating circumstances. They can sort that problem out in Court. Our action was cut and dry. Arrest and charge the Perp.

Bryan O'Donnell was transported to our Basement Cells in the Police Building in Parramatta. He would be formally interviewed and charged the following day. The day after that he would face a Bail Hearing and granted Bail on his own surety as long as he stayed at one of his children's homes and did not leave the State until his Trial date.

The children actually flipped coins amongst themselves for the honour of taking care of the old man.

Go figure.

We'd stopped at some six inch and foot long Roll and Salad joint that never put butter on their rolls for a late lunch. We were seated out the front of the establishment on a small deck area that overlooked the choked suburban arterial road. Enjoying a healthy lunch as we breathed in the putrid, diesel fume filled air.

"Remember...I can't remember her name...she was bashed to an inch of her life by her bloody, bully husband...he was some Shock Jock on the radio...about a year back."

"Diane Kinsley. She was a successful model before she married the jerk." Mar replied.

She was good like that. A lot better with names from old Cases than I, that was for sure.

"Yeah. Her. We'll be in Court very shortly at her Trial. Soon. Reading between the lines that the DPP is sprouting, her Solicitor will apply "The Battered Wife Syndrome" Defence if she is any good at her job. There is enough evidence of the poor woman suffering from the moment that they married. And the first wife tells a similar story...the book on her suggests that she'll either get off entirely, serve a suspended sentence or at the most, be instructed to do Community Service for a period of time. She will not do jail time."

"Yeah? Don't get me wrong, but I bloody well agree with that!"

She looked over at me as though I had grown horns.

"So? What's brought this up?" Astonishment on her face.

I went to open my mouth. Mar butted in.

"Oh! I see. What you're saying is that poor Bryan O'Donnell, who it would appear has suffered psychological and emotional abuse for the past umpteen years, *will* serve jail time...which is not bloody fair! Not right...That about it?"

I nodded my head in agreement.

"Yeah. But if I had said such a thing to you, you would have said that I was sexist, misogynistic and discriminatory...wouldn't you? He'll do jail time, for sure!" I shot back.

She looked over at me, giving me a look that only a mother would give an errant son.

"He could have walked out, like a lot of men do!"

"So why not the women?" I parried.

"Because it's different!"

By the tone in her voice, I knew that she felt she was on shaky ground. I gave her a look that a Teacher may give Little Johnny at one of his jokes.

She waved away the discussion as though it was useless discussing such matters with me. She lowered her head. I heard a little giggle. She looked back up at me and with defiance in her voice she asked whether I knew of one Men's Shelter in Australia for them and the kids.

I shook my head. It's not that I would lessen the impact of Domestic Violence of women in Australia. You have just got to look at the statistics to know that it is an epidemic problem in this country. It's just when a similar situation arises that is on the opposite side, there is no sympathy for the male, as though women have a monopoly on being victims!

"Caramine Lees worries me a bit. She's been down for a while now. That's not like her." She stated, just to steer the conversation to shallower waters.

Her sudden changed of subject often threw me. This time I was hit for six!

"I thought that she was being her most acerbic and sarcastic best. No? No, I suppose not. She needs a break. A trip to the Maldives, Thailand or Vietnam, perhaps. That's her style. To a five-star Hotel somewhere. A bit like you. Camping is definitely not for her, either. Fair Dinkum, you guys don't know what you're missing out on..."

"Yes, we do, Joseph Lind. Yes, we do!"

## CHAPTER SEVEN

I groggily handed my Partner a thermo-cup of coffee as I slumped into the front passenger seat of the Unmarked.

"No, it's not! Don't even say it!" I angrily exclaimed before she could utter a word. Her usual chirpy introduction of what a brilliant morning it was would grate on this particular morning.

I vaguely remembered being ejected from bed with some-one shouting something about *'stop bouncing around'* in the middle of the night. I was awoken by a jab of her knee as she stood above me. I was on the Lounge. A sheet flung over me.

"Your bloody alarm has woken me, Joseph Lind! Get up otherwise you'll be late. I'm going back to bed until the second coming...Joseph? You've got to see some-one about it! If you don't, it's going to send both of us crazy from broken and lack of sleep!"

"Well..." I replied straight-faced. "That's solves the World's problems..."

I had no idea what she was on about and I didn't see the need to ask her to enlighten me. I flung off the sheet and walked noisily, naked into the Bathroom.

After I had dressed and come out into the Kitchen, Tellie was no-where to be seen. Two thermo-cups of coffee looked lonesome on the Kitchen bench.

She'd worked a double shift last evening on the Toxicology examinations of some murder victim that some-one else in the Squad Room was looking after.

I glanced across at my partner as I buckled up my seat belt.

"Bloody hell! You look twice as bad as I feel! A rough night, eh?"

"Brian and I have been up since around three this morning."

Brian 'Muscles' Sarvich was Marge's live-in Love. He was also the Deputy Head, Forensic Pathologist at the NSW Coroner's Office. In charge of all Post Mortems conducted at the City Morgue. He also had been good friends to both of us well before he and Mar became an item. This had surprisingly occurred not long after his return from a sabbatical on the former battle-grounds of WW1 where a previously unknown mass burial site of Allied soldiers had been unearthed. Most of the bodies were Australian soldiers of the First AIF.

I was tickled pink that the two of them had hooked up. They were good for one another.

"Caramine Lees committed suicide last night...Muscles is beyond sympathy."

"Arrh... shit! Bloody hell! No... fuck!"

Caramine and I had history.

At one stage, we had a loose arrangement...when she felt the itch, she would give me a tingle. If I was available, then usually we would spend the night, often the week-end together. It was an open-ended agreement that actually did not result in that many 'dirty' week-ends. Enough though for her to have a special place in my heart. Sure, we had quite differing reasons for the meetings, but at the time it was most beneficial for both of us. The arrangement we both knew, was never going to result in anything more than that dirty week-end and both accepted that it would never last for-ever, knowing that sooner or later, one of us was going to hook up with a more satisfying involvement.

She met and fell in love with a Senior Constable attached to the Highway Patrol. A man who had just terminated his second marriage. Three kids by those former marriages. He had form and a name as a bit of a womaniser with an OCD complex and a need to sternly

manage the relationship. There were quite a few who would want more for Carmie; including me, but what can you say? She was a grown woman with strong and forceful notions of her own.

"How?" I asked as I blew my nose. Took a slurp of my coffee. It had lost its flavour.

"Pills...sleeping tablets...so it seems. She took a while to wake up to what her man was really like...and what she saw, she didn't like, but didn't know how to extricate herself, so it seems."

"Her mother is still alive...or was about a year ago...and she has two sisters from memory. I once met her eldest sister. Janeen or something like that...lives up the Mountains from memory. How's 'Muscles'?"

"Taking it bad. Blames himself in some ways, as he knew that she had not been herself for several weeks now...he'd been meaning to have a word with her as there had been some reports filtering back to him on her attitude of late...it was just that he never got the chance for that natter..."

"Yeah, well...he's not alone in feeling that he had let her down in some way...I reckon that she would have opened up to me if I had taken the time to just...I don't know...what a bloody waste. A bloody waste. She was a good operator. A top notch Forensic Pathologist...a real live-wire person when she was on an up...otherwise she could be hard work at times, if you get my drift. Bordering on manic depressive I would contend. She was on some heavy Happy Tablet so she once told me...shit!" I sniffled a couple of times. Blew my nose. Had another sip of coffee that was still tasteless.

I realised that I had already slipped into a past tense situation when talking; when thinking of her.

It seemed too easy a thing to do.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

For the next couple of days, I was on a real 'downer'.

Not even the surprised return of our beloved Professor Bernie Ford for Caramine's funeral could take that edge of darkness away from me.

A beautiful funeral and a wake of some magnitude could not break me from the grip of that crawling blackness. The senselessness of life and death. Of living. Of groping through the

mire of what one human being can wilfully and so easily do to another human being. Usually that some-one had been at some stage, some-one that they had loved.

It was to me, as though the human race had a planned obsolescence arrangement on itself. A definite survival of the fittest where the dog who attained that mountaintop position was slightly insane...definitely not sane, that was for sure! It seemed to me that the most vicious, those inured with no conscience, were always the survivors. The last time that I had felt this way was some months after I buried my wife some twelve years previously. I had existed in those couple of months on pure remote control, not thinking. Not registering life go past me...and then that feeling of blackness enveloped me and I drifted uncaring into its comforting embrace.

Without the help of friends, a caring Boss or two and hours spent with the Police Psychiatrist, I would not be here to-day. That said in all honesty and in a rare moment of self-truth.

It was Lestelle 'Tellie' Sanchez, my 'live-in' better half who waded through the mire with me and helped pull me out of its clutches. This my reaction to Caramine's death which did not, thank God, drift into the dark recesses that I had entered when I had mourned the loss of my beloved wife those many years ago.

I always felt that the black hand of depression was always shadowing me, from those dark days to the present time. When an event such as Caramine's death would savage me, corner me into those dark recesses all too easily.

A dark side of me that rarely surfaced...but I could for-ever feel its close presence...waiting patiently like some silent, smiling Buddha for that moment to arise...

"Joe! Enough is enough! You either make an appointment to see the Police Shrink or you watch me walk out of here! I've had about enough of your tossing and turning waking me at all hours. Even shouting out something about the frozen bitch! It's about time that you put that "Bones in the Bags" Case behind you...or learn to deal with it in a sensible way or I'm out of here, understand?"

She stood before me. Legs akimbo. Hands on hips. A wretched expression on her face. Her shoulders sagging as though she was about at the end of her tether. Lose her?! I could not survive such a loss. Her raw emotion of the moment showing me how hard it would be for her to walk away...but she would, I know, if I did not do something to lift myself from the morass.

I made an appointment to see the Head Shrink that very day. I was surprised to learn that my nightly callisthenics could be linked to an old case that Marge and I had stitched up three ways to Sunday only months ago.

What also helped my outlook on life enormously was Mar coming over unexpectedly one night with Muscles Sarvich to tell us that they were expecting a baby...and if everything went OK, then they'd try for a second one straight away. Mar was in second heaven, of the opinion that she had been given a second chance...maybe perhaps, if the truth be known, a third chance at becoming a Mum.

She would most definitely be one of the best Mums in the whole world!

Poor Mar drank water while the entire household got deliciously drunk in celebrating the news.

During that period, we had three more Domestic Violence murders. They always seem to come in convoys!

It must be the moon, is all I can tell you!

## CHAPTER NINE

"Joe? Mar? You guys are next in line. Human remains found some way off the main road. Wangi Road. South of Toronto. In the bush in the shadows of Eraring Power Station, about seventy minutes up the Motorway. You'll need to take the Morisset exit ramp. Here's a new Murder Book and Note Books with the Case Number provided. It's been a busy year as we're already into the hundreds! When will people stop trying to reduce the population of the Earth by foul means...in some ways a good thing, I suppose. It keeps me dutifully employed and with the world's population figures in balance, it means that we will not starve to death!"

"You're right, mate. We'd definitely be out of a job if the populace all turned to Pacifism as a way of life..."

"Or Buddhism as an alternative..."

"You in saffron robes? Now *that* would be a sight!"

We could still hear his chuckle as the Lift doors closed behind us.

It took us close on two hours to find the dump site on a spur track off the main Fire trail that led back into the State forest behind the Eraring Power Station. One of about half a dozen coal-fired Power Plants that supplied most of NSW's electrical power. It's tall thin smoke stacks and bulky, smooth sided Cooling Towers looking like some giant upside down egg-cups dominating the skyline.

"Bernie? Old man. What in blazes are you doing here? You've done your fair share so why don't you retire and enjoy yourself?" I scolded.

"Joe..." He shoulder-tapped me in an extravagant manner that left the young one's rendition of the practise high and dry.

"Joe, I've told you before. I'd have nothing to do if I retired and my sole enjoyment in life is this type of work...I volunteered to fill in until a suitable replacement is found for Caramine...such a bloody loss! Mar, how goes the human carrier, mmm?"

Mar bent to the old bloke and gave him a peck on the cheek.

"Bernie, you'll never lose that gift of the English language. You're looking good. Dead bodies will do that every time to a bloke like you...what have we got?"

"Not much, really. The body is too far gone to be able to make a positive ID in that manner. Dental Records hopefully from the National Data Base...if not, maybe DNA if a family member is in the system...you guys will have to wade through Missing Persons records. DOD hard to tell. Maybe three to four months. Cause of death? I have no idea and I doubt whether the Post Mortem will be conclusive in that regard. Female between the ages of sixteen through to twenty-four. Trim. Around 155 centimetres tall. An athlete I'd say who looked after herself by a strict training regime. No jewellery or other personal effects found though the local lads and SES guys are doing a "crawl through" as we speak. No discernible trace found on the site which would be expected as we've had hot to cold days with plenty of rain...her shoes may help in the identification process..."

"Who found her?"

"A local RFS bloke doing a walk through for a bushfire reduction program for late winter next year. His dog actually started to bark. Ran off up this spur track...maybe a Quoll or a wild dog, more than likely a wild cat spooked him. The condition of the remains is surprisingly complete for one left for so long in the bush...which may suggest that she had been dumped here only recently. We'll know more when we move her...from what trace there is that would have been left in the soil under her...but if I were a betting man, then I'd say she's been here all along. No animals around here perhaps..."

"I find that hard to believe, Bernie. On average, there's around four to five wild cats to the hectare right across Australia. Including the Desert areas. They would have found her quick smart if she'd been lying here that long."

Bernie nodded his head.

"I won't disagree with you, young man. Not until I do more work..."

"Any tracks? Footprints? Cigarette butts?"

"They're harder to come by, what with the quit rate..."

"Mmm...these things always have a detrimental effect in some way, don't they?" I joked.

The old man liked that statement.

"Perhaps you should take it back up as a counter-revolution... just in case we ever need the DNA trace." He remarked between chuckles.

"Tellie would draw and quarter me..."

"Yes. I heard that you've met your match in coupling up with her. Keep you on the straight and narrow I reckon. About bloody time! I saw you together at the funeral and wake. A fine couple you make. A lovely woman though I haven't met her yet at a body site. I'll hold my tongue until that moment arrives." He added. "Now. You've seen enough? Let me get back to it, eh?"

"One thing, old man. You mentioned that ID maybe possible by her shoes...how come?"

The doyen of Forensic Pathology in Australia straightened. Stretched his back. Groan.

"You don't know your 'runners' do you? They are top of the range. Professional grade. She was into Orienteering or training through rough bush tracks. That's for sure."

"Maybe that's what she was doing out here..." I looked around. We were out in the back-blocks, that was for sure. "She maybe tripped and fell. Banged her head as she came down...and didn't revive in time enough to get help..."

Bernie squinted up at me. Shook his head and walked back over to the remains mumbling under his breath wondering why I was a cop as I may have made a better Mystery Writer.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

"Jannah Kolowic. Pronounced Kolowich. Twenty-two years of age. DOB March two, nineteen ninety-two. Born in John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle. Lived with her mother and father at Number Sixteen, Lake Vista Circle, Toronto on the Central Coast. Only about thirty kilometres from her last resting place. One of six children. Another younger brother died at the age of thirteen about two and a half years ago. A big family. Good Catholic stock, eh? Mother Dorothy Jannah nee Pentthoroughgood. Australian born. Nineteen seventy. Father Bortro 'Barrie' Kolowic, born in Serbia. Nineteen sixty-eight. Migrated to Australia with a large extended family group just before the outbreak of hostilities in the

Balkan region. He a Carpenter and a Fly-in, fly-out to the Atherton basin in Queensland. The wife a Primary School Teacher. So is the oldest surviving daughter. All three girls gained High Distinctions in just about everything that they did from High School on. Including Cricket, Soccer and Netball. The youngest daughter doing her High School Certificate this year. Seems to be natural athletes...so are the three surviving sons. One of the older sons is on the Mariners Youth Soccer Team with a "look out" against his name for future Rep Football honours. We will meet the parents to-morrow morning. They both have taken the day off. OK?"

I nodded my head slowly as though I had other things on my mind.

"You get all that?"

"Yep...we'll meet the family tomorrow...."

"Fucking Hell!!! Give me strength!"

Mar had dug up as much information as possible on the Deceased through a computer search.

Dry.

Impersonal.

Merely simple facts.

I wanted more.

I wanted to know this person as though she was sitting beside me pouring out her heart to me. Confiding her inner-most thoughts. I figured we owed that much to her in death. These family meetings I hated for the emotions became raw and ragged. All the background had been filled in. We still awaited a recent photograph. A feeling from the family on the real person. Known associates. Boyfriends. Girlfriends. Did she have a computer? A Smart Phone? Jewellery? In cases like this, often the perp took these type of things as some sort of trophy.

The girl had been identified from Dental Records. A visit some months back for a check-up meant that X-rays were transmitted onto the National Dental Data Base.

Her License Photograph was two years old and 'mug-like'. I wanted a more personal shot of her to place into the Murder Book. Cause of Death could not be determined accurately, possibly suffocation though that wasn't set in concrete.

By all accounts, she had been dumped at the site around the time of her death.

That made me feel sad for her, as I thought that no human being should leave this world with a question mark on their death hanging over their heads. It just wasn't right. One of my atheist points on death and its consequences, is all.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was a big house.

I guess it needed to be to house six kids!

Blonde, smooth brick of a faintly Australian Ranch-style design. Not a project home but one that had been designed and built by the Owners. For their specific use and life-style. Beautifully located beside a small, tree filled Reserve that was the summit of a small knoll. Absolute waterfront with views across Lake Macquarie.

Several Catamarans on trailers in the front yard, down the side of the house while another bobbed in the small windblown chop tied to a small, white painted, finger jetty that jutted some thirty metres or so out into the Lake.

We climbed up the front steps onto a long veranda that ran the length of the house. The roof line projecting to protect its length. The outer edge of the roof supported by a series of thin fluted circular columns. The downstairs area appeared to be one large Garage going by the glimpse we afforded ourselves as we headed to the stairs.

The front door opened.

A tall, good-looking, middle-aged man greeted us. A square chin. Receding grey hairline showing more baldness than hairline. Soft grey eyes. Grey pallor...maybe it was his ten O'clock shadow. Slightly bent though he was still tall.

"Georgio Kolowic...George...umm...I'm Jennah's Uncle. Her favourite...and only Uncle."

The humour fell flat.

We shook hands.

Identified ourselves.

He gestured for us to enter.

Led us inside.

The air was cool.

The air-con was on.

The entire family...and the extended family appeared to be present. There had to be around twenty, possibly twenty-five people seated in the Lounge Room spilling into the Dining Room and Kitchen Bar.

Sniffles. Sobs could be heard.

It seemed as though we were expected to stand in the centre of this extended family, still in shock at the news that the body of their daughter had at last been identified after almost four months since she had left the house for the last time. Going to meet a friend so she claimed, though the identification of that friend was not clearly known in the preliminary investigation into her disappearance. As a twenty-two-year-old, her flight as an adult, though unexpected, was not that uncommon. A secret lover had been suspected. Some-one that the family as a whole, would not have approved of.

This summation was not supported by the family and their constant nagging and hounding of the Police became a well-known thorn in the side of the LAC Commander.

A man stood, asking several of the younger children to perhaps go play in the Pool. Several teenagers were asked to keep an eye on them.

"I am Bartro Kolowic. Call me Barrie, everyone else does. I'm Jennah's father. Please sit. Would you care for some coffee? Something to eat? You've come from Parramatta. The Police Building there. Yes? How can you be sure that the body that was found near Eraring Power Station is that of our missing daughter. It would seem that identification could not be ascertained due to the...um...arrh...the condition of our girl. We went to the City Morgue but they wouldn't let us view the body...just bones, so I was told. So how can you be sure?"

"Um...we're very sorry that we have to bring you this sad news...it is not something that we like about our jobs. Um...We would like to take a DNA swab of yourself and your wife to be absolutely certain, but the dental records confirm that the body that was found was indeed your missing daughter, Jennah."

The blowing of noses and sniffles seemed to cascade around the room.

A mug of coffee was thrust into my hands. A plate of biscuits slid onto a low coffee table in front of me. We sat there for close on an hour hearing the life story of Jennah Jean Kolowic. The eldest daughter of six. Three girls and three boys. One set of twins. Another boy drowned in a boating accident on the Lake while competing in the smallest Catamaran Racing Division. He had been thirteen years of age.

Several Photograph Albums were produced and proudly, but sadly examined.

In every shot that included the Deceased, she was the one with the serious look on her face as though she had never learnt how to smile...broadly smile. An attractive, photogenic young woman who never seemed to be enjoying life, even from an early age.

Each of the children had their own Bedroom making it an especially large house with four Bathrooms and eight Bedrooms. A Granny Flat in the downstairs area was the domain of the elderly Kolowic grandparents now sitting silently surrounded by their descendants.

Jannah Jean's bedroom faced the Lake.

A large rear deck extended to her bedroom that overlooked the rear yard and pool area. It was a sizable room and I doubted that it had been altered or touched since her disappearance. Waiting patiently for her return that would now, never occur. The Bedroom was neat, functional, lacking any adornment or frills of a "girlie" girl. Ribbons, awards and cups were neatly arranged along one entire wall. A walk-in Robe. An Ensuite Bathroom. A Three-quarter bed. One family photograph. An old fashion Pine Chest of Drawers with a mirror and jewellery side draws. A small computer table under a side window. A laptop centrally located on the table. Two flat screens were connected up to the Laptop. For all these inclusions, the room still had an aura of detachment. An impersonal air. I glanced at Mar as she rifled through the drawers, walked through the Walk-in Robe. Inspected the Ensuite Bathroom.

She raised her eye-brows in agreement as she gave me a look of sadness.

The father following her every footfall.

"Has any-one played with this Computer?" I asked the next oldest sibling. "Since Jannah's disappearance?"

A boy of twenty, about. Good looking. An outdoors guy. An Athlete. A sailor, I would have thought. He shook his head no.

"The Cops turned it on and scrolled through the e-mails, as far as I know. No-one else has touched it since...I'm pretty sure. We each have our own, so there's no point..."

"Has she got a smart phone. A Tablet?"

He pointed to both sitting on top of the Chest-of-Drawers.

"Is it like her not to take either one when she went out?"

Again, the shake of his head. Though tentative, I thought to myself.

"Her car?"

"Down stairs. I drove her to the Railway Station. She was heading for Sydney and she said it was easier to catch the train then worry about all the traffic down there. Parking. That type of thing. She didn't like driving in the City..."

"She had an appointment?"

Again, the shake of the head. A shrug of the shoulders that only the young can master.

"She said she was meeting some-one. They may stay for Dinner. Catch a show...she'd get the late train back and ring when she got to the station..."

"Do you have any idea whom she would have been meeting?"

He shook his head. Again, I felt in an uncertain way.

"Her Smart Phone is here, How? If her phone and tablet were here...how would she ring for you to pick her up...or for some other member of the family to do the honours?"

"She'd taken her work's phone I guess..."

"But you're not sure?"

"No. No, I'm not."

"Why didn't she drive her car to the Station? To save you sitting up half the night waiting for her to ring you?" Mar asked.

"Umm...there's been a few car break-ins of late. At the Railway Station Parking area. It's badly lit and a bit out of the way. Stuff taken from the cars. It was just as easy for one of us to drive her. There'd be at least one of us still up to drive to the station to pick her up...it's not that far..."

I nodded my head thoughtfully.

"Did she wear any jewellery?" Mar asked.

Up until then, the Father had stood at the door of his daughter's room, giving the appearance that he did not want to enter. Or to answer any of the questions. He stepped forward for the first time as though he felt that the pecking order had been usurped.

"Um...yes. A gold chain around her neck with a tiny cross. Small hoop earrings which she never took off. My wife and I gave them to her for her fifteenth birthday. A gold ankle

bracelet with two small dolphins hanging off it...a couple of other charms...and sometimes a ring. A gold one that was her Grannie's. My Wife's mother's."

The older man had pushed past his son to answer the question. As though he thought that the son was taking too much of the lime-light. I looked at him for some moments. Nodded my head. There was something not quite right. The brother seemed to shrink back to the door, as far away from his father as he could.

"Have you any photographs of Jennah that would show those items?"

"Yes. Some, I think. The ring was quite an expensive piece."

"How expensive...and would she have worn it that night? How about the other jewellery pieces?"

"It is not where she would normally keep it if she didn't have it on, so one can assume that she would have worn it that night...we have some photographs of it for Insurance purposes. It was worth around five grand from memory, and that was when we got it valued after Grannie Jean died...oh...fifteen years ago. It was always going to be Jennah's as she got older. That was Grannie Jean's wishes. Jennah was the spit'n image of the old girl...even in disposition. Character. Clever, very intelligent but aloof...some would say super shy...or snobbish."

"Could you get those for us...plus the most recent photo of her...and we'll need to take the Computer, mobile and Tablet. Where did she work?"

"The Hunter Medical Research Institute..."

"What did she do there? Any friends there?"

"Um...friends? Not really friends...though I guess Jilly and she were close...she was a Research Assistant. Loved the job...she was expecting a promotion as she had completed some Course at Uni..."

"Her Boss's name?"

"Professor John Gilbert. Head of Biological Research."

"Thank you."

The old man still hung around the doorway of the room.

"Um...those photographs, if you could."

"Oh! Yes. Sorry." He exclaimed as he scampered down the long Hallway.

I looked at the tallest youth who had been the most talkative.

"Is there anything that you would like to tell us...about your sister now that your father is out of earshot?"

The guy looked embarrassed. looked at his feet. Shook his head slightly. I wanted to have a quiet word with him and his younger sister at a later date. That I placed in a corner of my brain and would jot it into my Note Book to jog my memory. The youth and one of the sisters could not hide the guilty looks on their faces.

Mar bundled up the computer and other pieces into Evidence Folders and took them out to the car as I took DNA test swabs from Jennah's mother and father.

It was the first time that I had laid eyes on the middle-aged woman since we had arrived at the address.

She was lying on a single bed. One of two in the room. The large bedroom in semi-darkness with the blinds tightly pulled closed. Her eyes red-rimmed. Her nose worried into a redness that would be sore for days.

I hated these types of interviews.

Bringing news that dashed what hope the family had bravely carried. At least there was now some closure. They now had an answer, no matter how heavy the weight on their hearts.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

"Not impressed with the local boys and their token effort around the time of the disappearance. They didn't even bother to check the Train video systems to check whether she had returned from Sydney in the train...or for that matter whether she even caught the train to Sydney. It was almost as if they accepted that as an adult, she had the right to disappear from her family if she wanted to..."

