



Peter C. Byrnes

A Crime Novella

**MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES
JOSEPH LIND AND MARJORY HENDRICKS**

**NOT
WORTH
THE PAPER
IT'S WRITTEN ON!**

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVE JOSEPH LIND

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Peter C Byrnes

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The Police Building was twenty-two storeys tall, making it for a short time, the tallest building in this City, which supposedly, was the hub, the centre of the sprawling metropolis of Sydney.

It also went another ten floors below ground. One of which was the underground Gym and slightly heated Lap Pool of eight lanes which it shared with the 'Pig Sty'. The overnight Holding Cells. The lowest level was the Ballistics testing and gun range. Along with a sizable Armoury and the required specialised vehicles for the Tactical Operations guys and Crowd Control requirements.

The cells were the first floor down, accessible from both the Police Station on the Ground Floor and several Lifts that serviced the rest of the building. There was one Lift that was used exclusively as a carrier for the transfer of Prisoners. While in use for that purpose, it could not be entered by anyone pushing the Lobby button to reserve it.

The building and its associated expansive mall surround took up an entire block. The building off-set on this block with a light pink coloured aggregate finished Plaza that gave almost level entry off the street footpath on three sides. The most was five up and ten down on only small sections of the boundary caused by the fall of the land. The entire Plaza Area sufficiently protected against vehicle intrusion by heavy bollards; to deter even a tank, some would suggest.

Regimental in their location on the vast, flat pedestrian-way were landscaped plots looking like small oases amongst a desert of light pink aggregate stone chips. In the centre of each small plot stood a spindly white trunk gum with little canopy foliage. Light, silver-grey, thin leaves that always drooped downwards.

Looking forlorn.

Anaemic.

Underfed.

Though that was the look of this particular Eucalypt.

Planted for its aesthetic charm; not for what little shade they could offer. Contrast between the pink and the white with the almost grey foliage, so the Architect would have enthused!

Over half of the ground floor of the Police Building was two storeys tall. A Foyer suitable for any up-market, modern Office Block in town. Completely enveloped in single panes of very thick glass. Treble-sheeted so I was once told. A close inspection on a slow day failed to enlighten me on that point. Supposedly bullet proof and shock proof although I wouldn't like to be standing near any of the panes if subject to a gunshot or a bomb explosion. Cost a fortune so went the rumour. Each

massive pane slightly off-set, one against the other.

A flurry of Lifts.

A single, large revolving door that never stopped spinning its slow orbital trajectory. It was also the first metal detector 'station'. Several turnstiles, accompanied by an X-ray chute and a full Body X-ray machine at each position. This was a bloody bottle-neck and a pain at each morning start-on time. Half the building's staff realised that if they came an hour earlier, they could avoid the 'squeeze' and get in valuable Gym time before the scheduled sliding 'start-on' time.

Thus the bottle-neck now existed for two bloody hours each and every morning; instead of the previous one hour!

To be crowded onto trains like sardines to get to work only to have to practically strip down in front of the milling throng to gain entry through these various 'stations' into your place of employment was both frustrating and humiliating!

A further sign of the times!

A ritual that the majority must now abide by to protect us from a very small minority!

Of course, any-one driving an Official or an Unmarked vehicle avoided this frustrating ritual. Straight down the Entry ramp into the second to fourth Sub-Basement levels for official vehicles.

A car bomb one would think, would cause more damage to the building and its inhabitants than anything that an individual could bring in, in their brief case or handbag.

That was just too logical so it seemed!

Perhaps we were just more trustworthy....or something!

Those that drove Official Police Vehicles or 'Unmarked' sedans.

To be fair, there was a Barrier operated by an armed guard....and several other technical bits that I am not at liberty to divulge.

Most of the Officers who drove these vehicles wouldn't know if a tonne of explosives had been somehow inserted into their vehicle while it was parked overnight at their residence. Wouldn't have a clue and I doubt that any would ever check that point before starting up said vehicle each and every morning.

A Security/Reception/Enquiry desk snaked its way towards the large Lift Lobby, positioned so that a final eye-view of all those who succeeded in finally gaining access were given one last 'look over' as they then crowded together in the Lift Lobby!

Paranoia personified!

The rest of this area was a smattering of cosy settings. Large, bulky sofa lounges and chairs. Very rarely used I would maintain. Heavy, very heavy solid timber occasional tables centred within

each setting. A beautiful 'In Door' Plant Garden seemed to find its way through the thick glass walls from outside. A bubbling waterfall and stone covered creek outside did seem to breach the impossible transparent barrier. There was always local bird-life winging brilliantly through this lush fernery. Some had even made their way inside much to the annoyance of the Counter Security Staff.

What was left of the ground floor area was taken up with the local Police Station.

Tacked onto one side of the Ground Floor of this monolith was a projection like a glass triangular bubble called the Coffee Jar. At any time of the day or early evening, the outdoor settings would be a third full with Cops from the adjacent building. The Sixteenth Floor cafeteria could not compete with the standard of the coffee...or tea on offer from this establishment.

The outdoor seating arrangements seemed to grow after every rainy period, sprouting large umbrellas like mushrooms protecting the ever increasing number of table and chairs. People seated like some form of fungi under these towering mushrooms. The available indoor area was almost always empty unless a cold wind was blowing from the snowfields or lashing rain deterred even the most hardy coffee sipper.

Smoking was tolerated in the outdoor area even though it was illegal!

It was a gorgeous day. Warm, not hot. Sunny. There were even some Rainbow Lorrikeets flying kamikaze loops at an incredible speed around and through the trees of the Plaza.

Squawking their pleasure as they did so.

Estelle and I had sat for a cup of coffee at the Coffee Jar before we wandered back into the Police Building. We'd walked around the nearby huge, multi-level Shopping mall, munching on our sandwiches as we slowly walked past seemingly hundreds of shops and countless mid-day Shoppers and Amblers. Us too, adding to the mindless stroll of the throng.

2

Estelle covered my hand with hers. I knew that she had something to say to me as all Lunch time she appeared to be waiting for the right moment to speak.

To tell me something.

Instead her attention was drawn to a man standing just a little away from our table.

He stood there, small jerking, agitated actions, a look of apprehension on his face for some

moments. His face lathered in sweat, mumbling to himself before he began to yell out at the top of his voice.

'You fucking bitch!' He screamed. 'You've been bloody unfaithful, you bloody bitch!'

He pulled a pistol from his jacket pocket. Took aim and fired off four or five quick rounds.

Before he had fired his second, there were screams, sounds of chairs being upended, broken china and glass being ground into the pink aggregate of the Plaza surface. Estelle and I seemed to react around the same time, grabbing the table to tip it over. I had no idea whether the stainless surface and plywood under of the small circular table would stop a bullet, but I wasn't about to sit there like a duck in a shooting gallery. I thought I may have pushed Estelle off her chair and the sound of her hitting the ground was a whoosh of air escaping from her lungs. By the time that I was lying on the ground behind the upturned table, I had my Glock in my hands. The screams were still ear-splitting, a woman somewhere behind me seemed to be hysterical. People were running. Crawling. Cowering behind up-turned tables. Spilt sugar on the pink aggregate of the Plaza surface glistened in the high noon sun.

'Put your gun on the ground. Hear me? Put your gun slowly on the ground. Just do it!' I yelled. It seemed to be repeated by several others. An audible reverberation from around us that really sounded like a jumbled ancient tongue to me.

'Yer mother-fucker. Your gun. On the fucking ground. Now. Do it!' Estelle yelled.

I thought that she was practising for some Hollywood Movie! I almost took my attention from the man to look sideways at Estelle. I'd never heard that language escape her lips before. Neither the tone of anger in her voice...nor its volume! If the situation hadn't been as serious as it was, I think that I would have started to giggle. To crack up laughing!

Her voice was a lot louder than mine. Admittedly at several octaves higher it seemed to lack that authoritative edge. But it seemed to work as he looked at us not more than five metres from him. He slowly bent, a half kneel, as he held the gun out in front of him. Quickly though, he went down on one knee, brought the gun up into the firing position, let off one shot and was turning in our direction when there was what sounded like one loud shot that seemed to go on and on.

He seemed to dangle in the air like a rag doll having an epileptic fit before falling sideways onto the hard surface of the Plaza. His head hit the concrete hard, splitting his scalp open.

I knew that I had fired off three shots and felt that Estelle and several other Officers around us had gotten off at least two shots each.

His body would have had to have gained a kilo or two from the amount of lead that I felt had been fired into his body!

'Fuck, what a way to spend your Lunch hour....' I murmured.

'Yeah....you sure know how to excite a girl....' Tellie replied. Her voice tremulous.

'Your OK?'

'I think I landed funny. I've skinned my knees and the palm of my left hand....and I'm all shaky. Nervy.....'

'Your first time?'

'Yeah. Yours?'

'No....but you never get used to it. The last time that it happened, that I fired a shot, I ended up killing this massive dog that was heading straight for Mar and I....now that was scary....'

'Scarier than this?'

'I don't know. The adrenalin hasn't stopped yet.....I guess sex is out of the question right now?'

'Bloody hell, Joe....what you men think of at a time like this!'

'Just joking, sweetheart. Just trying to lighten the moment.....to tell you the truth, at times like this, when the adrenalin starts to slow and nerves kick in, I can get a little flippant.....'

'So I've noticed, Big Boy.....sex seems like a good option right know....'

'I always have said that we were compatible! You get flippant too, huh? Or just plain horny?'

Both of us giggled nervously.

'Officer? You two OK? Good shooting both of you. He had you in his sights. About five metres from you. He got a woman sitting a couple of tables behind you. Five shots so he wasn't a beginner at target shooting that's for sure.....although the woman who is still hysterical.....is his former wife. She says that it was her that he was after. She had a couple of AVO's out on the guy. Can you stand OK?'

Estelle tried to but couldn't. Her legs like rubber. I carried her into the Cafe's interior out of the sun and placed her gently onto a long leather bench seat. She laid down. Her head almost touching the head of a woman who had been hysterical moments before. She was still sobbing violently.

'Standards and Ethics guys will be here shortly.....'

I groaned.

'You've had experience with them, eh? We've unholstered our guns. Fired off shots. They need to be involved.....I'd say that you could be the most senior Dee here so you are the head guy. OK?'

I wasn't paying attention. Still lost in the moment.

Some-one placed a blanket over Estelle. Paramedics starting to hover about, asking who we were and if we had been hurt. I hadn't even heard the Ambulance sirens. I glanced outside, noticing

numbly that there was a lump under a blanket out in the Plaza.

Shock I guess.

I heard Estelle whisper to one of the female Para's that she thought she may have wet herself. Or had a shit.....she didn't know. It was then that I noticed blood on the front of her skirt. I pushed my way towards her but was stopped by several Uniform Constables.

'She's OK, Detective, she hasn't been shot.....'

'Then what is the blood from?' I asked angrily.

A Paramedic turned to me. 'You her husband.....?'

'Yes. She's my partner. We share a flat together. She's a Forensic Technician up on the eighth....'

'I'm afraid that she's had a miscarriage. Sorry Detective..'

3

'You've got to stay on site, Joe. Not only did you fire shots but you are also the most senior Officer on site.....at the time.....'

'Who gives a fig, Mar. Estelle.....she's had a miscarriage so it seems. She musta fallen onto one of the table legs sticking up.....I flipped the table over.....I think I forced her off her chair....straight onto the table leg.....it didn't break skin but she has a hell of a point bruise already turning black....I gotta go with her in the Ambulance, Mar. She'll need me.....'

'All in good time Joe. First things first. I've got her service revolver in an Evidence Bag. The S and E guys will want to know that the evidence chain has not been broken. They'll need your revolver too, Joe. Just sit down there for a bit until you get your thought patterns in order. OK?'

'You OK, Joe?' Abbey asked as he sat down beside me. I shook my head vaguely. 'I knew that there was something that she was aching to tell me, Boss. She was pregnant. She lost it, Boss. She lost her....our baby, Boss'

The tears welled up in my eyes. I shook them away with a swipe of my arm. A bloke came to crouch in front of me. I knew who he was. He was from Standards and Ethics. Always called out when an Officer has fired his service pistol causing death or injury.

'Your Glock, Joe. You need to give it to me. Now. How many shots did you fire, Detective

Lind?'

I had trouble trying to recall the moment.

'Two....no three. I think. Estelle loosed off two. I know that for sure. She was right beside me and it almost deafened me. My ears are still ringing.....'

'Can you give us any idea on who else may have got shots off?'

'The Shooter got off a pattern of five quick shots.....then that single shot. He was turning to aim onto us....I got off three....yeah, three. Estelle two.....but there were several others firing. It seemed to be instantaneous....maybe three others I think.....maybe two or three shots each though I can't tell you what that was based on.....'

'Did you see his gun?'

'Yes.....no.....I saw it in his hand. I have no idea what type it was.....maybe a Browning.....'

'A Browning 1911-22LR with the standard 10 shot magazine.....though it seems that he only had six shots available to him....'

It took some moments for me to collate that information.

'Nothing left.....nothing up the spout?'

The guy shook his head.

'Was he definitely turning to you aiming his handgun?'

'Shit yeah. He had kinda half crouched almost onto one knee as though he was going to do as we asked. That was to lay the gun gently onto the ground....then he went solidly onto one knee as he brought his arm and the gun up into a firing position to let another round go....to tell you the truth it hadn't or wasn't computing at that time how many rounds he had fired off. He was just swinging towards Estelle and me with his gun hand up in the firing position.....a double hand hold so he knew what he was doing.....it was all reflex.....it happened in under five seconds about.....no time to think.....just to act!'

'Mmm.....Joe, don't get me wrong. You collaborate what every other guy has said.....but we still have to go down this road . OK?'

'Yeah. I understand. How many others had their Service Glocks out?'

'Three.....'

'And they all fired at the same time?'

'It appears that way. Some two shots. One other guy three shots.....a lot of lead and there-in lies the problem. Once the media gets hold of this, there'll be opinions of an overkill situation occurring....especially amongst the Shock Jock and Conservative Crowds.....you know how it is?'

'Unfortunately, yes, I do. Those bastards weren't here....and are never likely to be placed in a similar situation so they're talking through the top of their hats.....what do they expect us to do? Form a Committee to determine who should be the one to fire at the Perp? They wouldn't know what to do under similar circumstances yet they sit there on the Airwaves in judgement....bloody hell!'

'Plenty of people will believe them.....'

'Tell me about....can I go off to the hospital now?'

'Yeah....but do you want to see the victim?'

'That's where I'm going.' I shook my head. 'Sorry. Yes, I suppose I should under the circumstances.'

4

The woman was still slumped in her chair. Partly held there by the arm-rests, she was somewhat slouched down in the seat.

Dark hair. Reasonably attractive. Good quality clothes. An expensive Dress Ring on her index finger of her right hand. A just as expensive Bangle and matching necklace chain. Diamond earrings. She had a cluster of three bullet holes dead centre of her chest. One that obviously pinged off her collar-bone and another in the side of her neck that looked as though it severed the Carotid Artery. She would have bled out fast if the three bullets hadn't killed her first.

'Typical Browning.....to the left and rising.' The S & E guy said into my ear.

'Where's the last shot?'

'Up in the roof....or more correctly, penetrated one of the glazing panels that formed the roof of the Cafe.....' He pointed skywards with his finger.

I glanced up to see a neat craze and hole in the thick smoked glass of a ceiling panel.

'Mmm.....where was the ex. Missus sitting?'

'Two tables over....only partly facing in the direction of the Shooter.....'

'That doesn't make sense.....'

'What doesn't?'

'Supposedly he was aiming for the Ex.....what? Some metre....one and a half metres to the left of the Vic. The Vic is shot with an initial cluster of three shoots all within a 50 millimetre radius.....good shooting.....then he fires another two that climb to the left and according to what you say, is a peculiarity of the Browning semi-automatic on rapid fire.....still.....those initial shots.....there's no way that he was aiming for his Ex.....no bloody way.....!'

'I think that you're right Joe.' Abbey commented.

He had been privy to every piece of conversation between I and the Investigating S & E guy. And he'd followed me like a bad smell every pace that I took. His Mobile out and recording every gesture. Every word and nuance. He knew the ropes and how this could get out of hand if some-one was moved by Public pressure at a later date.

'You're right Joe. Who's the Vic?' He asked.

'He wanted us to shoot him....he knew that he had only one bullet left.....he fired it off up into the roof.....if he wanted to hit some-one with it he could have, judging by the pattern in our Vic's chest. And you cannot tell me that he hadn't noticed his ex. Missus by that stage. She had begun screaming during the initial couple of shots and didn't shut up. I reckon that if he wanted to, he could have shot her with his last bullet.....if he wanted to....no, he had done what he had set out to do and was laying the groundwork for us to shoot him. He started to turn to us knowing what the outcome would be. Suicide by Cop shooting! Wouldn't be the first, and most definitely won't be the last.....it wasn't his ex. missus that he was after, that's for sure.'

Abbey shook his head in agreement.

The S & E guy looked away then back to the Vic. Mumbled his concurrence.

5

Marge walked towards us, iPod raised.

'The shooter's name is Warren Wilton-West. Hyphenated last name. Last known address in Oakfields North. Has quite a history with over a half dozen AVO's out against him.....' She swung the Tablet around for us to take a peek. A glancing moment before she adjusted it back so that she was its sole Appraiser. That infuriated me no end! As though she was the expert and me and all others, absolute drongos!

'His Ex-missus has two out on him....and the rest I guess are ex-girlfriends or partners. The Victim was Angela Bowman. Thirty five years of age. A Salesperson for a large Cosmetics Firm.

Address in Haberfield. She had taken an AVO out against our Shooter some months ago.....'

'So, she was the latest partner who called it quits, with him not being able to take the verdict so to speak. Seems like a possessive type of guy.'

'Mmm.....Joe? Mar will drive you to the Hospital if the S & E guys are finished with you.....'
He turned to Reg Parkes, the lead S & E guy at the Scene. 'Reg? Do you need my boy here, for anything else? No? Can we get him to the Hospital? Shock? His Partner?'

Abbey was talking in shorthand.

