

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES JOSEPH LIND and SHELLEY SHIELDS



PETER C BYRNES

MURDER SQUAD DETECTIVES
JOSEPH LIND AND SHELLEY ANNE SHIELDS

SO SHALL YE REAP

PETER C BYRNES

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CHAPTER ONE

He angrily pulled his pants up.

Adjusted his bum bag as though he thought it the culprit.

He was not pleased.

This was the third time that he had ejaculated way too early.

In fact, he doubted that he had even penetrated the woman! Or any of them if he had to be totally honest with himself!

That really pissed him off.

He should go and see a Doctor about it as it did worry him when he was placed in this situation.

He lashed out with his foot, landing it heavily on the white buttock of the young woman.

She tried to squirm away from him. Soft sobs escaped from her mouth.

'What's she got to cry about?' He thought angrily.

He doubted that he had even raped her. Cum inside her. Pierced her. Penetrated her...these thoughts started to make him hard again.

He bent over and gave her another punch to the face, just below the eye to let her know that it was all her fault.

She curled tighter into a foetal position, sobbing silently. Shielding her battered face with her hands.

It was all her fault, he thought to himself. If she hadn't been so unwilling to succumb to his advances, he may not have cum so quickly. Her meagre throes of opposition had only excited him more.

Yep!

It was all her fault.

He again kicked her hard in the buttock.
Harder this time.

He heard her groan.

He readjusted his bum-bag and stepped out from the bushy area.

Looking both ways, he started up the jogging track pleased that not a soul was about.

The sun had only just peaked over the horizon.

It was going to be a fine day, he thought to himself.

He began to go over what he was required to do on this day.

It was going to be another busy one.

A day of challenges.

Of compromise and negotiation.

"Another good day," he whispered to himself as he picked up speed.

The crumpled, soiled woman that he left behind in the bushes the last thing on his mind. Lost in the myriad narcissistic thoughts that spun through his brain.

The frustration and anger felt just a few brief moments ago gone to be replaced with the choice of important chores that lay before him for the rest of the day...the week...perhaps the month.

Business decisions that only he could make that lauded him with kudos from the plebs!

Another good day?

You betcha!

CHAPTER TWO

"Bloody Hell!" I exclaimed. I covered my eyes with my hands and shook my head. "Ouch! That'd hurt...was he alive when he had it chopped off?"

"A nice clean cut...a sharp knife or a scalpel even, that's for sure...and that tree branch shoved up his anal passage wouldn't have been a load of laughs either." Shelley responded.

I may have been wrong, but I suspected that there may have been a little glee from my partner over the manner in which this Victim experienced his last moments.

"Was he alive for that?" I asked incredulously.

A sensation coursing through my genitalia and back passage akin to terror electrified by adrenalin and the utter horror of the feeling that both acts would cause me. My sphincter muscles already working overtime to eject the foreign material that I thought that I could feel. Tests on my Prostate foreign to me, and by all accounts would remain so until I died, such was my opposition to the physical examination!

I felt squeamish!

The big brave cop!

"Hard to tell until we examine him on the cutting table...cause of death? Take your pick. The massive head trauma possibly caused by a long stem beer bottle if the glass remnants can be reconstructed that seem to be lying about here...or blood loss from having his penis cut off at the very base...or blood loss by having that tree branch rammed so far up his arse he could use the end of it as a toothpick...which would I think, have lacerated the anal wall to shreds...or choking to death after having his penis rammed halfway down his throat. I won't know for sure which of those was the cause of death...or maybe it would be safe to assume that a combination of all of them would be the cause...the trauma to his body was enormous."

"Anger...pure and simple...and I'd say that the Assailant knew his Victim...revenge...that's what I see here..." Shelley Shields, my partner muttered as she stood from her stooped position over the body. "Sheer, unadulterated anger."

"Didn't the Mafia...or Costra Nostra, cut off the penis of informers and stuff it into their mouths?" I asked no one in particular.

"What? You suggesting a Mafia hit here, Joe?"

"I'm not suggesting anything...but...it was a favourite way of dealing with guys who sold secrets to the cops and other opposition mobs, wasn't it? Back some years ago..."

"This isn't Chicago of the Thirties, Joe. This is Sydney, Australia in the twenty-first century..."

"You telling me, Shells, that the Mafia...or Costra Nostra, does not exist in this day and age? Here? In Australia?"

She shook her head.

"No Joe, but I doubt that there'd be a case on record where any Mafia payback hit involved shoving a tree branch up the arse of their target...this is anger. Retribution. Revenge..."

"They were good at that too, Shells...the Mafia..."

The three women looked at me as though my tutu was around my ankles. Questioning looks wondering on my sanity.

I got the message. I considered myself fast like that.

"Revenge? For what?"

"You're the Ace Detective...you go figure it out and leave us in peace to finish off our work!" Brenda Wzerlic stated forcefully. She dressed in a pale blue 'Onesie' bio-suit which kind of negated her angry stance as she looked at me. She looked comical standing there. All she needed was a Teddy Bear and she'd be right for bed. I couldn't help but smile. That was not the right expression this morning in front of these females who seemed to have it out for me.

"I agree!" Dee Dee Jameson seconded angrily.

She was the Lead Forensic Officer.

"Leave the area until we are finished with the site. Go interview some witnesses..."

She in a striking blue creation of similar design from the same manufacturer. The one size fits all swimming on her small frame.

"There are none apparently." I replied quietly. "According to the Uniforms who were first on scene."

"Then go count the number of Possums in the immediate area...anything! Let us finish our work, Joe. Huh?"

"Possums??!!"

"Come on, Joe. Let's get out of their way. Some people find your sense of humour and left field comments a little too hard to swallow this early in the day."

Shelley grabbed me by the arm as a kind Teacher would lead an errant pupil from the room.

My lower regions still suffering that queer sensation from what I thought would be sheer torture.

CHAPTER THREE

"Your name?"

"Harry Shore...I jog around this Park about a half a dozen times this time of the morning. Every second day. Rain, hail or shine..."

"Live locally then?"

"Yes...almost directly opposite the main vehicle entrance gate into the park...I've got views of the foreshore and park. The Bay. Million dollar views..."

"Yes..." I replied deadpan.

The affliction of all Sydney-siders. The house and its value and its outlook, whether it was for sale or not. It didn't matter. The value of the property had to be known at all times. Spoken about. Broadcast. So much so that the local Real Estate windows were regularly checked for prices on houses that maybe located on the same street! A thrill if the price had escalated by several tens of thousands. Sleepless nights if the price bracket was stable! Or God forbid, gone down. The apoplectic Owner of said property never likely to sell for at least fifteen to twenty years and that was to invest in his retirement days. God forbid if the value of Real Estate suddenly dropped through the floor. There would be mass hysteria...then lemming-like, a rush to The Gap!

"Look, Detective...um...I'm already late for work...will this take much longer?"

"Can you go through your story again for me, please."

Shore shook his head a little impatiently.

He felt that he was dealing with a couple of imbecilic twits.

Maybe that is the level of morons that the Police Force attracted, he thought to himself.

He wiped his face down with a towel that his wife had bought across from their residence for him. At his beckoning. She stood off to one side of her husband, looking continually at her watch as though she expected time to go into reverse at any moment and she did not want to miss the phenomenon.

"I... arrh... do the foreshore jog every other day, as I've said. I start out around sun-up in summer. It's still dark in winter. Around five. Five-thirty. I came around the corner here...and stopped by those exercise bays. For a breather. A couple of push-ups and some other exercises. To loosen up my hamstrings. They get tight. I was doing the hamstring stretches when I got a whiff of something dead...you know that smell? It seemed to get

stronger the longer I stayed there...I just walked into the brush thicket. Saw the body lying over the log...with something sticking out of his behind...a stick or something. I rang my wife to get onto Crime Stoppers to call it in... I threw up...was too shaky to keep on jogging. I was going to walk home when the first cop car turned up...you know the rest. I've been stuck here for over two hours...there goes work for the day...I really can't afford to be so lax!"

"Where do you work?"

"I'm an Insurance Broker...head of a firm that employs ten people. In King Street. In the City."

"Why did you call your wife?"

"I didn't want to get involved...you know? I knew that I'd be stuck here for hours explaining over and over again what had happened which was really bugger all, Detective."

"Mmm...then why did you stay around? Because you were sick all over the place? Your knees too wobbly..."

"Um...no. My conscious got the better of me...and he was a fellow jogger...it quite easily could have been me, you know?"

"Why do you say that?"

"You know...a fellow jogger by the way he was dressed..."

"Do you recognise him?"

"No... though I didn't get a look at his face...but his jogging gear looks familiar."

"Local?"

"I don't know...if not, he more than likely would park his car down in the parking area...just inside the Park entranceway..."

I nodded my head.

We already had several Uniforms stationed in the Parking Area ticking off each person as they returned to their vehicle. It was only a matter of elimination before we knew whether he had come by car or was a close resident. Every vehicle registration plate had been cross referenced and the registered owners logged.

A young Uniform Constable came up to stand beside me.

"Yes, Constable?"

"We have a Mz Cynthia Highland down in the parking area. She is a regular jogger here. Goes straight to work. A shower. A change of clothes before she starts her day. With the Bank. Down in the Shopping precinct close by."

"Yes?"

"Um...sir? I think you should perhaps have a word or two with her."

"Won't be a moment, Constable. Can you stay with the woman, please.?"

I nodded my head in dismissing the young Uniform.

"Is there anything else that you would like to add, Mister Shore?"

"No... I don't think so...can I have your number just in case?"

"Yes. Anything. Doesn't matter how irrelevant you may think the information. Just let us know, okay?"

He seemed to shine at the attention as though there was little of that in his life. His attitude the complete reversal of his initial impatience. His work duties seeming to slip from his mind. He'd be taking the day off was my bet.

I watched him walk away being questioned by his wife as she continued to glance every now and then at her watch.

I wondered why anyone would walk into a dense thicket of bush because he could smell something dead. It could have been anything, like a possum which would be a fair bet around here...and not a human body!

CHAPTER FOUR

Shells and I walked down to the small Parking area near the entrance to the Park. It could hold around thirty cars I guessed, with around half that number vacant at this time of morning.

We were introduced to a slim, fit looking young woman who had muscles where I thought there were none...on my body in any case!

She was obviously a Gym Junkie.

"As I've said to this young man..."

Indicating the young Uniform with a wave of her hand and a smile that was glittering.

The young Constable shuffled his feet, looked at his shoes in embarrassment.

"It's getting kinda worrying around here...what with this...it is a murder, isn't it? Some of the girls? They have been accosted...you know? An idiot tries it on...says something smart like...you know? About your cute arse. Your toosh...as they jog up behind you. I've even had my bum pinched, would you believe..."

She tried hard to broadcast that she was upset about the incident. It didn't quite come off.

"Why didn't you report it to the local Police?"

"Something like that? You know...just a wannabe lover who thinks we all should fall for him. A wannabe Romeo. Better to ignore them..."

I nodded my head, not entirely convinced.

"Them? More than one?"

"Don't know for sure..."

"How often has this been occurring?"

"Um...over the past year, I reckon. About...some of the girls go to my Gym. It's a common talking point...we at one stage were going to jog en masse and when the creep tried it on we were going to beat the crap out of him...you know."

"Then you would have been in trouble with us. It would have been better all round for you to have contacted us...can you describe the man in question?"

"Tall. Over six foot. Shaved head on occasions. Maybe a Number Two on other occasions. Tanned. Buffed. No facial hair though he seemed to have a heavy beard line. Late twenties perhaps. A good physique. Very tanned. Good looking actually. Some of the other girls reckon that when they first set eyes on him he looked like a real honey...but pretty quick he became a real jerk. Often jogs without a top...very lithesome...has very supple hamstrings going on his stretch regime. Not a footballer. More a runner or maybe a swimmer..."

"Names?"

She shook her head in the negative.

"The names of the other girls?"

"Jeez...just first names as they are only Gym buddies. You know? A common interest in jogging, I suppose, but I don't know them that well. A couple appeared to be really close friends, though. Maybe the Gym can help out...the Fitness Well attached to the Leagues Club up at The Junction...they would know."

We took her particulars including her Gym Membership number.

"Later this morning, Joe. They serve a good coffee in their Café downstairs."

I nodded my head in agreement.

I was spoiling for a break and a reasonable coffee. A bite to eat.

I was just about through with interviewing these 'get well fit' fanatics whose brains had been addled by one too many steroid injections or too many glances at their reflections in the mirrors as they undertook their daily exercise regime!

CHAPTER FIVE

If it was a fellow jogger who had carried out the dastardly deed, he more than likely would not curtail his jogging regime. He may curtail his exercise for a morning or two because of the heavy Police presence, but would start up eventually. Because of that, we organised a covert surveillance of the parking area and the jogging track to obtain photographic evidence of all joggers and all vehicles that entered the parking area around that time of morning.

You never know.

Early indications from the Forensic Pathologist was a time of death of between four in the morning to ten the same morning, approximately twenty to thirty hours prior to the body being discovered.

We walked slowly back towards the crime scene now surrounded by blue tarps spread between star pickets to keep nosy parkers out.

"Do you reckon that description from Miss Universe comes close to our Vic?" Shelley asked as she propped to look back down the bay and the expanse of water that lapped the edge of the Headland Park.

"Nah! Not in my wildest imaginations. No way. Our guy is tall, yeah. But fair skinned. Blond long hair with a short man bob. A goatee and soul patch...well-proportioned and

athletic sure...but that is where the similarity ends..."

"You reckon we could have a couple of bum-pinchers amongst the male jogging crowd?"

"Could be, I suppose...some of those backsides...and tooshes...mmm....and she didn't seem that averse to having her arse pinched, that's for sure..."

"Give me strength...Joe, don't tell me you went through a phase of bum-pinching? That's so sexist and disrespectful...childish and downright bloody dirty...obscene."

"Shells? Settle down. I agree with you...what the hell these types get out of the practise I'll never know. Um...the whole crime scene...it's been stage managed to some degree, I reckon...it means something to a person...or persons...who carried out the homicide..."

"In a most sadistic and cruel manner, Joe."

"Which, as you said previously, means anger...a great deal of anger...and that bloody stick? Forced penetration..."

"Rape...a payback for a rape, you reckon, Joe?"

"The more I think about it, the more that conclusion keeps buzzing back into my mind. Yeah. A rape victim...venting his or her anger at being violated previously by our Vic. It would have taken considerable strength to overcome our Vic... he is no weakling, let me tell you..."

"Which would indicate more than one person..."

"Or a lucky sucker punch that rendered him unconscious..."

"Joe, that's jumping a bit, let me tell you."

"Mmm...yeah, I know."

CHAPTER SIX

"We have an ID on our Vic. One Harris Clyde Westcott. An address in Bondi. Owns the small silver BMW out in the parking area."

Brenda stood and stretched.

Her tiny frame lost in the 'one size suits all' forensic boiler suit.

"Of course, he did...own a small BMW that is. Just his style...anything else?"

"Not as long as you have seen enough, in which case I'd like to get the body out of here. Dee Dee is panting at the bit wanting the entire area...she reckons she can construct two beer bottles from all the shards about. She reckons that she should be able to at least get partials off some of the bits and pieces...maybe something off the anal stick also..."

Brenda looked up at me as she shimmied out of the bio-suit, tossing it into a bio-waste bin. She was dressed in tight jeans and a white T-shirt that hugged her body.

"Get you out of bed, huh Brenda, my love?"

"Yeah...and it wasn't mine, let me tell you. A waste of a bloody night, though!" She giggled in reply.

My mind was drawn back to another time.

To perhaps my favourite Forensic Pathologist after Professor Bernie Ford, bless his cotton socks. Another one of Bernie's favourite protégés before the hapless Caramine Lees took her own life.

Dominique Sherbaverst.

She too a pert, diminutive figure that had a lust for life and a sexual appetite to match.

She was now head of the WA Crime Laboratory and rarely if ever graced a crime scene any more. More's the pity. She now happily married to the Deputy Commissioner of the WA Crime Commission with three healthy kids. Both she and her husband in big demand on the small Dinner Party circuit around Perth. One of the City's favourite couples by all accounts.

Why didn't that surprise me?

She was always destined for greater things, so Professor Bernie Ford would always say about his favourite Forensic Pathologist in training.

My mind then drifted back to Caramine Lees and her sudden demise.

In hindsight, all the signs were there.

The sudden change in personality from a reliable, happy person to a despondent, moody girl who would often call in sick for no reason at all...and then her lonely suicide which affected all of us who knew her. I was sure that a little seed of guilt and contrition lived inside all of

us who experienced this wonderful person change so dramatically and all of us failing to offer her our hand.

Too busy...some-one else closer to her would be more suitable.

Not realising that we were all she had!

It's so easy not to miss a step walking our own path wrapped in our own comforting cocoon. Ignorant or not wanting to get involved for all sorts of second rate reasons. None of which withstood the test of time and the constant dissection from our consciousnesses!

It was a long time to miss a very special person. Death was for keeps. I especially had a more than tenuous relationship with the girl. Shared her bed and her mind on more than one occasion. Even then, if I thought about it, during those times of deep conversations and confessions, all the signs were there for a delicate, insecure girl who went along with our arrangement because it gave her closeness for how-ever brief a moment. Me too wrapped up in the affair where strings were not attached, supposedly.

I should have seen it on those occasions...instead of wallowing in the typical male ego trip.

"Joe? You at home, my good man?"

I shook the melancholic thoughts from my mind. The present and the job had a higher priority...as it then did, those couple of years ago, much to my sorrow.

"Yeah?" I stammered out. "Sure. What?"

"Okay to remove the body? Where did you get to?"

"A memory from the past. Two in fact. Caramine Lees and Dominique Sherbaverst. They both at one stage held your position..."

"Yeah...I know of them. Muscles has implemented a very fine program. From the time of the Professor going forward, he has mounted a photograph of every Forensic Pathologist, Morgue Assistant and Clerical person even, along the Entry Hallway wall...with their years of service, position, DOB and DOD if applicable, and a short history of their service. A cool idea to acknowledge the contribution each person has made to the Lab... I'm up there too...a bloody terrible mug shot for posterity...now...can we remove the body, Joe?"

I nodded my head.

That tit-bit was news to me, but then I recalled it had been some time since I'd last entered the Coroner's Office via the front door. Usually we went in through the 'Dead Doors' at the rear. However, I was a little miffed that Muscles had not shown or even remarked on this

idea when we got together at each other's place at least once a fortnight.