"Did you get a copy of their Working File? From the local Cops?"

"Yeah. That's what I'm going on...There appears to be history with the family...the LAC guys may have visited the home on a few occasions. Maybe more times than that. Called out on a Domestic Violence issue. The father spent two occasions overnight in the cells. No Court time. No convictions. It would appear that because of that history, the local guys assumed that Jennah may have skipped because of the prior offences...and thus did not

follow it up as they perhaps should have...a lot of water under the bridge which will make things a little difficult for us..."

"Leave it alone, Joe. There would be those who could point the accusatory figure at a couple of our investigations...hindsight can be a smart-arse jerk! You know that. You've been stung big time, remember? So, the chances are that she was either snatched before she boarded the train or on her way home..."

"More than likely on her way home...last train out of Sydney more than likely...leaves Central around 2:05 AM... stops at just about every stop between Gosford and Newcastle...a slow train. I can just imagine how many drunks would be peeing between the carriages..."

"Experience, Joe?"

I gave a cut-off chuckle. A smile at past indiscretions.

"...maybe. Perhaps in my younger days. Falling asleep and missing the Hornsby stop! Perhaps she was offered a lift home from the Station...which would mean that it more than likely a local guy...nah! We're getting too far ahead of ourselves. Leave the theories until we have more facts. We need to check out further this supposed meeting of an alleged friend...you get a list?"

"Of sorts...let's check out her Place of Employment. I'd say any of her girlfriends would still be at work. We've got their addresses so we can check them out after the place of work...is it a fair way?"

"Nah....just up the road...Mar? if you were going to meet a friend down in Sydney. Go for a meal. See a show perhaps...what kind of shoes would you wear?"

Hendricks looked over at me. Her eye-brows arched high.

"Good point, Sherlock. Good point. We should have picked that up the moment it was uttered. For sure. We're getting a bit sloppy..."

"Don't flog yourself, Mar. A lot has happened recently. Caramine's passing. You learning that you were pregnant. Me being chucked out of bed so many times my back is in constant spasm...and you being pregnant...I understand it can play havoc with the mental process..."

"Fuck me, Joe. Are we going to go through this for nine bloody months?"

"What? You carrying an elephant? I thought that you were six weeks all ready."

"Grrr..." She flung the vehicle into gear and with hardly a glance in the rear vision mirror, took off down the road. "C'mon, Einstein, tell me how to get to Newcastle and the Research

Institute, huh?"

Thank God for the little GPS screen mounted in the Unmarked.

"What's the distance from the Awaba Railway Station to Eraring? About?" Mar asked out of the blue.

"Here we go again. I'm not your private Google Map! OK? Don't know, but it wouldn't be that far I would reckon...maybe thirty-odd kilometres at most. But if she was dumped late at night up that Fire Trail spur track, then the guy would have to know of it. Local? Dirt Bike Rider? Off-Road Club member...maybe even in one of those Mountain Bike Clubs."

"Good of you to narrow down the field of suspects, Joe. You're good that way."

I knew that she was only stirring. Wanting me to bite!

I let out a laugh instead.

"What did you think of the siblings' attitude...they were not that forthcoming...and the boy...Barrie Junior? He was definitely hiding something."

"The two younger sisters weren't that much better..."

"Yeah, well...I guess with an abusive and dictatorial father, the kids tend to shut up. Embarrassed by the reality of the situation...."

"I guess if I was the father of six...at one stage seven kids, I'd be a bit toey at times, myself."

"No, you wouldn't, Joe...but I reckon that you'd spend a fair amount of your time down the Club..."

"Nah. In the back shed, maybe." I chuckled. "Which, by the way, I still can't get into what with all the junk and stuff Mal has stacked in there."

"Don't worry, handsome. You were never that much of a Handyman, in any case."

"Oh, Mar. That hurt. Really hurt."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Were you interviewed by the local police at the time of Jennah's disappearance?"

The woman shook her head.

"Why didn't you approach the local coppers when it became obvious that Jennah had disappeared?"

The attractive, young woman rubbed the back of her neck. Tears filled her eyes. She looked down at the floor. Looked up. Turned her head to see if anyone was in close proximity.

"Um...we...um...Jennah and I... we were having an affair. Jennah and I. Since about the time that we both left School. It was getting serious though Jennah didn't want her family to know. About us. I... arrh... my family were a lot more... um... progressive? That way. We would often have a meal over at my parent's place. They own a small acreage at the back of Awaba. About fifty acres. About a twenty-minute walk down from the Station. There was a back Granny Flat, a free-standing house actually at the rear of the property which my Ma had lived in up until she died. I did the joint up. I've lived out the back in it from around the time that I got my first job. Before this one, that is."

"So, you and Jennah went down to Sydney? And came back up on the late train to your place? Is that right?"

The woman nodded her head. Blew her nose. Wiped away tears that were now rolling freely down her cheeks.

"Do you mind if we go outside? To the Outdoor Staff Eating Area?" She asked between snuffles.

We followed her outside onto a paved area dappled with bright sunlight fighting to pierce through the crowns of stately White Gum. A Waitress approached us before we had even sat at a table, asking if we needed something from the Cafeteria Area as they were closing shortly. Vending Machine produce then became the only option.

We all ordered coffees. Mar and I a sandwich. We hadn't eaten since early morning on the way up the Motorway. Mar was starting to look a little green.

"Yes...to your question before. Jennah stayed overnight. She was a bit concerned as she knew that her father would chuck a wobbly as she had not informed him of her intention to stay out all night...but we had a wonderful time." She fished out her purse from her voluminous bag. Took several small plastic encased photo albums from her purse. Thrust them at us.

They all showed a laughing, happy couple. The difference in Jennah was quite astounding.

I said as much.

"Um...she has never said it or for that matter implied it, but I suspect that her father may have molested her when she was younger...and up to about the time that she reached the age of seventeen, her father used to belt into her and the other kids...he could fly off the handle apparently. Very easily, so it seemed. He had an extremely short fuse. It stopped only when Samuel, he was about fifteen I think and a big boy, stood up to his father demanding that he stop at least hitting the girls. '*Try hitting into us boys*', he told his father. Apparently, Sam dislocated his father's shoulder. That was the last time that the father ever laid a hand on any of the kids...perhaps he was ashamed. More than likely scared of his sons, I reckon. A bully. A bloody bully."

I was amazed at the frequency of child abuse, even sexual abuse of children behind closed doors. If Domestic Violence deaths was of epidemic proportions, I doubted that child sexual and/or physical abuse was not that far behind. We were training the next generation in a similar life-style, it seemed to me. A cyclic degeneration of the population, I would contend. Mar may accuse me of gross cynicism, though I would still contend that the population was slowly degrading.

A really sad thought!

The coffees came and we concentrated on them for some moments. We hadn't eaten anything for Lunch. I was peckish, to say the least. I hoed into my sandwich. Apologising to the attractive young woman. Offering our normal excuses of irregular eating hours. The sandwich was thick as though they had placed everything on it so that there was no waste with the Cafeteria closing up for the day.

I washed the crumbs down with half a bottle of water before re-commencing the conversation.

"Sorry about that...So Jennah stayed with you overnight? What time did she leave your place the next morning?"

"Um...oh...about tennish, I suppose. Maybe some time...maybe half an hour before that...I can't rightly remember, if you know what I mean? It was a while ago now. She'd only left about ten minutes...maybe fifteen, twenty-five minutes before her father showed up wanting to know whether I'd seen her at all. He had to have passed her as she walked towards the Train Station...from memory she was going to time her phone call to her brother to pick her up with the arrival of the Sydney train...he had to have driven past her...it was the only road to the Station...in fact it's the only road to anywhere! I told him that I hadn't seen her since we knocked off and drove home together on the Friday afternoon. From work. We took it in turns. She had to drive past my place almost, to get onto the Motorway to go to work. One

week she would leave her car at my place and come with me and then the following week we would drive to Newcastle in her car...she wanted to move in with me but telling her father was the big hurdle...not even about us but just wanting to leave home..."

"Was this a regular occurrence? She staying with you overnight?"

"Not as much as we would have liked. Her father had a ring in her nose...even though she was twenty-two, he still treated her like a thirteen-year old...and the other kids too."

"So, it takes about twenty minutes to walk to the station from your place? And you say Barrie Kolowic came to your house about ten minutes, maybe fifteen to twenty-five minutes after Jennah left?"

"Yeah. Give or take a couple of minutes...as far as I can remember...not her father. No way. No. He had a short fuse but no... he couldn't. Could he? Kill Jennah?"

We both looked at her without replying.

"Um...where did you eat in Sydney? Did you see a Show?"

"Um...at a Pub down in The Rocks...and to be truthful, no, we didn't get to that Show. We thought about going to the Pictures but they are way down George Street past Town Hall. We stayed at the Pub before we caught a train to Central and then got the Newcastle train..."

"What shoes did Jennah have on?"

"Sorry?"

"Her shoes. What shoes was she wearing? Can you remember?"

"Her brother dropped her at the Station. She walked here. She had her Runners on. She would have worn her favourite pair of mine, I'm sure. We're the same size in shoes."

We both nodded our heads. The mystery solved.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

"It's close to four. Do you want to go back to the Office?"

"Yeah, I do." I exclaimed. "We are falling behind again on our swimming regime....and

Abbey is putting us to shame. He is now going twice a day. Morning and night."

"B.S. Joe. We've missed what? Counting to-day only two afternoons...and so he says!"

"It's only Wednesday, Mar!"

"It's a nice day. How about I drop you home...it will be close to six by then and we'll meet in the Athletic Field for a couple of laps of the oval...then we go into work half an hour earlier to-morrow morning for a couple more laps of the pool?"

"Sounds like a good plan...what did you make of the old man?"

"I thought it a bit funny that he didn't meet us at the door. From that front window, they all could see us pull into the driveway."

"So? Nah... maybe it is just because he had a history of belting the kids and possibly molesting his girls...a guilty conscience? He would have assumed correctly that we would have done our homework with the local lads first up."

"Jilly Bright only confirmed what the local lads also knew about the family dynamics...and she's not out of the woods as a suspect, to my way of thinking."

"Mmm...I don't think so...the old man...he seemed a bit defensive. Furtive. Don't you think that after all this time and him constantly calling in to see the local cops, he would have mentioned that he had driven around to all Jennah's friends' places to see if she was there?"

"You don't know if he did, Joe."

"I'll lay odds."

"OK. Do you want to check those addresses out now so we don't have a need to come back up here again?"

"No. We'll be back up here again...in the next day or to."

"Oh? Why's that?"

"I want to travel from the Railway Station to Eraring Power Station by way of Wangi Road. The road that we could safely assume was the route that the Killer took. I would like to question Jilly Bright's parents and to re-question Barrie Kolowic and perhaps the mother and at least the two older boys of the family. Again."

"I reckon that the other sister would be a safer bet to get more out of, but...OK, Sherlock. I'm with you...so it's home for now?"

"Yep...and to-morrow we should do a complete check on the entire Kolowic family. You're good at complete computer searches on persons of interest...we should chuck Jilly Bright into the mix as well."

"So you keep telling me...and then you say that she wasn't the one to kill her lover. Jennah comes from a family with a domineering, abusive father. Jennah knows no different and similarly treats her lover, Jilly, in the same manner. Abused lover has enough and kills her domineering lover. Case closed."

"Good theory, but I don't think so."

"Mmm...we'll see...While I am doing all these searches, what, may I ask, will you be doing during that time?"

"We've got to tidy up...what...three Domestic Violence deaths and get them off our desks otherwise Abbey will be baying for blood...I'll finalise them for both our signatures. Reports for the Coroner, the DPP and our Murder Book...I'm good at that."

"So you keep telling me, Sherlock. So you keep telling me."

"You know, if the timing was that tight between the time that Jennah left Jilly Bright's place and the time that Barrie Kolowic dropped by, then she had to have been taken bloody quick....by whom-ever."

"That's why I'm leaning towards Jilly Bright. We only have her word that Jennah stayed the night at her place and that Jennah's father dropped around within that time-frame. If it wasn't Jill Bright...or her father...or perhaps her brother...then who?"

"Arrh...most certainly by a person that she knew and trusted. No mucking about. Straight into the car on the offer to be driven home...had to have known the guy, that's for sure...Sunday mornings it would be a little slow out that way, one would suspect. We should question anyone living on that road between Bright's place and the Station. It's some months old now, but some-one may know...or have seen something out of the ordinary..."

"That narrows it down somewhat, Sherlock! There's only a couple of houses that I could see along that stretch of the road from Jilly's joint to the Station...and that shop opposite the Station..."

"Stop calling me Sherlock, or else!"

"Or else what?"

"I'll start calling you Watson...or girlie." I replied.

A smile on my face.

"You do, Sherlock and you'll feel my Service Pistol up your fucking nose, my dear!"

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"Did you know that over seventy per cent of Police Call-outs Australia-wide, are for Domestic Violence issues..."

"Catching up on your e-mails are you, Joe?"

"Mmm? Now that's interesting. Australia has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the World...and we call this the Lucky Country?"

Why we were bombarded with these gems of knowledge, I have no idea, but we had to wade through all our e-mails to separate the chaff from the hay, so to speak. Some would say a complete waste of time.

"Joe, weren't you going to concentrate on those three Domestic Violence Deaths this morning? Get them off our desks? Instead your clearing your Inbox of Internal E-mails that are at least a month old!"

"Yeah, Mar. Yer right, but yer gotta clear them sometime! Don't get your knickers in a knot. I've done two of the three reports already...they await your perusal and joint signature before I hand them onto the Boss." I scratched my head and leant around my Monitor to look at my partner. "Did you know that the Electric Light Bulb...when it was invented, could have been manufactured to last indefinitely. The Licensed Manufacturers of the time realised the folly of that production philosophy and instead, deliberately made the light globe to last a minimum of two hundred working hours. Over time, this has been further reduced. To ensure that the production figures were artificially increased thus making them more money. The first real product of the 'Planned Obsolescent Society' which was the pre-cursor to our 'Throw-away Society.' Bloody Hell, they've gotta hide. How do you feel to be so manipulated? Led...and most people either don't know or don't give a rat's arse. What a sad reflection on modern-day Society."

I continued to look at my Partner, enthralled at what I had just read on some e-mail from some-one. Expecting her to be also enthralled.

"How much of our lives is controlled by unseen men in stuffy Offices...it makes you think, doesn't it? That our lives can be controlled so much, by others. Unseen and unknown. Us mere puppets on the proverbial string. Being bounced about at some-one else's beck and call. All for the love of the mighty dollar, one suspects."

The look on her face was enough for me. She wasn't enthralled as much as I. That was easy

to see. But I continued to waffle on, despite the constant look that could kill a spider at ten paces...or cower a dog at twenty!

"Did you know that?" The incredibility in my voice obvious.

"Joe....."

"OK. OK...I can see that you are not into self-development...I'll send the two Reports that I have finished over to you for your perusal...I was just getting rid of some of the backlog in e-mails, that's all. To give me a rest doing those reports, is all."

There was silence for some time.

"That's interesting..." I began.

I swear I heard an exhalation of exasperation coming from across the width of our two desks but continued none-the-less. I was now in one of those moods.

"The "Bones in the Bags" Case? They've changed their plea to Guilty. Tallis. South and Longford. They should get the death penalty...sometimes I feel like paying a Hit-man to do the job! Remember that case of not long ago...the Sniper deaths. That ex-SAS fellow who was mixed up in the Brothers for The Flag...no... that wasn't it. The Patriot Brothers of the Southern Cross...."

"Mmm...Matthew 'Big Dog' O'Sullivan."

"Yeah, him, though I guess he'll be tied up for the next fifty years or so...mmm?"

"Joe, yer gotta get over that case. You still going to the Shrink, aren't you? Twice a week?"

"Umm...I've cut it back to once a week. We've got too much work on..."

"On her advice, or is it a self-meditative type of thing that you are famous for?"

"She didn't offer any opposition to the changes. Once a week is good enough and I'm benefiting enormously from that visit each week...and she didn't say anything when I did decide to cut it back."

"What could she say, you bloody drip!? Bloody hell, you're bloody impossible, Joseph Lind. Bloody impossible."

"Have you dragged anything interesting up on Barrie Kolowic or extended family?" I needed to change the subject otherwise I'd be sitting there being insulted for the next fifteen minutes!

"Not really. No. A couple of Call-outs by the local boys on the Domestic Violence ticket. The father spent two separate nights cooling his heels in the Cells. No Charges laid. No Court Time. No alcohol involved in either incident. No Hospital time for any member of the family. A couple of Speeding and Parking Infringement Notices spanning a fifteen-year period...that's about it. Nothing untoward in his behaviour...Jilly Bright...appears to be an exceptionally bright person. No pun intended. Two Speeding Charges. Arrested during a raid on a local address known as a drug selling point for the district. She was not held or charged as no drugs were found on her person...nothing else. An Intelligence Report intimated at the growing and selling of a small quantity of "weed" from her parent's farm-let. The Kolowic boys, Samuel twenty-one years of age, Jacob twenty and Jon aged eighteen who has a twin sister. As pure as the driven snow when compared to boys of that age group. Above average scholastically. All attended the Catholic School from Primary to Higher School Certificate. Above average to exceptional sports-persons...all the kids. Plenty of words on them in the local papers...the thirteen-year old boy, Colin was a bit of a tear-away...possibly finding it hard to aspire to the heights of his older siblings...really, a good solid family that may have a secret or two to hide...but who doesn't. I don't like the father for the crime."

"Oh? Why not?"

"It just doesn't fit, that's all. No history...he seems to lose his temper at a drop of a hat but it doesn't amount to much. No-one in hospital. No charges laid. Maybe a split-lip. A couple of bruises."

"C'mon Mar. As you said, there's hints of violence, over-the-top disciplinarian issues, possible child molestation whispers."

"That's just it...rumours, innuendos and supposition. That's not good enough to hang your hat on. Don't get me wrong, I am not discounting him entirely and I think we should drag him to the Local Cop Station to give him a formal Interview, but my gut says that he should not be our prime POI"

"Trust your gut...but who else is in the picture?"

"That's just it, Joe. No-one! But that doesn't mean we should pin it on some-one for the sake of solving the crime...does it?"

I didn't bite.

I still had my money on the old man.

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

"Am I being arrested?" Barrie Kolowic asked nervously.

"No, sir. We would just like to ask you a few more questions. And at this stage of the investigation, some form of...um...formality is required."

We were in a small Interview Room at Toronto Police Station. Full recording of the Interview was being conducted. Kolowic was made aware of this factor.

"So I'm a suspect, then?"

"Everyone is a suspect at this early stage of an investigation... should we consider you in any other light, Mister Kolowic?"

"No....." He shook his head vigorously. "No, sir. I've done nothing wrong. It was my daughter who went missing...I wouldn't do anything to hurt her...do I need a Solicitor?"

"That depends on the severity of the abuse. Sure, as a parent you have some right to discipline your child...the meaning of the Law is somewhat clouded as to what represents parental discipline. Would like to inform us of your interpretation in that regard, sir?"

I leant back in my chair and gave the man my look. He didn't last long before he broke the stare and looked at his hands clasped tightly in his lap.

"Mister Kolowic, that's your prerogative in obtaining legal Counsel. Should we pause while you arrange legal attendance? Sir? Is that correct? No...?? OK. We understand that there were accusations given to the local Police over the past several years of...um...shall we say, enthusiastic disciplinarian actions on your children...even sexual molestation accusations. Are they true?"

The man lowered his head, shaking it slowly. He sniffled.

"Sir, is there any truth in those accusations?"

"What can I say...perhaps it is something that you ask of my children. Not me...isn't there something about self-incrimination?"

"In American TV Shows, Sir. So, there is truth in the rumours? Could that be the reason why your daughter wanted to move away from home...as you know, she did not, at the age of twenty-two, require your consent. Somehow, I would think, she would have wanted your blessing to strike out on her own. Would she not?"

"Not with that dyke friend of hers. No way!"

"So, you were aware of the relationship?"

"I...um...I have nothing to say..." he turned his head away. The look on his face was one of pure disgust.

"I understand that you visited just about every friend and acquaintance of Jennah's the day after she did not return home. Is that correct? And you made continuous calls to her mobile phone on the morning of her disappearance. Is there anything that you would like to tell us about that, Mister Kolowic?"

Again, the slow shake of his head. He continued to look down at the table, unable to look at either one of us.

"You did?" Mar re-iterated.

"You seemed to have checked out that piece of information...I'm sure that it is quite easy for you people to do...in this Police State."

I would love to reply to that comment that perhaps they should go and live in a Police State to fully understand what they have just said. Like Romania...or Russia, perhaps!

One day I will do it, I promised myself!

"If that be the case, Mister Kolowic, why didn't you mention that fact to us when we visited your home the other day?"

"My family didn't know...and I didn't want my daughter's name associated with that Bright girl...the word around is that she is Gay."

"I think that they may have guessed at what you were doing. Don't you? Your family that is? I don't think that you needed to be Einstein to be able to figure that out. Do you? You visited Jilly Bright's place first, is that right?"

Again, a slight nod of the head.

"Mister Kolowic. We need you to speak up. Unfortunately, a nod of the head doesn't record that well...."

"Yes. I visited that Bright girl's place first...."

"That must have been very hard for you to do. What did you do?"

"Asked the bitch whether she had seen Jennah. She said that she and Jennah had driven home from Newcastle on the Friday afternoon after work. She hadn't seen her since."

"Anything else? Did you see anyone on the road from the Station to Bright's place?"

"No. No-one. And that's all she said. I left. I really didn't believe her, but what can you do? If you try to belt the truth out of a person like that, they have all the Laws behind them. I would have been in serious shit. Did I see anyone to confirm me being there? Not that I can remember...No, I'm pretty sure...oh...it was so long ago...I really can't remember...no... I then went to a couple of Jennah's old school friend places. They hadn't seen her. Didn't know who she may have been with...there is only one really who Jennah kept in contact with. Went out occasionally...Sue Venda. She hadn't seen Jennah since Netball practise on the previous Thursday evening. She said that Jennah seemed her normal self...nothing else."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"Samuel...what do you prefer? Sam or Samuel?"

"Sam... or Kollie." He stated with a broad grin. "All my friends call me Kollie."

He was a good-looking boy who would break many a heart, so I thought. A big, fit, healthy looking kid who had an open, honest face. Classic looks of a heart-breaker who seemed oblivious to his pulling power. Very mature for his age as though he had seen a lot in his short life. I guess he may have with a father that flew off the handle at a drop of a hat. Usually in private, taking out his anger and frustration on his family. No-one else.

"Thanks for waiting for us."

"You had Dad in here. Is that right?"

"Yes, we did. Is that a problem for you?"

"No... no. I guess not. It's fine. Is he a suspect?"

"Why would you ask that, Sam?"

"Oh...um...I guess you know about him spending a couple of nights in Lock-up? After he lost it big time...it only happened a couple of times."

"Unfortunately, in a case such as this, everyone is a suspect...until we can say with utter certainty that due to the evidence in front of us, that person is taken from the list."

"Then I'm a suspect, too? I couldn't hurt my big siss...she and I bore the brunt of Dad's raves while we were growing up. She protected and took the whacks for the younger ones."

"Your father? He worked in the mines...a Fly in-Fly out guy. Even though he was a very

good Tradesman...an artisan...a Carpenter and Joiner of some note."

"Yeah...he is good. He and Uncle George with Grandpa Kollie built that house. Dad always said that without him working in the mines for close on ten years, we wouldn't have that house...and everything else...Cats and bikes and cars...and us kids didn't appreciate the sacrifices that he had made...for us kids as though we should grovel big time. All I know is that when he was 'Bush,' we escaped his back-hand...and his temper...and his vile mouth."

I nodded my head.

It was an all too familiar pattern.

Mar wanted to keep the tempo in the Interview.

"Were you aware that she was in a relationship with Jilly Bright?"

"Bloody hell, yeah...it was the best thing that had happened to her. Happiness is everything as my Mum says and when she was with Jilly, she was almost a different person. Happy. Friendly. Alive...what did I think? That she deserved to be happy...who are we to judge, although I know that if Dad knew the reality of the situation he would have...oh...sorry...um..."

"He would have what, Sam?"

The lad slowly shook his head.

"Um...he would have lost it, I'm sure. He is ultra-conservative that way and he would have felt that it reflected on him as a man...old fashion. Narrow-minded. Insecure...that is me Dad."

"You seemed to have pulled him up somewhat on his disciplinarian attitudes, so we are led to believe."

"Me? I guess...with the help of Jennah. It was she who first stood up to him. I guess that I reacted to protect Jennah."

"Your mother?"

"Huh.... she had just given up, long ago. She spent most of her time in the bedroom with it all dark. My brother who died a couple of years ago? He was the result of Mum being raped...that was the last time that Dad even touched Mum...I told Dad that if I even thought that he had done anything to Mum, I'd bash the living tripe out of him. Put him into hospital...and Jacob, Jenny and Jennah would help me...I couldn't expect the younger kids to get involved...that was...oh...a couple of years ago now...Dad tended to stay out of our way

after that. It was better, though you could almost feel the underlying currents just below the surface...we all expected him to explode some-day...maybe that is what happened to Jennah...but I think he and Mum kinda patched things up for a while...and I have an inkling that he was on some sort of tablet that kept him a bit quiet...so no..."

"You went looking for your sister that morning, didn't you?"

"I guess...I knew that if Dad found her first, then he may not have been able to stop himself from doing damage to her. I guess Jacob kinda thought that too. He insisted in coming with me...and Jon too."

"Why didn't you accompany your father?"

"Hah! He...um...he wouldn't have it, when both Jacob and I suggested it. That's why we didn't wait that long before we headed towards Jilly's place. I kinda guessed that Jennah would have been with her...you could always tell even if she didn't tell me...when she was going out with Jilly..."

"You went to Jilly Bright's place? That morning? Did you see anyone along the road between the Railway Station and Jilly's place? Did you see your father drive into Jilly's place?"

"Yeah. Dad had already been there...didn't see him though. We must have missed him by minutes...Jilly told me that Jennah had started to walk to the Station not long before Dad had turned up...he would have had to have seen her walking along the road if that was the case...so...either it was Dad or...Jilly and Siss had a falling out."

