

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES JOSEPH LIND and MARJORY HENDRICKS

# AN ECONOMIC SOLUTION



A  
Crime  
Novella  
by

PETER C BYRNES

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AND  
MARJORY HENDRICKS

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PETER C BYRNES

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## CHAPTER ONE

It was becoming a rarer occurrence. Seeing the boys on their hogs in double file, roaring up the Motorway proudly displaying their 'colours'.

Especially since laws were changed forbidding the congregation of 'The Boys' wearing 'Colour' numbering more than a couple. No gathering on a Public Street with 'colour' showing. Denoting to one and all what Gang they belonged to. Proudly displayed. A rare occurrence these days. Yes indeedy!

A beer or two with the mates was out of the question, as though the taste was somehow diluted by the fact that 'colours' were worn while enjoying the past-time!

A stream of boys on their hogs roared up the Motorway.

Perhaps an afternoon drinking session at a Pub some distance away. A gathering of several Chapters from up and down the coast. From Newcastle, through the Central Coast to the Sydney burbs.

Their Colours proudly displayed. A direct snub at the Cops and their recently legislated Laws.

The White Skulls Motor Bike gang.

They'd been decimated some time back by desertions, murders and OD's.

They were making a 'come back', having doubled their number over the past eighteen months. All because of the charismatic Boss of the Club who could sell ice to Eskimos... and given half the chance, would more than likely do so!

As they passed slower moving vehicles, the very base of the road seemed to vibrate with the sounds of their Harleys. The riders sitting on the Hogs seeming to take little interest in the cars that they overtook. Their eyes glued instead, on the road ahead. Stern looks on the faces of those that you could see as very few were without face patches or kerchiefs covering their mugs.

The vision of incognito priority one to most of the riders.

And 'Rubberneckers' they weren't!

Two abreast.

Perhaps ten pair in perfect formation as though they spent their leisure hours practising the

arrangement like the participants of a Marching Band. Crowded in their Club House yard, practising the 'abreast' formation until they could ride with their eyes closed. A very strict configuration that had The Boss at the head of the legion.

Then came four Police Motorcycle Units and two brightly coloured Highway Patrol Vehicles.

Vehicles in the outside lane veered to the inside as the parade drew closer not wanting to be the one who did not permit free passage of the lot. They needed not have worried though for the occasional driver who remained rooted to the outside lane was overtaken by the stream going around them. For some moments that vehicle was completely surrounded. The driver now terrified of his position. The roar of the bikes all enveloping. The vibration worrying as it entered the very bones of the inconsiderate driver. There wasn't a glance or a shift in the heads of the Hog riders as they cut to the inside, overtook then veered back to the fast lane.

The formation not even breaking its speed or form in the movement. Like a stream of red hot lava coursing down the side of a volcano crater. Nothing stopped the onward progression.

The Cops too, copied the process, though they glared at the ignorant, maybe overwhelmed driver as they passed them by. Letting them know in no uncertain terms, that they were indeed lucky to have survived the ordeal.

The procession was perhaps halfway through a long, easy sweeping, right-hand curve when the lead rider seemed to jerk, his body falling forward to slump over the chrome petrol tank of his hog. The bike careened to the left across the two traffic lanes, up onto the sloping bank beside the roadway. Coming to an angry stop against a clump of Wattle trees. The rider flying through the air, crumpling onto the ground with the heavy bike skidding over him before coming to rest.

It seemed to take some time for the parade to realise the situation. The procession veered onto the breakdown lane to retrace their route against the traffic, coming to a stop at the point where their beloved Leader had careened into the bush. They parked their hogs keeping a semblance of order as though this was expected. One beside the other, facing out onto the busy traffic lanes.

The second in line rider did not have to sprint that far into the bush to stand over the remains of his Leader.

It was obvious that he was dead.

At first a heart attack came to mind.

Perhaps a stroke.

The Boss guy was one of those waiting to happen.

Too many tokes. Too many smokes. Too much grog.

"Fuck mate. What a way to go out! On ya Hog roaring up the Highway. Man... that's true nirvana!" The guy said in a croaky voice, as he knelt over his fallen leader.

It was then that he noticed that half of the Boss's face was missing. An exit wound from a high calibre bullet had made its mess. This was not how the old bloke would have wanted to go out, he thought to himself.

He slowly stood, his hands covered in the blood of his mate and leader.

He looked about, half expecting the cowardly shooter to come crawling out of the bush.

That was never going to happen.

Immediately the Second-in-Command thought of a rival gang. They had been flexing their muscles lately. Selling drugs to a few of the regulars for a lower price than what was the accepted market level.

Muscling in!

They'd pay for this.

In a bloody big way, he promised himself.

The Cops then started to flex their muscles, wanting to take control of the situation.

Ordering all the boys away from the scene.

They just wanted to pay their respects to a cool and admired leader who had lead them for a lot of years. Through a lot of pain. A lot of laughter. A lot of shit-faced hours.

They wanted to make sure that the Boss's Hog was looked after.

Given due respect.

There was a protocol to adhere to, though the Cops seemed oblivious of that fact. The guys started to grumble. Some resorting to words flung at the Cops.

Several more sirens could be heard coming from both directions up and down the multi-lane motorway.

Some-one needed to take control, otherwise there could be a rebellion right here. And now.

The 2IC needed to assert his authority before several others leapt into the void wanting the coveted 'top dog' status.

The ascension role eagerly sought and often fought over. Like here, over the still warm corpse of the former leader.

The Homicide death was never solved.

No-one was ever brought to justice for the 'sniper' killing of the CEO of the Gang, though Police suspected that it was a contract killing that originated from inside the Club itself!

There were suspicious thoughts by the Second-in-Command of the White Skulls. He the rightful heir to the throne and the natural recipient of Top Dog. But he was out of his depth, perhaps shaken more than others by the death of his best mate, so he failed to show the rank and file that he was willing and able to accept the role of 'Leader of the Pack'. Because of this, his own Lieutenant, Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski had stepped straight over the head of the 2IC and had taken immediate control, even inheriting the former wife of the deceased as a sort of trophy prize.

A beautifully executed coup.

It was the way of the movement as a whole! Politics was not the exclusive practise of those who inhabited Parliament House in Canberra. Though the 'boys' tended to erupt into violence instead of taking it as part of a game. Discussing the pros and cons. Politicking was not their forte.

There were rumblings of 'The Pole' being guilty of organising the shooting of the elderly leader, but that is where the suppositions remained, as a slight, whispered out of ear-shot of the new Boss, who always had a reputation for cruelty.

The disposed Leader quietly sank into the mire of the rank and file and not long after, retired from the gang completely, citing rheumatism as the reason why he had lost his mojo in wanting to mount his hog.

The position of the Shooter was never conclusively proven.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

Not long after the body was removed and before sufficient numbers of Police had arrived to provide the necessary search, it absolutely poured down rain.

One of those southerly busters that roared up the coast. It rained for the rest of the day and most of that night. Washing away any likelihood of ever defining the sniper's location.

The heavy-booted Biekie guys didn't help one iota.

They stayed out in the rain plodding around the area trying to locate a clue or two hoping that they could have first 'dig' at the shooter. Any evidence was either washed away or trodden into the mud and slush.

The Cops had a fair idea of where the Sniper had laid in wait and any fool could surmise that inside information had to have been provided for the guy to have laid in ambush at that time and in that spot.

The Biekies seemed to have overlooked that probability!

### **CHAPTER THREE**

"That's handy." I murmured.

"What is?" Estelle Sanchez asked as she sat on the lounge beside me. Curling her body into mine.

She had been married for a short time to the 2IC Major Crimes, which turned out to be a bad decision in so many ways. Not the least, because of his controlling and domineering manner. He had never physically hurt her, but 'Tellie', as she was known to one and all, felt that it was only a matter of time. She had tried to patch up the relationship on many occasions until she ran out of patience and Band Aids. She having lost a great deal of her legal entitlements as a consequence of wanting a quick annulment. She had been thinking of moving interstate as her role as a Forensic Technician would always mean that she would bump into her Ex in the corridors of The Police Building where both worked. Or at a Crime Scene.

That was resolved when her Ex took up the position of Head of Major Crime in the Northern Territory. His home State.

In some ways, I know that I have been blessed with the women who have entered my life.

Sure, there have been some sad moments when they've left me unexpectedly.

Being murdered as my wife of some ten years had been when our son was but ten years of age; being taken from me prematurely as Penny Catt had been. Dying from injuries received

at the hands of a jealous ex-husband who could not let go; and the severing of ties by mutual consent as Penelope Pinicello and I had done as she had too many close affiliations to the wrong side of the track. Realistically, they would have always stood solidly between us, mainly because I was a career Murder Cop! She the only daughter, albeit estranged, of a well-known, feared gangland family in Melbourne.

Finding Estelle Sanchez had bought sunshine back into my life when I badly needed it.

We had met while both of us had worked on the "Bones in the Bags" Case which had affected me something terribly. She the head of the Forensic Trace Team, looking into the DNA trace uncovered. It was her work that led us to an eventual arrest of a callous, cruel individual and his transsexual partner.

She now shared my humble little Granny Flat that was attached to my house. It had taken only some short months after her marriage was annulled for her to move in with me. It was a big step for her...me too, in a lot of ways. We had both agreed to keep marriage out of our relationship, but either one of us could bring the subject up when-ever it suited.

Of course, there always were those who stated that we were made for one another...there's always that crowd...but we were both in agreement of the statement.

Our home, the one that my wife and I had purchased a lot of years ago. Just before we married, actually.

The Granny Flat care of my Mother-in-Law who had volunteered to look after Billy, my ten-year old at the time of the murder of my wife. She had sold her house which financed the Granny Flat.

My son and his 'live-in' for almost three years now, an AFP Computer Analysis expert, had swapped with me. They taking over the four-bedroom main house while I had been relegated to the Granny Flat.

I had opposed the move for some time. On what grounds, I've never been able to discern. And now that I am comfortably nestled within, I often wonder why I hadn't agreed to it earlier!

"What is?" Tellie repeated.

"Oh...these new Terrorist laws that the Attorney General has introduced to Parliament. Call me a cynic, but the recent raids by eight hundred Cops, AFP and ASIO personnel here in NSW and Queensland seemed rather opportune to sway any opposition to the 'tabled' Bill...especially amongst the populace...there appears to be certain theatrics about the timing of the raids and the introduction of the Bill..."

"It's a real and present threat, Joe...." Malisa chimed in.

She'd know, being an AFP Operative.

We were in the larger quarters of the accommodation...my old part of the house to be precis...which was the norm when-ever we were all together at meal time. It seemed rather stupid to have two Chefs slaving away under the one roof when I could boastfully cook up my Spagbol which everyone enjoyed. Or fire up the BBQ on most sunny, summer afternoons.

Or Tellie or Mal wanting to experiment with a new dish, which usually turned out scrumptious!

Surprise, surprise!

"C'mon..." I countered. "They arrested what? Sixteen guys with only one being charged and held in custody...for minor matters only, not related to any terrorist activity on his part. It seems to me to be a little too coincidental for words...and then they march out these new laws a couple of days later...didn't our illustrious Prime Minister utter only weeks ago, that there was no threat to National Security, to any resident of Australia that he knew of and now we have armed Police, in full riot gear carrying semi-automatic assault rifles visibly patrolling the grounds of Parliament House...fingers close to the trigger guard...c'mon, who are they trying to kid?"

"Joe, these things can surface just like that."

"...and if pigs could fly we'd have lighter, airier bacon." I concluded, never too sure on the validity of that statement within the meaning of the conversation we were now having. "C'mon Mal, the one guy who does appear to be a heavy duty Muslim radical with ties to overseas and illegal Terrorist Units would have been known to the Counter Terrorists Intelligence Units, the AFP and ASIO for some time. Years, I betcha! I guarantee that there was a 24/7 surveillance regime on him by the AFP for some time...the other fifteen arrested were just minions of the cause caught up in the hype...or...or...one of them was an undercover AFP agent with his arrest with the other fourteen just an elaborate charade to give him more 'credo' in the eyes of the brothers...to push him deeper into the group as an Undercover mole."

"Don't egg him on Mal, you know what he is like. He can run off at the mouth for hours if you let him..." My son, Billy interrupted her. "He's been watching too many James Bond movies!"

Ben and his partner giggled, trying to hide it behind their hands.

They had also taken up residence in the downstairs bedroom suite.

This had been only a three-bedroom house when my late wife and I had purchased the place not long after we had married. Then Helene had insisted on First Floor additions. Two bedrooms, a very large Ensuite Bathroom and a Walk-in Robe upstairs. The three bedrooms downstairs had become a Guest Bedroom and Ensuite and a separate bedroom adjacent to the existing Bathroom that had been reduced in size to allow a Walk-in Robe to be included. The removal of the original 'built-in robe' to this Bedroom had enlarged it to a very spacious room. All this, the design expertise of Helene...she had been good like that...me? I couldn't design a plant in a pot!

These alterations hinting at the large family that she had wanted...now for-ever reduced to just Bill...though with everyone sitting around the Television, one would never know that. We looked for all the world like one large dysfunctional family, and when my newly discovered biological father and the bus-load of his children, my half brothers and sisters, and grand-children visited, there wasn't room to sneeze!

Let alone swing a cat!

"Go on, Joe..." Malisa challenged.

"Well...the Government Opposition forced an amendment to the Bill...that a Clause be inserted never permitting the use of force, or torture to be used in the investigation of these cases..."

"That's reasonable..." Tellie replied.

"It's already a Law of this Commonwealth...and every State. That was just a puerile attempt by the Opposition to win a couple of points. They were just playing politics instead of allowing free passage of the Bill through Parliament." Billy asserted forcefully.

"You'd never guess on his Political leanings, now would you...oh! Where did I fail...it's all your late Grandmother's fault...but you're right...but notice that death or murder was not included..."

I liked these conversations.

"That's already Law..." Billy chimed in.

"But not under the Laws prescribing to and relevant to the Apprehension and Investigation of Terrorist Suspects under the Clauses being submitted to The House for consideration..."

"That right, Dad!? C'mon...Gawd, Dad, we're not like some of your more gullible friends."

"Or paranoid persons..."

"Or Conspiracy Theorists."

"Before this degenerates into one of those late-night talk-a-thons, who's stacking the Dishwasher? I've got an early call to-morrow."

Estelle jolted us back to the important things of life.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

A sudden vision streamed across my mind's eye.

A troop of Hyenas squabbling over the remains of a carcass that had been bought down and savaged by a Lioness. She, after having her fill, had left the jutting bones and bloody scraps for the Vultures and other 'bone pickers' of the Plains to fight over.

Picking at the scraps.

The crumbs!

Fighting over the remains.

Two alpha males circling one another, snarling their claim of the cadaver. Two of the same troop belligerently staking claim over the prize!

I smiled at the thought, sure within myself that that is how it must look to an interested and astute by-stander watching the current proceedings of the troop of alpha males. One with a vivid and rabid imagination.

My mind can sometimes run away with itself and project images that seem out of this world!

Two collapsible tents had been joined together and placed over the position of the corpse. By the time that we had arrived at the scene, a number of the Gang Related Crimes Team were already there. Their number mounting by the moment, as though sheer numbers of representatives was the magic potion that gave them the right to stake claim of the investigation.

We ignored several of the plain-clothes cops and flipped the tent side up to walk into the small and stuffy interior.

Brian "Muscles" Sarvich was the Lead Forensic Pathologist.

He gave my partner an air kiss. Nodded to me. Their relationship was now out in the open. They didn't care who knew of it, though too close a familiarity over a dead body didn't make for good Press.

"Muscles? How goes it?"

"These early morning wake-up calls are playing havoc with my sex life." He replied. A wink at Marge.

"Mine too!" She responded with a warm smile.

I turned away. I didn't want to know.

"Looks like we're in for a full Turf War." Muscles commented. "Ten bucks on it."

"Over my dead body!" Marge angrily replied.

"Steady on Mar... there's no need to up the ante to that degree!" I retorted.

Both Muscles and I had a chuckle over that.

"You bloody men! Yer both got weird senses of humour...it must be a wiring fault in your grey matter..."

"Always the come-back, my lady. That's why you love us both dearly, my dear." Muscles countered.

"I reckon that it won't take long for a couple of tit-for-tat shootings to go down."

"Yer could be right about that." Muscles continued. "But I was referring more to the Major Crimes lads wanting to take control of the investigation instead of you Murder Squad guys...who should be the Lead Investigators...too obtuse, eh? Turf Wars...a fight within the Force over an investigation...it loses something in the explanation...Apparently, the victim is a well-known Bkie's mole and the former wife of the murdered ex-CEO of the White Skulls group. Georg "Bunny" Kralik. He was killed about six years ago by a sniper's bullet as "Bunny" and the Boys rode their much-loved Hogs up the Newcastle Motorway. You ever ridden one of those yank Harleys? Not designed with creature comforts in mind, although that throb coming up through your bum and balls has a certain effect on some, I would imagine...bloody hard to ride...especially around tight corners...I guess I just needed more practise, heh? The Owner of said Hog was not impressed when I leaned it over. Scratched his chrome which I gallantly paid for...bloody hard to ride...and those "Come to Jesus" handle-bars are an absolute pain."

"You once some Bkies' mole in yer younger days?" I interrupted with a grin. "It sure

sounds like it!"

He gave me a wink.

"Boy, there's plenty about this young lad that you don't know about...no-one was ever arrested for the hit. 'Bunny' Kralik remains an Unsolved Homicide...do you know that Kralik is Yugoslav...or is it Czech?" He shook his head. "I'm not sure now...Czech I think...means rabbit...hence the nickname 'Bunny'...The third in line to the throne took over the headman job of the gang, a bit of a coup actually which got the 2IC of the gang nose out of joint at the time. One of the Leader's perks entailed also owning Georg's missus, so I was told earlier."

"Oh...who filled you in on those wonderful tit-bits? You doing a PhD in Bikie Politics and Organisational Control?"

Mar gave us that raised eye-brow thing, thinking here we go again!

Muscles and I could feed off one another for hours with this type of repartee.

"Um...you'll have to ask one of the Major Crime guys, I guess."

"Her name is Olga Kralik nee Pavic."

We hadn't even heard the two Major Crimes and Gang Related Group's guys enter the tent. It was starting to get a bit cramped what with two Forensic Assistants to 'Muscles' Sarvich also crowded around the inert body.

"...though she was now Alek Pojaski's mole. Alek has been the CEO of the White Skulls since the premature demise of 'Bunny' Kralik...Kralik is Czech for rabbit. Bet none of you knew that, eh?"

Sprouting their greater knowledge to us lessor human beings further down the totem pole.

"Yep. I did actually." I replied. A smart-arse smile across my dial. I felt like taking a swing at the smug bastards. Marge leaned into me which made it difficult for me to move.

The expressions on their faces gave the same message. A tit-for-tat brawl under the white vinyl of a Crime Scene tent. That would go down well with the Media...and the Police hierarchy. It would seem absurd to one outside the 'rink' for us to be circling above a body bashed to a pulp for the express purpose of staking the claim for investigative rights!

Turf War! Silly really!

I knew both guys. The sun only shone out of their arses and no-one else's...and they were the only Coppers who were keeping the Public safe from the evil element! So they thought!

Roy Reynolds and Dave Burrows.

Two front row forward types who were turning to seed. Both a little heavy around the middle...and the edges. Known for their slothful thinking too, like their former Rugby positions would indicate. They were my age about. Both had been quite expressive in the past about the dishonesty of Vice and Narc guys. Their take only. That made it doubly hard for me, being an ex-Undercover Narcs and a Vice guy. And now a Murder Dee of some note!

They even hated Murder Detectives.

It was common knowledge amongst the rank and file....and my name was mud with them at the moment!

We said our farewells to Muscles Sarvich, nodded our recognition of the two guy's presence and ducked back out into the bright, sunny morning.

There was still a slight chill in the air from the evening before.

My partner, Detective Grade 3 Marge Hendricks and I, Detective 3 Joseph Lind of the Murder Squad of the New South Wales Police Force, stood to one side watching the proceedings unfold around the bloodied corpse lying in the deep suburban gutter.

It must have been getting a little clammy inside the tent with all the sides down. Some-one rolled up a couple side panels to let the air circulate. To let out the putrid air I thought, as the two MC & GRT guys were still standing rigidly under the canvass. Neither one getting the hint when two sides of the tent were rolled up!