I'd stir him about it next time I rubbed shoulders with him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"He has form. Never imprisoned, but has several minor assault charges against females against him. Fines. Suspended sentences. Community service..."

Shells looked up from her Tablet.

Swung it around to show me a mug shot of the Vic and his charge sheet.

I went through it quickly.

Nodded my head as though I expected as much.

A crud from the lower nether who somehow, had worked his way up onto dry land if the little BMW was any indication.

How these guys managed to survive had me beat.

A leech that sucked some poor female dry, taking as much as he could while giving little.

A mental picture of his body drooped over that large bough of a fallen tree suddenly entered my mind's eye. The small branch sticking out of his behind front and centre. My sphincter muscles again did a double take, trying desperately to eject the foreign object. My buttock went into a taunt freeze action to help out.

I couldn't work out why these reactions were so severe...and to tell the truth, I really didn't want to investigate it further.

As I have mentioned, a prostate examination will never occur while I am alive!

"His place?"

"That's a plan...a coffee first though, as long as we are finished here..."

"That's a better plan."

We wandered back down to the small Parking Area now filled with all sorts of official vehicles.

Gave instructions to the Uniforms for a cop presence to exist for the next forty-eight hours.

Every person who entered the Park was to be interviewed with their particulars noted. Any that may cause any form of uncertainty or suspicion were to be transported to the local Police Station for further questioning.

No-one was thus transported by any Uniform to the local Lock-up within that period.

We went and had a coffee and a B&E roll for breakfast which help to ease my sphincter muscles somewhat!

Highclere Avenue was lined with dense foliage trees on either side of a concrete roadway.

Fig and Lilli Pilli trees.

Every time a vehicle having certain tyres...or pressure in their tyres, rode over the raised abutment of each concrete road slab, you would hear thump-thump as they progressed up or down the road.

All day.

Every day.

All night.

The Avenue had once been lined with the typical nineteen thirties and post-war Housing Commission dark, double brick, two and three storey 'Flats' as they were known back when. These were the typical construction in pockets right through the Eastern Suburbs for years. They were now being replaced with the typical 'tropical' multi-storey Unit and Apartment blocks.

How times have changed!

The only thing in favour of this modern construction design was ample balconies that you could position a table and four chairs on with relatively ample room to still walk around and the fact that the Balconies gave magnificent views of the famous beach. Ample off-street, underground parking was also a tick to the rise of these coloured monoliths.

This off-street parking had been sorely missed in the street of old...and the diversity of design...if one could expect such design imagination in a single tower construction of some thirty storeys or more, then you were an eternal optimist!

I stood from the Unmarked and stretched.

Looked around.

We had parked in the 'Visitors Only' area of around a dozen car spaces. The area half full. I was sure that this complex, in roughly the middle of the length of Highclere Avenue, would have been close to where we had a 'safe house' Flat in the old days. Close to thirty years ago now. I a young blade as an undercover Narcotics Officer.

Gee, how time flies without you really comprehending its steady progress....and nothing remains the same!

We walked past a large pool enclosure.

Several people frolicked and splashed about in the clear, fresh water.

We were within walking distance of one of the world's most famous beaches and here people preferred the monotony of an enclosed pool. Sure, it had the ubiquitous 'sails' partially shading the area, but...

"They must have some Holiday Letting Apartments in the complex...helping to pay off the large loan, I suppose."

Shelley nodded her head.

I could tell she was not about to enter into the conversation.

We scanned down the list of occupants with perhaps a dozen vacant of any name tag. Those would be the Holiday Lettings.

Harris Clyde Westcott's 'digs' were on the twenty-ninth floor. Along with a Mz. Caroline Lindsay.

Surprise. Surprise!

I rang the security buzzer hoping to get the live-in Manager.

Instead, some-one in Apartment 2904 answered.

"You're the cops?" More a statement then a question. "You've found the bastard, eh?"

"Um...you are?" I asked as Shelley positioned her ID Card for the security camera.

The front door buzzed open as an elderly gentleman stepped through.

"I'm Lyndall Cassell. The Manager of this establishment and the one next door also. You are the police. Can I help?"

"Harris Clyde Westcott? We understand that he lives at this address. Is that correct?"

"Hah!... Westy...a lover of life and many women. He can't help himself, so I believe...he in trouble? I'll swipe you up to his level. His live-in partner is at home, I think. Another heart-ache for her. She is too good a person to be involved in a crud like Harris, if the truth be known."

"Oh? Why do you say that, Mister...um...Cassell? Isn't it?"

"Yes..."

He led us into the spacious Lift Lobby. Swiped a card to call down the Lift to the ground floor. Swiped again to open the doors...and again to whisk us up silently to the Twenty-ninth floor.

He didn't add to the statement although his questions were more of a busy-body looking for tit-bits to spread around the complex. He was that type of guy. Shells would say a bit of a sleaze.

"Thank you, Mister Cassell." I stated by way of dismissing him.

I had the feeling that he wanted to hang around to overhear any part of the conversation.

The Lift doors whisked shut as I knocked on 2904.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Coppers...jeez...come through. 'Hassle' Cassell will have it spread around the Tower in no time...where was he found this time? Which Hospital? Bashed by a cuckold husband...is there such a thing nowadays? What does it mean? It's an old fashion saying, isn't it? Is he all right?"

The youngish woman was nervous. On edge.

She looked tired. Drawn out although her make-up was immaculate as though she had just stepped from in front of the stage lights. It was that thick. Mid-thirties and chasing it, I thought to myself.

We were led through into an Apartment out of the pages of some glossy magazine. Polished marble tiled floor. Large squares of deep pile, off-white carpet. Works of Art on large expanses of wall. Furniture that not only looked good but was probably comfy as all hell as

well! A Chef designed Kitchen. A curved TV screen that would cost my annual salary.

The trance was broken by the smell of freshly made coffee.

"Coffee?... I'll need one I reckon, by the time that you tell your story of Harris's latest escapade. I've had enough of the cheating so-and-so. He's out of here as soon as he is released from Hospital...which Hospital did you say?"

All this as she placed us gently into a beautiful off-white, soft leather sofa that I did not want to rise from. It kind of melded into my body and supported all the important parts. She then continued with her patter as she made us a coffee.

"Now...here you are...where is he?"

"Mz?" Shelley began, trying to get the woman to relax somewhat.

"Caroline Lindsay...Caroline... or as my friends call me Linney, please. I have several Import/Export firms mainly dealing in fine furniture and Art... I also own the Bondi Junction Art Emporium up on the ridge and another here in the commercial strip on the beach...my luck with men is my downfall, I'm afraid...is he badly hurt? I hope not, otherwise I'll be tossing all his stuff, meagre as it may be, out over the fucking balcony. It can float to New Zealand for all I care...he's overstepped this time...he's had some floozy up here while I've been away...using my toiletries, my perfume, my underwear and my clothes. Enough is enough, let me tell you...what Hospital. I'll pick him up when he is released and give him the rounds before I tell him to bugger off..."

"Mz...um...Linney...fantastic coffee by the way...Harris...um...Westcott...this is Detective Shelley Shields and I am Detective Joseph Lind. Of the Murder Squad. I am sorry to have to inform you that your partner's body was found this morning on the Bay Headland...it is estimated that he had been dead for at least twenty-four hours..."

She sat frozen for some moments, before she spoke.

"Bashed to death..." She stated matter-of-factly. Carefully placing her coffee cup back into its saucer. Looked around at her surroundings without seeming to see anything. Rubbed the back of her neck before taking a tissue from her skirt pocket and blowing her nose.

"Why would you say that?"

"He...arrh... I promise that I will not cry over the bastard...he was incorrigible. A real skirt chaser. I knew that when I met him...thought he would change...that I could change him...you know? My feminine ways in curing a compulsive romantic...well no... that's the wrong description of him...a complete crud, actually! It would appear that I am not that bloody good!" She looked over at me. She on the edge of tears.

"Why are you home at this hour? You know, with all your business interests?"

"I've just flown in from a whirlwind business trip. Milan. Rome. Paris. Beijing and Tokyo...all I want to do is sleep...I doubt that I got much of that over the last seven days..." She shook her head as though she was stealing herself. "...okay...where do I view the body to ensure that he is out of my life."

Very non-committal. I would have pronounced on the verge of coldness. But then, I did not know the history of the two though I was beginning to obtain an over-view.

"You have proof of your overseas travel?"

"What...am I a suspect?"

"Everyone is, at this stage, I am afraid. Until alibis can be confirmed...can I have a refill?"

"Gladly. Me too. Detective? Would you like another cup?" She turned to Shelley who might as well have been a statue of Buddha such was the woman's acknowledgement of her presence. She was totally devoted to my presence. A woman who longs for male company.

Shelley nodded her head enthusiastically.

"It's a special blend that I get from a little shop in the back of Rushcutters Bay. It has taken me years to find it actually and they created the blend just for me. Beautiful, isn't it?" She asked as she removed the empty cups from in front of us and began to prepare fresh cups...in clean cups, I might add! She rinsed out the used cups and saucers and placed them immediately into a Dishwasher.

Cleanliness and order her middle name.

"So, what happened? You know...how did he die?"

Again, that disassociation as though we were conversing about the weather.

"Proof of your travel, Mz Lindsay. Perhaps your Passport."

She placed fresh cups of steaming coffee in front of us and went to retrieve her Passport and other travel documents.

Shelley photographed the lot.

"So, what happened to him?"

"We are not too sure at this stage. It would appear that he was bashed heavily around the

head, stabbed several times and left to die. He was found approximately twenty-four hours after his death...we are waiting on the autopsy results and any forensic trace found at the scene...that could be within twenty-four hours or a week...you will be informed by the Coroner's Office when you may view the body...more than likely to-day or to-morrow."

"No matter what the bastard was like, he didn't deserve to die like a dog...like that." She began to cry silently.

"His haunts? Would you know where he may go to...you know...to meet other women?"

She shook her head angrily.

The moments slipped by.

"His Gym, I guess...and he was a regular on the headland jogging circuit...always just on sun-up. He'd drive from here down there...you reckon these joggers could jog to where they want to jog, don't you? Less than a kilometre away...beats me."

She shook her head. Blew her nose and endeavoured to wipe the tears that fell down her cheeks.

"Um...A Coffee joint down near the beach. Java Sea which I own. He'd sit there to be close to me, so he would say...but he had a roving eye...Ivy's Place up at the Junction associated with the Leagues Club.... 'Dirty Thoughts and Dirty Deeds' at the bottom Pub on the beach at night time...that's where I met him...the louse."

Again, a flood of tears.

"Anyone that we can ring for you? We don't want to leave you alone."

Again, she shook her head.

Angrily this time.

"The prick ain't worth the tears, no matter what...maybe Carissa, my friend. She lives two floors down...she...um...she and I have been friends since Uni days...partners actually in our business interests. I'll ring her now..."

She picked up her mobile with an air of uncertainty. Perhaps more an act of insecurity.

I felt a sudden wave of sorrow for the woman as she appeared unsure who she should ring in this time of need.

No-one came a close second!

"Cars? Can you come around? Now? Harris...he's been murdered. Yeah...the cops are here...they'll wait until you get here. Ta. Thanks."

She put the mobile back into its charging dock, as she looked sheepishly at me.

This woman was the type that required a warm body to sleep with no matter what, I thought to myself. Can't live without a male in her life no matter what the circumstances. It will be the bane of her life...how does such a successful person get their personal lives into such a muddle?

Shelley broke the spell of the moment.

"Would you have a recent photo of Harris? A head shot perhaps?"

"Yeah...of course...um...yeah. I'll just be a moment."

She came back out walking slowly. A large photo album filled with arty black and white shots. Mostly of nudes already open as she flipped through the pages.

"Um...photography...it's a passion...a hobby of mine...along with fine furniture. Good art. Chic décor. The third bedroom is set up as a studio...here...that's one of my favourites of him...he was a good subject. Knew it unfortunately...Nice facial lines...pity about the character..."

She began to cry again as the front door chimes rang.

Shelley again took several shots of the Studio-class portrait with her Tablet. Commenting as she did so on the quality of the shot.

"You're pretty good as a Photographer. That's a good shot." She muttered.

The compliment falling on deaf ears as the woman led us up the hallway to her front door.

CHAPTER NINE

I'd come down into the Gym earlier than usual, to rid my mind and soul of the sight of the hapless Harris Westcott of yesterday morning.

My scrotum and sphincter muscles still reacted violently whenever I thought of the manner of torture the man was subjected to.

I was in the Change Rooms changing into my pair of cossies.

My mobile skittered on the bench seat.

I swore softly to myself. It could only mean one thing, this early in the morning!

"Joe, sorry, but you and Shells are it...the night lads have had a busy night...hands full...full moon I suspect...and it is right on the cusp of the normal shift change-over in any case..."

"Yer a bit early on that statement, Boss...it's like...another hour and a half before my official knock on time."

"Well...the night boys are knocking off and you and Shells are it representing the Day Shift guys."

"C'mon Boss. We're not even up for the next case as far as I know...or on 'Slip Team Duties' let me tell you...and it's close on two hours before our day officially begins! I think that I'll have to change my exercise regime times to stop this practise! It's not the first time that this has happened, Boss."

"So, sue me...one of the thrills of being in here at work so bloody early...Shells should be just getting down there. Took the call as she was heading out of the Office. Get changed and come back up to get all the info on the case...the body has just been found."

It made me think what time our illustrious Boss, CB arrived in the Office or whether he ever went home!

Way before Start Time so it would appear...and left well after all the Day Shift guys had gone for the day.

Maybe he did that so that he could check in with the Night Shift boys as that is where he had come from. The 2IC of the Night Shift for so many years under DS Barry Bellamy. Santa as Bellamy was known as, retired around the same time as 'Sonny' Liston, our 2IC to DS Church. It was thought at the time that Peta Daniels would be a 'shoe-in' for the top job with me as her 2IC.

That was never going to happen apparently, and Clive Butler, or CB took over the helm of the Murder Squad.

There were those who always said that that move was to negate any chance that I might have had at a toss, even only as a relieving position, in the top job.

Maybe yes. Maybe no.

The Deputy Commissioner who had been my most vocal detractor and who some say had orchestrated these machinations had himself, only recently retired, albeit under a cloud of suspicion about his ties to certain Drug Manufacturers and Distributors.

Abbey had taken the golden handshake only months ago so it seemed, and we were still acclimatising ourselves to the ways and moods of Clive Butler.

We headed out of the Office before any of the Day Shift teams had arrived at work, except for those who had adopted an 'early morning before work exercise regime' as Shells and I adhered to. We could have adhered to the Official line and spent some time in the Gym during normal working hours. That hadn't worked out that well when-ever we tried it as it took too much time out of our average working day...there wasn't enough hours in the day as it was to process all our work.

Okay, shoot us for being extra-diligent!

Thankfully in heading away from the city, we were going against the tide of the traffic heading east towards the CBD.

We were back in familiar territory heading towards Windsor and an historical old Church.

The tight turning circle at the front of the old bluestone Church was bumper to bumper with Patrol Vehicles, LAC Command patrol cars, Crime Scene and Morgue vans. All bar-lights a-flashing, creating a visual orchestral aria or one where the entire Orchestra were tuning their instruments in a cacophony of sound. This though, a kaleidoscope of colour from opposing bar-lights on top of the vehicles.

I walked down the length of the main aisle of the Church from the front door Porch area and Narthex to the northern Transept. This was the short aisle and pews that crossed the main aisle and depth of the old Church which created that 'cross' in ground plan of so many Churches built before the last century.

The body was lying just inside a small side door off the side of the Transept.

The entire area had been taped off with Dee Dee Jameson and her small team down on all fours crawling slowly towards the door opening. Brenda Wzerlic and her two Assistants were just finishing up their examination of the body.

The Forensic Photographer was shooting away as though he had some type of stupor that made him involuntarily keep on pressing the 'go' button of the camera!

"Morning all...the devil has been about, so I see..."

"That's not even close to Shakespeare." Dee Dee stated deadpan as she turned to me.

"Or even clever." Brenda added.

"Or original" Shelley muttered. A grin said it all.

I was being outnumbered and out-gunned by the three females! Again!

I was suitably chastised. There was no humour in this lot at this hour of the morning.

"All unwilling participants so I see...just like Shells and me."

This bought groans from the gathered throng.

Best leave it alone, Joe, I thought to myself, unless you want to get into hot water.

"Who called it in?" My voice seemed to reverberate around the stillness of the large Church.

"Um...a Fiona Watts. She's in the Church Auxiliary. Helps with the cleaning here in the Church. Prepares the Priest's breakfast. Keeps the Residence clean. Does the Priest's laundry...you know, stuff like that?"

"Nothing else?"

"What do you mean by that comment, Joe?" A look of disgust on the young Forensic Pathologist's face.

"These Priests get mollycoddled, don't they? Like their mother would have done when they were but boys...a nice job if you can get it with all the perks involved..."

I couldn't help myself.

"Joe...leave it alone. I know your...um...unfavourable take on all churches...and religion in general. This is not the time or place to get up on your pulpit."

I gave a gesture that encompassed the cavernous interior. A smug smile on my dial. What better place to do so, I was gesturing.

"I wonder if he...um...you know...made it up there..."

I let my eyes drift to the vaulted ceiling.

"You know...his reward for all his worldly endeavours and continued loyalty...regardless of any worldly sins?"

Shelley rolled her eyes. Shook her head sadly.

"You're bloody incorrigible, Joseph Lind. A lost cause."

"...and Detective, there are some of us who believe in the Gospel." One of the Forensic Team exclaimed as she gave me a filthy look.

"That should not mean that I cannot voice an opposite opinion on the subject..."

"There's a difference between disrespect and voicing an alternate opinion..."

"Depends on where you stand..."

"All the time, Joe? It gets a little thin...and really, you know the Law. No to colour of skin, religious belief or political leaning..."

I was warming to the discussion.

"Which does not exclude those who think religion in all its guises, as being a lot of hoey should be constantly muffled...I do not knock on your door on a Saturday or Sunday morning wanting to extol the virtues of Christianity...or the lack there-of, with not an ounce of logic or belief within its doctrine...as long as you follow *their* take on it...the *right* religion, then you are okay to all those believers while all others are bile in the throat! It seems to me that if you do not belief in *His* doctrine, i.e., Christianity, then you don't believe in anything...as though that is the only belief mechanism available!"