"Do you know that for sure?"

"As far as I know, they never fought...but you never know for sure...just look at Dad!"

"Why didn't you tell this to the Police at the time of Jennah's disappearance?"

He looked away. Wrung his hands.

"Um...stupid I know...loyalty to the family...to Dad...I just hoped that Jennah had got away. Ran for it...got out from under...I never thought for one moment that she may have been abducted and killed...although I must admit, I started to worry as she had not contacted either me or Mum. I reckon that she would have if she was still alive...at some stage. By now, I reckon."

You often see it in family structures such as this one.

A certain degree of denial that the family show. They being no different from any other,

even though the violence maybe a daily occurrence. And the thought of escalation into something more sinister would never cross the minds of the others. Or if it was allowed to enter, then it would have been flung asunder. Driven from the mind!

"Did you see anyone else along the road that morning. Between Jilly's place and the Railway Station?"

"Just Mitch Burrows. He was loading up his trailer to go dirt bike riding. He and my younger brother are in the same Club. Mitch is like a Mentor to Jacob. And Jon. Mitch is about thirty, I reckon."

"Did Jennah know him?"

"Sure. Jennah was into it for a while...she was a bit of a tomboy when she was younger. She belonged to the same Club. It was she who got Jacob into it...he's a bloody star now...Jon dropped off somewhat...too scared of being hurt, we have always said. He's a bloody good Soccer Player now...should make it big time."

"Could Jennah have gotten a lift from Mitchell? Mitchell Burrows?"

"Could have, I guess. But if she had, she would more than likely be sitting in the front of his ute...I didn't see her. Possibly she was inside, I guess. Helping Mitch pack ready for the day. There was a Meet on, I think. Up Newcastle way. Dirt Bike Racing." He added by way of explanation.

I nodded my head. I saw Marge write a note to herself in her Note Book.

"About how long after your Father visited Jilly, did you show up there?"

He shook his head.

"I really don't know...wouldn't have a clue...but long enough after so that I didn't see him along the road...it goes for a-ways after the Station before the road hits the main road. The main Awaba by-pass road."

"So, if he went that way, and turned back onto the Awaba By-pass road to head back towards Toronto, then at some time you *should* have passed him going back towards Toronto as you headed that way?"

"Yes...I would have thought so...but my friends often say that they have gone passed me with me being completely oblivious to their presence going the other way...it's a standing joke amongst us...even if they flash their lights. Honk their horn."

"Surely Jacob or Jon would have seen him? Don't you think?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He seemed uncertain and could not offer any substantial reason why the other two also had not spotted their father coming towards them.

I nodded my head. Let the moments pass without a word being spoken. It was Mar who broke the silence.

"That road...the one that goes past the Bright's' place..."

"Railway Parade." Sam stated.

"Of course. Yes...Railway Parade. Does it finish as a dead-end?"

"It used to, until a couple of years back when we had a series of bad Bush fires through the area. There was only that one way in and out. A couple of families were almost trapped. They bull-dozed a track as an extension to Railway Parade through the bush."

"Where does it come out?"

"Onto Wangi Road a-ways north of the Power Station. Near the Buttaba turn-off."

"And Wangi Road goes past the Power Station?"

"Yes. I guess. If you turn right off the track onto Wangi Road. A back way out. Yes. A bit rough, but at least it gave you an alternate escape route in case of any fires coming through that area again. We would often use the track as a dirt bike track...the local Cops didn't like that. We had one of the best dirt bike tracks in the State just down the road but we still used that...a public road so the Cops would say...any traffic coming along that track could cause us grief...what would they know!"

He gave a cut-off laugh. He suddenly realised that he had two coppers sitting opposite him. His face reddened in embarrassment.

Only the young were blind to the dangers.

"Perhaps your father went that way. The reason why none of you boys spotted him heading back towards Toronto?"

"I suppose...yeah. That's possible." Though he didn't sound as though the logic of it felt right to him even though it felt right to us.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Circumstantial, Joe. We will have a bloody almighty hard job proving that old man Kolowic killed his daughter in a fit of rage, dumping her body on a back spur-track behind the Power Station by way of that back track off Railway Parade. There is nothing to substantiate the theory. No DNA trace. No admission. No corroboratory evidence. Nothing!"

"Mmm...to my mind, he is our Number One POI...we'll get him, Mar. Eventually. Let's go and interview young Jacob Kolowic. Then the other girlfriends of Jennah's. The Bright parents and I want to drive that back route out onto the highway..."

Jacob Kolowic was sitting glumly in another room. An unused Office of the Station. We had managed to keep the three male Kolowics apart and not noticing one another. They may have had suspicions that other members of the family were in close proximity, but they were never too sure.

Jacob was a younger version of Sam. Maybe slightly taller.

He verified what his older brother had basically stated. Completely ambivalent to the senseless actions of his father. As though it was expected that fathers were permitted such actions when things turned against them. He was proud of the fact that he had helped on several occasions with Sam and his two sisters to control his father from hitting out at the younger Kolowic children. As though a bond was formed for survival.

What amazed me was that nearly all the kids seemed anchored to the home though the three boys did not show any fear of their father. It was if the pecking order had at some stage altered. The children keeping the old man in line. Staying was the only option available to them in order to protect their mother from the now very rare bursts of anger from the old man.

I wondered how Barrie Kolowic's parents, living in the Grannie Retreat underneath, felt about the abuse. They had taken up residence in the Granny Flat below when the house was first completed some twelve years previously. They could not have turned a blind eye to their youngest son's adult tantrums and anger periods. Surely!

What an ugly environment for so many people to live in!

Regardless of the rare circumstances of my upbringing, I was eternally grateful for the fact that violence was not a part of it.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Jillian has taken some time off work. The first-time in... oh...in the three years that she's been there. She is very upset about the finding of Jennah's body. It's a pity that they didn't do what they had been talking about for some time...running away together...but then that job that they both had was a once in a life-time thing for both of them...and I think that Jennah was afraid to leave her mother...if you know what I mean?"

Brenda Bright had to be the original Hippy.

The elderly Aaron Bright was the re-incarnation of Jesus Christ, even down to the sandals that he wore. Incense stung the nostrils as we sat in a worn Sofa Lounge in the front room of the small house. The front door was open. An ancient fly-screen door swung back and forth in the breeze letting insects come and go as they pleased. The door a token gesture for flying insect control. The room overflowing with indoor plants as though a tropical jungle was in the process of being created. A cat straddled the large arm rest of the single sofa that the woman sat in. A mangy Border Collie lolled at the man's feet. A white miniature Poodle Cross sat in his lap eyeing us sternly.

It was the first time that a dog managed to out-stare me.

Ever!

"She's up the back paddock. In her joint. Do you want to see her? Just follow the track and you'll find it. We'll let her know yer coming. We got a line... a party line...a telephone line between the two houses. Had it put in when me Mum lived back there and was starting to get a bit sick, if you know what I mean?"

As though the wonders of modern science and telecommunications had just evolved.

"Can you remember the day that Barrie Kolowic visited...on the Sunday morning?"

"Not really...yes and no, if you know what I mean?"

During this banter, Aaron Bright sat opposite us with his eyes closed. Gently nodding his head as though he lived within the Autism spectrum...either that or he was as high as a kite! One hand casually stroking the dog in his lap. Perhaps he was listening to psychedelic music that only could be heard inside his head.

Whose to know.

"Can you remember Sam Kolowic and his brother Jacob also visiting not long after that?"

"Not really...yes and no, if you know what I mean? Sam is a nice boy...in fact, all the Kollie kids are good kids...it's a wonder, if you know what I mean? Met the Mother way back when she was a Teacher at the local Primary School. A good teacher. A good person from what I remember. Why the woman stayed with that man I'll never know...if you know what I mean? If Ron here even raised a hand in my direction, I'd be outa here quicker than Daniel ever got outa that Lions' Den, if you know what I mean?"

"He didn't!" I interrupted. Deadpan.

"What...oh sorry. It was just a saying, if ya know what I mean? I'm sorry, but apart from it being a while back what you're talking about, if it was a Sunday, I doubt that we were even here. We'd more than likely been taking our pigs to market...or the Veggies...on a Sunday we leave to get to the Markets about six...after we packed up the truck with Produce...we usually sell the lot...including the Piglets when we got them, if'n you know what I mean?"

I nodded my head slowly, bursting to acknowledge that we were well aware of what she meant. Mar seemed to sense my need to comment and as she gently pushed me out of the dim, dust-mote filled house, she gave me one of her looks meant to turn me to salt. I was glad that she had lost the ability that way.

We crawled up the track towards the back of the property.

A well-kept Chinese garden was laid out to one side. Row after neat row of various veggie plants. Ducks and Hens ran from our slow progress or pecked at morsels in between the built-up, neat rows. An Orchard with rows of trees under low hanging white cloth to protect the maturing fruit from hail-stones, insects and Flying Foxes. A productive farm-let. Well-tended. Well worked.

"Salt of the earth people..." I murmured as Mar crawled the Unmarked along at walking speed.

"I'll lay odds if you looked closely, there'd be a marijuana plant or two amongst those taller rows of what-ever those bushes are."

"Olive trees I think...and for personal use only, I would hazard a guess."

I gave a cut-off chuckle at my reply.

"Yeah, right, Sherlock. A nice little side-line to keep the dollars rolling in."

"You cynic you....."

We rolled around a circular drive to slowly come to a stop at the front of the small house. A full-length veranda offered deep shade to the front of the building. There were several Gums

giving respite for the house from the western sun. Climbing rose bushes on an arched trellis marked what would have been the front gate. A short pathway. What was the front yard crowded with bushes and flowering plants. A kaleidoscope of colour and bees. Neatly arranged. The outer edge of the veranda one continuous row of hanging plant pots, flowers again spilling, overflowing from them. Drip tubes serviced every pot. Every plant. I took out my Smart phone and took a couple of shots.

I was that taken by the display.

"Beautiful, eh?" Jillian stated as she opened the fly-screen door. "It takes a bit, especially with me working, but Dad helps out too...when he can. How can I help?"

She was down. Her tone, her very stature bowed as though the world was about to end. It was definitely not the same girl whom we had interviewed only days ago. She had stepped into that dark abyss.

"The only reason why I get up of a morning is because I know when I walk out here I will be uplifted...only a little bit over the past couple of days...I guess...if you know what I mean. No. I'm not the type of person who would slit my wrists or do anything stupid like that but..."

She let it trail off.

I half expected "*you know what I mean*" to end the sentence and was a little disappointed when it wasn't uttered.

"Could we ask you a few more questions, if you don't mind?" Mar asked as she stepped up onto the veranda.

It was decidedly cooler in the shade by a good few degrees.

"Yes. No worries. Mum rang...um...I'm making a coffee for myself. Would you care for one? Come in. Come in." She gestured as she opened the Screen door.

Two small white balls of fur bounced their happiness at her sudden return, as though she had been gone for a week or two.

"Cheyne and Cheyanne...they won't hurt you...unless you draw your weapons and threaten to shoot...then they run into my bedroom and hide under the bed!"

She gave a chuckle. Perhaps the first for a while.

"Please. Sit."

One large room.

Lounge. Dining and Kitchen combined. But the overall dimensions of the room meant that nothing was squashed in. Or out of place. The furniture of good quality and looked after. She was proud of her house and looked after it. Inside and out. The Lounge area dominated by the TV. Huge. An impressive Hi-Fi system. A double Lounge suite and two single matching sofa chairs. A small timber crate with a glass top, the Coffee table. A computer table and desktop set-up in the corner behind the front door that was centrally located in the front wall. French windows either side of the Entry Door. The Dining Table and four chairs tucked into a corner with the Kitchen wrapped around it on two walls. A large window above the sink looked out onto a back veranda similar to that at the front of the building. A mass of pot plants, hanging gardens and ferns protected from the western setting sun by shade cloth, roll down curtains at the extremity of the veranda width.

The Kitchen small but functional.

Neat with nothing on what little counter top was available. A chrome rail hung from the ceiling. Several saucepans, a frying pan, a cast iron pot and a plethora of cooking utensils hung from the rod. An old-fashion wood-burner stove and hotplate would have warmed the entire house in winter. A timber floor of very wide floor boards.

Jilly caught me looking.

"We got that flooring out of a Warehouse being demolished in Newcastle. The original flooring was a bit rotten...this stuff is a good fifty millimetres thick. Warm as toast in winter. I was told once what type of timber it is, but have forgotten."

"Looks like some type of hardwood. Possibly Blackbutt. Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. You should be proud of yourself."

I was actually referring to the entire house.

"Yeah. Ta, I guess. The boards were as hard as hades. Dad had one hell of a time laying them down on the Joists...and he secret nailed them, what-ever that is. Had to drill every nail hole before hammering in those secret nails. This was actually two rooms when my Granny lived here. This area. I knocked down the wall to make one large room. Dad and my brother built the rear veranda, the kitchen with the larger window and French Doors. Even made the cupboards. I did up the Bathroom...everything myself. And the Laundry. Jennah and I..."

She stopped for some moments.

Placed the Jug back on its base and grabbed a tissue. She had her back to us.

"S... sorry...um...we painted the joint out...outside too...the two of us laid the concrete for both front and back verandas and tiled them too...we were proud of that...yeah...sugar and milk in the jug. Here's yer coffee. Do you want something to eat... sorry, I'm not into titbits and such. I can make you a sandwich if you want? I have some Sao biscuits...No?"

She sat heavily facing me from the opposite side of the table.

"More questions?" She asked as she raised her mug to her lips.

The two dogs had retired to the Lounge area. Both lying in small dog couches. Their heads stuck out so that they could still spy what was going on. Their eyes glancing back and forth to whom-ever was talking.

"When we last interviewed you, you seemed quite adamant that Jennah's father could not have killed her. Yet he seems to be possibly the last person to see her alive...if your account of the timing is correct. He must have seen her walking along the road towards the Train Station..."

"Yes?"

"Why were you so adamant about Mister Kolowic's innocence?"

She looked confused. She glanced across at the dogs. Both sensed her discomfort and stood. She eased them back onto their blankets with a gesture of her hand. A stern "NO." An assurance that she was OK. She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know...I know what he had done to all the kids through the years. It was an open secret around the traps, if you know what I mean? But my Dad...the most gentle and lovable man that nature put on this earth...you tend to gauge other fathers in the same manner...good people, if you know what I mean?"

I glanced at Mar, feeling comfortable that we had not escaped from one of the family traits. I doubted that she even knew that she repeated the saying as much as she did...or even that it was said parrot-fashion, the same as her mother...if you know what I mean?

"And... well...Dads don't do that sort of thing...I know that doesn't make much sense when one knows the heart-ache that Barrie caused his entire family, but...murdering Jennah? It doesn't seem possible....in saying that...I guess...as I am the last person who possibly saw Jens alive, I could be your favourite suspect, if you know what I mean?"

Denial came in many guises, I thought to myself. In many shades.

"Why would you say that, Jillian?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Did you kill Jennah Kolowic, Jillian?"

Her eyes grew large. She held her breath. I felt sure that at some point I would need to smack her on her back to start her breathing again.

"Truly. Honestly. No. She was my life. If you can imagine what it's like in such a... remote... a small community such as this, to find your soul mate...and know so from halfway through High School...both of us considered ourselves the luckiest people on Earth. We knew that we were meant for one another. No. I will not have you even thinking like that...just not on...if there is nothing else...."

"Jillian? We have to ask these questions. Every-one, and I mean everyone, is a suspect until we can narrow the suspect pool down...hear me?" Hendricks leaned over the table and took the girl's hands in her own. "It's hard sometimes, you know? The questions we have to ask of those who are hurt so much by their loss."

The young woman nodded her head. Took her hands from Marge's grasp and wiped her eyes. Blew her nose with a scrunched-up tissue.

"OK" She muttered quietly. "OK."

"You must admit, if your assertions were correct, the times that you provided us, then he must have seen his daughter walking along the road."

I left that comment to float around the room. Jillian looked from me to Mar.

"You didn't mention to us that Sam and his brother also dropped in here looking for Jennah. Why not?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I can't give you a reasonable explanation for that omission...I don't know...I guess I may have been in shock...or confused...or wondering the very point that you have now inferred. That perhaps Mister Kolowic was involved in the disappearance and killing...I don't know."

She commenced crying.

"Sorry...I won't be a moment."

She walked quickly from the room. Both dogs trailing after her as though being held by leashes. They suddenly burst back into the room and ran to the front door Fly-screen. The backs of their bodies gyrating wildly as a gentle knock could be heard. The door opened and

Aaron Bright stepped slowly into the room.

"I thought...where's Jilly?"

"It's OK, Dad. I just had a silly moment. I'll be OK." She went over to him and gave him a hug.

"I just thought..." He glanced about, a little embarrassed. "While I'm here, yer mind if I have a cuppa? Sit down?"

The filthy Border Collie sat against the door.

"Bones...away from the door. Yer not coming in here until I give yer a bath...a waste of time actually." He turned to me. Sat easily at the table. "As soon as I wash him, he goes out and rolls in the dirt and the hen poo...every time! Do you mind if I stay?" He looked at both of us. Looked at his daughter. Concern etched across his face.

I gestured with my hand.

"No. That's fine. We're almost finished."

Jilly took a man-size handkerchief from her jeans pocket and blew her nose a couple of times. Placed a mug of steaming coffee in front of her father.

"Sugar and milk on the table. Serve yourself, Dad...um...where were we. Sorry...I thought I was all cried out...Sam I guess, turned up about twenty minutes after his father was gone...about half an hour after Jennah had left I suppose...maybe longer perhaps...it's so long ago in some ways. The time line could be a little out, but that is what I remember roughly...about the times, that is, if'n you know what I mean? Somewhere along the line the lot of them should have crossed paths, one would think, if you know what I mean?"

"Unless Barrie drove down the back track.... the dirt track extension of Railway Parade." I added.

"Can't see that. I doubt that he would do that in his truck. It would be lucky to have seen a dirt road, let alone driven on one...but anything is possible I guess."

"Well, from the information that we have, that would be the only explanation that explains why no-one saw each other as they returned back along Railway Parade."

"Unless some-one is lying." Jilly's father stated matter-of-factly.

"Or the times are a bit skew-if." Jillian added. "It was a while ago to draw exact times, if you know what I mean?"

"Even if the times are a bit off, if they all drove back to the Awaba By-pass road, they had to have passed one another." Mar put into words what I was thinking.

Aaron Bright looked confused at that statement. The look on Jillian's face was not that of guilt or deception but one of innocence. Of genuine concern that she may have been wrong in the remembering of the times of that fateful Sunday morning and the whole case revolved around those points on the dial of a clock.

Time would tell that it very well may have got down to minutes, even seconds!

"It was the middle of winter back then. Wasn't it?" I asked. "It seems strange that Jennah would want to walk up the road at that time of morning...I would imagine that it would be somewhat chilly, even cold around these parts at that time of year."

Jillian nodded her head. Screwed up her brow as though in deep concentration.

"I can't remember...really, though Jennah loved to walk...and that time of year she preferred instead of the heat of summer. Me? I wait impatiently for summer to arrive."

A smile broke the furrow on her brow as a sense of fondness accentuated the words.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY**

Mar suddenly stood from the table.

"Do you mind if I use your toilet?"

"No. Fine." Jilly replied surprised. "Um...the second door on the left down the Hall. 'Scuse the mess."

After Mar had disappeared, I explained the situation.

"She is about ten weeks pregnant. She only found out about two weeks ago. Actually, this is the first attack that she's had. With her earlier pregnancy, the morning sickness was pretty full on!"

Jilly rose from the table and walked quickly down the Hallway. It took her some time to return.

"I hope that you're not in a hurry. She's lying down on my bed. Apparently, it was the coffee. That was the first cup that she's had...she should have had water. She forgot, that's all."

It was a good twenty minutes before Marge emerged from the house.

Jilly, her father and I were walking around the house. Me poking my nose into every pot-plant to check out the contents. Taking photos with my Smartphone. Asking questions off-handedly. Occasionally chucking one in from left field about the case. Mostly though, it was about the house and surrounds.

I had to admit it.

I was jealous of the joint.

It was the picture that I had in my mind's eye of my perfect home. Simple. Relaxed. Full of colour and warmth. Inside and out. Out in the Bush where the next-door neighbour could not be seen or heard.

A loving hand and a kind heart had nurtured what was here. That much was obvious.

I had to question my motives and whether my ideals were clouding my judgements in regards to Jillian Bright. There appeared to be many lies by omission being conducted by all the persons involved in this case. While omissions were the expected because of the time that had past and omissions were human nature, in this situation, the number of them seemed to twitch my nose.

We crawled back along the 'home track'.

Aaron Bright chose to stay with his daughter. He would make the long walk later.

"You OK?" I asked. Concern lacing my words as I glanced over at Mar. She was sitting in the front Passenger's seat, shading her eyes from the sun. It was very rare that she ever let me drive our Unmarked. I didn't mind actually, as she was a far better driver than I on any given day.

"Yeah...I had to force my fingers down my throat when Jillian came to the Bathroom door. I wanted a look at the rest of the house. The Bathroom Cabinet for what things may have been inside. In the Bedroom. Nice. She's a home-body. May suffer from a mild form of OCD as that joint is spotless although she could have gone on a mad cleaning program as some sort of 'cure-all' once Jennah's fate was established. There were several photos in frames of the two of them in the Bedroom. Who-ever took them was a darn good Photographer. Good shots. About half were posed but it was a natural looking pose. Well framed. I wonder who...Jennah...she...um...she was happy in them. A complete contrast to those that we looked at, at the Kollie house..."

"If you were suspicious, we could have easily obtained a Warrant to poke about..."

"Not necessary...she's a victim of sorts too. And a fine person who has a heavy heart at the moment. She'll make it through, hopefully. She's not a suspect as far as I'm concerned..."

"Oh? Gut?"

"And heart, Joseph Lind but I doubt that you would be able to understand."

"You never give me credit for being an understanding, empathetic type of guy."

"I wonder why."

I swung the car onto the macadam roadway to head back towards the Railway Station.

"Bugger!" I softly hissed. "I wanted to take that back road down to the Wangi Road intersection and onto the Power Station..."

I waited until a driveway on my left came up and swung into it.

I went to throw the vehicle into reverse to three-point turn across the road to trace my route back the other way when the name on the twenty gallon RMB Mail Box caught my eye.

"Burrows...wasn't that the surname of the guy that Sam Kolowic said he saw that morning when he came out here after his father? Mitch Burrows?"

"Yeah. While we're here, eh. Let's see if he can corroborate any part of that story for that Sunday morning..."

The house was built close to the roadway, so we stopped the vehicle where it was. Turned off the motor and got out. The day had heated up somewhat.

"I've gotta have something to eat soon, Joe. I need to have something to eat."

"Yeah. We won't be long here, then we'll go back to that General Store near the Railway Station to see what they've got. Maybe a packet of Biscuits. If we're lucky, they may make us a sandwich or something...maybe a loaf of bread, a bit of margarine and some Crisps...it's been ages since I've had a chip sandwich. Maybe ask them a few questions. They would have been open at that time on a Sunday morning. Sunday papers and all..."

"Not a meal recommended for pregnant woman I'm afraid, Joe. Though beggars may not be choosers in this case."

I pounded on the front door.

A white 4WD Ute was parked up close to the side of the house.

The door cracked open.

A guy peered through the crack. By the look of the expression on his face, we had woken him up. We'd never see mid-day again to-day. Typical young lad. They all lived on Bat-time!

"Yeah...don't want nuttin that ya selling. OK?"

"Detective Lind and Hendricks. Homicide Detectives from the Murder Squad in Sydney. Just want to ask you a few questions."

I shoved my ID Card at him.

"Fuck. Shit. No way...nah. Got nuttin' to say. Don't know shit from clay."

"Are you Mitch Burrows? We are investigating the disappearance and death of Jennah Kolowic around September this year. We are led to believe that you may have seen her the morning of her disappearance. Sunday, September twenty-one this year..."

"Oh...Jennah...yeah...um...shit...that was what? Three months ago? Shit! You want me to remember back that far? No way. Uh, uh."

"Sir, would you mind opening the door?"

"Oh..."

The door closed, a chain was detached and the door opened wide. The inside of the house was in darkness even though it was close to one in the afternoon. He stepped out onto the veranda in front of us, slowly closing the door until it gently latched. He had a pair of satin boxer shorts on. Nothing else. He hugged himself as though he was cold, which was absurd as it was over thirty, closer to thirty-five degrees. I did a double take. I knew this guy but for the life of me I had no idea from where. I had met him. Had a run-in with him, perhaps. My mind started its wheels a-whirring.

The look on his face indicated a similar feeling on his part. He was racking his brain trying to place my face.

"Detectives? About poor Jennah? I heard that her body had been found. Some-one killed her. Who?"

"Do you remember seeing her?"

"When?"

"On the morning of her disappearance. On the Sunday morning around ten in the morning. A cold morning. You were seen loading up a trailer with your Trail Bikes...around that time..."

"Jeez...um...her brother. Sam? With Jake. Jon was with them too. Jake gave me the finger, the smart-arse Dude. We belong to the same Dirt Bike Club. The grounds are not that far from here...yeah. That's it. Around ten. Maybe later perhaps. Ten-thirty. On that morning. We had a Club Meet at Newcastle scheduled for twelve that day. I was going to be late again. The mate was late...the Dude rides and is my Mechanic. Jake wasn't going...his age group wasn't included in the inter-Club Meet. Yeah. That's it. Didn't see Jennah though...some cool chick. A prize. Not the way to go, I reckon. Some dirt-bag who don't belong around here..."

"Why would you say that...about the dirt-bag not belonging around here?"

He looked from Mar to I. Confusion on his face. Shrugged his shoulders. Glanced at our vehicle.

"Dun know. Just a cool saying, Dude. No need to get uptight, man. Just a saying...we all know one another. Went to the same School...played the same sports on the same side or against one another, you know?"

"You'd know her if you saw her, would you?"

"Sure...she was one cool chick. A real prize though she didn't know it. She used to ride. Early teens up to about when she was fifteen. Had a bad fall. Knocked the confidence...and the wind out of her...she was good, though. Better than both Sam and Jacob though you didn't hear that from me. Did I see her that morning? We were out pretty early getting stuff ready for the Meet. Checking the Bikes. Our gear. Don't remember, really."

"Anyone else from the family?"