The Deceased lay with her legs casually crossed. An arm jutting up, held in that stiffened position by the leading edge of the kerb and gutter. Her face turned into the vertical surface of the kerb, eyes open and staring as though she was fascinated by the pattern of concrete of the kerb. Her hair matted with drying blond. A thin rivulet of blood coursing its way down the gutter for some way. Now stopped as though it had given up the exploratory examination, not wanting to be too far removed from its host. She wore a leather jacket and matching little vest. Black tight T-shirt. Tight, stretch jeans now smeared with blood. A jangle of gold bangles on both wrists. Large, round, gold drop-earrings that touched her shoulders. Make-up that needed a trowel to apply now smudged and smeared. Bright red lip-stick ditto. Her mouth a bloody mess with several teeth missing having been savagely removed not that long before her last breath had exhaled. By one or two quick jabs to the face.

The Major Crime and Gang Related Team members were circling, adamant that the body was theirs.

They certain that it was a definite warning from a rival Gang to stay out of the territory that was never theirs!

Because of the obvious links, the Major Crimes guys wanted the 'spoils'.

Stating that because of their Intelligence and close liaison with all the known Bikie Gangs in the country, they were better equipped to solve the murder. The obvious hint by omission was that they had no intention of revealing any of their hard-fought intelligence on the state of a particular Bikie gang if the Murder Squad was to take over the investigation.

An 'Us and Them' scenario that we had encountered on previous occasions that ignored the fact that we were supposed to be on the same side...at least to the insidious eyes of the Media!

Who said politicking was not rife within the New South Wales Police Force.

We, as Murder Squad Detectives, always had first claim on any body that had obviously met a grisly and suspicious end. The Major Crime guys adamant that it was their case because of the obvious Gang links. Which-ever way that you looked at it, there was going to be hell to pay. That was the common opinion on that morning. The White Skulls would be after revenge blood, so we assumed. It was rumoured that the existing head of the gang, Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski had cruelly disposed of the former head, Georg "Bunny" Kralik just for the hand of the woman, who didn't at first glance, look to me like a prized feline worthy of fighting to the death over. She was approaching old age with no amount of plastered on foundation, hiding that fact.

Maybe I had a different outlook on what was considered a foxy woman! Though I guess there were signs that in her day, she could have been half decent....to some!

I don't know, but looking at her inert body lying there in a deep and wide gutter in leafy suburbia, I much preferred my latest Squeeze, Estelle 'Tellie' Sanchez over this Bikie's mole!

I couldn't for the life of me see what there was in the inert form worth fighting and losing your life over!

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

Who-ever said that Climate Change was a lot of hooey, needed to stay in this city for a couple of years. Temperature records were seemingly broken every season with hotter and longer periods of nothing but sunshine. And severe bush fires!

My partner and I had not long returned to the city hoping for relief from the above forty-

degrees temperature, night and day of a large town in the far west of the state. The land around the township parched and dust blown. Not a blade of grass. No surface moisture.

A Farmer had run amok killing his entire family.

And his extended family as well.

Better to make a good job of it, so it would seem!

The threat of personal bankruptcy and the loss of his land too much for the bloke. His missus, his four sons and their families shot to death. He had drugged them all and shot them as they were sleeping. Turning the gun on himself. He the last victim in a guiltless crime!

Twenty-two people, including a dozen kids ranging in age from three up to ten!

An absolute tragedy.

Both my Partner and myself had a hard time closing the case.

It was made worse by the incessant heat that seemed to bear down on you as soon as you left any form of air-conditioned coolness. The heat never worrying me before, but this was the first time that I had experienced heat close to forty-five degrees and higher.

Coming back to the coast, we had thought that there would be some relief.

The surf.

The coastal cool breezes.

Not on your life.

Here the temperature was above that forty degrees for almost fifteen days straight with the latter half of the heatwave having high humidity also. That only made it more unbearable!

This morning though, a cooling north-easterly breeze blew in off the ocean, forecasting an end to the record breaking heatwave. The breeze keeping temperatures to the low thirties. It was still remarkably glary.

So Marge Hendricks and I stood with sun-glasses on looking at the throng of Cops as the Crime Scene Forensic Team went about their business.

Both the Major Crimes guys and us were waiting for some-one...anyone...to take control.

My mobile buzzed in my pocket.

I fished it out before it commenced its latest tune. 'The Needle and The Damage Done' by Neil Young at a thousand decibels, so it seemed in the still morning air.

OK, I was into music that had been popular well after my teen-age years. I hadn't even begun to select any of the classic Queen tunes to upload as a ring-tone as yet! Or the early Rolling Stones stuff that would surely crack a few heads! Or want others to hitch a ride on a cloud. But I loved that stuff, so boohoo to anyone who found it hard to get their heads around.

After all, it was only a bloody ring-tone!

"Joe? Abbey...just got word about your Crime Scene. Walk away. Leave it to Major Crimes and Gang Related Team...I reckon that it will float onto your and Mar's desks eventually. Come back into the Office after you have enjoyed that cooling breeze for a while. It'd be bloody nice outside to-day...unlike the past fortnight or so...OK?"

"Yes Boss."

I closed up my mobile, raising my eyebrows at my partner as I did so.

"We're out of here, Marge." Loud enough for the two Front Row forwards to overhear. They couldn't miss the meaning of our premature departure, surely! They're not that dumb and slow of thinking, surely!

Abbey aka Detective Superintendent Church was the best boss that I had the privilege of ever working under in the NSW Police Force. An absolute bonzer bloke whose first thought was always the well-being of his staff. For him to order us away from this Case meant that he had received a call from on high...higher up the chain. From some-one who always was looking for ways to pull the rug out from under our Chief!

It happened.

Another Turf war of sorts being waged by the hierarchy.

For kudos, publicity, influence and payback for slights of old.

We had plenty of work to catch up on even though there were no ongoing Homicide Cases. The bloody Murder Suicide deaths of that entire extended family in the west of the State had to be written up for the Coronal Enquiry that could be months off.

The 'Bodies in the Bags' Case had to be tidied up with all paperwork checked. All Forensic evidence prepared, catalogued and registered. Several meetings with DPP Officers were still

to be organised so that the Crown's Case for Trial was completely acceptable and exhaustive. This was the process that could be achieved in little time if one was to concentrate on it for a couple of days or so. Both partners working together, or it could be strung out, being attended to as we investigated several homicide cases concurrently.

No one knew of the degree of Office time required for these closing steps even on the simplest of cases.

Abbey indicated that we should step into his Office as we sauntered past to go to our desks.

"What do you think? On that body found in the gutter this morning?"

"Arrh...Olga Kralik nee Pavic...I guess she would have been known as Olga Pavic as it had been some six years since her former husband had been killed as he rode up the northern Motorway...it's not a Bikie 'hit' Boss, regardless of what the Gang Related guys want it to be. I can guarantee that...and I reckon that Joe agrees with me, though we haven't really discussed it in depth."

I was amazed at Mar's ability to remember the names of victims.

"You disagree, Joe?" A smile on his face. He always wanted to contest the unchallengeable.

I shook my head. I wasn't as certain as Mar on the reason for the killing and the dumping of the body in such a manner, even though I was leaning her way.

"I'm not as convinced as Mar, Boss...when her former husband was shot, there were three deaths of lowly soldiers of a rival Bikie gang who it was felt may have been involved in 'Bunny' Kralik's shooting murder...it was considered a fair and reasonable exchange...three soldiers for the death of a CEO of a rival gang...there were no other incidents as far as we were told of as part of the history...by the Major Crimes morons this morning...did you know Abbey, that kralik means rabbit in Czech...that was why he was called 'Bunny'..."

"Mmm...and 'twit' in Czech is *lind*..." Abbey butted in.

"Really??!!"

I was amazed at my Boss's knowledge. It took me some moments and a widening grin on both Abbey's and Mar's faces for me to realise that I had just been had.

"He's quick, is our Chief Investigator." Mar just had to get it in. "Getting back to the subject at hand...it is what, six years since the homicide of her ex... Bikies do not mull over a retributive attack for that long. It usually is a quick and decisive blow that leaves no-one in two minds as to the reason for the action...so her death is not related, as far as I am concerned. The manner of her death and body dump is not a usual method of Bikie

retribution or action in any case...this is a personal thing and not a rival gang's revenge for some slight that we are not aware of."

"I remember at the time of 'Bunny' Kralik's shooting death that there were some Officers who believed that it was possibly the work of Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski, who stepped over the aspiring 2IC...I can't remember his name...Bulek or Bullock or something similar...to take control of the White Skulls. In doing so, he also took control of Kralik's wife which some would say, only formalised a relationship that had existed covertly for some time."

Abbey added his recollections on an act that had occurred some six years previously. He never failed to amaze me.

"Perhaps he was tiring of the favours of our Olga...she had to have been a lot older than Alek which may have been a little...you know...disappointing, perhaps. An aging lover that was starting to grate."

"To my mind, Boss, that fits better than a rival gang's action for some reason that the Gang Related guys either don't know of or were not willing to divulge to us mere mortal Murder Cops."

"I'd go with the former, Mar. Let things settle for a while. I'll stir the pot behind the scenes and see what bubbles to the top...I wouldn't go too far away as I think that the case may find its way back to the rightful, more astute and clever Investigators than those clods in Major Crimes...what else have you got going?"

Nothing really, though you would never admit that to the Boss, no matter how much you respected him.

"Paperwork to catch up on, on the "Bodies in the Bags" Case for the DPP and a couple of others that we're dragging the chain on for future Coronal Enquiries."

"Nothing then, eh? But go finish up all your paperwork, as you never know when a Case will drop into your laps that might take up a lot more of your time than you would have thought in the beginning...OK?"

As it turned out, they were very prophetic words indeed!

## CHAPTER SIX

Mar and I had already knocked off for the day and had spent forty-five minutes down in the Sub-Basement Gym doing laps of the pool and enjoying the 'end of day' rub-down from two of a team of Masseuse that were now permanently employed by the Force.

A bloody positive thing.

We'd come back to our desks to collect our belongings before we headed home. I had three sets of Gym clothes that definitely needed a wash in a small Laundry Bag. Knowing me, I'll forget to take clean clothes the next day!

"Mar? Joe? Can you help us out here?" Abbey yelled from his Office as he looked as though, he too, was preparing to call it a night.

"Yes, Boss. I think that you should join us morning and evening down in the Gym." I replied.

He gave me a stony glare.

"A good idea Boss. You're slipping back into your previous custom...before your heart attack. A morning swim would be a good habit for you to get into, Abbey...and I can hear your Doctor agreeing." Mar added.

He looked from me to Mar.

"Funny you should mention that. My wife, Banjo, has been on my back of late...she seems to think that I'm putting on a bit too much weight and am crawling back into old habits of too much work and not enough downtime...I might take you up on that...but that is not what I need your help on...we have a body...and the Afternoon guys are flat out. You two have no Cases...so..."

"What's the overtime situation, Boss?"

"Back on. And so is the rule of at least a ten-hour break between shifts. OK? Leave you with it? Barry Samich has the details. Good evening. See you in the pool to-morrow evening."

Barry Samich was the Night Shift's indispensable Clerk. The heart and soul of the Office during the dark hours.

Our Clerk, Guy 'Hendo' Henderson's night-time equivalent.

His shift commenced at six in the evening and finished at six the next morning. If there was

a major Case that required his input in bringing the Day Shift guys across it, he could still be in the Office around mid-morning. On those occasions when that occurred, which was extremely rare, he looked like a wrung-out Bear. He was a huge man. Shoulders that meant that he had to sidle through a door opening. Now more drooped than in the old days. His back not as straight. A five O'clock shadow that looked more white than black then it had done in the old days. A voice that was gruff and grating, radioing an impatience for sloppy work or inattentiveness. And a lifetime of cigarette smoking.

He showed us two new Case Books and a Murder Book Folder that he had already prepared as we walked towards him.

"Sorry, guys. I don't like doing this to you, okay? It wasn't my idea. Really. Fair dinkum."

His grin indicated the truth behind the lie.

"OK...I may have hinted as much to Abbey...just a subtle hint." He admitted dolefully.

"Yeah, Sam. We believe you. Thousands wouldn't, believe me. What have you got?"

"Homicide by a single gunshot wound. A youth around twenty years of age. Getting out of his car at the front of his house...or his parents' actually. No known affiliation with any gang as far as we know, so you shouldn't have the Gang Related boys buzzing around your ears. OK?"

News travels fast in Office situations such as ours. Even the night staff had had run-ins with the Gang Related Crimes lads over the areas of responsibility of each section.

It would appear that the hierarchy of that Area was muscling for a greater share of the pie...some would say that they had plans that the Murder Squad be swallowed up into the Major Crimes portfolio.

It would never happen while DS Church still lived and breathed, but it could not be denied that the Vultures were circling.

As each day went by, our illustrious Leader's day of retirement edged closer!

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

It was still light as we turned into a quiet street in a leafy far south-western suburb of Sydney. It had taken us over an hour to travel from Parramatta to almost Campbelltown down the Motorway. Amongst the thousands of fellow drivers hurriedly returning home at a

snail's pace at the end of their day. All heading in the same direction.

Blue strobe lights from the LAC vehicles and the red of Ambulance lights hardly cast a shadow or a reflective glow.

It was the height of summer though the late daytime temperature had cooled to a pleasant thirty degrees!

It was all relevant when the noon temperature was just over the forty mark!

Half the street was cordoned off with Crime Scene tape. The usual gaggle of gawkers strained over the plastic tape as though they wanted a closer inspection. All of them would more than likely lose their weekly input of food if they did spy a bloodied victim laying on their front driveway.

As yet there wasn't the usual muddle of Media representatives. Perhaps a more news-worthy event was occurring several suburbs away that we were not privy to.

I went to hop out of the Unmarked, instead slumping quickly back into the front seat.

"What's up?" Mar enquired.

"You know how sometimes you have this flash of recognition? Remember that Case...oh...a year ago about...the two dogs...eating the Vic's body and signs were there that he may have been alive for the start of it...in that Housing Estate tucked in behind middle class suburbia?"

"Joe, don't remind me of that case. I had thought that I had placed it into a far recess of my mind...but I still have an occasional nightmare about it... Luke and Kestra Mohammed. They moved up to Queensland after they re-married. That was a lovely ceremony, wasn't it?"

I nodded my head. We had been asked to be witnesses at their wedding vows at the Registrar Generals. I was amazed once again at Mar's ability to shoot out names from cases that we had closed many years previously.

"You should know by now Mar, that that is not the right way to deal with a particularly gruesome murder investigation. Think about it, put it into perspective, remove it from your recall hard-drive and get on with living..."

"I had done that quite successfully, you twit...forgotten about it...until you brought it up! Why? And it is obvious that you haven't dealt with it satisfactorily either...why bring it up now?"

"I don't know...something about this...setting...reminds me of that case."

"The only good thing about that case, Joe, was the fact that you found your biological father...and Kestra and Luke went off to Queensland as a couple very much in love and extremely happy."

"There you go...see...good things can well come from bad things."

"You're a complete twat at times, Joe Lind. You know that?"

I stood beside the Unmarked. Stretched. It had been a long day and was only going to get longer.

I looked around at the street, noticing a small Park almost opposite the crime scene address. A slight slope down from street level. Really, it looked more like an area that was dotted with quite a few dense copses of Sydney Blue Gum stands. Crime Scene tape was stretched from several tree trunks on the farther side of the Park adjacent to a dead-end street with several Forensic personnel on all fours within its boundary. Several more were combing a stretch of roadway on the other far-side of the Park. This close on two hundred metres away.

The Shooter's position and his vehicle I thought, as we headed towards the main crime scene area.

Two hundred, maybe two fifty metre distance from the Shooter to his Vic.

Not a hard shot.

A silenced rifle. Hard to get in Australia but if you want one, then it was only a money problem...unless you were on the side of law and order.

That thought whizzed across my brain to surprise me.

We scooted under the tape, identifying ourselves to the Constable in charge of the Log-in Book and dutifully signed in, making small talk as we did so

"Who's Lead Forensic Pathologist?" I asked the young Constable.

"Umm....Murray Rivers. It's his baby...his and his two Assistants."

"Murray? I thought that he got out? On sickness benefit?"

Marge shrugged her shoulders.

She was little help.

So much for discussions on work related matters, as pillow talk between her and Muscles.

Tellie and I gossiped something fierce after the event.

A shallow substitute for a smoke and a can of Coke, as in the old days!

That bought a smile to my face, causing Marge to enquire silently with a rise of her eyebrows on what may have amused me. I shook my head in reply. It wasn't worth the backlash in the telling.

Murray Rivers was for a lot of years, the blond-haired boy of the Pathology Department within the City Morgue precinct. He had been the irrepressible Bernie Ford's second understudy for a good many years. Second in line to Muscles. It was felt that when the lovable old man retired, it would be Murray who would most likely fill his shoes. He or Muscles. A lively competition. It was said that Murray was indeed a pure Artisan when dissecting bodies during post mortems. Better than Bernie Ford, it was rumoured. Instead, even before Ford took up a post with the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Murray had succumbed to some form of viral infection that laid him low and hospitalised him for a number of months.

It would appear that his partner and he had purchased an old vacant Factory building in one of the city's inner suburbs and had plans afoot to turn it into four salubrious Town Houses and a Penthouse Apartment for their purpose, retaining much of the elements of the old structure. Doing much of the work themselves. His partner had been a Carpenter in his early years going on to become an award-winning Architect. Because the building had been vacant for such a long time, the place was infested with vermin. Cats in particular, who regularly used a pile of sand as their lavatory. Poor Murray had contracted Toxoplasmosis. While his partner had shown very little discomfort as he had also contracted the disease, Murray had gone downhill surprisingly rapidly with the bacteria attacking his vital organs.

He was lucky to be alive!

That was close on two years ago!

Some people get it and their immune system fights it off, while those who have an impaired immune system can find themselves in dire straits.

We stopped for some moments looking at the Vic's car parked neatly in the driveway. Its driver's door open.

"That the Vic's car?" Mar asked the fingerprint Technician who was deftly handling a bulbous brush across the ducoed surface. Grey smudge marks displayed her progress.

"Yeah...." She replied with a cut-off giggle. "Not a young bloke's ride one would have thought." She grinned her replied as she straightened up and stretched her back.

"Yer right about that. These have got the name of the Granny Ride...so my son calls them."

The Tech giggled.

"The door was open?"

"It was when we got here, so one can only presume that. It would seem that he was blown away as he stood beside the door. Didn't even have enough time to close it and lock up, which would be a condition living around these parts." She looked at the surrounding street and its neat line of houses.

We nodded at this as we stood there for some moments. Every-one was a Theorist at Murder Scenes.

"Found anything interesting?"

"Yeah...a couple set of prints that shouldn't be there...we've done a complete family set for elimination purpose. Exemplars. I'll be running what I've lifted from the car...inside and out...through the Laptop as soon as I've finished the outside shell...I'll let you know if anything comes up of importance."

We'd been dismissed. I nodded my head and wandered behind the tarpaulin screen that indicated the body position.

"Murray...Muscles told me that you're back on deck. How are you?"

"Recovered and raring to go. How are you, Marge? I hear that you and Muscles are practically married...you deserve one another, you know. Both of you are special people."

This was a complete surprise to me. I was shocked to be the last to learn.

"Whoa, Murray...let's not get ahead of ourselves. Marriage has never been or will it ever be, an item of discussion in our relationship. Guaranteed!" This said with some force.

I was somewhat relieved.

Murray Rivers nodded his head and gave a chuckle. A 'gotcha' look his reply.

"Huh...Muscles seems to be just as adamant...scared of it, both of you!"

He held up his hands in surrendered. A smile on his face. Mar had that black look that indicated that she was close to 'blast off'. She seemed rather thin-skinned on the matter.

"Mar, c'mon. Chill out...he was having a go at you. That's all."

If the truth be known, I have never been a fan of Murray Rivers. There was something that bugged me about him. Mar would hazard a guess and say that it was because he was gay...and had been open about it since year one. It wasn't that at all. I had got on well with his partner on the odd occasion that we had socialised. In fact, he was an intelligent, very funny person who could talk confidently on just about any subject...but Murray...he was a bit of a close-minded kind of guy, which always made me wonder what the attraction was between the two. His partner had to be almost twenty years his senior.

"Joe...it's been awhile. You two don't often do the night shift work...you trying a bit of experience of the 'Dark Side'?"

We all had a giggle at that.

Murray was a Star Wars freak.

It was said that he even had a life-sized replica of 'Acey-ducey', or what-ever his name was, in the middle of his Lounge Room.

"You moved in yet?"

"No... which reminds me. We're having a house-warming party the last Saturday of the month. Come along. Seven O'clock. A bottle of Red as a gift. Nothing else. Bring your latest, Joe."

I nodded my head. It sounded as though I had a revolving door of relationships in my life. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"Tellie Sanchez, isn't it? A good woman who deserves a little sunshine in her life. That AO ex-husband of hers was a complete dirt-bag...I had several run-ins with the guy tossing his weight around to prove that he was some sort of power-man...or something. It doesn't wash with me."