'Joe? No matter what the Hospital diagnosis is, I don't want to see you for the rest of the week. Understand? Mar will tidy up our side of the Case and put it to rest. The DPP and the Coroner should be able to work it out without too much trouble. Without your presence or input. Understand? See you next Monday. I'll organise some time with the Police Psychiatrist.....'

'Boss. That's not necessary.....'

'Yes it is Joe. Yes it is.'

Mar led me to an Unmarked parked on the footpath hard up against the Plaza bollards. Ambulances, cop cars and Emergency Services vehicles added a surreal touch to the scene with their light bars strobing the clear, early afternoon light.

For some reason I was a bit wonky on my feet. I knew that I was trembling and I couldn't keep my train of thought on one particular thing. At one moment I thought that I was clear and lucid, the next, my thoughts were a complete jumble.

Maybe the Boss was right.

I'd need a couple of days to get over it though for the life of me I couldn't work out why. I'd been in similar positions as this one on a couple of occasions and walked away just fine.

This one, for some reason, was different.

Perhaps it was having Tellie so close to danger. Maybe it was my guilty conscious kicking in. Blaming myself for the loss of the baby. Maybe it was just a build-up of all the close calls that I had experienced throughout my career.....I didn't know and that was the most infuriating part of it for me!

A paramedic laid me down on a stretcher. Strapped me in and closed the doors as his partner started in on me. Heart monitor. Blood pressure bandage. My eyes. Mar said that she'd see me at the Hospital or some-such. I found it hard to hear. Still. The ringing in my ears was drowning out all other noises. Speech.

I felt the Ambulance lurch forward.

I don't seem to remember much else.

6

It didn't go according to plan. What I had anticipated or thought!

It was Tellie who visited me each early evening after she had knocked off for the day.

It fact I did not have a shortage of visitors. On some days when I wished for peace and solitude my bed would be surrounded by Visitors beaming with bonhomie and well-wishes! All trying desperately to make me laugh....or at least smile! Or conversely, ignoring me completely as they carried out conversations with one another as though I wasn't present!

My ear-drum was torn to shreds, presumably from the noise of Tellie's gunfire or a combination of that and from the muzzle gas force of each of her shots. She felt guilty I knew, for having been the party who had caused this injury while I felt guilt over her losing the baby as it was I who, I thought, had pushed her straight onto the leg of the table in our joint endeavour to find some sort of cover from the Shooter.

She gave me the rounds of the Kitchen in that regard telling me to stop being the martyr. What had happened had happened. No-one was at fault....or if you want to find fault then it was the Shooter's fault. Doing what I was doing was not going to let us move forward as a couple if we had guilt feelings between ourselves....she reminded me so much at times of Helene, my former wife who had a similar outlook on life and relationships.

I was stuck in Hospital for two whole weeks!

There were those who have had similar operations on their ears who have walked from Hospital only days after the event. Me? I rode my bed as though it was a bucking horse every time that I moved my head. Even a tiny amount! Clinging onto the sides of the bed as it attempted to buck me free. The room spinning in counterpoint!

No reasons as to why I should react in such a violent way after Ear Surgery. It happened to some while others were not effected at all. A bad case of vertigo and stigmata of my eyes that should end when the vertigo settled down.

A finely tuned Athlete I would contend. Or I would respond by saying that it was the sensitive me who had induced this enforced Hospital stay.

The Tinnitus had increased with little professional advice forthcoming as to the likelihood of it diminishing or completely ceasing.

It sounded as though it was a 'bumper year' for Cicada 'births' and I was trapped in a forest clearing surrounded by dense bush alive with these noisy insects. A continual and unrelenting two-pitch loud noise emanating from inside my head. So loud in fact that it made normal conversation

and the ability to hear the educated replies that much harder to comprehend!

7

Ellen Phelps was the Police Psychiatrist.

She must have thought that she would at last, have a captive Patient in me.

My regular meetings with her after each horrific homicide that effected me to some degree never seemed to comply with the required regime as declared in the Police Force Protocols and Personnel Requirements Handbook.

I usually would cut the number of visits after such Cases to a bare minimum. To her credit she would never refer to my attitude as anything wrong. Something within me that would not permit a stranger in particular, to be the recipient of my most inner thoughts and concerns. She would just battle on with what she had, often referring to me as her most complex but uncooperative copper!

It was one morning of the second week of my ride on this bucking bed that she seemed to drift into my Ward Room.

'Joe.....you seem to find odd ways to escape the drudgery of employment....' She murmured with a smile. 'How are you holding up?'

'If I could just get this bloody bed from rolling about trying to eject me, and to be able to turn down the volume on the ringing in my ears then I would say I was fine....you thought that a couple of sessions while I'm lying flat on back would be the only way that mutually satisfying therapy sessions could be achievable?' Giving her my most benevolent grin.

'Do you mind?'

'Not really....at least I won't need to ring for a Nurse to take me to the toot!'

'I can do that for you, Joe, though as a Psychiatrist I am not trained to hold anything for you.'

'Ho, ho, ho.' I replied. 'I can assure you Doc, we will always keep this on a professional level.....even if there is a need for you to hold anything.....'

That was rather funny as I had the hots for her the first time that I had lounged in her Office on the Tenth Floor, with its fantastic views over the City. Over the Park and the River.

She was a well-presented late forties, early fifties woman with alert blue eyes, a figure that belied her age, a wicked sense of humour and a thirst for work and the assisting of Officers who

genuinely required her help.

She was good at what she did.

'Abbey tells me you were in the middle of that shooting incident last week. Down at The Coffee Jar on the Plaza.'

'Yeah.....a real bugger actually.....it doesn't matter what time of day it is, you'll always find a fair selection of the City's finest slurping on their coffee down there. I spilt my coffee without taking a sip! Had paid for it too!'

'Not surprising as the coffee there is far better than the swill from the Eighteenth Cafeteria. I'm sorry to hear that your partner had a miscarriage as a consequence of that shooting.'

'Mmm....' Forgetting my predicament, I nodded my head in agreement. The beast was again unleashed, trying desperately to toss me from my hospital bed. I clutched at the side bars that were raised to prevent me from toppling onto the floor. The session lasted but seconds, but to me it roiled on for some time.

'I think that I may have pushed her accidentally onto one of the upturned legs of the table as we both dived for cover. It was lucky that the leg didn't penetrate her stomach. She still has a deep bruise there, though the colour is yellowing a bit now....'

'You seem to think that it was your fault.....'

'Doc, you know me. Whether it was or it wasn't, I'll always find a way to blame myself....'

She shook her head slightly. Looked towards the window. 'Does the "Bodies in the Bags" Case still keep you up at night?'

'Not in here. They give you some sort of sleeping pill each night....but yes, even with that, when-ever I let my mind drift, it scours over that Case.....and a more recent Case. The Farmer and his extended family all shot to death.....another bloody waste.....'

'You consider "The Bodies in the Bags" Case a waste too?'

'Most definitely!' I asserted. 'A total waste...and senseless.'

'Why do you say that?'

I thought for some moments before I answered.

The Case still fresh in my mind.

Still causing anger through my entire being.

'They purchased, notice that I didn't say *adopted* because they bought those twins when they were no more than six months old.....for the express purpose of grooming them, using, abusing and ill-treating them before tossing them away. Like bloody rag-dolls having outgrown their usefulness.'

Why? Because they were showing all the signs of reaching puberty....and they were into young kids.....and the biological mother who cried streams of tears when told that her twin son and daughter had been murdered.....she didn't even attempt at any form of investigation to check on the suitability of the adoptive parents at the time that she sold them....the prospective father was a convicted paedophile for Christ's sake.....his partner of similar caste and a pre-op transsexual I think is the proper name for...her?....and when the biological mother had become a well-established Business Woman up in the Coffs Harbour area with a very lucrative Surrogacy Business in her homeland, Thailand, there was no effort to trace down the kids.....which common decency tells you that she should have.....no, that's wrong really when you look at it....but that's the way the Case has gotten to me, making a jumble of thoughts and emotions shine through.....but then....she collapsed when told of their fate! For around ten years those kids went through hell....a life that decent people would never be able to imagine.....even the Child Protection Agency knew something of their existence...and predicament....but failed miserably in their duty of care...shit...those poor, tormented kids!.....'

My voice had risen in volume and tone.

It wasn't hard to pick that I was bloody angry.

Still....and the tears still welled up in my eyes!

We had worked on the case almost a year ago now, yet it still tugged at my heart-strings. At my sense of fairness and parental obligations.....of adoption laws and the responsibility and ulterior motives of adoptive parents.

'And the Farmer and his extended family?'

'More about the kids.....a sixth generation farmer on the same plot of dirt. Two of the sons had purchased neighbouring allotments that combined with the original of the father, made it the largest holding owned by a private family in the district. But....The Banks were circling. The drought was biting.....and the tragedy of that case was that two weeks after the act....which must have looked similar to the Waco Massacre in the US a while back.....it rained. Good drenching, heavy rain with follow-ups over the next month or two that meant that the winter harvest will be bumper one next year! For the entire District! A Farmer lives on hope.....they all do when it comes to the vagaries of the weather....he just ran out of it and couldn't stand being seen as a failure by the rest of the family.....that's basically what his Suicide Note intimated. Too proud for his own good....and his family's.....but it was the kids.....'

I angrily swiped away the tears that were welling up in my eyes. The action again releasing the bucking beast.

I didn't care if I was tossed onto the floor and trampled!

She stayed for a longer period than the normal appointed hour in her Rooms at the Police Building. After she left I fell asleep and for the first time without the aid of sleeping tablets, I slept

the sleep of an innocent with not a nightmare to evoke a tossing of my head with its incumbent vertigo maelstrom being unleashed. I had felt completely wasted! As though every word recorded in my 'grey matter' had been wrenched from the hard drive, with me wrestling in opposition over every letter extracted.

They had to wake me for my evening meal.....they shouldn't have bothered!

8

'All stitched up?' I asked Mar as I slumped into the passenger seat of the Unmarked.

'Yeah.....you were right. He was aiming for his ex-girlfriend. It is doubtful that he even saw his ex-missus sitting not that far from her.....I wonder what the outcome would have been if he had.....'

'....or had enough bullets to carry that through.'

'Yeah.....seven AVO's out on the guy. Two by his ex-missus. Two by the current ex-girlfriend and victim of the shooting and one each by other less long-term partners.....a similar story by all his ex's.....a manipulative, domineering bastard who had severe anger management problems who at first came across as the original White Knight in shiny armour.....'

'The AVO's sure did what they were intended to do. Stop a rampaging, jealous so-and-so from taking out his grief, anger and insecurities on an unsuspecting partner.....they're not worth the paper that they're written on. It's about time that the Courts realised this and did something about it instead of leaving it up to us coppers to sweep away the problem as best we can.'

'Yeah, Joe. But an alternate system isn't that easy to evolve. What are you going to do, arrest some guy if he is thinking of breaking an AVO that has been issued against him?'

'Surely several Court Instructed sessions with a Court Appointed Psychiatrist would show up those bloody sods who were more than likely capable of breaking such an Order....and in a violent way.....'

'What then Joe, arrest him on suspicion that he may commit a crime? Our Prisons would be full to overflowing....and shades of Orwell's novel....no Joe, that isn't the answer though I can't give you a reasonable and workable alternative, I'm afraid.'

'So we sit on our hands and turn up at more and more of these types of crime scenes.....'

'Yeah....well, Joe. Ya not gunna save the world....but it sure is good to have your smiling

disposition back with us.....can you hear out of that ear?'

'Only when I want to!'

'Typical male!'

'It's the bloody ringing that is constant that gets up my nose. The prognosis is that I more than likely will have it for the rest of my life.....now that's something to look forward to!'

'Yeah, well. We all have our crosses to bear....and you have a reasonable excuse if you don't hear something correctly....but then, when have you ever needed an excuse. As I said, a bloody typical male!'

It wasn't worth the effort to reply.

I pretended not to hear her comments.



He bought his vehicle to a slow stop at the kerb.

The driver behind gave an exasperated honk of his horn.

It was not yet 9 O'clock and it was still a Clearway where parking was strictly prohibited.

He turned off the ignition, opened the driver's door and unfurled his long body from the car. As he closed and locked the vehicle, the driver behind was going ape-shit on his horn. Several others caught up in the line also began their horn blast of discontent. The guy, who stood a hair's width under two metres thought momentarily about walking back to the other car to give the driver an ear full.

Maybe even a bullet up his nose.

No, he decided.

He was on a mission.

The shop door had just been unlocked at precisely the same time that it did every morning that he had watched.

8:35 AM on the dot.

The irate driver was now not only standing on his horn but was slinging insults and expletives at the tall guy.

He gave him the finger as he walked around his vehicle to step up onto the footpath. Immediately forgetting the mayhem that he left behind. The good looking young woman who had opened the shop front gave him a cursory look as she turned to decipher the cause of the noise that seemed to be escalating out of control.

She was tall for a woman.

Close to 180 centimetres tall.

Her height slimmed down her body although she was a size 16. She felt that her hips were too wide. Her boobs too small. Large feet that she had always hated, never being able to find a decent pair of shoes that she could love. The heels at 6 centimetres, only added height to her mien. Most said that she had an extremely attractive face. Open and honest. A smile that hinted at all sorts of possibilities though she felt that her mouth was too wide. Her eyes not right though they radiated a bright blue. A love of people and a sincere interest in their well-being.

A tailored suit with a silk blouse that hinted at lacy undergarments. She'd always hated her height as it seemed that all the men that she was attracted to stood less than 165 centimetres tall! Her last three lovers had been that short; or even less. They may have been excellent lovers but the height difference looked absurd when the two of them would enter a restaurant or some such. While it hadn't seemed to bother her last lover one iota, she felt that he saw her as some type of trophy. People would gawk at them. It didn't register to her that they all were immediately under her spell as she saw herself as some type of Amazonian misfit.

The only place that she felt really comfortable was on the Basketball court.

Or the pool doing laps in her early morning ritual.

It took the man two strides to cross the width of the footpath, grabbing the woman's arm in a tight grip as he draw up to her side. She gave a startled cry. A look of uncertainty momentarily flashed across her face to be replaced quickly with one of terror. He didn't seem to exert much pressure on her upper arm though she didn't offer much resistance. She seemed unable to do so. He guided her back into the interior of the shop.

Sat her down on one of the Waiting Area chairs. Withdrew a snub nosed .38 from his jacket pocket, placed it between her eyes and pulled the trigger.

He absent-mindedly glanced at the blood spume pattern on the wall behind her head. Bits of her brain began to dribbled like jelly falling from the chin of a child.

She was slumped to the right, her head bent back as far as her neck would allow. She looked bug-eyed with one eye ball hanging loose. A small black hole in her forehead ringed in red and black. A single line of blood fell to her empty eye socket.

He gently straightened her in the chair and lovely bent her head to loll against her chest.

He longed to close her eyes but the effect of the bared eye-ball made him feel nauseous.

He recalled that she had had beautiful eyes. Full of life. Fun and happiness. Eyes that you would die for.

He found scant comedy in that thought.

He sat slowly in the chair beside her slumped figure. Taking her hand lovingly in his, he lifted the gun to his right nostril and pulled the trigger.

If he had been able, he would have perhaps examined the blood and gore plume behind his head and been totally dissatisfied as it did not match with hers. His more parabolic, reaching to the ceiling. He would have wanted to try again!

Possibly due to his height, his body slowly slumped to the left so that he lent into her.

Touching for eternity.

He would have been in second heaven if he had realised that!

10

'Carmie! My love. What have you got for us this fine sunny morning. A stabbing murder of a gay Florist who wouldn't send flowers to his lover on a weekly basis?'

Caramine Lees spun around, placing her finger to her pursed lips. Shaking her head vigorously as she did so. Indicating that I may have been close to the mark and the said Florist was within earshot.

Whoops.

My mouth will always get me into trouble.

'Joe, my love. You back at work and firing on all fours. That was a nasty bit at the Coffee Jar....and you right in the middle of it! Nothing surprises me about that, now. You OK? Yes? Nothing much exciting I'm afraid with this one. Just your normal Murder and Suicide with a snub-nosed 38. Open and shut case. A note on the front seat of the Shooter's vehicle out at the kerb. Caused all sorts of mayhem until the prescribed time that the Clearway finished this morning. You won't need to extend your grey matter too much on this one. Several witnesses await your attendance. The Owner of this Florist Shop. One Jonathan Williams. Jon to all and sundry. He is in the stuffy back Office come cupboard.....and an irate motorist who was directly behind the Shooter's vehicle. Had the hide to pull up in a Clearway well before the allowable time that one is permitted to park in the kerb lane. Irate but grey around the gills. Daniel Biels. Both he and our friendly Florist Jon happened on the scene at the same time. Both came running at the sound of gunfire....as I said, they await your presence. Hello Marge, when are we doing the town red again? Soon, I hope....have a quick look. The guys are waiting to move the body out, OK?'

I looked down at both bodies still seated comfortably on the chairs. They looked as though

their positions had been staged if you could ignore the entry and exit wounds with its accompanying blood and brain spumes on the wall behind them.

I felt angry.

Completely useless.

'What?' I exclaimed angrily. 'A bad moon rising? Something in the air? This is the third murder/suicide case that we've been handed in what? Three months? Some-one got a macabre sense of humour. There's no winners in these cases.....just bloody losers! What a bloody waste of lives.....I'll lay a bet Mar, that there is an AVO separating these two though they will be fore-ever joined.....for eternity! What a bugger. Just as well I don't believe in the after-life, ain't it? And another example of how the system needs to be overhauled....these AVO restrictions do not work in most cases.....!'

'Joe, settle down. We don't know about any Orders in place for the two of them. Regardless, at least it won't take a lot of shoe leather....just a brief report for the Coroner and we're over it.....!'

'You reckon??!! I was proud to be a Murder Squad Detective once. Putting the lowlife Perp into prison where he belonged....these cases, there's no victim and perp....just two wasted human beings.....or a whole bloody extended family wasted.....!'

'Still keeping you awake?'

'Don't you dare mention anything to the Cop Mind-reader, Mar. I've done the required five visits.....!'