"Like her father. He needed a good hiding, that bloke. An arse-hole for sure. He sped outa the Bright's driveway as though his arse was on fire...about half an hour before Sam showed up..."

"Where were you?"

"Bloody hell...yer asking bloody hard questions. We usually load up around the back. Close to the Barn. That's where we keep the bikes. Clean them down. Hang our gear. That's the usual though I can't say that for sure because sometimes we load up beside the house...for no real reason except the weather, perhaps."

"So, you definitely didn't see Jennah?"

"Not that I can remember. No...I think I would remember if I had. She was one prize chick...but you know, she was Jilly's bird...know what I mean?"

"Which way did Barrie Kolowic go when he came out of the Bright's driveway?"

"Up the road...towards the Station...no... I'm not too sure. I think he may have gone the other way...down towards the bush track."

"Isn't that a dead-end?"

"No. There's a track that goes through the State Reserve. About fifteen kays...maybe longer. Comes out onto the Wangi Road not that far north of the Power Station. The bloody chimneys tower over everything...and the Cooling Towers."

"That would be rough, wouldn't it? For a car?"

"No... No... Old man Kollie was in a 4WD. White. They grade the track every year before the fire season starts to make it easier for the tankers and such if they need to get through that way. Then it is like...a good dirt road, man. No good for our dirt Bikes...no challenges...look, if there's nuttin' else, I'm trying to catch up on some sleep. I've lost a bit over the last couple of days, is all."

"Your mate's name and address...."

"Trev?"

"Was he the mate who was with you that morning?"

He nodded his head. Look a little uncertain before he divulged his mate's name, address and mobile number.

We thanked him for his time and headed back towards the Unmarked.  
I could tell he was still trying to place me, as me with him.

I eased myself into the driver's seat, adjusting it again for the umpteenth time to try and find a comfortable position. I turned over the motor, turned on the air-conditioning and hunched over the steering wheel. Stared at the young bloke's Ute parked hard up beside the house.

"Get onto Sam Kollie, Mar"

"What for?"

"To find out the name of the Dirt Bike Club that he, Jennah and that bloke Burrows belongs to."

"What for?"

"Ask him if he knows where in Newcastle they normally went to for a week-end Meet. In particular, that week-end that Jennah went missing."

"Why?"

"Ask him if he happens to know the Secretary, the Treasurer or the Organiser of that particular Club in Newcastle...in Newcastle could cover an area from Raymond Terrace to Kurri Kurri to Swansea I reckon...."

"Yeah? And?"

"They may have records on what time Burrows and his mate... Taylor was it? What time they turned up for the Meet. Burrows reckoned they were running late...Sam Kollie reckons that Burrows was putting a swag into the back of the Ute. What would he need a swag for if it was just a Sunday afternoon Meet? If he had to go via that spur-track to dump the body, that would have added another hour at least onto their time.... which means that Trevor Taylor just became an accessory to murder."

"Jeez, Joe, you make work for yourself...well, no. For others, like your long-suffering colleague, perhaps. Maybe it was a small tent. You know, one of those to allow them to work on their bikes out of the sun...or the rain. "

"Mmm...why, when he's got one of those roll-out awnings on his Ute."

I jutted my chin in the direction of the Ute.

I reversed out onto Railway Parade as mar picked up her phone.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE**

We drove slowly up to the small General Store.

The interior dim but cool.

The chap behind the counter pleasant but unhelpful. Confusion was the best way to describe him. I doubted that he could remember who had last walked into his shop on this morning let alone place a face of some three and a half months ago. He did admit to knowing Jennah Kolowic. In this area, everyone knew everyone else. Both Jennah and Jilly were regular customers together. Lovely girls. No troubles. Always smiling and laughing. Always happy like teenage girls are.

We purchased half a loaf of freshly made bread which he sliced up and buttered. A small deli pack of Ham and Devon, a sliced half of a cucumber, a sliced-up tomato and a superb meal was provided.

Mar a large bottle of water. Me a Coke.

I swung the car around and drove slowly down the extension to Railway Parade through fairly dense bush. Two creek crossings, a steep gradient up onto a ridge line. Beautiful country. The smell of the bush hypnotic. I tried to peak Mar's interest as we crawled along. The occasional bird call, a brief stop at an Orchid growing out of the fork of a tree.

I needn't have bothered. Mar sat in the front passenger seat often with her eyes closed. Willing me and my enthusiastic commentary away so it would seem.

We parked the vehicle under a huge Gum and had our Lunch as we spied the bush as it rolled in gentle gullies and ridges out before us. The food seemed to perk Mar up as she sat awkwardly in the front seat. The back of the seat down a notch or two.

It was then, for the first time, that the thought occurred to me, that I was going to lose my long-term partner. I did not like the thought, so I closed the thought down.

We stopped at the intersection of the track as it emerged from the State Reserve to meet the Wangi Road. The main north-south arterial road hereabouts.

"See those RMB Mail Boxes there. About six of them. Clustered together? Did you notice any houses back down the track?"

"It's a State Reserve, isn't it? That's what every-one has said..."

"Google Earth it up will you...I'm just going to check a couple of those RMB Numbers. A couple ring a bell."

I swung the car over close to the cluster of Mailboxes.

"Venda...that's the name of Jennah's school friend. Wasn't it? Played Netball with Jennah? Where's the house...or a track to designate that a property exists around here?"

I turned my head either way. Reversed the car around to try and spot any tracks that may lead off into the bush.

"Maybe they're here because it allows a fair turning circle for the Mail Contractor....off the road itself...and at a guess, this maybe the most distant point for the local School Bus from the Catholic and Public Schools in Toronto...to also turn around and pick up kids from around here."

I half said this to myself.

A thought that escaped into the voice box and echoed out.

"Joe, we're not that far out in the bush, are we? For that type of arrangement? You know? These big mail boxes that will take mail, milk and groceries and stuff?"

"It seems we are...the proof is in the pudding...or in this case, those 44-gallon drums for Letter Boxes. It ain't typical suburbia, now is it? If that happens to be the Venda family that Kolowic mentioned that he saw straight after leaving the Bright's place, then *there is* his reason for taking the back road...not as we think, to take a short cut to the Power Station to dump his daughter's body."

"Burrows was the first to mention that Kolowic was driving a 4WD Ute...no-one else mentioned that."

"Either Burrows was mistaken, couldn't remember...or everyone else was mistaken."

"We are not aware that the old man possesses a 4WD Ute. Does it come up on his Vehicle Registration History?"

"I'll have to check again.... but you know what this may mean, don't you? We're back to square one with possible POI's."

"Mmm...check the ownership of vehicles when we get Internet coverage again....and let's see if we can locate that property first...for verification of his word."

We drove slowly up Wangi Road back towards Toronto heading north. No more than sixty metres from the mouth of the track that we had emerged from, there was another track leading off the macadam on the other side of the road. A large post with the Number 631 was painted roughly on a 44-gallon drum lid.

"That's it." Mar yelled out as I drove past.

It was another kilometre before I could safely do a U-turn and back track to the mouth of the house track.

We crawled up the track. Dense bush on either side of us.

The dense bush bordering the Highway thinned out some one hundred metres in.

A large brick home in the middle of the clearing. On top of a slight rise. A wide low roofed veranda encircled the dwelling giving it the appearance of it cowering under the mid-afternoon sun. Off to one side were several fenced horse paddocks. A training round took

pride of place in the middle of this geometric arrangement.

A woman led a horse around the run. The nose lead in one hand. A whip on a long thin pole in the other. Stocky. Wide backside. Buxom. A hat that shaded her entire face and her shoulders. She glanced in our direction.

Yelled out.

"Do you mind waiting for one moment. I'm almost finished her session. Won't be a moment."

Several other horses wandered to their paddock fences to peer in our direction. Unimpressed with the look of us, they turned away. Several expressed their disgust by short neighs and lip blows. A toss of their heads their parting gesture as they slowly departed. A finger in horse-speak, perhaps. She muttered something to the horse that she was exercising. Slowed it to a walk from the canter for a rotation or two and then pulled it up. She led it to a small stable section, gave it a quick rub down, played a hose over its body and dried the horse down. It trotted into one of the smaller fenced enclosures.

She walked quickly up to us.

"Sorry, yer can't just stop when you've been exercising them for about twenty minutes. Yer gotta cool them down. Debra Venda. And you are?"

We both showed our ID Cards.

"Cops. What has the bastard done now? He'll be the death of me. Like kids, ya never loose of the ex, now are you. I've bloody well re-married and he still causes me grief!"

"Missus Venda? We're from the Murder Squad. In Sydney?"

"That crash on the main road last month? Don't know if'n I can help that much."

"Arrh...No....." There's always these people who'll not wait for you to explain yourself. Jumping to a conclusion not letting you get a word in edgeways.

"Missus Venda? We are investigating the abduction and death of Jennah Kolowic. Last September...her body was discovered on a Fire Trail up behind the Eraring Power Station a couple of weeks ago...not that far from here, down the Wangi Road."

She nodded her head slowly. Looked down at her muddy Wellies. Kicked some mud from them.

"Yeah, a sad business. Tragic actually...it was in the local...and all the Horse people in the district have been talking about it. I've had at least a dozen calls...come inside out of the

sun, eh?"

We followed her up onto the veranda where she shed her hat, placed her whip on a hook and worried out of her Gumboots.

"Horses. Ya either love them or ya hate them. No in-between." She commented as she bent to put house slippers onto her feet.

A large Labrador stirred. Two Border Collies watched every move that we made. An occasional wag of the tail a subtle warning.

"Honey? Joe and Jess? C'mon. Inside with me." She turned to both of us. "Yer may say yer Cops but I don't know you from a bar of soap. Not that I don't trust yers, I just don't know yers."

We followed her into the coolness of the house. I figured correctly that she was alone. She had primed the dogs to be on guard and watch our every move. This woman had been attacked before and now, didn't take any chances. I'd bet my house on the ex. being the culprit. She sat us on tall stools at a Kitchen Counter bar. She leant against the bench-top opposite us. Looking at us sideways. A good metre from us with the bench-top between us. The Labrador sat close to her. The two Collies sat either side of Mar and I. These dogs had been trained to attack at a certain word being uttered by the Boss. I was very impressed. You looked at them and they appeared relaxed though their eyes never left us.

"Jannah? Poor girl. She and my daughter were best friends all the way through High School. Jannah wasn't into horses like my Sue, but they both loved Netball. Both of them good at it. Jannah was Sue's Bridesmaid when she got married. I hope I'm not speaking out of turn in saying that she was gay. We knew a long time ago, though it didn't affect their friendship at all. Sue was devastated when she disappeared. She knew that something bad had happened to her."

"Did Mister Kolowic come to see you on the morning of her disappearance?"

"Ranting about how we were hiding her from him...not the first time I might add...he's a bit off, isn't he? Scared the bejesus out of Sue. Thank God it was a Sunday morning and my husband was at home. If I'd been here with just the kids, the bastard would have been mauled to death by the dogs. Let me tell you!"

"What time would that have been?"

"Just before Lunch time from memory. It's what...three months ago. Perhaps about eleven. Around then."

"The vehicle he was driving?"

She blew out an exasperating stream of air through her mouth, much the same as the horses had done after they figured we weren't of interest. She rolled her lips the same way the horses did! I was amazed!

She shook her head.

"Honestly, I don't remember. It may have been a white sedan. A 4WD. A Ute. I don't recall. Sorry...maybe a white 4WD Ute. Double Cab...yeah, that sounds about right."

She'd talked herself into the conclusion.

We questioned her for another fifteen minutes about for little result.

I pushed myself off the bar-stool and headed for the front door. The dogs tailing me as though they knew I was the unfriendly and suspicious one.

"A word of advice, Missus Venda. If you let these dogs off with a command and they do any damage to any person, then you will be liable to assault yourself. And if they kill anyone, then you are liable to be arrested on a Homicide charge, so I'd be very careful if I were you...and by the way, we are both armed. Thank you for your time."

I didn't like the woman.

I figured that before we had even closed the Unmarked doors, she'd be on the phone spreading the gossip....and accusing us of Police brutality! Threatening to shoot her dogs.

She just got to me.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO**

"OK? Where are we with this Case? Have we made any remarkable headway?"

"Nah! We're no more advanced than we were before we went up to Toronto...in fact I'm more confused now."

"Well, Mar, that's not actually true...."

"I know. I know. We can discount all our preconceived suspicions that we may have held prior to visiting the area."

"I'm still not convinced of old man Kollie's complete innocence."

Our rub-down was finished after our swim and thirty-minute work-out in the Gym. So was our joint appreciation of our frustratingly unsolved case. Discussed as we lay on adjacent rub-down litters receiving a pummelling from two sadomasochist purveyors of pain and cruelty extremis!

"C'mon, Joe. We can't be late for the weekly Squad meeting. Abbey wouldn't be impressed even if we tried to convince him that we were better people for the Work-out just completed as our reason to be late! He only did five laps this morning and didn't have a rub-down that I could see."

At the beginning of each working week, as many Murder Teams as possible were required to attend the joint meeting where each team spun out their Cases so that every available Dee in the Squad Room who was present, could offer advice on those Cases that had hit a brick wall. Fresh eyes. Fresh ears. Different perspectives. This sometimes helped to move an obstinate case into motion once again. Not always, but on sufficient occasions to warrant the enthusiasm of all those who attended. And it was a good time for all of us to get together for a bit of light banter to ease the frustration of our work. It wasn't unusual that with the constant coming and going of the Teams, there was very little chance to catch up with one another.

To natter about other things. Family. Sickness. Holidays. The cricket or football last weekend depending on the time of year.

The usual banter that would be the norm in an Office if the inhabitants were sitting in close proximity for a major part of the working week.

This rarely occurred with us.

Abbey aka Detective Superintendent John Clifford James Church, our illustrious Boss and the best Chief I have ever worked for, chaired the meeting. It was often an aside or thought from this excellent former Murder Dick himself, which helped to jemmy open a stubborn case.

There were six two man teams including us in Abbey's Office.

The remaining six two man teams on the Day Duty roster were either in the field, on sick leave, stress leave which wasn't that uncommon, or enjoying the cyclic round of holidays or the glorious months or even just weeks of long service leave.

Once over the initial hump and the absolute thrashing of our very being when first introduced into the ranks of the Murder Squad, Murder Dicks tended to stay within the ranks of the Section. More so than the personnel movement in other spheres of the Force. I had yet to hear a concise reason for this except to state that Murder Dicks, as an entire group, loved the job!

Go figure!

It was just as well there were so many absentees as we were all crammed in. At close quarters with all breathing the chlorine tang from Mar and my bodies. This always bought the wags out in numbers. The comments usually revolved around perhaps me investing in a more expensive under-arm deodorant to Mar's selection of au-de-chloriné!

Usually it was those who did not pursue the daily exercise regime who were the most vocal in that regard!

Go figure.

Most cases were open and shut with no surprises or snags that may cause heart-burn, especially from any member of the DPP's Office when presented with the Cases. They were the chief complainants when-ever they thought our conclusions and the manner in which it was gained were either questionable, not up to scratch or a waste of Court time. They demanded perfection in a case being given to them for prosecution.

An old hand, Detective Three Brett Senior with his “wet-behind-the-ears” Detective Two Dallas Courtney took the floor. They had been the Team called out to the discovery of a young woman's body in a natural water-course Storm Drain adjacent to the Campbelltown Railway Line some one hundred metres from Minto Railway Station.

I vaguely remembered that it had been Caramine Lees' second last call out. She went from our Bryan O'Donnell Domestic Violence Homicide out to Minto. She had mentioned that we needed to hurry in our examination of the Deceased, the late vitriolic Doreen O'Donnell as she had a “fresh one” out around Minto.

Sad in a way...it made me think of her for the first time since her funeral.

How easy it was to forget those who had passed...when they were work colleagues and not family...even though in life, we did think of all of them as family as we spent more time in their presence than we did with family, usually.

The young woman had been identified as Shandy Templeton of Strathfield. Eighteen years of age from a close and loving family. The girl was a bit of a loner with no close friends. Loved animals and children and had wanted to be a Pre-school Kindergarten Teacher though her grades would make that selection of employment highly unlikely. She was slightly autistic though on first meeting this was extremely difficult to ascertain according to school acquaintances and family members.

What she was doing at Minto was any-one's guess.

There was no indication why this should have occurred.

Perhaps drawn out to that area to meet some-one though no-one had an inkling on the identity of that person.

A forensic study of her Computer had produced several clues.

Her Facebook Page was being closely monitored by a third party though the links could not be chased out to help identify the culprit.

Her e-mail address and content had shown that she was being expertly “groomed” by a person unknown. Again, there were “gates” and “dead-ends” that hid the person from view. After an exhaustive forensic search of her computer, the base transmission point was identified as a Computer Cafe in Newcastle.

A shady establishment that was also thought to be a place of drug transactions and money laundering.

Shandy had been raped and then strangled.

Her body left in the filthy water of the Storm Drain that helped to wash any DNA trace from her form. Her time in the water was assessed as at least several hours which meant that she would have been strangled as the peak commuter 'rush' was winding down around those parts. Around eight to eight-thirty in the morning. This would have meant that in order to have arrived at Minto from her address in Strathfield, she would have needed to have left home around six. Six-thirty at the very latest.

Video had her boarding a train at six-forty-five at Strathfield Station bound for Campbelltown. Stopping at Minto at eight-oh-five though she was not videoed alighting from the train at that station.

It was a mystery how she left the train and came to be submerged in a dirty, murky water-course to be found some several hours later.

There was very few worthwhile leads obtained from the crowd of commuters who used the “Drive and Ride” Commuter Car Park nearby. As apparently happens, the Perpetrator was extremely lucky with no-one seeing anything.

This had taken over a week of Police presence in the Car Park to determine.

The only consensus of the Commuter crowd was the constant complaint of the Coppers taking up valuable parking positions which were in short supply as it was!

There had been reports of an older, tall guy lurking in the area and a video of the adjacent “Drive and Ride” Car Park showed several vehicles arriving and then leaving the area within a projected time-line that was relevant to the crime. All but one vehicle had been identified with all persons interviewed.

The one mystery vehicle was a white 4WD Utility.

The number plates proved to be stolen from a vehicle of the same make and colour parked all day at a similar location three Railway Stations away. Video showed a tall male of similar build lurking in that Car Park, though the angles and locations of the video surveillance cameras were all wrong to catch said person stealing the Number plates in question.

Exhaustive studies through the Motor Registry Department looking for all white 4WD Utilities of that make and model proved inconclusive. It was surprising the number of similar vehicles registered in the State.

The two Detectives had hit that brick wall!

"Did the Vic have a mobile phone?"

"According to her parents, yes Boss, though it was not found amongst her possessions located near the body."

"Did the parents know whether she had it with her when she left her residence?"

"It appears that way, Boss."

The two Detectives knew what was coming. They had fucked up big time. As soon as they were made aware of the Vic having a mobile Phone, they should have been onto the Telco Carrier to trace all calls from and to that phone over the previous week or two.

They had no excuse. Her identity was proven at the time of examining her body in-situ. A handbag and small backpack were found on the bank of the water course. The two Detectives should have...should have immediately ascertained which Telco carrier she used. Immediately contacting Abbey who would apply for a Court Order for all recent activity of the phone to be saved. As it was a Murder investigation, all Telco Companies cooperated with us knowing that a CO was in the system.

The two had failed to carry out this essential piece of investigative practise.

It was only recently that the Federal Government had tabled a new Law forcing all Telco Carriers to retain the data information from Mobile Phones and Computers for a period of two years. It was yet to be passed into Law. Only the "Big T" had the capabilities to comply with that Law immediately. All the smaller Carriers were negotiating with that Carrier to possibly use their equipment and data storage as that was considered the most cost efficient method at this point in time. To comply, investment figures of tens of millions of dollars was involved in setting up a separate Data Base for each of the smaller Telco Carriers. Something that they could ill-afford at this point. Even so, all Carriers had the ability to

store such data for a maximum of two weeks. The “Big T” was already storing such information for twelve months.

Thus, if the two Detectives had been on the ball and approached the small Telco carrier that the Vic had used, valuable information may have been forthcoming. It was an oversight and a bad judgement call on their part. It would be safe to assume that the Perpetrator had contacted the Victim to change previous arrangements with their meeting being moved to another Railway Station where the young woman was met by the Perp in his vehicle.

Presumably a white 4WD vehicle.

A golden opportunity was lost to possibly identify the Perp by that stored information. By the time that the two Detectives realised their mistake, any recording of phone calls had been wiped from the Data base.

They knew that they were in for a dressing down of major proportions.

The expression on Abbey's face told the story.

"Have you narrowed it down so that you're not having to interview all the Owners of *all* vehicles of similar make and model...say maximising your search area to Residents from around the Campbelltown area. Widening the point of investigation to an area say from Liverpool down to Goulburn...if that fails?"

"That's a pretty big search area...for a bloody white Ute!" One of the other Detectives offered.

"Yeah, but it would have to be done, to discount that possible other alternative."

"Yeah, we've done that. Almost to that exact geographic area."

"Welcome to the exciting world of the Homicide Cop. Nothing but boring hours of computer searching. Going slightly bonkers and overdosing on caffeine poisoning." I offered amongst sniggers from all in the room.

A general nod of the collective heads. Groans and good humoured banter followed.

"Enough, guys..." Abbey interrupted. "How about in the Newcastle Area...seems to me that he could be a local from up around that area...as the link was to that area, wasn't it? Didn't you mention that?"

"Yes Boss. As you know, we sat for many an hour outside that Internet Cafe...we needed your approval for Overtime..."

There were hoots and comments from all the Officers to that piece of news.

Overtime was a hard potion to obtain as the NSW coffers always seemed to be empty in that regard. Many an hour was spent by Investigating Officers on cases for gratis just to keep the Case rolling. It was one of the most general grumbles heard right across the rank and file of the Police Force. The bureaucrats had scant appreciation on the mechanics of homicide investigations. Or for that matter, Police work in general.

The right to divvy out Overtime Dollar kudos was similar to Midas handing out gold coins at a Market stall!

"Settle down, guys." Abbey again yelled over the mumbled discontent and 'stirring' humour.

Brett Senior continued. A smile across his face.

"The Internet Cafe was not a thriving business. There was no video coverage over the Customers...I'd say the guy that owns it, is hanging on by the short and curlies...A lot of shady customers, if you get me drift...I can't see the demand any more as most people own some sort of computer device now-a-days..."

"You get the mind picture of little Johnny leaning over his Computer Screen watching writhing bodies as he's not allowed to get onto sites like that at home...Mum and Dad have exclusive use over sites like that after he has gone to bed..."

This bought a renewed swell of banter. Some of it bordering on lewdness and little Johnnies the world over needing to masturbate during every porn video that they covertly watch.

"Men!" Exclaimed Peta Daniels. "They discover their weenie when they are about three years of age and never stop playing with it or talking about it! Their minds are never out of the gutter from the age of eight when they first cotton onto toilet jokes and the power of farting! It keeps them company through to the grave!"

Her smile lit up the room.

The stir not lost on every male there.

"Any regular Clientele, Brett?" Abbey asked, ignoring the replies to Daniels observation.

The expression on his face showing that he was fast approaching the point of exasperation with his sub-ordinates. This happened every week. It was as though it was a definite plan to see how long before Abbey's patience wore thin. He had never exploded so went the rumour, though the boys in all the men would continue to try him!

"Yeah. A few. We covertly photographed them as we interviewed them. No-one stood up and waved his hand if you get my drift."

"A series of visits to the Cafe to cover his tracks just for that one victim." Abbey remarked. "A very careful dude. A thinking, intelligent murderer. Now that's a revelation...we may have our hands full on this one."

"Even knowing that, the guy may not be the registered Owner of the vehicle. If he is that careful, I'll bet a quid that the vehicle is indeed registered in another name...have you run Photo ID comparison examinations against License Photos that correspond with your list of Owners of similar vehicles in that area?" Abbey looked over at Brett Senior and his partner, Dallas Courtney. "If not..." He could tell by the expressions on their faces that that avenue of investigation had not been considered by either one of them. "If not, perhaps you should get either...um...Cooper Cross or that girl...Beryl Vines...is that her name? Up in Computer Analysis Section? A real Computer wizard. From Computer Analysis and Investigation Section. She should be able to enhance all your covert "mug" shots and run them as base models against only the registered and License holders who come up on the RTA records against that type and make of vehicle. If that draws a blank, then it could be safely assumed that the vehicle is owned and registered in another name by an unknown person."

"Or registered as a business vehicle." Mar cut in.

"Good point Marge. That should keep the two of you busy for a number of days."

This bought a howl of good natured stirring.

Abbey held up his hand.

"By the way..." He countered over the general conversational hum. "Your use of covert and unauthorised photographs cannot be made public or made knowledge to the DPP's Office. Especially if it draws the Perp out as it would not be permitted in any Court Case without the Court Order requirements to legally obtain them being obtained. So keep it quiet. If something is yielded from the search, then it was due to that proverbial lucky break. Understand?"

"Or that anonymous tip-off!" I countered.

"Yes indeed." Abbey added.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

"OK. Marge? Joe? What have you got? Anything that may require the brainpower of these imbeciles around you?" A smile lit his face. The mumbles that that comment generated were not worthy of recounting.

"We're running out of ideas...though I'm still leaning towards the father, Bartro 'Barrie' Kolowic as our Number One suspect...though there is scant evidence to support that view, I must admit."

I could see that Mar was shaking her head.

"You disagree, Marge?" Sonny Liston, the 2IC of the Squad Room and Head of the Special Projects commented.

Liston's Section was formed to deal with Political Murders, suspicious deaths of Minors and possible serial killings. That variety were few and far between on the ground, contrary to what every Fiction Writer of that genre would have you believe. The number in Australia could be counted on two hands since the time that Aborigines walked across the land bridge. That occurrence well before Eve discovered that nudity led to skin cancer.

"Um...OK." Mar paused to gather her thoughts.

I knew that she was about to shoot me down in flames. I could tell that made her feel uncomfortable. It was OK for her to do so when we were alone, but to do it in front of our colleagues???? She had a conscience and a standard to live up to that usually did not include belittling her partner in front of others...on most occasions, that is!