Mar seemed to read something in my expression.

She quickly got the subject back to the Vic, who lay in a crumpled and uncomfortable looking manner. I guess he wouldn't complain. His eyes were wide open as though he had just been told he'd won one hundred million dollars. An arm splayed above his head. The other awkwardly under his body. One leg straight out. The other twisted and broken. A blood stain on the T-shirt in the middle of his chest. A neat bullet hole through his T-shirt, though the material was twisted towards his back.

"A single shot. Neat. He was standing beside the open door of his car. I'd say he turned...something attracted his attention...a noise...a sound, perhaps. Maybe the Shooter yelled out his name to force the guy to turn to offer a full body silhouette. He turned. The

bullet hit with such force it threw him what? Three metres to here...a single shot. About one eighty, maybe two hundred metres away. We're pretty sure of the Shooter's position. The charge would be suitable for a line of sight shot of at least five times that distance. I'd say that half his back is missing. The bullet exiting with such force I doubt that we'll ever find it. Sorry. It seemed to have glanced off his vertebrae, taking two out as it passed through. If he wasn't dead, then he would have been paralysed before bleeding out or dying of the sheer shock. I doubt that he would have felt much."

With that he and his two Assistants rolled the body over onto a clean Autopsy Sheet.

"Fuck!" Was all I could say. His back was a bloodied mess. His spine and several ribs were exposed...a shoulder blade was evident as though it had been cracked in half. That image that I had as I had started to climb out of our Unmarked came back to me. The bile began to climb up the back of my throat. I staggered away from the area and spewed up every meal that I had had that day.

It had been years since I had lost meals at Murder Scenes.

I couldn't give a reason why it should have occurred at this one. Perhaps the meat in the sandwich that I had for lunch was a bit off, I tried to tell myself.

I wasn't very convincing.

Mar didn't believe a word of it!

"You okay? I'll get you a bottle of water from the Forensic Van." Mar offered as she scurried away.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

I sat for some time on the front seat of the Forensics Van. Embarrassed at my perceived weakness.

"You okay now?" Mar inquired.

I nodded my head. Had another large gulp of water. The taste of bile still remained.

"Yeah. I've seen enough of the Vic. Let's take a walk down to the Shooter's position."

We walked slowly to the area encircled by Crime Scene tape that stretched from tree trunk to tree trunk enclosing an area of some ten metres square.

"Can you stay out Detectives, until we have cleared the area?" The Lead Forensic Technician requested as she came over to us. "We're almost finished.... hello, Joe. How are you?"

Tellie and I were the talk of the Forensic Laboratory, so it would seem. I didn't know the Lead Technician by name though I had seen her at plenty of Murder Scenes and in the halls of the Forensics Lab when-ever I had a reason to visit the Eighth Floor. Usually just to spend a minute or two with Tellie.

"Anything conclusive?" Mar asked.

"We've got a bit of trace, though nothing that would identify the shooter, just clarify his position. We've picked up some oil trace from a position that may have been the Shooter's vehicle...or may not have been. Apparently, the Cul-de-sac is the local 'Kiss and drop' as it is just a few steps from the Railway Station entrance, so there'd be plenty of vehicular presence, one would imagine. We've just taken a call of a vehicle fire...less than two kilometres from here...a white van. Stolen about a week ago. Plates stolen yesterday from the local Shopping Centre car park about a kilometre from here. Lay a bet that it is the Shooter's get-away vehicle. The hit thought out as though these guys knew what they were doing...not much else. Several shoe prints, an indentation of where the Shooter lay...even a slight indentation of the spent cartridge which would indicate a semi-automatic rifle...more than likely a 7.6 X 50 projectile. NATO uniform requirement. Apparently, no sound of a shot was heard by any of the neighbours according to the LAC Uniforms which would indicate a rifle fitted with a silencer...a professional piece...a professional job."

"Why would a young kid, maybe twenty years of age, facilitate the need for a professional Sniper's kill?... and with a charge that blows half his back to smithereens?"

"That's why we're here, Joe. To find out."

I poked my tongue out at her.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

We walked to the front door of the Vic's house, knocked on the open door and walked in without waiting.

The entire family sat in the Lounge.

Several Uniforms stood at the doors that lead from the room giving the impression of the family being incarcerated in their own home. All those seated had red eyes. The women,

there were three, were still sobbing silently. Two large men in full Muslim robes sat beside the women. A female Constable was fussing over coffee mugs.

"Would you like a cuppa, Detectives?" She asked as she headed presumably, towards the Kitchen.

"Yes...arrh...thank you. Yes, please." I needed something stronger than water to rinse the taste of the bile that was still discernible in my mouth. "Arrh...Mr. Shatra. Basra Shatra?"

A rotund man stood. Shook our hands as we introduced ourselves.

A shiny, bald head. Dark eyebrows. Intelligent dark eyes. A nose that fitted the face even with its slightly flattened appearance. A kind mouth that was used for laughter and song, not grief. He wore a sweat shirt and clean track pants. Thongs on his feet.

"Um...Doctor Shatra. My wife is also a Medical Doctor. We share a practise adjacent to the local Shopping Centre..." He indicated a slim woman seated in between two other younger women. She was clear skinned. It looked as though she still had her day clothes on. Expensive blouse. Tight mid-length skirt. I presumed that because there was no sight of any religious artefacts or any sign of hiding of hair, that they were conservative Muslims. The younger women sitting either side of her were dressed in modern, western attire. Make-up. Jewellery. Lustrous dark hair that fell to the shoulders of one. A short 'Bob' cut the other. Both held the hands of the older woman tightly.

I assumed that they were daughters of the Doctors. There was that family appearance in the faces. The ease in the way that they sat beside the older woman.

"Can we ask you and your wife a few questions? I know that it is a difficult time, but we need to talk to you."

"Yes... um... I understand. Please, come out onto the back porch."

We followed him out to an expansive rear deck that partially surrounded a kidney shaped pool. Around half of the deck had triangular shade clothes that protruded out over a section of the pool. He gestured for us to sit, calling out to several women whom we noticed in the Kitchen as we passed through, to bring out coffee and biscuits.

He gently showed his wife to a seat.

"I'm sorry Detectives. My wife has taken the loss of our son rather badly...I too, am distraught, but as the head of the family, I must show more...um...you know...control."

We all sat. Waited for the coffee and the biscuits. Tim Tams. My favourites. Their inclusion surprised me as I expected a more exotic example. Something from the 'Homeland' perhaps.

My face must have displayed surprise.

"I came to this country when I was ten years of age, Detective. It was hard at first. My mother and father. Six siblings. Both my parents worked hard at two measly jobs each to ensure that we all had a good education...that is why they immigrated...more for us children than themselves. I met Sophia, my wife while at University. We were both doing our Medical Degree. What can I say...she is the most wonderful woman in all the world...apart from my beloved mother of course..." He said this with a sad smile, as he took his wife's hand in his. "Sophia's parents also came out here before she was born...from Iran. Again, more for their future children, so they may have a better chance at life. Sophia was born here in Australia. Only her and her sister. Her father was killed in a boating accident on the Hawkesbury. He was into fast boats. Had a very successful Petrol Station and Mechanics Workshop. The best in the area, actually."

He poured the strong black coffee out into cups for us all.

"Please help yourselves. Cream. Milk. Sugar. We...um...we have six beautiful children of our own. Michael is the second youngest. He is in his second last year at University. Engineering. A good boy. We have been blessed with our children, all well behaved. Respectful. Law-abiding. Good Australian citizens as you would expect. As you have no doubt comprehended, we are Muslim though the Islamic teachings are not...how would you say...not righteously adhered to...you would possibly describe us as...non-practising Muslims...Michael's younger brother and his older sister in line, still live at home...the other three are in various parts of the world at this moment though I would imagine that they are making arrangements to return as quickly as possible after I told them of this tragedy...have you any idea, Detectives? Why?"

"Not at this stage. It is still early in the investigation. No. We need to ask you some questions, as difficult and painful as that may be...your son's friends? And have you any idea why some-one would want to kill your boy in such a manner?"

The patriarch of the family shook his head.

"No... we know most of his friends. He is the type to remain loyal to those that he has befriended from early High School...or in his part-time job when he worked at McDonalds for a number of years...to help pay his way through University himself. There would be a small band of around half a dozen I suspect..."

He looked to his wife for concurrence.

She nodded.

"On hot afternoons, they would congregate around the pool...with his two sisters and their friends too, it could develop into quite a party as you can imagine...not too much

alcohol...never...we would not allow that in this home...but the music at times could be quite annoying...you know...thump, thump, thump! They were never any trouble though. If one of the neighbours ever complained, which was rare and only when it was getting rather late, they would always call it quits for the night. No troubles. If you require a list of his friends, then his sister would be able to provide that information a lot better than I...it would all be on their smart phones...as you can understand, there was a couple of blossoming romances...nothing too serious amongst the group...they'd always go out as a group...as to having any idea why he was shot...honestly, Detectives, I have absolutely no idea...perhaps mistaken identity maybe."

He looked to his wife for support.

She vaguely nodded her head, agreeing with her husband's sentiments.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

We interviewed every person of the family that were present. Even the extended family as by this stage, several brothers and sisters of the two Doctors were crowding out onto the Deck area.

Friends of Michael Shatra also turned up to offer their condolence.

The consensus was that no-one had an inkling as to why Michael should have his life taken at such a young age and in such a manner. It was a complete mystery to all persons that we interviewed. The common theme.

A couple of the long-term friends did offer one piece of advice that differed from the family view. That is, that Michael over the past six months or so, had become a little...less friendly...not wanting to join in with the weekly group outings...was more aloof...more...introspective...though none saw that as a problem as, throughout his life, he had had these moody sessions before. Where he seemed to prefer his own company. But these 'sessions' as it was said, lasted only weeks before he was back to his old party-clown self. It was always put down to the pressure of studying, exams or girlfriend problems...that is, his bad luck in never finding a deep relationship. They were always little flings...never lasting for that long, so one close mate divulged.

As we made our way from the house after looking through Michael's bedroom where we found nothing that would not look out of place in any twenty-year old youth's bedroom, Mar muttered out the corner of her mouth that perhaps the lad was having gender issues. Sexuality diaspora.

"Bloody hell, Mar... that seems to be always the answer, isn't it?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

It was now dark. Several generators purred away, lighting up and denoting the areas where figures still congregated, though Michael's body had been removed some time before.

"When you packing it in?" I asked the first figure I passed. Not noticing who it was. The little Hatchback was being loaded onto a Flat-top for its delivering to the Forensic Vehicle area that was adjacent to the City Morgue allotment.

"Just about now, actually. We'll leave a skeleton staff here until the morning when we'll give it another going over..."

It was the middle-aged Fingerprint Specialist who had been tickling the duco of the vehicle with a large bulbous hairy brush.

"...we...arrh...we got a couple of hits actually. A full palm and fingerprint impression above the driver's door...as though the person was leaning one handed on the vehicle as he bent down to speak to the driver...and another good print on the nearside rear pillar...a left and right hand print on the front mudguard...as though a person was leaning against the mudguard listening to the words of the person whose prints were above the door. Pushing themselves off the car by placing both hands on the mudguard."

Theories that I didn't hold much weight to. We all could visualise why a person's hand-print was on a particular location of a vehicle and then postulate what a person was doing who belonged to the hand-print.

"These people were around the vehicle at the same time?" I asked.

"Well, I can never ascertain from a set of prints the time-frame on when they were left on a particular surface...or whether all were left at or around the same time...but the positioning would indicate a scenario...and hopefully one day that information may be available to us, along with DNA trace taken from the oils left as the fingerprint sample...one day, perhaps."

"A theory?" Mar broke in.

She nodded her head sheepishly.

"Um..." She appeared to understand that she may have over-stretched herself. "Um...I'll send you down the full profiles when I get back to the Office to-night. I guess you guys will be calling it quits yourselves...you are normally on Day Shift, so you're doing a 'double'...surprising identities really. When you think about it."

"You want to keep us in suspense?"

"Yes...um...sorry, not intentionally. I just want to check it, that's all...sometimes these cyber-sent details can get it a bit wrong...I want to check the records back at the Office, OK? You'll know soon enough on your Day Shift roster to-morrow some time...the Vic won't mind the time delay...and there's bugger all you can do at this time of night with the unconfirmed information."

I glanced at my watch.

It was past eleven.

Inside another hour and it was midnight.

I didn't feel as though I was losing sleep. I was wide awake and raring to go. The adrenalin would slowly dissipate and sleep may be a little hard to come by. A warm Scotch and milk and a Valerian Forte tablet should do the trick, I thought to myself.

I was surprised though, wondering where the time had sped to!

We wouldn't be in the office until around mid-day to-morrow by the time that we made it home and allowed for the minimum ten hours between shift times. Including travel time off a Crime Scene site.

Nights like these, we had come to an agreement. Tessie was one of those people who, when subjected to broken sleep, would not function at all well the following day.

It looked as though I would be sleeping on the Lounge in the main part of the house to-night. My late entry would definitely not wake the kids!

They all slept like logs! Unfortunately, Tellie didn't and was like a rabid dog if woken at some ungodly hour.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

The promised e-mail from the Fingerprint Technician was not forthcoming when Marge and I hit the Office at eleven AM the following morning.

I pondered on its absence.

After the both of us had bought the Murder Book details up to date, we talked over the Case

to date. Nothing popped out. Nothing pointed to an obvious solution. A possible guilty party. We put that down to it being early days in the investigation.

"You know, Joe...I've been thinking about what I said about that Bikie mole homicide...the more that I think about, the more I am convinced that it was not a rival gang hit. They do not concentrate on the partners of rival Gang members to seek revenge. They do not dispose of a body in that fashion and they do not bash a woman to death in that way...it is not their style...it's against their moral compass."

"You saying that those turds have a moral compass, Mar? That should be cut out and framed as the 'Quote of the Week.' Besides Mar, we do not have the Case, remember?" I replied curtly.

"I was just thinking aloud, Joe. That's all...no need to get your knickers in a knot...our case, OK? The Shooter sure had balls. Alright, he was partly hidden by those bushes and trees but it was still broad daylight...that pathway through the Park...sure it was on the opposite side of the Park from where he lay, but it sure took bloody balls."

I picked up the thread and ran with it. We did this exhaustively to the point of boredom during any investigation that we were involved in. Other staff in close proximity would just shake their heads or wonder aloud at whether we really heard and took in what each of us was saying. It appeared that we didn't!

"Two or more were involved. I'd say a minimum of three. A driver, possibly a separate guy who was the Spotter and the Gunman himself...and I agree, the whole operation took balls. That pathway leads to another Right-of-way on the other side of that Cul-de-Sac that they were parked in. A pathway that leads to the Railway Station...about three hundred metres further on. Plenty of people would use that path as a means of walking from their residence to the Station each and every day. Like clockwork. We should get the Uniforms out there to canvass each and every person that got off the train and walked along that Pathway within a certain time-frame. Some-one must have seen something."

"What for? We're pretty sure that that burnt out shell was the van in question. Found what? Less than two kilometres away. The Uniforms canvassed the area around the streets where they must have changed vehicles...no-one saw anything...what are your Train-goers going to see? Apart from the van parked at the kerb...the obvious?"

"The number of guys in the van. What they looked like...did they see the Shooter...that's another reason for at least a minimum of three guys involved. At least one would need to keep an eye out for any one walking along that Path...and all the guys would have had to be radioed up to keep in touch with one another. That also points to a professional operation."

"OK. OK. I'll get the Uniforms to question every person who walks that Path from the Station, let's say for about thirty minutes before the homicide to the same time-frame after

the hit. What are you going to do?"

"Forensics..."

"Joe, if you continually go up to see Estelle, you'll get her and yourself into trouble."

"Mar, I'm going to ring them...about our Sniper Death. OK?"

After five minutes of talking on the phone I gave up in disgust.

"Bloody hell! This is impossible. No-one was willing to talk to me on the case citing that it was the Night Shift personnel who were responsible for that case. It would have to wait until the Night Shift guys came on. No amount of explaining that we were the Lead Detectives on the Case but that we were Day Shift personnel would resolve the issue...it wasn't their turf, so one of them stated! Bloody Hell. We're gunna get this bullshit all the way through until the bloody case is solved with us working double shifts more than likely!"

"Not really, Joe. Calm down and think about it. We'll clear it with Abbey. We commence an hour later than our usual roster-on time. We knock off an hour later. We do our usual one hour down in the Gym. We come back here and clock on for another hour and communicate with the Night Shift guys then. Problem solved by the superior Detective. We maybe work an hour, an hour and a half later than our required daily roster, but late enough to be able to converse with the night shift guys in Forensics if need be...it shouldn't be a long-term arrangement, I wouldn't have thought."

She fluttered her eye-lashes at me.

A smug look on her face.

I felt like taking out my service revolver, leaning across the expanse of our two desk widths, putting the barrel up her nose and pulling the trigger. She seemed to read my mind.

"Don't even think about it, Joseph Lind. Not ever!"

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

"Is that Detective Lind? This is Gloria Burgess up in Forensics. Fingerprint Section. Your Sniper case of the other day. I said that I'd get back to you with an e-mail on those fingerprints that I lifted from the Vic's vehicle. Sorry about that. I was called out on a Smash and Grab. It took longer than expected. I'm about to send down the info that I promised you. Will you be there for a while?"

"We're over our allotted time. Could you send it down and we'll look at it to-morrow morning?"

"Yep. Will do, but I'll write it up as the full Report for the DPP Case when it reaches that stage. You can attach it to your Murder Book. Let's say by the end of my shift. OK?"

"Fine. I'll peruse it first thing to-morrow morning. If need be, I'll e-mail you back with any questions. This is a bit ponderous with me working day and you, night...like a lot of Cop marriages I suppose."

"Mine included, Detective...we learn to live with it. Good night to you."

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

"Joe? We've got an early Call-out. Another Sniper death. A young Muslim lad. This time a known hot-head...we've been given the Case because of the similarities to our other 'Sniper' Case...pick you up in fifteen."

It was like old times again. I rolled over, giving Estelle a good morning kiss as I did.

"Work?"

"Nah, my lover just rang. She has the itches. Needs my expertise."

"Huh, good luck to her, she'll need more than your expertise to get rid of itchy feet. Don't you dare come back here with Athletics Foot or some such highly contagious condition..."

She smacked me on the bum as I rolled out of bed.

"I'll make you a coffee and a couple of pieces of toast while you have a shower...Bacon and Egg sandwich perhaps? Enough time for anything else?"

I so wanted to stay in bed and oblige the lady.

"Bloody hell...all these females wanting a piece of me...."

"You're that good?" She asked as she rolled out the other side of the bed. Beautiful in her nakedness.

"If I must say so myself..." I replied with a smug look on my face.

That earned me a pillow swung in my direction. A giggle and a scream as I launched myself across the bed.

I missed her by inches which was just as well as I would still be in bed long after Mar had come and gone.

"Bacon and egg toasted sandwich with tomato sauce would be superb.... though it pales into insignificance when even a 'thoughtie' is contemplated!"

"Dissatisfied again. You men have got to learn how to keep a lady happy, otherwise I'm outa here."

She again slapped me on my bare bum as I headed for the shower.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

Mar grumbled all the way to the Murder site about the smell of a bacon and egg sandwich in the car and how unthoughtful I had been in not providing one for her.

We drove back down the Campbelltown Motorway.

Rolled into a small industrial area and down a wide concrete roadway with large Warehouse buildings and Industrial Plants on either side of the road. Parking was at a premium with not a space available at the entire length of kerb-side. The bar-lights of cop cars, vans and Forensic vehicles highlighted the crime scene.

Who needed a GPS when you had these beacons of lights?

"Mmm...we're only a couple of streets from Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski's place of business."

"What? How do you know that, Joe?"

"I looked up the records."

"You are the one who accuses me of running off at a tangent. It's not our Case you tell me, while you go around behind my back looking things up...jeez!"

"Just thought I'd check for future reference...and it was a rather quiet time so I decided to check."

"You decided to check...Christ, Joe Lind...you're a bloody twat! I suppose you'd like to call

in at some stage...would I be right on that point?"

"Wouldn't hurt none...and we're in the area...it's close by...one or two streets over, actually."

Mar let out an exasperated breath as she got out of the Unmarked. Shaking her head in frustration. She gave me a sideways glance. I couldn't for the life of me, work out her reason for such a display of frustration!