'It don't work like that Joe. You know that I'm still seeing her over the "Bodies in the Bags" case. We haven't even gotten to the Farmer Bishop family out west yet. It has nothing to do with the number of hours but how you are dealing with the memories of a particular case.....!'

'Yeah, yeah....!'

'You two had enough? Can we move the bodies?' Caramine Lees cut across our conversation.

I looked across at my Partner. Raised my eyebrows. She nodded her head as she turned and walked out.

'Yeah. Thanks. We've seen enough. How long before the post mortem results and forensic reports are finalised and sent up to us?'

'The usual Joe. We haven't a backlog at the moment so around three weeks to a month. As you know it's the Toxicology work-ups that take the time.....though one wonders why we should bother with that added expense on cases like this....but that's the protocol that we have to abide by. You understand. Nothing else?'

I shook my head sadly and followed Marge out of the shop.



Jonathan Williams was openly gay and proud of it.

'Daniel Benton Schofield. That was his name.....and I heard you mentioning AVO's. Yes. There was one against him from coming too close to Diddy's.....'

'Diddy?'

'Yes. Diddy. That was her name. Diddy Tiller. I'm pretty sure that was her real Christian name.....um.....an AVO restricting his access to Diddy's place of work, home address, Basketball Court when Diddy was playing or at the Pool where she swam laps.....in place for almost six months. Yet you'd often see him across the road there just lounging against that wall over there. Staring this way. I called the local Cops twice....all they did was shoo him on his way.....nothing else they could do as the AVO stated within a one hundred metre radius of the shop.....he was stalking poor Diddy. Sending her mad.'

The guy began to sob quietly.

'A bloody waste....a total bloody waste.....they went to the same school. From Kindy up through High School so she told me once. Some would imagine that because they were the tallest two all the way through school, that they were made for each other. And so it seems, that's what he thought! But as Diddy would often say, *'He was a loser.....not a competitive or ambitious bone in his body.'*

He shook his head. Again drying his eyes with a tissue, sniffled before continuing.

'She was ultra-competitive and about to break into the big time in the Women's Basketball League. She was being signed by the Sydney Bloomers. The World was her oyster and unfortunately, I was soon to lose my most valuable employee because of it.....but.....her world was way beyond a Florist Shop in the burbs. Christ.....' He shook his head, blew his nose. 'Sorry, Detectives.....I think I should lock up for the day....after you guys are finished. Can I do that?'

We nodded our acceptance of his suggestion.

We took his statement which corresponded with that of the irate driver who had been stalled behind Schofield's vehicle.

Daniel Biels was a little less coherent with his statement with the Ambo advising him that he should spend at least twenty-four in Hospital under Obs. The guy had an obvious high blood pressure problem and was moderately overweight. He had been shaken to the core from the incident. We took his particulars, advising him not to leave the country on the off-chance that we may need further information. He would be needed at the Coronial Enquiry which could take place within eighteen months. His motor vehicle would be transported to the Police Pound where he could retrieve it at his convenience.

We walked the strip shopping precinct interviewing several other Shop-owners whose attention had been diverted by the constant sounds of blaring horns and loud voices.

We interviewed both sets of distraught parents.

There was no winners or losers, just victims in cases like this.

Open and shut.

Straight up and down.

Case closed!

12

I pummelled out my frustration on the punching bag. Again it bit back much to the delight of those in the Office who were looking covertly at my sweating shenanigans.

'Some thing's sure got up your nose!' Detective Peta Daniels muttered sarcastically as she passed by the thick floor mats that denoted the area.

'What?' I asked as I stood to peer at her.

The bloody bag took a swing at me, almost knocking me off my feet.

The Squad Room erupted in laughter and whoops of delight.

I was not amused.

Mar leaned across our desks to take up my phone as it chirped its presence.

'Joe? Your phone. A Sergeant Sherbach from the Goulburn LAC Station.'

'Yeah?' I answered as I took the phone from Mar.

My hands and arms were glistening with sweat.

I'd given the bag a 'what for'.

That would be the last time that it would ever take a swing at me while I wasn't looking.

'Detective Lind?.....um.....we've got a 'Red Flag' on a DNA sample that was taken from a local man.....oh.....around two months ago. David South. The name mean anything to you?'

'No. Sorry, Sergeant. Not in any of our recent cases.....that name hasn't come up.....'

'The Homicides of Tia and Thomas Tallis. Brother and sister. Twins. Their bodies were found in suitcases up near Coffs Harbour.....there's a link to David South.....DNA link....your name attached.'

'You're a bloody ace, Sergeant. That was one hell of a case. We knew that there was a third person involved but all we had was a DNA trace from a couple of cigarette butts.....you still got the guy?'

'There's the rub. We had him on 'Driving a Stolen vehicle, a high-range drink driving charge and ditto marijuana in his system'. We had him in the cells over a week-end until first thing on the Monday morning when he appeared for arraignment where he was allowed out on bail. He failed to appear in Court on the Charges and has done a runner. We have not been able to locate him...'

'Shit. That's bad luck. You put out an 'All Points' on him?'

'Yep, Detective. State wide.....'

'In that case can you update the data to include an Australia-wide alert on 'Suspicion of involvement in a Double Homicide' and he is to be approached with caution.....my name along with yours on the 'All Points' for contact purposes.....um....any known aliases?'

'No. Not that we're aware of.'

'Local lad?' I asked. Excitement tingeing my voice.

Mar looked over at me.

Raised her eye-brows.

I silenced her with a gesture of my raised hand.

'In a way, yes. Was born and bred around here. Once he left school at the age of fourteen without a reasonable Report Card, he drifted about. Always seemed to return back here though he wasn't close to his family....they had basically disowned him. From around the age of 10, maybe 11 we were aware of him. Minor run-ins. The typical lost kid who was always going to grow up on the edge of the game.....and a little behind it if you get my drift.....'

I nodded my head. It was an all too familiar pattern with a lot of small-time Crims.

'Thanks Sarge. That's good. Can you e-mail up the recent mug shots of him? We'll do a bit of digging up here to try and get a link with him on the homicide matter. Perhaps his cohorts can fill us in on his possible whereabouts. One still in Long Bay awaiting trial on the matter. The ex-partner made bail. We'll keep you in the loop. Thanks again. We'll get him Sergeant, all being well with your help. Thanks.'

I felt good again.

We had a bad guy to concentrate our efforts on!

It took some moments for the slow realisation to penetrate my dense grey matter. That was that we were again being thrust into a Case that had left muddled emotions that I still had nightmares over. I knew that my Partner too, was still caught in the web that surrounded the "Bodies in the Bags" case.

Regardless, that thrill of the chase had returned.

A long ago assortment of feelings that had not been present in the recent Murder/Suicide Cases. Cases that we seemed to have been wading through recently that left us empty and not feeling as though we were Murder Dees.

We were again on the trail of a bad guy.

What we both felt had returned. That being the true purpose in both our lives, regardless of what the Case had engendered in our emotional well-being.

Perhaps if we could nail this mysterious David South to the case, the resultant closing off of the homicide deaths of the twin brother and sister would be the panacea that would rid us of those lingering mixed emotions for both of us.

Only time would tell.

13

I filled Mar in on the development.

I swear her pupils dilated and her breathing increased, like a rabid dog who has just caught a whiff of freshly killed meat! She was back on the hunt and firing on all fours!

'How do you want to handle it, Joe?'

'You're better at the Computer cross-checking details. You dig into the guy's background, life, known associates, places of employment, ditto former addresses, banking details, Medicare Card details, Licence details, etcetera.....mug shots and description coming up from Goulburn as we speak....he may have prior, Juvenile arrests or at least the local guys were well aware of him....so have a more detailed conversation with them....they may spew forth that little gem.'

'....while you sit in the sun enjoying a coffee downstairs while I bask in the insipid glare of fluorescent tubes here in the Office.....'

'I was thinking more of the eighteenth Cafeteria, Mar. We can both sit in the warm sunshine and mull our way through the Case.....you know, using our Tablets. You are aware that we can Wi-Fi them to the Cop Data Base while we're away from our desks.....'

A Biro came sailing across my desk towards me. Stabbing me hard in the chest such was the force that she threw it at me! I couldn't help but smile. I had got her!

'C'mon, Joe. Face your demons. I'll go with you to the Ground Floor Coffee Jar....it's about time that you put that little episode behind you. We can take our Tablets and do a bit of digging while we're there. C'mon. Get your arse into gear, my man. Let's go!'

I followed meekly behind her.

She was right, though you would never hear that from me!

I had been ignoring the Coffee Jar and its excellent coffee since the 'shoot-out'.

Yep, I did need to put that behind me. I needed a caffeine fix of the sweetest type and not the dirty water that I had been having from our Cafeteria using every excuse in the book as a reason not to venture to the ground floor establishment.

I needed to gulp down a soup spoon of concrete to toughen up, I scolded myself.

14

'Where's Taralga?' Mar asked me as she peered at her Tablet.

'Up the Taralga Road....'

'You're a smart-arse, Joseph Lind!'

'No. True. About thirty kays north-east out of Goulburn. Up the Taralga Road that commences with the old highway as you enter the main flats east of the Shopping precinct of Goulburn. Why? Google Map it instead of always thinking that I'm your personal Gregory's Street Directory.....'

'Mmm.....South's last known address was an RMB 130, Lower Cutting Hill Road, Taralga South. More than likely an out-of-the-way farm house or something similar. Complete privacy. Just what low-lives like that would savour.....'

'Tallis and South met while Tallis was living in Goulburn.....isn't that what Tallis said some time back when we interviewed him. That was about it.....even though we now know that South was the other guy in the homicide of the twins, Tallis was never going to give him up. David South. Remember we spoke about that at the time, wondering why that would be the case.....we still don't have an iota of an idea on that question, do we?'

'Obviously South had something over Tallis....in a big way.....'

'What would that be? He was willing to take the fall alone and not incriminate South.....although he was only too keen to give us an earful on his long term partner Charlene Longford aka Charles Longford.....we'll have to interview them both again. Tallis is still in Long Bay, isn't he?'

Mar nodded her head, seemingly inattentive to my ramblings.

'Mmm.....Tallis went to Canberra in 2002...' She began. 'Stayed less than a year before

returning to his place of birth. Goulburn. Charli didn't go with him. The relationship ended so they both say. Early 2003 Tallis hooks up with David South in Goulburn from what Tallis told us. He still had the twins. Winter 2006 they kill the twins in Goulburn, stuff them into those top quality Travel Luggage cases and head towards Coffs Harbour supposedly because they both had hooked jobs at Banana Flats just out of Coffs. They get nervous about the bodies that they're carrying in the back of South's Ute so they veer off the Highway onto that Fire Trail as a spur of the moment thing. They last only a short time in the Coffs area presumably because the work is not to their liking.....'

'Banana picking....cow of a job.....'

'I'll take your word for it.....they piss off back to Goulburn and register for the dole.....'

'Do they? How do you know that!?''

'I don't.....but that is what that type of person would do, don't you reckon?'

'I reckon that they'd be on the dole for-ever.....that's an avenue we need to explore. Centrelink. There's no way that South would forego his Dole payments. We'll need a Court Order to get into their files.....for a recent address for David South....they may surprise us and furnish an address where he is now keeping low.....According to Tallis, South would only help him in the disposal of the Twin's bodies if he could see and smell their blood.....what type of job would that type of guy excel in?'

A smile cast away my scowl of concentration.

'Abattoir!!!' We both exclaimed together.

'I'm pretty sure that there is one in Goulburn or surrounds.....'

'OK.....how do we approach this? By phone or a visit? Let's for one moment presume that South has had an alias up his sleeve for some time.....the common thread is the address in Taralga. The Abattoir would have that as the place of residence for either South or what-ever name he was using...a few taps on the Computer Personnel files for that address and we may very well have the name that he is now travelling under.....a Court Order. No?'

'OK. Interviews of Tallis and Longford again. A visit to the Abattoir.....how about getting the local guys to do that? They would be known more than likely to the Abattoir management.....maybe if they go there it would circumvent a need for a Court order.....'

'That could jeopardise Due Process and stuff up the Case on a technicality.....'

'.....OK. A Court Order.....the question of what South has over Tallis.....'

'They're both paedophiles....or so we presume South to be as that is their connection.....any cases of young kids going missing in the surrounding area all the way to Canberra and back in 2002 up to and including the present time?....well, up until we arrested Greg Tallis last year.....'

'OK.....how about you follow all that up plus the complete computer checks on our suspect while I tidy up the Farmer Bishop tragedy and the Diddy Tiller homicide/suicide cases. Get them off our desks and up to the DPP's for the Coronial Enquiries on both cases. You're better than I at

Computer Background checks and I'm a better Report Writer than you....another thing....Goulburn isn't that big a town. That type of person seems to be able to seek out those tarred with the same brush. I'd say Tallis and South may have known each other since they were kids.....perhaps possibly even went to the same school. A point to check out, my young lady.'

Mar opened her mouth to say something. Thought better of it, drank the dregs of her coffee, closed down her Tablet and stood.

'That's a plan. Let's do it Sherlock. Let's do it!'

She had that Hunter look in her eye as we headed towards the Lift Lobby of the Police Building after going through the usual security check-points and X-ray machines.

I wondered whether I could sue the Force if ever I contracted Pancreatic Cancer or some such that could be attributable to too many X-rays penetrating my body.

Probably not, I thought to myself as we headed towards the Lift lobby. Our very countenances were known off by heart with the front Security Chaps but we still had to go through the same formality every time that we stepped through that automatic revolving door.

Serious!

15

We spent the next week and a half chained to our desks.

Me typing up the final Reports on the Farmer Bishop tragedy and the Florist homicide of Diddy Tiller and immediate suicide death of Daniel Benton Schofield. I liaised with the Standards and Ethics guys on the Coffee Jar shooting death of Angela Bowman by her ex. boyfriend, Warren Wilton-West.

My partner had basically tied up that case while I was lounging in Hospital fighting one bugger of a bucking bed. The S & E guys wanted everything in triplicate and no loose threads though.

Before sending the finalised reports off to the DPP and the S&E guys, my Partner read through them carefully, inserting and amending as she went. She was never one to *not do* these amendments when-ever I wrote up the Reports on our Cases. It was a principle that she would never desist from! Her reasoning was that if her signature was also required on any Case Report that we had both been involved in, then she was going to ensure that she agreed with all the facts so stated in them....including the grammatical construction of the contents!

I figured that no matter how perfect I prepared any Report, she would always find fault.

Just to be narky!

Any Murder Case Report leaving the Murder Squad had to be also countersigned by the head of the Murder Squad, DS Church aka 'Abbey'. The best Boss that I had ever worked with. He too, would always apply a red Biro mark on any of our communications that he was to countersign, but at least you knew he wasn't doing it to be nasty.

He was just a perfectionist! Super-so with things like that!

At least the final Edition of the Report was always prepared by our Office Typist who would ensure that sufficient copies were available for transmission, Court Document sets, DPP's copies and the Murder Book after all signatures were obtained.

A typical bureaucratic requirement. But these Reports invariably found their way into Court so perfection was required! Expected! Nothing else would suffice!

Marge organised the local guys in Goulburn to do a history check on the possible association of Tallis and South while still at a local Primary and Secondary School. And the possible lead at the local Abattoir.

Both with accompanying Court Orders.

A visit to Long Bay was organised for the following week along with a visit to the home address of Charli Longford in Balmain.

16

Greg Tallis was still a weasel of a little man. His head ferret-shaped. A long thin nose. Beady eyes giving you the impression that he couldn't see that well. Always squinting. Skin stretched a little tighter over the bone of his face than when I had seen him last. His eyes furtive and for-ever roaming, never settling for long on any object as though he was eternally alert to a prowling predator. His time in Prison did not seem to be a holiday for him. On the contrary, he was not at home at all in this place, which was a pity as he should get at least 'life', hopefully never to be released!

'G'day Greg. Been a while....' Marge began. 'You don't look happy in this glorious holiday camp.'

Tallis looked away.

'He must have forgotten to take his happy pills this morning.' I mused.

Tallis sneered at the attempted humour.

'I think you should get used to being here, Greg. What with the good meals, regular health check-ups, dental care and the exercise regime, you should live to at least eighty. What? Another twenty-six, twenty-seven years? I'll tell you now.....' Mar leaned further across the table towards him. Getting into his space. He leant backwards away from her. 'I'll lay a bet that the Court hands down a 'Never to be Released' sentence in due course....a pity really, when your mate and cohort still walks the streets a free man.'

She spun an A4 colour 'mug shot' photograph of David South across the table to him. The shot taken about two months previously in the Goulburn Watch House.

'Know this man, Greg?'

He barely glanced at the photo in front of him.

'He's in Queensland we suspect. Enjoying the sun and sand.....'

'Not bloody likely. He hates the surf. Sharks. Scared to death of them. And the sun ain't his friend neither.....'

'So you do know that fellow?' She asked as she tapped the photograph with her finger.

'Nah....' Though he knew that he'd fucked up.

'Then how do you know that he hates the surf because he is scared of being eaten by a shark?'

'He looks the type.....'

'Smart answer, Greg. Yer quick. Yer former De Facto is also enjoying a free time of it at the moment....until her Court case that is. It must rile a bit that you are the only sucker in Prison at this time, and by all accounts not enjoying it one iota. Am I right on that one, Greg?'

Again the eye movement to momentarily look up at Marge. A furtive sweep around the room.

'Some are lucky. Some aren't. I have always been the unlucky one.....'

'What? C'mon Greg.....think back! You must have been in second heaven for quite a few years. Grooming those twins. Making heaps of money from your little kiddy-porn videos.....do you know Danny Steele? Went missing from out the front of his place a street away from where you lived in Canberra? In 2002. March of that year. He had just turned five. His body has never been found. About three weeks after you took up residence there.....for only a short time before you moved back to Goulburn.....the weather too cold in Canberra? And you moved where? Bloody Goulburn has got to be colder at times than Canberra, hasn't it?'

'And hotter.....' I chimed in, just to keep him off-balance.

He sat still for some moments before again glancing every which way except at us.