"He had motive..." She began. "He would have been livid to be confronted with the fact that his daughter had spent the previous day...and that night with her gay lover. He would have known for years as a father, of his eldest daughter's leanings at least...but he chose to spend his time in utter denial...he had the opportunity...he must have passed his daughter walking along the road towards the Railway Station as he drove down that same deserted street towards Jilly Bright's place...it is an out-of-the-way sort of place. A quiet backwater joint of few streets and even fewer houses. All on some hobby farm sized allotments of a few hectares or more...it is not a place where a Predator would wait in his car for that lone, good looking woman to walk past on a chilly winter's morning. It was never going to happen..."

"But it did, Mar..." I reiterated. I wasn't about to let it go. She shook her head. Lowered it.

You could see that she felt uncomfortable.

While in our general banter and day to day communications, our differing views and thoughts were a kind of game for both of us, bouncing alternative and often diametrically opposed views off each other, this was entirely different and rarely happened. For her to stand and disagree with my summation in front of every-one was uncomfortable for her. I could sense that much. I could blame her present condition of pregnancy for this feeling of hers which would be howled down by those present as coming from an unfeeling, chauvinistic pig!

Perhaps the comment had some merit, though.

Mar was shaking her head as though she had read my mind.

She gave me a filthy look.

I could only surmise that she had!!!

"OK. We know he has a trigger temper...the father...in a big way. That has been advertised throughout his married life...but to reach that point to enable him to kill his daughter on the spur of the moment..."

"...and out in the open, one would surmise..." Sonny Liston offered.

"Yes...and then confront his daughter's lover minutes after the event with no physical conditions that would suggest *to her* that something untoward had just happen...it is beyond comprehension...and then to continue on...supposedly with the body of his daughter hidden by a blanket in his vehicle, to other friends of his daughter's to grill them on her supposed whereabouts...to hours later dumping her body some thirty kilometres from the initial attack area...it's beyond a vivid imagination and in the realms of space ants."

I knew that comment was directed at me and the size of my brain and the complete absurdity of my imagination. When put the way she had just conveyed the facts, I must admit to begrudgingly agreeing with her...though that was not going to be made public, especially amidst this gathering!

"So, who else?" Abbey muttered quietly. He knew the score. I could tell.

"The gay lover. The victim never left her place. They had an argument the day before perhaps, during the night and she does away with her. Pretends to be the broken-hearted girl..." One of the other team members muttered.

Marge again vigorously shook her head. I agreed with her opposition to the theory.

"No. Jilly Bright was just as much a victim as poor Jennah. I couldn't see Jilly in that role at all...No. Not on!" She remarked stubbornly.

"Everyone is capable of murder, Mar, given the right set of circumstances, the fair-mindedness that Society and nurturing has engendered can be wiped away within a second by a set of circumstances that rear up at a moment's notice." Peta Daniels countered.

Marge gave her a look that only two females could decipher. Peta was actually defending Mar's view on the matter in a backhand sort of way. Letting her know that the 'sisters' needed to band together!

"I agree with Mar's summation of Jilly. She would not be capable of such an act." I murmured.

"The problem with all of this is that we are making summations about a Case that basically has gone stone, bloody cold by the time that the body of the Vic was found...is there anything that the local boys were suspicious about when they did the initial 'Missing Persons' investigation." Dallas Courtney suggested.

"That investigation was rather half-hearted. Because the father was known to the local guys. His temper. Even his treatment of his family members down through the years, they lazily thought that at twenty-two, Jennah Kolowic had finally fled from the abuse...there goes any further depth in their investigation..." Sonny Liston surmised. "It's not an uncommon prognosis."

I voiced my agreement to that conclusion. I had not been game to voice those very accusations of the behaviour of the local Constabulary. Especially with my recent past events in that regard still fresh in everybody's mind. I was astute enough not to go out on a limb again when it came to the ineptitude of the local Uniform guys.

"Were they aware of the relationship between the Vic and.....?" Senior's Partner asked.

"Jillian, Jilly Bright? Um...it is not recorded in their Case File, but it could have been known by one or two of the local lads but not recorded as it would appear to be sexist and discriminatory...you know how political correctness can warp the reporting of facts. We all have been its victim."

There was a general nod of agreement from all sitting crammed into the Office.

The Murder Book and our Case Note Book could be used in Court. Any indication of such a stance on the lesbian overtones could be detrimental to the Prosecution Case as had been experienced in the past. The Defence would pounce on any little incident to lessen the emphasis of guilt on their Client and onto the bumbling Investigating Officers instead.

A Court ploy that was often attempted.

A favourite amongst a small band of Defence lawyers.

"So! What have we got? A mysterious 'Loiterer' who no-one can remember seeing; the father who would fit the crime to a tee except for some undeniable facts that seem...that seem to eliminate him as a suspect; the Lesbian Lover who is not considered a candidate because Mar here seems to think strongly of her innocence; three brothers who supposedly followed their father around hoping to protect their beloved sister from harm by their dastardly father...and all we have is their corroborative statements that reinforces each other's story. Nothing else; and the mysterious neighbour who no-one saw except the

brothers...to reinforce their own stories. Their story of that morning. Is that about right? There is no corroborative evidence at the scene, no DNA trace due to the time scale of the body being left out in the open...which also raises the question of the time-line of the body dump as the cadaver was in relatively good order when found. That is hard to believe given the circumstances...anything else? Team? Any thoughts on the crime?"

There was silence for some moments.

"A back-ground check on Mitch? Yes? Mitch Burrows...maybe the brothers also and a forensic search of the father's vehicle. Bring it into the Forensic Workshop for a proper going over...has a complete background check been conducted of the Vic? Seeing as how she had a lesbian lover which was in some ways, an open secret, were there any others in the wings? Was there a disgruntled ex-boyfriend who couldn't handle being overthrown for a woman? If the timing is out by only minutes...and it was said that she was walking towards the Station *at that time* to correspond her call to her brother with the arrival of a Newcastle bound train, what are the chances that she may have met her Attacker, her Abductor as he alighted from the train? Were there any vehicles parked in the adjacent Parking Allotment that no-one recognised? I would imagine that it is quite a large flat area? Was there any-one else about? Lurking? Was there any workers...night workers who would habitually alight from the train coming from Sydney at that time...who may have noticed the meeting...or an argument between two persons...one of them our Vic?"

"That would involve overtime, Boss." Mar remarked. A grin on her face.

Hoots from the collective!

"Two Sundays in a row...from say nine in the morning to an hour and a half hour after the departure of the train from the platform..."

"Plus, travel time, Boss. An hour and a half either way. From our place of residence. Up the M1 Motorway." I added to more groans and discontent from the others. "Which would mean a total of five and a half hours for each Sunday. Under the terms of working week-ends, especially on a Sunday, any time greater than four hours worked will be rounded out to an eight-hour shift paid at the prescribed penalty rates."

"Let Joe be my Advocate on my next Standards and Ethics Panel Hearing!" One of the wags uttered loudly.

Everyone laughed.

"Then you would most definitely be sacked from your present employment with the Police Force. Joseph Lind is not the S & E's most cherished and beloved Officer." Abbey countered to whoops of laughter.

My run-in with the Panel had become the words of legends...and my several wins

over them!

These meetings were just as good for morale as the old Punching Bag in the middle of the Office area. And like the Punching Bag, these meetings were often criticised by those outside the Murder Squad umbrella who always had an axe to grind citing a waste of valuable time that could be better spent on the job!

Doing other things instead of spending close to two hours in a closed Office with laughter the norm.

Go figure!

"OK. Enough. You all have work to do. Out!" Demanded Abbey. "Senior? Courtney? Remain here. The rest of you out. Last man out, close the door behind you."

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

Neither Mar nor I had made the same mistake as Detectives Senior and Courtney and it was one of the first things that all us Murder Dees acted upon as an unquestionable first step in all murder investigations.

As soon as the identity of the body was verified, we applied for a Court Order instructing all Telco's to examine their Client Lists and provide the necessary information on any and all mobile devices that the victim may own. We had done this as soon as Jennah's body was identified. Admittedly that was close to four months after the initial report of her disappearance was recorded. Her name and all of her immediate family and their telephone and Internet activity was thus made available if...and it was a big if, if that Telco had the ability to record those activities for some time.

With the lag between her approximate date of death and her body being identified, it was close to a four-month time line.

A most despairing situation.

Unfortunately, Jennah's choice of Telco meant that that avenue of information was lacking. A blind alley.

How-ever, her father and Samuel, Jacob, Jon, Judith his twin sister and the youngest of the family, Jody who was still at school though doing her Higher School Certificate next year, did have accounts with the "Big T". This meant that records for them were available back to the weeks leading up to Jennah's disappearance.

Her brother Sam had spoken to her twice on the day before her disappearance and at nine fifty-seven on the morning of her presumed disappearance. When questioned about this, Sam had advised us that he had rung to warn his sister that their father was on the war-path because Jennah had stayed out all night without phoning home.

Barrie Kolowic had tried from eight-oh-five onwards to contact his daughter. Up until ten-oh-five each call had rung out! He would have been seething early on in the morning by this complete lack of regard by his daughter towards him. Then the phone had been switched off so it would seem.

Or it had run out of battery power.

This gave us valuable insights into the estimated times that every-one offered us when questioned as to what had transpired that fateful morning some months before. And an estimation into the senior Kolowic's state of mind as the morning progressed.

It also opened up a further possibility.

Because of that time line between Sam and his father's calls, there was that possibility that Jennah had indeed meet her Attacker as he had alighted from the train. As Sam Kolowic had described, any time that Jennah was picked up, it was always on the other side of the railway line to Jilly Bright's place. That meant that Jennah, in order to get to the other side of the main north-south rail line, would have used the old disused level crossing at the southern end of the Station. As all locals did who left the last couple of carriages. Those in the forward carriages would have used the overhead steps and pedestrian bridge. Her presence standing near the platform should have been noticed...and could have made it easier for her Abductor to strike up a conversation. If no-one thought there was nothing unusual going on at the time, that would surely point to Jennah knowing her Kidnapper, Rapist and Murderer.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE**

Mar was off on sick leave for the following three days.

For the first time since we became partners some five years previously, I had time to think what it was going to be like without her.

She had already hinted at not returning to work after the mandatory twelve month 'baby leave' duration. She wanted to become a "Home Mum" at least until the child left for school. This I felt would be further extended if she and Muscles were successful in becoming immediately pregnant after the birth of their first born. A plan that both of them

talked about.

Time was ticking away for Mar and she wanted to beat the odds.

I was happy for her and Muscles...but concerned about my position being left as a one-man team.

When I had first transferred into the Murder Squad, the attrition rate of partners who Abbey paired with me was tragic, to say the least. Most thought that I was slightly crazy, hard to work with, expected far too much or too insulting. That comment by every young female partner that I was attached to as their mentor. Abbey had a stroke of sheer genius when he paired me with Marjory Hendricks. For some reason, we clicked. Were successful. Our mental prowess complemented each other. Our senses of humour dovetailed. Our work ethic, morality and sense of fun and fair play melded together seamlessly.

Now?

Without her, I considered myself half the Investigator, though Abbey had hinted that I was selling myself short...three-quarters was his estimate! But more so, I would be back having to walk as though egg-shells was my pavement.

Without Mar I was forced to do the Computer searches myself, something that I had hated from the get-go. I decided to run a search on Jilly Bright first and for a day and a half I struggled to hook into every site that may have helped me. None-the-less, it soon became apparent that Jilly's life up until then, had been a very lawful existence, more than I can say for both her mother and father. Both having records and time spent at "the Governor's Pleasure"! Her father especially, had spent a somewhat murky and rebellious youth, straddling the line between good and bad! It made for good reading if nothing else and it bought a smile to my face.

The next day and a half I spent tracing out the Kollie children only to learn of exceptionally talented and athletic youngsters. Something that we had already surmised through earlier trawls.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX**

"Have I missed anything important...you did do some worthy endeavours while I was off, didn't you?" Mar enquired with a School Marm tone to her voice.

"What? Do you think that I can't function as an extraordinary Investigator when-ever you aren't around, my Dear?"

"Um...that's a loaded question. You really do not want me to answer that in case I have to be brutally honest...no more coffee for me, Sherlock. So, in an effort to aid your partner and to take away any tempting aromas that may drift across our desks from your direction, I declare this day that both of us are on a caffeine free existence!"

I was astounded!

How dare she make such a proclamation without consulting me first!

"Is that all? How can I not obey your command? Your welfare is uppermost to my every living breath. Water it shall be for me as well, until such time as you apply for and receive your Birthing Time-off...next week by any chance?"

"You're a dreamer, Joe Lind. A bloody dreamer. I'm still in my first trimester, silly...and by the way, I could very well be having twins...it looks positive...So? Where we at?"

"What?!"

I bounced around our desks and gave her the biggest hug. Announced the news at the top of my lungs to the entire cavernous room. Soon our desks were the hum of activity for close on an hour before Abbey broke it up.

"So, you'll be back earlier to work than you first anticipated?" I asked.

My future welfare uppermost in my mind.

She looked at me, uncertain as to my motives.

"I'll miss you like hell, my dear. That's all." I turned away, embarrassed by my unguarded moment of truth-telling. She came around to kiss me fair on the lips. Hugged me tightly.

"You too, Joe. That's about the nicest thing that you've ever said to me."

She pushed herself away from me.

"OK...enough."

She swiped away the tears that had filled her eyes with her arm.

"Enough! Where we at?" She reiterated.

I filled her in on the progress I had made over the previous three days.

"Bugger all, I see. I suppose that you want me to carry out a full "trawl" on that Burrows

guy? Is that all?"

"Yes, Boss. You up to a bit of car-sitting on Sunday morning. Or catching the ten-oh-four train from Sydney to Newcastle stopping at various small Stations including Awaba?"

"You've already organised it?"

More a statement than a question.

I nodded my head in agreement.

"Then I guess that we are on. Do you want to include a couple of the local Uniform lads as we do not know how many people will alight from the train?"

"Already organised...they'll hang around the Parking Area canvassing all who enter or leave."

"Well...I see that you are good at some things. Now leave me alone while I do some searching."

"That's OK. I'll be heading up to the Tenth Floor in a little while. To the Computer Analysis Section. They've been doing a forensic search on Jennah's Laptop, Smart-phone and Tablet. We may have something."

"Don't you dare sneak out and have a coffee otherwise I'll beat you to death if I smell it on your breath."

"Yes Boss."

"Tell me something. Why would a Research Assistant obtain a 'Works' Mobile Phone? Those Organisations wouldn't hand out Mobiles willy-nilly. They're always short of cash. Did Jilly Bright have a Works Phone? It seems a bit odd to me, that's all...I was thinking about it while I was walking the streets maintaining my fitness between bouts hugging the toilet. That's the one thing that I hope finishes very shortly!"

I looked at her, unsure as to the relevance or weight of the point. It was just like her to chuck in a furphy which she would defend by saying that it was a loose end...is all! I shrugged my shoulders. I'd forgotten who it was who mentioned that piece of information to us. I still couldn't see the relevance of it though.

I again shrugged me shoulders.

"So?" I asked her. "What's that got to do with the price of fish in Denmark?"

"Nothing perhaps. Nothing at all more than likely. The price of fish in Denmark would never be influenced by Jennah having a Work Phone or not...or so I imagine. I just thought it a bit strange is all."

I walked off shaking my head. A smile on my face.

"Joseph Lind. Do not come back into this Office with the smell of coffee on your breath if you care for your safety and life!"

"Yes Boss!" I yelled out to her as I disappeared towards the Lift Lobby.

Pregnancy can do strange things to some people, I suppose. I couldn't remember back that far when my late wife had been pregnant with our son, Bill, so I had no base to make a judgement call on the issue.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN**

"Joe? They've taken Marge up to the Nurses' Quarters for a lie-down. She was feeling a bit yucky."

"Oh!?...everything alright?"

"Yeah, she just had a bit of a turn. That's all..." Hendo, our Number One Clerk informed me. "She said to tell you that she left some things on your desk and that you need to 'Google' out Mitch Burrows name for more information...she said she'll be back in a while. When she's feeling a bit better. OK?"

"Yeah. Sure. Thanks, Hendo."

It was close to Lunch Time so I wandered down to the Coffee Jar to have something to eat...including that elusive mug of coffee.

I sauntered back into the Office about forty-five minutes later.

"Sorry Joe. You're up. A young woman's body has been found at a remote camp site up in the Watagans. Been there for a week about. A bit messed up. Parts missing. The local feral cats have had a picnic apparently. Bernie Ford on his way now. Um...Marge ain't back yet from the Nurses Quarters...do you want to ring her or just take Dallas Courtney with you for company?"

"I'll ring Mar to see how she is. If I don't give her first call, she'll never forgive me."

I phoned her.

She didn't sound that well.

She wanted to accompany me but I could tell her heart wasn't truly in it. Not for that length of time. It would take close on two hours to get to the scene...an hour there at the minimum and a two-hour trip back if we didn't have any leads to chase out from what we could surmise at the scene. A fair chance that it would be a late knock-off though. Especially if we visited the next of kin which was always on the cards. The Local guys often did it, but there were times that it was left up to us.

A part of the job that I detested. And tried to avoid like the plague!

"No, Joe. Do what Hendo suggested. Take young Courtney with you. Take our Unmarked. I'll get a lift home or a Cab this afternoon. Pick me up in the morning though. OK? Usual time. OK?"

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT**

Dallas Courtney was a funny guy. Not funny ha-ha in my estimation.

He was a nervous talker who wouldn't or couldn't shut up. Maybe he'd be different once he settled a bit. Got used to my ways of doing things.

To tell the truth, I'd had enough of him by the time that we crossed the Hawkesbury River Bridge. I wondered how I was going to make it through the rest of the day. I had to hold my tongue on numerous occasions, wanting so badly to yell at him to shut the fuck up!

We had to leave the Unmarked at the main Camping Area in the Watagans. Not far from the Ranger's Station. Getting a lift further into the National Park in a 4WD. I was surprised how close we were to the dump site of young Jennah Kolowic. Maybe thirty kays as the crow flies. Maybe a little more.

"What have we got, Bernie?"

"A young girl. Sarah Saxton. Eighteen years of age. Home address Scenic Circuit. Charlestown. Um...first glance I'd say Snake bite. On the upper calf. Her tent along that track through the trees."

"Snake bite? So why have we been called in? Camped out here by herself?"

"Looks that way...and you know as well as I. An unexplained, sudden death...c'mon Joe. It ain't the first time."

"Jeez...a bit of a risk, don't you think? Camping by herself?" Courtney murmured. I ignored the aside. I was of the impression that he wanted me to bite! Either that, or he didn't have an adventurous bone in his body!

I was getting a dislike for the guy already!

The Professor looked up at me and then at my young partner.

"The change of the guard already. Marge is what? Still in her first trimester? Having troubles already. Could be a slow, painful pregnancy...I haven't met, young man."

The Professor leaned in front of me to shake his hand.

"It's a rough arrangement that you've got yourself into, I'm afraid. Joe here, will keep you guessing, young man."

I ignored the banter, agreeing with Dallas Courtney that camping by herself was inviting troubles in this day and age.

"Joe, this is a bold new world where women are equal to men in so many areas...you ever camp alone? I have. Why not this poor young thing if she loved that type of thing."

"Yeah, well. She obviously wasn't that experienced at camping if she got herself bitten by a snake."

"Shit happens Joe. Shit happens to the best of us. Just look at 'Crikey'...um...oh hell! What was his name? With the Stingray? All his experience."

I had no idea who in hell he was talking about. I wandered around what was left of the body. My young off-sider was nowhere to be seen.

"The local ferals have had a meal or two on her, I see...Who found her?"

"Fresh meat. Nothing better. The National Parks and Wildlife Service Ranger came across her, lost her lunch before she called it in to her Base Office. More for the ferals. Dessert. They'll be in second heaven. She was just checking on her as she said that she was only staying for the week-end. Possible a day or two longer. She hadn't seen her leave."

"Where's her vehicle?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders. Looked around.

"Don't know Joe. Ask the Ranger. Joe, stay within the taped area, can you? The Forensic Trace guys are having a bit of an exercise...a band of young Graduates have been bought up here as a Field Day exercise around a real life, death scene...does that make sense? Just to sort the chaff from the wheat so to speak...so watch your step. OK?"

"Mixed metaphor Bernie...Beats School of the Air any time, I guess."

"So be it, Joe. Better the twain."

Another one, but who gives a damn. He could keep it up for-ever.

I began to walk away not wanting to hear any more from the old man. He was starting to dribble!

I followed the yellow tape pathway away from the body site back to the camping area. Just a small clearing amongst tall Gum. A vehicle track some ways off through the bush. You would have to hike everything in from the vehicle if this is where you wanted to camp. Secluded. Rather remote.

Young Dallas was standing beside two Rangers dressed in their khaki shorts and shirts. Broad brimmed hats on their heads. One was a pretty young woman with a bridge of freckles across her nose. A round face. Blonde hair tucked up into the hat. A little beamy if you get my drift. She looked a little pale. She held a bottle of water in one hand. It was shaking. The guy in similar garb standing beside her. Stocky. The hairiest arms and legs I think I've ever seen. A five O'clock shadow that would require two shaves per day. A quick easy smile. A firm handshake. In fact, I knew that I had shaken hands with him after I had. For some time, actually. Grey eyes that looked straight at you.

"You found the body? Miss?"

"Hollick...Samantha Hollick. Sam to all. This is my Boss, Terry Schofield. Yes...Um...she said that she would be staying for the week-end, maybe extending to the Monday or Tuesday, depending on the weather. I didn't see her leave so I got a bit concerned for her...went looking this morning. I had a fair idea where she may have been heading..."

"She walked in?" Surprise in my voice.

"Yeah...it's about five kay in... not that far, really..."

"With all her gear?"

"Not much. An all-weather Swag. A small thermo. Enough supplies for a couple of days. If you know how to pack and what to take as essential things, it ain't much. A billy. What more do you want."

"How did she get to the Park entrance?"

"She said a friend dropped her off."

"Do you see him? Her?"

"No... not really. A white Ute, I think it may have been."

"An experienced Camper. Perhaps a Trekker..."

"Looking at her gear, I'd say yeah..."

"Gets bitten by a snake?"

"She had her pants down...hard to run..."

"Snake bite. A tragic accident...um...I'll need her address as we'll need to interview her parents. Family. What-ever. She lived in Charlestown. That's south of Newcastle, not that far from here...we'll go up and see them this afternoon."

I glanced at Dallas. I still looked a bit pale.

I turned to the local Uniform who would have been the first Call-out.

"Was it you that contacted us?"

"The Station, more'n likely."

I nodded my head.

"Would they have already contacted the family?"

"No, Sir. They said that they'd leave that for you."

"Yeah. Right. Of course, mighty friendly of them."

This was not the normal protocol in situations such as this. Sure, it could be construed as a suspicious death by some, but a quick look at the body would have ascertained the cause of death for even Blind Freddy. Then it would just be a local matter for the Uniforms to attend to. I was being picky I knew, but the thought of having to bring bad tidings to the family concerned was never one of my choice roles. It was always Mar who would step up to the plate in that regard. I had a bloody Greenhorn who would not....and should not be left with such a responsibility.

I was it!

"Look. This looks pretty simply. Accidental Death that can be handled by your local people."

"You handing it to us, Sir?"

"Yes. I don't think that the Murder Squad need be involved."

"Yes, Sir. Should I bring my Station Sergeant across it, Sir?"

"Yes, Constable. I think that would be a good idea. My partner and I will go see the family now. Any follow-up you guys can take care of. OK?"

"Yes, sir. I'll get onto the Station. I can take you back to your vehicle, Sir. I'll need to drive there in any case to be able to contact Base. OK"

I nodded my head slowly. There were several thoughts buzzing around concurrently in my head that questioned the present scene. My need to lead the young Constable was irking me as well.

I was not in a good space.

This world appeared to be full of bloody Amateurs!

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE**

We were standing to one side of the clearing watching the group of Forensic Graduates crawling around the camp site of the young Sarah Saxton.

"It always amuses me when I see that. It reminds me of prehistoric, giant Witchetty Grubs squirming about on the ground."

Dallas Courtney gave me a look that said he thought I was quite insane.

"Nothing else for us here. Let's go." I suggested to the young Uniform.

We walked single file around the perimeter of the clearing and had entered the walking trail heading for where the vehicles were parked.

"Detectives? Detectives?"

We turned to see a young guy still in Forensic scrubs running towards us.

He came to a sudden stop. Skidding on the damp humus build-up on the walking trail.

"Um...the Professor? He'd like to see you. He thinks that you should perhaps take a look, yes?"

We followed the giant Witchetty Grub as it waddled its way in front of us back towards the clearing.

Bernie Ford looked somewhat perplexed.

I'd never seen him look so uncertain and unsure before. He looked for all the world like a confused old man. For the first time. I mean, he was a bloody old man. Close to seventy-two but still possessing one of the best scientific and diagnostic minds in the business.

I felt for the old guy.

"Joe...um...I don't know...I may know more when her body is on the table but...she was raped I think."

"What?"

"As she was dying is my guesstimate at the moment. I am pretty sure that she was alive when she was raped and I could be totally wrong, but I would hazard a guess and say that she was raped after being bitten by a snake."

"Wouldn't the normal body reaction to being raped quicken the effect of the snake venom?" Dallas asked.

"Yes, it would, young man...the quickening of the heart rate would be enough."

"Christ! What a terrible and cruel way to go!" I uttered.

"Will you be able to tell what type of snake bit her?" Dallas cut across my thoughts. I couldn't see the point of his question. A bloody venomous snake was a bloody poisonous snake, no matter the circumstances as far as I could see.

"Yes...during the blood work-up we can ask for a DNA make-up of any venom found....do you think that might be of some importance?"

"It could be, I think." The young man replied.

"Hang on. Hang on..." I interrupted. "Firstly, what makes you think that she may have been raped? And secondly, what makes you think that she was raped after being bitten by a venomous snake."

Her remains were scattered about somewhat. The ferrets had had a picnic.