Both of us stooped under the Crime Scene tape that was strung between the entry and exit gates of the Industrial complex. It was a huge food Distribution and Warehousing building, part of which was a large refrigerated section. We signed in and walked down the sloping driveway towards the front of the building. A huge staff parking area was off to our left. Ample large Gum Trees gave shade and dropped gum onto the roof-lines of vehicles parked under them. Several cars had blue tarps or similar grey covers stretched across the roof-lines and bonnets. The Owners fastidious about their steel and plastic investments.

The Staff Entry doorway was blocked off.

A white canvas tent with two sides down squatted in front of the doorway.

A distraught man practically ran towards us.

"You the two Murder Squad Detectives? Yes? I'm Jim Sanders. The Operational Manager of this complex. We need to get around a dozen Semi-trailers out of here an hour ago loaded up for urgent deliveries to a couple of Supermarkets around here and a couple going down the Motorway as far as Goulburn and several towns in between. When can we get approval to let those trucks out of here...it is imperative that they be permitted egress immediately. Understand?"

"Mister Sanders, I'm Detective Marjory Hendricks. My partner Joseph Lind. As soon as our investigation is complete and forensics have finished with the site, then normal traffic flows maybe recommenced."

"How long would that be?"

"Could be an hour or three. Could be that in days."

"Days!!?...no way! I want your boss's number immediately."

"Understand Mister Sanders. This is a now a Crime Scene. A Murder Investigation. Nothing and no-body moves from this site until we say so. Understand me, Mister Sanders. Nothing moves off this site until we give the go ahead...surely an alternate route off the site is open to you...an emergency route. Those trucks may be able...I repeat...maybe able to be driven off the site after they have been fully examined and the drivers interviewed...you can ring

the Police Building switchboard at Parramatta and asked to be transferred to DS Church, the Murder Squad Head."

"You suspect one of my drivers? And no, those front gates are it. In and out."

"Everyone on-site has to be questioned. Now, if you'll excuse us, we'll organise the local Uniform Constables to begin those interviewing processes so that everything can get back to normal as quickly as possible. Mister Sanders, no-one leaves this site without our prior knowledge and without us interviewing them beforehand. It may be good policy for you to tell your staff as such. OK? What are your staff numbers, Mister Sanders?"

He shook his head several times, confused as to the sudden question.

"Umm...arrh...Warehouse staff, twenty-two...no... twenty-one now. Of those, the majority are Forklift drivers...about twelve. Office, twelve. Dispatch and Orders, ten. Drivers, twenty including four relief who usually sit on their arses all day playing cards, but it is a Union requirement. With Cleaners, three and Sick Bay Attendants, two, one Mechanic in the Workshop with a Labourer Off-sider....and an Outdoor staff of four with five Security officers, if every-one showed up for work on a given day, the total staff numbers for the day shift would be about eighty. Plus, me and my Assistant Manager. We share a PA. The night shift and dog shift have about a third of that number...it's a big concern that has to run like clockwork with no disruptions."

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

"Caramine...Carmie, you're up early."

"So are you, Joe. The lovely Estelle Sanchez kick you out of bed being sick and tired of your famous Dutch Ovens."

She laughed at her own joke.

She and I had a very open-ended relationship some time back.

When she got an itch that needed scratching, she'd call in her number one man of the time.

Me.

It suited us both and had been a good healthy relationship that resulted in some very tiring week-ends!

"Usaffa Mohammed. Local boy. Known as a bit of a hothead. Has form for assault. Concealed weapon charges. Drug possession. Small stuff. Shot in the back with a single shot. Death came quick. The bullet passed through and embedded itself into the Staff Entry door. Tore out his chest as it passed through his body...we're about to turn him over. Want to see? No? I'm not looking forward to it, either. The bullet high velocity. High charge. Would make a mess at the exit point. I don't think that they have identified the Shooter's position...if they haven't as yet, I doubt that they will...that's about it. Oh! The Vic's vehicle. We'll tray it to Vehicle Impoundment. The Forensic and Fingerprint Techs are doing a work-up on it at the moment.... but we'll do a better job back at the Office."

She meant the Forensics Vehicle Yard out the back of the Coroner's Office at Glebe. They'd pull the car apart. In a situation like this, I had no idea why. Maybe as a practise thing or to wipe away the hours, perhaps.

"How far would you say the Shooter was away from the Vic?"

"Can't even guess at that, Joe. Sorry. As I said, a high velocity round. A high charge. Without doubt, some sort of specialised Sniper Rifle. Could be a military style weapon...which I doubt, as they are very difficult to obtain here in Australia...or a Police Issue Sniper Rifle. Has a smaller range for obvious reasons. The ones that I've seen...the SWAT guys have a large arsenal of them... they're semi-automatic. Some of the Army types are bolt action but they too, have semi-automatic types. Silencer fitted though that reduces the range significantly. The SWAT ones can also be fitted with a silencer. The effective range usually around four hundred to six hundred max. The specialised military grade sniper rifle when not fitted with any form of noise suppression device? Around two kilometres but hits have been made and confirmed at a greater range than that. Check with the SWAT guys. Their Leader likes to brag about his toys... um... better known as the TOU. The Tactical Offensive Unit. Out at Redfern in the old Police Training facility. The old Mounted Stables area."

"You seem to know a bit about them." Mar butted in.

"Yeah...well...I'm what you would say, a bit of a nut when it comes to armament...my partner and I belong to a Gun Club...it's become our shared...let's say...hobby."

"I didn't know that, Carmie." I commented.

"You were never into pillow talk, Joe. You always fell asleep, you dog!"

Mar and she enjoyed a laugh together at my expense.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

We were out of there inside two hours.

The body removed.

Crime Scene tape taken down.

The Vic's car removed for a more exhaustive examination back at the Vehicle Forensic Workshop.

No-one saw anything.

Heard nothing.

Neither the Uniforms or ourselves got an itchy nose while interviewing the staff. We in fact, only interviewed the Office Personnel while the local LAC Uniforms did the honours on the rest of the staff.

We heard rumblings from Uniforms and the Forensic people that pressure was exerted from on high to leave the address as quickly as possible.

Abbey, by his silence, was never going to bend to the implied wishes of those higher up the food chain who felt that they had sole responsibility in such matters.

We would receive the dribbles of information and reports on the morning's procedures over the coming weeks from the LAC Constables who had done the bulk of the Interviews. Badly written reports. Bad spelling and even worse English. Good grammar, spelling and a modicum of being able to put into words the daily performance of an Officer, obviously not a prerequisite in the hiring of people for the Police Force of to-day!

We took a small detour to visit the Workshop business of the current Leader of the White Skulls Bike gang.

It was never going to be out of our way!

The Panel Beating business was the largest by far in a long Industrial Building of some vintage. The Common driveway that separated two mirror image developments having a smattering of parked vehicles. One of those Roll-out awnings attached to the outside wall of the complex and normally associated with Caravans protected a gleaming Harley-Davidson. Two other bikes kept it company. They both lacked the appeal and glamour of the big bike.

"Jeez-sus! You bloody Coppers have got a bloody hide! A shot is fired and you immediately

think of us innocent Bike Riders...ya think it was us? Wanting to nail us for the caper? I ain't been involved in no shooting for yonks...ya hear me?"

"Was that a confession, Alek?" Mar asked. "Concerning Bunny's demise some six, maybe seven years ago now?"

A smile on her face.

Confusion on his.

He had over-stepped himself.

Again!

"What time did you hear the shot, Alek?"

"Wot? No bloody way...ya not gunna plant this onto me. Do ya trick with that GSR test on me. It'll show that I ain't fired a gun in bloody years...go on, ya bloody cops. Do ya tests!"

Career criminals seemed to know all the right words. All the protocols and procedures that were required when, and where. It made you wonder why they insisted in pursuing their criminal activities as being nabbed was always on the cards. And they bloody-well knew it!

"What time did you say that you heard the single shot? It was a single shot, wasn't it, Alek?"

"Yeah...nah. I didn't hear nuffin'...so's ya can lay off with ya tricky questions try'n to trick me up. Piss off. Ya need a Warrant or something...before ya can come onto my property."

"This Apron area is Common Property, Alek. Like Public property...and you only rent your couple of Bays, don't you?"

We were standing at the large roller shutter opening into his Industrial Unit. A standard four Bay Unit. Large by all accounts when you looked at the neighbouring units. Mostly One or Two Bay Unit businesses.

A large sign on the front façade of this section of the long building declared that this was the premises of :-

***'PRO-SHINE PANEL BEATING AND STREET CAR MODIFICATIONS'.***

Proprietor A. Pojaski and Associates.

It looked to be a profitable business. One that the White Skulls maybe heavily involved in. Stolen vehicles. Parts. What-ever else that could come to mind. Money Laundering

a definite!

"No stolen vehicles inside?"

"Ya think I'm stupid or somethink?"

He could be called that I suppose, as he could have ended the conversation at any time. He did not need to talk to us. It was as though he wanted to give the impression that he was afraid of no-one. Not even the Cops.

"Ya'll need a search warrant or somethink if'n you want to check out my premises."

He crossed his arms. Spread his legs and stood like some solid sentinel at the opening to his Aladdin's cave.

A young lad in dirty overalls walked up behind him.

"Boss? The phone."

"Who is it?"

"Dunno."

"OK."

The old Bikie walked back into the gloom of the Workshop.

"Um...your name, son."

He looked from Mar to I.

"Who's asking?"

He was still too young to pick us. That, or he was one ship short of a convoy.

He wore those caps that seemed to be popular amongst the Muslim youth.

I flashed my badge.

"Um...Murder Squad. Want do you want me for?"

"Your name, son."

"Atari El Marpeta. Everyone calls me Tony."

"Tony, eh? Do you know Michael Shatra? Usaffa Mohammed?"

I had no idea why I had even asked the question. Why I had even singled out the lad as Alek Pojaski had disappeared into the gloom and smell of the Panel Beating Shop to answer the phone.

"What if I do? What's it to youse coppers?"

The same talk as his Boss. It was contagious!

"They're both dead. Shot. Now, we can ask our questions of you and then leave after you have replied respectfully...or we can arrest you on suspicion of 'Withholding Information' that may have some implication in two murder enquiries. Take you to Parramatta and charge you. Keep you over the week-end locked up in a cell with other drunks, druggies and queers. Understand, Tony? It's your call. What's it to be?"

"Typical bloody coppers. Throwing your bloody weight around...when the Jihad commences in this god-forsaken land, you'll know how much weight we'll carry in the name of Allah."

"Until then, Tony. How do you know Shatra and Usaffa?"

His look of insolence and hatred was palpable.

"The Bookshop. The Shahada Book Store. In town. Campbelltown."

"They go there a lot?"

Alek "The Pole" walked back out of the gloomy interior of the Panel Beating Shop.

"Enough, Tony. You don't have to talk to them coppers..."

"Is Alek another Infidel who will suffer Allah's vengeance when the Jihad commences?" I asked sarcastically.

The young lad ignored the question. There was a look about him that was centuries old.

"Tony..."

Alek started to bring the Roller Door down, leaving us standing outside in the glare of the bright, hot sun. Before it was halfway down and still well above our heads, I walked up to Alek and eye-balled him. Nose to nose.

He stopped the screeching downward path of the Roller Door.

"Just so's you know Alek. Major Crimes and Gang Related Matters may not have twigged to you killing your partner, Olga Pavic, but my partner and I have you stitched up three ways to Sunday for the deed...got it?"

The startled look that crossed his face and then immediately disappeared said it all. We just had to prove the hypothesis.

As we drove out of the small Industrial Complex onto the Service Road, Mar nodded her head towards an Unmarked parked almost opposite the entranceway into the Complex.

"Yeah...I noticed them when we drove up. They can't make it more obvious even if they had a red and blue light bar on top of their vehicle."

"Don't acknowledge their presence Joe."

"Bugger that Mar. I'll lay ten bucks on them having taken our photo and telephoned in on us trespassing on their turf. You know how possessive they are of their Turf? Betcha."

I leaned across Mar as she slowly drove past. Gave them a little wave and a smile.

If looks could kill, I should be booking the Hearse right now.

The looks that they gave us was worth any hassles that our presence on their turf may engender in the near future.

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

"Misguided?"

"They perhaps may say the same thing about you."

"And the twain shall never meet."

"That's rather deep for you, Joe. You can even surprise me on occasions. Joe, I'd like to take a visit to the Police Armoury in Town. You know, Caramine Lees suggested that we find out a little more than we know on Sniper Rifles. What do you think? I think it's about time that we had a lesson in Basic Sniper Rifle types 101."

"What about that Bookstore, while we're in the area?"

"Jeezus, Joe. How many times do you need to be put on that bloody leash...it's not our turf."

"C'mon, Mar. There is the connection. The bloody Book Store. Both of our Victims frequented the Store by all accounts...which is our case, remember? A visit just to ruffle the feathers to see what may fly out."

"Let's do it tippy-toe, Joe. Let's do a little background on the Store before we go trudging through...you know? How we normally do it. Softly, softly. Slowly, slowly."

We hardly spoke to one another as Mar drove the car towards the CBD. Both of us seemingly lost in thought...or both of us having a dummy spit, determined not to be the first to speak or utter a word. Like two little spoilt brats!

We were permitted to park within the confines of the NSW Police Armoury at Surry Hills. It was just as well, as you'd be hard pressed to find a spot to park a bicycle such was the situation on the surrounding streets.

The Chief of the Armoury was in Town at the Police HQ Building on some important conference. His 2IC had accompanied him. Because of this, we were ushered into an Office beside the Police Museum and the Historical Armaments Section of the Armoury.

Members of the Public were allowed to view this excellent arsenal of historic and interesting artefacts of the NSW Police Force at selected times.

"You are the Lead Detectives on those two Sniper Deaths in the south-west suburbs over the past couple of days?"

Sergeant Dan Bailey was straight into it.  
No mucking about.

He had all the hallmarks of ex-military in his bearing, his speech and his short back and sides.

"The radio is full of the stories. The Shock Jocks are having a field day...it sure has set the cat amongst the pigeons as there is a major 'jaw' conference in at the HQ Building this afternoon. Every-one from DS up was given an hour to attend. I hear that there is even Australian Federal Police and ASIO Reps present...something big is going down...now...how can I help?"

"We're pretty sure that in both cases, a Sniper Rifle was used...not an old .303 or an M1 Carbine but a rifle that had a NATO bore of 7.62 apparently...and fitted with a silencer."

"That's a pretty specific and unusual piece of equipment out there in publicville. You sure it's a NATO bore?"

"That's what we've been told by the Forensic personnel on site at both crime scenes. A large

powder base would indicate it being powered for a much longer range than what was the kill zone. The power of the bullet, the mess it made as it exited both bodies, the position...admittedly less than a two hundred metre range for the first kill...the location of the Shooter of this morning's shooting cannot, or has not been determined at this stage, though the bullet was retrieved at the scene. 7.62 slug. Forensics are of the opinion that it possibly was some sort of Sniper Rifle used in both instances. We just want a basic 101 Lesson on such armament."

"You could have gotten that from a couple of fellows in Ballistics...in your building out at Parramatta."

Terse. No mucking about, as I said.

"Frankly, Dan, we didn't even think of that! We thought we'd come to those who know the piece and handle it every day...and we wanted an up-close look at the possible weapon, if you have something similar."

He gave a cut-off harrumph, giving the impression that he thought he had two silly twats sitting opposite him.

"What can I tell you...there is a difference between a military sniper rifle and those utilised by just about every Police Force the World over. The main variation between the two, is the question of distance, thus shell size and powder gram weight. A military weapon operates ideally in a range of seven hundred to fourteen-fifteen hundred metres. Though a successful kill in the two-kilometre range has been recorded on quite a few occasions. The record is two successive kills at a range of two point six seven kilometres. You need perfect conditions at that type of range. I think it was a Canadian in Afghanistan who made the kills...or maybe it was a Pommie bloke. I'm not sure now. The preferred weapon of choice varies enormously from country to country. We have several military style Sniper Rifles in the Armoury. The M-40A3 which is the adopted rifle of the US Marines and Navy Seals for their Sniper roles...it's a version of the M1 Carbine...I don't know why the Yanks do it. There's several superior military Sniper Rifles made by the Europeans, even the Russian military sniper rifle I think, is a better product, but no, they want their own 'brand'...look, sorry. Would you like a coffee? I'm due for one."

It was then that we realised that we hadn't stopped for Lunch.

I was famished.

We followed him along narrow, dog-legging corridors that were defined by large sandstone blocks up to a four-metre ceiling height into a spotless Kitchen and Dining Room.

Several of the table and chair settings were taken by Police Officers, male and female, in serious conversation or light hearted banter. Bailey indicated mugs, coffee, sugar and the

Fridge for milk. Boiling water unit. A Sandwich Dispenser. We left what change we had in an 'Honesty Box', an expected gesture for every visitor, so it stated in a wall mounted sign. After we had filled our mugs and grabbed a handful of biscuits, we followed him out to a rear courtyard.

A tiny enclosure surrounded by a high sandstone wall.

"This used to be the exercise yard of the old Goal..." He informed us with a smile.

He lowered himself into a chair with a sigh, indicating several chairs, gesturing for us to do likewise.

He took several sips of coffee.

Lit up a small Cigarillo.

"Yeah, I know. I should have given it away years ago. What with a nagging wife and four kids who go off every time I light up...this is the only area where we are permitted to do so. I'm down to two a day. Next is the patches. They're going to totally prohibit smoking in this area in a month or two...if you want a smoke, you'll be forced out onto the street which will also be prohibited if you are in uniform...there is only about three...maybe four of us left...a dying breed." He grinned at his own joke. "Now...the NSW Tactical Operations Unit, commonly and incorrectly named the Police SWAT Team...which is based here, uses a variety of weapons...or should I say, has a variety of weapons available to them, depending on the type and location of the emergency. Their day to day weapon apart from their holstered Glock, is the Heckler and Koch MP5 A5. The Sniper guys within the Unit have several weapons to choose from. Most have their favourite rifle which has been altered to suit the peculiar requirements of each person. The operational range requirement is vastly different from that of the military...perhaps up to a maximum range of seven hundred metres. In usual circumstances, it is in the order of one hundred to two hundred metres, max....with the powder used reflecting that range."

He took a puff, blowing vile smelling smoke from his mouth and nose. Once upon a time that was considered macho? Cool? It looked bloody disgusting to me! But as an ex-smoker, I tended to be a little over-judgemental. I commented as much. Bailey shook his head in agreement before continuing.

"...The Yanks prefer their Remington 700 PSS. A couple of guys here also prefer that rifle but the most commonly preferred is the H & K PSG1...semi-automatic. A beautiful gun but it is a bloody expensive piece with little change from Ten K. At a guess, I'd say that is the rifle that was used..."

"Is it usual that the gun would cause so much damage as the bullet exits the body?"

"Is that what has happened?"

"Yeah...in both cases. In one case the chest was cleaved open. The other, the back of the body is... exploded apart... it looked horrible."

I could feel the bile rising up the back of my throat. I was becoming a "softie", a bloody woman in my old age!

"That's not the fault of the gun. That is due to a too heavy a charge being packed into the shell. The Shooter is making up his own bullets...possibly a Marksman used to longer distance shooting. Maybe ex-military who was used to heavier charges due to their required longer range...they use a rifle capable of a 1200 to 1800 metre range. Some of those guys preferred to charge their own bullets based on the distance requirement...what-ever. The Shooter will have to watch himself because if he is using a heavier charge, he could blow the shit out of the rifle...and I say that he is using some type of hollow point...or fragmentary slug that explodes on impact. Makes a mess of a human body, that's for sure."

"Why are you so adamant in that regard? About the type of rifle. That you mentioned before...and are they easy to obtain on the black market?" Mar asked.

Dan Bailey visibly squirmed.

"I guess you can get anything, if you want to pay the going price, though that type of armament would be very difficult to snatch on the open black market...and the ammunition for it would be about impossible to obtain...in usable quantities, that is...I guess you only need one, I suppose."

"What aren't you telling us?"

He leaned back in his chair and stubbed out the small remains of his cigarillo. Finished off the dregs of his coffee. He then leaned forward to place his elbows on his knees. He looked down at the sandstone flagstones as he spoke softly.

"Security within these walls is extremely tight. The TOU boys are paranoid in the extreme about security of all their toys...the Police Armoury here, supplies the weapons, standard issue and specialised equipment to every Officer in the State. Every piece of equipment has a recorded cyclic testing and maintenance program attached to it. Each Officer is responsible for that protocol. The specialised stuff even more so. We have the machinery here to practically make any sort of revolver or rifle that we require...not quite but you get the drift...every piece of equipment is numbered and registered...even the striation marks on the bullets are now recorded digitally...they're in the system for future reference if you get my drift."

He scratched his ear, turning to me briefly before continuing.