'What do you think we may find if we did a search of that house? The Garden? Danny Steele's body? Bindi Wilcox? Perhaps her body? Bonnie Taylor? Jacob Daniels? Any others that I've failed to mention.....in that what? Ten year period?'

There was silence. He had stopped moving.

'Should I mention several little boy's and girl's names that went missing around the Goulburn area when you moved back there.....should we take a close look at the house where you and South lived in South Taralga.....don't worry, it's being organised as we speak. They've got these machines....on rubber wheels.....that X-ray the ground. They can tell whether anything is buried without having to dig up half the district.....they're working on that now, then they'll swing around to your old Canberra address. Do you want to save them the trouble of a painstaking ground survey search? Anything that you want to tell us, Greg?'

Mar let the silence grow for some moments. Not one of us moved an eye muscle.

'Goulburn East Primary School. Year Two through to High School apparently you were great buddies with David South according to the reports that are digitised and kept at the Schools. You would truant at least one day a fortnight or two, the two of you. Former neighbours told of cats and dogs going missing, often being found skinned alive. Gutted. Terrible cruelty obvious on family pets. Your own mother tells the story of you taking your sister's Goldfish out of the water and staring at it as it flopped about until it died. Your little sister screaming in the background. Not being able to do anything as you had tied her to her bed.....remember the good old days, Greg? What a hoot! A real load of fun yer are! Must have been a great conversation starter at parties that you went to....you'da been the focal point of all the laughter, right? You piece of shit!'

The last comment said with real menace in her voice. It even scared me for a moment.

'Nothing to say, Greg?' I took over. 'Never mind, we'll be back to charge you with as many murders as bodies are found on those two properties.....'

'Ya can't pin those on me! Ya got no proof!' He screamed.

'Oh, yes we can, Greg. Remember how we got you on the twin's homicides? DNA trace. It's remarkable what you can leave behind at a crime scene or a burial that you are none the wiser about.....a cigarette butt or two.....you being a country boy would never throw a lighted smoke into the bush and you were such the Greenie that you would always place your butts in those small plastic 35 mm. Film containers so's not to leave any lying about.....yer old man useta do the same thing, didn't he? That's why you are sitting opposite us at this moment in shuffle chains. Uncomfortable aren't they? DNA trace. Remember, Greg? We found your DNA trace on cigarette butts found inside one of those Luggage Bags.....and we are told that they were under the body.....meaning you dropped them as you wrestled to get the body into the bag. Remember? There's no other explanation but the one that says that you were instrumental in shoving the bodies of those poor kids into those Suitcases.....you've implicated your mate in bleeding them out. Remember, Greg. You're done Greg. Sealed and delivered.....but your mate, he's still roaming free....how does that make you feel?'

'Twern't me. Southy wanted to see them bleed. Wanted to see them squirm as their life blood soaked into the dirt.....I had a good wrap going that bought a lot of loot into our pockets what with all the porn videos but all he wanted to do was watch them bleed out. It twern't me. It was Southy.

He killed all those kids. Not me!

'Have you heard of "Before and after the facts" Greg. You were there. You were aware of the crimes....I'll bet you even helped in the abductions of the kids. Would that be right? Yer mate South should let us know about that, don't yer reckon?'

17

'Gawd, I hate coming to this place.'

'Mmm.....it's not the happiest sort of place to visit, especially if you are on a downer.'

We were slumped into the front seats of the Unmarked. We had bought Coffees from the small shop not far from the entrance into the Prison proper.

'I thought we had lost him there for a bit...'

'Me too.....have you organised one of those Earth Radar Machines?'

'No! I couldn't get approval on a gut feeling. They cost a bit to get up from the CSIRO Earth Science Laboratory in Melbourne. Abbey wanted something more concrete than dates of the missing kids corresponding with the times that we *presume* that Tallus and South were in the areas.'

'Yer got that now.....'

'Yeah. I'll ring Abbey to get his approval. Apparently there's something like a month lead-in time on the hire of those machines.....'

'You want to do Goulburn and Canberra?'

'Yeah.....but there are two addresses in Goulburn.....or near Goulburn that I think should be investigated. That address at Taralga South and a hobby farm closer to town that they both used for a while after Tallis's return from his stay in Canberra. Three kids went missing during that time from south-western suburbs of Sydney out near Campbelltown and Picton. Both are just a short hop up the Motorway from Goulburn. The kids taken in similar circumstances. Not too hard a stretch to suppose that our two had something to do with the disappearances.....'

'It's been what, ten years or thereabouts. Would the machine still be able to discern the difference in soil density or what-ever it picks up, after all that time?'

'I'm told that the soil never constitutes back to the same density or compactness as the surrounding natural layers even after several centuries. Of course, the longer that the soil has been left undisturbed, the less the difference. But the machine can still pick up that difference no matter how small the variation. If there are bodies buried at those three sites, then we'll know in due

course.....say no longer than six weeks from now. Let me ring Abbey so that he can start the ball rolling.'

'We still going to Balmain?'

'Yeah, why not?'

I just nodded my head.

I thought that it may be a little early yet.

The Partner of Charlene Longford was a Solicitor and their hours of work were notoriously long or varied. Then I remembered that she worked from that address in a front Office in the Terrace House.

18

Briney Waters was her fair dinkum name.

Not a good moniker for a practising Solicitor. And a good one by all accounts.

She stood no more than five foot tall which could be the reason why she wore ridiculously high stilettos all day. Every day. Must play havoc with her though the pain barrier looked as though it was unusually high.

This afternoon not so.

A little roly-polly figure but a dynamo known for her quick mind and acerbic tongue.

Not this afternoon so it seemed. Tears streaked down her face as we interviewed her. Her usual high standard of foundation and make-up smudged by the constant dabbing of her eyes with a saturated Tissue.

'I have no idea where Charli is, Detectives. She lit out outa here as though there was a dress sale at Zampatti's. After the Bail Hearing. Haven't seen her since. Only took her favourite clothes. Left the rest. Why? I have no idea, they were never my size and never would be, though the mind would wish on occasions. The house is Bail Surety, so if she doesn't turn up for the Trial Date, then I could lose this piece of prime Real Estate. There's nothing more sorrowful than a dyke in love left high and dry....if you get my drift. So Detectives, there is nothing more that I can add, so a good afternoon to you. You do understand that as my Client, if she does show, then I am not obliged to inform you of that fact, but to show good faith and realising the strife she's in, I will let you know.....until then?'

She showed us the door.

'Let's go home Mar. By the time that we arrive back at the office it would be time to call it quits for the day in any case.....'

'What about our swim for the day?'

'OK. Back to the Office we go.'

19

Our forever present Head Clerk Guy 'Hendo' Henderson was tidying up his desk to head out for the day as we passed.

'Early mark eh, Hendo?' I remarked. The Stirrer in me can't help an occasional jibe. Hendo was known for his many additional hours at nil pay. A once or twice early mark would never be frowned on, especially in his case.

He gave a chuckle at my stir. 'Oh! Joe? Marge? Don't forget that you're up for this week-end. Brett Senior and Dallas Courtney will be Number Two behind you. OK?'

To tell the truth, I had forgotten that it was our turn.

There was a rolling roster every week-end where two, two-man Murder Squad Team members on the Day Shift were on "Call-out" duties from the Friday night through to the following Monday morning. It was an extremely rare occurrence where even the Number One Team were called out due to the work load of the Dog or Night Shift boys being snowed under with urgent cases. But because we were on "Call out", there was a hefty Penalty Payment of \$150 less tax for the three nights. This obviously escalated if there was an actual Call out with hourly penalty rates applying.

Good beer money unless it was a messy case, then no amount of money was compensation for being on duty for close to thirty hours without sleep! Which could happen if the call-out occurred in the early hours of the Monday morning. Which it had done on the odd occasion for all of us. But as I said, it was an extremely rare event where we were ever called out.

Abbey waited at his Office door while Mar and I placed our wallets and stuff, our holsters and Glocks into the shared Gun Drawer.

'I thought that maybe I would be swimming the laps alone this afternoon.' Abbey remarked as we headed towards the Lift lobby.

'Yeah, well. It was almost the case, Boss. But as we haven't done a morning stint for almost this entire week, then we figured we were getting too far behind.'

'I was hoping.....' He chuckled. 'But then Sonny kept reminding me! Notice that it is the guys

that do not participate in this daily ritual of exercise who are the most vocal in reminding you of a skipped day? Go figure.'

We all chuckled at that observation.

20

The Moon suddenly lit up. It appeared huge on the horizon. I was told that at sea, this was not an unusual phenomenon. A bright full moon that almost blocked out the sky. It must be that phase where the moon is closest to the Earth, I thought to myself. I heard ringing from the Bridge and half expected a voice to proclaim four bells and all is well. Some-one nudged me in the small of my back. It hurt a bit. Then a stronger nudge in the back that hurtled me over the guard-rail into the sea below. I opened my mouth to scream. To attract attention. I was so terrified I was left voiceless watching the slow disappearance of the ship as it continued its voyage towards the horizon. Something nudged me in the small of my back again. I turned my head to see a shark circling around me. It turned and rushed towards me, again hitting me in the small of my back. That hurt and I thought that it was determined to break my back before it devoured me.

"Joe....Joseph....." The shark yelled.....the shark yelled?

'Bloody hell, Joe. Answer your bloody phone....'

'Wha? What time is it?' My bedside lamp was on and blinding me, shining directly into my eyes. Tellie had used that ploy previously to jolt me from sleep.

'Almost four thirty.....'

'We've got a call-out.' I complained groggily. I picked up my phone.

'Joe? We've got a call-out. Be there in fifteen. Be ready....and don't go back to sleep.' Mar hung up.

I wrestled the phone back onto its charging base and began drifting off again.

'Don't you dare, Joseph Lind. Get up'

Tellie pushed with both feet as hard as she could, rolling me out of bed onto the floor.

'Have a shower and get dressed while I make you a coffee and a bacon and egg roll.....'

'And the same for Mar, otherwise she will never forgive you.'

Mornings are not my best time. Especially when it is this early. I often wondered how I ever got into the habit of an early morning surf, a run or a swim.

Had me beat.

I slumped into the passenger seat of the Unmarked, placing two thermo-cups of coffee into the cup holders, handing Mar a B&E Roll.

'Not runny. No sauce so you can't drip it down the front of your blouse as you drive. Ain't Tellie a loving, caring and thoughtful person?'

'Mmm.....I will thank her from the bottom of my heart next time that I see her....what's the matter with your back? Some-one knee you, did they? Kicked you out possibly?' A smile a mile wide. 'What a thoughtful woman you have, Joseph Lind!'

'Tell me about it. What have we got, Mar?'

'I guess that the Night Boys are snowed under. Saturday night and all that. A couple of Pub brawls no doubt with stabbings galore. Our body is up the Mountains apparently. Near Faulconbridge. The Mountainside Temple of God. One body. That of the Pastor. Pastor Douglas Hawkins. His Assistant, a Mister Bartholomew Hartcher discovered his body when he entered the Pastor's Office to help prepare to-day's Sermons. You do realise that it is Sunday morning, don't you?'

'The Mountainside Temple of God? Never heard of them.....and no, I wasn't too sure about the day. You know how I am before my first coffee and when-ever I am awoken at such a Godless hour.'

'Another Evangelical birth. They're like Rock and Roll Boy Bands.....'

'What!!?? How so?'

'They all look the same, sound the same, sing similar songs, practise mob euphoria and come and go with regular monotony. Build a large following, make a bloody fortune and sink back into anonymity just as quick. With the money!'

'Love the analogy....a little cynical, but.....what happened to the pure little Catholic girl. Don't tell me that your Brian 'Muscles' Sarvich has shaken you from your inbuilt Catholic beliefs?'

Brian Sarvich had been our friend for zonks.

He had been one of Professor Bernie Ford's prime pupils. He was now the Lead Forensic Pathologist and Deputy Head of Forensic Medicine at the City Morgue. Since Bernie had accepted the post of Head Forensic Pathologist for the International Criminal Court at The Hague at the age of seventy-one, when most men had had their feet up since attaining the retirement age of sixty-five. Not our Bernie, though rumours were that he was missing his homeland and was hinting at returning to Sydney in the very near future. Sarvich was also Head Forensic Pathologist for The

Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Veteran Affairs and had taken a sabbatical some time ago to head up a team in Belgium locating and identifying a huge number of Servicemen found in a mass grave in some lowland's field. Killed during WW1. It wasn't that long after his return that he and Marge had teamed up. Keeping the union a secret for some months until 'outing' their affair at the House warming party of his night shift colleague around nine months ago now.

Brian was now cohabiting with Marge at her place. A finer couple I have yet to meet. I was tickled pink for Mar when the partnership blossomed. They are two of the most important people in my life....along with perhaps another twenty or so who I categorise as also being that important!

Brian 'Muscles' Sarvich was built like a Greyhound. Almost. Skinny with not an ounce of fat on his lean frame. No muscle definition like a pre-pubescent youth hence his nick-name. He is a devout Atheist, if there is such a thing, and it was our joint beliefs in that regard that perhaps was the basis of our friendship. Our teaming together at parties and corralling an unsuspecting religious person was the stuff of legends!

By the time that we turned onto the Motorway heading west towards the Mountains, Marge had scoffed down her roll and slurped noisily on her coffee.

'Arrh....that hit the spot! Compliments to the Chef.'

I half expected a complimentary burp to round out her feeling of euphoria.

'Remember last year. At that Presentation night. Sarvich had that discussion with that self-righteous, prig of a woman who belonged to a different era.....Seymour, Senna.....something like that.....'

'Jackie Sennah. The wife of the Deputy Head of the Police Media Group. 'Muscles' sure knows how to pick his adversaries. He's going to get himself in hot water one of these days. He should know by now that if you are standing there with a group of people, each with a beer or a glass of wine in their hand, the worse subject to introduce to the throng is either Religion or Politics.....'

'Yeah....but it got the 'stuffy shirts' going that night, didn't it? Muscles bought up a couple of points which, to my way of thinking, are the crux of the whole subject. That is, in order to believe in the veracity, the validity of one, you must believe in the truthfulness of the other. And vice versa. If you admit to the falseness of The Bible, then the validity of there being a God has to be questionable....and vice versa. It got me thinking.....and please, never tell Brian this, but I started reading up on the subject. First up The Bible....and The Koran have to be the greatest examples in history of outright plagiarism. Vast passages in both books were taken from the Jewish scriptures and the Torah. And it was recently discovered that large sections of the Jewish Script had been taken from some ancient Mesopotamia writings. And the Koran took passages from The Bible. In both cases there was some 'twigging' to the text but it is still noticeable. The Bible emerged in the Third Century AD and The Koran in the Seventh Century AD. The Bible, the Roman Catholic version, has been the basis for all Christian beliefs then and since....all the different Christian

Churches....and sects....and if you try to convince me that the St. James Version of the Bible was written with the help of the Hand of God, you'll have a hard time convincing me! It was a purely political event that brought that version of the Bible into existence.....a heavily emended version to lessen the effect of that Catholic patriarchal system. The original by all accounts was the work of a group of back room Priests and Monks supposedly collating "Original Books". If that be the case, then the benevolent, wise and fair God was in favour of a patriarchal system of "rule" that allowed the Priesthood to flourish, become astoundingly wealthy and powerful. And to ensure that the females of the Faith were not slighted by this obvious patriarchal system and feeling left out of things, the 'Virgin Mary' was exalted to above Rock Star fame and status! If that isn't the most condescending act in World history, then Hilter should be proclaimed a Saint. As I said, the Old Testament was basically stolen from the Torah. Word for word. The New Testament was supposedly the record of events surrounding the birth and life of Jesus Christ. Recorded by his contemporaries and cohorts. At that time in history, the only persons who had a modicum of literate knowledge, could read or write, were the High Priests of the Temples and the Roman Ruling Class. Yet nearly every Disciple apparently wrote a book that formed some continuum on the life of Christ and was full of philosophical theorem and parables. That beats the odds of the day, don't you think? We sit here in judgement over the seemingly tribal differences with murder and mayhem of the two most popular sects of the Muslim religion.....Sunni and Shi'ite....yet the Christian religion with its score of various sects based on the same basic ideals as written in their particular Bibles, has been fighting its own battles since the First century.....here we have the three main....or should I say evident religions with a commonality between them that belies why there is constant friction between them. Religions of Peace? I think not! My Grandmother bemoaned the fact that she had not entered the Convent before she married. I remember when she said it one time, I was maybe thirteen, fourteen and going to a good Catholic Girls' school. Thinking at the time, that perhaps I should enter a Convent when I reached the age of eighteen.....'

'Fair Dinkum! You at one stage considered becoming a Nun. Un-fucking-believable! Look at you now.....'

She looked across at me with a bemused expression on her face.

'Joseph Lind.....most impressionable young Catholic girls who had strong beliefs in the Church and who went to a strict Catholic Girls School, would at times covet such thoughts.....'

It was all I could do not to break out in laughter. Mar continued with her meandering discourse.

'.....I replied that if she had, then she wouldn't have had all her grandchildren to love. You know what her reply was? God would have found a way.....it was then that my belief system began to be questioned.....isn't that such an absurd and illogical statement from a very intelligent person. Even at that tender young age, I knew that my mother, two Aunties and an Uncle could never be the product of "Immaculate Conceptions".....It makes you wonder, doesn't it?'

She took a few sips of coffee and was silent for some moments.

'Another thing that always bemused me was how my Grannie would say that the Religion was perfect; it was the Brethren that were imperfect. That wasn't the fault of the religion.....I could never understand the logic in that statement.....what, us meek followers were supposed to spend our lives chasing perfection, a state that could never be achieved as that would then mean that you were 'God-like'....and that was not possible.....unless you achieved Heaven.....like some form of pass mark that allowed you free rite of passage which was only available to good practising Catholics! I had friends, even members in my own family circle who I considered good Christians...not Catholic but good people who would never achieve Nirvana. To me that was so.....wrong.....it reminded me of the have and have nots.....the Caste system of India.....England.....'

She finished off her coffee as we sped up the Motorway at over 100 k.p.h. A no-no especially for us cops! She snapped the silence as she again started up.