"Well...there is sperm evident on the ground sheet under her Swag. Also, smeared sperm marks on the underside of the Swag that corresponds with the position of it on the ground sheet. The Swag has been pulled back over the ground sheet causing that transfer to occur. Possibly to hide it...or more likely to return the camp site back to how it looked before the rape...a considerate rapist, don't you think...allowing her to lie on the ground sheet. I think he was just trying to cover his tracks. It is relatively fresh sperm deposits. A visual of what is left of her vagina indicates forced entry. We will have difficulty in determining any bruising from her being held down during the act due to the extent of damage to the corpse by animals, but I will be looking closely for any sign that would indicate forced entry during the post mortem. I think that I will find something. I am sure of it. Because of the damage to her face, there may be little that I can learn, although any clean breaks to the jawline may indicate being hit with a hand...or fist. Let's not theorise too much. Let's see. The back of her Hiking boots could...I stress could indicate that she was dragged for a short distance. The person then realises his mistake and picks her up to start carrying her...There are slight...very slight drag marks evident in the grass just near where the swag is positioned...her pants and knickers are around her knees...but in a manner that would not indicate that she had pulled them down herself. I think...and we are now looking more carefully at the Camp Site...I think that her position has been staged to make it look as though she was bitten as she was going to the toilet..."

He turned to look back at the girl's remains. Turned back to us.

"By the gear that she had, she was an experienced Camper. Possibly a Trekker. I'd say that in her young life she may have trekked several of the longer trails in Tassie...the South-west Wilderness area, perhaps. Such an experienced person and a lover of the bush would never go to the toilet with her bum perched over a fallen tree trunk. She would have a shovel, which is in her pack and would have dug a hole to even piddled...and poo-ed. I think we may have a carefully arranged murder scene here, Joe...and it has not been me who has picked up on the clues. Two of these Graduates will make excellent forensic Technicians, I would think. They will be getting letters from me for their diligence and inquisitiveness...it's now in your hands, Joe. You're top dog. See what you can make of it, huh?"

I stood for some moments. What was whizzing around in my head was "snake bite...snake bite" and "white Ute." Even though I knew that the connection was non-existent.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY**

I pulled over around the block from the Saxton Address. Dialed in the main Office number.

"Hendo? Can you put us through to George Weston, please mate? And could you look up the Murder Folder on the Jenna Kolowic Case and get the mobile number of Samuel Kolowic? His mobile number. Give me ten minutes before you ring back with it. OK?"

I heard him patching me through.

"George Weston. Telecommunications Liaison Officer."

"George? Detective Lind. Murder Squad. Could you put a request through to all Telco's to hold all recordings and provide a location of a Mobile Phone belonging to one Sarah Dawn Saxton. 22A Scenic Circuit. Charlestown...as a matter of urgency. A Homicide Case. Case Number 2014-122F-DS-JAL/MMH. Under my authorisation. Badge number 89/105. DOD of Vic sometime between last Sunday 9 November to Tuesday 11 November. A Court Order will be arranged within seven working days. OK?"

"No worries, Joe. You can't narrow it down for me with the Telco name?"

"Sorry George. Not at the moment. I don't have her mobile details which would help you. Sorry. We are about to interview the parents so they may know. If so, I'll ring you back. It would appear that the phone has been taken by the Perp as some sort of trophy. Here's hoping he's not that clever and left the Sim card and batteries in... how long?"

"Give me until early next week at the earliest with something back from the smaller Carriers, will you? Anything complex in the report could take up to ten working days." He read back the details. I confirmed that he had them correct.

"Do what-ever you can do, George. Thanks."

I started the car up and moved back into the traffic.

"Yer trying to rub it in, Joe?"

"No, lad. But it's a good lesson to remember. You can learn a lot from the Vic's phone usage, their Internet browsing and their e-mail traffic. And it's especially important with the younger generation. Your age and younger. Get my drift? You can learn a hell of a lot, that will save a lot of hours of door knocking, shoe leather and yes, wearing the Boss's shoe up yer arse for a couple of weeks. He's the best Boss in the Department, don't get me wrong. He'll cover you as you walk through hell with his own body if he thinks you're worth saving from the flames. Show him a "don't care; don't think attitude" and you won't last the year out. He expects a lot but will give a lot if he thinks you're worth it...now...no more needs to be said."

We pulled up out the front of 22A. A long drive-way denoting the battle-axe block. My phone rang. It was Hendo with Samuel Kolowic's mobile number.

"Thanks, Hendo. See you to-morrow...no...by the time we finish here it will be around eight by the time we get home. See ya. We're at the residence of the Vic. One Sarah Saxton. At Charlestown."

A rangy, healthy looking middle-aged chap opened the front door.

"Mister Saxton?" We flashed our ID Cards as he acknowledged his name. "Um...may we come in?"

We were seated on a comfortable Lounge in a rear Sun Room that ran the length of the house. Views to Newcastle and beyond. To the north and the north-west.

"Can I get you a coffee?" Missus Saxton asked nervously. She also was a rangy woman. An outdoors person. Landscape photographs filled the length of the wall of the Sun Room. All featuring some panoramic shot with the two older Saxtons and three kids at various ages.

"You enjoy the great Outdoors?" Dallas remarked. "It looks as though you've trekked just about every trail in Australia and more..."

"Yes...we're planning a Nepal Trek next northern summer. All being well, though somehow I think that we may have to curtail that plan if I am any judge...Sally, Judith or Jason?"

"Um...Sally? Sarah?"

"Every parent's pure nightmare...Yes...Judith couldn't pronounce Sarah when she was born. The closest she came to it was Sally...so it stuck. You're both Homicide Detectives. What has happened to our little girl?"

Stoic. Matter-of-fact. Holding himself tightly, waiting for the news that he knew was coming. He was no fool.

"I'm sorry, Mister Saxton..."

"Call me, John...Dear?" He yelled out to his wife. "Forget the coffees. I'll get them later. Please come and sit with us. Here... now. Detectives? What has happened?"

I went to open my mouth. Dallas jumped in before me.

"Your daughter's body was found about mid-day. At a remote camping spot in the Watagans National Park...I'm sorry that we have to bring you such news...um...please accept our condolences."

"Yes. Thank you..."

He lowered his head. Tightened his grip on his wife. There was silence for some moments.

"Um...." He sniffled. Lent to one side to fish a handkerchief from his pants pocket. Blew his nose. Rolled the handkerchief up in his free hand. "She...um...she said that was where she was going. Maybe walking out this afternoon at the latest. That is why we weren't worried. She was going to ring for me or her brother or sister to pick her up. At the latest to-day. What happened?"

Missus Saxton sank into the side of her husband. He placed his arm around her, patting her gently on the shoulder.

"What happened? A tree fall? Something like that. Unexpectedly?" The woman asked quietly.

Again, Dallas answered first. You could tell that the couple were a little confused. The younger Detective captaining the conversation.

"It's a little too early to tell...if you know what I mean..."

"Ferals?"

The old bloke knew the ways of the bush and what happened to a body left to ferment.

"Yes. I'm afraid so, though first indication would suggest snake bite as cause of death."

There was silence for some moments.

"That's not possible, Sir. Our daughter is an experienced Bushwalker. A Trekker. She of the three of them the most enthusiastic. The most careful. The most enthralled by the Bush. By being outdoors. There is no way that she would have been bitten unexpectedly by a snake. No way, Detectives. There must be another explanation for her death..."

"As I said...it is perhaps a little premature to draw conclusions on the manner of her death at this stage. The post mortem will shed more light on what may have happened."

"Yes...if that is all?"

"Um...just a couple of questions, if we may? Does your daughter have a mobile? Yes? She did take it with her? Yes? Do you know who her Carrier was? Thank you. If you'll excuse me for one moment..."

I stood and walked from the room dialling in George Weston's number to give him the Carrier details.

I apologised as I came back into the room, sitting comfortably back into the easy chair.

"Um...where was I? Yes...has she a Computer? A Tablet or other device? Would we have your permission to take those implements for a forensic search to be conducted? Yes? Um...how did your daughter get to the Ranger's Station in the Watagans?"

"She was picked up by a friend who drove her there. She was going to hike in by herself. Hike back out and ring me when she emerged."

"Do you know the friend?"

"Um...no, not really. But we trusted our girl when it came to her picking her friends...she had a common sense about her as far as that went. She had quite a large circle of friends."

"Did you see her being picked up?"

"No...it was early Saturday morning. We were still in bed I'm afraid. Around five so I have been told...he had a white Ute. Parked at the top of the driveway. I guess he either rang or knocked quietly on the front door. Thoughtful, don't you think. He apparently loves camping...I haven't meet him. Have you dear?"

She shook her head. She was crying silently.

"How did she meet him?"

"Apparently on the Internet as most young ones do now-a-days...Detectives? What is this all about? If she was supposedly bitten by a snake, why all these questions? You don't think that he may have had anything to do with Sally's death, do you?"

"Not really, no. But at this early stage of an investigation, we try to corral all acquaintances and friends so that we can...identify them...if we need to...we might have a need to question them. To get background information on your daughter. It would seem that parents do not always know what their children are up to...and the Coronal Enquiry will need to know all these details."

"I understand. I know that our children have secrets as we from them. It is only natural...please do not jump to the wrong conclusion, we are an extremely close family...our Bushwalking and trekking has always been done together. As a...a... family."

"Would you mind if we take a look in her room? Does she have a Diary of any sort? Eighteen-year old girls often have a diary."

"Yes...Hers was password controlled on her Laptop...would you be able to circumvent that process?"

"I'm sure that we could manage...or at least our Computer experts can."

As we came back out of the Bedroom with a Tablet and a Laptop sealed in Evidence Bags, I turned to Mister Saxton. He seemed to have shrunk a little.

"Did Sally wear any jewellery?"

"Um...yes. A gold necklace which had her Grandmother's wedding ring on it and little plain gold earrings. She never took them off. A present from her Grandmother. They were especially close."

"Have you a recent photograph of your daughter that we be able to have...perhaps a shot that clearly shows those items of jewellery...if we could. We'll take copies and get the original back to you."

Both adults nodded their heads. Missus Saxton stood unsteadily and walked from the room. Returning quickly with a framed shot of an attractive, clear skinned, bright eyed girl. A smile that bespoke of a happy disposition and friendly outlook on life.

We were well away from the address before I heard Dallas breathe deeply as though he had been holding his breath for the entire duration of the Interview.

"Shit that's hard, ain't it. I don't want to do that too many times."

"No... better you than me, though." I responded. A chuckle in my voice.

He laughed at that.

He was going to be alright.

"By the way, do you want to do a bit of overtime next Sunday. I doubt that Mar will be up to it, so will you help out...interviewing people as they alight from the train at Awaba Railway Station?"

"Yeah...if you need a hand. Sure."

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE**

I pulled over before we hit the Motorway.

Dialled in Samuel Kolowic's number.

"Sam? Kollie? It's Detective Joe Lind. Murder Squad. I'm Lead Detective into your sister's murder. How are you? Good? Can you talk in relative privacy? No? How about I give you five minutes to walk out onto your back jetty? OK? Speak to you in five."

We sat there for some moments before I turned to Dallas Courtney.

"You did well with the Saxton matter. You handled yourself well."

"Never again."

"We all say that, though it is amazing how quickly the incidents come around...Thankfully, sometimes the LAC guys do the honours...but we all have to do it, unfortunately."

He looked at me. Nodded his head. I placed my mobile onto open mike and redialled Sam Kolowic's number.

"Kollie?"

"Yep, Detective. How can I help? How's the investigation going?"

"We're waiting for the final Forensic Report. Other than that, we have several lines of enquiry that we are following..."

"When they say that on Cop TV Shows or in Books, it means that the Cops have bugged all!"

"No, not really, lad. As you can appreciate, with your sister's body lying out in the weather for so long, a lot of trace elements disintegrate or got weathered away. We have to rely on other avenues that sometimes are a slower form of investigation...we're not sitting around on our hands waiting for some-one to confess...I can assure you. In fact, I think that we are close to an arrest..."

"That ain't gunna happen, eh? Someone walking into your Office to confess?"

"Well...No... though I'll tell you boy, that has happened...why I'm ringing. Jennah had two mobiles. The one that we presume was taken by the Perp and the one that was in her Bedroom. A Smart phone. Your father stated that the one that she must have had on her at the time of her abduction was a Work's phone...um... is that right?"

"Arrh...in one word, yes and no! Sure, that is what he said. What he believed. That is what Jennah told him...and that she had it purely for her Lab to contact her in case of an emergency...it could not be used for any outgoing calls or the number given out to anybody apart from Work Associates. Dad believed that..."

There was silence for some time.

"Kollie? You still there? Kollie?"

"Um...yeah. Sorry. Dad sent Judith out to ask who was I speaking to. Typical. It's got to be worse than a prison living here...um...we all got Mobiles for our eighteenth birthdays. That was more to do with Dad being able to ring us to find out where we were, who we were with and what time we'd be home...every time that we left the house, day or night...you could be sure that he would ring us at least once during that period. More times usually...Jannah got me, Jacob, Jon and Judith a pre-paid phone each...to be used only to ring one another in case of an emergency or to warn each other of Dad being on the warpath...and to allow us to have a phone when we would go out and forget *on purpose*..." He gave a little chuckle at that aside. "...to take the phone that Dad had given us...you know those mobiles where you pre-pay for your calls...that was through Vodaphone I think. Jannah handled everything...Dad didn't know about that."

"So, you were ringing her on the morning of her disappearance to warn her about your father? On her pre-paid phone number?"

"Yes...and Dad would have been ringing continuously on the phone that was in Jannah's bedroom...kinda funny in a way...sad..."

I nodded my head in agreement.

It *was* sad.

"So, you spoke to your sister that morning?"

"Yeah...before or as she was leaving Jilly's place...I think."

"Why didn't you mention this before?"

"Because Dad was there. Standing right beside me. Remember!? He would have been livid knowing that I had contacted her while she had ignored his calls...there was no way that I was going to let it slip that he would have been ringing the wrong phone...and... even though Jannah has gone, we still have the same arrangement in place...Dad is still none-the-wiser...and that's how we kids would like it to remain."

"Arrh... did she arrange for you to pick her up at the Station as you indicated to us previously?"

"No. She said that it was OK as she had a lift...I could hear some-one in the background."

"Do you know who?"

"No... no... it was more the sound of a motor ticking over...a diesel maybe. I think...not a

person...then...look, I can't be sure. I'm sorry, Detective Lind."

"That's OK. It was so long ago and...to remember such a thing would be questionable, even suspicious. You're doing well as it is...About what time?"

"Oh...it was so long ago...around tennish. That is all I can think of..."

"Thanks, Kollie. That's a big help. One thing. You first said that you thought you spoke to her when she was still at...or leaving Jilly's place, yes?"

"Yeah...well...that was a bit of a guess on my part knowing that she would have stayed overnight at Jilly's. I can't say with any certainty that when I spoke to her, that I knew where the hell she was... no...wait a moment. I heard a train in the background. It had to be the Sydney train either coming into the Station, or leaving."

"You sure on that?"

"Yeah. Sure. It just came to me."

"Good work son. Thanks. That is very helpful. Speak to you soon."

I hung up, started up the car and moved out into the traffic.

"I wish to Christ he had pulled either Mar or I aside to tell us about that phone bloody earlier. It could have saved a girl's life."

"You know who killed her then?" Dallas asked me.

"I think so...and I'm pretty sure it could be the same person who killed Sally Saxton...but proving it, that's going to be mighty difficult as I can't see a confession ever being offered. Bugger! Bugger!"

We headed down the Motorway towards Sydney.

At least I had solved the quandary of the second mobile that Mar seemed to think was so...strange.

It would be close to eight after I had dropped Dallas Courtney home before I got to my front door. I was feeling old having been on the go since before six this morning. A fourteen-hour day was becoming a little hard to take.

I must be getting old!

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

It looked like rain, even though the morning forecast didn't predict it.

I sometimes wondered that if these Weather Forecasters stuck their head out the window of their TV Studios, we'd get a more accurate prediction!

I wasn't to know that it was fog and mist that would eventually burn off into a glorious summer's day.

After all, I wasn't a weather forecaster!

"So now you've seen Joseph Lind in his chirpiest, happy morning mood, Dallas. It goes downhill from here!" Marge chimed in as she sat in the front passenger seat of our Unmarked.

I was permitted to drive without even a bleat from the passenger seat.

She was thoroughly enjoying the Iced Mocca that I had made especially for her. She had quickly finished off the Egg and Bacon roll that Tellie had made. Dallas, sitting in the back was still devouring his. Mar didn't wait for a response, instead asking what had transpired on Friday afternoon as she knew that I had left the Office on another Case.

Dallas and I filled her in on the events of that afternoon. Down to the phone call with Samuel Kolowic.

"Jeezus. Bernie wouldn't have liked missing the relevant points at the Scene...I think that it is about time that he hung up his Scrubs...that's what he returned to Australia for. To retire, you know. He only agreed to fill in until Muscles could get a qualified Forensic Pathologist to replace Caramine Lees...unfortunately they are few and far on the ground...and he is apprehensive about advertising overseas...look what that dragged up the last time that was done. That obnoxious twit from England...apparently, he has moved to New Zealand. Almost run out of Melbourne because of his constant complaints about the weather...didn't we have a bet on that Joe? How long it would take for him to run from the Melbourne summer?"

"Looks like you owe me..."

"If pigs could fly...that second phone...I knew that there was something suspicious, not right about the claim that the Research Institute had provided it...jeez...what a set-up. How did all those kids end up being like they are with an absolute arse-hole of a father like Barrie...beats me..."

She was silent for some time.

She'd be mulling over every little item that both Dallas and I had relayed to her of the afternoon's events. Placing them in the correct box. Flagging those that she saw as possibly important. Relevant. Discarding those irrelevant items so that the "Hard Drive" remained free of clutter.

"Um...so the poor girl looks as though she was being raped as the snake venom was whizzing around through her system...what a terrible way to die...what a bloody sick son of a bitch..." Mar remarked. "I did a search on Jilly Bright's father again. A deeper one. There are two sons by the marriage as well. One is a middle management Public Servant. With the Director-Generals Department. Resides in Deewhy Heights. The other, as far as I could find, still lives somewhere on the farm-let...the Taxation Department knows the enterprise as the "Homegrown Vegetable and Fruit Farmgate." Barely makes a living for the two older Brights and only marginal wages for the son and two others who help on the farm. According to the last Taxation Form. The underground cash society is alive and well. All the Tax guys would have to do is take a good look at the enterprise some time...on the ground to kinda twig to a concern that makes a lot more than they are aware of...and there are several vehicles registered in the Company Name. One a Toyota Hi-lux Twin Cab diesel Ute. Interesting? No?"

I held my tongue knowing that the crux of the conversation, the jewel in the crown so to speak, was yet to come. You could tell just by the expression on Mar's face.

"Aaron Bright...my parents talked about a... a zoo like, carnival set-up existing at La Perouse in the nineteen fifties, early sixties. The scariest exhibit was the snake enclosure where masses of poisonous snakes were kept. About the size of a Basketball court. Long grass. Surrounded by a gutter filled with water. A Corrugated Iron fence barricade which had a piece of timber on top so that you didn't cut yourself on the edge of the corrugated iron sheeting. There was a rise into the centre of the enclosure where there were several large dead tree limbs stuck into the ground. The fence no taller than about ninety centimetres. Pretty basic. Very rustic. Most of the guys involved came from the neighbouring Aboriginal camp...or Redfern. But one of the "off-siders" in that enclosure was a bloke called "Notso".... Gerry Bright. Aaron Bright's Uncle. Aaron Bright's family originated in Redfern. Right through the First World War and the Depression..."

"Jilly's father wouldn't have been alive back then. In fact, the Search that I did on him had him being born in Newcastle in the early nineteen sixties..." I countered.

"'Notso' Bright died in Newcastle in Nineteen eighty-two...Aaron knew his uncle up until his early twenties...gaining a love of snakes from his Uncle that has lasted to this day. Aaron did time for Marijuana possession. Having a commercial quantity...selling...drunk and disorderly."

"All before he became a successful two-bit farmer from what I found out...and is the snake

thing exact or a fact by association? Hmmm?"

The expression on her face told me that she had reached into the realms of fantasy for that association. But to her credit she kept going!

"...And the Owner of a small Hydroponic section on his farm. Covered in translucent plastic and chicken wire..."

"Where was that? I didn't see anything like that when we went to Jilly's place?"

"Google Earth it"

"Are you sure that it belongs to Bright?"

"The vacant block of ground...twenty hectares...between the Bright farm and the Burrows holding."

"It was nothing but weeds. It looked as though it had been under fallow at some stage."

"There is a dense row of trees that we thought denoted the rear boundary of that vacant allotment...behind which is said two rows of...what do they call them...white plastic tunnels with several more under construction at the time that the Google photographic 'Fly-over' took place. There's even a big earth dam...two in fact that holds back a considerable amount of water...now why have that hidden behind trees?"

"Because of its proximity to a water supply...hydroponics requires a regular supply of water. Mar. Even I know that!"

"The whole Bright dynasty comes from shady stock."

"Yeah...meaning? Look Mar, I'm with you...let's get a Warrant to search high and low over that property based on a Google map. Not bloody likely! We need more before we bring in the troops."

"Mmm...Dallas? You're now getting an insight into how the most successful Murder Squad team operates. Impressed? I see by the look on your face that you are flabbergasted...speechless perhaps?"

She said this with a smile on her face as she turned to look at Dallas in the back seat.

"A word of advice, young man. You've got to keep this old bloke primed, up on his toes. If you give him a moment to relax, he falls asleep."

The three of us began to laugh. Mar almost wetting herself.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Four Uniform Constables from the Toronto Station met us in the “Drive/Ride” Parking area adjacent to the small, rural looking Railway Station.

There goes our Overtime allocation for the year, I thought to myself as the Uniforms would be billing our O/T allotment for the call-out. And in the end, the whole exercise was frustratingly fruitless.

Seven people alighted from the train. All Night-shift personnel who parked their vehicles in the Parking Area. All had been doing the habitual thing for at least two years. All had not seen a thing...or more correctly, could not recollect anything unusual occurring around that fateful Sunday morning in the middle of winter. Four months ago, now. Looking at them, I doubted that any of them would have noticed a bevy of naked marching girls go passed them in the Car Park such was the condition of their eyes and their obvious lack of observational skills after alighting from the train. I guessed that the lot of them had fallen asleep before the train had left Central Station. Only waking as the train drew close to Awaba station.

"I wonder how they do that? Wake just in time to get off the train at the Station."

"They prime their mobiles to ring some five minutes before that..."

"What about before Mobile phones...or the ones that you can do that with?"

"Those little travelling clocks I would imagine...can you imagine several dozen alarm clocks going off around the same time as the train gets closer to the Station...what a hoot!"

"Mmm...I'd imagine by the second Station stop, every-one in the carriage would be wide awake and complaining about the constant noise of clock alarms! I couldn't do that."

"Me neither...this whole exercise seems like a total waste of time."

"I don't know, Mar. It's a beautiful day. We're getting time and a half. Up here in God's country so they call it. With brilliant company. A great conversationalist. You're getting a bit of exercise. Walking is good when you're pregnant."

"Joe. Joe! Leave off with the BS will you."

We signed off the Uniforms telling them that their services would not be required the following Sunday for a similar operation.

"What now?"

"Let's go and pop in on Jilly Bright. See how she is holding up."

Jillian was sitting under her front veranda sipping on a steaming mug of coffee and reading the Sunday papers as we crawled up to the front trellis entry. The picket fence looking as though it had just received a fresh coat of paint. I always was concerned about a cocky's comb of dust wafting through into her home so that was why I always crawled at less than walking speed along the farm dirt track. I needn't have bothered as it looked as though there had been a drop of rain overnight up around these parts.

The Weatherman was wrong again! Then again, we were some one hundred kilometres north of Sydney. I supposed you could have a different weather pattern up here to that of Sydney.

"Coffee, guys?" She asked, holding her mug aloft as we stepped from the Unmarked.

"Ta. Love to. Not for Mar though. She'll have water."

I introduced Dallas Courtney to Jillian Bright.

They seemed to hit it off immediately.

Light banter the order of the day. I was surprised when Dallas started to comment on the flower pots bursting with colour. He knew all the names including the Latin botany name of all the blooms. And others besides. A slight phht of water as the pots received their daily drink counterpointed the conversation. A light stream of water issuing from the tiny watering points of the automatic black plastic piping system.

"You guys here on an official visit?" She asked. Somewhat guardedly.

We explained our trawl of the Sunday commuters as they alighted from the train.

"No good, huh?" She guessed by the tone in our voices.

"Oh, corroboration on a couple of points." Mar advised her.

We would never admit to failure.

"Your Dad into snakes?" Dallas asked out of the blue.

Jilly did a double take. Giggled.

"Nah... bloody hell, he's dead scared of them. We get a couple around here. Off and on. Tigers. Red-belly Blacks mainly. He screams like a stuck pig if he comes across one...especially up in the Hothouses. They love to get in there...and it's near the dams with plenty of frogs and such."

"Hot Houses? Yer got Hot Houses? Where?" I asked. Feigning surprise.

Incredibility in the tone of my voice.

We, the Thespians of untruths and non-scripts!

"Out the back. Behind that row of trees that are a windbreak from the violent south-westerlies and north-westerlies that we get mainly in Spring and Autumn. Mainly Cherry tomatoes. Summer salad items...he wants to expand it when he gets a bit more money. My brother...he's a little slow...Mum's says it's because she um...she toked while she was carrying him...he's an absolute wonder on the hydroponic side of things. He has found his niche which is wonderful...he lives up near the tree line. In a caravan. A big one. He's as happy as the proverbial pig, if you know what I mean? Tucked out of the way. He is not a people person. Super shy. An absolute genius on the Computer though...he says he has over ten thousand friends on Face Book...most interested in his hydroponic set up...so he reckons."

"Did he know Jennah?"

"Who? Gerry? Yeah. He worshipped the ground that she walked on. He was inconsolable when I had to tell him that she had gone missing."

"Does he drive?"

"Yes...but he hasn't a license. Just around here on the farm. Loves driving the farm tractor. The AWB Farm Kart."

"Your Mum and Dad home?"

"No... Sundee morning...they're at the local Toronto Markets to-day. The last Sunday in the month. Make a bit out of it. All the locals love the produce. No insecticides. They've got a bit of a reputation now. About bloody time."

"Your father good with Computers? Like your brother?"

"Oh...not in the same league as Gerry...but still savvy for an old bloke."

"Camping...he into it?"

"Yeah!... in the early days. They used to take me, Gerry and Andrew when we were babies. Camping. They don't have the time now...and I think Dad especially, is over it, if you know what I mean?"

"How many vehicles here in the farm?" It was Dallas who was into it. Mar and I sat back and let him have his head. Sipped on our drinks. He was doing OK.