"We had an incident here...in...um...last year...April 2013...we had done a surprise audit in late 2012 to find handguns and a number of Heckler and Koch rifles missing. Also, one Remington."

"Sniper Rifles?"

He nodded his head slowly. Embarrassed by the disclosure.

"Um...it was not widely reported. An Armourer...a respected ex-Army guy was the culprit. Lived up on the Central Coast. Berkeley Vale. When his house was raided, all the handguns and a lot of other stuff was recovered. He had a very good set up in the back garage. Milling and turning equipment. He could make...um...handguns at a price...silencers...extremely good quality stuff...he was an artisan...was selling them to local Bikies...or anyone who was willing to pay the right price...he had right wing sympathies, if you get my drift. A little disenchanted after his military service and with the manner in which the NSW Police Force operated...who's to know, huh?"

".... And the Sniper Rifles?"

"Arrh...and several large boxes of specialised ammunition...some other stuff...were never recovered...he is keeping mum...I doubt that he'll celebrate his sixtieth birthday as a free man...he is in his mid-thirties."

"You say large boxes? How many bullets?"

"That's not the problem. If you have the know-how, you can make your own bullets. It's the shell casings and the detonation pads that is the hard thing...but if you have the equipment and the knowledge, you can just keep churning them out...oh...there is limitations on how many times you can re-use the shell casings but..." He raised his eye-brows. Took a gulp of cold dregs that sat at the bottom of his mug.

Lit up his second smoke of the day, but who was counting?

"So... if one of those missing Sniper Rifles was used in a crime, say a death and the bullet was recovered, there would be 'base examples', exemplars in the system already that would identify those rifles...yes?"

He nodded his head.

I was happy with that piece of information.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Surprise. Surprise!" I muttered as I lowered myself into my desk chair.

Mar looked over at me. I lifted up the Binder for her to see. It was the Case Folder on the homicide of Olga Pavic.

"The White Skulls mole..." I added by way of explanation.

"Joe, that's disrespectful and downright discriminatory. She was the partner of Alek Pojaski until recently and the former wife of the late "Bunny" Kralik who had been for many years the 'King Pin' of the White Skulls Motorbike Gang until his untimely departure with a bullet that blew away his face some six years about. Don't tell me we've been given the Case back?"

"Looks that way."

"I said don't tell me that."

"I know that yer trying to gee me up, Mar. It ain't gunna work. Not this afternoon."

I dropped the Binder back onto my desk. I was disgusted. Opening it, I let out a loud moan.

"Look at it. It's a bloody mess. How in hell can those imbeciles in Gang Related Crimes ever solve a case if this is an example of the way that they organise their Case Folders...folios all over the place. No order in consecutive dated attachments...had written shit that would challenge a Doctor's scrawl...and not a bloody word to warn us that we were about to inherit the Case! A proper briefing or a hint even. Not even a summary of the case so far to help us...shit! Just plop the bloody thing on our desk for us to pick up the strings...c'mon, Mar, let's do some laps. It's Friday afternoon and it's about an hour to normal knock-off time. I've had enough. We didn't do any exercise this morning, yesterday morning or the night before. Our regime is starting to be a little hit and miss. Let's go."

I noticed that she didn't need any more cajoling as she slipped her holster and gun to place them in our shared Gun Drawer.

"OK, Joe. OK. Don't get yourself into a lather. Let's go."

"Want to check if Abbey wants to join us?"

"He's not in his Office."

As we passed Hendo's desk, I asked if he knew where Abbey was, as he had agreed to go with us when-ever we went down to the Gym for a work-out.

"He has been usually hiding himself around this time so that he can't be talked into going with you guys!"

He gave a cut-off laugh.

"But he has a reasonable excuse this afternoon. He's in town at the HQ building. A Conference of some type that was broadcast only an hour before it was due to commence...something big is going down...I've gotta get into the habit, the same as you guys. I'm totally out of condition. I've gotta start...sometime."

"Yeah, yeah. Hendo. Stop talking about it and do it. The hierarchy is recommending it for all employees. Just do it!"

He nodded his head in agreement.

"Maybe next week."

"Yep!" I mumbled as we walked out of the Office.

We'd done our swim and spent fifteen minutes on the Running Machine. We were on adjacent rub-down tables having our legs and shoulders pummelled into submission. My mobile chirped its "Message Received" chimes. I picked it up and scrolled through the list. The latest was Gloria Burgess from Forensic Fingerprints. This was her third message received.

I dialled in her number as skin on skin slaps resounded through the mobile.

"Joe...Christ! Where are you? At some S&M Dungeon?"

I chuckled at that.

"What do you know about the sounds emanating from S&M Dungeons...you are a woman of many surprises, my young lady...we *must* get together."

"You're a bloody flirt, Joe Lind. I'm almost old enough to be your mother...maybe your older sister perhaps...and now I feel extreme sympathy towards your Tellie Sanchez as she must be black and blue after one of your sessions!"

She let out a guttural laugh at her own joke.

"A little familial familiarity...perhaps? A threesome of fun and slaps, perhaps."

She gave another hearty laugh.

"There's a warning message out on you, my good man...and I can see that Estelle, your live-

in partner...just in case you needed reminding...is knocking off. I can see her through the glass partitioning...apart that I'm a happily married woman who...arrh...doesn't mind a little flirt of her own occasionally, as long as there is a cut-off point...we've just reached that, Joe."

A chuckle to round off the conversation.

"You're a bloody kill-joy...what can I do for you?"

"Any chance of you coming up here to the Eighth before you leave for home. To tell you the truth, I really do not want to send this report and some relevant attached material down to you through the system...there's something a little weird going on...it won't take long, my love."

"Oh...um...sure. Give us thirty. We'll need a shower after this ten minutes of agony to wash away the blood."

That earned me a slap on my bare buttock from my regular Masseuse.

## **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

Estelle and I had an open-ended arrangement when it came to knock-off times and whether she accompanied Mar and I home in the Unmarked. It wasn't unusual that either one of us could be delayed at the end of the business day at any particular time. It was a less than a fifty per cent occurrence where we did share the same knock off time.

We actually passed each other in the Lift Lobby. She going home. Mar and I going to see Burgess. I gave her a peck on the cheek. A squeeze of her hand.

"Another hour. No more." I said in saying my good-bye.

We settled into chairs in a small Conference Room.

Gloria Burgess was straight into it. There was a stack of thin files in front of her.

"Right...I had to do over thirty exemplars...and that doesn't mean that I got them all...it reminded me of the old days amongst the Catholic faithful. Even if you had fallen by the wayside...or been only the occasional guest of the local church, upon your death...my mother's actually, your entire family and extended family, friends and acquaintances and Church friends congregated at your home. Coming with food and cake and what-ever. Including the priest who would always make an appearance. He would always stay for a

beer or a glass of wine. That's what the Shatra household reminded me of the other day, even down to the Imam and his Assistant. Completely out of place in that residence, I felt...ummm...never mind...I did a double check of Michael Shatra's vehicle after we transported it to the Forensic Vehicle Impoundment Area. Right...there was a clear, full set of prints of the left hand of the Imam on the near-side rear pillar. As I said at the time at the Crime Scene, there was a full hand print above the Driver's door, as though that person had lent his hand...his arm against the vehicle to bend down to talk to who-ever was in the Driver's position of the vehicle. Basra El Baspari...he is the fire-brand Owner of the Shahada Book Store. In Campbelltown. Another set belonged to one Ossi Belmarri. He runs the Prayer Room above said Store. Is also the registered part-Owner of said Store and has been implicated in the procurement of funds and fighters for the ISIL cause in Syria and Iraq. There is a 'Stop and Search' ruling on several vehicles attributable to the two...and I understand that both are under some form of surveillance with our Intelligence Section and our State Counter-Terrorist Unit....so the AFP and/or ASIO wouldn't be that far away."

She stopped to hand us a thin file.

"All the information that I have and will divulge to you to-night, is covered in this file...um...another set of prints on the top of the right hand front fender...as though the person had been leaning with his bum on the mudguard, pushing himself off with both hands. I'd like to be able to say that these prints and those of Baspari were left at the same time...that is a wild assumption that I have no way of proving...unless there exists video of the incident...which may exist knowing the level of surveillance and the explosion in the rate of surveillance of these types over the past six months or so. Those fingerprints belonged to Marrish Mohammed...he is a known stand-over man, bouncer and a recent attachment to the Iman as a bodyguard. He was formerly known as Barry Phillips."

"Barry Phillips? I know that name. We've come across it during this investigation, I think. Mar?"

I turned to her with a questioning look on my face.

"Barry Phillips. He was the former 2IC of the White Skulls Bikie Gang. He was trampled over by Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski for the Headman position after the shooting death of... 'Bunny' Kralik." Mar smiled as she relayed this information.

I knew that I could rely on my partner. She was so good with names.

"A small world! Connections becoming clearer between known fanatical Muslims and a former Bikie Lieutenant...He...ummm...did he convert to the Islamic faith?"

"Yeah...well, we must assume so, as he pops up about two years ago...in connection to the Book Store and the Prayer Hall above it..."

"Now that is a bit of a coincidence with Alek Pojaski's Panel Beating Business not more than what? Three Kilometres away?"

"And the fact that he employs young hothead Muslims as Apprentices." Mar added.

"No such thing as coincidences in homicide enquiries."

"The thing that has my nose itching in this case is, I tried to cross-reference those names that I have mentioned to gain some bulk to them if you know what I mean...the Counter-Terrorist Unit, the Police Intelligence Unit and even the LAC records, all have some form of barring on the sites when you 'blog' in each of those names."

"Even Intelligence?" Mar asked incredulously.

"Yes...they have information up to a couple of years ago and then nothing, which surprised me, I can tell you...and it appears to be only a recent censorship from what my 'In-House' computer expert...who will remain nameless...tells me."

"So where did you get the information from?"

"Just Googled it...Newspapers, local Rags, TV News and Current Affairs programs were a rich source of information. I wouldn't be surprised if 90% of the information gathered and stored by our Intelligence Unit comes from the same sources...and who-ever, can't put a stop on Mister Google and his information."

The three of us chuckled over that piece of information.

"Call me paranoid, but I didn't want to send this information and all the attachments down to you via internal e-mail...I just didn't want to." She handed me a thick file. "The full Forensic Fingerprint Report signed and countersigned by myself and my Boss...and copies of every piece of information that I've managed to pull from Cyberspace on the persons in question...I know that I have over-stepped my area of responsibility and possibly entered your zone, but it got me going. I apologise."

I waved away the apology, telling her that she had done good.

"Thanks for that Gloria. You've done more than we could have anticipated."

She nodded her head sadly.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't give you answers to the sixty-four Dollar question. That is, why was a non-practising young Muslim lad, well-educated and of above average intelligence and the product of a loving, close, non-religious family who, by all appearances had no interest in those beliefs, be seen associating with several known heavy-weight Muslim

radicals and mischief-makers?"

"Why indeed?" Mar agreed quietly.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

It was mid-afternoon on the Sunday of the following week-end.

Everyone had been on deck in the morning doing yard and garden chores and now they all had retired indoors for a nap or to get out of the heat of the day. Or gone down to the beach. I had stayed behind. The kill joy, so Tellie had said as she flounced out the door with the others. It had pleased me no end to have my little extended family together out in the back yard. Enjoying the day and each other's company. Now I had the house to myself.

I was half asleep on a banana chair on the little private deck attached to the Granny Flat.

I heard the side yard gate squeak open and then close.

No-one used the side gate.

Everyone just ambled in through the front door. It was never locked and usually on days like this, it was open. The insect screen door not even latched or locked.

I turned my head and cracked opened an eye.

"Knackers! What the..."

That lead weight dropped to the pit of my stomach as it usually did when Knackers turned up unannounced or unexpectedly. As was usually the case. In fact, I could not remember a single time that he had been to this house, let alone known to enter via the side yard gate in order to get direct access to the rear of the Granny Flat. I immediately surmised that he had been here before without my knowledge...and after I and Tellie had moved into the Granny Flat!

I had that feeling of doom, as I always got when-ever he appeared.

The Portent of Disaster, I called him in my mind.

"Knackers...old mate. What the fuck! This is a surprise."

He was an Australian Federal Police Officer. Formerly an undercover Operative who had

successfully infiltrated various Motorbike gangs. Gaining colour and their confidence in the doing. He had been my late wife, Helene's undercover partner. Helene more the 'Catcher', the point of contact for intelligence and help if it had been required or given. They were working in some remote South Australian township, he undercover with a Chapter of the Angels, Helene as a Barmaid at the local Hotel, the Gang's preferred 'hang-out'. Helene was taken out into the desert, shot and buried in a shallow grave. She had been 'made'. Knackers had seen the entire thing and could identify the culprits but it was deemed more important that his cover be protected so the culprits were not brought to justice at that time.

Billy, our son had been just ten years of age when that had happened. A rough time for him...and me.

To Knackers defence, he did not stop scheming. Plotting various ways to implicate the Brothers Templeton in Helene's murder. It was some nine years later that he organised a beautifully manipulative plot that involved me cold-bloodedly shooting an old 'snitch' and Drug Seller of mine from the old days when I was an Undercover Narcs Officer. The guy was dying a slow and painful death from lung and stomach cancer so I always considered that I had done him a favour. His murder I tied to the two Brothers Templeton with tainted evidence with Knackers hovering around in the background ensuring that things went smoothly. It wasn't until sometime after the brothers were raided and pinged for an arm's length of offences including the death of my former snitch *and* my wife that Knackers inferred his involvement. I had thought, that at the time, I had acted not only to avenge the death of my wife, but to protect my son and his best mate, Ben, who had supposedly found a batch of dried leaf and were considering a business enterprise to make some money to help finance their dream trip to Europe and Great Britain.

Luckily, I made them see the folly in that scheme, but my mind had run at a million miles an hour when they informed me that the 'leaf' had come from the Brothers Templeton's residence. A successful scheme was implemented and completed thanks to my scheming brain.

Knackers had suddenly appeared during the "Body over the Balcony" Murder case which resulted in the AFP taking over the entire investigation. The murder in question that was Mar and my Case, slipped down the greasy totem pole as the AFP were more concerned in collaring the Melbourne Crime Family who had been responsible for the Sydney killing, with other crimes that they considered of more importance.

More kudos would be forthcoming for the AFP for the breaking up of a large international drug importation, distribution and selling racket on a National Scale than the gory murder of one 'good time' girl in Sydney!

"Brendan Waszackinack. Known to all as Knackers. AFP. Formerly of the Anti-Drug and Criminal Gangs Section. D3 Undercover Officer. Now the 2IC of the overworked Counter-Terrorist Surveillance Unit. How you going, Joe?"

He held out his hand.

I took it, shaking it firmly.

The warm smile on his face didn't dissipate that weight in the pit of my stomach.

"Hope you don't mind me letting myself in? You've taken up residence in the Granny Flat, I see. Forced out of your own home by the kids, huh? Yer better off here, aren't you?"

"Do you want a drink, Knackers? Coffee? A beer? Are congratulations in order for a promotion. A step up the slippery slope within the ranks of the AFP?"

Again, the broad smile. A nod of his head.

"That'd be nice. A stubby with a condom. OK?"

I grabbed two, as you can't drink alone. The neighbours would start talking. I handed him the stubby sunk into a 'stubby cooler'. He took a couple of gulps.

"That's good. Yer changed to my brand...about time that you saw the error of your ways." The smile hadn't left his face.

"For what do I owe the pleasure of your company?"

"Nothing really..."

He stepped up onto the deck and slumped into the other Banana Chair positioned beside mine. I noticed that he was packing. He was on duty...though he always seemed to be.

"Um...I haven't seen you for a while. I've got a couple of days owing to me and was wondering whether we could pay a visit to your old mate Barry Holtz. Do a spot of fishing out on his boat...I need a bit of a break..."

"They're in Europe at the moment. I got a Postcard from them last week. He had too much Leave accrued. If he didn't use it he was going to lose it...so a trip or two down a couple of European Rivers and a Motorhome tour through Great Britain...though to me it seems the wrong time of the year to do that. It's winter over there..."

"Let's hope for his and his delightful missus's sake, it turns out to be a mild one...Oh, well...when they get back...no hurry. Heard you had your hands full with a couple of Sniper Deaths. Young Muslim lads..."

There it is, I thought to myself. The reason for his sudden appearance.

Their religion was never released to the Media what with the way things were unfurling with things overseas in Syria and Iraq. I guess the 'Media hounds' could have found it out quite easily if they really wanted to put the effort in on the story.

I didn't know though, as I seldom watched, listened or read the news. It was usually too depressing and tended to be one sided, depending on the leaning of the Owners of the Broadcasting conglomerate that the particular Station or Paper belonged to.

I nodded my head.

"Not much to go on, actually. Nothing left at the scenes to help with any ID's of the Perps though the general consensus seems to indicate that some sort of professional was involved in the planning and execution of the crimes. The first hit though, is a bit of a quandary as he and his entire extended family were not practising Muslims...so that angle doesn't fit...you know, a hate crime...or something similar. The later Vic was known to the LAC boys, had form and was a known Muslim hothead who sprouted some evil words...two short spells in Juvenile detention...drug related...with him, one could surmise some type of hate crime...but it still is too early to draw inferences...apart from that, we were handed a Case on Friday with no explanation or how's yer father. A homicide of a Biekie's mole, about two weeks ago that the Gang Related Guys elbowed in on. Sure that it suited their turf parameters. Now it seems that they've run out of gas...up your street, perhaps?"

"Once was, maybe. Which gang?"

"The White Skulls."

"Arrh...our friend Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski's mole, Olga. Formerly 'Bunny' Kralik's woman."

"I see you keep your hand in."

"The corridors are full of gossip...this business of the Sniper deaths is a bit of a worry though... what with everything going on overseas...Syria, ISIL and the bloody beheadings...now we got some nut doing these crimes on home soil which is only going to stir the brew...the pot!"

"Mmm...maybe that is what they want...who-ever is doing these shootings."

"Fucking right wing fanatics who can't see that they are as bad as their targets...you know, the Patriot Front or The Brothers of the Southern Cross wanting to rid their proud land of Muslims fanatics...doing to Muslims what they say the Muslims are doing to us...or will...they're just as bad with their brand of one-eyed patriotism."

"Why do you say right wing fanatics? You guys got some inkling...if so Knackers, help us out here as we've about hit that wall."

"The two I've already mentioned...The Australian Allegiance. The Aryan Brotherhood. The Southern Sons. The Right to Bear Arms Alliance...The Shooters...and a couple of others that are mainly one man outfits not worth the trouble to mention...if I had to bet, then The Southern Sons or The Brothers of the Southern Cross would be more likely...don't get me wrong, they are in a way, doing us a favour...."

"What!?!?" I exclaimed as I looked over at him.

"C'mon mate. You know how many men it takes to keep a 24/7 surveillance embrace on a suspect? Multiply that by some one hundred to one hundred and fifty and we are talking a lot of men and resources are tied up...think of the fucking costs..."

"What? This has become an economic equation...an economic solution to solve the AFP's growing operating costs, huh? C'mon, mate, give me strength."

He nodded his head slowly. Took a swig of beer. Wiped his mouth with his arm. A hint of a smile.

"We've become pretty thin on the ground. Stretched to almost breaking point...you know how it has been over a number of years, especially after 9/11...and now of course, with this new push, the Politicians want absolute zero incidents of home-grown terrorist acts. Now that is a 'pie in the sky' scenario. We cannot guarantee such an ongoing outcome...you especially would know the resources required to have 24/7 surveillance on one suspect! Now imagine the financial and personnel strain created by the requirement of 24/7 high stakes surveillance on close to three hundred subjects Australia wide...it will eventually send us broke and the stake-out guys bonkers if it was allowed to continue...so yeah, they are doing us a favour. Kind of...an economic solution...I like that...who-ever they are!"

"With the shooting of one suspect Muslim hot-head!?!? Come on, Knackers. Get real! Next you'll be hinting at a covert Government initiative giving some 'Alphabet Soup' Secret Agency the approval to carry out 'wet' or is it 'black' assassinations of people of interest who show some enthusiasm of wanting to join an ISIL Brigade in Syria or who have had their Mobiles intercepted with them plotting with others the bombing of Parliament House in Canberra."

Knackers smiled that smile of his.

"That fits, Joe. That fits...it could be just the tip of the Ice-berg, Australia wide. How would you guys really know...it would be easy for some secret Government Organisation to keep it under the radar."

"What?!?!? You now suggesting that it is some Government conspiracy? To reduce the over-all costs of the National Surveillance Budget by slowly reducing the number of surveillance subjects?!?!...c'mon Knackers. Get real! How much have you had to drink this afternoon?"

I gave a sarcastic laugh.