'Nearly every Christian Country that has a proportion of Catholics in its populace, has had some form of Royal Commission or Parliamentary or Police Investigation into the paedophile practises of the Priests in the last decade or so. It was stated by the Canadian Investigation Committee....I think it was them or some Report in Boston in the US, that the Roman Catholic Church protects the largest grouping of homosexuals and paedophiles in the World.....and what makes me mad as a cut snake is that recent Synod Conference in the Vatican where the question of homosexuality in the Church was rejected. The question was watered down to accepting or rejecting the Church's stance on *respecting* homosexuals and gays. The Pope had wanted it worded to allow the recognition of Gays *in the Church*.....which was watered down to *giving respect* to Gays....and that was rejected.....what an absolute absurd paradox!'

She turned to me. A questioning look on her face.

'Mar, you don't have to convince me.....you are teaching to the converted.....'

'Another thing.....when you are discussing such matters with a.....a Believer for want of a better name.....and you mention some fact in the Bible that is absolute nonsense....like The Flood and Noah's Ark which has been proven could never be built in timber of a size that the Bible, The Koran and The Torah all dimension.....all describe.....you know what the reply is? Always? You must have faith in The Lord.....what type of answer is that to an obvious false story? Doh!'

I let out a low whistle.

'There's the rub,' I began. ' Give a zealot the floor and the only way to get him out from under that spotlight is by using a Shepherd's crook!'

We both began laughing.

21

'Caramine.....you're the last person I expected to see this early in the morning.' I exclaimed as we walked into a spacious Office. It was on the second floor at the rear of a huge sloping auditorium that triangulated down to a small platform with a huge rectangular multi-coloured glass window behind that formed the base of a stone and steel spire topped by a lighted Cross.

From this office you could either look over the Church Auditorium one way, the outside garden lawn area with its generous speckling of large trees through this wall to ceiling window or through a smaller window that looked out over the rear Hall and Kitchenette area. This Office and several others formed a raised spine, the whole building covered in a gently arched roofline that was supported on these beautiful exposed intricate timber trusses.

A window wall looked out on what seemed like hectares of lawn that was liberally dotted with stately giant Mountain Ash and White Gum trees. The other three walls were bare of any adornment. The lack of photographs or framed prints or anything only adding to the 'largeness' of the room. A soaring ceiling. Several rows of exposed timber trusses. The timber sectional beams of the trusses of sizable dimensions.

Close to the window wall and suspended by rope from one of the exposed trusses was a naked figure. White. Devoid of colour. Hands tied together. A hook attached to that rope manacle slung over the lower beam section of the ceiling truss and tied off to the only piece of furniture in the room, except for a black leather, high backed Executive chair. A huge, heavy looking solid timber Desk. Two visitor chairs where upended to one side. The feet of the suspended figure just missed touching the deep carpet of the room. The ankles were tied together. A pool of congealing blood soaking the thick piled carpet indicated that he had bled out. A deep cut from the man's rib-cage to his scrotum allowed the entrails and stomach to hang to the floor.

A ghastly sight.

'Apparently it has been one mother of a bad night. All the Forensic Staff are stretched to the limit. I was Number Two on roster for this week-end. The Number One is doing a sixteen hour shift as it is.....I wish that I hadn't gotten this one though.....picking up the entrails is not going to be a job to look forward to.....the bloody stuff is like a handful of slippery, squirming eels. It practically oozes through your fingers. He also has a broken jaw. Some-one got in a hay-maker of a swing at him.....not with a fist though is my first impression.'

She looked down at me with a slight grin on her face. She was standing on a stepladder placed close to the swinging cadaver. She had been examining the Vic's face. She now stepped up to look closely at the knots and the rope slung around the beam. She asked that the Crime Scene Photographer take some close up shots of the Victim's face and the various knots in the ropes before the Victim was lowered to the floor.

I placed my hand over my mouth, thinking that I was going to puke. Not from any smell as there was very little. It was the set-piece staging of the scene that got to me. I had no idea why. I had been to more gruesome Crime Scenes where the body of the Vic was hard to recognise as human remains without losing my breakfast. The Scene, the way that the body was suspended, stretched so it seemed, made me feel uneasy.

'Not good, eh?' Carmie butted against my concentration. My face must have gone pale and noticeable to those that knew me.

All I could do was to shake my head.

'It's amazing the length of the human gut. The Intestines. The bowel.' Mar uttered as she walked around the cadaver. I knew what she was doing.....and it was working. I walked quickly from the room and chundered up the bacon and egg roll that I had so much enjoyed. Straight into the Bio-mat Waste Bin outside the room.

'You OK, Joe?'

I walked out of the building to stand on a large rear paved area. Breathing in the cool morning mountain air. The sun was just starting to make its light noticeable.

It was the first time in ages that I felt that I needed a smoke. A couple of lungfuls of cigarette smoke seemed to be what my lungs craved for.

'Joe?' Mar walked up behind me, placing a hand gently on my shoulder. 'You OK?'

I shook my head.

'Yeah....let's get this over with. I think I need to change into another set of Scrubs.' I'd dribbled muck down the front of the white forensic cover-alls.

'I can finish it off if you want?'

'No. No. Let's do it together.' I remarked as I struggled out of the cover-alls, tossing them into another Bio-mat Bin at the rear double doors of the Church. Mar helped me into another set which included booties all in one like an adult size 'Onesy' PJ set.

'I'll be OK' I re-assured her as we headed back into the building.

Caramine Lees glanced over at me as I came back inside the Office. There was knowing glances between several of the Forensic Team in the room.

'Can you determine cause of death, Carmie?'

'Bled out. Was more than likely unconscious from the blow to the jaw. Would have had trouble breathing, I reckon from the way that he was suspended. Could have come around to see his guts hanging out onto the floor I suppose.....Not a nice way to die watching your guts spill out all over the floor.....' She was laying it on thick for my benefit, I knew. '.....like a beef carcass hung up

in an Abattoir.....'

'What did you say?'

'Have you ever seen the death chain in an Abattoir? Not dissimilar.....'

I turned my head to Mar.

No!!

Just a coincidence.

But as Mar always said, there are no such things as co-incidents in a Murder Investigation.

'Umm.....any clear prints? Trace? Anything to point to the ID of the Perp?' I was still mulling over the remark about an Abattoir.

'Joe, you're a bit bloody early.....we have some prints. Yes. Whether they relate to the homicide or not we can't determine as yet. I reckon that we'll need to take hundreds of exemplars depending on who is allowed entry into this inner sanctum.....there are signs of smudged hand prints outside on several surfaces.....perhaps where the perp stopped to gather his thoughts.....'

'.....or to have a smoke.....' Carmie's Assistant butted in.

'.....an area near the front gate.....a small pedestrian gate in the front wall adjacent to the main vehicle entry and exit gates that exhibits traces of blood.....and tyres marks of a vehicle standing there.....at this stage it may or may not be related to the crime.....'

'Ok.....I get the picture. What you are saying is for Mar and I to be a little patient. The person who called it in? Where is he?'

'Out in the rear Hall.....Kitchen area. A Mister Bart, Bartholomew Hartcher. He is Pastor Douglas Hawkins' Personal Assistant.....'

'A business operation for sure.....'

'To-days sermon was going to be video-ed for prime-time viewing on some US Cable Network.....that broadcasts this type of goings-on continuously....you know....hand clapping, singing, smiling congregation in some sort of mild, mass hysteria with the charismatic Pastor out front belting the devil out of one and all with his fire and brimstone sermon.....'

'Not a fan eh?'

'You guessed right, Joe. You guessed right! They're just a money-making concern, that's all!'

22

Bartholomew Hartcher was a man of 'averageness.' Average height. Build. Looks. Stance. Even the clothes he chose to wear one could call average. His voice was average, although this morning there was a tinge of emotion.

An average amount.

'I help the Pastor with his Sermons. I type them out. Adjust the tempo, the emotional content, the manner of its delivery. It is a practised art, you know. If any-one tries to tell you that it is an art from the heart and does not require rehearsal is telling little fibs. We had an American camera crew taping this morning's Sermon. The Pastor was nervous. He asked that I come in early to go over the words again. He had made some alterations to the words that he wanted me to hear. He was nervous....and excited by the opportunity being presented to him. It was 'big time' to be broadcast on that Religious channel, you know.....'

'So you last saw him.....when?'

The average man glanced down at his average looking hands held tightly together.

'Last night. We'd gone over the words again....he had it almost down pat. Just a minor tweak or to and I reckoned that he would deliver the best Sermon of his illustrious career. I live up in Springwood. Just down the highway. I left here about six I guess to be home for Dinner.....'

He sniffled. Blew his nose. Gave us an embarrassed glance, muttering sorry as he did so.

'Who would take over the Ministry now?' Mar asked. 'Is there any form of.....?'

'His son has been waiting in the wings for such a long time. He is not as good as his father and some are not drawn to him like the flock that is magnetised by The Pastor, but there is no-one else waiting in the wings.....'

'His son.....?'

'Yes. Pastor Anthony Douglas Hawkins. Or the Pastor's Administration Manager, Gavin Judge. Both good men but not crowd 'swayers' like The Pastor.'

'Gavin Judge....he doesn't help with the Sermons? The content. Or his son?'

'No. Pastor Hawkins always preferred my input. My authorship. I would help Anthony with his words though he wasn't as open to my suggestions as his father was. Anthony had a different style. Less.....arrh.....less emotional shall we say. He took the afternoon and the evening sessions.'

'How did the Pastor appear to you when you left him last night?'

'Nervous...as I said.....'

'Was he expecting any visitors?'

'No. Not according to his Diary. No. He was going to spend some hours memorising the Sermon. He would have slept here overnight. He would rise at around six and done a walk around the grounds in the early morning light. Air. He said that it was the best part of the day. Would normally have had a small breakfast in the Church Kitchen or possibly joined those in the Camp Kitchen.....'

'Camp Kitchen?'

'Yes.....we have a motel suite of twenty units....and a Bunk House for the Volunteers who do most of the cleaning, the cooking, the looking after the grounds. We usually have a band of loyal volunteers who rotate in and out of here. The Pastor often shares his meal with them. Some are troubled souls who require his wise words to make it through the day.....but as you can see, they do a bonzer job. The grounds are always in superb condition. There is one full-time paid Gardener who controls the Volunteers. Same with the Cleaning staff. They don't live on-site though....'

'We'll need a full list....and you'll need to direct us to both the Motel section and the Bunkhouse area.....how large is this block of land?'

'Um.....I think about fifty hectares.....and.....um.....that information I'm not privy to. His Administration Manager, Gavin Judge will need to be consulted on that matter. He basically runs the place. The day to day requirements, taking the load off The Pastor.'

'Where would he be?'

'I would imagine that you may find him at the front gate. Your Constables would be not permitting any one on site, would that be right?'

Mar nodded her head. Gave me a nod and walked from the room to find the Uniform who was in charge of the Site security.

'Oh...a couple of other things....' I called after Hartcher as I had started to follow Mar from the Hall. 'The vehicle that you drive?'

'A Toyota Twin Cab Ute.....' That surprised me. I had him pegged in an average sort of little sedan of some type.

'You need a card to gain entry so I believe outside normal hours. Do you have one?'

The man nodded his head.

'Could you give it to me please. We will return it in due course.....'

He seemed to be a little apprehensive but eventually fished it from his wallet. I held it by the edges, giving it to a Forensic Technician after Hartcher had walked from the room.

'Could you check for blood trace? Fingerprints, please?'

Gavin Judge was indeed at the gate being prevented from entering the site. He was quite vocal in his thoughts on the matter. Marge instructed a young Constable to retrieve said person from the front of the Property and sit with him in the rear Kitchen Hall until both she and I were available to interview him.

I looked out the window at the grounds. Immaculate. Superb. The early birds were starting to stir and a myriad bird-calls could now be heard. I was impressed.

'All kept like this?' I waved my arm at the vista out of the window.

'Oh, yes. The grounds are meant to be a reflection of God's Garden of Peace. Of tranquillity. Any of our flock are free to wander through the allotment. There are meandering walkways. Paths that even the elderly can negotiate. You should take a walk.....some say that they find God as they meander about.....'

'Yes. Are the Grounds ever locked up?' I already knew the answer, having been informed by the Uniform guys trying to keep the peace at the gates as we had driven up to the property.

'Yes. An hour before sunset summer or winter. Opened up to allow free access only on Sundays. The rest of the week, access by appointment only.'

'Is it possible to gain entry....otherwise?'

'Anything is possible, I guess. The Grounds staff have, what I have been told, a free reign in that regard. Several other of the Hierarchy of the Church are so blessed.....and anyone staying at the Motel Section are given card access at any time.....Have you any idea.....who?'

'It is still early in the investigation. We need to interview all persons who were on the grounds last night. In the Bunkhouse and in the Motel Section.....yes. Can you guide us there please, Mister Hartcher?'

I had an average dislike of the chap. There was something that wasn't sitting right with the man. He was hiding something, I was sure.

23

Access to other parts of the Property was via Electric Golf Buggies.

There were around half a dozen tucked neatly into a small garage built under the same roof

but at the rear of the large Church building. The Garage near a small Undercover Loading Dock. All the Buggies were on charge as detailed in a large sign screwed to the rear wall of the enclosure.

I turned to talk to Hartcher who was behind me, like some little loyal puppy following along behind.

'Would it be possible to ascertain whether any of these Buggies have only recently been put on charge and not so, all night?'

He shrugged his shoulders. Looked blank.

'I have no idea.' He mused.

'I guess by placing a meter across the terminals one maybe able to ascertain whether one is on full charge or not. I suppose....' One of the Uniform Constables who were accompanying us offered. 'Maybe that little gauge there.' Another pointed out. We checked all the Buggies. They all appeared to be on full charge. What that may denote I had no idea on.

We were accompanied to the Bunkhouse by four Uniforms following in a Buggy behind us. I was impressed by the beautiful grounds with dotted large gums giving mottled shade from the early morning sun as we wended our way along a concrete path some two to three metres wide, smooth as a Motorway surface, through the vastness of the Property.

The property had to be worth a fortune!

The bunkhouse squatted in the middle of a sparse grove of trees. Hidden almost from prying eyes. Artificial stone faced concrete blocks. A corrugated iron roof covered in solar panels. Large water tanks sat like Buddha sentinels at either end of the low-slung building. A wide covered verandah ran the full length of the dwelling. Deep in shade at this time of early morning.

A familiar face sat with several other people on the verandah sipping on steaming mugs of coffee.

David South looked as though he didn't have a care in the world.

We were introduced to the six persons sitting around. Offered a coffee which we gladly accepted. When it came to being introduced to David, he looked a little apprehensive. But not suspiciously so. His name, we quickly learnt was David Sou. I walked to him to shake his hand, grabbed it hard, spun him around and hand-cuffed him all in the one motion.

Hartcher objected feebly to my actions. I ignored the murmurings of the others on the veranda.

'David South I believe. There are several Warrants out for your arrest. Not the least for failing to attend Court in Goulburn on a drink-drive and stolen vehicle charge. I am arresting you on suspicion of the homicide death of Pastor Douglas Hawkins. Also the homicide deaths of Tia and Thomas Tallis on or about June 2006 in Goulburn. Also on suspicion of abducting and killing one

Danny Steele, Bindi Wilcox, Bonnie Taylor and Jacob Daniels between the years 2002 to 2013 in the Canberra and Goulburn areas. You are not obliged to say anything, but anything that you do say maybe used against you in a Court of Law. Do you understand the Charges against you, Mister South?'

He nodded his lowered head.

We placed him onto the back seat of our Buggy in close contact with two Constables. The ride back up to the Church building would be squeezey for him.

We interviewed all the people in the Bunkhouse. Obtaining their statements that amounted to little in regards to the homicide murder of the Pastor. No-one saw or heard South leave the Bunkhouse at all during the night. No-one, so it seemed even stirred after 'lights out' which was eleven PM. There was no indication that the four Buggies at the Bunkhouse had been used and after a Forensic Tech was called, there was no blood trace on any of the seats of the Buggies.

He could have walked or run I supposed, but looking at the frame of the man, such an effort maybe life-threatening to say the least.

To run up to the Church, commit the crime, run back, have a shower and then go to bed without waking a soul or him not having a heart attack didn't seem plausible.

There was general disbelieve that their Davey Sou could be the cold-blooded murderer of the beloved Pastor.....or any children....he was such a loving and gentle guy. Funny too. There was shock all round that such a person was in their midst and had completely pulled the wool over their eyes. To think that they had been sleeping in a Dormitory style Bunkhouse for the past month or two with a serial killer was beyond their grasp of reality.

They continued to display their disbelief as we turned the Buggies around and headed back to the main Church building.

24

'Detectives? One moment?' A Forensic Tech in full scrubs called out to us as we alighted from the Buggies.

We handed our prisoner over to a couple of Uniforms, instructing them to dump the sod in the back of a paddy wagon nearby and transport him to the Basement Cells of the Police Building at Parramatta.

We walked briskly into the main Church building and up the back stairs to the mezzanine first floor area. Following the white garbed Technician into the Pastor's Office.

'Umm....a Laptop.....on the Pastor's desk. It was in Sleep mode and we were able to open it by by-passing the Password control. He flipped on the Laptop and stood back. 'Kiddy porn' photographs started flipping across the screen.

'Jeezus fucking Christ!' I muttered angrily. 'Will it ever cease?' Many of the photographs looked familiar.

I straightened up to look around the room. The Pastor's body had been removed. The room almost devoid of the plethora of Technicians who had been present some hours ago. Caramine Lees was packing up her gear and instructing her two Assistants to carry the bags out to their vehicle.

'You heading out?' I asked her.

'No. Not yet. We've just about finished in here and will concentrate on the grounds. There's some blood trace been found outside. We need to look over the area.....'

'Joe? Joe? Look at this.....that's the twins.....' Mar cut across my conversation with the Lead Pathologist.

'Yeah....well, that'd make sense. South up here peddling his wares to a fellow weasel.....'

'No.....the twins look as though they're with The Pastor.....I think.....and there's shots of other kids too.....'

'Let the Child Protection people look through them. I'm not interested.'