I was starting to get up on that pulpit, which earned me a dig in the ribs and a look that could kill from my partner. I returned her angry stare long enough for her to know that I did not enjoy the bruise that she had created.

Begrudgingly, I walked over to the small side entry door that would give direct access from the Rectory into the Church. Circling around the large blood trail and several bloodied boot prints that were easy to see. One of the Forensic team spat fingers of fire at me as I progressed slowly to the small arched door.

"It wasn't locked..."

"It's never locked, according to Fiona Watts. The front doors are closed and locked after Services, but that door is never locked. Those that require solace at unusual hours know to enter through this door...I'd appreciate if you could keep well away from any part of this Transept until we have concluded our search of the area, Detective. Hear me?" Dee Dee chastised. "We want all of those shoe-prints intact, understand?"

Boy, they sure were chirpy this morning!

"That sure does diminish the suspect pool, eh?" I muttered sarcastically. "Anything on time of death, Brenda?"

I shoved my hands into my pockets. It was a little chilly within the interior of the church.

Brenda Wzerlic was in line to become Muscles Sarvich's 2IC.

As Head of the Forensic Pathology Department of the City Morgue, Muscles had done an excellent job in surrounding himself with youthful Technicians whose enthusiasm and attitude to work ethic had lifted the overall tempo, expertise and morale of the place one hundred-fold. The terrible period of the obnoxious Harold George Wilcox from London was now a dim memory. Bought to light whenever the conversation called for a take on rude and unsocial twits! Otherwise the man was a forgotten blip on the radar of our lives.

"Around three to seven this morning...cause of death easy to determine. He was bashed to death...possibly a baseball bat. Broke both kneecaps. Dislocated and fractured the right knee...possibly to force the Priest onto his haunches, perhaps. Or at least into some submissive posture. Then split his head in two. He would not have died immediately but he wouldn't have known much from the time of the impact. A huge amount of blood loss and spatter...as you can see, the Perps may have stepped into the blood pool. We will have an excellent footprint of the Assailants. Two different sizes and styles of shoe...Forensics will be able to inform you of the style, make and size...and possibly height and weight and any walking or striding idiosyncrasies of the two..."

"What? From the tread pattern left in the blood pool?"

"Yeah...ain't forensic science wonderful...and we too, are very clever. We've come a long way since fingerprints were first mooted as an important crime fighting tool...just think what Arthur Conan Doyle could do with to-day's advances in criminal sciences...and that trail of footprints going towards the side door will tell us a lot...so will those smeared, bloodied fingerprints on the door handle and stile."

This was meant to give me a stir.

This early in the morning before my first cup of coffee, I was not about to rise to the bait. It was okay for me to be frivolous and sarcastic at this time of morning, but God forgive anyone else who wanted to compete with me!

CHAPTER TEN

A Miss Fiona Watts sat stoically on a small garden timber bench in a walled Courtyard between the Church and the Rectory. Beside her sat another woman who sniffled and saturated a small white handkerchief as she sobbed quietly.

"Good morning ladies..."

That earned me a cold stare from both elderly women.

Maybe not a good start.

Rather cold, impersonal and rude, when I thought about it.

I was really trying to rile people this morning, Shelley's fierce look in my direction seemed to infer.

"Um...Detective Shelley Shields, my partner. I am Detective Joseph Lind from the Murder Squad. Could we ask you both a few questions? And... arr... we'll need to gain entry into the Rectory and to the Father's personal belongings."

Miss Watts looked up at me with a stony resolve.

"I'm sorry. I can't allow that without the permission of the Bishop, the Monsignor or his Secretary."

"This is a murder investigation which relies on time being of the essence..."

A standard deadpan reply.

Coughed out like a Cockatoo reciting the same words over and over again.

Shelley coughed to clear her throat and perhaps to pull on the bit.

"Um..." I glanced towards her. "Um...Could I ask that you contact your Bishop in that regard...we need to examine his things...ladies? Has there been any sign of trouble lately? The Father assaulted...accused of something that he may have done some time ago...a disgruntled parishioner, perhaps?"

Again, the stony stare as though I had insinuated that the friendly Parish priest had tried to throttle the Pope!

A jut of the chin from Mz. Fiona Watts.

"If you are implying, Detective, that perhaps Father Kilpatrick was somehow involved in any of the Devil's work with young boys as is being insinuated by that Royal Commission skulduggery set up by the Devil's partner, that atheist female Prime Minister who, thank God, no longer represents this Nation, then you are sadly mistaken. Father Kilpatrick is nothing but a gentle man who gladly, piously served his Saviour...his Lord."

I nodded my head.

"Mmm...could you ring the Bishop...or better still, perhaps if I ring?"

We sat opposite the two women gently plying them with questions on the habits and day to day service of the Father while awaiting the arrival of the Bishop. My bottom getting cold from the stone seat that Shells and I sat on.

A crunching of tyres on the gravel of the Rectory driveway. A slamming of car doors informing us of the Bishop's arrival.

A large figure opened the arched gateway in the stone wall that provided this private setting. Quiet. Tranquil and full of the sounds of the morning calls of at least a dozen birds. A rotund, diminutive figure followed the tall man.

He came to me with hand extended.

"Bishop Trevor Sheldon...a bad business all round. Mz. Watts? If I could have a word with you in private...perhaps in the Rectory?"

"I'm afraid that will not be possible without our presence, Bishop."

He looked at me as though I had just uttered that God did not exist.

"Oh? In that case, I will speak with you to-morrow...you would like to search through Father Kilpatrick's things. Either I... or my Secretary here, should be present at all times. Mz. Watts? You may go. I doubt that your presence will be required any more. The key to the Rectory though, if you will."

This man was used to giving orders. Being obeyed and not being questioned.

"Um...Mz. Watts? Missus Avista...we may need to have another talk with you, so please do not go interstate or overseas until this terrible business has been resolved...perhaps next week then, we may visit you at home. Just up the street...is that right? Yes? My Associate has your home addresses and telephone numbers. Yes? Until then, ladies."

I could not allow this pernicious, self-important twit to issue the orders. I was amazed that not once did he show any concern or thought towards his junior subject still lying on the cold marble floor of the Church no more than metres from where we sat.

"Joe...I'll go with the Bishop to the Rectory. Could you organise a forensic trace team and computer expert to come over when they are available?"

Turning to the Bishop, she enquired, "I assume that Father Kilpatrick was in possession of a

smart phone? A tablet perhaps? A laptop?"

"Yes. That is so. Why would you need to examine those?" He asked haughtily.

"In any such investigation where the Assailant or Assailants are unknown at this stage, it is standard procedure to examine closely such things...and all belongings of the Victim. These types of assaults and homicides are rarely...very rarely, a random incident."

"Oh? I doubt very much that you'll find any inkling of any impropriety on behalf of the Father..."

"I am not suggesting otherwise, Bishop Sheldon. Maybe so...maybe not, but we would be remiss if we did not investigate all avenues relating to the victim. You can appreciate that, Bishop...that this investigation will require the utmost adherence to procedure?"

The Bishop seemed to lean into Shelley.

To invade and intimidate.

It didn't work.

I smiled to myself as I headed towards the front of the Church.

It may be some time before we could call in a forensic computer specialist and I wanted to spend as little time as possible with the man.

I could see a major incident occurring if I was forced to do so!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

We spent the rest of that day rifling through every drawer, cupboard and desk in the Rectory.

The Bishop or his Secretary peering over our shoulders at every turn.

I pulled out drawers and turned them upside down. Looked into the backs of Cabinets after the drawers had been removed. Looked at the backs of all the Wardrobes and cabinets to ensure that nothing was stuck on the surface. We perhaps, carried on a bit too much, but when an acerbic old man is looking at your every move, the gestures become more pronounced, let me tell you!

It was close to knock-off time and I had given orders for the building to be sealed and a patrol positioned until our return the following morning.

The Technician allocated to examine the Laptop and phone of the deceased Priest had only arrived thirty minutes before.

"Detective? A moment."

It was the Computer Tech who had sat at the Priest's desk and poured over the top-quality Laptop as though it was nectar from heaven. The Bishop sat stonily in a corner of the Priest's Office not wanting the Laptop or the mobile phone to disappear from his view. The expression on the Bishop's face looked as though to even begin working on the device would result in our Technician being sent to Purgatory for eternity!

"Um...I'll have to take the computer back to the Lab...and the smart-phone...but some-one has deleted some stuff from the Hard-drive. Recently...um...not that long ago..."

"Can you see what it may have been?"

"Not now...but I will back at the Lab. The Smart-phone...it has some interesting numbers which have also been recently deleted...I'll let you know."

I nodded my head and glanced at my watch.

"Okay, everyone. Let's call it a day. I want the Office door taped up along with the back and front doors into this building...we have not as yet examined all of the first-floor level or the Cellar. To-morrow, guys. It can wait until then. Organise a permanent Patrol on the Church and the Rectory. No-one in or out until further notice..."

"That is preposterous, Detective. We have Services to conduct over the week-end...and often lost souls come looking for kind words and solace in praying to the Lord." The Bishop rebelled.

"I feel sure that the Parishioners will understand...and the chalked outline of their Priest's prone position...and the large pool of his blood would not thrill any of the congregation. I'm sure that in this day and age, you can contact nearly all of the congregation to advise them of alternate arrangements until such time as our forensic technicians have finished their work...and surely you can construct a few words up on the Notice-board to inform those who may still visit the Church on the Sabbath the reason for the Church services being cancelled?"

"How long do you think that this situation will remain in place, Detective?"

I looked at the man and his rotund little shadow figure.

A hint of a smile on my face.

I shrugged my shoulders, before walking out onto the veranda of the two storey Rectory.

I did not feel in the mood to extend my day, but Shelley and I had applied for an overtime period of several hours to pay a visit to several of the Bars and Clubs that may have been favourite haunts of our hapless Harris Clyde Westcott.

That being the other homicide case on our books.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Shells came over to my place to change into something more appropriate for the Club 'scene'.

Me?

I changed my T-shirt!

We went to my favourite Pizza Joint prepared to sit out several hours as the young rarely hit these Club joints before eleven at night. God knows why. If I had planned a night out on the tiles I'd want to be raving as early as I could, not waiting until the night was half over! By then, I would want to be curled up in some beautiful woman's bed, sleeping the sleep of a superb, satisfied Romeo in post coital nirvana.

That rarely happened though, with the night ending with me staggering down the street, an arm slung over a mate's shoulder, whispering sweet nothings into his ear. As far as post coital nirvana was concerned, it was rarely experienced, instead snoring my head off on the couch of a mate's parents place!

"Joseph, my friend...I hear on the grapevine that our mutual friend has been released from the Clinic in Switzerland...and wanting back in with his favourite firm..."

"Big Charlie? This is Shelley Shields. My professional partner in crime...a Detective of some note in her own right."

That came out before I could cut it off!

He looked at Shelley.

Gently took her hand to touch it with his lips.

"Enchanted, my dear. My compliments, Joseph. You have a superb taste in women let me tell you, Joseph...or you are the luckiest man alive to be blessed with such beauty each and every day...Our mutual friend always said that of you..."

"Charlie? Shelley here, is fully aware of Knackers, the AFP and all the things in the middle..."

"Okay, Joseph, what-ever you say...it is hinted that our mutual friend maybe returning to Sydney soon. He cannot stand the northern winters...it will be good to see him again. Soon, eh?"

"Let's hope, Charlie."

The news was a surprise to me.

I had not spoken to my old friend since he had been flown out to the Swiss Clinic by charter plane close on a year ago now.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

We visited close to a dozen Rave Dives, Clubs, Hotel Bars and Singles Joints at the Junction, Bondi and along the beach promenade.

The music in all the places, disgustingly loud.

The drinks too bloody expensive and too diluted as the night wore on and the smell of splashed on perfume and deodorant mixed freely with the stench of being shoulder to shoulder, a prerequisite in trying to have any form of conversation. The acrid smell of weed hung heavy in the air even though smoking was not permitted in any of the venues. Would cones and smoking vessels constitute 'smoking' in the normal sense of the word?

One thing I learned from the night was that the female half of the younger generation had far more front and flirted as hard as the guys compared to my young blade days! Oh, to have been born in this generation, I thought momentarily.

Then I realised everything was at warp speed.

Getting drunk.

Getting high and cracking on!

There was no finesse.

No subtle movements or eye contact.

No should I or shouldn't I.

The Friday night special which would be repeated on Saturday night!

Harris Westcott had been a regular at about half the joints we visited.

Opinion on the guy ranged from a real cool dude, a smooth mover on and off the dance floor, a chick magnetic and a lover-boy down to the fact that he was a strutting peacock and a shit guy in bed.

Take your pick.

There were several young women who grieved over his passing, but these were not as common as I would have thought, taking into consideration Caroline Lindsay's portrayal of his extra-curricular activities!

All in all, little concrete evidence was obtained for the night's trawl, though Shelley had three young blades vying for her attention while I was considered way too old and uncool for anything but walking the dog!

We sat in the Unmarked at a Maccas sipping on a coffee that I really didn't want. What I wanted was to go home and fall into bed.

Shells looked a million dollars and as though she had several more hours left in her! Geed up on all these attempts by the young blades to crack onto her, she was raring to go. I felt it my duty to remind her that she was in a loving relationship and had been even before she had joined the Murder Squad. This resulted in a chilly stare and a jab to the ribs that actually hurt.

"Joseph Lind? I know who I am. Where I am and what I am. I will never wander to the other side of the street but a little harmless flirt never killed anyone...hear me?"

"Check up on that last statement, my dear. It has led to premature death on quite a few occasions, let me tell you."

Another jab had me almost doubling over in pain. I was definitely slowing down as I did not see either coming.

I glanced at my watch.

Just on two... jeez!

"The manner in which he was trussed over that fallen tree bough with his arse so exposed,

reeks of the thing being stage-managed. We said that at the Crime Scene. I keep coming back to a payback hit because Westcott had raped some young woman."

"Or a guy perhaps...but I know what you mean Joe, but I have my doubts. What we know of the man indicates that he is not a rapist in my eyes...he doesn't follow the type, if you get my drift. Sure, he is narcissistic. That's obvious. A woman lover not a hater and he seems to seduce both delta women and submissive types...that to me doesn't spell a man who commits rape as a power thing over women...not his style!"

"Then why the display...the manner of his death was both cruel and smacked of outright anger...this was personal!"

"Should we consider that he swings both ways...we have already stated previously that we doubt that a woman could overpower the guy..."

"...by herself...without help..."

"Maybe we should consider an outraged gay lover who finds out that 'his man' is unfaithful...and likes it both ways, perhaps. There must be guys that fall into that category...and the branch up the Khyber Pass could hint at those homosexual overtones."

"Mmm...yeah...something to think about...but we have not had one hint that Westcott does swing both ways..."

"Because we aren't including the right crowd in our questioning forays."

I looked over at my partner and wondered not for the first time, how I'd be without her.

All the same, I let out a groan thinking that our late night appeared to be only half over.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Too late to hit the gay bars, you think?"

"Well...that's not the problem...the gay scene has evolved enormously since I was in Vice some twenty years ago...clubs have come and gone during that time...and yeah, I'm running on empty, Shells."

"C'mon, Joe. Where's the man that they still talk about? The man in the old days who could go three days without sleep and still make it at dawn at his favourite surf patch?"

I gave a cut-off laugh.

"That young man existed for no more than six months before he realised that burning the candle at both ends has only one result...let me tell you."

She leaned across to kiss me on the cheek.

"C'mon old man, do you still know some-one in Vice...or Narcs....or have they all retired?"

I got the inference in her question.

I gave her my best smile to let her know that I wasn't that old or that my mind had slowed somewhat this early in the morning...or so late at night...take your pick!

I rang two numbers.

One an old snitch who was something of a legend in the Gay Scene back when Adam wondered what that thing between his legs was and why Eve didn't have one!

I knew that he was still alive as he had been one of the spokespersons on the recent 'Seventy-Eighters' who had sat and listened to the State Parliament officially apologising for the dreadful carry-on in hitting the gay protesters hard in their first Gay Rights March in 1978. This was the precursor to the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade held as an annual celebration up Taylors Square way along Oxford Street that was now partly funded by Government money under the tourist industry umbrella.

How times change! In those days, the Cops thought they had almost sole rights to bash the shit out of anyone who even looked gay! Through the Seventies right through to the late Eighties, over a dozen gay deaths occurred in the Eastern Suburbs alone where little or no Police investigation ever took place in the deaths. A sad part of our City's history.

The other call was to the Night Clerk in the Vice Section which was still housed in the old Darlinghurst Cop Station.

I was given the name of four Clubs in the Bondi Junction, Bondi and Bondi Beach area that would fall into the category of a Gay Bar. Two only opened on Friday to Monday nights at this hour. The others, normal Pubs that closed at midnight on week-ends. Ten at all other times. They had been hit too many times for under-aged drinkers.

That narrowed the selection considerably.

'Clive's Place' was a dingy, small suburban Pub halfway between the Junction and the Beach. Far enough from the normal tourist traps not to draw attention to itself. Homophobia was still alive and well and don't let any Parliamentarian tell you differently. Gays were still being bashed to an inch of their lives. At least one a month succumbed to their injuries with scant resources allocated to their murders.

It was a sorry state of affairs that required some publicity and investigation, though I wasn't about to hold my breath waiting for the full forces of the Constabulary to concentrate on the cases...they would exist purely as statistics!

Society had apparently moved on with the spotlight falling on the Lesbian and Transgender fraternity. Gays were yesterday's news.

We drove around the block several times before we were able to snare a parking spot. Some two blocks from the corner Pub. We were more than a block distance when the sound of blaring music hit us.

I'd hate to live next door!

"You people lose your way? Took a wrong turn, perhaps?"

I mean, how do you look straight? Or gay? Is it a tattoo written on your forehead that only shows up under black light?

I flashed my badge.

"Oh! I'd still definitely say that you've lost your way!" The Barman exclaimed. "What happened this time? Some little old man expose himself to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and you immediately think he has to be gay? Right? You people still haven't learnt not to jump to conclusions and brand anyone who falls outside the accepted norm as most definitely gay, right?"

I slid a photograph of Westcott across the Bar to the angry young Barman.

"There's pre-conceived notions on both sides of the divide..." I yelled at him, leaning across the Bar so that I could be heard.

I tapped the photo with my finger.

"Harris Clyde Westcott...do you know of him?"