He shrugged his shoulders. Gave me one of his smiles that held a lot of meanings that only he could interpret correctly. Every-one else left guessing.

"Gord, we're becoming a Nation of Paranoids and Conspiracy Theorists...as bad as the US...the Yanks...or getting that way. Gord help us and I'm a bloody Atheist! Give me strength!"

We both had a chuckle at that.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE**

Knackers stayed until he had downed three 'throw-downs' to my one.

That was unusual in itself.

Speaking in riddles and inference for most of the time. It would take me several days to collate and absorb the nuances of his words.

I often wondered if Knackers fabricated smoke-screens to shield us from the truth in an investigation or mentioned what seemed like radical scenarios at the time that upon reflection, held that element of truth in them. Either way, his sudden appearance was not and would never be out of some fondness and empathy for this Murder Detective.

I never doubted that!

I rang Marge who agreed to meet at the Athletic Oval that was conveniently located halfway between our two homes which meant it was a short two-kilometre run for both of us to get there. Because of the hot weather, we agreed to meet just on sunset. There would be several teams practising at that time of night, so the Oval lights would be blazing.

We did our usual ten laps and then sat up near the Change Rooms and Showers. We both had stood under the showers fully clothed such was the heat. Now we sat outside dripping wet. I ran through Knackers sudden appearance and his just as sudden departure.

"What do you think?" I asked my partner in crime.

"Apart from him always wanting to play with your mind, he always appears just before some momentous or calamitous event...and he talks in riddles, in intimations and paranoid thoughts so it would seem to me. But there is always that element of truth inserted that we

are meant to jig on...I don't know Joe. But if he was my friend, then I wouldn't trust the seat that he last sat on to not collapse under your weight when you went to next sit on it, if you get my drift...and yeah, I know, his link to Helene is the thing that keeps you hooked, no matter how hard you wiggle about trying to gain your freedom."

"....and you reckon that *he* talks in riddles!" I chuckled my response.

"Mmm...right wing nuts? Commonwealth Government complicity in 'wet' affairs...for just two hits...one of a minor hothead and the other of a young man who has not shown any inkling of subversive ideological leanings, what so ever!! Sounds like the stuff of novels. Le Carre or Ludlum. Take your pick. Sleep on it, Joe and see what bubbles to the top. You told me to do that once and it turned out to be good advice."

"It was your advice to me, I think."

"What-ever!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"Joe? Mar? Are you guys going down to the Gym to do some laps before you sign in?"

"Yep, Boss. Want to join us?"

"Yes, I do."

"You'll need to have a going over with one of the Coaches and fill out a Medical History questionnaire that usually takes about thirty minutes. Your first time and then to-night, when you go with us again, your Personal Coach will assign the appropriate exercise regime and work-load for you."

"Who said anything about to-night?"

"This afternoon then, Boss...or maybe your Lunch Break, if they have worked out the correct exercise regime for you by then."

"That's stretching the friendship a little thin, don't you think? Who in hell gets a fair Lunch Break, eh?" He muttered under his breath.

An hour later we were sitting back at our desks, having shared only a rub-down with Abbey on a neighbouring gurney.

"Christ guys. I feel buggered from the bloody rub-down. I feel like a bloody nap! You two got anything planned for this afternoon? Straight after Lunch? No? Good. Be in Number One Conference Room at Two O'clock. Straight after Lunch. I want 'Sonny' Liston to be also present with 'Hendo' taking the notes. OK? I've got another hierarchy meeting until lunchtime, so I'll see you then. What have you two planned for this morning?"

"Didn't you want to visit that Book Store, Joe? In Campbelltown?" Mar asked.

"Forget it. That's an order, OK?" Abbey curtly cut in.

We walked back to our desks with smiles on our faces. Abbey was sure in for a surprise for the first couple of weeks' worth of exercises, that's for sure.

After Lunch, we were all slouched around a small Conference Table. Large Coffees in front of us. We each had a Note Book thinking that we would need to take notes. Abbey walked into the room closing the door securely behind himself. I noticed that he had flipped the 'Engaged' and the 'Do not disturb' Signs and also the locking latch.

He looked at our Note Books.

"No Notes. 'Hendo' will take the minutes which each of you will sign after you have read the contents and the 'Minutes of the Meeting' will then be held in my Office Safe until further notice...or it will be shredded immediately after you have counter-signed it. Understood? We are talking about the Secrecy Act and the Commonwealth Government Edicts on Counter-terrorism issues."

Abbey slowly sat in the only remaining empty chair. A sigh escaped his lips. We thought that he was putting it on somewhat, as we had seen him only do three laps and fifteen minutes on the Walking Machine before he went for his rub-down and shower.

"Okay...As you know, I was at a meeting on Friday. Given one bloody hour notice to get my arse into the HQ Building in town. There was a broadband link to every large Cop Station in the State that had a Grade 2 Commander or above sitting in the chair. For his eyes only and Grades above. Across the State. Simultaneous meetings in every State Capital and Territory in the Commonwealth with the same far distant broadcasts permitted. A Nationwide hook-up. Pretty impressive as it was the first such occasion that that had occurred. The meeting went from one to ten that night. The participants were in the thousands across the country. No-one was allowed to leave...there were representatives from the Commonwealth and State Governments, ASIS, ASIO, APOA, AFP and several other...um...covert concerns that I hadn't even heard of. Plus, the State Commissioner for Police, Deputy Commissioner, Major Crimes and Deputy Commissioner, Terrorist Surveillance Group and The Tactical Operations Unit. They were all out the front. Sitting there like ducks in a shooting gallery...Oh for a gun! We were told that the equivalents were also present Nationwide...everything that I relay to you to-day is not to be repeated for fear of Jail time.

Understood? Is that clear? I cannot be more serious with that...any leaks and the full force of the law will fall on your shoulders...okay?"

We all nodded our heads solemnly.

He stood, walked around in a small circle. Took several sips of his coffee and then continued as he again sat.

"History first. In around 1998 through 1999, the Victorian Police accidentally came across a group of 'Shooters' out on some farm that was owned by who-ever...that is not important at this stage. Five men in typical Muslim garb. Beards. The little beret. The whole bit. Shooting up a section of a farm in western Victoria. Practising at pulling down their guns. Rapid fire movements. Close quarter regimes. Illegal weapons which were confiscated. After that, there were the usual spot checks done on the five within the usual time-frames. An electronic surveillance link to their known bank accounts and plastic. There were several other groups under similar surveillance in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. After 9/11 things altered dramatically." He looked around at us. "Greater participation of 24/7 surveillance techniques, greater observations of known associates and family members. This was now undertaken by State Counter-Terrorist Units that had been formed in every State as a consequence of 9/11 and at the insistence... no... on the orders of the Commonwealth Government. Commonwealth finances was used to initially set up these Units. Legislation was passed with more...what some labelled...draconian rules to deal with Terrorists. Their movements, apprehension and subsequent Court appearances. There have been more than ten matters brought before the Courts since then. Up until October this year. 2014. Seven of which were held in camera resulting in massive sentences being handed down. With no Media involvement! The case of the 'Victorian Five Cell' went to Court in 2009 with several sessions of that Trial also being held in camera. Sentences were handed down in February 2010 ranging from 15 to 23 years. There has been two Appeal Hearings held since then that have resulted in the minimum charge of 15 years reduced to 13 and the maximum charge increased to 28 years. Again, there was very little media hype or hyperbole...very little. The actual Court proceedings was estimated to have cost A\$10M...and that was the Legal Aid Bill for the five alone. Paid for by the Australian Tax Payer. It was estimated that the total surveillance bill for the five from 1998 through to the time of the trial, which by the way went for four months, was twice that amount of the Trial costs!"

He paused to allow those sums to sink in.

"Something like...A\$6M per Terrorist. In round figures! There are those who asked was it all worth the cost...The Victorian Five Cell had an agenda of poisoning the Melbourne Water Supply, blowing up several Office Towers, causing mayhem on the railway system by derailling and blowing up several suburban trains...was it worth it? An estimated 5,000 people may have been killed from the terrorist actions, especially in poisoning the metropolitan water supply...the Hospital system, the Police and Ambulance service would have been completely overwhelmed. The City would have been closed down for weeks...the

water system possible unusable for months, even years. Think about the effect on the general populace...many believe that the sentences handed down was insufficient and that they should have been imprisoned for life! That piece of legislation is still pending..."

He shook his head. Looked at each of us before continuing.

"From 2001...9/11 up until now, the Counter-Terrorist Surveillance Operations has increased tenfold. In NSW and Victoria double that again. There are now almost 500 persons on 'close surveillance' or a higher grading...that higher tag is complete 24/7 surveillance with audio, video and electronic regimes...a high proportion of the 500 in that category! There is close to an additional 1,000...I say again 1,000 persons on some form of 'stop and search' protocol on their vehicles anywhere or any time and 'stop and hold' protocol at Departure Lounges of the International Airports. Understand, only a small number of this total relates directly to Counter-Terrorist matters...but it is still significant for a country such as ours. You can imagine the numbers and the financial outlay that we would be talking about in say the US or the UK! Europe. It would be mind-blowing I suspect! Beyond any amount that we could think of...There has been over 150 passports revoked, withdrawn or removed directly relating to suspected terrorist activities. The vast majority in the past twelve months!"

Again, he stood and took a couple of sips of coffee.

"A wee break?" Mar requested.

We all went to warm up our coffees.

The door was left slightly ajar until our return when Abbey again went through the motion of latching and locking it shut.

"Um...right...everyone comfortable? As you can imagine, with so many...um...organisations and Police Units basically doing the same thing, there has been examples of extreme Keystone Cop fuck ups. That basically was what that meeting was all about yesterday... that and explaining the new legislated Commonwealth Terrorist Surveillance and Apprehension Orders. The recent rash of media releases relating to these new Laws has led to some confusion. These Laws are a direct result of the ISIL or ISIS or Da-esh situation in Syria and Iraq and the number of fighters that have been streaming into that area from western democracies...including from Australia...and the fear of what these traumatised and radicalised men and women will do if they are allowed free entry back into their Country of birth or their adopted country. What information that has been released for the benefit of the masses is but the tip of the Ice-berg. The Devil is in the Detail...which is not for general consumption. Mar? Joe? You are now included in this National debate. Apparently, it is not the first time that this situation has occurred but it is the latest. Three different surveillance operations on the same suspect almost jeopardised by the heavy-footed intrusion of two Murder Squad members. Those are not my words by the way. A day or two before the

Conference I am told...there is no retribution or black marks to be placed on Personnel Files, but the incident was mentioned to highlight the problem. This is exacerbated by the fact that resources in the form of financial and personnel input for these various surveillance regimes is stretched to the limit...three different groups surveying the one subject...it must have been crowded out there...and as you can imagine, it is not the best use of severely stretched resources...most persons got the point of the matter and not the...um...purported stupidity of two very good Murder Dees...that we need, all States and Commonwealth...need to twig, perhaps streamline or to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing would be more accurate in regard to our Counter-Terrorist Surveillance techniques if we are expected to keep abreast...or more importantly, to keep ahead of the influx of additional surveillance subjects...we cannot afford, in terms of budget restraints or personnel operatives, to have that type of situation occurring again."

He again stood to do a little spin around. A sip of his coffee and again as he sat back down, he took up the commentary.

"It is intended that the States would keep their autonomy with their Counter-Terrorist Units increased to deal with the added work load. A new Department would be formed to oversight the activities of each of the States in regards to those Units only..."

"Typical" I interjected. "Have a Conference that involves more than five people or more than one State and you can bet your house that a new Department will be formed to further the cause of Empire Building!"

"Arrh...the cynic in you, Joe. I was wondering how long it would be before you opened your mouth...you haven't disappointed me! Yes...the new Department will be housed in the recently completed ASIO Building in the nation's Capital and be named nominally as The Office of Strategic Surveillance, Procedures and Protocol...OSSPAP for short. This Department will have final say on the level of surveillance of a subject...a suspected terrorist subject... new table of surveillance levels and gradings will be forthcoming by the end of the month. With any Interstate transfer or travel of a Subject, this office will organise and brief the acquired State on their new surveillance subject. All electronic trafficking and surveillance will be handled as it is now by the joint AFP/ASIO Data Banks with the AFP Cyber Crime Unit expanded to include a separate Terrorist Analysis Cell. Any information garnered by this group will be immediately transferred to the relevant State for action that has been countersigned by the OSSPAP Chief. Yet to be named. This may seem rather ponderous at the moment, but the whole thing will be examined in three months' time and then on a quarterly basis until we get it right. For too long there has been a certain...um...shall we say...apprehensiveness by States to share their surveillance subjects and their movements with each other. Ditto the States and the Commonwealth which resulted in the fiasco that you two stumbled into."

He nodded his head in our direction.

"That has to stop. As you can imagine, a Conference that goes for roughly eight hours with a couple of wee and eat breaks covered a lot more than what I have just described...the reason for my overview and the telling of only you three is twofold:-

One...You more than likely will lose your Sniper Death Cases in the near future to the AFP. Um...for reasons that I cannot disclose to you as yet. They, meaning the newly formed OSSPAP Group, will need to collate and check all of the available data on the two cases...with you eventually being briefed as to why you have lost those cases...and

Two... Your involvement in the Olga Pavic Case. The Case Book was placed on your desks without it officially being passed or endorsed by myself. Major Crimes will be made aware of my anger for the agreed protocol not being adhered to...but again, you very well could be losing that case to the AFP for the same reasons that I have previously hinted at but cannot divulge at this time. Once I have been given clearance on the matter then I will indeed inform you of those reasons."

"Could it be, Boss, that there have been similar cases of Sniper Deaths of young Muslim hotheads in other States that have all slipped under the radar of the Media? And could it also be because of the supposed connection of a certain Bikie Gang to Muslim radicals? This unlikely alliance would be a major head-ache for every State and their Police Forces, if it is a reality."

He looked at me with a blank expression on his face.

"Um...Joe? Where *do you* get such wild ideas? Next, you'll be suggesting that there is some sort of conspiracy amongst the faceless men of the Government to have formed some sort of Assassination Squad primarily to kill hot-headed Muslim youths who have come to the notice of certain State Counter-Terrorist Units. These same State Units and affiliated Commonwealth Bodies are finding it more and more difficult to abide by the surveillance standards and frequencies that these Subjects truly require...so they are ridding themselves of these surveillance subjects."

Mar looked at me thinking that perhaps this was not the time to mention my way-out opinions. Abbey noticed it.

"The two of you have already discussed such an option, haven't you?"

"Yep, Boss. We have...that or a Right-wing faction hell-bent on removing those Muslims who it is deemed are risks to our society...how they have received the Intelligence on each Subject, we haven't been able to ascertain as yet...but we can see a link in the outer south-western suburbs of Sydney, though that doesn't provide an answer, nationally."

Abbey shook his head slowly.

Gave a slight chuckle.

Again, Mar looked at me as though I'd grown another nose.

Me?

I was flying by the seat of my pants, chucking theories out there to see what the reactions would be! It wasn't the first time that I had scrambled out onto that proverbial limb, and knowing me, it wouldn't be the last time!

"...and Abbey, you said that there were three separate Groups spying on "The Pole's" place of Business that we stumbled into. OK, we know why the Major Crimes and Gang Related guys were there. It was embarrassingly easy to spot their presence. We can guess at the Counter-Terrorist and perhaps the AFP being the other two...but the question is, what were those guys doing there in the first place? Is there a connection between our recently returned Case of 'Olga in the Gutter' and the two Sniper Deaths? If so, what is that connection, and why does it seem that we will lose both Cases to the Counter-Terrorist guys?" Mar commented quietly.

It was a good point. It was obvious that as I had thrown my two-bob's worth into the fire, she wasn't going to see me burn alone.

Don't you just love the woman?

"I can't answer that, Mar."

"Can't or won't?"

Abbey raised his eye-brows.

"Arrh...you two seem to be ahead of the pack, I think. What were the two of you doing there in any case? At the Panel Beating business?"

We were hoping that that point would be overlooked. I glanced at Mar. Abbey picked up the uncertainty on both of our faces.

"You were sticking your nose into a Case that wasn't yours and wasn't even allocated to this Squad at the time of your visit! Would that be a fair assumption?"

"Well...we...arrh...we have possibly found the connection between the two Shooting Victims. A Radical Book Store in Campbelltown that the two frequented."

"And?"

"It's a lead that needs following up. Um...the Shatra family by their own admission, are not practising Muslims. In fact, they have basically become 'non-believers'...that being the case, why was the young Shatra lad frequenting a known radical hot-spot that was the well-known haunt of the local hothead group of young Muslims? And led by the two owners of the Book Store who are known Terrorist sympathisers and Recruiters for the Cause overseas? I reckon that several young radicals have already gone overseas to fight with ISIL who have had ties to that Book Store."

"I have no intention of confirming or denying that point, Joe... but good point.... but you still haven't explained your presence at the Panel Beating Shop. I will say that The Gang Related guys were told in no uncertain terms to desist with their investigations of one certain Leader of a Bikie gang immediately. Forthwith and pronto. So out of sheer spite so it would seem, they just dumped the Case Folder onto your desk without explanation or a polite Good Day. Thinking perhaps, that as they know the lead Detectives quite well, those Dees would go off like brides' nighties on the Wedding night clod-hopping through the suburbs. The Gang Related guys confident in their supposition that that would be the actions of the two which would warrant a severe dressing-down from perhaps the Deputy Commissioner, himself! Another Turf War avenged in full!"

"As you have just indicated, the orders for them to leave off their investigation must have come from on high...very high...and well before the organisation of the Conference of last Friday PM."

"Yeah, you're right about that...but you still haven't answered my question...perhaps it maybe best that I do not know the answer though I can well guess at it."

"One thing..." Mar again butted in. "The two other parties shadowing Alek Pojaski's Workshop would indicate that they have been on his trail for some time. They therefore would have possibly seen, maybe not the act of homicide necessarily, but they would have followed him and seen him dump the body...regardless of circumstance, wouldn't a homicide investigation take precedence over anything else... and we could subpoena those who witnessed the body dump to give evidence in Court... and we'd have the guy stitched up three ways to Sunday... we may even get a confession on his part in the shooting homicide of his former Boss, 'Bunny' Kralik."

"In your dreams, Mar"

'Sonny' Liston had remained silent up until this point.

No-one was too sure what 'Sonny's' rightful Christian name was as he had been called Sonny for obvious reasons, since before Eve realised she should have a Party Dress in her wardrobe for her first serious date! He was the Murder Squad's 2IC and had been, prior to Abbey's heart-attack and sabbatical, Abbey's team partner in Homicide cases. It was after Abbey returned to work that he had refrained from any further investigative work which

was a pity as both Sonny, with Abbey, made up the most successful Murder Investigation Team in the Squad. Now 'Sonny' was the Head of the 'Special Cases Team' with Peta Daniels as his 2IC. Another two, two-man team carrying out the drudgery and leg work of any investigation that they may currently have.

He cleared his throat before commencing.

"Sorry...this I think, is a lot larger than our little piece of Turf. We seem to be talking about what could be termed as National Security. As you both know, once the AFP or any Commonwealth Department gets involved, then State interests take a back seat! Even if it is a Homicide Investigation. Sorry guys, I feel for you. The question as to why a Counter-Terrorist organisation...or two...would be staking out the Leader of a Bikie Gang! That would be of interest to me...and the other question that has not been raised, is why would the AFP or ASIO require that all matters relating to the Sniper Shooting deaths of two Muslim youths in the south-western suburbs of Sydney be turned over to them...homicide of Australian citizens is not in their Mission Statement as far as I know...and I guess that same comment also relates to the Olga Pavic Homicide and Body Dump case."

Abbey lowered his head.

"Could it be..." Sonny continued. "...could it be that the AFP or who-ever, want those cases bought into their sphere of influence in order to protect themselves or other persons who may have committed a criminal act... possibly they, themselves, or Operatives within their Services, are involved in... shall we say... a scheme to reduce the over-all burden on scant national financial and personnel resources?"

We looked at one another.

Then at Abbey.

It was obvious that he knew the answer to those questions, but was not permitted to divulge any information. Or at least that is how I interpreted his reaction.

His raised hands in mock surrender said it all.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

The two men walked swiftly across the expanse of the Murder Squad Room and entered DS Church's Office without knocking.

"Feds" I muttered quietly to Mar.

She swivelled her chair around to take a squiz.

"Mmm...looks like it..." She swivelled back to me. "When are you going to see Abbey on what you have found. I'm still a little sceptical on your interpretation of your findings...I reckon you may be jumping the gun on this one...and to try and assess a National figure just from what you found in NSW might be a bit of a stretch...do you think that you should leave that bit in abeyance when you confront him?"