'Joe....if the Pastor was a customer of Tallis and South, why would South kill him? It wouldn't be over money as the Pastor would be able to get plenty of loot one would think.....and South did not act like a guilty perp when you spun him around.....'

'He didn't have time....he could have been blackmailing the Pastor....pay up or be exposed.....'

'No. No way, Joe. He would have had to expose himself then. Excuse the pun. Not on. Not even as a bluff. Even as we approached him, he seemed relaxed and unperturbed.....not the least concerned about us nailing him for anything. After he was read his rights and given the Charge list, that's when he did appear guilty.....not until then. You could see it in the way that he held himself.'

'Mar, you saying that you think he didn't kill the Pastor?'

'Yep.....I reckon.'

'How about we wait until there is collaborating Forensic evidence, eh? We've got him on the twins.....for sure though an admission of guilt would be so much nicer.'

'And that is all. It will be another couple of weeks yet before that Subterranean Ground Survey machine begins its trace.....'

'That's enough for now, Mar. That's enough and he won't make bail after he did a runner from that lesser charge in Goulburn. We'll have him stitched up three ways to Sunday by the time that we finish with the bastard. Count on it!'

25

'Mister Judge? Gavin Judge? Thank you for being so patient.....'

'You caught the man already?'

'Um...no. There is no evidence to connect David So.....Sou to the homicide death of Pastor Hawkins. Um....your Mister Sou was arrested as he had several outstanding Warrants against his name. How long has he been a Volunteer here in the Church grounds?'

'Oh, about three, maybe four years. Turns up on time in mid-Spring. Stays usually around two months....enough time to earn sufficient points to last him for the year.....so he can still be eligible for the Dole Payments. A hard Worker. From memory a troubled soul like many of the Volunteers. The Pastor took it upon himself to help those in need....he was especially troubled by David so he confided in me one time, though he had hope for him.....'

'Has the Pastor ever been the subject of harassment, threats of any kind?'

The man looked away. Examined his hands before again looking across at Marge and I.

'Jesus was persecuted all his life. Eventually being crucified as common criminals of the era were.....'

'Yes, well. Jesus was a minor rebel and trouble-maker in his day.....we're talking about the Pastor?'

The man straightened his back. Gave me a glare that would have frozen a normal person. Took a deep breath as though he knew that he was in the midst of a lost soul in me.

Mar gave me a side-ways glance that cut me to the core. Judge looked fixedly at me, trying to determine whether I was being irreverent, smart or sarcastic. I figured that he was none the wiser but it was some time before he responded, looking down his nose at me.

'Detective, we have a file that thick.....' He indicated with his fingers with a gap of over fifty millimetres. '.....of menacing and negative thoughts from those who seemed threatened by our beliefs. Talk of murder and mayhem. Any Man of God who promises eternal salvation would also receive similar such opposition words.'

'Any that seemed that little bit more threatening?'

'The Pastor had several Prevention or Apprehended Personal Violence Orders organised on some persons who found it necessary to try and harass, cajole, heckle, accuse or intimidate him, especially here in his Church where his innocence and saintliness is there for all to see.'

'How long have these AVO's been in existenc?'

'The first was issued some two years ago against a particular fellow who basically trespassed onto Church property.....then several others were issued against companions of that fellow who insisted on creating a nuisance of themselves. They were even harassing our regular Church goers and the latest AVO forbid them being any closer than a kilometre of the Property primarily on Sundays.....!'

'Can you state off-hand those involved?'

'I will need to consult my Computer. Understand, we have several mid-management and high-management Local Police Officers as a part of our congregation who helped enormously in the early days of the fracas, and when that failed to decrease the annoyance and intimidations, they were instrumental in assisting us in taking out those Prevention Orders. They were most helpful.....would you care to follow me to my Office?'

We walked down the corridor from The Pastor's Office. Judge's Office was at least half the size of his Boss's. One entire wall was floor to ceiling shelving groaning under the weight of Binders, Folders, books, Volumes and loose-binded papers. A small desk. Obviously second hand Public Service 'throw-out'. A Tower computer from another age. It was clear that the Pastor was into only ensuring that he was the one equipped with the necessary whizz-bang office requirements. I hinted as much to the man who seemed to ignore my jibe.

He cleared two chairs of books and papers and gestured for us to sit. He swung his cheap second-hand Executive Chair to face the Computer screen and keyboard, tapping furiously. A small window gave views of the other side of the building. The grounds were just as pristine and beautiful. The work required to keep them in such a state would be hectic, hard and on-going.

'Is your Computer capable of connecting to the Pastor's laptop?' Mar asked. I thought to break the silence.

Judge swung around to face us as a Printer whirred into action.

'Umm...no. Pastor Hawkins was not in favour of such interconnection even though it was, as you would no doubt be aware, an easy function to achieve. The only interaction between my computer, which is connected to several others around the place and The Pastor's, was via Flashdrive Memory Sticks. Which was rather archaic and non-productive at times....but....what can you do?'

He sounded rather peeved at this arrangement.

'It made things a little difficult to say the least.....' He stood and bent down to take a single sheet of paper from a Printer's chute. 'Here you go. Half a dozen names though only three are interconnected....the first three. The other names were only added when we learnt that they were previous Parishioners and close colleagues of the first three. We wanted to be sure that the net was cast as wide as possible. Telephone numbers. Addresses too.....if there is nothing else? I have a lot of work to do. I will need to put out a Press Release and notify as many of our Flock as possible via e-mails.....'

'Arrh....we would appreciate that you leave any discussions with the Media, local or otherwise, well alone. We will make formal statements after which you may conduct any Media arrangements keeping the details broad and non-specific with no mention of how the body was positioned, what was done to the man or what you may think is a reasonable assumption of guilt or innocence of any Party. Could you please comply with those requirements?'

He was not happy, possibly thinking that he may have the chance at his fifteen seconds of fame because of his Boss's predicament. It was at that moment that I decided that I did not like the man.

'One thing, Mister Judge. When was the last time that you saw the Pastor?'

'Oh.....I went home in time for Dinner last night. Around five-thirty it was, that I left here. Yes. He was alive at that time. Like a cat on a hot tin roof. Excited. Nervous. Anticipative. Apprehensive. All those things and more. He felt that the Sermon that he had prepared was going to be a beauty....as he would say! I was home all night. My wife can vouch for me.....'

'He prepared his own Sermons?'

'Yes. Usually. Oh, Bart Hartcher thought that he was an integral component in the penning of most of the Pastor's Sermons and speeches.....to be fair, he did help I suppose.....'

I glanced down at the list of names and addresses, now convinced that with the death of its driving force, the Church would eventually go the way of many others. I was interested in who would benefit from the sale of the Property.

I asked as much, to be given a blank look. Silence filled the void for some moments before the man cleared his throat. A gesture I felt sure that was intended to advise me that the question he thought, was bordering on impertinence.

Tough!

'I suppose the group of four. Hawkins Junior, Fred Fredrick Junior that is, Hartcher and I, I would imagine. It was Hartcher's father, along with the senior Hawkins and Fred Fredrick Senior who established this church. This Property. Have you met Junior Fred yet?'

We shook our heads to indicate that we hadn't. Not as yet. It seemed like he wanted the conversation over.

'Seems that the Church is set up to pass on the power.....and the running of it through a small number of families.....' I offered.

'Nepotism....job for the boys.' Mar countered which earned a black look from Gavin Judge. It took some moments for him again to gather the threads of his conversation.

'.....He is the Groundsman Overseer. He would have stayed here last night because of the American TV crew. He wanted the Grounds looking pristine for their coverage. They spent last Friday filming various parts of the Grounds, especially the Grottos which were Fred Junior's little babies. He has said on many occasions that the Lord spent a lot of time beside a Grotto musing on his teachings. His sermons. I guess in some ways, Fred Junior was the 'Quiet Achiever' in this establishment. It was his and his father's vision that has given us this valuable asset. A place to contemplate. To pray. With the Pastor, we are the four who have inherited the legacy of our fathers' dreams to established this arm of the Church on these grounds....oh, some thirty, thirty-five years ago. From humble beginnings.....'

I didn't like the man!

'You say that the Groundsman, Fred Junior? He would have stayed on the grounds last night? He wasn't in the Bunkhouse when we went down there. Do you know where he may be?'

'More than likely having breakfast with one of the guest families at the Motel section. More than likely. I'm told one of the families was kin of his. From Melbourne. When he does stay overnight, he bunks down in the Gardening Shed. Behind the Motel Section. He has a bunk bed there.....a little fridge. A small cooking ring. Coffee maker. Since his wife was killed and his kids have flown the coop, he often stays there.'

'Um.....how many.....other Churches of your group are there?'

'We have quite a flock, actually. Melbourne. Albury. Armidale. Brisbane and Rockhampton. We have entered into negotiations to purchase a large piece of land north of Newcastle, at Tomago. You know it? Yes? Around three thousand parishioners I suppose, throughout Australia.....'

'The Pastors of those Churches? How are they chosen?'

'With the help of our Lord. Through prayer and meditation.....'

The look on Mar and my face must have said a thousand words as he replied that those who have not any contact with The Lord would find it very difficult to understand.

'The word is faith...!' He said forcefully to us. 'Those who don't have faith are destined to visit the devil's table.....'

'Only if you believe in him also..!' I responded, earning a jab in the ribs from Mar.

'Mister Judge? What type of car do you drive?'

'How is that important to the investigation?'

'Could you just answer the question, please.'

He seemed perplexed by the question and took some time to answer. I really did not like the man. He was definitely being difficult.

'Very well. A Three series BMW sedan.'

'Nice.....can we have your Gate Card please?'

Again he showed signs of impatience.

I held the card by its edges and dropped it into a small evidence bag.

'Do you have more than one?' Mar asked.

He looked at her.

'Um....yes. Here. A spare that I keep in my desk drawer. I suppose that you would like that also?'

'Yes, we do.'

Again we dropped it into a small Evidence Bag. It looked as though it was well used. An old one while the one that he had taken from his wallet was brand new!

26

The Motel Building had been pointed out to us as we had sped towards the Bunkhouse. It was perhaps halfway between the large Church building and the distant Bunkhouse. A single storey, low slung building of ten units long. Double sided to give a total of twenty, two room units under the single roof. A wide open verandah down both sides returning around both ends. Each two room Unit with a small Ensuite and Kitchenette included. A large Apartment tacked on the farther end was the exclusive domain of the Pastor when he needed to remain on the grounds. This apparently was out of bounds to one and all and even the Cleaners were not permitted within without The Pastor being present.

I wanted to see within the secret realm, knowing what we now knew of the man! That would come later, though I instructed a nearby Technician to gain entry and begin the laborious task of scrutinising every surface within. If anything untoward was discovered, then we were to be contacted immediately.

'Fred Junior? Fred Fredrick Junior?' Mar asked a muscled, nuggety man sitting at an outdoor

picnic setting. A casually dressed couple shared the same table.

There was a familial resemblance.

There were a number of kids playing in a nearby Play Area. One was belting a tennis ball up against a wall and returning it with a cricket bat. Several others splashed noisily in the half size pool.

The man turned. Rose from his seat and extended his hand.

'I was wondering how long it would take you to get to me. A terrible business. Would he have suffered? The Pastor?'

Mar shook her head.

'I don't think so.....' It didn't sound convincing. 'You stayed here last night?'

'Yes....the film crew....it was going to be a big day for the Church....we thought that the evangelical tourist boom alone from the States would be enough in itself to warrant the intrusion of the film crew....now?.....' He looked into the distance. Shook his head sadly. 'Please, I am so rude. This is my son, Timothy Fredrick. His wife, Stella and their six kids running around the Play area or in the pool. They're up from Melbourne. The other kids are from two other families also spending their holidays helping around the property. My son has a very successful Design Business down there. In Melbourne....A founding member of the Church down there too. I'm very proud of him. They're spending a week up here....a sort of a religious holiday. A sojourn to the Place of Worship of the original Church....and of course to see me,' He beamed proudly at that latter part of the statement.

'Do you mind if we have a few words in private, Mister Fredrick?' Mar requested quietly.

'Yes, of course....and please, call me Fred.....Junior is much preferred even though I won't see fifty again.....' He patted his son on the shoulder. 'I won't be long, boy.'

I hadn't heard that saying in reference to a father/son relationship for ages. The man didn't look a day over forty. In fact he aged me something fierce!

We ambled to the other side of the fenced pool area and sat down at a similar picnic table setting.

'How did you find out about The Pastor's homicide?'

'Even though the allotment is over fifty hectares, it can still be a rather small place at times. I got a call from one of the Volunteers down at the Bunkhouse. This place is wired up with internal telephone and two-way radio system, I knew pretty well as you were heading towards the Bunkhouse....practically. Don't tell me you think that David Sou may have committed the crime? He couldn't have. He was a worried soul but.....truly.....incapable of such a deed....'

I nodded my head. I solemnly disagreed.

'Maybe.....' I replied. 'But he has several Outstanding Warrants in the name of David South....for several homicide deaths of minors....and suspicion of several others.....did you know that he was a convicted Paedophile?'

He lurched his head to one side at that information, looking disbelievingly at me and Marge.

'Murder?' He murmured quietly. 'He....um.....he kept some secrets from us.....he didn't kill The Pastor, did he?' He seemed very troubled as though his own son was somehow implicated. 'No, of course not. The Pastor spent some time with him helping him over his....um....affliction. One thing that we insist on is the absolute honesty of all our Volunteers. They are in a trusted position and here not only to help us but also for the soothing hand of God to help them resolve their tortured souls.....it seems that David wasn't as forthcoming as both The Pastor and I believed.....or wanted to believe, I guess.....sometimes The Lord even forsakes those of his flock at the most darnest of times.' He shook his head slowly. He looked devastated.

'I'm sorry to say this and you may think I am being completely impertinent, but David South was well beyond salvation.....'

'Um....Detective, no-one is beyond the reach of God. You must trust Him and let Him into your heart before you can receive redemption.....David was doing that.....or so we believed. Thought.'

In some ways I wanted to scream.

In another way, I could respect this down to earth guy, a mere Gardener, for his strongly held beliefs.

A discussion on the authenticity or not of an all-powerful Being was not why we were here.

'Mister Fredrick, did you hear or see anything out of the ordinary last night? You did sleep in the Garden Shed, didn't you?'

He smiled at this. 'The Garden Shed!?' He mumbled more to himself. 'I like that.....' He looked up at us with clear blue-grey eyes. 'Detectives, I had a meal with my family down in the Bunkhouse, with the Volunteers. A good night all round. Every-one seemed to enjoy themselves....even the kids.....with David.'

He seemed to stress that last point as some sort of defence for the man. It would seem that there are some people who cannot see the evil in others. Or don't wish to!

'We left there around seven, perhaps a little later, walking up the Grotto Path so that I could show my son the work that I have recently completed.....'

'That's a fair walk.....' Mar offered.

'Yes, it is. But beautiful at that time of night. You'd be surprised at what animals and birds can be spotted after the sun goes down. We detoured to the bottom dam as I am pretty sure that we now

have a pair of Platypus living in it. We got back to here....oh.....around nine-thirty I guess. I bade my family goodnight.....walked to the Garden Shed.....as you have now named it....had a shower, a cup of tea and honey, read the Bible until around eleven which is the normal time that I have always retired and slept the sleep of a babe until my young grandson woke me with the news that the place was crawling with you Police.....I heard nor saw nothing.....but the Shed is somewhat removed and hidden from the normal foot-traffic that may be about late at night or in the morning. I'm sorry, I can't offer you anything useful to your investigation.....'

'You mentioned that your son is The Pastor of the Church in Melbourne. Do you personally know The Pastors of the other Churches in your.....um.....your.....fold?'

'Yes.....' He answered carefully.

'How are they selected for the job?'

'They are assessed on their faith. Their interest in the welfare of the flock. Their ability to communicate.....'

'Through prayer and meditation?'

He gave me a sharp glare.

'That is the main manner. Asking The Lord for his guidance.....'

'Are any of the others relatives or close friends of you four founding members. The Members of the Inner circle. The high Synod?'

'What are you implying? If you must know, The Pastor of Armidale is with us at the moment. Or he will be shortly the Pastor as the incumbent is getting a little dodderly. If you must know, he is Hartcher's Uncle, also my father's brother. The existing Pastor. The man who will take over his position is....his son.....I think that makes him my nephew though there is a few marriage break-ups that make direct lineage difficult to ascertain. He's in Unit 18 and 19 with his wife and four kids. Ditto The Pastor at our Albury Church. The Pastor at what will be the new Newcastle Church will be Hawkins' youngest son.....is there a hint of nepotism? I'm sure that you would intimate that, being non-believers. But the filling of those important positions involves many a meeting and a great deal of prayer.....'

'So it would seem.' I sarcastically replied.

'Were you aware of a Prevention Order that The Pastor may have had on a couple of persons?' Mar cut across my line of questioning, wanting to steer away from my deeply held suspicions. And my insinuations.

Fredrick looked at me for some moments, obviously thinking that I was that proverbial lost soul who required help of the most profound type!

'Yes....it was hard not to know about those people. They forced their way into the Church on a

number of occasions and made quite a commotion. We found it necessary to obtain help from the Police in the matter. It was upsetting to the Parishioners.....'

'Are you aware of any.....umm.....habit that The Pastor may have had that would be frowned upon by his Flock?'

'The Kiddy Porn thing.....sick I know.....and I have spent many a night in prayer wanting to help the man overturn his demons.....but he was seeking the help of God to have it striven from his mind.....he had it beat as far as I know.....'

There was a flash of recognition across his face.

'David Sou.....' Was all he uttered. He had connected the dots. A moment of clearness in his thoughts unmuddled by the blanket of his beliefs. A look of sorrow crawled slowly across his face.

His eyes began to well with tears.

'Were you aware that David South aka David Sou was a purveyor of Kiddy Porn. Had a very profitable business and was a star in a lot of the material.....some of which was found on The Pastor's Laptop Computer?'

Fredrick looked down at his hands. Cast his eyes at a grove of trees behind us. He shook his head. Tears filled his eyes. It was obvious that that connection of recent times had escaped his knowledge. The practise of The Pastor hardly striven from his mind and would never be so, as long as the association between he and South had continued. He seemed to face that fact for the first time. He lowered his head slowly, meeting it with his hands as he covered his face. His body racked with spasms as he sobbed quietly.