The Barman hardly looked at the shot before shaking his head in the negative.

"Nah... what's he supposed to have done?"

"He was viciously assaulted and left to die...which he did...yesterday morning..."

"Arrh, jeez...bugger! Another gay bashing, huh? Why is he so important when countless others have seemed to have fallen through the cracks without even a token investigation?"

"We don't know either way whether he was gay or not, that's why we are here. To get some answers, hopefully. The manner of death would suggest homophobic overtones...know him? Take a closer look, will you?"

"That's Westy... Cottie some called him... what do you want with him?" Another Bar-person of androgynous features had sidled up to our rather cynical and uncooperative Barman.

"Westy? You sure... yeah... you could be right." Our man backtracked looking decidedly guilty. "He was murdered yesterday..."

"Bloody hell...that was Westy? Up on the Headland Jogging track...Westy? Why would anyone want to do him in... he's not even gay!"

That statement seemed to say a lot.

Her...it could have been a 'Him'...eyes filled with tears as she ran the length of the Bar to disappear from view.

"I best see how's she's going...will you excuse me?"

"One more question before you go..."

The Barman was signalling at some-one in the crowd. His charade indicated that he needed help to man the Bar. Two people emerged from the gloom to jump over the Bar counter.

"Shouldn't be for too long...um...Blaze is in trouble. I need to go to her...either of these two will be able to help you guys. I'm outa here for a bit!"...and he was gone.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

One of the good looking, buffed, temporary Barmen came up to me. Leaned over the Bar to be heard.

"That group up on the raised section behind you...they're drinking Westy out. Good friends of his. Carlyle Azerenko, Billy Gjerlic and Cary Holding. Westy used them all the time as drink waiters and such whenever there was a need. Me too sometimes. His partner? Caroline Lindsay? Whenever she had a 'Showing' or was doing a special at one of her Studios...you know? They may be able to talk...if they aren't too far gone."

The smell of weed was strong the further up the stairs we climbed to the open mezzanine area.

The crowd parted as we progressed.

Some turned their backs on us as a silent protest.

Others scampered away like frightened rabbits while others showed opposition with steely looks. Or disgust on their faces.

The word of our presence had spread through the crowd very quickly.

"Mind if we join you guys?"

I swung a chair around and sat at their table. Shelley stood behind me but off to one side.

At least we seemed to be above the music as I was more able to converse without shouting!

"Harris Clyde Westcott was brutally murdered yesterday morning. Early. We need your help."

"This is a first...our help? Please forgive my astonishment!"

"We know nothing..." One of the others stated stonily.

"All we know was that he was doing his usual. A couple of circuits of the Headland track. Back home for a quick shower then off to work..." Stated the third in a friendlier tone.

"Where did he work?"

"An Advertising Agency...up at the Junction. Fluoro, Paterson, Quigley and Scott...he was one of those guys that gave you those really annoying ads...thought he was clever...and being friends with a group of gays was the 'in' thing of the moment, so he thought. That sentiment was nigh on ten years out of date, but what the heck, the guy was useful with his occasional bouts of money in the hand employment."

The last statement caustically tinged.

"You don't sound too matey...you are?"

"Cary Holding."

He quickly introduced his two mates to me.

"We were told that you were all close mates of his..."

"Don't mind Cary, darling. He can be so much the bitch when he wants to be."

So camp.

Full of the feminine gestures and arm waves as well.

"Cottie...that's what his close friends from this side of the track called him...he was straight...though there were sometimes hints of latent...something..." He smiled at this as though it was a gem from the master. "It's in all of us, darling...wanting to break free..."

A girlish giggle followed the comment, as he looked me up and down and then decided perhaps that I was too old for him.

"He was okay for a straight guy as he would fraternise with us lot as though he was one of the crowd...he wasn't, Darling....just a Wannabe who thought that mixing with the other side was both dangerous, exhilarating and cool...but he was harmless.... hah, touch his thigh and he was outa here. Mention a blow job and he'd turn crimson."

"Had he mentioned lately that he thought some-one maybe stalking him? Following him?"

"That was always on the cards...he was a chick-magnet, let me tell you, darling...it was always going to get him into trouble...and his long-suffering partner was getting sick of it, let me tell you, darling. He had for once, a woman who idolised him. Spent a lot of money on him. Pampered him...even turned a blind eye to his early philandering...would you believe, darling"

"In the beginning, Billy." Carlyle Azerenko butted in.

Cary Holding still sat with a sullen expression on his face. It was clear that he did not want any part of the conversation.

"You were all friends of his?"

They nodded in unison.

"Friends? That's a funny word for a... you know? Yep, I guess...he was one cool dude...and we got a fair amount of casual work...no tax paid. No questions asked, darling. From either Caroline or his Work...and he didn't point the finger at us as queers or poofs like...so many of you straight people have a need to tag us...know what I mean?"

"What type of work did he get for you?"

"As I've said, mainly as drink waiters...you know...drink guys...penguin suits. Platters of horses' hooves. Champagne. Wine and spirits. Good money usually, especially if it was high class...sometimes out in the Kitchen cleaning up the dirty dishes...you know, the usual thing from the 'lucky' people."

He emphasising the word lucky.

"....and Harris?"

"He was good...excellent in fact, in circulating, if you get my drift..."

"At Caroline Lindsay's affairs?"

"Oh, yes. More so...it was as if he had fun baiting her by flirting with all the beautiful women in front of her. It got him into trouble a couple of times...with Caroline and several nervous, insecure husbands."

"Could you remember such incidents. Name names?"

"No... but one that I can remember involved a prominent politician and his wife. She took a shine to Cottie...big time...there were those who said a back room in Caroline's Number One Studio got quite a use...three or four times during a heated night...with some saying that the...um...dalliance was beautifully videoed."

"How long ago did this occur?"

"Around six months ago..."

He turned to his friends for confirmation.

We stayed with the trio for close on ninety minutes before my mind started to wander and my eyelids became heavy. I was not too sure whether it was from the lack of sleep or the haze of marijuana smoke that hung heavy in the air.

Shelley dropped me home and went on her way.

All the time she had rambled on, none stop.

Perhaps we both should have caught a cab!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

We had our normal early morning regime in the Sub-Basement Gym and headed out to the Church and Rectory again.

Saturday overtime rates were on at the moment.

We picked up two extra-large coffees and sat out in the small enclosed Courtyard between the Rectory and the Church. A warming sun. A cooling breeze blowing through the small Jacaranda tree. At full growth, it would dominate this Courtyard, I thought to myself, though with its winter shed, it would be the perfect tree for such a location.

"How you feeling?" I asked Shelley. A smile on my face.

"Fine. Why?"

"You were chattering away all the way to my place last night...do you realise that it was well after three when you dropped me at home. What time was it that you got home?"

"I put the siren and lights on! I was home in no time."

"Shells!!!"

"Joking, Joe. Just joking...but do you get the feeling that we're about to open Pandora's Box with that case? Our suspect pool is about to expand exponentially!"

"Yeah...I think over the next couple of days we should do a complete search on Caroline Lindsay...and her backers, perhaps...there seems to be a lot of money tied up in her various enterprises."

"...and that Politician and his wife. That shouldn't be that hard. There must have been some mention of them gracing the Opening of something very important back what? Six months ago. It should be in the Social Pages of the Sunday paper at least. It'd come straight up with the help of Mister Google."

"Mmm...I still have money on a cuckold husband who possible thinks that Westcott bent both ways...something that the poor husband abhorred...that is why that branch was stuck so deep up his arse..."

"Yeah... no... maybe...I'll reserve my judgement until we have a little more. Anyhow. Come on. We have to finish going through this building. Let's get it over and done with. I wonder if the Bishop will show to-day to watch our every move."

"I don't think so..."

"No? Why?"

"The evidence that he has been concerned about has been erased from the computer. The smart-phone. They are at our laboratory being minutely examined at this moment. He knows that something of importance was deleted and is confident that it cannot be recalled...have we got news for him!"

"I have no idea on what you base those facts, but it's a Saturday and I have not the slightest inkling to argue against my better judgement!"

Gawd, she was like my old partner, Marge Hendricks who always had to get the last word in....what is it with females?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It was well into the afternoon before we could say that we had examined, pulled apart and moved everything that could be subject to such a search for nil results. Regardless, we would not permit any unauthorised egress until further notice. I was taping up the front door again and sticking 'No Unauthorised Entry' Signs on both the front, back and side doors.

My Mobile chattered in my pocket before belting out the opening bars of Guns N Roses 'November Rain.'

"Detective Joe Lind, is it?"

"Yes, it is." I answered.

"Barry Wright. Computer and Digital Forensics...I have some interesting stuff for you that was on both Father Kilpatrick's Laptop and Smart-phone...and back images on the Security video system."

"You working to-day?"

"Like you, Detective. There's not enough hours in the day and we have a sizable back-log of jobs to wade through. The Catholic Church still has pull in this day and age. I haven't done O/T for so long... this edict came from on high through the Premier's Office. A whisper says it even filtered down from an ex-PM who had begun his career in the Seminary at the same time as the late Father Kilpatrick and who was now a Back-Bencher who cannot keep his mouth shut. Not that I'm complaining as I could do with the extra dosh...I should be able to isolate all the tit-bits for you this afternoon so you can look through them on Monday morning...bring an extra coffee as you owe me big time."

This was becoming a more prevalent thing...owing some-one big time for them only doing their job. I could see the day when most of my salary would be going in Superannuation and coffees owed big time!

I said as much to Shells, who gave me a filthy look for my endeavours. I reckon she owed me a large flat white next Monday!

Before we left the scene, we once again wandered through the old bluestone Church.

"Who-ever the villains were, they were already in the Church. Through the side door. It trips a signal in the Rectory..." My voice again echoed through the empty building. "...and begins a recording which was also wiped...the only person who could have done all this was either the Vic or the Perps. If it was the Vic, why? He must have known his fate and did not wish what-ever was on those various devices to become common knowledge...even though it may have....and in the case of the digital recorder in the Rectory...more than likely it would have identified the Perps. Why wouldn't some-one want his killers bought to justice?"

"You're jumping one too many hurdles, Joe. Let's keep it simple for the time being. The Perps knew their way around the Church and the Rectory. They did not want any reference to their being there bought to the attention of the investigating police. Plain and simple."

I nodded my head in agreement.

Maybe, I thought to myself. Maybe.

We will know soon enough.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I hadn't realised how tired I was until I hit the sack and was immediately asleep.

Not for the first time I wondered whether my aging body was up to the rigours of double shifts and then backing up for another eight-hour day of grind.

We had completed a standard ten-hour shift on the Friday to sit around in my favourite Pizza Place until the bewitching hour...or a little before ten that night before we hit the favoured haunts of one Harris Westcott. By the time that we had finished up in the Gay Bar of 'Clive's Place' and was driven home, it had just gone three in the morning.

Saturday and we did a normal eight-hour day.

Saturday night I was drawn out ready to collapse!

I wasn't aware of it at the time, but Shelley did not go all the way out past Liverpool back to her place, but instead returned to Bondi Beach and her mother's place on the southern headland overlooking the beach.

Not that she'd appreciate the view that early in the morning.

We met up at the Gym in the Basement of the Police Building in Parramatta to indulge in our usual exercise regime before heading towards the Church. Arriving there a little worn and unenthusiastic around nine AM for that other eight hours of over-time.

Both of us had barely four hours sleep on that Friday night and carried on with the painstaking search of the Rectory all day on the Saturday.

I was thankful in a way that Tellie had gone to the Movies with Malisa, Marge Hendricks and Dee Dee Jameson so I had the place to myself after knock-off on the Saturday afternoon.

I made myself a cheese melt on toast. A warm chocolate with a Scotch chaser and I hit the sack before the sun had disappeared over the western horizon.

I was that knackered!

I heard the scream.

Waking with a jolt, I was half out of bed as Tellie dived onto the bed beside me.

"You okay?" I mumbled. "It was you that screamed, wasn't it? What happened?"

Still half asleep, I sat bent over on the edge of the bed not too sure where I was or what day it was.

"Joe? Guess what?"

I was in no mood for fun and games and was on the verge of saying so.

"I'm pregnant...Joe? We're going to have a baby..."

"Who's the lucky father?" Slowly waking.

"Arrh...could be the Milkman...no, he didn't visit my bed during the ovulation period, I'm sure...I think more than likely the young teenage Paper-boy. His introduction to sex with an older woman...jeez he was goofy.... what do you think?"

"You'd be going to get regular child maintenance payments from him, let me tell you."

I laughed.

I was over the moon.

Ecstatic.

I hugged Tellie and rolled her over the bed, which led to other things. My tiredness having suddenly evaporated.

"Should we...you know..." Whispering between prolonged kisses.

"Maybe you could deliver a miracle and make it twins..."

"We could try...a medical first."

"Let's..."

The morning was a flurry of activity.

Tellie rushing around making plans.

The second bedroom come Study was examined with an eye to turning it into a Nursery. Malisa was full of ideas, none of which would cost her a Zac!

Who to tell?

Immediately...should it be Muscles?

Would Dee Dee get her nose out of joint if she wasn't the first informed?

What about Marge?

Then she went into a sobbing session because she could not tell her mother.

It was superfluous that she had not spoken to her mother for absolute years...before her first marriage occurred if the truth be known...when she had commenced Uni and set her sights on a career in the Forensics Section of the NSW Police Force.

It was not a career choice for a young, beautiful girl according to her mother. Marriage and children should be her lot, as it had been for her!

She rushed into Bill and Malisa's side of the house, determined to snatch away their fourth bedroom to turn it into a Study thus freeing up our second bedroom for a Nursery.

The plans were set in concrete within the hour

"Joe, come on. We can bust out that wall onto the deck. Concertina doors. A good spot for the Study...we both spend an inordinate amount of time on our computers in our present Study. What do you reckon?" As though I was to don my work clothes, goggles and grab the sledge-hammer and commence straight away!

"Sweetheart, we've got nine months to work all this out...okay, not quite! I want to go back to bed."

Bill and Malisa had joined the Planning Committee which added to the mayhem and countless alternative schemes!

To my way of thinking, we were fast running out of backyard, that wealthy attribute shared by most Australian households. I was fearing a suggestion that the extension to the Garage and Carport that had once again become 'My Shed' would be or should be demolished to give the back yard a little help to its dwindling complaint.

"We'll give you our fourth bedroom for your new Study as long as we can extend our section of the deck and construct another deck out from our first floor Main Bedroom..."

"That's a great idea!" Tellie gushed. "Extend the deck at an angle so that it goes around the tree...and then we can have another sail over the pool area..."

"Can I have a cup of coffee before I start?" I interrupted the gabble. "...and I need to sit down as we have gone from a simple knocking out of a wall to form a Study which would cost no more than say... \$5 to \$7K thereabouts, to extending the ground floor deck and constructing a first-floor deck and sails over the Pool which would be in the order of \$45 to \$60K! Way to go! Whose got control of the purse strings?"

They all ignored my logical equation of the project that seemed to take on a life of its own!

"Coffee...coffee..." I mumbled as I headed towards my side of the house and the Kitchen.

"No... from now on, no coffee for me...or alcohol...or fatty food...I've got to Web-search on the correct diet regime for a pregnant woman...can you believe it? I'm pregnant. Gotta ring Dee Dee and Marge. Now! Marge will know about food...wouldn't she. I'll ring her."

And so it went on.

A gushing period that lasted all day... with the coffee machine banished to the Garage for the foreseeable future!

I slinked into Bill's half of the house to use his coffee machine wondering where this all would end.

My enthusiasm waning dramatically as the day wore on. I fell asleep on their lounge.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"I had an interesting conversation with an old friend of mine whom I actually knew before I was granted asylum in the Murder Squad...he...arrh... has been sequestered from Robbery for a couple of years now to become an Investigator for the Royal Commission set up to examine Child Abuse in Institutionalised Australian Society...you know, it's on the News nearly every night and has been for about eighteen months now..."

"Oh? Don't tell me our Father Kilpatrick is known to the Royal Commission?"

"He has been investigated, yes? For Child Pornography. There's a clique apparently who do not practise any form of Child Abuse but are quite enthusiastic in sharing child pornography over the Net. My friend's nose still twitches every time that the Father's name is mentioned. There was no proof mind you, but he thinks that Father Kilpatrick may have been involved in child abuse early in his tenure...he had been hoping for Victims to come forward during these Royal Commission investigations, though none have so far."

"So his homicide bashing death could be related to his activities in that manner?"

"Yes, according to this old mate of mine. He seems to think that's how we should look at his homicide. Yes. He'll bet money on it as with every Priest and Father and Padre and Pastor who has proven to be Paedophiles or Child Molesters that they have investigated for the Royal Commission, the vast majority had some form of child pornography available to them. On their computer, Tablet, phone or a heap of old fashion photographs...a large proportion."

"Jesus Christ...these AO's...I can't get my head around what pleasure anyone would get from such a thing. "

"Power over another person, perhaps. I have no idea either, Joe."

The Lift doors opened and we came out onto the Computer and Digital Forensic Science Laboratory floor. We were directed to Barry Wright's desk which was really just a position on a long Lab counter.

"Arrh... good morning Detectives...arrh... thank you with all my heart. I could do with that, but no drinking when we go into the Computer Lab Area. Any spills and we could endanger material of about a dozen crimes...not just homicide cases. I doubt that I would keep my job."

He took several large gulps of coffee before continuing.

"Beautiful. The Plaza Coffee Joint, eh? The best coffee in Parramatta...first up...here are

hard copies of the Priest's last dozen sermons. Transcripts that I downloaded from his Laptop. I have not gone back any further but there is approximately three years of transcripts that I will need to go through to prove my theory...I'm actually starting at the end of the thread...in explanation."

This was said with a high degree of enthusiasm and glee.

"This is quite startling, if it turns out to be true..."

I gave a look of *'What are you going on about?'*

These types could take hours to explain what could or should take less than five minutes to divest.

"Um...I have highlighted certain passages in each of his Sermons that will help you understand...they are small, yes, small snippets on the evils of the Islamic Faith and how Christianity should be wise and forthright to the slow intrusion of this faith into the societal framework of Australia...small but repeated in each sermon in various ways. Over and over again for the entire dozen sermons. I am expecting a similar...um...treatment in his earlier sermons going back years."

"I somehow have my doubts on that being the reason for his brutal death...some-one taking offence at his alleged intolerance."

Wright raised his finger.