"The Ute. A three-tonne flat-top which is the truck that they usually take to markets. An old 4WD Patrol that Gerry drives around the farm. It's not registered. Another Toyota Ute that Mum drives...two AWD Farm buggies...a couple of heavy duty trailers. Two Tractors, one hardly working...that's about it. I did have a little Toyota Seca. A bloody good car before I crashed it...with Jennah sitting in the passenger seat. We were coming home from work down the Motorway. Just left it onto the exit ramp. A car ran up our backside. The speed limit on the ramp was down from one ten to eighty. He didn't see the sign...or us apparently! It wasn't insured and I didn't have the money to get it fixed...gee...that was...almost a year ago now...gee! What's this about Detective Courtney? Why are you asking me these questions?"

"In cases such as Jennah's abduction and murder, especially when we have so little Trace to go on, we try to come at the Investigation from several different directions hoping that that one gem of information, no matter how small, will emerge and gel all the strings into the one conclusive element. The rope that will hang the Perp."

"So you suspect me?"

"No... you're not on the suspect list. We believe that you perhaps are as much the Victim as was Jennah... but we believe that you may know her killer."

"My parents? My brother?"

"No... what I am trying to do is relax you...we find that when persons close to the centre of the investigation are relaxed, they tend to talk more. Divulge more. Unconsciously sometimes dropping that one little clue that can make all the difference...something sometimes so inconsequential that you have no idea on the importance of it."

Jilly nodded her head. Muddled over what Dallas had just said. She seemed to accept the gist of his words.

"You must remember Jilly, that you are more than likely, the last person who saw Jennah alive...apart from her attacker."

That was the worst thing that he could have said.

The emotions welled up into a stream of tears. That little gem would never be forthcoming when emotions were as raw as that.

I glanced at Dallas.

He knew that he had botched it. A simple throw-away line.

He'll learn, I was sure.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

We stayed with Jilly for about another hour, not talking about the Case.

Instead walking with her to look at the Hydroponic set-up.

We did not see her brother although several times I was sure that a pair of eyes could be seen peering through various windows of a large, thirty-foot long caravan up on blocks. A tropical roof membrane over the top of the Van roof.

It was surprising how much this item kept the insides of the van cool.

A power pole fed an electric lead into the van and the two Hothouse tunnels. The skeleton ribbing of two others arched over concrete beds similar in length to the completed two. Waiting for that injection of money to be completed. It looked as though they both had been in "stall" mode for quite some time. As soon as we walked into the first section there were two large Marijuana Plants in pots near the entrance door.

"You need to get rid of those...or at least hide them a bit better than that!" Mar exclaimed.

I reckoned that they were but the tip of the ice-berg. Jilly begged to differ saying that her father still had a toke every now and then with her mother joining in on the odd occasion. No-one else, including her, imbibed...and it was for personal use only.

I had to show my suspicions on that point.

"Jilly, those two plants are more than the Law would allow for personal use. They represent a commercial quantity. My suggestion to you is to tell your father to get rid of them. We're not here to bust him or to pass on the intelligence on their existence...we're just giving your family a bit of friendly advice, OK?"

She nodded her head apprehensively. I thought she may have known the history of her parents. She looked sheepishly around her. On the verge of apologising for her parents, I felt.

I walked about halfway down one of the rows. The smell of tomato plants assaulted my nostrils. An unmistakeable aroma.

The length of the tunnel was divided into four separate rows of white plastic conduit supported on galvanised frame. The tomato plants, lettuce, cucumber, radish and capsicum plants crowded each level of piping. The sound of running water, the humidity and temperature enveloping and entering my very pores. I whistled at the set-up. It would need a major money injection to set-up initially.

I said as much.

"Yeah...my older brother helped Dad out actually. I guess you may say that he has one fifth share in this enterprise though Gerry will gain my and Mum and Dad's share when we die. Andy is like the silent partner...but he comes up and stays as he thinks it important that his kids know about these things...they're good kids. One of them especially loves coming up here...every school holiday he comes up and stays with us. Mum and Dad's. Me or with Gerry. Loves it. He's a good kid. Wants to be a farmer himself...helps out around the place. Earns his keep. No problems."

We walked back to the Unmarked. Bade farewell as I reminded her of my advice on certain plants in the Hothouses. I had no doubt that other plants existed as well. More hidden.

As I crawled along the farm track towards Railway Parade, Dallas thumped the seat beside him.

"Shit!" He exclaimed angrily.

"Don't belt yourself over the head, Dallas. We've all done it and to mull over the incident will only send you bonkers. Up until that point, you were doing good...just treat it as an education for future reference."

He just shook his head. Looked out the window.

I stopped at the tiny General Store and Newsagent opposite the Railway Station to get a drink.

I slumped back into the driver's seat and took several gulps of Zero Coke. Gave Dallas a bottle and Mar a sweating bottle of water. It was still heating up even though it was after two in the afternoon!

"You should have water too, Joe. Better for you."

"I will when I fall pregnant, my Dear."

I turned the car around.

"Where you going? Not up that forestry track again. Not in this car, Joe."

"No... while we are here I thought that we might as well drop into see Burrows again...just for another chat. It's a brilliant day for chatting, don't you think?"

I turned the Unmarked slowly into the driveway of Mitch Burrows place. From there it was quite easy to see the dense row of trees that were the wind-break for the Hothouse construction. You could also just make out the roof-line of Jilly's beautiful little house. The

chimney of the wood-burning stove and the several large Gum that acted as shadow breaks across the house from the western sun.

"Doesn't look as though he's at home, Joe. His truck is not in the driveway."

I opened the car door.

"Where you going, Joe? You just can't walk onto his property and start snooping around...especially when he's not at home."

"Mmm...." I got out of the car and stretched.

"Joseph Lind! Don't you dare start snooping around. It could blow the case if he turns out to be the culprit... Jennah's killer."

"Mmm... I reckon that he may have just firmed into our Number One POI. Don't you think?"

"All the more reason to be careful."

"Just going for a pee, Mar. Up behind that Barn so no one can see me from the road."

"Fuck, Joe!"

"Do you want to come, too?"

"Dallas? Stay in the fucking car."

Mar angrily opened the car door and sidled out. Her actions slowing somewhat from her usual reactions. The Bubs were starting to assert their presence. Marge waddled quickly up behind me, slapping me hard on the bum. We stepped up onto the tiny veranda and knocked loudly on the front door. After three attempts at waking the dead and trying to push down the door with our knocks, we walked towards the Barn that was at the rear but to one side of the house.

"Look at that Mar. The Barn Door is slightly ajar..."

"No, it's not, Joe."

"There may be a toot inside."

"No there's not, Joe."

The Barn Door squeaked open enough for me to sidle inside.

"Don't come in, Mar. I'm having a piss...bloody hell...he must be into tropical fish in a big way. There's about a dozen glass Fish Tanks in here...a Tractor. Several dirt Bikes in bits. A lot of mechanical tools...a 4WD Ute up on blocks. No engine..."

Mar shoved her head through the opening.

"They're not Fish Tanks Joe. They're too big for that. People use them to keep snakes in....."

"You spying on me, Mar?"

"Hah, hah.... you ain't got enough to spy on Joe...yeah, they're more than likely Snake tanks."

"Snake bites."

"Yep, snake bites!"

We both walked out quickly, closing the large door silently behind us and headed for the car.

"Did you do a wee?"

"Of course, Mar. What do you think I went into the Barn for? It wasn't to sticky-beak."

"Good. I'm busting. I'm going to go behind the barn. No following, Joe."

"Be careful of snakes, Mar. Keep an eye out. I'll stay here. Close by just in case."

"Shut up, Joseph Lind. Just shut up! You're making me skittish. I'll be too wound up to have a pee if you keep on going with shit like that."

"How about we head back to that little shop. I doubt that he would mind having a loan of his toot."

"I doubt that I could hold on until then...just stand there while I go, will you?"

I took my mobile out and dialled in Abbey's number.

"Boss? Could you organise a Search Warrant for the Burrows place? RMB Number 20 Railway Parade. Awaba...and also include all out-buildings and surrounds."

"On what grounds, Joe?"

"Um...he's firmed into our Number One POI. He was seen out the front of his place at the time that Jennah Kolowic was walking passed. He knew her, about her and the family and

history...he's into camping and he owns a diesel Toyota 4WD Ute."

"Mmm...um...how about we put a trace on his landline if he has one. His mobile and his Internet connection. Get some background stuff before we go in all guns blazing...and we do not require an Order to organise that if he is now the only POI in the Case."

"OK, Boss. I'll go along with that. As quickly as possible. I do not want him to be spooked into fleeing."

"Then get away from his place of residence, Joe. Right now."

"Sorry, Boss?"

He laughed.

"I'll organise it as soon as you hang up and drive away from his address. OK?"

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE**

I was still shaking my head as I relayed the conversation to Marge as we walked to the Unmarked. Dallas was standing behind the back of the car looking up the road.

"How does he do it, Mar?"

"You're so bloody transparent at times, Joe. Like reading a bloody book."

We reversed out of the driveway.

Drove up past the Railway Station on the right and the small General Store on the left.

I glanced over at the Store wondering how long it would be before we could accumulate that electronic information that would put the noose around Mitch Burrows' neck.

I almost slammed on the brakes as we headed passed the house that was attached to the side of the General Store. It stood back from the Shopfront which created a small front yard. A fence of sorts. A set of double gates that were open. A 4WD Ute parked on the grass.

A tall, young guy had just wheeled a Dirt Bike up into the back of the Ute. The tailgate was down. Camping gear was piled to one side on the tray. He glanced at us as we passed.

"Shit!" I exclaimed.

"What?" Mar asked. Surprise in her voice.

"Don't look. He's still looking at us. He's walked out to the front gate of the property. Dallas, get to one side of the back seat and tell me when the guy walks back inside."

"What, Joe."

She could tell by my voice that something important had happened.

"OK, Joe. He's gone."

I drove to the end of the straight where the road did a left-hand curve to meet the Awaba By-Pass road at an angle. I pulled over onto a cleared section at the side of the intersection. Dropped the car out of gear and put the hand-brake on.

"Remember when we went to the Kolowic residence for the first time? We looked at about six Photograph Albums...they seemed to want us to look at them. There were shots of Jennah at her Year Twelve Graduation Ball. Dressed to the nines. Looked good. Looked very good. Grown up. Her Escort for the night was some guy. Gangly. Skinny. Pimples but good looking...that was the guy in the driveway..."

"Yeah? So?"

"Remember that camping week-end with the boys that I went on. When that young woman died from snake bite. The guy shot through like a Bondi Tram. Going a million miles an hour, to only come back in the Cop's 4WD vehicle. Packed up all his camping gear to put in the Cop Truck which I thought was a bit...I don't know...weird, perhaps, maybe the best way for me to describe how I felt...here he is packing up his gear while his supposed girlfriend was leaning against a tree, dead! I'm pretty sure that that guy is the guy that was packing up his camping gear that day...he had camping gear...he was loading up to go camping...it was the same guy. No doubt about it!"

"You only saw him for a tick...what? Okay, he's got a white 4WD Ute. A bit dirty I might add. What else? You're talking yourself into it, Joe."

"A tick can be long enough, Mar. You saw a bit in that tick and you weren't watching that much, were you?"

"What's the chances that that is the guy that Brett and I have been chasing for that Minto Body case? Shandy Templeton? A white 4WD. Tall. Rangy. He fits the silhouette of the guy that was caught on surveillance cameras in that Station Car Park." Dallas offered from the back seat.

We sat there for some moments not moving.

It felt like one of those “light bulb” moments.

When things suddenly became clear. Visible.

When things gelled.

When we all knew that a corner had been negotiated.

"Whoa...let's not get carried away, OK? A less than a three second look and we have him stitched up for three murders."

Typical Marjory! Always the stick-in-the mud. She did it just so I could theorise enough to convince her that her cynicism was not justified.

Then again, she often did the same to me when I was being the proverbial cynic. That was a deliberate ploy on my part. That was the difference!

"When you think about it, all were similar in execution."

"Jennah didn't die from snake bite."

"We don't know that Mar, do we. I'll lay odds that there was no trace done on her remains for snake venom. Lay odds! And I'll bet that no similar test was done on the Templeton Girl either!"

"A bit late now. I think Jennah's body was being released this Friday."

"But if hair samples have been retained...or organ samples, then a DNA examination on a couple of strands should show something up...shouldn't it?"

"I don't know...Wait a minute. Wait a minute..."

"No... that guy had history with Jennah...he had motive...he was rejected by Jennah or he became suspicious of her sexuality by her constant visits to Jilly's place. He must have seen her as she visited...living close to Jilly's place he must have known that she was gay...the anger builds up. He sees her walking alone along the road. Knows her. Offers her a lift. Gets a snake. Makes it bite her...more than likely rapes her up that dirt track until she's dead Then after he has done the dirty deed and the poor girl is dead, he dumps her body behind the Power Station... he's a Predator... grooms girls through Social Media Sites, arranges meetings in out of the way places, does the snake trick, rapes them and then leaves them... what a terrible way for Jennah to die. She knows she's going to die with the venom coursing through her body. He demeans her; belittles her because he knows her as a Lesbian, she would find the sex act with a male a most horrid experience...what a way to die."

I had never felt sorrier for a Victim than what I felt for poor Jennah Kolowic at that moment.

"Gets sick and tired of their presence perhaps...doing them in is the only way of ridding himself of them with Jennah being the exception. She more an opportune moment for him to get revenge on her...OK. I'll go along with that...what should be our first step?"

Dallas was all for the theory.

Mar still required more work to dilute her cynicism.

"We don't even know his name, for Christ sake." Mar objected strongly.

"Ring Kollie. Sam Kolowic. Or Jilly Bright. They would know his name surely, if he was Jennah's Escort at the Graduation Ball." Dallas offered. "He had to have gone to the same school to be her Grad Escort one would think...and if he's lived around here for most of his life, he'd be known...a dirt bike in the back of his Ute? He more than likely belongs to the same Dirt Bike Club just up the road as the Kollie boys...might even had been a member when Jennah went...had the hots for her for most of his teenage years."

Dallas nodded his head in agreement.

"We thought that we had interviewed every-one who needed interviewing on this side of the rail line...why have we missed out on him?" Mar remarked.

A good point, I thought.

My excitement eased down a notch.

"Perhaps he has been away...that's the first time that I've seen the Ute parked in that driveway. On holidays...has a job that takes him away perhaps. I have no idea, Mar. What I do know for certain is that is the guy that I saw in the Barrington Tops on that week-end I had with Bill and Ben...snake bite. Sally Saxton was driven to the Watagans by a guy in a white Ute...and she died from supposed accidental snake bite that we know for sure, was staged...and she was raped the same as Shandy Templeton."

My excitement levels went up two notches again.

I took the reins firmly in my hands, barking instructions. My voice had that excitement clearly embedded in it.

"OK. Mar, you ring Muscles."

"It's bloody Sunday, Joe. If we require that Jennah and Shandy's bodies be examined for any

trace of snake venom, it will need a request signed by Abbey."

"One thing at a time, Mar. Just see whether he can get a check done for snake venom on Jennah's remains...first thing on Monday morning...and Shandy Templeton's Forensic bits and pieces that they kept...also make sure that a blood tox on Sarah Saxton's body includes for a similar trace...so that a comparative test can be undertaken on the three to see if it is the same snake each time...Dallas, use your Smart Phone....good, you've got your Laptop. About six months ago. Mid-Autumn. The Barrington Tops National Park. A young woman died of snake bite. It should have made the local newspapers at least...if not, check with Dorrigo Coppers...they were across it. Then check the Internet with the following words..." *Young girl/woman/snake bite death/National Parks and State Reserves/camping alone or with a male companion*".... for the East Coast States, I think. At this point in time...see if there are any others with a similar scenario...you never know. And check the name of the male companion on that snake bite case in the Barringtons."

"Good...what are you going to do, Joe?" Mar asked quietly. A smile on her face.

"Sit here and think...no! Take a walk so that I can see the property and see which way he heads if he hasn't gone already...and get onto Abbey to explain what has happened and get him to put traces on the landline, the mobile and Internet connections of the guy."

"You haven't got his name...or address yet!"

"Then hurry up, my girl. Hurry up."

We were on the straight heading towards the finish line.

I could feel it.

That moment when our case does a complete turn-around in our favour.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX**

I watched as the 4WD disappeared from view, driving down the length of Railway Parade and onto the dirt Bush Track extension.

Bugger!

I walked down towards the Shop, growling about the heat as I entered the dim interior. The rotund, tall bloke behind the Counter laughed at my complaint.

"No more than around thirty-five. Wait until the February heat waves hit us. Then you'll have something to complain about. You're the Cop on Jennah Kollie's murder case...doing any good?"

I nodded my head in agreement. We'd interviewed him previously on Jennah's disappearance, and our frequent trips to his shop for refreshments and such had more or less made us regulars.

"Yes and no." I replied. "That your son just drove out?"

"Yeah...he's headed out for his job. Why do you ask?"

"Oh...no reason. We had thought that we had interviewed everyone around here, about the morning that Jennah Kolowic was abducted. *And killed.*"

I stressed the last bit.

The man shook his head.

"Sad business...I doubt that my boy was around. His job takes him out and about a fair bit. From the Victorian Border, up through Queensland...he's away a fair bit."

"That sounds interesting. What does he do?"

"Tree Trimmer. His Boss contracts to Forestry. The Department of Forestry. In the three States. He's excited as the Boss has indicated that he is in the picture for a contract in Tassie and WA. He could be going all over Australia."

"Oh...what does that entail with so much travel?"

"You know those Pine Plantations? Everywhere these days. Some bright spark figured out years ago that if all the lower limbs were cut off...even those small twigs and branches...even the littlest ones...just leaving the crown for the tree to breathe, then the tree would grow faster, mature quicker, be stronger and have straighter grain than if you left all the twigs, limbs and branches on...then there was more effort going into forming the trunk of the tree than in the branches. Know what I mean?"

I nodded my head...certain sayings appeared to be contagious around here! A local dialect almost.

"They began doing it only to the Pine Plantations. Then they discovered if they did the same thing to the Blue Gum Plantations...which is only used for wood chip production, and Black-box, Black Butt and even Mountain Ash, those trees would mature faster and be straighter, stronger, etcetera. Know what I mean? That is what my son does...a gang of three

to five...there's a fair few gangs. He told me once how many. I can't remember now. But he goes for a couple of weeks at a time...the busiest time is Spring and early Summer but they work all year round. Camping out. Roughing it a bit...he loves it. The Outdoors."

"Is he into snakes?"

"Was...well, he still has a couple but because he's gone for long periods, guess who is expected to look after them? They're easy, I suppose. A rat about once a week. Once a fortnight. Keep the Tanks at an even temperature. He and Mitch next door, they were into it in a big way for a number of years...until Mitch got bitten one too many times. The next one they say they won't be able to save him with the anti-venom...sad, really. They don't mix much no more because of it...I guess no common interest except for the dirt bikes...but Mitch is in to competitive racing where my son ain't. Too many falls during his teenage years...though he still loves it...as a recreation and he takes his bike with him on his job trips. To get from their Base camps to the point where they'd stopped trimming the day before and needed to start on that day. Know what I mean?"

My phone buzzed in my pocket.

"Scuse." I said by way of apology as I walked from the shop. Put the mobile to my ear.

"Where are you?"

"At the shop. The boy's gone...but he's firming as our favourite...what's up?"

"We didn't know where you were, is all..."

"Were you worried about me, Mar? That's nice."

"Fuck off, Joe Lind. We'll drive down to pick you up. OK."

"Will be waiting by the kerb...or is it the Ocean's wall? Or the ocean's roar? What bloody song was that from again?"

"You're bloody impossible, Joe Lind. Bloody impossible."

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN**

First thing on the Monday morning, we held a joint meeting with the Boss.

Brett Senior and Dallas Courtney. Mar and I. We figured it best that we combine efforts as

it was looking more and more like our Perp had committed more than the four murders that we had him pinned for.

A minor Task Force was what was required.

'Sonny' Liston understood the dynamics of not transferring the cases at this late stage across to his cell which had been set-up to deal with multiple murder enquiries. We were close to an arrest. We four knew the bolts and nuts of the case and nothing was to be gained by transferring it out at this late stage...except as Sonny dryly noted, *'it created that dangerous precedence'*. If truth be known, he could not have realistically taken the Case over as his entire small workforce of five were snowed under with several Child Homicides.

Grisly cases that I hoped I would never be involved in again.

It was the following week that we reported back to Abbey with a full Dossier on our main POI.

Mar had done a tremendous job on the computer search while Senior, Dallas and I worked the phones.

For two days, we stayed in the area around Toronto. Local Cops. School. Dirt Bike Club. The present Firm that he worked for. Mitch Burrows. Former classmates and enemies.

"Trevor Newberry White. The 'Newberry' is his middle name. Not a hyphenated surname. After his maternal grandmother's side of the family, apparently. Born Brisbane. Queensland Nineteen ninety-two to Barney and Susan White. They bought the General Store with compensation money from a car accident that Barney was involved in...in Nineteen ninety-six. Barney was partially incapacitated. Unable to work as a Brick-layer. Been in Awaba since then. Trevor went to the Catholic School in Toronto. Same classes basically as Jennah Kolowic. At one stage, they were considered "*an item*" even though Jennah was leaning towards Jilly's company even then."

I took a sip of water.

"Um...Trevor did take it badly, especially after the Graduation Ball. Apparently, there was an incident that was broken up by Jacob. White apparently "tried it on" if you know what I mean."

I had to smile when I realised what I had just said. It sure was a contagious thing. And bloody infuriating!

"Got a bit nasty, by all accounts. This resulted in several Social Media attacks questioning Jennah and Jilly's sexuality. Bullying. Even words about "local lesbians" being sprayed on the sides of cars and shops in the main street of Toronto according to the local reports.

Police involvement was words only. Trevor had two speeding infringements against him in the first two months of holding a license which resulted in suspension of his license. Speeds of close to one hundred over the limit which seems to indicate an angry young man. Possession of marijuana resulted in a suspended sentence. One count of breaking and entering...the young lad was drifting to the wrong side of the street. Then he straightens himself out with the help of the Sergeant at Toronto Police Station and their "Youth in Crisis" program. I have a copy of his progress through that Program. There are some prophetic statements. Nothing that would have sounded the alarms by themselves at that time, but knowing our man and his propensity for cruelty and in the way that he does away with his Victims, those words are now very profound."

I looked down at my Report.

"This Tree-trimming job. He's had it for close to two years. Seems to have found his niche, though it is a young man's profession. He's travelled all over the State, northern Victoria and southern through to central Queensland. Loves it, by all accounts. A loner when he is at home which usually isn't for that long. There appears to be some...arrh...some friction between he and his old man that is more intense than what is considered the norm...very close to his mother who also lives in the shadow of the old man, if you know what I mean."

"Do you have a tag on him?" Abbey asked. "He can't repeat his alleged activities while we're in the process of building a case against him, can he?"

"We have a continuous link to his Smart Phone. He moves more than three metres, we'll know about it within five minutes. His Smart Phone is being continuously monitored. According to the Boss of the Firm, the Trimming gang that White is in will be in that area for another couple of weeks. We now have links to the two landlines going into the shop and all Internet connection transactions. And we have started to explore his previous Internet history. Ditto his phone traffic. As soon as we have any indications that he has had conversations either by way of Social Media channels or phone usage with any of the deceased women, we will bring him in... the Computer Analysis Section is handling that. We have uncovered a similar death by snake bite of a young lady at a remote camping site...actually in a Pine Forest plantation north of Brisbane at a time that his mobile history shows him in the area and another close to Canberra almost a year before that incident that I was witness to in the Barrington Tops National Park. We're onto him Boss. He won't slip the net."

"That's six victims! You sure? Shit! OK. Make sure you build that case against him as an air-tight examination. If one of the Homicides looks a little slim on concrete evidence, switch your efforts to one of the others. We only need to get him on one to make the case..."

"We'll make the case on all half dozen, Boss. That I'll guarantee. Oh, initial toxicology results have come back on Jennah Kolowic and Shandy Templeton. Evidence of snake venom being present in their system...we're getting a Warrant issued to trash his residential

address as we speak. Looking for the obvious 'Trophies' that were taken from each of the Deceased. Jewellery and phones, so it seems. We also want to have samples taken of each snake's venom that maybe in his possession. Apparently, they can compare the DNA strains with the venom evident in the blood of each of the Deceased...or in the molecules of the hair samples in the case of the remains of Jennah Kolowic. We've organised that raid for this coming Friday. We have two Handlers from Taronga and two "Milkers" from the Central Coast Zoo. They do the milking of Funnel Web Spiders and Snakes for the anti-venom serum held by the Commonwealth Serum Laboratory. They will immediately milk what snakes we find at the residence and transport the venom to our Forensic Laboratory for DNA evaluation and comparison...that will take at least four weeks though. At the earliest, even with a rocket blast attached. As the Raid is being conducted, both Mar and I will be there. Brett and Dallas will arrest our man down in the Southern Highlands...if he is still there. If not, where-ever!"

"Where is he at the moment?"

"Belanglo State Forest. It's a huge pine plantation east of Goulburn, close to Berrima..."

"Belanglo? Now that's a familiar name...it seems that that area attracts the most sadistic of Killers."

I had no idea what he was on about.

"Don't tell me that one of the worst serial killers in the State of NSW has escaped your knowledge? Milat? Ivan Milat? Belanglo State Forest was his happy hunting ground."

I nodded my head vaguely. I couldn't see the import of the information, for the life of me!

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT**

"Trevor White? Do you know why you have been arrested?"

"Bloody bullshit. Something about raping and killing what? Six girls? Women? You have to be joking. I want to speak to a Lawyer. I ain't saying another word. Got it, arse-holes?"

We were seated in the largest of the small Interview Rooms on the Eighth-Floor Murder Squad Area. We were a little crammed. The Accused. Mar and I and Dallas Courtney. A Uniform officer at the door. The room was adjacent to the crammed Electronics Room where everything said and acted out in the adjacent three Interview Rooms was recorded, taped and videoed from several directions.

Abbey and Brett Senior sat there with the Electronics Officer from the Forensics Section whose job it was to be available at any time to man the equipment in this room.

The Accused was made aware that the entire proceedings was being monitored and recorded.

He shrugged his shoulders. Didn't seem to have a care in the world.

For three hours we cajoled, accused, badgered and threatened the man to no avail.