"In for a pound; in for a penny...or what-ever. He'll either listen before he tears strips off me or he'll agree that I am one brilliant Detective."

"Who again has over-stretched his sphere of responsibility." Mar chimed in. "You written it up?" She asked.

"No. I figure that it would be better if I kept it all up here..." Tapping the side of my head with a knuckle. "...until I see how the Boss is going to react to the information."

The two Federal Dees walked briskly from Abbey's Office to disappear out into the Lift Lobby accompanied by a young Uniform Constable who had given them access onto our floor and into our Squad Room.

Abbey walked to his Office door, saw that I was looking his way and beckoned with his finger. Marge rose to her feet as I did, mumbling something about not wanting to miss this for the world. Then confidently saying to me that as my Partner, she was with me all the way. Abbey indicated that he did not require her presence. She slumped back into her desk chair humming "The Last Post" as she did so!

"Boss? What-ever it is that you wish to discuss with me, can I go first? Um...and can you wait until I have my say before you either tear strips off me or congratulate me on an excellent investigative procedure? And I would prefer that Marge be present during these proceedings."

"That won't happen, Joe."

This he said with a blank look on his face. I gave him a bright smile to indicate that I appreciated his dry sense of humour. The smile was not returned.

"I'd rather lose only one of my better Detectives in one foul swoop than two."

"Sir?"

He waved his comments away with a brush of his hand. Wiped his hands over his eyes. Went to the door, beckoned to Mar to come forth, waiting for her arrival before closing and latching the Office Door.

"Now...before you two jump to any wrong conclusions or theories that would astound the most lateral thinker, let me say this first. It goes without saying Mar, that I consider you one very bright Investigator. One that continually looks at the alternatives and notices the subtle nuances and mannerisms of suspect people. Your logical progression through a case has no peer in this Room. I mean that, Marge..."

He turned to me. Scratched his ear and looked down at the floor.

"You Joe, on the other hand, you are like that shotgun being waved about at a Market Place at times. You let spray, jump about, rub people the wrong way...often...voice the most ludicrous suppositions that any sane person has trouble comprehending, yet somehow, that theory often turns out to be fact after time has proven its veracity. I would imagine with Mar's guidance, the two of you crack some of the most baffling of cases. Not just through doggedness, patience which at times you have little of, but through sheer flashes of brilliance...that is the upside of your career. I will leave the downside until I hear what you have to say...away you go, Joe. You've got the floor."

Abbey settled back into his Executive Chair, crossed his hands over his expanding stomach and positioned himself into a comfortable slouch.

I began by going over the fingerprint report that Abbey would not have yet seen. The connection between the Owners of those fingerprints found on Shatra's vehicle and the two victims of the shooting deaths. The connection between the Bikie Gang personnel and the radical Muslim group.

"What do you think maybe the underlying link, Joe?" Abbey asked. A frown on his face.

"Drugs first up, Boss. It is no secret that a huge slice of the 'Jay' traffic, the 'E' and the 'Ice' manufacture and distribution is through the various Bikie Gangs. 'The Pole' provides the drugs which are transferred by the young guys that he employs as Apprentices. All Muslim hotheads. To be delivered to either the Book Store or the Prayer Hall above. We know through the Narcotics Branch that the Drug Trade in the south-western suburbs is mainly controlled by two gangs. Both connected to that Book Store. The profits from the sale of the drugs is sent overseas to several Terrorist Organisations."

"You know that for a fact, Joe?"

I shook my head no.

"Hmmm...go on, Joe. Continue."

"I did a trawl through the NSW Records going back eighteen months. My search word criteria was... *Young male. Muslim. Eighteen to twenty-five. Accidental death. Unexplained death. Disappearance. Unsolved Death.*

I looked earnestly at my Boss. I was about to bombard him with an avalanche of unbelievable facts.

"Umm...straight away, of course, I got our two Sniper Deaths....umm...Eight disappearances with the probable reason which I will accept for the moment, that they had flown overseas to take part in the battles in Syria and Iraq. But no confirmation that they had indeed left our shores. There has been four hit and run deaths. Unsolved. Four single car vehicle accidents involving death...all on little used back roads. None that could not be explained on suburban or major arterial roads although there were six deaths in that category...in locations such as I have just mentioned."

Abbey rose from his chair to stand at the window overlooking the Park and the River. He began jiggling loose coin in his pants pocket, as was his habit.

"...one, a one hit sucker punch murder that remains unsolved, two bashing deaths and six supposed suicides that involved drugs, alcohol and knives...though the more pious Muslims do not permit alcohol to pass their lips...in total, that is twenty-seven unexplained deaths in those categories within the last eighteen months. Twenty-seven, Boss. I was thinking of extending the period back to the recognised date of commencement of hostilities in Syria. Three...three and a half years...perhaps taking the age division from sixteen to forty, tops."

Abbey turned to face us.

"When did you do this search, Joe?"

"Yesterday afternoon. Mostly. And first thing this morning."

"You, Marge?"

"No. I was unaware of what he was doing, but if that information is correct, then there appears to be something going on at a deeper level."

"Mmm..." Abbey lent across his desk, picking up his phone as he slid open a drawer that held the Internal Telephone Directory. He punched in an internal number.

"John Sachs? DS Church. Murder Squad. What are the chances of some external...shall we say, party, from hacking into...say my computer and letting that party know of the activity on that machine?"

There was silence for some moments.

"Minimal, you reckon? But not impossible, huh? Is that right? Is there any way that you can come across...say...one of my Detective's computers to see if there is any trace of such an action having occurred in the...let's say...in the last twenty-four hours...Yes? Detective G3 Joseph Lind. ASAP. Thanks. I'll hear from you inside ten. Good."

Abbey hung up his phone. Again returning to the window to jiggle with the loose change in his pocket.

This time at a faster rate.

Suddenly he went to the door and opened it.

Catching 'Hendo' eye, he asked if he could get three coffees from the downstairs Coffee Jar.

He handed out a twenty dollar note.

I went to open my mouth.

He closed the door, nodding his head for me to shut up.

He sat down, took up the telephone again and speed dialled in a number.

"Darren? Abbey. Up here in Sydney. How's the weather down there? As pitiful as ever?"

He chuckled at what-ever the reply was.

"Listen, I need a very special favour and one that must be kept extremely confidential...well no, I don't expect you to put your head on the chopping block...pick your most expendable Homicide Cop though...oh! That's you!"

There was laughter.

He was presumably speaking to his equivalent in Melbourne.

After the pleasantries, he succinctly asked that his equivalent Number in Melbourne run a Computer Search through the Victorian Archives using the same criteria as I had done.

"Umm...no. Not by e-mail. Can you just ring back with the information? Thanks. I'll owe you big time...oh! If you get a similar surprising result as to us, then it will be most evident and distressing and disconcerting. I'll wait to hear from you."

He hung up.

Immediately the phone rang.

He quickly answered.

"What does that mean? A shadow? A bug? Can you trace it out? No?"

He looked across at me.

"How often do you do that operation? I see, once a month? Can you run a 'seek' program on all the computers and telephones within the Murder Squad? It is obvious that we have had a major breach in security, to my way of thinking. An external third party basically bugging my Detectives use of their computers and equipment. I do not think that that requires the signature of the Commissioner...don't get me wrong, I'll get his approval for such an operation as I will be seeing him very soon in fact, but I feel sure that will mean that you'll be on the receiving end of some very churlish questions...OK, then. When? To-night? Fine. Thank you...Oh! Is there no way that the trace or bug or bloody insect...what-ever...can be trace out to its home...its hive or what-ever? No? Them's the breaks, I guess. Thank you. You will report your findings to me to-morrow morning? Thank you. I await your advice."

He rang off to slowly place his phone back on its base. Looking up at me he muttered something about me getting us in a fine mess.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

His phone rang again.

Hendo knocked on the door before opening it.

The aroma of good quality coffee wafted into the Office. Abbey asked the person to hang on, thanking Hendo for his help. As soon as the door was closed, Abbey informed his caller that he was placing the call on Speaker-phone. By way of explanation, Abbey introduced Marge and I to Darren Leeks, the DS, Homicide Division of the Victorian Police Force in Melbourne.

"How are you all up there in smoggy Sydney? Breathing difficult as per usual?"

It was the usual banter that erupted every time that a native from each of the two Capital Cities got together.

"Abbey, I extended the criteria to the ages of sixteen through to forty and the time frame to four years at the suggestion of my 2IC who is sitting with me here in my Office. David Berlitz. Detective Grade 4. Umm...I think we may have a problem."

"Before you say any more, Darren. It would seem that we have had a breach in our Computer Security System. Some sort of listening device or a bug of some type. Whenever Detective Lind typed in a certain search criteria that we now have both used into the Internal File Register here in NSW, the bug was activated. So who-ever, is well aware of our

recently gained knowledge. We are organising a complete sweep of all computers and desk phones in our Squad. I would suggest that it may be prudent that you do the same. Our Information Analysis Security Service people will be doing such a check on all equipment to-night. At this stage, they cannot trace the breach back to the source but are hoping to do so while they do the sweep. All that was found was what they called 'a shadow' which apparently indicated the placement of some form of bug and then its removal. So, in general terms, what was the...um...outcome of your internal enquiry?"

"Umm...John? I have no idea what you've plunged us into, but...it is bloody scary! Who, one wonders, though I will hazard a guess...and it's not some-one on the other side. I'm getting Berlitz to organise a quick sweep now of our systems so if the bug is still in existence in our system, we may be able to track it...we're on the same side...and that's what shifts me the most...we're talking close to forty subjects under your criteria here in this State but with the extended time-frame and age grouping. One moment Abbey...."

There were the sounds of a muffled conversation.

"...sorry about that, John. Umm...based on the prior Arrest Sheets of all those that have fallen within the 'Base Search Criteria', then conservatively we could be looking at ten subjects. It wouldn't be beyond our wildest fantasies to assume that those ten would have some sort of surveillance protocol on each of them. Then there maybe another five perhaps whom we are unaware of their terrorist leanings...I have not contacted our Counter-Terrorist people just on the off-chance that there is some collusion between them and their Federal counterparts. It would not be a wild guess to state that between us we are looking at around the thirty to forty mark...Australia wide? Any-one's guess...the Counter-Terrorist guys must be twigging to a decent reduction in the number of their surveillance subjects. Surely!"

"You'd think that they'd be the first to notice and pull the chain...unless of course they are complicit in the act..."

"C'mon, Abbey. No way. If this is something that is being sanctioned by any State or Commonwealth body, then we are no better than those Barbarian ISIL fighters! That is not on...do you mind if I run with this information here in Victoria?"

"No. Not at all. I'll be going straight up to see the Commissioner as soon as I get off the phone to you. He's in the building this afternoon. You know, because of that Conference last Friday afternoon..."

"Impressive, wasn't it?"

There was silence for some moments.

"Sorry...do you think that there is a link between what we have found and the... um... recent... um... enthusiasm by certain members of the hierarchy to this new Anti-Terrorist

Protocol?"

"It wouldn't surprise me...and this listening into certain computer investigations says a lot to my way of thinking especially when certain actions have been taken around two recent sniper deaths in our State and a body drop that could connect this whole mess together.... I know that I am speaking in tongues... and apologise, but I will fill you in on details at a later date."

"Okay...Look, I'll keep you in the loop. Home numbers. You still got mine? Yes? I'll ring you about eight to-night. OK? Before I go...yes, there appears to be some sort of bug inserted into our computer software that comes alive when a certain search criteria requirement is typed in... that is not on. I'm Poker 'mates' with a few who have a lot more influence than I have whom I think I should bring across this situation. We need to get to the bottom of this and quickly. Thanks for bringing me across the situation, John. I'll get back to you. One thing, if it is a Federal Conspiracy, do you think that the bottom line is one of pure economics...by the way that several of those Federal guys spoke at the Conference last Friday, you could assume that things...in terms of money and personnel, the Commonwealth Agencies responsible for this surveillance are getting a bit stretched on the ground."

"Could be. An economic solution to an ongoing prohibitive program...rather cold-blooded. As you said, it makes us no better than those brutal ISIL guys beheading merely for the shock value...for no sane reason at all!"

Abbey said his good-byes and hung up his phone, staring unblinking at both of us. It was some moments before he spoke.

"Um...I guess I owe you at least some sort of explanation...though what-ever I'm about to say must never leave this office. Agreed? Both of you? Right...some of the things that both of you have mentioned of late have a modicum of truth in the words. It was some of those things that you said that...um...congealed? I don't know if that is the right word...confirmed what others had spoken of in the previous day or two...and a recent visit from two high ranking Feds...and at that Conference of last Friday. There is no way that a few of those comments should have been known by certain people at that particular time...it just fell into place in a lot of areas. Your imagination has some basis in fact, Joe. Will that suffice?"

We looked at him blankly.

Both of us knew that we would not get any further comment from him.

We nodded our heads meekly.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Abbey raised his hand to still our silent conversation.

A smile on his face.

He rang several phone numbers before he tracked down the location of the Commissioner, who allowed him a ten-minute window in another twenty minutes. In the twelfth-floor cafeteria. The outdoor northern corner.

An audience while the Commissioner enjoyed a relaxing cup of tea for the first time that day.

"Yes Sir. It is extremely important, Sir. As soon as I learnt of the information, I felt that you should be bought across it...Yes, Sir. It has ramifications nationally. Until then, Sir. Thank You."

Abbey hung up.

"What an AO....he's full of his own self-importance and I doubt that he will act alone on this matter as he does not like to stick his neck out...a complete twat! Before I go. Those AFP Officers who came into my Office before all this began, they dropped these DVD's off. A complete Dossier on one Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski. Enough to charge him with several capital crimes and a string of others including supply and distribution, money laundering, stolen vehicle violations, etc. etc. A list a mile long apparently...so they informed me."

"Why give him to us on a platter like that. From what I understand, they were going to take both our cases from us...Boss, you said the same thing!"

"Sacrificial lamb, I think maybe the appropriate term. If it is he who did... and I stress that word...*did* murder his partner, Olga Pavic, then I think that he may have over-stepped himself... become some sort of embarrassment to them... outside their control or protection maybe... though they still wanted the Sniper Death Cases. At least I got that impression that they were trying to intimate a swap should be the go. How bloody mule-headed of them trying to play politics... a turf war! Not on my bloody watch. No way! Feds or not, they've got a bloody hide to even try! I doubt that that will be forthcoming if I can convince the Commissioner otherwise... so... I promised to indicate your negative traits and how they were going to get you into hot water one day, Joe."

A smile appeared for the first time in some minutes.

"I think we can leave that for another day, but never consider that it is completely off the table, hear me?"

He ushered us to the Office door.

"Good bloody work to both of you. If I'm not being too premature about both these Cases, then a propriety award will be yours in the not too distant future and I'll be recommending it be awarded to you by the State Premier, no less... hell, let's aim higher. The Prime Minister... now out, you've still got plenty of work on the 'Body in the Gutter' case to wrap it up... oh... and I'm with you this afternoon... hell, in about an hour for that Gym visit. OK?"

We nodded our heads in agreement.

As we made our desks, I turned to my partner.

"What's a Propriety Award, Mar?"

"Hell if I know, Joe."

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX**

"This guy has been hung out to dry, Mar. I almost feel sorry for him...almost."

"Who? Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski?"

"Yeah...I haven't finished reading every file on these discs yet, but that's how it's looking. And I'd say he was in a similar stew not only with the AFP, but the NSW Counter-Terrorist Unit and Gang Related Unit boys as well. I doubt that he could turn around by himself without getting the approvals from all three. The AFP in particular, seemed to hold these videos over his head like some avenging sword on an unravelling piece of string."

"It's almost knock off time, Joe. We going down to the Gym?"

"Let's wait for a couple more minutes to see if Abbey makes it. I reckon that he'll be looking for an excuse...not to join us."

We eventually got sick and tired of waiting for the Boss, instead signing off and wandering down to the Sub-Basement Gym.

We doubted that we would see the Boss while we were down there.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Marge dropped another large coffee container in front of me.  
My third for the day.

We'd hidden ourselves in the Electronics Room that was position adjacent to and between the three Interview Rooms that the Murder Squad used regularly.

Even as small Conference Rooms.

The Electronics Room allowed us to do incredible things to transcriptions, voice activated transcriptions, videos and still camera shots at the touch of a button or a touch pad.

We were viewing the DVD's that the AFP had left us. A complete dossier on Alex 'The Pole' Pojaski including a weekly surveillance log that the AFP had kept on the man. For three fucking years! The guy had to have been sweating bullets with so much coverage over him. He must have known!

With the help of our resident Electronic Technician, we were making two additional DVD copies, a Flash Drive copy that would be inserted into the Murder Book and a copy straight onto the Murder Squad Hard Drive that could never be erased.

"How's it going?" Mar asked as she settled back into the Exec Chair beside me.

It had been her turn for the coffee and bickies. Our Electronic Tech wasn't keen on us eating and drinking in his domain and let it be known in a series of moans and groans and constant complaints.

"I think that we just may have found the 'missing link' in this case. The Shooter."

"That bloke there?" Mar pointed with a finger.

"Huh-ha. One Matthew 'Big Dog' O'Sullivan. Former SAS soldier. Forward Scout in a Long-Range Insertion and Surveillance Group in Iraq War Number One. Three tours of Duty of Afghanistan before leaving the Army in 2004. Had known Alek 'The Pole' from drinking in the same Pub before he had joined the Army. Had once said that he had joined up because he wasn't that keen to get involved with mad Biekie Gang guys...seems he has renewed his acquaintance with them not long after getting out. You missed a prime scene where the two of them were haggling over the fee on the hit of Georg 'Bunny' Kralik. O'Sullivan wanted 35 straight up. 'The Pole' adamant on 20 plus 15 if the 'hit' was successful...'The Pole' won the hard-fought argument. Logistics, routes, times, dates were all discussed. The details of the final meeting place to confirm the details and pass over the initial fee amount...and when the final payment was to be made and where if the plan was

successful...it's all recorded in surround sound. Beautifully filmed. In fact, suspiciously so! As if the two were actors on a Sound Stage with the usual mickey mouse camera and lighting gear."

"Have we got enough for an arrest?"

"Yeah...we will need Search Warrants on every one of Pojaski and O'Sullivan properties. A concurrent raid to pick the two of them up...keep the film rolling as we aren't up to Olga Pavic's demise and the dumping of her body, but I'll bet my house that it also has been dutifully recorded...and I'll lay odds that Pojaski has seen it in full."

"This is what they had over him, you reckon? Why? What did the AFP gain out of the relationship?"

"Pojaski supplied the major proportion of drugs to the Muslim gangs for sale in the Campbelltown area through the Book Store. Or the Prayer Hall upstairs over the Book Store. He therefore had inside information on the members of the Prayer Group, the people who frequented the Book Store and all associates that may have been of interest to the AFP...and I'll guarantee he had a similar relationship with a couple of the other rabid Book Stores in the suburbs. Campsie. Lakemba. The 'inside' man who would always be under the AFP thumb."

"You saying that he was the inside man for the AFP? Knew a lot about the various radical chapters who were not only sending money, but men and women to help in the ISIS/Da-esh fight in Syria and Iraq."

I nodded my head at her.

"What about our NSW Police Force Counter-Terrorist Unit. We assume that they were the third Surveillance Party there the day that we trampled into the 'web' of intrigue."

I laughed at Mar's tongue-in-cheek humour.

"Yeah...don't know yet...but we're getting there, Mar. We're getting there. Maybe the same scenario. The same...arrh...video or taped evidence of his murders, perhaps. Then again, it could be for the age-old reason. Money for information."

"You mean he could possibly have been a snitch for the Cops...the Counter-Terrorist Unit...that'd fit...in fact, 'The Pole' would find that funny...in a Polish sense of humour, sort of way."

"Which-ever way, he must have been a very busy man keeping basically three mistresses happy...the AFP, the Counter-terrorist Cops and the Muslim radicals...and I haven't even counted Olga Pavic or his business or Gang responsibilities in that mix!"

"A bloody busy boy...he had a brain to be able to juggle all those responsibilities...keeping all the balls in the air!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

For that week and most of the following, Mar and I were cocooned into that tiny, stuffy Electronics Room that had a two-way window of varying sizes on three of its four sides. The other wall was just basically blinking lights, cables, monitoring screens and equipment that we had no idea on its functionality. With the help of our now friendly, cooperative and funny Technician, we re-played sections of the video recordings until we could revisit them in our sleep. We read, listened to and cross-references pages of transcript information until our eyes stung. We made notes, practised relevant questions, streamlined the order in which we would ask them and basically almost sent both of us around the twist.

During that time, we organised through Abbey, who was a regular Visitor to our 'Cubby-Hole', the Search and Arrest Warrants, Court Orders and other prerequisite paper form to ensure that we got the operation right.