"One moment, please. Have you ever heard of the Knights Templar? Of Crusade fame in the ninth to the eleventh century. Sent by the Roman Catholic Church to rid the birthplace of Christianity from the clutches of the Infidel...or more correctly, those of the Islamic faith...I think there may have been around seven such Crusades...the last two especially ending in calamitous defeat for the Christian soldiers...but they especially were ill planned, ill manned and badly led...I'll need to Google up more information on the subject before I get too far into it..."

I nodded my head. Glanced at Shelley and took several gulps of coffee to hide the expression on my face.

We were now having a History lesson that I felt was irrelevant and immaterial to our Case. I rocked from one foot to the other to broadcast my annoyance and impatience.

Shelley had a grin on her face.

"Yes. I remember reading about those Crusades back at School..." I replied, though I did not want to egg him on.

"A Catholic School perhaps? They would never tell the whole story that's for sure..." The FO admonished.

Shelley turned to me with a raised eye-brow in a questioning manner.

I gave her a slight grin.

"Well...our elderly deceased Priest belonged to a small group calling themselves The Knights Templar Redefined...with similar thoughts of ridding the land of Christianity, read Australia, of all Muslim followers..."

"You have to be joking! C'mon. This is the twenty-first century, my friend..."

"Yes, I know...yet prejudices run deep for some. A far-right group with those thoughts and aspirations does exist. I have the e-mails and correspondence going back several years. Just think of certain right-wing Politicians who have publicly stated the same things...and I don't need to remind you of what is going on overseas. These communications were the things removed from the Priest's Laptop and Smart-phone...along with telephone numbers to a surprising number of far-right organisations, certain clubs and fringe groups. I have cross-referenced the lot. It will take me another couple of days to complete the process, but there is sufficient proof to confirm my notions...you will have a full Report by the end of the week...and here...arrh...are the images that were removed from the surveillance camera digital recording of the side door into the Church. You may be able to run them through a cross-referencing Photo Recognition Program..." He sniggered as he looked at both of us. "By the looks on both your faces, I think we should do it up here...give us until the end of next week for a complete analysis."

Why do these computer experts think they are so much better than us mere mortals who can just achieve working with 'Word'? With a stretch, maybe 'Excel'!

"The Bishop? Perhaps it was this association and political leaning that he was aware of...wanting it gone to save some embarrassing questions..."

"Yes...could be."

I shook my head in disgust.

"So, he was voicing his right-wing views in order to sway his congregation to his political leanings...and here I thought that modern western democracies had a fundamental tenet. That was, that the State and Church were completely separate..."

"C'mon Joe! You're being a bit thin-skinned, aren't you? A couple of words spoken in a Sermon denoting the end of the democratic movement..."

"A couple of words! Every Sermon going back years! There would be those who still believed in the wisdom and validity of the Priest sacrosanct. Irrefutable...hanging off his every word without thinking..."

"And there would be those who could look through that type of hate and intolerance wrapped in a Christian Sermon and not take offence at the comments..."

"But the point is Shells, those words of hate and intolerance of another Religion should never have been uttered within the confines of a Catholic Church...how much really, is our democracy impinged on by the opinion of the Church? Just look at the Vietnam War, Abortion Reform, The rights and acceptance of Gays and Lesbians, Same Sex Marriage...just think of Howard, Kevin oh seven, 'Adolf' Abbot and Turnbull...their religious beliefs are the mainstay in Australia not accepting the Same Sex Marriage Debate...Politicians are supposed to be about the people that they represent, not about their own personal religious beliefs...but you can go back through several Prime Ministers to find the same conservative thinking that is parallel to their own religious beliefs..."

"Julia Gillard was a self-confessed Atheist..."

I didn't know what that had to do with the price of fish in Denmark.

"True...and it was her and her alone who got that Royal Commission up and running...not a practising religious politician in sight! They strongly resisted the call for such an Investigation and look where it has gone. Right into the very fabric of our society and all its various religious groups."

"Maybe that's it, Joe...they *are* representing the vast silent majority that they *do* represent!"

If my glare was bullets, Shells would have been cut in two by now.

I strutted quickly towards the Lift Lobby to telegraph my annoyance.

I pushed the 'down' button and stepped back.

Shelley sidled up to me. Standing beside me, she muttered, "The problem we have now is that if these right-wing inclusions were in fact heard by the Parishioners, then the number of possible POI's has just increased dramatically. A member of the congregation who did not like these views being spread about as Gospel during sermons, decided that the Priest needed silencing."

I had to agree with her, though by my stance, one could get the impression that I had not heard her utterance!

CHAPTER TWENTY

"History repeating itself? Give me strength! What a lot of bullshit!!! I'm with you Shells, child pornography or child abuse seems so much a better reason for being murdered, than far-right thoughts expounded during his sermons, to rid the land of all Muslims!"

"Mmm...yes and no... right-wing hatred and vitriol. I wouldn't discount it, Joe...you...arrh... you went to a Catholic School, eh? Surprise, surprise...and now you are an atheist. That does not compute. Like so many lost sheep, I bet you've still got your rosary beads, huh?"

"My mother's...no, my grandmother's. Somewhere..."

"Ever had the need to get them out? Worry them through your hands? You never fail to surprise me, Joseph Lind. Never fail."

I carried on with what I was doing wanting to ignore the comment though its gravity concerned me no end. To paraphrase some Pope, *"give me your four-year-old child and I will give you a loyal Catholic for life!"*

That whizzed around in my head.

I had rejected all religious beliefs around the time of seeing the seedier side of life while in undercover Narcs.

I wondered on the connection.

This pronounced abhorrence for religion...all religions, was further reinforced on the death of my first wife, Helene.

I knew what Shelley was trying to do. Extend the conversation as it had made me hot under the collar. She had me going and wanted to continue. She could smell blood! Not on. I was not going to give her the satisfaction of a win! No way!

I looked up at her as though her comments had not been uttered. She found this ability in me so infuriating at times. Now was one of those times. She thought that she could get under my skin.

Not on!

"Hang on...you said that he had been investigated by the Royal Commission guys? When was that? And why didn't they unearth this crazy Knights Templar Redefined group at the time?"

"Perhaps it was overlooked. They were purely looking for child abuse material...then they

saw the child pornography..."

"I don't know...there's something not right."

I rang up to Barry Wright, our Digital Forensic Officer.

"You stated that all this right-wing stuff on Kilpatrick's computer had been erased? Can you determine a date for that, Barry?"

"Yes. To the day...seven months ago...it would appear that the Royal Commission were investigating Kilpatrick for Child Abuse when they tripped over his hidden stash of child pornography on his Laptop. While that is outside their charter, they would have informed either the AFP or the Child Abuse Team within our ranks as per procedures...the Royal Commission as such, cannot begin proceedings or charge anyone for alleged crimes committed that they may unearth during their investigations. The information collected would be given to either one of those Enforcement Agencies to further examine and to lay charges as they see fit..."

"The Laptop? The computer that the Commission would have confiscated?"

"They'd either still have it or it has been passed to either Agency..."

"So, all this information on the Laptop that you are examining?"

"Um...at a guess...all the information contained in the original computer must have been downloaded onto an external hard drive or a series of flash-drives...which would then have been uploaded back onto his new Laptop...he couldn't do without the stuff to pour over."

"Which you could also ascertain, right? As to the date of that transfer? Yes? But if he had deleted all that incriminating material...somehow knowing that he was about to be investigated by the Commission...then the erasing exercise on this latest Laptop did not take place at the time of his murder...but some months before. Thus, the reason for his death cannot now be ascertained...and very likely is also not linked to any of his activities of right wing intolerances...we're in the dark again as to motive."

"That deleted material could have been copied inadvertently perhaps, onto the new computer..."

"You think so? Inadvertently copied? Uploaded?"

"No... I guess not. It was a deliberate act, more than likely."

"Yeah...Okay. Thanks. That clears something up for me...until your report gets to us, thanks for all your work."

Shelley was lounging back in her desk chair facing me. Her hands clasped behind her head.

"Okay. I could follow that line of conversation..." Shelley commented. "But where does it take us? Let's assume that he moves all that stuff off his Computer onto Flash-drives knowing that he was being investigated by the Royal Commission guys. It is possible that the Bishop...or let's live dangerously, one of his right-wing Associates, knows of the investigation. When nothing really comes of the investigation, he is given a new Laptop. He immediately downloads all the stuff onto it from those Flash-drives. The Bishop...or one of those right-wing fellows guesses correctly at what the guy has done. Thinking that the Royal Commission guys would come back around, they delete all the stuff..."

I nodded my head slowly.

"Or the Bishop deletes the porno for obvious reasons...remember, he was concerned about what may have been left on the Laptop and as a parallel exercise, the Secret Society delete all the far-right shit...I like that. Yes? Oh! By the way, I'm going to become a father in approximately thirty-odd weeks' time."

She sat in her chair as though frozen before the female in her took over.

She let out a squeal of delight, so loud that every head in the Office turned our way.

"Thanks for filling me in so quickly...and having your priorities so skew-if...everyone! Joe is going to be a middle-aged father later this year."

She rushed around from her desk to squeeze me tight.

A big kiss on the lips.

Another big hug.

The whole Office erupted.

Slaps on the back.

Sloppy kisses.

A general buzz of excitement and shared pleasure made me feel kind of special though severe embarrassment seemed to be my response that was conveyed to all.

This made them worse with their celebrations escalating.

Coffees all round shouted by our new Boss, Clive Butler.

Little work was done by Shells or I for the rest of the day.

Plans A, B, C through to Z were discussed at length on the manner of the internal works on my house.

Shelley was in her element.

She could have easily been an Architect as far as I was concerned as a plethora of little plan sketches emerged on the various schemes that she dreamt up.

Just like that.

A snap of the fingers.

We became engrossed in this exercise, surprised to see knock-off time come around so quickly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"Shells? Joe? You're with me all morning. A visit to the AFP building in town."

My heart skipped a beat.

I had this funny feeling that we were about to have a certain investigation taken out of our hands.

The Priest's homicide bashing death, I would contend, because of its possible links to far-right politics and unsavoury neo-Nazi and Bikie gangs!

We were accompanied by two burly AFP Officers into the inner sanctum of the AFP building.

A little more up-market than our building, though it had been built some fifteen years prior to the Police Building at Parramatta. Obviously, it had a 'make-over' every couple of years.

Commonwealth money had no limits, so it seemed.

"It's been a while, Joe. That multiple death scene out on the docks. Port Botany...."

I nodded my head. Shook his offered hand. Sat where I was shown as though there was some sort of pecking order involved in his Office.

"The number of bodies found trapped in the Ford Utes at Port Botany makes you wonder what motivates people to take such risks with their lives...and those of their families...How are you, Clive. Let me congratulate you on your promotion to Detective Superintendent of the Murder Squad. It's the first chance I've had to speak to you. How's it going?"

"It's a lot easier when you have a good team under you..."

Harry Cain nodded his head in agreement.

"Yeah, but there's always that one who knows how to spoil it...keeps you up all night worrying over the bastard and wondering whether he's worth the hassle..."

"Not like our Joe here, eh?"

Laughs all round.

"Yeah...well...John Church advised me that Joe was a high maintenance Officer...it's true, but at the same time he would be my most successful Dee. He and Shelley here make a most formidable team."

Harold Cain shook his head again. A smile lit up his face. There appeared to be some unspoken joke that I could not grasp.

We were seated in sofa chairs around a small coffee table away from his desk and work area. We had views out of a large window onto the myriad train tracks as they left Redfern Station and headed west and south away from the city.

Cain introduced us to two AFP Officers.

Detectives Byron Hamilton and Isabella Penta.

Orders were taken for coffee.

"Okay...this is an informal meeting to discuss the recent homicide bashing death of one Father Shamus Brin Kilpatrick. My two Detectives have had the case since the Royal Commission supplied us with information pertaining to Child Pornography found in hidden files on his Laptop computer seized by Commission Investigators who were examining the Priest's life because of certain information relayed to them during...or should I say...relayed to them outside the Commission's sitting period. There was no indication of child abuse being found, though there were deep suspicions that could not be proven...but then the pornography angle reared its ugly head. Thus, our involvement."

There was a light knock on the door and a woman brought in steaming mugs of coffee and biscuits for all.

"Thanks Bella. That smells wonderful." Harry Cain extolled.

We mucked about adding cream and sugar to our mugs and selecting a biscuit to nibble on. After several sips of the coffee, Cain resumed.

"Arr....these types of like-minded groups are getting a little cagier in their use of the Internet to share their crop of photos...it has me beat what or how these people get off looking at this stuff...sick bastards to my way of thinking. They now limit the number of members in a cell to no more than half a dozen. A dozen at the most. There is a 'Key-Master' who controls the activities of the group and keeps abreast of the financial matters of the members. He in turn would be involved in at least three, maybe up to half a dozen other cells whose members are unaware of the existence of each of the other groups...though the Key-Masters met regular-like at least once every 12 months, so I am led to believe. This a security device to make it harder for Law Enforcement people to be able to determine and identify other cells...we have thankfully...and with the help of Agencies in Northern Ireland, England, France, Spain, Japan, Canada and New Zealand, a series of coordinated raids planned to be undertaken in the coming month...which by the way, had included your Father as one of seven persons earmarked to be arrested in Australia...belonging to that one cell."

He took another chocolate biscuit from the pile and hoed into it, washing it down with several gulps of coffee.

"Now...as a completely separate investigation, which I might add was instigated through a sheer fluke of discovery, we have been delving into a ruthless Right-Wing movement that wishes Australia to be free of all Muslims and Eastern Mediterranean natives...this is a worrying development that is beyond the hatred that is spewed by known right wing groups and neo-Nazi gangs and certain Politicians. The Sons of the Southern Cross. The Patriots of the Australian Flag and several others that are known to us and are regularly checked up on. This group called the Knights Templar Redefined has come out of the woodwork and really surprised us. The membership is surprising and has the Prime Minister and several of his inner Cabinet members worried. They want results...but this whole thing is a two-edged sword. Arrest and charge certain upstanding members of society such as our popular Priest with crimes against the country and not arrest a similar number of Muslim hot-heads could be seen to be playing into the beliefs and intolerances of these right-wing groups...so we have been going extremely slow hoping to lasso prominent participants from both sides of the fence...we are almost there."

"Buggered if we do; fucked if we don't!" Clive Butler murmured.

"Exactly! Um...what I'm about to detail should stay within these four walls. Okay? I don't think I need to qualify the number of house fires that are experienced every winter in Australia. In every capital city that has cold winters and every provincial city and town. I do not have the exact numbers involved over the past ten years or so, but what I can tell you, is that approximately just under 2% of the total population of Australia is of the Islamic faith.

Yet the number of house fires where Muslims are in residence is something like 30% of the total number of residential fires. The deaths caused by these fires is again heavily biased to those of the Islamic faith...sheer coincidence? I think not."

Again, he took a moment to sip on his coffee.

"We have kept our research limited to the past fifteen years...as a predetermined data base line. The year 2000. The biased figures are alarming...sure you may intimate that this is caused by uneducated or ill-informed recent migrants who may have gained warmth in their country of origin by a naked flame...and you may be right up to a point...but examination, especially where a death has been involved, would indicate that the initial flashpoint of the fire has centred around a naked flame positioned too close to flammable materials. A candle perhaps. When questioned, these people are extremely reticent, in fact completely uncooperative in helping the investigating Fire Officers...but there is a general reaction from all those questions that they were not aware of any candles in such and such room...but the stats are heavily stacked in that being the cause of the fires in too many of the house fires of Muslims in residence. In Sydney. Melbourne. Adelaide. Bathurst. Bendigo...and another dozen provincial towns where winters are colder than those in the northern areas of Australia. It is an alarming statistic which has no proof in the pudding, I am afraid."

"I guess it would be quite easy to slip a candle into any room of a house that happened to have an open or unlocked window and let it do its best...no need to break into the house. No need to cause any alarm...and probably after the fire is extinguished, what remains of the candle cannot be used as any sort of evidence...either DNA trace or even possible point of sale examination."

"Too true...so easy, huh?"

We adjourned for lunch. Provided by the same old lady who was our "tea lady" earlier in the morning. More coffee and sandwiches with a delightful array of fillings.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Well, adjourn maybe the wrong word. As we munched on freshly made sandwiches, we continued to talk over the case that was unfolding before us.

"It was by sheer luck that we had a break-through. Understand, this theory had no weight. No corroborative evidence. No witnesses. No suspects...it was your good friend, Joe...your son's partner who stumbled across the trail. I and Byron and Isabella here chaired a meeting with the Digital and Electronic Surveillance Group's 2IC to see whether they may be able to help. Within twenty-four hours we had the address protocols to several right-wing and far

right-wing sites there in plain view on FB...with an astounding amount of information on possible targets and methods of attack that they wished to undertake...that maybe a slight exaggeration as all the sites had a public view and a secure off-line chat-room that proved to be astonishing in its quantity and quality of intelligence. Your young Malisa was incredibly useful in that regard. We kept up a continuous digital surveillance on all chatter for several months. Enough to commence several arrest procedures...surprisingly, there was a group of four Catholic Priests who showed alarming right-wing tendencies who used their position to voice a veritable hate message intertwined within their sermons of each week. I must stress that none of the Priests' immediate supervisors or higher Officials claim to have any knowledge of these extravagances...and insist it is not a Catholic edict from on high but more than likely, a personal opinion allowed to flower...we are unaware of any complaints from those Parishioners subjected to this flimsy attempt at subliminal messaging...amazingly though, a certain high Priest now in office in the Vatican, can sit in a combined conference with four or five of his peers to discuss the mechanics of relocating a certain cretin Priest and not be aware of the reason why these arrangements are required...and about three months after he becoming the Bishop of Melbourne, he brandishes the 'Melbourne Protocol' when he supposedly had no prior knowledge of child abuse by his fellow priests...hard to swallow, eh? So? The proposition is that perhaps there is some sort of conspiracy managed from on high...as that seems to be the case with subject guilty Priests being exposed by the Royal Commission."

Cain stood and tidied up the Lunch crumbs. Not a sandwich was left and the coffee percolator was empty.