He did not say a word. Utter a sound except call us all the names under the sun...and more.

In the end, we charged him with the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah 'Sally' Saxton.

That was our strongest case.

His semen, DNA trace and fingerprints were found at the site deep in the Watagans National Park. We expected that DNA comparison tests would come back positive on snake venom taken from the deceased and matched against one of his snakes.

No jewellery that was taken from any of the females or their mobile phones were found at the residential address at the General Store at Awaba.

The cases for Shandy Templeton and Jennah Kolowic were considered weaker with only tenuous and circumstantial evidence linking the Accused to those two victims.

Debra Fingleton, the woman who I had checked to discover that she was dead in the Barrington Tops was twenty-two years old. Again, a weak case except that the Dorrigo coppers could identify that White was the young man who had accompanied them back to the Fingleton girl's last camping experience.

Brenda Shore was the nineteen-year old victim in Queensland.

Polly-Anne Summers was the twenty-four-year-old raped and murdered outside Canberra in the ACT.

She was his first victim as far as we could ascertain. Her body was discovered some ten months after her disappearance was reported to the Police. Very little of her remains were recovered due to feral animal activity. Thus, Forensics trace was all but non-existent on her. Or around her. A very tenuous link indeed to the Accused.

The only link for all those cases was the similar MO and settings. Except that of Shandy Templeton.

The Forestry Commission and the Sub-Contractor that White had worked for, had supplied dates and locations that generally positioned our Perp close to those areas where the victims had been found. Unfortunately, there was little other evidence to directly link him to the slaying of Summers, Fingleton and Templeton, unless a confession was forthcoming.

We very much doubted that we would ever see such a written and signed statement going on our first interview with him.

The one good moment to occur during this time was the Judge disallowing White's application for Bail based on the severity of the charges and his possibility of killing again according to the Report handed in by a Court appointed Psychiatrist. As a 'Rider' to this application, we had included the Report prepared by the Toronto coppers who had looked after the young Trevor White in the "Youth in Crisis" and whose assessment of the lad had been so prophetic in their words.

Five weeks after White's arrest and Charge, DNA comparison tests showed that two of the Snakes housed in glass bins at the residential address at Awaba had comparable DNA to that in the blood, tissue and hair molecules of Templeton and Kolowic.

A link!

The DPP still felt that the evidence was not strong enough to reveal in Court the crimes or link them as an umbrella charge against the Accused.

He would go down for one homicide only, something that angered the bejeezus out of me! And I was not backward in demonstrating my opposition to this edict. For some reason, I wanted at least justice for Jennah Kolowic who, in her own way, had suffered the injustice of living in a family environment that no child should endure and still remained a worthwhile human being. And in death suffering even worse. She did not deserve that or not having her name linked to her Killer with him being recognised in a Court of Law as such.

At one of the numerous meetings held with the DPP, it was even suggested that the entire legal strategy against the Accused was in jeopardy due to my incompetence. It was ludicrously intimated that in failing to identify myself to the Local Lads who had been on the site of the Snake Bite victim, Debra Fingleton up in the Barrington Tops NP and then to become Lead Detective in the Murder Investigation when I should have excused myself, distance myself from the investigation, could be construed as a technicality that the Defence could use to their advantage.

I near leapt over the Conference table to throttle the imbecile who had uttered the words! The fact that the Fingleton death case only came under the umbrella of the over-all investigation into the Accused's activities late in the proceedings escaped the tiny mind of this legal twit!

How-ever, I had to admit to being concerned by the point. The Legal Fraternity could be at times, more ruthless than the most vicious Client that they would ever defend!

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

For the umpteenth time, Abbey was chairing a meeting in the Conference Room on the Eighth Floor adjacent to the Murder Squad Room. This sizable facility was not for the sole use of the Murder Squad but was available for general use by the entire building if required.

Present were Abbey as the chair, Senior, Courtney, Hendricks and myself as the Investigating Officers in the case, Petriano representing Forensic Trace and his off-sider Henrietta Maclean, Harrolds and Pisa from Computer Analysis. 'Muscles' Sarvich from Forensic Pathology and Lindhurst and Toohey from the DPP's Office.

A dozen persons who could recite word for word every nuance of this case by now, as they had spent hundreds of hours in their own spheres of responsibilities in examining the very minutia that had been gathered on what essentially were six individual homicide cases.

There was a mountain of notes. Reports. Photographs and evidence items.

This was considered one of the biggest Murder Investigations to hit the State in quite a few years and when it became common knowledge that the Accused, even though associated with the deaths of six young females, was only standing trial for the one murder, Public anguish and vitriol became almost palpable.

"We've been over the six cases with a fine-tooth comb. The common link for all six is the snake bite venom coming from three different snakes that were in the domain of the Accused's residence. That is not enough for conviction...it is but a link. We have been over the Trace evidence with a fine-tooth comb. We have literally examined every surface of the Accused's bedroom with an electronic microscope, vacuumed the life out of the bed linen and pulled his 4WD vehicle and camping gear apart trying to find any microscopic evidence that would further link him to the other five crimes...not a bloody shred. Not even a minuscule example of plant trace on his camping gear that would place him at any one of the camping ground crime scenes. We require further links to each victim and White as the Perp, however circumstantial. Even if our cases are built on that basis, the more evidence, the greater the chance of that one also being presented to the Court for prosecution as a concurrent exercise. The DPP will proceed with the charges under an umbrella and the more evidence, especially more significant than what we now have, how-ever circumstantial, the greater chance of a conviction for all six homicides. That is what I want. So? What are we missing?"

There was silence around the room

"I think I said early in the piece that we had an intelligent Killer for once. Look what happens when he is...he runs circles around us...it says something about the cleverness of my Detectives, now doesn't it?"

Abbey was getting angry.

You could tell. I was a good Investigative Officer that way.

"What the fuck are we missing? What is it that will link White conclusively with all six victims? We are missing something, gang. Figure it out. Quickly!"

Abbey was under a huge amount of pressure for him to explode in this manner. It was the first time that I had seen him this way when others outside the Murder Squad were involved in the meeting. Sure...he had displayed similar emotions at our famous weekly 'in house' meetings, but never when 'outsiders' were involved. Especially members from the DPP's Office. They were just as likely to gather their things up and walk out!

To my surprise, they didn't!

"What's this Opal Card thing?" Senior asked out of the blue.

"A Rail and Bus Transport electronic ticket for commuters. Why?"

"Oh...why would White have one of them...his work involved driving miles to remote Pine Plantations didn't it? Out in the bush. What's with a suburban rail ticket...how do they work?"

As often happens in situations such as this when the Investigation has slowed to a complete stop, any small worrying item that doesn't seem to fit the pattern but has been overlooked because of its supposed irrelevancy to the case, is often ignored. Forgotten. When it does finally draw the concentration of all those involved, other miscellaneous irrelevancies seem to surface almost immediately.

"Arrm....." I turned to Tim Harrolds from Computer Analysis. "Does the Card hold the history of its usage?"

"No. Only the amount of money as credit that is available. As each journey is debited from the card, at some time, the Owner of said card needs to top up the amount of money available for use."

"Could it be ascertained when the card was last used? And for what journey? And God forbid, the time and date of when that journey was made?"

"I truly don't know...I doubt that it would specify the exact journey details...but that may be able to be ascertained by the amount of money debited for said journey. For example, if say a fifteen-dollar amount had been debited on Saturday last at nine-oh-five, then the chances are he was going from Central to the Central Coast and not just one station away...get my drift? One would think that the time and date would somehow be embedded also...I'll work with that and report back on it. OK? Um..."

He looked nervously around the table. It was obvious that he was not used to such big meetings with so many outsiders.

"Um...While I've got the floor...we know that the Perp groomed these women, all of them except Kolowic, through a Social Media Site. We know that from all the victim's Computers, tablets or Smart Phones. That's a fact! We've traced that out. What we haven't got is any evidence...not a trace, that he used the Desk Top Computer that he had at his place of residence for that purpose. We even forensically examined the hard drives of the Computer that was in the Shop and another that was used by both White's parents. Nothing. Zilch. Nada. So, he must have had another device. His parents say *no*.... very adamant on that point both of them were, but that point was never asked of his work colleagues... I don't think in any case... an oversight, perhaps?"

"Good point, Harrolds. He had to have used something to lure these girls. Joe? Mark that down for action...wasn't there some mention that .... the girl found at Minto.... she had been lured by some-one using an Internet Café in Newcastle, wasn't it? Which brings up the obvious...as he did have another device...I think that we can safely assume that...then where is it? Something else...we know that he took trophies. Mostly jewellery. Some very distinct in the case of the Kolowic and Saxton girls. We know that he is a cunning, intelligent and thinking killer...let's suppose that he had all the jewellery and mobile phones of the victims...with sim cards and batteries removed...where are they...you would not keep the discarded batteries with the jewellery. Surely...a hiding place around his home that was easy for him to get to...like a removable floor board in his bedroom...something like that, perhaps."

"Umm...no. We went over that room especially...and the rest of the house with a fine-tooth comb looking for exactly what you just referred to...nothing, I'm afraid. Not even in the ceiling, behind furniture or even a space in an interior wall...we gave it our best shot..."

Petriano from Trace and the Head of the Crime Scene on three of the four crime scenes and Head of Crime Scene at the Perp's home, stated evenly.

He suddenly threw up his hand.

"Wait a moment...Umm..."

He picked up a thick envelope, emptying it of its content. A thick wad of A4 photographic

enlargements and tiny images spilled out. He fished through them quickly looking for a particular shot.

"Here..."

He exclaimed loudly, laying several photographs out on the table.

"These shots were taken of the back room...used as a Store and Rubbish Room for the Shop. The Shop. It just twigged while we're talking about it...There is a large glass container...at a guess an old fish bowl...it's full of used batteries. A2's mostly...but as you can see, there are Mobile Phone batteries amongst them...they could...and I stress, could...be the batteries that we are referring to...may possibly have prints of the victims on them..."

Abbey slammed his hand down onto the table surface.

"Good work Petro...this is what we want...connections!"

"Umm...we talk about the cunning of this guy..." Dallas Courtney began. "When we drove passed the Shop and White's home on that Sunday, Joe here said that he looked at White for but a second and recognised him straight away as the chap who climbed out of the back of the Cop 4WD vehicle at the camp-site in the Barringtons.... White also recognised Joe in that split second because he came out onto the road to watch our passage up the road. There is no other explanation for him doing so. He knew that we were Cops as we had been around the area for quite some time. We'd been at the Railway Station opposite his home for a couple of hours that morning in fact, interviewing persons who had alighted from that train at the Awaba Railway Station. He knew that we were getting close...possibly to his way of thinking a little too close...he was packing his vehicle up to head down to the Pine Plantation out of Berrima. Belanglo State Forest. His next job location...he would have thought over his crimes and wondered what he had at home that would incriminate him...link him to those murders..."

"The jewellery. The laptop which he may have always taken with him in any case..." Mar interrupted.

"The batteries slipped his mind as they were lost within sight, so to speak, with so many other batteries in that fish-bowl." I added. "The proverbial forest and the trees, so to speak." I added.

"Yeah...and where would be the most obvious place to hide those other items where there was very little chance of them ever being recovered?... or of being found?"

"A Pine Plantation!" We all chorused.

An air of excitement exuded and filled the room. Voices could be heard talking over each

other becoming a babble.

Unintelligible.

Another corner had been negotiated.

Another light bulb moment had just been experienced!

"OK guys. Hush up...OK. A plan is required. Tim Harrolds? Can you see what you can do with that Opal Card thing. Perhaps he was on that morning train as it pulled into Awaba Station. Saw Kolowic as he alighted and thought that he had a chance at revenge...perhaps. Or was just being friendly like and it escalated from there...Petro Petriano...can you organise a couple of your Forensic Crime Scene guys to accompany Marge and Joe here back up to the White's residence to arrest that fish-bowl full of batteries. Every one of them is to be given the full gambit for trace and fingerprints. Comparisons against all our victims...and the Perp. It would be fantastic if a battery had the fingerprints of the Victim plus the Perp... that would not be considered a tenuous link but a decisive association! OK? Also, organise a couple of your people with Metal Detectors to accompany Dallas and Brett here to that Pine Plantation in the Southern Highlands...oh...before we get too far ahead of ourselves...re-interview..." He turned to Dallas. "Re-interview the Boss of the Tree Trimmer gang that Trevor White belonged to. I reckon that they would set up camp in a central location within the Pine Plantation so that they didn't have to move the base camp around too much, if at all, as they worked their way through the forest. See where they set that up and use that as the point of reference. If he indeed did bury those things, including the Laptop, I'll lay odds in heavy duty plastic wrap that would last a millennium, then it more likely be in close proximity to the base camp...and close to some 'pointer' of some kind. He may have thought that he could retrieve his trophies at a later stage...I think that they are an important part of his whole reason to carry out these homicides...we've got work to do. Good work guys."

We all started to pack up our Case File Dossiers.

I had the most Murder Book Folders that I had ever had on my desk.

Eighteen that covered the minutia of the six homicides crowding out the desk surface. So much so that I had organised a small, side table, bookshelf arrangement for the future storage of these Folders and those of other cases that we still held. Mar's Desk did not have that cluttered, lack of space feel that was most evident on mine...I needed to talk to her about that one day. As the DPP guys had, we also had a trolley onto which we began to load all the Folders, files and dossiers pertaining to the six cases.

"Umm...one thing! Who interviewed White's work associates and Field Boss? His Trimmer gang in other words?"

"Courtney and I, Boss." Brett Senior offered.

"OK. Brett? You go with Marge back up to the General Store at Awaba. Courtney? You go with Joe here to re-interview the gang and the Bossman about the location of the Base camp down there...and quiz the guys again on any peculiarities that White may have displayed to the other boys while camped out...what he was like...his little habits....and check that the same persons have been involved in the Gang since White had joined. If a guy perhaps, has left the Gang, find out his personal details and go and interview him. There could be a reason for the chap's employment departure. Stuff like that while the Forensic guys walk around with their Metal Detectors. That's it, I think."

I knew why Abbey wanted to break Mar and I up. Firstly, so that a fresh set of eyes could scour each area for the first time, talk to the participants with a slightly different perspective than that displayed previously...and more importantly, with Mar soon to begin her sabbatical away from work to the easy life of child-birth and rearing, he was experimenting with possible future partners for me.

I had indicated to him that I was impressed with Courtney's show of maturity and nous in interview techniques, his ability to grasp quickly pertinent points and his obvious talent to sometimes think outside the square that should be nurtured. While Brett Senior was an excellent Investigator, a rare teacher and a man of immense patience, his ability to encourage those that show rare talent was not so dominant. He was best at partnering the raw Murder Dick recruit and spotting an unsuitable person for the role; not the pupil who shows rare gifts that often make top-notch Investigators.

I considered that I was such a teacher! And that Abbey was aware of that fact.

I could be wrong in that regard, but I doubted it.

Abbey pulled me back after the Conference Room was vacated.

"You don't mind do you, Joe. Seeing as how Mar will be leaving us in a couple of months' time, hopefully the longer the better, I figured that we should begin to try and find you a suitable replacement...you can remember the number of partners we tried you with before we struck gold with Mar, don't you. You are one devil of a guy to match some-one with. You're a bloody obstinate, crude, rude and vulgar person at times, Joe. But I've got to admit reluctantly, a bloody good Operator. One of the best." He slapped me on the back. Gave a little chuckle to denote that there was a bit of 'stir' in his words. He walked off quickly, leaving me speechless and a little burnt around the edges.

I had yet to figure out whether my ego had just received a pummelling or not.

Bugger me!

## CHAPTER FORTY

"Good morning, Mister White. I am Detective Three, Peta Daniels. I think you may know my partner, Detective Three Marjory Hendricks already."

The Court appointed Psychiatric Report detailed his hatred of females as one of the twisted reasons for his crimes. Because of this, we decided to have Mar and Daniels attend the interview and the formal charging of the man on six homicides. We felt that he would not take kindly to two females dominating him and invading his space. This meant however, that Abbey, Senior, Courtney, myself and the Senior DPP Prosecutor, Barry Lindhurst who would be taking the case to Court, were crammed into the Electronics Room with the Technical Officer in charge of all the equipment!

A bloody tight squeeze for us!

"Do you know Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers? Mister White? I'm asking you a question."

"You are advised not to answer that question, Mister White." His solicitor, an elderly gentleman who had been around the Police traps for years commented. Legal Aid had provided the services of Hugo Lyons. A capable and likeable chap who had a keen legal mind.

"Did you kill Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers, Mister White?"

Again, the same advice was given.

"Did you rape Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers, Mister White?"

The advice was repeated.

Trevor White sat there with a vacant, bored look on his face thinking that the questions were absurd.

"Did you abduct Jennah Kolowic. Hold her against her will, Mister White? She must have really upset you after the Year Twelve Graduation Ball...rejecting your overtures? That was what? Four years ago, now. You can hold a grudge, can't you, Mister White?"

He looked intently at Daniels as she spoke, smirking as his Solicitor more or less answered for him.

"Did you deliberately cause three different snakes that you own to bite Shandy Templeton,

Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers, Mister White?"

This threw him a bit. He wasn't expecting that.

"Can you explain how three of your snakes have been identified through DNA trace, to have bitten the six poor victims I have just named? The venom of those three snakes that have been identified as yours, has been detected in the blood of all six persons. We can provide the description and what type of snake with its victim's name, if you want us to be clear on the matter."

He shuffled his feet. His Solicitor placed a steadying hand on the young man's fore-arm.

"The gang of Tree-Trimmers that you belong to? A group of seven, isn't it? That group has the highest drop-out rate of all the gangs employed by.... Conrad Silverton. Your Boss. He felt that it was you who was the rotten apple that caused this acrimonious air to exist.... he was going to pay you out, you know."

White leaned forward to yell something out across the table. Hugo Lyons whispered into his ear and pressed the lad to lean back in his chair again.

"Did you remove personal items of jewellery from Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers, Mister White?"

He hadn't thought that this would be a problem...but what the heck, they'd never be able to link him to the jewellery. They would never find it in a million years.

"Did you remove mobile phones and Smart Phones from Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers, Mister White?"

He guessed that as they knew of the jewellery, through the families he supposed, they would have also been informed that the girls had had Mobile Phones in their possession at the time that they left their homes for the last time.

"Did you, Mister White, remove Sim cards from Mobile Phones and Smart Phones belonging to Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers?"

*How would they have known that,* he asked himself. That worried him.

"Did you, Mister White, remove batteries from Mobile Phones and Smart Phones owned by Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers?"

He was wondering now, how much did they *really know*? This was a fishing exercise and they knew bugger all, he thought!

Marge started to place various Mobile Phone batteries out in front of him. Securely sealed in strong clear plastic Evidence Bags. A series of numbers. The name and signature of two Officers so it looked like. A card attached to each envelope with writing filling its page.

"Do you recognise these batteries, Mister White? They were found in a clear glass fish bowl in the rear Store Room of your father's Shop. Do you recognise them?"

He shook his head. But fear was tingling his insides.

"Let it be known that Mister White shook his head in the negative to the question just asked." Marge said.

"Mister White. You will need to answer in a loud, clear voice. The recordings do not pick up body gestures." Daniels took over again.

*That wasn't exactly right, he thought to himself, as they had indicated that not only were they recording these events, they were also videoing the proceedings. He was smarter than they thought.*

"So, you are saying, Mister White, that you have never seen these batteries before? Is that right, Sir?"

"That is correct, Detective." He answered clearly. A smirk on his face. *These suckers have fuck all*, he thought to himself.

Bingo.

We have lift off.

In all the previous Interviews, the Accused had failed to say one bloody word that was not insulting or degrading. Not one. He had answered the question in a civil manner.

We now had him opening his mouth.

"They were found in the back of your father's Shop..."

Daniels and Hendricks glared at him.

"They may have been found in that location, as you say but I've never seen them before. I've already answered that question."

*You silly slut*, he thought to himself. He smirked at that thought.

"Is there something funny that my colleague has said, Mister White?" Marge butted in. White looked from Daniels to Hendricks. For the first time looking a little confused. Daniels continued in that even, unrelenting tone.

"Then how come your fingerprints were found on this one..."  
She picked up one envelope and then placed it gently back on the table.

"This one...and this one, and yes...this one. Can you explain that to us, please? If you haven't seen them before, how come your fingerprints were found on these four. Four out of six batteries. Can you enlighten us on that point? Mister White."

*She's a bloody smart-arse*, he thought to himself. *If I had my way...he started to harden.*

"Well, Mister White?"

"Well...I guess that they must have been in our Battery Bin...it was an old glass Fish Bowl where we would chuck old batteries that customers bought in for us to get rid of. You're not supposed to put them into the Wheelie Bins 'cause when they burst open the stuff inside can poison the earth...not good...so I guess I may have touched them with my fingers when they were in that bowl."

*There!* He thought to himself. *You can't outsmart me, you bitch!*

"I see...can you explain how the fingerprints of Shandy Templeton, Jennah Kolowic and Polly-Anne Summers came to be on three of those batteries, Mister White?"

*Fuck. Whoops.*

He shook his head.

"Mister White, as I have said before, the recording cannot record you shaking your head. Why are you shaking your head? Because you don't know how those young ladies' fingerprints came to be on those batteries or are you indicating that you still don't know these women? Which one is it, Mister White?" Marge asked pointedly.

*You fuckin' smart-arse bitch. If I had five minutes with ya I'd show ya what for!*

"They musta been Customers to my Dad's shop. Came in and gave him those old batteries for him to get rid of 'cause as I said before, ya not allowed to put them in ya Wheelie Bin to have them emptied into the Garbage Dump. They poison the soil."

*There, that'll fix them.*

"Can you explain then, Mister White, why the families and friends of Brenda Shore and

Polly-Anne Summers say that they have never been to that part of New South Wales before. In fact, we are assured that Brenda Shore, a native of Queensland, has never set foot outside her State. Can you explain that? How her battery from her Mobile phone with her fingerprints on it and also yours, came to be in a Fish Bowl in your Father's shop. We could assume that Jennah Kolowic, being a resident of nearby Toronto, may have visited your father's shop on occasions...but the others? Have you any explanation for that discrepancy, Mister White?"

*Smart-arse, stop calling me Mister White. My name's Trevor....or Snake Eyes,* the lad thought. Screamed it out in his mind.

White shook his head as he said that he had no idea on how that could happen.

Marge took the envelopes containing the Batteries off the table.

Replacing them with a series of coloured A4 photographs showing different jewellery items.

"Do you recognise these jewellery items, Mister White?" Daniels keep her voice low. On an even note and tempo.

The young man's heart skipped a beat. *How the fuck did they get photographs of all the jewellery,* he thought to himself. *I guess some families take photos of their stuff just in case they get knocked off. I suppose. For Insurance, I guess.* Then a thought struck him like a length of four by two across his shoulders. *Those arse-hole bastards turned turtle and told the cops down in the Plantation...if I ever get my hands on the bastards, I'll kill them.* He screamed inside his head.

White's face drained of colour. He shook his head as he stated that he had never laid eyes on that stuff before.

"Then how come we have taken your fingerprints off this item belonging to Sarah Saxton, your partials were lifted from a ring that was Sarah's Grandmother's and are on these earrings belonging to Shandy Templeton? Also on jewellery that was taken from the body of Jennah Kolowic. A very expensive ring...here..." She tapped another photograph of a large ring. "Your partial fingerprints were taken from the surface of that stone. Have you anything to say to that, Mister White? Can you give us an explanation, Mister White?"

"My name's not Mister White, arse-holes. It's Trevor or Snake Eyes, you cruds!" Anger in his voice. His eyes bore into Detective Peta Daniels.

She seemed not to be affected by the stare.

"Your fingerprints on those items, Mister White? Can you explain that?" Daniels didn't drop the tempo. Or turn her eyes away from the young man.

The young man wiggled in his seat. His Solicitor placed a calming hand on the lad's forearm. It was swiped away.

Both Daniels and Hendricks exchanged glances. A slight smirk on both their faces.

"Any explanation, Mister White?"

The guy opened his mouth to speak. Decided against it and closed it again. Nodded his head. A sweat sheen covered his forehead. His armpits were sweating bucket-loads.

The colour photographs of the jewellery were removed from the table to be replaced by a photograph of a sturdy Laptop travel bag.

Then a shot of a Toshiba Laptop. A mid-range model still worth just under a thou.

Then another shot of the screen-saver. A nude photograph of a woman lying on a pale-yellow ground sheet. Her legs apart. Her eyes wide open with the unmistakable death stare look. A dome tent pushed to one side.

"Recognise the woman, Mister White? The Laptop travel bag? The laptop? The screen saver on that Laptop? The tent, Mister White? It is your laptop, Mister White. That has been confirmed by your three work mates and your Boss, Mister White. The woman's name is Debra Fingleton. Sound familiar, Mister White? It should, I would imagine, seeing as how it is your screen saver on your Toshiba Laptop. Your DNA and fingerprints are all over it...poor Debra died from snake bite...as you were raping her...in the Barrington Tops National Park. At a small, remote camping area known as Chinaman's Flats. I'm told it is a pretty place. No?"

White dropped his head into his hands. Mumbled something.

"Sorry, Mister White. What did you say?"

He looked up. his face contorted into one of anguish.

"I'm in deep shit, eh guys?" Anger was replaced by a note of nervousness.

"You certainly are, Mister White. Have you anything to say. Do you admit to killing Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers?"

"I'm advising my Client that he does not have to reply to that question." The solicitor Lyons countered, as his Client shook his head.

"Mister White. I will advise you that we have recovered your laptop and other documents

and photographs. We have also forensically examined your laptop's Hard Drive to discover certain items, communications and photographs. Certain communications link you to five of the six murder victims. We have also recovered the hidden stash of jewellery belonging to your six homicide victims from a position not that far from your second Base Camp in the Belanglo State Forest. Mister White, from irrefutable evidence that we have obtained from those said sources, you are being charged with the abduction, rape and murders of Shandy Templeton, Sarah 'Sally' Saxton, Jennah Kolowic, Debra Fingleton, Brenda Shore and Polly-Anne Summers. Do you understand those Charges, Mister White?"

"My fucking father's name is Mister White. I ain't his son...me name's Trevor or Snake Eyes, yer bitches! Hear me?"

He didn't at all seemed concerned about the hole that he was now in.

Trapped for his natural life.

Denial comes in many guises. Some more dangerous than others.

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