We organised raids to occur on the Friday of the following week, which gave us another four days to pick through the loose strings of the evidence that was given to us.

'The Pole's' Arrest and Charge sheet was all but bomb-proof for one Homicide conviction and conspiracy to commit another.

That was good enough for us.

The Shooter, O'Sullivan's case how-ever, was a little 'iffier', though we had him at this stage on Conspiracy to Commit a murder. While we had the video evidence to attest to that Charge, there was no complementary evidence that placed him at the scene beside the Motorway or pulling the trigger of the gun that killed 'Bunny' Kralik. Sure, his acceptance of the money for the 'hit' along with the recording of their two-way conversation was enough for the Conspiracy Charge, but any Defence Solicitor worth his salt could argue against the murder charge.... of O'Sullivan pulling the trigger.

That lead-in period gave sufficient 'scouting manoeuvres and practise runs' for a great number of the Murder Squad Team, to conduct in partnership with the LAC guys who would be helping out on each of the raids, enough time for all of us to assess the 'lie of the land'.

We did not want to include any member of the Counter-terrorist Group or our own Tactical Operations Unit as we were still unsure of the depth of involvement of any Government

Unit or Department to the conspiracy that we had uncovered concerning the unexplained deaths of young Muslim radicals and hot-heads.

We were committed to four synchronous raids just on sun-up of that Friday which drew grumbles all round.

It was not expected that a shoot-out or a hostage situation would result from these simultaneous raids, but we were kitted up in full riot gear, just in case.

Because of all this, and the large amount of time that we spent in that tiny room for that entire week and a half, Mar and I were not privy to the constant stream of Visitors beating a path to DS Church aka Abbey's Office doorway. From the Commissioner to several Deputy Commissioners to important looking men who had to be AFP, ASIO, APOA. OSSPAP and other Agencies that none of us knew even existed.

It would seem that the end result in all these secret negotiations was that the Murder Squad would retain the "Body in the Gutter" Case and the two "Sniper Deaths", although that one was still on shaky ground, so it seemed.

Mutterings of National Security, the Secrecy Act and stumbling across several key operations of national importance kept bubbling to the roiling surface.

The Commissioner, to our surprise and to his credit, stonewalled any suggestion that would have taken the Cases away from the NSW Police Force.

His intimation of Commonwealth duplicity helped enormously in that regard.

The Indians were circling and the soldiers were getting concerned.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE**

"Alek Pojaski? Do you realise why you are under arrest?"

Nothing. He concentrated on a spot on the table top that only he could see.

"You have been read your Rights...and Official Charges have been laid against you. Including Murder and Conspiracy to Murder. Do you understand those charges?"

Silence.

"Do you understand that three consecutive raids were conducted on your Place of Residence at Number 14, Hilltop Crescent Macquarie Hills Heights? At your place of Business at

Units 1 through 4, Number 18B, Enterprise Circuit, Minto Industrial Precinct and at your farm at RMB 1542, Blackbutt Ridge Service Road, Upper Wilberforce?"

Silence.

"Do you understand that a large quantity of Marijuana leaf was found on that property? That several members of the White Skulls Motorcycle Gang were the 'live-in' custodians of the property? That an elaborate underground Hydroponic set-up was uncovered in six eight metre Shipping Containers that had been expertly buried into the side of a hill? That on the other side of that same hill, four other six metre Shipping Containers were also buried. These were used as a Meth and an Ice Lab... with pill presses... chemical apparatus and precursors for the manufacture of Methamphetamine more commonly known as Ice ... were you aware of these drug labs?"

Silence... for some moments.

He rocked his body back and forward.

"Don't know nuttin. Them silly idiots who I put there to look after me farm musta turned it into some kind of drug thing without me knowing... we had a container buried into the side of the hill as a Fire Bunker...you know, during bush-fires. Somewhere for us to go to be safe if'n a roaring bushfire engulfed the area."

Bingo!

We had lift off.

Once they started talking, it was almost as if they couldn't turn the tap off. That was our experience after all these years. There was some bravado shown. Some resistance at first, but when the dam wall broke, there was no way of stopping the torrent.

"Yes. We searched that one, Alek. Very well done. Set up good. Yer could live there under the flames for quite some time, though I think that would be scary, not knowing what was going on outside...there was even enough room for your hog...good one!"

"Better'n being cooked alive!"

"That's how I'd feel being stuck in that Container...the other ones though, a very sophisticated drug manufacturing set-up all round."

"Don't know nuttin' about them.... those people living there looking after the place, it musta been their doing."

"Then how do you explain your fingerprints on the inside of several of those

containers...and a "Chemical grade" mask that was hanging on a hook below your name. I betcha we find your DNA on the inside of that mask...why was it inside the Containers? What were your fingerprints doing on the inside of seven out of ten of those Shipping Containers?"

"Any fool knows that you need a mask inside that type of thing...if'n ya don't want to get high on the things floating around in the air. I look after my employees...ya know, Occupational Health & Safety Procedures. It's very important. The Workforce boys can close ya down if'n they find any breaches."

You had to admire his obedience and conformity in certain Federal Workplace statutes!

"In a commercial Panel Beating Shop, I guess." Mar added.

"Yep...and especially in a Meth Lab too..."

"So you know of their existence?"

He nodded his head. He wasn't that silly, though the look on his face showed that he thought that he may have said a little too much. He was not about to implicate himself. You could almost hear him thinking that himself!

"Who was your AFP Handler?"

This completely threw him.

For the first time, he looked intently at me. You could almost hear the ticking brain trying to compute how much we knew.

"He'll kill me if'n I tell you."

"Alek...I doubt that you will ever see the light of freedom in your lifetime again. AFP guys are good but they've got no pull inside NSW prisons."

"You sure?"

"Yep...though your Tactical Operations Officer Handler from the NSW Police Force may have a chance to reach you in Jail. The best defence against that is to let us know what we want to hear. The chap will be arrested and charged and be no longer a threat to you...I doubt that they'll put the two of you together in the same prison."

"I aren't dumb ya know. You bastards will make sure he ends up in the same Prison as me. Just to give me grief."

A slight smirk on his face. He reckoned that he had our measure.

"I can very much discount that. You're going down for murder, conspiracy to murder, drug charges a mile long, receiver of stolen goods, stolen vehicles and associated charges, conspiring with several known terrorist groups to cause death and mayhem in Australia and so many other charges that I can guarantee that you will not share the same prison...and understand Alek, it was the video and tape recorded evidence supplied by the AFP that has helped us enormously in being able to charge you with the Conspiracy to Murder on 'Bunny' Kralik and you murdering your partner Olga Pavic."

"Bullshit...there's no way that they would ever make such stuff available. They told me that themselves. No way, Boss. I was doing them a favour."

"Alek, they've hung you out to dry. You had outlived your usefulness as soon as you murdered Olga...they knew that they would have a hard time trying to protect you once you did that silly thing...and you musta known that you would be overstepping yourself by tapping her...so why?"

He shuffled his feet. Moved his body about.

"Why, Alek? You had an almost perfect set-up... with Federal cops even protecting you... paying you a bloody good wage. Fuck me man, you had it made for life if you just did as you were told. Kept your nose clean. But no, you thought perhaps you were now outside the Law with the AFP looking out for you. Is that about right, dude?"

"Yeah, well. I was getting tired of the old witch...she wouldn't even come riding with me...says the vibration hurt her bones...she was getting to be an old hag, but I couldn't get rid of her because...as she said, she had Bunny's death hanging over me...so I didn't have many options, now did I? " He scratched his chin. You could hear the saw cut sound of his fingers going across his five-day growth. He frowned as something clicked. " What's this about conspiring with several known terrorist organisations...I was playing James Bond. I was getting information on those 'towel-heads' to pass onto Reg...and the Counter-terrorist guys paid me for the same information...I'm a bloody hero! An Australian Treasure...isn't that what they say? Being charged!??? No bloody way!"

He began an angry tirade that named names, places, dates and deeds. The mouth opened and out poured a torrent of information. The one piece of information that I found interesting was his claim of passing on the same information to O'Sullivan.

I cut across his angry spiel.

"Why would O'Sullivan require that information, Alek?"

He sat back to take a breath. Looked about the room as though I was one stupid twit!

"What? You dumb or some think? So's he can kill as many of them as he could. He hated the bastards. And I guess in a way I agreed with him. They were no good for Australia. They's should all be deported back to their own country where they comes from. That's what Matty reckons...either that or kill them. He reckons that he and his mates have got a fair few but he reckons that they worms their way out of the woodwork. He reckons that he has a life-time of work getting rid of the lot of them."

"Do you know his mates?"

"A couple. He's got about ten of them here in Sydney. About the same number in each State. Melbourne. Perth. You know, right around the country. He visits them regular like. He always comes back with a smile on his face...he don't shoot a lot. He's too clever for that."

"That'd cost a bit. Flying all over the Country. Where does he get his money from?"

"I gives him a bit from time to time. He's real careful with money. A couple of big-wigs...you know...Guys who own big companies...he says I'd be surprised."

"Does he belong to a Club? Has he got a Clubhouse?"

"Nah... but they meet regular like at each other's house. Maybe the local Club. Pub. They calls themselves somethink like...oh...he told me way back...silly sounding. He told me a while ago. I thought he was joking. I reckon I could make up a better name."

"The Southern Sons...or something like that?" Mar offered.

"Yeah. That sounds right. Or something like that."

We terminated the Interview.

It would seem that we could turn the tap off and on when-ever we needed to with Alek 'The Pole' Pojaski.

We both figured that as a former SAS soldier, Matty O'Sullivan would be a different breed of fish.

We weren't disappointed.

He was forthcoming with his Place of Residence address, Vehicle License Plate Number, AIF Personnel Serial Number, his home phone number and mobile and what type of vehicle that he drove.

Nothing else.

Also, his Pilot's Licence Number which was his only mistake, as we were quickly able to detail his Interstate travel itinerary. The Plane that he used on every occasion owned by a company that had as its CEO, one of Australia's best known persons. Also, he was one of Australia's leading philanthropists and conservative right wing figures...go figure.

O'Sullivan sat like a smiling Buddha, turning his head to look at the person who was asking a question. Concentrating on a spot just to the left or right of our heads. At a spot on the wall. Not a bloody word.

They train them well in the SAS!

We played all the video that we had, that implicated him in several of Pojaski's schemes including him entering the farm property. This in itself did not implicate him in any drug distribution scheme but as he drove from there straight to the Airport to fly off into the wide blue yonder, one could assume the worse...more than likely with his favourite Sniper Rifle in its Gun Case hidden in his Army Bag that he took with him every time that he flew out.

"Your plane?" Mar asked as the video ended.

He shook his head.

We already knew the Registered owner of the Light Plane that was capable of flying from Sydney to Perth in one hop. The owner at present was undergoing questioning in Melbourne by our equivalent Murder Squad Detectives down there.

He shuffled his feet.

"OK. Ya got me on a Conspiracy to Murder Charge. Big deal."

"And we'll have you on the Sniper Murders of one Michael Shatra and Usaffa Mohammed."

"Don't know them."

"...as soon as Ballistic checks come back on the Sniper Rifle that was found at your Place of Residence..."

"...don't know where that gun came from...it was on my door step the other day..."

"...your fingerprints are on the trigger guard, trigger and stock..."

"...I'm an ex-soldier. An ex SAS bloody soldier. I know a good gun when I see it. I picked it up. Checked its balance. Its feel. Its comfort zone...you always place your finger on the trigger guard and trigger to get the feel of a fine rifle..."

"...your fingerprints were also found on the shells in the ten-round clip..."

"...I emptied the clip. Checked to make sure that there wasn't one up the spout...good practise. They teach you well in the SAS..."

"...and your fingerprints were found on shells in two other ten-round clips, on the bullet dye, shell loader, gram weighing machine...everything required to re-load empty shells of 7.62 calibre...not a usual calibre that is available to members of the Public...and there's video of you target shooting with a Heckler and Koch PSG 1 Police style Sniper Rifle. Some twelve months ago actually. On Pojaski's farm out at Wilberforce. The same rifle and a Remington Sniper Rifle bearing the same Serial Numbers that were stolen from the NSW Police Armoury at Surrey Hills on or around February, March 2013...found at your residential address. Can you explain that, Matty? To our satisfaction? Oh...I feel sure that when Ballistics come back on the bullets found in or nearby seven other victims of Sniper fire around Australia, it will show that that gun was used in all instances...also, we have two other members of the Sydney Chapter of Southern Sons in custody. It will be only a matter of time before we have you all...right around Australia...and I doubt that the majority of them have been subject to SAS training on how to resist Interview techniques as you have...oh! They'll sing like canaries."

I stood up, leaning into his space, almost touching nose to nose across the small Interview Table as I did so. He yanked back with a fright. He had his Achilles heel, so it would seem. I will have to remember that.

He shut up.

Not another word.

We worked on both of them for another two days before we were obliged to ensure that they had Legal Counsel.

By then we had sufficient proof to charge both Pojaski and O'Sullivan with a string of charges. The Membership of Southern Sons was being decimated right around Australia. Most of them in custody and charged with Homicide or Conspiracy to Murder. Several high-ranking members of the Group committed suicide as did several supposedly 'secret' Donors to the Cause.

DNA trace would take another three to eight weeks but that would ensure the tightening of the noose to strangulation tension for all concerned.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

Abbey walked out of the Electronics Room as we closed the door to the Interview Room behind us.

"Wrapping it up, Boss. Over the coming weeks, we'll pull all the collaborative evidence together into an indictable Case for the two of them...the two Sniper Shootings and the 'Mole in the Gutter' Case."

"Good work, both of you. Better than that, excellent. Bloody excellent...you both doing the Gym this afternoon?"

"Yes Boss. Are you thinking of joining us?"

"Um...yes...I'm running out of places to be at knock off time, so's not to see you two walk out of the Office on your way down to the Sub-Basement."

We all laughed at that comment, especially knowing that there was truth in the words.

"Boss, there's always a morning session...or mid-day..."

He shook his head.

"I wouldn't make it to the end of the day."

"That only lasts a week or two, Boss."

"I'll think about it this afternoon as I'm swimming laps with you."

"Boss...um...look, realise that you may not be able to keep stroke for stroke with us. We've been doing it now, regularly for more than a couple of years."

"I won a "Blue" for Swimming during my Uni of Sydney days...OK! I relent to your superior knowledge and stamina...come into my Office will you. There's a couple of things that remain dangling in this case."

He again closed his Office Door.

This had become a habit when-ever our two cases were being discussed or intending to be discussed.

"OK. Two things. What's your view on how The Southern Sons gained their intelligence on 'proposed' targets interstate? I can take a guess on how they came to know about the targets in NSW....through Pojaski....but Interstate?"

"That's one, Boss."

"Yes...um...the other is a little ticklish...our Security Services...take your pick...involved with home-grown Terrorists...either State or Commonwealth entities...they must have known that their list of surveillance subjects was slowly dwindling by what-ever causes...did they? Or more to the point, why didn't they twig to that fact? Did they sit on their hands and totally ignored the situation that was unfurling in front of their faces? They could see the merit in the numbers of surveillance subjects diminishing thus making it easier on their workload resources and financial constraints.... but surely...."

"That's four, Boss." I stated deadpan.

"Well?"

"You'd be in a better position to be able to answer all or one of those questions, Boss. You are privy to a lot more sensitive information than either Mar or I. But at a guess, they had inside information and yes, some-one was sitting on the information that their surveillance subjects were slowly diminishing. Possibly even giving the theory to explain the loss that the subjects were leaving Australia to join ISIL Brigades in either Syria or Iraq...maybe even North Africa where they can then be channelled into the Middle East conflict. Either from the very top or not that far from the top inside their Federal Organisations...there was close to what...perhaps around the fifty mark that we assess as being victims of the Southern Sons...that is a lot of citizen's deaths in anyone's language!"

"I reckon you could almost double that and be closer to the mark, although that would be almost impossible to prove...one thing for sure, Boss." Mar butted in. "If it was...sanctioned from on high...we'll never know. Never know. If the Intelligence information was coming from some-one in a 'need to know' type of job that involved the covert capture and assessment of that type of intelligence Nation-wide, look for a premature Retirement in the coming months...and possibly a sweeping of a broom through such a section in one of the Government Agencies. That will be the sum total of it! Just a quiet nod for some-one to elect to take an early retirement...shits you, doesn't it? But that is how the system works, unfortunately."

"You're getting as cynical as your partner, Marge. But yes, I agree with you."

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE**

It was several months later.

We had just released all the O'Sullivan and Pojaski properties that we had in 'lock-down'

since the series of Raids were conducted.

It seemed such a long time ago now.

Coincidentally, the TOU along with AFP and ASIO Units performed a large series of raids Nationwide. Simultaneously across the land on the very Friday that we had carried out our local raids.

Too hard to swallow?

You betcha!

Over one hundred persons were arrested around the land as a consequence of those raids with a huge range of Charges pending from "suspected of plotting, planning terrorist attacks on Australian soil, belonging to outlawed terrorist organisations, inciting, possessing illegal literature" with lists of charges a mile long including illegal transfer of sums of money to Internationally listed Terrorist organisations, drug possession, distribution and selling, cultivation, owning illegal fire-arms and ammunition, explosives, possessing literature that instructed how to set and detonate explosive devices, gathering in large numbers with a view to plot against the Nation and other charges relating to the newly passed Commonwealth Laws on Terrorist activities.

The least sentence would be deportation.

Others would eventually receive prison sentences ranging from ten to thirty years. All would be flown to overseas destinations at the completion of those sentences. One boggles at the legal Aid Bill to defend all persons so charged.

It would have to be huge.

So be it for a freedom loving Democracy, where even the guilty are supported by all Taxpayers in their pursuit of claiming innocence until proven guilty in a Court of law, even if the great majority of cases were held in camera to protect the Government participants and Police personnel from possible repercussions by those still out in the community who see nothing wrong in taking the Law into their own hands.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO**

I'd just cleaned down the BBQ after a very successful meal.

Sausages. Rump. Prawns and two large Snapper. Tossed salad to die for.

Organised to celebrate Malisa's birthday and proposed promotion and posting to the Counter-Terrorist Electronic Surveillance Group. This was a much-expanded Unit within the AFP that electronically monitored and recorded all suspect conversations either over the telephone, mobile or landline, all e-equipment and all computer 'traffic'.

Mal would be a 'Cell' Overseer.

Responsible for a specific area.

Specific suspects.

Even her Father and Mother came down from the country to be with her. Their opposition to her living in sin with my Bill somewhat jaded. Or begrudgingly accepted. Her sister and brother-in-law with their kids were the birthday surprise.

With a number of my extended family, there was close to forty people milling about in the backyard and creating one hell of a mess in our recently completed in-ground pool.

She was standing beside me, a Stubbie in her hand. A serious look on her face. I could tell that she wanted to talk.

"Ya know, we lost our Department Head last week. The rumour is that he was offered an early retirement package too good to refuse. He was a good bloke. A beaut bloke though apparently, his politics could grate...he was a bit right wing...but he would always acknowledge you if he was in the area. His Deputy too. A really nice person. You rarely saw her around our area. Word has it she was being moved side-ways into AuSiD."

"What's AuSiD?" I asked, completely in the dark about these acronym Government Departments.

"Australian Signals Directorate. An ultra-secret Department that no-one that I asked, knew anything about."

She took a swig of beer.

"It's funny you know, all these rapid staff changes that have occurred over the past week or so. Like...you know, a funny thing happened on Friday. Ben Buckley? He was the 2IC of the whole Operations Room. A really nice guy. He announced his early retirement due to ill-health...just like that. We were told about his health a bit during the celebration on the morning of his departure...a bit strange don't you think?"

"How old was he?" I asked. The hairs on the back of my neck standing up ready to wave in the breeze.

"Oh...in his late forties, I think." Mal replied uncertainly. "Too young to die, of course. No-one seemed to know anything about his health problems...it was a surprise actually, as he always seemed fit and healthy. Those in the know said that he'd never had a day off sick in his life! A surprise...and Dan Springer, who was the Operations Overseer...Buckley's 2IC on my floor...he...um...he's taken another job. Out of the blue. We had a bit of a party for the two of them last Friday. At lunch time. They really didn't want to be there, if you know what I mean. It was a bit funny and I wasn't the only one who thought so, either. They were escorted to the Lifts after we said our good-byes...only took a few things. Personal stuff. Some-one said that the remainder would be boxed up and sent to their home addresses later. Really funny...they were met by a mob of guys downstairs. I guess mates who wanted to take them for a drink, perhaps...a bit funny, though..."

"Yeah." I replied caustically. "A real belly laugh!"

Mal gave me a filthy look.

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