"Now...we needed a few suspects from the other side of the fence if you get my drift...you may recall that over a period of time, there were quite a few attacks on both Muslim Mosques and Jewish synagogues. We have the evidence to charge several persons by their own admission on FB. Boasting of their wonderful exploits on smearing pig blood across white walls, smearing blasphemy on others. Leaving pig entrails and severed heads...nothing very bad, but most obnoxious. This resulted in several revenge attacks on Catholic and Jewish properties which kind of escalated things. Tit for tat attacks on various properties...and now we have the death of Father Kilpatrick. Apparently, his vitriolic sermons reached certain sensitive ears which resulted in his death. So ye sow, so shall ye reap, I think the saying is...we can identify your Perps for you...and give you a lead on their own boastful remarks on their personal FB pages...it's so easy when you know how."

He stood and reached across to his desk.

He gave me a thick dossier with two DVD's stuck in inside envelopes.

"It's all in there, though I think you will need to clarify each disclosure. Each personal admission of guilt of certain assaults...I think you should bring your DPP Reps across the case before you even question the two...and I think we should cooperate and arrest our suspects...us with the right-wing dudes responsible for all the spite and attacks...and you

with the arrest and charging of the two with first degree homicide. At similar coordinated times. Yes?"

I couldn't help but experience the slightest tinge of suspicion at the AFP being so bloody cooperative...and helpful.

I was sitting there waiting for the hammer to drop, even as we drove away heading back to the Office.

This was too good to be true, I kept on saying to myself, but chose to keep my misgivings to myself, so as not to mar the euphoria that both CB and Shelley were displaying over this good fortune.

That hammer had to fall, though, sooner or later!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

"You've been a grouch all afternoon since we left the AFP building. You hardly said a word on the trip back here to the Office. What's biting your balls, Joe?"

I gave an exaggerated shrug of my shoulders, unsure myself on my sudden despondency.

I got up from my desk and scratched my arse...

"Sorry...it's your arse that is being bitten."

I gave a quick smile at that.

"Shells? I don't rightly know, but to me we have been given a lemon. We've watched both those DVD's twice now, for what? We could not go and arrest those two on what is shown on those two DVD's. There is no connection between those two and the Church, let alone Father Kilpatrick! Sure, they were in the vicinity...the next suburb which proves diddle-de-squat! Okay, as Murder Dees we could not chase out any far right-wing twits for crimes against society, but by the AFP taking over that entire avenue of investigation, there is no way that we can attribute or even suspect any of those twits as being our guilty duo...."

"You don't hold the AFP in high esteem, do you Joe? Yet what, you have a close mate who is a mover and shaker in the Force...and a daughter-in-law who is of some importance, also....to me, that doesn't compute."

I scratched my arse again. Shook my head.

"I trust Knackers with my life... that's an absolute... yet I don't trust him. If you want me to explain that, then I am sorry as I haven't a bloody clue... all I know is that they treat us like poor second cousins and giving us all this bullshit evidence was so bloody condescending...."

"Which is the thing that shits you the most...this outward appearance of what they think of us...you personally. That's it, isn't it?"

Again, an exaggerated shrug of my shoulders.

I slammed a Biro down hard onto my desk. It bounced off and almost hit Shelley in the eye.

"Do that again, and you'll be dodging bloody bullets, partner."

"He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword."

It was Shelley's turn to scratch her head. I was waiting for the arse scratch, but then...I don't think that I've ever seen a woman scratch that part of her anatomy!

"Arr....Joe? Brenda Wzerlic didn't mention anything about sword injuries on the Priest's body. He was belted into the next life by a length of wood...or even could have been a baseball bat....so what's with the sword?"

"To lighten up the atmosphere...it was getting too heavy."

It was Shells turn to return the Biro post haste!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

After a decent sleep, I felt better the next day.

"Okay...let's run all we know on these two AO's for what it's worth.... what have you got on them?"

"We've got priors on Ballan El Kashir. Assault and assault with intent...no prison time but at the moment on a good behaviour bond...this I don't believe! He has a fire-arms license, would you believe! It has not been revoked either...shit! Permitted to carry. Last known employment SASS, Sydney Area Security Services. He does night patrol work and works as an Enforcer and Bouncer at the *'Love and Quarrel'* Pub at Granville....aptly named for the area, I reckon. His mug shot shows a typical one brow Leb with a permanent frown by the looks of it...known associate Kallat Zahir. A radical hot head who was last arrested at that

protest march that went sour last year down near College Street. Was arrested but released later that day. Ditto for his appearance at the Cronulla Riots of a couple of years back. Has been seen with the Neo-Nazi crowd at various protest marches...has a radical FB page that sprouts hate and vilification towards all infidels and their masters...the same old same old. Not considered a terrorist threat though periodic surveillance is conducted on him by the AFP and Border Protection."

"Nasty chaps that a free society permits to exist side by side with reasonable, peaceful persons...when will we ever learn. I reckon he is one step away from martyrdom, the way you have described him."

"If we didn't permit him to exist within general society as a free man, to believe what he wants, then we would be no better than what he sprouts as freedom...."

I shook my head. I wasn't so sure.

"He's not a threat according to the experts in the field, though their far-right-wing views would snare certain impressionable youths, one would image."

"Do you want to bring them both in for questioning?"

"Not yet...I'd like a full dossier on their lives before we go down that road...and some sort of corroboration of their actual bashing to death our elderly Priest...not just traffic surveillance images that show them driving about in the area...I know they're a long way from home, but still...and to me their boasting of doing a 'payback act' in the near future for the pigs' heads on stakes found out the front of the Auburn Mosque a couple of months ago, does not constitute a criminal act. Regardless of what maybe detailed on both their FB pages. There's a big difference between severed pigs' heads on stakes and bashing to death a Catholic Priest in his own Church as payback! There's not enough to commit them even on suspicion."

"Your take or the AFP's?"

"That's what the AFP are insinuating. Several clear shots of them both coming and going from the area...an adjacent suburb...I think we should wait until our Computer guy comes back with better imagery of that side door into the church."

"Makes you wonder, doesn't it? The Priest and four of his colleagues are considered far right wing...but so are his suspected assailants...does that make sense?"

"I know what you mean. I guess every-one has enemies and in the circles that they tread in..." I gestured with my arms. "I guess when you begin to deface each other's Mosques and Churches, you open up a divide that has existed for nigh on fifteen hundred years. That type of hate over all those years can sure ferment into something nasty if you are so

inclined...Religion!!! The belief of peace and love...what a load of hooey!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

"Detective Lind? This is Senior Constable Gwen Burrows. I'm Lead down here at Bondi Beach on the headland jogging track where that chap was found murdered a week or two ago..."

"Yes, SC Burrows. What can I do for you?"

"We've been down here every day since the body was found. Interviewing everybody who uses this facility...a lot of people, let me tell you. We interviewed a chap this morning...a Mister Odal Wzorski. He supposedly jogs the circuit every morning just after sun-up...but this is the first morning that we have encountered him...that got my nose itching...he appeared to be extremely nervous as we asked for personal details and whereabouts on the morning of the murder..."

"Odal Wzorski...a local?"

"Yes. His address is Unit B, 29 Beachview Crescent. Overlooking the beach...a good pad according to him. Left to him by his grandfather who died some years back...it was all nervous patter gushing from him, so I thought."

"Occupation?"

"Manager of a Retail Store in the Junction Mall."

"Good work...anything else?"

"Yes...when we mentioned the victim's name he went pale...but I got the impression that he was aware of that fact prior to us talking to him...I don't know why..."

"The Vic's name was released yesterday..."

"Oh! Maybe...he broke off the interview and went jogging on his way...he vomited when he thought he was out of view. One of the younger Uniforms, dressed in all the right gear, tailed him...he didn't go to work this morning...he went straight home and as far as the 'tail' knows, he's still in his residence."

"Excellent work, CS Burrows. I owe you one."

There I go again.

If I repaid all my promised debts in coffee, I'd be broke for months!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

"C'mon Shells. We may have a lead...a suspect."

"Wait a moment, Joe. The Autopsy results have just come in on both Westcott and Kilpatrick....and a Prelim Report on the Kilpatrick crime scene."

"Look at them when we get back."

"Okay, Boss...don't get your nose out of joint! I'll read them as we are going...I can download them onto my iPad....where are we going?"

Shelley was quiet as I drove our Unmarked towards the CBD and out into the Eastern Suburbs.

"Joe? Those guys you mentioned this morning. The two that the AFP believe are the Perps in the bashing death of Father Kilpatrick?"

"Yeah? What about them?" Almost swearing and standing on the horn at some idiot who swung straight across in front of us.

"They both had form...didn't they?"

"No prison time, but yeah, both had form for minor offences...good behaviour bonds is all...minor fines."

"We'd still have their fingerprints...and DNA on the Central Data Bases, wouldn't we?"

"Yeah...just link into the Central Registry and type in the names...Murder Number required. You know the ropes."

There was silence for a few more moments except for the quick tapping of Shelley's keyboard.

"OK. Yeah...ugly, sour bastards, aren't they? DNA and fingerprints..."

"So, what's the problem?"

"The smeared fingerprints on the door handle. On the edge of the door and the outer Courtyard door do not match anything on Central Registry...ditto DNA trace."

"You sure!?"

"Not just me, but it's here in black and white with the autopsy results and the crime scene detritus...which means, folks, we are back to square one, Tonto...shit! This case is gunna be the death of me!"

I swung around to glare at her.

"It's just a saying my dear old Mum uses from time to time...that's all."

"No! Me the Lone Ranger. You Tonto..."

"Not to-day, my hairy little thing riding a small pinto...for to-day...as I always get to be the little guy and not the hero in the mask...so for to-day, I am the hero in the mask!"

"A Holden Commodore...that's my ride though it too, is pure white...Hi Ho, Silver away."

I accelerated away from the lights way too fast. A cop is supposed to drive courteously and modestly according to the Policy and Procedures Manual!

"That's a bugger!" I continued. "Though with no possible connections. Looks like the right-wing tit for tat crime wave was a little out there. More's the pity because by all accounts those two idiots should not be roaming the streets as free men...can you type in the address at Bondi Beach into the GPS thing-a-ma-jig?"

"Joe, rein in your bloody horse, will you? Slow down to a trot as it is so much more sophisticated...and struth Joe...you should know the area like the back of your hand by now. We've driven up and down every bloody street and avenue in the suburb, almost."

"Just do it, huh, my one feathered friend."

"Cut the crap, oh masked one, huh?"

This said with a giggle.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

"Odal Wzorski?"

"Yes. Who's asking?"

I flipped my ID Card at the gentleman who had opened the door as we had knocked on it.

"Oh! Police!? Coppers! What do you want with me...who's died?"

"Um...may we come in, sir?" I looked about me as though the entire population of Bondi Beach was leaning in to listen to our conversation.

The guy looked nervously up and down the street. He must have seen the crowd as well!

"Um...Yes. Sure...I was on my way out...but I guess a couple of minutes won't make much difference...come through...I'll just ring my friend to tell him I will be delayed slightly. Okay?"

I nodded my head as we were offered a seat. A fantastic view over the top of several other blocks of flats to a panoramic view of Bondi Beach from the southern headland.

"Fantastic..." Shelley muttered. "Beats my Mum's view..."

"Your mother live around here?" The well-kept, young man asked.

"Um...yes...a little further up the towards the top of the headland...Ridge Street."

He nodded his head.

"Oh...that view...you never tire of it...um...now...how can I help. Is it about Cottie's death?"

"Yes. It is. How did you know the deceased?"

He looked down at his hands. Long slender fingers. I looked around for a piano. None in this room at least. He wasn't a guitarist either as there were no calluses to be seen. Or a Guitar Case.

"Um...I...um...am gay. I often go up to Clive's Place on a Friday night...I know Cottie from there."

"Yes?... and?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

Looked about, unsure what he was supposed to say next.

"You seemed rather...shall we say...nervous and unresponsive this morning when questioned by the Constable up on the Headland jogging track..."

"Oh! Um...I guess you may be too...it was the first morning that I went jogging after Cottie's body was found. I usually go every morning...couldn't hack it...I guess there was a certain amount of guilt as I did do the circuit a couple of times that morning...um...the morning of his death...and from what I understand, he was attacked and killed that morning...I could have...may have been able to help him...if...you know..."

His voice caught in his throat.

He excused himself as he left the room, only to return with a box of tissues and watery eyes.

He settled uncomfortably opposite us again. Fidgeted. Adjusted himself as though a shelled pea was digging into his behind.

"You went jogging the morning of the attack?"

"As I said, every morning. Usually. Then I jog back here along the Promenade, have a shower, get dressed for work and head to my little Café for breakfast before heading up the Junction to open up the Store...the Java Sea...sometimes share a coffee with Cottie if he was by himself."

"You drive?"

"No. I don't even own a car...too hard to get a parking spot around here. A complete waste of time. I catch the bus. I used to ride a push bike but a couple of near misses from lunatic drivers got me quickly out of that habit...and when it's raining!? Shit!... I don't even have a Driver's license any more...I should go for one as it will only get harder, the older I get, I guess."

"That Monday morning...did you see anything out of the ordinary?"

"Like what?"

"Something that shouldn't be there...or was there on every other occasion that you jog the circuit at that time every morning, but wasn't there that morning, perhaps? Or some-one who shouldn't have been there.... was not the normal jogger because of his clothes...his appearance. Mannerisms...you know, shortness of breath, perhaps sweating way too much..."

He looked blankly about, appearing to not focus on any one thing in the room. He shook

his head.

"How well did you know Harris Westcott?"

He looked down at his hands, that he now twisted together in a nervous manner. Thin, fragile hands and fingers.

"I had thought when I first met him that he was gay. You know? I was attracted to him and he never...um...discouraged that impression. He gave me work at night. On week-ends. Cash in hand no questions asked. Easy money when his 'friend'...who I now know as his partner, Caroline Lindsay...was having an open night or special function. Cottie was so empathetic towards me...you know? Listened to my complaints. My life story. My estranged family whom I haven't spoken to for years because they see me as some type of monster...the bloody whole family...I think my Grandfather felt sorry for me in leaving me this pad in his will...but then he had plenty to go around for the entire family, so they let me keep this...how kind of them! He was the first male to show me that I was a human first...a person...a gay guy third...I'll miss him. Granddad and yes.... Cottie."

"Would you have any idea who may have wanted to kill him in such a savage way?"

He shook his head for some time. Squeezing his eyes shut to stop the tears.

"I wasn't aware that he had been savagely killed...he didn't deserve to go that way. Who would want to kill him? Not a soul...he was that well-liked by not only the gay community...which is tight especially from Clive's Place...but by everyone whom I've met from the other side...you know through those events...it was there that I realised how much a chick magnet he was and yet I still wanted to believe that he swung both ways...for my own self-centred reasons...but it didn't take me long to realise that that was never going to happen...but still it didn't matter...."

"How do you feel about that?"

"What you are really asking me is whether I killed him? Nah. No way. I could never do something like that...if for no other reason than that he was my only true friend."

The man lowered his head and began to cry silently.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

"What do you think?"

"I'd like to leave him on the list of POI's...high up..."

"Mmm, I don't think so..." I mused, shaking my head. "The abuse that Cottie received before he karked it...it would have left the Perp's hands and knuckles red raw, I reckon. Wzorski's knuckles are so feminine without a scratch on them. I reckon if he hit some-one on the jaw, his knuckles would fracture like a glass vase!... but leave him up on our list in any case, if you want."

"We've still got to do a complete trawl of Caroline Lindsay's life...but I've managed to isolate her business interests...the Art Studio at the Junction. The Interior Design and Furnishing Store also located at the Junction. The Art Studio here at the Beach...and two Coffee joints here at the beach...quite a handful, eh?"

"How about we go back to that Coffee Joint that Westcott frequented...the one that's called Java Sea. I don't suppose that it's owned by her?"

"Um...hang on..." She tapped quickly on her Laptop. "Yep...and three separate Import/Export businesses with the one address in a...an Industrial Estate in Smithfield...I guess the Warehouse Central for all her import goods...to be divvied up there and then sent to either of her Interior Design Stores."

"Remember when we first met her? In that incredible Apartment? She said before we gave any details of Westcott's death, that he had been bashed to death. Straight out. That's rather strange, don't you think?"

"Let's ponder the question over a coffee at the Java Sea...we should interview the personnel there in any case to get their opinions of Westcott, which we failed to do on our first pass of the establishment...now...with this connection of ownership...wheels within wheels."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

"You're not the Barista?"

"Hah...No. Barry does the honours, though I fill in when needed. I'm the Manager...and part-time Chef. Denis Halloway."

He offered his hand to both of us.

"Can I get you a coffee before we commence...this won't take too long will it. We've had a busy morning and I need to get in some supplies before the Lunch crowd hit us."

I glanced at my watch.

"No... not long... yes, a coffee would go down well."

"We have only three choices of blend...that is why we are so popular. The blends are ours alone which are very well received by our clients...which is half the battle won."

He clicked his fingers at a young waitress that took our order.

"A couple of slices of Raisin Toast also, love, and my usual. A glass of water..."

He must have seen the expression on our faces.

He smiled.

"If I drank as much coffee as I could, I'd never sleep...one cup a day is enough for me...now...how can I help you. I guess it's about Cottie's death...poor sod...though you kinda half expect these things especially when you saw his life-style...and the people that he mixed with...as plain as day out the front here on most fine mornings. Sticking it up to Caroline."

That comment I would come back to.

It was a strange comment to make under the circumstances when there was no clear lead on the Perp at this stage.

"How long have you been the Manager here?"

"Here and the Java down the street. The next block. The "Sit and Sip" which is the joint I prefer. About three years. Close to three years, I guess. They get a more rounded clientele down there...not so much of the peacocks preening themselves...the gay crowd and the in crowd who seem to think that to rub shoulders with the obvious gays is some type of societal class. Beats me!"

"That'd keep you busy...both joints."

"Too right...busier than when I was a Mechanical Design Engineer earning three times as much money...and working about a quarter less hard...but funny enough, I enjoy this job more!"

Though there was a tinge of anger? Of sadness in his words. Something didn't gel...sit right with the man, as far as I was concerned.

Shelley gave me a glance trying to indicate for me to shut up. Here was a man who would respond more readily to a woman asking the questions. More open to a woman's gaze. Smile. So she perceived. I let her take the lead with a slight nod of my head.

"Who did you work for?" Shelley's voice took on a smoky tone. A subtle sexiness to it.

"Ford Australia...we were on the verge of completing a revolutionary Gearbox and Differential combination. Lighter. Stronger. More efficient that would marry more readily with front wheel drive vehicles. Electric vehicles too...gets shipped back to America. We get the chop. The Yanks take the kudos and the money...though I guess the redundant package was pretty good."