His son must have been watching closely as he was quickly beside his father's side.

'I think that is enough, Detectives. My father will not answer any more of your questions. Good morning to you.' The younger man sank down beside his father, issuing soothing sounds as he cradled his father's head. Tears were in the young man's eyes as he stole us a look that competently indicated for us to bugger off!

27

We walked down the length of the Motel building and around to the other side of the complex, knocking on the last door. It was opened almost immediately. The Producer of the US filming unit identified herself as Mandi Berwistz....Mandi with an "I". She offered us coffee which

we refused and walked with us to another picnic setting.

'We will be leaving here shortly. To-morrow morning, in fact.....'

'If we allow it.' I said to her.

'You can't hold us against our will....' She replied.

'This a murder investigation. We can do just about anything we like including holding you if we consider that you maybe a prime suspect.....or witness....or withholding relevant information to the investigation. This is not the US.....and I thought that you would want to be here in the middle of all of this.....'

'What is that suppose to mean?' She asked defiantly. On the defensive.

'Did you see or hear anything last night....let's say between twenty-three hundred hours last night to oh three hundred hours this morning?'

'No. Not a thing.' She sounded pissed off!

'There apparently was quite the reception for you. Expectations were high.....what? The Homicide murder of The Pastor not your type of news?'

'No. We represent a devoutly Christian Organisation and Broadcast Channel in the States, and are not interested in the work of the Devil, homicides or why he was murdered.....or his illegal behaviour.....'

'How did you become aware of his questionable habits?'

'By accident.....we were filming a segment on the Grounds....and happened to see.....um....into his Office just on sunset. Last Friday evening. Early evening. The lights were on...he didn't seem to realise that it was more than noticeable.....'

'Who was he with?'

'Sorry.....no one that we could see....he was standing in the middle of his Office as though he was reciting his speech....um....at the same time playing with himself.....for all the world to see! We do not need to publicise that type of behaviour back home. It was disgusting! Now....have we your permission to leave to-morrow?'

'Not yet. We will need more time on the investigation. Any-one else that you could see? In the Office with him?'

She gave a look that hinted of Sodom and Gomorrah being transposed in Australia. That the Devil lived on site.

'You would expect such a thing here, would you?' She replied. Aghast at the suggestion. At the inferred implications.

Mar nodded her head.

We interviewed the Camera-man, sound man and gopher to hear a similar story as that of the Producer. All three were suitably shocked, or gave that impression at least.

28

We had interviewed the two other families who were holidaying on the Church grounds.

Spending their time toiling for their God.

They too, had seen and heard nothing during the night.

Their senses were bombarded by the news of the death of The Pastor and they appeared in a state of stupor. The fact that there would be no Church Services this day too much for them to bear. They were prepared to cut short their sabbaticals to this Place of Worship and Peace because of this tragedy.

One of the men appeared to be most effected by the homicide. He was the Assistant Pastor, or as his wife had later labelled him, the Relief Pastor of the Church Branch in Armidale. They were most adamant wanting to leave these premises as quickly as possible after staying for less than half of their intended period. I had to be somewhat terse in instructing them that they were remaining on-site until we could approve them to leave. They too, seemed to think that this was against the law. That they were being held against their will and they would speak to some-one who would tell me to get my act into gear!

'Are these people out of their minds? They seem to think that they do not need to adhere to the Laws of the Land but are answerable to some higher Authority!' I remarked angrily as we walked back towards the Church building.

'I suspect they just see the good in people. Any bad trait can be expunged by deep prayer and private meditation.....if it was true enough there'd be a lot of Professional Health Workers out of a job.....what do you want to do now?'

'What about we find those people on the AVO lists?'

'Seems like a plan....and any excuse to get away from here for a while.....the air is becoming heavy and stifling.'

The main entrance-way onto the Church grounds was like Pitt Street any time of the day.

Uniform Constables were parrying questions, taking names and addresses, type and make of vehicle and Number Plate details of all those who had turned up expecting to be a part of the early morning Sermon. Some were rather put out in learning that Sunday had been cancelled, wondering perhaps whether their souls would be saved because of the missed appointment!

It took us some time to negotiate through the milling throng, now enlarged by a growing Media scrum, slinging questions at any-one who looked interesting. What-ever that was suppose to engender or be based upon I had no idea!

We drove to an address further down the Blue Mountains.

Knocked on the door. Paint was cracked and peeling on its surface.

A man bent slightly at the waist slowly opened the door. He squinted in the bright morning sun. It was obvious that we had got him out of bed. Sundays was the sleep-in morning so it seemed for those who weren't Church-goers or dawn athletes.

'Colin Baborvic?'

He shook his head slowly. 'Nah. That's me son.....round the side to the garage at the back. What do you Coppers want with him, in any case?'

We ignored the question, quickly walking off the verandah and down the side path of the house. The door of the rear section of the garage was open. A man of around twenty, maybe twenty-two was lolling in a chair wanting the warm rays of the sun to warm him. Or to wake him. I wasn't too sure which. A mug of coffee in his hand. Hair unruly. Eyes that suggested he had not fully awoken as yet.

'Colin Baborvic?' I asked as I heard the back door of the house squeak open, then slam shut. The old bloke was limping across the expanse of weed covered lawn towards us. The young bloke looked up at his father. Then stood as he seemed to notice us for the first time.

'Coffee, Dad? Coppers, eh?' As he peered at our offered ID Cards, he muttered in a smart-arsed fashion. 'Murder Cops! Two and two are five to you people no matter how often common sense tells you otherwise.....what was I doing last night will be your first question, right?'

'You know about the Homicide then? Of Pastor Hawkins?'

'It was just on the News. Non-specific but if you can read between the lines, then there is only one Church that will fit the facts.....'

'Well.....how did you spend your time last night?'

'Alone. In bed by eleven. No witnesses. Can't prove that in any way.....and I'd say that at least two other names on that AVO list that the Church gave you will say the same thing. Don't get me wrong, I celebrate the bastard's death, but I consider it a mite premature.....'

'Oh....why would you say something like that?'

'I was told that not only me....but at least a dozen others were due to appear before that Royal Commission.....the one on Child Molestation in Institution-type Establishments across Australia. Been going for about a year now. Me and others were at last going to have our day in Court. In February. Mid month. Where I would at last, on a stack of Bibles, state the facts pertaining to my years between the age of seven up to eleven years of age being molested by that bastard Pastor. Me and at least a dozen others so I've been told....so the last thing that I would want is the bastard dead.....I wanted him alive to answer our allegations in Court, at long last, to the crimes that we allege occurred. I'll just get the paperwork for you. OK? To prove what I have just stated. You Cops want that collaborative evidence....isn't that what you call it?' His sarcasm was palpable.

The old man glared at us as we stood there waiting for the young man to return.

'Two and two ain't five, Officers....not all the time. Hear me? My son, he's suffered enough at the hands of that sod.....and it was all my fault. I at one time, thought that the Lord spoke through that man.....he was The Lord on this Earth. Alive. What a bloody mistake I made and my son will suffer for the rest of his life because of my blindness.....'

'It's OK, Dad. Twern't ever your fault. I've said that to you before.' He handed the paperwork to Marge. It seems that he trusted women more. I couldn't blame him.

She read through several pages. Nodded her head. Gave the papers back to him.

Without another word, she walked briskly up the side path of the home. Me scampering behind her trying to catch up. Before she reached our Unmarked, she spun to face me.

'There's something drastically wrong with the whole system. You've only got to look at that recent murder case in Victoria where the father killed his son with a cricket bat. At a Practise Night in front of the whole Town almost. It's totally bloody wrong in our case, where the Perpetrator successfully applied for a Prevention Order, an AVO to restrict....to limit the movement and actions of a number of his victims. Those same victims were not given their time in Court to explain.....to oppose said Prevention Orders. In fact they were not even made aware of the reasons for the Order being granted! There's something basically wrong with that! They're not worth the paper that they're written on, that's for sure! And as we know, those AVO's mean bugger all to fellows who think that they're above the law. The only sods who obey those Orders are law abiding sods who lash out in a moment of madness.....and are never likely to do it again out of sheer shame when they've looked at their actions.....but most of the sods are twits who really do not care one iota about the law.....or have any common decency or empathy towards the person who took out the AVO in the first place! They are angry, slighted, revengeful, domineering, insecure, manipulative small brained twits who don't give a fig about the law. About morality or decency! There's got to be a better way to resolve this problem!'

Mar sounded angry.

'Mar, didn't we not that long ago, have a similar conversation....except it was me who was voicing those same words?'

She stared at me for some moments before angrily opening the Driver's door of the Unmarked. Fell inside and slammed the door shut as I was getting into the passenger seat.

'Your a bloody smart-arse, Joe Lind. Shut the fuck up, will ya!!?'

29

'We're missing something, Joe. Something in front of our faces.' She said in an even voice.

Her anger having dissipated as soon as she took out her frustrations on me. I sometimes wished that I could cool off just as quickly. Just as easily.

'Mmm.....where we going?'

'Back to the Church.....the rope.....at least two people would have been needed to get Hawkins up in that position.....he was hit so hard it broke his jaw.....which Caramine Lees said was not a fist.....that TV crew want to leave.....when did they say they saw him with his 'little boy' out? In his Office just on sunset on Friday night last, wasn't it?'

'That TV Crew represented a huge wind-fall for the Church.....no-one associated with the Church, the hierarchy, would jeopardise that arrangement....it was hugely to their benefit. To the future success of the Church, thence to those who would benefit the most by it.....who are? The four Beneficiaries....Hawkins, therefore Hawkins Junior, Fredrick, Judge and Hartcher. The Founders by birthright, of the Church.....'

We were doing it again. Voicing our thoughts. Bouncing off one another without questioning or seemingly, comprehending what each of us was saying.

'Mmm.....and also Fredrick's son who is the Pastor of the Melbourne branch of the church.....and the guy from Armidale, what is his relationship to the four senior members?'

'Family ties.'

'Mmm.....it seemed somewhat muddled.'

Mar would often get into this fugue state on a case when things seemed out of place. Not positioned as she saw things. In a rigidly, logical progression. It drove me mad at times but I had learnt from bitter experience to keep my mouth shut and just let her stew. To mull.

Consequently we drove in silence back up the Mountains, heading back to the property.

As luck would have it, we entered the Church property just as Caramine Lees in a Forensic

Van was leaving. Her most Junior Assist was driving.

Mar flagged her down. Hopped out to talk to her.

'Fingerprints? How many exemplars did you get? Did it include all those people who were staying at the Motel?'

'Yes, I'm pretty sure. Plus of course the Admin and hierarchy and volunteers....plus a couple who were insistent that they belonged on-site but were detained at the front gate.'

'Any of those exemplars present within the Crime Scene Room?'

'Yeah....but off the top of my head....you're asking a lot.....I'll let you know after we have gone through the information in the Lab.'

'OK.....any close to the body, let me know....and the other thing. You seemed pretty sure about the Vic's jaw not being broken by a swing of a fist. What is that supposition based on?'

'The obvious impact zone and the damage caused could not have been caused by a person....or if it was, then there would have been a fair amount of damage to the perp's fist, wrist and arm....possibly even the shoulder.....'

'What about a professional Boxer?'

'Still too much force as denoted by the impact point. I'd say something like a Golf Club or a Cricket Bat. A piece of timber of some dimension and length. The Post Mortem and forensic examination of the skin, the abrasion and trauma around the impact zone....that will confirm it, I reckon.'

'Would it be safe to assume that the method of suspension would require two people?'

'I haven't much thought about it, but yes, that would seem right. Two or more people I'd say as an educated guess. The body would have had to be lifted physically to allow the rope to be slid over the timber truss of the roof. It wouldn't have slipped easily any other way. The weight of the body would have made it extremely difficult for one person to haul on the rope to lift the body into the air. The Vic was not a small or light man. Not impossible but extremely improbable.....at a guess, two or more persons, but at some stage, two people would have to haul on the rope to allow the body to attain the height that we saw. A person could not lift the Vic's body to that height alone without the help of exertion on the rope.....so I would say three people more than likely.'

'Would the way that the body was suspended aid in eventual death?'

'Yes. With the arms held aloft in that position with the whole weight of the body being supported that way, suspended, death by asphyxiation would be the outcome. The lungs would have no help from the diaphragm to expand and contract.....'

'So it is a fair assumption to say that the Vic was possibly deceased before he was gutted?'

'More than likely....but that will be confirmed with the post mortem results....'

'Any alcohol or drugs involved?'

'A full Tox examination will reveal that. I am not willing to guess on that at this point in time....any thing else? We have another Crime Scene to attend to. A home invasion that has left two people dead. One hacked to death with a machete, the other apparently stabbed.'

'A busy week-end.'

'Yes, by all accounts. You'll have something from me within five to six weeks. Sorry, but I think that we'll be flat out for at least two weeks just doing autopsies of all the vics of this week-end just to break even. To catch up. Sorry. Until the next one, see youse. Don't forget, Marjory, you owe me a bottle of Red.'

Her laugh could be heard as the van crawled up the driveway towards the large, heavy sliding entry and exit gates. The flashes from cameras increased as the Van drew closer to them.

30

We drove slowly past the large Church building and headed towards the Motel.

White clad figures still ambled, crawled and stood about searching for the smallest trace. Grey powder smudged pristine painted surfaces. Triangular yellow marker blocks still marked the spots where something interesting had been located.

The Public were completely unaware of the painstaking forensic process on the periphery of any murder scene. Anything and everything was noted, photographed, collated, marked and placed in forensic evident bags, whether it was crucial and relevant to the crime or not. It would be sorted later by at least a dozen different divisions of Forensic Science involving at least double that number of personnel.

'Would you like a Sausage Sandwich?' Junior Fredrick asked as we alighted from our Unmarked at the rear of the Motel complex.

Time had slipped away. Both Mar and I had not eaten anything since early morning....and I had lost that in a rush! I was bloody famished.

'Bloody oath. I could eat a horse....have you any coffee?'

'Yeah. I'll get Stella, my daughter-in-law to rustle some up. Two sandwiches?'

'OK. You've twisted my arm.'

Mar chimed in. 'Thank you....um.....the lad, this morning. Who was hitting that tennis ball with a cricket bat? He about?'

'Yes. That was Harry George, my grandson. He's in the pool. The one sitting on the edge....'

Mar walked over to the Pool fence and called out for him to come over. He trotted around the pool edge. A kid of around thirteen. Maybe fourteen.

'That Cricket Bat that you were using this morning. Was that yours?'

'No, Miss. It was leaning against the wall. Over there. Pa says it usually was kept in the box with the other cricket things. He thought that I may have played with it yesterday or the day before and not put it away overnight. In Pa's shed. I told him that it was leaning against the wall when I got up this morning. I got a ball from the box in the shed.....'

'Where is the bat now?'

The lad pointed to it, still leaning against the cement-rendered wall.

'Any-one but you touch it?'

'No. just me.....I'm pretty sure.'

Mar got onto her mobile.

'Carmie. Marge Hendricks.....yeah, I know. We may want some further forensic help here. Who have you left in charge?.....OK.....his number? Ta. See ya.....Arrh, son? Could you leave the Bat there. Don't touch it, OK?'

We sat with Fred Fredrick and his family to have a bite to eat. A hot coffee. Stella Fredrick and Tim Fredrick seemed to sense that we wanted to speak to the old man alone and excused themselves, taking the kids on bikes to do another tour along the winding walking pathways of the allotment.

'You keep all the Sporting Gear in your Garden Shed?'

He nodded his head in agreement as a middle aged guy in forensic scrubs lumbered up to us.

We pointed out the bat asking that it be tagged and 'sleeved' and tested for blood and skin remnants, crossing checking those items against those of the Deceased. Also, we asked that all sporting gear held in the Shed be checked for blood trace. Fred accompanied the Forensic Technician to the Shed to show him the location of all the Sporting Gear Bins. Two other Techs joined them. Fredrick returned to sit heavily beside me.

'I'm a suspect in this murder?'

'Every-one is Fred, until each can be cleared. Do you lock your Shed?'

'The only thing that is locked on this place is the front vehicular entry gates and the pedestrian gate beside it, a couple of the Offices in the main building, the individual Motel Rooms when someone is in occupancy and The Pastor's Unit down the end of this complex. Everything else is open. In fact, a lot of the doors cannot be locked, only latched.....'

'So it's not only the Vehicular front entry gates, but the pedestrian gate beside them, that have card control for egress and ingress purposes?'

'Yes.'

'Is there a digital recording device which would record the time and the Owner of each access card?'

'No. We looked at that when we set up the system. It was the preferred option by the Management Committee....you know us as the sons of the original group....but it turned out to be too expensive. We had other things to invest in at the time. Um.....money was a bit tight around that time, from memory.'

'Do you often have the evening meal down at the Bunkhouse? I would have thought that you and your family would have Dinner with the other Officials of the Church.' The sudden change in direction of the conversation threw him somewhat.

'Um....yes....arrh.....We had shared a meal with The Pastor and the others during the week. Several times in fact. Hawkins had wanted time with Hartcher last night, before he left to go home. Things have been a little out of the norm during this past week because of the TV crew. The Pastor.....and even I do not usually sleep overnight here, but.....' He shrugged his shoulders. 'This event was considered very important to the Church and the Organisation as a whole. If it had of come off, it meant a real boost to us. We would be able to expand the Church into other States. Other cities.....I can't remember who suggested we share a meal at the Bunkhouse.....but they are my responsibility. My team, so to speak, and my son's entire family had been helping in some way all week. They knew all of the Volunteers....it just seemed natural to share a meal before the most important day thus far.....'

I was a little flummoxed by that revelation. But then he was more a part of the workers and not the Office Crowd so it seemed to me. Of the crowd, not of the Bosses.

'The TV crew?'

'No. They kept to themselves most of the time as though that was some sort of policy of theirs. A bit strange, I thought. But then.....'

'You, Hawkins and Hartcher were all second generation hierarchy. All around the same age.' Marge stated. 'But it appears that Judge is not. Is that correct?'