He shook his head.

"It must have been hard..."

"Too right...the more you specialise...double Degree with one in Metallurgy..."

"Not much around..."

"I was head-hunted by the Australian Defence Projects Organisation...even went for an interview. In South Australia. My conscience wouldn't allow me to be involved in inventing new and more efficient ways of producing killing machines, bombs and bullets...and it would also mean that a huge decision would need to be made about my wife and I moving to Adelaide...so I sat around feeling sorry for myself until Caroline offered me a job being the Manager of these two establishments..."

"So you knew Caroline Lindsay prior to commencing here?"

Shelley leaned toward the man who was sitting opposite her over the small outdoor coffee table.

"Oh, yes...my wife and she are partners in the various businesses that they have...we live in the same complex..."

"Your wife?"

"Yes. Carissa...um...Carissa Cummins...we define ourselves by retaining our maiden names. She and Caroline met at Uni. Cars and I met also at Uni...at a Rave Party actually. I didn't like Caroline when I first met her that time. She was too...Oh, I don't know...You knew straight away that the pair shared something special. A passion. They were mapping out

their future and their business interests before they had completed their studies. Interior Design and Business Management Degrees. Well founded. Took them a while...money the obvious sticking point, but once they started, it came together quickly for them...maybe a bit of luck too, being at the right place at the right time."

My mind flung back to our meeting with Caroline Lindsay. We were at the door leaving her Apartment when the door chimes had rung. Caroline had opened the door to be rushed by this woman.

Presumably Carissa Cummins.

Denis Halloway's wife.

You could have whipped me to a bloody pulp on the likelihood of the relationships. I would never have guessed!

Shelley was one step ahead of me.

"She was involved in a recent accident...she looked as though she had some trauma to her face. A black eye perhaps..."

He shuffled his feet. A nervous look came and went quickly.

A wife basher I immediately thought. Frustrated in his under-achieving position in life and lashes out at his very successful wife who is on top of the world and continually shoving that fact in his face.

"No... stupid really...I've been on her back for quite a while to have her eyes checked...she jogs up on the headland circuit with the other people rebelling against the constant march of aging...she tripped and fell...banged her head up bad. Really bad. On the gutter edge or one of those stretching frames or something."

Vague.

Very similar to the stories that I've heard from other Abusers...trying to keep it simple and believable so that people would never suspect!

"She went to the Hospital?"

"Yes...St. Vinnies Emergency. I drove her."

Of course he would, wanting to be able to instil in her a plausible story perhaps, before they reached the Hospital. Threats mixed with heartfelt apologies of never doing it again. Promises not kept but believed by the spouse who wanted to believe the bullshit.

I had my doubts.

I'd seen enough facial injuries to know when some-one had been subject to a beating!

"Your wife is Caroline Lindsay's partner?"

"Yes...the real brains behind the Company, I've always said. Money-wise. Trend-wise in furniture and décor she is ahead of the pack...but it is Caroline who is the people person. The Seller. The Buyer. The Negotiator. The traveller. The Organiser...and that is the role that she prefers. Carissa prefers to stay in the shadows...and it has worked up until now...the one shit...um...point of contention between the two is Caroline's choice in men...she continually falls for losers. For cads. For young, frivolous scatter-brains..."

"Is that how you would classify Harris Westcott?"

"Him!!?? He's the worse that she's had...it's almost...like...um...her picture of self is a reflection in the shit guys that she falls for...jeez...he is so...people seem to be taken by him. His smoothness. His display of genuineness. Of interest. The only person that he is truly interested in, is himself...and he doesn't give a damn about flirting with either sex in front of Caroline...then he smooth-talks her and all is right for a couple of weeks...he is an absolute cad. A turd of major proportions!"

There was anger in his voice. In his mannerism. The flinging of his arms in a wild manner as though fanning away a multitude of flies that had been annoying him for hours.

"Would you have any idea who would want him dead?"

He looked up at Shelley with a firm gaze.

"Me, I suppose." He gave a little nervous chuckle. A quick shake of his head. "Huh...I guess that maybe the wrong thing to say to the two Investigating Officers...look...I have things to do. If there is nothing else?"

He stood, shook our hands, offered us re-fills and then disappeared into the gloom of the Café.

Shelley raised her eye-brows at me.

"Just place the man at the head of the queue, huh? We could say that he has just confessed...what a strange thing to say either way, don't you think?"

"Mmm...yeah..."

But my mind was whirling through all the conversations that we had had of recent days. Trying to jag out and join the relevant comments.

CHAPTER THIRTY

We headed back to the Office.

"Caroline Lindsay. Carissa Cummins and Denis Halloway. A complete trawl on the three of them...plus a financial investigation into the various firms that Lindsay and Cummins are involved in." Shelley said forthrightly.

"Mmm..."

"What? You disagree?"

"No...no, I don't..."

"That didn't sound awfully convincing..."

My mobile thrummed in my pocket.

I answered through the Blue-tooth arrangement in the car which placed the call through the radio speakers.

"Detective Lind...you are on Speaker-phone. How can I help?"

"Detective, this is Detective Prahana Sahill at Surrey Hills Station...we bought a couple of 'johns' in here early this morning on Drunk and Affray Charges. Took their fingerprints and DNA swab a little while ago. One of the gent's fingerprints bought up a red flag and your name as the Lead Detective..."

"What's the case?"

He read off the Case File Number.

"Victim. Father Shamus Brin Kilpatrick. Deceased...arr....close to three weeks ago now..."

"You're sure?"

"Surer then the Yanks are about having that goon as the next President..."

"We'll be about thirty minutes...you are still holding them?"

"They're due for a Hearing later this afternoon."

"Hold that in abeyance. We may have additional charges to lay against them. Thanks for the heads-up."

"Not a problem. See you in a while."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

He stunk of stale beer and vomit.

"Your shoes...I need your shoes."

"What for, copper?"

"Mine are wearing thin."

I glanced at Shelley.

She knew what I wanted, nodding her head as she rose to leave the small Interview Room. She would take possession of Gregory O'Brien's shoes for forensic testing as well. He was being held in the Cells of the Police Station. We would get to him in due course.

"Immediately pop them into an Evidence bag. Seal and sign....and get one for me, too, huh?" I added.

She saluted, clicked her heels as she closed the door behind her.

A Uniform Constable had come into the small room as Shells vacated it.

The shuffling about seemed to confuse the young man. Too much alcohol can have that effect, especially on the morning after the night before.

"What do you want me for, copper?"

"What School did you go to..." I looked down at a copy of the Charge Sheet. "Warren Stills? Your mate's name. Gregory O'Brien?"

"What you want to know for?"

"Just making conversation...the Religion box hasn't been ticked on the Arrest and Charge Sheet...an oversight perhaps. Are you Catholic?"

The mid-thirty something chap looked straight through me.

"Church...did you go to Church? I presume only when you were younger...is that correct?"

I was fishing in long gentle arcs seeing what was out there.

"Churches...they shit me...got no time for them myself. A waste of energy. Me? I'm one of those non-believers...I guess I am the true meaning of an Infidel...if Religion is built on love, how come there's so much hate mixed up in it?"

I knew the speech off by heart as I believed every word. I had said the same thing on several occasions to get the Dinner Party guests going.

Go figure.

"And abuse..." Stills mumbled.

"Sorry?"

"Abuse...abuse...what? You fucking deaf, copper!"

I leant back away from the chap. He was a bright red. It looked as though he was about to shoot off his poople valve!

I raised a hand to calm him.

"Obviously, Religion is not your favourite subject. Mine either, though I don't get so worked up about it as you. I may ramble on a bit about it, but..."

I let the silence drift until the colour faded from his face.

"So, what angers you so much about religion?"

He went to reply but instead, held his counsel. He nodded his head. Looked down at the table. He suddenly jerked his head up and glared at me.

"You ever been arse-fucked by a Priest who continually said that it was all my fault to look so beautiful? Had to have his cock shoved in my mouth until he came, all the while listening to him recite The Lord's Prayer. Every week when he came to give Religious Classes. At School...and all the other boys knew what was going on...blaming you...bullying you...accusing you of being a poofteer...the Father's little boy! Have you ever? Me and O'Brien were the only two that he picked on as far as we knew...just us...supposedly as we had little boy, good looks...and that was our fuckin' fault...don't that beat all."

Tears had suddenly erupted down his cheeks.

"Father Kilpatrick..." I stated.

It wasn't a question.

"You took your revenge? Did it make you feel better? Bashing him to death?"

He nodded his head as he let out a wail that I hoped I never had to hear again.

A wail of anguish, pain, horror, embarrassment and loss of all hope.

For the life of me, I wondered how the man was still alive, living every day with the memory of the acts.

"You made him kneel..."

He nodded his head. Swiped angrily at his tears. Snot was dropping onto his chin mixing with his tears.

He looked up at me. His mouth was twisted in sheer anguish, maybe rage.

"Funny...I couldn't put my cock into his mouth...that was too cruel...I wanted to with all my being, so he could possible feel that same feeling...the disgust of it..."

He looked up at me with a pleading look.

"But that's it, isn't it? He would never feel that same disgusted feeling that I felt every time."

"No. I doubt that he would ever be capable of such an emotion...um...look..." I coughed.

I felt a tear drop down my cheek.

"Look...um...we'll need to transport you to the Police Building in Parramatta to finalise the paperwork...the case against you and your mate Gregory O'Brien and officially charge you with the homicide bashing death of Father Kilpatrick..."

I read him his rights as Shelley came back into the room.

Stills was led from the room, walking in his socks. They were filthy as though he had worn them for weeks!

"You okay?" She asked. A hand on my arm.

I shook my head.

I really didn't know.

"I don't know."

I shook my head violently and leaned into her to cry like a baby.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

I took the rest of the week off.

I felt completely down.

Depressed.

Drained.

Repugnant of the acts that Stills had briefly described.

I felt for him.

I knew how he felt!

I wondered why I had taken such an admission so much to heart.

Was it because I too, was hiding something that had occurred in my early school days.

I have never let it be known graciously or voluntarily that I had gone to a Catholic Primary School. Or been a Page Boy for a short period. I wondered why I was so secretive about it. Why I was so angry at all religions and religious persons. Was there something in my grey matter that I had hidden, had ignored for all these years. Suppressed into my subconscious, promising that it would never see the light of day.

I wondered why I had been taken from the School...in mid-term...from the Church by my maternal Grandmother who was my legal Guardian.

No...no, no, no!

I would not allow these thoughts to creep into my being.

Never.

There was a name for this...and that feeling of thinking it may have happened to you even when you knew it hadn't.

It could tear a person apart, so I am led to believe.

That would not happen to me.

Never!

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Tellie cried.

Shelley cried.

Even I had a tear well in my eye.

Dolly was accompanied by Barry Bellamy, the retired Murder Squad Night Shift Boss.

She of course, was Owner of the Coffee and Food joint halfway up Oxford and who was the unofficial maternal figure for the Transgender and Cross-dressing crowd who frequented that portion of Oxford Street and the nearby Pub.

I had met her during the horrible bashing homicide case of Dean 'Billie' Worseley. The 'Crossdresser in the Lane' Case of almost three years ago now. 'Billie' and 'Bennie' had been a pair at the time of his murder and it was perhaps fated that there was an immediate attraction between Bennie and Dallas Courtney.

Dallas had been returning to Bennie's place at Ultimo when he was T-boned by a drunk and high on drugs, young driver which will leave Dallas permanently in a wheelchair. The fact that he had taken up residence with an important person in the Worseley homicide case without obtaining the Boss's approval and prior to the case being put to bed, was an instant dismissal offence. It was both Abbey, the former Boss of the Murder Squad and myself who had held our collective breaths hoping that that important aspect did not come to light during the investigation.

We were both mightily relieved when it didn't as Dallas's entitlements and rehabilitative expenses were at stake.

I reckoned that Dallas Courtney and his bride, Julia 'Bennie' Anderson had scoured Sydney and environs looking for the smallest Church they could find.

One that had the least length in its main aisle from the Altar to the Entrance Porch.

That is why we were gathered at this cute little stone Church out Wilberforce way.

Alongside the Hawkesbury River.

Dallas kept his promise to walk unaided down the length of the Aisle with his new Bride.

I do not know whether it was a cry of accomplishment, of happiness or of pain, but the look on his face as he emerged from the Church with Bennie on his arm could have been any one of those...or a combination of all of them. Whether it was that broad smile of happiness or a grimace at the pain he was enduring was never fully captured by the plethora of camera flashes as the two emerged from the gloom of the Church.

I will say that as soon as the photos were completed, Dallas sank exhaustedly into his wheelchair.

The Reception was down the road a-ways at the local Golf Club. Adjacent to this complex was a small Caravan Park with a selection of On-site Cabins. Most of the Wedding crowd had booked into these cabins for the night instead of risking the long drive back into the city.

All the prerequisite speeches and toasts were long gone with a live band pumping out good old Rock and Roll of a very acceptable level of expertise. I'd gone outside onto the large sweeping balcony of the Golf Club Reception area to get a breath of fresh air. I had not danced so much since my marriage to my first wife, Helene so many years ago.

Dallas wheeled himself out to where I was standing. The Balcony was devoid of other Wedding guests.

"Joe? Thanks for everything that you've done for Bennie and I"

"You don't have to thank me, mate. I have done very little...it's Abbey that you should say thank you to...and besides, you've already thanked me so many times during your speech..."

"A little birdie or two has hinted at the extraordinary lengths that you've gone to in ensuring that I get a hearing with the Digital and Cybernet Forensic Section...um..."

He handed me a letter.

NSW Police Force letterhead.

It was an Acceptance Confirmation letter in being permitted to commence within the Forensic Team from the 1st of next Month.

"Congratulations, Dallas...you did it on your own, mate..."

"The first Officer to be accepted who has not a Degree in Computer Science in the whole

darn place...um...there's the rub!"

"Oh? What do you mean, Dallas?"

He handed me another letter.

This one with the AFP Letterhead emblazoned across the top of the page.

"It's a confirmation letter of being accepted into the Forensic Cyberworld and Electronic Surveillance Section of the AFP. This would entail similar work as to that in the Force, but with the added sugar of National and International use of the Web to dig out Terrorist activities, follow financial fingers around the world and yes, do the mundane examination of ghost figures on all digital devices and social Media sites..."

"I heard through the grapevine that you blew the Examiners away with your revolutionary circular binal theoretical security wall that cannot be breached..."

"If it's man-made, it can be man-betrayed, Joe...nothing is foolproof!"

"But your system is just about foolproof..."

"Mmm...yeah...well...that's not the problem. I know and appreciate all that you and many other people have done for me. You especially...with Shelley, have gone out on a limb for me. I know that I was on shaky ground at the time of the accident because..."

I held up a hand.

"You don't need to go there, Dallas. That is ancient history and swept well under the carpet. Understand?"

He nodded his head.

"I understand. I'm eternally in your debt...that is why this decision has been so difficult to make..."

"If the AFP position holds greater challenges for you...which you thrive on by the way, then you don't owe anyone...hear me...anyone any favours. I will be thrilled for you no matter which way you decide to go...you've already made that decision, haven't you?"

"No. Not completely...not until I could have a word with you in private..."

I folded both letters up and handed them back to him.

"Congratulations. I think you have made the right choice for yourself...I will be able to keep

an eye on you through my future daughter-in-law, Malisa Lind nee Cambridge...she's 2IC or something in the Electronic Surveillance Section..."

"Arrh, Joe? She's a lot higher than that, let me tell you...though as you know, I cannot elaborate."

He shook my hand, stood unsteadily and gave me the best bear hug that I think I've ever received in my entire life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Shelley had obtained written confessions from the two for the bashing homicide death of Father Shamus Brin Kilpatrick.

The case was wrapped up tighter than a rolled-up Newspaper tossed onto the front veranda. The boots of the pair matched the bloodied footprints on the marble floor of the Church. The fingerprints and DNA trace. The trace on the baseball bat that was taken from Stills' home. Traffic Surveillance photos of the pair in O'Brien's vehicle in proximity to the Church on the early morning of the attack. The ghostly surveillance shots of them entering the Courtyard. Opening the arched side door of the Church. Grey figures but there were one or two shots that clearly identified the two as they crept through the Courtyard towards that inner door that was never locked.

The act had fermented for years with the two supporting each other through their periodic cycles of depression and threats of self-harm.

Regardless of how much we dug, we could not find one other person who admitted to being the victim of Father Kilpatrick.

There had to be others, was the general consensus, but no-one else stepped forward even with all the publicity surrounding the case and the plethora of evidence against certain Catholic Priests across the Nation that the Royal Commission unearthed.

It would seem that it was these publicised submissions placed before the Royal Commission that had re-ignited firstly the nightmares, then the gross memories of the abuse that the two young boys had been subjected to. Their reason for such drastic action was their belief that the Royal Commission had no intention of placing any of the guilty parties on trial for their abuses, so they felt that it was they who would be the only ones to address the problem head on.

When it was explained to them that the Royal Commission could only compile evidence

against a guilty party to transfer to local Law Enforcement Agencies to attempt charges, they showed scant regard that any of the named perpetrators would ever see the inside of a cell.

They may be right on that one!

Shells, with all she had to do in preparing the Kilpatrick Case for the DPP Office, had little time to pursue the Harris Westcott homicide while I had been off.

We both came into the Office after half an hour in the Gym.

CB called us into his Office as we passed.

"Shells? Joe? A minute? Close the door. Well done on the Kilpatrick homicide..."

"It was all Shelley, Boss..."

"A lucky drop from up Kings Cross, Boss, if the truth be known. I reckon that we would have been floundering about for some time with it becoming a 'Cool Case' if not for that lucky break." Shelley chimed in.

"As you know, the percentage of cases that are wrapped up due to those fortuitous breaks are more common than we like to let on...arrh...Joe? How you feeling?"

I nodded my head.

"Yeah. OK, Boss."

"You're due up at the Shrink's in fifteen...she's come in early just for you, Joe. Go see her. You should have made the arrangements last week..."

"I..."

Clive Butler held up a hand.

"I'm not interested in knowing how tough you are. How resilient...just do as I say, okay?"

I nodded my head.

There was no getting out of it.

A couple of hours a week for a couple of weeks sitting opposite a very attractive woman pouring out my heart to her...or as much as I wanted her to hear in any case!

It could be worse, I guess.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

It was close to Lunch time before I returned to the Murder Squad floor.