The Head Gardener nodded his head.

'Yes.' He replied. 'We knew him from an early age as he was of the congregation with his

parents. He went to University. Did a Business Degree. Accountancy majoring in Australian Taxation Laws. Our fathers were a bit haphazard on the financial side of things. When the three of us took control of the running of the Church nation-wide, we knew that we too, were rather short on that type of business acumen. Judge was the perfect candidate to fill the role. We voted along with all the Pastors of the Church Council. There was not one dissenting vote to the question of he being an equal partner in the running of the Church. In fact he practically runs the business side of things now. All the financial aspects as well. The expansion program, building maintenance, wages, salaries...everything. He has two woman office workers. Paid employees and members of the Church. How we operated without him is beyond me.....'

'No frictions. Everything AOK?'

'Yes. With his guidance and expertise, we have doubled the asset base and thus the congregation. As in The Bible, all Parishioners pay a tithing. 10% of their salary.'

'That's quite a sum of money coming in each week, Australia wide.'

'Yes. It is. But we run what we call a Charity Basket. None of our congregation go hungry, are homeless or freeze in Winter. It is a very successful operation thanks to our band of loyal volunteers over-sighted by both Hartcher and Judge. And all profits are placed back into the Churches....expansion. Additions. With a growing Congregation in just about every parish, we need to think about enlargements to the original buildings.....'

'What type of vehicle do you drive?'

'A Toyota One tonne Ute.....I need it to pick up stuff for the Gardens. We have a heavy duty dual axle trailer that we use to. It will take a couple of the Buggies.....'

'You rely heavily on volunteer labour.....'

'Yes we do.....much the same as any Church organisation, I would imagine.....'

Marge rolled through her photos of the Crime Scene until she came to the ones she wanted.

'The rope to tie The Pastor's arms and legs. Really cord. Do you recognise it, by chance?'

She let him look closely at the photographs of the cord. She then scrolled to the next shot.

'The rope that was tied to the Office Desk. About twelve millimetres in diameter. Look familiar?'

The man seemed to turn grey around the gills. He nodded his head slowly.

'I...um....there's several rolls of it in the Shed.....'

Marge scrolled down her mobile. The Techs were still in the Shed. She asked that samples be taken of the rolls of rope that corresponded with the lengths that were used to tie up The Pastor. Special attention to the cut ends and whether they joined up.

'Check to see if the ropes from the scene match those that you can see in the Shed. OK? Check around for a cutting implement. There maybe worthwhile fingerprints on them if we're lucky.'

She closed up her mobile, looking into the middle distance to gather her thoughts before continuing.

'Um.....the two other families who are staying here? Did you see them last night?'

'Yes. Both families were sharing a BBQ. Their kids were splashing about in the pool when we left.....it was still rather hot.'

'They saw you leaving to go to the Bunkhouse? Was there any conversation about the intended time of your return?'

'Oh....we may have mentioned that we would be several hours and if we had not returned by the time that they were readying to retire, could they make sure all the lights were out. The Security lights would then come on automatically....something like that perhaps. I suppose.'

'The Security lights? Do they light up all the grounds?'

'No. They just light up the walking paths. There are several as you can imagine on each building.....'

'That include the pathway that leads to the Garden Shed?'

'Yes...'

'....and up to the Church building?'

'Yes....why these questions? You don't suspect one of the families being involved, do you? No!'

The three Forensic Techs came down the path from the direction of "The Garden Shed". The Cricket bat was enveloped in a paper Evidence bag. There were several other smaller Evidence bags. Sealed and counter signed. The Lead Tech gave me a slight nod of his head. They had found trace on the bat....and a cardboard cutter and that could mean that fingerprints were also lifted. The rope would more than likely prove to be a match upon examination.

I felt that we had just crossed an important bridge.

We thanked Fred Fredrick Junior for his hospitality and time and headed for the other side of the Motel complex, knocking on the door of the Unit where the TV Producer was in occupancy.

The door was open.

'May we come in?' I asked cheerfully.

'Do I have a choice in saying yea or nay?' She replied icily.

She had been talking on her mobile which she hurriedly closed off.

'Just a few questions....'

'To justify your actions in holding us here against our wishes, perhaps?' She took several sips of water from a water bottle shedding condensation down the front of her blouse. 'Does it ever get cool in this place?' She ranted.

'It's a lovely day to-day.' I countered. 'You're lucky its not a normal summer and above forty for nights and days on end.....'

'Thank God for small mercies!' She countered sarcastically.

I gave her a slight smile.

'You should put your investigative skills to the test and place some of your more draconian laws back home under the spotlight. You maybe permitted to highlight some of the most stifling laws in existence in the "Free World" currently on your Statutes in the US. To restrict your personal freedoms. It may surprise you.....'

Marge cleared her throat. I must admit to being surprised at my attitude that had come to the fore during this investigation. Allowing personal attitudes and opinions to be mouthed was not good practise for a Detective. I needed to place my personal views back under wraps before I found myself in hot water again.

'Um....save me the sermon will you. I come from the Land of the Brave, the Home of the Free.....' She gave an embarrassed smile.

'Um....your decision to hold in abeyance any further filming.....was it a result of the homicide of the Pastor? Or the earlier incident that you saw through the window of the Office.....on Friday, early evening? Is that right?' Mar asked.

'Yes. Just around sunset last Friday. We'd be flying out of here to-morrow....the earliest that we could get with all our equipment....because of that incident. Disgusting! If we had been permitted, that is, but we had to cancel the seat reservations.' She turned to me. Challenging me with her eyes for me to make comment.

'You obviously would have had to give some reason why you would be cutting short your stay....and the decision to not go ahead with the filming of this Sunday morning sermon.....'

'Yes.....'

'Who did you speak to?'

'Umm.....Judge. Gavin Judge.'

'Was there anyone else there with him when you explained your decision?'

'I believe so. Yes. The guy from Armidale, is it? Ted somebody.....Gibson.....and then they

called in Bart Hartcher. They were all.....not shocked.....more resolved about my decision to desist from any further filming. I had been given such directions from my Boss back in the States. He wanted us out of this Gomorrah as quickly as possible.'

'When did that meeting take place?'

'Later on the Friday night. After I had put a call to the Office back home.....around eight I'd say.'

'And everyone in that Office was shocked by your decision?'

'I'd say more irate than anything else.....sorry....do you mean my Office in the States, or the Church Office?' As though her office maybe of some importance to a homicide in a backwater place in Australia. Typical Yanks I thought. The World revolves around them!

'The Church Office.....'

'Yes.....'

'Can we run through this conversation again as we video it....and could you write out a Stat. Dec in your words....I think if that is satisfactorily completed, there would be no reason why you couldn't leave to-morrow.'

'Doh! I doubt whether that will be possible. Because of our gear we need to have a lead-in for reservations of a couple of days in advance.....but we'll get the hell out of here to-morrow morning if you say so. The less time spent here, the better as far as I am concerned! Yes?'

31

We were seated in the rear Kitchen come Hall of the Church building. Enjoying a cup of coffee. Collecting our thoughts. Writing up our Murder Note Books. It was mid-afternoon and the temperature was hovering just shy of the magic forty.

'The three of them? Bart Hartcher? Gavin Judge and Ted Gibson? Totally pissed off at The Pastor basically killing the Goose that was going to lay that golden egg? Sound right to you, Mar? The bloody hand smudges near the pedestrian gate from Hartcher....maybe also Judge nervously trying to insert their exit card into the Gate Reader.....we'll have to check what vehicle corresponds with the track and tyre imprints on the other side of the front fence.....it may not be relevant.....one can always hope that amongst the bloody smudges that there is a readable finger print or two to implicate at least one of them.....and check those cards for blood trace.....and Gibson had plenty of

time to go to the Garden Shed to get the rope and to inform the other two that he thought that they should go ahead with their plan later that night.....we'll have to check telephone records. Hartcher says he was home in time for tea.....'

'Judge said the same thing stating that his wife could confirm that he remained at home all night. What time did Hartcher say he landed here this morning?'

'Obviously some time before he called it in. Before say four thirty.....that's a queer hour to turn up here, don't you think?'

'They realised at long last that Hawkins had become more of a liability than anything else. An embarrassment if the facts become common knowledge. They would have been dreading the outcome of the Royal Commission Hearing next February for sure. A further slight on the authenticity and purity of the Church. They had a good thing going and didn't want it spoilt. A hive full of nepotism that was benefiting enormously one or two families at the centre of the Church.....what do you think of Fredrick? He included in the plot to kill Hawkins?'

I shook my head in the negative. I just couldn't see the man being involved. He was the one truly religious, yet humble man that I had met to-day. Although, because his son was also a Pastor of the Church, there had to be some doubt.

'Do you think that we have enough to arrest the three of them?'

'Purely supposition on the lot of them.....but let's arrest them on suspicion to conspire to commit a homicide and see what falls from the tree....'

'We could be making one hell of a mistake. How about we interview them separately. Again. See what transpires.....if nothing we'll have to wait for some forensic trace to back up our theory.'

'Yeah...maybe that is the more prudent action to take.'

32

'Mister Gibson. Thanks for seeing us again.....'

'I doubt that I had much choice as we're like a captive audience here. When are you going to permit us to leave. My family are visibly upset on what has transpired here.....'

'So much so that you were all enjoying a BBQ lunch while your kids frolicked in the pool earlier on to-day.'

He looked from one to the other of us, unsure as to how or if he should respond.

'You all seem to be related to one another.....'

'Is that a question?'

'Then it's true?'

'My mother was Bart Hartcher's older half sister. There is no crime in being related.....'

'Will we find your prints on the Cutter used to cut lengths of rope up to use to bind The Pastor....or on the Cricket Bat used to break the man's jaw?'

He sat there not moving a muscle. His hands held together so tightly that the fingers were white. He took a deep breath. Looked up at us. Looked away.

'Should I get myself a Lawyer?'

'That's your prerogative, Mister Gibson. After we take you to the Cells at the Police Building in Parramatta and questioned you further to-morrow. Is there anything else that you wish to add?'

He shook his head, now lowered. A picture of a beaten man.

Mar stood and walked around behind him, grabbing his arms to hand-cuff them behind his back.

'Mister Edward Anthony Gibson, you are being arrested on suspicion of conspiring with others to commit murder and on suspicion of murdering Pastor Douglas Hawkins on or about oh one hundred hours this morning, this Sunday at the Mountainside Temple of God. You are not obliged to say anything but anything that you do.....'

I nearly always let Marge make the initial arrest.

She practically grew three feet during the act. It helped define who she was and why she was a Murder Detective.

I'm thoughtful that way!!??

33

We walked in through the rear double doors of the Church Building. Hartcher was sitting at a table near the rear Kitchenette. A cup of coffee held by both hands as though he was drawing heat from the hot mug. Two Uniform Constables sat with him. The expression on his face indicated that

he knew his fate.

As we approached he nodded his head, stood and offered us his hands. We formally arrested him as we had his co-conspirator and read him his rights.

'What happens now?' He asked softly.

'You'll be held in the Basement Cells of the Police Building in Parramatta. You'll be formally questioned and charged with the crime to-morrow and perhaps on Tuesday you will front the Court for a Bail Application. You may have a Solicitor present during that time, but not for the initial arrest and question time. This is a murder charge and we can hold you without representation for seventy two hours. Constables, can you accompany Bart. Bartholomew Hartcher to Parramatta under Detective Three Marjory Hendricks directions. Thank you.'

Hartcher was meekly led away.

Fredrick Junior came in through the rear Church doors with his son as Hartcher was led out.

'So it's true?' He looked lost. A broken man. His dreams, his hard work to establish a Garden of Prayer depleted. I nodded my head as I placed a hand on his shoulder.

'I'm sorry.....' Was all I could manage.

Gavin Judge was a little more forceful in his opposition to him being handcuffed and led to our Unmarked, blaming the other two for the planning and execution of the crime. He was an innocent bystander who was asked to help haul The Pastor up into a suspended position.

That was all he had done.

I believed that he would have been the ring-leader. The one to coax the other two into the act of killing The Pastor. Enraged at all the hard work that he had put in over the years to extend, to expand the religious empire. The one, who in a fit of rage, had gutted the man as he hung suspended like a side of beef. The one who had perhaps returned to his home as though nothing had happened, telling the others to do the same. Smearing his blood stained hand print on the wall beside the Pedestrian Gate as he attempted, hand shaking, to insert his card into the slot that allowed the gate to open.

I felt that Hartcher was incapable of returning to his home address and had hung around burdened with guilt until he had rung Triple-Oh as some sort of cathartic action. A cleansing of his soul.

That of course, would never be enough in his own eyes or in the eyes of the "All Powerful God" whom he believed in so strongly.

34

'David South? Did you spend a restful night in the cells. Best to get used to it as it will be your home from now until you perish from this earth. Interesting that you would pick a progressive Church to lie low in. Do you believe in a God?'

He sneered at that suggestion.

'I thought not.....just a place to hide. People to con. It must have been a load of laughs listening to all those souls trying to save yours....and to cap it off they go and commit murder. A load of laughs, eh?' I repeated.

He looked up at me. Through me.

'Is there anything that you want to tell me about the Tallis twins? Tia and Thomas? Was it good to see them squirm as their life blood seeped away....now that's sick. Very sick. Eleven year old brother and sister no longer wanted by their adoptive father Greg Tallis. Why? Because they were both showing signs of entering puberty.....so he gives them to you so you can bleed them out.....then both your mate Greg and you stuff them into fancy suitcases and lug them in the back of your Ute halfway around NSW. How sick is that?'

'I had nuffin to do wid dat. Don't even know whose ya talking about.....'

'Then how did your DNA get to be on several cigarette butts in a small container....along with your mate Greg's, inside one of the Cases.....under one of the bodies.....Tallis smoked Rollies. You smoked B & H Tailor-mades. Am I correct?'

Again he looked up at me. Through me.

'Yer mate, Tallis? He's implicated you in their deaths. Anything to say about that?'

'Greggy's got a big mouth, is all.'

'Mmm.....we're organising a machine that will tell us if there are any bodies buried in the property in South Taralga.....and the one closer to town. Plus the house where Tallis lived in, in Canberra and a couple of addresses in the Wollongong area. Have you any idea what we may find?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Don't know, but if'n ya find some little kids buried there, it tweren't me who kilt them. Greggy was the guy who got a high that way. Not me.....'

'Are you suggesting that we may find some kiddies' bodies buried there?' Mar asked quietly. He ignored her, not even looking at her.

'You were sacked from the Abattoir about a year ago. For obscene behaviour...pouring cattle blood all over your body and getting off with the smell. Anything you want to say about that little episode? You got a thing about warm, fresh blood, haven't you? No? Have you heard of Danny Steele? Bindi Wilcox? Bonnie Taylor? Jacob Daniels? We got every one? Or are there a couple that we've missed? Just kids. Five, six, seven years of age. Scared out of their wits. You're sure a big man, Davey. Not even your mother or father care about you.....'

'They're shite!' He spat out. 'Worse'n cringin' dogs on the street. I should have kilt them when I had the chance. Saved the world the trouble of them livin'.'

'Threatening to kill your parents is an indictable offence.....It's interesting, Davey.....That both of you accuse the other of the disappearance and killing of those kids.....but you don't deny their deaths.....in a way that is self-incrimination, now isn't it. Get used to your stay. You'll not make bail as you have shown that you are a 'flight risk'.....over a minor 'Drink Drive' charge at that. So be prepared to never see the freedom of a sunrise again. You can at least dream of your time up the mountains, I suppose.....and we'll be patient until that Ground Survey Machine gives up your secrets, eh?'

35

It was close to three weeks after that long Sunday that we had spent up in the Blue Mountains. We had been paid for the week-end "Call out" and for the day.

The money had long been spent.

We had three cast-iron confessions for the homicide death of Pastor Douglas Hawkins with Hartcher the only one showing extreme signs of guilt and remorse. To such an extent that the Prison Psychiatrist had suggested that the man be placed on a 24 hour Suicide watch.

Their confessions were all well and good, but we were starting to nag the various Forensic Departments for some concrete evidence to seal the deal. The three had agreed to plead guilty which meant that long Court time and a Jury Panel would not be required. At first, Gavin Judge had bucked at this arrangement. The DPP had explained to him that as his two cohorts in a fit of remorse, had agreed to the Guilty plead, then his cry of innocence would almost certainly guarantee a longer sentence for him.

He reluctantly reversed his plea.

Unfortunately, David South was being a little more obdurate. I still thought that we could

wear him down though the Subterranean Survey Machine was impatiently being anticipated in the coming week to help with the case. The discovery of bodies was all we felt we needed to win him over to confessing to the crime involving the twins being stuffed into two suitcases and left in the bush outside Coffs Harbour. And to the number of bodies that we felt sure would be discovered.

My phone buzzed across my desk

'Detective Lind, is it? This is Sergeant Jenna Rutledge of the Queensland Highway Patrol. Out of Maroochydoore. I'm on the Bruce Highway just out of town and....um.....I've just pulled over a.....um.....she insists being referred to as Charli...with an "I", Longford. NSW Drivers' Licence states a name as Charles Longford. Male. Checked for priors on my car computer and your name came up on an outstanding Arrest Warrant for the gentleman....um, sorry...the lady.'

'Oh, you're a beauty. Could you transport her to your Lock-up? Please give her the dignity of placing her in the female section if you could. If you need any special instructions in that regard I will be only too happy to provide them. We'll begin immediate extradition proceedings for her return to Sydney. She is wanted in association with the homicide deaths of two eleven year children around eight years ago...and possible implication in the disappearance of several others....ta much.'

I had no idea where that last bit had come from but it just made sense.

All of a sudden.

Children would be more likely successfully enticed into a vehicle if it was a woman by herself in that vehicle. More so than by one or two men, especially if they looked a little worse for wear, as did Tallis and South! No amount of attention could ever make those two look clean, honest and dependable. Maybe that had been their problem from the start. The way they presented to the outside world.....it's just a theory, that's all.

But for sure, we now had the "Bodies in the Bags" Case coming to a close.

I just knew that my nightmares would diminish.

I just knew!

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