Drained.

"Okay...you want a coffee, Shells. I'm hanging out for one. Join me downstairs, huh?"

She followed me out telling our illustrious Office Clerk, Hendo, where we would be.

"Up in Forensics, Hendo...about an hour...then out to lunch. Back at two."

"Yeah, sure." Was all he said.

We settled into a back table at the far rear of the Java Pot. Hoping not to be spied. I ordered coffee and a hamburger with the lot. Shells a coffee and a chicken wrap.

"You on a health kick, Shells?"

"I've got to lose a bit of weight."

"Stop having sugar in your coffee..."

"Can't drink it otherwise..."

That was news to me.

"Try that sugar alternative."

"Don't like the taste..."

"It's an acquired taste. It won't take too long before you become used to it."

"Makes the coffee taste funny."

I shrugged my shoulders and gave up.

"Okay, fill me in on the Kilpatrick Case. Bring me up to date."

"Read the Murder Book! How's Tellie?"

"Yeah, good..."

"Good? No morning sickness? No aching limbs? Sore boobs?"

"She's lucky to be ten weeks, Shell. There's a long way to go yet...oh! Thanks for those sketches. We've interviewed a Builder...a husband of one of the Forensic Technicians. He's gunna start in two weeks without the need to go through Council according to him. Internal work. No structural stuff..."

"No structural stuff? You sure? Yeah? Bullshit! At least that will save a bit of brass and a lot of time."

"Mmm...I'll read the Murder Book to bring me up to date...I will Shells, but I want your personal take on it as well..."

I listened for close on an hour as Shelley went through every detail of the case from when we were first called to the crime scene. Her power of recall always amazed me. I did not interrupt her monologue.

"It amazes me that there are no other victims of the Father...doesn't that seem strange to you...and the fact that the Commission Investigators did not pick up on Kilpatrick. Unusual...what do you think the outcome will be?"

"I don't want to second-guess the Court...but I'd say...with the correct psychological evaluation of the pair, maybe a suspended sentence...or the two unable to stand trial because of their mental state..."

"That'll get some noses out of joint...and you must remember...I read it somewhere, that the judicious system, legal fraternity and us cops...a high proportion are Catholics...with a surprising number being practising Catholics."

"What, you think that they'll do time? Serious time?"

"I don't know...I'd like to think not, but I don't like the chances."

"Mmm...under those circumstances, me neither. One thing that really got to me as I interviewed them for several hours on a couple of days while you were off, was their sincerity...they are basically good guys."

"So are most murderers...80% or more of homicides committed are completely spur of the moment actions."

"That's not true, Joe...well...to a point. What's not recognised in the statistics is the number of years that the perp may have...I repeat *may have*, been subjected to mental abuse. Emotional abuse. Anguish. Male or female. Before something snaps...a spur of the moment thing. These two, Stills and O'Brien, thought this through...even arming themselves...pre-meditation. Intent. Don't get me wrong, I'd love to see them get off...but I doubt it. A bloody

shame, really."

"Most homicides are, Shells....a bloody shame."

She nodded her head in agreement.

Not for the first time, a thought whizzed across my mental plain. About having just about enough of this. Of having my fill...then I took another bite of the Hamburger.

It was good!

For the rest of the afternoon I read the Murder Book and all the relevant Reports.

There was no pleasure when I finished.

I rubbed my eyes and placed my feet up on my desk.

Closed my eyes.

Let things enter and leave my brain.

Compartmentalised the case.

Went backwards and forwards through the words.

The proof.

I may have been impressed with the written word that Shelley had compiled. It was of a high standard. Very professional. But again, I felt empty. As though enough was enough. Time for a change.

Then I scolded myself saying that it was just the standard mid-life crisis that a lot of men go through. Women had their 'Change of life', men this mid-life crisis.

Was it true? Bugged if I knew but I needed a reason for feeling this way and that seemed to satisfy the Examiner inside me. I just needed to keep a rein on its malignancy.

I should go and purchase a Sports Car, I laughingly scolded myself. Maybe a Harley! That made me chuckle more.

This made Shelley look up, raising her eye-brows in a questioning manner.

I waved a hand at her to dismiss her query. I doubted that she would understand why I was having these thoughts. These queer desires to somehow rebel in either a minor way or to

drastically change directions in mid-stream.

"To-morrow, Shells. We need to attack the Westcott Homicide case." I stated instead.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

"Okay...where do we go from here?"

I felt that we'd hit that proverbial brick wall and the homicide investigation of Harris Westcott was deemed to become a Cold Case.

Shelley rose slowly from her chair and began to stalk 'Big Red' as though she was about to commit hari-kari with or without it. She dropped her arms in a gesture of surrender. Bowing religiously to it as her show of respect, she stepped off the mat and slipped back into her shoes.

"When in doubt, my spurious leader, you re-read the Murder Book and every Report contained there-in..." She commanded as she turned to me. "A man of vision once told me that."

"Spurious leader? What do you mean by spurious leader?"

"I couldn't think of anything kinder."

A smile split her face.

She began to giggle.

"You start on the hard copy of the file, I'll commence reading the electronic versions...again"

"Do you know that spurious means illegitimate. False. Misbegotten..." I parried.

"Does it? Oh!! Dear me...I expect that you want an apology from me. Tough titties, Tonto!"

We spent the next two days going through every piece of information recorded on the case. Hardly speaking to one another except in one syllable words. Yes. No. Coffee? Yes? No?

"Did you get the impression that Denis Halloway could be a wife abuser...that his wife, Carissa Cummins, as we know her as the brains in the various firms that she is in partnership with Caroline Lindsay, would put up with such behaviour from her spouse?"

"Yes, to the first part of your statement...don't know to the second assumption as we have never interviewed the woman..."

"Maybe we should."

"Good idea. Yep. Good idea."

"Where would she be?"

"At home..."

"What? No way. Why would you say that?"

"We interviewed Caroline at her place at around mid-day. Caroline had been overseas for what? Seven days? Yet she rings her friend who is two floors below and she came straight up. The woman is the brains behind the whole she-bang but prefers the shadows...she is the one who spends time on the trends from overseas, the various new lines, etcetera, etcetera. She can do that from home...and even if she doesn't usually, she would want to keep hidden because of the bruising to her face. Staying out of the public eye on two counts...she works from home, is my bet."

I nodded my head in agreement. I could not fault the logic.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

"What should we call you?"

"By my name. Carissa Cummins. See how societal mores make us embarrassed and unsure as soon as wedded women do not want to be known as Missus so-and-so...an attachment via a surname to the guy that you marry? Even you coppers see it as a problem. The World hasn't changed much even with all this bullshit about equality of the sexes, has it? Some women who feel that they are so emancipated, will bravely accept the hyphenated juxtaposition of both surnames...how ridiculous is that. They are still being chained to the male demigod. Call me Car...or Carissa as all my friends do.... you are the Detectives who were at Caroline's place the other week. To tell her of Harris's death..."

There was a melody in her voice. An excitement of life. Of love. Of her job and her place in the world. Here was a woman at home with herself in all respects including her marriage. That convinced me that she would not take shit from any male. Husband or not! That left us a bit out in the storm with no place to retreat to.

"Um...may we come in? We would like to ask you a few questions about Harris

Westcott...and his relationship with your friend from your perspective."

"You have questions for me? I don't think that I can help in any way..." She stated as she led us into her Apartment.

I had expected 'chic premier international' but was surprised by upper class suburban mishmash design. Not like her friend, Caroline's pad or what I had expected at all.

A quick glance at Shelley revealed that she too, was surprised by the décor!

"Will you excuse me for one moment? I want to close down a conversation I am having with a company in China. I am trying to tell them that their product requires some strengthening before it would be acceptable on the Australian market...or for that matter, the American or European markets. There is a huge difference in height, weight and stature between Orientals and Caucasians. You'd think they should know that by now...but they still try. Coffee on the counter bench. Drip, I'm afraid. Help yourself. Mugs on the hooks. Sugar where you can see it and skim and full cream in the fridge."

We were standing at the sliding glass wall that led out onto the huge balcony area. The view was only marginally less thrilling of the expanse of Bondi Beach as that two floors above. The view alone a million dollars!

"You've got your coffee? Good. Please, would you like to sit outside or in? No preference? Then I'll take the initiative. Outside it is. I'm usually in my Office from sun-up to sun-down, so a bit of fresh air is a change. Now, how can I help?" She asked, a smile on her face as she jiggled about to get comfortable in the chair.

The bruising on her face was more noticeable in the bright light of outdoors. A terrible yellowish-brown hue with still a hint of blue-black under her eye. Her eye still puffy and half-closed. A deep cut on her jawline and cheek.

"You've been Caroline Lindsay's friend for...?"

"Since the heady and seedy days of Uni...1994 through to 1998...in our first year of friendship, we had our lives kinda mapped out...that's over twenty years ago now! Good Lord! Things have stayed on track and as planned for all these years. We set a five-year plan...we'll be doing another next year, I reckon."

That surprised me. Both women were older than I had thought.

"What did you think of Caroline's relationship with Harris Westcott?"

She seemed to miss a breath. She drew herself upwards to take in more air. Pursued her lips and slowly exhaled.

"Caroline makes shit choices as far as men go...Harris is not the first crud in her life...and it seems the older she gets; the less astuteness goes into her selections. That is our one subject of disagreement, if you must know...she had her eyes on Denis well before I was ever interested in him...though he seemed from the start to prefer my company which I am eternally grateful for...he gave up a lucrative career in Adelaide for me. He's one in a million as far as I am concerned."

The woman hadn't answered the question.

"What did Caroline think of that? That you took Denis off her?"

She gave a chuckle at that interpretation.

"I wouldn't have expressed it in such a manner. Even then, she could never...um...make up her mind about a man...she didn't seem to care either way, actually...and there has never been a cross word from her in accusing me of stealing her man...never."

Again, there was that choice of words that placed several interpretations on the subject leaving things partially unsaid.

"And your thoughts on Harris Westcott?"

"I thought that I answered that question earlier, quite succinctly..."

"Um...obtusely, one may say." Shelley commented, which earned her a hard stare.

This woman did not take a backward step. No way had her husband hit her. He wouldn't be game to! I thought to myself.

Shelley had the bit in her mouth and by the set of her chin she had a scent.

In times like that I stood back and watched, forever impressed with her intuition.

"Where did she meet Westcott?"

"Some Club up at The Junction I think. I'm not too sure."

"You seem to be somewhat critical of the Victim..."

"Is that a question? What was there not to love about the man...a lot, I would contend though his opinion of himself was extremely high...and he could never accept that a woman would *not* find him attractive..."

"He came onto you?"

She turned in her chair to face Shelley squarely, spilling coffee on her jeans as she did.

"Where did you get that indication?"

"Your speech. Mannerisms. He raped you, didn't he. It was he who bashed into you giving you those bruises on your face...you told the ER Doctor that you had fallen over and hit your head on either the gutter or on some of those Stretch things at a Rest Stop on the jogging circuit on the Headland. He didn't believe you...the ER Doctor...he has seen enough facial injuries of battered women to know the difference...though he seemed to think it was not your husband who had done it...so he did not report it as he should have. Harris raped you. Came up behind you. Smashed you in the side of the head that stunned you. He then dragged you into that little thicket and raped you...all because you would not give in to his constant demands for sex. After all, your loyalty to your friend was most paramount to you...and your husband's fidelity...and that is also the reason why you never reported it or told Caroline the truth of it...you never wanted your friend or your husband for that matter, to know the truth. It would have devastated your friend and I think, infuriated your husband..."

It all fitted.

Shells had been flying by the seat of her pants on every detail. But it all fitted perfectly.

I cut across Shells.

"Your husband was furious. You had never seen him so livid...he forced out the truth from you though I suspect that he knew from the beginning. He had his suspicions as he knew the man. Watched him day after day spruced up and on the prowl...right in front of him at the Java Sea...and even in Caroline's Unit when-ever you visited. He would bring his trophies down to the Java Sea. Male or female! It didn't matter to Harris. They were ego trips to him. Photographs to put up on his mantle-piece of conquests. It was your husband who killed him...he was savagely beaten...raped with a branch up his anus. He had his penis cut off and shoved halfway down his throat...and then he belted him over the head with a beer bottle. What killed him? A combination of all those things that was done to him...even a crud like Harris deserves a little better than that!"

I showed anger. Not a good look!

It was not for Westcott, but for all the decent people that he may have tainted. That type of person carries this invisible air of negativism around with them looking for an opposite pole to latch onto. To tarnish and yes, to belittle. All in a manner that only a few would suspect to be a toxic character.

"Stop... " She buried her head in her hands. "Yes...I suspected that Denis may have killed him...I was too afraid to know the truth...to ask him...just in case it was he who had done it...yes, I suspected him...but if he did kill Westcott, then it was for Caroline and me."

Tears rolled down her face.

She gagged several times trying hard to stem the flow.

"Carissa? It would have wrecked your relationship in the end. You know that, don't you?" Shelley said softly.

Between sobs, she nodded her head in agreement.

"Is there anyone that we can ring for you? Caroline perhaps?" Shelley asked.

"No. My sister. I'll ring. Can you stay until she gets here?"

I nodded my head as I went inside the Apartment to ring Bondi Junction Station, requesting that they accompany one Denis Hallaway back to the Station. He would be located either at the 'Java Sea' or the 'Sit and Sip' Café, both at Bondi Beach.

They knew both establishments.

Best coffee on the Beach was the remark when I questioned them.

We would pick him up from there and transport him to the Police Building in Parramatta for due processing sometime early this afternoon.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

"I guess it was only a matter of time, really. Stupid, huh?"

He lent towards the table to take a couple of sips of the coffee that I had shouted.

"Mmm...not bad java. Needs a little blend of Nigerian, perhaps."

He lazily lent against the chair back. Stretched out with his hands on the table. Looked at both of us.

"What happens now?"

There was no signs of contrition or remorse for his deed.

"We charge you. You attend a Bail Hearing possibly to-morrow. Maybe the next day. We will not oppose bail...and then the normal process occurs. It could take up to two years,

depending on the log-jam of cases in the Courts..."

"I can go home? Still work?"

"Yes...you will need to attend the local Police Station each day or a number of times a week until the Court date...do you care to make a statement?"

"Shouldn't I have my Solicitor present?"

"It's up to you...if you so wish to have your Solicitor present, we will have to adjourn until he arrives."

He shrugged his shoulders. Squeezed his nose. Looked down at the table.

"He was a Peacock. A show-pony. Continually out there on show...every morning thereabouts, he'd sit out the front of the Java Sea preening. Prancing. Showing off his latest conquest. Male or female it didn't matter. Shoving it in my face. It was even worse when Caroline was away. It was as if he was constantly daring me to say something to Caroline about his... you know... his performance... his latest snared rabbit who always looked like that frozen rabbit caught in the spotlight...until the gloss wears off and realisation hits that the person was just another number almost."

"Did you know that he had raped your wife, Carissa?"

He rested his elbows on the table and bowed his head, resting his chin in his hands.

"She eventually told me...I wasn't stupid. As soon as I saw her injuries...even the bruising to her thighs...her buttocks...her rib cage, I knew she had been forcefully raped, kicked and bashed. Einstein could figure out pretty quickly who the culprit was...and it was if he knew that I knew that it was him. He knew that we would never tell Caroline...Carissa made me promise not to say anything to her...their friendship meant that much to each of them...well, maybe no. When you think about it, the fact that Carissa was raped by the no-good boyfriend who Caroline was tiring of by the way, that should have brought the two closer together, you would think...wouldn't you? Make Caroline realise at long last what an AO the guy really was..."

"So, what happened?"

He took several more sips of coffee. Nodded his head.

"Compliments to the Barista where you get your java from...um...Carissa had been on my back about joining her for a leisurely circuit or two of the Headland track. She stopped after the rape. I didn't...it was more of a quick walk in my case but at least I was giving it a go...I had a reason to continue with the morning regime. Saw the AO a couple of times...and he still came to the Java Sea to spit in my face. I began to stew, I guess..."

He leant back hard against the seat back again. Clapsed his hands together on the table top.

"...this one morning...it looked like rain. A southerly change...he was doing stretches at that Rest Stop. I just came up beside him and thumped him in the side of the head. A sucker punch actually. He went down like the bag of shit that he is. I dragged him into the thicket. He started to come around. I hit him a couple of times which seemed to rile me up...all my anger about Carissa being raped...what he did to Caroline behind her back...I picked up a bottle and hit him hard over the top of his head...I tied him over the bough of a fallen tree with the shoe laces from his joggers. You know, thumb to big toe. Went back to the car to get a knife...stewing all the time. My temper actually seething. Brewing. Getting worse. I picked up a Cardboard Cutter which was sharper than my knife. Cut off his cock and jammed it down his throat...I was that mad...it'd stop him bragging about his conquests as though challenging me..."

"Was he dead at that stage?"

"Don't know. Didn't care...I guess not, as the blood stream was pretty wild...there was a tree branch. Not big. About an inch in diameter. I sharpened the end of it and rammed it hard up his arse a couple of times...the bloody poofter!"

His face was red with built up anger.

He shook with it.

"If you had of reported the rape then none of this would have happened. Caroline is still going to know what type of philanderer he was...that he savagely raped her best friend...her business partner...but I have my doubts that you will be celebrating your sixtieth birthday as a free man. A bloody crying shame, don't you think, Mister Hallaway?"

"Yeah...and the person most hurt...Carissa...I guess."

"Mmm...maybe Denis... though I think it could be you!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Shelley gathered up her file and iPad and without a word, beckoned for the prisoner to be escorted back down to the Basement cells.

I offered to do the duty.

I stood and patted her on the back as we followed the large man out of the room.

She slumped into her Office chair and spun it a couple of times, mad at the world and what could happen to nice people when a toxic sludge drifts into their space.

Again, there was no winners or losers in this case as well. Just a trail of broken people mired in the evil of one person.

The old biblical saying of "*As ye sow, so shall ye reap*" seemed so apt.

Pleasure and satisfaction at closing a case successfully seemed scant and in very short supply.

I sat at my desk and mulled over my future under that black cloud.

I wasn't too sure what the future held.

It wasn't the first time that this feeling enveloped me.

I should feel elation and secure in the future as I was going to be a father again...maybe that was also weighing heavily on my current fugue state.

Maybe I did need a couple more episodes with that Shrink to work it out.

To rid myself of this feeling when I had so much to look forward to!

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